

Review

Twelve Teachers Teaching

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Coxwell-Teague, Deborah, and Ronald F. Lunsford, eds. *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*. Anderson: Parlor P, 2014. Print. 422 pages.

Scene: Madrid, Spain. 2006. A second-semester MA in Literature student enters the TOEFL prep classroom she has been suddenly assigned. This is a woman whose teaching experience has more to do with tutoring peers in math than in writing, who will soon enroll in a writing pedagogy class, who barely knows enough Spanish to ask for directions in her new city, and who isn't sure a degree in literature is right for her. This is a woman who hasn't yet discovered the field of rhetoric and composition.

First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice is the book I searched for as a new writing instructor and graduate student contemplating the leap from literature to rhetoric and composition studies. Deborah Coxwell-Teague and Ronald F. Lunsford bring together twelve teacher-scholars to illustrate how key moments, theories, and pedagogies materialize in the first-year composition classroom, in public and private institutions, in PhD granting institutions and community colleges, in historically black colleges and universities, and in multilingual and multimodal classrooms. Readers will be impressed with the range of ideas, theoretical dispositions, pedagogies, policies, activities, and assignments contained in the volume.

This is an essential text for new composition instructors. The contributors—Chris M. Anson, Suresh Canagarajah, Doug Hesse, Asao B. Inoue, Paula Mathieu, Teresa Redd, Alexander Reid, Jody Shipka, Howard Tinberg, Victor Villanueva, Elizabeth Wardle, Doug Downs, and Kathleen Blake Yancey—expand on the theoretical positions their FYC classes embody. Furthermore, they share their syllabi to offer insight into their classrooms; the texts they require; schedules; in-class work and activities;

policies; methods of self-, peer-, and instructor-evaluation; and composition assignments.

Reflecting back to 2006, I can easily imagine how my teaching would have benefitted if I had this collection on my desk. I had beliefs about writing but was unprepared to translate those into beliefs about writing instruction. What I did know came from my own experience in composition where I never fully understood what *revision* meant, even after fifteen weeks. In creating my first syllabus, I dug up the guidelines and texts from my favorite undergraduate literature courses and most challenging political science courses. My justification was something along the lines of “This is what worked and what didn’t for me.” My saving grace during this period was what Villanueva describes as a love of language in chapter ten.

For those as new to the profession as I was then, *First-Year Composition* can become a foundational text to help novice instructors go beyond instinct and personal experience. Coxwell-Teague and Lunsford “encourage readers to read the following chapters while imagining their own first-year composition classrooms, and to think about how to borrow from and adapt the ideas presented here to use with students at their respective schools” (viii–ix). Readers are explicitly invited to interact with the theories and practices within the text. Those practices offer important guidance to new instructors who do not have years of experience to draw on as they attempt to craft a syllabus for a flipped classroom, as Chris Anson does in chapter one, where out-of-class work includes video tutorials and where in-class work ranges from the familiar—large-group discussions, peer brainstorming, and revision sessions—to the more advanced—poster creation, gallery walks, and case studies (10). In chapter three, Doug Hesse offers further explication on what student-centered class activities might entail:

Open Studio Time. Students work on a project that they are either continuing or starting. I circulate the room for short conferences. Students ask questions of me or of one another, but if they have none, I pull up a chair for quick conversation, asking, “What are you up to, and how is it going?” (61)

Victor Villanueva suggests a sequence that respects the realities of the end-of-semester dash for students and instructors alike:

The end of a semester is a time when students are cramming and writing like crazy. Accordingly, my most important assignment is next to last, when students can dedicate more of the time and energy I would wish them to spend. The last is decidedly informal, yet still relies on all that has come prior, during the semester. (264)

Its dedication to writing instruction as a daily practice, as lived experience that takes place both within and outside the classroom, is only part of what makes *First-Year Composition* valuable.

Scene: Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 2012–13. A PhD candidate serves as basic writing coordinator. She is informed by years of teaching international students in an intensive English program and multi- and mono-lingual students in a FYC program for an open-access university. She is inspired and challenged by her advisor's argument that theory and practice are inseparable, and she tries to make that connection apparent in her curriculum. Her advisor is well aware of the origin of his field and its insistence on connections.

What PhD student would not benefit by the clear and elegant introduction by Coxwell-Teague and Lunsford? They expertly situate the book within several major moments composition studies witnessed in the late twentieth century: the founding of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the 1966 Dartmouth Conference, the Students' Right to Their Own Language position statement, the Summer Rhetoric Seminars and NEH Composition/Rhetoric Seminars, and the New London Group. Coxwell-Teague and Lunsford write,

Our view of this history is that, from the beginning, it represents something of a tug of war between those who would reduce writing to form and formulas—e.g., those who instituted the first “writing” courses at Harvard—and those who see writing instruction as something more—e.g., those who founded CCC. (xxvi)

As Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs describe in chapter eleven, “college writing instruction is [traditionally viewed as] an inoculation: a one-shot, ‘fix it all now,’ get-it-out-of-the-way attempt to treat writing as a basic, fundamental, universal skill that can be permanently mastered” (278–79). If, however,

composition is understood as an entry point rather than as an inoculation, it can focus on accomplishing an obtainable goal that lays groundwork for the remainder of the students' writing education; that is, *teaching students flexible and transferable declarative and procedural knowledge about writing*. (279; emphasis in original)

The brief accounts of each historical moment in rhetoric and composition offer insight into how the field has responded to public discussions of writing and suggest the twelve praxis chapters that follow are a result of these key moments. It's an effective strategy, “a way of whetting the appetite of our readers for the main course of this study: our contributors' syl-

labi and their discussions of the theories that give rise to them” (xiii). For the novice compositionist, the moments offer a framework to begin understanding the current state of the field, background to understand why Asao Inoue in chapter four, for instance, might “calculate course grades by labor completed and dispense almost completely with judgments of quality when producing course grades” in an effort “to cultivate a more critical, democratic community” (70). For the seasoned reader, the moments offer a new way to consider how teacher-scholars, such as Howard Tinberg, write and teach in the shadow of these foundational moments, how they have influenced his claim in chapter nine that

first-year composition must be true not only to the conventions, scholarship, and best practices of Rhetoric and Composition as a discipline, but it must also be true to a whole galaxy of other concerns, including the nature of the institution and the diverse needs of its students. (236)

Along with its dedication to writing instruction as a daily practice, the collection is, therefore, also important in establishing the place of first-year writing in our field and the broader implications of the curriculum in post-secondary education.

Scene: South Georgia. 2014. A first-year assistant professor enters a new department, eager to contribute based on her research in writing pedagogy and assessment and wonders about the connotation of expert knowledge. The curriculum is open; the outcomes are familiar, based on the work in this field (the WPA Outcomes Statement, the *Framework for Success in Post-secondary Writing*). She knows enough to understand that what worked for students in Madrid and in Milwaukee might not work here because writing instruction, like writing itself, is locally situated—a perpetual point well made by Teresa Redd in chapter seven.

At the outset, Coxwell-Teague and Lunsford describe how the project emerged after being inspired, as many of us are, at a composition conference and by other foundational texts in the field. Indeed, the collection is an ideal companion volume to *12 Readers Reading: Responding to College Student Writing*, the 1995 classic by Richard Straub and Lunsford. They created a dream list of contributors to show “what leaders in our field actually do in their classrooms” (viii). What is it that these scholars do in the classroom? They emphasize writing to learn about process, community, multiple modalities, about creating knowledge, about power. The authors talk back to documents such as the WPA Outcomes Statement and the High-Impact Educational Practices statement sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, both of which underscore the

importance of rhetorical knowledge and enhancing awareness of writing as situated practice. Jody Shipka's point of view in chapter eight sums up the expansive approach of the volume best:

To ensure that our courses do not become irrelevant—or, depending on one's perspective, to ensure that they do not become *increasingly irrelevant*—we must ask students to examine the design of words on a page as well as the relationships among words, images, codes, textures, sounds, colors, and potentials for movement. We need, in short, to embrace composition. (211; emphasis in original)

As a novice instructor, I would have been energized by Shipka's argument and course design. Now, with almost a decade of teaching experience, I admit I am a little daunted by considering radical changes to my pedagogical approaches! In the classroom and in our discipline, we often discuss taking risks with writing students. *First-Year Composition* similarly invites readers to take risks with their pedagogy and offers the careful guidance and support we would expect from an empathetic teacher. I emerge from this text with ideas about writing pedagogy, yes, in addition to strategies to put those ideas in practice in my own classroom. Compelled by contact-zone and ESL pedagogy? Let Suresh Canagarajah in chapter two serve as your guide. Interested in online and hybrid approaches to teaching writing? Turn to Alex Reid in chapter seven. Daunted by the implications of multimodal? Well, Jessica, get back to Jody Shipka's chapter and take a risk.

I started to write, "After reading *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*," but *reading* is an inadequate verb. I've read, re-read, annotated, dog-eared, talked about, tested out, and even adopted this text (for a pedagogy course), so perhaps *grappling* is a better word. After grappling with *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*, I am convinced it is a book destined for bright-eyed graduate students, pedagogy courses, and the shelves of mid-career and senior scholars. It challenges us to re-view our own pedagogies, philosophies, and practices and prods readers to consider how we might more clearly align our own theories with our writing classrooms. The volume helps us to envision how we might view our work more mindfully, how we might consider the ways, as Paula Mathieu describes them in chapter five, in which "a writing course—or a writing program—should be responsive to the environment in which it resides" (112).

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