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WHAT IS COLLEGE-LEVEL WRITING? -
THE COMMON GROUND FROM WHICH A NEW SECONDARY –
POST SECONDARY COMPOSITION PARTNERSHIP CAN BE
FORMED

by

NANCY JANE BERGER
B.S. University of Central Florida, 2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Rhetoric and Composition
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

In the Introduction to What is “College-Level” Writing?, editors Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg state that the title asks “one of the most important questions in our profession” (xiii). However, even after 418 pages of essays written from the perspectives of high school teachers, college instructors, students, and administrators, the answer remains elusive because college-level writing does not, in fact, start in college - it starts in high school - where high school teachers believe they are instilling in their college-bound students the writing skills required by post-secondary institutions. The students, meanwhile, show up in first-year composition classes to find not only have they not been prepared for college-level writing, they haven't the faintest idea what college-level writing is.

Our students have more writing demands on them now than ever before -- both in and outside of academia -- what past CCCC president, Douglas D. Hesse, terms “obliged” and “self-sponsored” writing (349). The job market has gone global and careerism is a reality for the college graduates of today. Yet, college writing instruction represents the last chance students have to learn the rhetorical traditions behind the writing skills, along with the realization that without an understanding of process and purpose, the products they do produce will never reach full potential. It is this seemingly dichotomic relationship between the "global village" job market and the rhetorical tradition that has created the exigence for this research.

This study examines twelfth grade English and first-year college composition instruction from the three perspectives comprising the College Writing Contact Zone rhetorical triangle (practitioners-professional organizations-textbooks). Following the model of analysis used by Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg in What is “College-Level” Writing, essays and articles written by high school teachers and first-year composition instructors involved in the “what is college-level writing?” conversation are discussed, examining each for the common threads running throughout their different viewpoints. The curricula at both the 12th grade high school and first-year college levels is also researched, in light of the mandates instituted by the professional organizations of the discipline (the NCTE and CCCC). Specifically examined are the roles these respective professional organizations played in the evolution of 12th grade high school English classes and the first-year college composition course, as we know them today. Finally, the textbooks, which inform the curricula of 12th grade high school English and first-year college composition, are investigated in regards to scope and sequence, assumptions, and authorship. The learning theories driving the textbooks are then used to construct the definition of college-level writing from the perspective of textbook publishers.

The answer to the “What is college-level writing?” question emerging from this research is not what one might expect. College-level writing, as an entity, does not exist because college-level writing is the *result* of college-level discourse literacy. Since first year college students must step outside their *comfort zone* into Pratt’s *contact zone*, perhaps, “instead of asking how to make

high school writing prepare students for college writing . . .” we should be asking what [discourse] literacy looks like”(Thompson 80). Making students aware of the different discourse communities in existence at the college level (Hesse’s self-sponsored and obliged) is the first step in their being able to learn what writing is considered appropriate within each discourse community.

What is needed is a new paradigm in the form of a transitional composition class that cultivates students as critically thinking writers who are the experts of their own thoughts and ideas. Whether this class belongs in the twelfth grade curriculum or the first-year college curriculum needs to be determined, but its absence is the missing link responsible for the non-transference of writing skills from the high school to the college level, as well as the non-transference of writing skills beyond the first-year composition class within academia.

Our high schools, recognizing the fact that all of their twelfth grade English students are not going on to college, teach the writing skills and reading analyses needed for post-secondary school life – whatever that may be. First-year composition instructors assign their essays and research papers expecting their students to already be well-versed in the self-sponsored and obliged discourses of the academy – but they are not. The contact zone is created and the conflict begins because students need to access those discourses if they are to start creating self-sponsored knowledge of their disciplines. It is this ‘knowing,’ this created knowledge, that transforms our students into *writers*; the writers for whom we are the stewards.

To Jerry, who makes all things possible.

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Dr. Young first introduced me to Composition instruction during my undergraduate studies, in my capacity as one of her writing consultants at the University Writing Center. She has remained involved and supportive throughout my academic career at UCF.

My research topic and questions were developed in Dr. Jones' Research and Bibliography class. Under his expert tutelage, born out of vast research experience, he showed me how to focus my topic and introduced me to the research tools available.

Dr. Bell is my mentor, and someone whom I am also proud to call a friend. Her unwavering expectations of excellence resulted in my own desire to settle for nothing less than my personal best. In the creation of my own knowledge, she has gently nudged me in the directions I needed to go, and was there to catch me and show me the way back whenever I wavered off my path.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|------|--|
| CCCC | Conference on College Composition and Communication |
| FCAT | Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test |
| FYC | First-year Composition |
| GTA | Graduate Teaching Assistant |
| NCLB | No Child Left Behind |
| NCTE | National Council of Teachers of English |
| SSS | Sunshine State Standards |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the Introduction to What is “College-Level” Writing?, editors Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg state that the title asks “one of the most important questions in our profession” (xiii). However, even after 418 pages of essays written from the perspectives of high school teachers, college instructors, students, and administrators, the answer remains elusive because college-level writing does not, in fact, start in college – it starts in high school - where high school teachers believe they are instilling in their college-bound students the writing skills required by post-secondary institutions. The students, meanwhile, show up in first-year composition classes to find not only have they not been prepared for college-level writing, they haven’t the faintest idea what college-level writing is. And so, despite the good intentions of all parties involved, it is easy to see why the first-year college writing course has been labeled a “site of conflict since its very inception at Harvard in the late-nineteenth century, with debates over the nature and function of the course continuing up to the present day” (Durst 1).

Our students have more writing demands on them now than ever before – both in and outside of academia - what past CCCC president, Douglas D. Hesse, terms “obliged” and “self-sponsored” writing (349). The job market has gone global and careerism is a reality for the college graduates of today. Yet, college writing instruction represents the last chance students have to learn the rhetorical traditions behind the writing skills, along with the realization that without an understanding of process and purpose, the products they do produce will never

reach full potential. It is this seemingly dichotomic relationship between the "global village" job market and the rhetorical tradition that has created the exigence for this research.

College-level writing perceptions of high school teachers and first-year college composition instructors are examined in this study, always searching for the commonalities among our differences when it comes to answering the question, "what is college-level writing?" By identifying those commonalities, and addressing the remaining differences, a blueprint for a new secondary – post secondary partnership can emerge in support of college-level writing that is defined, and understood, by educators from both sides of the writing chasm.

The Composition Contact Zone "Rhetorical Triangle"

The "contact zones" inherently existent in the first-year composition class are one component of Durst's "sites of conflict." "Contact zones," an anthropologic term coined by Mary Louis Pratt in her 1990 MLA keynote address, describes the space where students and instructors "meet, clash, and grapple with each other" in the context of the asymmetrical relationship of power existent in any classroom (4). A contact zone is created whenever a dominant culture and a subservient culture must exist within the same social space. This "power differential" is even more apparent in the first-year composition class because of the 'perfect storm' conditions residing within its confines (Wolff xiv). First-year college students want to pass through the door of academic discourse, and it is their college composition instructor who is the gatekeeper.

In essence, first-year students must learn to navigate two rhetorical triangles. The first, has ancient roots in the fourth-century B.C.E. teachings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle who taught rhetoric as an oral art. Also called the “Aristotelian triad”, the relationship between the audience, the rhetor (writer or speaker), and the subject is illustrated. In written rhetoric, once the purpose and the exigence is determined, “the rhetorical triangle suggests that a person creating or analyzing a text must consider three elements:

The subject and the kinds of evidence used to develop it; the audience – their knowledge, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs; [and] the character of the rhetor – in particular, how the rhetor might use his or her personal character effectively in the text” (Roskelly 6-7).

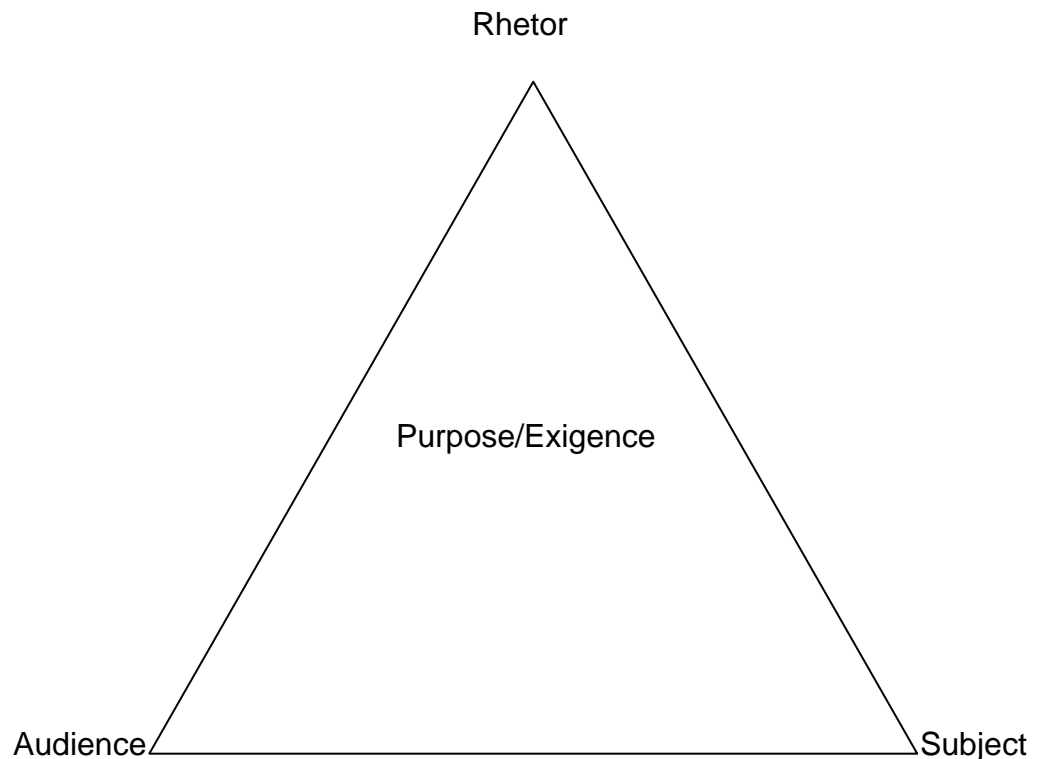


Figure 1 – “Aristotelian” Rhetorical Triangle

The first-year college student gains access to the Aristotelian triangle by passing through the “College Writing Contact Zone” triangle.

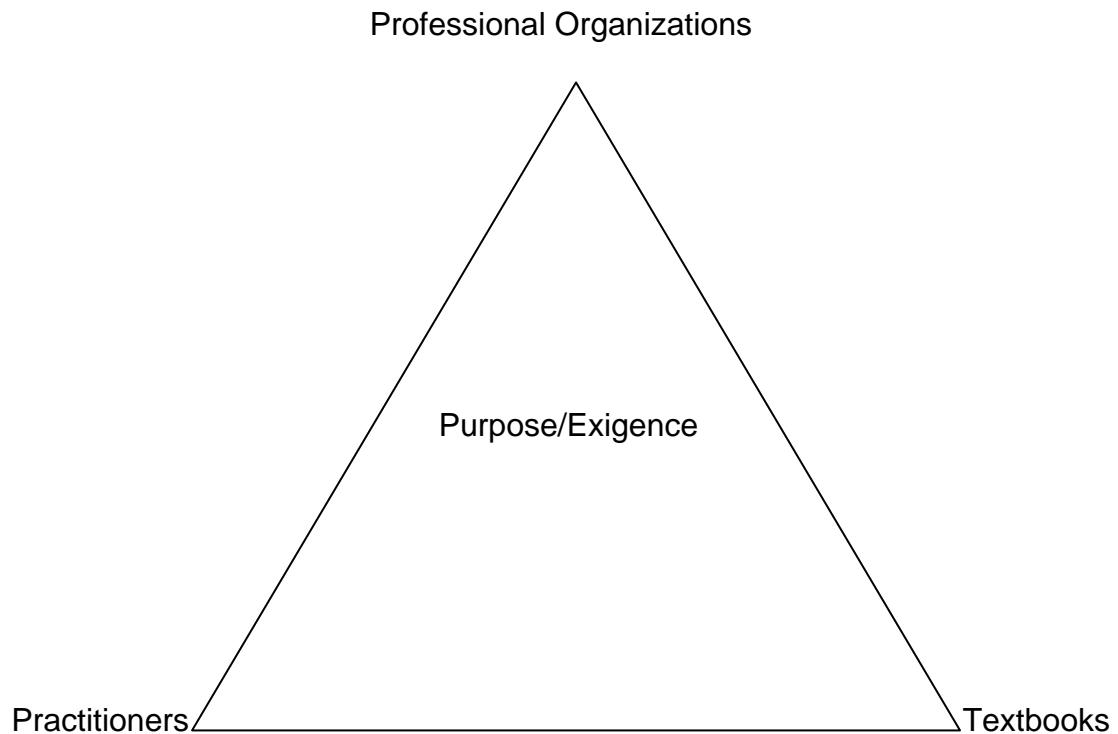


Figure 2 – “College Writing Contact Zone” Triangle

The first point of this triangle, the practitioners, is comprised of the high school English teachers of college-bound 12th grade students and first-year composition college instructors, both of whom have long struggled over curriculum boundaries. While each wants their curriculum to be recognized as separate from the other, high school teachers also voice frustration at what they see as the unwillingness of colleges to define the college-level writing for which they are expected to provide the scaffolding. They teach what they think college professors expect their students to know, but their students come back to them

complaining about having to accomplish writing in college not taught to them in high school.

College instructors are not unwilling, as much as they are unable, to give high school teachers the definitions they seek. The role of technology, visual rhetorical components, and multi-modalities in college composition, along with the careerist bent of many of today's college students, has muddied the rhetorical waters of college composition. When Douglas Hesse's "obliged" and "self-sponsored" student writing is taken into account, he answers his opening question of, "who owns writing?" by separating the *writing* from the *writer*. Hesse acknowledges it is the responsibility of composition instructors, backed by research and the best practices in their field, to act as stewards of *writers*, preparing them to take responsibility for their own writing, wherever, and for whatever, purpose.

Making up the second point of the College Writing Contact Zone rhetorical triangle are the professional organizations of the Practitioners, specifically the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). The history of these organizations reveals the reasoning behind the curricula taught by their respective members, while their professional organizations, committees, and member publications work to keep these curricula uniform and up-to-date.

Textbooks comprise the third point of the triangle, because it is through the textbooks that the underlying philosophy of the curriculum is applied. Investigated here is the definition of writing espoused within 12th grade high

school English textbooks as compared to those used by first-year college composition instructors.

When viewing each point of this College Writing Contact Zone rhetorical triangle within the context of the other two, a co-dependency becomes apparent. Just as the Aristotelian triangle represents the relationship between the audience, rhetor, and subject; so too do the practitioners teaching the composition curricula have a direct relationship to their professional organizations, as delineated by the course textbooks they use. By superimposing one rhetorical triangle upon the other, the research illuminates the interdependency between the Aristotelian triangle first-year college students aspire to understand and the College Writing Contact Zone triangle which represents the means by which they will acquire that understanding.

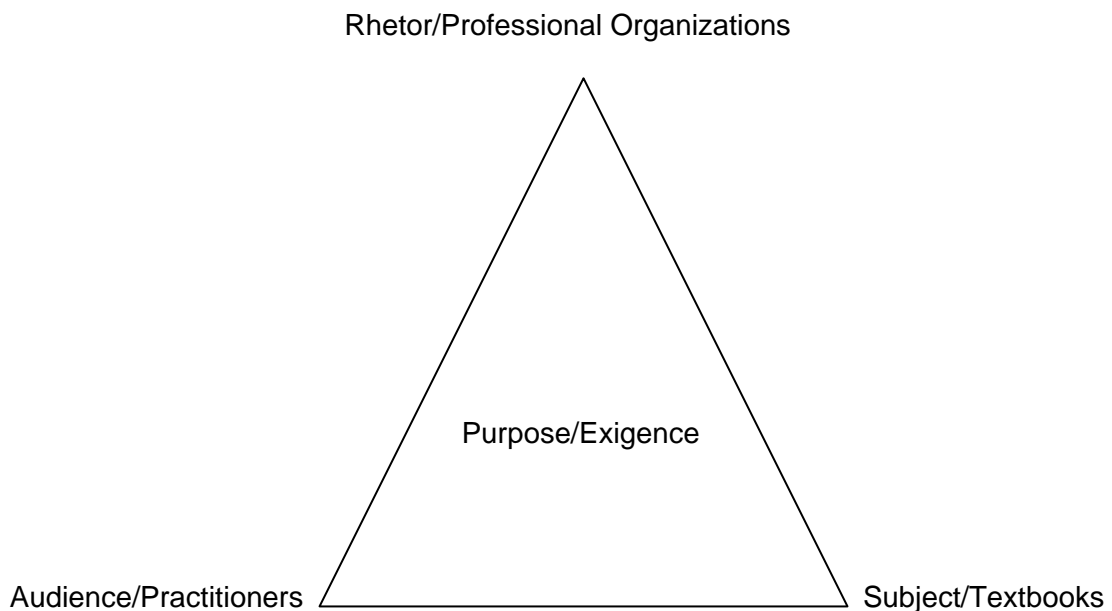


Figure 3 – Combined Rhetorical Triangle

In Conversation: Analysis of the Individual Voices

Following the model of analysis used by Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg in What is “College-Level” Writing?, Chapter Two will discuss essays and articles written by high school teachers and first-year composition instructors involved in the “what is college-level writing?” conversation, examining each for the common threads running throughout their different viewpoints. The results from this research will be synthesized to construct a definition of college-level writing from the perspective of writing practitioners.

Chapter Three will analyze the curricula at both the 12th grade high school and first-year college levels, in light of the mandates instituted by the professional organizations of the discipline (the NCTE and CCCC). This will involve researching what roles their respective professional organizations played in the evolution of 12th grade high school English classes and the first-year college composition course, as we know them today. Until we realize from whence we came, we can never chart a new course as to where it is we want to go.

In addition, Chapter Four will examine the textbooks which inform the curricula of 12th grade high school English and first-year college composition in regards to scope and sequence, assumptions, and authorship in Chapter Four. The learning theories driving the textbooks will be used to construct the definition of college-level writing from the perspective of textbook publishers.

The definitions of college-level writing that emerge from the three perspectives comprising the College Writing Contact Zone rhetorical triangle (practitioners-professional organizations-textbooks) will be discussed in Chapter

Five. How do the educators who are taking part in the “what is college-level writing?” conversation, represented by this research, define college-level writing? What are the perceptions of 12th-grade high school English teachers versus the expectations of first-year composition instructors? How have English and Composition professional organizations influenced textbook publishers, thus affecting writing curricula via the textbooks produced? The conclusions drawn from the research will delineate and support the possibilities for a new, 21st century secondary – post secondary composition partnership, based on a collaborative definition of college-level writing.

CHAPTER TWO: PRACTITIONERS

In Why Workshop?, Richard Bullock states it is the primary teachers who are “kindred spirits” to first-year composition teachers, and not the high school teachers, as one might imagine. He bases this observation on what he calls the “commonality of purpose among primary teachers and first-year writing teachers: both are helping neophytes learn how to survive in a new educational environment” (34).

Although it could be argued middle school teachers also “must initiate students into a new system,” he sees middle school teachers as picking up on the “[education] trend that starts in fourth grade and is full blown by ninth or tenth grade: an increasing emphasis on subject matter” (34).

Ironically, according to Bullock, high school teachers do not relate to first-year *composition* teachers because they more closely relate to their *literature* professors, “the ones who teach Shakespeare, Milton, Whitman, and Emerson” (34). To Bullock, the reason for this is simple, “In English, as in most subjects, 7-12 [grade] certification programs closely mirror traditional English (that is to say, *literature*) majors in their requirements, and most middle schools and high schools are structured according to subject, just as colleges are” (34). Although he does not go so far as to cite a specific quote, Bullock does write, “I’ve heard it said on more than one occasion that elementary teachers teach students, while college teachers teach subjects. Once again, secondary teachers are somewhere in between” (34).

High School English Teachers

Ideally, a high school English teacher has earned a bachelor's degree in an English language arts education program. The recipient of such a degree has successfully completed subject-matter courses in English Literature, American Literature, and Grammar studies, in addition to educational pedagogy. College courses in Rhetoric or Composition are not part of the required English Language Arts Education curriculum.

In reality, however, anyone with any type of bachelor's degree theoretically can teach at the high school or middle school level, using a temporary teaching certificate. A temporary certificate is issued with the understanding the applicant will complete the required educational pedagogy courses within a specified time-period, at which time they will be awarded a permanent Professional teaching certificate.

It is important to realize the high school English class is NOT considered a writing class. It is, in essence, a literature survey course; surveying literary genres and varying historical periods from around the world. Fiction, nonfiction, poetry, short stories, and drama are all read within the course of a school year or semester. In addition, grammar instruction, college prep, and a research report are also part of the prescribed curriculum. Most of the writing in a high school English class is writing based on, and in analysis of, the literature read.

There are also additional instructional demands on the high school English teacher. State-mandated curricula directly align to state and national achievement test scores. While counties and states establish prescribed

learning objectives, high school teachers determine the pedagogy used and skills taught in order for their students to reach those objectives. SAT prep, college applications, and achievement tests are all part of their daily lesson plans. In a schedule this varied, at the high school level writing is seen as a set of skills needing to be mastered, not a stand-alone subject of study. Mechanics, analytical syntax, rhetorical elements, and genre-based structure are all included in the college-prep skills repertoire. In fact, in regards to college-prep programs, it is a source of school pride to be able to say their graduates possess the *skills* necessary for college writing.

The form of choice in high school for the implementation of writing skills is the “essay,” a term used to loosely describe the analytical compositions or summary responses assigned in high school. Research reports, slightly longer in length than essays with annotated Bibliographies to document sources, are also utilized.

Merrill J. Davis teaches English at Armuchee High School in Rome, Georgia, in the same school system in which she has taught for twenty-seven years. A system which, she states, “now claims that students who complete their rigorous Honors College Preparatory program are ‘guaranteed to be ready for college’” (Sullivan 31). In order to meet this “guarantee,” what college-ready writing skills is Merrill Davis teaching? “I tell them what I *think* they should know and be able to do . . .” (31). To Davis, this includes mechanics, analytical skills, the ability to develop and support a specific idea in order to create a clear thesis,

organization, and transitions. After speaking with college professors in her town, she is also including voice and audience in her writing skills repertoire.

Grammar is a subject that is much up for debate in the high school arena. Original pedagogy espoused the teaching of grammar outside the context of writing pieces, often through the use of grammar worksheets. However, current studies published by both the NCTE and the NWP now show the teaching of grammar is only effective when viewed in the context of a writing piece. These two pedagogical approaches to grammar are not reconciled. Davis includes grammar as part of the writing “mechanics” she teaches because she has, “often printed out statements from colleges that tell of giving a grade no higher than a C to students who commit even one error, such as a sentence fragment, a run-on sentence, or a comma splice” (32).

Davis is not alone in the choice of writing skills she chooses to teach. She also is not alone when she states, “high school teachers constantly struggle with what to focus on with student writers. I have always thought that high school should give students a good foundation so that they can adapt to whatever comes their way in postsecondary education” – specifically, in regards to writing challenges (34); - a sentiment echoed again-and-again by high school English teachers.

The students of English teacher Jeanette Jordan, from Glenbrook North High School in Northbrook, Illinois, spend six-weeks during junior year on a research paper. In addition, she gives them “a good grasp of the basics of grammar and essay structure” and values “nonformulaic writing . . . to push our

students beyond the very limiting five-paragraph structure that they find so comforting and familiar” (38). Jordan states, “I plead with my students to learn the differences between phrases and clauses so that they can properly punctuate sentences” (37). She does this because “I sometimes tell myself that writers need to understand the traditional rules before they can learn a sense of how and when these rules can be broken” (37). Although she struggles with students who want “a single template that they can apply to all writing situations” (38) in regards to form, purpose, and audience, Jordan declares, “I am convinced that my students learn to be better writers, readers, and thinkers through their high school English experiences” (37).

At Sequoyah High School in Canton, Georgia, Milka Mustenikova Mosley (a fifteen year teaching veteran of high school English), does not agree with Jeanette Jordan - at all. She very clearly states, “In general, I would call high school writing *formulaic*” (58). To her, “high school-level writing is usually very predictable” because “high school students typically write mainly to conform” (59). Mosley has a very good reason for this, “our English classes are not composition classes, but are *surveys of literature classes*, mainly surveys of different genres of literature, but also surveys of World Literature, American Literature, and British Literature” (61). Study skills, vocabulary, and grammar are also taught, but within a “curriculum approved by our school boards because everything we do is closely monitored by standardized testing” (60). She further explains that writing time is lost in English classes due to disruptions that occur in addition to school-wide testing. These disruptions include assemblies, pep

rallies, discipline problems, and virtually any school-wide activity because “every student has an English class” (61). In short, when it comes to high school writing instruction, Mosely says, “we have too many students and too little time for grading, so we allow students to follow a formula to produce a product” (58).

To Anne Gere, Leila Christenbury, and Kelly Sassi, in their book Writing on Demand, secondary students “must learn to write effectively within a narrow window of time” (2). They state what is needed is “a real sense of fit between the writing that takes place in English class and the writing that successfully meets the criteria for on-demand tests” (7). Their belief is “good writing and writing on demand are not contradictory . . . [because] the essential skills that student writers need to craft effective prose – getting ideas, drafting, revising, editing, and working with sentence-level issues – are all part of an effective writing piece that will yield appropriate scores for on-demand writing tests” (5). They call being able to effectively write on demand “crucial skills for high school and college students, and it is imperative that we, their teachers, help them learn that skill” (5).

In the Handbook of Research on Writing, Charles Bazerman uses a James Berlin (1984) quote to identify what Bazerman calls “an assumption that continues to dominate instruction in secondary schools at the beginning of the 21st century,” namely, the “basic assumption [is] that effective writing is learned through examples of effective writing” (313). By comparing Applebee’s 1981 and 1984 studies of writing in American high schools with Hillocks’ 2002 study,

Bazerman further elucidates what comprises 21st century high school writing instruction.

Hillocks' study shows "students are writing far more than they did twenty years ago" (316). Teaching of the multiparagraph composition is a high school writing curriculum staple, with many districts focusing on the five-paragraph essay. Much time is spent on pre-writing and there is "greater attention to audience" (316). Seventy-eight percent of the language arts teachers interviewed by Hillocks, "used model pieces of writing" and sixty-four percent, "talked about revising as an important instructional technique" (316). Bazerman discovered, however, "an underlying similarity in the way writing is taught during the two periods [1980's vs. 2002]" – an assumption by both teachers and curriculum "makers" that "the knowledge necessary for effective writing is general knowledge of a few principles that are applicable to all or most writing" (316). It is assumed college-level writing would be included in the "all or most writing" description. The teaching of grammar is still important at the high school level, but Hillocks' study revealed "more than seventy percent held it as a secondary focus" (317).

T.S. Johnson and colleagues, in their 2003 study, found high school writing instruction "focused on highly specified and rigid forms of writing, not on learning strategies for examining the content, which might dictate form" (Smagorinsky 62). J.A. Langer's 2001 study, however, revealed six teaching strategies consistently found among "high performing" teachers of writing, whose

students obtained “higher achievement in English,” thereby making them the most college-ready writers (72).

Langer’s high performing teachers “use a combination of approaches to teaching skills . . . , integrate preparation for district- or statewide tests into the ongoing curriculum,” “overtly point[ed] out connections . . . among concepts and experiences within lessons,” “overtly [teach] their students strategies for organizing their thoughts and completing their tasks,” go “beyond students’ acquisition of the skills or knowledge to engage them in deeper understandings” and, finally, “create social contexts for learning” (73).

According to Smagorinsky, the reason high-performing writing teachers (those whose students are, presumably, college-level writers) are the exception rather than the norm, is because most secondary language arts teacher education programs “appear to present only the most general knowledge about writing, focusing instead on literature” (74). He quotes M.M. Kennedy (1998), who separates teacher education programs into two categories; traditional, “focusing on the mechanics of presenting lessons but largely ignoring subject matter” – and reform, “focusing on the subject matter” (74). “One might conclude,” writes Smagorinsky, “that colleges and universities simply do not prepare teachers for the teaching of writing, and therein lies the problem with writing in schools” (74). One does not need to carry this conclusion much further to be able to apply it as the reason for the dilemma of the high school teachers

already discussed here who are trying to discern which writing skills they should be teaching for college-level writing preparedness.

In Teaching the Best Practice Way, which is the follow up to their 1998 text, Methods That Matter: Six Structures for Best Practice Classrooms, Harvey Daniels and Marilyn Bizar state “the practices described in our first edition have grown and spread in American classrooms” (2). These practices include “peer-led literature circles,” “collaborative activities broadly endorsed by . . . the National Council for Teachers of English,” “thematic, integrative units,” “extended, interdisciplinary studies ,” and “strategic reading, or reading-as-thinking” (2). In their opinion, “reflective, student-driven forms of assessment are replacing traditional tests and quizzes, while conferences, rubrics, and portfolios are becoming new standard forms of evaluation” (2). They term these practices as working on student “*inputs*, making sure there would be equity and excellence for all” (3).

High schools, according to Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Rita ElWardi, are the “capstone institution[s] for preparing youth for their lives beyond school” (Indrisano 137). They state, “This responsibility is especially complex in terms of creating independent writers and thinkers who can participate in higher education, engage in the workplace, and meet their civic responsibilities” (137). This is a very tall order to fill, but Fisher, Frey, and ElWardi write that high school teachers ready their students for college by “build[ing] on the writing instruction provided in elementary and middle schools, in order to extend students’ abilities to write and think independently and to fill in the gaps of students’ learning” (137).

Mary Nicolini teaches English at Penn High in Mishawaka, Indiana. She writes that education suffers from a “*get ‘em ready syndrome*” that suggests her “primary responsibility as a high school teacher . . .” is to “*get ‘em ready for college*” (Thompson 76). What Nicolini does, instead, is “work to help seniors develop habits of mind or dispositions about the writing process that they can adapt and transfer to college-level assignments” (74). According to Nicolini, “the best way to meet students’ diverse needs is to have them think about ideas and generate original theses about topics of interest that they then defend and support with specific details and concrete examples – skills that will be essential no matter where they attend college” (76). She also values voice and style, a choice which she admits is not seen as “rigorous” by some teachers, but Nicolini questions how to define that term. In fact, to Nicolini, “*Rigor* is another area in which twelfth-grade teachers do a disservice to the college-bound senior. Too often it is a false rigor: doing more faster, not necessarily in more depth” (77). Nicolini disagrees with high school English teachers who “declare that they must teach a certain genre because students will *need it in college*” (78). Instead, to Nicolini, “what is most important to me when teaching a genre or writing strategy is not *how* I should teach it but *why* I am teaching it” (78). She does, however have one concrete item she has labeled as necessary for college-level writing. In 1995, a college professor by the name of Ed Kline told her, “It would be helpful if they knew what a thesis was”; to which Nicolini replies, “I can prepare students for that” (78).

Table 1 - High School Writing Skills

| | Writing Process (Pre-write, draft, revise, edit, publish) | Mechanics (Spelling, punctuation, capitalization) | Grammar | Clear Thesis & Support | Organization | Voice/Vocabulary | Audience | Standardized Test-Prep (on-demand writing) | Research | Analytical Skills | Collaborative Activities | Formulaic Writing | Critical/Creative Thinking | Syntax/Style |
|-----------------|---|---|---------|------------------------|--------------|------------------|----------|--|----------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Davis | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | | | | |
| Jordan | | X | X | X | | | X | | X | | | | X | |
| Mosley | | | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | | |
| Gere, et al | X | | X | X | X | | | X | | | | X | | |
| Nicolini | X | | | X | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Hillocks | X | | X | X | X | | X | | | | | X | | X |
| Johnson | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| Langer | | | | | X | | | X | | | | | | |
| Daniels & Bizar | | | | X | X | | | | | | X | X | | |

First-year Composition Instructors

First-year composition instructors do not agree with the generalized perception held by high school teachers that college-level writing is a litany of writing skills needing to be mastered. In fact, in their article, “Teaching About Writing, Right Misconceptions,” (CCCC, June 2007), Douglas Downs (assistant professor and writing program coordinator at Utah Valley State College) and Elizabeth Wardle (assistant professor and director of writing programs at the University of Dayton) go so far as to state, “When we continue to pursue the goal of teaching students ‘how to write in college’ in one or two semesters . . . we are, thus, complicit in reinforcing outsiders’ views of writing studies as a trivial, skill-teaching discipline” (553). They consider “faculty, administrators, parents, [and] industry” to be “nonspecialists [who] have always assumed it [FYC – First-year Composition] can: teach, in one or two early courses, ‘college writing’ as a set of basic, fundamental skills that will apply in other college courses and in business and public spheres after college” (553). Unlike the high school English teachers, who cannot agree on the specific writing skills necessary to produce college-level writing, the one tenet upon which all first-year composition instructors seem to agree is the conviction that college-level writing is *not* “a set of basic, fundamental skills.”

Also, unlike high school English teachers, first-year composition instructors do not have to carry any type of teaching certification. In fact, many first-year composition instructors are graduate students (of all majors) functioning

in the capacity of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). This is particularly true at the university level, where the ability to earn a stipend and tuition waiver while completing graduate-level studies is oftentimes the major enticement for teaching freshman composition. GTA training is mandatory, ranging anywhere from a weekend in length to twelve-week courses for which participants earn a certificate of completion and a stipend for attending. Class management, lesson planning, and basic educational psychology and pedagogy are a sampling of the subjects taught at these seminars.

First-year composition GTAs are provided the textbooks to be used in their courses, and sample syllabi are available for their use. As is the case with high school English teachers, although the curriculum objectives are provided to them, the GTAs decide the pedagogy used.

Adjunct professors of composition must possess a master's degree with at least 18-credit hours completed in English studies. Universities (both public and private), colleges, and junior colleges all employ adjunct professors. Adjuncts are paid employees who teach without the possibility of tenure or employee benefits.

April Sawyer is a teacher at Hugh High School in Reno, Nevada who is "working . . . to bring developmental and first-semester college writing courses to her campus" (Thompson 101). Through the professional development she has acquired over the course of her teaching career, she found it "simultaneously reassuring and disconcerting to discover that among college English teachers there is no consistency of purpose and differences can be found both among

colleges and within colleges. Some professors, Sawyer has found, “prepare students as writers and others prepare students to write for professors” (110). In other words, she has found no definitive pattern among first-year college composition instructors

Mary Nicolini, one of the high school teachers already quoted, has also taught at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and the University of Notre Dame. She states college-level writing requires “habits of mind or dispositions about the writing process that they [students] can adapt and transfer to college-level assignments;” habits she works to develop in her high school seniors (Thompson 74). It is Nicolini’s opinion that “most first-year composition programs work hard to expose students to writing strategies that will serve them regardless of their degree programs” (77) and it is her responsibility, as a high school teacher, to help her students begin to develop those habits.

Stephen L. Fox also teaches at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. The writing programs in which he has worked emphasize analytical thinking with emphasis on, “a flexible writing process that includes self-evaluation, and thoughtful, imaginative, appropriate use of language” (Thompson 83). When asked if he teaches grammar, he replies, “Yes, I do”; because, to Fox, “if you help students understand how to use language appropriately for their specific writing situation, how to make editing an integral but not stifling part of the writing process, and how to understand the way language works in our society, then you are teaching ‘grammar’” (83). Although both high school teachers and first-year composition instructors “can argue about the best

assignments or the most appropriate balance” of writing genres, to Fox, “having students learn to use writing processes that take full cognizance of audience and purpose is the best approach” to college-level writing (85).

Stuart Greene, from the University of Notre Dame has this answer, “So what do we teach? We teach argument. Argument is very much a part of what we do every day: we confront a public issue, something that is open to dispute, and we take a stand and support what we think and feel with what we believe are good reasons” (Thompson 89). College-level writers should “advance a scholarly conversation and not reproduce others’ ideas” (90). In order to “develop an argument that is akin to a conversation” (91), Greene states “it is useful to think about [college-level] writing as a form of inquiry in which students convey their understanding of the claims people make, the questions they raise, and the conflicts they address” (90).

Janet Alsup is an assistant professor of English education at Purdue University who agrees with Greene that, “. . .students and teachers should understand writing as a process of inquiry” (Thompson 119). A published author, Alsup has also appeared on multiple writing panels at both NCTE and CCCC conventions with her colleague, Michael Bernard Donals, professor of English and Jewish studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Donals views the inquiry process as being important enough to the first-year student to state, “understanding argument and invention as ethical acts [is] what holds high school and college writing together” (118). He sees rhetoric as “simply another term for argumentative discourse” with argument “the instrument people use to probe”

and rhetoric “finding the available means of persuasion in any given case” (119). Although Alsup states that Donals’ “emphasis on the language of argument and rhetoric is sometimes hard for me to swallow;” they are able to find “a middle ground” where Alsup’s “unencumbered student expression [of inquiry]” and Donals’ argument that “writing is an ethical act that requires taking a stance” can find a place in the classroom that balances “safety with rigor” (116).

In a study of writing by high school seniors and first-year college students conducted by Jay Simmons, who teaches reading and writing at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, Simmons had to come up with four writing assignments that college-bound seniors, basic college writers, and first-year composition students could all complete – in essence, four college-level assignments. The assignments he chose as representative of college-level writing were “a personal essay, a research-based piece about a significant place in their lives, a cultural critique, and a persuasive essay” (76).

Mollie O’Rourke, “who is in her fifth year as a writing instructor . . . believes that students in college writing courses should be able to write intelligently about important current affairs, . . . [and] often develops writing assignments that enable her students to take positions on issues they encounter in the media” (Anson 64).

Patrick Sullivan, in What is ‘College-Level’ Writing?, is very clear about his definition of “college-level” writing. A college-level writer should be able to compose an essay “in response to [a] reading or group of readings [that] demonstrate the following:

- A willingness to evaluate ideas and issues carefully.
- Some skill at analysis and higher-level thinking.
- The ability to shape and organize material effectively.
- The ability to integrate some of the material from the reading skillfully.
- The ability to follow the standard rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling” (17).

He gives this definition, however, only after a clarification of the term “college-level writer,” a term Sullivan feels is incomplete. Sullivan suggests the term be changed to “college-level reader, writer, and thinker” because “good writing can only be the direct result of good reading and thinking” (16).

Table 2 - First-year Composition Components

| | Writing Strategies | Rhetorical Choices (Audience, purpose, occasion, tone, style) | Analytical Thinking | Self-Reflection | Argument | Inquiry | Essays (Various writing genres focusing on audience and purpose) | Organization | Conventions (Grammar, punctuation, spelling) | Current Affairs |
|----------------|--------------------|---|---------------------|-----------------|----------|---------|--|--------------|--|-----------------|
| Nicolini | X | X | | X | | X | | | | |
| Fox | | | X | X | | | X | X | | |
| Greene | | | | | X | X | | | | |
| Alsup | X | X | X | | X | X | | | | |
| Bernard-Donals | | X | | X | X | X | | | | |
| Simmons | X | X | X | | X | X | X | | | |
| O'Rourke | | | | | X | | | | | X |
| Sullivan | | | X | X | | X | | X | X | |
| Downs | | X | X | X | | X | | | | |

CHAPTER THREE: ORGANIZATIONS

In Rhetoric and Reality, James Berlin explains “The English Department was a creation of the new American university during the last quarter of the 19th century. Its prototype appeared at Harvard . . . [and] its initial purpose . . . was to provide instruction in writing” (20). In our country, however, the story of Education has been one of increasing public access. By the 19th century, the swelling ranks of high school students started to translate into increased college enrollments, as students from low socioeconomic classes became desirous of a higher education. Although only 4% of all high school graduates went on to college, that small percentage nevertheless heralded a shift in public thinking that a post-secondary education was no longer a reality for only a privileged few. Many of these students from the 'cross-section' of America came to college with literacy skills below those of their higher socioeconomic counterparts.

Mike Rose points out in Cross-Talk in Comp Theory, "it was in 1841, not 1985 that the president of Brown complained, 'Students frequently enter college almost wholly unacquainted with English grammar . . .'" (563). Although Berlin states “the writing course had been firmly established as the staple of the [college] curriculum in the last century – a requirement for all students during the sophomore, junior, and senior years,” Harvard’s president, William Eliot, “had in fact considered writing so central to the new elective curriculum he was shaping that in 1874 the freshman English course at Harvard was established” (20).

The irony is, at the very same time Harvard was, essentially, partnering with high school writing instruction (by choosing to build upon the writing

foundation high school provided), the schools in our country started moving away from replicating college-level writing instruction and began moving towards writing that was more child-centered and ideologically based (i.e. more emphasis on the practical product vs. the rhetorical process). This decision at the high school level was largely in response to the establishment of “Uniform Reading Lists.” These lists “consisted of titles of books on which students were tested for admission to college” (Berlin 33).

A required freshman English class was first instituted in 1874, when Harvard became “the first institution . . . requiring a short English composition . . ., the subject to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time” (qtd. in Wozniak 70) (33). High school educators viewed this requirement as an attempt to dictate high school English curriculum by instituting what was, in essence, a required reading list for all college-bound high school students. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) was founded in 1911 to curtail any further such attempts.

A “group of educators in Chicago, Illinois known as the English Round Table of the National Education Association” formed the NCTE to “create a professional response to changing needs and values regarding education, particularly English language education” (D. Smith). By 1911, large numbers of students no longer attended high school in preparation for college. In fact, “only a small percentage of high school students went on to college – only four percent of those from eighteen to twenty-one years old” (33). Because of this, the NCTE was born out of “concern that school curricula were becoming too narrow and

were incapable of addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse student population” (D. Smith). Although open to teachers of English at all grade levels (elementary through postsecondary), the NCTE came to realize “the special needs of communication and composition teachers at the college level.” In 1948, the Conference on College Composition and Communication was formed, as a division of the NCTE, in order to address these needs.

Now, over a century later, is it any wonder why the chasm between high school and college writing instruction has grown so wide? Colleges have continued to teach writing based on the rhetorical traditions, while high school English instruction has become driven by assessment-based writing products. This instructional split partly came about because of their differing educational philosophies, but also as a means for high schools and colleges to delineate their own respective curriculum turfs in regards to English Education.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

Over 77,000 active members strong, the NCTE is comprised of three separate voting sections, Elementary, Secondary, and College, each containing their own constituent organizations. All sections view “English language arts education as a vertical and horizontal entity that listens to other voices and sees commonalities” (Mc Hugh 104). Membership dues, sales of books and publications, and governmental grants, all support the NCTE.

A Board of Directors, made up of representatives from all of the NCTE divisions as well as affiliated non-members, meets once a year at the annual convention. These affiliated members are from both local English associations

and national organizations, and “are an independent but highly valued constituency within the NCTE . . . [because] such groups are frequently enlisted in the pursuit of NCTE-sponsored special projects . . . and campaigns” (D. Smith 2). In addition, an Executive Committee meets three times a year, and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the organization. Executive Committee members are elected officers and representatives of the voting sections and constituent organizations.

NCTE teacher members are researchers of their own profession, with professional development and best practices in the teaching of English seen as two of the highest goals of the organization. To this end, the NCTE Research Foundation provides grants to support teacher research. In addition, for over 75 years, the NCTE Books program has been publishing research books, for all levels of education, at the rate of 20-25 books per year.

Also deeply committed to advocacy, the organization is currently lobbying Congress to implement NCTE-recommended changes to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), both publicly and by urging over 77,000 NCTE members to contact their Congressional representatives. “Providing guidance to policymakers at the local, state, and national level on all issues relevant to the teaching of English,” the NCTE is a driving force in determining the direction of English language arts education in our country (D. Smith 1). This guidance comes via NCTE Commissions, research, and publications authored by its members.

The NCTE is a myriad of Commissions, Assemblies, and committees comprised of NCTE members who share common interests or fields of studies. There are varying levels of qualifications for each entity level designation. The “driving force” behind NCTE’s advocacy power is the NCTE Commissions who drive the areas of study of the Assemblies. The Assembly most pertinent to this research is the Assembly for Research, funded by the NCTE Research Foundation. The Assembly of Research home page describes the Assembly as “a democratic body that strives to incorporate research activities into the broader goals and practices of the National Council of Teachers of English.” It is important to note, while the site states, “The purposes of this assembly are to promote inquiry into literacy practices . . . ; [and] to provide opportunities for researchers in different sites and from different perspectives to come together to learn from one another . . . from all levels of schooling;” it further states their purpose is “to promote the growth of research and researchers *through the forum provided by the Assembly for Research.*” Which brings one back to the aforementioned stated purpose of the Assembly, namely, the incorporating of these research activities into the “goals and practices” of the parent organization – the NCTE.

NCTE publications are numerous and varied. Each Assembly has its own newsletter, and the Commissions print annual reports. The NCTE also has a list of “Featured Publications of Affiliates and Assemblies” accessible on their website under the online heading of “Assembly Publications.” There are twelve journals and periodicals for teachers of all grade levels covering “practically every

area of interest in English and Language Arts.” All NCTE members receive *The Council Chronicle* newspaper. However, the cornerstone of NCTE publications is their book program. NCTE is a book publisher. Their website advertises their “wide selection” of books that deal with “current issues and problems in teaching, research findings and their application to classrooms, ideas for teaching all aspects of English, and other topics.” While the majority of these publications are written by NCTE members, research has shown NCTE isn’t the only company publishing works authored by the NCTE membership. NCTE members are also writing for the textbook companies.

Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)

At the 1948 annual meeting of the NCTE, a run-away session chaired by John Gerber, that included George Wykoff as one of the speakers, represented the earliest beginnings of the CCCC. Choosing to throw away his prepared remarks, Wykoff chose instead to discuss “the usefulness and value of composition” (Bartholomae, *Freshman* 40). Wilbur Hatfield went on to label Wykoff’s remarks, “a clarion call to the profession to alert itself to improving the climate for the teaching of freshman English” (40). After reluctantly ending the session with a promise to continue at a later time, the NCTE approved a petition to hold a 2-day conference on freshman English the following year. Five hundred people attended the “College Freshman Courses in Composition and Communication” and, in November, the NCTE approved a request for the creation of a separate college section of the council - the CCCC.

What spurred the participants on, at that 1948 NCTE meeting, was being able to finally have a discussion with their college-level teaching peers about the specifics of teaching freshman English.

At this point in Education history, college English was generally defined as instruction in literature (via what Bartholomae calls a “Norton-anthology-like unified body of texts”), that ultimately resulted in students who “could demonstrate acceptable ways of using and responding to those texts, as the primary representative of English” (41). The landscape was changing, however, due to the large influx of students into our colleges, many of whom were GIs, and the resulting strains their numbers put on the introductory courses offered. Many of these new students were not prepared to take the traditionally taught college English courses, “requiring the creation of a new faculty to do a teaching for which their English PhD’s had not prepared them,” (41) in courses “we have variously called “required English,” “freshman English,” and “composition” (39).

Since that time, the CCCC has strived to maintain its original “historical concern for pedagogy and the classroom” in regards to college composition (47). The CCCC “gives status and recognition” to first-year composition instructors and works to “revise the graduate training of perspective teachers of English [composition]” (41). Recognizing the need to acknowledge the word *communication* in its title, and the relationship that inherently exists between *composition* and *communication*, the CCCC works to maintain a high level of discourse among its members in a field that is ever-changing; evolving as instantaneously as words can be put to paper.

As stated on their web page, (which can also be accessed through the NCTE.org site), the “CCCC accomplishes much of its work through the use of committees. It is because of committees that [they] have position statements, award programs, even a conference itself.” Committee terms are three years in length, at which time the committee chairman must petition the CCCC for renewal.

College Composition and Communication (CCC) is the CCCC membership journal. Accessed through either the NCTE or CCCC websites (as well as via U.S. mail), the CCC publishes “research and scholarship in composition studies that support those who teach writing at the college level.” Articles for the CCC recognize the “research and theories from a broad range of humanistic disciplines while supporting a number of subfields . . . relevant to the work of college writing teachers and responsive to recent work in composition studies.” This journal is archived and can be accessed by members through both websites listed above. The *FORUM* newsletter, printed twice a year, relates to “non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition courses.” In 1989, the CCCC Executive Committee established the *CCCC Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric* in order to provide a “permanent, comprehensive bibliographical resource to remain informed of the scholarship in the growing discipline of composition studies.” However, as is the case with the NCTE publications, there is one CCCC publication that is most relevant to this research; namely a series titled, *Studies in Writing and Rhetoric*, co-published by Southern University Press. The CCCC plainly states on their Publications web page, the purpose of

this series is “to influence how writing gets taught at the college level.” Although the CCCC is not a book publisher, per se, as is the NCTE, many CCCC members are published authors – published not only by the NCTE, but also by other literary publishing companies, and textbook publishers.

Position Statements

The differences between the NCTE and the CCCC, in regards to focus of curricula, are apparent in their position statements.

Since both British Literature and grammar are taught in twelfth grade English classes, two NCTE position statements were researched: The 1985, “Teaching Composition: A Position Statement” (the only position statement available on their website under the category of “writing”), and the 2006 “Resolution on the Essential Roles and Value of Literature in the Curriculum.” The “Teaching Composition” position statement identifies writing as a “powerful instrument of thought” (1). The writing process is emphasized, along with writing in multiple genres. A “full range” of “composition powers” is to be developed for use in academic subjects other than English and nonacademic writing outside of school (2). “Guidance in the writing process and discussion of the students’ own work should be the central means of writing instruction” and assessment of student progress “should begin with the students’ own written work” (2).

The “composition powers” alluded to in the position statement are elucidated in the NCTE Guidelines titled, “NCTE Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing,” published in November 2005 by the Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee. The NCTE belief is “anyone can get better at writing,” (1)

and “process skills and strategies,” as well as “writing skills” are refined throughout a lifetime. While conceding, “a correct text empty of ideas or unsuited to its audience or purpose is not a good piece of writing,” the Guidelines also state, good teachers of writing must be able to guide students toward “developing both increasing fluency in new contexts and mastery of conventions” (5).

“Resolution on the Essential Roles and Value of Literature in the Curriculum,” the 2006 NCTE position statement on literature, cites concerns about the loss of student exposure to literature due to high-stakes testing and the use of “specific commercial reading programs” encouraged by The Reading First Initiative of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (1). To this end, NCTE resolves to teach literature using “full authentic texts rather than with adaptations,” with a “reading curricula focus on selecting, reading, responding to, and analyzing a wide range of literature” (2).

The two CCCC position statements researched were the October 1989, “Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing,” and the February 2004, “Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments.” The 1989 position statement focuses mainly on principles and standards in regards to the hiring and tenure practices towards writing faculty. However, between the opening statement of, “A democracy demands citizens who can read critically and write clearly and cogently,” (1) and the ending observation that writing teachers comment on the papers they read “not simply to justify a grade, but to offer guidance and suggestions for improvement, . . . not just to improve particular papers but to understand fundamental principles of

effective writing that will enable them to continue learning throughout their lives,” (6) nowhere in this CCCC position statement is writing identified as a set of skills and conventions to be mastered.

The same is true of the February 2004 position statement concerning writing in digital environments. While the need for all students to have equal access to digital hardware and software is stated, the CCCC position is, “principles of best practices in teaching and learning” do not change in a digital environment, and are “equally applicable to face-to-face, hybrid, and online instruction” (2). These principles of “good practice” include, “encourages contacts between student and faculty,” “uses active learning techniques,” “communicates high expectations,” and “respects diverse talents and ways of learning” (2). As in the 1989 CCCC position statement, writing skills and conventions are not mentioned in the 2004 position statement; and the “good practices” principles listed support those originally identified in 1989.

Each of the above position statements remains true to the origins of their respective organizations. The 1985 and 2006 NCTE position statements are reflective of the organization’s recognition that not all twelfth grade English students go on to college. Therefore, their position is that high school students need to be exposed to literature during their final year of secondary education, while also being given the tools to communicate via the written word in whatever capacity their life after high school requires. The 1989 and 2004 CCCC position statements address the post-secondary education of college students that the organization supports, namely, the development of critical thinking and effective

writing in the quest for knowledge and lifelong learning. The NCTE and CCCC members who author professional texts written for their targeted grade levels, do so in accordance with these position statements, utilizing research and studies conducted within the two distinct secondary/post-secondary parameters outlined above.

Table 3 – Organization Position Statements

| | Writing Process | Writing in Multiple Genres | Process skills & strategies | Writing Skills | Conventions | Student Reading of Literature "full texts" | Literary Response & Analysis | Critical Reading | Effective Writing | Writing to Learn |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------|--|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| NCTE 1985 - | | | | | | | | | | |
| "Teaching Composition" | X | X | X | X | X | | | | X | |
| NCTE 2006 - | | | | | | | | | | |
| "Literature in the Curriculum" | | | X | | | X | X | X | | X |
| CCCC 1989 - | | | | | | | | | | |
| "Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" | | | X | | | | | X | X | X |
| CCCC 2004 - | | | | | | | | | | |
| "Writing in Digital Environments" | | | X | | | | | X | X | X |

CHAPTER FOUR: TEXTBOOKS

Research on a sampling of eleven high school English and first-year composition textbooks revealed an interesting phenomenon; although the names of seven different publishing companies appear on the covers of these books, in reality, they represent only six different publishing groups. The reason for this disparity in numbers is the fact that education publishing is, essentially, controlled by a handful of publishing entities.

Two twelfth-grade English Literature texts, three twelfth-grade grammar texts, three ENC1101, and three ENC1102 texts by the following publishers were examined:

Twelfth Grade Literature Texts:

Elements of Literature

Holt Rinehart [The Harcourt Companies]

Prentice Hall Literature – Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes

Prentice Hall [Pearson Education]

Twelfth Grade Grammar Texts:

Elements of Language

Holt Rinehart [The Harcourt Companies]

Langage Network

McDougal Littell [Houghton Mifflin]

Writer's Choice

Glencoe/McGraw-Hill [McGraw-Hill Companies]

ENC1101 Texts:

Everyday Use; Rhetoric at Work in Reading and Writing

Longman [Pearson Education]

Frames of Mind

Thomson/Wadsworth [Cengage Learning]

The Call to Write

Longman [Pearson Education]

ENC1102 Texts:

Discovering Argument

Prentice Hall [Pearson Education]

Everything's an Argument
Bedford/St. Martin's [Holtzbrinck Publishing Group]
The Informed Argument
Thomson/Wadsworth [Cengage Learning]

Used on a daily basis in the classroom, one can argue that *textbooks* dictate composition curricula at the high school and college levels. Since the majority of all high school English and first-year composition textbooks are printed by only a few publishers, one can extend the argument further and state composition curricula at these academic levels are being dictated by a handful of *publishing companies*. However, the real question is this - who is providing the information these companies publish in their textbooks?

The mission statements found on their websites were all variations of the same theme. Pearson Education wants to “Focus on education in the broadest sense of the word” by “embracing technology to change the way people learn.” Houghton Mifflin has “an over 150 year legacy of quality and commitment,” pledging “innovation, dedication, and responsiveness to the needs of educators.” The Harcourt Companies are “a leader in secondary educational publishing . . . in the business of helping teachers teach and students learn,” while the McGraw-Hill Companies pledge to be a “lifelong learning partner to students and teachers of all kinds, everywhere.” The Holtzbrinck Group provides “exceptional materials for teachers and students,” while Cengage Learning wants to “shape the future of global learning by delivering consistently better learning solutions for learning instructors and institutions.” Every single publishing company researched pledges a commitment to teachers, learners, and institutions - “everywhere.” With mission statements all relatively the same, why are the textbooks (and,

thus, the resulting curricula) so very different? To find the answer, the following textbook components were analyzed: learning theories, assumptions, scope and sequence, and authorship.

Learning Theories

There is a fundamental difference in learning theories between twelfth grade English/grammar texts and first-year composition texts; in the high school textbooks, learning is viewed as a product (“knowing *that*”), while in the first-year composition texts, learning is viewed as a process (“knowing *how*”) (M. Smith 2).

In the high school texts, “learning is something external to the learner . . . – it becomes their possession” (2). To the high school learner, learning is a “quantitative increase in knowledge” which can be described using the following terms: “acquiring information or ‘knowing a lot’, storing information that can be reproduced, acquiring facts, skills, and methods that can be retained and used as necessary” (2).

High school English and grammar texts do not even need to be opened in order to get a glimpse of the “product” learning to be found inside. The English textbooks examined were Florida editions, with the outline of the state emblazoned on both the covers and spines. All front matter targets the Florida Comprehension Assessment Test (FCAT). Glencoe’s Writer’s Choice begins with pages of correlations between the Florida Sunshine State Standards (SSS) on which the FCAT is based and specific teacher and student edition page numbers. The Holt Rinehart Elements of Literature offers an “FCAT Test Smarts Section.” Prentice Hall has an entire “Florida Language Arts Standard and

Research Handbook” at the beginning of the Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes text. This handbook contains page correlations to the SSS and a program planner indicating the specific SSS benchmarks covered in each section, as well as a form showing teachers how the program aids their ability to meet the SSS in their teaching. In fact, there are sections titled “Teaching to the Standards” interspersed throughout all of the teaching units. Clearly, the skills deemed necessary in order to pass the FCAT is the product these texts promise the student will learn.

First-year college composition texts espouse “learning as making sense or abstracting meaning” (M. Smith 2). Through the use of recent and relevant texts and issues, the textbooks lead students to learn by inviting them to relate “part of the subject matter to each other and to the real world,” viewing “learning as interpreting and understanding reality in a different way . . . comprehending the world by reinterpreting knowledge” (2).

To this end, first-year composition texts are filled with timely essays and topics on subject matter to which college students can relate, enhanced with bold graphics, cartoons, and photographs. Although publishing companies do offer the ability to have texts personalized (as was the case in the UCF edition of Longman Publishing’s The Call to Write used in this research), unlike the high school texts, nowhere is there any specific mention of either the institution nor the State in which it resides. Customization at the college composition level pertains to the scope and sequence of the information found within. Questioning the world, and their place in it, is a habit first-year composition textbooks cultivate

in college students, along with the ability to then develop those thoughts into written form.

Assumptions

Twelfth grade high school English textbooks cover two distinct areas, each with their own inherent assumptions; grammar, the acquisition of writing skills, and literature, where British Literature is first read and then analyzed.

British Literature, from 449 A.D. through the twentieth century, is the focus of the literature books researched. There is analysis of literary elements and genres along with workshops on writing, speaking, and listening – specifically in regards to the British literature pieces contained within. It is assumed students utilizing the Literature texts already possess the writing skills required to complete the writing activities, as all writing activities are based on literary analysis – not writing skills, such as grammar, mechanics and usage, spelling, etc.

Grammar found in Literature is only one component of the high school grammar texts. The assumption of these texts is that students at the twelfth grade level need re-teaching of every aspect of the written word, starting with something as elementary as the parts of speech and continuing right on through to the writing process. The emphasis, however, is on the nuts-and-bolts components of writing: spelling, punctuation, pronoun usage, subject-verb agreement, etc. The written pieces assigned showcase the acquisition of these elements.

The first-year college composition texts make the assumption that all grammar usage rules and mechanics are already part of the students' prior knowledge. The texts instruct students to read rhetorically, through the eyes of a writer, creating their own knowledge by learning to identify the exigence and kairos for the texts, along with the rhetorical appeals utilized by the writers. Students make connections to the text and express the knowledge they've created through prescribed writing activities. The reading and writing pieces found in the first-year college composition textbooks lead students in such a way as to clearly show an understanding that reading rhetorically is an art the first-year college composition class works to instill in students. The lack of any grammar instruction, whatsoever, reflects the assumption first-year college students already have possession of the writing skills necessary to compose written papers.

Scope and Sequence

The high school English books researched reveal there is no scope and sequence between the literature and grammar components of the high school English curriculum. Each book is totally independent of the other. The literature books, both of which cover British Literature, survey the periods of British Literature from 469 A.D. to the twentieth century. Prentice Hall's Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes, assigns a separate Unit to each period, set up chronologically in the textbook and split into Part, 1, Part 2, Part 3, etc., with section titles varying among literary periods. Contained within the sections are

poems, fiction and nonfiction pieces, speeches, Scriptures, epics, dramas, and screenplays reflective of the literary period in which they are written.

At the end of each Unit is a “Skills Workshop,” containing sections titled, *Writing About Literature*, *Writing Workshop*, *Listening and Speaking Workshop*, and *Assessment Workshop*. It is important to remember both literature books researched are Florida editions, so it is not coincidental that writing, listening and speaking, and assessment are all part of the Florida SSS. Each “Skills Workshop” is pertinent to the literary period Unit in which it is located.

The high school grammar texts in no way relate to the titles or works found in the literature texts. Of the three grammar texts researched, one varies in sequence from the other two, but all three are identical in scope. Both Elements of Language published by Holt Rinehart and Writer’s Choice, Glencoe/McGraw-Hill begin with a Part 1 that introduces the different composition genres of description, exposition, and persuasion. Both textbooks continue to “Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics” sections, followed by a section on references and writing skills.

Language Network, McDougal Littell, is put together in a slightly different order, beginning with “Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics” before going on to cover the same information described above. There is, however, an additional “Student Resources” section at the end of this textbook that the other two grammar textbooks do not have.

Only the Glencoe/McGraw-Hill textbook, Writer’s Choice is a Florida edition, and therefore has Florida SSS page correlations located in the front

matter. The literature or essays found in any of the high school grammar books are solely for the purpose of modeling the grammar or writing skills discussed in the chapters.

First-year college composition is divided into two classes, each one semester in length. For the purposes of this research, we will label these classes ENC1101 and ENC1102.

As evidenced by the textbooks, ENC1101 functions as an essay survey in which students read essays rhetorically (through the eyes of the writer), make personal connections, and then compose their own core essays via the use of the critical thinking skills their readings have inspired. Essay construction, critical thinking, and the reader-writer connection are the emphasis of ENC1101. Starting with the memoir essay, ENC1101 successively works through the increasingly more intricate essays of commentary and review, before culminating with an introductory-level argument essay, usually about a topic that is personally relevant to the first-year college student. ENC1102 teaches the writing of argument supported by research. Students read the pieces and graphics located within, and are guided to use critical thinking skills to determine their opinions. Researching of the pieces, emphasizing the use of a variety of sources and their documentation, leads students to the creation of their own written arguments in support of their thesis statements.

Everyday Use: Rhetoric at Work in Reading and Writing, published by Longman, is the only one of the researched ENC1101 books teaching the composition of all essays specifically using the five traditional rhetorical canons

of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. All of the ENC1101 textbooks use the rhetorical canons in their instruction, but Everyday Use begins the text using the traditional rhetorical terms and verbiage throughout. The Call to Write, Longman, offers some sample rhetorical analyses, but teaches the rhetorical appeals of logos, pathos, and ethos only in regards to composing an argumentative essay. Frames of Mind; A Rhetorical Reader, Thomson Wadsworth, uses “provocative visuals . . . designed to inspire real rhetorical responses. Again, although the rhetorical canons are implied, and used, the rhetorical terms are not utilized but are, instead, illustrated by the visuals.

All three of the ENC1102 textbooks focus on the composition of argumentative essays. The further nurturing of critical thinking skills, and the realization there are more than two sides to an argument, is evidenced throughout the texts. The structure of various types of argument found within all literary genres is analyzed, and the development of an argument using rhetorical appeals and argumentative strategies is instructed. There is emphasis on the importance of research for presenting opposing viewpoints, or in the support of a position, along with the necessity of properly documenting multiple sources of research.

In the ENC1101 texts, argument is just one of the essays described; therefore limiting the amount of instruction given to research and source documentation. The argument is traditionally the last essay written in the class, because it is the most difficult and labor intensive. Prior essays on memoir, commentary, review, etc. are used as scaffolding for the argumentative essay.

Since the entire ENC1102 curriculum consists of the various modes of argument, all of the ENC1102 textbooks extensively teach research and documentation. The evaluation of sources for reliability and fallacies is contained within this chapter, along with research strategies and the importance of avoiding plagiarism through proper documentation of all sources used.

The following tables illustrate the similarities and differences in content and purpose of the textbooks researched, as well as the existent overlaps and lack of inclusion among, and between, the two grade levels.

The Twelfth Grade English Textbooks table clearly shows the delineation between the literature and grammar texts. The grammar texts teach basic writing skills relevant to all types of writing genres found across the curriculum. The literature texts offer a very limited coverage of writing skills, lumped into “workshop” sections that also cover reading, speaking, and listening skills – as they pertain to the literature. The focus of the literature books is the reading of actual British Literature, with writing activities incorporated throughout to guide students in their analysis, summary, and interpretation of the literature genres covered within. The Florida editions also include alignment of the Florida Sunshine State Standards to the material, along with preparatory activities for the Florida FCAT state exam.

The table of First-Year Composition Textbooks is not quite as segregated as the high school textbooks table, although the two very different goals of ENC1101 and ENC1102 are apparent. The use of rhetorical appeals and visual rhetoric are equally represented in both the ENC1101 and ENC1102 texts, and

both groups of textbooks use essays as models for the students' own compositions. The research process as a tool for marrying opinion with fact, and ultimately finding one's own place in the research conversation, is also exhibited in both textbook levels.

However, as the tables exhibit, ENC1101 is an essay survey textbook, exposing students to the composition of narratives, memoir, and commentary, ultimately working up to the inclusion of argument in their composition repertoires. ENC1102 restricts all instruction, including referrals to the rhetorical appeals and the research process, to the study and composition of argument. Neither ENC1101 nor ENC1102 textbooks teach basic writing skills. Instead, contained within are assignments promoting critical thinking, along with the importance of linking audience to the purpose of the composition and the rhetorical strategies used.

Table 4 – Twelfth Grade English Textbooks

| | FCAT Prep/SSS | British Literary Periods | Literary Genres | Writing About Literature (Analysis, summary, interpretation) | Skills Workshops (Reading, writing, speaking & listening, assessment) | Writing Genres (Narration, exposition, persuasion) | Research Skills | Grammar, Usage, Mechanics | Sentences & Paragraphs | Reference Resources |
|--|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--|---|--|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Elements of Literature | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | |
| Prentice Hall Literature - Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | |
| Elements of Language | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Language Network | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Writer's Choice | X | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X |

Table 5 – First-Year College Textbooks

| | Rhetorical Canons | Essay Survey (Analysis, Argument, Memoir, Narrative, Commentary) | Rhetorical Appeals | Revision | Readings as Essay Models | Visual Rhetoric | Research Process | Source Guide | Definition & Understanding of Types of Argument | Argument Construction | Style & Voice in Argument | Argument Strategies | Evidence & Documentation |
|--------------------------|-------------------|--|--------------------|----------|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <u>ENC 1101 -</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Everyday Use | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | | | |
| Frames of Mind | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | |
| The Call to Write | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | |
| <u>ENC 1102 -</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Discovering Argument | | | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Everything's an Argument | | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| The Informed Argument | | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

Authorship

In any written genre, the author controls the written message contained within. Textbooks are no different. Adrea A. Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz, in the Preface to Everything's an Argument, write, "*Everything's an Argument* remains a labor of love for us, a lively introduction to rhetoric drawn directly from our experiences teaching persuasive writing" (vii). Since teachers, either active or retired, wrote all of the textbooks researched, it is presumed teaching experiences provided the basis for the information found in their textbooks. However, it should be noted, not all of the textbooks researched listed authors, per se.

Only one of the high school textbooks, Elements of Language, published by Holt Rinehart, lists their authors on the cover, but even in this case, the names listed are not authors in the sense the words inside are their own. They are "program authors" who oversaw panels of high school teachers serving as program consultants, critical reviewers, and field test participants, along with a panel of teacher/student consultants who provided models of student writing. In fact, panels of high school teachers composed all of the high school textbooks, overseen by "program authors," "content specialists," or "program consultants" with doctorate or specialist degrees. For the purpose of this research, the term "program authors" will be utilized.

A look into the biographies of these program authors reveals their connections to the professional organization of their teaching discipline and/or grade levels:

Taking one high school textbook as an example, Kylene Beers is listed as a program author for Elements of Literature, published by Holt Rinehart. She is the current editor of the NCTE journal *Voices From the Middle* and received the NCTE Richard Halle award in 2001. Another program author of this same textbook is Robert E. Probst, a past CCCC Chair and a past Chair of the NCTE Assembly on Research. Since the research has already found the goals of both the NCTE and the CCCC, respectively, are to incorporate research activities into the “goals and practices” of the parent organization (NCTE) and “influence how writing gets taught at the college level” (CCCC), one can surmise the information found within the textbook supports those goals, as well.

The same argument can be applied to the textbooks written by panels of teachers. The NCTE and CCCC are *the* premiere professional organizations for the teaching of English Language Arts in our country, which means the majority of our country’s instructors in these disciplines are either members of these organizations, or have read and/or purchased publications by these organizations, with most of the publications having been written by organization members.

When examining ENC1101 and 1102 textbooks, the professional organization connections are even easier to ascertain. All one needs to do is go online to the website of the university printed after the author’s name. For example, William Palmer, co-author of the ENC1102 book Discovering Arguments, published by Pearson Prentice Hall, is listed on the title page of the textbook as a Charles A. Dana Professor of English at Alma College. A quick

check on the Alma College websites shows Palmer has The National Council of Teachers of English listed as one of his “Professional Memberships.”

While it is true only a handful of publishing companies are actually responsible for the publication of the majority of high school English and first-year composition textbooks, the information inside the textbooks is being provided by a plethora of teachers, at all grade levels, who possess varying academic degrees. However, these teachers belong to professional organizations that number less than the publishing companies represented. While the information found within the textbooks is research-based and representative of best teaching practices, it is research and practice that is supported by “the broader goals and practices” *of the professional organizations* in order “. . . to influence how writing gets taught . . .”

The argument, therefore, is thus: High school English and first-year composition writing curricula in our country is driven by professional organizations such as the NCTE and the CCCC. Each of these organizations promotes a distinct purpose within their position statements. The NCTE is concerned about the 12th grade students who do not choose college after high school. It is their position that this cadre of students is best served by exposure to British Literature, writing skills, grammar, and conventions they may never again encounter in their lives after high school. The high school textbooks researched cater to this position. True to the CCCC position statement, the ENC1101 and ENC1102 textbooks researched espouse critical thinking skills and the ability to convey those thoughts into written words. They guide students

in the creation of their own knowledge by observing the world in which they live,
and then justifying their places within it.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In their June 2007 CCC Journal article, Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle state college-level writing is a “tool” to be used “to mediate various [writing] activities,” because writing is “neither basic, nor universal, but content – and context-contingent” (558). Good writing varies depending on the purpose and subject, as well as the reader’s expectations, which means what constitutes good writing will vary from major to major and from discourse community to discourse community. Downs and Wardle do not feel first-year composition courses, as they are currently structured, adequately address this definition of college-level writing.

Twelfth grade high school teachers see writing as a set of skills to be mastered in order to be successful in college-level writing. This viewpoint is not wrong, because first-year composition classes are not remedial courses and, therefore, cannot teach any writing mechanics or conventions a student may be lacking. The skill set has to be there upon entry into college. In fact, not one ENC1101 or 1102 textbook researched addresses mechanics or conventions (Table 4). However, it must be reiterated that the entire semester of a twelfth grade high school English class is not spent solely on writing. British Literature is also surveyed for both content and style. Twelfth grade English classes, in reality, are a combination of an entry-level British Literature class *and* a writing skills class.

Miscommunication comes about when first-year college students present in their college classrooms with only a *set of skills* to power the writing “tool,” but

no understanding of *writing as a tool* – in and of itself – resulting in a clashing of the Aristotelian Rhetorical Triangle of rhetor-subject-audience with the College Writing Contact Zone Rhetorical Triangle of practitioners-professional organizations-textbooks. Looking at the two very different curricula of the twelfth grade high school English class, versus the first-year composition class, one can see why the formation of the above “contact zone” is inevitable.

A good portion of twelfth grade high school writing is content-based in relation to the British Literature read. In first-year composition classes, students read in order to see how the piece “might influence their understanding of *writing*” – not content. In high school there are “different rules for student writers than for expert writers” (i.e. the writers of the British Literature pieces surveyed) (560). Students don’t feel they are experts at any level of the writing process, because they are not given much opportunity to analyze the pieces they read simply as *writers* – they are analyzing mostly for content and style as it relates to meaning. As evidenced in this research, the twelfth grade high school curriculum is skills-based. Table 1 lists the writing skills high school teachers teach, which is supported by the contents of the grammar and literature textbooks they use (Table 3).

While twelfth grade high school students are taught voice and organization, as first-year college students they are expected to be aware of “research writing as conversation.” It is expected they already know that “one needs to gather the information already found by other researchers who have either joined or started this conversation, so that one knows what they are going

to say in relation to what had already been said by others” (573). It is the realization of this conversation that allows students to begin creating their own knowledge. The idea of balancing the “need for expert opinion” with “their own situational expertise” so they can “write from it as expert writers do” is not being realized at the high school level because of the twelfth grade English class’s duality of purpose (560). Every one of the ENC1101 and ENC1102 textbooks in Table 4 utilize the Research Process in support of the essays addressed at the two composition levels.

Although this research does not reveal there is anything inherently “wrong” with either twelfth grade high school English or first-year composition classes – as they currently exist - there is, seemingly, no transfer of writing ability from the twelfth grade English class to the first-year composition course. First-year composition courses are expected to “prepare students to write across the university” because “it assumes the existence of a ‘universal educated discourse’ that can be transferred from one writing situation to another.” However, Downs and Wardle quote in their article, “more than twenty years of research and theory have repeatedly demonstrated that such a unified academic discourse does not exist and have seriously questioned what students can and do transfer from one context to another” (552). Apparently, there is also no transfer of writing ability beyond the first-year composition course.

There has to be a new paradigm in the form of a transitional composition class that cultivates students as critically thinking writers who are the experts of their own thoughts and ideas. Whether this class belongs in the twelfth grade

curriculum or the first-year college curriculum needs to be determined, but its absence is the missing link responsible for the non-transference of writing skills from the high school to the college level, as well as the non-transference of writing skills beyond the first-year composition class within academia.

Writing skills (conventions, spelling, and grammar) are the foundation upon which students build their critically thought out composition pieces. However, students need to feel, *before* they enter first-year college classes, they are critically thinking writers with something worth saying. With that mindset, as first-year college students they can then concentrate on learning *about* writing as a tool to be used in the completion of the writing activities appropriate for the different college discourse communities they must negotiate.

Downs and Wardle contend that first-year composition classes need to move “from teaching ‘how to write in college’ to teaching *about* writing,” (553) in order to see it as “a researchable activity rather than a mysterious talent” (560). Students can then use their understanding of the “nature of writing” to “explore their own writing practices” so as to understand what is appropriate for the different discourse communities they find themselves in at the college level (i.e. Hesse’s obliged and self-sponsored writing) – both within, and outside, the academy (560). If, as Hesse states, composition instructors are stewards of *writers* – not *writing*, the creation of such a transitional composition class will require high school and first-year composition teachers to reach across the aisle to determine which educational level can best provide this compositional missing link.

Making students aware of the different discourse communities in existence at the college level is the first step in their being able to learn what writing is considered appropriate within each discourse community. And yet, in Bazerman's Handbook of Research on Writing, Richard Haswell's discussion of first-year college students states, "We know very little about the ways that the compositional motives, choices, and processes of students are influenced by their extracurricular work, financial aid, living group, study environment, concurrent coursework, peer support outside of classes, continued involvement with family, and dozens of other dynamics of their academic surround" (342). In addition, research has given "only limited attention to the entire trajectory of writing education or issues of transition from one level to the other" (281).

A quote in Thomas Thompson's Teaching Writing in High School and College states an "essential focus" for English language arts teachers is to instill in their students a "willingness to step outside the comfort zone into the arenas of discourse in which varied perspectives are aired and allowed to interact, clash, and modify one another" (96). In other words, first year college students must step outside their *comfort zone* into Pratt's *contact zone*. Perhaps, "instead of asking how to make high school writing prepare students for college writing . . ." we should be asking what [discourse] literacy looks like" (Thompson 80).

Beafort (2000), Heath (1982), Hull (2001), and Rose (2003) all argue, "that there can be no one standard for what counts as writing proficiency or expertise" (Bazerman 229). Gee's (1989) statement that "true literacy in a discourse is possible only outside of one's primary (home) discourse" determines that "what is

correct or good depends on the social context . . . and can illuminate what is going on in individual writers' behaviors and in individual texts and groups of texts within discourse communities" (229).

The failure to recognize that both Hesse's obliged *and* self-sponsored discourses must be successfully negotiated by the first-year college student may also help explain the lack of writing knowledge transfer from high school to first-year composition classes, and then from first-year composition classes to other classes throughout the academy.

My research has shown writing at the twelfth grade level is skills-based, resulting in knowledge that is transferred via the "low road" transfer process (Billing 500). The abstract, critical thinking skills demanded by academic (obliged) writing demanded at the college level are transferred via the "high road process" (500). "The 'low road' process occurs if practice makes the skill almost automatic, whereas in the 'high road' process the learner deliberately abstracts principles" (500). True to David Billing's descriptions, the demands placed on high school writers by their skill-based writing assignments and content driven literature analyses is tailor-made for the low road "*pop up* access directly to specific knowledge" (501), a transfer skill reinforced on a regular basis via high school curricula dictated by the textbooks and supported by the NCTE position statements.

When the high school student enters a first-year composition class, however, they are expected to be able to create knowledge through the recognition of researched arguments and their own critically thought out place

within the conversation, as supported by the CCCC position statements and the textbooks driving the first-year composition course curricula. The transfer process needed to extract these abstract concepts utilizes a “*dig out* access via general knowledge,” a transfer skill they are not comfortable with and in which they are not well-versed (501). First-year college students flounder in their writing assignments outside of their first-year composition class because they are writing for these classes (classes demanding their utilization of the “dig out” transfer process) at the same time they are learning to become proficient in the “dig out” process in their first-year composition classes. By the time they become proficient in the implementation of this transfer process, they have reached the point in their academic careers “when they decide on a major, develop a more realistic sense of authorship and academic voice, and discursively construct a more viable interface between private and public identities” (Bazerman 343). In short, they have become literate in both discourses of the academy – the obliged and the self-sponsored.

To quote Joe Harris, a former editor of the CCC, “What I am arguing against, though, is the notion that our students should necessarily be working towards the mastery of some particular, well-defined sort of discourse. It seems to me that they might be better encouraged towards a kind of polyphony – an awareness of and pleasure in the various competing discourses that make up their own” (Elbow 254). Hesse recognizes student writing activities as being either obliged or self-sponsored writing. What better way to be stewards of

writers, however, than to recognize the polyphony of discourses that are actually inherent within these two categories?

A new transitional composition class that teaches *about* writing, instead of teaching what we commonly know as “academic writing,” would have a “clear attainable goal and a clear content while continuing to help students understand how writing works in the academy so they can achieve in that context. Its content does not distract from writing (the perennial difficulty of writing-course content), since the content *is* writing” (Downs 578). A course such as this recognizes that nonacademic discourse is necessary “for the sake of helping students produce good academic discourse” (Elbow 237). The use of solely academic discourse “often masks a lack of general understanding” (237). A student can often best demonstrate understanding “if she [he] can translate it out of the discourse of the textbook and the discipline and into everyday, experiential, anecdotal terms” (237). In a composition course that teaches *about* writing, where a student’s self-sponsored writing activities would be the breeding ground for this translation of knowledge, Gee’s criteria for true discourse literacy is met because the student is using their secondary (obliged) writing discourse to critique their primary (self-sponsored) discourse – the result of which is the creation of their knowledge.

The answer to the “What is college-level writing?” question posed by Sullivan and Tinberg is eloquent in its simplicity, as stated by Michael Bernard-Donals, “One reason the seamless transition from high school to college writing is a fantasy is that there’s no such thing as ‘college writing’” (Thompson 117).

My research has shown Mr. Bernard-Donals is absolutely correct in his assessment. College-level writing, as an entity, does not exist because college-level writing is the *result* of college-level discourse literacy.

Our high schools, recognizing the fact that all of their twelfth grade English students are not going on to college, teach the writing skills and reading analyses needed for post-secondary school life – whatever that may be. First-year composition instructors assign their essays and research papers expecting their students to already be well-versed in the self-sponsored and obliged discourses of the academy – but they are not. The contact zone is created and the conflict begins because students need to access those discourses in order to be able to start creating their knowledge of their disciplines.

As the current paradigm exists, the lag-time is too long. Students are not able to get a sense of themselves as writers until they are already halfway through the academy. With the recognition that a transitional composition course is necessary, first-year composition students will be able to “experience something of how scholarly researchers take authority for themselves and state opinions, thus making their own writing more *authentic*” (Downs 573). In addition, they will “have the confidence in their abilities to complete ‘hard’ work,” and be able to accomplish “something they ‘still don’t believe’ they did” in regards to writing assignments (573). The importance of these accomplishments to first-year composition students is the ability it gives them “to move into their chosen disciplines with realistic and useful conceptions of writing . . .” knowing “where to go for answers when confronted with writing-related problems” (573). It is this

“knowing,” this created knowledge, that transforms our students into *writers*; the writers for whom we are the stewards.

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