In *Writing across Contexts*, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak illustrate the complexity of writing knowledge transfer and invite readers to fundamentally rethink their assumptions about how well first-year writing curricula support students’ transfer of writing expertise across contexts. The emphasis on composition curricula in relation to writing transfer is precisely what makes this book useful to TETYC readers. The role played by the content of composition in the transfer of writing knowledge has remained largely unexplored until now; *Writing across Contexts* seeks to fill this gap by exploring the efficacy of what the authors call a Teaching for Transfer (TFT) course designed specifically to foster writing transfer. Underpinning the TFT curriculum is the premise that the use of writing-specific core concepts and reflection as a tool for thinking about writing enables students to conceptualize their own framework of writing knowledge and practice, which they can then carry over beyond the context of the composition classroom.

The TFT course the authors propose includes two distinctive features that distinguish it from other transfer-promoting curricular designs, namely the use of eleven key rhetorical terms and the emphasis on a semester-long metacognitive reflective process that leads students toward the development of their own “theory of writing.” Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak compare the TFT model to two fairly common composition curricula, one designed with an Expressivist framework in mind and a second one grounded in a cultural studies and media approach. In the span of two semesters, the authors interviewed seven study participants from three different sections (following Expressivist, cultural studies and media, and TFT approaches, respectively) of the second semester composition course at Florida State University and analyzed their writing samples. Interviews with the instructors and analysis of the course materials were completed as well. Ultimately, the authors conclude that “the content in first-year composition does matter, contributing in very specific ways to students’ intentional transfer of knowledge and practice in writing” (61).

While the results of their research support the idea that transfer can be successfully achieved, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak recognize the complexity of writing transfer and the reality that “even in a course designed to assist transfer, and in which some students
demonstrated successful transfer, others may not transfer due to various factors” (101), including the ways in which students make use of prior knowledge. They identify how students use prior knowledge in three specific ways—1) by inserting bits of new information into prior understanding of writing (the assemblage model), 2) by integrating elements of new knowledge and prior knowledge (the remix model), or 3) by encountering a critical incident that requires them to rethink all prior writing knowledge. They theorize how students’ use of these forms of prior knowledge contributes to or detracts from the efficacy of transfer. That prior knowledge factors in students’ development (or lack thereof) of writing abilities, including the ability to imagine their own theory of writing, is an especially salient finding; readers from both two- and four-year institutions engaged in conversations about students’ transition from high school to college will undoubtedly benefit from the authors’ contribution to this important topic.

In sum, Writing across Contexts is more than a comparison study of three different approaches to composition. It is a “hybrid” project that combines a “research study into the efficacy of a certain kind of curriculum” with a “synthetic account” of scholarship on transfer and prior knowledge and “a text theorizing transfer of writing knowledge and practice” (33–34). The lack of a fully developed method section is a minor weakness of the book, particularly for readers partial to Haswell’s call for replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) empirical research. Overall, however, the detailed description of the research design and the content of the three composition courses presented in chapter 3 (as well as the full version of the TFT course materials included in the Appendixes A and C) will likely suffice for readers interested in adopting or adapting the TFT approach at their own institutions. Well researched and clearly written, the book presents a compelling argument for the efficacy of TFT in “assist[ing] students in transferring writing knowledge and practices in ways other kinds of composition courses do not” (5) and provides many important insights into the ways students conceptualize writing knowledge and practice, both prior and new.

Works Cited


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Understanding Language Use in the Classroom: A Linguistic Guide for College Educators

Grammar instruction in the composition classroom has been the subject of considerable debate. Early research into the efficacy of such lessons (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer; DeBoer; Harris) suggests that a
“skill-and-drill” approach is ineffective, even potentially detrimental to students. These studies encouraged many to abandon grammar instruction altogether, but others would later look to teaching grammar in context (Hillocks; Weaver), sentence combining (Graham and Perin; Strong), and rhetorical grammar (Kolln and Gray; Micciche) as ways of improving students’ language abilities. In her book *Understanding Language Use in the Classroom: A Linguistic Guide for College Educators*, Susan J. Behrens argues for the value of using linguistics to help students learn academic English, a variation of standard English that shifts according to audience, discipline, and genre. Through studying linguistic principles, Behrens maintains, students can acquire a metaknowledge that examines the structure, function, evolution, and reception of language. “Metaknowledge is power,” as James Paul Gee explains, “because it leads to the ability to manipulate, to analyze, to resist while advancing” (qtd. in Behrens 47). *Understanding Language Use in the Classroom*, then, can be of particular service to community college English instructors who want to teach and problematize academic English.

The first section of Behrens’s book lays the groundwork for her argument, offering a rationale for using linguistics to teach academic English in the college classroom. She notes studies that show how college students fail to develop their critical thinking, reasoning, and writing abilities, arguing that acquisition of academic English can improve these skills. Behrens recognizes, however, the concerns associated with teaching academic English. She reviews the “grammar wars,” a period in the 1980s in which prescriptive grammar instruction came under attack. She also acknowledges the problems of privileging a dialect associated with what Lisa Delpit calls the “culture of power” (qtd. in Behrens 47). But, Behrens argues, cultivating a linguistic understanding of language does not necessitate an abandonment of native dialects in favor of academic ones; rather, “students (and educators) need to toggle between forms of English” and use what best fits their particular communicative contexts. Although she concedes that language instruction is still controversial, she maintains that “[t]he pendulum is swinging back toward more overt knowledge about language . . . so that students can move from passively mimicking standard conventions and toward co-constructing the academic discourse” (45).

In part 2, Behrens instantiates her vision of a linguistic education. She begins by dispelling the view of correct and incorrect language. As she explains, “all language forms . . . are regular, rule-governed and equally capable of conveying an idea or thought” (51). After discussing linguistically marked and unmarked dialects, Behrens organizes the chapters in this section according to different units of language, such as “Word Formation/Morphology,” “Grammatical Markers/Morphosyntax,” “Narrative Structure/Discourse,” and “Voice Quality and Speech Melody/Prosody.” In these chapters, she provides a brief overview of the topic, and then, in one of the more interesting aspects of the book, answers questions broached by students and teachers. Inquiries include “How do I know when a new word is legitimate?” (59), “I am trying to avoid...
using I in my essays . . . but then how do I ‘academically’ begin my sentences?” and “Why can’t students just memorize the rules for apostrophe use?” (73). In her responses, Behrens reviews relevant linguistic principles while also suggesting strategies for improvement.

Behrens offers study sheets in part 3 of her book that correlate with the topics discussed in the previous section. In these worksheets, she reviews common features of academic English before providing exercises designed to interrogate the issue further. It is worth noting that some of these activities seem similar to those that early researchers cautioned against, as they frequently ask participants to correct sentences or fill in blanks. Still, the sheets can be useful in ways similar to grammar handbooks: they define terms, present examples, and provide exercises that help gauge competency.

Despite my concerns with the third section, Behrens’s book offers teachers productive ways to talk with students about academic English. Recognizing that these discussions are anything but politically and culturally neutral, she provides instructors with linguistic tools so that they can help students deconstruct the power and privilege associated with different dialects. Many two-year college instructors strive to help their students learn academic English, as they know that students may be judged harshly in certain contexts for nonstandard usage. Behrens’s *Understanding Language Use in the Classroom: A Linguistic Guide for College Educators* may be of value to these instructors in particular, as it encourages them to explain linguistic features of academic English while still honoring students’ own voices. Such an approach enables students to make more informed choices about the kind of language they utilize in the classroom and beyond.

**Works Cited**


Micciche, Laura. “Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar.” *College
This collection of essays is perhaps the most diverse collection of thought on the subject of creative writing and education. The contributing authors hail from Australia, the UK, China, the Netherlands, Pakistan, New Zealand, and Israel. What is more, throughout the eleven chapters and seven commentaries (thousand-word contributions written by the authors and interspersed throughout the book), there are over a dozen creative writing topics and approaches discussed, such as how to use creative writing to aid students with retention of scholarly reading (Toby Emert and Maureen Hall), the role and function of assessment in creative writing (Dianne Donnelly), and the ways that creative writing is evolving in the Chinese university (Fan Dai). All in all, I find the collection not only diverse and inclusive but also useful to the teaching of creative writing, especially in higher education.

*Creative Writing and Education* is a book worth reading for those teaching introductory creative writing courses at any institution of higher education. Globally the arts and humanities is in either a state of decline or change, depending on how one views the discipline. Regardless, as Harper stated in another recent publication, “Creative writing at all levels of education has never been greater” (Harper, *Future* 11). Up to this point, the teaching of creative writing (especially in the United States) has been focused predominantly on the written product (or the last stage of the writing process). However, thought is shifting. Creative writers and teachers of creative writing are exploring the myriad elements that might constitute the creative writing process. That is why a book like *Creative Writing and Education*, which discusses the individual writing experiences of writers from the United States and the UK (Randall Albers and Steve May), the cultural experiences of directing an international creative writing program in the Middle East (Marcela Sulak), new notions of writer and reader cooperation in creative writing (Nigel McLoughlin), or how to assess the creative writing process (Donnelly), is so important, especially to two-year colleges, which are responsible for providing opportunities for students transferring to four-year institutions to acquire the skills needed to succeed.

In addition, some chapters might have interesting applications in the composition classroom as well. For example, in her chapter, “Against
Carefulness,” Katherine Coles discusses teaching students in poetry classes the important distinction between taking care with writing poetry and carefully writing poetry, where taking care in writing is encouraged while carefully writing is not always. Coles states, “If we are to encourage risk-taking, we must be committed to caring for our poems, for each other and for each other’s work, while avoiding being so careful that we are unwilling to risk making mistakes” (101). The need for risk taking in composition studies has been addressed by many teacher-scholars, including but not limited to Wendy Bishop and Geoffrey Sirc. Though Coles discusses approaches to teaching poetry, allying her line of thought with that of Bishop, Sirc, and others is not a stretch and might yield unique, interdisciplinary insights to both creative writing and composition studies.

One element that some teachers at two-year colleges might find absent from Creative Writing and Education is an array of pragmatic exercises and approaches that demonstrates the theories therein. One reason for this exclusion might be because so much of what is presented in this collection is in its nascent stages. Take, for example, Donnelly’s chapter on assessment in creative writing. The language of assessment—formative, summative, outcome-based, and Growth-biased assessment—is language not often used in creative writing classrooms. Yet, in other areas of writing studies, these models of assessment are sometimes integral to obtaining funding and sustaining the life of a writing program. Similar requirements are, undoubtedly, on the horizon for creative writing. Though Donnelly does not provide samples of these models for the classroom, she does begin a dialogue in which creative writing teachers can partake where new methods of creative writing assessment might be the end result.

While an understanding of the creative writing process within higher education is evolving, that evolution must not begin and end at the four-year institution, where more advanced creative writing classes tend to be housed. Creative writing teachers at community colleges have a great opportunity (and responsibility) to help redefine professional creative writing in higher education. Creative Writing and Education provides a broad foundation of thought on the subject of creative writing and education, a foundation upon which all of us can build.

Work Cited


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The TYCA regional associations invite proposals for their 2016 conferences. The conference dates, themes, contact persons, and deadlines are listed below. For specific information, please contact the program chair listed or visit the website.

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Marriott St. Louis Grand Hotel
St. Louis, MO
Contact: Chantay White-Williams
(chantey.white-williams@swic.edu)
Proposal Deadline: July 1, 2016
For additional information, go to:
http://www.tycamidwest.org

TYCA Northeast
“Creative Collaboration for Critical Literacy”
October 13–15, 2016
Hilton Hartford Hotel
Hartford, CT
Contact: Daniela Ragusa
(dragusa@ccc.commnet.edu)
or Elizabeth Keefe
(ekteefe@gwcc.commnet.edu)
Proposal Deadline: May 1, 2016
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TYCA Pacific Coast
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http://www.ecctyc.org

TYCA Pacific Northwest
Theme and Date TBA
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR
Contact: Dennis Bennett
(dennis.bennett@oregonstate.edu)
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TYCA Southeast
Theme TBA
February 22–25, 2017
The Hyatt House Charleston
Charleston, SC
Contact: Ann Nicodemi
(ann.nicodemi@chattanoogastate.edu)
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TYCA Southwest
Theme TBA
October 27–29, 2016
Drury Plaza Hotel-San Antonio Riverwalk
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Contact: Walker Weimer
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