

CHAPTER 4

THINKING VERTICALLY

As we argue in Chapter Three and in this chapter, there is significant agreement among a variety of stakeholders concerning just what it is that we should be doing in our writing classrooms in order to prepare students for lifelong success as literate actors in the world. There is also significant agreement about the macro-level, high-impact practices shown to improve student learning. How, then, might we chart a path forward that takes into account the many complexities we've discussed throughout this book? Relatedly, how might we quickly and effectively intervene in current efforts to shape writing instruction at the high school and college level? We will now focus on the moments of opportunity presented to us through debates surrounding the Common Core State Standards. In particular, we propose acting at the confluence of Core to College driven initiatives, research on transfer emerging within rhetorical genre studies, and an investment in K–College professional learning communities at the local and national level. In short, we advocate for First-Year Composition curricular development projects, vertically aligned with high school curricula, as well as writing across the curriculum at all levels, that teachers, researchers, and state policymakers can all endorse. Along the way, we must reassert the agency of teachers and students as we recreate assessment not as a tool of accountability, but rather a teaching and learning practice rooted in context-driven standards.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS INITIATIVE

Let's begin by taking time to more fully understand the Common Core State Standards in general, and the Language Arts/Writing Across the Curriculum strands in particular, in order to have a better sense of how we might leverage them in debates about literacy instruction at the college level. The Common Core State Standards are intended to provide a common set of milestones for grades K–12; skills are to build from year to year, so that current learning scaffolds upon prior knowledge and skills. The Common Core State Standards Initiative claims that the standards:

- Are aligned with college and work expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;

- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based. (“About the Standards”)

Previous attempts at standards-based education varied by state, causing a problem for curriculum development and textbook selection. As John Kendall claims, “Standards were out in front, while curriculum to support these standards lagged behind. This lag crippled districts’ and schools’ attempts to implement standards-based instruction and has been counted by many as the single greatest failing of the standards movement” (6). Furthermore, having local state-by-state standards but an increasingly transient population meant that as new students relocate into a school district, teachers have no easy way of knowing what prior knowledge the students are bringing with them.

The CCSS, which include detailed discussions of goals for each level and suggested curricular content as well as a rising tide of attendant professional development networks, intend to provide national standards that will make previous issues of curriculum support, textbook development, and student mobility less problematic. In addition, these standards are focused not just at the high school level, as some state standards initiatives are; rather, they encompass a student’s entire school experience from kindergarten through 12th grade and into college (e.g., Core to College). The comprehensiveness of the Common Core is important for those of us in higher education to understand. Because Core to College initiatives are already in place, universities might experience the results of the CCSS on student learning relatively soon.

As writing teachers and researchers, we are supportive of the intent of the CCSS. In particular, we are emboldened by the emphasis on literacy (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) as a shared responsibility across grade levels and content areas, as well as the increased expectations for the variety and complexity of the texts students read and write across the curriculum—especially nonfiction texts. And we are encouraged by the efforts to create partnerships among K–12 and college teachers. Still, given the history of writing instruction and standardized testing in the United States, we also have serious concerns.

Much like the earlier rhetoric of crisis following Sputnik that led to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, as detailed in Chapter One, the CCSS are being propelled by a fear that the United States is falling dangerously behind other countries in global tests of academic achievement. More specifically, as the October 7, 2013, issue of *Time* magazine proclaimed: “What’s driving the core standards conversation now is the ambition to succeed in a global economy and the anxiety that American students are failing to do so” (Meacham

44). But a critical difference is that in the case of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the federal government was the main driver and investor. In the case of the CCSS, the federal government seems to be trying to appear as little more than a supportive bystander in an effort seemingly driven by states, but really fueled by private foundations and testing companies. As explained by Thomas Newkirk in “Speaking Back to the Common Core”:

A number of literacy educators have chosen to cherry-pick—endorse the standards but not the tests; yet they are clearly a package. The Department of Education has committed 300 million dollars to the creation of these new tests, which are now being designed by two consortia, PARCC and Smarter Balanced. These tests will give operational reality to the standards—in effect they will become the standards; there will be little incentive to teach to skills that are not tested (this is a lesson from *No Child Left Behind*). (4)

The Smarter Balanced Testing Consortium and the Partnership for Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) were among the first to develop and offer comprehensive systems to measure student mastery of CCSS. We have been focusing on PARCC simply because we both live and work in PARCC member states and so are more familiar with its history and trajectory. We are concerned not only with the continued narrowing of the curriculum and the lack of student and teacher agency such a well-funded system of accountability entails, we are also concerned that some states have already committed to using the results of the PARCC assessments given in high school for college placement and admission decisions (“Colorado Measures of Academic Success”; Illinois State Board of Education “PARCC Assessment FAQs”). Further, the lack of diversity in our assessment practices that such concentration on a single measure of student achievement will result in is likely to limit access to many students who, as William Hiss and Valerie Franks show us in their study on test-optional colleges and universities, “have proven themselves to everyone but the testing agencies” (61).

Research has begun to emerge on the effects of CCSS. While some argue it is too early to measure the effects of our latest educational reform project, many states are considered early and strong adopters of CCSS, aiming for full implementation in 2012–2013 (Loveless), and it is reasonable to use these states as a starting point. In fact, some states are already in their fifth year of implementation. This is not to say that we believe all students and teachers have been provided with the support structures needed to meet these new standards, but rather that we have much to learn by working to understand whether or not CCSS is evidencing its intended effects earlier rather than later. Further, briefly revisiting the outcomes

of No Child Left Behind over the decade of its strongest implementation period provides us with a way of benchmarking Common Core State Standards.

NCLB required states to test students every year in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school to determine whether or not schools were meeting “Adequate Yearly Progress” as defined by NCLB. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was designated as a test of achievement that would be independent of the state-controlled tests. While the law authorizing NCLB was signed in 2001, it is generally agreed upon that it did not take effect until 2003. In 2012, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing published “NCLB’s Lost Decade for Educational Progress: What Can We Learn from this Policy Failure?” As this report, and many others conclude:

Overall, growth on NAEP was more rapid before NCLB became law and flattened after it took effect. For example, 4th grade math scores jumped 11 points between 1996 and 2003, but increased only 6 points between 2003 and 2011. Reading scores have barely moved in the post-NCLB era. Fourth grade scores increased just 3 points to 221 between 2003 and 2011, remaining level since 2007. In 8th grade reading, there was a meager 2-point increase, from 263 to 265, in that same period. Since the start of NCLB, gains have stagnated or slowed for almost every demographic group in both subjects and both grades. (Guisbond with Neill and Schaeffer 3)

These results suggest that not only has NCLB failed to result in the intended increase in student achievement as measured by the independent NAEP, but the only modest gains occurred very early in the process, as is often the case when adopting innovations of any type. It will be important to see if CCSS follows a similar trend.

There is certainly considerable variation in the timing and strength of individual states’ adoption of CCSS that should be taken into account when assessing early results of the CCSS initiative. Tom Loveless, in “Measuring Effects of the Common Core,” uses two indexes to categorize states as strong adopters, medium adopters, and non-adopters. The 2011 index lists nineteen states as strong adopters, twenty-seven as medium adopters, and four as non-adopters. Strong adopters spent considerably more money on CCSS and engaged in at least three implementation strategies—professional development, new instructional material, and participation in one of two testing consortia (PARCC or SBAC). Medium adopters engaged in at least two of the three implementation strategies listed above. Non-adopters did not adopt the CCSS at all. The 2013 index is based on each state’s timeline for classroom implementation of CCSS, with twelve states

listing 2012–2013 as their implementation date and thus categorized as strong adopters, thirty-four states identifying an implementation date after 2012–2013 and thus categorized as medium adopters, and four states as non-adopters. Based on these indexes, Loveless examined 2009–2013 NAEP scores:

Fourth grade reading scores improved by 1.11 scale score points in states with strong implementation of CCSS compared to states that did not adopt CCSS. A similar comparison in last year's BCR [Brown Center Report] found a 1.27 point difference on NAEP's eighth grade math test, also in favor of states with strong implementation of CCSS. These differences, although certainly encouraging to CCSS supporters, are quite small, amounting to (at most) 0.04 standard deviations (SD) on the NAEP scale. A threshold of 0.20 SD—five times larger—is often invoked as the minimum size for a test score change to be regarded as noticeable.

Because the NAEP writing test was last administered in 2011 and is not scheduled to be administered again until 2017, we are not in a position to say much about CCSS in relation to writing and NAEP assessments.

Of course, it remains to be seen, as was the case with early results from NCLB, if this is as high as the gains will be over time. There is some additional evidence that this may be the case. For example, a series of reports was prepared for the National Center for Educational Statistics (overseers of NAEP) on the degree of alignment between NAEP and CCSS by the American Institutes of Research. Among the findings for K–8 math are that there were not significant areas of content in the NAEP mathematics framework that are not also in the CCSS math standards. However, there are some important differences to note: the algebra and geometry content in the CCSS math standards are more rigorous than in the NAEP framework; certain skills, such as the ability to estimate, are woven throughout the CCSS math standards but assessed in isolation in the NAEP; conceptual understanding of a greater number of math topics is required by the CCSS math standards; and certain math content is introduced at a higher grade level in the CCSS math standards (Hughes et al. 11). Given this raising of the bar in the CCSS math standards, it's interesting that states categorized as strong adopters of CCSS didn't show stronger gains in math on the NAEP assessments.

In a parallel validity study for the National Center of Education Statistics on reading and writing, led by Karen Wixson et al. of the American Institutes of Research, we can see how the CCSS ELA standards align with the NAEP reading and writing assessments. The authors found that many elements of the NAEP reading assessment are in line with current research and the CCSS-ELA

standards. Further, the reading selections for grades four and eight are within or above the ranges specified in the CCSS-ELA, while the grade twelve passages are below the ranges specified in the CCSS-ELA (92). Importantly, “Panel members caution NAEP to be cognizant of the lack of research base, inconsistencies, and specificity of the ‘learning progressions’ embodied by the K–12 grade-level standards in CCSS-ELA” (93).

As with reading, the panel found that the NAEP writing assessment reflects current research on writing and major elements of the CCSS-ELA standards, with both emphasizing writing as a social act. Importance is placed on the role of audience, purpose, task, and rhetorical knowledge as well as the development of ideas, organization, and language facility and conventions (94). Beyond these similarities, the panel points out that the CCSS-ELA emphasizes writing from sources and performance-based tasks while the NAEP assessment relies on writing from background knowledge and personal experience (95). CCSS-ELA also places emphasis on writing in the disciplines, including the use of domain-specific vocabulary (95) as part of an overall shift toward non-fiction texts in ELA classrooms.

Indeed, some consider the shift away from a near exclusive focus on fictional texts in English Language Arts classrooms toward a balance of fiction and non-fiction text to be among the most controversial shifts CCSS recommend. Here the NAEP can also be helpful as it asks questions of teachers about their professional development activities and instructional practices. As reported by Loveless in “Measuring Effects of the Common Core,”: “Fourth grade teachers in strong implementation states decisively favored the use of fiction over nonfiction in 2009 and 2011. But the prominence of fiction in those states experienced a large decline in 2013 (-12.4 percentage points). The decline for the entire four year period, 2009–2013, was larger in the strong implementation states (-10.8) than in the medium implementation (-7.5) or non-adoption states (-9.8).” This data suggests that even if adoption of CCSS does not lead to dramatically improved reading and writing scores on standardized tests, it can lead to a significant improvement in certain widely agreed upon recommendations about best practices in writing instruction, including that students read and write in a variety of genres across disciplines and that these genres move beyond traditionally defined academic writing. Taking a closer look at the Language and Literacy Common Core State Standards will show why this is the case.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The English Language Arts standards for K–12 are divided into four strands. The reading and writing strands have ten standards each while the speaking/lis-

tening and language strands have six standards each. So many standards could be difficult to cover during the year in a meaningful way for student learning. However, unlike many other state-based standards, the Common Core seems to strike a workable integration of language and literacy standards within the context of other disciplines. In fact, Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical subjects states:

Just as students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, so too must the Standards specify the literacy skills and understandings required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines. Literacy standards for grade 6 and above are predicated on teachers of ELA, history/social studies, science, and technical subjects using their content area expertise to help students meet the particular challenges of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in their respective fields. It is important to note that the 6–12 literacy standards in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects are not meant to replace content standards in those areas but rather to supplement them.

The four strands of the language and literacy standards (reading, speaking and listening, language, and writing) create “a set of College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards that broadly describe what students should be able to do, from kindergarten through 12th grade” (Kendall 12–13) in order to be prepared for higher education and/or work. Certainly, there is overlap between these strands. Language, which is concerned primarily with vocabulary, is important for writing and reading. Likewise, speaking and listening, which has as one of its concerns presenting ideas to an audience, overlaps with written rhetoric’s focus on audience-based writing. As most readers of this book rightly understand, there is a deep interconnectedness between reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language use.

In terms of the writing strand, the Common Core Standards focus on three “text types and purposes”: arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives (Common Core ELA Standards 18). Other standards in this strand focus on appropriate development and organization for audience and purpose; the writing process; the use of technology for production of, collaboration on, or dissemination of writing; research skills to find and evaluate credible sources from a variety of media; academic honesty when using sources; the use of analysis and close reading as evidence; and writing in both shorter and longer time

frames for varying audiences and purposes (18). We note significant alignment of the Common Core with Graham and Perin's eleven most effective approaches to improving student writing, as discussed in Chapter Three.

As Kendall posits, one of the strengths of the Common Core writing standards is the focus on argument, which many state standards did not have. He notes that states did have "persuasion" as a type of writing, "but in a form that appeals to the audience through emotions or the character or credentials of the writer rather than depending upon argument, which seeks to convince the audience by means of the perceived merit of the claims and proof offered" (18). Wolfe's analysis of assignments across myriad disciplines, on the other hand, indicates that argumentation is one of the primary genres used. Therefore, the Common Core's emphasis on argumentation rather than persuasion supports college-ready writers.

We appreciate the intent of the Common Core State Standards to bring consistent standards across states, to prepare students for college or for the demands of a twenty-first century workforce that continues to demand more of workers, to emphasize writing and literacy in broad ways, across genres and disciplines, and to establish rigorous achievement levels for students. We further think that the notion of knowledge scaffolding on which the Common Core State Standards were built is cognitively and pedagogically sound. We are also encouraged by how all of this might bring K–12 and college faculty together. At the same time, we are very much concerned with how the CCSS are being positioned, not simply to prepare students for college, but perhaps also to drive the college curriculum itself. Still, like Thomas Newkirk, we are hopeful skeptics:

It may be that the CCSS does what others claim they will—encourage good pedagogical discussion, clarify goals, help students read deeply, give writing its proper place in the curriculum, expand the repertoire in English Language Arts to a focus on quality nonfiction. And that the initiative won't dissolve into teaching new tests. (6)

If the Common Core is not co-opted by the assessment industrial complex, and continues to promote a meaningful partnership between K–12 and college faculty, we see value in CCSS in the long term as the overall framework for CCSS supports existing and emerging research in best practices for writing instruction across the curriculum. In the rest of this chapter, we highlight the areas of most promise that should not only guide that ongoing implementation of CCSS, but also our work at the university level.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Recently, writing studies has seen a reemergence of interest in cognitive-based research—in particular, the notion of knowledge transfer has become the subject of theoretical discussion and empirical investigation. D.N Perkins and Gavriel Salomon in their seminal article “Teaching for Transfer” define transfer as “knowledge or skill associated with one context that reaches out to enhance another. Transfer goes beyond ordinary learning in that the skill or knowledge in question has to travel to a new context” (22). Knowledge transfer can occur both inside and outside of educational settings. Most educators believe that transfer is important and that it needs to happen in order for students to move fluidly from one context to another where they adapt and apply prior knowledge. Yet, as Perkins and Salomon suggest, most teachers believe that transfer will “take care of itself,” what they call the “Bo Peep Theory”: If left alone, the sheep will find Bo Peep” (23). Gerald Nelms and Ronda Dively distinguish the difference between “learning” and “transfer.” Drawing upon many sources, they define learning as “the durability of knowledge—that is information stored in memory” whereas transfer “involves the application of knowledge acquired in one situation or context to a different situation or context.” They continue: “Of course, learning is a crucial prerequisite for transfer,” but argue that unless transfer occurs, education is not successful (215).

Transfer, however, is not easily achieved, and Perkins and Salomon posit that transfer may be difficult to achieve because of several factors—either the knowledge needed is not deeply enough learned so that it can be transferred, or it may not be able to be applied to various contexts because it has not been “cognitively assimilated.” It could be, they argue, that knowledge is so closely tied to its locus and to specialized knowledge that it cannot be transferred to other contexts, what they call “local knowledge” (24). Offering the “low road and high road model” of transfer, Perkins and Salomon suggest ways transfer might be successful. Low road transfer, they suggest, occurs when significant overlap exists between prior knowledge and a current situation. They suggest that one could drive a truck based on prior knowledge of how to drive a car (25). In other words, between these two contexts, significant overlap exists. High road transfer, on the other hand, relies “on deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application to another” (25). Two kinds of high road transfer exist: “forward reaching and backward reaching” (26). “In forward-reaching high road transfer, one learns something and abstracts it in preparation for application elsewhere” while in backward reaching transfer “one finds oneself in a problem situation, abstracts key characteristics from the situation and reaches backward into one’s experiences for matches” (26). Low road transfer, Perkins and Salomon

suggest, is the easiest way for transfer to occur, while high road transfer is more difficult, but not impossible, to attain. They argue that in order for transfer to occur, students must be explicitly taught about transfer at a meta-cognitive level: “Accordingly, a major goal of teaching for transfer becomes not just teaching particular knowledge and skills for transfer but teaching students in general how to *learn for transfer*” (30).

Although Perkins and Salomon provide an often-used framework for understanding transfer, theirs is not the only one to consider. Indeed, researchers in writing studies have begun to refine notions of transfer within the context of what we already know about literacy development. For example, Elizabeth Wardle discusses three understandings of transfer: (1) “‘Task’ Conceptions,” which resemble Perkins and Salomon’s understanding of transfer and “theorize transfer as a transition of knowledge used in one task to solve another task” (“Understanding Transfer” 68); (2) “‘Individual’ Conceptions,” which focuses on “teach[ing] students ‘learned intelligent behavior’ that will help them seek out and/or create situations in which what they have learned will transfer” (67); and (3) “‘Context’ Conceptions,” which go beyond the task or the individual to the larger social context, whether it be “situated,” “sociocultural,” or “activity-based” (67–68). Wardle suggests that activity-based transfer may help us think more broadly about transfer:

[A]ccording to the complex understandings of transfer that emerge from activity-based theories, some previously learned knowledge and skills that are appropriate for and needed in a new context or activity system may be applied differently than in the context or activity system in which they were learned. Therefore, if we look, but do not find direct evidence that students use specific previously learned skills in new situations, we cannot necessarily assume that students did not learn them, have not used them, or will not use them in the future. (69)

Positioned more concretely, we might envision transfer as a problem-solving negotiation that writers enter into upon experiencing a new context. The question then becomes less about the student’s prior knowledge of various genres and more about the student’s meta-awareness of problem-solving strategies as literate actors in the world. Thinking about transfer is important since first-year writing courses are often key components to general education requirements at most colleges and universities. The assumption is and has been that what students learn in first-year writing courses can be transferred to other writing situations throughout their university experience and even into the workplace, although David Smit has argued this is likely an erroneous assumption on our part. Several recent empirical studies

have attempted to determine whether or not transfer is occurring from first-year writing to the other writing tasks that students face in the university. Results of these studies suggest that two central themes occur: Transfer and genre are linked, and transfer is also connected to behaviors and meta-awareness.

TRANSFER AND GENRES

First-year writing programs generally predicate their value upon the assumptions that students are prepared to write beyond the typical two required courses, that students are taught writing strategies and behaviors such as drafting and revising that supersede any specific type of writing, and that students who have had little experience writing more than a five-paragraph essay will broaden their abilities to write longer, sustained pieces often involving research. These are noble goals. The reality, however, is that writing courses are often relegated to graduate students, adjuncts, or tenure-track faculty who may not be prepared for or interested in teaching writing. Often these faculty value and teach their students to replicate the kinds of writing done in literature to the exclusion of other disciplines in the liberal arts, let alone the “hard” sciences. And, seldom does this teaching include the vertical transfer of skills that might allow us to argue that those literary skills do, indeed, have value outside of English.

The results of Wardle’s 2009 study suggest as much. While Wardle noted that the genres assigned are diverse, there are genres that are assigned beyond composition, such as an observation and an argument. However, Wardle suggests that the way these assignments are structured for a composition course—and the way in which the rhetorical situation is constructed—make the assignments less transferrable and more unique to first year composition “genres” than to disciplinary genres, what she calls “mutt genres.” “They are asked to write mutt genres,” Wardle argues, “because the exigencies giving rise to the genre in other courses are not available within FYC (nor can they be expected to be available). Thus, FYC students are told to write an argument . . . simply for the sake of doing so (i.e., for ‘practice’)” (777). The lack of consistent genre instruction may be a factor in students’ ability to transfer knowledge from first-year writing courses.

Similarly, Linda Bergmann and Janet Zepernick’s research, conducted at an engineering-focused school—which admittedly could affect their results—suggests that students separate writing done in English courses from the writing done in disciplinary content courses. Writing done in disciplinary courses is part of “their socialization into the disciplines” (129). Furthermore students view the personal writing assigned in composition courses as not rule-governed and idiosyncratic. In their disciplinary writing, however, students indicated that they understood the disciplinary boundaries and expectations for their

writing. For that reason, students reported that while they generally thought writing skills are transferrable, they did not believe that the skills they learned in first-year writing courses were transferrable since they were not disciplinary in orientation (129).

In their cross-institutional study, Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi asked participants to acknowledge the kinds of writing tasks they had performed prior to matriculating at their respective universities. Students at the University of Tennessee overwhelmingly reported the research paper as their top genre, while the five-paragraph essay was the predominant genre reported by University of Washington students (321). Beyond academic writing, students reported writing in their personal lives as well, including emails, text messages, and business letters, results that are quite similar to those noted by the WIDE Research Group at Michigan State University's cross-institutional study. Interestingly, when asked to reflect upon the genre knowledge they utilized when approaching a specific writing task in FYC, "students tended not to report drawing upon the full range of their genre knowledge" (323). They would not necessarily, for example, draw upon their out-of-school genre knowledge for an academic assignment; even if such prior knowledge might have been seen as relevant by the researchers, it was not by the students (324).

Across these studies, we can begin to see how situatedness in genre may prove to be critical to a student's ability to transfer knowledge from one writing situation to another. We must be careful, however, not to assume that more exposure to a wide array of genres is the key to transfer. In other words, we cannot necessarily jump to the conclusion that teaching all genres will lead to transfer. It could lead to learning, perhaps, but not transfer if we think of transfer as the ability to apply knowledge from one situation or social context to another. Teaching all genres would also be impossible in a composition classroom as well, leading to the mutt genres divorced of rhetorical exigency that Wardle described. Amy Devitt argues that genre knowledge is not transferrable since "they do not meet the needs of the [new] situation fully" (222). Antecedent genres, which Devitt defines as "the known genres that writers use in new situations" (221–22) provide writers with a foundation upon which to approach a new writing task in a new genre. Writers develop awareness of their antecedent genres through meta-awareness about writing, and this meta-awareness does seem to be something that students can learn in first-year writing and transfer beyond. Further, in support of CCSS insistence on reading and writing across the disciplines, including a significant shift toward a balanced approach in English Language Arts when it comes to increased emphasis on nonfiction in English Language Arts classrooms, we find significant opportunity to leverage CCSS in teaching toward transfer.

For example, every three to five years the ACT National Curriculum Survey asks teachers in high school and college what they teach as well as what they think about the most pressing educational issues of the day. The most recent survey was conducted in 2012. This survey revealed that while high school literature and reading teachers “place a good deal of importance on topics requiring knowledge of content such as literary techniques and devices, literary genres and subgenres, and literary history and periods” this type of content knowledge is considered much less important by those who teach first-year college literature courses (5). We would add that it is even less important to those of us who teach first-year composition courses. This focus on content knowledge represents a misalignment between high school preparation and college expectations. If we shift our focus to center on transfer, high school literature and reading courses would include literary nonfiction, teaching students how to use literary techniques to document, synthesize, and argue real-world issues. In this way, we are not suggesting abandonment of literary study, but rather agreeing with the recommendation of ACT:

Rather than eliminate the analytical techniques inherent to the study of literary content knowledge in high school, high school teachers could bring these techniques to bear on a wider range of texts important to a variety of disciplines and careers, fostering critical engagement and highlighting the broad importance of reading comprehension skills in general . . . [while] emphasize[ing] the creative component inherent in persuasive and informational writing, while still exposing students to the expressive benefits of learning to write fiction and poetry.” (10)

BEHAVIORS AND META-AWARENESS

While the students in Wardle’s study self-reported that they gained new knowledge about writing in their first-year composition class, such as strategies for approaching and managing research-based writing or new rhetorical approaches to organization, and that they gained meta-awareness of language use across various contexts, they claimed that they did not have to use these strategies in order to be successful in writing in their disciplinary courses. Her analysis of other data suggests that when students participated in “engaging and challenging writing assignments” they were able to occasionally transfer knowledge, “but rarely consciously” (79). Bergmann and Zepernick suggest that students do not seek ways they can apply the skills learned in FYC to other writing tasks (139). Both

Wardle's and Bergmann and Zepernick's studies provide evidence that what students learn may not be raised to their consciousness as they move out of FYC and into disciplinary intensive courses. Nor are they, as Wardle notes, able to articulate that meta-awareness.

Drawing upon Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz's notion of boundary crossers, Reiff and Bawarshi's results suggest that apart from confidence, one indicator of a student's likelihood of being a boundary crosser—that is someone who is able to engage in high-road transfer—is the ability to move from “reliance upon whole genres to reliance upon smaller constellations of strategies” (326). Successful writers in their study were able to go beyond noting that a new writing task resembled an antecedent genre to use Devitt's term, but rather to begin examining various prior strategies that they had used. Boundary guarders—those who utilize low-road transfer of prior genre knowledge, holding close to their prior knowledge—rely upon whole genres rather than strategies. It would seem, then, that when students are able to gain perspective and distance at the meta-level, they are able to deconstruct what they know and reassemble it as needed to approach other writing tasks.

TEACHING VERTICALLY

Given the rather ominous tone in many sections of this book, we want to offer hope to readers that all is not lost. In fact, we think the intersection of CCSS and knowledge transfer can lead us to think about how we should be addressing genre knowledge from the earliest beginnings of writing, and how we should begin to re-shape what it is that we are doing. We also want to be very clear that we are not suggesting that the proverbial baby be thrown out with the bathwater. We firmly believe that required writing courses play an integral role in students' college curriculum—and perhaps even more so today than ever before. We also do not intend to suggest that disciplinary study or humanistic inquiry be shortchanged, or to suggest that first-year writing exist purely to offer support to professional schools (an issue that is close to both of our hearts as our campuses increasingly favor professional schools). As many colleges and universities are reducing the hours required for graduation to improve student retention and time to graduation (two metrics that are tied to state funding for higher education in Illinois and Colorado, for example) and to reduce students' potential student loan debt (an issue of significance for the financial health of students and our country), having a required sequence will be essential for students. Indeed, the NCTE Research Policy Brief “First Year Writing: What Good Does it Do?” confirms first-year writing courses improve student engagement and retention as well as develop students' rhetorical knowledge, metacognition, and sense of responsibility. Given

the possible potential threat to reducing composition courses as hours are being redistributed, we need to make sure these courses are doing the very best job for our students in the few weeks we have with them to promote their successful growth as writers in their future coursework and in their future employment.

What might such a curriculum look like? As we have hinted with the title of this chapter, we argue for a vertical writing pedagogy that leverages the best intents of the CCSS and knowledge transfer. Building upon the knowledge that students will have learned under CCSS, which is a vertical model that builds in developmentally appropriate ways from one year of schooling to the next, would benefit post-secondary education. This cannot happen, however, if those of us addressing these issues at the university level do not partner with our K–12 colleagues in meaningful professional development opportunities.

If we began to think of what we teach in college as both the culminating experiences of a lifetime of learning and an entry to new learning contexts such as workplaces and graduate school, we believe that a vertical curriculum allows the serving of two masters: providing disciplinary knowledge and teaching to transfer. In fact, English Studies generally has done very little to help ourselves by proving the value that our courses offer students. We assume that the ability to read a literary or theoretical text closely will transfer with the student, and that he or she will be able to read all texts closely and analytically. But where's the evidence? We also have boasted that writing—any kind of writing—will improve students' abilities to write in other courses, that learning MLA style will help them transition to APA or CBE style, that writing a killer personal narrative will help them write a lab report. As we discussed in the last section, writing studies is finally beginning to empirically investigate that claim, and as we alluded to in previous sections, the evidence suggests that a reframing of high school ELA classes and first-year writing is in order.

The essential framework that seems to emerge across the various studies is genre analysis as a problem-solving activity. As Robert Schwegler argues, when required composition courses were created at the end of the nineteenth century, English studies had different understandings of reading and writing in which literature was an object of analysis, and writing was a universal skill that was not contextually bound (25). In other words, good writing was good writing. As we came to understand that writing in engineering, science, or history differed by varying degrees from writing a clear expository essay, some English departments and universities began creating writing across the curriculum (WAC) courses to give students experience writing the types of documents they would see in their disciplines and professions.

Our burgeoning understanding of knowledge transfer coupled with current genre theory, though, rightly complicates this idea of writing as a fixed set of

skills that transfer from one context to another. In the field, we throw around the term “genre” and see it used frequently in writing program outcome statements. Yet, as Barbara Little Liu argues, many writing programs do not seem to acknowledge in their curriculum the complicated meaning of genre and the implications of rich understanding of genre theory (72–73). Several scholars in the field have contributed to a nuanced understanding of genre theory as it can be used to conceive of reframed writing programs (Miller; Bazerman; Carter; Devitt; Russell; Downs and Wardle; Wardle; Reiff and Bawarshi) and we refer readers to those sources.

A first-year writing program that acts vertically and teaches for transfer must consider a genre-based approach rooted in a writing across the curriculum practice as argued for by multiple stakeholders (see Chapter Three) and supported by the goals of the Common Core State Standards. It seems to us that there are two basic manifestations of such an approach. One manifestation is a more generalized notion of rhetorical genres that would emphasize helping writers to read in multiple genres, deconstruct and analyze multiple genres, and write either in these multiple genres or in more meta-cognitive ways about genres. Liu argues that writers would also inquire into “the political and ideological agendas of writing communities” (81) as they write to or react against expectations of genre. A second manifestation would be emphasis on writing across the disciplines in first-year composition. In this approach, composition courses would focus less (if at all) on the “expository” text, but would consider how arguments are constructed across disciplines, *à la* Wolfe, as mentioned in Chapter Three, and write in various disciplinary genres. Because it is impossible to teach students all possible genres, students would also need to learn about genre analysis as a problem-solving activity in order to transfer knowledge from one context to another.

Various machinations of a genre-based approach or WAC approach have been offered by Downs and Wardle, Wardle, Fishman and Reiff, and others working at the intersection of genre studies, writing studies, and transfer. We will not rehash those here, but we would like to offer the salient considerations supported by research, presented in this and previous chapters, of a vertical curriculum:

- Genre-analysis must be a central focus.
- Students must write about and/or write in a variety of genres beyond the expository essay.
- The curriculum provides readings in a variety of genres.
- The curriculum emphasizes and teaches meta-cognitive awareness, including self-reflection, to facilitate high-road transfer of knowledge.

- Assignments must build sequentially upon one another in meaningful ways to promote knowledge transfer.
- The curriculum and its pedagogies must be made transparent and explicit to students to reinforce knowledge transfer.

This approach (or these variations on an approach) calls us back to our foundation in rhetorical study. Basing a college-level writing curriculum upon the study of and writing in genres calls on us to stake the territory of genre, rhetoric, and writing as ours, certainly shared with other disciplines like speech communication, but certainly ours. It also calls upon us to re-evaluate the multiplicity of approaches to writing: Our content is not literary analysis, cultural critique, or the like except as they support our central concern of teaching rhetoric and genre. Often first-year writing courses are seen as divorced from content, but in fact, our content is rhetoric.

We recognize that such a transformation of first-year writing curriculum and a vertical alignment of K–college writing curriculum will not be easy in many cases. And, we are forever concerned about the movement toward accomplishing such transformation through assessment schemes that center on accountability and standardized testing instead of assessment as an iterative, collaborative teaching and learning practice. In our own experiences and those of other writing program administrators and department chairs, we know that there is often resistance by the faculty in English departments to a more capacious thinking of genre that expands beyond the literary or expository genre. Often, adjunct faculty who may be firmly grounded in literature, creative writing, or other rhetorical theories that do not align with a genre-based approach, staff first-year writing courses. In our own experience working with teaching assistants (TAs), for example, we have observed that they are often resistant to teaching any citation practice other than MLA, in part because it is the only citation style that they have ever used. TAs and adjuncts, having rarely written in other academic genres, lack the confidence to teach these genres, or possess little interest in doing so. This approach, then, takes many faculty outside of their comfort zones. These and other problems are not insurmountable, and we believe that a transformative writing curriculum will utilize the knowledge that students will bring to college with them from a Common Core curriculum, stretching them into academic success in college and beyond.