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Longitudinal Study of Cadet Writing Instruction at U.S. and Polish Military Institutions

I work at the University of North Georgia (UNG), USA. This university is a federally designated senior military college tasked with preparing undergraduate cadets to commission and serve in the U.S. Army upon graduation. In my capacity as a writing instructor and writing program administrator, I help cadets hone their writing skills. I particularly help them learn to write according to the Army writing standard. The Army defines their writing standard in Army Regulation 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence*: “effective Army writing is understood by the reader in a single rapid reading and is free of errors in substance, organization, style, and correctness.” Cadets use this standard when writing common Army genres like an operations-order and 9-line MEDVAC report.

I designed a longitudinal case study to understand better how cadets develop their writing skills according to this Army writing standard. For four years, I followed a cadet named Caleb. I interviewed him, collected his curricular and extracurricular writing, and observed his military science classes. This research project became a book project. But when I began drafting the book proposal for a publisher, I felt the work to be too restrictive: just one student, at one location. I wanted to bring more voices and perspectives into my project. I wanted to leave the United States and hear and see how other military institutions around the world prepare the writing skills of their future soldiers. So, to Poland I went.

The University of North Georgia (UNG) has established multiple international partnerships that include cadet exchange and faculty exchange. UNG has a robust partnership with General Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military University of Land Forces (MULF) in Wrocław, Poland. Wrocław, once the Germany town of Breslau until the end of the Second World War, sits on the western edge of Poland, closer to Prague than Warsaw. A beautiful old town with the Oder River winding through the streets.

At MULF, I led two faculty development workshops with their English writing and speaking instructors and spent time in one-on-one in conversation with some of these instructors and Colonel Marcin Bielewicz, who oversees these instructors. To commission into a Polish Army, cadets need to receive a Masters degree and achieve proficiency in English writing, speaking, listening, and reading. Poland, like the U.S., is a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) country. NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance of 29 countries, and the lingua franca of NATO countries is English. Polish cadets sit for a variety of standardized tests in English that are designed and administered and assessed according to NATO standards.

Just as my focus was on writing with my research at UNG, so too did I focus on writing instruction in Poland.

Our cadets, in the U.S. and Poland, are immersed in a wide variety of literate activities that adhere to strict standards of communication. Within North American Writing Studies, I am familiar with a large body of research on student-veterans, those students who have served in the military and

are coming back to the college classroom to complete degrees. But I am not as familiar with scholarship on cadets, those who are preparing for a life of military service and the written communication and genres that will come with this life. I've spent five years wondering how our cadets take-up the Army writing standard and the genres therein.

Institutional context

I work across two institutions: the University of North Georgia (UNG), USA, and General Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military University of Land Forces (MULF), Poland. UNG is a multi-campus senior military college tasked with preparing future soldiers for the U.S. Army. UNG enrolls civilian and cadet students. MULF enrolls only cadet students. Unlike UNG cadets who must receive a Bachelor's degree to commission, MULF cadets need to receive a Master's degree to commission into the Polish Army. Polish cadets also need to show NATO approved proficiency in English writing, speaking, listening, and reading to commission.

Additionally, my home institution shapes my work. I find myself researching the unique students with which I work. But also, my institution is primarily a teaching institution where promotion and tenure hinges on effective teaching and there is little direct support for research, particularly book-length research projects requiring international travel. My institution is primarily interested in supporting research with clear pedagogical implications, so that is at the fore of my mind as I work on findings and implications for my work. And with additional travel restrictions for health and financial reasons, I fear that I will not be able to make any future visits to Poland. These are the institutional constraints under which I am moving forward with my research.

Key Theorists

My research project, broadly, considers how writers learn, take-up, and use genres within their specific community of practice. To this end, I frame much of my research in genre studies, writing-related transfer, and longitudinal studies of writing development.

Genre studies

Charles Bazerman offers genres as tools, critical cogs in the machination of community building and doing. Bazerman even offers us a conception of a genre system in line with an activity system: a fluid and dynamic organizing action spurred and supported by genres. Disruption or continuation of community goals hinges on genres. He writes, "Understanding the form and flow of texts in genre and activity systems can even help you understand how to disrupt or change the systems by the deletion, addition, or modification of a document type" (311).

Writing-related transfer

Randall Bass argues intentionally designing curricula to foster transfer is a hallmark of higher education. With the emphasis in the original text, Bass writes, "Designing for writing transfer entails acts of intentionality and integration that speaks precisely to what we mean by *higher* education" (146).

Gwen Gorzelsky, Carol Hayes, Ed Jones, and Dana Lynn Driscoll work through findings from their Writing Transfer Project, a two-year project of student-writing across four institutions using mixed methods data collection. They draw roughly 80 student papers and roughly 400 reflections from 123 students. For the first year, Gorzelsky, Hayes, Jones, and

Driscoll found that “students who viewed genre as a means for inquiry and analysis, rather than as formulaic conventions, made the greatest mean scores on the year 1 pre- to end-of-semester writing samples” (116).

Longitudinal Studies of Writing Development

In *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*, Anne Beaufort designs a qualitative case study focused on the literate development of a one student. In her book, Beaufort’s offers a conceptual model of the five knowledge domains upon which learners draw when developing expertise in a given community: writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, genre knowledge, and, the domain which encompasses the other four, discourse community knowledge. This conceptual framework undergirds her study time and establishes “recommendations for restructuring university-level writing instruction in ways that will increase the likelihood of positive transfer of learning” (21).

Lifespan Writing Development Group (LWDG) comprised of Charles Bazerman, Arthur Applebee, Virginia Berninger, Deborah Brandt, Steve Graham, Paul Kei Matsuda, Sandra Murphy, Deborah Wells Rowe, and Mary Schleppegrell. Supported with a Spencer Foundation group, this group with ranging methodological and theoretical approaches to studying writing, offered their consolidated principles in a brief *Research in the Teaching of English* forum piece (2017) and then a book-length study (2018).

The work of the LWDG is not without detractors. In his pointed response to the LWDG’s 2017 essay, Paul Prior (2017) states that “if we want to produce rich accounts of writing development over the lifespan . . . we need to constantly interrogate and refine our theoretical and methodological frameworks . . . the *just-writing, just-in-school* agenda will not capture the rich complexity of writing development across the lifespan” (217). Prior focuses attention what should be our unit of analysis when seeking to better understand how people develop as writers. “Indeed,” he writes, “it is long past time for us to accept that embodied, mediated, dialogic, semiotic practice is the matrix of all so called ‘modes’ and to recognize that semiotic (including literate) development is a ubiquitous cultural process, not the special provenance of school” (217). Prior urges us to attend to how people’s semiotic development occurs across all communicative spheres and occurs through coordination with other people, objects, and tools.

Glossary

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance of 29 North American and European countries

Operation-orders (OPORDs): a plan designed to relay specifics of a military operation to subordinates.

9-line MEDAVAC reports: a nine-line form used to detail casualties and request medical assistance.

Research Question

Only for the International Researchers Consortium Workshop at CCCC2021

How do cadets leverage resources available through a standardized Army writing curriculum to develop as writers?

Specifically within the United States context, how do cadets leverage resources available through a standardized Army writing curriculum to develop proficiency in the Army writing standard and common Army genres?

Specifically within the Polish context, how do cadets leverage resources available through a standardized NATO Army writing curriculum to develop writing proficiency in English language writing?

Questions I am working through...

I undertake this work, as a civilian citizen of the United States of America. How can I best account for my position as a participant outsider as I continue collecting and then analyzing these data? I am particularly interested in this question and how it relates to my work at MULF. How might my civilian status actually aid in my study of Army writing development?

How might I better involve my participants in data analysis and then the circulation and publication of my findings? Again, I am particularly interested in how I may better involve my Polish participants given that I live in the U.S. and do not have funding to travel to Poland again soon.

How might theories of writing-related transfer limit what I am looking for and engaging with in my broad work on Army writing development? In what ways, might these theories stymie the questions I ask and the findings I arrive at?

Why might civilian researchers be interested in the writing development of cadets in the United States and Poland?

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