Chapter 9. A Framework for Transfer: Students' Development of a "Theory of Writing"

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Reflect Before Reading

Before reading this chapter, consider your FYC course and these questions: What is your present understanding of transfer and its relevance for your work as a teacher of FYC? What activities and assignments do you include that you believe will help students write successfully in different contexts, academic and otherwise? How do you determine what knowledge and understandings about writing your FYC students have at the start of the course?

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> "Writing, in general, is when a person composes some sort of coherent text, on paper and/or physically copying it down, that express thoughts and ideas that are to be shared with some sort of audience. . . . "
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> —*Margaret, first year writing student*

Transfer of knowledge about and practice in writing continues to prompt discussion in the field of composition studies, as we explore how the goal of assisting students with the transfer of writing knowledge and practice might be most effectively realized. Defined basically as the repurposing of knowledge and practice from one writing context to another, "transfer" here most often refers to the writing knowledge and practice students bring with them into new contexts and the ways that they repurpose both for new writing tasks. However, while this is a useful, quick definition, transfer, as both scholars and instructors can attest, is much more complex, as is the research focusing on it. Moreover, because trans-

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fer occurs in context, it's difficult to achieve generalizability in transfer research, though writing studies scholars are trying—as we demonstrate here.

If transfer is an important goal of writing courses, then we would be wise to consider the research on transfer demonstrating that teaching for transfer is possible: research has documented how a curriculum designed to foster transfer can be successful in helping students repurpose what they learn in such a classroom for new contexts (see Beaufort; Wardle; Yancey et al.).[1] More specifically, if one goal of first-year writing courses and programs is to help students take up the knowledge and practices they learn in writing courses and transfer them to writing situations within and outside of college, we should look both at the content taught within the first-year writing classroom and at related factors influencing student learning in that classroom.

We know from such research on prior knowledge and its effect on college writers that students bring into college a range of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, practices, dispositions, experiences, and values about writing (see Driscoll and Wells; Reiff and Bawarshi; Robertson et al.). Cultivated over years of writing in and out of school, students' prior knowledge and experiences with writing, positive and negative, have shaped these writers as they enter college. Likewise, we know from transfer research that such prior knowledge can both help and hinder students as they attempt to transfer what they know into first-year composition (FYC) and other collegiate writing situations (see Yancey et al.). Another factor accounting for students' writing experience in college is an absence of prior knowledge (see Robertson et al.), which can include students' limited conceptual schemas they might use to frame new writing situations. Developing such a framework is one goal of our curricular design for transfer, which we call Teaching for Transfer (TFT), which includes three interlocking features: key terms, systematic reflective activity (including readings, activities, and assignments), and a culminating "Theory of Writing" project in which students articulate their understanding of writing. In other words, in the TFT curriculum, students are asked to develop a theoretical approach to writing by drawing on both prior and new knowledge and practices. In addition, in developing writing knowledge and practice, students find the Theory of Writing instrumental; in combining cognitive and reflective practices, the Theory of Writing assignment, and the activities leading up to it, relies on the type of mindful abstraction[2] necessary for transfer. Students who engaged successfully in developing their Theory of Writing were

1. For more on the various positions and perspectives about transfer in writing studies, see *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*, especially Chapter Two (Yancey et al.).

2. As stated by Daniel Perkins and Gavriel Salomon, mindful abstraction encourages high road transfer and occurs when the learner is able to *abstract* information from one context of learning and *mindfully* searches for connections in another context (7).

able to see themselves differently as writers—as writers who adapted to writing situations by calling upon the conceptual framework of writing knowledge and practices they understood as appropriate in that situation and which they knew they could utilize regardless of whether or not the situation was new.

In our discussion of the Teaching for Transfer curricular model throughout this chapter, we focus in particular on the Theory of Writing, a curricular feature that has helped our research subjects—both previously and currently—transition from understanding writing as a universal practice to understanding writing as a contextualized practice keyed to each situation. Through detailing the experiences of three participants, two first-year students from a private liberal arts university in the West and one first-year student from a public university in the Northeast, as they enter FYC, complete the Teaching for Transfer curriculum, and write in other classes, we illustrate how students' development of the Theory of Writing helps them both frame new writing situations and compose in them.[3] To do this, we begin with a brief overview of the Teaching for Transfer curriculum and a background of the study to help contextualize the Theory of Writing assignment and its effects.

The TFT Curriculum: A Set of Key Terms, a Reflective Framework, and a Theory of Writing

The Teaching for Transfer curriculum reported in *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing* (Yancey et al.) has now been used on multiple campuses, two of which we focus on here.[4] As identified earlier, the TFT model includes three integrated features: (1) a set of key terms for writing concepts, (2) an intentional reflective framework that is both systematic and reiterative, and (3) students' development of a Theory of Writing as a recursive, cognitive, and reflective assignment. The culminating Theory of Writing assignment requires students, after a quarter- or semester-long reflective process of several iterations, to define their writing knowledge and practice as developed in the TFT course, its ultimate aim being to support students in creating a conceptual frame for bridging the writing in FYC and the writing in other sites. As an assignment, the Theory of Writing engages students in a set of practices tapping into both their prior and emerging writing knowledge as they continue generating an understanding of their own writing practices. The specific attention to reflection in the TFT model, especially the Theory of Writing assignment, often changes the way students understand composing, in part because they are asked to take up their knowledge and practices in new situations within the course.

3. There are two institutions involved in this research, one public and one private; our findings are not school-specific, an important observation given the school's differing populations.

4. For more on the TFT curricular model as adapted to new contexts, see http://writingacrosscontexts.blogspot.com/

Since the field's turn toward process over product more than 30 years ago, writing classes have focused on process as a kind of content, one that the research suggests is necessary but insufficient on its own to help students transfer. In the TFT curriculum, by way of contrast, students engage in an intentional reflective framework asking them, concurrently, to *think*—consider, reflect, theorize, mentally map—and *act*—compose, revise, edit—to address a writing task, as opposed to thinking and acting separately. More specifically, students are asked to *recall, reframe*, and *relocate*. As detailed in what follows, students begin the course by *recalling* their prior knowledge and experiences they bring into FYC, which provides a conceptual foundation. Next, in different reflective activities and assignments, students are asked to *reframe* their prior knowledge and experience to meet the writing situation presented by each assignment in the course. In asking students to reframe a writing situation based on both prior knowledge and experience and current knowledge and experience, we want students to put the two in conversation with one another in order to build their conceptual foundation. Lastly, writers can then *relocate* the knowledge and practices gained from the current writing situation to other writing situations; in other words, they can see opportunities to use what they now know. Learning acquired and articulated through the reflective activities and assignments helps students not only read across assignments, but also read across subjects, genres, and process(es). In sum, this reflective sequence—*recall, reframe,* and *relocate*—has students theorizing about both their past and current knowledge and practices in meaningful ways that promote transfer.[5]

Students develop their Theory of Writing in response to scaffolded prompts encouraging them to forward their thinking about and understanding of writing. The Theory of Writing, for which they mindfully abstract their own knowledge about writing, helps students develop as writers and as agents of their own learning (see Yancey, *Reflection*). With that agency, they are better able to make sense of how their prior knowledge and experiences *with* writing, as well as their knowledge *about* writing, can be used to transfer successfully. As we outline in what follows, the Theory of Writing becomes the framework students utilize to transfer writing knowledge and practice into concurrent writing situations and forward into future writing contexts.

The Theory of Writing can be particularly advantageous in helping students overcome barriers to progress in writing that might be created by the prior knowledge they bring to college (see Cleary; Driscoll and Wells; Reiff and Bawarshi; Yancey et al.). Given that writing involves both theory and practice, we can assume that knowledge about writing goes beyond what is involved in just the "doing" of writing to include thinking about writing conceptually, a point made

5. See also Taczak's threshold concept, "Reflection is Critical in the Development of Writers," in Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's edited collection *Naming What We Know*.

in signature pedagogies, an educational reform effort emphasizing the idea that helping students *think like*—for example, like a chemist, a sociologist, or in this case, a writer—is fundamental to helping students develop into that identity (see Gurung et al.). Moreover, addressing writing more specifically, Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle argue that "writing is a subject of study and an activity" (15), and it is this idea of writing as both knowledge and practice—concept and process—that the TFT curricular model, and the Theory of Writing assignment specifically, aims to help students understand. The conceptual knowledge *about* and practice *in* writing, using their conceptual model (Theory of Writing), helps students *think like* the writers they are becoming in FYC and the writers they need to be in the contexts beyond it.

Background of the Study

For the purposes of this chapter, we provide participant excerpts from interviews and writing samples from two IRB-approved research studies conducted at two different sites.[6] The first is a private, selective doctoral degree-granting institution in the West classified as a "research university with high research activity" with 11,500 students, 5,000 of whom are undergraduates. The university encourages an interdisciplinary approach to intellectual work and supports students' majoring in more than one area, and the first-year writing courses (a two-quarter sequence is required of all students) are housed in an independent, award-winning writing program. The second institution is an Hispanic-serving, public comprehensive suburban university in the Northeast, with an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 10,000 and a graduate enrollment of approximately 1,500 students, who are largely of working class background and are mostly first-generation students. This institution features a wide range of majors, has a high transfer-in rate from local community colleges, and features a writing program with a one-semester course requirement in composition.

For the purpose of this chapter, we base our observations on the experiences of three students from these two institutions, focusing primarily on interviews and on Theory of Writing assignments. The participants were interviewed as they moved from first-year composition to new writing contexts, specifically other college courses in various disciplines in which writing was required. Like the earlier students we studied, the participants discussed in this chapter also demon-

6. As we continue to conduct research featuring the TFT curriculum, we constantly re-evaluate to consider potential adaptations given different institutions, different student populations, and different writing program goals; we also refine the model based on our past findings. As noted previously, our initial study (described in detail in *Writing Across Contexts*) included several findings that centered on students' prior knowledge, and from these findings we aim to tap into students' prior knowledge as they learn in our TFT-model FYC course.

strated—through their Theory of Writing assignments—an uptake of key terms, which they use in framing an approach to new writing contexts.

The Theory of Writing: A Reiterative Sequence of Moves

In order to promote students' Theory of Writing, reflective activities and assignments are built around the four major course assignments, which means that at any given moment students are reflecting on one or more of the key terms, the course readings, and the major writing assignments. Because the Theory of Writing is developed and re-developed through a series of reflective activities and assignments, students are able to articulate what they've learned about writing and about themselves as writers, as well as identify where they can repurpose this learning. The Theory of Writing assignment thus provides a space for students *to make sense of* their writing—the knowledge and practice—in ways they have not been asked to do before.

During the first week of the TFT course, for example, students are asked to complete a reflective assignment asking them to explore their prior understanding and attitudes about writing, ways they define writing, and ways they identify as writers. The purpose of this first reflection is two-fold: (1) to have students articulate their understanding of what writing is and (2) to have students articulate their sense of their own writing. In response to this reflective assignment, for example, Margaret, a participant from the private institution in the West, defines writing capaciously:

> Writing, in general, is when a person composes some sort of coherent text, on paper and/or physically copying it down, that express thoughts and ideas that are to be shared with some sort of audience. . . . How good or bad writing is [is] based on the opinion of the reader; personally any writing that has the ability to hold me captive simply from the voice and language used is good to me. I see myself as a pretty good writer that has enough knowledge to write in several genres but I am by no means an expert in any of them. My key terms are Voice, Effective, Thoughts, Opinions, Interesting, Language, and Syntax.

Margaret's understanding of writing is fairly sophisticated for a first-year college writer. She understands writing as a material practice, and she theorizes writing as more than mere authorial "express[ion]," instead asserting that writing is to be "shared" with an audience and that the "opinion of the reader" will speak to writing's quality. Margaret herself identifies as a reader, commenting that "any writing . . . has the ability to hold me captive simply from the voice and language," and she also identifies herself as "a pretty good writer . . . but . . . by no means an expert." As important, in outlining her sense of writing and herself as a writer, Margaret uses the vocabulary of writing: "writer," "audience," and "genre." Among

our participants, Margaret's response indicates an understanding about writing, and a vocabulary for writing, that is unusual for first-year students so early in the TFT course. At the same time, as Margaret herself asserts, she is a novice, someone who is not an expert. As Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz argue, students who accept their status as novices have a greater opportunity to learn how to write as college composers, and as we will see, Margaret's acceptance of herself as a novice helps her as she develops her knowledge about and her Theory of Writing.

A second reflective activity involves the introduction of some new key terms: students read both theoretical texts on key terms (such as Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" and Kerry Dirk's "Navigating Genres") and texts that exemplify the key terms (such as the way audience is invoked in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"). Their next step is theorizing for themselves through reflecting on the key terms, which allows them to begin developing a Theory of Writing. More specifically, students are asked to compose a reflective essay that organizes their response into three areas: a discussion of the key terms they value at this point in the course, a discussion of how they identify as a writer at this point, and a very brief statement of their emerging individual Theory of Writing. This reflection is designed to be reiterative and intentional, as students build on and return to the previous week's reflection.

The reflective framework of the TFT course creates a recursive process by which students begin to theorize about writing, often in ways they haven't experienced before, and which encourages thinking about their approach to writing every time they start to write. In the early iterations of the reflective assignments in the course, however, student reflections are more reporting than theorizing, as Scott, our participant from a public institution in the Northeast, demonstrates. In responding to instructions to (1) discuss what you value about writing—your writing, writing that you read, or just writing in general and (2) identify the key terms about writing you think are important for writers to understand, Scott indicates no awareness of the course key terms (only two—genre and audience—have been discussed at this point) and articulates a limited understanding of research writing, based principally on high school courses:

> My key terms are editing, layering, and evidence. My writing is better when there is evidence to explain what I'm writing about, and when I can use layering to add more information that might be important to tell. These both make my writing more full and factual. And then editing, because writing and editing go hand in hand to make any writing better you have to edit it a few times. Another of my terms is persistence. I have to be persistent to make sure the other terms are happening.

Scott's focus here includes attention to qualities of writing and to a strategy of layering that he finds helpful. Better writing, Scott says, includes evidence because it "explain[s] what I'm writing about," and the strategy of layering—"to

add more information that might be important to tell"—can help provide more information; combined, evidence and layering make the writing "more full and factual," qualities that Scott values. Likewise, "better" writing is edited writing, Scott believes. Not least, creating such writing—informed, evidential, and edited—requires persistence on Scott's part. These terms, based on Scott's prior composing experiences, don't match the course key terms, of course, but rather articulate Scott's understanding of writing, which is located in specific qualities, in one strategy for achieving them, and in a required behavioral pattern.

As the term moves forward, students in the TFT course develop more sophisticated reflection about aspects of their writing, moving from relying heavily on prior knowledge to integrating both earlier and new knowledge developed in the course. Again, Scott's example illustrates his thinking about his own writing during a later iteration of the Theory of Writing assignment. In the sixth week of the 15-week semester, Scott was asked to look back at his previous iterations of his Theory of Writing to consider what he thought he knew about writing on those previous occasions and what he thinks he knows currently:

> I think my key terms are changing because I looked back at my [previous reflection outlined earlier] and I don't know why I used all those. Those things are important but I don't know if they are key terms for me. I think maybe evidence is key if you're always doing research I guess. But now I think my terms are audience, purpose, and genre. And I guess perseverance is still a good one. But audience, purpose and genre work together, because you need the genre that fits your audience and the purpose and all of them need each other to work right. As a writer I need to have those things figured out so my writing will do its job. So my Theory of Writing now is more about knowing who your audience is and what genre they need from you, if you're the writer, and why you are writing to them or what need are you filling? These are the things you have to know as a writer. . . . I can still edit or whatever, but fixing my mistakes doesn't matter really if my audience gets the wrong kind of writing from me.

Here, Scott identifies the three key terms of "audience," "purpose," and "genre" as "things figured out so my writing will do its job." Writing, he says, is more than composing an argument, although "maybe evidence is key if you're always doing research." But writing for Scott is now more than research, less tied to the genre of argument: it's "more about knowing who your audience is and what genre they need from you, if you're the writer, and why you are writing to them or what need are you filling." As important, just as he revised his sense of writing to expand beyond argument, Scott also revises his view of editing so that the writing itself comes first: "I can still edit or whatever, but fixing my mistakes doesn't matter really if my audience gets the wrong kind of writing from me."

Final Theory of Writing: Students' Framework for Transfer

While students' Theory of Writing continually evolves throughout the entire course, it culminates in the course's final major assignment: a Theory of Writing that is also a reflection-in-presentation (see Yancey, *Reflection*) students develop by reflecting on the entire semester, in which they *recall, reframe,* and *relocate* key terms as a means of writing themselves into other writing situations (Taczak 78). The reflection-in-presentation assignment specifically asks students to identify the key terms they believe are most important to writing in order to theorize as to why they chose these key terms and to use the key terms in explaining how they understand writing. The reflection-in-presentation assignment asks that students consider the following:[7]

1. Define your Theory of Writing.
2. What was your Theory of Writing coming into this course? How has your Theory of Writing evolved with each piece of writing?
3. How have you already used your Theory of Writing in this course and/or other writing contexts?
4. How might your Theory of Writing transfer to other writing situations, both inside the classroom and outside the classroom?

Asking students to articulate their final iteration of Theory of Writing (in the course) engages them in thinking about the ways in which they make knowledge about writing, the ways in which they practice writing, and the ways in which writing impacts who they are as writers. As Yancey's work has also shown, reflective practices like the culminating reflection-in-presentation, and the reflective activities leading to it, allow students to make assessments about their writing, help them make sense of their writing practices, and over a period of time, support them in becoming a writer who "invents, repeatedly and recursively, a composing self" (Yancey, *Reflection* 168, 187, 200).

Margaret's final Theory of Writing shows us what a culminating Theory of Writing looks like: here it continues to emphasize the role of genre and audience, but the key expression of rhetorical situation anchors a more complex understanding:

> So what makes writing good? Writing is much more than forming sentences using the grammatical and punctual structures we were taught as children, it's more than just the use of language to communicate an idea or thought. My Theory of Writing is that

7. The final Theory of Writing assignment—the reflection-in-presentation—involves several class periods, reading of a chapter on transfer from *How People Learn* (Bransford et al.) and an excerpt from Yancey's *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, and a good deal of process work involving drafting, self-analysis, peer review, and revision.

> writing is an action; the act of reflecting in the past and looking into the future in order to strategically respond to a rhetorical situation. It is a process of transferring knowledge and creating new ideas in response to the situation. Writing should meet basic requirements, such as being grammatically correct as well as fit into a specific genre in which the author intrigues and influences the audience through their language, tone, and use of facts and opinion.

Like Scott, Margaret is interested in quality, in "what makes writing good," her view that it's "more than forming sentences using the grammatical and punctual structures we were taught as children, [and] it's more than just the use of language to communicate an idea or thought." What that "more" is, Margaret identifies, is writing as action. Unintentionally echoing Kenneth Burke, Margaret defines writing as "an action" and observes that it requires a kind of reflection: "the act of reflecting in the past and looking into the future in order to strategically respond to a rhetorical situation." In doing this, Margaret says, a writer can both transfer "knowledge and creat[e] new ideas in response to the situation." The situation, in other words, becomes the governing key concept in Margaret's theory. In sum, in her Theory of Writing, Margaret demonstrates development of her writing knowledge through her theorizing and using the key terms to create a conceptual frame.

Theory (Reflect) and Practice (Reflect); Repeat

In order for students to develop their Theory of Writing so that it functions as a frame for facilitating transfer, the theory needs to be conceptual and practical. Practice is based on the understanding that the students are developing as writers, and the theory informs their practice. Therefore, as noted previously, the TFT curricular model engages students in reading both theoretical pieces about the key rhetorical concepts and examples of key terms in action. These readings—which focus on and exemplify the TFT model's key writing concepts—are analyzed in class instruction and discussion, then reflected upon through writing about the conceptual content and about what students think about that content. This curricular model works best when students are constantly engaging in directed, intentional reflection throughout the process, which prompts them to begin to make connections across what they are learning and what they are actually doing. A guiding assumption for this work is that students are novices who, like the participants Sommers and Saltz studied, can write their way *into* expertise rather than *from* a position of expertise. Alena, another student from the private university in the West, illustrates this by writing her way into expertise in her science classes. In this section, then, we provide an analysis of Alena's experience over the span of a year, first as she began the TFT writing course and then as she moved into organic chemistry courses.

Alena's first reflection in the TFT course theorizes about writing as focused on organization as a strategy, which her key terms suggest:

> Writing is a form of communication. But I believe that it is a way to turn actual thoughts into a more organized form of communication. Sometimes I feel that communication is incomplete of your own thought process. A lot of times it is so hard to form words to what you are processing in your mind. But the best way to organize and present your thoughts is usually writing. . . . This all depends on what I have to write and how it is related to me. These are the key terms . . . flow, convincing, organized, detailed, emotionally engaging, complete, personal, and a presented counter-argument.

Alena here identifies writing with organization, a word (and its roots) repeated three times in this short passage: organization is her grounding concept. She also associates writing with a means of expression because without it, it can be "hard to form words to what you are processing in your mind." Writing is also personal for Alena in another way: central to her writing is "how it is related to me." And her list of eight key terms, in its juxtapositional listing of values (e.g., "detailed") and strategies or textual chunks (e.g., "counter-argument") characterizes a somewhat disjointed conception of writing.

In her first interview of the research study, conducted midway through the term, she responds to a prompt asking what she believes is good writing: "[I believe that good writing is] putting down your thoughts in words in order to communicate with someone or persuade them. . . . [An author] I think that puts a lot of outside things into her books like knowledge and really connects things well [with an audience] is Jodi Picoult." Later in the same interview, she responds to whether or not, based on her definition of good writing, she is herself a good writer: "I think it depends on what I'm writing because if it's something that I don't have a lot of knowledge about or I don't want to write about it then I'm not going to put enough effort in, but if it's something I want to write about or know a lot about, I do better." Alena's initial understanding about writing and herself as a writer is connected to authorship: to Picoult as a best-selling author that Alena admires for her writing, and to herself as the author of her own writing. When discussing her writing, Alena qualifies the context in which she is writing as having a lot to do with how "good" her writing will be, or how much effort she puts in, and although she doesn't use the term "context," Alena does recognize that there are different situations for writing. In discussing her example of Picoult, however, Alena says that a writer should connect with an audience, even if she says so in the context of discussing a commercially successful author. At the point of this interview, the term "audience" had been discussed in the TFT course, so it's possible that Alena is mirroring that discussion in her interview or suggesting it because she thinks it is the "correct" response. But Alena also recognizes that

writers in general must consider the impact of their writing on those for whom it is intended, and she indicates a belief that, for her, "expert" writing is based on whether or not there is effort behind it and whether or not she has knowledge about the subject. Alena also has an analytical approach to writing, attempting to partition writing into various objectives and connections, even if she doesn't articulate more specifically what those objectives or connections are.

As Alena continued in the course and as the research study progressed, she reported that at the beginning of the course she was uncertain of what she was learning and was resistant to approaching writing in new ways, especially since she had been successful in her previous academic writing emphasizing research, personal writing, and cultural analysis. She expressed a discomfort, in particular, with the idea of a Theory of Writing: "while I was in class I freaked out about some of the writing assignments because it was the first time I ever had to approach writing in that way [by theorizing about it]. Now I looked back on it . . . it just seems like a different way to write now that I have been exposed to it." Because students are asked to theorize in ways that are unfamiliar to them, they do tend to "freak out" or resist. Theorizing about writing often seems counterintuitive to them: writing is something they are used to doing, but not something they are used to thinking about, at least in the ways required in the TFT course. The reiterative reflective framework of the TFT model, however, requiring that students revisit both writing practices and writing knowledge, can help reduce such resistance. In her final reflection-in-presentation/Theory of Writing drawing on her understanding of key terms, Alena continues to emphasize analysis, but now includes it inside the rhetorical situation:

> I am a very analytical writer. This has developed my theory and also allows for me to have identity as a writer. All writing starts with a rhetorical situation. When writing I always like to establish a good knowledge base by using my own ideas, but also looking at other ideas and sources that can contribute to my writing. In doing so, I can also find a way to set up my paper and organize all of the thoughts that I would like to include. . . . I would have thought that writing in English and writing up a chemistry lab report were two completely different things. Now that I have established who I am as a writer and also how to write I know that I can apply my writing methods to all pieces. I will always identify with being analytical and know how to apply that across all subjects and ways of writing.

Alena hasn't abandoned the idea of organization, which she values in writing, but she uses that previous thinking within the context of new knowledge about rhetorical situation, which she also values: "all writing starts with a rhetorical situation." Here she also articulates that writing is not only about the writer expressing oneself, but also about the elements of the rhetorical situation a writer must

consider, which expands her earlier, less sophisticated position that writers like Picoult are successful because they connect with an audience or that good writing is related to effort. She sees the rhetorical situation as foundational to writing across contexts—as she indicates by registering her surprise at the similarities between writing for English and writing for chemistry when viewed through the lens of rhetorical situation. Likewise, in this developing Theory of Writing, she indicates a growing acceptance of theorizing, which she initially resisted. Finally, she indicates a level of expertise (see Bransford et al.; Robertson et al.; Sommers and Saltz) when she identifies patterns across different writing situations in discussing the analysis required in English class and in chemistry lab reports. She concludes that her Theory of Writing centers on "address[ing] a rhetorical situation in an organized manner and specific genre through logos, pathos, and ethos to achieve my purpose of writing."

As Alena explains in her exit survey ten weeks after the completion of the TFT course, the most important thing she learned in the TFT course is her Theory of Writing:

> I think the Theory of Writing . . . because I understand why I'm writing and how to do it. But it also helps me with something like my lab reports because it helps me set up the purpose and once you get to the higher levels [in science classes] it's hard to always understand what's expected or what goes into . . . so for example what's expected in organizing chemistry lab reports. But after learning the key terms and identifying and understanding them, I can fit those to the writing pieces in [both] biology and chemistry. And even apply my theory . . . I can develop and understand my writing in many situations.

Moreover, as she explains in an interview one year later, she puts her theory into practice in writing her lab reports for Organic Chemistry:

> For lab reports, it's kind of habitual now. I usually focus on . . . the introduction, and what I need to tell the reader, and then the materials and the methods is a quick summary, and for the discussion, which is the bulk of it, I usually look over sources and the prior knowledge that I have on it. So, I look at the purpose, first, then the information being able to pull as sources are something important for me, and then answering the question. I always think, too, about my audience.

She explains that it was learning the key terms (from the TFT course) and developing her Theory of Writing that enabled her to understand how to successfully write her lab reports, explaining, "I think with lab reports [the Theory of Writing] helps me because it helps me to direct my writing more. . . . I know why I'm writing and I also have the resources to give me the information that's

needed to answer the question and I know I have to have it make sense for the audience. . . ." Later in the interview, she stated that the Theory of Writing "made me be able to focus why I'm writing and how I'm writing better and also give me a reason to write instead of just kind of blabbing on about stuff." Alena thus suggests, through her interview a year after taking the TFT course, that she relies on her Theory of Writing, specifically for her Organic Chemistry lab reports, to help her understand *how* to approach the assignment: *I also have the resources to give me the information that's needed to answer the question and I know I have to have it make sense for the audience*. She notes that this understanding began with the first reflective assignment, which made her stop and re-evaluate her prior experiences with writing: "it wasn't like an aha moment like I get it now, but it was a moment where I began to understand that writing could be done in a different way because I had never been asked to do a writing like that." In sum, after beginning FYC by "freak[ing]out," Alena found out that the TFT course, specifically the culminating Theory of Writing assignment, helped her develop her writing knowledge and practices for purposes of transfer.

The framework students develop in the Theory of Writing assignment—with its reiterative quality and its requirement that they think about *why* they are writing, not just *what* and *how* they are writing—continues to evolve as they grow as writers and learners. Often in new contexts during the TFT course and after completing it, when the required assignments of the Theory of Writing are finalized, students, including the participants in this study, find themselves continuing to theorize and learn on their own when encountering new writing contexts. They use their Theory of Writing as the conceptual frame to analyze new situations and plan approaches to them, not merely applying what they know to a given situation, but re-envisioning the situation within the frame of their Theory of Writing, as we see in Scott's account:

> Now I always think about my Theory of Writing, of what is going to be important for every assignment I have to write. Everyone reads it in class and they just look for the minimum pages we have to have or the kind of essay it says, like if it's a research essay or whatever. But I read the assignment and think about it as a mixture of my audience, even if it's just the professor for this, the genre I need to use, the context that the writing happens in, and the purpose, which is the easy part. The purpose is usually right there in the instructions, because the professor tells you what you're writing for. But I think about it anyway because what if there's more to it than just the professor telling you what to write and why. Or who you write it for. It should be bigger than that. Ever since [the TFT] class I use my Theory of Writing everywhere. I had to do this artist statement and that was hard for everyone but I just thought of my Theory of Writ-

> ing and put all those parts together to figure out what to write. I mean I had to work on it a lot but the bones of it were always there because I knew about my audience and purpose and the genre a little bit. It made it easier for sure.

Scott demonstrates in this excerpt that he has developed an approach to writing in context based on his Theory of Writing. He understands that his Theory of Writing is a framework guiding an approach, depending on the context for which he is writing. He thinks about the audience for the assignment in analyzing what the assignment requires, but he thinks beyond the requirements of the assignment since "It should be bigger than that." To accomplish this, he analyzes the writing needs of a situation to identify genre, audience, context, and purpose. In doing so, he demonstrates a strong use of a conceptual frame for approaching writing in new contexts.

Conclusion: Reaction into Action

Students' initial reactions to creating a Theory of Writing, those of students in general and of the three participants here, are what we might imagine, and they take two forms. In one, students are simply surprised that there could be such a thing as a Theory of Writing, especially given that they have not previously encountered any explicit theory about writing. In the second, students believe that they cannot create such a theory, in part because they don't yet understand how to theorize about writing, and in part because they sense that they don't qualify as writers who can create a Theory of Writing. However, by the conclusion of the course, many students in the TFT course can both create a Theory of Writing and put it into action, to varying degrees, as demonstrated by our participants. Through understanding writing as a process of moving from a reaction to a considered action, students can shift from relying *only* on their previous underdeveloped approaches to writing to drawing on prior and new knowledge and practices in a conceptual, intentional, and recursive process, one that we outline here in steps but that in practice tends to be recursive, which offers several benefits. First, using their Theory of Writing as a frame for taking up each new composing task, students interpret the situation based on their prior and new knowledge and practices, drawing on what they know or have experienced to identify the writing situation they're in and what might be similar to other situations. Second, students assess the situation, also drawing on what they know to determine what is required or called for in this writing situation and what they might have experienced that is like it. Third, students consider how they might approach the situation by drawing upon their Theory of Writing to develop a "solution" to the problem the writing situation is presenting. And fourth, they *repurpose* their Theory of Writing successfully to the new context by extracting the knowledge and practices they know are appropriate for the situation, based on the identification,

assessment, and consideration of the previous three moves, and *repurpose* them to compose the written artifact most appropriate for the situation. These moves are recursive in nature. Through recursive reflection, and by repurposing the conceptual framework they have developed, writers can continue to develop or adapt as they meet each new writing situation.

More than 20 years ago, Ann Berthoff argued that "in reflecting, we can change, we can transform, we can envisage" (751); our intent is that through the Teaching for Transfer curricular model, students "change . . . transform . . . [and] envisage" their writing knowledge and practice through the creation of their Theory of Writing. Our participants Margaret, Scott, and Alena show us how they did, in fact, change and transform in their practice as writers and in envisioning their future as writers. The Theory of Writing provides students with the intellectual space to do exactly that, as Margaret explains:

> The reason I signed up for this class was basically to meet my credit requirements, maintain a good GPA. . . . I had no expectations to learn anything new about writing, I just assumed that we would read some articles and write a few papers to show the university that we were proficient in college level writing. I was wrong. We learned more about good writing this quarter than I learned in my entire high school career. . . . My Theory of Writing can be applied to other writing situations because I have to use all of its components in any writing process I go through. I must think about the rhetorical situation I am responding to, the genre I am writing in, what information I want to include, and the language I use whether I am composing a paper for another class, texting a friend, or writing an email to a future employer.

In sum, the TFT curriculum's Theory of Writing provides students with a conceptual frame that assists them as they develop as writers and as they adapt their knowledge and practice to the writing situations in their future.

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion After Chapter 9

1. The authors contend that the theory of writing that students create enables them to see themselves differently as writers and, as a result, they are better able to adapt their writing for different situations and contexts. What assignments are you currently using in your FYC course that work to help students re-see themselves as writers? Or what assignments might you use to allow students to see themselves differently as writers?

2. Kara, Liane, and Kathleen note that FYC courses should accommodate writing both as an activity and as an object of study. Identify a text that you could use in your FYC course to promote students' understanding of some aspect of writing. What would students learn from reading this text? How might this learning be of benefit to them?

Writing Activity After Chapter 9

Create your own theory of writing and explain how you might use your theory of writing in your FYC course. For example, what learning might result from sharing your theory of writing with your FYC students? In what ways could your theory of writing inform your pedagogy?

Further Reading

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