

Fact and Theory and Value Judgment: What *They Say/We Say* of Basic Writing's Unhedged Good

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ABSTRACT: *This article uses Zak Lancaster's 2016 discovery that academics do not actually write the way They Say/I Say says they do to reflect on relations between, on the one hand, facts about academic writing and, on the other, the pedagogical values that underlie and guide those facts—or, put another way, to reflect on how values we may espouse relate to the facts of actual practice. What implications for how we teach Basic Writing follow from the facts of how academics write? I argue that what “follows” is deliberative, not deductive: although value-laden practice may emerge from and relate to certain facts, such practice is not necessarily entailed by those facts. Some discussion of is/ought relations helps explain this argument, i.e., that how things go is not always how they should. This argument also points, then, toward the good that Basic Writing should promote.*

KEYWORDS: *Basic Writing; civic engagement; critical reading; deliberative practice; fact; the good; They Say/I Say; value*

Do academics really write the way *They Say/I Say* says they do? The answer to that question surely matters; how it might matter to Basic Writing is the focus of this article. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing (TSIS)*, a popular textbook by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, develops the metaphor of academic writing as “a conversation.” *TSIS* claims that when “writing [i.e., what *I Say*] responds to something that has been said or might be said [i.e., what *They Say*], it thereby performs the meaningful task of supporting, correcting, or complicating that other view” (xiii). Basic conversational responsiveness and then some—this promisingly dialogic take on academic literacy is an outcome that the writing program I direct aims for. Based on recent program-wide assessment, however, our aim appears off-target, especially with respect to teaching reading as a critical part of such conversation. This failure is disappointing but, as I’ll discuss below, perhaps not all that surprising. More of a surprise is the possibility that

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TSIS itself does not deliver what it promises. Many of us—I, for one—teach as though the templates *TSIS* features are actually used. Yet evidence that these templates are *not* generally used has recently been presented—most notably by Zak Lancaster’s 2016 article “Do Academics Really Write This Way? A Corpus Investigation of Moves and Templates in ‘*They Say/I Say*.’”

Lancaster investigates whether the templates recommended by *TSIS* are actually used. His discovery is that those templates are generally *not* used. The templates that are in fact used, the moves that are in fact made, are *less direct* than the templates and moves recommended by *TSIS*. Lancaster’s article, then, presents an opportunity to reflect on how values we may espouse (such as those in *TSIS*) relate to the facts of actual practice. Reflecting on what his practical discovery means, Lancaster joins his project to others that seek “to recenter language in writing research and instruction” (459). This call “to recenter language” may mean that the language practices that constitute academic writing are what related research should pursue and what writing courses should impart. If so, then I would say not that such a commitment should be made central to BW research and instruction only—but rather that this commitment is, or can be, on a continuum with BW’s deliberative priorities, *civic* as well as academic. I will return to this continuum in closing, at which point it should be clear why—in BW classes—priority goes to deliberative discourse, by which is meant actual, reasoned discussion about future-oriented policy questions. This is the *unhedged good* to which my title refers.

To argue for this good is not to diminish studies like Lancaster’s—studies that make available knowledge that is verifiable—as Keith Rhodes and Monica McFawn Robinson put it (13, 18). Verifiable knowledge (such as whether academics actually write the way *TSIS* says they do) is more than a little useful. Credible evidence of links between developmental reforms, e.g., Accelerated Learning or Stretch programs, and a decrease in student attrition has the power to persuade administrators, perhaps also colleagues in other disciplines—those with reason to be skeptical of sacrificing more curricular space and money to “remedial” programs. Not to embrace research that is replicable, aggregable, and data supported—“RAD research,” as Richard Haswell calls it—is to surrender “its ability to deflect outside criticism with solid and ever-strengthening data” (Haswell 201, 219). Who would disagree—would disavow the usefulness of knowledge it is unreasonable to reject?¹

Would more than a few of us, insofar as readers of *JBW* constitute an “us,” contest the claim that such knowledge is intimately connected with values—with our normative, value-laden theories of what BW is,

what its pedagogy should do? Here there is more uncertainty, perhaps—an uncertainty emerging from the connection itself, not from the question of whether there’s a connection. When we reflect on our knowledge, the factual basis of our knowledge and the values that drive our theory and pedagogy needn’t be opposed. They can work interdependently (Haswell 203, 219) and, moreover, probably work best that way (theory without knowledge, knowledge without theory? No thanks). But even so, as we work with facts and values as though they were interdependent, on what basis should a new fact—an empirical finding, say, about how experienced or inexperienced academic writers actually signal concessions—count as a reason to adjust our value-laden theory, such as our pedagogy or the principles that justify a Stretch program?

This is a pressing question for me. When our program converted to Stretch in 2014, we did so based on value-laden theory: teacher-researchers *should* imagine classrooms of student-writer citizens who regard others, as they regard themselves, as free and equal. They are free to pursue their own conceptions of the good; committed to the principle that others are also free to pursue their conceptions of the good—a pursuit often enough leading to differences of opinion—they are able and willing to cooperate, critically and creatively, to help make the classroom a place of collaborative inquiry. This collaborative enterprise is symbolic action for civic, professional, and personal ends; those ends inform the deliberative community’s decision regarding which differences of opinion become *stases*—those places where the agreement to disagree begins the inquiry.

In the hopes of better accommodating the students conducting this enterprise, we eliminated remedial, pre-baccalaureate (i.e., non-credit bearing) BW instruction; replaced it with a curriculum in which the same fifteen learning outcomes are met in either a single-quarter course, a two-quarter sequence (Stretch), or a three-quarter sequence (Extended Stretch); and instituted Directed Self Placement (DSP), allowing students to use standardized tests—such as the California State University System’s English Placement Test—and a local survey, as well as the counsel of online teachers and tutors, to place themselves. Whichever option students place themselves into, they engage the same fifteen outcomes, and these outcomes—whether they address drafting strategies or critical reading or the contingencies of rhetorical situations—are understood as instrumental to the deliberative assumptions our program makes about students and the reasons they and others could have to care about, to study, to develop one’s reading and writing.

These deliberative assumptions imply value judgment, an implication I can explain with reference to the important question of educational transfer. Transfer, as presented in Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak's 2014 *Writing Across Contexts*, depends on "the ability *to see* both similarity and difference across sites, and *to see* similarities only where they exist and differences where they exist. Those distinctions, we believe, are at the heart of transfer" (102n.6; emphasis added). *Writing Across Contexts* inquires into, and reflects on, teaching practices that enhance "students' ability *to see*, like experts, patterns of similarity and difference across tasks and thus enhance their theories of writing" (147; emphasis added). Let us assume that "to see, like experts" implies not so much seeing positivistically—seeing what anyone would see, regardless of her theory—as, rather, something like seeing in a theorizing way: i.e., a kind of *reading*. To read in a theorizing way, "like experts," need not mean seeing the same thing experts see. While it may be true that experts can see the same thing, sometimes they do not, and often enough they have to justify what they see as *more or less* important. To read for the facts of the matter, then, may involve an active sort of seeing, an act both involved and involving. Such reading does justice to one of the dynamic aspects of "fact," as presented by Alasdair MacIntyre: "In the sixteenth century and earlier 'fact' in English was usually a rendering of the Latin 'factum,' a deed, an action, and sometimes in Scholastic Latin an event or an occasion" (357).² To get our audience to see as we do—to see an occasion of fact in routine data, to see that fact as a reason to believe or do something—is to compose the value-laden inquiry we and our audience co-conduct.

That our stretch curriculum might help students imagine reading as *this* kind of value-laden inquiry seems a necessary assumption—an assumption about the good that our curriculum should help realize. It seems to us that, regardless of the facts, this good *must* be assumed. If, for example, facts about how our students enact Critical Reading seem unaligned with this good, then the fault (we believe) lies not with the assumption but elsewhere—perhaps in our practice. But we cannot, I think, resign ourselves to our failure to address this good—or to address key components of that good, such as Critical Reading, the outcome that for our program is proving especially problematic. Although through two rounds of program-wide assessment the results for most of the outcomes have been predominantly positive, how students talk about and enact Critical Reading sticks out as disappointing, disturbingly so. To begin explaining why, let me introduce

our Critical Reading learning outcome, which reads as follows: “Read difficult, research-based texts with critical understanding.” This outcome is then elaborated:

- a. “Explain in clearly written English the rhetoric of others.”
- b. “Reconstruct and revise the connections between claims, reasons, and evidence in your own writing, your peers’, and published authors’.”

This elaboration, “a” and “b,” is a version of the Is/Ought question to be more fully addressed below—the question, that is, of the relation between the textual material that has been brought forth as what *is* relevant (“a”) and, in accord with this material, the inferences that *ought* to follow (“b”). To make the case that the Critical Reading outcome and other outcomes have been met, students use their cover-letter commentary to guide the reader through the evidence they’ve assembled in their portfolios (essays and projects from their stretch courses and other courses). Their cover letters address an audience beyond the instructor of record: “the program,” the university community, taxpayers, prospective employers, and others a student may wish to imagine—others to whom a student might make the case that she has begun realizing in some meaningful way outcomes that promote her own good specifically and, more generally, the welfare of others.

Almost to a person, students choosing the three-course (Extended) Stretch have, at the end of more than thirty weeks of instruction, a view of Critical Reading that strikes us as overly uncritical—a view focused almost exclusively on “a” (explaining others’ words) and much too little, if at all, on “b” (reconstructing and revising the connections among claims, reasons, and evidence). The following statement from an Extended Stretch cover letter is typical—taking critical reading to mean decoding and using the words of others in a way that does not violate institutional correctness: “I was required to critically read these sources in order to not only understand them but to acquire the ability to use them correctly.” Also typical (and also from Extended Stretch):

To help me better understand my reading skills my professor told us to highlight, circle, and define unknown words throughout the essays to get a better understanding of the message the author is presenting. I developed a habit of often memorizing the author’s name of key people referenced in the readings because my professor would often use names as questions on the pop quizzes.

Such strategies are understandable, but they put little premium on any critical activity that the writer, as a free and equal person, might use to advance her own project. Decoding “the message the author is presenting” and demonstrating that one recalls proper nouns from the reading—that is the value that comes through. This is not exercising judgment about what one has memorized. This is not seeing like an expert. This is all “They Say” and no “I Say.”³ This is not the good that *They Say/I Say* aims for. Neither is it the good aimed at by the writing academics actually do.

The Question of What Follows from How Academics Actually Write

Facts matter to theory, as acknowledged above, and research articles in comp studies that bring new facts to light can certainly be as meaningful and helpful as studies that argue new ways to see and understand. One such study that brings new facts to light is Lancaster’s, a study that inquires into the particular bundles of language—templates or moves—that *TSIS* claims academics use when pressing their claims, offering concessions, entertaining objections, and so on. *TSIS*’s aim is “to demystify academic writing by isolating its basic moves,” not just any moves but “*the* moves that matter” (xvi, xvii; emphasis added). It is a given, I suspect, that most users of *TSIS* assume that the moves that *TSIS* isolates as highly meaningful in academic writing are moves that occur in academic writing, are moves that will be found with some regularity or at least in privileged places (introductions, conclusions, transitions between sections, etc.).

Perhaps in the grip of such an assumption, most responses to *TSIS* have questioned whether these moves should be taught—whether teaching them as moves to be learned and imitated is good, in other words. But by questioning the assumption itself, Lancaster engages a quite different and “empirical question”—the question of how academics “really write,” of whether *TSIS*’s templates “accurately reflect patterns of language use in written academic discourses” (439). To restate: Avoiding the prescriptive policy question of whether textbooks in general “*should* capture the tacitly valued discursive strategies used in academic discourse,” Lancaster takes up the descriptive question of whether this textbook in particular *does* capture those strategies (439). And only after answering this question with empirical findings—which show that academics do not really write the way *TSIS* says they do—does Lancaster engage the qualitative question of what these findings might mean (439).

Using electronic concordance software (AntConc), Lancaster analyzes three different databases, amounting to well more than 100 million words of writing from incoming first-year students, from students in the disciplines, and from scholars writing for refereed journals (see 444–45). The results of this careful and credible corpus analysis have been called “little short of astonishing” (Haswell, “Focus”). No argument from me—who finds just as astonishing the brute fact of Lancaster’s empirical question, a question which had never occurred to me, though I have not only used *TSIS* in BW classes but also written about the experience. About the astonishing results themselves, two points of special relevance to BW: (1) they are anchored in a developmental pedagogical context, a context that compels Lancaster to single out *objections* and *concessions* (because “writing research has shown that acknowledging and negotiating with opposing views is a persistently troublesome area for novice academic writers” [440]); (2) the results underscore the recurrence of bits of language that we academic insiders may take for granted, whose significant interpersonal effects we may fail to explicitly register (see 450, 457, 460). These findings especially resonate locally: for two years now we have found evidence of our Extended Stretch students’ trouble negotiating not just “opposing” views but others’ views, period. We are receptive, then, to the suggestion that certain facts warrant a different kind of attention.

One of those facts that resonates—maybe especially because we insiders are blind to it—is the general realm of the interpersonal, more specifically the norms of politeness said to govern *good* conversation. In academic writing, the interpersonal may be far more important than previously suspected and, in some ways, perhaps more important than the “*ideational*, which has to do broadly with expressions of propositional content” (Lancaster 461n.5; see also 442): “it appears that interpersonal tact may be a *greater* concern in academic writing contexts than ‘precision and impact’” (449; emphasis added). As elaborated by Lancaster, “interpersonal meanings—expressions of attitudes, stances, and reader positioning—have an effect on readers’ judgments of overall writing quality” (440). Although judging “overall writing quality” is not necessarily the same as judging whether one should lean more closely toward the authorial position—judging whether one is persuaded, in other words—judgment of the whole’s quality surely affects how we understand its parts. Singling out parts that have to do with interpersonal meaning, Lancaster asks writing-instruction-related questions—questions such as “whether it is *better* in certain contexts to entertain objections directly or indirectly” (444; emphasis added). Just as

“greater concern” above is evaluative, so is the question of how “better” to entertain objections—and here my own commentary begins.

In a discussion of the fact-value relation, *better* stands out. That evaluative salience animates Lancaster’s more explicit engagements with student writing, such as when he entertains how first-year writers might be helped to do more with concession moves, in particular to do more to validate those who hold different views (458–59). Of his revision of one such move, Lancaster says he “cannot argue that this [revised] voice is inherently ‘better,’ but it offers an alternative to the more agonistic stance” (459). Now while it could be that limitations of space prevent Lancaster from arguing why one voice “is inherently ‘better’” (or maybe inherency is the problem), he is able to voice his preference for a less agonistic stance. Whatever the reason for why the question of better cannot be argued, a value judgment is nevertheless made. The ground may be well-prepared; the leap from it, however, is uncertain.

Making such an uncertain leap is one we must make as well. If we join the factual event of seeing what *TSIS* calls “templates” as “formulas,” linguistically understood (Lancaster 441—more on formulas in next section), should we in BW who use templates therefore do more to work with them formulaically? Does the presence of formulaic language—of the transfer potential of “important cross-disciplinary and cross-generic patterns” (456)—mean that such language should be a focal point in BW? What if a template has more heuristic power than does a formula? Might the heuristic value of, say, *directly* addressing objections then outweigh the formula’s *interpersonal* value—perhaps on the grounds that directly addressing objections may help students become some of the persons of value in “interpersonal value”? Depending on where we find ourselves and with whom, templates might be better than formulas when it comes to “plunging [students] into actual discussions and debates,” getting them to try out “different patterns of response,” and thereby helping them get “a sense of what works to *persuade different audiences* and what doesn’t” (*TSIS* xxv; emphasis added). Let me here offer a fact inseparable from value: I’m more interested in getting students into deliberative games than into gaming the judgment of the quality of their writing.

A helpful illustration of this fact-value entanglement appears in Deborah Mutnick and Steve Lamos’s “Basic Writing Pedagogy,” which distinguishes between the BW metaphor of “spatial approaches” and the metaphor of BW as initiation into “the ‘rules of the academic game.’” In tension with “*the* academic game,” generative of “games of persuasion,”

and akin to “contact zones” (discussed below), spatial approaches posit that the game’s “rules, the game itself, and the terms of such practice all depend centrally on where and how each is imagined, and posit as well that members of any given discourse community may *contest* those rules” (32; emphasis added). The words “depend centrally” are telling: what is central is not fixed. It moves with, or can be moved by, contingencies of place, modes of imagining, even perhaps the concerns any individual member of any individual community may voice. Those gathered into deliberative community might well try to advance their interests, be responsive to more voices, discern more good, enlarge responsibility. And as Mutnick and Lamos say, in such a community the norms of communication—the communicative facts and the values they seem to imply—can be contested.

To restate this spatial dynamism: When learning or contesting or changing norms, somebody in some medium in some place and time advocates something to someone, and with someone, for some reason. In this exchange, in which what is advocated is a public object of deliberation and hence subject to change, interlocutors may expect that certain norms be observed—such as the norms of politeness that feature in the next section. To make contact with such interlocutors, writers (should) design their choices relative to those expectations. Relating to those expectations is part of advocacy—of cultivating common ground, not prostrating oneself on ground owned by others. I take this assumption as ground readers of *JBW* work in common: priority goes to helping students co-create deliberative community. That priority in place, relating to others’ expectations is surely as constitutive as other literacy acts. The question now is what to make of the different forms that relating to others’ expectations might assume—whether, that is, this or that form communicates impoliteness, respect, or something else. To engage this question, let us proceed to the matter of Lancaster’s value-laden approach to the fact of *TSIS*.

Whose Good?

As facts matter to theory, facts about academic discourse matter to BW pedagogy. But which facts matter, so much so that values follow them? As discussed above, Lancaster nominates *indirect interpersonal formulas*, which not only occur in academic discourse but also embody values important to academic discourse. By acknowledging uncertainty, readers’ attitudes, and alternative interpretations, as well as by soliciting cooperation in a joint inquiry, formulas help constitute authorial stance, such as indirect

interpersonal stance. Indirection is embodied in formulas like “It may appear” and “It could be argued that”—in contrast with formulas in which interlocutors are more directly named, such as “Some readers may question” or “Linguists are likely to claim.” As it happens, and of special interest to me, is that interlocutors are relatively directly named by writers I routinely assign in BW classes. In Michael Sandel’s *Justice*, for example, some version of the “*Libertarian reply*” or “The libertarian has a ready response” appears seven times in four pages (66–69). Yet if most academic writers more frequently feature indirect than direct interpersonal formulas, then maybe preparation of BW students for the discursive practice that awaits them should privilege formulas of indirection.

To think about this, let us consider *concessions*. In contrast to *TSIS*, which advocates a more direct approach—concessions are for *overcoming* objections, for example (Graff and Birkenstein 88)—Lancaster finds in actual practice an approach that builds “solidarity with interlocutors by affirming and validating their views” (Lancaster 452). As Lancaster notes, “This view of argumentation as a process of building sympathetic understanding between writer and reader is one with which many beginning writers are less familiar than the view of argumentation as armed combat” (452). This account seems right. In my experience, at least, BW students associate argumentation more with adversarial combat than with collaborative inquiry. Combat, furthermore, seems reinforced by *TSIS*’s metaphor for concessions: to *overcome* objections. To many students and as well to many of us, *to overcome* may signify a kind of vanquishing, a getting the better of. This is a motive that academic discourse might mitigate rather than reproduce.

There is, in other words, firm footing for Lancaster’s rationale. Yet I’d like to destabilize it, just a little, the better to focus on what BW is more properly good for, for whom it is good. What if, in a BW classroom, we have reason to give more priority to heuristic value than to interpersonal norms? After reading Lancaster’s article, I am far less sure about my first *reaction* to this question (Of course we have reason to! Don’t we want students to be more concerned about their claim on the audience than self-conscious about how they sound?). Though that initial reaction is insufficiently hedged, it remains deeply rooted, so let me follow those roots, beginning with Birkenstein and Graff’s response to critics: “Far from turning students into mindless automatons, formulas . . . can help them generate thoughts that might not otherwise occur to them. And such formulas aren’t set in stone. Students can and should be encouraged to modify them to suit particular arguments and audiences” (Birkenstein and Graff).⁴ Inventing arguments, tailoring

argumentation for the situation and for the people with whom one is in argument—I'm in. I'm in because if the good of my teaching role were not to help students head more resourcefully and mindfully in this direction, then my role has been badly rehearsed and not worth performing.

But what if my role *has* been badly rehearsed, badly because I have not understood the script, in particular *formulas* as linguists define them and identify them? Whereas I have (following Birkenstein and Graff) emphasized the heuristic relation between formulas and the thoughts they help invent—the ideas that might claim the reader—Lancaster points out that formulas linguistically conceived do not so much claim the reader as “guide the reader”: formulas less embody propositions than “frame propositions” (Lancaster 441). They help prepare the common ground on which interlocutors can meet by displaying “socially valued stances or discursive identities” (442). This common ground can be extended by certain hedging formulas that “cross disciplinary boundaries,” such as *to some extent* and *in some cases* (442). The promise of transfer across discourse communities, a promise implicit in our curriculum’s learning outcomes, is no small recommendation for formulas.

What we recommend and when, however, varies with audience. How this platitude importantly relates to BW I can explain via a metaphor important to both *TSIS* and Lancaster: academic discourse as *conversation*. Consider what “[g]ood conversationalists, or discussants,” do:

[They] carefully listen to, mirror, and validate others’ views, even those with which they disagree. They give room for others to ask questions and express concerns, and they try not to put words in others’ mouths. They try to be fair, respectful, and open-minded, asking questions, offering reasons for their judgments, and pausing to consider counter views and evidence. At its best, academic writing reflects these qualities. . . . (Lancaster 458)

If templates clear space for a claim, formulas help claim the reader—with fairness, respect, open-mindedness. While these qualities can be hallmarks of good conversationalists, do they exhaust the ways conversation and its makers can be good? There is much evidence, thanks to scholars like Shirley Brice Heath and Deborah Tannen, of cultural variability in conversational competence and pleasure (such as overlapping speaking turns, such as bravura star turns). This variability concerns as well ethical norms (such as directness), even what goes into “pausing to consider counter views.”

In another text I've used, the philosopher Darrel Moellendorf's *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change*, directness does not preclude politeness and may, in fact, be one of politeness's norms. Consider: "In the course of a useful discussion of catastrophe, Richard Posner contends that" followed by "There are two problems with this approach" (Moellendorf 87). Conceding the usefulness of Posner's discussion, Moellendorf then quite directly identifies two problems with it, amplifying them in a way that is conventional for philosophy. An instability may lie, then, in the description of *good* conversation, which is as arguably selective as it is clearly evaluative: good for whom, for what purposes, in which contexts.

With BW contexts in mind, let's consider the general preference for indirection revealed by Lancaster's study. This preference for a *good* conversation implies a conversation that may not qualify as *as* good, a conversation that is more direct than indirect. Imagine varieties of directness and compare them with good academic conversation: not only do good academic conversationalists "try not to put words in[to] others' mouths"; good academic conversationalists do not use the words of others, especially not if the others are the readers addressed. Neither put words into others' mouths nor, in accord with norms of indirection, cite the words that *have* come out of their mouths—that is the maxim. This maxim appears to presuppose, certainly to favor, an insider addressing insiders. What it might take for writers new to college to achieve such a feat may raise questions about how much rhetorical finesse it is reasonable to expect. Maybe teaching formulas for indirectness would help cut to (the inequity of) this chase, or maybe a better place to begin would be teaching the norms of argumentation and inquiry as they occur in conversations that are generally deliberative. Yet from either way to begin emerge questions that seem basic to me: Why would we want to? Who benefits? How do BW students, wherever they are, stand to benefit?⁵

Put another way: If the formulas Lancaster has called to our attention represent the way it is in Rome, then following a When in Rome strategy is one step we might take. We might also ask, however, whether Rome is where we want to be or a stop along the way toward more utopian destinations. Lancaster questions the *TSIS* templates "in terms of how well they reflect these implicit politeness conventions" (457). To question how well conventions and norms are reflected—this would seem to reinforce what already exists, that which is prior to the conversation it helps guide. Such conversation can be, as Lancaster says, constituted by "strategies for building mutual understanding and respect between writer and reader and other

participants in the discourse” (457). This conception may be not only, often enough, adequately accurate but also normatively regulative—a stipulated model of conversation that aspires toward an ideal.

But to concede that to reflect such an ideal would be a good is neither to abdicate the pursuit of other goods nor to concede their absence. The norms of politeness we cite do not represent (among other relevant voices) the majority—that is, the unpublished voices of those scholarly contributions wishing to join the conversation but which are formally prevented from doing so. What about those and other voices? There is serious work in comp studies, like Mutnick and Lamos’s spatial approach to BW, that turns such worry into pedagogy. Such transformation can be seen in another spatial approach, the contact-zone translingual classroom as described by Suresh Canagarajah:

Since there are *diverse norms* for languages, genres, and literacies in the contact zone, interlocutors must negotiate them situationally for texts and for talk that make sense to each other. This does not mean that multilinguals are insensitive to dominant norms and ideologies of correctness in society. Instead, they consider these norms as *open to negotiation*, especially in relation to their interests and values. (33–34; emphasis added)

The plurality of norms in any contact zone prompts collaborative sense-making. This sense-making does not ignore “dominant norms and ideologies of correctness”; rather, norms are negotiated—negotiated “*especially* in relation to [multilinguals’] interests and values,” that is, in relation to their different conceptions of the good. This negotiation is local, not necessarily conforming “to a rigid notion of genre or the textual conventions of any one community” and possibly, in point of fact, taking “a shape that is appropriate to the rhetorical objectives, audience expectations, and authorial interests in that contact zone” (Canagarajah 34). In BW contact zones, academic norms of politeness are relevant: subject to questions of whether they should be conformed to and, if so, why and how.

What spatial approaches and contact zones have in common is that the facts negotiated therein—if only to be mastered and hence conformed to, often enough to be assimilated or tweaked, perhaps to be resisted—have an intimate relation with value. We seek not only some facts of convention worth our curiosity, then, but also facts that might count as evidence, as reasons. This question has long emerged from how value relates to fact,

Ought to Is, yet this question's long standing may make it harder to see—something like the invisibility of what we have acquired rather than learned (see Lancaster 450, 457, 460). Making this question more visible for the BW community might help improve how we engage the fact-value relation—not least in our use of *TSIS* and of Lancaster's critique of it.

Critical Reading: Ought from Is

One cannot deduce an *ought* from an *is*, Hume famously claims.⁶ Rather, one negotiates with others which facts are relevant and how, given those facts, things might go or should go. Hume's claim deserves to open this final section, if only passingly, because rather than refute Lancaster's project—which makes that big move from *is* to *ought*—Hume's claim warrants that move: though we cannot *deduce* oughts from ises, oughts can be derived from them. *Deducing* oughts from ises is illogical. Moral obligation is not entailed by what exists; the way the world is does not compel this or that value. But how we derive oughts from ises is another issue—and one that bears on BW and the practical reasoning most relevant to it. Two typed, double-spaced pages of a BW student's draft may contain twenty or more errors, but whether the fact of those errors counts as evidence for downgrading or rewarding the draft is up for debate: where one reader might infer carelessness, another reader might infer ambition. Or a draft might contain language that one reader regards as annoyingly in-one's face, another reader as a thought-provoking involvement strategy. Or in the case of non-anonymous work, what we may know of a writer in advance of her crafted ethos will probably affect how we contextualize any claim of hers. The same fact, in other words, neither automatically nor necessarily engenders in everyone the same *ought* conclusion—nor necessarily any conclusion at all, if the fact fails to become (weighty enough) evidence or reason. Whether an *ought* follows an *is*, then, is itself a motivated judgment—a judgment we have reason to make and present to others to judge.

Although the modal scope between description and evaluation is different—to evaluate is not to describe—evaluation depends on description, on fundamental facts. If we recommend that X ought to be done, we ought to be right about certain facts regarding X—about people's capabilities and attitudes, also about the material properties and interactions that would help realize capabilities and redeem attitudes. If a writing program values “critical reading,” for example—so much so that it features Critical Reading as a learning outcome—then that value must relate to something students

can actually do and could wish to do. What if it is a fact that students, as readers, seemingly cannot—or seemingly do not wish to—do what we believe they eventually must, if their reading is to count as critical?

Recall that aspect of our Critical Reading outcome that we found little or no evidence of in student portfolios: “Reconstruct and revise the connections between claims, reasons, and evidence in their own writing, their peers’, and published authors’.” Recall also that we struggled to identify evidence of connections among claims, reasons, and evidence reconstructed analytically or revised into alternative readings. Rather, we saw—as shown above and again here, in an excerpt from another Extended Stretch portfolio—representations of Critical Reading as correct comprehension: “When reading the information for my research paper, most of the information was new to me and I needed time to digest the long texts. With this reason, my critical reading skill got a great improvement and now I can pick up the main idea in a long text very quickly.” Representative of what our sample of 260 portfolios had to say about Critical Reading, this excerpt seems to imply that persuading one’s audience that the Critical Reading outcome was met means assuring that audience that assigned material/researched material was read and understood.

This implication is a bit heartbreaking. To demonstrate a kind of comprehension is a good, but it is not the same good as “seeing like an expert.” Seeing like an expert—assessing the strength and quality of connections, imagining justifiable counter-readings—is a core outcome, not only a norm we value highly but also a norm with which we identify, by which we develop our character. We do care whether we can justify, to the relevant audiences, what we choose to do based on the best available evidence. We care about the relation between our values—our *best* practices—and the facts that ground them, the facts they will redeem, the facts they promise to create. We care about helping our students exercise their judgment to read critically and to engage others’ readings, even if their performances are clumsy with concessions and figure objections as obstacles best taken head-on.

If this core value is not evident in one set of facts—the students’ portfolios—what does this absence mean? What is to be made of it? Relinquishing the value altogether seems absurd. If the preceding paragraph is right, we will not want to—we cannot—deduce from the facts that our value is mistaken (that value resonates in our very concern!). Yet something follows from those facts, if only the desire for more facts. What about the fact of the students’ attitudes behind, and their reasons for, responding as they

did? Why did they elect not to deploy something they were taught? What are the odds that all 260 students in the sample were exercising their right not to display something that, at the time, they felt insecure about? Could it be that at the end of the third quarter of students' first year in college, there was so little evidence in their coursework (including their stretch work) that writing is used to read critically *in this way* that they politely put this outcome to the side? Or that, given students' prior and ongoing experience with jobs and bosses—bosses who may have been the models for the prospective employers the students' cover letters may have been addressing—students had little reason to believe that this kind of critical reading was in fact valued?

Our BW students are young—fresh out of high school. I bring this up because age is likely a factor. In their work with high school students, Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm found that with policy arguments, students are more likely to take risks, less likely to play it safe. When it comes to policy, students perceive teachers as less likely to be “looking for a single correct answer”; accordingly, students experience the policy arguments they write as more real than ““assign-and-assess”” papers—papers that students perceive as writing that the instructor uses to test content knowledge. The instructor's comments on such papers, furthermore, are perceived as functioning mainly to justify the grade (135, 121). In light of our findings, Smith and Wilhelm's work resonates. The discourse of policy debate—discourse amplified by an election year that promised to make history, discourse present in students' everyday lives—seems linked with the very few portfolios which feature a different representation of Critical Reading. For example, writing about an opportunity to analyze one of then-Presidential-candidate Donald Trump's 2016 stump speeches, a student in Extended Stretch assumes this relatively active stance:

As I read the speech I not only highlighted what I thought was important but took notes and *rephrased* important ideas. “With no explanation why, the audience takes his word and now believes that with Trump as president, we can magically become better and stronger than all the other countries he claims are better off.” I am able to think about what trump is trying to say and show the audience how I have critically thought of it and I *explain why he might be wrong*. (emphasis added)

The writer brings forward a connection between Trump's implied claim (here is what we should do to become better and stronger) and the evidence (no

evidence, other than Trump's unpremiss assertion that other countries are better off). The writer selects ideas that are "important," recasts them, and acknowledges a reader who will judge the explanation for why Trump "might be wrong." In the terms of *TSIS*, there is at last an "I Say" responding to a "They Say"—even if it amounts to He Says Yes/I Say Probably Not. More promising than no conversation at all, this conversation also seems engaged, concerned with where it might lead, in contact with people who might be made to care enough to respond.

I end by putting this kind of conversation on a continuum with *TSIS* and Lancaster—on the same continuum, of course, but more importantly at that end of the continuum that *TSIS* and Lancaster point toward: practical reasoning for all, reasoning in which questions such as which facts and whose values can be fair game. BW teaching and scholarship already leans this way but can, I have argued, by more deliberately engaging the relations between fact and value, make a greater difference for those it serves.

For those we serve, those relations should be not only dynamically deliberative but actual. In a passage cited above, *TSIS* claims we "learn the ins and outs of argumentative writing not by studying logical principles in the abstract, but by plunging into *actual* discussions and debates, trying out different patterns of response, and in this way getting a sense of what works to persuade different audiences and what doesn't" (xxv; emphasis added). Earlier, to highlight authorial investment, I'd underscored "persuade different audiences." For acts of persuasion to have these learning effects, however, they probably have to strike students as real: "actual." Not only does plunging into "actual discussions and debates" seem reasonable, then—a good place to begin—it will likely help younger BW students better see the point of Lancaster's sophisticated formulas. Such students might better experience the ethical and heuristic potential of hedges, for example—the way hedges can work both "to project a measured stance toward claims, demonstrating the writer's awareness of complexity and concern for carefully delineated assertions" and "to open up space for alternative views and voices, creating room for readers to bring their perspectives to the discussion" (442). In academic discussion generally but perhaps especially importantly in BW classrooms, readers bring their perspectives of the good. This is the unhedged good with which our practical reasoning begins, and as it encounters others' conceptions of what is good, it will find reason to hedge. That is, our students will better see the point of hedging—its usefulness for *ethos*, for invention with and involvement of readers, for the value-laden contingencies of rhetoric and reading. In BW research and instruction, such language is less

what must follow than something that could be followed—if that language is understood less as formulaic and more as the claims we readers make on one another, amid democratic complexity, to constitute ourselves individually and politically, and as the value-laden core around which other uses of language might be recentered.

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Notes

1. Typical of the agreement I believe we'd find is Chris Anson's agreement with arguments that research-based evidence "may change the views of detractors or the terms of the debate" (17).
2. Compare with what Marie Ponsot and Rosemary Deen say in *Beat Not the Poor Desk* (a book that has informed my pedagogy): Although, as they tell their students, "What you notice has to be something everyone would recognize when you point it out" (58), not only does the "something" have to be pointed out; it is the result of an intellectual, analytic "reordering" (64).
3. Or, as Lancaster says, "Counter-argumentation is thus pervasive and necessary for building robust arguments, yet many students still struggle with, or altogether avoid, this key element of academic writing" (443).
4. Let me confirm here that I agree with Lancaster that Birkenstein and Graff leave themselves open to the charge that they claim they are teaching the moves that are actually made: e.g., "Many students fail to pick up those moves on their own, however, either because they don't read widely, or they don't read with an imitative eye. That is why representing the moves in explicit formulas is often necessary. Teachers who think they are being progressive and student-centered by rejecting such prescriptive methods are passing up a chance to demystify intellectual practices that many students find profoundly puzzling" (Birkenstein and Graff). To write of students that "they don't read widely, or they don't read with an imitative eye" implies that if students did read widely or with an imitative eye, they would see more of the "intellectual practices" that we see, if not try imitating them as well.
5. Other linguistic approaches to literacy have taken this approach, such as Academic Literacies (ACLITS), which is said to be "best able to take

account of the nature of student writing in relation to institutional practices, power relations, and identities” by looking “further at the wider aspects of the learning situation, in terms not only of disciplinary epistemology and methods, but also of student identity, social positioning and resistance, gender, and so on, as well as in terms of wider institutional factors, in short to consider the complexity of meaning making which the other two models fail to provide” (Russell et al. 453, 466).

6. Here is Hume: “For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, ’tis necessary that it shou’d be observ’d and explain’d; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it” (3.1.1, 469). Factual descriptive statements do not entail evaluative prescriptive statements. One can derive an ought from an is, but that action is deliberative, not deductive. We do not deduce values from facts but deliberate from facts, and when we deliberate, we are seeking value, that is, facts that can count as evidence and reasons.

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