Jacqueline Preston

Project(ing) Literacy: Writing to Assemble in a Postcomposition FYW Classroom

In this article, I turn to a grounded theory study that examines the experiences of students participating in an individual project-based FYW course, exploring up close the exploits, practices, and products of one student "writing to assemble." I question pedagogy stayed to theory that would treat writing as primarily a technology of representation, and in its place introduce the concept of "writing as assemblage." Positing a theory of the writing space that underscores writing's more generative qualities, I call for a new definition of proficiency for all manner of first-year writing courses.

At the 2013 Annual Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Victor Villanueva presented the paper "Toward a Political Economy of Basic Writing Programs." Here, Villanueva called into question some commonly shared assumptions pertaining to the basic writer.[1] As one live blogger wrote,

> [Villanueva] reminds us that Basic Writers . . . are not in need of remedies or in need of development. There is no illness. There is no cognitive dysfunction. We must stop thinking about our students in terms of deficit and needing to be "prepared" for classes beyond basic writing. (Rysdam)

Villanueva's words echo arguments long made in literacy studies. His insistence on rejecting deficit models appeals to those interested in issues of access, who recognize that any approach to learning that would frame students as culturally deficient ultimately functions to deny access.[2] For scholars and instructors steeped in decades of scholarship in literacy and composition studies, Villanueva's words are evidence of the failure to shake free of the deficit models underpinning all manner of first-year writing (FYW), particularly basic writing (BW) courses. However, outside these circles and across the university, Villanueva's proposition provokes two important questions: "Who are these first-year students, if they are not 'underprepared'?" and "What does a FYW course offer when we no longer view it as a service course to the 'remedial' student?"

In this essay, I address these questions, referencing the work of postcompositionist Sidney I. Dobrin and others who dismiss the pedagogical imperative all together, who paradoxically, in their efforts to shift the focus away from the subjects and toward writing itself, have created a potential for understanding better how FYW serves students. What separates the argument presented here from those often made by postcomposition theorists is a concerted interest in the subjects.[3] An interest in better understanding students and what becomes of them in the writing classroom is in fact the impetus for this article.[4] Here, I argue for a new consideration of FYW students, not as individuals underprepared or even underserved but, rather, as those who are actively and purposefully engaged in an ongoing and complex dialectical process of developing a sense of self and world. To regard students in this way is not meant to forward yet another euphemism to describe those whom many consider as *outside* the academic circle. Rather, it is an attempt to institute an academic circle that acknowledges the histories, experiences, and literacies that students bring with them to the classroom, and moreover that outright rejects theories of writing, curriculum, and pedagogy that would situate students' familiar rhetorics and well-developed literacies as deficits to learning.

Here, I argue that the pedagogical imperative to prepare those perceived as underprepared to write for the university has fostered a rush to theory that threatens to choke what might be gained by alternative pedagogical methods (Ewald 121). I call into question both curriculum and pedagogy stayed to theory that would treat writing as primarily a technology of representation and a writing process rooted in a notion of a fixed and stable reality that proceeds organically from one distinct object to the next. Instead I posit a theory of the writing space and present a fresh approach to the teaching of writing, under-

scoring writing's generative qualities. Referencing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of "assemblage," I demonstrate that not only in theory but also in practice, we have much to gain in recognizing writing as a complex and dynamic gathering of "things" and pieces of "things"—ideas, people, memories, events, and experiences. Taking up Kenneth Burke's peculiar treatment of the dialectical as overlap, ambiguity, and change, I advance a foundational theory that would treat the writing space as a dialectical space not *between* the writer and the audience but rather a space of ambiguity, overlap, assemblage, and expression of culture itself. My hope is that upon this theory of the writing space we might begin to build new theories of writing.

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A major portion of this essay references a grounded theory study. It explores the experiences of students enrolled in a project-based methods FYW course, and examines explicitly the experience and writing of one student in particular to demonstrate the opportunities afforded when instructors refuse curricula built on the idea that the purpose of FYW is to prepare students for their next English class and instead take seriously writing theory and practice that underscore relevance, assemblage, and expression.[5] What is new is not the project method outlined here, for project-based learning has been around at least since John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick (Helle, Tynjälä, and Olkinuora) wrote extensively about experiential learning and the project model in the 1920s. Rather, what is fresh and of paramount importance is the insistence that the field and the students enrolled in FYW courses have something to gain when our current definition of proficiency takes a backseat to relevancy.

Proficiency, Mastery, and the Quest to Prepare the "Underprepared"

Proficiency, like *mastery* and *effective writing*, are terms born out of compositions studies' relentless mission to address what Villanueva so ardently resists—yet what George Pullman asserts is the imagined rhetorical problem underpinning all FYW courses—that is, to make literate those we believe to be illiterate. In his chapter "Stepping Yet Again into the Same Current," appearing in Thomas Kent's edited text *Post-Process Theory*, Pullman discusses what he refers to as the *perceived exigence* of the composition classroom: "ill-literacy, an ignorance of important conventions" and a conviction that "those who have

been granted the opportunity for an education apparently cannot obtain that education" (27). What results as a means to resolve this rhetorical problem is the FYW course and an agreement among the various stakeholders, administrators, faculty, and students that FYW is, first and foremost, a "safe space" to practice new conventions (27).

Literacy development, like writing, however, is situated. This is to say, that what it means to be literate is neither absolute nor arbitrary; it is, rather, socially, politically and economically driven. Exacting material conditions motivate individuals both extrinsically and intrinsically to develop literacies peculiar to a situation, and these conditions perpetuate a particular notion of what it means to be literate and what it means to be a proficient writer. In the context of this larger materialist framework, literacy is understood as not merely a functional skill learned and practiced by individuals but rather a development nurtured and sponsored by social systems, structural conditions, and particular historical, political and economic climates. As Deborah Brandt reminds us, it is "sponsors" that "set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty" (2).[6] Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the FYW and BW classroom. FYW courses emerged and, often in response to administrative necessities, continue to be housed in English departments rather than writing studies programs (see Dobrin; Smit; Downs and Wardle). Given this peculiar disciplinary history, the curriculum and pedagogy that constitute these courses are generally driven by a notion of good writing, specific to humanities courses, wherein "essayist literacy" is privileged (Farr). In turn, curriculum, pedagogy, and, perhaps most insidiously, assessment of students' ability to write well perpetuate what is both a peculiar and a particular notion of what it means to be literate. For students enrolled in FYW and BW, terms of access are in most universities driven by standardized placement tests. The design and content of these assessments are rooted in and continue to reinforce a singular and autonomous view of literacy. When we regard literacy as autonomous, a proficiency born out of context, we reinforce the mistaken assumption that what happens in the writing space can be reduced to mechanics and organization.

A notion of proficiency as control over mechanics and organization is rooted in a theory of writing as primarily a "technology of representation."[7] To imagine that writing's primary function is otherwise is to upset what is for many the obvious purpose of FYW—to help students use writing to communicate more effectively in an academic setting. Yet an insistence on reducing writing to

its function as merely a vehicle for representing ideas and to suggest that what is important about student writing is the capacity to demonstrate mastery is an opportunity lost both for the student and the instructor.

While writing includes representation, it is problematic to approach the study of writing in this way. As Sánchez reminds us in *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*, "Writing does something different and altogether more important than transmit information." Meaning and concepts are not merely expressed through writing but are themselves a function of writing, not merely a component of culture but culture itself (4). To regard writing as culture is to recognize language as symbolic action, the means by which we construct worlds and express realities. Understanding writing as culture affords a change in our understanding of the important work beyond representation that takes place when we write and when we study and teach writing. In the following section, I reference the work of Kenneth Burke to begin a shift away from a view of writing as primarily a tool for representing ideas and toward an understanding of the writing space as a dynamic dialectical space of expression, a space in which ideas circulate, regenerate, shift, and produce anew—an assemblage.[8]

Assemblage and Expression: The Writing Space as Dialectical Space

The word *assemblage* suggests a bringing together, a weaving or an interlacing, wherein the different strands and lines might separate but are also ready to bind together others (Derrida 131). To regard writing as an assemblage is to insist that what is important about writing is not its capacity to represent ideas but, rather, what writing does, from whence it comes, and how it reproduces. Writing always and already functions with and connects with other assemblages—other writings, histories, memories, places, people, ideas, events, and so forth.

A key component in understanding writing as assemblage is to recognize that writing is in constant flux, pulled from and plugged into others, a multiplicity that converges with others to make new assemblages and morphing as it circulates across contexts. Critical beyond the mechanics and organization underscored in theories of writing as primarily representation is writing's complexity, its relevancy, its contingency, and, of particular importance, its *becoming* (Deleuze and Guattari 272). To speak of *becoming* is to highlight writing's protean quality. *Becoming* underscores change, flight, and movement. In *becoming*, one piece of the assemblage is knitted into the landscape of another piece, changing its value as an element and bringing about a new kind of unity.

While the process of *becoming* may include imitation, it is primarily generative, a moment of invention, identification and articulation. As we shall see, writing as assemblage—writing to assemble, is more a function of influences rather than resemblances.

Writing as assemblage is not a question of organization but of composition (255). To approach writing as an assemblage in the FYW classroom is to move away from a notion of writing as a set of discrete skills and processes and rather to draw attention to the heterogeneous components that go into the production or genesis of the writing. Herein, the writer is faced with writing's complexity, the diverse and overlapping experiences, and competing ideas that meet in and contribute to the writing space. The process of writing is one of removing a piece of writing, an event, an experience, or a memory, from its original function to bring about a new one. This opens a rhetorical pathway for engaging writing's generative qualities, for treating the writing space as a dynamic protean dialectical space and, as I have argued, a recognition that the writer is always and already prepared to write. What follows is a closer look at Burke's use of the dialectic to examine more closely how a theory of writing space serves as a lens by which writing theory can be more usefully embraced. My purpose here is to move beyond understanding to a way of doing.

In "Dialectic in General," from *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke writes, "By dialectics in the most general sense, we mean the employment of the possibilities of linguistic transformation. Or we mean the study of such possibilities" (402). In contrast to a more classical treatment of the dialectic, Burke's dialectic operates in the realm of both/and rather than either/or; the dialectic is for Burke, the "margin of overlap" and it is in this overlap that worlds are both dismantled and expressed (Williams). According to Burke, language functions via a process of "merger and division," to bring about a kind of "transcendence," understood not as a state but as a kind of "spiraling development" (*Grammar* 403). In other words, ideas and assumptions are carried into the writing space; they merge with others, both familiar and new. Via the word, they intersect, conflate, modify, divide, and reassess new ideas encountered there. To regard the dialectic as a process of vagueness, overlap, intersection, and contradiction is to envision the writing space as quite literally a "series of terms in perpetual transformation" (Burke, *Rhetoric* 38). To regard the writing space as a dialectical space replete with ambiguity and change is to see writing not as a contribution to culture but culture making itself. The writing space is a layering of attitudes, experience, words, and motivations, a space wherein the writer transects the familiar rhetorics, ideas, and events of the recent and distant past with emergent

ideas and fresh encounters, rerouting these resources into moments of interpretation, expression, and consequence. As we shall see, the overall assemblage and the other assemblages it plugs into function as the necessary tools, the required equipment for writing. In his chapter "Reassembling Postprocess," Byron Hawk writes, "The overall assemblage sets the conditions of possibility for particular acts, processes, or products, which are experienced as equipment for writing" (83).[9] From this perspective, no longer do we regard merely skills and processes, but, rather, the events, experiences, and products constituting an overall assemblage as the necessary equipment for writing. It is through this lens that we can begin to build a theory of the writing space that helps us not only understand the complexities and multiplicities inherent to writing but also take up these theories in the classroom in a way that is useful to the writer.

The Project Model: From Theory to Practice with Empirical Results

To illustrate, I turn to a grounded theory study examining the experiences of students participating in a project-methods BW course, which I teach. Unlike most universities, whose BW courses are taught primarily by graduate teaching assistants or part-time faculty, this large four-year, open enrollment university sponsors an independent basic writing unit. The program is made up of eight tenured and tenure-line faculty, whose scholarship falls under one of three areas of writing scholarship—literacy studies, composition theory and pedagogy, and rhetorical theory. The faculty members share not only a background in composition and rhetoric but also a commitment to BW and FYW. This uniquely positioned faculty, not surprisingly, has long rejected curriculum and pedagogy that would place strong emphasis on surface-level error, and like many writing studies programs has for some time engaged curriculum and applied pedagogy strongly aligned with writing process theory. Beyond process theory, the program has made a point to include language in the departmental outcome statement demonstrating a philosophical commitment to constructivist approaches to teaching writing. It's in this context that the project model first gained support.

In 2012, taking seriously the concerns of literacy scholars, rhetoricians, and postprocess and posthumanist theorists, calling for writing programs to address more pointedly the social, political, and rhetorical nature of writing, the program adopted a project model for their Basic Writing II model syllabus. The project-based curriculum afforded ample opportunity for faculty to take on more rigorously a constructivist approach to teaching composition while

directing attention to those elements of context that inform writing: author, audience, purpose, genre, and medium. As the number of faculty who privileged the works of postprocess and posthumanist theorists grew, a desire to build curriculum that underscores "language in use" came to the fore. Increasingly primed by the belief that FYW, when treated solely as a service course to other disciplines, is restrictive and works to the detriment of students, the program seized an opportunity to give students a chance to practice writing outside traditional pedagogical imperatives. Instead of focusing on proficiency and mastery, those supporting the project-based curriculum are interested in providing opportunities for students to take up their histories and acquired literacies and to recognize writing as relevant to the literacy learning moments that occupy their everyday lives—the reading and writing that individuals encounter at home, in the workplace, in their personal lives, and across the university. Not long after its implementation the program rewrote its mission, committing itself to curriculum and pedagogy aimed at helping students connect and carry forward acquired literacies as a method for negotiating the challenges encountered in the university and for constructing new worlds. This approach to teaching BW places at the center of the curriculum, not the underprepared student subject or the traditional academic essay, but a project to be researched, designed, and proposed by the individual student; the approach insists that here in the project, writing happens.

The project method itself is, of course, not new to education. In 1921, William Heard Kilpatrick, a student and colleague of John Dewey, pioneered the project-based method.[10] Later Kenneth Adderley examined the project-based method as a viable approach for postsecondary work in his 1975 monograph *Project Methods for Higher Education*. Adderley's contribution is well noted in current works exploring project-based learning, and his work continues to be useful and referred to often (Helle, Tynjälä, and Olkinuora; Holt). Building on both Kilpatrick's and Adderley's work, the project method as applied to the teaching of writing does the following:

- asks students to focus on a topic of particular interest to them and to establish and identify problems relevant to the topic.
- requires initiative by the student and necessitates a variety of research and writing activities, which recursively build on and inform one another.
- requires that the student draw on his or her experience and interests

and build upon previously acquired knowledge and skill, transferring this knowledge to practice.

- results in an end product or deliverable (e.g., formal proposals, videos, short theses, public service announcements, brochures, events, and models).
- includes the possibility for work that often goes on for a considerable length of time, sometimes extending beyond the length of the course and the purview of the current instructor.

A project methods course in writing lends itself to any number of curricular designs. However, what is core to any project-based curriculum designed for the postcomposition writing classroom is the belief that what is important about writing is not its capacity to assess and establish a peculiar kind of proficiency, but rather writing's relevancy and its capacity for constructing culture. I use the term *proficiency*, underscoring the tendency by administrators and instructors across the curriculum to privilege representation over the active dialectical processes that constitute what I am referring to here as *culture making*.

In the context of providing a brief outline of the course, including a description of some of the assignments, I reference a larger grounded theory study, which examines the experiences of students and instructors who took part in the project-based FYW course highlighted here. In this essay, I focus primarily on student experiences. My hope is first to underscore some of the gains afforded to students when instructors dismiss an imperative to prepare those assumed by the institution to be underprepared to write in the university and second to highlight pedagogy that treats writing as more than a conduit for communicating effectively. I provide a foundational theory of the writing space upon which a new theory of writing might be built. My intention is to complicate our understanding of what goes on in the writing space and to bring Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage to writing theory as a way of doing something, not merely understanding something.

From Pedagogy to Theory with Empirical Results

For the last two years, along with a small team of researchers consisting of two fellow faculty members and four student research assistants, I have been tracing the experiences of students participating in the BW project-based courses offered at my institution. The results of this study are grounded in a series of

interviews conducted with ten students and seven faculty members who completed and taught the course, respectively.[11] In these interviews students and faculty explore, in depth, their reactions to assignments, their choices about topics; their attitudes toward writing at the outset of the course; their experience of writing during the course; and any shifts in attitude or orientation that occurred to them over the course of the semester.

In recounting the stories and experiences relayed via student interviews, the term *project(ing)* surfaces as a fitting term for what can best be described as a kind of conceptual scheme or shift in attitude toward writing and its relevancy. In response to questions about what they gained, students interviewed commented on experiencing writing for the first time as, "bits and pieces," linked to something larger—"something of value." It is through project writing that the individual is afforded an opportunity to experience writing more consciously as an *assemblage*.

Because most writing assignments are designed to help students move forward as they invent and develop ideas for chosen projects, the writing that happens in the context of these larger projects is writing that is inherently relevant, situated, and contingent. What I refer to as *embedded writing* connects this literacy event—that is, the writing taking place here and now—to the past experiences, current readings, future events, and imagined projects that make up some overall assemblage. These are assignments that, throughout the course and particularly at the beginning, insist on a view of writing as an assemblage, plugged into other assemblages, memories, things, ideas, desires, and projects. These writing assignments provide opportunities for students to gather together bits and pieces of their lives. Students write to reflect on their past, recall memorable events, identify interests, and contemplate their experiences with chosen topics. In their writing, students hone in on why a subject is important to them and draw connections between the topic, the problems associated with the topic, and people in their lives who have a stake in or interest in the topic. These writing assignments not only include traditional invention activities, such as mapping, brainstorming, and reflecting, but also writing that on the surface is not readily identified as invention. An assignment, for example, such as turning a reflection, a diary entry of sorts, into a short story, which takes place in the first unit, asks the student to use language, description, and dialogue to express in concrete ways what is important about a moment. These kinds of assignments challenge students to think critically about the significance of the moment, and it's in the writing space itself that identities are

established and worlds are created. In the second half of the course, on which I focus more explicitly in this essay, students begin thinking about individual projects they'd like to see carried through. In the spirit of portfolio assessment and multigenre writing practices, such as those forwarded by Nancy Mack in "The Ins, Outs, and In-betweens of Multigenre Writing," students take up writing and research, not to demonstrate their capacity to communicate effectively, but rather as a means to think through their ideas, renegotiate their assumptions about how the world works, and move forward with their projects. Instructors encourage students to write about topics to which they, the students, are connected in some way—an interest, a hobby, or a personal or family-related concern. Topics arise from the lived experiences and genuine concerns of students, as was the case for one student who chose her topic in response to her mother's recent diagnosis of diabetes. Other examples include school-related topics, for instance, a student taking a history class who decided to prepare for her final by writing a substantive proposal to complete a ten- to twelve-page research paper on social Darwinism. Topic ideas emerge also from the work students are doing outside of the university, as in the case of the student who worked as a counselor for a wilderness substance-abuse treatment center for youth interested in the effectiveness of this treatment. Real questions, concerns, and subject matter, in which the student is invested, provide the basis for an overall assemblage into which the students will ultimately plug their writing.

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To illustrate the possibilities and to examine up close the writing space itself, I want to narrow the focus to one student, Hyram Scott, who enrolled in one of the first project-based courses taught in our writing program. Hyram was twenty-four years old when he entered the university. As a result of his scores on a placement test, he was required to take English 0990, Basic Writing II, before moving on to English 1010, first-year writing. Like many of the students enrolled in BW courses, Hyram initially expressed concerns about his ability to write papers for a college English class. In our discussions, Hyram stated that as a child he had been diagnosed with dyslexia and had been homeschooled or what he referred to as "no schooled" for most of his elementary and secondary school years. While Hyram's education had been rich experientially, he was anxious about his ability to write for the university. He assumed that he would be asked to write academic essays and research papers and that his

writing would be judged primarily on his ability to demonstrate that he had mastered grammar and punctuation rules, a reasonable conclusion based on the assessment criteria used to place him in the course. His assessment of his own writing at the beginning of the semester, like that of many of the students participating in the study, was informed by an idea of correctness. While the assessment determining students' placement and Hyram's understanding at the time of what it means to write in a composition classroom reflected a notion of writing as primarily representational, a thing to be assessed as either effective or not, his relationship to writing began to shift early in the semester.

Following a series of writing assignments designed to facilitate *transfer from* versus *transfer to*,[12] Hyram took the opportunity to draw on his personal history and current interests and his experience. A few years prior to enrolling in the university, Hyram, along with some other bike enthusiasts, decided to open a do-it-yourself repair shop for area residents and organize a local bike collective with a group of like-minded friends. Ultimately, Hyram chose to draw on his experience founding the collective and developing literacies as a community organizer. He chose to work on a project to persuade the city to install more bike racks in the downtown area.

For students, in general, an individual project, such as the one Hyram selected, functions as an organizing principle, an overall assemblage setting the conditions for what counts as vital for the writing space. Within the context of thoughtfully chosen individual projects, students' histories and everyday experiences emerge as the necessary equipment needed to write well. For students and instructors, what it means to be a proficient writer then begins to shift radically.

"Good Writing" in Context

In the context of a project-based FYW course, "good writing" includes writing that helps the student think more critically about the social, rhetorical, and political nature of writing. "Good writing," although not always presented in a coherent and linear fashion, is writing that helps the student move forward in understanding the complexities inherent to writing in multiple contexts. It is writing that opens up new possibilities to the writer and the reader. To regard "good writing" as such does not dismiss altogether functional skills or skills needed for representing ideas—the capacity to take up a style suited to a particular audience and attend to the conventions of various genres—yet it does insist that what it means to write and to write well is a much more complex undertaking than what our disciplinary history maintains. What is

required, when writing is treated as an assemblage, is the necessary equipment for writing—"the processes, products, and acts" that constitute the overall assemblage (Hawk, "Reassembling" 83). For instance, Elena, a student whose mother was diagnosed with diabetes, had been present as her mother experienced symptoms, scheduled doctor's appointments, adjusted her diet, and treated the illness, and she knew firsthand the struggles and challenges that a family faces in this situation. And Marcus, a student who worked at a drug treatment center and self-identified as a recovering addict, was able to draw on his experience of becoming addicted to a substance, entering a treatment center, and struggling daily with the possibility of relapse. These experiences—the processes, products, and acts—that make up the assemblage are, in the context of a project-based writing classroom, the necessary paraphernalia for writing.

To illustrate what it means to regard writing as an assemblage and to examine more closely the writing space itself as a dialectical space in which the bits and pieces intersect, I include below a section from Hyram's first topic proposal (for the assignment, see Appendix A). As seen here, Hyram collects not only his past experiences, his knowledge about bikes, an acquired vocabulary, and previous writing (a mission statement), but also his desire to take up his subject and extend it, all of which set the conditions of possibility for further acts, processes, and products. He writes the following (italics mine):

> Since the beginning of 2011, I have been working with 6 other associates to create the Provo Bicycle Collective, *a non-profit organization* with the mission statement of *promoting cycling as an effective and sustainable form of transportation and as a cornerstone of a cleaner, healthier, and safer society.* The Collective *provides refurbished bicycles and educational programs to the community*, focusing on children and lower income households. Since forming this mission statement with the board of the Provo Bicycle Collective, I have wanted to broaden it to involve *local bicycle infrastructure* and how cycling affects local businesses in a positive way. I would like to propose the idea of bicycle racks being placed in downtown Provo. These racks would *promote a safer pedestrian and cycling environment as well as boost local economy* for businesses located near them.

What is evident in Hyram's writing is that he has seized an opportunity to draw from his past the acts (experience organizing the collective), processes (the construction of a mission statement), and products (the mission statement itself). His experience working with others to form the bike collective and create a mission statement for the collective emerges as a primary factor in selecting his topic. This history and all that constitutes it not only inform his understanding

of bikes but also influence his current understanding of the social and political implications surrounding his chosen topic. At the sentence level, Hyram is able to draw on familiar phrases and vocabulary from his previous experience to articulate with clarity his ideas for proposing a topic he hopes to pursue in this class. At the same time, constraints, associated with mastery, fall to the wayside as he orients himself to writing about a topic that is of interest to him and connected to his past, to previous writing events, and to a community of people he interacts with outside the university. Hyram's project functions as the overall assemblage, setting the conditions for him to interpret his past experiences, acquired and familiar literacies, ideas and people, as significant or not to the writing that is taking place here and now. The writing itself is an assemblage, a gathering space, a site of accumulation for a necessary rerouting of resources into a project of consequence—self-development and ultimately sociocultural change.

While most writing studies scholars insist that "good writing" extends beyond functional literacy skills, it is common for instructors outside the field and students alike to express the sentiment that if they could simply master the rules of Standard English, they would be prepared for writing and learning across the disciplines. This perception is amplified in the BW classroom, often at the expense of providing opportunities for students to engage critical and political literacies, that is, literacies that enable a growth of genuine understanding in all of the spheres of social life in which they participate (Apple 42).

In service to critical and political literacies, students conduct secondary research and also engage with primary resources to understand better some of the problems surrounding their topics. In this context, in addition to writing to learn, instructors ask students to take up writing as a means for scheduling interviews with someone in their community who has firsthand knowledge about their topic, a peer or a community member who is a stakeholder. Students compile emails with the intention to effectively persuade contacts to meet with them and also to understand how their writing functions in other ways, such as to launch and support relationships and to establish identities. They develop interview protocols and questions to practice writing well-crafted questions and also to understand how writing is used to elicit precise information that can help them think more deeply about the issue.

Functional literacy skills play a part, but in the project-based classroom such skills are subordinate to the critical and political literacies that constitute good writing in a given context. As part of this research unit, it is not unusual

for students to come in contact with people, ideas, and experiences that challenge their long-held assumptions and extend their thinking. For example, Jim, a student who volunteered as a youth football coach, arranged to interview a professional football player whom he had befriended some years ago. In his interview, Jim asked questions about how seriously professional coaches and players treated concussions. This led to a deeper understanding of the economic factors at play and ultimately concerted thought about how the culture of professional sports informed attitudes and expectations for youth leagues. Elena, the young woman whose mother has been diagnosed with diabetes, discovered after careful research with members of her family that there was an increase in diabetes within her Hispanic community. Eventually she chose a project targeting this local audience.

For Hyram, the research component facilitated important encounters with audiences who, if not resistant to his ideas, certainly complicated them. Hyram's original idea was to persuade the city to install more bike racks, but after researching the topic, he discovered that what he believed was a solution to a simple problem—not enough racks and a city resistant to purchasing them—was, in fact, a problem much more complicated than he assumed. At the start of his research, Hyram located articles through secondary research, confirming his initial assertion that the city needed more bike racks and that the installation of bike racks was good for business, two points that he believed settled any counterargument that the city might pose. If Hyram were simply writing an argument paper, he would set about making claims and organizing his resources to demonstrate his ability to build a well-supported argument. Yet instead, Hyram engages in a series of writing assignments designed to help him question his assumptions. To begin, Hyram compiles a list of interview questions that he believes will help him understand the problem on a deeper level. As a result of his interview, Hyrum discovers that convincing the city to install more bike racks is a project that unsuccessfully had already been attempted by others. He writes of this experience in an assignment that asks him to report on his research (for the assignment, see Appendix B). The writing itself functions as a dialectical space wherein Hyram begins to transect and overlap previously held perceptions with new information, new ideas, and new perceptions about what constitutes the problem. As Hyram writes in his report:

> Originally when I thought of a way to solve the issue of not having bike racks downtown, I was thinking I would do a presentation to the Downtown Alliance myself, as a citizen showing maybe a Pros and Cons list, a survey of local businesses

> or a cost effective way of going about it, but after speaking to Zac [the person Hyram chose to interview] that all changed. When I sat down with Zac, I asked him what he had done so far. He had done the meetings with the city, met with design companies and gotten a rack design the city liked, so I then had a little break down thinking to myself, "Shit, he did my project already." As the interview went further I asked, "What's the biggest problem you're facing with the city and why hasn't it moved forward?" "Money!" he said simply. "The city sees the data and all the facts, but they are so focused on the right now and how much it will cost, they don't see that bicyclist are one customer Provo can steal from Wal-Mart." This opened my mind to a whole new project: a fundraiser and social media campaign involving the community. To find out more about how bicycle racks could affect my local community/economy, I looked to some preliminary research I had done. One article I found was from two gentlemen in Germany who focused on analyzing social networks involving bicycles and the bicycle infrastructures the cities had put in place to support those networks. These cities did not have much bicycle use in them until the cities took the initiative to change the way they looked at transportation. What the article shows is that having a strong bicycle infrastructure is dependent on a strong social network of people using bikes.

As noted, Hyram not only gains a deeper understanding of the problem, but he also takes the opportunity in the context of the writing space to draw new conclusions. He renegotiates previous assumptions, accepts some of what the person being interviewed says, and then apportions, rejects, and reconstructs this information. For Hyram, the realization that his original idea had been proposed previously but had failed to be approved forces him to think more critically about why the arguments he had planned to put forth had not succeeded in the past and to ponder what other factors might be contributing to the problem. A close reading reveals that the person whom Hyram interviews sees the problem as both a matter of economics and a failure of imagination on the part of the city. Importantly, Hyram uses the writing space to renegotiate assumptions that the problem is solely economic and takes up the interviewee's suggestion that it is a failure of imagination. Hyram reassembles his ideas within the writing space, ultimately concluding that a "strong bicycle infrastructure is dependent on a strong social network of people using bikes." Such an insight would have been unlikely had the curriculum situated writing as primarily a conduit for building a strong argument and effectively expressing ideas.

In a more traditional classroom, students conduct research and, more often than not, focus on gathering resources as ammunition to oppose counterarguments. Research and the resulting writing that takes place in the context of a project and an understanding of writing as assemblage treat the writing

space as a dialectical space wherein the conditions are set to contemplate, reevaluate, and renegotiate assumed realities. Hyram's new understanding of the political and social implications at work help him move forward with his project, shift his focus, and gather the necessary equipment to stave off the naive and unsupported assumptions that often mark student writing in a more traditional course.

Writing in the context of assemblage asks the student to regard writing as relevant to identifiable purposes and particular audiences. Within the writing space itself, Hyram has a chance to come face-to-face with the inherent complexities of his writing project and to see "good writing" as a multifarious and contingent response to constantly shifting rhetorical, social, and political realities. Hyram writes:

> After doing my interview and looking at my research in a slightly different light, I was able to hone in on my project and shape it to what I feel will be a success . . . I am starting to devise my plans for the social media campaign and setting up brainstorming sessions for fundraising ideas. If I can lock all of that down and get the community behind it, I feel like the city will finally give us the go ahead to install the racks in Downtown Provo.

This reflection demonstrates the futility of teaching a writing process that would assume a writer can move seamlessly from one well-articulated point to the next without the kind of critical literacy that constitutes writing well in a given context. Writing as an assemblage calls into question any notion of a fixed and stable reality that proceeds organically from one distinct object to the next. It thwarts any illusions of linearity that would obscure writing's girth in relationship to the project. It inspires both faculty and students to experience the complexities of writing, to see it as a patchwork of ideas, a mosaic, a *becoming*.

As part of the final writing assignment in this project-based course, students use the research and writing completed thus far as resources for completing the final assignment, a research-based proposal (see Appendix C). The proposal aims to garner support from an individual or organization interested in sponsoring the student's project. As part of the research unit, students use writing to both assemble and represent ideas. They report on their experiences, experimenting with academic conventions for incorporating quotes and referencing outside sources. They write annotated bibliographies, summarizing their secondary research. They learn about signal phrases and other strategies common to the university for referencing scholars and their works, and they

consider effective approaches for appealing to targeted readers. The final assignment, the proposal, asks students to consider the rhetorical nature of the proposal, to draw on what is by now a clear understanding of their purpose and what they've learned about their audience and their expectations, and to apply what they have learned in their study of writing to accomplish an identifiable objective. Students write a well-researched proposal to a sponsor, requesting funds, space, labor, or in some cases simply permission to move forward with the desired project. The proposal is also an assemblage. It includes not only traces of past events, memories, and people who are important to them, but also bits and pieces of the writing that they have completed throughout the course, sections from their annotated bibliographies and research reports. Students make decisions about their writing, with a clear understanding of how their writing connects and plugs into the overall assemblage. For instance, for his final project, Jim, the football coach, developed a clear understanding of his purpose and a complex understanding of the economic forces at play, and he decided to create a video for coaches and the young players they worked with. To inform this very specific audience about the risks of concussions so that they could make well-informed decisions on the spot, Jim created a fifteen-minute video in which he incorporated video clips of players who had been injured. He wrote his proposal to the school board requesting permission to present his video. Elena, whose mother struggled with diabetes, decided to create a brochure focused on preventing diabetes versus providing information about diabetes. She decided to write her proposal to a local health department in her Hispanic community, requesting permission to distribute the literature. And Hyram, in response to his research, ultimately organized a music festival to promote the bike culture in his community.

While initially students write to assemble their thoughts and formulate new ideas, it is in the proposing of the project that strategies and conventions begin to gain value. As is often the case, when writing has genuine purpose, students are eager to know more about the conventions of particular genres and how best to use outside resources to appeal to specific audiences. They are eager to locate second readers and editors who can help them polish their work for these audiences. Because the writing takes place in the immediate context of projects designed by the students, they engage with writing in a more complex way. Writing is experienced as a human activity inherently connected to the realities in which students are already engaged. What Hyram and other students gain from such a course is a deeper understanding of writing as relevant to those moments of literacy learning that encompass their everyday lives.

What Counts as Effective Pedagogy

As instructors of writing begin to shift their orientation toward thinking about writing as an assemblage, there looms the question of what constitutes "good writing" and what counts as effective pedagogy. As students and instructors shift away from a focus on organization to a focus on composition and the parts that comprise and meet in the writing space, relevancy and contingency take center stage in our understanding of what counts for good writing. The measure of our writing is determined by the degree to which it connects to other assemblages. Herein, literacies, the practices and processes by which we read and write the world, old and new, function as assets, contributing to what it means to be a proficient writer across multiple contexts.

This new understanding of what it means to study writing and what it means to write well reshapes our understanding of what counts as effective pedagogy. In the postcomposition classroom, we might then imagine a new set of criteria for evaluating pedagogy:

- To what degree do our methods and practices contribute to notions of literacy that afford access, and in what ways does it begin to disrupt notions of a singular and autonomous literacy and a notion of under-preparedness that would deny it?
- In what ways do assignments facilitate the transfer of previously acquired literacies, knowledge, skill, and experience to the writing being done in the classroom today?
- How well do assignments facilitate a notion that writing is relevant to the cares and interests of the student and how well do they shelter and facilitate ownership of the student's writing?
- How well do assignments, materials, and activities encourage students to take up writing as a dialectical space of critical inquiry, intersection, and transformation?
- In what way do assignments assist students in producing writing that has consequence—self-development and sociocultural change?
- In what ways do our methods and practices help students carry forward their writing and what they learn about writing, about the subject matter, the context in which their writing happens, and its consequences?

In examining pedagogy rooted in a notion of writing space, as more than a conduit for expressing ideas, we come to value new outcomes, which in our urgency to "prepare the underprepared" we have dismissed as irrelevant. The project model outlined in this essay sets the conditions for students to transfer previously acquired literacies, engage in purposeful inquiry, intersect their ideas with the ideas of others, and recognize that writing is relevant and contingent—a complex, fundamentally rhetorical, social, and political undertaking. Project writing involves investing in and aligning a multitude of activities, all of which involve some form of rhetorical negotiation, leading to a pragmatic end.

The project model outlined in this essay sets the conditions for students to transfer previously acquired literacies, engage in purposeful inquiry, intersect their ideas with the ideas of others, and recognize that writing is relevant and contingent—a complex, fundamentally rhetorical, social, and political undertaking.

The curriculum presented in this essay is but one of many pedagogies that assist in revisioning FYW. And as such, I want to conclude here with a nod to the possibles, a quote from Dobrin, taken from the text *Postcomposition*, in which he heralds a call for a new understanding of what it means to study writing in a postcomposition world. He writes:

> *Postcomposition* is a call to resistance, to a rewriting of what *We* do, of how *We* think about writing and about how *We* define the spaces We occupy. Postcomposition might be thought of as Leibnizian possible, in that there are more possibles than actuals. Possibles emerge on the edge of chaos, and the difficulty comes in the willingness to step a little closer into chaos. Possibles strive toward becoming actuals, but without engaging possibles, we stand little chance of altering the conditions of composition studies' actuals. (191)

The FYW classroom highlighted in this essay speaks to the possibles not only for curricula and pedagogy, but also for new definitions of proficiency, fresh criteria for what counts as effective pedagogy and importantly the burgeoning writing theories that a theory of the writing space as dialectical space gives rise to. Instead of imagining the classroom as a liminal space, wherein the underprepared practice the contracts and concords of the academy, we have invented a place in which acquired literacies are taken up examined, defined, modified, challenged, accepted, sometimes rejected, but always already in the process of becoming. We have treated the writing space as not simply a place to practice conventions, to test one's theories and interpretations on other humans; but rather, it is a place where students draw on and intersect acquired

literacies with new literacies and do that most important work, "express worlds" (Hawk "Reassembling" 77).

Paradoxically, in terms of postcomposition, I've begun this essay with a focus on writing pedagogy. Yet in alignment with arguments associated with the work of Dobrin, Rice, and Vastola and others, my purpose has been to consider the possibles when we approach the study of writing, rejecting theories of writing informed by a notion that the purpose of FYW is to teach the underprepared. Instead I have begun with an assumption that what is characteristic about these students is that they are engaged in a complex dialectical process, negotiating movement to and from their home community and university, across the university, across first and second languages, and across academic, professional, and personal/social spaces: college classrooms, workspaces, and home. The students that make up our FYW and BW classrooms are not unlike any other individuals who encounter on a daily basis an opportunity to take up writing for meaningful purpose and experience moments of literacy learning as often as they encounter the shifting realities that make up their everyday lives. In lieu of an imagined exigency to make literate the illiterate, the project-based curriculum highlighted here, as well as curricula that underscore multigenre writing practices, places at the center an individual project that the student deems worthy to pursue, and, as such, the project acts as a catalyst for writing and pursuing the study of writing. What emerges is a new theory of the writing space, one that insists that writing is a messy and difficult undertaking, especially messy for FYW and BW instructors who regard the writing space as a place to work out the possibles. It is in this space that we can begin to regard writing as more than representation and rather as an assemblage, constituted by other assemblages, relocated, plugged in, and fixed to new and emerging assemblages—a dynamic evolving dialectical space, wherein ideas merge and emerge, assumptions about how the world works are revisited, and new realities are constructed.

Appendix A: Assignment: Dear Professor: Topics That Matter 1–2 pages

Audience: Your Instructor
Purpose: To identify a topic that matters
Genre: Letter/Proposal
Stance: Casual
Medium: Digital
Length: 1–2 pages

For this assignment, you will write a "Dear Professor" letter, discussing how you first became interested in the topic you've chosen to pursue in the next unit.

Using some of the methods that were discussed in this class—listing, brainstorming, connecting with others, and surfing the Internet— you have now identified a broad topic of interest. For this assignment, consider why you are interested in the topic; what you already know about this topic; what more you want to know about it; and what ideas you have for a project. If you haven't yet made a firm decision, this assignment should help you move forward in making a decision.

The topic proposal is meant to help you identify a topic that you want to pursue—one that is worth the time, thought, and energy required of you as you see this topic through to establishing a problem relevant to the issue and ultimately proposing a project that has the potential to contribute to solving the problem. Your topic should be particularly meaningful to you and worth pursuing in that it is in some way relevant to others.

Be sure to use some of the developing narrative skills you've been practicing to tell your story. Part of what you want to do here is to provide some context for helping me understand why this topic is important to you. You'll be using appeals to pathos to introduce your topic—for example, providing a short anecdote that convinces me that this is indeed a topic worth pursuing. You will also have an opportunity to think critically about a problem that is associated with this topic.

For This Assignment:

1. Begin by writing a short paragraph that shows why you are interested in this topic. Draw on your narrative skills and tell a story, one that demonstrates your interest in this particular issue. Avoid an introduction that starts with "I'm interested in this topic, because . . ." or "My topic is . . ." Instead, use your skills as a writer/artist to do some rhetorically savvy work, here.
2. Next, consider what you know already about your topic and what you would like to know.
3. Finally, what is the problem associated with this topic that you believe should be addressed? You may want to include here a problem statement, such as "I believe it's a problem that . . ."

Appendix B: Assignment: The Research Report

Audience: Your Instructor
Purpose: To reflect and report on your research
Genre: Research Report
Stance: Formal
Medium: Digital
Length: 3–4 pages

For this assignment, you will report on your interview and your library research. The purpose of the research conducted thus far is to help you gain insights in developing a worthwhile and effective project—one that serves a specific purpose for a particular audience. That said, you will want your report to demonstrate your ability to use the information that you gained from your research to do just that.

Organizing Your Research Report: Include Headings in Your Report

Introduction:

1. Begin by introducing your topic; you might say a few words about why you are interested in your topic. (You may use information that you included in previous assignments. In many cases, you may be able to copy and paste sections.)
2. Write a short paragraph discussing the project
    a. Briefly discuss the problem that you want to solve or the need you want to meet.
    b. Describe the project that you believe would address this problem or meet the need.
    c. Identify the audience—that is, who is it that your project is reaching out to?

Literature Review

Write a couple paragraphs about the research that you've located pertaining to this topic. You must include content about your library sources.

1. Write a short paragraph or two discussing the library research you've completed in preparation for the proposal. You may use whole sections from your annotated bibliography in this section. Identify the article or articles that were most helpful and state why. Is there a story, a statistic, or a quote that you can use in the writing of your proposal, either to introduce your topic or to establish a need?
2. (Optional) Write one or two paragraphs on what you gained from the Internet search. What websites were helpful to you? Be specific; for instance, what can you use from the website either to support a claim you are making about the problem or a potential solution to the problem. Perhaps you've found a website that addresses a problem similar to the one that you are considering. How might you use this resource in writing your proposal? Perhaps it includes leads to other resources, categorizes and organizes in a way that is helpful to you, or contains information that you would want to include in your project.

Methods: Field Research

Write about your interview and any other methods of research that you used, such as a survey or a field observation. Identify the person that you chose to speak with; why you chose this person; and what you were hoping to accomplish in talking with this

person. Write two or three paragraphs on what you gained from your interview. What did you learn in your discussion that helped you think more critically about the problem or rethink your project?

Support your claims that the interview was useful by providing evidence. You may want to reference the handout "Quote Sandwich" by Nancy Mack for help with incorporating quotations.

1. Provide context; state what question or questions you asked that turned out to be especially helpful.
2. Quote the person you interviewed, stating how he or she responded to your question.
3. Explain how this statement helped you reconsider your problem or develop ideas for the project.

Conclusion

Write a final paragraph that describes how your project is evolving. You might make a few summarizing statements about how this project has changed as a result of your interview and the research you've conducted on the Internet.

Include a Works Cited page, referencing the sources cited in your research report.

Appendix C: Assignment: The Project Proposal

Audience: Your Choice
Purpose: To request funds, permission, labor, support
Genre: Proposal
Stance: Formal
Medium: Digital
Length: 4–6 pages

For this final assignment you will gather together the various ideas, resources, research, and experiences relevant to your topic to write a project proposal (4 to 6 pages). Your audience will be someone who you believe might be willing to sponsor your project in one way or another. Your objective is to convince this person or persons that your project is worthwhile and worthy of their sponsorship.

The following are some examples of sponsors to whom former students have written their proposals:

- A board of directors of a community center to request space
- A university administrator, to ask permission to distribute flyers
- The city council, to request the opportunity to present
- A professor, to propose a final project, a research paper
- A grant-awarding committee, to request funds to conduct research

Your first draft will consist of three parts aimed at introducing and outlining the need for the project. Later you may want to provide additional information to make your argument stronger and explain in more detail your plans for the project.

Topic Section: Introduce your topic with a story or a statement about the topic that appeals to one or more of the following:

- An appeal to pathos: A short story about you or someone else that illustrates the importance of this issue
- An appeal to logos: A statement, fact, or statistic that illustrates the significance of this topic
- An appeal to ethos: A quotation from a relevant and credible person—preferably an author or study the sponsor would respect (an expert, someone with experience with this topic, a reference to research)

Problem: Write a bit about what you see as a potential problem related to your topic. This problem is the exigency for the project. In other words, it forms the bases (the urgent need that calls for a response of some sort) for why your project is needed.

Make a claim about the problem—a rationale for the project you are proposing and support this statement with information from outside resources.

For example:
In the article, "Skiing Is for Kids," author Michael Jones states, "Children are capable of learning to ski soon after they begin to walk, and by elementary school students who have been introduced to the sport early show interest." Jones's statement suggests that it is not an inability to learn or a lack of interest, but that few children have been exposed to the sport.

Project: Finally, write a bit about how you would like to contribute to addressing this issue. Will you create a brochure; write a radio script; write an article for the newspaper; write a research paper; design a research study; develop a presentation? Be sure to include some mention of the audience for this project and what will they stand to gain.

For Example:
"I'd like to contribute to meeting this need/solving the problem by developing/ creating/ composing/ writing _____."

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Notes

1. The term *basic writer*, for the purposes of this article, references students who by either self-placement or standardized testing are enrolled in a first-year composition course. This includes those courses categorized as basic writing, English as a second language, and first-year writing.

2. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, scholarship emerging from across disciplines including the fields of psychology and anthropology posited what we've now come to regard as *cultural deficit models* to explain discrepancies in student achievement. These models have their roots in the concept of a *culture of poverty*, first coined by Oscar Lewis in 1959 in an ethnography entitled "Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty." Such work situated some groups more than others as *culturally deficient*. Based on the recognition that some parents and the communities in which the children lived did not instill the same values and experiences that white middle-class families provide for their children, the authors argued that these children and their families could be identified as culturally disadvantaged and deficient. In 1971, anthropologist Eleanor Burke Leacock challenged this hypothesis in an edited collection, titled *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique.* Leacock argued that the assertion was untestable and that the notion of a culture of poverty itself contributed to sustaining poverty.

3. In his 2011 text *Postcomposition,* Dobrin insists that writing theory and research has been too much influenced by the pedagogical imperative to teach the subject to write (190). Writing theory and research born out of a study of writing itself, not bound to the disciplinary focus on improving writing proficiency, is the hallmark of postcomposition.

4. For more information on how the postpedagogy movement informs the classroom, see Paul Lynch's *After Pedagogy*.

5. The term *expression* as it is used here is in reference to what Joshua C. Hilst refers to in his 2012 essay, "Deleuze: (Neo)Expressivism in Composition," in which he writes, "The goal is not to reveal or discover a true self, but to see what emerges, what might be trying to express itself" (par. 2).

6. In her well known text, *Literacy in American Lives* and other related articles, Brandt examines what she calls *sponsors of literacy*, highlighting the processes by which systemic forces both underwrite and withhold literacy. Underscoring the material conditions that inform a literacy, Brandt makes associations between

"literate skill and social viability," radical shifts in technology, "persistent inequities in access and reward," and what she identifies as those elements "related to structural conditions in literacy's bigger picture" ("Sponsors" 165).

7. In *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*, Raúl Sánchez challenges the idea that writing is chiefly a means for representing ideas, "a technology of representation," and situates writing as not merely a component of culture but culture itself (61).

8. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Deleuze and Guattari speak of an assemblage as a gathering into a single context any number of things or pieces of things. Early in their text, Deleuze and Guittarri offer up the book itself as an example of an assemblage. The book as described by the authors, is a tangling of discrete parts, bits, and pieces (4).

9. Understanding writing as contingent, situated, interpreted and public is an idea that gained currency with the post process movement and has been examined more deeply in recent works by posthumanist writer, Byron Hawk. Hawk in his chapter "Reassembling Postprocess: Toward a Posthuman Theory of Public Rhetoric" and in his text *A Counter-History of Composition: Toward Methodologies of Complexity*, forwards a posthumanist theory of writing, which insists on decentralizing the human subject and treating the human as not central to but part of a complex rhetorical system.

10. Killpatrick believed that central to this approach was heartfelt experience on the student's part. Project-based methods were in his words "any instance of purposeful activity" wherein "an inner urge" fixes the aim of action; guides its processes; and furnishes its drive—and the students' "inner motivation" (Helle, Tynjälä, and Olkinuora 295).

11. The research presented references a larger qualitative study in which students who had completed the project-based course were interviewed. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with ten students enrolled in three separate project-based courses and seven faculty members who had taught at least one semester of the project-based course. The study took place over approximately twelve months. Students who participated in the study all completed the course within a year of the study and had received a passing grade. Researchers initiated the study, using a grounded theory method to examine what students and instructors stood to gain from a curriculum rooted in writing theory that dismissed the pedagogical imperative to prepare students for their next writing class, per se. Questions elicit general responses to the course overall, the students' attitudes toward writing going in, their level of engagement with writing assignments, reactions to choosing topics, their experiences writing in the context of a project chosen by them. This essay draws on this research and my experience in the classroom working closely with one of the students who participated in the study.

12. The expression *transfer from* versus *transfer to* refers to the field's current focus on whether students demonstrate a capacity to transfer skill and knowledge practiced in one course to a future course. An emphasis on transferring knowledge and skill to the next course places the onus on the student alone to make these connections. Contrary to a focus on *transferring to*, a focus on *transferring from* takes into consideration the central role that context, curriculum, methodology, and assessment plays in providing opportunities for students to take up previous experience, acquired literacies, and skill in a way that is meaningful in a new context.

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Jacqueline Preston

Jacqueline Preston is an assistant professor in the Department of Basic Composition at Utah Valley University. She is a contributor to the forthcoming *Class in Composition: Working Class and Pedagogy* and to *Working Writing Programs: A Reference of Innovations, Issues, and Opportunities.* Most recently, with Joshua C. Hilst, she has coauthored *The Write Project: A Concise Rhetoric for the Writing Classroom.*