



A. Patricia Burnes

**Supporting Undergraduate Writers Beyond the First Year
(WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies, No. 6)**

May 2010*

The last two decades of work in discourse studies and cultural theory have challenged our sense of what it means to teach writing. Since the process and product of writing gains shape and meaning from the genres or activity systems in which it participates, and since those genres evolve depending on the subjects using them and the contexts in which they are used, there can be no safe set of forms or practices we can insist all students learn. That our students need an understanding of and practice in writing after the first year is beyond doubt; deciding how to provide that practice and understanding is not easy.

To this end, this bibliography includes texts that provide at least partial understandings of the contexts through which students work to understand and shape their academic and professional lives and how they learn to do that work successfully. Five (Carroll, Haas, Herrington and Curtis, Shamoon *et al.*, Sternglass) are longitudinal studies providing useful insights into the complications of expanding literacy during the college years. Two (Bazerman, Dias *et al.*) record important descriptions of how classroom-based literate practices can serve larger goals of literacy. Others (Carter, Thaiss and Zawacki, Russell and Yanez) provide inspiring stories of dynamic, engaged faculty from many disciplines working in academic programs that build on students' work in first-year composition by helping them understand the role of writing in creating their disciplines. Each points to the importance of students and faculty coming to reflective awareness of the varied contexts that support their intellectual activity.

Synthesizing many of the threads in this bibliography is Barbara Little Liu's essay on the importance of the term "genre" in the WPA Outcomes Statement. Her text details the kinds of complex work required to help students understand the dynamic role genres play in the reading and writing through which they learn. What Liu's essay underscores most dramatically is the shift in orientation required to think of teaching writing—at any level—as providing experience in and understanding of the way discourse works. In the context of all the items reviewed below, her suggestions are compelling. Our students' time in college is brief. As writing specialists and writing-program administrators, we can best support writing in the disciplines by lending our expertise to assignments, pedagogies, and outcomes that invite and reward serious commitments to academic genres and that promote understanding of the contexts within which those genres function.

*Cite as: Burnes, A. Patricia. (May 2010). Supporting Undergraduate Writers Beyond the First Year, WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies, No. 6. *WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies*.
<http://comppile.org/wpa/bibliographies/Burnes.pdf>. Date of access.

Bazerman, Charles

Response: Curricular responsibilities and professional definition

In Petraglia, Joseph (Ed.), *Reconceiving writing, rethinking writing instruction*; Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum (1995), 249-259

Bazerman grants that engagement and situatedness are central to good writing and effective writing pedagogy. He also grants that, as earlier contributors to Petraglia's book point out, such qualities are often missing in required first-year courses, but does not accept that first-year courses *must* exhibit these lacks, arguing that the "best way to learn the power of writing is to write and become engaged in a compelling discourse" (257). Since it is impossible to know which discourses will best serve students in years to come, Bazerman suggests that students in their first years be engaged with a variety of discourses and that that work be connected to upper-division instruction in the major. Acknowledging that transferability is difficult to achieve, he advocates that students be taught to recognize and compare situations as well as to adapt previously-learned procedures.

KEYWORDS: curriculum, advanced, FYC, profession, abolition, interest, WID, WAC, skill-transfer, situational

Carroll, Lee Ann

Rehearsing new roles: How college students develop as writers

Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press (2002)

Carroll followed 20 college students for four years, interviewing them about writing tasks, challenges, successes and failures, and reading (with a team of faculty researchers from various disciplines) the texts the students produced and the writing logs they kept. The pattern of development they note aligns with a "Cultural/Environmental View of Development" based in the work of Jerome Bruner, Michael Cole, and Urie Bronfenbrenner. This view holds that development is uneven and that progress entails increasing ability to understand and respond to the environment in which one finds oneself. The most successful students were those most willing to take on take on new challenges and to work toward the meta-cognitive awareness needed to figure out what a new challenge required and what they needed to do to meet it. (Significantly, such students frequently said they were able to give the teacher "what s/he wanted.") Carroll concludes by recommending that faculty "[t]ake seriously questions about 'what the professor wants' and provide clearly explained assignments, guidelines for performance, models, specific feedback, and opportunities for self-assessment and improvement" (134). Faculty and WPAs should also work to:

- think of student work as literacy challenges and not writing tasks;
- help students focus on writing differently, not better;

- learn from other faculty what demands they will be making and help students anticipate; provide more options in required literacy environments;
- develop projects and assignments that will challenge *all* students—even if finished projects are less than great;
- provide scaffolding to support development by directly teaching discipline specific research and writing skills, using grading strategically to reward improvement, scheduling interim deadlines for longer projects, and requiring classroom workshops, study groups, and teacher conferences.
- reconsider with students, colleagues, and other professionals whether “what the professor wants” is, in fact, what the discipline needs or should want.

KEYWORDS: development, case-study, data, self-evaluation, teacher-expectation, teacher-student, WID, WAC, college-span

Carter, Michael

Ways of knowing, doing, and writing in the disciplines

College Composition and Communication 58:3 (2007), 385-418 [Braddock Award Winner, 2007]

Drawing on the North American genre theories of Carolyn Miller, David Russell, and Charles Bazerman, as well as eight years’ work with outcomes descriptions and assessments, Carter proposes that disciplines define themselves by the genres or intellectual actions central to their work. This definition has several implications:

- it defies the late 19th century notion of university disciplines as static bodies of declarative knowledge;
- it forwards the more recent sense of disciplines as collaborations of scholars engaged in ongoing work;
- it draws attention to the act of writing as the means by which the essential work of all disciplines is realized;
- it makes it inevitable that all faculty are teachers of writing; and
- it suggests fruitful areas of cooperation among disciplines.

After describing the many genres through which intellectual work is realized, Carter describes four metagenres (Problem Solving, Empirical Inquiry, Research from Sources, Performance) that name intellectual actions common to many disciplines. He suggests that by concentrating on these metagenres, university specialists in WID can help all faculty better understand and teach the genres in which they are engaged and for which they are responsible. The article closes with an appendix listing program outcomes from three academic departments at NCSU, Carter’s home institution.

KEYWORDS: WID, discipline, genre, meta-, multidisciplinary, cross-discipline, Dave R. Russell, Carolyn R. Miller, Charles Bazerman, WAC, epistemology, write-to-learn, outcomes

Dias, Patrick; Aviva Freedman; Peter Medway; Anthony Paré

Worlds apart: Acting and writing in academic and workplace contexts

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum (1999)

Drawing on many of the theories associated with the social turn in composition studies, dialogics, activity theory, and genre theory, as well as seven years of observation, the authors affirm writing's crucial role in students' enculturation into academic disciplines. This book's more significant finding is that essential distinctions in the activity systems basic to either context make *direct* transfer of writing skill from one to the other nearly impossible. While the authors insist that the action of writing contributes differently to and is differently defined by the larger activity systems in which it exists, they also claim that some aspects of writing ability developed in academic settings can prove significant in the workplace. Writing's ability to make inner speech explicit and thus to function as a means of thinking is an aspect of writing that can be transferred to the workplace and should be "cultivated as habit and engaged across the curriculum" (232). (Also portable are oral skills and social skills required for collaborative work, syntactic and lexical sophistication, the ability to produce continuous text and to maintain flow, and stylistic flexibility.)

KEYWORDS: activity-theory, contextual, social, Vygotsky, Wertsch, ethnographic, workplace, situational, genre, community, architecture, performance, authentic, cognition, epistemic, internship, academy-workplace, real-world, WID

Haas, Christina

Learning to read biology: One student's rhetorical development in college

Written Communication 11.1 (1994), 43-84

This is a longitudinal study of a single student's increasing rhetorical sophistication in reading science texts through four years of college relying on regular interviews, read-aloud protocols, and reviews of all assignments. The student began by ascribing meaning to situation-less, a-historical texts, typically textbooks. Over time, she came to distinguish among texts, to situate them historically, and to ascribe motives to their authors. She also came to understand herself as practicing the science about which she was reading. Haas speculates on several causes for this development: increasing subject matter knowledge, changes in instructional support and challenges, development as influenced by the structure of her course of study, and the cognitive apprenticeship the student received from working as a laboratory assistant for the last two years of her college career. The telling exception to this increasing rhetorical sophistication came immediately after the student's first year. An English course she was taking then sparked a beginning rhetorical awareness of the ways texts can work; yet this appeared to atrophy during her sophomore year when she was no longer taking courses in English, but before she began WID coursework.

KEYWORDS: reading, development, college-span, longitudinal, authorship, constructivism, measurement, sophomore, slump, expertise, life-span, text-processing, biology, WID

Herrington, Anne and Marcia Curtis

Persons in process: Four stories of writers and personal development in college

Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English (2000)

Detailed case studies of four college students (including student texts, journal entries, and interview transcripts) over the four years of the students' college careers reveal that while each student varied greatly in background and professional goals, each developed simultaneously and interdependently as a writer and as a person. Deeply felt personal conflicts or beliefs often appearing first as journal entries reappeared throughout the students' writing careers as they were required to write from within the perspectives of various academic genres. The students' growth in self-knowledge and, simultaneously, in command of academic discourse is obvious throughout. Herrington and Curtis conclude by insisting that the writing development of college students be understood as ethical and emotional as well as cognitive: a conjoining of students' private and public lives. (See also "Writing Development in the College Years: By Whose Definition?" [CCC 55:1 2003] in which Curtis and Herrington place their earlier study in current context. Even though modern accounts of discourse render agency suspect, they align themselves with psychologists who posit a two-way interaction between individual and environment.)

KEYWORDS: development, college-span, case-study, data, maturation, psychological, research-method, self-evaluation, self-definition, mentoring, essay-writing, sample, personal, academic, audience, basic, WID

Liu, Barbara Little

More than the latest PC buzzword for modes: What genre theory means to composition

In Harrington, Susanmarie; Keith Rhodes; Ruth Overman Fischer; Rita Malenczyk (Eds.), *The outcomes book: Debate and consensus after the WPA outcomes statement*, Logan, UT: Utah State UP (2005), 72-84

Noting that the undertheorized way in which the term "genre" appears in the WPA Outcomes Statement may lead readers to misunderstand the complex approach to writing that the statement endorses, Barbara Liu reviews contemporary genre theory and explores the implications of that theory for teaching writing. Drawing on the foundational work of Bakhtin and Carolyn Miller, she insists that genres be understood as dynamic categories of discourse allowing their users to participate in significant communal actions and to change and be changed by those actions. She further complicates her explanation with insights from the linguistics work of James Paul Gee and John Swales and also from the

work Mary Jo Reiff has done on authentic instruction in genre to conclude that a first-year writing curriculum informed by current genre theory would expose students to as many kinds of genre as possible, would help students “develop the mindset of ethnography and inquiry” needed to examine the writing communities they care about, would help them investigate “the political and ideological agendas of writing communities,” and would help them foresee the consequences of writing their ways into new discourse communities or of resisting such alignment (81).

KEYWORDS: WPA Outcomes Statement, FYC, genre-theory, Bakhtin, objective, metalinguistics, role-playing, positioning, participant-observer, WID, ethnographic, research-method

Petraglia, Joseph (Ed.)

Reconceiving writing, rethinking writing instruction

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum (1995)

This collection had its roots in three years of sessions at annual meetings of the *CCCC* on abolishing the first-year writing requirement. Its contributors argue that the traditional first-year course in composition does not and cannot prepare students for the writing that will be expected of them throughout their university careers, arguing instead for first-year writing courses that can serve as disciplinary apprenticeships or as introductions to rhetoric or writing studies.

KEYWORDS: curriculum, profession, abolition, interest, WID, WAC, skill-transfer, situational

Russell, David R.; Arturo Yanez

‘Big picture people rarely become historians’: Genre systems and the contradictions of general education

In Bazerman, Charles; David R. Russell (Eds.), *Writing selves/writing society: Research from activity perspectives*; Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse, 331-362. Retrieved March 5, 2010, from wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/

The authors use basic principles of activity theory (Engeström) and genre-system theory (Bazerman) to explain how writing can move students beyond double-bind conflicts incurred from the conflicting expectations of general-education requirements. They note that general-education requirements can be understood either as paths to specialized ways of knowing or as paths to general understandings essential to good citizenship, a conflict that is heightened when gen-ed courses are writing intensive: understood either as transmitting general writing skills or as helping students develop through writing the ways of knowing crucial to a discipline. To move beyond this contradiction, the authors suggest imagining courses as cultural-historical activity systems in which writing serves

to expand understandings of the genres through which the course topic is realized and of the genre systems through which those genres are valued, thereby allowing students to contextualize the activities central to the course as meaningful for professional and personal goals. Examples of how this can be achieved are provided through detailed analysis of the work of a college journalism major enrolled in a gen-ed history course who worked through serious contradictions in her understanding of what it means to write about history.

KEYWORDS: activity-theory, cultural, historical, genre-theory, gen-ed, history-course, historiography, alienation, critical-thinking, higher-order, contradiction, historian, WID

Schwegler, Robert

Curricular development in composition

In Shamoan, Linda K.; Rebecca Moore Howard; Sandra Jamieson; Robert A. Schwegler (Eds.), *Coming of age: The advanced writing curriculum*; Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook (2000), 25-31

Provides an incisive analysis of why then-current theoretical work, especially work in discourse analysis, cultural studies, and social theory, prompted the profession to create courses beyond first-year writing. Schwegler explains that when FYC was invented at the end of the 19th century, literature was understood as an object to be analyzed, and writing was understood as a single skill which did not vary from context to context. Once mastered, it could be simply employed in whatever context one chose. Current work in discourse analysis and especially in activity theory, Schwegler points out, greatly complicates the profession's sense of what the act of writing entails. "Courses focused on activity fields," he asserts, "would investigate recurring textual and discursive practices; relationships of textual knowledge, resources, and power; and systems of representation—all while stressing discursive participation in a field and offering opportunities for practice and response" (30).

KEYWORDS: advanced, curriculum-design, WID, civic, discourse-analysis, cultural-studies, social, skill-transfer

Shamoan, Linda K.; Rebecca Moore Howard; Sandra Jamieson; Robert A. Schwegler (Eds.)

Coming of age: The advanced writing curriculum

Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook (2000)

A print-linked publication, this book includes complete copies of many of its essays and introductions to others; the introductions link to complete texts available on the enclosed CD-ROM; also available there are full course descriptions for each of the types of courses discussed in the collection. As the editors explain, the essays and descriptions included in the

collection address the question of “what an advanced undergraduate writing curriculum should accomplish” by insisting that such curricula should prepare students for “highly rhetorical participation in public life” (xv). As means to that end, each of the courses described in the collection works toward one of three curricular goals:

- providing students with an awareness of writing as a discipline,
- preparing students for careers as writers, and
- preparing them for ways of using writing to participate in public life.

KEYWORDS: advanced, syllabus, objective, curriculum, private-public, disciplinary, career

Sternglass, Marilyn S.

Time to know them: A longitudinal study of writing and learning at the college level

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum (1997)

Substantially extending Mina Shaughnessy’s description of Open Admissions students and responding to Patricia Bizzell’s 1986 call for an in-depth study of “What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College,” Sternglass provides a detailed chronology of the academic lives of nine CUNY students, five of whom had been placed into basic (pre-college) writing courses. Through records of interviews, of written work, of classroom observations, of formal and informal reactions to teachers and assignments and programs of study, Sternglass provides a compelling picture of the role that material conditions play in students’ academic careers, of the fact that with additional time and thoughtful support, students from backgrounds impoverished (in every sense) can come to participate successfully in the language practices of the academy, and of the crucial and varied role writing plays throughout students’ academic maturation.

KEYWORDS: basic, City College of New York, longitudinal, minority, assessment, mainstreaming, college-span, case-study, data, material-conditions, materiality, contextual

Thaiss, Chris; Terry Myers Zawacki

Engaged writers: Dynamic disciplines

Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook (2006)

In the authors’ view, students develop as disciplinary writers by being able to understand their majors as coherent fields of diverse voices and styles within which they can work to realize intellectual passions and projects. Perhaps Thaiss and Zawacki’s most helpful contribution is their careful delineation of the many levels of meaning implicit in single terms wrongly understood as transparent. “Academic discourse,” they point out, is meaningful within at least five contexts (generic, disciplinary, subdisciplinary, local, and idiosyncratic). They describe students’ development as disciplinary writers as occurring

through three stages of understanding (belief in a few rules as absolutes, belief in teacher idiosyncrasy as the reasons for conflicting rules, and recognition of varied rules, styles, and formats as evidence of the dynamic discipline to which the student is committed). The book closes with twelve recommended practices for faculty interesting in working with students on their writing. Each reminds faculty of the importance of contextualizing all they do: assignments, feedback, course-design, formal and informal conversations with students about writing.

KEYWORDS: academic, interdisciplinary, scholarly-writing, publishing, ethnographic, dynamics, data, WID, retraining