

**TRANSFER AND FACULTY WRITING KNOWLEDGE:
AN ACTIVITY THEORY ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how faculty members' previous writing experiences in a variety of activity systems shaped their current understanding of writing, as well as to analyze the ways in which this understanding manifests itself in the courses they teach. Using a survey, interviews, genre analysis, and class observations, I aimed to gain an understanding of the ways that faculty members across disciplines transferred and/or recontextualized their own disciplinary writing knowledge. Previous research on faculty writing knowledge is often limited to participants at universities with long-standing, formalized WAC programs. Through nine case-study analyses of faculty across disciplines, this study expands the scope of previous research by focusing on a more diverse set of faculty to contribute to our knowledge of how faculty members negotiate their own understanding of writing with their goals for student writing. The participants' ability to transfer writing knowledge was largely determined by the way they understood their own processes of learning to write. Those who understood learning to writing from a social interactive perspective transferred rhetorical knowledge among activity systems, while faculty who understood learning to write from a text-based ideology relied on their knowledge of form, grammar and/or mechanics. Participants who shared a writer-based understanding, on the other hand, were resistant to the notion that writing can be taught. Though not entirely inclusive, these unique understandings of how writers develop manifest themselves in the ways disciplinary faculty include writing in their courses. This study demonstrates the nuanced and complex reasons for faculty choices in relation to student writing and encourages WAC/WID writing scholars to consider the complexities of faculty understandings of writing knowledge.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2010, I became interested in how teachers' writing practices, histories, and current knowledge influences and contributes to their own understandings of the teaching of writing across multiple disciplines. My goal was to gain an awareness of how those steeped in disciplinary work move among the writing spaces they inhabit, how they help new members to join these spaces, and what factors might inhibit or increase the transfer of writing knowledge. To that end, I conducted a pilot study for which I interviewed five tenured professors in various disciplines (History, Architecture, Industrial Design, Science & Technology, and Rhetoric & Writing), all of whom formed a writing group that had been ongoing for some time, although some of the professors had been in the group longer than others. One of my key findings in this pilot study was that professors' own experiences with writing, including learning new genres, shaped their decisions about the inclusion of writing in their own courses. For example, one professor of Architecture spoke about her struggle to learn a new genre, zoning ordinances, which influenced her decision to give her students exposure to a wide variety of genres so that they would be more prepared in diverse writing situations.

While this finding may sound obvious, I was struck by just how persistent these past experiences were in continually shaping these professors' understanding of writing, even in the face of what we might consider contradictory evidence. For example, all of the women talked about learning to write within their disciplines as a process of being socialized into that discipline, showing an awareness that learning to write new genres takes more than just proper grammar. Yet most of the professors had a difficult time relating their own experiences to challenges they saw students facing in their classes. For example, one professor felt that she had

missed her opportunity to learn to write at some previous point in her life (not recognizing that her success as a tenured professor suggested a strong writing ability). As she discussed writing in academia, especially her struggles, she consistently told me she did not know how to write. I began to see that she seemed to be working under the assumption that a struggle with writing represents a lack of knowing *how* to write. Further, she continually expressed her desire that students should come to college knowing how to write and believed any writing classes in college were remedial. Thus, although she talked about her own process of learning to write in her discipline as a part of her socialization into the discipline, she struggled to relate this understanding not only to her own writing but to her students' writing as well. As a result, there seemed to be a disconnect between instructors' immediate understanding of writing—that there is some generalizable skill that should be taught in college, and their understanding of their own writing practices—that the writing they do is highly contextualized.

I was, to saw the least, fascinated by what I saw as a messy, complex web of different goals and understandings, in addition to knowledge that seemed to shift among contexts. Although I had approached this pilot study wanting to know how faculty backgrounds in writing influenced their decisions about writing in their courses, I realized that what I was actually studying was transfer—critical transitions, I believe, that can tell us much about how pervasive previous knowledge can be even in the face of new, sometimes contradictory knowledge.¹

In 2004, David Smit wrote in *The End of Composition Studies*, “As far as I know, there are no research studies that concentrate directly on the nature of transfer in writing” (124). Although there were indeed studies that followed students between classes (McCarthy) and that followed students’ progress within a single course (Carroll; Herrington; Walvood and

¹ We see such pervasiveness of writing knowledge from students who try to rely on the five-paragraph essay even for six-page papers, for example.

McCarthy), the focus of such studies was not transfer, at least not initially. Yet in the years since Smit's claim, our field has responded to the call for studies on transfer with a flurry of research in journals, at conferences, and even a two-year seminar² devoted to understanding critical transitions of writing knowledge. In addition, a recent issue of *Composition Forum*, edited by Elizabeth Wardle, was completely devoted to the question(s) of transfer. From recent studies, we have learned that students draw on a variety of genres when they face new writing tasks (Rounsville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi), that students make use of that prior knowledge in a variety of ways (Roberson, Taczak, and Yancey), that students often see little transfer value between first-year writing courses and their majors (Bergmann and Zepernick; Jarratt et al.), and that even when students do recall knowledge from first-year writing course, they may not have future opportunities to transfer that knowledge (Wardle, "Understanding"). Overall, we have learned, and continue to learn, that transfer is complex, messy, and difficult to study.

Education is based on the assumption that what one learns in one place will then be transferable to new situations. We generally learn addition before multiplication, letters before words, and basic scientific elements before chemical experiments. Thus, there is reason to assume that knowledge of writing will easily transfer from one location to another, such as from first-year composition courses to writing in the disciplines, from writing in the disciplines to the workplace, or even among courses. However, discussions of transfer, or a lack of transfer, have naturally led scholars to increasingly question where and how writing can be taught and learned. Recent research has questioned whether genres can be taught and/or learned outside of the context in which they are really used, as these genres are no longer working for the same purpose (Berkenkotter and Huckin; Freedman, Adam, and Smart; Russell, "Activity"; Wardle, "Mutt").

² The 2011-2013 Elon University Research Seminar, entitled *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer*, focused on multi-institutional research over a two-year time period.

Pedagogical movements, including writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines (WAC/WID) function on the assumption that writing is best taught within specific disciplines.³ Indeed, Russell argues that because writing is “a matter of learning to participate in some historically-situated human activity that requires some *kinds* of writing, it cannot be learned apart from the problems, the habits, the activities, the subject matter—of some group that found the need to write in that way to solve a problem or carry on its activities” (“Vygotsky”). Many people learn to use the tools of these situations through immersion, to greater and lesser degrees (Beaufort, *Writing*; Carroll; Freedman; Herrington). As a result, it is not surprising that people have a hard time pinpointing when they learned how to write, as such learning was a gradual process learned alongside other knowledge, a process that is likely still ongoing.

Yet despite this flurry of research, I argue that we need to expand our studies of transfer beyond looking solely at students and their movement in classes, between classes, and into the workplace. Nelms and Dively argue that knowledge transfer “is a complex construct, both to study and to manage pedagogically. It involves not only what goes on in the writing course but also what goes on in target contexts, namely other academic writing situations and the workplace” (214). Indeed, these target contexts, particular the academic disciplines, are of particular interest to me. Scholars have long studied writing across disciplines, with many books, journals, and even an online website, the WAC Clearinghouse, devoted to this research area. Research across the disciplines has provided us with much knowledge about how faculty conceive of writing, just as research on transfer has provided us with an increased understanding of how writers transfer knowledge between contexts. Yet we rarely see these discussions together. Why, I wonder, are we only interested in student writing knowledge, especially if we

³ Although I will be pulling from some WAC/WID research, as most work on writing in the disciplines is done at schools with WAC/WID programs, I refer to writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines more generally to mean *any* writing that occurs, not just as a part of a formalized WAC/WID program.

truly believe that learning to write is constantly ongoing and dynamic? How might studying different populations of writers help us to understand transfer? Our field has yet to study transfer of faculty writing knowledge between previous and current contexts, including how this knowledge is negotiated even in the face of possible contradictions. My own study, thus, stems from what I see to be a rich area of research.

This chapter, then, has four main goals. First, I will provide a brief historical background on writing in the university, showing how many current practices related to the teaching of writing in disciplines has stemmed from an early and persistent misunderstanding of how we learn to write. Second, I explain the research goals of my study and provide my overarching research questions. I then conclude this chapter by providing a brief synopsis of the chapters within this dissertation.

Historical Context

To better situate my study within the context of how the disciplinary teaching and learning of writing has progressed through the modern university, I turn now to a brief historical discussion. While a history of the field of writing studies is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I aim here to provide a understanding of how writing came to be seen as a separate, transferable skill rather than as situated activities within particular disciplines. David Russell calls the belief that all teachers should teach writing “a cliché as old as mass education” (“American” 4). Yet over time, first-year writing courses have come to be seen as foundational courses that are at minimum “prerequisites to further learning or at the very least to success in the academy” (Smit 11). More often, however, such courses are viewed as *the* courses to teach students to write within the disciplines (Wardle, “Mutt”). For the purpose of this study, I define “discipline” as an

institutional, “socially and rhetorically constructed” space where “academic knowledge is the product of sociolinguistic activities advancing individual and group interests” (Bazerman *Constructing* 73). Of particular importance to note here is that disciplines are products of both *individual* and *group* interests, so I see disciplines as being as much contested spaces as they are collaborative communities. Thaiss and Zawacki argue that “research on academic writing practices and products should not be bound up in rigid conceptions of disciplines nor should disciplines be viewed as synonymous with traditional departmental structures or majors” (14-5). For example, my PhD program, Rhetoric and Writing, is housed in an English Department, which has possible undergraduate majors in Creative Writing, Literature, Language and Culture, and Professional Writing. Yet Rhetoric and Writing programs are sometimes separate from English departments, so those in Rhetoric and Writing do not necessarily identify with English studies. I see this discipline, therefore, as being interdisciplinary. For example, much research in Rhetoric and Writing draws from educational or psychological theories. Disciplines, then, can be fluid.

Russell explains in *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* that writing was traditionally understood as a mechanical skill, especially as professionals began to move from relying on speech to communicating through print. Thus, knowledge and content were understood to be separate, and writing was simply a way to record that knowledge; one was, then, merely thought to be “talking with a pen” (7). In the mid 1870s, universities turned toward the German research university model of education, leading to the creation of specialized departments (Bazerman et al.). Bazerman et al. explain that “these disciplines each developed its own specialized form of language, but had no place within its curriculum for disciplinary language training, rhetoric or writing” (15). As the research university became increasingly specialized, the university also

became more accessible. With the new student enrollment came the first literacy crisis, leading to the creation of composition courses.⁴ Russell explains that a misunderstanding of writing “mistakenly led educators to look for a single solution to a specific educational problem” (*Writing 7*). The result was the creation of a general composition course, steeped primarily in current-traditional rhetoric and thus focusing on correctness and form. Writing, then, became seen as “a kind of adjunct to the ‘real’ business of education, the teaching of factual knowledge” (*Writing 5*). Russell notes that “though academia held onto a generalized ideal of an academic community sharing a single advanced literacy, there was never any consensus in the modern university about the nature of that community or its language” (*Writing 22*). Thus the idea of academic discourse as a singular language that crosses disciplines prevailed.

That is, however, not to say that writing disappeared from other disciplinary contexts; indeed, when the composition course did not have the expected result of teaching students “how to write,” cross-curriculum writing programs were enacted. Russell explains that “there have been literally hundreds of cross-curricular writing programs since the turn of the century at institutions of every type” (*Writing 8*), although such writing was usually taught *separately* from the courses they were meant to support. A structuralist view of language, which argues that language is a transparent reflection of reality, influenced and continues to influence disciplinary understandings of writing. “This naïve view of language,” Russell argues, “supported the wider organizational structure of the new university by confining discourse to discourse-specific forums” (*Writing 11*). Even today, we hear wonder from faculty across disciplines about why students did not learn to write, including the genres of their disciplines, *before* entering their classrooms.

⁴ The first composition courses are usually credited back to the Harvard model created in the early 1800’s, which established the Boyston Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory. See, for example, William Riley Parker’s “Where Do English Departments Come From?” for a brief history.

As a result of our current understanding of writing in the university as socially embedded within the activities of disciplines, which I explain more fully in Chapters 2 and 3, within the last few decades writing scholars have started both to methodologically study writing in the disciplines and to develop writing across the curriculum initiatives. Although full discussions of both of these movements are beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will briefly summarize each, as much important research from these areas has led to our increased understanding of writing in the disciplines. In other words, these areas of scholarship have helped us to understand both how different disciplines construct knowledge and how new members learn to write in ways accepted by these disciplines.

Perhaps one of the most seminal works on disciplinary writing and the construction of knowledge came from work by social scientists. Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* provides a detailed ethnographical study to examine the process by which scientific claims become facts to the larger community. Thus, their work challenges the assumption that science is methodologically pure truth rather than the rhetorically and socially constructed result of an inscription process. Around the same time, rhetoricians were investigating writing in other disciplinary domains. In Bazerman's *Shaping Written Knowledge: the Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*, he analyzes articles in biochemistry, sociology, and literary studies to see, in effect, what moves are made in terms of the studied object, the literature of the field, the expected audience, and the author's own identity (24). He further follows the history of the scientific experimental article, highlighting its changes through social and rhetorical influences. Additional research in the rhetoric of disciplines has focused on discursive practices in economics, law, and anthropology (see, for example, Nelson et al.). While much of this work draws from communication studies, I believe such work is relevant to my study for its continual

influence on the way we conceive of disciplinary work.⁵

The other, perhaps more well-known, movement of the last few decades is writing across the curriculum (WAC). Originally, WAC drew heavily from the British theoretical models that looked at how language is used for learning; i.e. writing to learn (Russell, “American” 35). Meeting a response to the literacy crisis of the 1970s (literacy crises seem to be cyclical), WAC was highly supported by administrations. WAC proponents “stressed the power of writing to produce active, student- *and* teacher-centered learning” (Russell, “American” 40). Most WAC discussions focus on one of two strands: WAC or WID (writing in the disciplines). Bazerman et al. posit that WAC “refers specifically to the pedagogical and curricular attention to writing” (9) and “WID refers to both a research movement to understand what writing actually occurs in the different disciplinary areas and a curricular reform movement to offer disciplinary related writing instruction but within a program designed for that purpose” (9-10). The former, writing to learn, views writing as a tool for discovery. The latter, writing in the disciplines, argues for students to learn the genres of their discourse communities. Like other scholars, I believe these two strands are not mutually exclusive. For example, Susan McLeod and Elaine Maimom, in response to many claims that WAC and WID are incompatible, write that “writing to learn is not different from or in opposition to learning to write in the disciplines, nor is it superior” (580). For example, a history professor might require students to keep a dialogic journal to help them process historical events by working closely with ideas, a writing to learn activity. That same professor may also require students to write academic arguments that followed uniquely disciplinary ways of writing in History, a writing in the disciplines practice.

⁵The journal *Across the Disciplines* is a strong example of the current work being done to help our field to understand the writing of other disciplines. Because my purpose, however, is not to cover our current knowledge of what writing looks like across disciplines, however, I only draw on research when it becomes relevant for my particular case studies.

WAC (which I now use to represent WAC/WID) has been actualized in many different ways. The most traditional form of WAC involves workshops for faculty across disciplines and varying degrees of institutional support (Bazerman et al.). Many WAC programs involve requirements for writing-intensive courses taught by faculty members in their corresponding disciplines, although often coordinated by writing faculty. These courses usually have fewer numbers of students than other disciplinary courses, and a certain percentage of the student's grade must come from writing (McLeod and Miraglia). However, schools might have writing-intensive courses even without a WAC program (Thaiss and Porter). Another variation of WAC involves learning communities, which can take a few different forms. Zawacki and Williams write that "learning communities are curriculum change initiatives that link, cluster, or integrate two or more courses during a given term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, and involve a common cohort of students" (190). For example, a large general education course such as psychology or history might be linked with a first-year writing course. Zawacki and Williams note that the biggest challenge with such links are, as their case studies illustrate, that first-year writing teachers are often positioned as needing to respond only to grammar and punctuation. And finally, writing centers are often also seen as supporting the work of WAC programs, although writing centers are pervasive even at schools without formalized WAC programs. Overall, William Condon and Carol Rutz argue that in terms of WAC, "the pedagogy and associated philosophy have become widespread" (358). However, they also note the following: "WAC as a phenomenon does not possess a single, identifiable structure; instead, it varies in its development and its manifestation from campus to campus" (358). WAC, therefore, can refer to anything from writing-intensive courses to permanently funded program integrated into a university's overall goals for its students. For instance, my own site of study, Virginia Tech, had

in place a program called ViEWS at the time of this dissertation as a part of their Curriculum for Liberal Education. Though I will discuss this program in greater detail in Chapter 4, I note here that a main goal of the program was to charge each discipline to determine their own student outcomes for oral, written, and visual communication” (“ViEWS”).

Although my overview of writing in the university is brief, my aim here is to highlight a few major ideas. First, while our understanding of writing as a field has shifted significantly over time, within university and public contexts there are what I would call significant and even damaging misunderstandings about what it means to learn writing. Bergmann and Zepernick write, somewhat depressingly, that “even though the field of composition studies is beginning to look very closely at the implications of activity theory for writing instruction, administrators and legislative bodies are demanding ever more narrowly defined skills-based instruction producing writing that can be easily measured through standardized testing” (143). Second, although research on the rhetoric of disciplines is increasingly studied in communication and writing departments, writing scholars are still for all intents and purposes outsiders to the other disciplines we study, in addition to the public discourse on writing, so most of this research remains within our field. However, this brings me to my third point. WAC movements continue to be successful on many levels, showing continual growth, and many of the studies I reference in Chapter 2 and 3 draw on research from schools with formalized WAC programs. The most recent study on the growth and prevalence of WAC shows that WAC exists at 51% of schools (Thaiss and Porter 540). Yet while the presence of WAC thus suggests that writing is valued on some level across the university, it does not indicate that writing is more valued, more effectively taught, or better understood than at universities and colleges where there is no formalized WAC program. This third point is of particular importance to my own study, which I address in more

detail in the next few chapters.

Research Questions and Goals of Study

As I will explain further in Chapters 2 and 3, theories in the field of rhetoric and composition have challenged researchers to question both where writing can be learned and whether such writing knowledge can transfer across multiple contexts. Drawing on activity theory, with its emphasis on genres and human activity, including movement, this dissertation examines faculty across disciplines and their understanding of and movement among writing spaces. Previous research on faculty is often limited to participants at universities with long-standing, formalized WAC programs. Thus, through case-study analyses, this study expands the scope of previous research by focusing on a more diverse set of faculty to contribute to our knowledge of how faculty members negotiate their own understanding of writing with their goals for student writing. As activity theory tells us, subjects carry with them traces of their past and previous experiences in activity systems, even when the transfer of knowledge is contradictory. Thus, my main research questions aim to address how people appropriate knowledge of one system to another and how participants work in numerous and overlapping systems. They are as follows:

1. How do professors work within their own activity systems and transition among various activity systems? How do they negotiate these systems?
2. How is faculty awareness of their own writing development intertwined with their understanding of student writing development, and in what ways is this awareness in agreement or conflicted?

Although other questions are built into my main research questions, as I will discuss in Chapter

4, these two questions provide the major incentive for my research. Wardle suggests that writing studies scholars “should attempt to account for the ways in which knowledge and skills are *transformed* across contexts” (“Understanding” 69). Therefore, it is reasonable to consider a multitude of different contexts across which knowledge and skills might be transferred or transformed. My study thus looks at how subjects’ writing knowledge from a variety of past activity systems continues to influence their participation in current overlapping and multiple systems, at the same time that subjects are continuously shaping and being shaped by these current and past systems.

Writing Instruction: My Own Values and Assumptions

Though Chapter 3 will explain in detail the theoretical framework that shapes my current understanding of how writing is learned—specifically as a part of one’s socialization into a new activity system—I briefly share here my own writing background and how my understanding of the teaching of writing has shifted and been challenged over the years. In many ways, I could relate to various aspects of my participants’ own experiences and understandings of how writing can best be taught, and, as I will discuss later, though I do categorize these participants, such categories are neither static nor forever representative of those participants’ understanding of writing.

Like Tiffany, a Professor of English whom I will introduce more thoroughly in Chapter 4, I was an avid reader who never found writing to be particularly challenging, and although I wrote for my own entertainment, the bulk of the writing I did in school was literary analysis. Indeed, in my high school honor’s English courses, it was assumed that the students were already talented writers, and writing was never the focus of the courses (or ever really discussed at all).

Neither was grammar or mechanics, and although at times my paper would have red marks for commas or verb tenses, I knew so little about the language of grammar that I could not understand the mistakes I made. Like many of the first-year writing students in the studies I reference later, I linked writing to literature or English. Because I was “good” at writing and often enjoyed the process, I took a writing course as an elective my first year of college. Though the course introduced me to the idea of peer review, I questioned its value because the students with whom I worked never articulated any problems with my writing. Throughout college, I continued to write literary analysis after literary analysis for my coursework, never with any feedback other than some scattered comments throughout a paper I would never revise. Only after I began my Master’s program was I challenged to think about writing for two reasons. First, I was essentially entering an entirely new discipline, and second, I was expected to teach writing as a part of that discipline despite not yet being an active, participating member, much like Valeria, whom I introduce in Chapter 4. The unstated assumption seemed to be that good writers should be good teachers of writing. Yet at the time, I wasn’t sure what it meant to teach writing; like many of the participants in my case studies, I could not remember ever learning how to write or even identify instances that shaped my understanding of writing. Nonetheless, I plodded on, teaching many different writing courses, including technical writing, and I shaped those courses in a variety of ways depending on the department in which I was working. I did, however, begin to question the teaching of writing when there seemed to be little agreement among those programs.

After several years, or the summer before I entered my PhD program, I discovered genre and activity theory, which finally gave me the language I needed to express the discomfort I was feeling. Much like David Russell or Elizabeth Wardle, I questioned what activity and genre

theories would mean for the teaching of writing. As I read more about theories of transfer, which I articulate in the next chapter, I, like Russell and Wardle, became convinced that most iterations of first-year writing courses are too decontextualized from any social context, resulting in the creation of “mutt genres” from students. After working with students who would be teaching first-year writing the following semester, the majority of whom previously and currently study literature or creative writing, I saw that their own position within those disciplines would make it challenging for them to teach writing without a particularly disciplinary lens. Their syllabi and writing assignments illustrated those literary values by requiring students to master MLA format, to rely on quotes for sources, or to have a thesis-driven essay, even after I stressed to them that these qualities of writing exist very different outside of literature. These experiences, along with others I have not articulated, have convinced me that writing instruction should occur in the disciplines, taught by members of those disciplines.⁶ My understanding, then, is that the most effective approach to the teaching of writing happens by introducing students to the genres of the discipline as a part of the activities of those disciplines. Further, because I believe much of the writing instruction happens simply through one’s socialization into a discipline, which I articulate in the next two chapters, I also argue that explicit teaching of those genres is likely helpful but perhaps not completely necessary.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature of research on learning to write in the disciplines and of writing transfer. I begin with a discussion of studies of disciplinary socialization, highlighting the challenges of learning to write in disciplinary ways. I then review research on writing transfer, most of which focuses on student writers but also draws from

⁶ The Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines at Cornell University is one example of this type of program.

educational theory. This section highlights the many ways that transfer is currently being theorized. I conclude this chapter by highlighting the limitations of this current research and demonstrating how my own study fills a current research gap.

In Chapter 3, I move to describing socio-cultural theories of how we learn to write, drawing on work by activity and genre theorists. These theories shape the way I approached this study, but also, as I explain in Chapter 4, informed my data analysis. Using activity and genre theory as the conceptual framework, I further discuss previous studies on faculty knowledge of disciplinary writing. I thus move between the theoretical and the practical, showing how other researchers have drawn on these frameworks to forward our understanding of writing in multiple contexts. I conclude by bridging this discussion with Chapter 2, highlighting the potential for future research in this area, especially in relation to the study of transfer with regard to faculty across various disciplines.

Chapter 4 details my research methods but also illustrates how activity and genre theories provide a useful methodological framework for studying transfer. After a description of my theoretical approach to the study's multi-modal research design, I discuss my chosen site of study. I then explain my chosen research procedure, including research instruments, and my participant selection, both for the survey and for the interviews. I also include a summary of the survey results, as the survey is meant to supply additional context for my case studies by providing additional information about my site of study. Specifically, these results can provide a larger contextual picture of the writing practices and the teaching of writing at Virginia Tech, although, as I will explain in Chapter 4, this picture is only a small window. I also include descriptive background information on my nine case study participants. Chapter 4 concludes

with a discussion of my data coding analysis and an explanation of how I have categorized the participants, as well as the limitations of those categories.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 move to the thick description provided by case studies. Rather than devoting a chapter to each of the nine case study participants, I weave their stories together into what I identified as three overarching themes. Thus, in Chapter 5, I discuss participants who write within a variety of activity systems and demonstrate a rhetorical understanding of how we learn to write, which I argue may be the result of their unique backgrounds and positions in the university. In Chapter 6, I focus on participants who show an understanding of writing as being text-based, meaning they tend to focus on form and grammar in their teaching despite showing a disciplinary understanding of their own writing. Though these participants seem to engage in low-road transfer of writing knowledge, I argue that their own situational constraints may contribute to their inability to transfer more rhetorical knowledge. And in Chapter 7, I focus on participants who have a writer-based understanding of how we learn to write. Although they are resistant to the idea that writing can be taught, they nonetheless assign writing to students, and I suggest that they have much of value to teach students but may need support to engage in positive transfer.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 8, synthesizes and discusses the findings of the previous three chapters. We have studied student writers, graduate students, and workplace writers moving among various activity systems, but we have largely ignored faculty *as* writers in our research, although programs such as WAC/WID and the National Writing Project have encouraged faculty to embrace their own writing practices. Yet I argue that understanding faculty as writers and how their own writing practices influence their choices with regard to the teaching of writing is of importance to those of us in writing studies. In the final

chapter, then, I focus on the ways my study can increase our understanding of the transfer of faculty writing knowledge among a variety of activity systems. I conclude with suggestions for future research in this rich area of study.

CHAPTER 2

DISCIPLINARY SOCIALIZATION AND THE TRANSFER OF WRITING KNOWLEDGE

Overview

This chapter will highlight the challenges of learning to write within a new space, specifically a discipline, which makes the transfer of writing knowledge particularly difficult. Most of the current literature on socialization into disciplines and writing transfer, which I draw from here, focuses on students. I begin with a discussion of research on student writers and their socialization into these new spaces. I continue by focusing on the previous, although limited, studies of transfer, highlighting important contributions to the field. I conclude this chapter by discussing how little we know about transfer regarding *faculty* writing processes, and how understanding more about faculty transfer can further our understanding about composing generally. The analysis chapters in this dissertation reveal the rich potential in discussing disciplinary socialization and faculty transfer.

Disciplinary Ways of Writing

Many studies of writers moving from one genre to another, from one context to another, or between disciplines, support our current understanding that writing is not a easily reducible, transferable skill (Bazerman; Beaufort; Berkenkoter, Huckin, and Ackerman; Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Pare; Dias and Pare; McCarthy; Schryer; Walvoord and McCarthy). Russell and Yañez compare our understanding of writing to playing a variety of sports that each utilizes a different type of ball:

A lot of games are played with a ball, just as a lot of fields use a tool called writing. But

the ball is different, the rules of the game are different, the object of the game is different. And knowing how to shoot a basketball (or write in one way, one genre) doesn't mean you know how to throw a baseball (or write in a different activity or genre). Learning a new genre (or academic field and its ways/genres of writing) means participation in a new activity, and using tools (including the tool or technology we call writing) in different ways (336).

Thus, each time a writer composes a genre in a new situation, that writer is participating in a new activity even though on the surface, the activities may seem the same. Doug Brent argues that "regardless of the fact that two activities may involve highly similar operations, they are nonetheless different activities if they involve different goals and therefore constitute entirely different rhetorical exigencies" (569). For example, a student who writes a lab report for a biology class and another lab report for a geology class is involved in two different activities despite the shared name and similar structures and activities.

This perceived sameness of activities might make writing even more challenging, especially for students new to a discipline. In addition, what appear to be common to writing across disciplines—for instance, an analysis or a research paper—are quite distinct depending on the particular discipline. In a study by Rebecca Nowacek of students in a learning community of three linked courses, literature, history, and religious studies, the teachers struggled to articulate the differences in writing between their courses despite efforts to do so. While all of these professors required thesis-driven essays, and explained their expectations to students, disciplinary differences remained: "it [the thesis driven essay] went by the same name, and the professors affirmed similarities during discussion. But these similarities were, as Russell and Yáñez say, 'maddeningly deceptive' and posed considerable challenges to the students enrolled"

(“Why” 391). Yet Nowacek also points out that while each instructor’s explanation of the thesis-driven essay “does resonate with scholarly and popular analyses of how to write in those disciplines,” nonetheless, “no individual can be said to be fully representative of the entire discipline” (“Why” 388). In addition, when Nowacek challenged students to discuss the ways they had developed as writers, they claimed to have learned knowledge such as how to use sources well and how to create flow in a paper. However, Nowacek notes, “students often spoke of these abilities as skills they had mastered; they spoke of them in ways that implied these skills could and would transfer effortlessly from one context to another. However, that tacit assumption of portability was often wrong” (*Agents* 101). The professors, who were each using the same terms—thesis, supports, etc—but without articulating the differences in meaning to students, further amplified this confusion.

The challenges associated with different disciplinary representations may be further increased when students are enrolled in two courses of the same discipline that seem to differ in terms of what is valued, particular in terms of purposes for writing and expected audience roles. Anne Herrington’s study of students writing in two different engineering courses, a chemical engineering lab and a chemical process design course, revealed the struggles students may have in moving among these disciplinary spaces. For instance, students taking the lab course assumed that the audience would be already quite knowledgeable of their work, while the faculty disagreed, although the audience for the design course was assumed to be more knowledgeable. In addition, there was no obvious consensus over the intended audience for the lab course, and as Herrington notes, “not only did the specific professor change for each lab, but also the audience role they stipulated for assignments” (345). Thus the instructors—eight total for the lab course, two of whom also taught the design course—did not always state the same goals and purposes

for the writing assignments, nor share methods for assessing work, so students had confused perceptions of what constituted acceptable work in their discipline. Herrington argues further that “members of each community did not always agree on the conventions appropriate to that forum” (342), including both the students and the professors. Of course, even the design course, though more faculty and students agreed that it mimicked a “professional forum,” (345) was nonetheless limited by the classroom environment.

Recent research that demonstrates how students learn to write in disciplinary ways (Beaufort, *College*; Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman; Freedman et al.; Prior; Winsor) often shows that socialization into that discipline largely influences a writer’s ability to learn the necessary genres.⁷ Many scholars have turned to studies that detail writers’ transitions, or socialization, into the workplace or to graduate school (Beaufort, *Writing*; Casanave; Dias et al.; Freedman; Pare). For example, Winsor’s longitudinal study follows four engineering co-op students through their disciplinary work. As these writers began working with the genres and accompanying expectations and participating in their workplaces, they were provided with an increased understanding of the ways the texts were used to advance the work of such systems (206). Documentation became a means to provide “an account of their own past actions” (208). Over time, their membership in these workplaces revealed expectations for them as writers, such as when one participant learned through taking minutes at a meeting that his understanding of what knowledge was important to record differed from others at the meeting. However, such particular genre knowledge could not have been learned in a different context. Winsor argues that the students were “gradually socialized into producing text that was acceptable to its members and thus gradually became members themselves” (19).

⁷ Because I am not focusing on student writing in this dissertation, I reference studies about students to talk about learning to write more generally. However, for an excellent overview on studies that focus on students learning to write in the disciplines, see Russell’s “Where do the Naturalistic Studies of WAC/WID Point?”

Also focusing on student disciplinarity, Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman write about a graduate student's socialization into a rhetoric doctoral program, looking at how Nate (who is actually Ackerman) acquired textual competence. Through an in-depth linguistic analysis of Nate's writing throughout the program, they noted, for instance, that his early writing contained features not unlike that of a gospel preacher (17). However, through practice writing in this new disciplinary context, combined with feedback from various professors, by the end of his first year Nate showed marked improvement in his ability to work within prescribed conventions.

Berkinkotter et al. argue that "one might best describe the shift that Nate was forced to make in graduate school as the transition from using a register for written discourse based on an informal repertoire to using a more formal register appropriate to academic discourse within a disciplinary community" (18).⁸ Of particular importance to their findings, and other studies that focus on how writers become socialized into a disciplinary space, is the understanding that writers need to learn both declarative and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge, or content knowledge, differs from procedural knowledge, which focuses on how to do something. Nate, then, had to learn the declarative knowledge—the issues that concern rhetoric and writing professionals, as well as the procedural knowledge—the ways that he was expected to work with such knowledge through the appropriate use of disciplinary genres. Writers who enter a new discipline, then, are often expected to demonstrate the procedural knowledge, such as writing a genre appropriate for a Historian, despite not having a grasp on the appropriate declarative knowledge. Genre knowledge, then, requires the appropriate use of both procedural and declarative knowledge.

Boundary Crossing into Disciplinary Space and Ways of Knowing

As I discussed in the previous section, one of the biggest struggles for a writer's

⁸ For an alternative reading of "Nate," see Catherine Predergast's "Catching up with Professor Nate: The Problem with Sociolinguistics in Composition Research."

socialization process is determining the appropriate amount of shared knowledge, thus making the procedural knowledge even more difficult to learn. A lack of knowledge in a particular context, in addition to a lack of knowledge about the genres used in that context, creates a boundary that may inhibit a writer's ability to write appropriately in that context. For instance, when I recently volunteered for a grant writing position for a non-profit organization, despite having some knowledge about the genre of a grant, I was unable to write in that genre until I become not only more knowledgeable about the rhetorical purpose of a grant but also about the organization requesting the grant so that I could speak on its behalf. Janet Giltrow and Michelle Valiquette argue that "shared knowledge-of-the-world can be a boundary-forming condition of the discourse community that uses the genre. An individual writer's eligibility for membership in that community can be measured by his or her competence in estimating the shared-knowledge standing of certain propositions" (49). In other words, they posit that even if new members to a discipline might be able to make inferences about the form of a genre, "this newcomer would not be so likely to make reliable inferences about the community's shared-knowledge dispositions" (49). Their study, which looked at student writers in psychology and criminology, found that at critical moments, student writers demonstrated their lack of shared knowledge by including too much detail when describing a study or defining terms that are common knowledge within their discipline. Hilgers et al.'s study of 34 students across disciplines shared this finding, as they conclude that "students struggled to determine what information was considered 'widely shared knowledge' and therefore did not need to be explained in detail" (326). Mary Soliday also argues that understanding what counts as common content is especially challenging given the nature of school genres. She writes, "in school, students are expected to display knowledge for teachers, and this expectation can create conflicts in how experts assess student work: an expert

does not need to hear about standard procedures, but, nevertheless, she wants to know the novice has grasped their importance” (83-4). Such writing, then, requires those new to a discipline to show not only that they *know* the material but also that they know what material to leave out—a potentially contradictory practice. Further, the amount of appropriate content is also driven by the expected audience the writer envisions, in that writers may either assume their audience knows too much or not enough, thus adjusting their writing accordingly, although perhaps not appropriately.

Much of these types of knowledge required of writers, though often defined distinctly, are interrelated in that writers need to draw appropriately from all of their disciplinary knowledge in order to demonstrate their expertise as a member of that discipline. Procedural and declarative knowledge, then, are inseparable from genre knowledge in the context of a writing situation. In other words, knowing appropriate content in a discipline and the ways of working with that content are useless if one does not also have the means of communicating that content through an appropriate genre. Anne Beaufort proposes that writers need to draw upon five main areas of context specific knowledge. In addition to the procedural, content, and genre knowledge I previously discussed, she also identifies discourse-community and rhetorical knowledge as key to a writer’s development. Discourse-community knowledge, then, requires an understanding of the “goals for communication” and “underlying values” of a discipline, while rhetorical knowledge requires knowing the “needs of a specific audience and specific purpose(s) for a single text” (“Developmental” 148). Though these types of knowledge may be utilized separately, such as when a writer chooses to create a poster to share the findings of a study, the other types of knowledge are nonetheless intrinsically linked to that decision and thus shape the writer’s choices, such as when he/she shapes that genre to meet the intended audience’s

expectations. Unfortunately, Russell rightly notes that students often pass through general education classes without becoming members of disciplines, doing “boundary work,” or the work between a discipline and the classroom. This peripheral disciplinary work makes it particularly challenging for outsiders to become insiders because they never have the opportunity to become socialized into a discipline enough to learn these different types of knowledge.

Other scholars have shown that socialization into a discipline requires familiarity with not only a corpus of shared knowledge but also with a particular way of knowing. Judith Langer argues that “if teachers are to help students develop higher-order reading, thinking, and writing skills, they must be able to articulate the ways of knowing that are central to particular domains” (70). Many scholars have studied language use in various disciplines, often identifying what appear to be consistencies. However, Langer believes that what seem to be consistent across discipline—such as report writing—“may mask important differences in the ways in which these purposes are achieved” (71). In other words, what constitutes an appropriate data set will differ depending on a discipline’s accepted methodologies. In a more recent work, Michael Carter argues that we might conceptualize disciplinary writing as ways of knowing, since “ways of knowing and doing are more general to the academy” (216). He introduces the idea of a metagenre, which he defines in the following way: “a metagenre indicates a structure of similar ways of doing that point to similar ways of writing and knowing. For example, the lab report may be seen as one of a collection of possible responses to learning situations that call for empirical inquiry, a collection that includes the scientific paper, poster, and project proposal” (218). He goes on to explain that metagenres then form a metadiscipline, as they “point to a social formation composed of individual disciplines that emphasize the way of doing defined by the metagenre” (218). Carter recognizes four metadisciplines: problem solving, empirical

inquiry, research from sources, and performance. Although he goes on to explain that these genres “may be inflected differently in different disciplines and in different contexts” (219), he nonetheless argues that “at the center of each metadiscipline is a way of doing shared by its constituent disciplines despite their differences in content knowledge” (227). He sees these categories as being a way “to help faculty in the disciplines recognize the broader ways of doing in their own disciplines and to understand how different individual genres can be used as tools for teaching disciplinary ways of doing, a shift in focus from the isolated genre to the metagener” (226). *What* students are asked to write, then, should align with the particular ways that each discipline works to make knowledge.

Jan Meyer and Ray Land have complicated the notion of ways of knowing further, positing that each discipline contains one or more threshold concept. A threshold concept, they put forward:

represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may be thus a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even worldview. This transformation may be sudden or it may be protracted over a considerable period of time, with the transition to understanding proving troublesome. Such a transformed view or landscape may represent how people ‘think’ in a particular discipline, or how they perceive, apprehend, or experience particulate phenomena within that discipline (or more generally) (3).

This threshold concept could perhaps represent a mini paradigm shift for members of a discipline. For example, within the field of rhetoric and composition, one threshold concept could be the understanding that language, and therefore writing, is socially constructed; another

might be the understanding of genre as a rhetorical action rather than a form, which I discuss more in the next chapter.

Threshold Knowledge and Faculty Understandings of Student Writing

Because writing is both a discipline but also an interdisciplinary practice, the threshold concept becomes important in our understanding of the ways in which faculty, many of whom have not passed through this threshold, understand writing practices. In particular, Meyer and Land argue that although a threshold concept is often transformative, it is also potentially troublesome. A threshold concept often involves troublesome language, or “specific discourses” that have “developed within disciplines to represent (and simultaneously privilege) particular understandings and ways of seeing and thinking” (14). As a result, those who are not members of a particular discipline—in this case faculty in disciplines other than writing studies—may not have access to the specialized language used by writing scholars, limiting their ability to talk about writing in more than generic terms. Indeed, Bazerman explains that through his work in studying language within the disciplines, he has discovered that for many faculty members, “although they have learned the genres of their profession and are successful in them, their reflective ability to manipulate them is limited because of a lack of linguistic and rhetorical vocabulary and analytical methods” (“Genre” 289). Judith Langor also found this implicit but difficult to communicate understanding of writing among the teachers she studied (84), which makes the discussion of writing particularly challenging when talking to faculty in various disciplines. However, Charlotte Brammer et al. noticed that faculty who represent a variety of disciplines may use a different terminology to describe a similar ideology (“Culture”), which is something that will be of importance to note for my own study.

Some disciplines may share threshold concepts, as Linda Adler-Kassner et al. suggest in

their study of a history and a writing course. They identified the two courses as sharing broadly the “centrality of audience, purpose, and context in the production of genres” (“Value”). However, they found that their participants used these concepts inconsistently throughout the duration of the study. Adler-Kassner et al. remark that “sometimes, instructors described how they situated writing, reading, and analytic skills in the course explicitly within history as a discipline . . . with the idea that GE [general education] should introduce students to *disciplinary* threshold concepts” (“Value,” emphasis original). However, “at other times, though, instructors seemed to imply that they were teaching writing, reading, and analysis skills that were ‘universal,’ reflecting the presumption that these skills were stable across all learning contexts” (“Value”). The researchers note that this move back and forth between a disciplinary and general view of writing is problematic because the latter “does *not* reflect these threshold concepts as they are enacted in composition—that is, in a way that acknowledges that they are defined within particular contexts shaped by specific audiences with specific purposes” (“Value,” emphasis original). Of course, what is important to note here is that the particular view of writing enacted in composition—one that stresses that writing is shaped by contexts—is not normally a threshold concept within other disciplines. In other words, because faculty in other disciplines are not also writing scholars, they have most likely not learned the threshold concepts of our discipline and thus may not view writing in the same way.

Additional Socialization Challenges

Another additional socialization struggle within a discipline comes from a writer’s attempt to determine the appropriate role he/she is being asked to inhabit. In other words, students are often conflicted because although they see themselves as students, they are often expected to inhabit a more disciplinary role as they move through classes; for instance, a student

taking a philosophy course to fill a general education requirement is often expected to make arguments and to use evidence appropriate to this discipline, to take on the role of a philosopher. In a longitudinal study of students and teachers in four disciplines, Walvoord and McCarthy found that “students had difficulty constructing not only the reader but also the self” (195). Most students took on what Walvoord and McCarthy call text processor or layperson roles; in the former, the student tries to process a text by summarizing rather than by trying to solve a problem; and in the latter, the student focuses on the issue but ignores the discipline’s knowledge and methodology (9). However, the professors had other expectations for what constituted acceptable student roles: “all four teachers expected students to function competently in the role of ‘professional-in-training’” (8); such expectations, though, were tacit. Similarly, the engineering students in Herrington’s study also took on different roles—the student or the practicing engineering—depending on the course. For the lab course, the students saw themselves in the role of the student, writing to show the professor that they had successfully completed the experiment. In the design course, however, the students saw themselves as “experts” who did not need to prove their knowledge (348-9). No matter the role students are expected to take within a class, they remain also in a student role, so the challenge for students to choose the “correct” role to occupy is no easy task. Similarly, Freedman et al. found that students in their study, though expected to “adopt the roles of management consultants,” were able to dress the part but were not sure of their expected role because they still saw their professor as being their primary audience.

All of these challenges to helping students move seamlessly within and among different disciplinary spaces—which most students must do without ever becoming members of the disciplines—are further compounded by the misconceptions about writing that faculty members

rightly hold, given that they are not members of the writing discipline. In a survey of eight faculty who represented a variety of disciplines, Brammer et al. aimed to determine descriptive knowledge about writing, particularly with how it is understood among different disciplinary cultures. They devised a model of learning to write that they characterized as text-based, writer-based, or social interactive to uncover faculty ideologies about writing. For example, a person with a writer-based view might argue that “learning to write is an innate talent or involves trial and error,” which Brammer et al. argue “may result from faculty frustration when dealing with students’ texts rather than any steadfast belief” (“Culture”). On the other hand, a text-based view stresses “issues such as mechanics, format, or generic expectations” (“Culture”). Brammer et al. go on to explain, “From this perspective, we see an overriding concern with correctness, a rather simple and narrow notion that student writers should learn ‘the right’ rules and formats in order to be ‘good writers’ and, moreover, that these ‘correct’ writing behaviors can and should be learned prior to college or at least within the confines of first year writing courses” (“Culture”). Finally, they explain that “a rhetorical perspective values processes such as feedback and revision but extends to social interaction within and across discourse communities” (“Culture”). In addition to finding that over half of the faculty talked about the socialization aspect of learning to write, as well as the text- and writer-based views, Brammer et al. noticed that disciplinary stereotypes and writing-to-learn ideologies broke down after more discussion. In particular, “all interviewees expressed in some way that writing involves both skill (rule-based, fact-based) and art (interpretive/explanatory, clarity), indicating at least some consensus that creating effectively written text is a complex task” (“Culture”). These understandings about writing are important in determining how faculty understand their role in helping students to enter a disciplinary space—much of which is done through writing.

Writing Transfer

As I introduced in Chapter 1, that very few studies have explicitly focused on transfer resulted in a call for more research, or, as Wardle argued in 2007, we “would be irresponsible not to engage issues of transfer” (“Understanding” 66). Recent studies on transfer, then, have led our field to face many difficult questions with regard to how and where writers learn, to what writing knowledge can actually transfer between situations, and in particular, to what these findings can and should mean for first-year writing courses. Thus, although my own research does not focus on first-year writing courses, out of necessity I draw from much research on first-year writers, as this is where the formative work on transfer is currently happening. In this section, then, I will start with a discussion of studies on first-year writers and move to broader discussions on transfer that go beyond the first-year writing course and to faculty transfer in particular.

Transfer and First-Year Writing

Smit writes that “the ability to transfer knowledge and ability from one context to another is what we mean by learning in the first place. However, we cannot assume that writers will transfer the kinds of knowledge and skills they have learned previously to new writing tasks” (130). Since composition scholars have started to challenge the assumption that what one learns *here* is later used *there*, most resulting research has ranged from mixed to pessimistic regarding the transfer value of FYC. Two early studies, which I detail here, demonstrate such findings. In her well-known study, “A Stranger in Strange Lands,” Lucille McCarthy follows Dave through classes during his freshman and sophomore years of college. Although she does not contextualize her findings in terms of transfer, she does note that Dave saw no connection between writing in each of his classes despite the similarities McCarthy perceived. Thus, “in

each new classroom community, Dave in many ways resembled a beginning language user” (261). Likewise, in their naturalistic study of students across four disciplines, Walvoord and McCarthy followed students and faculty through disciplinary courses to see how students adapted to new writing situations and whether those adaptations met teacher expectations. They argue that the students *did* transfer knowledge from one classroom to another: “we saw students guide their thinking and writing by models they had learned elsewhere, such as the ‘term paper,’ ‘reflection paper,’ ‘thesis and subs,’ or the model of the streetcorner debate” (233). However, the researchers acknowledge that not all transfer was successful, and as Smit points out, “they [Walvoord and McCarthy] cite example after example of students who try to apply knowledge and experience that is inappropriate or in ways that are not helpful” (128-9). As I will discuss later in this section, the inappropriate transfer of knowledge, which Smit refers to here, is often called negative transfer.

In a more recent longitudinal ethnographic study, Anne Beaufort follows Tim through his college career and into the workplace, focusing specifically on his first-year writing course and his double major in history and engineering. She details Tim’s struggle to transfer writing knowledge from one course to another, and from one major to another, noting the following challenges:

Tim was somewhat aware of other aspects of the social milieu in each course: he understood the freedom to play with ideas and forms in Carla’s freshman writing course and that a teacher’s interpretation of history was what one should espouse when writing for that teacher. What Tim missed was the difference in genre requirements and critical thinking stances required in the discourse communities represented in these courses. Though intelligent, Tim was not primed by teachers in either discourse community to

understand different values and community purposes as they would affect writing goals, content, structure, language choice rhetorical situation, etc (68).

Because of these differences in activities among disciplines, and with the lack of cues from his professors, Tim struggled to transfer writing knowledge between situations, and he would often inappropriately transfer knowledge between his first-year writing course and his history courses.

Within the last few years, studies focused on transfer of writing knowledge of first-year students have expanded our current understandings by looking at not only transfer from previous experiences but also transfer to new experiences. Looking backward, Rounasville, Bawarshi, and Reiff's study focuses on what genres from past experiences students draw on in their first-year writing courses. They found that students had written, at one point or another, a diverse range of school genres and other genres. Yet students primarily drew on school genres for their current work, thus not utilizing their full "discursive resources" (105). This finding is not particularly surprising given that students were still in a classroom context. Looking at current understandings of transfer between course, Bergman and Zepernick used interviews and focus groups to discern students' own perceptions of learning to write. They found that students did not differentiate between writing and English courses and felt that "students tend to think of writing in English classes as personal and expressive rather than academic and professional" (129). Jarratt et al. had similar findings in their own study through their interviews with students, which asked participants to recall their early college instruction. Students, in addition to seeing a disciplinary gap between the humanities and the rest of the university, also "did not draw meaningful connections among different learning situations but described a sense of inevitability about their improvement—it just happened somehow" (54). Of course, this should

be taken into account with Jarratt et al.’s argument that “in terms of transfer, when it is successful, the skill is remembered but the transfer is forgotten” (54). And looking forward, Wardle follows students from her first-year honors writing course into their majors, only to find that students rarely used writing from this course not because they had not learned anything but because they were not given an opportunity to use their knowledge (“Understanding”). Together, these studies demonstrate the particular importance of past, current, and future contexts in how they shape students ability and/or desire to transfer knowledge they have learned.

Although the recent studies on transfer have often, as Doug Brent argues, viewed the glass as half empty, with an “emphasis on what learning does not transfer as opposed to what does” (“Transfer” 402), transfer *can* and *does* happen. After following six students in a co-operative education program to their first professional experience, Brent found that “most students seemed to bring to their workplace environment a flexible rhetorical knowledge” (“Crossing 585), yet he also notes that the transfer of this knowledge seemed to come from “more general features of the academic environment than to any course in which they were ‘taught’ it” (“Crossing 585). Thus, recognizing what occurred as a transfer of knowledge would be challenging, as students were not drawing from one particular course or experience. In addition, Brent found that “students frequently subsumed most of the skills and knowledge they used on the job under the rubric of ‘common sense’” (588), which “suggests how internalized these students’ rhetorical knowledge had already become” (588). Rather than transferring specific knowledge, students were transferring “a general disposition to make rhetorical judgments” (589). Brent’s findings here illustrate the challenges of trying to study transfer of knowledge between any two particular locations. In addition, a recent study by Julie Ford, who

looked at how students transfer knowledge from a technical communication class to an engineering class, determined also that students transfer rhetorical strategies between contexts. Ford found that students shared their understanding of writing as a process and considered audience and purpose in their writing, attributing their learning of these strategies back to technical communication courses, as well as first-year writing courses. However, they also transferred what Ford calls “model-based rhetorical strategies” (310), meaning that students tended to think first about the structure of what they were writing rather than the particular context in which the genre would be used. These findings demonstrate the complexities surrounding the study of transfer, as students may draw from a variety of different strategies learned previously no matter the success of those strategies when applied to a future situation.

Several recent longitudinal studies, while not always focused solely on transfer, have followed students through college and/or into the workplace, showing how students develop as writers over time. (Carroll; Sommers, and Salz; Sternglass). These studies, such as Sommers and Salz’s, for which they followed 400 undergraduates through their time at Harvard, have shown that while students do, in fact, *develop* as writers, one cannot necessarily argue that students become *better* writers. These studies did demonstrate that students make connections between their writing tasks, suggesting that transfer does occur. However, Nelms and Dively ask us to consider the role of the researchers in these types of studies, noting that “each of these longitudinal studies requires its subjects to reflect on what they are doing and on their progress over time. Reflection represents an important mechanism for achieving metacognitive awareness of the potential for transferring learning across contexts” (216). While research influences are likely in most studies on transfer, of importance to note about these studies is that transfer of writing knowledge can happen, even if such transfer does require the use of reflection of writing

tasks. The role of reflection, and its potential to facilitate the transfer of writing knowledge, has recently become an area of focus for scholars interested in studying transfer (Taczak).

Drawing from an Educational Theory of Transfer

Before moving to a discussion on particular challenges of studying transfer, I turn now to a brief explanation of more general educational theories. These theories are important foundations for the study of transfer, and many writing scholars have used them as frameworks for their own research studies. Further, because much of the early research on transfer of knowledge has taken place outside of writing studies, many current composition scholars draw from educational researchers. David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon, who articulate a theory that separates transfer into what they call low-road transfer and high-road transfer. Low-road transfer “reflects the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context” (25). For example, those who use email accounts could probably easily open and use an account through a different provider. Or, as Perkins and Salomon suggest, those who can drive cars can easily transfer this knowledge to successfully drive a truck. High-road transfer, on the other hand, “depends on the deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another” (25). This type of transfer, then, requires writers to actively seek connections between dissimilar contexts.

Perkins and Salomon further divide high road transfer into two types: forward-reaching and-backward reaching. Forward-reaching transfer occurs when “one learns something and abstracts it in preparation for applications elsewhere”; for example, a professor might attend a workshop on team building exercises and then make a connection to how she could use such exercises when teaching a technical communication course that requires an extensive group project. On the other hand, backwards-reaching transfer occurs when “one finds oneself in a

problem situation, abstracts key characteristics from the situation, and reaches backward into one's experiences for matches" (26). For example, when one is writing a scientific article for the first time, he/she might realize that he already knows how to write a lab report and can draw knowledge from one genre to another genre. Although Perkins and Salomon are writing about education in general, their theories are easily applicable to composition studies. Of particular importance to note here is the difficulty in determining that high-road transfer has occurred. For example, a person may bring helpful and applicable knowledge to a new situation without being able to attribute that knowledge back to its genesis, a challenge I will discuss in my analysis chapters with regard to my participants.

Negative transfer, however, is easier to recognize. Perkins and Salomon argue that negative transfer occurs when "knowledge or skill from one context interferes in another" ("Teaching" 22). For example, a writer might have learned at one point that one should never write in the passive voice, only to enter a scientific discipline that values this privileged discourse. In such a case, the writer might struggle to write in her disciplinary conventions if she previously learned that good writers use active voice. Russell and Yañez articulate an instance of negative transfer in their study of Beth, an aspiring journalist in a general education Irish History class. In particular, Beth was asked to write a book review, a seemingly familiar genre from high school, or "a tool of historical discourse she thought she understood and could use" (346). Beth, along with many other students, understood history to be about reporting facts, often reflected by the learned goals of book reviews in high school. Yet, as Russell and Yañez note, in addition to being factual, "in a book review in an academic journal of history, another rule is to *critically interpret*" (348, emphasis original). Not surprisingly, Beth pulled from her knowledge of high school history. This knowledge, in addition to her journalism training that

focuses on objectivity, resulted in her production of a book review that was not acceptable in a college history course. Her previous background, then, resulted in an instance of negative transfer of writing knowledge.

Transfer Challenges

Indeed, Nelms and Dively note that awareness of transfer usually happens when such transfer does *not* seem to be happening: “a few semesters’ experience as a writing program administrator inevitably brings to light the problem of transfer in the form of complaints from non-composition faculty about students not having been taught adequately in English 101” (216). In their exploratory study, which used interviews with first-year writing GTAs and focus groups with faculty who taught writing-intensive courses in applied sciences and arts, Nelms and Dively attempted to unravel some of the writing knowledge that transfers between first-year writing courses and writing-intensive courses in the disciplines. Their study highlights the large problem of transfer between *any* educational contexts, as faculty “repeatedly noted the perceived inability of their students to make even the most superficial connections between what they were learning in one course and what they had learned in another” (223). Although the faculty did see some knowledge to be transferring, such as the use of thesis and support, they also noted three problems that may hinder transfer. First, the faculty noted their lack of time in their course to cover writing instruction, time they saw as “overridden in the face of the perceived need for content coverage” (225). Second, the members of the focus group argued that students often showed a large lack of motivation for writing, noting “a mistaken belief that they [students] do not need to develop higher order writing competencies” (226) to succeed in their future careers. And third, the faculty noted that conflicting vocabularies between different disciplines often made it challenging to talk about writing. Nelms and Dively argue that “this use of different

terminology, no doubt, must contribute to the failure of knowledge transfer from composition courses. It can cause students to overlook cues that might signal the potential application of concepts, strategies, and skills learned in first-year composition” (227). There are, as Nelms and Dively demonstrate, many potential roadblocks to transfer.

An Expansion of Research on Transfer

Overall, most studies on transfer, which draw heavily from both educational and psychological theories of learning, look specifically at what knowledge is transferred from one specific place to another, such as from a first year composition course to disciplinary courses (Bergmann and Zepernick; Jarratt et al.), and even then, Nelms and Dively argue that “it is important to reiterate how relatively little we know about the transfer of composition knowledge and, thus, how much research is still needed” (230). While many studies have focused on transfer of student writing knowledge (Beaufort; Bergmann and Zepernick; Carroll; Jarratt et al.; Russell and Yañez; Walvoord and McCarthy; Wardle, “Can”), few studies have studied the transfer of faculty writing knowledge. Further, most research on faculty writing practices and knowledge is limited to those universities with long-standing, formalized WAC programs (Soliday; Thaiss and Zawacki; Walvoord, Hunt, and McMahon). These studies work on the assumption that the inclusion of writing is a robust, and required, practice among disciplines.

One particular notable text influencing my current study is *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*. In this 2006 text, Thaiss and Zawacki detail the results of their four-year cross-disciplinary study of faculty and students. Their study attempts to address questions such as the following: How do faculty across the disciplines define the qualities of good writing? What is the role of alternative writing in the university? How do students learn to write within their majors and to acquire proficiency in

academic genres? They approached this study through the lens of academic writing versus alternative discourse, arguing that they hoped “to achieve a research-based idea of the relationship between the ‘academic standard’ and individual variation” (v). This text is extremely comprehensive in scope and includes interviews with faculty, surveys, focus groups, timed essays from students, and assessment data from departments. Yet, this study was not one focused primarily on writing transfer but rather on the ways that faculty challenge disciplinary expectations through alternative writing practices.

This dissertation, then, aims to extend Thaiss and Zawacki’s study in several important ways. First, Thaiss and Zawacki’s study was conducted at George Mason, a university with a well-developed and long-standing WAC program that can be traced back to 1978 (Zawacki and Gentemann). They recognize the need for their methods to be used at different universities, noting at the end of their study that they “believe the findings become richer and more meaningful as sources of data multiply, but certainly replication of any portion of our model can provide useful results” (168). Therefore, I conducted my research at Virginia Tech, where there is no formalized and centralized WAC program currently in place (although perhaps traces of one), which I discuss further in Chapter 4. However, this does not mean that writing is not happening across the disciplines in many departments, so these perhaps localized versions of WAC will further lend a unique perspective to my study. Second, Thaiss and Zawacki purposefully choose tenured or tenure-track professors, all of whom had participated in WAC workshops, for their own sources of data; as a result, their population was limited to faculty whom they “knew to be successful writers in their fields as well as teachers committed to student writers and writing” (27). However, courses in many disciplines are taught by a much wider population of people, many of whom may not have experience with a formalized WAC program,

so my population represents faculty with more diverse backgrounds, including some faculty new to the university I study. Third, I plan to focus solely on faculty through nine in-depth case studies, which adds a depth that would have been challenging for Thaiss and Zawacki's large-scale study, which utilized multiple methods to study both faculty and students. And finally, although Thaiss and Zawacki make a case for own their theoretical lens, alternative discourses in the academy, they also recommend studies using lenses such as activity theory, which they say has influenced their study but does not provide their overall framework: "We feel that we have only begun to think about not only the application of these frames to our data and findings, but also the explicit use of these frames to focus research and teaching" (169). As a result, my own study uses activity theory, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3, as a framework to expand upon our understanding of transfer between writing spaces, particularly how faculty transfer the writing knowledge gained from their own experiences to their classes, as such transfer requires participants to work in multiple and overlapping systems, some of which may have contradictory motives. Although many scholars have seen the potential in using an activity system as a unit of analysis (Devitt, *Writing*; Russell, "Activity"; Wardle; Winsor), I will also look at multiple and overlapping activity systems and participant interactions among them, in relation to writing transfer.

In this chapter, I provided a review of literature on writers and their socialization, particularly into a new disciplinary space. In addition, I discussed the relevant studies on the transfer of writing knowledge, highlighting the challenges that writers face as they move from one or more writing contexts to another and take on new writing endeavors. I believe that a socio-cultural understanding of language can help us to understand what accounts for these particular challenges, yet this is only one such framework with which to study transfer. Thus, in

the next chapter, I detail my theoretical framework, which draws from our current understandings of language learning, using a synthesis of genre and activity theories.

CHAPTER 3

ACTIVITY AND GENRE THEORIES AS USEFUL FRAMEWORKS FOR STUDYING WRITING TRANSFER

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the current research on both the writing and socialization process into academic disciplines and the transfer of writing knowledge among writing spaces, primarily between first-year composition and disciplinary courses, or disciplinary courses and the work place. However, perhaps because the study of transfer is relatively new to the field of writing studies, most of the research is tentative and exploratory, and therefore does not rely heavily on a theoretical framework but rather works to develop new theories. Recently, though, scholars have turned to rhetorical genre theory and activity theory as useful frameworks for the study of transfer. These socio-cultural theories of language have become increasingly important to our understanding of how writers learn to write within multiple contexts.

While the previous chapter and this one could very well be integrated, I purposefully keep separate the studies on transfer and writing socialization from the forthcoming discussion on genre and activity theories because many of the previously referenced studies did not use these theories. Such a separation ensures that I avoid projecting my own theoretical interpretation onto these past studies. Thus, in this chapter I introduce unique studies that do draw from activity and genre theories as their framework, although such studies can also help us to understand many of the findings in the previous chapter such as, for example, why students tend to struggle with disciplinary socialization. In addition, I believe that this progression of chapters demonstrates the reasons why many scholars have naturally been drawn both to genre and activity theories as their frameworks due to the unique challenges one faces when studying transfer, such as studying why students may misuse writing knowledge when learning a new

genre. The studies in the previous chapter raised questions about how and where students can learn writing, in addition to what knowledge students transfer among situations. Activity and genre theories provide us with a deeper understanding of these situations as localized spaces working toward specific activities—through the use of unique genres—therefore allowing us to analyze *why* this transfer of knowledge does or does not happen.

In this chapter, then, I begin by explaining activity theory and genre theory, showing their usefulness as frameworks for studying writing transfer, as such theories treat writing as a complex phenomenon instead of a set of generalizable, easily transferable, skills. I then move to a discussion that demonstrates the challenges of writing among different systems, drawing on research of faculty understandings of disciplinary writing. After a discussion of how I see activity and genre theories as being compatible, even over-lapping, I conclude with a discussion of how I see these theories as being useful conceptual frameworks to study the transfer of writing knowledge. Dorothy Winsor argues that “when scholars make use of a theory such as activity theory, one of the most important questions to ask is what work the theory does for us” (201), and I agree that theories should be carefully considered and applied. Thus, at the end of this chapter, after I have described my theoretical framework, I explain in more detail my rationale for this particular choice.

Activity Theory

A.N. Leont’ev developed the framework of an activity system as a way to consider the question “Why this action now?” (*Activity*). Derived from psychological theory originating with Lev Vygotsky, activity theory is a social approach to learning that stresses the importance of engaging in activities with others. Vygotsky created a model of mediated action, which shows

how subjects work toward a goal through the use of a meditational tool. Leont'ev, one of Vygotsky's colleagues, expanded upon Vygotsky's theories by introducing the concept of the object of activity. He explains that for any activity, "it is exactly the object that gives it a determined direction" (62). An activity, then, always responds to a particular need (object) within a particular situation and cannot exist without an object. Although Leont'ev is most often credited with the development of activity theory, the concept of an activity system was first posited by Michael Cole and Yrjö Engeström (Russell, "Rethinking"). They explain that the use of such a system adds to our understanding of activity in two ways: first, mapping a system "provides a conceptual map to the major loci among which human cognition is distributed" (8), and second, the mapping of a system also demonstrates that there are other people "who must somehow be taking into account simultaneously with the subject as constituents of human activity systems" (8). Cole and Engeström go on to explain that although such systems may appear to be stable, such as a school, a "closer analysis of apparently unchanging activity systems reveals that transitions and reorganizations are constantly going on within and between activity systems as a fundamental part of the dynamics of human evolution" (8). As a result, they note that "activity systems are best viewed as complex formations in which equilibrium is an exception and tensions, disturbances, and local innovations are the rule and the engine of change" (8). Cole and Engeström's understanding of activity theory is the version composition scholars have claimed for their own purposes, although activity theory is an interdisciplinary framework used in a variety of fields such as computer science, education, and psychology.

Activity theory now commonly uses as its unit of analysis the activity system, which Russell defines, based on Cole and Engeström's earlier definition, as "any ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction"

(“Rethinking” 510). Typically, an activity system is comprised of the following parts (See Fig. 1):

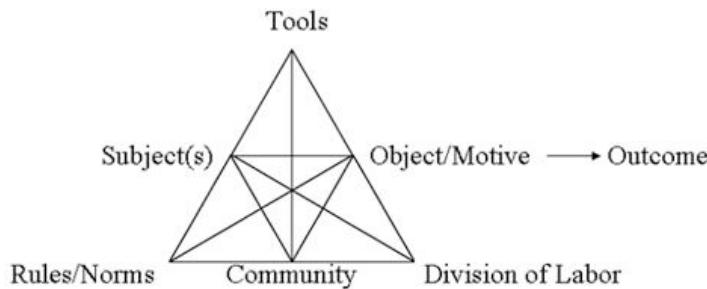


Figure 1

Each of these parts are illustrated differently in a given activity system, but I will define them briefly here and give examples of how each might be illustrated in a university classroom.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Tools: | The objects or artifacts that help people to accomplish the activity, or the genre(s) that work to mediate the activity. For example, most professors depend on a syllabus to communicate course goals and expectations to students. |
| Subjects: | Those people participating in the activity. In a typical university classroom, for example, the subjects include the professor and the students. |
| Rules/Norms: | The explicit and implicit do's and don'ts of the system. A professor might include a strict attendance policy on his/her syllabus but in reality might rarely take attendance. |
| Community: | The larger group of which the subject is a part. In a university classroom, this can include the entire class, and to a larger extent, the entire university. |
| Division of Labor: | The distribution of tasks. Students might be expected to write papers in a composition classroom, as one task, and the professor would be expected to grade them, as another. |
| Object/Motive: | The object of attention and guiding purposes of the system. A purpose of a university classroom is to teach students a subject matter or skill, although students might bring their own purposes to the classroom. |
| Outcome: | The actual or unintended result of the activity. A student who takes a class in, for example, psychology, may learn the basics of |

this discipline but might also learn very little or decide to become a psychologist.

Activity theory is interdisciplinary in nature, and only within the last few decades has the use of activity theory in writing studies become a commonly accepted framework for analysis.

Scholars such as Russell, Bazerman, Winsor, and Wardle have used activity theory most recently as a way to study transfer among different activity systems. My own understanding and use of activity systems draws from these scholars' appropriation of the model, as I will discuss later in this chapter. First, however, I explain our current understanding of rhetorical genre theory, as most of the scholars who use activity theory, myself included, understand genres as mediating actions and thus integral to activity systems.

Rhetorical Genre Theory

Although I will return to a discussion of activity theory later in this chapter, I want to focus my discussion now on the concept of genre in the literature, thus showing its significance within an activity system. Of particular importance is the use of tools within activity systems, specifically genres, as the genres can both shape and be shaped by the system, although one might argue that all parts of activity systems are equally important. Although I will refer to genres as tools within a system, a word that may suggest a static form, my current understanding of genre stems primarily from Bakhtin, Miller, and Swales' early work in this area. Though these scholars were not writing in conversation with one another, scholars in writing studies continue to draw from each of their work. Despite the fact that Mikhail Bakhtin's work was not translated until after much theoretical discussion on genre was already underway (Bazerman et al. *Reference*), many scholars connect their work back to what is now a seminal text on genre, "The Problem of Speech Genres." Bakhtin argues in this text that all meaning is made from

dialogism, or the exchange between a speaker and/or text and another. He writes that “language enters life through concrete utterances (which manifest language) and life enters language through concrete utterances as well” (63). Language is, according to Bakhtin, essential to our lives because dialogic exchanges are what enable us to make meaning of ourselves and of our worlds. Understanding language as a dialogic relationship, and one that must necessarily take into account past and future exchanges, is what enables us to communicate. Rather than speaking and writing in sentences, we use these sentences to form utterances that work as both a response and a stimulus, each with “an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others” (71). Utterances tend to recur; genres, which are created over time, become these recurring utterances, or what Bakhtin calls “*speech genres*” (60, emphasis original). Though Bakhtin was not working with the concept of activity systems, he nonetheless explains that these genres work in “certain spheres of human activity and communication” (64), thus recognizing the inherently social nature of genres. He goes on to explain that “particular conditions of speech communication specific for each sphere give rise to particular genres” (64), consequently arguing that genre are created to meet particular communication needs, or actions.

Carolyn Miller, with her pivotal text, “Genre as Social Action,” was one of the first writing scholars to ask us to reconceptualize what was at the time a common acceptance of genres as formulaic. She argues that genres should be viewed as social rather than merely formulaic and that “a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered [. . .] on the action it is used to accomplish” (151). Drawing on rhetorical situations, Miller contends that “what recurs is not a material situation (a real, objective, factual event) but our construal of a type” (29). Miller does not, however, reject form; she notes instead that “a particular kind of fusion of

substance and form is essential to symbolic meaning” (159). However, she goes on to explain that the formal properties of genre, which make them recognizable, are nonetheless dependent on the situation: “context is a third hierarchical level to meaning, encompassing both substance and form and enabling interpretation of the action resulting from their fusion” (159). Exigence thus “provides the rhetorician with a socially recognizable way to make his or her intentions known” (30). As a result, genres also play a role in the construction of the situations to which they respond. Rarely does one read a piece on genre theory that does not reference Miller, and Amy Devitt rightly points out that Miller’s definition is the basis for most current definitions of rhetorical genre studies (*Writing* 3).

However, despite our more recent understanding of a genre as dynamic, John Swales’ influential work takes a linguistic and textual approach, particularly in his analysis of the research article. Swales argues that all research articles make the same moves, including “establishing a territory,” “establishing a niche,” and “occupying the niche” (141). Genre analysis, then, has become a way for writers new to a discipline to gain access by understanding the underlying rhetorical moves a researcher is expected to make. Though such an analysis focuses primarily on the textual form of the genre, Swales does not reject the social context. Indeed, he argues that “a genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” (58). Swales work is not incompatible with rhetorical genre scholars who identify with Miller’s definition. Indeed, most current genre scholars, including Bawarshi, Beaufort, Devitt, Reiff, and Wardle, recommend genre analysis as a means for helping students to gain genre awareness. Students learn how to recognize genres as rhetorical responses to particular situations but also how to analyze such genres as a means to participation in such situations. Berkenkotter and Huckin, for instance, who expand upon both

Bakhtin's and Miller's understanding of genre, argue for the importance of understanding form and content as a part of their theoretical framework. They argue that "genres are inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to the conditions of use and that genre knowledge is therefore best conceptualized as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities" (477). They go on to say that "genre knowledge embraces both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time" (478). Thus, as I discussed in the previous chapter, understanding genre knowledge requires not only an understanding of form but also of appropriate content knowledge, as well as situation. Therefore, I agree with Berkenkotter and Huckin that most "generic classifications," such as a "lab report" can only "describe superficial parameters of form and content" (488).

Nonetheless, genres do provide us with ways of responding to recurring, or similar, situations. While it is true that genres might share the same form, a change in context or the consideration of the current rhetorical situation requires that use of the genre take such matters into account. Genres are dynamic, only "stabilized-for-now" (Schryer), so they change as purposes and goals within an activity system change. Genres can both shape and be shaped by activity systems. For example, a psychology professor might decide to give a short answer exam rather than an essay exam for a final one semester due to limited time, thus choosing one classroom genre over the other. The short answer exam may satisfy the professor's learning outcomes as well as the previously used essay exam, leading the professor to adopt that new exam structure. The choice of genre, then, would be shaped by the needs of a community member within the system. Yet a short answer exam likely asks students for a different kind of knowledge, so the change of genre alters the activity from, for example, an application of content

to, perhaps, a regurgitation of knowledge. As Bazerman argues, “a genre exists only in the recognitions and attributions of the users” (“Systems” 81). Or, for example, consider the genre of the Powerpoint as a presentation tool, which brings with it user and even viewer expectations such as a bullet point structure. When I recently encouraged first-year writing students to use Prezi, an alternative online presentation tool, they immediately tried to shape this new genre to fit their prior understanding of a presentation tool. However, after some practice, students realized the unique affordances that Prezi provides. Thus, they were able to shape the genre to fit their own needs rather than allowing the generic constraints of a Powerpoint to shape their presentation. Likewise, Mary Soliday argues that “genre is a *social practice*,” in that “genre links the expectations of individual readers and writers to those of larger social groups” (2-3). In other words, genre use is a way for one to become socialized into a group through recognizing and correctly using the communication methods of that group.

In addition to recognizing genres, we might see a situation as being reoccurring, thus calling to mind specific genres. Therefore, we continue to respond to those situations in the same way because the genres used previously have been established as conventional, even when such genres do not result in successful outcomes. Kathleen Jamieson argues that people are often restricted rhetorically by antecedent genres when such genres are used in similar situations despite a needed change. Jamieson gives as an example the state of the union address, which originally took the form of the King’s address to parliament, an unfitting reply that “carried a subservient tone inappropriate to a coequal branch of a democratic government” (413). Whereas the address was previously a written genre sent to Congress, Woodrow Wilson started the current tradition of giving the speech in front of Congress, and the genre continues to be shaped by current factors such as its now televised nature. In addition, students who enter new situations

are likely to draw on a variety of previously used genres, to varying degrees of appropriateness (Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi). For example, a student who has written primarily literary analysis papers may try to apply this thesis-driven approach when writing a lab report for a biology course. While each genre may not always be the most fitting at any given time, genres do help us to communicate so that we do not have to create a new response to every situation. Berkenkotter and Huckin write that “we use genres to package our speech and make it a recognizable response to the exigencies of the situation” (482). I know, for example, that the first day of my writing class calls for a syllabus and a calendar, and students taking this course would likely not respond well to my refusal to provide these genres. However, that is not to say that the genre for any class shares the same form. Though these genres can take on vastly different forms in terms of length and level of detail, they are defined not by their form but by their rhetorical purpose of giving students an understanding of class expectations.

Genres as Systems

Recently, scholars have acknowledged that genres rarely work alone but rather with other genres. Devitt named these connected texts genre sets, referring specifically to genres used by tax accountants (“Intertextuality”). A genre set owned by a particular group, then, would be another concept termed by Devitt—a genre repertoire—which she argues is “an especially helpful term for this set, for it connotes not only a set of interacting genres but also a set from which participants choose, a definer of the possibilities available to the group” (*Writing* 57). Contributing to this discussion, Bazerman introduced the idea of systems of genres, or the “interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings” (“Systems” 97); as an example, he looks at the genre system of a patent application. However, he also explains that systems of genres occur in other situations, such as a classroom. For instance, a writing prompt,

a discussion about assignment expectations, the papers produced, and a grading rubric would all be genres working together as a part of the same system. Clay Spinuzzi has introduced the term “genre ecologies,” which he defines as “interconnected and dynamic sets of genres that jointly mediate activities” (63). Though genre sets and systems are often viewed as a static or stable set, meaning that for each activity there already exists corresponding genres, genre ecologies view genres through a more dynamic lens. Spinuzzi argues that “an activity continually changes and thus the ecology of genres mediating the activity must also change if the activity is to continue” (65). Looking at participants from various state and local agencies, he analyzed the ways that workers adapted to changes in a database. For instance, workers who needed a node map and dialog box to work together managed these genres in a variety of ways, including one participant who added a sticky note to the ecology, so the node map, “which had officially been conceived as a central genre” (139) of the system, was pushed to the side. As a result, the actual activities continued to shape the genres of the ecology to meet the needs of the workers. As Spinuzzi argues, “intercoordinated genres intermediate each other and any change in the ecology (such as altering, introducing, or removing a genre) can change the entire dynamic” (119-120).

Thus recent conceptions of genre as situated and dynamic, and demanding of the “uptake” (Freadman) of a specific role, has lead to many important questions for writing scholars. Russell and Yañez write that “activity and genre theory offer a vocabulary for discussion of the contradiction [between activity systems] in terms of writing, for having a dialog among professionals in the field” (358). Genres, because of their role in enabling or limiting communication, are a necessary and important aspect to study within an activity system. One can, for example, analyze the ways in which a particular genre helps to enable or to hinder the object/motive of an activity system.

Genres Within an Activity System

The convergence of genre and activity theory in writing studies has resulted in questions for writing scholars about the nature of learning, particularly how people learn to write within one activity system and then transfer that knowledge to a different activity system. In the previous chapter, I detailed understandings of how people become (or fail to become) socialized into disciplinary spaces, which I reference here to show that that I understand this socialization as becoming a part of the activity systems of the discipline. Further, I see much of the research I addressed on writing transfer, especially when it does not occur, as being a problem of writers struggling to move among activity systems and to learn the genres of these systems. One common question is whether one can learn a genre outside of an activity system or whether learning a genre is a part of the socialization into that system. The latter view is recently becoming the more popular stance among activity theorists. Scholars have found that genres become routinized for those continuously working in an activity system (Wardle “Can”). As a result, living in a disciplinary space can contribute to less awareness of the nuances that shape these different locations for writing, even when one writes in multiple activity systems of both professional and social situations. Carroll argues that “professors in major disciplinary courses may underestimate how different their expectation about writing are from those that students have already experienced and how much practice is needed to apply discipline specific concepts, knowledge, and conventions in writing” (6). Further, Russell argues that “the transparency of rhetoric in the disciplines makes it much more difficult for faculty to see and intervene in the student’s socialization into the discipline” (*Writing* 18). Since genres are often “learned as a part of one’s socialization into a new activity system (Russell, *Writing*), this results in writing knowledge that is mostly tacit (Beaufort). This tacit knowledge, of course, leads to many

misconceptions about writing. One of Carroll's main findings about writing beliefs was expressed best by a professor who felt it "was a shame that these young people hadn't been taught to write *before* they got to college" (2, emphasis original), although this belief is common and not surprising given many current understandings of writing as a decontextualized skill to be mastered early in life. As I will discuss in later chapters, this understanding about writing has real consequences in terms of the ways in which faculty see their own role in helping students to continue gaining the ability to write.

Contradictions Within Activity Systems

This disconnect in beliefs about writing illustrates how problems within activity systems can be rich sites of study. Subjects within a system may have different motives, a different understanding of tools of the system, and competing goals, for example (Russell "Rethinking"). Engeström calls these differences contradictions, or "dynamic tension between opposing forces in an activity system" ("Communication" 178). Wardle writes that "contradictions are seen in activity systems when various aspects of the activity system are incompatible in some way" ("Can"). Analyzing contradictions is especially important in my study as a way to understand tensions within an activity system. To study possible contradictions, one might, as Wardle explains, "ask whether the subjects have the knowledge to use the available tools" ("Can"). For example, universities that have disciplinary writing requirements rely on the assumption that faculty have the necessary knowledge to teach students writing within their disciplines, which suggests that no special knowledge of writing pedagogy is needed. Much of Spinuzzi's work in *Tracing Genres through Organization* focuses on identifying contradictions by looking at changes such as how the participants divided the labor or understood the object of the activity in which they were involved. One of the main contradictions he identified was that the same

object, the data set, was being used “in different ways, to achieve different outcomes using different genres developed for the given activity” (128). Using the same object for different activities by a variety of groups meant the database could not support all of those activities equally well.

Contradictions can often lead to double binds, which Engeström explains as that which happens when an individual “receives two messages or commands which deny each other—and the individual is unable to comment on the messages” (*Learning*). For example, Lundell and Beach, in their discussion of the activity systems surrounding a student writing a dissertation, note a contradiction between the Graduate School and the individual’s department: “while the departments were perceived to be concerned about moving students along in a timely manner, participants also noted that once students began the dissertation, they were often ignored because there were no departmental norms or rules associated with the object of graduating students” (496). Facing a double bind is common for those who teach writing, no matter the discipline, as classroom genres have to operate within the activity system of the classroom while trying to work within either the activity systems of a discipline or of a public. Yet remediating these contradictions may be challenging, if not impossible, for two reasons. First, Elizabeth Wardle argues that because the writing within an activity system works to serve that system, “separated from the activities the writing serves, the writing of one activity system will likely seem strange (even inexplicable) to an outsider” (“Mutt” 781). As a result, outsiders to any given activity system will have difficulty writing in a way that is expected by insiders (Russell and Yañez). And second, faculty may not believe that students should be taught the genres of their disciplines, especially those instructors who teach introductory classes to non-major students. Even so, Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki found that all professors privilege a disciplinary

approach even if they believe they are asking students to write in a general, academic way (70-73), which I discussed in the previous chapter.

Of course, other double binds may exist. For example, one of the participants in Thaiss and Zawacki's study, Radar, discusses the contradiction she faces with a current book project, as she feels that she cannot ignore that she's working in an academic context, yet she most wants to please her activist friends: "Given these competing exigencies, we can see why it has been hard for her; she's struggling to find a form for a genre she's creating even as she writes" (47). This example illustrates how a double bind cannot be dealt with on an individual basis, as Wardle points out that re-mediation cannot be done alone: "individuals cannot re-mediate the contradictions in the activity system by themselves because contradictions are in social/material relations among groups of people and the tools they use" ("Can"). To remove this double bind would require this professor to change the activity systems of the university and the expectations for publishing, a feat usually beyond the realm of one participant. However, that does not mean that a person cannot adjust to the contradiction. Lundell and Beach note, "Triggered by a set back, disturbance, or surprise, learners recognize, define, and reflect on the double bind in order to begin entertaining ways of coping with the double bind" (488). Indeed, Russell and Yanez present the following explanation:

Contradictions also present a constant potential for change in people and tools (including writing)—for transforming—re-mediating—activity systems. Thus, there is always potential for learning, both individual and social, for becoming a changed person and changed people, with new identities, new possibilities—often opened up (or closed down) through writing in various genres. These deep dialectical contradictions within and among activity systems profoundly condition (but never finally determine) what

individuals and students do (and do no (new page) do)—and what they learn (and do not learn) (341-2).

Paying close attention to contradictions and double binds is important, as they might contribute to what I call transfer interference, or that which might inhibit writing knowledge from being transferred from one activity system to another. Nowacek writes that "activity theory helps us to see that borrowed materials are never thoroughly pure or devoid of resonances from other activity systems" and stresses that "individuals using mediational tools from one disciplinary activity system within another face a series of complex, unpredictable, and often unconscious negotiations." (495). Thus I attempt to reveal some of these negotiations that my participants face by looking in particular at how they negotiate their own understanding of writing with their goals for student writing. Activity theory allows me to analyze these negotiations by studying the various parts of the activity systems that reveal this understanding, including faculty goals for writing (for themselves and for students) and their use of disciplinary or non-disciplinary genres.

The Convergence of Activity and Genre Theories

I have thus far treated activity theory and genre theory as compatible, as I believe that one cannot understand a particular genre without understanding the activity system in which it works. Indeed, the previously reviewed works of Miller, Bakhtin, and Spinuzzi all stress the importance of the social and contextual nature of genres. Spinuzzi, for instance, argues, "The genres of an activity, then, are caught between history and addressivity—between offering the solutions of the past and responding to the exigencies of the present" (117). Further, I would argue that one can better understand an activity system by studying the genres that help members of that system to achieve their outcomes. Russell was perhaps the first scholar to synthesize

activity theory with Bazerman's theory of genre systems ("Rethinking"). Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, two rhetorical genre scholars, argue that activity theory has "allowed genre scholars to illustrate the dialectical relationship between genres, individuals, activities, and contexts," "enabled genre scholars to more fully describe tensions within genres as individuals negotiate multiple, competing goals," and "provided genre scholars with a flexible analytical tool for studying varying dimensions of activity" (102). Thus, this synthesis provides a useful theoretical heuristic, and "since larger activity systems will often contain multiple activity systems and be connected to multiple other activity systems, a genre researcher can adjust her or his analytical frame in order to study varying levels of activity" (Bawarshi and Reiff 102).

However, other scholars have possible issues with this synthesis, two of which I will address here briefly. Devitt moves back and forth between critiquing activity systems and wanting to use them as a way to understand genres. Devitt writes: "although applauding Russell's move to see context in text, I think that the emphasis on systems too easily loses sight of the mess, the lived experience, the intensely local and micro-level construction of those systems by people, even as it makes it difficult to analyze cultural constructions that may extend over multiple activity systems" (*Writing* 26). Yet she rejects the study of discourse communities because this concept "privileges discourse above other group activities, motives, and purposes" (39), and she returns again to activity theory, liking that it attempts "to bridge the macro and micro levels of analysis" (47). Devitt's main qualm with activity theory is her claim that it treats genre as a tool rather than an action, yet scholars who work with genres in activity systems treat them not as tools but as a means of mediating activity. Russell argues that "writing does not exist apart from its uses, for it is a tool for accomplishing object(ive)s beyond itself. The tool is continually transformed by its use into myriad and always-changing genres" ("Activity" 57). Devitt also represents

activity systems as being able to exist independent of its parts: “people move in and out of activity systems with the system apparently existing separately from them” (48). However, I argue that people are constantly creating new systems and changing those systems, and that systems fail to exist when their purpose is accomplished, although traces, or influences, can of course remain. For example, as I will detail fully in the next chapter, I observed the classes of some of my case study participants, with each class being a unique activity system. Although the activity systems of those courses I observed have already ceased to exist, many of the genres of those systems remain, and the professors may transfer parts of their experience from the courses into new activity systems, such as future courses they teach.

On the other hand, Dorothy Winsor explains that activity theory is often used the expense of genre theory because our understanding of genre theory “usually concentrates its analysis on repetition and continuity (and thus underplays the role of agency and change)” (201). Discussions of genre theory tend to focus only on the flow between “the social context to the text” (201) rather than the ways that genres can both shape and be shaped by their contexts. However, her study of documentation in the workplace leads her to conclude that “texts shape context as well as vice versa” (220), which returns more influential power to a particular genre. I look specifically at how participants in my study shape and are shaped by the genres with which they work, in multiple and overlapping activity systems. The same genre, for instance, might also work in multiple activity systems, but within each system, the genre serves a different motive. For example, Lundell and Beach examine how dissertation writers negotiate multiple activity systems, each of which has unique goals for the dissertation depending on the context and the community. This dissertation, for example, will serve multiple activity systems as a genre, including but not limited to fulfilling the Graduate School requirements, meeting the

expectations of my advisor and committee, and contributing to research in our discipline. Thus while the synthesis of genre theory and activity theory has not gone without debate, I also believe that arguments against one theory in favor of another are reductive. Further, I agree with Berkenkotter and Huckin, who argue that “an activity-based theory of genre knowledge would therefore locate our learning of academic genres in the processes that Vygotsky described as ‘socially distributed cognition,’ occurring in the situated activities of a practitioner in training” (487).

Nonetheless, Devitt, who seems to come to terms with activity systems later in her book, argues that “using activity system as a unit of analysis, therefore, enables a clearer depiction of diverse participants and roles, of an overarching purpose for multiple genres, and of multiple genres as the means of achieving that purpose” (55). Because activity systems function as communities with shared goals and purposes, as well as contradictions, analyzing the transfer of knowledge among such systems can help to highlight the enabling and disabling aspects of activity systems and how teachers work through these tensions. For example, Isaiah Smithson and Paul Sorrentino’s previous study of a 1980 Virginia Tech WAC workshop’s ongoing influences found that faculty struggled to spend more time teaching when they were primarily rewarded for their research, which resulted in a double bind of subjects wanting to include writing in their courses but fearing they would fall behind in their research. Thus faculty decisions about whether to incorporate writing into their classes are not necessarily indicative of their knowledge about writing, a point of particular interest to my study. Writers are consistently influenced by their experiences in activity systems, carrying with them the knowledge gained by such experiences. As a result, even activity systems that no longer exists—for example a writing class a professor took in college—might continue to be influential even in the face of present,

and often contradictory, systems.

Activity Systems and Transfer

David Guile and Michael Young argue the need to “reformulate transfer as a process of transition between activity systems” (77). Activity and genre theory provide a useful framework for the study of transfer, or “transitions” among activity systems. Because an activity system is a localized space working toward a specific activity, we are challenged to question how knowledge transitions from one context to another, as knowledge is not reducible to a set of skills that can simply be removed from one activity system and then applied to another. For example, when a writer works on a grant proposal, he/she is engaged in a new activity even if that subject has written hundreds of grants. While this is an activity for which we assume one might transfer previously knowledge from previous grant writing instances, what transfers is not a set of skills but an understanding of how to take a new rhetorical situation into account as he/she works on a familiar genre in a new situation.

Further, because knowledge is bound up in a subject, the knowledge does not simply move from one activity system to another but is rather carried by a subject. Wardle addresses why this makes studying transfer particularly challenging:

According to the complex understandings of transfer that emerge from activity-based theories, some previously-learned knowledge and skills that are appropriate for and needed in a new context or activity system may be applied differently than in the context or activity system in which they were learned. Therefore, if we look for but do not find direct evidence that students use specific previously-learned skills in new situations, we cannot necessarily assume that students did not learn them, have not used them, or will

not use them in the future (69).

The study of writing transfer is not simply searching for a one-to-one correspondence of skills but the study of how activity systems “link the individual with the social structure” (Engestrom, “Activity” 19). Nowacek posits that we might understand transfer as an act of recontextualization, part of which “recognizes multiple avenues of connection among contexts, including knowledge, ways of knowing, identities, and goals” (*Agents* 20); she sees transfer as “an act of reconstruction” (25). Similarly, Liane Robertson et al. “theorize that students actively make use of prior knowledge and practice in three ways: by *drawing* on both knowledge and practice and employing it in ways almost identical to the ways they have used it in the past; by *reworking* such knowledge and practice as they address new tasks; and by *creating new knowledge and practices* for themselves when students encounter what we call a setback or critical incident, which is a failed effort to address a new task that prompts new ways of thinking about how to write and about what writing is” (“Notes”). Studying the transfer of writing knowledge, then, involves more than merely looking to see whether a person who, for example, knows how to write a thesis statement in one situation can also write a thesis statement in another. Indeed, studying transfer also involves looking at writers who transfer their knowledge of a thesis statement to an activity system whose genres do not rely on the traditional thesis statement. In terms of transfer, Wardle argues, “we do not recognize more evidence of ‘transfer’” because “we are looking for apples when those apples are now a part of apple pie” (69). As a result, the transfer of writing knowledge, in terms of activity system, involves looking at how knowledge is shaped, and continues to be shaped, both by the individual and the activity systems of which she is a part.

Why Activity and Genre Theories

Although the previous discussion on activity and genre theories provided a thorough explanation of the richness of such theories and their applications, I turn now briefly to my rationale for choosing these particular theories. Activity theory helps one to make sense of human activities, and it stresses both the social and the individual elements of those activities. Russell and Yañez note that the activity theory “triangle is a theoretical tool, a kind of heuristic lens, for viewing complex activity. It doesn’t give us neat answers, it gives us useful questions [. . .] It provides us a way to focus in on essential aspects of human social interactions to construct a flexible unit of analysis” (338). In short, activity theory allows for the messiness that is inherently a part of the study of writing.

In many cases, activity systems are used interchangeably with other social theoretical frameworks such as discourse communities or communities of practice. All of these theories agree that communication is only meaningful within a particular context. For example, Swales defines discourse communities as “sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals” (9). The notion of a discourse community, a term coined by Patricia Bizzell in a 1982 article (Prior, *Communities*) has been much contested, although a discussion of that debate is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Lave and Wenger write that “a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (98). Communities of practice were originally designed to study apprenticeship and enculturation (Lave and Wenger). Of interest here is that even Lave and Wenger refer to a community of practice as an activity system, noting that membership in a community of practice “does imply participation in an activity system” (98). Because all of these theories stress the importance of the social in relation to the

individual, I considered each as possible ways of theorizing my data. However, I believe that activity theory provides me with more analytical tools than these other social theories and affords me a useful language.

In particular, activity theory also allows for the study of the ways in which genres help to influence or mediate the motive and outcomes but also assumes that other parts are equally at work. Further, activity theory assumes that any system will have competing and contradicting motives and objects, and that different subjects will perceive of these parts in a variety of ways. Russell and Yañez note that “people act in multiple, interacting systems of activity where writing that seems the ‘same’ as what one has read or written before is in practice very different—and not only in the formal features, the ‘how’ of writing. Lying behind the *how* are the *who*, *where*, *when*, *what* and—most importantly—the *why* of writing, are the motives of people engaged in some system of activity” (359, emphasis original). Because I am interested in transfer, activity theory helps me to examine a variety of ways in which subjects draw from their current and previous activity systems and their motives for their choices.

I began this chapter by demonstrating that activity and genre theories are useful frameworks, drawing on relevant literature to support my argument. In addition, I explained why I see activity and genre theories as being compatible and complementary, and I concluded by showing how theories provide me with the most useful framework to study writing transfer. In the following chapter, I describe my methodology, including the theoretical underpinnings behind it, and how my chosen methods—including a survey, interviews, observation, and genre analysis—will help me to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS

Overview

In this chapter, I detail my theoretical approach to the case study's multi-modal research design, which includes surveys, interviews, observations, and genre analysis. I further show why case study research is a valid methodology within the field of writing studies, but I also acknowledge the limitations of such an approach. Next, I discuss my site of study, my research procedure, including research instruments, and my process of participant selection. I then provide a brief discussion of my survey results, which paint a broad picture of the university. From there, I provide detailed descriptions of each of my case study participants, whose experiences will comprise the remainder of the chapters. After providing a discussion of my data coding analysis, I conclude this chapter by explaining how I will use the categories of social interactive, text-based, and writer-based in my discussion of the case study participants.

Case Study Research

Case study research has become a respected methodology within the field of writing studies. In a study of published research between 1999 and 2004, Mary Juzwik et al. found that 51.4% of research in writing studies used interpretive methods such as interviews, discussion groups, case studies, or ethnographic research, and “research focused on context and social practices of writing dominates writing research at the beginning of the 21st century” (467). Such interpretive methods are needed, they argue, because “if writing researchers examine and conceptualize writing as an activity involving meaning negotiation (e.g., among persons, texts, and contexts), then interpretation is essential to the work of writing research” (470). Indeed, many of the studies I referenced in chapters 2 and 3 drew from case study research (for example,

Herrington; McCarthy; Nowacek; Russell and Yañez; Thaiss and Zawacki; Winsor). From such research, we have learned, for example, much about how students develop as writers.

Rather than asking “what?” case studies often ask “why?” or “how?” (Yin). Case studies, while comprising similar components of ethnographies, are usually conducted over a much shorter period of time, such as a semester (MacNealy). Mary Sue MacNealy describes a case study as “a carefully designed project to systematically collect information about an event, situation, or small group or persons or objects for the purpose of exploring, describing, and/or explaining aspects not previously known or considered” (197); she argues that such studies can provide both ““*a holistic view* of an event or situation” and “rich *detail* that can lead to a better understanding of an event or situation” (199, emphasis original). Further, such studies rely on thick description, which Gary Shank argues is meant to “make meaning clear” (77). Although, of course, the descriptions are still subjective, providing as much relevant detail as possible is an important way for a researcher to support his/her interpretations of the data.

At the core of a case study is the narrative the writer composes that draws from the multi-faceted data collection. Thomas Newkirk explains that “the strength of this mode of research is not in producing generalizable conclusions, guaranteed by rigorous and objective observation procedures; the strength, according to North, comes from the ‘idiographic’ nature of case studies, their capacity for detailed and individuated accounts of writers writing.” (132). He notes that while a case study often pretends to have rigor through coding and analysis, “a more honest strategy—for both quantitative and qualitative researchers—is to admit, from the beginning, that we are all storytellers” (134). Likewise, Gesa Kirsch writes that “the effectiveness of a case study relies as much on its culturally rooted narrative structure—the rhetorical stance—as it does on the evidence presented” (251). My interpretation, or my story-telling, is of course only one

interpretation. Thaiss and Zawacki are right to argue that “one of the givens of qualitative research is that the whole process is unavoidably subjective, from the design of survey and interview questions to the construction of meaning from the data that ‘emerges,’ including the analytical categories for coding that data, which are themselves derived from prior knowledge and experience” (25). Given these subjectivities, the resulting analysis becomes one “version of reality” or “one of a variety of culturally grounded narratives” (Newkirk 135). My own perspectives, then, will likely influence my research process even in ways of which I am not immediately aware.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, prior research raised important issues about transferability among activity systems that necessitated further, more methodical study. To address these questions, I conducted a multi-faceted case study research project that combined surveys, interviews, observation, and genre analysis. Studying the features of an activity system, including genres, requires a contextual understanding of a community; however, I recognize that I only shared the activity system of the university with my participants. Constraints such as time and access did not allow for an in-depth ethnographic study of each activity system. That said, my purpose was not to become a member of such systems, as is common with ethnographic research, but rather to use this framework to study participants’ own understanding of working within and among the activity systems of which they are a part. A research design that allowed for multiple methods provided me with the rich data needed to address my research questions. I agree with Ellen Barton that “interesting problems are invariably multi-faceted; the central problem of our field – how and why written language is produced, understood, learned, and taught in a variety of contexts—demands investigations from a variety of methodological approaches” (407). As I discussed previously, one cannot study activity systems without

studying their multiple components, including genres, which demands the need for what Lauer and Asher call “deliberate and interactive multimodality,” especially with regards to “rhetorical and empirical research” (7).

Limitations of Case Study Research

Nevertheless, I am aware of the limitations of case study research. In particular, David Bloome identifies three potential “problematics” about working with evidence in literacy research, which I will discuss here in relation to my own study. First, he argues that “what counts as evidence depends on the theories one brings to the field” (143), and suggests that “one could almost claim that the theory produces the evidence” (143). I recognize that I am working from a socio-cultural theoretical framework that sees writing as social, situated, and contextual, and I acknowledge that someone either within or outside the field of writing studies may approach my data with a different viewpoint. Chapter 3, then, worked to illustrate the particular theories that will affect my understanding of the data.

Second, Bloome argues that researchers must acknowledge that “the evidence that can be claimed about any moment of social interaction—whether it is reading aloud in a classroom instructional group or sitting alone at home—is always and inherently partial” (144). However, he notes that while this partiality is “part of the context of making claims and supporting them with evidence,” that does not mean “that claims should not be made or supported” (144). What he suggests is that researchers recognize that “any argument is but a moment within a social and communicative event(s) itself that is inherently partial, belonging only in part to that researcher” (144). Of course, a common suggestion for those doing case study research is to temper their results through qualifiers, which allows for interpretive claims to be made within the context of a particular framework.

And third, Bloome argues that with any study of a social event, “something is always lost in the translation/representation” (144). As I mentioned previously, case study research relies heavily on narratives, so not only might a case study participant present a narrative in a deliberate way, but I as a researcher then must represent that narrative in the context of my own study. Bloome notes that “researching human actions always requires contextualizing that behavior and re-presenting that behavior for another audience”; however, “researchers have no alternative but to engage in research and representation” (144). Thus, although I believe that such translation is unavoidable, I also argue that I can address this challenge by bringing in the voices of my participants as much as possible to show how I reach my particular conclusions about individuals.

Case study research, then, is particularly challenging given the subjective nature of the methods and their interpretation. MacNealy argues that “because the scope of a case study is so narrow, the findings can rarely be generalized; but a case study can provide insights into events and behaviors” (195). However, I do agree with Yin that “case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” because my goal “is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)” (21). In particular, although I favor thick description over generalizable results, the local over the global, I also believe that these limitations do not prevent me from making claims about the ways in which writing knowledge is transferred among the activity systems of my study, which scholars at similar and different universities might believe to be of use.

Research Site

Virginia Tech is a public land-grant university with over 30,000 full time students. Located in Blacksburg, Virginia and founded in 1872, this university has 65 bachelor’s degree

programs and 150 Master's and Doctoral degree programs. At this time of this dissertation, the university ranked 47th in university research in the United States. Of the 1,364 full-time instructional faculty, 62.8% are tenured ("About"). This university provides me with a unique site of study given its history with writing initiatives. Although Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) activities at Virginia Tech can be traced back to 1980 (Smithson and Sorrentino), WAC was most recently a part of the freestanding University Writing Program on the Virginia Tech campus from approximately 1992-2004. WAC was well-established at many universities by 1990 (Russell, "The Writing"), and like many WAC programs, Virginia Tech's was highly focused on helping faculty to incorporate low-stakes, writing-to-learn activities into their courses, and it involved workshops and a summer institute for faculty (Heilker). Further, students were required to take six credits of writing-intensive upper-division courses in their majors, with each course requiring 15-20 pages of writing that went through multiple drafts and workshops.

Virginia Tech currently has a Curriculum for Liberal Education that comprises 25-30% of a student's credits toward graduation, and its stated purpose is "to empower students with a broad base of knowledge and transferable skills through exposure to multiple disciplines and ways of knowing" ("CLE"). The Virginia Tech's Curriculum for Liberal Education FAQ's webpage states as follows: "In Spring 2004, the university passed a resolution that made important changes to the writing-intensive requirement. First, the writing-intensive requirement was transitioned to a spoken, visual and written communication requirement. Second, responsibility for this requirement moved from the University Core Curriculum to individual departments" ("FAQ's"). After the writing-intensive course requirement ended, departments could either continue these writing-intensive courses or create a new system as a part of the

ViEWS (Visual Expression, Writing and Speaking) requirement, which is “a university-wide requirement that all departments address oral, written and visual communication learning outcomes in their majors” (“Curriculum”). This program allows each department to determine how students, particularly majors, will meet this requirement, and courses no longer have to be designated as writing-intensive. In particular, each department submitted a plan to the Core Curriculum Committee, a plan that “reflects the department’s communication-related learning outcomes, instructional plan, and assessment process” (“ViEWS FAQ’s”). Of importance to note is that while ViEWS placed much responsibility for the teaching of writing and verbal communication in the hands of specific disciplines, that does not mean that faculty were given support for the creation and/or implementation of these discipline-specific plans. Thus although the WAC program is no longer in official existence as a part of a writing program, there are still writing requirements that departments need their students to meet, but those requirements are decided by the departments. Run through the Center for Instructional Development and Educational Research (CIDER), the Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching offers its services in support of professors who need help with instructional strategies, including the teaching of writing. Currently, individual faculty can choose to attend professional development events focused on developing writing assignments or using interactive technologies, though attendance is optional and limited.

My study’s purpose, however, is not to understand why the program was dismantled, and discussions about WAC are likely not to arise unless my case study participants bring them into the discussion. Instead, I hope to learn how a diverse understanding of writing knowledge, including any WAC principles which some of my participants may still adhere to and others may have no knowledge of, affects issues of transferability. Thus, I am less interested in the former

WAC program than I am in the writing knowledge of individual faculty, which I assume to be shaped by a multitude of experiences.

Research Procedures and Instruments

To begin, I created a survey to send to faculty across the university (See Appendix A) to gain a more detailed picture of writing across the university, as well as of individual instructors' own writing practices. The survey's purpose, in addition to providing an overview, was designed to help me to shape my interview questions. Reaching all departments was beyond the scope of this study, as Virginia Tech has well over 70 majors. However, I did hope for a participant from each of the seven colleges: Agriculture and Life Sciences, Architecture and Urban Studies, Engineering, Business, Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Natural Resources and Environment, Science, and Veterinary Medicine. Distributing my survey to each of these colleges proved to be challenging, as I was dependent upon the responsiveness and willingness of each college dean to agree to distribute the survey. I first distributed my survey to the college of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences. When this approach did not return as many results as I wanted, I further selectively distributed the survey to the Computer Science department, the Biology department, and the department of Engineering Education, as these were departments included people I know who were willing to help. This approach inspired a few people in these departments to complete the survey.

This survey was designed to paint a more detailed picture of how the subjects of particular department activity systems understand the object/motive of those systems, including the use tools (genres) and intended outcomes for students. My study was limited to faculty who taught courses to undergraduates, although both for majors and non-majors. Because the survey also included some questions about past writing experiences, it was designed to illustrate some

of the ways in which participants have transferred rules/norms, genres, and objects/motives from previous activity systems to present ones. The survey, while limited in depth, included questions that addressed the following questions:

1. What are the previous writing experiences of professors among disciplines?
2. How do professors believe they learned to write within their disciplines?
3. How do professors in the disciplines perceive the goals of student writing within the university?
4. What do professors value in writing for both majors and non-majors?
5. Do professors participate in discussions about writing in their department?

The final question of the survey asked participants if they would be willing to participate in interviews and class observations during Spring 2012. Therefore, while my initial survey included what Seidman calls “purposeful sampling” (52), I intended for my interview participants to be self-selected from my original sample, as a way to settle on a diverse population. I then emailed the 12 participants who agreed to continue their participation in the study and set up interviews with five of those participants, each of whom represented a unique department within the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. The remaining seven volunteers never responded to my email requests.

At this point, I wanted to gain further case study participants who were members of other colleges. As a result, the remaining participants were selected through purposeful sampling, which, according to Silverman, “allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested” (250). Using Virginia Tech’s website, I chose at least one department from each of the remaining six colleges, including Agriculture and Applied Economics, Forestry, Chemistry, Marketing, Management, Building Construction, Hospitality, Mechanical Engineering, Population Health Sciences, and Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise. I then identified courses from several majors within those departments that were described as writing intensive, or ones that claimed to have at least a writing component. Using

the Spring 2012 course timetable, I identified faculty who were currently teaching these courses and emailed them to ask whether they would be willing to participate in my study. I received responses from four faculty members from three different colleges within the university, bringing my total number of case study participants to nine. In the later part of this chapter, I note which faculty chose to continue participation from the survey and which are those whom I actively recruited through purposeful sampling. Although of course all participants have their motivations for participating, which I address when applicable in my next few chapters, I do want to show that these two ways of finding participants did not result in any significant differences between each set of participants.

A diverse set of participants can show how different degrees of membership in an activity system contribute to that person's understanding of that system. Seidman argues that there is no ideal number of participants (55), as one cannot ignore factors such as time and resources, and scholars such as Weiss argue that most researchers come to a point in their interviews when they start to hear a repeat of information. I agree with Seidman that "the method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (55). Indeed, my participants range from a lecturer and new Assistant Professors to Professors thinking about retirement. Thus, I decided that the nine faculty members in my study were a sufficient number.

I planned for the bulk of my data to come from the interviews I conducted with each of my case study participants. Jarratt et al. argue that "the interview is well respected in writing studies as a means of retrieving information as an extractable content, and the debates about its reliability are well documented" (49), although they also note the challenge of asking someone to

remember years of writing practices and instruction; as a result, “the interview generates as much as retrieves knowledge” (49). The findings of my own pilot study support this claim, as several participants noted that they had never really thought about their own writing practices or that they learned much about themselves through our interviews. Seidman recommends a series of three 90-minute interviews, with the first focusing on life history, the second on details of experience, and the third on reflection (16-18). I had planned to follow this structure, altering the specifics of each interview to fit my own project. However, I found that two interviews with each participant were enough to gather sufficient data (and were respectful of their busy schedules), and participants were able to answer via email any follow-up questions I had after reviewing my data.

The first interview focused on participants’ writing practices to reveal whether they identify themselves as writers, how they describe writing within their discipline, and their experiences with learning how to write (including disciplinary specific writing). This interview also focused on participants’ writing that they consider to be *outside* or even just *different from* their disciplinary work. This interview introduced me to the multiple activity systems in each participant’s life, including previous systems from which they might still transfer writing knowledge. This interview was especially focused on the following questions:

1. How do professors work within their own activity systems and move among various activity systems? How do they negotiate these systems?
2. Do professors share their writing with members of their discipline for feedback? With people outside of their disciplines?
3. What writing, if any, do professors participate in outside of academe? How do they understand this writing in relation to their academic writing and teaching?
4. How do professors learn to write within their disciplines?

These data from these questions helped me to understand professors’ previous and current understanding of writing within multiple activity systems.

The second interview focused on the undergraduate classes that each participant currently teaches or had previously taught, including questions about their expectations of students as writers, the kinds of writing they require of their students and why, and the ways, if any, in which they prepare students for writing those specific assignments. Here I gained an understanding of how instructors' own activity systems play into the activity systems of their classrooms, which addressed the following questions:

1. How do professors in the disciplines perceive the goals of student writing within the university?
2. How is faculty awareness of their own writing development intertwined with their understanding of student writing development
3. What role might major courses play in introducing students to the writing used in various disciplinary activity systems? How do faculty represent this writing?
4. Do faculty require different genres from majors and non-majors?
5. How do faculty respond to student writing, and how is this response shaped by disciplinary expectations?

At some point between the first and second interviews, I tried to visit a class period for each participating faculty member. When possible, I hoped to visit on a day when a writing assignment would be introduced or discussed (if any writing is included). Due to scheduling issues, however, I was only able to observe two classes. That, and one of the classes was taught in Spanish, a language in which I am not fluent. Although I took a list of questions to the two interviews (see Appendix B), some of my questions during the second interview focused on what I had observed during class or understood from reading through course syllabi and assignment prompts. Seidman argues that one key to strong interviewing is “to listen actively and to move the interview forward as much as possible by building on what the participant has begun to share” (81). Further, during my pilot study, participants often answered questions on my list without my having to ask, a practice quite common (Seidman 92).

Additionally, over the course of the semester I collected any and all texts that participants

utilize in their classes, including syllabi, assignment prompts, rubrics, exams, and samples of participant's own writing. Although some participants shared a variety of texts with me from multiple courses, others gave me texts from his/her current teaching schedule, including in two instances, access to their course sites on Scholar, Virginia Tech's online course management system. Collecting and analyzing these texts helped me to understand how these genres function within their particular activity systems, in addition to helping me to understand what goals instructors have for their students in terms of writing. These documents were also discussed within the duration of the second interview. Together, the interviews, observations, and textual analysis provided with a detailed picture of each faculty's understanding of writing and how that transfers to classroom practice.

Survey Results

In this section, I will discuss the overall demographics of those participants who took my survey. Because the two purposes of the survey were to gain a broad understanding of the university and to find interview participants, I also include selective results from the survey without my analysis or interpretation to provide more contextual background on the location of the study.

Demographics

All of the survey participants had at least an MA, with most holding a PhD or an MFA, and they held degrees in a variety of disciplines such as Philosophy, Journalism, Literature, International Studies, Curriculum & Instruction, Human Development, Professional Communication, Psychology, and Mathematics. Several of the participants work in disciplines different from the disciplines of their degrees and thus may not necessarily identify with that

discipline. For example, one person identified his/her discipline as Religion and Culture, with the note, “It’s a bad fit for me since I’m not of this discipline.” In addition, the participants included Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors, and Instructors, and all of them had taught at Virginia Tech for at least one semester. Over half of the participants identified themselves as being strong writers, with the remaining few claiming to be decent writers who have both succeeded and struggled in writing situations. None of the participants identified him/herself as being a weak writer.

Backgrounds on Writing

Most of the participants had taken a writing course in college, which tended to involve writing about literature or creative writing, in addition to some focus on rhetorical elements such as purpose and audience. Even though I asked specifically about writing courses, many of the participants seemed to assume that this also meant any English class in general. In addition, there was a strong familiarity with writing-intensive courses, although one participant noted, “I’ve never understood Virginia Tech’s use of writing-intensive. Many of my undergraduate courses and almost all of my graduate courses required regular writing.” In addition, at the same time one participant shared, “In the 1960s, almost all courses were writing-intensive, from history to theatre to psychology to physics,” another commented, “Are you kidding? Nobody had even thought about the concept back in the ‘50s!” The participants drew from a variety of methods when learning how to write in their discipline, including trial and error, help from peers or professors, practice, reading in their disciplines, and attending writing workshops, with almost everyone noting that he/she is still learning. Further, they identified a variety of challenges to this learning. For example, several noted the difficulty of learning how to adapt to audiences, and others talked about organizing material, making their ideas accessible and interesting,

learning what details to include and omit, finding a unique voice, and, “ignoring the French theory that was all the rage when I was in graduate school.”

Learning Disciplinary Writing

When asked to define good writing in relation to their discipline, almost every participant included the word “clear” in his/her description, and most included a reference to an argument, such as the following: “People need to be able to make arguments using simple, strong expository prose.” Yet most participants went beyond this adjective. One person wrote, “I don’t think much disciplinary writing is good writing. It’s obscure, jargon-laden, and unduly complex.” On the other hand, we have a participant who responded that good writing in his/her discipline is “refereed publications, books/book chapters, dissertations.” Yet another person wrote, “original, interesting, logical, well-argued, well-researched, grammatical. Learned would be nice, but one mustn’t ask for too much.” And a particular compelling description of good writing was as follows: “The best writing helps us to see/understand something we didn’t see or understand before. I often think that a good writing project has a kind of ‘hour glass’ structure. It first casts a rather wide net to capture a broad base of interests, then draws the reader in to the important details, and finally broadens out again to suggest the broader implications of the details discussed.”

The Teaching of Writing

When asked to describe any training they had received in the teaching of or responding to writing, a few of the participants noted having taken some pedagogy courses. However, most participants drew from other experiences, including the following: having read a book about writing well, being “prepared to teach real ‘writing-intensive’ courses at previous institutions, working as a reporter and editor, attending workshops with writing coaches, receiving teachers’

and colleagues' comments on their writing, having advanced placement training, attending CIDER workshops, reading writing handbooks and instructional materials, and attending workshops by a professor in the Composition Program at Virginia Tech. Three of the participants claimed to have had no training, although others noted that they have had no additional training since graduate school.

Most of the participants noted that the quality of student writing is an item of discussion and/or concern within their department, although it was observed that much of the discussion is anecdotal or discussed in passing, either to complain about the quality of writing or to note that something should be done. Others mentioned that despite discussion about needing to increase the quality of writing, little is actually done to work toward improvement. One participant commented that writing is abysmal at not only the undergraduate and graduate level but also among many professors.

Although the participants assign writing in a variety of genres, only about one-third are at least somewhat satisfied with student writing abilities of non-majors, while that number increased to about half for majors. Nonetheless, the faculty members do use a variety of pedagogical writing practices, including giving feedback on drafts, holding conferences on papers in progress, requiring multiple drafts, doing peer reviews, giving opportunities for informal writing, asking students to reflect on their own writing, and discussing the writing assignments in class.

The biggest obstacle to assigning writing that faculty face is the lack of time to assess it. Others identified as problems the ability to design an assignment appropriate to all writing abilities. Perhaps, however, the most informative responses came from faculty when asked to provide any other comments with regard to their own writing practices or to the teaching of

writing. In particular, the following answers give a more well balanced perspective to faculty views. Select answers are as follows:

“The CIDER (formerly CEUT) program on campus is underutilized by faculty and is a great resource. I've taken several workshops and feel that it's kept me current on pedagogy and influenced my own writing, as well.”

“Writing well takes time and reading, and I tell my students that all the time.”

“Teaching writing is rewarding when students try to incorporate suggestions I have made for improvements. I am gratified by their appreciation for help.”

“People need to teach writing and integrate it into their classes. It's a lot of work but it needs to be done so I don't have a lot of sympathy for those who use that as an excuse.”

“All of my theories about writing and the teaching of writing are heretical. As far as the teaching goes, I think that it is basically useless to try to teach writing to non-readers, and as fewer and fewer of our students enjoy reading, it is ever more likely that their writing will be of poor quality.”

“I try to coach writing. The process takes lots of effort. I want students to try assignments without fear of failure. If they don't succeed the first time, they can learn from the experience, see ways to improve and try again.”

“Unfortunately, quality teaching is not much valued at VT. Given the very strong emphasis on research, faculty are in fact sometimes advised NOT to spend much time on (undergraduate) teaching. The weight given to progress in research and service (over and above teaching) really makes it hard to cultivate good writing skills/habits in students. Also, I think there's too much emphasis on quantity of research writing and not enough emphasis on quality of research/writing amongst faculty.”

“I continue to struggle greatly with my own writing. Despite my attempt to keep an even pace, it very much progresses in fits and starts with long periods of stagnation.”

“In lower-division courses (mine are for non-majors) I create assignments that specify how students should organize their papers. By following the assignment, they may learn something about how social scientific empirical papers are organized.”

“The non-majors I teach are usually honors students, but they have not taken English in years or not at all at VT. They are often better students (smarter, more knowledgeable generally) than English majors, but have had less practice. My job is to bring writing back to them as a critical thinking and interpretive practice.”

“I have started conducting research in this area.”

“I teach science, not writing.”

These descriptions, thus, help to paint a wider picture of some current understandings of writing practices and the teaching of writing on Virginia Tech’s campus, although of importance is to remember that these responses are primarily representative of one of the seven colleges, Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

Case Study Participants

In this section, I introduce my case study participants and provide some background information on them, including a short description of their fields of study and any courses they teach or recently taught. Although I group them here by those who self selected and those I actively recruited, I do this only to provide complete transparency, as these types of recruitment did not seem to impact my overall findings. I will refer to these participants throughout the next few chapters, drawing from their experiences where relevant. There are five professors from the College of Liberal Arts and Humans Sciences (CLAS) representing five disciplines (Science & Technology, Spanish Literature, Literature, Sociology, and Music). Two professors are in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, representing Agriculture and Applied Economics and Human Nutrition, Foods, and Science. One faculty member is in the College of Business, specifically Management. The final faculty member represents the College of Science, in the department of Chemistry. Thus while my participants come only from four of the seven colleges at Virginia Tech, they are varied in the disciplines with which they identify and in their overall teaching and writing experiences.

Participants who Self-Selected from Survey

Thomas is an Associate Professor of Science & Technology Studies (STS) within the

College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (CLAS). With a bachelor's in both chemistry and science in society, he noted that he has been in the social sciences and humanities most of his professional life. He explains that STS studies are very interdisciplinary: "It took me a long time to decide that I am a humanities scholar and not a social scientist because it sits at that boundary between the humanities and the social sciences, sort of the more humanistic side of the social sciences and the scientific side of the humanities. But really it is a writing profession." The field, which draws from sociology, history, policy and politics, anthropology, philosophy, and social and cultural theory, is really "a field of reading and writing." A believer in active and student-centered learning, he currently consistently teaches one undergraduate course on international development in science and technology, in addition to graduate level courses. Thomas has also taught other undergraduate courses in, for example, Science and the Law and Science and the Public.

Dexter is an Assistant Professor of Spanish Literature and a recent hire at Virginia Tech. During the time of our interviews, he was only in his second semester at the university. However, Dexter has a unique background that includes training in the teaching of writing in addition to his work in comparative and Latin American literature. During his PhD program at an Ivy League college, he taught within their writing program, which places theme-based composition classes within the disciplines. For example, he commonly taught a course on intellectual property and creativity. Each of these courses—taught by graduate students or faculty within the disciplines—utilized common writing course strategies such as peer review and revision. At Virginia Tech, he currently teaches a Spanish composition conversation and grammar course, which he runs like a writing workshop.

Heather is an Associate Professor of Sociology who majored in French as an

undergraduate but did not want to teach French, which “seemed like one of the main things you could do with a degree in French.” She also noted that she wasn’t “crazy about literature and doing literary analyses,” but realized she had more of a “scientific mind” and went for a doctoral degree in Sociology. She currently focuses on behavioral genetics and their influences on mental health and identity, in addition to her broad interest in the family. Although her classes are primarily lecture-based, she also tried to interact through discussions and occasional group work. She currently teaches sophomore level classes on marriage and the family, in addition to the occasional introduction to sociology course.

Arthur is an Associate Professor of Music who describes himself as “a musician, first and foremost,” who never wanted to do anything else. As he worked on his bachelor’s degree over a 12-year period, he was also on the road as an entertainer, including four years in the Air Force band with his quartet. When his quartet began breaking up in the 70s, he started graduate school because he “figured the two kinds of people that had to know the most about music were the musicologists, the scholars who studied it, and the conductors, the people who had to bring it to life off the page to make it happen.” After receiving his master’s in choral conducting and finishing his coursework toward a PhD in musicology, he took a job as faculty at his doctoral institution and ended up never finishing the PhD. He came to Virginia Tech in 1979 to take over an entertainment group called the New Virginians. From there, he moved to teaching music history and early instruments, in addition to directing the ensemble that does early music.

Tiffany is an Associate Professor of English who specializes in Shakespearean studies. She received a PhD in English. She also worked as a technical writer for a few years, helping to develop online coursework for anything from helping to teach bank tellers their job to showing how to train a guard dog. Her career in academia after graduate school has been at Virginia

Tech, where she teaches primarily courses in Shakespeare. Her goal for these courses is to “teach them [students] to understand the literature and to enjoy it.”

Participants I Actively Recruited through Email

Brandon is a Professor of Agriculture and Applied Economics with an undergraduate degree in agricultural economics and a law degree. He spent six years in Washington, DC working for both the public and private sector inside USDA as a lawyer and congressional staff member. He then returned to school for a PhD in agriculture and applied economics, and has been at Virginia Tech for over 30 years. He studies food, energy, the environment—“all those things that agricultural economists get worried about”—from a legal perspective. He believes that “most agricultural economics attempt to apply tools very pragmatically to solve people and food and environmental issues.” He is currently the only lawyer among the faculty in his department, so he teaches most of the law courses, which focus on the application of economic concepts and policies, such as environmental law or agricultural law. A fan of the Socratic method, Leon describes himself as “old-fashioned,” arguing that he tries to get students to critically respond.

Albert is a professor of Management who has been at Tech for 35 years. During the semester of our interviews, he received a prestigious Teaching Scholars Award, which is presented to three Virginia Tech faculty each year to recognize outstanding teachers. This award is among several others that he has received during his 30+ years at Virginia Tech. He most commonly teaches a course on productivity and quality management, the capstone for the major, in addition to one on organizational behavior. Well known for his problem-based courses, Albert’s pedagogy focuses around team-based projects. He explained, “What I do with my students is I create problems for them to solve. I create problems that are challenging for them,

and then as they work on the solution, I provide the means through tools or the course content. In addition, I also give them challenges and tools to work in teams more effectively.” After receiving an undergraduate degree in psychology and a master’s in urban planning, he switched focused to work on a PhD in organizational behavior. Other than a two-year stint at a small campus in Texas, Albert has been a faculty member at Virginia Tech since 1978. He currently works on the study of justice in organizations and how fairness is perceived in the organization, among other projects with multiple graduate students.

Valeria is an Instructor of Chemistry who has been teaching at Virginia Tech for around 11 years. Her previous bachelor’s and master’s degrees are in chemistry, from different institutions. She worked in two different corporate research labs before moving to Virginia Tech when her husband, a chemistry professor, decided that he wanted to go into academia. In addition to several laboratory courses, she also teaches a course called chemical literature. She describes all of her classes as hands-on.

Rilo is an Assistant Professor of Health Nutrition, Food, and Exercise (HNFE). She has been at Virginia Tech for four years, with the first three as a post-doc before being promoted for assistant professor. She focuses on energy metabolism and aging and explained that although she is technically an exercise physiologist, she is actually more of a physiologist and “doesn’t know very much about exercise other than that I do it.” The year of our interviews was also her first year of teaching, during which time she taught a section each semester of writing and discourse for the HNFE major. Despite not having “the best structured teaching experience,” Rilo noted that her “priority is to get the students engaged, interested, and involved in what they’re doing.”

Analysis

In this section, I will explain how I coded and analyzed my data. I began by playing the recordings of my interviews and transcribing them into separate word documents, using what Danile Oliver et al. call naturalism transcription, in which “every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible” (1273). I agree with their argument that transcription is “a powerful act of representation” rather than simply a “behind-the-scenes task” (1273) and that transcription can “powerfully affect the way participants are understood, the information they share, and the conclusions drawn” (1273). Thus, in addition to paying close attention to non-verbal cues during each interview, I also listened carefully to participant pauses and other utterances while I transcribed each interview. Further, I paid attention to ways in which I may have been unintentionally leading a participant and/or influencing his/her response based on my line of questioning.

After transcribing the data, I made notes in the margins of the transcribed interviews about what I observed and possible categories that I could use. At this time, I also looked through the other documents I collected, including course syllabi and assignment prompts. I kept each participant’s data separate from one other until I felt that I had a firm grasp on each person’s understanding of writing. I then began to form tentative categories. Keith Grant-Davie argues as follows: “The main reason for dividing and classifying data is to simplify the material and impose order on it. Coding organizes, allowing researchers to abstract patterns by comparing the relative placement and frequency of categories. It gives them a system by which to demonstrate these patterns to other readers, and it provides researchers with a perspective from which to view the data, so that the coding can directly address their research questions” (273). Dividing and classifying, then, became a necessary step toward making sense of my data. I

looked for overall trends among my participants, and I began coding the ways that the participants talked about their writing practices or the teaching of writing. I began to create various themes based on the data. For instance, many participants talked about specific moments that they believe influenced their current ability to write. According to Shank, themes do not emerge from the data; rather, “what emerges [. . .] is an awareness in the mind of the researcher that there are patterns of order that seem to cut across the various aspects of the data. When these patterns become organized, and when they characterize different segments of data, then we can call them ‘themes’” (129). In particular, I noticed that rather than seeing trends shared by all of my participants, I saw they had different understandings of writing, especially with regard to how one learns to write, which enabled me to categorize the participants.

Understandings of Learning to Write and Categories of Transfer

The more I read through each participant’s interview transcripts and course documents, the more I noticed that each participant’s understanding of how he/she learned to write seemed correlated to if and how that participant transferred writing knowledge into his/her classrooms. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Brammer et al. identified three primary ideologies that faculty hold about how people learn to write, including social-interactive, text-based, or writer-based perspectives. Although no category holds true in every case, these categories do reflect what I believe to be the participants’ overall understandings of writing that continue to shape their choices. The participants in Chapter 5, then, talk primarily about the social aspect of writing and their processes of learning to write as continually ongoing and developing through their socialization into a variety of activity systems. This understanding reflects the social-interactive ideology, wherein a person learns to write through feedback, revision, and other social processes.

Although the participants in the next two chapters also seemed to value these practices, they spoke of their own processes of learning to write in unique ways. The participants in Chapter 6 shared an understanding that reflects a text-based view of writing, or the belief that writing is learned through the mastery of mechanics, grammar, and form. Of course, as I will discuss in this chapter, these participants do nonetheless value disciplinary genres but approach their teaching in ways that more reflect this text-based view. And finally, the participants in Chapter 7 tended to question whether writing can actually be taught, noting that their own experiences with learning to write seemed to happen through an individualized process or because of a natural talent. Though at times these categorizations break down, I also found the persistence of their beliefs to be fascinating, which raises interesting questions for writing scholars about the persistence of early memories of writing.

In addition to identifying that the participants hold unique ideologies, I also saw that such perspectives seemed to correspond to the ways that those participants then transferred writing knowledge into their classrooms. In particular, the participants in Chapter 5 tended to transfer their understanding of writing as rhetorical, social, and contextual into their classes, in the genres they assign to students, in the ways they talk about writing to those students, and in the ways they evaluate such writing. The participants in Chapter 6 tended to transfer their text-based understanding, which resulted in the teaching of those writing abilities that often *do* transfer among activity systems, including grammar, the use of active voice, and the structure of some genres. In Chapter 7, then, I focus on the participants who question what it means to learn to write, which seems to be the result of their years of experience as writers and teachers. Though each participant in this chapter also has a wealth of disciplinary knowledge, he/she often chooses to transfer little of that knowledge to students, even when there are opportunities for what

Perkins and Salomon call positive transfer. In other words, their understanding of how we learn to write interferes with their ability to teach that writing to students. Though often this phenomenon is called negative transfer, I see it as the lack of positive transfer in places where it might be encouraged and needed. These categories in particular were chosen for their use in helping me to make sense of the various kinds of knowledge that faculty transfer among a variety of activity systems, and how this knowledge then affects their choices in the teaching of writing. However, these categories—while helpful tools with which to understand writing knowledge, are just that—categories. Thus, while I do use them to draw connections among the participants, I also respect that each participant is a unique individual whose experience I hope to capture through my narratives in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER 5

A SOCIAL-INTERACTIVE UNDERSTANDING: THE TRANSFER OF RHETORICAL WRITING KNOWLEDGE AMONG ACTIVITY SYSTEMS

“I think that writing is where most of my thinking happens.” – Thomas

“Writing is an unfolding process.” – Albert

“There’s a give and take in the process of writing something.” – Dexter

As I sat down for interviews with three of my participants, Dexter, Thomas, and Albert, what immediately struck me as they chatted about their individual writing practices and research, their understanding of writing knowledge, and their teaching practices was their ability to talk about writing much like those of us in the field of writing studies do. For example, rather than lamenting about the poor writing skills of students, they spoke only of writing as contextualized and inseparable from content. However, as I spoke with them at greater length, I soon found that two of the participants have had experience in teaching first-year writing courses. Further, the fact that each participant was in some way involved in interdisciplinary work seemed to have shaped the ways in which they view writing. In addition to being able to speak at length and in great detail about their motives for themselves and for students as writers, they also easily verbalized how they had come to these particular goals, and, for example, how they use specific tools to help students to work toward particular outcomes. Further, they recognized the individualized and localized nature of writing situations. The participants’ ability to abstract and transfer knowledge among a variety of activity systems, while taking into account the differences among those activity systems, lead me to see them as clearly capable of the transfer of an understanding of writing as social and contextual. However, such knowledge is not simply transferred among activity systems but also transformed for a new rhetorical situation. These participants, I argue, understand writing from a social-interactive ideology, or the belief that we

learn to write through our socialization with others. I detail this perspective later in this chapter after I have introduced each of these participants, and their experiences in a variety of activity systems.

However, though I only include three participants in this chapter, that is not to say that other participants do not, at times, also show an understanding that writing is learned through socialization. I include the remaining participants in separate chapters, however, because they tended not to transfer this understanding of writing into their classrooms in the same way the participants in this chapter do. The participants in Chapter 6, for instance, share an understanding of writing that may include some rhetorical knowledge but that also depends heavily upon abstracted writing skills. Rather than discussing writing as an integral part of their disciplinary work, and thus seeing that writing as a response to a rhetorical situation through an appropriate genre, they focus instead on writing as formulaic and grammatical. And the participants in Chapter 7, while being able to talk at length about their own writing practices in their disciplines, tended not to transfer much of that knowledge to students simply because they questioned the value of doing so.

This chapter, then, focuses on Dexter, Albert, and Thomas, each of whom I believe to have a sophisticated understanding of writing and the ability to intentionally transfer or adapt that knowledge to a variety of situations. At the same time, they each have faced, and currently face, multiple challenges as writers, but they are able to recognize these challenges and adapt their abilities accordingly. Each of the participants, while being situated in a particular discipline at Virginia Tech, is also interdisciplinary either in his background or current work. This shifting among disciplines, which I discuss in this chapter, may be of influence in each professor's ability to transfer and recontextualize writing knowledge among a variety of activity systems. Although I

briefly introduced each participant in the previous chapter, I begin here by re-introducing Dexter, Thomas, and Albert and the early writing activity systems of which they were a part, including their remembered socialization into their current disciplines with which they identify. I then discuss the current activity systems in which they operate, looking at how their remembered past experiences seem to have shaped their current understandings, in addition to the ways in which they balance the differing motives among systems. I follow this discussion with a look at how they approach the teaching of writing, showing the ways in which their understanding of writing has transferred into the activity systems of their classrooms, including their course motives and genres. I conclude with a brief discussion of how these findings can inform our understanding of how a social interactive understanding of writing might shape writing transfer across a variety of activity systems.

Formative Writing Experiences

Thomas

When I met with Thomas, currently an Associate Professor of Science & Technology in Society (STS), I was struck by his overall enthusiasm as he tried to recall instances from his past, and he was quick to note, “I was a writer as a kid. I wrote stories when I was young, voraciously, and for show and tell I used to bring in my stories and read them out loud.” At the same time he shared about having had encouraging English teachers in high school and having won writing awards, he talked about never having had any formal training in grammar, and admitted, “I couldn’t tell you what various verbs are called or why a sentence is wrong other than that it is, and I know how to fix it.” However, he did not phrase this lack of grammatical knowledge as being problematic, explaining that his writing was often just from ear and sound, and contiguous with reading: “I kind of write from a voice, which is why I think it used to be

easier for me to write because the voices I had in my head were more straight-forward.”

Mimicking genre strategies became important for Thomas as he moved into his discipline. As I’ll discuss later in this chapter, Thomas talks about the current challenges of writing in academia in relation to his reading practices, which have since become more complex.

Despite knowing that he wanted to do something that involves writing, Thomas never saw himself as being a writer because he felt he lacked the will power needed to sit down every day and write. Yet he recognized the irony in that his chosen profession is, as he observed at one point, a “writing profession.” As Thomas moved into college, receiving a bachelor’s in both chemistry and science in society, followed by a PhD in science and technology studies, he quickly learned to adapt to a writing process that was systematic and involved:

I would sit down in a quiet place, usually the library. You know I had these little nooks that I knew, and I needed sunlight and quiet. I would go in with just a pad of paper, and maybe if I had a book that I needed to respond to, I’d go in with a book or two, but basically just me and my pad of paper. And I would just outline the entire argument, and rearrange things, and then I was done for the day. And the next day I would sit down with my outline and just start writing from the top, so that I already knew exactly where I was going and all the points, and whatever I had, basically I would get it done in a day.

Thomas, who admits he was never a last minute writer, learned to develop and appreciate a writing process that worked until he wrote his dissertation: “I think it really was in the dissertation that I started to get lost in a way. You know the process kind of broke down.” He found himself “mired in tons of information. It became an organizational task at that point as opposed to sort of a conceptual task.” The messiness of writing that Thomas identifies here still exists for him, which he stressed to me during our interview by gesturing around his cluttered office. Rather than attributing his knowledge of writing back to one particular activity system of

which he was a part, Thomas identified overall habits of writing that he not only transferred among writing situations but also transformed. Thomas, then, was clearly comfortable rejecting even a writing process he had long found to be successful when he saw it no longer helped him to write appropriately. Later, Thomas's understanding of writing as fluid is further illustrated when he discusses his experience with writing among a variety of disciplines.

During his graduate career, Thomas taught a first-year writing seminar, but his training for this course was only a one-credit class, and he stressed, "it wasn't a full blown pedagogy course, but in that they did pedagogical techniques primarily focused on writing." He mostly remembers teaching this class as being very challenging, but it was also his first teaching experience and involved a writing-intensive course, with required pages of writing. He remarked that the experience allowed him "to consolidate some thoughts that I had had around the course and pull that together and practice." However, he only taught this course once, as he was starting to write his dissertation, so he spent the remainder of his time as a TA for other courses, noting that he "got that informal training that you get as a TA working with particular faculty members and then just the rest of it was being a student." More recently, he has taken some of the CIDER⁹ courses offered by Virginia Tech, although sporadically. He now regularly teaches a first-year introduction to humanities, science, and technology course, in addition to several courses at the graduate level. Thomas demonstrated enthusiasm for each of these experiences, and, I will discuss in relation to his teaching, his understanding of learning to writing as an ongoing development process is something he clearly transfers into the courses he teaches.

Dexter

Like Thomas, Dexter's first memories of writing were also pleasant ones. He specifically

⁹ As I explained in Chapter 4, CIDER stands for the Center for Instructional Development and Educational Research and offers workshops, seminars, and a discussion series for faculty, as well as instructional consulting.

remembers writing poems for a school program when a poet visited his school and helped the students to arrange words into poems. He noted, “I wrote a poem that seemed to impress people, so I liked the fact that one, it seemed like a scam in that I had just arranged the words that were already selected for me in a way that really impressed people, but on the other hand I really enjoyed doing it. So I started writing a lot.” After the positive response from others, he began writing and sharing stories with people. As we also saw with Thomas, Dexter was influenced by the positive experiences writing in activity systems. Though the participants in the next chapter could talk about proud moments in their writing, none of them vocalized having experienced this same type of praise at an early age.

Dexter also spoke of his admissions essay for college as being a pivotal experience for him, especially with regard to developing a writing process: “That was probably my first experience with participating in an actual revision process where you start with something, and the end result just has the most tangential connection to it, kind of like when you know you have a ship, and you replace every single piece of material on that ship, and then the end ship shares nothing in common with the ship you started with, but somehow it’s the same thing.” After getting accepted into the university for which he wrote the essay, he realized the value of revision practices, but he also questioned his previous writing. He explained, “A lot of people told me that I was a good writer, but they didn’t really read, so I learned that their opinions weren’t really—they were just being nice to me. But once I started hanging around people who actually read, then they would give me much more specific feedback. They would read something to me and be like ‘Why did you do this?’ or ‘This is clumsy,’ so that was more useful.” As Dexter entered increasingly specialized activity systems, he realized that his writing would also have to adapt to the new environment, and he began to value the knowledge of other

subjects within those systems. Prior to his experience in college, Dexter explained that his writing approach was “pretty oblivious,” perhaps given the positive reactions to his early writings that never challenged him to question what he was doing. However he noted a time during college when he first realized that there “was a connection between the really good stuff that I read and what I was trying to do. But that was a realization.” This realization inspired him to try to bridge the gap he saw between what he was reading and what he was writing, but he also believed that he could improve himself as well by “thinking about strategies and exposing myself to different things.” Being in activity systems that valued literary works also helped, as he tried to imitate the writers’ style: “I went through a very long phase of trying to imitate people, both in creative writing but then also if I’d have to write an essay for class. I would not plagiarize but basically imitate, try to write in somebody else’s voice.” We saw this same practice with Thomas, who realized that reading and mimicking the genres of his discipline could help him with his own writing practices.

In college, Dexter studied comparative literature with a focus on Latin American literature, and due to the writing required for his classes, he “learned the mechanical limits of must how many words one can write in a 24-hour period.” He also received a master’s in special education, which he described as “totally worthless,” and seemed not to want to discuss further. After this time, he taught in an art-based literacy program for emotionally disturbed elementary school kids before entering graduate school in Spanish. During his graduate school experience, Dexter often crossed multiple disciplinary activity systems, as he was expected to teach composition as a part of his assistantship. He explained: “All the freshman composition classes there are taught in the discipline, so you take a writing class that’s a themed content based writing course taught by a biologist or a historian, someone in cultural studies.” This experience

allowed him to design and teach courses based on his research, with themes such as intellectual property and creativity. But it also placed emphasis on the value of writing within a disciplinary context rather than as an activity taught separate from a discipline. For example, these courses utilized composition pedagogical methods such as peer review.¹⁰

Dexter eventually became a co-facilitator for the program, teaching incoming graduate students how to teach the first-year writing courses. Dexter then was already comfortably moving among roles even within the same system, and he talked at length about the benefit of helping others to learn how to teach: “There’s the general idea that if you really want to master something, you have to teach it, which is kind of the opposite of the other ‘if you can’t do, teach,’ which obviously I think is stupid. I think it’s the other way around. It’s impossible to demonstrate your mastery of something *until* you try to teach it, until you try to pass on that knowledge to someone else, so it forced me to be much more reflective about what I do.” He also had additional training in teaching Spanish, which he notes was much more “grammar-driven,” and involved a course in a romance studies department that focused on second language acquisition. But Dexter finds that he pulls from all his pedagogical training, and noted, “I have much more training in teaching composition than I do in teaching second language.” As I will discuss in a later section, Dexter, like Thomas, had amassed a large number of writing experiences from which he clearly felt comfortable recontextualizing knowledge in ways that worked in different activity systems. At the time of this interview, Dexter had been an Assistant Professor of Spanish at Virginia Tech for only a semester; as a result, he was still adjusting to the larger activity systems of Virginia Tech, which have their own object/motives unique from his

¹⁰ Interestingly, Thomas attended the same Ivy League Graduate school as Dexter, although as a part of a different discipline, and also taught as a part of the interdisciplinary writing program, although over a decade earlier and with a much more peripheral involvement.

prior institution, an Ivy League school. In addition, the overall community is comprised of vastly different subjects, which, as I discuss later, proves to be a particular challenge in helping him to achieve his course goals.

However, Dexter distinguished his current position as being different than if he were teaching composition courses, and he identified himself as a literature professor, noting that the courses he teaches should be comparable to upper division English courses. Yet he clarified that the comparison is not really accurate because very few Spanish majors are native speakers and thus have “problems with the language.” He went on to say, “it doesn’t make sense to just pretend that everyone is fluent.” However, rather than reject what he learned while being a subject within the activity systems of composition, Dexter instead embraces and consciously transfers this developed understanding of writing, including specific practices such as peer review. As I will discuss later, Dexter seems to struggle with balancing the object/motives of the course as being disciplinary—for example, for students to become well-practiced in literary analysis—with his desire to meet students where they are in their writing abilities.

Albert

For Albert, a current professor of Management, his memory of writing was less a school-based activity and more of a home one. He recalls that his mother was a strong writer, with an exceptional vocabulary and a love of crossword puzzles, and he remembers her teaching him how to spell with phonetics and other things he wasn’t “learning in school.” He specifically remembers learning the alphabet in the 5th grade from a cartoon where they had the alphabet song, which he explained in a way that made it clear he was criticizing his schooling. Albert, who mostly remembers getting into trouble in his early years, struggled to pinpoint any exact memories from his early years. The first time he really thought about writing was when he

started college as a young psychology student. In particular, he remembers an older student in his discipline who looked at his writing and told him, “‘This is absolute crap. This is terrible. You write terrible.’ And he actually helped me write well.” This peer-to-peer feedback inspired Albert to be more concerned about his writing, and, as he explained to me, “it got me looking at good writing, writing that was done well. I started taking an interest in it, so that people actually understood what I wanted to say.” At this time, he also realized that writing with “big elaborate words” was not equivalent to writing well.

As he continued into his graduate work, Albert received a master’s in urban planning and then started a PhD in public administration before switching focus to organizational behavior, which he now considers to be his area within management. He explained, “it also has other elements like sociology and economics and anthropology, but it’s heavily influenced by psychology.” He attributes his turning point in writing to having happened while he was writing his master’s thesis, which forced him to pay more attention to his writing, and as did help from his chair, although he also explained, “People who read my stuff in the classes I was in, they would make comments, but there was not a lot of training on writing.” Albert also began to see a pattern in the judgment of a piece of writing, noting that “what happens with writing is that it conflates with the actual quality of the ideas that you’re working with, so-so ideas, and if they’re presented very well, you’ll get a good grade. You can have great ideas, but if you don’t present them well, people have trouble getting through them and understanding them.” Albert spoke at length about the importance of knowing one’s audience and purpose—in other words, the rhetorical situation for which one is writing. Further, Albert recognizes that genres of writing, no matter the discipline, should work toward the outcome of a particular activity system while still remaining flexible, and, as I’ll note later, this is something he stresses to his students.

After talking with each of these three participants about their early writing experiences, and noting how limited this information was despite my gentle prodding in our interviews, particularly with Albert, I immediately thought of Jarratt et al.'s discussion of pedagogical memory and their argument that the "metaphor of memory as a container of static content" has shifted to "a narrative constantly under construction within changing contexts" (49). Because I was asking participants to draw from memories that were, in many cases, decades old, I realized that, like the students in the Jarratt et al. study, my participants would not "bear a pedagogical memory available for recall but create it in the presence of an addressee" (50). Yet for my purposes, that participants accurately remember their writing histories is not so important as *what* they remember, or more specifically, what they attribute their learning back to even if it is only a partial account. While I might safely assume that the participants are also transferring knowledge that they no longer remember learning, *what* they do remember seems to relate to *how* they currently view writing. For instance, although Thomas could no longer remember anything about learning grammar, his writing is not riddled with errors, so at some point he must have learned grammar and mechanics. His current view of writing, which I discuss later in this chapter, is a rhetorical one, in that grammar is important only so far as it affects the meaning of what one has written. In addition, Thomas, Dexter, and Albert recalled specific turning points or moments that shifted their understanding of their own writing. For Thomas, it was his dissertation; for Dexter, his exposure to good writing and its connection to his own; and for Albert, his experience with another person who challenged him to improve.

Further, all of the participants in this chapter see themselves as strong writers. Several of the participants I introduce in the next two chapters, on the other hand, view themselves as weak writers, often attributing their struggles to having missed an important writing to learn

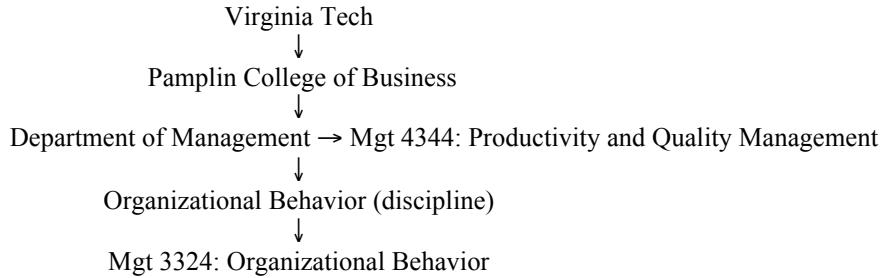
opportunity in their early years (although, as I will discuss, they often conflated the challenge of writing with their identities as poor writers). However, the participants in my later chapters struggled even further to remember their writing pasts, even those events that happened in graduate school. What seems important about the memories of this chapter's three participants, as well as those participants in the next two chapters, is that they were able to articulate several moments that changed the way they thought about writing and that they are able to transfer and adapt rhetorical knowledge to a variety of activity systems.

Writing in Multiple Activity Systems

Disciplinary Activity Systems

All of my participants were quick to talk about the challenges associated with learning how to write in their disciplines, and, in some cases, multiple disciplines. Of importance to note here is that I see a discipline as being comprised of many activity systems, and further embedded within a department or a university. In other words, not only are multiple activity systems a part of disciplinary activity systems, but the disciplinary activity systems are also embedded within others. For my purposes, when I refer to a participant's discipline, I am referencing the activity systems at Virginia Tech that he/she identifies as comprising his/her primary *discipline*. For example, Albert works primarily in the Department of Management but identifies his discipline as being organizational behavior. In addition, the Department of Management is also in the Pamplin School of Business. Thus, while his department is one activity system, his actual discipline is comprised of multiple others, and the classes that he teaches additional systems as well, although they also overlap.¹¹ These activity systems can be represented as follows:

¹¹ At other schools, the activity systems may not overlap. For instance, at Virginia Tech, the Rhetoric & Writing PhD is a part of the same department as Literature, although this is not true at all universities, many of which have a separate Department of Writing Studies or Department of Rhetoric and Writing.



Of course, many other activity systems are not represented here, including, for example, the other departments of the business school or the other courses that comprise the Management major, in addition to the multiple and research activity systems of which various members are a part. Although the other participants are of course embedded within other departments and disciplines, I show the example above to distinguish what I mean by *discipline*.

Given the complexity of these often embedded and sometimes overlapping systems, it is no wonder that these three participants found learning to write within an academic context to be an ongoing process that they face even after years of writing within their disciplines. Yet I believe they also found academic writing to be limiting, particularly Thomas and Dexter, making them often resistant to their disciplinary activity systems. Thomas, whose work pulls from multiple disciplines, draws a distinct line between the academic and the nonacademic, noting "I don't think I ever tried to mimic the academic voice. It was something that happened to me." He remembers his mom, after reading his work, told him that he sounded like a professor, to which he responded "Oh no!" because he knew his mom was comparing him to a professor who writes in a convoluted, obscure style. Yet he attributes this voice back to his practice of mimicking the voices that he reads: "I was engaging with his ideas in the context of this course, and it was very much in conversation with him," which made his own writing similar in style.

Thomas also finds that academic writing moves back and forth between accepting more or less creativity, noting that "if you look at really old writers, there's actually quite a bit of voice

in there in a way that I think has disappeared.” Yet he notes, “To the extent that we’re not really in the social sciences, we’re really more in the humanities, there really is a space to be creative, but it gets kind of overwhelmed with citation and reference and you know, trying to forestall the counter arguments.” For Thomas, this space became a way for him to challenge this lack of voice that he identifies as common of the genres of many academic activity systems. He went on to say, “I used to be very good at writing in a way that I don’t feel I’m very good at it anymore.” When prodded further, he suggested that perhaps it was because he has less of a system but also that writing is just harder: “I think the voices I have in my head now are sort of more cacophonous, and they’re also more academic, and academic writing is not always very good, so it doesn’t flow very easily now the way that I think it used to.” Thomas, who spoke of mimicking genres as a process of learning to write earlier, has transferred this practice to his current work. Writing was also made more challenging simply from his increased exposure to a variety of academic writers. He explained, “When you’re engaged in a conversation with a literature, you tend to write in that form of literature.” Thomas talked about feeling stifled by academic writing in his graduate program and recalled writing a paper in graduate school where he allowed himself to “break out of the academic voice” and “take on this playfulness.” Years later, he tries to remind himself of this breaking out whenever he struggles with whatever he happens to be writing. Thomas, who was able to talk about specific practices he has transferred into academic writing, such as adapting to the language practices of others, was also somewhat critical of the result. Though he found this practice to be successful for his academic writing, he nonetheless was caught in the contradiction of having to write in an academic voice he does not particular admire. Later in this section, I will show how Thomas rejects this division for his students by allowing them to “play” with genre.

Like Thomas, Dexter also feels quite disenchanted with academic writing. Although he enjoys writing about his focuses of dystopia, utopia, colonialism, and areas related to Latin America, he feels like the actual outcome of research in his disciplinary activity systems—writing for academic genres—is nearly worthless: “Academic writing is always a challenge because no one reads it, so it’s always very depressing to write something that you know very few people are going to read. And there are a lot of conventions that are that I don’t really understand but I need to follow. I actually try to make my academic writing as interesting as possible, but then I also try to write in different registers, tones for different kinds of publications, different audiences.” In particular, Dexter talked about a challenge with an editor who wanted to “strip his voice” from a piece, noting that although he believes that some academic conventions are changing, albeit at “a glacial pace,” that this results in a unique challenge with academic writing and revision. He explained, “it’s not clear when you’re interacting with someone if the reviewer is trying to make the piece read better or just read in a more monotonous, less personal kind of way because that’s ‘as it should be’ supposedly.” Despite Dexter’s dissatisfaction, he does feel that writing in an academic context helped him to develop a strong writing habit. He remarked, “Academic writing taught me the habits that are transferable skills to any kind of writing that you do” and that he “can use those habits to produce a different kind of writing.” Dexter, who seems well aware that writing is contextually distinct, also finds ways to transfer knowledge among systems in the forms of habits. Rather than remembering a particular genre as the outcome of the activity systems in which he operates, Dexter instead sees his writing habits as perhaps an unintended outcome that has allowed him to adapt to a variety of systems.

Albert, on the other hand, does not seem to see the same limitations of academic writing,

which he often referred to as business writing. In general, the number of activity systems in which Albert is engaged seemed to be fewer than the number for Thomas and Dexter, though by no means less complex, although as I explained, Albert's background is interdisciplinary, drawing from psychology, administration, and organizational behavior. Whereas Thomas and Dexter are engaged in activities that are either interdisciplinary or "outside" of the academic, Albert is more firmly rooted within his department of management but freely moves among several focuses within this department, and he spoke at length about a variety of projects his graduate students work on, some of which are only peripherally related to his own discipline of organizational psychology. Thus his understanding of writing is more disciplinary but not necessarily limiting. In fact, he even notes that "business writing doesn't have to be dry; it can be engaging." However, given that Albert often talked about the need for writing to be pragmatic and useful, his perspective of academic writing here aligns well with his understanding of his disciplinary activity systems.

Interdisciplinarity and Transfer

Although an understanding of disciplines as somewhat fluid (Thaiss and Zawacki) may help faculty to move among activity systems, it also involves a high degree of transfer and adaptability. Rather than working within the same genre system throughout one's career, working among disciplines prods one to become aware of distinct generic differences among disciplines and even methodologies. Indeed, I argue that these experiences working with a variety of genres in unique disciplinary activity systems may have further shaped these participants' ability to understand writing as situated and rhetorical. Of course, working among disciplines is not without its own challenges. For Thomas, the interdisciplinarity of his work

makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact genres he should be writing given that he must draw from a variety of activity systems. He explained this as follows:

There is a simplicity to knowing your audience and to having a narrow set of conversations that you're engaged with, and a particular way, a particular form of presentation. And I never have that luxury. I'm always between and among and I think this is part of my struggle in writing currently is that I'm never quite sure of whom I'm writing for. You know there is always this audience question; there's always this voice question of what's my positionality? What's the conversation that I really want to be in? How many different conversations can I engage in at once? How many different kinds of audiences can I talk to? Political scientists, and practitioners, and anthropologists in the same moment? I try to, and I think I sometimes fail at all of them."

Thomas also notes that not having a disciplinary methodology makes writing for a discipline particularly challenging: "I think in a discipline, you tend to have a methodology, or a very small set of methodologies. And methodologies are not just about what you look at, but it's also about how you look at it and how you organize the information that comes out of it. So historians have organizational methodologies that are different from the organizational methodologies of, for instance, sociologists." Thomas thus recognizes not only the differences in methodologies but also the ways in which genres are shaped around them. Nonetheless, he feels that he has to "borrow and steal from a lot of different kind of methodologies" and believes that "this is one of the things that is difficult about interdisciplinarity." He compares his methodological approach to anthropological methods and explains that he does data collection such as reading texts, interviewing people, and participant observation. Rather than claiming allegiance to any one discipline, then, and working solely within that discipline, Thomas finds himself working not

only within the humanities but also within the larger activity systems of Virginia Tech's College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (which is itself formed of multiple and overlapping systems). As a result, he must negotiate a variety of disciplines, with such disciplinary activity systems encompassing a distinct range of diverse motives, rules/norms, and expected outcomes. Thomas, then, seems particularly able to recontextualize writing knowledge, adapting genres to a variety of situations. Despite the noted challenges, Thomas sees his interdisciplinary work as being an advantage and especially enjoys reading voices that represent a variety of disciplines, which he believes allows him "a bit more balance." He defines his field as one of "reading and writing" because it "draws extensively from sociology, history, policy and politics, anthropology, philosophy, social and cultural theory," and writing is the activity that connects these fields.

Although Thomas was the only participant in this chapter who explicitly talks about writing in his interdisciplinary field, and the challenges associated with it, I also believe that Dexter and Albert also participate in interdisciplinarity in a way that is less immediately obvious. Given Dexter's background in literature, writing, and Spanish, all of which are often identified as distinct disciplines, it is perhaps not surprising that he is influenced by what these disciplines value. However, as I will discuss later with regard to his teaching, Dexter often seems to conflate these activity systems, although not necessarily in ways that are problematic given the unique nature of his courses. Further, as I discuss later, Albert also participates in writing activities that work outside of his disciplinary activity systems.

Using "Outside" Activity Systems to Achieve Individual Motives

Dexter turns to activity systems outside of the academic context to do the writing he seems to enjoy the most. When I asked him about writing for other audiences, he lit up and

talked about his creative writing: “I send it to my friends, and they read it and like it.” He further notes, “ I have certain friends who are not in academia, but I maintain a very literary relationship with them, so one of my favorite things to do is sitting down and writing an email to someone about an experience that’s worth writing down.” For Dexter, a new assistant professor, tenure was the foremost concern for him in terms of what he was writing. Yet that his creative writing was not valued within academia, or for his tenure case, did not keep him from engaging in it, and often it related to his current activities. For instance, he noted, “I tend to write poetry when I’m teaching poetry just because of the imitative thing I was talking about before.” Dexter, then, is able to transfer what he is working on “outside” academia to his classes.

In addition, Dexter had been amassing a huge amount of material for a blog for the past three years, but he is torn about what the tone of the blog should be and whether he should connect the blog to his academic work: “You know, I’ve been collecting them and thinking I should do something to make them more available to people who don’t know me. But then I’m not exactly sure if they’d want to read them.” He went on to say, “There are also professional considerations; you just never know because I’m looking at the tenure process and being evaluated, and it’s still relatively unclear in my profession where a blog—even if it’s kind of a high brow essay blog—if that’s going to be evaluated as a distraction and waste of time or if it’s going to be evaluated as part of my academic practice.” Here Dexter is faced with a distinct contradiction of working in activity systems that value particular genres of writing, all the while wanting to engage in activities that may not have the desired outcome. In other words, Dexter is worried that the activities he views as outside of his discipline—such as writing a blog—would not be considered a valued activity within his discipline, and thus not an acceptable genre in which to forward the knowledge of his discipline. Not surprisingly, Dexter understands this as

not just a disciplinary problem: “it gets to a larger problem with academia and then the connection between academic writing and nonacademic writing. I’ve seen situations with friends and colleagues where the kind of thing that I would consider public intellectual work is actually viewed as a distraction from the academic work that we should be doing, and then an impediment to getting tenure.” Dexter is acutely aware that unless the community of his disciplinary activity systems change to accept a larger variety of genres, he will need to keep separate his disciplinary and personal writing.

Unlike Thomas and Dexter, Albert seemed to embrace academic writing, and although he has written for a broad academic audience, he did not make the distinction of it as being non-academic. Most recently, he has written a book for training to be used in both community colleges and universities, which he sees as a broader audience, but mostly in an academic way: “It was meant to go from management to nursing to education, you know, those kind of audiences.” Nonetheless, the wide variety of possible readers challenges him because, as he notes, “you have to get into the heads of the different readers and what’s important to them. And there’s all these different readers that are reading the same chapter, so how do you express what’s going on in that chapter that will speak to those readers?” He decided to start each chapter with a scenario from a different kind of readers’ perspective, such as from a police chief, the head of nursing, etc. Albert contended that “even if you’re a police chief, you’d say, ‘Well here’s this one as a police chief, but here’s a nurse. This is another professional like me.’ And it got me in the frame of mind to speak plainly to professionals, and it also helped me to organize my thoughts for what was going on in that chapter. So I used that as a device, for me, because I found I couldn’t write the chapters without it.” Albert, who realized that his book would be used as a genre in multiple activity systems, nonetheless found a way to make it relatable to subjects

in a variety of those systems.

Collaborative Writing Practices that Inform Disciplinary Activity Systems

Although Dexter had not been involved in any collaborative writing, Albert and Thomas were both involved in several collaborative projects. However, Albert defines collaboration broadly, noting, “my class assignments are kind of collaborative because I listen to my students’ voice in terms of how they respond to the instructions and how they respond to the assignment.” More formally, Albert has also been involved with other collaborations, noting that he often takes his cues from his collaborator in terms of how they want to present the work, although when he collaborates with graduate students, he tends to direct them more. Thus, he is able to adapt his role depending on his intended outcome for a particular situation, and his previous history of valuing the feedback from others has transferred into his current work. For Albert, collaboration is primarily a learning opportunity, either for himself or for others, noting of one of his recent collaborators: “Anything she said about writing I immediately took as right.” Yet Albert has also helped others, noting a time that another collaborator was having trouble expressing himself: “I said ‘Well we should say this and all that,’ and he said ‘Slow down and tell me why you’re making these changes,’ you know, sort of like an English lesson.” This experience aligns with Albert’s previous experience of learning to write through social experience with others, although he now feels capable of also playing the role of the teacher. Further, Albert has also hired graduate students from the writing program to help him with his writing, noting, “I find it’s a great opportunity for me to learn how to write better.” Because Albert’s conceptions of writing come across as fluid rather than rigid, he spoke at length about learning not only for his students but also for himself. When he spoke about collaborating, he stressed the importance of passing the collaborative work back and forth as opposed to dividing

it: “What that tends to lead to is fragmentation of the ideas. The ideas have to emerge in a connected way, but to do that the coauthors have to be connected with the development of the ideas. It’s a collaborative process between writers and what’s put down there on paper because it speaks back to you, it talks back to you, so it’s more like that.” Albert’s understanding of writing as a means to learning was a common theme that emerged often during our conversations.

Thomas has also participated in several collaborative projects, and he called to mind a particularly challenging one where he had started working on a project and found that someone was doing a similar project. The plan was for both of them to get a paper out of the project, and although he was able to publish from the experience, he notes the difficulty was “partly because we are from very different fields. She was from anthropology, which seemed like it should be close, but she was very much a structural anthropologist, and I’m much more of a post-structural theorist, and we just have these very basic clashes over issues of truth and what’s really out there.” This discussion not only illustrates the challenges of doing collaborative work—especially interdisciplinary collaborative work—but also highlights how Thomas’s work in a variety of activity systems has shaped his understanding of the differences among those systems. Although the participants in the next two chapters also speak of collaborative writing practices, as I will discuss, they tended to approach the collaboration in a different way. Whereas the participants in this chapter wrote collaboratively, the participants in the next chapters tended to work collaboratively, with one person doing the actual writing.

Constructs of Writing as Social Interactive

Although one of my last questions for my participants asked them about their general

beliefs about writing, I found that Thomas, Dexter, and Albert each shared their perspective without my needing to ask for it. While this was generally true of all my participants, unlike the participants I discuss in the next chapter who generally went into a tangential discussion about writing, these participants tended to talk about writing in terms of their motives or challenges. In addition, they constructed their understanding of writing from a social interactive ideology (Brammer et al.) in terms of how people learn to write (and continue to do so). From this perspective, writing “considers and is learned within and through the social interaction implicit in all angles of the rhetorical triangle: between the writer and the audience via the text” (“Culture”). These participants often provided me with insights into their thoughts about writing processes that showed their understanding of writing as rhetorical and situated rather than a separate, mechanical skill. Writing habits, in addition, were a part of the writing knowledge that transferred rather than a particular genre. I include this section, though brief, to show some of the participants’ thoughts about writing before I turn to a discussion of their teaching practices, although many of their other comments throughout this chapter also illustrate their understandings of writing as social and contextual.

As Albert talked about his writing process, he noted the importance of a writing being able to bring the reader along: “It’s really kind of an influence process . . .when they finish reading what I have written, I want them thinking a certain way. And so I have to get them from wherever they are here at the beginning to the end that now they’re thinking in the way I want them to think. I don’t want them to get pissed off because they had to read three pages when one would do.” In addition, Albert provides an elaborate discussion of how this influence process works, which I will quote at length to illustrate what I believe to be representative of Albert’s understanding of writing:

A lot of people think, and maybe it's true, that writing is something they do to a piece of paper. It's really a conversation of sorts between my thoughts and what gets put down on paper because what gets put down on paper informs my thoughts. So one consequence of that is that I never know what I'm going to write, or what I want to write, until I've written it. And so it's an unfolding process, and the best way to make that process unfold, for me, what I advise students to do, is to write from beginning to end, recognizing that as you do so, you'll run into a lot of things—'Gee I should say this,' 'I shouldn't have said that'—and to discipline yourself just to make notes and keep writing. And then if you find yourself wanting to craft a paragraph at this point, it's likely because you don't know what else you want to say. And that's why you're putting your energy there rather than pushing back to the end. So put that aside, make your notes, and then just keep hacking away at it. And then when you get to the end, you'll have a far and away better idea of what you want to say because it has begun to unfold, and a lot of the things that you thought were important are not important. A lot of the things that you were skipping around and making notes on, you realize you have to dig into. And then you write it again, and the second time through will be a huge jump.

In addition to stressing the importance of revision and writing to learn, and talking about sharing this process with students, Albert at one point also stressed that writing and ideas are not distinct entities, and in particular, he views writing as a process of discovery: "There are challenges of ideas, and then there are challenges about how you express them. And so the way I look at writing is there is overlap there. It's not like ideas are separate and distinct and forever removed from the written work, and the written work will often contain things that the author wasn't aware that he was putting down in there, that kicks off other thoughts with the reader." Albert,

then, is well aware of the intended and unintended social nature of writing.

Dexter also noted the importance of understanding writing as a process, and respecting that process: “You know, I’m writing something right now, and I have a deadline, but then also the ideas and the flow, it has its own temporality, so you can’t rush it.” In addition, he stressed the importance of “having that mixture of critical distance from your own work and then also the courage to cut stuff out.” He remarked that he admires a writer from Argentina who would wake up every morning, have coffee, sit down, write until he hits a certain number of words, and then goes forth to do other stuff. While Dexter is not able to do this for himself, he does like the idea of setting goals for himself. Dexter described a writing process that very well aligned with Albert’s unfolding strategy. Dexter observed, “There’s a give and take in the process of writing something. I don’t write things straight through. I’ll start with ideas that I somehow feel are connected, so I’ll try to flesh each one out, and then when they come into being take shape, I start thinking about how to organize them together. I have a very spatial way of thinking about this. I’ll be actually you know typing, building a paragraph, but other times I’ll be reading through and organizing and cutting and pasting and moving things from one place to another. Um, and there always has to be a back and forth. And then also the third part of that, so there’s the writing, there’s the organizing, and there’s also the reading. I’m always writing in conversation with something I’m reading.” Dexter, however, also highlighted the importance of writing not only as being constantly in a state of revision but also as being a social exchange with others.

Thomas, in addition, has a similar perspective as Dexter and Thomas, noting both that writing is a means of learning but also that writing is a part of a social context. He contended, “We write to think and not just to convey, so I think writing is where most of my thinking

happens. I'd say the other place it happens is in classrooms when I'm talking, you know that kind of stuff, but I think a lot of my thinking happens in the context of writing, even more than reading. When I read I tend to kind of let things wash over me a bit, but when I write, I have to figure out what I want to say." The social interactive understanding of writing is clear here and previously when Thomas stressed the importance of the conversational aspect of writing. All of these professors value this social interactive view of writing. As Brammer et al. argue, "a rhetorical perspective values processes such as feedback and revision but extends to social interaction within and across discourse communities" ("Culture"). Further, these participants all see writing as being an integral part of their disciplinary activity systems, rather than as an activity separate from their disciplinary work.

All of these professors are highly involved with multiple activity systems beyond their own disciplinary activity systems, which seems to have enabled their ability to transfer rhetorical knowledge among these systems, adapting such knowledge for a variety of motives. Further, they all view writing from a social lens rather than a text-based or writer-based view, which is unique from the participants in the next chapters. In addition, all of them have experience writing within a variety of activity systems, and they view learning to write as an ongoing process of negotiation with themselves and with those with whom they interact. In this next section, I turn to their experiences with and understanding of writing in relation to their teaching practices. Given the unique nature of each participant's teaching experiences, I discuss them separately in this section before closing with some overall connections among them.

Teaching as a Part of Adaptable Activity Systems

As I chatted with Albert, Dexter, and Thomas about their teaching practices, I noticed

they shared a desire to adapt to the particular needs of their subjects within the activity systems of their classes. For example, although Albert had never had any formal pedagogical training, he explained, “I think I’ve changed more as a teacher than they’ve changed as students, and I think it’s much better for them that I have. I think I was too egocentric.” Whereas before he would take it personally when students failed to complete things, he now tries to remember that his “class isn’t their only class. They have a life. They’re struggling through; It’s a terrible time for them in many ways.” Likewise, Dexter has also found himself adapting to the communities of the larger activity systems of Virginia Tech. For instance, he explained that although he prefers to use portfolios as an evaluation tool in his courses, he realized this may not work well given the change in location from his previous institution: “Every time I’ve mentioned it to my colleagues, they’ve just laughed at me. I guess the general belief is that the students are not going to be very open to portfolio evaluation. They’re really focused on grades.” When prodded further, he remarked, “I demand that my students take audience into account. I must take my students into account, and so there’s no sense in doing that here.” And Thomas shared that although he is “an advocate of active-learning, student-centered learning,” he does not always practice that due to larger class sizes. He admits that he does lecture quite a bit because it is “the nature of the class” but also “in response to student expectations as well.” When pressed further, he admitted, “There’s a certain amount of information they want and that I feel I need to be giving them.”

Rather than demanding that students adapt to the stated outcomes of their specific classes—such as course objectives—all three of these participants are willing to adjust their genres and their rules/norms to balance the students’ motives with their own. In other words, when faced with a different activity system, they recontextualized their writing knowledge to meet the needs of that system. Instead of worrying that these alterations may result in different

outcomes than intended, the participants seemed to believe the adaptations of their courses would actually help them to reach their overall outcome of student learning. With these flexibilities, all of the participants have developed ways of teaching that they believe to be effective.

Albert

Albert declared that several years ago he replaced his entire teaching apparatus and pedagogical practices, noting, “I was not at all pragmatic in my approach to students. I just gave out bunches of theory and used multiple choice tests.” The courses he teaches to undergraduates, which are focused on organizational behavior and productivity and quality management, are now influenced by pragmatism, or a pedagogical practice that focuses on “matching material to the problems that students are facing at the time.” To that end, Albert creates problems for students to solve. Further, one of the course goals for students is to learn how to work in teams effectively, and he explained, “in addition to whatever content we’re teaching, I also give them challenges and tools to work in teams more effectively.” His pedagogical approach also draws from “goal-setting theory.” As a result, the first writing he requires of his students is to develop tasking documents, “where they specify the deliverables that each person is supposed to produce next week,” and he challenges students “to compare tasks that are well spec-ed out with what you expect to ones that are more vague, and then answer the question, which is more effective for you?” And finally, he draws from distributive learning, and so tries “to get the teams to share their information with one another.” He went on to say, “There is a guy named Vygotsky who talked about this kind of thing, to share their learning—and so I do all kinds of exercises in the class where they bring together their work and show one another.” Albert, then, has turned to a variety of pedagogical theories from a variety of activity systems, yet he recontextualized that knowledge to work in his own classes.

For Albert, a large motive for team-based learning is geared toward the outcome of student being prepared for the future profession. He explained, “Undergraduate students haven’t really been challenged very much. And I see a large hunger to be challenged. When that happens, not only do they get the tools that they need in order to be effective in our profession, but they get the well-deserved feelings of self-efficacy [so] when the boss says ‘I need someone to help do this’ they can raise their hands” and volunteer to contribute. Toward that end, he specifically chooses projects that students “have zero competency in” so that “in a very short period of time, they have to become competent enough in order to turn out a really good product.” His motive for this assignment is that the experience lets students “know that they can go from zero to something good in a very short period of time, and really do it on their own because they’re self-managed work teams.” In addition, Albert likes to share stories with his students to stress the importance of writing: “I give them stories about people who have graduated here and where they’ve gone and the impact of their writing in the contexts that they’re working.” In doing so, Albert shows his awareness of the role his class serves within the students larger activity systems of their major, yet he also recognizes that students will bring a variety of motives to his course, thus he needs to motivate them through story-telling.

In addition, the genres Albert assigns are disciplinary based but with intended outcomes beyond the class. For instance, he noted that he assigns project reports so that students can produce something “that a boss won’t throw away because they don’t want to read it,” and Albert hopes that students learn how to write in a way “that’s succinct, to the point, and says something that’s of interest to a decision-maker.” Although he has noticed that students tend to use too many words, which he also said about himself, he also notes that this is discipline specific: “they write in a non-business way, which is great in creative writing and stuff, but it

doesn't go in business." Nonetheless, he understands that students will be learning new genres in his class: "They don't know how to write executive summaries. You know an executive summary to them is an introduction." To that end, he goes to great lengths to help them learn this new genre, including a lengthy document he provides students, which summarizes what should go into each section of a project report and the rhetorical reasons for doing so. Thus he treats the genre not as merely a form but also as a particular means of communication within particular activity systems.

When Albert talks about writing with his students, he does so in the context of the projects on which they are working. In particular, the class is a back-and-forth process of giving students a challenge and the means to meet that challenge, using examples that mimic challenges students might face outside of the class. For example, he first gives them a complex, lengthy tasking document to read in a short amount of time, which contains everything they need to know about their project. He explains, "But it's so overwhelming to them that they have a hard time getting through it. And one of the things that our students are faced with out in the real world are contracts that are very complex. And often written to confuse you. So this is one of their first exposures to this kind of complexity." As students move through the project and face additional challenges, he gives them the means to move forward. He shared, "a week before they're to turn in their project report, I have a lecture on project reports because they're scrambling now to write up their project reports." Albert also spends significant time on the information design aspect of their projects, showing the difference in readability of a paragraph and a list of bulleted points that try to convey the same information. In the future, he hopes to add more demonstrations for them, noting that "they need exemplars, but the thing is, if I give them an exemplar of how to write up something, what I get is *that*. I don't get them struggling to

get there and produce something on their own. They give me *that*. And that's not what my course is all about. My course is all about struggling on your own to produce your own product."

Nonetheless, he does provide them with a useful guide for macro-organization, noting that by the time students reach the second project, they understand about macrostructure, "which is a big step forward."

Genre knowledge becomes especially important to Albert when he evaluates the students' writing. His grading sheet specifically identifies the various "substantive components" of the project, such as the executive summary, introduction, etc. He finds that in grading, he'll "do a lot of crossing out of stuff that is not relevant." In addition, as students continue to struggle with the genre, he'll remind them to "go to the project guidelines, read what the executive summary is." Most of the comments he provides are specific to content, and although he also identifies some mechanical problems, he asserted, "I don't grade down for poor writing directly, but I tell them, indirectly, you know, the best ideas in the world go nowhere if they're not presented well. And even mediocre stuff will command attention if you present it well. And so I think it's very important that they get feedback on their writing and on their verbal presentations as well."

However, most of the problems with writing he sees of his students is related to moving into new activity systems, which he seems to recognize. As he notes, "A lot of my students are really good writers, exceptionally good writers. The only thing that they need to tweak a little bit more is getting to the point in a more concise way."

Albert was obviously enthusiastic about his approach, noting that having students "work on projects that were meaningful in terms of a course goals, that they actually produced something that was substantive in terms of the scope of the course." In addition, by working in groups, he also believes that "the weaker writers get instruction from the stronger ones. And

even if it's not the terribly stronger ones, they actually think about it, they *think* about their writing.” Albert, who recalled his own writing development as a process of socialization with his peers, is clearly trying to provide his students with the same opportunity for such development. Although he previously had students turn in their project reports as drafts when his class was writing intensive, his classes are now too large to include this component.

Despite what he believes to be an overall improvement to the course, Albert notes that there may just not be enough faculty who are willing to approach the class in this manner: “I don’t know if we’re going to be able to pull it off though because we have so few faculty, and it’s an intense thing to do with a class, and so it takes away from research time and that sort of thing.” His frustrations were very voiced when he talks about students needing even more practice with their writing. He shared, “It makes all the difference in the world in whether they’re going to be taken seriously, and I think we do a pisspoor job at Tech in teaching this stuff. We’re doing so much other stuff. We’ve got to do that too, and so I sympathize with professors who are trying to do other stuff.” Albert here recognizes that he despite the intended outcomes that his department shares for students, the professors are still working within the larger activity systems of both the business school and the university, both of which value and reward professors primarily for the quantity and quality of their research.

Thomas

Thomas’s courses regularly attract a variety of students from disciplines across the university, including engineering, business, and physical sciences. Because he expects most students to be new to his discipline, Thomas spends a class period talking about reading in the humanities. In addition to sharing his understanding of reading and writing as a conversation, and active reading versus passive reading, Thomas explained, “I talk about engaging in the

conversation. I talk about audience and the fact that they are not necessarily the intended audience for the piece, and so part of what they have to do when they're reading is to figure out what the conversation is that this piece is engaged in, and to recognize that texts in the humanities are arguments, and to figure out what the argument is, and what is being argued for and against." This is a change for many students, he believes, who are used to a history book that presents history as facts, as "an information source as opposed to a source of critical engagement." In addition, Thomas spends considerable time talking about what counts as evidence in the humanities, particularly that such evidence is textual.

When asked why he includes writing in his course, Thomas responded, "I can't imagine not. The kind of material that I cover just can't be tested or worked with other than through writing. I mean it's humanistic study. And humanities are a writing profession, and I'm not interested in right and wrong answers." He furthered explained that he used to give a multiple-choice part to his final exam, which he felt required to have, whereas now he includes short answers: "It's all written, and the idea is that what I'm interested in is having students grapple with the material, think through it, and produce original thoughts. So I can't imagine teaching a course like this without writing." When asked to explain why he changed from multiple-choice, he explained that he moved away from a fact-based curriculum, and "really took advantage of the fact that I wasn't teaching toward a next course." This allowed him not to focus on a particular content, so the content becomes 'a means to getting them to think critically, to read with insight, so it's more sort of skill-based.' Thomas sees this approach as providing students with "a broad exposure to humanistic approaches and thought." For courses that he teaches, then, Thomas draws not only from his disciplinary activity systems, which are already interdisciplinary, but other disciplines as well, much like he does for his own writing practices.

Rather than feeling limited by the fact that these disciplines have their own genres and motives, Thomas rather sees his position as a way to encourage students to work in genres that are flexible and adaptable to student preferences. Given that Thomas regularly writes in a variety of genres that function in different disciplinary activity systems, it is not surprising that he does not hold his students to one genre in particular. As he noted, “My focus isn’t in some ways on the writing but really on the writing as an avenue to the thinking.” Although the writing his students produce may seem separated from the activities of a particular system, I believe that the interdisciplinary genres make sense given Thomas’s intended course outcome of helping students to become more capable of critical thinking. He did not seem to be as concerned with the particular tool students choose as much as he is “that they wrestle with the material in a way that is evident in their paper.” As a result, Thomas’s courses, for example, usually involves a research project that is fairly open-ended, so students can write, produce a video, create a blog, etc.

Nonetheless, he is frustrated when he does specify a particular genre that students fail to understand. For example, he once required students to complete a one-page nature journal for a course built around the concept of ideas in nature. He explained, “they were supposed to pay attention to their daily lives and find an instance during the week in which an idea of nature is evoked.” Although he found that students struggled to relate their writing to the course themes and concepts, he was more surprised that students “tended to write about nature rather than ideas of nature. So even though the whole course was build around this ideas of nature, in other words the conceptual apparatus with which we make sense of what nature is and what’s natural, they would just write, ‘I went for a walk,’ etc.” Thomas’s flexibility with genres, then, might end up causing some confusion for students, especially when a plurality of terms—journal, reflection, etc.—is used to define the same writing activity.

Despite his flexibility, Thomas does take a humanistic approach to writing, which became especially clear when he talked about some of the particular struggles he saw students facing and in the assignment prompts he shared. For example, one prompt explicitly states that students should have a specific argument and “a central thesis that is clear and compelling,” an understanding of a thesis that is interdisciplinary. Although he believes that most students are prepared to recognize and to write a thesis and have basic ideas of “how to put an essay together,” he notes that the problem comes in “producing a good essay as opposed to just an essay,” or “having something to say and supporting it strongly.” Thomas seems to struggle with his desire to give students some structure within the context of his activity system but also to allow them a freedom to break free from the generic constraints of the genre of the essay that dominates the humanities. He explains that he tells students, “for the most part, you guys should have a very clearly stated thesis in the first paragraph. I say, you know, good writers don’t necessarily do that. As you get more skilled, and if you are particularly skilled it’s okay not to do that, but those of you who are not yet highly skilled and strong writers will find that you’re going to get yourself in trouble in your paper.” He went on to say, “I try to give them the space to not do that if they feel that they can but to emphasize that there’s a reason that they’re taught that way.” As I discussed earlier in the chapter in relation to Thomas’s frustrations with academic writing, and his own feelings of not having one particular genre in which to write, here we can see this problem manifesting itself in his struggle to guide students and yet not necessarily force them into a narrow definition of academic writing.

In addition, Thomas sees students struggling with understanding the material and finding a place for themselves to speak within the discipline, which manifests itself in several ways. He’s found that students “don’t feel competent or authorized” to be able to make claims, relying on

quotes instead. He sees students struggle with “using source material in meaningful ways.” When prodded further, he posited, “sometimes I think it’s just a cover for not really getting it. There are some students who just have those terrible writing habits where they will just give endless quotes and string these quotes together, and they think somehow that’s an argument.” To that end, he provides a helpful explanation on one of his handouts for students, which contains the following information: “The first thought any writer should give to a paper is not ‘What am I going to say?’ but ‘Who is my audience?’ You can think of the audience of your humanities paper as an informed and intelligent fellow student [. . .] You are writing to someone who knows the work at least as well as you do, so do not fill up your paper with plot summary.” Despite these frustrations with student struggles to make sense of these activity systems, Thomas believes that what he teaches are “college skills,” and since most of his students are freshman, they “literally have not learned those kinds of skills yet, so I understand my role as at least introducing them to the idea that there are skills to be learned.” As a result, he is very aware of what students might be transferring in to his classroom, in addition to how he might help them for their future classes.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Thomas has great respect for writing processes, and this is reflected in that he encourages students to do an optional revision, although only about 20% of students take advantage of the opportunity. However, Thomas and the students often had different motives for revision, making Thomas include revision as a part of the new grade. He observed that students were just “fixing their grammar thinking ‘Oh I can get a couple of extra points by fixing my grammar’ because they think it [the grading rubric] is going to be on the same scale.” His policy of revision aligns with his goals for the course, however, in that he sees it as an opportunity to help a student individual: “What’s nice about the revision process is that

we have an opportunity for proactive intervention because we're saying 'Here's what the problem is with this paper, and come and talk to me about it.' So we can sit them own and say, 'The paper was structured very well. That's not the problem. I don't want you to work on the paper's structure. That's fine. I want you to dig deeper into this idea because you're skimming the surface or you've misrepresented.'" His desire to meet each student where that student currently as a writer is not surprising given his own struggles with trying to write in a variety of systems.

Now that Thomas's classes are larger, he relies on TAs to teach the recitation sections and to do most of the grading. After each assignment is submitted, he meets with the TAs to calibrate, and he noted that most discussion occurs over "oddball cases" such as "the ones where it's an excellent essay but it doesn't answer the question." Although Thomas sees rubrics as a way to formalize grading with TAs, he also sees the genre of the rubric as being indefinitely flexible, and he explained, "this is a rubric that's supposed to help them, and they can always throw it out and just grade qualitatively." He went on to say there have been times when a paper didn't fit the categories, so the TAs are encouraged to "slash and burn the rubric, change the text and stuff in the rubric to fit the difference that sits in that paper." When asked of his reasons for doing so, he expounded upon an example such as a paper from "somebody who is just this expansive thinker, but [the paper] doesn't quite have a center to it, but there's all these really interesting thoughts, and you know, they're deeply engaged with the course but not sure where to go with it." He went on to say, "It's hard in a large class —150 students—to not be cookie cutter, but I don't want it to be cookie cutter experience for the students. I want there to be that space for people to try something different if that's their inclination and to not penalize them just because they don't fit the rubric or something of that sort." He notes that in the rare cases he has

taught seniors, in smaller classes, he appreciates that he can learn where each person is as a writer, noting then that he can “calibrate the way I respond to a paper to my understanding of where that person’s coming from and what their training is.” Thomas, then, has clearly been shaped by his own experiences in working with a variety of disciplinary activity systems, of which there are no shared genres or methodologies. His classes, then, reflect his transfer of this knowledge from his own writing practices to his expectations for students as writers.

Dexter

Although Dexter was a new assistant professor at Virginia Tech at the time of our interview, he had taught three different first-year writing courses during his graduate program, all of which were comparative literature courses with different focuses such as studying globalization through literature. The literature courses were writing-intensive, but he explained that not all of the students taking the courses were literature majors but also students who were interested in the topic or who chose it because it fit into their schedule. Because he had a mix of students from social science, engineering, and literature, for example, there were many students taking a disciplinary writing course for what was not actually their chosen discipline. He explained that the core belief of the writing program was that “there is not a divide between content and form in writing, so in order to effectively teach writing, you need to teach it in the discipline because there are many different kinds of writing.” On the one hand Dexter seemed to recognize that the activities of one system require different genres than another. However, on the other, he seemed to reject this approach in favor of his own courses, which he called “more thematic and interdisciplinary” than some of the other courses, many of which were “much more invested in disciplinary formation.” He gave an example of training people to teach these courses and noted that he knew a historian who would say something like “‘This is how you

write as a historian' or 'A historian would think about the problem this way,' so a lot of disciplinary training." Dexter noted, "That's not how I ran my class." Rather, Dexter believed that his class was more about "the different ways that this idea of utopia pops up in science, in fiction, in film, in political theory," for example. Nonetheless, the writing of the course was literary analyses, a genre that lacks the interdisciplinary approach for which he strived.

Despite this disciplinary approach, Dexter still utilizes the methods he learned as a graduate student, and my focus here will be on the courses he currently teaches, all of which are in Spanish. The semester of our interview, he was teaching a junior level introduction to Spanish literature course, which he ran as a "writing workshop." He explained that many of the techniques he learned previously, he carried over into his current teaching, including pedagogical methods that draw from practices such as pre-writing activities and assignment sequencing. No matter the course he teaches, he tries to incorporate peer review and bring student work into the class.

For Dexter, reading and imitating voice and strategies is important for the development of writers, which he drew on in his own writing development. One particular writing activity, for example, might require students to write a short paragraph "trying to imitate the essay they read," in order to "imitate that with their historical figure." When students reproduce the first couple of paragraphs, he notes, "I encourage them at this point to just do all out plagiarism. It can be as blatant as just rewriting the paragraph, taking his language as a starting point and rewriting it so that it can work with them, just to get a feel of what he's doing." This practice Dexter clearly transferred from his own experiences writing by changing mimicking the language of others. In addition, Dexter encourages his students to draw techniques from the genres they are reading. For example, in one of the stories students read, the author uses a

flashback, so he encourages students to use a flashback or another nonconventional way to tell a story. However, he notes that “it’s very hard for them to do because it’s difficult for them to do in English, and then they’re struggling so much with the language that they don’t really feel that they have the control to be experimental [. . .] I feel like I have to hold their hand a lot more.” He went on to say, “There’s just a basic problem of expression I’m trying to get through.”

Yet at the same time that Dexter encourages students to try a variety of techniques, he also seems to recognize that his way of learning writing is not necessarily the only way. Dexter noted that a particular challenge with teaching writing is “that the first impulse is to impose your own method of writing onto people, and so I don’t want to do that because I don’t think many people have the constitution to put their body and mind through what I go through in the process of writing.” He believes it is important to not only respect different ways of writing but also knowing “how to encourage people to explore and experiment with their writing.”²² However, he admits that part of the challenge is getting students to realize that writing is something worthy of exploration. Though some of the participants in Chapter 7 will also talk about developing an individual writing process, they differ in their understanding about the ways that writing is learned and/or taught.

Although the students taking Dexter’s Spanish Literature courses are expected to be at a specific language level, which follow guidelines set forth by the American Council of Foreign Language Teachers, many of the students are actually below this level. Dexter shared, “these students are supposed to be coming in at full intermediate mid to intermediate high, moving toward advanced low.” Nonetheless, despite some frustration, he adapts the motives of the activity systems to meet the needs of the students. For example, Dexter explained that a particular challenge with teaching writing in Spanish is that students need to adjust to writing in

Spanish rather than translation. He clarified, “In English if you use the passive voice a lot, it’s just a sign of either technical writing, journalism, or just bad writing. But in Spanish, if you’re thinking in English and then translating, you end up translating all these passive expressions into Spanish, and then it just sounds translated. So it’s a big stumbling point for them.” He reminds students that the “composition part, the writing part, has to actually occur in Spanish,” and he will encourage them to make his course the semester that they make this shift. Dexter recognizes that part of this is due to students learning a new genre in this language, at which point many students “have linguistic breakdown.” In other words, students are expected to learn Spanish content at the same time they are still learning the language in which they are expected to compose.

Despite drawing from strategies he has learned in a variety of past activity systems, Dexter clearly distinguishes between the course goals of a writing-intensive course and a content-driven course, the former of which he sees as helping students to become better writers within a discipline, and the latter as helping students to learn specific content, although writing can be a means for doing so. Yet he often moved back and forth to talking about teaching disciplinary writing—such as literary analysis—to writing that is not as clearly a part of any specific activity system. For instance, he shared that he prefers having students decide writing topics so that they “can use that question to guide who their audience is going to be, what format it should take, what tone, what length, what kind of evidence, what kind of formality, all those things.” This discussion of writing suggests that students may have some control over their genre depending on what they decide in terms of things like audience. However, when students are working on a literary analysis on Spanish novels, for example, he explained that the goal is for students to move “toward more detailed literary analysis” and that most of class time is spent

in discussion of literature. Although his course genres are adapted to the specific activity system of the classroom, Dexter nonetheless seems to privilege a literary approach.

However, Dexter clearly recognizes that a literary analysis is a distinct genre, and he talks in particular about a challenge students have when they start writing literary analysis. He explained that students “write. write, write and then finally in the concluding paragraph, they’ll come up with something that appears like a thesis,” although he sees this problem in both English and Spanish. He went on to say that students are “taught to write this very specific kind of essay, which is very boring to me, and they get to the end of the essay and they’re trying to write their conclusion where they are basically restating what they’ve said in the introduction.” The genre problems he describes here may be symptomatic of students who are used to writing the five-paragraph essay in relation to literature, a genre that Dexter sees as distinct from what he expects from students. As a result, he challenges them to go further, noting that “every once in awhile, they’ll write a question like ‘Could it really be this way?’ And so I circle that and say, this is the question, go back, put that in your thesis, and explore that question for the whole paper.” Of course, students resist this because they’ve written an entire essay, at which point Dexter notes that he tells them, “No, you didn’t write an essay. You did a prewriting exercise that got you to a thesis, but now you have a nice thesis, go write a paper.” He further notes, “It’s amazing how consistently they do it though where they let themselves have one imaginative flight of fancy in the last paragraph, and then that ends up being the only actual substantive idea in the entire paper, so then, so there it is.” He attributes this to writers not doing any prewriting exercises, although it may also be a problem of students transferring a genre they learned in high school or other activity systems that valued this genre.

Although Dexter wants students to become skilled at the genre of literary analysis, his

larger motive for his courses is have students develop as writers rather than to learn a particular genre. He explains that one of his goals is “to get the students to the point where they can realize the amount of control that they have over the writing is essentially infinite and then to determine when to start researching, when to stop researching, and write a draft and all of these things.” He went on to say that for writing, “the goal and the idea is to bring the process to the surface and make them conscious of what they’re doing.” Yet he finds that students within the classroom activity system are at least initially resistant to this goal. He notes that at Virginia Tech, “the undergraduates are so concerned with their grade that it’s very difficult to get them to try something else because they’re terrified of evaluation.” In other words, the desired outcome for students taking his course is a good grade rather than the learning of some specific knowledge much less writing knowledge. However, Dexter explained after “an initial two-week period of resistance, the students really bought into it, and they realized that it was going to be their one opportunity to try to do something totally wild or outside of how they’d been taught to write.” He also notes that there is an inherent contradiction in teaching writing because it does not allow for failure even when that failure is needed: “There is a structural problem that we have to deal with in the way that we teach writing is generally to find a way to allow for failure within the context of the semester in an activity or even in an entire assignment, and then find somehow to evaluate as instructors at the end of their learning process in a way that can take account of the fact that they may have actually learned more by failing than by successfully completing the assignment in a standardized way.” Previously, Dexter used portfolios as a way to overcome this contradiction, but because such an approach is not viable for his current activity systems, he admits to struggling with his grading process, which he feels is “absolutely arbitrary.” At his previous institution, his experience was different: “Normally I just keep making the kids redo it.

But now I'm finding out that the students here are fine getting Cs in this class, so then they'll get Cs. But it's not something that I had to deal with at my previous institution, so I'm still working it out." Dexter, who recently moved from previous university activity systems to current ones, is challenged with a significant difference in the subjects of his classes, as his previous institution was Ivy League.

Conclusion

Rather than speaking of transferring specific genre knowledge among activity systems, such as knowing how to write an academic article in a specific discipline, what Dexter, Thomas, and Albert spoke of transferring were habits, writing processes, and an understanding of writing that allows for one to easily move among activity systems. In effect, this understanding allowed them to re-contextualize knowledge (Nowacek) to make it work within a variety of contexts, including the courses they taught. For instance, Albert often spoke of working with other writers in his discipline as being key to his own writing development, which manifested itself in the ways he encouraged students to learn from others as well. And Thomas, when faced with a writing process that no longer worked, recognized that a dissertation was a unique genre requiring a more complex writing process. Additionally, these participants were able to determine when previous practices would be ineffective in a new context, such as when Dexter could no longer use the grading practices of his former activity system. Robertson et al. call these "critical incidents," as they involve the ability to "let go of prior knowledge" and then adapt a "model and/or conception of writing" ("Prior") that works in the new system. Though Dexter still understood writing best learned as a process of revision and even failure, he nonetheless recognized the uniqueness of students at Virginia Tech, and at the time of our

interview, he was currently in the process of finding a way to adapt his grading policies. In other words, Dexter was able to remix his knowledge, which Robertson et al. define as “prior knowledge revised synthetically to *incorporate* new concepts and practices into the prior model of writing” (“Prior,” emphasis original). And because these participants recognized the distinct genres and methodologies of their disciplines, they were able to provide students with explicit instruction for writing in those genres—genres that Millers argues are “keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of the community” (165).

In addition, Dexter, Thomas, and Albert do not feel bound by their disciplines, nor do they see themselves as writers only within those disciplines; instead, they identify themselves as capable writers able to adapt to a variety of situations. In particular, Thomas’s interdisciplinary work is particularly important in pushing the boundaries of what constitutes an activity system, as although he technically works within the activity systems of humanities or STS studies, he also works at the periphery of a variety of activity systems, thus creating a new space for himself. And Dexter feels comfortable drawing from Spanish, Literature, and his knowledge of writing pedagogy, molding and adapting that knowledge to fit the current activity systems of which he is a member. For all of these participants, then, writing is not a separate activity to be completed after they accomplish the “real work” of their discipline—such as their research projects—but rather an integrated part of that research process. All of these participants spoke at great length about using writing as a tool to organize their thoughts, to determine what they were trying to say, and to enable their own learning processes.

Further, these participants, in addition to demonstrating a rhetorical understanding of the ways in which genres are shaped by distinct activity systems, were able to shape that knowledge into their classroom contexts. Their understanding of learning to write as a process of continual

socialization with their peers, as well as constant revision, was clearly demonstrated in the ways they shaped assignments for their students. Thus, perhaps because writing is so integrated into their everyday disciplinary practices, all of the participants in this chapter spoke not of learning to write as an event that happened but rather shared their understanding of writing development as a continual process of learning within a variety of activity systems.

CHAPTER 6

A TEXT-BASED UNDERSTANDING: THE TRANSFER OF SKILLS-BASED WRITING KNOWLEDGE AMONG ACTIVITY SYSTEMS

“I’m more of a scientist. Definitely a scientist.” – Valeria

“People in my department think I’m a good editor.” – Heather

“The thing about science writing is that it’s extremely boring.” – Rilo

In the previous chapter, I suggested that three participants, Albert, Dexter, and Thomas, drew from a social interactive understanding of how people learn to write, or a belief that people learn how to write through social interactions with members of a variety of activity systems. Thus, the ways they talked about writing, and how this understanding influenced what they do in their classrooms, suggests that they view writing as highly social, situated, and inseparable from content or context. Further, they wrote in a variety of activity systems, carefully adapting their motives and genres for each, as well as an understanding of different rules/norms. The participants in this chapter demonstrated a unique understanding of writing from those participants in the previous and next chapter. While Heather, Valeria, and Rilo all share a desire for overall improvement as writers for both themselves and for their students, they did not talk about writing from the same rhetorical perspective and often positioned writing as an activity separate from their work. In particular, they identified themselves as not having any training in writing, and though they were able to talk about purpose or audience for their own writing, they usually focused on form or grammar and transferred the latter into their classrooms. A language barrier—or an inability to talk about writing—may be one factor; Bazerman notes that he has often “found smart, accomplished colleagues in other disciplines who have little vocabulary for discussing writing beyond the corrective grammar they learned in high school” (289). However, I argue that more than a language barrier is at work; these participants seem to share a deeply

ingrained understanding of writing as a skill, able to be learned separate from content. This understanding of how we learn to write suggests a text-based ideology, which understands writing skills as abstracted from situational contexts and focused on grammar and editing. Russell et al. argue that his view “suggests that literacy is a decontextualised skill, which once learned can be transferred with ease from one context to another” (399). I expand upon this explanation of a text-based ideology later in this chapter, after I have provided the writing backgrounds of these participants.

In addition, unlike the more interdisciplinary participants of the previous chapter, Heather, Rilo, and Valeria tend to work and to define themselves within their current disciplines, although one of the participants did her undergraduate work in a different discipline. Further, these participants tended to separate their identity of being a writer, if claimed at all, with the other labels they gave themselves—a scientist, for example. While each of these participants could be said to teach writing, in that they value writing and include it as a part of their courses, they work on unique assumptions on what teaching writing actually involves. That is not to suggest, however, that they were not asking students to write in the genres of their disciplines. Rather, they often assigned students disciplinary-specific genres but drew from their knowledge of writing as text-based when teaching students how to write in those genres. This differs from the participants in the previous chapter, who spend significant amounts of time talking about the particulars of writing in their disciplines to students, as well as the participants in the next chapter, who assign students disciplinary genres of writing but do not talk about writing in their classes.

I begin this chapter by sharing the formative writing backgrounds of Heather, Valeria, and Rilo, including any particular activity systems they remember as being of influence. I then

provide their experience with writing in their current activity systems, particularly their disciplines. From there, I turn to a discussion about their understanding of the teaching of writing in their own disciplinary classes, showing how their understanding of writing has shaped their course goals and genres. I conclude by suggesting the potential for these participants' experiences to inform our understanding of a text-based understanding of writing transfer among activity systems.

Formative Writing Experiences

Valeria

Although the participants in the previous chapter were quick to speak at length about their writing backgrounds, when I asked Valeria to share with me some of her memories of writing, she struggled to grasp onto any memory in particular: “I don’t think I can. I mean, I must have had high school writing classes, but at this point, I can’t remember much about them.” When pressed further, she explained that her writing must have been good enough, since she received high grades. Despite our two conversations, which were spaced over the course of two months, during neither interview could Valeria remember a specific instance of writing or learning to write at a young age. The most she could recall about her time in college was taking a writing class, but she noted, “It was not a scientific one. I hated it.”

After awhile, I began to realize that Valeria sees writing as an activity that is somewhat separate from “doing science,” rather than an integral part of those activity systems. Indeed, during our interviews, she often referred to writing as a separate subject: “It’s definitely not my favorite subject without a doubt, and I think that’s probably true of a lot of scientists.” She noted that she was surprised by the amount of writing that scientists have to do. Valeria did not seem to view writing as an integrated and inseparable part of the activity system of her discipline, or even

as a tool that can serve that system. However, Valeria clearly views her role within her disciplinary activity systems as that of a teacher¹² and not a researcher or a writer, which I believe to be an important factor contributing to her view of writing. Indeed, as I will later discuss, Valeria's participation in her disciplinary activity systems is only peripheral, particularly because she is not required to do research or to publish in her discipline.

Valeria, who was one of two participants in my study without a doctoral degree, received her bachelor's and then master's degree in chemistry. For a time, she also worked in a corporate research lab before following her husband to Virginia Tech after he decided to go into academia. She has been at Virginia Tech since 1999. Although she wrote a thesis for her master's degree, she struggled to remember much about writing in this genre: "I have to tell you that was a long time ago. I honestly can't remember. I'm quite sure I would have started with results and discussion because that's just simply always the easiest or methods. And then I'm sure I would have moved to introduction and abstract and conclusion." Once Valeria got into industry, she remembers having to write internal reports and recalled learning these genres through models: "You'd look at old reports, or you'd look at somebody else's work, and you'd somewhat mimic it." As she talked more about this experience, it became clear that Valeria was familiar with several genres within her discipline, as she explained that she has written experimental procedures, summaries of results, and proposals, although she noted these genres were "generally smaller things though, several pages at most." Nonetheless, her inability to talk about the genres of her discipline stood in stark contrast to the participants in the previous chapter. In

¹² At many universities, courses that are designated writing-intensive are treated as separate from disciplinary content courses and assigned to lecturers or new assistant professors, some of whom might be fairly new to the discipline whose genres they are expected to teach to students. In this chapter, Valeria, an Instructor, and Rilo, a new Assistant Professor, teach such courses. Much like the ubiquitous composition course that is meant to prepare students for all university-level writing, these writing-intensive discipline courses are meant to prepare students for all writing within their discipline or even for their future places of work.

particular, while the previous chapter's participants spoke of these genres in terms of audience, or rhetorical purposes, Valeria focused on the conventions and forms of those genres.

Despite Valeria's challenge to remember her past writing experiences, she has over time developed a writing process that consists of the following: "Write it the first time, get the content and what you want to convey first. Wait awhile, then go back and edit. So I try desperately not to edit while I write because I think that is not as effective as just trying to get information out." As technology has become more prevalent, she also spoke of the value of programs such as spell check and grammar check that have made it easier for her to edit her writing. She explained that writing is "not as challenging because I've gotten pretty good at just spitting it out, and since I teach how to revise, I've gotten much better at how to revise, and where to revise, and what to look for. So no, it's not as hard as it used to be." Here Valeria hints of a writing process more rhetorical than what she professes; however, she continuously returned to a discussion of the mechanics of writing throughout our interviews. However, of importance to remember is that Valeria rarely writes in her disciplinary activity systems, so most of her time is spent on teaching and preparing to teach.

Heather

Heather, an Associate Professor of Sociology, also struggled to remember many specific writing memories: "I don't remember much about writing. I mean I did it when I was in middle school and high school. I think maybe it got to feel more difficult when I got to college. I'm not sure." However, at one point she noted, "I think I was always a decent writer in the sense that I got a good public school education, and for instance when I was in 6th grade, we were diagramming sentences and things like that, so I have a good foundation for that sort of thing." Unlike the participants in the previous chapter who spoke of writing a variety of genres for

different audiences, Heather's few memories are more focused around learning of grammar and mechanics, memories that seem to have transferred and currently underpin her overall understanding of writing.

Although Heather received her undergraduate major in French, she knew that she didn't want to teach French. She shared: "I wasn't that crazy about literature and doing literary analyses," a feeling further cemented after taking a graduate course in French literature her senior year. She recalled a friend who told her, "literary analysis is a little bit like drawing curly cues on bald heads." Heather went on to explain that "It's not that you're making stuff up, but you're doing a creative way of looking at things that's very different from social science research, which I'm much more compatible with." Heather, who sees herself as having a more "scientific mind," decided to go to graduate school for Sociology, and she currently studies social psychology and mental health. As Heather moved into sociology, she felt more challenged by the writing required of her. As a result, she decided to work toward improving her writing, and toward the end of her time in graduate school, she started reading books about writing. She noted, "That kind of motivated me and helped. I read Zinsser's *On Writing Well*. And probably the one that made the biggest impression on me because I still use it all the time was Richard Lanham's *Revising Prose*. That was really key." She also remarked that a book on style was of influence to her. Of interest to note here is that Heather did not seek out writing instruction or support within the activity systems of her discipline but rather chose books that treat writing as removed from any particular context. In other words, while a book on writing in sociology might focus on the particulars of writing about qualitative and/or quantitative research or writing an academic article in the discipline, these books contain suggestions on style or writing for a popular audience, for example. That is, however, not to say that these books, which

focus primarily on style, editing, and making writing more succinct, are not of value to writers. Indeed, they do focus on those features of writing that are transferable among activity systems, and they support what I see as Heather's understanding that good writers are good editors. What interests me here is that Heather, who writes primarily within her disciplinary activity systems, did not seek out ways of becoming a better writer *within* those systems. Whereas the participants in the previous chapter talked about improving their own writing in particular genres, Heather stresses the importance of improving writing in general, separated from any particular activity systems.

At one point, Heather did share that learning to "write about data analysis" during her graduate program was challenging, as was learning how to organize the material: "It was not so much the writing per se. I wasn't always sure how to organize things. And that was kind of a challenge." However, the most influential experience involves her work with a professor who was writing a textbook and wanted her to write the instructors' guide, including multiple-choice questions and exercises. Thus, like the participants in the previous chapter, Heather talks about working with others are being important to her writing development. The difference, though, is that rather than identifying this experience as a valuable way for her to become more integrated into her discipline and its corresponding genres, she spoke instead of the editor for the book, whom she greatly admired. Heather shared, "I learned so much just by looking at what she did to his prose. It was like 'wow.' She was really good. She just really tuned it up. And I learned a lot from that. She was very crisp and you know, that sort of thing." While Heather does seem at times to understand writing as a more situated disciplinary activity, she consistently turned our conversation back to editing—a practice with which she felt extremely comfortable discussing. However, unlike the participants in the previous chapter, two of whom actually studied how to

teach writing, Heather may not have the vocabulary to talk about writing as a rhetorical practice. Her own socialization into her discipline seems to have happened over time, without explicit teaching of disciplinary genres, so it is not surprising that she tends now to focus on those features of writing that do transfer among a variety of activity systems.

Rilo

Although Rilo, an Assistant Professor of Health and Nutrition, remembered more about her writing past than Heather or Valeria, her memories were not completely positive. She explained, “I was a terrible writer. I still struggle with writing. I can blame it on my school. We didn’t really have a strong writing program in my elementary school. It was one of those situations where we had a couple of teachers that just weren’t that good at it, and so a lot of those earlier skills that you’re supposed to learn, I didn’t really learn very well.” As I’ll discuss later in this chapter, Rilo clearly displayed a text-based view of how writing is learned, referring back to a missed opportunity to learn (particularly mechanics and grammar) in her primary schools. Though she continued to struggle in high school, a good friend of her mother’s who was a retired teacher worked with her extensively on writing. However, Rilo stressed that “it was more of a creative type writing; you know, so more of the English¹³ style of writing.” Of interest here was that Rilo, like the other participants in this chapter, shared a view of writing as either creative or scientific, the former being flowery and verbose, the latter being technical and dry. This view is

¹³ Several of my participants talked about writing in relation to “English,” which may not be surprising given they knew I was coming from the Department of English at Virginia Tech. However, this may have influenced their answers, as their portrayal of their own writing genres was put into comparison with the writing they equate with English, particularly literary analysis and creative writing, (although none of them seemed surprised that someone from the English Department was engaging in qualitative research). For instance, Heather seemed concerned about offending me with her description of literary analysis, but she also asked me if I had read any of the books on writing that she enjoyed. Nonetheless, I neither corrected or confirmed these stated understandings, as I did not want to influence their answers (more than my presence already did), and I was curious about the way our discipline (namely, rhetoric and writing) is understood by those in other disciplines. Most surprising, however, was a line on Valeria’s syllabus that she quoted from the American Chemical Society guidelines for writing papers: “Scientific writing serves a purpose completely different from that of literary writing.” This juxtaposition of science writing with literary writing, as though writing is limited to one or the other, seems then to be somewhat common.

important in that it differs significantly from the understanding of writing of the previous chapter's participants, who recognized and spoke of the disciplinary and public differences of genres as opposed to more stylistic preferences.

Rilo received all of her degrees from the same department of one university, where she also worked at a research institute, and she currently focuses on energy metabolism and aging. She came to Virginia Tech for a post-doc and then was promoted to Assistant Professor after three years. Rilo remembered little writing in college until she wrote her master's thesis, with which she struggled: "I was actually clueless on what I was doing with my master's work. Obviously I was writing, and it was being critiqued, but as far as the way I write now, and the way that I write for science, it was my PhD work that was the most significant in that." She attributed much of her learning to working with her advisor: "I would get it back, and it would be completely red. You know I think that's really where most of my writing style, at least in the science realm, has come from the way that he writes and the way that he kind of adapted some of the way that I wrote to his style. Otherwise he would continue to critique it." Although Rilo here speaks of writing for science in particular, this writing in fact comprises the majority of the writing that she does, as she writes primarily within her disciplinary activity systems.

After being a part of her discipline for some time, Rilo figured out a method of writing that works for her, and she shared that her writing process is to "vomit on the page and then figure it out later." However, she also explained that most of her work now is original research articles, a genre for which by now she has developed a process for writing. She went on to say "They [research articles] have methods, results, all that kind of stuff. And so generally the way that I put them together is you know methodology is pretty straightforward and easy, so I'll do that first. Then I'll work on putting the introduction together, and then based on the results, do

the results, and then finally obviously the discussion to discuss whatever we find.” Nonetheless, she values revision and does “a lot of rewriting.” Rilo’s writing process, then, is very steeped within the particular genres of her disciplinary activity systems, genres with specific ways of structuring information. Though Rilo’s early memories about writing are focused on what she missed—training in writing basics, as well as what help she did receive—editing from a former teacher and her advisor, she nonetheless understands the particular genre knowledge necessary for writing a research article in her discipline, which I discuss further in a later section.

As I listened to these participants’ few but important remembered experiences with writing prior to becoming socialized members of their disciplines, I was struck not only by how little they remembered, but also that many of the memories were primarily focused on grammar and mechanics. This understanding may provide a tentative explanation for why Valeria, Heather, and Rilo often talk about the writing they do either as an activity separate from their disciplines or as an activity that focuses on their ability to be clear and to use correct grammar. However, I do believe that these participants understand the genres of their disciplines, and, at least for Heather and Rilo, are able to comfortably and successfully write within those genres. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, they include disciplinary genres in their classrooms with the motive of helping students to improve their writing in their disciplines. Nonetheless, their inability to talk about those disciplinary genres in more than generic or superficial ways, or their choices to prioritize skills-based activities such as editing passive voice, poses an interesting study of how they have transferred this knowledge into their classrooms.

Writing within Disciplinary Activity Systems

All of the participants in this chapter do the majority of their writing within the activity

systems of their disciplines, though they engage in a broad spectrum of activities among them. Valeria, despite teaching within the discipline of chemistry, explained that she doesn't read, do research, or publish academic articles in her discipline. Valeria's role within her discipline, then, is quite unique from the other participants in this study. As I will address later with regard to her teaching practices, of importance to remember is that Valeria is being asked to teach genres that she herself is not currently writing. Thus while she teaches writing to students in chemistry, the majority of her own writing practices are mostly limited to the genre of the email. Nonetheless, it was while talking about writing emails that Valeria displayed the most surprising understanding of writing, one that did not come across when she talked about other writing practices. She shared, "You learn to write carefully because you never of course know how they [emails] are going to go or where they're going to go, so I think a big emphasis on anybody's writing these days is how to write an appropriate email regardless of whether it's a complaint or a criticism or positive or whatever." Here her awareness of audience in relation to writing stood in stark contrast to her discussions of other genres, which she simply explained by sharing how they were organized.

Valeria also showed a greater understanding of audience as she spoke about writing that she would do in the future. At the time of our interview, Valeria shared that she would soon start working on a general chemistry manual for students taking the lab courses. She explained, "I'm a little overwhelmed. We're changing a lot. I'm taking over as Director of General Laboratories, so we're changing up the manual." Her plans thus far for the manual, though she will keep some of the current material, are to include sections on how to use Endnote, Excel, and Word, how not to plagiarize, how to put in a figure, and how to clean glassware, for example. She identified the most challenging part of writing the manual as follows: "I think the hardest part will be to write

it so that I haven't made any assumptions of what the students already know. So that to me will be a little bit tricky just because I've been working in the labs for so long, I'm going to assume they know how to do certain things. I expect they're going to be excited to do this, and they probably aren't. That's probably the hardest part."¹⁴ Of interest here is that Valeria shows an understanding that she will be working in a new and unique genre, one that clearly comes with its own set of expectations in terms of audience and assumed knowledge.¹⁴ This hints at the social interactive understanding of writing shared by the participants in the first chapter, although I believe that because Valeria does not write within her discipline, she rarely has the opportunity to strengthen her own development as a writer.

Both Heather and Rilo, on the other hand, write more extensively within their disciplines, including articles and grant proposals, and it was as they explained these genres to me that they showed a rhetorical understanding of writing. They both spoke at length about the process of writing and submitting grant proposals, showing that they understood the way the genres differs, in terms of audience and content, from other genres they write within their discipline. Heather, who also reviews proposals for the National Science Foundation, explained, "you're often writing for people who aren't in your field necessarily. I mean if something goes to NSF, then you're going to get a general sort of sociology panel. And if you send it to NIH, chances are it was people all over the board who were reviewing it, you know psychologists and biologists and all kinds of folks." Knowing her writing would need to appeal to a broader audience, she explained that rather than spending a lot of time reviewing literature, "you really have to spend a lot of time on what you're going to do, what the research design is, because otherwise people go,

¹⁴ Though Valeria will not complete the manual under after this dissertation is complete, I am interested to know whether her work in writing in this new genre would affect the way she has set up the writing course that she teaches. In other words, I question whether facing this new genre would challenge her to look at the way her course prepares students for a variety of genres in which they may write in their graduate work or their chosen professions.

‘I don’t know what they want to do.’” Heather, then, seems highly aware here of the ways that audience shapes a particular genre. Rilo, who sends grant proposals to the same foundations, also understands the rhetorical nature of the genre: “You’re trying to convince somebody to give you a bunch of money to do the studies that you’re proposing to do, trying to be as concise as possible but at the same time, conveying enough that the reader says, ‘Oh yeah, this absolutely has to be done.’” They clearly understand, then, that writing a grant proposal—especially for audiences outside their own disciplinary activity systems—requires them to shape their writing for these different audiences.

Both Heather and Rilo spoke further about genre differences by suggesting that grant proposals are more limiting than articles in their discipline and make different kinds of arguments. As Rilo explained, writing a grant is more rules-based, in that “there are certain things you’re supposed to do or not supposed to do, whereas the manuscript you have a little bit more leeway in what you want to do.” She explained further that a grant has a more persuasive element than an article: “In the article, somebody can read it and say, ‘Oh I disagree with you.’ It’s like ‘okay that’s great.’ But for a grant, you’re trying to get that person to agree with you, so they recommend to fund your proposal.” Though she admits that an argument is also needed for an article, she also recognizes the difference: “you are trying to persuade the readers to view things that you do. It’s just like I said in grant writing there’s an immediate reason why you need them to agree.” Heather agreed, “The big deal with a grant is you have to say why it’s important and why it’s significant, and that’s a big part of it. And of course you do that with your research too. It’s all the same kind of thing, but it’s probably even more momentous there.” Here, both Heather and Rilo show a great deal of not only disciplinary knowledge but also of the rhetorical differences between two genres, a research article and a grant proposal, such as how those genres

require different ways of writing for an audience. In this respect, they align closely with the participants of the previous chapter.

In addition, both Heather and Rilo spoke a great deal about the collaboration of their writing practices, noting that the majority of their work is done collaboratively. Heather explained, “somebody takes responsibility for the first draft, and then the other people chime in and make suggestions and all that.” Rilo also writes collaboratively by sharing the text back and forth, and she explained, “generally the one who does most of the writing would be first [author].” Heather also expanded her definition of collaboration beyond articles that she writes with other members of her field. She explained, “I like collaborating with people. And my husband and I read each other’s work. We don’t read all of it, but I’ll have him read things sometimes. He’s a chemist.” In particular, she prides herself on being a good editor, explaining that with regard to her husband’s work, “I can edit his work. I can say this needs to be changed, even though I don’t really understand what it’s about.” This ability to edit one’s work, without knowing the content—which I agree is possible to an extent—might also have shaped Heather’s understanding that content and writing can be separated. She also shared that she is respected for being a good writer in her department, primarily because of her editing skills: “People in my department think I’m a good editor, which I am, because of the Richard Lanham and the paramedic method. I just apply it, and it’s amazing what that does.” Unlike Rilo and Valeria, Heather clearly identifies herself as a writer, primarily because she publishes, and she explained that “the percent of people in any field who publishes is not that large.” Rilo, when asked about being a writer, returned to the distinction between creative and scientific writing, stating, “No, in fact, I would say that science writing has stripped any chance I would ever have of being a creative writer because now to try and sit down and write something creative I wouldn’t know

where to begin. So no, to me the writing is more like a necessary evil. We have to write papers, we have to write grants, but it's more of doing the experiments, seeing the results, discussing what the findings mean and that sort of thing as opposed to sitting down and writing." Here Rilo somewhat denies that being a writer could be a part of her identity, much like Valeria's claim of being a scientist rather than a writer. Though Rilo clearly understands that writing is a necessary part of her disciplinary activity systems, she also seems a bit unsure of whether the writing that is done in her field—the scientific writing—could even be called *real* writing.

Both Heather and Rilo, then, demonstrate that they are able to move quite easily among the genres of their disciplines, which I believe is the result of their socialization into those disciplines. As Soliday notes, "a genre must be acquired to a certain extent in the natural contexts of its use" (6); often, this rhetorical writing knowledge of specific genres is gained without explicit awareness (Currie; Geller; Giltrow and Valiquette). Indeed, all of the participants demonstrated such knowledge and at times seemed to share the social interactive perspective with the last chapter's participants. As a result, the uniqueness of these participants is that rather than transferring the rhetorical knowledge they have about disciplinary writing to their students, as did the participants in the previous chapter, they rely instead on their earlier memories of learning to write, which draw from text-based understandings of writing, which I address in the next section.

Constructs of Writing as Text-Based

Though the previous chapter's participants primarily spoke of writing and learning to write in ways that Brammer et al. call social interactive, this chapter's participants shared understandings of writing that align more with a text-based construct of writing, in which "views of how writing is learned stress issues such as mechanics, format, or generic

expectations” (“Culture”). In other words, though Heather, Rilo, and Valeria may know how to write in a variety of genres within their discipline, and they may understand the rhetorical differences among those genres, they nonetheless speak of writing and learning to write primarily in relation to mechanics and models. Early in our interviews, Heather shared with me her fundamental beliefs about writing: “It’s good to write clearly. It’s good to avoid the passive voice when you can and turn nouns into verbs. And to use adverbs. It’s good to use topic sentences. There’s a fine line between thinking you should cite everybody and then not citing everybody.” The majority of these declarations, then, are somewhat decontextualized statements about what writing *should* be, no matter the context, the genre, or the discipline. Yet, not surprisingly, faculty among a variety of disciplines struggle to agree on what constitutes good writing (Currie; Thaiss and Zawacki). Thus, while it may be true that writing that is clear is preferred, clear writing depends on a variety of other factors such as disciplinary knowledge, organization, and genre expectations. Though, as I shared earlier, Heather identifies herself as a good writer, I believe she primarily identifies herself as being a good editor. She shared, “I published a paper this past year in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* with a couple of collaborators, and the editor turned it over to the copyeditor, and she said she couldn’t find anything to edit, and she said it had never happened to her before.” Rather than highlighting the importance than having her work published, then, she shared her pride that an editor found her work to be flawless in terms of its grammar and mechanics.

Though Rilo primarily talks about writing from a text-based perspective, she also at one point shared an understanding of writing as being an innate gift. She explained, “I think it’s somewhat a talent. My sister is a wonderful writer, and I don’t think she’s ever taken a writing class. It’s just natural. I think it’s a talent that I don’t have, and that’s why I struggle with it all

the time.” Yet in the same sentence, she goes on to identify it as a skill: “You know I think it’s something you have to keep working at, and if you stop doing it, then the skill kind of goes away. The more I do it, the better I am at it.” Thus, though she might believe writing can be a talent with which one can be born, she does not believe that a lack of talent keeps one from being an effective writer, which her other statements demonstrate. Further, unlike the participants in the next chapter, who fall more closely with a writer-based view of writing, I include Rilo in this chapter because although she may see writing as a talent, she also thinks that it can be taught, that one can improve on his/her skills. The participants in the next chapter, on the other hand, share a belief that writing is an innate gift.

Of all of the participants in this chapter, Valeria was the most opposed to writing in general, but she was also the participant who did the least amount of writing within her discipline. Given her position as a lecturer, she not expected to do research or publish as a part of her job. Throughout our interview, she stressed that she was “more of a scientist” and told me, “I pretty much hate writing. It’s not my favorite.”¹⁵ However, though Valeria shared few memories in relation to her own writing, a discussion about her courses, which I will cover more in the next section, demonstrated her understanding of learning to write as text-based. That said, these categories are not definitive; the participants at times also suggested a more writer-based view of how we learn to write—which understands writing as an innate gift, or they showed a more social-interactive view of writing—which views learning to write as being social. However, their understanding of learning to write as text-based seemed to be the primary

¹⁵ Though Valeria participated in two interviews like the other participants, I found these interviews to be particularly challenging, especially the one focused on Valeria’s past writing experiences. These interviews, despite my gentle prodding, were each at not even half the length of the interviews of other participants, especially the first interview. She seemed surprised that I was asking about her writing and continuously tried to turn the conversation to her teaching practices. I believe this may be due to the fact that Valeria does not identify herself as being a writer, never really sees herself as *writing*, and has an overall dislike of writing. Nonetheless, she does profess to teach writing, so she sees some value in it.

influence as they worked in a variety of activity systems.

Despite the understanding of their genres as disciplinary, Valeria, Rilo, and Heather do not seem to have the language to transfer their writing knowledge in terms that are not vague and or general. As a result, what knowledge they do transfer tends to be what I previously described as text-based knowledge. Though the genres they assign to their students are situated within their disciplinary activity systems, I argue that the conversations surrounding the teaching of these genres are only often peripherally a part of those systems. In this next section, I turn to a discussion of their teaching practices, which reveal this unique contradiction.

Teaching in Disciplinary Activity Systems and Transfer

As I discussed teaching practices with Valeria, Rilo, and Heather, I noticed that while they all have robust disciplinary knowledge, with courses that include appropriate genres for their disciplines, they nonetheless struggled to prepare students to write in those genres. Often they assigned quite specific genres to students but talked about writing in an abstract way, with a focus on grammar or on writing generic introductions, for example. Thus they often demonstrated a rule-based understanding of what constitutes acceptable disciplinary writing, which seemed to transfer from their previous activities that focused on editing or the mechanics of writing. While this was of course not always the case, it occurred with some regularity. I argue these choices led to contradictions between the stated motives of the course and the actual motives under which they were working.

Valeria

Valeria regularly teaches a senior-level course called a survey of chemical literature, in addition to several laboratory courses. The stated objective of the chemical literature course, which meets only once per week, is to “develop written communication skills for scientific

articles,” in addition to helping students learn how to use search engines to research scientific information. Valeria works on the assumption that half of the students in the course will continue on to graduate school, that another quarter will move to an unrelated field, and that the remaining quarter will look for jobs. She explained: “I stress the need to write, and it doesn’t even occur to them that they have to write in other fields. So my emphasis is more on writing correctly, where to reference, how not to plagiarize.” In addition to teaching students about writing in chemistry, then, Valeria also believes she is taking on the responsibility of helping students to write in their future activity systems, even outside of academia, by focusing on what she sees as transferable writing skills. Indeed, I would argue that while Valeria’s course does involve a great deal of writing, the actual content of the course is less about learning the genres of the discipline and more about learning tools that can help with writing and/or research practices such as Endnote. Of importance to remember, however, is that this course only meets once a week for 50 minutes, making the teaching of anything, let alone writing, particularly challenging. In addition to teaching students how to write in chemistry, this class is also expected to cover tools that may help students with their writing such as the library resources. A typical class, for instance, might include a PowerPoint presentation on how to use Endnote followed by students practicing its use. Though the actual genres students are expected to produce include summaries, a literature review, a synthesis, and a poster, based on the interviews and the class syllabus and calendar, I believe the class activities are only peripherally related to helping students write in these genres. Instead, the activities focus primarily on editing or using Sci-Finder, for instance, although there is a day devoted to submitting a journal article. However, I also argue that the overall expectations of the course are likely impossible for any faculty member to meet given the lack of time students are actually present in class.

Though the stated motive for this course is quite specific, the unstated motives of the course prove to be less about writing a scientific article—which might include a discussion on how to write an effective introduction in this genre, for example—and more about the mechanics of editing an article. For instance, weekly activities on the course calendar include topics such as the following: illustrations and tables, editing and proof reading, converting passive to active, submitting a journal article, and plagiarism. Valeria relies heavily on technology to help students master these skills, particularly showing students how to use the Word functions. Valeria shared, “I spent a whole lot of time on how you cannot have a spelling mistake. It infuriates people. So some of this syllabus is from personal experience.” Given the numerous spelling errors and grammatical mistakes she sees, Valeria explained that she tries “to teach how to use Word effectively and to actually look at the underlined words.” To further that end, she has students complete multiple worksheets asking them to complete tasks such as changing sets of words—it appears that, prior to, are known to be—to a singular word. Indeed, when she shared with me comments she had made on a student paper, the majority of the comments focused on grammar and mechanics, especially the identification of long sentences or passive constructions.

A particular challenge I see Valeria facing is that students are uncertain about the genres in which they are writing, and the course currently spends minimal time addressing this issue. For example, though she has students work with scientific articles, Valeria explained that she assumes most students will be familiar with this genre. However, students do need to write an introduction and a literature review for the course, and Valeria requires for this assignment 20 different references, with multiple citations for each one. Though the assignment is meant to help students with citation practices, she shared that students often try to quote or do not know how to use sources otherwise. Valeria does share with students that there are “no quotes in technical

writing,” but rather than showing students how to paraphrase, Valeria teaches them about plagiarism. She explained, “I don’t talk so much about how to paraphrase. I do have an example from the honor court in one of the slides that does show an example of how a student took a paragraph, and then they tried to paraphrase just a couple little words, and it was caught for plagiarism. And then I have an example of how the student could have rewritten it so that it wasn’t plagiarizing. I assume the slides are there, and the students can look through them on their own.” She stressed that the day to cover this would be the same day that she devotes to Endnote, so there is no time to also talk about paraphrasing. Thus, Valeria recognizes the limitations put forth by the overall structure of the course and feels constrained by the time she is given.

Though statements like the above seem to suggest that Valeria assumes students will come to her class already having a great deal of writing knowledge that just needs editing, she explained that she does not expect her students to have any experience with writing for chemistry prior to taking the course. Regardless, students are expected to produce what Valeria has identified as the important genres for those working in chemistry. For instance, she requires students to write a summary at the beginning of course with no instruction, as she wants students to see at the end of the semester the difference after they’ve learned to “revise a paper.” Valeria shared that when she gets the first summaries back, some are well-written, which she attributes to the following: “I think it really depends on how the students learn to write. Some of the students are very comfortable with writing a paper on a topic. Some of them will start out with ‘I’m gonna write a paper today on this article, and I’m gonna talk about this topic.’ And that’s clearly not what I want.” Here, Valeria does seem more concerned with students who do not adhere to genre conventions, although she equates a lack of genre knowledge with poor writing. Later, she shared that those students who did not improve on summaries over the semester were

the ones who “simply weren’t strong writers coming in; they didn’t take the time to really get rid of the Is’s and the Was’s; they didn’t really take the time to learn active and passive; they were a little bit sloppy.” Improvement in this genre, then, is primarily based on its level of correctness.

Revision practices in her class, for instance, tend to focus on editing papers. She explained:

“The one class they come in with an assignment, and I hand them their papers with red pens and yellow highlighters, and I have them circle every ‘is,’ ‘was,’ and ‘were.’ They highlight every passive voice; they have to write the topic of each paragraph; they have to write the number of sentences; they have to highlight the topic sentence.” Though Valeria values revision, her primary concern is less about the ways students have adapted to the genres of her disciplinary activity systems and more about how correct she views their writing.

Some of the problems Valeria identified with student writing seem to stem from students incorrectly transferring knowledge into her classroom, but Valeria recognizes these problems as writing that is incorrect rather than writing that is not appropriate for her disciplinary activity systems. For example, she shared her frustration with students not knowing how to be precise: “The biggest problem is wordiness or not knowing how to transition. Surprisingly, a lot of them can’t develop a paragraph.” She explained that most students want to write really long sentences, a habit she blames on their previous experiences with writing: “I usually blame that on the high schools.” Valeria also noted that teachers seemed to prefer long sentences, which “they tend to grade stronger because they think it’s just this long complicated sentence.” Valeria shared that she tries “to get them back to very short concise sentences, no personal opinion, just present the fact,” as though students used to write like that before they were encouraged to write longer and more complex sentences. Rather than recognizing that long, complicated sentences are valued rules/norms and quite encouraged in other disciplines, Valeria rejects this type of writing as

being a problem to fix.

In particular, Valeria was concerned with students learning to use the active voice rather than the passive voice, and she explained that recently there has been a push in the science disciplines to use active voice. When I asked her what she explains to students when they see passive voice in the scientific journal articles they read, she answered, “I tell them that that’s not my problem. I can’t control what’s been printed, but I can tell you that we’re moving to the active and if you want to get a job, you want to get that interview, you want to get that grant, then you got to write correctly.” Nonetheless, her course documents included the use of passive voice, which was surprising given that she equated passive voice with bad writing. In addition, Valeria suggests that her students visit the Purdue OWL for further writing help, a website that includes specific suggestions for writing correctly in the passive voice. Regardless, Valeria seems to equate the passive voice with bad writing and therefore incorrect. Thus her motives for the activity system of the classroom may contradict the experiences of writers who submit scientific articles to journals and desire the use of passive voice.

Further, Valeria’s grading system for the class very much aligns with her text-based view of writing that favors correctness and grammar. She grades students by starting with an 85% and then allows 15 additional percentage points to add or subtract based on the quality of the work. For instance, she noted that she might say as follows to a student: “I’m giving you 12 points because your grammar’s great, your subject coverage was good, your references were complete. Whereas I could say I’m only giving you 2% because I found spelling mistakes and fragment sentences.” Thus, Valeria does value discipline-specific content in her grading scale. However, she shared, “I hit them very hard for typographical errors, so if they have three spelling mistakes, they lost 9% because my husband accepts a lot of graduate students into the program, and I know

if he sees one or two spelling mistakes he'll just flat out reject them, so I know how infuriating spelling mistakes are." Much of this grading structure is based on grammatical errors such as word count or fragments, rather than on how well students meet the conventional and disciplinary expectations. Though I do see Valeria as holding a text-based understanding of writing, which manifests itself in her teaching choices, I also believe that she is in a unique position as a teacher. Because she is a lecturer, her role within the university is to teach and not to publish or to do research. Thus, she is only tangentially a member of her disciplinary activity systems. In other words, Valeria is required to teach students how to write in very specific genres of an activity system even though she is neither expected to read or to contribute to the literature of her discipline.

Rilo

At the time of this interview, Rilo was in her second semester of teaching, particularly a senior level course on writing and discourse for human nutrition, foods and exercise. As a new teacher, she explained, "I don't have the best structured teaching experience. But really my priority is to get the students engaged, interested, and involved in what they're doing. You know, really thinking about what they're doing as opposed to just regurgitating graphs and figures and that sort of thing." Her course consists of lectures centered on critical thinking, evaluating research, and researching and writing. She shared early on that as a new teacher, she was most surprised about student work in terms of "the actual writing, the grammar and that sort of thing." She shared, "I was surprised by what was just a lack of being able to write a paragraph, like a clear concise paragraph. The other thing that I noticed that they write almost like they talk." However, unlike Valeria, Rilo talked little about students lacking in mechanical skills and more about the ways she tries to teach them disciplinary genres. Of importance to note, and which I

will discuss later, is although I place Rilo in this chapter, I also believe that after more years of teaching experience, her understanding of writing would more accurately align with that of the participants in the social interactive chapter.

Rilo's course was developed primarily by Rilo in collaboration with the other professors to make sure there would be consistency across the sections. However, she has felt free to adapt it more to her liking. She explained:

There was like one big project, so they finished off the semester with one large paper. I didn't like that because those are skills, you know, writing a paper, giving a presentation, that's a skill that you learn, and you learn it by practicing it, whereas you know writing one big paper and then getting a C on it, really what have you learned other than you may not be as good of a writer as you thought you were, and so that's why I've now adapted it to multiple assignments, where it's almost a progression.

Like the participants in the previous chapter, then, Valeria is highly aware of the value of a writing process that allows for revision, and she shares an understanding that writing here as a process of development. To help students learn what she identifies as writing skills, Valeria requires students to write in a variety of genres, including a produce evaluation, a review paper, and a commentary. She explained, "the review paper and the commentary are essentially the same topic. The style is a little bit different, and so it's kind of a way for them to practice those sorts of things." As Valeria shared with me, she wants students to be familiar with some of the writing that will be expected of them in her discipline, either in graduate school or in their potential careers. Most of her assignments are very steeped in disciplinary genres; one assignment prompt, for example, states as follows: "This paper is intended to be like an editorial/commentary/perspective you would find in a professional peer reviewed journal."

In addition to walking students through sample journal articles, Rilo tries to prepare students for writing in her class through multiple PowerPoint presentations. Though Rilo's course seems very centered around her disciplinary activity systems, I found through viewing her course lectures, in addition to our interviews, that her understanding of writing as text-based tended to hold true, although she did not stress editing in the same way Valeria did. For example, one of Rilo's Powerpoints, entitled "Writing a Scientific Paper," pulls almost all of its material from the Purdue OWL, which primarily focuses on writing separated from any disciplinary context. The material, which she drew from a section titled "General Writing," covers introductions, thesis statements, and body paragraphs for example, and a discussion of transitions that pulls from the literary example on the OWL website. Nonetheless, this is not particularly surprising given her status as a new teacher. Thought Rilo seems to understand that writing is very discipline specific—even having students work in disciplinary genres—she also relies heavily on understandings of writing that are not discipline specific. In fact, much of the content she pulls from the website focuses primarily on writing what is commonly known as the thesis-driven, traditional academic essay. While such advice might apply to a variety of genres, she presents it as being the way writing is in general. Thus she does not explain how something like a thesis statement or organization might look dramatically different in a different genre. However, that Rilo was only in her second semester of teaching *any* course, much less a writing-intensive course, is important to remember especially since as a new assistant professor, Rilo herself was still learning the genres of her discipline. Thus, I believe her choices about what to cover in class may be the result of her overall inexperience with teaching, leading me to believe that over time, her class activities will more closely reflect the quite specific genres of her discipline.

Though her discussions about writing are general, which is significantly different from the participants in the previous chapter, her grading rubrics, on the other hand, pay more attention to the specific requirements of genres within her discipline. The rubrics were based on templates from previous faculty members who taught the course, though Rilo has also modified them to fit her own preferences. Although the rubrics contain categories particular to a genre, Rilo admits that she does tend to comment primarily on grammar, which is not surprising given her lack of training in the teaching of writing (or teaching in general). Further, Rilo also revealed that when several students come to talk about their work, she is able to give them more feedback; for example, she might tell them, “I don’t like this section, or this is what I think you should do, that sort of thing.” Though she seems challenged in terms of talking about writing specific to her disciplinary activity systems, in terms of what students should do, she expressed considerable more comfort working with students who had already produced some writing. In other words, Rilo does seem to recognize what does and does not constitute acceptable disciplinary work, but she struggles to transfer that knowledge into her classroom. Like the participants in a recent study by Adler-Kassner et al., Rilo moves back and forth between talking about writing that is situated in her discipline and writing that is somehow universal and “defined within particular contexts shaped by specific audiences with specific purposes” (“Value”).

Of interest, however, is that Rilo believes that students don’t actually have the threshold knowledge needed to master the disciplinary content at this point. She explained: “I do try to talk about the content as well, but I think trying to get the thoughts on the paper is kind of the most important part right now. I think as they continue, and whether they go into graduate school or whatever, that’s where the content would be, will improve.” For Rilo, disciplinary genres can be separated from disciplinary content, an understanding of writing that may be shaped by her

experience with students not knowing genre conventions such as what constitutes shared knowledge and appropriate methodologies. Indeed, she seemed very familiar with where students are in their understanding of the discipline: “They’re definitely not at the point that they can look at a group of studies and say based on these studies, ‘This study is a good study because it’s this, and so that’s why we look at this more highly than the other study.’” Instead, most students provided a summary rather than an evaluation. In addition, Rilo shared that students struggle with taking a stance: “They won’t even pick a side. They kind of present both sides and maybe at the very end will conclude that the product may work, but it’s like have you really proven that with your presentation or your paper?” These experiences, then, seemed to have only further shaped Rilo’s belief that students are not completely ready to write in these disciplinary genres, which may lend itself to some hesitation about how to prepare students for those genres later in their careers or graduate school.

In addition, Rilo also shared that she’s learning that students struggle to understand different genre expectations, and she noted, “I mean you have to be very specific in what you want.” She gave an example of assigning the produce evaluation where students should “evaluate the product on like what does the website look like, what’s the commercial about? And so really what I was looking for was does the research truly back what the product says, or what the makers of the product says. Tell me about these research studies and why you believe they do or don’t back the product.” However she found that most students reviewed the website. However, unlike Valeria, Rilo did not see this type of writing as poor but rather as a reflection of her need to be clear in her expectations. Rilo clearly recognizes the genre knowledge that students are lacking, which is not surprising given her experience working within these genres. However, she also somewhat questions the motive of preparing students to write within the

discipline, choosing instead to focus on what she identifies as having students write in a general way, one to be developed later after students learn the needed content.

Heather

Heather regularly teaches courses to first- and second-year students such as introductory sociology, the individual and society, and dating, marriage, and divorce, and most classes have up to 60 students. She explained that she lectures most of the time, although she wishes the courses had more interaction and sometimes has students do exercises in groups. In addition to the course content goals, Heather shared, “I like them [students] to learn something about writing social scientific writing, which is essentially technical writing,” in addition to learning about quantitative data. Heather, then, recognizes that writing in her discipline is unique from writing students have done in the past. Unlike the courses that Rilo and Valeria teach, which are senior-level courses focused on written discourse in a discipline, Heather’s courses are content courses with a writing component. Heather shared that she assigns writing because it’s required but also because she hopes students “learn from writing something about writing.” Thus, the writing assignments are not necessarily designed to help students improve their writing in specific genres but rather to improve or to practice disciplinary methodologies, which are nonetheless reflective of her discipline. For instance, one assignment states as follows: “This assignment is designed to develop your skill in analyzing data about how dating relationships change after college, and to develop your skill in interviewing.” Thus, due to the fact that Heather’s courses are content courses, she chooses writing assignments that require students to use the methodologies common to social sciences, with interviews and other methods of data collection. She explained, “I like the ones where they go out and interview somebody and talk to somebody. I like having them deal with a little bit of data.” She also regularly assigns readings of empirical articles that

include qualitative research, though she has noticed that students seem to struggle reading these articles, which shows in their test grades. In addition to texts, each class has four writing assignments, often in relation to the course readings.

Although Heather believes that student writing has improved in the last few years, she also noted, “my expectations aren’t that high I guess.” She explained further, “I guess it takes a long time to actually get people to see that maybe it would be a good idea to actually edit their stuff. I mean proofreading and stuff like that is something that students could improve I think.” Heather, then, is more concerned with how well students edit their papers rather than how well they meet the genre expectations, although the genres she assigns are shaped by disciplinary expectations. Heather explained, “I try to set the papers up so they’re very highly structured.” Indeed, her assignment provides provide very specific details for how each paper should be written, including what each paragraph should accomplish. For instance, one assignment prompt states the following: “In the second paragraph, summarize the data shown in Table 1, in which you profile your respondents.” Heather explained that these specifications are meant to help students organize their findings and the result of a past experience: “I had short papers in my other class, and the bad ones were ones where they didn’t follow the format at all.” The motives for these assignments, then, are less about having students learn specific disciplinary genres in a first- or second-year course and more about giving students a specific format for showing they have mastered content or learned a methodology. However, that is not to say that she is not making genre conventions somewhat explicit, although such conventions are primarily focused on paragraph organization.

As Heather talked more about specific assignments, she highlighted one that required students to conduct interviews and then “write a paragraph about the quality of their interviews

and summarize their main findings in a paragraph.” At this point, she shared that students struggle with this particular genre; “Writing a summary is, I think, a good skill to have, and a lot of people don’t get it. I mean I tell them when I make the assignment. I said, ‘I don’t want to hear ‘I enjoyed doing this assignment, and I got a lot out of it’ or something like that.’ But still, getting them to summarize is tricky.” When asked if she talks about summary to students, she admitted that she has not: “That would be a good idea I think. And they’d probably follow it if I did. That’s probably a good idea cause what one could argue is that maybe they don’t understand what is required.” Indeed, when I observed Heather’s class on a day she introduced a writing assignment, she provided students with a prompt, asked for questions, and then continued with a discussion of content. However, of importance to remember is that her course is not writing-intensive, so there is little time to devote to the teaching of writing, as well as too many students to require multiple drafts.

Heather’s genre choices are also shaped by her previous experience in working with students, especially her decision to require students to conduct secondary research. She explained, “Honestly with some much plagiarism on the internet and all that stuff, I’d be really reluctant to assign any research paper or anything like that. These are assignments that people pretty much have to do on their own. I think I gave up on research papers several years ago. It just didn’t seem worth it.” Despite research being an integral part of her disciplinary activity systems, Heather rejected genres that involve [secondary] research for her students, due to the unintended outcome from previously assigning such genres.

Heather is the only participant in this chapter who has a TA grade the writing assignments, and she provides them with a rubric to guide them. Like Thomas in the previous chapter, she also meets with her TAs to discuss the grading of specific assignments. She

explained that it “was very specific in terms of this paragraph is worth this many points, and so we went through a couple of them and talked about how to grade it.” Although the bulk of the grade comes from content, she also explained her system for grammar: “Basically you take off a point for every 3 grammatical errors or mechanical errors, and then there are some points built in there for readability (if they make good transitions or good topic sentences and things like that). So that’s in there, and those points are separate from the content points.” Though Heather does seem to value content, that students could technically fail an assignment for too many grammatical errors is not surprising given her strong commitment to proper editing.

At once point when we were discussing writing courses for students, Heather stated that students “need to know the basics, and if they haven’t, especially if they haven’t had a good foundation for grammar and stuff like that, they [writing instructors] really need to go over stuff like that. I’d love to see all students be required to take a technical writing course.” This statement aligns closely with Heather’s own experience of learning to write by learning about correctness through editing, as well as the belief that students who haven’t learned these basics should be able to pick them up in a course or two. Beaufort describes this understanding as one in which “writing is a generic skill, that, once learned, becomes a ‘one size fits all’ intellectual garb (*College* 10).

Conclusion

Rather than recontextualizing knowledge (Nowacek) as they move among activity systems, as did the participants in the previous chapter, Heather, Valeria, and Rilo maintain a text-based understanding of writing as a decontextualizable skill, an understanding they seem to have developed at an early age. Despite being or becoming successful members of their

disciplinary activity systems, they tended not to view writing as a primary means of socialization into these disciplines. Rather writing, or editing, particularly for Valeria and Rilo, is often treated as a separate activity to accomplish after the real work is done.. This view is distinct from the other participants who spoke of writing as a way to help them accomplish particular outcomes within their disciplinary activity systems.

Though this understanding of writing may be limiting, Heather, Valeria, and Rilo nonetheless have identified the genres important to the work of their disciplines, and they do value writing even if they do not particularly enjoy it. Their courses often created a contradiction of motives in that the stated purposes—to prepare students to write within those disciplines—contradicted with the unofficial motives under which they are working. However, I argue not that these participants have rejected these official motives but rather that they believe to be working toward those motives without recognizing that their values suggest otherwise. In other words, they have resolved the contradiction by focusing on what they believe to be general writing skills—skills they remember learning or struggling to learn previously. While the participants in the previous chapter were highly aware of their process of learning to write in multiple activity systems, for these participants, the rhetorical knowledge was less explicit. That is, however, not to say that they do not have this disciplinary knowledge, but that knowledge does not necessarily transfer into the ways they teach writing to students.

CHAPTER 7

A WRITER-BASED UNDERSTANDING: POSSIBILITIES FOR POSITIVE TRANSFER OF WRITING KNOWLEDGE AMONG ACTIVITY SYSTEMS

“I’m a Lit person. I’m not a writing Person.” – Tiffany
“I think that the more you read, the better you write.” – Brandon
“You’ve either got the spark, or you don’t.” – Arthur

In the previous two chapters, I introduced participants who understood learning to write from a social interactive perspective or a text-based perspective. The participants in Chapter 5 transferred rhetorical writing knowledge among a variety of activity systems, even when they had to reshape that knowledge to fit different motives and genres. That knowledge, then, was often transformed to meet the different rules/norms or motives of a different activity system. On the other hand, the participants in Chapter 6 learned writing as a system of grammatical and conventional rules. As a result, they tended to transfer this mechanical knowledge among activity systems, which often led to a somewhat decontextualized treatment of writing in the courses they taught. Nonetheless, the participants in all chapters could be said to be transferring writing knowledge among activity systems, but the type of knowledge being transferred differed. However, the participants I introduce in this chapter, Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur, tended not to transfer their writing knowledge into their classes. Rather than drawing from their own experiences as writers and shaping that knowledge in their teaching practices, these participants resist the idea of themselves as teaching writing, even within their own disciplines, thus limiting what writing knowledge they transfer to their classrooms. What *has* transferred for these participants, then, is an overarching belief in how writing is learned that manifests itself through their resistance to teaching writing. In other words, these participants resist the idea that writing knowledge can be taught, despite each having multiple experiences with writing in a variety of

activity systems. Though these participants could identify several instances that each believed shaped his/her understanding of knowledge, and clearly transferred writing knowledge among situations, Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur nonetheless seem to see writing from a writer-based perspective, which “emphasizes innateness” (Brammer et. al.). This perspective of writing lends itself to an understanding that writing is a talent that one is born with rather than a practice that can be taught, and “represents a core view that learning to write is an individualized and ‘magical’ process that resists instruction and coaching” (Brammer et. al.). Although Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur also argue that students cannot be good writers without being readers, a text-based view, they differ from the participants in the previous chapter who see themselves as capable of teaching writing and stress grammar and mechanics. Of importance to note here is the distinction between teaching and learning. I argue that the participants in this chapter believe that writing can be *learned*, albeit through individualized processes, but I further argue that they question whether writing can be *taught*.

All of the participants in this chapter were near retirement age at the time of this study, and all of them have spent the majority of their academic careers at Virginia Tech. Brandon, for instance, was quick to tell me that he could retire at any time. Thus, Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur also have the most overall academic and teaching experience of all of the participants at in this study. As a result, they have been through multiple changes at the university level in terms of core expectations for students, as well as department changes for some. However, they often expressed resistance to some of these changes. For instance, Tiffany no longer feels at home in her department, which is slowly becoming a writing department rather than a literature one, and she expressed that she often feels like “a dinosaur” within the department.

In this chapter, then, I start by providing what Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur identified as their formative writing backgrounds, based on their memory retrieval. Next, I focus on their current experience writing within their disciplinary activity systems, as well as other activity systems of which they are a part. I follow this discussion by a look at their understanding of how writing, and the teaching of writing, fits into their disciplinary courses. I conclude by considering the ways that Brandon, Tiffany and Arthur's experiences can provide us with insights into faculty who question the idea that writing as a subject can be taught, and thus concluded that they themselves have no business in teaching it (even though they choose to assign it for one reason or another).

Formative Writing Experiences

Brandon

Brandon, who at the time of our interview had been a Professor at Virginia Tech for around 30 years, explained his field of agriculture and applied economics as one where “most agricultural economists attempt to apply tools very pragmatically to solve people and food and environmental issues.” As the only lawyer in his department, he tends toward “specializing more on the law side.” When I asked Brandon about writing at an early age, he simply replied, “See Dick run. See Jane walk.” He went on to explain, “Those were the readers that were very popular when I was starting school, very simple, but Dick and Jane did a thousand things.” Though I had asked him about writing in particular, he spoke instead of learning to read. However, as I mentioned earlier and will discuss later, for Brandon and the other participants in this chapter, reading is the key to their own experiences with learning how to write. He also had fond memories of his father reading to him, which he said was an “encouraged function” in his family’s house.

In addition, Brandon also spoke of the challenge of writing in school, and stated, “I personally have to work hard at writing. Writing does not come easy to me. The most difficult task that I have is writing. I’m much more verbal than I am the written word.” He does recall writing quite a bit early in life but could remember no genres in particular. In addition Brandon spoke of taking English all four years of high school and noted in particular one memorable English teacher: “I had an English teacher who had a PhD from the university of Notre Dame in English, and I was raised in the country, and one of the reasons he was teaching in the country is because he said country kids need an education just as much as city kids. He was a very demanding about writing, and that was in the 8th grade.” Brandon, then, though far removed from these memories, does recall moments that influenced his understanding of both writing and reading, or people who shaped those experiences.

As Brandon continued on to law school, he explained that there was no separate instruction but rather that “there was always the assumption that you could write or would write.” He noted that law school “writes differently than any place else because you cite everything, and you use a different form of citation. You use footnotes like footnotes are going out of style.” Thus, he recognized here that writing is contextually unique given the activity systems in which one is working. Nonetheless, he did not recall specific writing instruction, which may have further shaped his writer-based understanding of writer development. Brandon said that his experience in law school was one where “you don’t have time to ask for help. And lawyers never ask for help. They’re self-made men.” He found the lack of instruction to also be true while getting his PhD, which he returned for after working for the USDA and other government jobs: “You read some of the other people’s dissertations, but again, you didn’t have any special instruction on it. You said, ‘There’s MLA or whatever that is.’ That’s probably the

biggest pain in the butt for me, probably the biggest thing that slows you down is you have to know which style you're supposed to be using." Brandon explained further that writing his dissertation, for which he did a lot of survey work, was "more baptism by fire. Just go do it." This trial and error understanding is consistent with a writer-based understanding of learning writing on one's own rather than through instruction. However, that Brandon learned how to write these particular genres during his socialization into both graduate and law school is consistent with studies that show writers often become adapt at disciplinary genres through socialization (Beaufort, *College*; Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman). Brandon also noted that "when you're reading, then you do a better job of writing," and he attributed the amount of reading required in law school to developing his own writing abilities.

Tiffany

Tiffany received her PhD in English and had been at Virginia Tech for 25 years at the time of our interview. She studies Shakespeare and Renaissance literature. Like many of the other participants in both this and the previous chapter, Tiffany remembered few specific writing activities from when she was young. She shared with me, "I remember writing in elementary school but what, I cannot remember. I can't remember any specifics." However, Tiffany recalled one negative instance in particular that made a lasting impression: "I had an appallingly bad science teacher in junior high school who made us write reams of stuff that was basically copied out of encyclopedias. So that really didn't do a whole lot of anything for one's writing style, I don't suppose, except in so far as being exposed to words might help." Further, despite writing a few papers in high school, she did not recall much preparation for writing: "I don't remember getting much in the way of writing instruction or being trained to write rough drafts or you know rewrite, and so it was just sort of 'Here's an assignment; go write this okay.'" Tiffany, like

Brandon, despite identifying a lack of writing instruction, did note the importance of reading: “I was a fairly fluent writer, I guess, being a big reader. And so it didn’t strike me—I didn’t much like writing—but it didn’t strike me as anything that was appallingly difficult.” Despite not receiving any explicit instruction, then, Tiffany nonetheless recognizes that she was a strong writer, which she attributes to her identity as a reader.

Despite her capabilities and chosen career path, one that depends on writing, Tiffany did not particularly enjoy the writing she was required to do in college: “I still didn’t like writing my assignments for my English degree very much, but on the other hand, I can’t say I found them at all that difficult to do or to get As.” She explained that her writing process probably suffered as a result, since she was never expected to write multiple drafts: “I mean I was in some ways a very good student and in other ways an absolutely appalling one from a writing teacher’s perspective. I used to wait until the last possible minute and then stay up late and write it. One draft, turn it in, and usually got an A. So there wasn’t any, there was much less challenge in trying to be clever or be impressive or, I mean, you know it was just the stuff in school was easy.” Tiffany’s experience here with one-draft genres that received high grades may have worked to confirm her understanding of writing as a natural talent. This belief was likely further solidified by the fact that she did not receive any explicit instruction in writing the literary analyses she was expected to produce. Like my own experience of writing literary analyses, which I shared in the introduction, Tiffany never saw the need for multiple drafts of writing.

Nonetheless, during our interview Tiffany seemed to shift back and forth to saying she had no writing instruction to identifying instances that helped her to develop as a writer. In particular, she talked about her experience working on her college newspaper: “Where I really learned to write was in college when I went to work as a freshman for the student paper. And the

reason I learned to write there was that the kids there took it very seriously, and because they were kids, there were no rules to speak of. So if you didn't do a good job, you got chewed out far more than you would by a professor who might have to hold back. That was very useful. It wasn't always very pleasant, but it was very useful." Tiffany went on to say, "I really feel that to the extent that I'm a decent writer, I owe an awful lot of it to the kids who were just slightly older than I was who pushed me a lot harder than my teachers for the most part did." Tiffany recognizes that her socialization into her membership at the newspaper was more influential than her experience writing academically, which aligns with the perspectives of the participants in Chapter 5 who spoke of working with peers are being crucial to their development as writers. Of interest is that Tiffany at first does seem to view the writing she did in an activity system different from those of her major as helping her with the writing she currently does in her disciplinary activity systems. Though Tiffany clearly identifies this experience as being beneficial, she later noted that this experience was not necessarily transferable to her disciplinary writing. Tiffany was, then, able to determine what the appropriate genres are for a context in relation to her own writing, and she clearly identified differences in expectations. However, I believe Tiffany saw these experiences as helping her to develop writing knowledge that already existed, and for her, writing was always something that she was capable of doing no matter the context.

When Tiffany spoke of writing in graduate school, she remembered a professor who became her dissertation advisor, and she shared, "He helped me learn how to write papers for publishable academic papers. But that's about it really." She noted that she had to adjust in graduate school in the following way: "I think there are certain expectations having to do with citing secondary sources and that sort of thing. But there's a certain tone and seriousness and it's

largely stylistic it seems to me. There's a certain box you're supposed to learn how to fit in, and you learn how to fit into that box, and everything's fine." Tiffany shows an understanding here of the ways that writing within her academic discipline differs from other writing she had done previously, even as an undergraduate English major. However, she also did not identify this change in writing to be a process of developing as a writer but rather a process of adapting one's style, not a particularly challenging adaptation.

While Tiffany was writing her dissertation, she also worked as a technical writer for a computer software company for computer coursework for five years. She explained, "I ended up in that position because a friend of mine from graduate school, with whom I'd also worked on the college paper, dropped out of graduate school after getting her master's and became a technical writer." She explained that the position involved creating online coursework: "One of them was how to train your guard dog. We would get basically a script from a content provider, and then somebody at the firm—eventually I was doing this, too—would design the course, would decide how many lessons there would be and how the content would be split up, and would you do it with talking heads, or cartoons, would you throw in games or exams or quizzes." Tiffany, then, has a rich background that includes writing in a variety of activity systems, but she spoke of these experiences as ones that were never particularly challenging for her as a writer, even though she did not necessarily find them enjoyable.

The most challenging experience Tiffany identified was teaching a first-year writing course while working toward her PhD, though she only did this once. She explained, "My first attempt at teaching freshman composition was a complete and utter disaster and ended after one quarter when I just quit." However, she couldn't remember much about this course other than at students were required to read magazine articles based around themes. These courses, then, were

not situated in a particular discipline. This experience stands in stark contrast to the experiences Chapter 5 participants Thomas and Dexter had teaching first-year writing courses, which they discussed as important to their own development as writers and teachers of writing. In addition, Tiffany's experience teaching this course, as I discuss later, seems to have further convinced her that writing is not something to be learned by explicit instruction. However, of importance to note is the lasting effects that teaching a first-year writing course has had on the participants in this study, though Thomas and Dexter, who taught this course within their disciplines, had much more positive experiences.

Arthur

As we sat down for our first interview, Arthur told me, "I am a musician, first and foremost. I have never wanted to do anything else. I have had probably at least half a dozen different careers, all of them in music." Arthur shared that his path through life as a musician has come about because of opportunities. He explained, "Goals are things you can plan for. Goals are things you should plan for. Opportunities are things you can never plan for, but if they come up, you're either ready for them or you're not. I have been very, very lucky in having a lot of opportunities open up for me that took me in very different directions." Arthur took 12 years to finish his bachelor's degree because he was on the road as an entertainer during that period, as well as when he spent "four years in the air force band with my quartet." He went on to say, "They took us in as a unit and used us about half for troop entertainment and half for VIP entertainment, and we were signed to the main band in DC which is actually a squadron of about 300 musicians and support personnel." His band toured until the music around them began to change and people lost interest in what he deemed a variety show: "We jokingly advertised it as half vocal, half instrumental, and half comedy." Arthur, then, of all the participants seems to

have taken the most nontraditional path toward becoming a faculty member.

Nonetheless, Arthur was determined to finish his degree: “I continued to take courses whenever we were in one place long enough to take a class, and transferred those credits back to my original college.” He explained, “I was supposed to have graduated in ‘58, and I eventually graduated in ‘66.” A few years later, he started graduate school for one main reason: “I figured that the two kinds of people that had to know the most about people were the musicologists, the scholars who studied it, and the conductors, the people who had to bring it to life off the page, to make it happen.” Arthur received his masters in choral conducting and finished his coursework for the PhD in musicology. He did not finish the PhD because he got a job offer and came to Virginia Tech to take over an entertainment group. He explained, “So the decision I had to make, I was becoming an expert in early music, but I was a professional in entertainment, and I went with the entertainment, and I came to Virginia Tech to build the New Virginians and did, and directed the group for 14 years.” After the group eventually was shut down, he returned to early music. He explained, “I’m now teaching music history and early instruments and directing the ensemble that does early music.”

When asked about writing, it became clear that composing meant something entirely different to Arthur than to the other participants I interviewed. Arthur explained, “I have always been writing music. I have been arranging music since I was about 15, arranging for every group I was personally involved with—the Four Saints, my groups in Indiana, my groups here.” He went on to say, “I like writing music that people enjoy, that they enjoy playing.” That Arthur turned immediate to a discussion of writing music was not surprising given that music compositions are the primary genre he works with in the activity systems that comprise his discipline, which I discuss further in the next section.

Arthur explained that both of his parents were school teachers, and he noted, “I had the worst, most strict English teachers in the school. I don’t know if my parents had anything to do with getting that setup, and I didn’t like it at the time, but I have blessed them for it ever since. I was doing a lot of writing in high school.” Though he could not remember any particulars, Arthur remarked that he must have “learned to write decently” because he was an A student. He explained, “One of my most prized Christmas presents was a royal portable typewriter. I took it on the road when my quartet was out entertaining, working on term papers and such.” Despite Arthur’s observations here that he learned to write at an early age, as I will explain in a later section, he later rejects this position for one that suggests writing cannot be taught but is rather a natural talent. Nonetheless, he concluded, “I think I write pretty well. But I write when I have to; it’s a tool skill.” Arthur, then, despite only writing in a limited number of genres, seems to recognize that writing serves a purpose for his activities but is important insofar as it allows him to accomplish what needs to be done.

Writing within Disciplinary Activity Systems

As I explained in Chapter 5, I use the term disciplinary activity systems to refer to the larger discipline with which these participants identify, each of which are comprised of multiple and overlapping activity systems. Kai Hakkarainen argues, “the disciplinary activity system provides domain-specific knowledge practices that guide basic lines of pursuing, inquiring, analyzing and interpreting results, and publishing the results” (13). For instance, though I would identify Tiffany’s disciplinary activity systems from the discipline of English, she also works in several other activity systems specific to her Shakespeare studies such as the courses she teaches or journals in which she publishes. These systems are, of course overlapping and continually of

influence; for example, in relation to her teaching, Tiffany talks explicitly about the field of composition, which directly influences her understanding of students' writing abilities in her courses.

Though both Brandon and Tiffany write within their disciplinary activity systems, Arthur explained that he does not do academic writing because he is not a musicologist, or "the musical scholars" who "are expected to write papers, to give papers, to write monographs, to write chapters, and stuff." Despite no longer producing academic writing within his discipline, a practice he did during graduate school, he nonetheless he regularly composes music, which he will conflate with writing later in discussion of his teaching. The only writing Arthur talked about currently being involved in was academic listservs. He explained, "Most of them have to do with music. Most of them I'm old enough to have an opinion about, and I don't hesitate to express it. There's one that I'm really intimidated on, the 18th century interdisciplinary list, which is mostly university English professors who are so much smarter than I am, at least in their field, that I really feel intimidated. But occasionally I'm able to contribute something. I love dialogues. I love discussions." Arthur clearly feels comfortable writing for a variety of audiences, and he explained that he has over time developed a working writing process. He shared: "I write stream of consciousness. And I've been doing it so long that it comes out fairly well-organized." In addition, Arthur also recognizes that academic writing is distinct, and even requires a different way of thinking from the writing he currently does on list-serves. He explained, "When I write, I don't try to be anybody but myself. I mean, I know how to write academically. I just haven't been in a position where I have had to do a lot of that. So I haven't kept up with that way of thinking." Like Valeria in the previous chapter, Arthur, who also does not have a PhD, is not expected to publish in his field, and he clearly identifies himself as a

musician rather than a writer. However, he feels comfortable in situations that require him to write, and in terms of his own writing practices, is able to transfer his writing knowledge to a variety of contexts.

On the other hand, both Brandon and Tiffany talked about writing in their discipline by sharing their writing processes rather than by identifying the particular genres in which they were working. For Brandon, writing in his field is largely citation management, and he talked at length about source use. He explained for the last article he wrote: “I did enough research and figured out what I wanted to talk about and how I wanted to talk about it, and so I literally outlined it and stuff that I’d already pulled and put into a file, or stuff I would go out and search.” Brandon explained that his process of writing has changed drastically since everything became electronic: “I have changed how I write because I used to open up books, but now you don’t have to because you can just go cut and paste and slap it in. You source it of course, and I don’t have any qualms about that, but instead of having to retype, you just cut and paste it and source it. So there’s no question I write differently.” His process of writing, then, has become a process of using source material but also of information management. He has, over time, been able to transform his own writing practices to meet the changing technologies. Brandon did not make a distinction between writing for law journals or economics journals, some of which overlap, though at one point he mentioned that “the law is all research.” Brandon shared that “As a lawyer, you don’t say anything without sourcing it. I mean the source can be wrong, but still, they said it, and so you have to give them credit and blame them as appropriate, you might say they’re wrong.” Most of Brandon’s conversation about his own academic writing, then, was about the immense importance of using sources in his discipline—to the extent that he continually turned the conversation back to citation use even when asked about writing particular

genres. Though Brandon had been writing in different disciplinary activity systems for years, he seemed at a loss about how to talk about writing in terms of the rhetorical features such as audience or purpose and instead reduced even his own writing to a matter of copying and pasting. Of interest, however, is that this knowledge does not transfer to the classes he teaches. In fact, Brandon later rejects the idea of teaching students how to use sources in this same manner.

Like Brandon, Tiffany spoke of her writing process more so than of particular genres in which she wrote, although she did share that her current project was a 40-page stage history of *Twelfth Night*. Nonetheless, she described the project by describing the process, particularly her own version of information management. She explained, “The problem is going through enough stuff so you can comment intelligently on 400 years of stage history of *Twelfth Night*. I’m supposed to be putting a spin on it in terms of how service and class in the play have been dealt with on the stage. And it really isn’t the writing. I actually have more than enough words on the infernal machine right now; they’re just not all the right words.” She went on to say that there is just too much to read. However, she described how her writing process has developed over time. While writing her dissertation, she noted, “I had a tendency—which even at the time I knew wasn’t altogether a good idea—to work on a paragraph until I was totally happy with it. I was not very big on dashing stuff down and then going back and revising.” She explained further, “I hadn’t really been taught to revise very much. I would write a sentence over and then cross that out, write another one, then I’d go on to the second one, then I’d go back. I could spend all day or six hours a day writing a couple of paragraphs.” However, she no longer spends quite the same amount of time, perhaps because she’s “gotten older and maybe more professional.” Now, she shared, “I revise more and am less completely freaked out about leaving a paragraph when

I'm not entirely happy with it. I'm not sure the writing has gotten any better, but I do more revision." Though she had previously stated the importance of her work on her college newspaper, when talking about her disciplinary writing, she noted, "To some degree working in journalism didn't really help of course because journalism is largely first drafts, so you'd better get it right the first time." Tiffany then clearly is able to determine which writing knowledge could be transferred among these activity systems, and though she attributes the previous experience to her improvement as a writer, she also rejects the one-draft process it requires. Despite the amount of writing she does, Tiffany several times noted, "I am for better or worse someone who would always rather be reading than writing." She went on to say, "I can't say I love writing, but I dislike it less. I'm more tolerant of writing now." Even so, Tiffany has published several books in her field, showing her success as an academic writer. Thus she clearly understands the rhetorical situations of her own disciplinary activity systems, much like the participants in the previous chapters.

Of all the participants in this chapter, Brandon was the only one who spoke of collaborative writing, though it depended on the discipline for which he was writing. He explained: "As lawyers, we tend to write by ourselves. We don't tend to write with other people. As economists, the answer is if you've got a graduate student, you write with them. It's very important to see that you publish with your graduate students, but if you're not, then you don't necessarily write with other people. You do a lot of work by yourself." Brandon has most often also collaborated with what he calls "bright, ambitious undergraduate students," though he noted, "Now to be honest about it, probably about half of them are bust. They can't write; they don't know how to write; they don't have good work skills. And I don't have to spend all my time holding hands. You can come and ask me questions, but if I outline something, I expect you to

go out and execute it." For these types of collaboration, Brandon explained that the undergraduate does most of the research and the writing, and he purposefully selects students he believes to be strong writers. Brandon, then, has less time for students who are not already developed writers, so his process of collaboration is less about helping students learn how to write in appropriate disciplinary genres but rather works on the assumption that they will figure it out on their own, as Brandon remembers of his own writing past. Unlike the collaborative practices of the participants in the previous two chapters, including Thomas, Albert, Heather, and Rilo, Brandon's collaboration processes do not involve writing together or back-and-forth but rather he provides students with an idea and expects them to do the research and writing.

Overall, how Brandon and Tiffany, Arthur talked about their disciplinary writing, then, is substantially different than the participants in both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. The participants in Chapter 5, Thomas, Albert, and Dexter, all understand writing as rhetorical and a process of socialization; thus, they shared their understanding of disciplinary writing primarily by describing differences in goals, methodologies, and audience expectations. For instance, Thomas talked about the challenges of writing for multiple audiences and drawing from a variety of methodologies in his interdisciplinary work, Albert spoke of the challenges of writing a textbook that could appeal to students across the disciplines, and Dexter shared that he tries to write for a variety of publications that allow him to work around his dislike of academic writing. Heather, Rilo, and Valeria in Chapter 6, who share a text-based understanding of writing, talked about disciplinary writing by describing the organizational structure of genres or the importance of editing. For instance, both Rilo and Heather explained research articles by listing the parts of these genres such as methods, results, and discussion. And Heather spoke about her talent for correctly editing her own work. However, Brandon, Arthur, and Tiffany, who share the writer-

based perspective I describe further in the next section, focus instead on their writing processes, often in great and explicit detail. However, as I will explain in the next section, their focus on the individualized process of their own writing development aligns well with a writer-based understanding of learning to write.

Constructs of Writing as Writer-Based

The participants in the previous two chapters talked about writing and learning to write in ways that Brammer et al. have classified as either social interactive or text-based. In Chapter 5, the participants shared an understanding of writing as a social interaction among the writer, audience, and text (“Culture”). For instance, Albert identified writing as being a process of influence, and both Thomas and Dexter stressed the conversational nature of writing. The participants in Chapter 6, on the other hand, aligned more with a text-based view of writing that focuses on learning in relation to mechanics, grammar, and form. Valeria, for instance, was extremely focused on helping her students to master concise sentences and the use of active rather than passive voice. My conversations with Brandon, Arthur, and Tiffany, however, convinced me that they align most closely with a writer-based understanding of writing, one that understands writing as an innate or otherwise individualized process. Brammer et al. argue, “Belief that learning to write is an innate talent or involves trial and error [. . .] may result from faculty frustration when dealing with students' texts rather than any steadfast belief” (“Culture”). Indeed, these faculty each have years of experience working with students, and in the next section, I will show the frustration that these participants clearly feel toward the teaching of student writing. However, I also argue that even though Brandon, Arthur, and Tiffany identified instances of learning to write, their inability to remember receiving actual writing instruction, or their lack of remembering it, has lead them to question the value of writing instruction. That is,

however, not to say that they do not think students can learn how to write but rather they question whether it can be explicitly taught.

Arthur, as I shared earlier, spoke of the importance of reading in relation to writing, and he explained, “In my opinion, I have learned to write by reading. I have read voraciously my whole life.” Though at one point he questioned why “high school kids don’t seem to learn how to do research and write research papers anymore,” toward the end of our first interview, he shared the following: “I have never studied writing for the purpose of learning to write. I don’t think you can learn to write like that. I don’t think you can learn to compose music by taking courses in composition. You either got the spark or you don’t.”

Tiffany shared an understanding of writing that was even more vocal: “I think as we know it [the teaching of writing] as a profession or part of the profession, I would hesitate to say it’s a joke. I think it is partly misguided and partly a scam.¹⁶ I find it odd that nobody thinks or almost nobody thinks that everybody should be able to sing, or draw, or play a musical instrument or do a lot of other things that are intrinsically human things that a lot of other people do, but somehow, the belief is everybody should be able to write.” She went on to say, “writing is the hardest thing I’ve ever learned how to do. But somehow we think that everybody, including a lot of kids who A, don’t read, and B, have no interest in learning how to write, should learn how to write.” Here, she connects her understanding of how we learn to write not

¹⁶ Tiffany may have further been influenced by an experience that happened shortly before our interview. She talked about one student in particular, noting, “The only thing I could conclude was that she had dyslexia. So I wrote a very careful note . . . And she comes to me as soon as she gets the paper back and she cheerfully acknowledges that yes she has dyslexia, but she says that ‘most of my professors never notice.’” Tiffany explained that she checked the girl’s grades, and found that the girl “got an A her first semester of freshman composition and a B the second. Somebody, one of our colleagues in technical writing was paying attention because she got a C- in technical writing. But on the whole, she’s going to graduate this semester with something like a B average in English.” However, Tiffany noted, “we have completely failed this kid, and there’s just too many. It is a unique instance, but we’ve got too many kids. This kid’s an English major, she’s going to graduate with a B average, and she is so functionally illiterate, it’s completely insane.” She noted, “I’m still obsessing about that because it’s one of the most depressing things that’s happened in years.”

just to a talent but also in relation to how much one reads. Similarly, Brandon explained, “I think that the more you read, the better you write. And I would suggest that I write better when I read more, that there’s a direct correlation.” However, he dismissed the idea that it was in any way his responsibility to help student to improve their writing. “I don’t think it’s my job to teach them writing. I have to struggle. I have to work at writing myself. I struggle with writing.” This aligns with the writer-based understanding that sees learning to write as an individualized process.

Arthur and Tiffany, then, both gave statements that suggest they do not believe in the value of explicit writing instruction, and they even go so far as to suggest that writing is resistant to instruction. Tiffany, however, does seem conflicted about this understanding at times, which is perpetuated by her belief that most universities fail at any attempts to teach writing, which she highlighted by sharing an example of a student with dyslexia whom Tiffany called “functionally illiterate.” In other words, she may believe that students can become better writers but is unconvinced by previous pedagogical practices with which she is familiar, which I highlight further in the next section. Additionally, Brandon, while not as explicitly rejecting the idea of writing being taught, nonetheless resists the possibility that he might play a role in students’ writing development. In other words, he expects that students will come to him *already* knowing how to write, and or perhaps quickly figure it out on their own, much like the experience Brandon recalls from his own “baptism by fire” writing in law school and graduate school. Brandon, Arthur, and Tiffany were able to pinpoint times in their lives that contributed to their own developments as writers, and, I would argue, are quite knowledgeable about writing effectively in their own disciplinary activity systems. However, this knowledge does not seem to transfer to the classes they teach. Instead their understanding of writing as difficult or even

impossible to teach means they miss opportunities for positive transfer of writing knowledge. Nonetheless, as I discuss in the next section, they each include writing assignments in their classes, by choice or by requirement. While the assignments given to students of the professors in the previous chapters were designed to help students improve as writers, in addition to improving content knowledge, the assignments created by the participants in this chapter mostly assume students already have the required writing knowledge.

Teaching in Disciplinary Activity Systems and Transfer

When I discussed teaching practices and writing assignments with Tiffany, Arthur, and Brandon, I found that despite their diverse experiences writing among multiple activity systems, and sometimes struggles to adjust accordingly, they did not often seem to transfer this knowledge into an understanding of the ways that students wrote within their classes. Perhaps because they never received explicit writing instruction when faced with a new genre, but rather learned these genres through what they saw as individual processes, they saw no reason why students would not do the same. As a result, I see these participants as questioning the possibility that their own writing knowledge could be used to better prepare students in their disciplines.

Arthur

When asked about his teaching practices, Arthur immediately told me, “We’re not English teachers. They were trying to make us English teachers.” I learned that Arthur had originally participated in Virginia Tech’s WAC program, although he explained, “I came to respect the writing-intensive program. We never implemented the suggestions we put forward for the ViEWS¹⁷ program.” Arthur went on to say that he remembered a workshop that focused

¹⁷ See pages 72-73 in Chapter 4 for a detail explanation of ViEWS.

on how to read a paper and “mark it so that you can express the things you know about back to the student.” However, as I will explain later, despite Arthur’s respect for this method, it is not one he actually utilizes in his courses.

As we chatted about the particular courses that he teaches, including early music literature, a designated writing-intensive course, Arthur immediately told me, “I teach one writing-intensive course. But I have adapted it to my students and my subject material and music. And it isn’t what any English professor would recognize as writing-intensive.” Indeed, Arthur went on to describe a course that I argue few would consider to be writing-intensive, or a course designed to help students learn how to write in their disciplinary genres. Instead, he has students look at music “that’s written at any given time in history,” using the notation of that time. His syllabus for this course states, “There are 4 writing assignments in this course, but this course is different. All these assignments involve transcribing music from early (medieval and renaissance) notation into modern notation.” In other words, Albert is not asking students to compose original music but rather to translate that music from one notation to another. This is similar, then, to a student translating a paper in Spanish to a paper in English, which, as Dexter articulated in Chapter 5, is not the same as writing. Nonetheless, Albert’s assignments are labeled clearly as “papers” in the syllabus. Arthur justifies this choice on the syllabus with the statement that the “student’s writing in this course be guided by the professor to represent the kind of writing that is accepted as suitable in the professor’s professional field.” However, of interest is that Arthur has chosen music translations as the only genres of his activity system, despite his background as a scholar in the discipline. In other words, those who study music do write in particular academic alphabetic genres, much like Arthur previously did, but he resists the idea of having students write in those genres. He told me, “This isn’t your kind of writing

(points to notations). This is my kind of writing. They either get it right or they don't. I give them feedback. You mess this up, fix it. But the whole point of the writing-intensive program was giving feedback, and giving feedback from the point of view of your professional field.” However, he is referring here to giving feedback on student translations of notations, not on any alphabetic writing they complete. Thus, although he spoke frequently of his own writing practices, and explained that many people in music write articles and other publications, he dismisses these genres in favor of others that I would call music translations.

Arthur does, however, include alphabetic writing assignments in other courses that he teaches, including two courses that are surveys of different musical periods. For example, students are required to attend and write a written review of a concert of classical music, and he gives students the option beforehand to receive extra credit by reading samples of professional concert reviews and writing “a 2-paragraph report summarizing such a review and giving your ideas on what a good review should be like.” Though he asks students to complete what amounts to a genre analysis, Arthur only provides this option for extra credit, which supports the notion that he sees their writing development as individual. Finding examples of a genre and analyzing them as a way to understand that genre is a popular practice among rhetorical genre theorists. While Albert and Dexter also use similar practices in their classrooms, they require all students to work with modeling and imitation. Arthur is unique in that he makes this practice optional, which is not necessarily problematic but more representative of his understanding that students can decide for themselves whether they need to conduct an analysis in order to write a review.

For the remainder of the assignments in his courses, Arthur requires students, according to his syllabus, “to choose the learning activities they find most effective and to choose the

degree of class participation they are willing to put it.” One option allows students to avoid any writing other than the concert review by taking quizzes and a final exam. For the more intensive writing option, students can complete additional concert reviews or write what he calls research essays between 500 and 750 words whose “purpose is to increase the student’s understanding of the societies in which this music is found.” The writing option, then, requires the same quizzes and exam but also two additional writing assignments, making everything count for less toward a student’s final grade. Arthur explained his goals for giving students these choices: “My feeling, rather I’m right or wrong, is that taking the multiple choice part gives me a reading on how broadly they have learned the material in the course. Asking them to write essays on two specific questions gives me a reading on how much in depth they have learned something in the course. And both are important to me.” Thus, he does recognize that writing can show students have learned one type of knowledge as opposed to the other, and he recognizes that those who write the essays generally score higher than those who take the test.

To prepare students to write these assignments, Arthur explained, “There’s always a discussion about what I’m expecting because they have to know what to do.” He then clarified, “If I’m asking them to write prose as opposed to music, I don’t tell them how to write it.” However, Arthur went on to say, “But I will critique it when I get it because in the workshop she said that’s our job as a part of the writing-intensive concept is to give good critiques from our point of view, from our professional point of view, which is going to be different in every single field, which is something that the English professors have a little trouble understanding.” However, after further discussion, I realized that Arthur was not actually critiquing the writing but rather the music translations. For the actual alphabetic written work, Arthur has a teaching assistant who helps him grade papers. He explained, “I made this marvelous discovery. I didn’t

even know it was possible. Students who are in the honors program can get honor's credit for taking a regular class if they do something extra for the class, like grading papers." He explained that his rubric, no matter the genre, is divided as follows: "40% on content, 20% on writing, is this well written? Only 10% each on spelling, punctuation, grammar, and whether they followed the required format or not." He went on to say, "content is the most important, but getting it across, writing skill, is the second most important, I think. I can deal with commas." When asked if he gives students advice on writing, he noted, "Never, I'm not a English teacher, I'm not a composition teacher. That's not my expertise." Thus, despite having gone through WAC workshops, and written much in his own discipline, Arthur resists the idea that he could have anything of value to teach students in terms of writing in his discipline—unless he redefines writing in his discipline to include music translations. Nonetheless, Arthur noted that student writing has improved over the years, perhaps because "the admissions office has tightened up admissions." Of interest is that Arthur believes writing has improved because students now tend to come to college already developed as writers as opposed to students developing their writing abilities in other courses such as first-year writing.

Tiffany

Tiffany explained that originally, she was hired at Virginia Tech to teach courses on Shakespeare and business writing. She shared, "I hadn't ever taught business writing, and I had hardly taught writing at all, and I hadn't told them that I had—I think some people thought I had." She explained that at the time, there were very few writing specialists, and nobody wanted to teach business writing. Tiffany went on to say, "It wasn't nearly as professionalized I suppose as it is now because the people who were teaching it were like me, you know. If anything they might have had a little experience doing it, but I don't think anybody had taken a course in how

to teach this.” When I asked her what she required of students during this course, which she no longer teaches, she explained, “I just taught it as basically a practical writing course—here’s what they’re going to expect you to be able to do in a business context, and one of the things of course was here is how you write a resume so you can get a job, and then you’re going to have to be able to write memos, you’re going to have to be able to write reports. And I thought that it was a useful course for the kids to have.” Though Tiffany’s comments here at first suggest that she does value the teaching of writing, she went on to say, “I actually think I’m not really a writing teacher. I’m not really trained to do that, but having been in business as a writer, I think I can probably actually do a better job doing business and technical writing than I can freshman composition.” Tiffany seemed to differentiate between first-year writing and business writing in terms of their purposes. Business writing, then, only requires her to teach students particular genres, something she knows, whereas first-year writing requires her to teach students *how* to write, removed from any specific context.

At the time of our interview, Tiffany was regularly teaching early Shakespeare, later Shakespeare, introduction to Shakespeare, and introduction to British literature, and she hopes that students who take her classes will “understand the literature and enjoy it.” Her courses draw not only majors but also students from theater and other disciplines, particularly the Shakespeare class. She explained why there is no writing in the British literature first-year course: “we are told we are not supposed to have them write. If they’re freshman, they haven’t finished taking freshman composition yet.” The class also has 80 students. She noted, “I tried having them write a couple of discussion questions a couple of years ago and wound up with problems with students who were plagiarizing from the internet. And most of the questions frankly were not really what I was looking for. They were not really very good.” As a result, the course now

consists only of multiple choice and matching exams.

Nonetheless, Tiffany's goals for including writing in her higher level courses, in addition to it being a requirement, is because she hopes "to encourage their [students] being able to analyze literature, particularly Shakespeare, and being able to write professionally and competently and intelligently about the literature that they're reading." She explained of her later Shakespeare course: "This is a lit course with a writing component, not a writing course, and so we're told 10-12 pages total." However, she's not very particular in terms of the genres she expects, and she allows students to replace the second writing assignment with other genres. For example, one semester an architecture student created a silk screening along with a brief paper explaining what he had done. Her purpose for allowing a variety of genres is as because of the students from different disciplines, and she noted, "I do have the usually Shakespearean feeling that Shakespeare is for everybody, and everybody should be taking Shakespeare, so that makes it a little less useful for the class as a whole to do nothing but standard English-style papers." Rather than sharing her disciplinary knowledge of writing, even for an upper-level English course, Tiffany prefers allowing students to, at times, choose genres that are not typical of those in literature courses. Perhaps this choice is because of her frustration with student writing abilities, as she commented that students come to her classes with a wide variety of writing experience: "Some of them could be fit right into the graduate program, and some of them are functionally illiterate." This statement somewhat summarizes what I took to be Tiffany's overall understanding of student writing abilities, in that students either know how to write, or they do not.

Though Tiffany explained that she spends very little time talking about writing in class, she does provide a lengthy handout for detailing her expectations for written work. Her

guidelines state, “Although I will grade your papers primarily upon content, this *is* an English class, and how you express your thoughts is important.” Tiffany, then, despite not explicitly teaching students about writing in her discipline, does seem to value disciplinary writing. The remainder of the guidelines covers quoting, footnotes, punctuation, and proofreading marks. The guidelines also explain the first assignment, an analytical paper, and give suggestions for writing it such as “make sure your thesis is limited,” with an example of a limited thesis. Though her statements in our interview about not wanting to require students to write “standard English style papers,” the guidelines suggest otherwise as they are tailored to the genre of literary analysis.

Despite providing these guidelines, Tiffany chooses not to include other writing practices such as requiring students to complete rough drafts. Tiffany explained that rough drafts are optional, but she doesn’t like the idea of requiring it: “I know that the conventional wisdom is that everybody ought to write a rough draft and that they should revise, revise, revise. However, I also know that a lot of these kids, especially the senior English majors, don’t really need to do this. They can write a paper that’s gonna get an A.” This understanding is not surprising given her own experience being a one-draft, A writer during college. Though Tiffany noted that most students who write drafts are not the ones who “need to,” her understanding of writing development as an individual process seems to have affected her ability to require drafts. Further, she noted that when students do revise, they ignore half of her comments. She went on to say, “This is the whole problem with teaching writing. I know there’s supposed to be a plan, and I know there’s supposed to be a system, but as far as I can tell, it varies so much.” This again highlights her understanding that even if students can be taught how to write, there doesn’t seem to be an agreed upon method of teaching them. However, Tiffany noted that it is easier to teach something like business writing “where you can have a very controlled and rigid kind of an

assignment,” for which “all you have to talk about is the writing really and the organization.”

Despite the fact that students cannot revise once they turn a paper in for a grade, Tiffany shared that she nonetheless takes far too long to grade papers because she comments on everything: “I comment on the ideas, I comment on the organization, I comment on the grammar, the punctuation and typos. I will comment on anything.” However, she admitted, “this is clearly insane, and every year I tell myself this is unsustainable, you’ve got to stop doing it, and I do it anyway because I don’t see what else I can do.” And she went on to admit, “I think it overwhelms some kids.” Despite the previous statements in which Tiffany questions writing as a subject to be taught, she nonetheless feels obligated to provide feedback. However, she made it clear that she wasn’t sure whether her comments were actually helping students to become better writers. When asked why she doesn’t give more instruction earlier in the students’ writing processes, Tiffany responded: “I don’t really see it as a science. I’m not sure I see it as an art, I don’t think it’s that grand. It’s a craft, and I do it differently than my colleagues. I do it, and I have difficulty, I’m reluctant to say to my students this is the way you get a good paper because I know very good writers who write in very different ways. People who get it all down and then go back and straighten it out, and people who agonize over every sentence and can’t move on until they get the first sentence right.” A writing process, then, is too personal for her to teach to others. Tiffany concluded, “I think it’s almost impossible to teach good written English to people who don’t read, which I am afraid is an increasing number of our students. And I keep getting creative writing students who explain to me they’re sorry they’re required to take Shakespeare because they don’t like to read.”

Brandon

Brandon currently teaches courses in environmental law, real estate law, agricultural law,

and appraisal. When Brandon shared with me his teaching philosophy, he explained, “I’m old-fashioned. I still attempt to use the Socratic method. I will ask them a question, and somebody will give me an answer; they might give me the correct answer; they might give me the wrong answer. I’m likely to look over at somebody else and say ‘Tell me why it’s wrong,’ even if it’s right. Or ‘Tell me why it’s right,’ so that they have to respond.” His syllabi align with his teaching approach, and each syllabus contains the following statement: “My goal is to get you to critically think, to challenge me and your fellow student. My goal is to assist you in the acquisition of tools and not in memorization. Tools and critical thinking last. Memorization alone does not prepare one for the future.” Though he tends to lecture quite a bit, Brandon went on to say, “When I’m good, I try to come in and lay out the issues and then have discussion.” However, he noted, “I teach to the book. I find I use good books, I bring them up to date, and I bring things into the classroom, a Supreme Court case that’s going on right now. We’ve had cases that are being relied upon we’ve actually taught in class. And so I’ve tried to relate what we’re talking about in class to what’s going on out there in the world.” Brandon, like the other professors I’ve in this study, was obviously passionate about the courses that he teaches.

Brandon shared that he requires essay exams in most of his courses, and he noted that students do well if they “pay attention and review and read.” However, he explained that when grading the exams, he focuses on the following: “I check to make sure they understand the concepts, but I don’t check on the writing. I don’t have time to.” In other words, he cares only that students have clearly illustrated their understanding of the concepts, even if they use incorrect grammar, for instance. Brandon explained that he uses essay exams for the following reason: “I think it’s more important that they realize that when they get in the real world out there, it’s not a multiple choice world. They’re going to have a problem, and they’re going to

have to solve it. So I look at it as more of a way to promote problem solving than anything else. And a lot of my exams, I tell a story, and then say ‘Make Sally’s argument’ ‘Make Bill’s argument.’ He went on to explain, “And they should be able to incorporate legal words and legal concepts and legal ideas basic fundamental rudimentary.” Despite asking students to write in these disciplinary ways, Brandon does not talk about his expectations for writing these exams. However, Brandon understands the writing to be separate from the content, as evidenced by his statement about students who take the exams: “Their writing isn’t always bad, although there is some.” He went on to explain, “I mean you’ll see sometimes, and again it’s kind of nice flowing stuff, but it’s just stuff. It’s not answering the question. It’s not even understanding what the question is. That bothers me because I’m more concerned about whether they have the content. There are some students who come in and write extremely well. I give an exam on Thursday, and when I get it back, I bet there’s some students who will have some pretty well written information.” Brandon here makes a clear distinction between students who write well but say nothing and students who may struggle with writing but seem to understand the content.

Nonetheless, he does require writing in his appraisal class, which he noted is a professional class: “It’s a class that at the end of the time they take the course, they could sit for an exam” and become an apprentice. Writing the genre of the appraisal, then, is important for Brandon’s students. Brandon shared, “Most of them are going to become professional appraisers, but most of them are in fields where they’re going to use the work of a professional appraiser, so they need to understand what is being handed to them. And I think the best way to understand that is to actually sit down and write up a report, and then you say ‘Oh that’s why it’s in here, that’s what I should expect.’” However, though Brandon assigns these very disciplinary specific genres to his students, he provides them only with a brief assignment sheet, and noted,

“The rest is in the book.” In other words, he does not spend time in class talking about how to write in the genres he assigns. In addition, Brandon explained, “I talk about why it’s important, that there’s different type of appraisal, recording requirements and how different people need different kind of information and why they need it, but I encourage them to do a little digging because I think too many students expect professors to just hand it to them.” Thus also Brandon hints here that he talks about audience expectations with his students, his decision to encourage students to find more information about this genre on their own is consistent with Brandon’s own experience of having to figure out on his own how to write in specific genres.

Even though his discipline, as he described previously, relies heavily on source use, Brandon explained that he doesn’t require similar writing from students for the following reason: “I’m not certain students can write well anyway in the legal area.” Thus he works under the assumption that in order to require such genres of his students, they should already know how to write those genres prior to his class. Brandon went on to explain, “I don’t have high expectations that they would do well-documented paperwork anyway.” He explained that students struggle with knowing how to properly document things: “A lot of them seem to think that unless you quote something directly, you don’t have to quote it. But I tell them if I write a 10-page legal article, I might have 300 footnotes there. Sometimes there are 5 words in a row and you footnote each word because of how and why you brought it. And students don’t seem to understand the importance of footnoting or endnoting, whichever the case. Lawyers footnote.” Despite Brandon’s understanding of these disciplinary expectations, he sees no need to have students practice these genres, even though he is obviously well practiced from his own writing experiences. He went on to say, “I don’t have high expectations for the average research paper that the student would hand to me. And then there’s another reason too. Like, if you look at the

schedule for readings for the real estate law class, I can't in all conscience ask them to read all of that and then ask them to write a paper on the clean water act." Here Brandon notes the challenge of asking students to write in a content course, which many faculty members commonly resist because they worry it will take away from time to cover that content. Thought Brandon spoke earlier of the connection between reading and writing, he sees the amount of reading he requires as keeping him from assigning more writing, rather than considering the use of writing to help students understand the reading. Thus, though Brandon does require written work from his students, he assumes they will come to his class with enough writing knowledge to figure out the genres he expects. He explained that he doesn't let students revise for the following reason: "I don't get to revise my work." He went on to say another reason he doesn't allow revisions is because he doesn't "consider it a writing course," suggesting he sees writing as a somewhat separate activity from mastering the content of the course.

Conclusion

Though the participants in this chapter share in common a diverse background of writing experiences, they nonetheless understand learning to write as an innate talent, perhaps one that can be developed by reading. In addition, they showed resistance to the idea of explicit writing instruction. As a result, the writing knowledge they transfer to their classrooms is limited by their doubts about what they can teach students, for example, in terms of the written genres of their disciplines. Though they each assign writing to their students, Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur give little guidance for their expectations, unlike the participants in the previous chapters, most of whom spent significant amounts of time in class talking about writing assignments. As a result, the majority of these participant's assignments work under the assumption that students will, on their own, determine how to write in what are actually quite specific disciplinary genres.

Rather than transferring the knowledge they have of writing in their disciplinary activity systems, what they do transfer is a steadfast belief that writing knowledge might be resistant to instruction—a belief that then becomes evident in all of their decisions about including writing in their courses. For example, Brandon continually expressed the absolute necessity of correct source use in both of his disciplines but rejects the idea that he might have students work with sources, seemingly because they don't *already* know how to do so correctly. Arthur, despite knowing how to write in the academic genres of his discipline, casts these genres aside in favor of having students translate music compositions. And Tiffany, who understood her own writing process as being the result of one draft, sees no use in requiring multiple drafts of students, each of whom she believes should develop an individual writing process.

I argue, then, that Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur are resistant to the teaching of writing because little in their past experiences has demonstrated to them that such a pursuit is possible. This understanding is vastly different than the participants in Chapter 5, who spoke of learning to write as an ongoing process with which they are still engaged, and the participants of Chapter 6, who recall instances of grammar or editing instruction (or lack thereof) that they attributed to their development as writers. As a result, Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur neither re-contextualize writing knowledge they have learned to make it work in their classrooms, nor do they focus on teaching students grammatical skills or forms of genres. Perkins and Salomon argue, “while the phenomenon of negative transfer is very real and important, on the whole it is much less pressing than the *absence* of positive transfer in the many cases where we want it” (“The Science” 3). Throughout this chapter, then, I highlighted much of the disciplinary writing knowledge each of these participants seems to know based on their own participation in their disciplines. Thus, in many ways, Heather, Brandon, and Arthur’s overarching belief about the innateness of writing

led to an absence of positive transfer of their own writing knowledge to their classrooms.

CHAPTER 8

THEORETICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine how faculty members' previous writing experiences in a variety of activity systems shaped their current understanding of writing, as well as to analyze the ways in which this understanding manifests itself in the courses they teach.

Using a survey, interviews, genre analysis, and class observations, I aimed to gain an understanding of the ways that faculty members across disciplines transferred and/or recontextualized their own disciplinary writing knowledge. In Chapter 1, I posited the two overarching research questions guiding my query, which I restate here:

1. How do professors work within their own activity systems and transition among various activity systems? How do they negotiate these systems?
2. How is faculty awareness of their own writing development intertwined with their understanding of student writing development, and in what way is this awareness in agreement or conflicted?

After providing a literature review of the research on transfer in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 presented my guiding framework, which combined theories of transfer with genre and activity theories. Next, Chapter 4 provided my methodology, shared selective survey results to paint a broader picture of faculty at Virginia Tech, and introduced my nine case study participants, who identified with the following disciplines: Spanish Literature, Management, Science & Technology, Literature, Music, Agricultural & Applied Economics, Sociology, Health & Nutrition, and Chemistry. At the end of chapter 4, I explain how I categorize my participants based on understandings of how people learn to write, including social interactive, text-based, and writer-based ideologies (Brammer et al.). Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provided case study

narratives of nine faculty across a variety of disciplines, all of whom brought to this study a wide array of writing experiences.

In Chapter 5, Dexter, Thomas, and Albert, all of whom engaged in interdisciplinary activity systems, demonstrated what I argue to be transfer of their rhetorical knowledge of disciplinary writing into their classes. They shared what Brammer et al. define as a social interactive understanding of how we learn to write, or an understanding that writing is learned through a process of social interactions among members within a variety of activity systems. This understanding of writing, I argued, allowed them to recontextualize writing knowledge (Nowacek) and appropriate that knowledge in ways that demonstrate an understanding of writing as contextualized and rhetorical. Further, they each demonstrate an understanding of what I argue to be threshold concepts of writing studies. In Chapter 2, I explained that threshold concepts are understood to be knowledge in a discipline that “represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress” (Meyer and Land 1); such knowledge often results in a change of worldview upon learning. For instance, a threshold concept in composition that is particularly important to this study includes an understanding of writing as being a product of social construction, best learned in a specific context. Further, those who study composition are well versed in the rhetorical nature of any writing situation, meaning that audience, purpose, and genre, for instance, all work to shape that situation. Chapter 5 participants, then, have a rhetorical understanding of writing knowledge, thus understanding that a discipline requires a particular way of knowing (Langer), with particular genres, and such participants articulated that understanding to their students.

In Chapter 6, I shared the narratives of Heather, Rilo, and Valeria, all of whom displayed what I classified as a text-based understanding of writing knowledge, which focuses on

“mechanics, format, or generic expectations” (Brammer et. al.). In addition, because these participants tended to talk about their own writing as a separate activity from their disciplinary work, they can recognize some differences in situations that require writing but are limited in their understanding of how unique particular genres are to those situations. Although they each do have a corpus of writing knowledge, they may lack the vocabulary needed to talk about writing in rhetorical terms; thus, they were often limited to discussions of grammar or form and they tend to pull from this knowledge, which emphasizes writing as a decontextualized skill. As a result, rather than recontextualizing their understanding of writing in disciplinary ways, they continued to rely on their view of writing as a skill, transferring that knowledge into ways they represented writing when teaching even disciplinary genres to their students. However, I also argue that Rilo’s position as a new assistant professor, for which she is just learning the genres of her own disciplinary activity systems, and Valeria’s position as a lecturer, one that does not require her to participate in research and writing in her discipline, may also be a factor in how these participants understand writing.

Finally, Chapter 7 offered the writing experiences of Tiffany, Arthur, and Brandon, all of whom shared understandings of learning to write as writer-based, a perspective of writing that questions whether writing can be taught through direct instruction; instead, they made statements supporting a belief that writing is a talent or learned as an individualized process. These participants did move comfortably among a variety of activity systems, especially those that involved their own writing practices. However, their previous experiences with writing, none of which involved explicit instruction, have made these participants resistant to the idea that anyone, much less they, could instruct students in writing. Rather than transferring their particular knowledge of writing in their disciplinary activity systems—which I argue they all

possess—they transferred an all encompassing belief about the nature of writing that becomes evident in their decision not to teach writing to their students. As a result, Brandon, Arthur, and Tiffany work under the assumption that students who come to their classes should already know how to write, no matter the genre or the discipline. Of all the participants in this study, these participants also assign the least amount of writing and do not necessarily require students to write in disciplinary genres.

From gaining an understanding of the experiences of these participants, and the ways in which their previous activities as writers have shaped their current ones, much can be learned about the ways in which faculty writers across disciplines transfer knowledge. In the remainder of this conclusion, then, I discuss several implications that emerged from my findings. First, I discuss my findings in relation to transfer, genre, and activity theories, putting them into conversation with previous research. Next, I offer potential implications of my findings. I conclude by acknowledging the limitations of my research and by suggesting possibilities for future research questions.

The Transfer of Writing Knowledge Among Activity Systems

Though I had expected that faculty who participated in my study would have a wide variety of writing experiences, I was surprised by the extent to which those experiences and memories continued to shape each faculty member’s understanding of writing. In other words, these findings confirm that writing knowledge does transfer, and such knowledge often persists even in the face of what may be contradictory knowledge. Faculty members transferred different kinds of knowledge, often rhetorical or grammatical, and thus understood and responded to student writers in distinct ways; this finding expands upon Carroll’s argument that “because faculty across the disciplines tend to see writing as a unitary ability simply applied in a variety of

circumstances, they often focus their attention on the most obvious features of student writing—word choice, sentence structure, usage, punctuation” (6). In fact, only the participants in Chapter 6, Rilo, Heather, and Valeria, showed concern with grammar and mechanics—often at the expense of rhetorical knowledge—while the remaining participants rarely mentioned these particulars of writing. Uncovering these understandings about writing, and the ways in which such beliefs manifest themselves in disciplinary courses, contribute much to our understanding of faculty writing and teaching.

Rules/Norms as a Means of Inhibiting Genre Knowledge

My findings, which reveal that faculty members have transferred much writing knowledge among a variety of activity systems, demonstrate the unique ways in which writers perceive of the actual activity of writing in relation to their own disciplinary work and courses. The participants often learned rules/norms while a part of previous activity systems, such as middle school, that continued to influence and shape the current activity systems in which they work. Though it was obvious that the participants in Chapter 6 were highly knowledgeable about the tools of the activity systems in which they work, they focused instead on the rules/norms of what they saw as a cross-disciplinary, general activity system of writing rather than the specific genres of their discipline. Because writing was often viewed as *separate from* rather than an integrated part of their disciplinary activity systems, Rilo, Heather, and Valeria’s entire understanding of writing, including rules that may not work in their current activity system, was the knowledge that transferred. As a result, these participants engaged in what Robertson et al. call assemblage, or “grafting isolated bits of new knowledge onto a continuing schema of old knowledge” (“Prior”). In other words, though they continue to build on their writing knowledge, they nonetheless hold steadfast to the overarching understanding of writing

as a decontextualized skill, even when such knowledge is in contradiction with the genres of their disciplines. For instance, earlier I shared Rilo's use of Powerpoints in her classrooms, which focus on writing a thesis-driven essay and draw from literary examples, features of writing vastly different from the inquiry-driven, scientific writing expected of her students. That is, however, not to say that these participants understandings of writing will not change over time. In particular, because Rilo was almost completely new to teaching, I believe that with more experience she may adapt her classes further to address the specific genres of her discipline.

In other instances, past knowledge of rules/norms seem to have hindered the ability of the participants to consider knowledge that might challenge previous understandings of writing. For example, rather than having a conversation with her students about passive and active voice, and showing students how to use both effectively depending on the rhetorical situation, Valeria rejected this possibility for a set reality, in which passive voice is always to be avoided. This belief that improving writing means improving grammar and mechanics led her to create skill and drill exercises for students. Because her role in the activity system is different from that of a tenured or tenure-track professor, or a role that requires research, Valeria relies often on others for insight into her own disciplinary expectations. Spelling, for instance, becomes overly important because her husband, a professor in the discipline, dislikes spelling errors. Thus, Valeria conflates idiosyncratic preferences with disciplinary expectations. However, this is not altogether surprising given that Valeria is only peripherally a member of her disciplinary activity systems. In other words, she does not read, research, and/or write in the discipline of chemistry, yet she is nonetheless expected to teach students the genres specific to this discipline.

Although Valeria, Heather, and Rilo assign students the genres of their disciplines, and even share disciplinary methodologies that have particular motives and rules/norms—Heather,

for instance, wants students to become practiced in working with data—these faculty members nonetheless talk about such assignments in ways only peripherally related to these genre-specific expectations. Given that Rilo and Heather, work primarily in their disciplinary activity systems, writing within a system of genres they have learned through a long period of socialization (Beaufort, *College*; Winsor), it is not surprising that most writing situations seem similar enough to require a singular approach. And, as Perkins and Salomon argue, “there *are* general cognitive skills; but they always function in contextualized ways” (“Cognitive” 19). As a result, general cognitive skills were conflated with all disciplinary writing skills.

Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur also treated writing as somewhat decontextualized, although for them, writing was less of a skill set to master than a natural talent one simply applies to a new situation. However, they nonetheless evaluated writing based on their disciplinary expectations (Thaiss and Zawacki). For instance, Tiffany allowed students to fulfill some of her course expectations by completing a project other than a literary analysis. Nonetheless, her own explanation of her grading process was that it was subjective and partially evaluated on the overall quality of the writing. Thaiss and Zawacki argue, “confusion for both faculty and students stems not only from differences in expectations based on unacknowledged disciplinary preferences but also from subdisciplinary and idiosyncratic preferences, both also unacknowledged and frequently unexamined by faculty” (60-61). Disciplinary and idiosyncratic preference aside, these participants worked on the assumption that a student who knows “how to write” will be able to adapt to any new writing situation by his/her own individualized learning process, his/her own rules/norms learned (hopefully) about writing at some previous point. Thus, given that Brandon, Tiffany, and Arthur each viewed their own writing development as lacking in any explicit instruction, it is not surprising that they expect students to individually uncover

the unstated written expectations, as well as appropriate genres, for their classes.

Interdisciplinary Activity Systems as a Means to the Transfer of Rhetorical Knowledge

In the same way Thaiss and Zawacki, as well as Nowacek, argue that interdisciplinary work helps students develop an understanding of how disciplines are different than subjects they previously learned in school, I argue that interdisciplinarity helps writers to develop a rhetorical awareness of writing. My findings show that participants who were most displaying of the transfer of rhetorical writing knowledge were those who also spoke of interdisciplinary work, or writing outside of how they defined their disciplinary activity systems. Further, both Dexter and Thomas had experience teaching first-year writing, although in disciplinary contexts, and they spoke of valuable strategies they continue to draw from teaching, or in Dexter's case, preparing others to teach these courses. Though Tiffany also taught a first-year writing class, her experience with it as a decontextualized class without focused disciplinary genres seem to have only further cemented her doubt that writing can be taught, although I believe she continuously negotiates this understanding. In addition, Dexter, Thomas, and Albert were all forced to confront the differing motives/goals, as well as genre expectations, of a variety of activity systems. Such recognition, Nowacek believes, forces writers to "consciously orient him- or herself among them" (Nowacek 32). Further, Veronica Boin Mansilla argues that an "interdisciplinary understanding" provides one with "the capacity to integrate knowledge and modes of thinking drawn from two or more disciplines to produce a cognitive advancement [...] in ways that would have been unlikely through single disciplinary means." (16). Thomas in particular spoke of the challenges of drawing from a variety of methodologies in his own work, though the value he saw in such practices of combining did not cause him to reject one discipline in favor of the other. Nonetheless, he recognized that with such methodologies comes a unique

way of knowing, and he invites students to become familiar with what he identified as writing within the humanities, all the while making it clear that the genre he assigns are valued and used only in specific disciplinary activity systems.

Further, I argue that the interdisciplinary work caused an additional awareness in these participants of the ways in which their own writing practices shifted and adapted to rhetorical situations. Nowacek argues, “Interdisciplinary thought can be understood as the shift from a recognition of the coexistence of multiple but apparently independent activity systems to an awareness of the overlap and interanimation of those activity systems. The defining characteristic of interdisciplinary thought is not freedom from all disciplinary constraints but awareness of the constraints, complements, and interrelations of a limited number of disciplines” (382). Dexter, for instance, spoke of the limitations he felt that academic writing imposed upon him, as well as other constraints that came with his participation in a new activity system, which he came to understand by his own practice in writing and teaching in multiple systems. But all of the high-road participants recognized the unique genres and ways of knowing in their disciplines, and they explicitly shared with students those disciplinary expectations.

Faculty Across Disciplines and the Teaching of Writing

Amy Devitt once wrote about a biology professor who complained about students’ inability to write in the genres required of the disciplinary activity systems of biology. Devitt posits, “I thought such a well-respected scholar and teacher would know better than to think that the research paper could be taught once and for all, and she need not worry about teaching it herself for her own field” (“Transferability” 215). A complaint from a faculty member lamenting the ineffectiveness of student writing is not altogether surprising, nor is Devitt’s response to this experience, which assumes that well-published faculty within a specific

discipline would understand the situatedness of such writing. While writing scholars could easily dismiss a complaint such as this one, my study encourages us to not only work to reveal faculty understandings about learning to write but also to question our own assumptions about faculty across the disciplines and their relationship to writing. In other words, I argue for the need to treat faculty members as we might treat students and ourselves—as writers, continuously developing, challenging, and expanding upon our writing knowledge.

Implications

The research suggests, and my findings support, the claim that a writer's past experiences will continue to be of influence long after that person is no longer a member of such activity systems. Those who work with faculty members among a variety of disciplines, whether as a part of a WAC or WID program, or even a more informal setting, could benefit from teasing out that writer's previous experiences with writing. For instance, a conversation about writing with Arthur, who rejects the notion that writing can be taught and replaces disciplinary genres of writing with music compositions, would be markedly different than a conversation with Rilo, a new teacher who knows the disciplinary genres her students need to master but is still working to determine the best ways to help students write in those genres. By encouraging faculty to reveal their underlying beliefs and understanding about writing, in addition to the past experiences that shaped those beliefs, writing scholars can be more adequately prepared to build rapport and/or support for programs such as WAC/WID. Though writing faculty often put faculty from a variety of disciplines into conversation with one another at WAC/WID workshops and ask faculty to define “good writing” (Thaiss and Zawacki), such workshops could also encourage participants to discuss their own memories of learning to write, which would uncover their

unstated assumptions about how writers develop. Lori Salem and Peter Jones argue that “it’s easy to assume that we know what attitude drives a faculty member to respond in a particular way” (61). However, my study demonstrates the nuanced and complex reasons for faculty choices in relation to student writing, and correctly treats faculty members as individuals with their own valuable writing histories. Though I do categorize these participants, I also argue that such categories are helpful only to the extent that they can help us to make sense of the participants’ lived experiences. Thus, of importance to remember is that each of these participants, at times, showed a social interactive understanding of writing, usually with regard to their own writing practices. Thus, my categories more reflect how those understandings get transferred to the participants’ teaching practices, which is usually where their ideologies—social interactive, text-based, or writer-based—became more distinct.

Limitations

The nature of case study research is to produce rich description of participants; therefore, my findings are limited to a small number of participants at one particular university. Further, though I was able to collect at least some syllabi and/or other course documents from all participants, I was only able to observe a class for two of the participants, so the majority of my analysis came from that the interview data I collected. That said, at times, triangulating my data was challenging, though I was often able to verify my tentative conclusions by analyzing the genres that faculty members had provided.

Nonetheless, my interviews provided me with much rich and useful data, which led me to wonder whether a more in-depth study of fewer participants would have provided me with even greater data for analysis. In other words, choosing three or four participants to study in greater

depth by attending their classes, observing their grading practices and assignment development, analyzing their own writing, and conducting more interviews over time may have given me additional insights into faculty writing practices and how such practices and knowledge transfers to their teaching.

Finally, I realize that my experiences with these faculty members were also shaped by my own identity, and their construction of my identity, as being someone who first, views writing through an “English” lens, and second, teaches writing. Thus, in some ways that were obvious and which I addressed previously, and in many ways that I may not know, my rhetorical positioning in the situation may have shaped their responses to my questions. I could have chosen instead to make clear my own understanding of writing rather than allowing the participants to make their own observations.

Further Research

Given the limitations in terms of this research, in addition to the plethora of findings, this area is rich in its potential for future research. Case study research, I argue, results in as many new questions as it does answers. Thus, in this section I will identify a few questions that arose throughout my study that would need further research to adequately address, particularly the gender of the participants and student populations.

Gender and Writing Transfer among Activity Systems

That all of the participants whom I classified as having a social-interactive understanding of writing were male, while those I classified as having a text-based understanding were female, has not gone unnoticed. Though I entered this study without considering gender as a factor in my findings, this division nonetheless raises potential issues. Though the division may have

been more related to my small sample size than to anything more significant, I offer a couple of potential explanations here. First, all of the Chapter 5 participants were tenured males who worked across disciplines, giving them access to a variety of activity systems and years of practice teaching. On the other hand, two of the Chapter 6 participants were in somewhat unique positions. Valeria is an instructor charged with teaching students how to write in a discipline for which she herself does little writing. As mentioned previously, this practice is common. Similarly, Rilo was extremely new to teaching at the time of our interview (she had only taught one class to completion), so at the time she was still shaping her course based on what others had previously taught. Rilo was also unique in that she seemed inclined to help students learn disciplinary genres, and thought she was preparing them as such. Thus, perhaps position and time in one's academic department is also a factor. Second, and I believe even more importantly, both Thomas and Dexter participated in the teaching of writing at the same Ivy League school while working on their PhD programs. Their former writing program is nationally recognized for its innovative teaching and placement of all writing within the disciplines, and Thomas and Dexter taught writing seminars that ask requires students to work with the genres of their discipline while mastering disciplinary content. As a result, both Thomas and Dexter worked as a part of the disciplinary system of writing studies, giving them access to rhetorical knowledge about writing and related threshold concepts, of which other participants would not be aware.

Nonetheless, these findings raise fruitful possibilities for further research that might look specifically at gender dynamics in terms of transfer by specifically controlling for gender. For instance, one might study specifically a variety of professors who share disciplines and status in the field, such as a group of new assistant professors in biology or a group of full professors near retirement age in psychology. The participants in each category of my study were all at similar

stages of their careers, particularly those in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7. Additional research could examine specifically those faculty members in a variety of disciplines who had similar training and experience teaching first-year writing to see if such an experience encouraged a social perspective of writing or provided faculty with an enhanced vocabulary for talking about writing. Finally, an additional study might simply draw from a much larger population of faculty, without controlling for any variables, to see whether particular genders seemed to align most with a social interactive, text-based, or writer-based ideology.

Students and Writing in Disciplinary Courses

Finally, though including students in this study was beyond the scope of this dissertation, a larger study, like Thaiss and Zawacki's, could have included the student perspective in this analysis. I imagine such a study would question students about their own perceptions of learning to write, what writing knowledge they believe they bring to their disciplinary courses, and an analysis of how they work through the writing expectations of faculty who approach disciplinary writing in vastly different ways.

Conclusion

Like Thaiss and Zawacki, my original inspiration for this study was my curiosity about “the degree of match between who . . . faculty were as writers and who they were as teachers of writing,” and I “wondered whether and how their own writing practices, based on the ways they constructed the expectations of their disciplines for themselves, would be translated in the assignments they give to students” (61). Activity and genre theories, as well as research on transfer, proved useful to help consider “transfer as recontextualization” (Nowacek 21), a stressing that people who move among a variety of activity systems will carry with them

previous knowledge, either holding fast to that knowledge or shaping it to meet new motives and/or goals. As Perkins and Salomon playfully note, “Transfer of learning can do mischief as well as good” (2). Learning why and how writers such as these participants transfer writing knowledge can only better prepare writing scholars to work with faculty in a variety of disciplines, all of whom bring with them a rich, varied experience of writing.

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Appendix A – Survey Questions

A Study of Writing

The follow survey asks you to discuss your past and current writing practices in relation to yourself and your discipline, including teaching. In addition, by taking this survey, you will also help to provide the English Department, especially those who teach writing, with a greater understanding of how writing is understood across campus so that we might best prepare students as they move into their chosen majors.

Which of the following best represents your beliefs about yourself?

- I see myself as strong writer who is capable of adapting to many writing situations.
- I see myself as a decent writer who has both succeeded and struggled in writing situations.
- I see myself as a weak writer whose writing is in need of much improvement in most writing situations.
- other:

Please briefly list your educational degrees.

Did you take any writing courses in college?

- Yes
- No

If yes, briefly describe your experience(s) with these courses. What do you remember writing about?

Did you take any other writing-intensive courses in college?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please explain briefly.

Please list your department and discipline.

How important is it that people in your discipline know how to write well?

- Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not Important

How would you define good writing in your discipline?

How did you learn to write in your discipline?

- Trial and error
- Help from peers
- Help from professors
- Practice
- Reading in my disciplines
- Attending Writing Workshops
- A class on writing in your discipline
- I am still learning
- other:

What is/was most challenging about learning to write in your discipline?

Which option best describes your current position:

- Professor Associate Professor Assistant Professor Lecturer Adjunct Professor
 Doctoral Student Master's Student other:

Have you previously taught and/or do you currently teach (in any capacity) at Virginia Tech?

- Yes No

**If you have never taught at Virginia Tech, you may scroll to the bottom and submit the survey at this time.
Otherwise, please continue.**

For how many years have you taught?

Please describe training you have received in the teaching of or responding to writing.

Does your department currently have any requirements for including writing in courses? If Yes, please discuss.

- Yes
 No
 I don't know

Is the quality of writing of students an item of discussion and/or concern in your department?

- Yes
 No
 I don't know

If yes, please explain.

Since you began teaching at Virginia Tech, do you feel that the quality of writing has

- Improved
 Stayed about the same
 Gotten worse
 No data for an opinion
 other

These next sets of questions relate to teaching of NON-MAJORS (usually freshman or sophomores) in your discipline.

What goals do you have for NON-MAJOR students when you assign writing to them?

- To help them learn content knowledge
 To help them improve academic writing
 To help them learn how to write within the discipline
 To help them meet course objectives
 I do not teach Non-Majors

other

Which of the following types of writing have you previously assigned or currently assign to NON-MAJORS in your courses:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research paper without argument | <input type="checkbox"/> Summaries and/or Abstracts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research paper with argument | <input type="checkbox"/> Lab Reports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Critique or Review | <input type="checkbox"/> In-class Writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis | <input type="checkbox"/> Outlines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Journal or Reflection Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Cover Letters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Position/Issue Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Resumes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Case Studies | |

Please rate how satisfied you are with the overall writing abilities of students you teach who are NON-MAJORS:

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A (do not teach non-majors)

Please rank your satisfaction with the specific writing abilities of NON-MAJORS you teach:

Developing main ideas

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using paragraphs

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Writing for multiple purposes

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Identifying a main idea

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using appropriate voice for purpose

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Analyzing data

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using correct grammar/syntax

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Synthesizing information

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Separating fact and opinion

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Writing for multiple audiences

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using sources appropriately

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Making an argument

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using correct mechanics/punctuation

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

Organizing ideas

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

N/A

N/A

To what extent do you use the following practices when teaching NON-MAJORS:

Give written feedback on early drafts

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Hold conferences on papers in progress

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Require multiple drafts

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Have students respond to student writing

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Provide written descriptions of assignments

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Provide criteria for writing grades

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Give opportunities for informal writing

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Provide models for good writing

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Discuss writing assignments in class

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Have students reflect on or evaluate their own writing

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Direct students to university support for writing help

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

These next sets of questions relate to teaching of MAJORS in your discipline.

What goals do you have for MAJORS when you assign writing to them?

- To help them learn content knowledge
- To help them improve academic writing
- To help them learn how to write within the discipline
- To help them meet course objectives
- I do not teach Majors
- other

Which of the following types of writing have you previously assigned or currently assign to MAJORS in your courses:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research paper without argument | <input type="checkbox"/> Summaries and/or Abstracts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research paper with argument | <input type="checkbox"/> Lab Reports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Critique or Review | <input type="checkbox"/> In-class Writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis | <input type="checkbox"/> Outlines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Journal or Reflection Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Cover Letters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Position/Issue Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Resumes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reaction Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Case Studies | |

Please rate how satisfied you are with the overall writing abilities of students you teach who are MAJORS:

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A (do not teach non-majors)

Please rank your satisfaction with the specific writing abilities of MAJORS you teach:

Developing main ideas

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using paragraphs

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Writing for multiple purposes

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using appropriate voice for purpose

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using correct grammar/syntax

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Separating fact and opinion

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Using sources appropriately

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

Identifying a main idea

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Analyzing data

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Synthesizing information

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Writing for multiple audiences

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

Making an argument

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

N/A

Using correct mechanics/punctuation

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- N/A

N/A

Organizing ideas

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neutral
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- Dissatisfied
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To what extent do you use the following practices when teaching MAJORS:

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Provide models for good writing

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never
- N/A

Discuss writing assignments in class

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

Have students reflect on or evaluate their own writing

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

N/A N/A**Direct students to university support for writing help** Always Sometimes Never N/A**What obstacles do you face in assigning writing?** I don't have enough time to assess writing. I don't have the training and/or authority to assign/assess writing In my discipline, students benefit more from other instructional and/or assessment methods. other**In the classes I teach, good writing is best described as the following:****Any comments about your own writing practices or the teaching of writing?****What is your gender?** Female Male Other**I agree to allow my survey responses to be used anonymously for both institutional and dissertation research, which may lead to publication** Yes No**Please check all of the ways you would be willing to continue your participation with my study:** Participating in Follow-up Interviews Sharing assignments prompts and course syllabi Allowing class observation(s)

Appendix B Interview Questions

Interview One

1. Tell me about your educational background.
2. Tell me about your discipline, what is studied, what is valued.
3. Tell me about your experiences with learning to write.
4. Do you consider yourself to be a writer? If so, in what contexts?
5. Do other people ever call you a writer? Who, and when?
6. How often do you write, and why?
7. What do you write?
8. What are your beliefs about writing?
9. Tell me about your own writing process.
10. Tell me about your experiences with learning how to write. For your discipline?
11. Does your discipline talk about writing? In what context? How?
12. Is writing used in your discipline? How?
13. Do you write outside of an academic context? Explain.
14. Have you ever been involved in a writing group?
15. Have you ever written collaboratively?

Interview Two

1. Tell me about your general philosophy of teaching and learning.
2. Why/why not do you assign writing to your students?
3. What expectations do you have for your students as writers?
4. How did you come to have these expectations?

5. What kind of specific writing preparation do you expect your students to have before coming to your classes?
6. What do you imagine is being taught to students in their writing courses?
7. What kinds of assignments would be most helpful in preparing students to write in your classes?
8. How much writing do you assign your students, and why?
9. What kinds of writing?
10. Can you tell me about some specific assignments you give to students and your goals for assigning them?
11. How do you introduce and prepare students for any writing requirements?
12. How much time do you spend in class talking about and/or doing writing?
13. Have you ever encountered any student resistance to writing?
14. Do you have students peer review their work, or do you comment on their written work?
15. What do you look for when you grade writing? Why?
16. How much is writing usually work out of the entire grade?