Beyond the Frontier

Beyond the Frontier:

Innovations in First-Year Composition

Edited by

Jill Dahlman and Piper Selden

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Beyond the Frontier: Innovations in First-Year Composition

Edited by Jill Dahlman and Piper Selden

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7632-1
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7632-2

Jill's Dedication

For Daddie. I miss you more than words. Thanks to Mom, Tommy, my beautiful Crystalita, and Alex for your never-ending love and support.

Piper's Dedication

To my family and friends, who put up with me when I ignored them when I was "in the zone." For Patti, the Wizardress of MS Word. For my sisters, Lo and Kimbo, and my children, Lauren and Theo. For my mother, my inspiration and role model. For my cat, who keeps me company when I work into the wee hours. And finally, for my darling husband, Todd. Always and Olive Juice. Thank you for your loving support and tech skills, for keeping me fed, and for keeping a ready supply of tea and red wine on hand. ♥

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jill's Acknowledgements

In 1997, I had the privilege of embarking on my first 18-day whitewater rafting trip down the Grand Canyon. At the time, I was a former research and trial paralegal turned freelance writer and jack-of-all-trades living in Hawaii and doing whatever I could to stay alive. I met two amazing people who inspired me on that 18-day trip to rise above who and what I was and to embrace something bigger and better: Kevin Lewis and Stephanie Harrison Willoughby. Stephanie was a teacher, K-12, all subjects. I wanted to BE Stephanie. Sadly (or thankfully) there can only be one Stephanie. Stephanie made me question my own abilities and helped me to dream big, to make a choice to return to college.

Kevin was a different story altogether. At the time, Kevin was a volunteer with American Whitewater (he is now the Conservation Director at Idaho Rivers United) when I was unceremoniously dumped on his raft by an ex-boyfriend. In the 14 days that followed, Kevin literally became my best friend. We talked about every kind of topic under the sun, and Kevin made me question my own provincial attitudes to embrace different types of critical thinking. He is easily one of the most intelligent people I know, and a damn good boatman. ☺

Between Kevin and Stephanie, my life changed, and when I got back to my home in Hawaii from that Grand Canyon trip, I began the tedious effort of finding a college to attend. It didn't take long to settle on a school, but it's important that I acknowledge Kevin and Stephanie since it was their intellectual conversations with me on that long ago whitewater trip that spurred me to be where I am today: a first-year composition specialist.

Fast-forward a few years: 2000. I attended the University of Hawaii at Hilo where I met Shonna Dooman, another influence in my otherwise uneventful life. I credit Shonna with getting me through my undergraduate years without going crazy. We were both Geology majors, but Shonna actually finished her Geology degree. I changed majors in the middle of my senior year to Writing, because "it's such a natural progression." ☺ In the meantime, Shonna taught me that I could not only reach for the stars, but I can also, if I put my mind to it, make those stars twinkle just for me.

The graduation at UH Hilo was bittersweet, though, as my father passed away before he could see me walk. I still like to think that Dad is sitting on my shoulder, watching over and inspiring me.

In grad school, I met perhaps the ***most*** influential person in my life, Piper Selden, the co-editor of this book. Piper GETS me. Like Kevin, Stephanie, and Shonna before her, we help to complete each other. As Piper teases, I am the machete, the big idea person. She is the lawn mower—the detail person who fills in all of the missing pieces. I began writing with Piper several years before this book was proposed, and I knew that I wanted to write with her for the rest of my life. That hasn't changed at all. In fact, this book only reaffirms what I already knew.

As far as scholarly influences, I need to thank Christian Weisser (perhaps THE biggest influence), Karla Hayashi, Craig Howes, Mark Heberle, Roberto Onopa, LaRene DeSpain, Darin Payne, Miriam Fuchs, John Reider, Jeff Carroll, and Todd Sammons. These people have made me think, and they've spurred me on to become the best scholar I can possibly be. I certainly wouldn't be where I am now without their inspiration and guidance.

Last, but certainly not least, I need to thank the people at Rocky Mountain MLA. This panel was first proposed by Miriam Gustafson, University of New Mexico, Valencia, and I, and the RMMLA (Joan Grenier-Winther and Joy Landiera, in particular) gave the panel a shot. It has since grown to become a feature at the RMMLA, moving from one panel to four. The contents here are the best of the presentations since the RMMLA's acceptance of the panel. Thank you all!

Piper's Acknowledgements

My acknowledgments as short and sweet. I would like to begin by thanking my immediate family—Lauren, Theo, and Todd—for being so terrific (and patient) during the quiet hours that I write, read, and study; the days that I am gone for conferences; and the hours I have spent away from home during the years I have spent accumulating graduate degrees. Thank you for your understanding and love.

I also owe a thank you to my extended family: my sisters Laurel and Kim, and my mother, Ann. I would like to say publically that my mother is the reason I love words, language, and writing today. She is one of the best reviewers/editors of my work and always has something positive to say. These three women have been the foundation of my life.

To my friends who put up with me being absent, missing parties, skipping belly dance, sleeping through acupuncture appointments, and

forgetting to return any number of texts, phone calls, and messages over the past several years: thank you. I appreciate your understanding and your encouragement, even though at times I do seem to out of my mind. It's true because I am. Academia really is a strange beast, and THIS… this is what I have been working on. Well, one of the things. ☺

And a big thank you goes out to my friends, colleagues, and professors in academia. Thank you to my friends and colleagues at University of Hawaii at Manoa, University of Hawaii at Hilo, Hawaii Community College, and Antioch University Los Angeles. And none of this would have been possible without the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association conferences and support staff. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of such a supportive and engaging academic community.

Finally, to Jill, my writing partner and overall partner in crime: thank you for your friendship and for your collaboration. Thank you for letting me crash on your couch when I was commuting to grad school. (Best words ever: "Hey, if you don't mind a couch and cats…") Thank you for helping me to feel at home at your place, a real part of your family. You're a supernova, rock-n-roll star in my book. So thank you, Jill, for the gift of your friendship. Here's to many more years of collaboration and craziness!

FOREWORD

LOOKING BACK TO MOVE BEYOND

CHRISTIAN R. WEISSER

The discipline now known as Writing Studies began with a simple goal: to find better ways to teach college writing. Our earliest pedagogical investigations, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, sought new ways to help student writers. Collectively, we began to see writing as more than a skill to be modeled and learned. Through newly-emerging conferences, journals, books, and other conversations, a growing body of scholars focused on how the classroom might allow students to use language as a means to clarify and understand their lives. In this emergent phase in our discipline, writing teachers and scholars engaged almost exclusively with the work of the classroom, and they considered the needs and concerns of student-writers in fundamentally new ways.

Since that time, Writing Studies has emerged as a complex and sophisticated field of study. Our conversations no longer focus exclusively on classroom writing: we now examine writing in diverse contexts and environments including the workplace, civic and public spheres, virtual spaces, and other sites of language use. Students are no longer the exclusive subject of inquiry: writing studies engages with writers of all types, categories, and proficiencies, often questioning the fundamental idea of the writer as a subject. And teaching is no longer the singular purpose of the field: contemporary writing theorists examine language use as it is developed, practiced, and imagined in diverse and often abstract ways.

While this evolution is a good and necessary thing, it is also important to remember where we began—with that simple goal of finding better ways to help student-writers. Remarkably, the essays collected in *Beyond the Frontier: Innovations in First-Year Composition* are able to engage with the complex and sophisticated developments in our field while at the same time addressing our earliest goals of improving writing pedagogy. This collection is grounded in our field's origins in pedagogy, and each piece in this book investigates the writing classroom as a site for student

development through discourse. However, these pieces move far beyond our earliest discussions of writing instruction to incorporate new and sophisticated theories and approaches to language use. In fact, the essays collected here show us that the dichotomy between theory and pedagogy often debated in our discipline's journals is a false one—writing pedagogy, as it is described and enacted in this collection, is best implemented through careful engagement with theory, not disconnected from it.

The five sections in *Beyond the Frontier* focus on diverse sites of student writing, including basic and first-year writing classrooms, WAC courses, and virtual and electronic sites, yet they stay grounded in thoughtful reflection on best practices in composition pedagogy. As such, this collection has much to offer to those who are new to the field as well as seasoned scholars in Writing Studies. Each essay takes up the old questions of writing pedagogy in new and innovative ways, and I am certain that readers will admire the timely and timeless nature of this collection. I know that I do.

INTRODUCTION

The idea for the panels of *Beyond the Frontier* proposed for the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association's annual convention came from Miriam Gustafson and Jill Dahlman's desire to find out what other first-year composition specialists were doing in their classrooms around the country and the hope of learning new ideas for implementation. From the humble beginnings of two sessions in Boulder, Colorado, the panels have grown to four sessions generally covering one full day.

These presentations and panels didn't have to be based on any specific pedagogy, though through the years, the panels have grown substantially (from one to four panels) divided by genre (most recently, Classroom Practices; Placement, Retention, and Assessment; Teaching Genre; and Technology, Training, and Practice). This book is divided similarly to the panels, so we envision this book to be set up like a quasi-virtual panel of presentations. Piper and Jill have taken the most compelling of those presentations and compiled them into what they believe is a sampling of the practices that will stand the test of time.

The purpose and idea of all of this is to present to you what Piper and Jill believe are innovative methods and techniques for running your own first-year classroom or simply to provide food for thought—passing the torch, as it were—so that perhaps new research can be conducted and new findings disseminated at some future point. The division of the book is meant to mimic the panels one would typically find on a particular day during the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Conference.

Unit One:
Leaving the Station: From High School to Basic Writing

We begin our examination of first-year composition where it is most practical: the bridge between high school and college. This section's goal is to begin the discussion of the transference of knowledge between those critical high school years and first-year composition. It also addresses at-risk students, an increasing number of the students in our first-year classrooms.

Unit Two:
Way Stations and Rest Areas: Praxis and Practicality

When examining the "how to" of composition pedagogy, specifically first-year composition, a void as to practical applications becomes noticeable. Though this section is not large, it does begin to fill that void. This section addresses novel ways of introducing difficult concepts to students including research and reflection. Chapters in this section aim to muddy the waters a bit as we address novel ways of working with students.

Unit Three: Exploring the Universe and Beyond:
Writing Across the Curriculum

As we move further and deeper into the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) frontier, composition instructors will be expected to keep pace. This section explores a myriad of methods of incorporating Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines into the first-year composition classroom. Methods addressed are varied: from yoga to the five-paragraph essay to art to propaganda to a community engagement project. Each of these essays can be applied not only in a first-year composition classroom, but also in classrooms in other disciplines.

Unit Four:
The Virtual Frontier: Electronic Realities

Digital locales have been researched and identified as problematic in composition for many years, but with the notion of gaming and digital texts thrown into the fray, the problem becomes even stickier still. The selections in this section all address digital issues and provide suggestions for dealing with the electronic age.

Unit Five: "I'm Giving It All I've Got Captain!":
Response and Assessment

Assessment is oftentimes thought of as the bane of every composition instructor's existence. What specifically complicates this issue is the notion that not everyone will grade essays the same way, and not all students will read commentary the same way (if at all). The essays in this section seek to de-mystify the assessment mystery.

We hope that by offering you a sample of the most innovative ideas being employed in campus classrooms to date that you will find inspiration to inject new life into your existing or future classrooms. We hope one day that you will join us at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, if not as a presenter, as a member of our audience.

LEAVING THE STATION:
FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO BASIC WRITING

WRITING FROM THE INSIDE, OUTSIDE: GARDENING AND DEVELOPMENTAL COMPOSITION

PIPER SELDEN

Grande dame Gertrude Jekyll, a 19th century British writer and horticulturalist, shared this bit of green wisdom with the world: "A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust." Seven years after Jekyll's death, another great thinker was born. Margaret Atwood, poet, novelist, and environmental activist had this to say: "Gardening is not a rational act." I like to think both are right, and that maybe what appears rational—according to reason, logic, society, and tradition—is not always rational. Perhaps what we need is to always question, to investigate other ways of knowing or making meaning. The white halls of academia, where the rational is often absent, seem as good a place as any to begin that investigation. Specifically, how students are conceptualized, particularly those deemed "remedial," "developmental," or "unprepared," must be challenged and changed. For this to happen educators need to examine and to revise their pedagogical practices—daily, if need be. Change can begin with something small, a seed of respect that we plant in the minds of our students. It begins with what we label them, how society has classified them.

In the spirit of gardening, let us begin by asking how we, as educators, define the "classroom" and a "learning environment." By doing so, we might all find answers where we least expect them. From 2012 to 2013, I taught in a green and growing classroom: an actual garden. My students were at-risk high-schoolers, troubled teens who had been expelled or were not otherwise on track to graduate. No one was more surprised than I to find myself in such a setting. A year earlier, I had been a college composition teacher, graduate assistant, and Ph.D. candidate. But when my daughter was diagnosed with an aggressive form of bone cancer, "normal" life ended. We left our home and jobs in the state of Hawaii to seek medical treatment. Upon returning, I learned that my university position had been filled. With medical bills rolling in, I needed work, but a new semester had already begun. I was desperate. It was then I accepted a

local charter school's offer to teach what many in academia would dread: a class of lost souls. Meanwhile, I filed applications with local colleges, promising myself that this high school teaching gig would be a short until college classes came through. The at-risk class proved to be a tough group, characterized by fighting, disruptive class clowns, and students struggling with poverty, abuse, and other special needs. One teacher described the students as "throwaways," though educational scholar, Mike Rose, would likely call them "lives on the boundary." For many of my students, this was a last chance at education—a preparation course for GED exams. Most were not motivated; many were resistant and openly defiant, having been court-ordered to attend as a condition of parole or to comply with compulsory education laws. Traditional education had obviously failed these students. Despite their differences, they banded together in a collective rebellion. I reached back to graduate school, to Vygotsky and social constructivist theory, to shift the focus from "teacher knows best" to the students themselves. My hope was for them to take an active part in their learning, to create what Hewett and Ehmann call a "community of knowledge," a place where knowledge-making "is understood to be dynamic, provisional, and developed and mediated socially" (33). Just as the class had slipped into a comfortable routine, the unthinkable happened. On November 12, 2012, one of the students took his own life. In a shared experience of grief and meaning-making, the disconnected class came together to create a community garden in this student's honor that ultimately became a safe haven, a peaceful memorial. In the garden, we discovered new ways to think about and experience life and education. We started with their stories, using culture and place as our developmental guides. This work, though it lasted but a year, helped prepare me for my next teaching adventure.

At the end of the 2013 school year, not surprisingly, the school informed me that funding had run dry for the GED program. I was not to have a new crop of minds for the community learning garden. Instead, I took a job teaching basic writing at a local community college. Early in the semester, I administered a writing assessment, asking students to introduce themselves through their writing and tell me what I needed to know about them in order to be an effective teacher. The purpose of this first writing assignment was two-fold: to gauge the writing ability of the class and to learn about my students. On these handwritten pages, I met them—brave and open as many of them continue to be today. My students are fringe, high school dropouts or graduates "just barely." They are ex-cons, students in recovery from drugs and alcohol, and single parents returning to school.

Figure 1: Beau's Memorial Community Garden Connections Public Charter School GED Class Hilo, Hawaii, 2012. Photo: Piper Selden.

They are adults beginning second or third careers, hoping to get ahead enough for retirement "someday." They are returned military personnel now entering civilian life, foreign and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, and people who feel cheated by the school system, who were left behind when no child should have been. These same students are those Mina Shaughnessy describes as being on "the wrong side of the academic gap" (275). Others call them *remedials*. Collecting the diagnostic, I was shocked by the number of students who worried about the class. Out of a class of 20, six or seven told me, "I've never been good at English," while another said bluntly: "I suck at writing." And who could blame them? Teachers had been telling them this for years. "This is bonehead English," one student confided. "It makes me feel like an idiot to be here. I *am* an idiot." Those words have stayed with me, informing my work as an educator and, more specifically, my classroom practices.

I started asking questions: Might there be a way to redefine "underprepared" students to foster self-worth while improving writing

skills? What can those on the front lines of teaching do to make things better? I know the latter is an older question. In 1975, I was making my own way through school in bell bottoms and Flower Power! tops, *Newsweek* asked "Why Johnny Can't Write." The article was damning: "Willy-nilly, the U.S. educational system is spawning a generation of semiliterates." America was failing her kids, and it was because we'd gone soft. "We have stopped teaching our children that the truth cannot be told apart from the right words," historian Jacques Barzun suggested (58). Years later, I ask my own question in response: If only the right words will do, by whose standards do we judge "rightness"? To complicate an already complicated matter, many technology companies now have programs to grade papers. How is a computer program to know what is "right" when a group of highly-qualified instructors can't agree?

As educators, we should all remain open to possibilities. Each time we open ourselves to other ways of thinking, our world view changes and possibilities expand, showing truth as a multifaceted gem. But, as I am often reminded when scanning the WPA and other listservs, some people in academia don't like change. Some professors are set in their ways, working off "seasoned" syllabi and assignments dating back to the Ford Administration. Perhaps these instructors are afraid to try something new or different, or maybe it's a lack of inspiration. Back in 1975, a nation worried about Johnny's composition crisis. Studies were conducted and experts proposed tough love, a return to basics: drilling parts of speech, grammar, and rules of punctuation. This was well before the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), and still today, forty years later, we're still struggling with the basics. It was only two years ago that my own college dropped the department-mandated rubric that failed papers at 4-four major errors in developmental writing courses. Even then, some professors refused to drop the rubric, citing continued use in their own classes. Admittedly, while it does make grading essays easier (who can't find four major errors in a typical essay?), it is unfair for the student, especially when many K-12 schools fail to adequately prepare their students for the rigors of college education.

For any number of reasons, students are underprepared according to college academic standards. Assessment and placement exams over-emphasize what can be quantified and graphed. Electronically-graded Scantron tests are fast and tidy, grading students by the tiny circles they fill on a strip of paper. These students can then be sorted according to "skill" as determined by a machine. Those students who "ill-prepared" and below the accepted score for college-level writing are "prescribed" a course in basic writing. My classes. Academia relies on medical jargon to

describe the underprepared. Remedial students work to remedy or cure their poor English skills. Even to frame students as ill-prepared is telling: "ill" as in sick (Rose 210). A medical positioning also puts teachers in the doctor (or nurse) position, making students passive who receive their "medicine" by way of traditional grammar lessons and limited writing, beginning with sentence-level prose, working to single paragraphs, and later to the full essay.

In their "talking book," *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*, Ira Shor and Paulo Freire address what can happen to students who internalize passive learning in a traditional classroom. Many "become non-participants, waiting for the teacher to set the rules." Students become apathetic, daydream, and "unplug" from the classroom, while others sit in "smoldering silence" (122). In other words, students who are caught in a traditional and passive student role tend to concede, give up, or they become angry and resentful. Either way, it is a negative outcome for the student. Rose touches on traditional classrooms and bind for struggling students:

> Through all my experiences… the one thing that strikes me most is the ease with which we misperceive failed performance and the degree to which this misperception both reflects and reinforces the social order. Class and culture erect boundaries that hinder our vision—blind us to the logic of error and the everpresent stirring of language—and encourage the designation of otherness, difference, deficiency. (205)

As educators and for our student's sake, we need to break the self-fulfilling circuit of frustration and perceived failure that leads to self-defeating behavior and realized failure.

Sorting and classifying students has yet another effect, one far more damaging for many students: self-identification. A student finding him- or herself in a developmental writing course feels the labeling. I know because my students have shared this with me. I recall the student embarrassed by his place in "bonehead English." In this example, the student tied self-worth and identity to his academic placement, based on test scores. Mike Rose shares his own student example in *Lives on the Boundary,* a young man who came in to dispute a grade on an essay: "I'm not a C-," he said. "Don't tell me I'm a C-" (177). Scenarios like this demonstrate that a low score can lead to identification and a self-defeating attitude, which in turn affects a student's self-efficacy and performance. But identification can also go the other way. Diane Kendig, a creative writer who taught inmates in prisons, found that successful students *felt* successful, empowered. These students had higher self-esteem (163). In

any case, writing instructors should be attentive to the problematic relationship between student scores and identification with them.

A hyperfocus on inadequacy—"how much we don't see when we look only for deficiency, when we tally up all that people can't do"—promotes, social othering and should be avoided (Rose 222). Students who already think of themselves negatively are beaten down further. That said, grading is a valuable tool; it should neither be downplayed nor watered down. The goals of basic writing are the same, "namely, the development of a readable expository style that will serve for courses and, later, for professional or civic writing assignments" (Shaughnessy 280). In a practical sense, attention to both process and product are important. Social promotion or a light touch on grading does a grave disservice to the future business professional if her writing is subpar and she loses her job because of it. We should remember that we are in the business of helping students improve their writing for a life outside our classroom.

Something needs to give, to change. Maybe that change is us. Can we reinvent ourselves as educators from the inside out? I think so. In *Writing Relationships: What Really Happens in the Composition Class*, Lad Tobin recommends that we, as instructors "analyze ourselves, that we consider our own neuroses in the reading and teaching process" (32). What can be gained by this exercise but a deeper look at our central beliefs as educators? We need to examine the writing context and experience within the classroom, as well as our own pedagogical approaches, if we want to create meaningful change. Without change, teaching becomes stale. Teachers unwilling to change or adapt to new challenges should consider retirement or a change of career.

One thing we can do to embrace change is to consider the Other and strengthen interpersonal relationships: teacher to student; student to student; and teacher to teacher (Tobin 4). Why not foster this type of community, this atmosphere of civility in the classroom? One of the kindest comments I receive from my students is when they thank me for treating them with dignity. This is a personal nod that my pedagogy is pointed in the right direction: student-centered and respectful. Once we change and/or strengthen relational dynamics in the classroom, we can adopt a more creative pedagogy, as Ira Shor calls it, which "seeks to reinvent knowledge situated in the themes, needs and language of the students, as an act of illuminating power in society" (81). In other words, students may be othered by society or placed on the outside before entering the classroom, but with compassion and careful guidance from the instructor, individuals can work together to affect positive social change—democratization for the betterment of all. Yes, we should work

together to raise the educational bar, but not to erect a solid wall to exclude or cast away others. For some in the classroom, we must build ladders, lower ropes, or employ climbing guides in the form of caring teachers, tutors, and student peers.

Maybe it is time for a cognitive shift. We could start by redefining underprepared students linguistically as "emerging writers and critical thinkers." By choosing our language more precisely, we acknowledge and show respect for different life experiences and myriad learning methods. Furthermore, we refute that *Newsweek* historian's claim that Americans have "ceased to think with words" (Sheils 58). Our words and dialogue don't just define us; they define our humanity. How, then, do we cultivate creative pedagogical change in the classroom? As writing instructors, we challenge students to write from their own unique position of place—on the outside. If emerging writers are allowed the opportunity to write from the inside, an interior landscape of being, they can think critically about ways to address change on the outside. In other words, we need to create change within ourselves before we can change the world outside.

For me, I began by reshaping my ideas by thinking differently about the classroom and learning environment. It would have been just as easy to begin metaphorically, by thinking outside the box with regard to teaching approaches, but I started in the garden. My GED students and I tended plants in our community garden and we wrote…a lot. Using life experience as a springboard for academia helps students make sense of their lives. Light and dark places are made real with what Kendig calls an "urgency of words," writing to render experiences meaningful (161). As stories are revised, students are able to make and remake themselves, not according to a grade assigned by someone else, but according to their own story. Thus, Kendig is reminded of Yeat's lines:

> The friends that have it I do wrong
> Whenever I remake a song,
> Should know what issue is at stake:
> It is myself that I remake. (qtd. Kendig 162)

I think back to my students and what they have shared with me, dark places of loss and disappointment—poverty, abuse, drugs, and divorce—but also light. Love, recovery, and recommitment to self. Moreover, knowledge-making through writing helps individuals become better members of a larger community.

I acknowledge that building community in the classroom is not a novel idea, but it is one we should champion more often, particularly with emerging writers and critical thinkers. They have been pushed outside the

boundaries in life and need more care. So I stand on ground made level, on a sure foundation laid by a community of academic masterbuilders. There is Ken Bruffee with collaborative leaning and higher education reform. Ann Berthoff demonstrates relationships between meaning and process writing. Peter Elbow shows us the way from freewriting to freethinking, while Mina Shaughnessy's work on cultural, linguistic, and sociological backgrounds helps us better understand problems for our students in the classroom. And there are so many more. The question, then, is what we do with what we have learned. These theorists aren't to be read in a graduate class and then cast off once our feet hit the classroom door. Their ideas need to be put to good use inside the classroom and within our lives. Our students reap the benefits when we become an active part of a knowledge community, learning from others and, in turn, sharing our own scholarship.

How do we use our time in the classroom to better enable our students in their writing? The answer is to change our pedagogical approach to one that is more creative, flexible, and dynamic, and one that does not segregate our students as "Others." Freire writes that "We are *becoming* something more because we are learning, are knowing, because *more* than observing, we *change*" (82). We become, we learn, we know, and we change. These students seek to change their lives. This is apparent because they are in our classroom, asking for help, requesting to sit at the big kid's table—the table where respect abounds. A traditional approach to developmental writing courses is rigid, the opposite of change—teacher in charge, armed with kill and drill fundamentals that have still not managed to teach Johnny to write. Sometimes those very same teachers are "taking one for the team," filling in to cover a late-add course or, worse yet, teaching a class in which they have no interest. Traditional teaching is status quo, and status quo is a dead thing. Instead, let us shift our focus from errors and lower order of concerns to content and meaning, higher order of concerns. By writing from the inside, students take ownership of their own learning. This type of student-centered environment creates a shared and renewed purpose, and something unexpected: hope.

Works Cited

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers.* New York: Oxford UP, 1973. Print.

Hewett, Beth L., and Christa Ehmann. *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction: Principles and Processes.* Urbana: NCTE, 2004. Print.

Kendrig, Diane. "It Is Ourselves that We Remake: Teaching Creative Writing in Prison." *Colors of a Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy.* Ed. Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom. Urbana: NCTE, 1994. 158-166. Print.

Rose, Mike. *Lives on the Boundary: A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America's Educationally Underprepared.* New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.

Shaughnessy, Mina P. *Errors & Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing.* New York: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.

Sheils, Merrill. "Why Johnny Can't Write." *Newsweek.* Dallas Independent School District. 2012. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

Shor, Ira, and Paulo Freire. *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education.* South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1987. Print.

Tobin, Lad. *Writing Relationships: What Really Happens in the Composition Classroom.* Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1993. Print.

SECONDARY EDUCATION AS A BRIDGE TO UNDERGRADUATE SUCCESS

ELIZABETH GIANFRANCISCO

Background

While secondary online education is no longer in its infancy, minimal research has been conducted to explore the bridge between non-traditional educational models and academic performance in undergraduate education. Although online educators and administrators may tout the impressive results of their programs, few authors ask former students to articulate how online education has made an impact in their lives. However, these student experiences can provide educators with a wealth of information to help guide educational practices as virtual learning models continue to expand.

This project explores the results of virtual learning's influence on organizational skills, time management, group work, communication with undergraduate educators, and general academic preparedness. The responses in this project specifically focus on high school graduates from Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA), a hybrid K-12 public charter school in Honolulu, Hawaii. Students in this blended-learning environment receive most of their instruction online. This means that students must be extremely self-disciplined and focused to excel in this type of educational environment.

Additionally, MBTA minimizes the use of "canned curriculum," or pre-created instructional materials purchased through vendors. Instead the school favors the use of teacher-created instructional units that are developed in conjunction with the school's curriculum director. The teacher-created materials are the foundation of the English program, as classroom instruction focuses on literary analysis and writing skills through short writing prompts, open-ended essays, and virtual classroom instruction.

Surveys

Having completed my fifth year of teaching at MBTA, I had an opportunity to reach out to many of its graduates who are currently in

college programs. After creating an online questionnaire using Google Spreadsheets, I contacted some of my former graduates directly via Facebook messages and a general notice posted in a Facebook forum for the school's graduates. Ten students responded to the online survey: two males and eight females. Five of the students graduated in the class of 2013. The remainder of the students graduated between 2010-2012.

After giving consent for the use of the responses provided, students were asked to complete 18 questions: seven multiple-choice questions and eleven free response prompts. In this way, it was easy to see a generalized snapshot of where the students rated their high school and college experiences while still having a deeper understanding of why they rated their responses in this manner.

Results

Based upon the students' previous success in the online/hybrid environment at the high school level, it is clear that such an environment encourages students to develop strong organizational and time-management skills. (A list of questions from the survey and a chart of the quantitative results can be found after this section.) However, I was curious as to whether or not students would identify as having these traits in their post-secondary educational careers. Seven students selected the choice that MBTA had "significantly" prepared them to be organized in college. The remaining three noted that they felt "somewhat" prepared. The numbers were the same for time-management skills, although some students swapped the "significantly" and "somewhat" ratings. The longer responses demonstrated why students felt that their high school experiences equipped them with these skills. For example, Sarah (class of 2013) revealed that she felt quite prepared to tackle her first year of college by being organized. "By the time I had finished high school I was keeping a[n] in-depth weekly schedule of assignments, live classes, chores, and work. I would list assignments by due date, importance, and estimated length of time they could be completed in..." Sarah also felt that she was better prepared than some of her peers. "…while I was organized and prepared, [other students] struggled to just keep track of due dates… MBTA taught me not only how to avoid rushing large projects, but the negative effects of doing so and the benefits of being organized." These experiential moments in high school may better prepare students to face the challenges of the college environment.

While still in high school, many of the students shared their personal struggles in keeping to a strict schedule, especially when so much of the