

A Review of College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction

Anne Beaufort, 2007. Logan, UT: Utah State UP. [ISBN 978-0-87421-659-2. 242 pages, including index. \$24.95 USD (softcover).]

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“Why can't graduates of first-year composition produce acceptable written documents in other contexts?” In her new book *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction* Anne Beaufort begins to answer this question through her longitudinal case study of one student's college and workplace writing experiences. Drawing on her research and experience, Beaufort crafts an argument emphasizing teaching transfer of knowledge and contextually based pedagogy at all levels of writing instruction. Compositionists, WPAs, writing center administrators, and college administrators from across the disciplines will find Beaufort's work thought-provoking and useful in developing new ways to more effectively prepare student writers for multiple writing tasks.

The question about the effectiveness of college composition courses in preparing students for disciplinary writing is of prime importance to instructors of writing and administrators of writing programs. Although many theories exist for how best to teach writing, few are backed by careful empirical research and data-driven arguments. Beaufort's work begins to fill this gap by providing a strong theory based on carefully collected research.

The first chapter of *College Writing and Beyond* considers the problems associated with teaching writing within the context of higher education and provides a conceptual framework for the larger case study. Beaufort attributes some of the failings of composition instruction to the "generalist" writing pedagogy and an unspecified discourse community and context for writing. She also discusses shortcomings of experts teaching writing in the disciplines including the role of writing in the classroom. After setting up the problems of writing instruction, she presents a conceptual model of writing expertise that includes writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, genre knowledge, and discourse community knowledge (17-19). This conceptual model is used throughout the book to frame discussions, provide analyses, and consider her findings.

Chapters two through five present the case study itself — interviews, observations and content analyses that document the experiences of "Tim" through four years of college and two years beyond. Tim, who is a double major in history and engineering, experiences a two-semester first-year composition course that focused focuses on traditional literary genres. When he moves into writing in his history and engineering courses, however, Tim lacks an explicit knowledge of genre conventions and community values. His difficulty is compounded by a lack of clear guidelines in history assignments or of instruction in the genre of history writing. Beaufort compares Tim's experiences in writing in engineering to writing in the workplace and concludes that although Tim succeeded at learning to write like an engineer in his junior

and senior years, the question of how better he could have been better prepared for workplace writing remains.

In the final chapter of her book, Beaufort uses her study of Tim to assert three major points — points that could have large ramifications for the future of college writing instruction. Beaufort argues for changes in both first-year writing instruction and disciplinary instruction surrounding issues of context, writer expertise, and transfer of knowledge. First, she argues that need a developmental model to understand writers' growth (142); second, that teachers of all disciplines should explicitly teach skills that emphasize transference of knowledge (149); and third, that students would be best served by "sequential, developmentally-sound writing instruction that extend[s] across courses in a major" (153).

In addition to the main body of text, the book also contains an epilogue conversation with Tim's first-year writing teacher, Carla, a sample first-year curriculum that teaches students tools that will transfer across disciplines, samples of Tim's essays, and a section on her research methods.

What I find most stimulating about this book is the way in which Beaufort draws upon theory, research, and practice to paint a picture of college writing, its problems and the need for change. She provides evidence-rich discussions of each of Tim's major writing contexts using her contextualist framework; this makes the book both easy to follow and also allows it to continually build upon what she has already said. It is refreshing to see a piece of research done in a thoughtful and thorough manner that both makes strong claims about how to serve our students more effectively and provides pragmatic solutions.

While Beaufort's work represents a substantial contribution to the field of composition and to writing across the disciplines, it does have a few shortcomings. First, as Beaufort admits, her argument is a bold one based on a single case study of one writer. The issue of generalizability is a continual criticism of qualitative work and no amount of ethnography can make firm claims about the nature of "all" writers. However, Beaufort clarifies in her introduction that her argument is drawn not just from her ethnographic work, but also as the result of her years of teaching, mentoring new teachers, writing program administration, assessment, and research (7). Beaufort's case study can lead other researchers using a variety of methods to explore related areas of inquiry such as: How is transfer best taught? What cognitive skills aid in the development of writing expertise? What does a developmental model of writing expertise look like?

A more pragmatic problem emerges from Beaufort's argument about how contextualist pedagogies would serve students best. First-year composition and writing courses within the disciplines are taught by a wide range of instructors with different abilities, experiences, and institutional situations. While it might be easy to implement a shift in curriculum at schools where strong mentoring programs, faculty development, or a coordinated writing-intensive curriculum takes place, other institutions and program administrators would find changing long-standing attitudes and practices surrounding teaching writing a challenge. The question, which falls outside of the scope of Beaufort's book, becomes: how do we make these changes? How can we assess that they are working?

Each year tens of thousands of educators make decisions about how to best teach writing to students; decisions often based on little empirical evidence. Beaufort's work provides us not only with a detailed picture of one writer's experiences in college writing contexts, but also an evidence-based theory for how to better serve writers in any discipline. Writing program administrators, including WAC and WID specialists, would find this book useful in developing evidence-based program-wide approaches to teaching writing. Individual instructors of writing from across the disciplines can use the sample assignments and models to more effectively teach their students genre and discourse community-based conventions. Finally, researchers and scholars interested in the development of writing expertise over time will find this work a refreshing blend of empirical research, theory, and pragmatic solutions.

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