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Review of *Writing Pathways to Student Success*

Edited by Lillian Craton, Renee Love, and Sean Barnette. The WAC Clearinghouse, University Press of Colorado, 2017. 162 pp.

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In *Writing Pathways for Student Success*, editors Lillian Craton, Renée Love, and Sean Barnette bring together essays that examine the benefits of transcending product-based learning, that speak to student engagement in writing processes, and that help build student self and social awareness in and out of the classroom. Contributors represent a range of academic institutions, including community colleges and state universities, and topics under discussion encompass curriculum standards, innovative pedagogies, and a variety of assessments. Practices offered in this collection lend themselves to differentiation within college writing courses as well as secondary English classrooms, both advanced and on-level.

This edited collection speaks to the editors' interests in the teaching of first-year composition (FYC) courses that shape students' experiences through writing in transformative ways. Lillian Craton passionately advocates for mentoring student writers, and Renée Love dedicates her work to building student success through examination of civic rhetoric and individual potential. Sean Barnette teaches first-year writing and works as an advisor for English majors in the Honors College at Landers University. The collection of essays is divided into three sections that respond to questions of why, how, and what we write. Section one—“Why We Write”—explores the “importance of rhetoric and self-expression for students' ability to thrive in and after college” (vii). Section two—“How We Write”—includes discussions on cross-disciplinary practices and how holistic pedagogy benefits both students and teachers

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in FYC courses (viii). The final section—“What We Write”—provides work grounded in pedagogy to “promote broad-based student learning” (viii). A unique and useful addition, the final section displays how abstract ideas and practices of previous chapters may manifest in actual classrooms. The major trends of this collection include an emphasis on student-centered curriculum, the incorporation of experiential and service-based learning, process-based evaluation, and personalized writing assignments that address student interest and perspectives.

Introducing section one, Barnette underscores the ability of FYC courses to complicate students’ views of writing and influence their involvement with the world, a focus that is also a controlling theme of the book. Sarah Hardison O’Connor’s “A Confusion of Messages: The Critical Role of Rhetoric in the Information Age” outlines the critical role of rhetorical practices in accessing and processing information in this new digital age. She introduces three principles for writing found throughout the book: communal relations, multiplicity, and listening to develop critical viewpoints. Karen Bishop Morris’ “Introductory Writing as the Gateway to Stronger Communities, College and Career Success” focuses on the ways civic and professional participation emerges by incorporating experiential learning (ExL). Morris bolsters the value of community-based writing by bringing authentic experiences into the classroom by encouraging student engagement with their own cultural capital.

Other contributors to the first section discuss how instructors may approach difference in FYC classrooms. In the following chapter, “The Value of Violence in Student Writing,” Lori Brown contends that violent texts require teachers’ heightened threat awareness in light of the violence in schools. Brown defends the cathartic value of students’ writing about violence, therefore underscoring teachers’ abilities to differentiate between dangerous warning signs and productive self-expression. Rachel McCoppin, “Embracing Diversity in Composition Courses,” focuses on building students’ identities as both academics and future members of workplace environments. She provides strategies to encourage student engagement with Otherness through service learning and studying opposing viewpoints. The final chapter in section one, Ruth Goldfine and Deborah Mixson-Brookshire’s “Influence of the College Composition Classroom on Students’ Values and Beliefs” differs from previous chapters through its psychological framework. They analyze students’ inability to articulate the reasoning behind their beliefs, and their findings suggest that instructors have a high level of influence over such beliefs and therefore advocate the importance of FYC courses in shaping student voices. Each section in this collection ends with an essay presents more radical ideas of FYC instruction, and this essay, in

particular, uses data to remind writing teachers of their responsibilities when dealing with student beliefs and arguments.

As the lead editor for section two, Love justifies the inclusion of cross-disciplinary practices which rejecting a “one-size-fits-all” mentality to teach writing. Rachel Fomalhaut, in “Holistic Learning for Real-Life Writers: A Call for Affective Pedagogy in First-Year Composition,” promotes the flipped classroom approach for active student engagement during class time with structured support from teachers to access alternative forms of knowledge. Building on non-traditional pedagogical practices in “Acting the Author,” Pamela Henney asserts that writing is performative, and students must be given time to rehearse their new academic personas. Building on practices of Method Acting, she claims this rehearsal results in embodiments of these new roles on paper. Next, Casie Fedukovich, “Free to Dance: A Somatic Approach to Teaching Writing,” challenges writing instructors to incorporate somatic pedagogy and disrupt the “choreography of the classroom” (87). This disruption allows for differentiation in both teaching strategies and student writing, therefore allowing for greater creativity and fewer restrictions on the writing process within FYC courses. The final chapter in section two, “Who Decides My Grades? Reflections on Team-Teaching and Peer Mentoring in FYC,” by Christopher Garland, introduces a new topic: team teaching. Evaluating his own experience with team teaching, Garland outlines the strengths of pedagogical synthesis for both students and teachers. Pedagogical synthesis is beneficial, for both teachers and students, as it allows for less experienced instructors to learn in a group setting with consistent feedback from veteran teachers, and it provides a smaller student-to-teacher ratio.

Craton introduces the final section as including pragmatic applications of previously described philosophies for writing instruction. The final, and most beneficial section, “What We Write,” provides specific assignments and strategies to incorporate the abstract disciplines previously discussed. Lynne Lewis-Gaillet, in “Primary Research in the Vertical Writing Curriculum,” provides strategies to include primary investigation and archival research in writing assignments; also, she fosters student engagement by emphasizing that writing should have real-world, physical consequences. Similarly, Kathryn Crowther, in “Composing Communities: Blogs as Learning Communities in the FYC Course,” shows how the dual purpose of blogging develops individual writing personas while also placing students in communal environments, therefore expanding the classroom and the traditional author/audience dyad. Lisa Whalen, in “Promoting Academic Skills Through Writing: The Survey of Academic Skills Essay Assignment,” outlines a detailed step process for writing including communal engagement, peer feedback, and scaffolded drafts with consistent

teacher feedback. Her contribution provides an extremely useful template which can be manipulated for any essay topic and allows for multiple levels of differentiation. Abigail Scheg, in “My Composition or Yours? What We Teach in FYC,” emphasizes student-centeredness and advocates for more career-focused writing instruction by requiring students to research writing expectations and samples from chosen fields of study. Finally, Matthew Paproth, in “Confronting the Uncomfortable: Food and FYC,” presents a non-traditional topic of study: food. He establishes the rationale for food as a topic because it can be approached by any individual from any cultural background due to its universality, and he then challenges his students with controversial texts to build argumentation and communication skills.

As a secondary English teacher with experience in Special Education, English, and AP Language and Composition courses, I find many access points to the practices described in this collection. Whalen’s writing assignment from the final section can be modified for any grade level. Students can easily follow the loose structure laid out regarding scaffold-stepping process in Whalen’s chapter, especially when students are encouraged to choose personal topics for engagement. Incorporating this scaffolded stepping process, which interweaves teacher feedback, will help students form their own definitions before creating and conducting a community-based survey that encounters different and possibly opposing perspectives. While tasks such as the question creation and the analysis of findings are completed in class, the application of a flipped classroom is a dynamic that requires independent primary investigation to aid students in positioning their findings for diverse audiences. Students begin to draft assignments during class before moving to peer evaluations, which aim to assess clarity and meaningful acknowledgment of opposing viewpoints. Students then conduct low-stakes speeches in which they speak for two-three minutes before the class outlining their findings and standing in the argument, allowing their peers to question and analyze their work to this point. With this feedback, students then write the final drafts. By incorporating step processes with consistent peer and teacher feedback, students find time to work through the struggles of writing with structured assistance and opportunities to expand beyond the classroom.

Through reliance on process-based evaluation, FYC and secondary teachers can increase student engagement and build the academic identities through including communal involvement, acknowledging diversity, and implementing cross-disciplinary and non-traditional pedagogical practices. The best practices for FYC courses outlined in the first two sections of this book find practical application in the final section, and I find the lessons and units very applicable within a variety of classrooms. This collection is a valuable asset for any FYC teacher, both new and seasoned, as it offers

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innovative practices for writing instruction. Also, the book is a rich resource for secondary teachers who need to prepare students for college-level writing. The assignments put forth in this volume are easily accessible and lend themselves to variance within different classroom levels. Applying elements of cognitive and expressive rhetorical theories, the editors of this book construct a rich resource for teachers who seek purposeful and meaningful outcomes in student writing. The inclusion of the final section transforms abstract best practices into concrete applications, and the multimodality and multiplicity woven into the foundation of *Writing Pathways to Student Success* allows for the differentiation necessary to create accessible lessons and writing projects.

About the Author

Casey Sigerman is currently working on an MA in English at the University of Texas at San Antonio with an emphasis in Rhetoric and Composition. She also teaches English education at the secondary level, including English III and AP Language and Composition and works with grades 9-12 on college readiness and writing instruction.

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