

RELATIONS LOCATIONS POSITIONS

**Composition
Theory for
Writing
Teachers**

**Edited by
Peter Vandenberg, Sue Hum,
and Jennifer Clary-Lemon**



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Critical Introduction

PETER VANDENBERG, SUE HUM, AND JENNIFER CLARY-LEMON

When we teach composition,” Donald Murray wrote in 1972, “we are not teaching a product, we are teaching a process” (11). Murray’s use of the first-person pronoun in 1972 may have been more wishful thinking than fact, but now, well into the first decade of the twenty-first century, few would argue with Murray’s declaration. The bestselling composition textbooks, rhetorics, readers, and handbooks all reflect what Maxine Hairston, in 1982, declared a “paradigm shift” in writing about and teaching college writing—a change in focus from product to circumstances of production. The editors of the book you are holding assume that most individuals who are now preparing to teach college writing at all levels have some experience with writing-as-process. Perhaps in your own experience as a student you engaged self-consciously in prewriting exercises, traded early drafts of writing assignments with classmates, revised your writing after a conference with a teacher, and came to think of “editing” as a writing task separate from “composing.” Indeed, some students who have learned to write in the past thirty years may well think of “process” as it is described in one well-known anthology of composition theory—as “the given” in discussions about the teaching of writing (Villanueva 1).

Without question, the *process movement*, which gained prominence when composition researchers began asking what writers actually do *as* they write, is responsible for constructing around the teaching of writing a vigorous and expansive academic discipline. Informed by, or consistent with, classical rhetoric’s canons of invention, arrangement, and style, process-based composition teaching is largely responsible for the rediscovery of rhetoric as an intellectual pursuit within English

departments. In their landmark 1970 book, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, Richard E. Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike fuse rhetoric and process together in the activity of the writer: “[T]he discipline of rhetoric is primarily concerned with the control of a process. Mastering rhetoric means not only mastering a theory of how and why one communicates, but mastering the process of communication as well” (9). The rewards of the process movement, for both teaching and research in composing, as Gary A. Olson has acknowledged, have been many: “It emphasized that the activities involved in the act of writing are typically recursive rather than linear; that writing is first and foremost a social activity; that the act of writing can be a means of learning and discovery” (7).

While “process” has dominated the scholarship of composition studies for some three decades, what it can or should mean for writing research and pedagogy has been under critique for nearly as long. In the early to mid-1980s, process-based writing pedagogies began facing persistent criticism for staying “too close to the text” (Odell qtd. in Reither 142). More than twenty years ago, James Reither pointed to a “tendency in composition studies to think of writing as a process which begins with an impulse to put words on paper,” a tendency that leads Reither to wonder if “our thinking is not severely limited by a concept of process that explains only the cognitive processes that occur as people write” (622). It is significant that some of the process movement’s most influential proponents have been instrumental in this criticism. Already in 1982, Janet Emig, author of the groundbreaking book, *Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, called into question the theory and methodology of early process research. In retrospect, it is apparent that the empirical methodology of early process researchers—the effort to “control variables,” approximate laboratory conditions, and pursue “objectivity” and the replication of results—tended to occlude crucial elements of context. Sondra Perl, who published the influential process-based essay “Understanding Composing” (1980), is the editor of *Landmark Essays: On Writing Process*; she points out in the introduction, “Writing Process: A Shining Moment,” that by the late 1980s “the scene of writing is more often understood not as a room in which a writer is isolated and alone, but as a room in which

many voices reside, those that both shape the writer and to which he or she responds in return” (xvi).

This attention to writer-in-context, often referred to as composition’s “social turn,” inflected composition scholarship with questions about the nature of knowledge (Bizzell; Bruffee), the relationship of writing to communal interaction (Bartholomae; Nystrand), and the larger societal functions of writing instruction, including its potential to assimilate students into unacknowledged relations of unequal power (Berlin; Trimbur). Although much of this research emerged as part of an uncamouflaged frontal attack on the scientific assumptions driving early writing-process experiments (Connors, Afterword), there remained a good deal of apparent congruence between writing-process *pedagogies* and the idea that knowledge is socially constructed. A commitment to the notion that writing is always the product of a dialogue with self and others—a process—came to animate a particular conception of writing process; the “social turn” seemed to underscore the value of prewriting, drafting, and revising by encouraging students to do these activities together.

In practice, however, there is no necessary connection between a social view of knowledge and a collaborative pedagogy. By 1990, Richard Fulkerson was encouraged to declare that a “full theory of composition” necessitated a conscious awareness that a teacher’s goals (axiology), belief in the nature of knowledge (epistemology), classroom practice (pedagogy), and sense of what students ought to do to achieve the teacher’s ends (procedure) must be understood as distinct formulations so as to ensure their unity. A given teacher may encourage students to engage with each other in a collaborative, seemingly process-driven pedagogy; the teacher might do so, however, in the most formulaic of fashions, driven not by a belief in the social construction of knowledge, but by a desire that students assimilate each other to a rigid demand for surface correctness. When such a teacher declares that “process works,” nearly everything remains to be explained about what is happening in his or her classroom. As one of the reviewers for this book astutely notes, “[w]hen scholars object to ‘process,’ they are usually objecting to . . . empirical research, expressive individualism, unstated assumptions of a universalized writing subject, or universalized standards for academic

writing.” Fulkerson’s important article demonstrates that the critique of writing as a process had reached a level of disciplinary maturity in composition’s published scholarship more than fifteen years ago.

More recently, the sort of research that continues to address the complexity and multiplicity that Fulkerson and our reviewer speak to has begun to coalesce under the rubric *postprocess*. The term is shot through with controversy, and as Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch points out, its prominence is unfortunate in that “the broader implications of postprocess theory have very little to do with process” (120). Breuch seems to use the term *process* here to refer to the now common recognition that any text is, in its final form, the product of physical activity and cognitive processes in which a reader recursively engages. This point can be taken as axiomatic in postprocess theory. Like most postprocess theorists we know, we see nothing dangerous or troublesome about a process pedagogy per se. We expect that your education as a composition teacher-scholar will include explicit consideration of the process movement and how theories of process may inform the teaching of writing. Indeed, you will encounter references to writing processes throughout this book. We hope you will come to see *postprocess* not as a term that signals a flashpoint between opposed scholarly camps, but rather as a sign of a healthy, evolving disciplinary discourse—one that is increasingly responsive to the world of symbolic representation it hopes to explain and influence. We have no interest in rejecting or overturning process pedagogy, but in continuing the inquiry *beyond process*, an effort that was in motion within composition well before most of our undergraduate students were learning to write.

Beyond Process

“The ways in which writing gets produced,” Joseph Petraglia writes, “are characterized by an almost impenetrable web of cultural practices, social interactions, power differentials, and discursive conventions governing the production of text” (54). Petraglia, like other contributors to Thomas Kent’s influential

collection *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm*, speaks to the multiple, overlapping layers of context that constitute scenes of writing. The most obvious commonality among scenes of writing may be, most significantly, difference. Any theory of writing—whether grounded in matters of surface correctness or prewriting, drafting, and revision—can be limiting if it is “justified as a distillation of the practices in which all ‘good’ writers engage” (Pullman 23) and then “reduced to rote repetition or pedantry” (Couture 30). We believe, as does Breuch, that more focused attention to contexts in which individuals’ writing processes function might reveal “philosophical principles” capable of guiding teaching practice in increasingly complex times.

Peter Vandenberg’s essay “Taming Multiculturalism” (included in this volume) demonstrates that when a writing pedagogy is yoked to a universalized, amorphous conception of “good writing,” matters of context are subordinated to procedures designed to ensure conformity to that conception of “good writing.” The risks are at least twofold; such a pedagogy (1) promotes a universal response to infinitely disparate rhetorical circumstances, allowing students to infer that a standard procedure should yield uniformly positive results independent of an immediate context or the expectations of readers in a given context; and (2) can erase a broad range of differences that students bring to the writing classroom, diminishing alternative ways of thinking, acting, and communicating in the world.

Given the changing realities of the writing classroom, this second risk is particularly troubling. James A. Banks shows that the use of two “infusion” approaches—developed in response to increasing diversity—tends to highlight diversity even as these approaches erase or assimilate differences (30). Using a “contributions” approach, teachers “colorize” their syllabi with texts written by minority writers and consider the influence of minority-culture elements such as heroes, rituals, beliefs, celebrations, food, and “costumes.” All the while, these cultural differences are located in or limited by their “native” environments, remaining on the margins even as they contribute to mainstream culture. Similarly, the “additive” approach assimilates issues of diversity into the existing educational framework by simply ap-

pending multicultural concepts, themes, and perspectives while maintaining the current (and, some might argue, discriminatory) curricular structure. Thus, while process pedagogies seem amenable to explorations of difference, they routinely homogenize these inclusions under the universalized rubric of “good writing.”

If we are to do more than promote one set of discursive practices as *the* way to write or one procedure as *the* writing process, we must continue to open ourselves—and open our undergraduate students—to the rich implications of context. The need for writing pedagogies that resist a monolithic conception of “good writing” and respond to wide differences may seem largely academic, the province of *theory*. But those of you who are preparing today to teach writing will work in classrooms very different than those of the 1970s, when process theory emerged. Projections of striking demographic change in college enrollments suggest the need for a more robust, democratic, and inclusive model of literacy instruction.

Contemporary composition scholars appear to anticipate recent college enrollment projections when they advocate pedagogies that range beyond the individual writer’s procedures or a one-size-fits-all definition of “good writing.” Indeed, the National Center for Education Statistics reports an increase in minority-student college enrollments and an estimated 20 percent share for minorities earning Bachelor of Arts degrees in recent years, thus making the student population in college composition classrooms increasingly diverse (“Condition”). Border states such as California, Texas, and New York—because of their disproportionate share of immigrants from around the world—have seen the most significant racial and ethnic change in college classrooms. Yet even states that are perceived to be more demographically homogeneous have experienced a steady evolution. Already in 1999, Connecticut’s Department of Higher Education reported a 3.2 percent growth in minority enrollment, the fifteenth consecutive year of such growth (“Connecticut”). And teaching writing will become only more complicated as student populations become more heterogeneous. In “Economics, Demography, and the Future of Higher Education Policy,” a report commissioned by the Educational Testing Service (ETS),

Anthony Carnevale and Richard Fry project that college-age racial and ethnic minorities will increase by 40 percent in the United States over the next dozen years; by 2016, college enrollments will increase by 2.6 million, and minority students will make up 80 percent of this increase (“Boom”). Some states that already teach the largest contingent of college students will experience the most significant change. A San Diego–area newspaper assessing the import of the ETS study for California finds parallels with Texas, where “[b]y 2020, whites will also be a minority in colleges and universities” (Contreras). As student populations are increasingly characterized by variety and difference, pedagogies that avoid attention to context become increasingly less relevant.

The process movement has been powerfully important to the teaching of college writing, yet we will have to continue building on the earliest critiques of the process movement by considering *process* in relation to *context*. To move “beyond process” is not to denigrate or replace the value of process theory, but to promote the idea that *writing* stands for a radically complex network of phenomena: no single unifying theory can provide teachers of writing with all they need to know; no generalized process can prepare students for the manifold writing contexts they will go on to occupy.

Twenty years ago, composition scholars could presume a dominant consensual belief that preparing students to meet the demands of college writing should be our primary concern (Bartholomae). Today, no such consensus exists (Fulkerson, “Summary”). Rhetoric and composition has expanded well beyond the focus of the first-year writing class to embrace Writing Across the Curriculum, professional writing, and even major programs in writing (Corbett; Connors, Afterword). Increasingly, those who speak at national conferences and write for professional journals and essay collections are more likely to advance pedagogies grounded in an “understanding of how diverse reading, writing, and discourse activities function in disparate temporal, spatial, social, cultural, political, economic, racial, sexual, and gendered contexts” (Goggin 185).

Engaging Context

“Collecting” scholarship that reflects an enterprise as expansive and diverse as the one Goggin describes is a project fraught with pitfalls. First, we cannot hope to provide enough essays here to capture the richness and complexity of theoretical positions that extend beyond writers’ processes. Composition studies is an interdisciplinary formation that draws on and informs scholarship across the university; we recognize that the introduction to composition theory that this book constructs will present a limited view on that expansiveness. While we might like to hand you a larger book, we could never hope to give you one that would settle all debates. Our choices will inevitably imply a rationale of selection and division; however, we want you to see this sorting process—and the naming of categories bound up with it—to reflect what it means to engage with a theoretical, scholarly discourse. As I. A. Richards explains in *How to Read a Page*, those words that are relied upon most to make meaning in crucial circumstances are typically characterized by a “‘systematic ambiguity,’ the capability to ‘say very different, sometimes even contradictory, things to different readers.’” Such words, Richards declared, ‘are the servants of too many interests to keep to single, clearly defined jobs’” (qtd. in Heilker and Vandenberg 2). Such is the case with the terms we use to demarcate the three sections of this book—**relations**, **locations**, and **positions**.

An effective encounter with this book will lead not to a rigid internalization of the categories we establish here, or the terms we use to define them. Rather, such constructions are formed and reformed through the discussions that scholars have about them, and we expect that questioning the value and limitations of our inevitably artificial boundaries and contingent vocabulary will be part of how this book will be used. We hope that you will see **relations**, **locations**, and **positions** not as a set of containers for static concepts, but rather as evidence of three convictions, each of which we see as central to meeting the changing demands of teaching college writing.

- ◆ Writing occurs through conversations and negotiations with others (**relations**).

- ◆ Writing is shaped by material places and intellectual spaces (**locations**).
- ◆ Writing reflects the contingency of our beliefs and values, and in so doing composes identity (**positions**).

Collectively, these convictions imply that how composition theory can or should influence instruction may be determined only in specific material circumstances. We hope you will find that a sustained encounter with the varied claims that emerge from these three convictions—which we elaborate below—will help prepare you to weigh alternatives in the particular conditions you go on to find yourself.

Theories of Relation

“I am writing a book which will be read by thousands,” Walter Ong writes, feigning impatience with a disruptive visitor, “So please, get out of the room!” (16). Ong’s imagined dialogue is meant to highlight the apparent irony of text production—that to *commune* with others through writing demands isolation from them—while asserting the importance of audience in the composing process. Ong’s essay has been cited often as a reflection of composition studies’ concerns with the needs and function of readers, yet Ong simply heightens the irony by going on to declare the audience “a fiction,” an *imagined construct* to which a writer’s self-motivated intentions should consistently and systematically appeal.

Ong’s goals are no doubt more complex than our retelling of this anecdote reveals, but a commonsensical interpretation is hard to resist, given the dominant view of authorship in which we are steeped. That writing should be understood as an expression of individuality is one of the more durable claims even in composition scholarship. This orientation, no doubt, has a great deal to do with composition’s historical origins in departments of English, where the cult of solitary literary genius is often nurtured; however, by no means did it arise there. We need look no further than the concept of intellectual property rights to see the extent to which the broader culture understands literate practice as a

privatized activity; the supposition that writing is an intimate, self-possessed enterprise is reinforced by law! The need to shut others out in order to write seems, if nothing else, to confirm the writer as an autonomous agent, and writing as the revelation of introspection and personal intention.

Few would argue that writing comes from writers, but to what extent can writing be labeled a private activity? Theorists interested in carrying writing instruction “beyond process”—those represented throughout *Relations, Locations, Positions*—suggest that composition pedagogies focused on the writer tend to mask or oversimplify the act of composing. Instead, they argue, the individual writer and his or her intentions are already interconnected with other writers, readers, and social institutions in a complex web of *relations*. By “*theories of relation*,” we refer to *explanations of how reading and writing practices, and the knowledge they produce, both structure and are structured by social interaction*. Theories of relation, taken up in composition studies and presented in this book under the rubrics *literacy, discourse, discourse community*, and *genre*, share a number of broad, interrelated presuppositions:

1. *Writing, like all language practices, is an invariably social activity*. An individual’s vocabulary, style, and voice are all themselves an outcome of prior language use. While no one would deny the significance of the individual as a point of synthesis and composition—and the exhaustive range of variation possible—the “raw material” with which any writer works is never generated autonomously.
2. *Writing, like all language practices, is ideological*. It is unavoidably bound up implicitly or explicitly with the advancement of certain values and beliefs and the denunciation of others; writing is therefore an instrument of power.
3. *Writing is constitutive*. It is inextricably interrelated with the creation, organization, and continuing development of contemporary Western society, as well as the formation and evolution of individual identity.

Theories of relation foreground the functions of writing in sustaining, altering, or organizing social action, and in so doing account for the ways in which individuals are connected through

literate practices. Because such interaction can be understood as a continual exchange of value claims, theories of relation remain attentive to the ways in which power is conserved, shared, and appropriated through writing and how such exchanges affect individuals. Writing pedagogies influenced by such theories propose that students are best prepared to write in college and beyond when they are encouraged to develop a self-conscious awareness of the complexity of writing and the interrelationships that make individual agency possible. This preparation, then, must surely include an emphasis on the social, cultural, and communal nature of writing.

Generalizations such as these can seem both eminently sensible and disturbingly cloudy; however, as the readings in the Relations section will demonstrate, theories of literacy, discourse, and genre become concrete when analyzed in specific, material-conceptual circumstances. And so a final presupposition of theories of relation is that social, constitutive, value-laden discourse is always *situated activity*—a manifestation of localized circumstances. The importance of location, and the attention to critical and material differences in particular writing contexts, is the focus of this book's second section.

Theories of Location

While theories of relation make clear that writers are always connected within a social matrix of readers and other writers, theories of location remind us that acts of writing are inevitably “situated,” that one always writes from some place. “Writers are never nowhere,” as Thomas Kent has written (*Post-Process Theory* 3). The perspectives from which writers respond to rhetorical exigencies or filter newly encountered experiences and ideas are considered in composition scholarship as both concrete, material sites and imagined, conceptual spaces. In all cases, theories of location are grounded in the belief that a sense of place or scene is crucial to understanding rhetorical contexts. Such thinking also helps foreground awareness of the possibilities and limitations created by location, how social control or power is “structured” by the design and maintenance of public and insti-

tutional space, and how sometimes unequal differences among social actors are naturalized or held “in place.” *Responsible discourse, theorists of location argue, depends on a self-conscious awareness of how one is located.*

The living human body is the standard for theories of location in much composition scholarship. Drawing on feminist poet Adrienne Rich’s “Notes toward a Politics of Location,” many compositionists see the physical body as *the* place where theory is actualized; one’s body defines a point of location relative to others, a sense of *where* from which one can act through language. Reflecting on a scholarly tradition marked by a difference-erasing tendency toward abstraction, Rich argues that “[t]o say ‘my body’ reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions” (215). Moreover, to begin with the corporeal body encourages one to recognize gender, skin color, age, and the mild or debilitating physical effects of one’s labor. Such observations can become an inroad to the recognition of privilege and difference, or the value-laden “station” one occupies while engaging others in language. The body can be seen, then, as a register of life in action, a locus of personal experience as a source of knowledge.

It is “not enough to claim the personal and locate ourselves” in rhetorical action, however; like other postprocess theorists of location, Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie maintain that experience and identity—one’s location—must be seen as a reflection of discursive interaction (8). By recognizing that meaning is a product of the social, theories of location *place* the body among other language users and in the physical sites they occupy; this situated relationship can be understood to reflect “the materiality of language” (Bleich). These physical sites, however, are never self-evident. How we demarcate space, define its use, and delimit action within it foregrounds *location* as an inseparable combination of the material and the conceptual.

One influential theory of location that foregrounds this material-conceptual understanding of place emerged from literary studies in the work of Mary Louise Pratt. Arguing against orderly, utopian conceptions of “community” used to describe social interaction, Pratt instead proposed the term *contact zone* to identify “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical rela-

tions of power” (34). By suggesting that a contact zone could be reimagined as a “safehouse,” in which connections among participants could be reconstituted in terms of trust, understanding, and protection, Pratt demonstrates the interplay between the conceptual and the material in theories of location. Many composition scholars have drawn on Pratt’s ideas to emphasize that in any social situation, differences are always present and power is always being enforced and/or contested; notions of the contact zone in composition scholarship tend to foreground connections between specific pedagogical locations and the exercise of power.

The significance of theorizing location for future teachers of writing and rhetoric is profound. Indeed, rhetorical effectiveness in a given location depends on one’s interpretation of and attitude toward place, and much public and institutional discourse is engaged—tacitly or otherwise—in endorsing particular ideas about place and the role individuals should play in it (Mauk). Consider a given teacher’s classroom, for example. It is not only the instructor’s degree and title that define the division between *teacher* and *student*; the architecture of the room and the arrangement and shape of furniture, all of which are serially reinforced in everyone’s experience, help define and sustain the *situated identities*, functions, and expectations of all participants. Location-centered inquiries have led to an understanding of ways in which the traditional classroom actually prohibits effective learning, and theories of location are used to elaborate and justify “real-writing,” service-learning, and experiential pedagogies that operate outside the material university and thereby refigure associations among participants.

Theories of location have helped redirect the attention of composition scholars as well. Indeed, when seen as a function of location, scholarly writing itself becomes evident as an “institutional practice” (Kent, “Consequences” 159) or mode of labor rather than a disinterested or universalized search for truth. Seen as a situated material-conceptual practice, modes of research can become evident as unintended mechanisms by which unequal relations of power are unwittingly substantiated (Kirsch and Ritchie). The notion that writing “cannot be separated from place, from environment, from nature, or from location” (Dobrin 13) has spawned an area of study unified around metaphors of ecol-

ogy. If writing is deeply bound up with space, as ecocomposition proposes, then writing instruction cannot remain limited to formalism, process, or a preferred body of grammatical or mechanical skills. The study of writing might inquire into the mediating influences of an array of material and conceptual spaces.

Theories of location, then, are interdependent with theories of relation; it is in material and conceptual spaces that speakers and writers engage each other for the purpose of making and remaking the world in which we live. But as we act through discourse, as individuals and in unison with others, who is it that our words say we are? And since our ways of seeing, and naming, and promoting change inescapably imply other ways of doing so—all that we have come to call *critical difference*—who is it that our words address? Theories of position engage these questions.

Theories of Position

While we use the term *location* in this book to stand for the interdependence or mutual reciprocity between people *in* the material and conceptual spaces they occupy, we use the term *position* to stand for those markers of identity—such as gender, race, class, ableness, sexual orientation, and so on—that are either physically apparent or culturally constructed at a level so basic that they impact social relations in nearly every context we occupy. *Think of positions, then, as the corporeal and cultural differences we carry with us—or that others believe we carry—as we move within and between locations across the sweep of our daily lives.* These differences critically affect the way we frame our experiences and encounters with others, and the way we are framed by others as we enter new contexts.

Crucial to theories of position is the conviction that the influence or effect of all of these differences, regardless of their origins in biology, is primarily the product of language in action. To be born black or white, male or female, rich or poor, ambulatory or disabled has considerably less impact than how these differences are organized or valued/devalued in cultural practice. In a given cultural formation, the relationship between authority

and a particular set of characteristics emerges to define status and privilege, and to mark variation as undesirable. The continued acquisition of limited social goods (money, status, power) by those exhibiting the favored characteristics—and the lack of success by those who do not—begins to rationalize the hierarchy until it is understood to reflect a “natural” order, simply “the way things are.” This process is enabled by social institutions—including law, religion, and education—that effectively inscribe these idealized cultural norms onto the consciousness of all those who participate; the favored and unfavored alike are made subjects of the social formation. One’s relative status in this socially determined hierarchy begins to position or “mark” one in some ways (consider nutrition or the lack of it) even before birth. As one’s identity emerges in language use, the relative access to dominant or “powerful secondary discourses” (Gee 5)—and the capacity to function within them or not—begins to impact how one is positioned in relation to other language users.

The positions we might occupy in relation to others are defined by the relative status of the differences we exhibit. It seems clear that those differences that are most distant from the cultural ideal, and most difficult to overcome or displace in an effort to approximate the ideal, are most influential on positionality. How we are positioned by this process and by other social actors and institutions with which we interrelate can define the range of possibilities and limitations we recognize, and thus establish the position from which we view the world.

Positionality is far from immutable, however, and mass education is the best evidence of that fact. The dominant function of government-sponsored education in any culture, some argue, is to reproduce commitment to a culture’s social and economic structure across generations (Carnoy). This can be done by denying access to those who demonstrate substantial difference, or by ensuring that those who exhibit particular differences remain degraded by limiting their potential to access discourses of cultural power. The organization, funding, and oversight of public schools by localized districts—a process that effectively handicaps poor, inner-city schools in the competition for money, equipment, and competent teachers—is one way of accomplishing this. A far more insidious route to the maintenance of cultural author-

ity, however, is to use education to colonize critical differences and, thus, alternative positions through processes of assimilation and acculturation (Hum). The teaching of “academic writing” in particular—through the eradication of emotion (West) and the imposition of standardized norms for grammar, organization, register, citation, etc.—reflects a history of improving writing by radically constraining the variety of acceptable conventions. By linking the acquisition of particular “writing skills” to utility, employability, and success in the dominant culture, alternate ways of creating knowledge, naming the world, and claiming a place in it can be displaced at the outset.

Most prominently, theories of position in composition studies underscore the way conventional writing pedagogies promote a white, middle-class, heterosexual subject position that passes for an “objective” or disinterested standard. Such theories encourage writing teachers to recognize their historical institutional role in suppressing difference through the imposition of one set of discursive norms. By engaging differences and encouraging them to the fore, writing teachers can allow students to explore the ways they have been positioned and perhaps position themselves differently. Students may gain some sense of an expanded potential for writing as their teachers become repositioned as learners in relation to them.

Conclusion

Theories of relation, location, and position remind us that as writers we are never alone, that “writing takes place” (Dobrin), and that all forms of symbolic action reflect a way of knowing the world conditioned by how we are positioned in it. In concert, these theories foreground the overriding significance of context in theorizing and teaching writing, and claim that contexts can be generalized or anticipated only by distorting what it means to compose. They encourage us, as teachers and scholars, to resist the systematic and to recognize that no conception of “good writing” emerges outside an implied or interpreted context.

Exploring relations between composition and the many critical discourses that inform it will no doubt lead you, as it has the

authors whose work is included in this book, far afield from the college writing classroom. We feel composition studies is best served by scholarship that pursues questions about writing well beyond conventional academic contexts, and we encourage you, as a prospective scholar, to read your way into new conceptual relations, locations, and positions. We recognize, however, that most of you will have come to this book by way of a university course or program that positions you, in varying degrees, as a prospective teacher, and with your professor we share a responsibility to help you find composition theory relevant.

Toward that end, we have asked some of the best teacher-scholars we know to write short, focused pieces that explain the value of contemporary composition theory to their work with students. These scholars offer ways of seeing the essays in this collection in situ; that is, within the contexts and spaces where theory meets practice—the classroom. We know that for most of you, this “location” will perhaps be in the back of your mind all along; it is our hope that these pieces call it to the fore as you create a sense of praxis, or theorized practice, for the spaces, contexts, and communities that you know best. We call these short texts “pedagogical insights,” and we hope they will provoke discussion among you and your colleagues as you explore *Relations, Locations, Positions*.

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This anthology for beginning teachers and graduate students in composition studies and other related fields begins with the premise that writing is always social, a dialogue between self and other. This “social turn” not only underscores the value of the writing process by encouraging students to prewrite, draft, and revise together, but, more important, it also focuses on *postprocess* by foregrounding approaches to teaching writing that highlight the importance of context. Thus, this anthology seeks to move “beyond process” by building on the valuable lessons from process pedagogy and by promoting the idea that *writing* stands for a radically complex network of phenomena.

The essays collected here are organized in three overlapping sections: **Relations**, which assumes that writing occurs through conversations and negotiations with others, highlights the concepts of literacy, discourse, discourse community, and genre; **Locations**, which explores how writing is shaped by material places and intellectual spaces, emphasizes the importance of contact zones, ecocomposition, materiality, and place; and **Positions**, which identifies how writing reflects the contingency of our beliefs and values, considers markers of identity such as sex, gender, race, class, ableness, and sexual orientation. To show how some of these ideas are demonstrated or experienced in actual classrooms, each section ends with brief “pedagogical insights” written expressly for this collection.

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