

## CHAPTER 1.

# WRITING STUDIOS AND CHANGE

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Writing Studio is a methodology articulated by Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson (1995, 1996, 2008) which enables writers to develop proficiency in the use and critique of discourses that constitute and surround the academy. Studio approaches have existed in both the fine and the practical arts, including rhetoric, since ancient times (Macauley, 1999). While studios differ widely by context, both in terms of the skills they model and the products they create, a defining feature has always been their emphasis on mentored learning-through-doing. In studios, apprentice learners master their craft through directed group participation. In Grego and Thompson's model for Writing Studios, learning-through-doing involves working on writing in small, facilitated groups. Participants in these mentored groups engage in collaborative reflection and interactional inquiry about writing and how writing is taught at their institution. Writing Studio's position in a thirdspace, outside-alongside the institutions and programs they serve, is a third feature of Writing Studies' version of studio.

*The Writing Studio Sampler* is a collection of essays about Writing Studio. These essays are, among other things, "I was there" stories: narratives told by individuals who designed, worked in, or administered a studio; or who used their studio's outside-alongside position to challenge and transform the institutional structures which framed it. Individual essays tell the story of a particular Studio: how it emerged at a specific institution; how it grappled with local economic, political, and social contexts; how it strove to meet the needs and purposes of its (varied!) stakeholders. Taken together, these essays illustrate the myriad ways collective reflection and interactional inquiry function to create what is most powerful about Studio: its ability to initiate change.

The fact that Writing Studio is a methodology—not simply a way to do things but a process for reflecting on, critiquing, and re-envisioning the way things are done—means that studios can serve many different pedagogical and administrative purposes. Studios described in this collection function outside-alongside community colleges (Leach and Kuhne), small liberal arts colleges (Fraizer), small urban universities (Cardinal and Keown), state colleges (Matzke

and Garrett; Gray), and large state universities (Santana, Rose, and LaBarge). While most studios described in this collection support courses in first-year writing programs, others act as sites for learning and change within a writing center (Miley), a service-learning program (Johnson), an Accelerated Learning Program (Ritola et al., Leach and Kuhne), or a training site for graduate teaching assistants (Korsnack). It is our intention that *The Writing Studio Sampler's* varied, detail-rich representations of what Studio can do will provide useful models and provoke questions for individuals interested in setting up or revising studio programs at their home institutions.

This introduction provides a brief overview of Writing Studio's history and theory, along with a discussion of why studio methodology is so important in today's changing educational environment. For readers who are new to Studio, these discussions can fill in the story of how and why Studio became part of Writing Studies, clarify definitions of unfamiliar terms, and direct readers to theorists important to Studio's on-going development. For readers more familiar with studio methodology, these sections can clarify the particular interpretation of Writing Studio set forward in this book. The final section of the introduction provides an overview of the collection's remaining chapters.

## THOMPSON AND GREGO'S WRITING STUDIO

Nancy Thompson and Rhonda Grego's Writing Studio was designed for the University of South Carolina's first-year writing program. It emerged from a complex web of political exigency, economic pressure, and sociological circumstance. In 1990, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education forbid four-year state colleges and universities from offering credit-bearing developmental courses. This, of course, did not prevent schools from admitting students needing extra support to pass first-year writing. During this time period, the University of South Carolina was working to increase its profile as a research institution. These shifts created a situation where the need to support underprepared writers was likely to increase and commitment to that support was likely to decrease.

As these changes were occurring, Grego and Thompson were full-time composition faculty in the Department of English at The University of South Carolina. Their working-class backgrounds made them well aware of the impacts these changes would have on their program. Departmental policies for funding composition further complicated the situation: "[The] English department's history of using the Writing Center and other kindred activities as a financial buffer . . . made it clear to us that further departmental funding cuts would soon disproportionately affect composition's work" (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 2).

Taken together with changes at the state and university level, this policy made it clear to Grego and Thompson that their program was in danger of losing its connection to “our discipline’s narrative of progressive social action” (2008, p. 2).

In response, Thompson and Grego, along with other colleagues from the basic writing program, spent the fall 1991 semester gathering data on their classes and reviewing relevant composition scholarship and available literature on institutional and government support for basic writing programs (Grego & Thompson, 2008, pp. 2-3). Their findings suggested that factors influencing the support for and success of basic writing students extended far beyond the classroom. As they report in *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces: The Studio Approach*, “[Composition instructors’] work with student writing (both products and processes) was influenced by institutional politics, preferences, and power relations at many more levels than currently attended to” (2008, p. 5). Additionally, they found that while scholarship on college writing in general—and on basic writing in particular—recognized the importance of factors outside classroom, it did not propose a solution, or even a plan, to address the larger, structural factors that shaped the teaching of writing. According to Grego and Thompson, scholarship merely

acknowledge[d] the institutional power relations and politics that . . . dominated our work as compositionists and affected the lives of writing teachers and students. In composition research and accompanying pedagogies, the classroom as institutional space/place was often neutralized, while the rest of the institution’s geography seemed typically only a generalized part of the picture provided—if it was attended to at all. (2008, p. 5)

In other words, researchers understood that pressures outside the classroom affected the success of basic writers, but they were not really working on addressing those pressures.

Studio was a response to these realizations. It was designed to create a means to study relationships between learning and institutional contexts; to challenge the discourses, structures, and material circumstances which create and maintain those contexts; and to support all stakeholders in learning to navigate those contexts and discourses. As Grego and Thompson put it, the studio approach positioned participants to act on “(a) our heightened awareness of the institutional power relations that defined not only ‘basic writing’ but also ‘student writing’ and (b) our desire to engage in local action, to explore a very located (in place) and situated (in space) view of student writing” (2008, pp. 5-6). Defining features of Grego and Thompson’s Writing Studio included studio’s position in

thirdspace, a place/space outside-alongside the institution it served; interactional inquiry as its central methodology; and all participants' engagement in collaborative reflection.

Grego and Thompson's original Studio, and most studios that trace their lineage from their work, organize "small groups of students to meet frequently and regularly . . . to bring to the table the assignments they are working on for a writing course, another English course, or a disciplinary course or undergraduate research experience that requires communication products" (2008, p. 7). In the original Studio, these groups were generally made up of students from different sections of English 101. Talk within the studio group helped students see beyond their individual course to the larger patterns of how communication was taught and used at the University of South Carolina at that time. The facilitator helped

by explicating assignments not only in terms located within the assignment itself . . . but also . . . in terms of the history of the course at that institution, in terms of what the [facilitator] knows about the disciplinary background of the students' teachers, in terms of the history of such courses overall, and, sometimes most important, in terms of [the facilitator's] own experiences as a writer who has negotiated similar assignments or teachers in his or her academic career." (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 95)

Rarely was a facilitator the student's classroom instructor, and even if they were, studio's positioning lessened their ability to enforce grading policies. Studio's "grade" was based on attendance and participation, and its effect on the student's English 101 grade was determined by the classroom instructor, not the facilitator. This allowed the facilitator to act as a guide instead of an evaluator. Grego and Thompson theorized this positioning using a theory of thirdspace, where the Studio exists outside but alongside traditional institutional and disciplinary structures.

This outside but alongside positioning helps create space for collaborative reflection which is not driven by dominant power structures. Collaborative reflection is a group process, and for it to emerge, studio groups must meet together over a defined period of time. Deep familiarity among participants—understanding of each other's personal contexts, habits of speech, interests, and aspirations—lays the foundation for successful collaboration. The reflective element, often modeled or prompted by the facilitator, heightens awareness of patterns in ideas, talk, and writing. Ultimately, as collective reflection becomes more comfortable and proficient, participants notice, name, and begin to comment

on discursive structures which make certain patterns inevitable and block others. Grego and Thompson called this process interactional inquiry.

Interactional inquiry has roots in feminist discourses and action research. It comes into being when “group participants (whether students or staff) engage in regular sessions in which they share, largely through talk and stories, their experiences, letting the life of their weekly everyday work gather force by finding similarities and common ground through a cross-sectional analysis” (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 175). Interactional inquiry’s reflection on and analysis of structures permeating participants’ experiences with the academy takes place primarily through talk. This talk, however, was supplemented by writing: writing produced for assignments, writing reflecting on assignments, and writing prompted by experiences surrounding both the assignments and life within academic culture. Ideas raised in all these different forms of writing are discussed and revisited, accepted and challenged, combined and recombined, discarded and picked up again over weeks of studio meetings by all participants, both students and staff. New experiences provide more data and refine the group’s analysis. This process of mining group experience for patterns, trying those patterns in the fire of group reflection and critique, and then re-casting them in light of group identities, questions, and interests is the heart of interactional inquiry. More in-depth discussion of interactional inquiry and thirdspace can be found in the “Theoretical Roots” section of this introduction.

Studio’s positioning outside but alongside traditional academic structures and its use of interactional inquiry laid the ground for the success. From 1992 to 2001 (the program’s last year), at least eighty percent of students who regularly attended studio meetings in Grego and Thompson’s program passed their first-year composition courses. These pass rates either matched or slightly exceeded passing rates for all first-year composition students (Thompson & Fosen, 2002). Grego and Thompson continued to develop the studio model in their on-going work as compositionists. When Grego joined the faculty at Benedict College in 1997, she developed the Bridges Writing Program, a version of Studio for Benedict’s first-year writing program. The Bridges’ program lasted a little longer than the original Studio, persisting in a limited form from 2002 through 2005. Thompson also expanded on the original project, designing a studio for the University of South Carolina’s College of Engineering. This Studio supported engineering students’ capstone projects (Thompson et al., 2005). Grego and Thompson’s experiences with both of these programs are described in the *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces*, the major theoretical text on Studio.

Beyond Grego and Thompson’s work, studio methodology has been responded to and modified by others. Early on, Peter Elbow (1996) praised it as a “seemingly utopian approach” that has allowed those involved in it to see basic

writers not “so much through the lens of basic and nonbasic. . . . Instead, they are beginning to see a range of students with particular locations in a complex universe of strengths and weaknesses” (p. 91). Elbow believes this focus on individuals benefits students by resisting the restrictive labels traditionally associated with basic writing. William Lalicker (1999) supported this judgment in his overview of approaches to teaching basic writing. He stated the approach “enforces the notion that basic and standard composition students are all working collaboratively toward fluency in academic discourse and critical discourse consciousness (rather than segregating basic writers in a simplistic linguistic world where grammatical conformity dominates.” (1999, “Alternative 2: The Studio Model”) Others (Contugno, 2009; EEO/EOF, 2011; Gill, 2003; Greshman & Yancey, 2004; Kim & Carpenter, 2017) wrote about how they implemented Studio in a variety of institutional spaces and for a variety of different populations. In April 2005, John Tassoni started a listserv to discuss studio theory and practice, and a Special Interest Group (SIG) dedicated to the approach began meeting at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 2007. The SIG has sponsored two workshops at CCCC: one (2015) focused on different studio sites and strategies for implementing a program, and the other (2017) shared pedagogical strategies used at various studio sites. Materials from both workshops are available online; see the references for the URLs. More importantly, both the listserv and SIG act as a studio space, a place where experienced practitioners can discuss their home sites and where newcomers can receive support for creating their own Studio.

## **WHAT MAKES A WRITING STUDIO UNIQUE?**

Grego and Thompson intentionally designed Studio as a “highly adaptable approach” made up of “a configuration of relationships that can emerge from different contexts” (2008, p. 7). In other words, Studios occupy spaces appropriate to their purposes, adapt to the agendas of their stakeholders, and reflect and subvert the discursive structures of the particular institutions where they are housed. This flexibility leads to the question: What features make a Writing Studio a Studio and not a writing group, or a writing center, or a workshop? The easy answer is that a studio positions itself outside-alongside the program it is attached to, and that it engages participants in collaborative reflection and interactional inquiry. But what does that mean? And what does it look like? Outside-alongside programs can take many different forms, in both theory and practice. And reflection and critique can take place in writing centers, workshops, and writing groups as well as in studios. So then, what makes a Writing Studio unique?

As pointed out by Grego and Thompson (2008, p. 7), the small, facilitat-

ed group is the most important component of Writing Studio. Interactive, mentored feedback loops within and among studio groups allow Studios to function as communities of practice: groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something, and who learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). A community of practice may or may not include facilitation, but for studio groups, the focused reflection orchestrated by a facilitator is essential. Depending on institutional context, facilitators may be undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, or academic specialists. Facilitators are not so much teachers as moderators, group members responsible for focusing the flow of discussion. In general, facilitators do not come to a group meeting with lesson plans, or even a fixed idea of what the group will do on a particular day. Rather, they respond to what participants say about their writing, about class experiences or experiences with school in general, and about all the personal and political circumstances surrounding writing process. Spontaneous discussion often suggests the group's agenda for the day, and students may accept or reject any topic or focus proposed by the facilitator. The facilitator then keeps the group moving in a timely fashion, offering support as needed. While the group's facilitator may have more experience with writing and with academia, it is a benchmark of studio methodology that discussion takes its direction through interaction, using interactional inquiry to explore the conventions of academic discourse and the institution in which students are enrolled.

For example, suppose a studio group is made up of students who have different classroom instructors, but who are all working on an assignment which involves analysis. Even if instructors use the same textbook, they will almost always design and teach a genre slightly differently. These small differences can confuse students, who bring their own particular histories with any given writing genre to the course. Studio groups' use of interactional inquiry—talking through the many different kinds of analyses their teachers have asked them to construct—helps studio participants identify and characterize what analytic process is and how it works. The facilitator may share experiences teaching or writing analysis, but these experiences are only additional data, not The Answer provided by “an authority figure.” This unfolding characterization of analysis as a genre gives students the opportunity to select, orchestrate, and modify general analytic features as needed to produce their individual compositions. When students receive instructor comments and other types of feedback on their work, they can bring this data back to the studio group to refine their thinking. Interactional inquiry does not require that all group members are working at the same place on the same assignment. It only requires that participants bring data and reflect



on language features. The features they explore might come from assignments, from class discussions, from the structure of institutional practices, really any language interaction of importance to the group.

This focus on cooperation and critical reflection on discourse creates a clear parallel between Writing Studios and Writing Centers. Both use guided learning through doing, and both (in different ways) place students in (different kinds of) outside-alongside spaces. Yet Studios differ from Writing Centers in several important ways. First, studios are meant to be “attached to any course or experience in the academy that requires students to produce communications” (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 9), and they work with groups rather than individuals. Writing centers support an entire institutional community, and while writing center coaches are sometimes attached to individual courses, they generally work in one-on-one sessions on an as-needed basis. In contrast, Studio’s learning dynamics center on relationships among a mentor and a group of students who work with one another over a prolonged period of time. Another difference is that writing centers often end up providing support that can sometimes become scripted. This script tends to direct the writer to his or her writing resources with attention to the writer’s process and the immediate writing context. In contrast, Studio’s prolonged conversation among multiple participants means that studio groups will have less stable scripts. The different perspectives within the group generally include scripts and discursive patterns from more than one assignment, classroom, or program. This broader perspective provides a different kind of support, discussions which ultimately lead to the interrogations of writing products and processes. The one-on-one structure of many writing center sessions is less often directed toward this end.

Writing workshops also have features in common with Studio, especially when they develop interactive, reflective discussions among a core group of participants. At the same time, writing workshops are almost always driven by an upfront, clearly defined agenda, and they generally do not engender the long-standing relationships seen within Studio. Even in a workshop series involving the same group of participants, workshops’ fixed agenda and the hierarchical flow of knowledge from leaders to participants is quite different from Studio’s interactive, emergent flow. Writing groups, with their long-term membership and egalitarian patterns for communication, can and do position members to reflect on and critique discourses associated with their writing (Chandler, 2001; Gere, 1987). At the same time, writing groups are generally not linked to institutional structures in the same way as Writing Studios; they are more outside than alongside, and more often than not writing group participants bring self-sponsored, rather than assigned, writing. In general, even when writing groups include a facilitator, procedures for presenting and responding to writing



are directed toward the agendas of individual writers, rather than toward reflection on and critique of an institutional writing context.

While this collection focuses on Studio, we do not mean to imply that Studio is better or more important than other approaches. Studios, writing centers, writing workshops and writing groups all provide support that is empowering, effective, and important while each being distinctly different. Studio's uniqueness comes from its creation of a longstanding group, and the engagement of that group in interactional inquiry within the outside-alongside position of a thirdspace.

## THEORETICAL ROOTS

If Writing Studio's most important practical feature is the group, studio's position in a thirdspace is its most important theoretical feature. Grego and Thompson's use of thirdspace draws from multiple sources, including architect Edward Soja's (1996) *ThirdSpace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. They use Soja's definitions of first, second, and thirdspace to theorize equivalent spaces for Writing Studies. Soja defines firstspace as concrete physical space, the world that can be mapped (1996, pp. 74-75). Grego and Thompson (2008) connect firstspace to student writers' "everyday work to produce their assignments" (p. 82), as well as the teaching practices and material conditions of a specific school. In other words, firstspace for Writing Studio is reality.

Soja defines secondspace as a theorized interpretation of reality. For Grego and Thompson (2008), secondspace is embodied in the scholarship representing Writing Studies' disciplinary doctrine. According to Grego and Thompson, this scholarship creates and codifies the language and concepts used to define "good" writing, as well as appropriate writing genres and pedagogies. Disciplinary scholarship sets up the right (and wrong) ways for teaching based on shared assumptions about appropriate forms and practices for academic writing, students' and teachers' identities, and the contexts in which writing for takes place. Grego and Thompson argue that because most scholarship is conducted at elite research universities, composition theory tends to be based on assumptions based in experiences and material realities associated with that very particular set of universities. When theory based on elite contexts is applied at non-elite institutions with radically different material conditions, economic resources, and student bodies, mismatches are inevitable. While applying scholarship based on conditions at research universities as institutions with radically different teaching contexts may "[allow] teachers to feel that they are at least providing their students with an education similar to that at institutions of a higher class" (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 159), methods derived from this research rarely address

or even recognize the very real needs within local, non-elite contexts. In general,

[t]he further away the faculty and institution are from the upper end of the scale/hierarchy of knowledge making in any discipline, the more generic the curriculum and view of writing handed down from loftier spaces/places may become—not because of any lack of faculty expertise but because the curriculum forged at the upper end of the scale will be ill-equipped to deal with firstspace life at other places. (p. 186)

Writing Studio is a thirdspace, a space designed to bridge the differences between a particular school (firstspace) and what composition scholarship theorizes as “the right way” to teach writing (secondspace). Soja (1996) states that thirdspace “can be described as a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a firstspace perspective that is focused on the ‘real’ material world and a secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through ‘imagined’ representations of spatiality” (p. 6). Because thirdspace is liminal, the norms of communication required in first and second spaces become available for critique, analysis, and re-creation. In thirdspaces, composition scholarship’s secondspace of best practices can be reconsidered and modified in light of faculty expertise and material conditions at a particular institution.

A second source for Studio’s thirdspace theory comes from Kris Gutierrez, Betsy Rymes, and Joanna Larson’s (1995) study of classroom power reflected in discourse. They posit that students and teachers use different scripts, defined as “particular social, spatial, and language patterns . . . that members use to interpret the activity of others and to guide their own participation” (1995, p. 449). Teachers control the dominant, culturally powerful script (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995, p. 446). Students have their own scripts which draw on and twist the teacher’s statements into ideas that “relate simultaneously to the teacher’s words and to [the students’] own cultural perspective” (Gutierrez et al., 1995, p. 461). These counterscripts enable students “to assert their difference from the assigned role” given to them by the dominant script (Gutierrez et al., 1995, p. 451). The different scripts can co-exist in ways that allow the classroom’s work to go on as usual, limiting possibilities for change (Gutierrez et al., 1995, p. 452).

Gutierrez and her co-researchers argue “that the potential for change exists in the dynamic interrelation between the official and unofficial scripts; it is in this interaction that a sustainable challenge to the social and political functions of the teaching relationship and the transcendent script can be created” (1995, p. 452). As both sides work towards mutual understanding, students and teachers “must let go of [their] scripts and communicate across them, [creating] a third space for unscripted improvisation, where the traditionally binary nature of the

student and teacher script is disrupted” (Gutierrez et al., 1995, p. 453). Thirdspace thus allows for the possibility of interrogating and changing identities.

Gutierrez and her co-researchers argue that creating thirdspace in a classroom is difficult; but as observed by Grego and Thompson, “the ‘outside-but-along-side’ positioning of studio groups can be a kind of ‘safe house’ for risk taking on the part of students and teachers” (2008, p. 74). When everything goes as it should, Studio does not eliminate or suppress students’ counterscripts. Rather, the way Studio opens

different writing courses, teachers, and assignments for weekly discussion can put [the counterscripts’] distancing activities on the table for discussion . . . [T]he script (and thereby the counterscript) enacted across more than one classroom [will be] more openly examined by students and group leaders in Studio groups as they meet to discuss not just the students’ writing but the contexts in which the writing is being assigned and assessed. (Grego & Thompson, 2008, pp. 74-75)

By opening up the scripts, students and teachers are able to change in ways that can benefit both groups.

If thirdspace provides a philosophy for Studio, then interactional inquiry represents its methodology. As explained earlier, interactional inquiry functions as action research; it is made up of conversation and writing produced through an on-going series of reflective interactions where participants examine and re-think their experiences. Thompson links this process to “the extended time of a semester that gives us the opportunity to think about the good places and the rough spots in our program; the extended time to bring them up, leave them a while, come back to them after we’ve lived a little more, had a few more experiences, and bring them up again with a new perspective to a group of other people whose perspectives have also changed” (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 180). This process, through which the group as a whole develops and tests hypotheses about academic writing in general and about how academic writing works at their institution in particular, is central to studio work.

Grego and Thompson explicitly state that “Studio and interactional inquiry are not interpretative models so much as productive ones” (2008, p. 172). They reference Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault’s analyses of how divisions between theory and practice have collapsed to explain how interactional inquiry creates points of connection between different spaces that are normally kept rigidly separate (2008, p. 173). By bringing conflicting, and sometimes ignored, discourses into conversation with each other, “[s]tudio looks for ways to help unheard voices speak into the silences more immediately and directly located

within their own institutional spaces/places” (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 188). Grego and Thompson point out that “too often it is organizationally easier (or less dangerous) to find fault with what students do or do not bring in their writing than to find fault with the harsh realities that the institutional setting wants us to ignore” (2008, p. 158), such as the quantity and quality of support for struggling learners, the curriculum’s effectiveness, or the faculty’s conception (or misconception) of best practices. In other words, students get blamed because faculty will not, or cannot, admit that the system within which their students are taught is the real obstacle to good learning. Studio’s recursive cycles of interactional inquiry create a safe space for everyone involved to openly discuss these obstacles and to develop ways to respond to and change them. Interactional inquiry opens up “the thirdspace that lies between the collapse of firstspace perceptions and secondspace conceptions, in part by ‘listening’ to persistent local problems that, by their persistence, seem to be ‘telling us’ something, either about ourselves or about student writing, or about both” (2008, p. 178). The “listening” made possible by thirdspace is able to “tell” staff about their studio’s and their institution’s workings through the application of interactional inquiry.

While research findings produced through interactional inquiry may not always produce traditional academic scholarship, Grego and Thompson “propose that ‘theorizing the cross-section’ of multiple Studio programs can help compositionists generate a body of knowledge about academic writing that reflects different kinds of higher education institutions” (2008, p. 25). Because findings derived from “theorizing the cross-section” are grounded in a broad range of institutional contexts, they would be both more inclusive and more particular than traditional scholarship, and well suited as a basis for local, context-based change. Grego, for example, describes how faculty in the Bridges Writing Program “came to see the institution’s role in constructing and maintaining distance between students and writing/learning” as a result of a lack of clear communication (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 198). Grego created lines of communication to administrators higher up the institutional hierarchy so that the administrators could see what was already working in classrooms, things they had previously been ignorant of or ignored. More importantly, the community created through interactional inquiry led to the faculty “coming together . . . in advocating with the upper administration for smaller class sizes and additional pay for increased classroom hours of teaching, as well as lobbying for our own writing program assessment design” (Grego & Thompson, 2008, pp. 199-200). These changes were meant to persuade administrators to use the expertise of Benedict’s faculty to better benefit students.

Our discussion of thirdspace and interactional inquiry here and elsewhere in this introduction has been designed as an overview. While all of the studio

programs described in this book use thirdspace as a philosophy and interactional inquiry as their guiding methodology, each program tweaks and adapts both to meet the needs of their institutional space. These modifications, fully encouraged by Grego and Thompson throughout almost all studio-related discussions they have ever participated in, increase the chances of creating a program that will work at a particular site and lead to positive change.

## WRITING STUDIOS AND CHANGE

Studio scholarship has persistently identified Studio's potential to effect institutional critique and change as one of its central strengths (Grego, 2002; Grego & Thompson, 1996; Rodby, 1996; Rodby & Fox, 2000; Tassoni & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2005). In light of today's changing landscape for higher education, Studio's power to identify, reflect on, and articulate paths for local change are sorely needed. Over the last twenty years, institutions of higher education have undergone economic, administrative, and pedagogical reorganizations with deep-reaching consequences for teaching and learning. Former provost of the University of Southern California and higher education researcher Lloyd Armstrong (2014) notes that

the economic picture has been dominated by two recessions in the past decade, with an accompanying significant repositioning of the role of the United States in the world. Real family income has been flat or decreased over that period for the vast majority of families, and family wealth has taken a significant dip. As a result, the ever-increasing real costs of higher education have become ever more onerous. (Section 1)

Rocky economics and governments' changing commitment to educational funding have contributed to changes both in the way students go to school and in how institutions of higher education are structured and administered.

Across all economic classes, an increasing percentage of students pursuing four-year degrees are choosing schools close to home (Eagan et al., 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This means they often commute, work part-time, or have family responsibilities in addition to being students. Increasing numbers of students also begin their education by taking classes part-time, or they start at a less prestigious school with plans to transfer (Eagan et al., 2014). This new pattern means lost revenue for the schools these students would have traditionally attended, and it compounds problems posed by decreases in federal and state funding for education. In many cases, colleges and universities have responded by adapting models from business and industry. As discussed at

length by scholars and in the popular press, these models fundamentally redefine roles for administrators, faculty, and students; and they often measure institutional success in terms of efficiency, economic return, or other measures which can conflict with traditionally established or research-based best practices for teaching and learning. In general, higher education's on-going response to these changing times has resulted in increased numbers (and varieties) of administrators and professional staff; decreased roles for and numbers of full-time, tenure track faculty; increased reliance on contingent and part-time faculty; reduced and "commodified" course offerings which have moved away from the liberal arts and towards vocationally-focused curricula; and the adoption of assessments which value efficiency and standardization (Ginsberg, 2011). Because of these shifts, writing programs are often called upon to do more for a larger number of students with fewer faculty, fewer courses, and less support.

Unsurprisingly, this shift is taking place within vigorous and unresolved conflicts over what services or products higher education is supposed to deliver, what students need, what practices constitute good teaching, and what administrative structures will ensure good learning and teaching (Berrett, 2011; Chomsky, 2014; Eberly & Martin, 2012; Klausman, 2013; Mendenhall, 2014). This debate over how best to re-imagine education is discussed more fully in other places. For the purposes of this introduction, it is sufficient to point out that the changing social, economic, and communication structures in the contemporary United States have created a moment in education where past assumptions about educational practices and goals must be reassessed with a critical eye.

*The Writing Studio Sampler* does not provide concrete answers to questions faced by writing teachers and administrators. Neither is it a volume of research which quantifies and correlates paths to success. While most of the essays present a kind of "hero" story, they are not all successes, so neither is it a collection of exemplars for meeting today's changing educational demands. Studios operate within particular contexts, and contexts change. Historically, writing studios have been created to solve institutional problems, usually on short notice and with limited funding. In doing so, they have also contributed valuable information about the cultural contexts they serve and why a given pedagogical approach will (or will not) work in that context. *The Writing Studio Sampler* comes from this tradition. The contributors describe situations where they find themselves in more than one role. They are often asked to act at odds with their training as compositionists, or they are otherwise positioned outside their comfort zones. Nonetheless, they take on the tasks placed before them; set forward their stories; and reflect on the ways Studio can support constructive interactions, relationships, value systems, and discourses within what are otherwise very trying situations. These stories provide the institutional histories which precede

reorganizations and demands for change, they describe the process of change created through studio practices, and they report the outcomes of applications of studio methodologies, regardless of whether the outcome was a success or a failure. Most importantly, each essay illustrates the important role Studio can play in the re-examination of the culture of teaching and learning. When taken together and cross referenced, they present an opportunity to “theorize the cross-section”: to notice, reflect on, and interrogate what Studio does and how it does it. Throughout, readers can consider the roles studio methodology can play in the re-visioning of writing pedagogies that can serve the many different and always changing needs of today’s students.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

*The Writing Studio Sampler’s* opening chapter sets the stage for those to follow by reminding us how cultural narratives shape our thinking and actions. In “Story Changing Work for Studio Activists: Finding Points of Convergence,” Alison Cardinal and Kelvin Keown draw readers’ attention to stories that frame our beliefs and shape our participation in educational practices. Using their experiences piloting several writing studios at a small urban university as data, they interrogate local and global stories which shape studio stakeholders’ expectations: expectations that will influence whether they will authorize (or block) a studio’s development. Within their own context, the authors report how their strategic, interactive responses to cultural stories led to increasing effectiveness in their studio’s successive iterations.

This chapter is particularly important because, as Cardinal and Keown point out:

little has been written about how to strategically tell the story of studio work to administrators and students. We argue that strategically engaging in what Linda Adler-Kassner (2008) calls “story-changing work” will increase the likelihood of success.

Their chapter documents how studio advocates can readily enlist cultural stories about learning transfer and acceleration in efforts to promote writing studios, and cautions that we must not get drawn in by our own stories so that we fail to notice the pragmatic interests and specific identity stories brought to Studio by students. This last idea may be the chapter’s most useful point: the warning to studio advocates not to become caught up in utopic dreams of what Studio is “supposed” to be, and as a result, miss opportunities to create programs more grounded in stakeholders’ actual needs.



As made clear by Cardinal and Keown, studios are engendered both by the cultural stories which frame and sustain them and by the contextual realities where those stories materialize. The next three chapters pay particular attention to the ways context can influence new program's development, or the maintenance and adaptation of an existing program.

In the first of these chapters, "Studio Bricolage: Inventing Writing Studio Pedagogy for Local Contexts," Aurora Matzke and Bre Garrett relate their different experiences starting new studio programs as they began their careers as writing program administrators at two different institutions. Using bricolage as a theoretical lens, they provide separate, but interrelated, reflections on how material and discursive affordances can shape Writing Studios. In particular, the authors use two concepts from bricolage, uptake and "not talk," as tools for recognizing and assessing available resources for program design. Uptake is the interactive, in-context process of interrogating the material landscape to discover what is available for the bricoleur's project, in this case, the development of Writing Studios. The uptake process is inclusive, and it emphasizes taking in all that is at hand before assessing its purpose or usefulness. In contrast, "not talk" assesses the particular ideas and discursive structures that frame a project in terms of what is NOT wanted, imagined, or desirable. Within this chapter, "not talk" clarified what was "not useful, needed, or wanted" by stakeholders who would participate in studio programs.

Through the use of uptake and "not talk," Matzke and Garrett dissect and re-think features of their institutional contexts, and then use this information in the development of their Writing Studios. In many ways, the use of uptake and "not talk" is a particular elaboration on interactional inquiry. Incorporating these two concepts when assessing a context can help focus and manage the often overwhelming challenge of accurately perceiving and analyzing studio sites. As might be expected, the development of Matzke and Garrett's Studios was not seamless, and difficulties encountered by the authors, especially difficulties with student buy-in, may cause readers to reflect back to Cardinal and Keown, or to look forward to chapters by Santana, Rose, and LaBarge, and by Ritola et al., chapters which further elaborate connections between context and the processes and practices which foster a successful Studio.

While Matzke and Garrett focus on the development of new or repurposed writing studios at schools with more or less traditional administrative structures, Tonya Ritola, Cara Minardi Power, Christine W. Heilman, Suzanne Biedenbach, and Amanda F. Sepulveda describe the challenges of developing a writing studio at a school with less standard structures and expectations. They were challenged to: meet pre-existing conditions set by funding sources, respond to the state of Georgia's larger political focus on retention, and create a process

for developing and administering a Writing Studio that could function within Georgia Gwinnett College's flat structure while simultaneously providing support for developmental writing which met the team's professional standards. Their chapter, "The Politics of Basic Writing Reform: Using Collective Agency to Challenge the Power Dynamics of a Flat Administration," focuses on how they capitalized on their collective agency as composition teachers and scholars to both resist and comply with these contextual requirements.

Specifically, Ritola et al., strove to create programmatic support in keeping with composition theory's best practices (practices and concepts which sometimes were not readily understandable to the administrators making programmatic decisions) without either making unsustainable demands on writing faculty or failing to meet institutional requirements. Implicit to the story of their negotiations are questions similar to those raised by Cardinal and Keown, questions about what happens when utopian stories of Writing Studio and writing pedagogies are simply not feasible within a given institutional context. As writing teachers and program administrators, we all face contexts which demand negotiation or even compromise. This chapter suggests collective agency as an approach for achieving a long-term course of action which preserves professional standards in keeping with local contexts.

Dan Fraizer's chapter, "Navigating Outside the Mainstream: Our Journey Sustaining Writing Studio," traces how the studio program at Springfield College, a small liberal arts college in Western Massachusetts, has responded to changing student and administrative attitudes and needs over two decades. This reflective discussion also focuses on how contextual factors shape and reshape writing studios' structures and practices with a focus on the importance of on-going conversations among teachers, administrators, and students as a factor in bringing about programmatic change.

Fraizer's chapter tracks two important, but traditionally problematic, aspects of studio programs: development of systems for placement and enrollment in studio programs; and systems for communication among studio facilitators, course instructors, and students. Each of the three placement systems Fraizer describes functioned well enough in a particular time and place, and it is not clear that movement from one system to the next represents progress in the usual sense of the word. Rather, Fraizer shows how his studio's placement practices necessarily respond to on-going changes in student identities and family dynamics which in turn shape how students make decisions about school, all of which contribute to changing conceptions of what placement standards should do and how they should do it. As a result, Fraizer suggests that looking for a "best" way to place students may be essentially untenable. This observation sets up the importance of his second reflection, which is presented within a story about

the need for regular dialog among teaching faculty, studio staff, and students. He concludes that the productivity of these on-going conversations can provide a basis for effective programmatic change. Fraizer's observations about how to support useful faculty-studio-student dialog can help program directors build strong studio programs despite the all too human, less than perfect personnel who usually staff (and administer!) writing courses and studios.

Like Fraizer, Christina Santana, Shirley K. Rose, and Robert LaBarge's "A Hybrid Mega Course with Optional Studio: Responding Responsibly to an Administrative Mandate" is also a meditation on relationships between studio placement decisions and studio success. The authors discuss a hybrid program with directed-self placement. The program included requirements for face-to-face class attendance and for completion of asynchronous online course assignments; it also included an optional Writing Studio which students could choose to attend up to five times a week.

Santana et al.'s Writing Studio was underpinned by a utopian narrative which allowed that students can best decide what kind and how much help they need with their writing. The accuracy of that narrative played out in complicated ways. The writing studio component, unsurprisingly, was plagued by poor attendance. Yet the chapter's analysis of student reflections on why they did (or did not) attend studio sessions and what they got out of sessions they did attend clearly illustrates that correlations between pass/fail rates, or even grades for the supported course, do not tell the whole story. A closer look shows some of the reasons why such data don't necessarily reflect what students learn from Studio, or for that matter, what they learned from making uncoerced decisions about whether or not to attend studio sessions. In their analysis, the authors "[draw] an important distinction between self-placement (which allows students to determine the level of difficulty of the material they are required to master) and required attendance (which structures student choice regarding elements within a course)." In making this distinction, the chapter demonstrates "that though students may seek out extra attention when they need it, they may only do what is required for a number of pragmatic and very rational reasons." Tension between these two different impulses is evident in the presentation of this studio's story, and it sets up important questions for much needed research on "students' abilities to make efficacious and strategic choices regarding their supplemental writing instruction." In addition to taking a much needed look at the ramifications of optional attendance, utopian stories, and material circumstances, this chapter also illustrates studio's potential to re-shape context. Like Ritola et al., Santana et al., point out how their program's structures for gathering data and formulating plans for change were integral to the outside-alongside positioning and interactional inquiry of Writing Studio itself.

The next three chapters deepen the exploration of context by exploring how studio methodologies might revise or work in tandem with courses or functions not traditionally associated with Writing Studios. In this grouping, we see writing studio methodologies elaborated as: a vehicle for communication among a cohort of writing teachers; a feature of teacher training; and a synergistic element within service learning courses.

In “Professional Development, Interactional Inquiry and Writing Instruction: A Blog Called ‘Accelerated English @ MCTC,’” Jane Leach and Michael Kuhne describe how a collaborative blog set up for studio program staff at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) functioned as a space for interactional inquiry. The blog was open to all MCTC Accelerated Developmental English instructors and selected colleagues. The blog allowed for the “continual to-and-fro between action and reflection” (Grego & Thompson, 2008, p. 72) which led to “trying out approaches, actions or changes discussed within the inquiry group in their daily lives at the site.” The blog’s support for interactional inquiry was particularly important at MCTC, a public, urban, two-year comprehensive college where faculty have heavy teaching loads and little time to sit down together to talk. Use of the blog allowed staff to participate in a kind of collaborative, in-process professional development; it also provided space for collective, reflective problem solving in order to meet program goals.

Leach and Kuhne report most frequently discussed topics (ascertained from the word cloud in the blog’s tag directory) and reflect on the kind and amount of resolution produced through online interactional inquiry among blog participants. The authors’ discussion of faculty posts about poor student class attendance deepens Santana et al.’s, discussion of poor attendance. Where Santana et al., present an analysis of student perspectives on attendance and experiences with Studio by excerpting statements from interviews, Leach and Kuhne provide selections from blog entries where staff write about how they felt about and responded to issues in students’ lives which affected attendance. Similar to Santana et al.’s, observations that traditional markers of “what students got out of studio” did not reflect what more intimate, grounded reflection revealed, Leach and Kuhne note that a blog used for collaborative reflection allowed participants “to discuss matters that too frequently are left unwritten or unspoken in our work.” In their conclusion, they point out the value of what can happen in a teaching community when such disclosures are subjected to interactional inquiry.

Kylie Korsnack’s chapter “GTAs and the Writing Studio: An Experimental Space for Increased Learning and Pedagogical Growth” opens up another application of studio methodologies. Her chapter illustrates how Studios can serve a vital role in training graduate students to become effective teachers, something that has become more important as the job market grows both more demanding

and more competitive. As she points out, even those graduate students who go through a rigorous training program can feel unprepared for classroom teaching. Her chapter documents the experiences of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who were eased into teaching responsibilities through spending mentored time as studio group facilitators and by observing experienced teachers.

The chapter centers on Korsnack's examination of program documents and interviews with studio facilitators and faculty directors. Analysis of these documents illustrates how a studio apprenticeship both supports GTAs in developing nuanced, grounded teaching philosophies, allows them to study student writing and helps them learn how to plan and manage class activities. Korsnack describes how studio's liminal space positions the new graduate student as a more experienced guide for a small number of students instead of as the authority figure over a traditional class. This different relationship with students, outside-alongside the perspective of the classroom teacher, provides GTAs with an inside view of how students think through their writing processes and positions them to learn lessons about teaching that they could not learn as easily within the role defined for instructors. The required observations of experienced teachers further supported GTA's growth as writing instructors, allowing them to "learn to see what works and what doesn't work [for the teacher they are observing] on the way to developing their own personal pedagogy."

Like Korsnack, Karen Gabrielle Johnson describes a program which extends the reach of writing studio methodology. In "Multiplying Impact: Combining Third and Fourthspaces to Holistically Engage Basic Writers," she documents the form and function of a studio program linked to service learning. She describes this program as a service learning/studio combination, and her analysis focuses on the synergistic effects for student learning when thirdspaces (Writing Studios) and fourthspaces (service learning) interact. Specifically, Johnson observes that while service learning courses can increase student engagement through their community-based, experiential components, students may need spaces both to articulate those experiences in language and to practice, discover, and invent the forms for writing about them. Her discussion illustrates how Writing Studio, with its facilitated discussions and on-going interactional inquiry, can provide such spaces. Because of this and despite the work-intensive demands of both Studios and service learning projects, Johnson concludes that the two approaches, when combined, help basic writing students better integrate learning.

In many ways, the two final chapters draw together and extend earlier discussions about the importance of context; the intentional, reflective use of studio methodologies to respond to and push back against those contexts; and the use of studio methodologies within new contexts and for new purposes. Each of these last two chapters, in its own way, presents a writing studio story which

suggests new possibilities for studio methods. Michele Miley's "Writing Studios as Countermonument: Reflexive Moments from Online Writing Studios in Writing Center Partnerships" documents how online studios can make visible "moments of resistance to innovation influenced by disciplinary discourse and institutional relationships." Mary Gray's "Something Gained: The Role of Online Studios in a Hybrid First-year Writing Course" describes a Writing Studio that is entirely online. In both cases, online features of these programs revise and reconfigure interactional inquiry, the outside-alongside placement of studios, and communication dynamics already present within studio methodology. These "new studios" also draw on theory and practice from digital writing and new media, and extend possibilities for the reflective, analytic, and interpersonal practices which energize face-to-face studio conversations.

Miley uses Paul Butler's discussion of countermonument theory to frame her discussion of Writing Studios associated with The University of Houston Writing Center's Writing in the Disciplines (WID) program. In the chapter's introduction, she paraphrases Butler's observation that "countermonuments require a great amount of self-assessment and reflection and, importantly, a willingness to allow viewers to share authority in the construction of identity" (Butler, 2006, p. 15). She points out that a countermonument's willingness "to open itself to its own violation" (Butler, 2006, p. 15) can allow us to see ourselves from multiple perspectives and in new ways, and then illustrates how a writing studio's positioning outside-alongside mainstream discourses creates the ideal space for a countermonument. As she puts it, she uses "Butler's metaphor of the countermonument and its possibilities for creating reflexive spaces to describe my experience with online writing studios both in a WID partnership and in the larger first-year composition partnership." This discussion draws from nearly four years of data and includes countermonumental reflections which consider "how online writing studios can help writing teachers . . . to resist disciplinary calcification and to work within and against the institution . . . [and] . . . how studios make visible the moments when, without the willingness to take the structural risks that Butler calls for, we [can] become 'monolithic or static' (2006, p. 11), despite our motivation to be innovative." Miley's elaboration of the metaphor of countermonument in terms of one online studio program suggests a way to conceptualize learning within the always changing contexts of studio programs that have not yet been fully invented.

Gray describes an online hybrid/studio-supported model for first-year composition, a studio developed through collaboration among the University of Houston's Department of English and the Writing Center. She tracks program development over several years, and her analysis of data to assess student reception and program success illustrate how a hybrid/studio approach can be used to comply

with institutional demands for alternative delivery methods while still supporting the National Council of Teachers of English's statements on the benefits of first-year writing courses. In discussing the success of the online studio, she observes that the fact that studio groups met online added multiple layers of complexity for student participation, facilitator training, and various communication issues. In light of these complexities, she reflects that the project could not have been successfully maintained "without the Writing Center's role as the site for studio development and implementation." The chapter concludes by suggesting that the hybrid/studio supported model "may offer possibilities for retaining important elements of traditional first-year writing courses that might be diminished or lost in the rush to new delivery methods and credit alternatives," and in doing so, they "may hold the potential to mitigate those losses and realize unexpected gains."

## AN INVITATION

Taken together, the chapters in *The Writing Studio Sampler* suggest the range of the Studio model's potential. As emphasized throughout this introduction and Grego and Thompson's work, writing studios respond to the contexts in which they are created. It is not a pedagogy in a box that can be used unmodified anywhere. As a result, the chapters in this collection bring issues "to the table," a phrase Nancy Thompson frequently used in staff meetings. All authors raise points grounded in circumstances at their home institutions. At the same time, they do not present responses formulated through their studio work as the only answer to their situation. It is up to readers to continue to explore studio's possibilities in light of their own experiences as they create programs and propose actions specific to their particular contexts.

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