

# Naming What We Know



Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies

LINDA ADLER-KASSNER AND ELIZABETH WARDLE

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*Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*

*Edited by*

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# THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

Doug Downs and Liane Robertson

### INTRODUCTION

First-year composition (FYC) is “a space, a moment, and an experience—in which students might reconsider writing apart from previous schooling and work, within the context of inquiry-based higher education” (Downs 2013, 50). It should be, in other words, a curricular space with two goals, one for students and one for the course itself: (1) for students to examine and ideally reconsider prior knowledge about writing in light of new experiences and knowledge offered by their FYC course(s), and (2) for the course itself to serve as a general education course, teaching transferable knowledge of and about writing so that what is taught and learned can be adapted to new contexts of writing. This mission is incredibly challenging given the nature of writing as a radically contextual and situated activity, one that varies dramatically from instance to instance and site to site.

When we examine first-year composition with an eye toward teaching threshold concepts of and about writing, we find that these goals for FYC—helping students examine prior knowledge and teaching for transfer—dovetail with a pedagogy that makes threshold concepts the declarative content of the course. Threshold concepts connect with reexamining prior knowledge because, as Meyer and Land (2006) suggest, early knowledge of writing is likely to be built on incomplete and inaccurate ideas about writing—misconceptions of the nature of the activity and misguided expectations as to how writing ought to work and go. To say that FYC will focus on threshold concepts, then, is to say that it will, in part, focus on misconceptions and work toward richer conceptualizations of writing. Threshold concepts connect as well with the

mission of teaching for transfer because the threshold concepts of writing are general principles that apply across a wide range of writing situations, even as those situations vary widely. Unlike narrow procedural (how-to) knowledge, which varies from task to task, threshold concepts apply broadly to almost every writing situation. A general education writing course is helped tremendously in its mission of teaching transferable knowledge about a situated activity when threshold concepts are the declarative content taught in the course.

Although we are relatively new to the language of threshold concepts and have only recently begun explicitly designing our FYC courses with them in mind, we have been implicitly making threshold concepts the declarative content of our FYC courses for some time. In this chapter, we first provide examples from our own courses to explore groups of threshold concepts that help FYC accomplish the two purposes we outline above (i.e., addressing misconceptions of writing and teaching for transfer). We then use this discussion of specific threshold concepts to help us develop grounded pedagogical examples in the second part of the chapter. There, we explore threshold concepts as a conceptual framework for FYC, theorizing about the reasons threshold concepts make effective content for FYC and unpacking the claims we've made in this introduction. In the final section of the chapter, we consider how threshold concepts can shape student learning outcomes and serve as course content. Ultimately, we contend that designing a first-year composition course around threshold concepts is feasible and that threshold concepts are a key to helping FYC achieve the dual missions of addressing misconceptions in students' writing knowledge and of teaching for learning transfer to later, different writing situations.

#### WHICH TO TEACH? CHOOSING THRESHOLD CONCEPTS FOR FYC

Writing is an exercise in, as Ann Berthoff (1987) famously puts it, *allatonicness*. No element of the writing process is ultimately separable from the other parts. The same is true of writing's threshold concepts. In part 1 of this book, individual concepts are bundled under overarching thematic concepts, but each concept is thick with cross-references to other concepts because they are interdependent and intertwined. In composing this chapter, we have also recognized that our FYC courses concern themselves with a large number of individual threshold concepts, and we have bundled them under four overarching categories. Here, we detail these categories and the individual threshold concepts that connect to them.

Our experiences have suggested that four areas present particular challenges when we attempt to address FYC's twin missions (addressing misconceptions and teaching for transfer): writing as human interaction (rhetoric); textuality; epistemology (ways of knowing and the nature of knowledge); and writing process. Students' misconceptions about writing most often relate to one of these categories. Thus, we believe these four areas are important to emphasize in FYC. Here we discuss each of these areas and attempt to connect them to the threshold concepts defined in part 1 of this book.

#### Human Interaction (Rhetoric)

Seasoned writers usually treat writing as rhetorical human interaction in which readers and writers interact to shape writing and meaning. Novice writers are much less likely to recognize the interactional nature of writing. To them, writing is strictly about getting sentences right rather than interacting with or being responsible to readers. Building an understanding of writing as a rhetorical activity, as human interaction, seems an essential threshold concept for FYC.

In the category of human interaction, we include threshold concepts that identify and explore the relationships writing invites and requires between humans: writer, audience, and context; and writing as collaboration. As discussed in the first section of part 1, human interaction positions writing as a social and rhetorical activity (1.0). It addresses, invokes, and/or creates audiences (see 1.2, "Writing Addresses, Invokes, and/or Creates Audiences")—directly or indirectly, actively or passively. Writing also mediates activities (see 1.5, "Writing Mediates Activity"), which reminds us that rhetorical theory stresses the situated nature of writing—that writing is constrained by the situation-specific exigence of particular people (readers, users, writers) who need a text to accomplish a particular goal. Writing speaks to situations using genres enacted by writers and readers with specific purposes and audiences in mind (see 2.2, "Genres Are Enacted by Writers and Readers"). These threshold concepts seem fundamental to building students' understandings of rhetoric and the nature of writing as rhetorical. So do two other threshold concepts implied by rhetorical theory but not explicitly named here: writing is contingent (based on contingent guidelines and conventions rather than on universal rules), and writing is always collaborative—because readers/users are writers constructing meaning in conjunction with their understandings or perceptions of audience(s) (again, see 1.2).

It is this set of threshold concepts, then, that is in play when we focus course content on human interaction and rhetoric.

### Textuality

New college students often hold misconceptions about another important threshold concept associated with texts: that meaning is constructed by readers, not wholly contained within the text itself. Yet there are few more essential conceptual shifts than this one, as gaining an understanding of meaning as constructed fundamentally alters both writers' and readers' relationships to texts.

Under the heading of *textuality*, then, are threshold concepts that relate to the nature of texts and how they integrate the relationships between writers and texts. Two central threshold concepts in this category are Words Get Their Meaning from Other Words (1.4) and Texts Get Their Meaning from Other Texts (2.6). We also emphasize that texts *do* things (get things accomplished), or in Andrea Lunsford's words, Writing Is Performative (2.5). In addition, it's important for students to learn that texts are objects *apart from* writers and can be improved and developed (see 4.1, "Text Is an Object Outside of One's Self that Can Be Improved and Developed"). We are also concerned with overturning the misconception that form and content are separable; writing integrates them as *arranged material*. Similarly, writing does not equal grammar or formula—in other words, texts cannot be reduced to syntax and formal concerns (see 2.2, "Genre Is Enacted by Writers and Readers"). The concerns that shape texts are greater than replicating accepted language conventions, and thus composing writing requires more than attention to formal concerns. To write is to invent content, not just to arrange sentences.

### Epistemology (Ways of Knowing)

In asking students to understand textuality differently, we are also asking them to consider the nature of knowledge itself: writing is more than transmitting existing information, it is instead a means of *creating new knowledge*. Considering knowledge in this way requires tackling a series of threshold concepts related to epistemology.

Students will need to learn that Writing is a Knowledge-Making Activity (1.1). That knowledge is socially constructed is itself a threshold concept (related closely to the threshold concept that textual meaning is constructed as well), as is the notion that writing and reflection

iteratively construct knowledge. Therefore, writing creates new meanings rather than transmitting information unaltered—writing is not simply a conduit. The concept that Reflection Is Critical for Writers’ Development (5.4) also seems critical here. Another related threshold concept involves recognizing that all writing is creative because all writing produces something new; this threshold concept can conflict with students’ expectations that “informative” or “researched” writing is distinct from “creative” writing.

Beyond the nature of writing itself as epistemic, students need to encounter threshold concepts related to how writing is learned. Writing must be learned, so writers are often aided by learning *about writing* (see 4.0, “All Writers Have More to Learn”). Students’ prior experiences and knowledge influence their writing (see 3.3, “Writing Is Informed by Prior Experience”) and can sometimes act as barriers to developing new knowledge about writing (Driscoll and Wells 2012; Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey 2012). For FYC students, learning about writing in ways that enable them to develop a conceptual framework *about writing* (Beaufort 2007) will be helpful as they face new writing situations. Through metacognition and cognition, they are better able to construct their own knowledge about writing, which they can repurpose for each situation in which writing is produced, particularly in challenging or new writing situations.

### Process

The fourth area in which we encounter deeply problematic misconceptions of writing among FYC students is connected to the composing and inscription (Prior 2004) involved in the production and reproduction of text, which we shorthand as *process*. We want to note here that we are not referring simply to drafting, writing, revising, and editing, but instead to a more complicated question: how do FYC students believe texts come into being, and what threshold concepts will change their thinking?

A number of threshold concepts on process align with FYC. Because Texts Get Their Meaning from Other Texts (2.6), we teach that invention is intertextual, not purely inspirational, and we try to help students understand revision as development of new ideas, not just “editing” (see 4.4, “Revision Is Central to Developing Writing”). Students often still need to encounter the threshold concepts that writing is not natural (see 1.6, “Writing Is Not Natural”) but rather unavoidably a technological activity (see 1.9, “Writing Is a Technology through Which Writers Create and Recreate Meaning”). In addition, FYC students rarely initially understand how writing is an ongoing and iterative process only

ever completed for now. The cutting edge of networked, electronic writing environments is illustrating more and more that texts *themselves* (not just the act of writing) are processes too—never completed, perpetually in circulation and development by multiple writers and readers.

As we consider our FYC courses and how we think about building them around threshold concepts, these four areas—the rhetorical nature of writing as human interaction, the nature of textuality, epistemology, and writing process—seem to us to have been critical in achieving the two goals for FYC courses we described in the introduction: addressing students’ misconceptions and teaching knowledge that will be applicable in later writing situations.

### THRESHOLD CONCEPTS AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR FYC

Why do threshold concepts—and these in particular—seem so effective for framing FYC courses? To answer this question, we will unpack the importance of three claims we have thus far simply asserted: that writing conceptions and theories are important to the activity of writing; that prior knowledge plays an important role in writing courses; and that there is value in making threshold concepts FYC’s declarative content. We will come back to a more thorough discussion about why threshold concepts are an effective organizing framework for FYC in our closing discussion of curricular strategies for implementing threshold concepts in FYC.

#### Threshold Concepts and Personal Theories of Writing

We have to this point asserted that a writer’s conceptions of writing—what they understand the nature of writing to be and their expectations for how writing ought to work—ought to be a central focus of first-year composition, and that the power of threshold concepts in shaping students’ conceptions of writing makes a curriculum organized around threshold concepts desirable. Much in our argument hangs on the premise of the importance of these conceptions of writing.

Every writer has a set of knowledges and beliefs about writing, some explicit and some tacit, that make up their personal theory of writing. The conceptions that make up this personal theory are developed through education, experience, observation, and cultural narratives of writing; few writers will ever explicitly articulate their theory, but they will live by it. By *theory*, we mean a systematic narrative of lived experience and observed phenomena that both accounts for (makes sense of) past experience

and makes predictions about future experience. The better—the more completely, consistently, and elegantly—a theory accounts for past experience and the more accurate its predictions about future experience, the stronger or more robust it is, and thus the more useful it is. The writer’s personal theory of writing—their conceptions of what happens when they write, what ought to be happening, why that does or does not happen—shapes both their actions while writing and their interpretations of the results of their writing activities. This theory of writing and the set of conceptions that make it up are how a writer—in our case, an FYC student—understands “the game” of writing.

The role these conceptions and theories play in writing is therefore of great importance in writing instruction. Take, for example, the conception of *giftedness*, as studied by Palmquist and Young (1992). Does a writer imagine writing ability as an unteachable talent or “gift,” or as teachable and learnable regardless of initial talent? A student’s belief in this regard will change their experience of a writing course. As conceptions bundle into theories, the influence grows. For example, the conception that writing well requires a gift, Michael Palmquist and Richard Young found, often occurs alongside the conception that the purpose of writing is “to express your own feelings about something” (Palmquist and Young 1992, 156–57). These “romantic” notions of writing (Palmquist and Young 1992, 158–59) shape students’ dispositions toward writing by interacting with writing apprehension: in the study, students with a strong belief in giftedness and low self-efficacy had high writing apprehension (Palmquist and Young 1992, 151). We see in such a study, then, interplay between conceptions of writing, the meshing together of conceptions to form—whether consciously or in effect—theories of writing, and the impact those theories can have on writing experiences and performance.

Threshold concepts, we find, provide a means of locating individual theories about writing within a framework that allows for transformation, the shift in values about writing that affords a reconceptualization of writing. The threshold concept of revision as development (within our area of process knowledge) is an easy example, as it takes little imagination to predict the difference in writing process between a student who believes revision is essentially a punishment for making mistakes and a student who believes revision is a desirable and essential part of writing.

#### Prior Knowledge

Theories of writing begin with one’s first literacy experiences. Because a writer makes predictions about future writing experience based on

prior knowledge of writing, to work on theories of writing is inevitably to bring prior knowledge of writing into play. Threshold concepts specify a particular role for and import of students' prior knowledge: when students find a threshold concept challenging, the challenge often relates to the types of writing they have engaged in and their prior knowledge. For example, many students seem to leave high school believing writing is formulaic, or writing in one context is universal for all contexts. Teaching threshold concepts exposes, and requires that students reconsider, prior knowledge that might be a barrier to learning to think in new ways about writing, and it asks students to think about writing conceptually rather than formulaically. Research on prior knowledge (Driscoll and Wells 2012; Reiff and Bawarshi 2011; Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey 2012) indicates that students' dispositions and experiences often get in the way of their ability to see writing differently in college, sometimes causing them to fail at assignments for which they apply inappropriate prior knowledge because they don't understand the expectations of that context—what Anne Beaufort (2007) calls “negative transfer.”

When FYC is framed as an encounter with threshold concepts, prior knowledge that may be a barrier to new learning is understood as “the problem” to which teaching threshold concepts might be “the solution.” While not all prior knowledge is problematic, the resistance to letting go of prior knowledge that prevents writers from seeing new possibilities is potentially limiting (Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey 2012). One of the defining features of threshold concepts is, in fact, the “troublesome knowledge” they create for a learner. A threshold concept is, in part, characterized by its difficulty to grasp, in terms of, or in light of, an individual's prior knowledge—troublesome knowledge manifested in “learning bottlenecks” that occur in such instances (Meyer and Land 2006). Teaching threshold concepts can help clear those bottlenecks by allowing the learner to loosen the prior knowledge that may have challenged their conceptual understanding. In the same way that a new paradigm is almost impossible to understand from inside an old one (see Polanyi 1994), threshold concepts can ease a learner into acceptance of troublesome knowledge that seems counterintuitive, alien, or incoherent (Meyer and Land 2006; Perkins 1999).

#### Threshold Concepts as Declarative Course Content

When threshold concepts are the subject matter that provides a theoretical framework for a writing course, they offer not only a *raison d'être*

and a mechanism for student learning but also the declarative content students study in the course and take to future writing situations. A wide array of research on transfer demonstrates the importance of mindfulness to transfer (Beaufort 1999; Carter 2007; Nowacek 2011; Perkins and Salomon 1992; Rounsaville 2008; Wardle 2007), and mindfulness is facilitated by declarative knowledge. Threshold concepts provide the framework into which students might transfer their prior knowledge: knowledge transfers in, is transformed or not, and then choices are made by students (with instructor guidance) through the framework of threshold concepts. And this framework extends to what to think about learning. If students understand that the threshold concepts they consider in FYC can transform their thinking about writing, they'll be open to threshold concepts in other contexts as they encounter them as learners. Having experienced the portal that threshold concepts might enable in FYC, and having experienced troublesome knowledge that has been or is being worked through, students will more easily recognize threshold concepts elsewhere or be confident that troublesome knowledge will lead to more learning.

#### ROLES FOR THRESHOLD CONCEPTS IN WRITING CLASSROOMS

Teaching threshold concepts, then, can help us achieve FYC's dual mission of helping students reconceive writing and transfer their learning to new contexts. And while threshold concepts remain a new way for us to think, in this final section of the chapter we draw on a great deal of experience gained using threshold concepts in our classrooms *in effect* to look specifically at three aspects of our classrooms: learning outcomes, principles for teaching threshold concepts, and materials with which we teach them.

##### Learning Outcomes

In developing writing-about-writing pedagogies, Downs and Wardle (2007) argued that one shift in a WAW course is *goals*. FYC becomes less about how to write and more *about writing*—its nature and processes (see the metaconcept “Writing Is an Activity and a Subject of Study”). From this perspective, declarative knowledge is emphasized. Though procedural knowledge—the *how*—remains central to the writing of the course, first-year writing is no longer posited as a course in how to write at the college level, one of the most frequently stated goals in non-WAW FYC pedagogy, but instead becomes a course in learning to study

writing and using writing as a means for facilitating that study. This shift from emphasis on procedural to declarative knowledge is in fact a shift in learning outcomes. This shift can also be understood as one toward a pedagogy shaped by threshold concepts: those we desire students to learn become declarative content in the course, with an accompanying shift in learning outcomes.

In Doug's program, for example, student learning outcomes are almost entirely grounded in threshold concepts:

*1. Understand the nature of writing and your own experiences with writing differently than when you began.*

The implicitly stated overall goal for the course is to encounter and learn a wide range of threshold concepts that unsettle prior knowledge. (Some of these are demonstrated in other outcomes in the list.)

*2. Increase your ability to read rhetorical situations and make rhetorical choices consciously in your writing.*

Here we directly engage the ideas about human interaction and rhetorical knowledge we describe above, which draw on many of the concepts in the first part of this book.

*3. Know what questions to ask when entering new rhetorical situations in order to adjust your approach to writing to meet that situation.*

Here we apply the threshold concept of rhetorical knowledge to a directly stated goal of transferability.

*4. Be a more reflective (mindful, self-aware, thoughtful) writer.*

Here we engage the threshold concept that both writing and the transfer of writing knowledge require mindful reflection (see 5.4, "Reflection Is Critical for Writers' Development").

*5. Build your ability to collaborate in communities of writers and readers.*

Again with human interaction, engaging the threshold concept that writing is always interactive and collaborative between readers and writers (see 2.2, "Genre Is Enacted by Writers and Readers," and 1.5, "Writing Mediates Activity").

*6. Gain comfort with taking risks in new writing situations.*

Here we engage the threshold concept that writing is contingent on situation and that old rules will not always apply in new situations (again echoing the rhetorical and activity-theory principles of threshold concepts related to "Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity" [1.0] and "Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms" [2.0]).

7. *Increase your control of situation-appropriate conventions of writing.*

Here is another statement of the threshold concept that writing is contingent, plus the concept that writing is not rule driven but rather convention and guideline driven, engaging the subject area of textuality.

8. *Expand your research literacy.*

Here we engage the subject area of epistemology (see 1.1, “Writing is a Knowledge-Making Activity”).

Though these outcomes were written more than two years before Doug encountered the idea of threshold concepts, they show the implicit presence of threshold concepts in the course.

In Liane’s FYC class, the use of writing concepts, key terms that help students develop a vocabulary for articulating their knowledge about writing and on which they continue to build beyond the course, inherently reflect the subject areas and particular threshold concepts for FYC we suggest here. For example, students learn the terms *audience*, *genre*, *rhetorical situation*, and *reflection* during the first few weeks and work toward understanding how to recognize these concepts in a range of writing situations, to theorize how the concepts work in each situation (see 1.1, “Writing Is a Knowledge-Making Activity”), and to reflect on their own knowledge and practice about writing as they learn (see 5.4, “Reflection Is Critical for Writers’ Development”). This concept-based content is intended to transform student understanding of writing; in fact, it fits all the criteria by which we define a threshold concept. The concept-based content is intended to transform student understanding of writing; concepts act as “anchors” of writing knowledge students are developing, and this mirrors the role of a threshold concept, especially in the epistemology area. This writing-concepts based, teaching-for-transfer design (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014), like writing-about-writing approaches, has as its foundation the threshold concepts of FYC we have highlighted here. If these successful course models are based on threshold concepts, even if they include threshold concepts only as implicit content, then we can assume these threshold concepts resonate with students and instructors in FYC.

#### Principles for Teaching Threshold Concepts in FYC

A few recurrent principles systematize our FYC instruction in threshold concepts. First, because to learn threshold concepts is essentially to experience paradigm shifts, we can expect the same learning principles to apply: the need to build a series of experiences and data points

that create strong dissonance with prior knowledge that is discarded as no longer useful, but which will at first be explainable only within the frameworks the prior knowledge provides. Only with a critical mass of dissonance-inducing learning and experiences will there come the “aha!” moment that constitutes crossing the threshold into the new concept. A critical incident is often the impetus for learning, especially when students perceive failure at something as an opportunity for learning, as is the case when a science experiment that fails can provide greater insight than one that goes smoothly (Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey 2012).

Second, learning within a threshold concepts framework is facilitated by (and usually requires) explicit, extensive reflection on what’s being learned. The mindful process of interrogating one’s knowledge and deliberately, thoughtfully trying to compare different ways of thinking is an essential oil for the learning process.

Third, it’s important to expect that the learning in a threshold concept driven course is likely to occur either near its end or after the course is over because of the time required to build critical mass against any ineffectual prior knowledge and to reflect on new explanations for experiences that prior knowledge then fails to explain.

Three teaching approaches might prove useful in introducing threshold concepts to students: providing research-based explanations, using metaphors and analogies, and helping students experience the threshold concepts themselves. Explanations for experiences that seem counterintuitive to prior knowledge should be *research based*, meaning that readings grounded in accessible existing scholarship and primary (first-hand) research experiences are crucial to help students understand both how knowledge is made and how they might contribute to the discussion about subjects they are researching. New explanations are further assisted by *translational* work—metaphor, analogy, and other comparisons—and by concrete examples. When we’re able to give abstract threshold concepts referents through the use of example, analogy, and metaphor—like equating revision-as-development to driving with headlights (each draft takes you as far as the headlights reach, and in “driving” that far with one draft, you can then see where to drive with the next one)—students are able to work with the new concepts more quickly and easily. Lastly, new explanations for failures in prior knowledge must be *experiential*—students need to be able to see for themselves and understand that since, for example, writing is not perfectible, there is no “right way” to write and therefore writing changes with each context. They need to see themselves as novice college writers (see 4.3, “Learning to Write Effectively Requires Different Kinds of Practice, Time, and Effort,” and

4.1, “Text Is an Object Outside of One’s Self that Can Be Improved and Developed”) so they can write their way into the expertise (Sommers and Saltz 2004) of college writing; if not, they will remain resistant to sloughing off the prior knowledge they no longer want or need and reticent to allow new knowledge to seep in.

These three approaches for teaching new explanations—research based, translational, and experiential—create transparency so that troublesome threshold concepts are more accessible to students, a “pulling back of the curtain” to reveal the realities of the “wizard” behind it (in Oz-ian terms) (see also Nowacek 2011).

#### Curricular Materials

What, then, can an FYC curriculum look like when it’s based on threshold concepts embedded in learning outcomes and responsive to the above pedagogical principles? We teach threshold concepts through specific combinations of course readings, writing assignments, and classroom activities including discussion and workshopping. We both attempt to provide students experiences that create dissonance with ineffectual prior knowledge and new explanations that help resolve that dissonance. However, there is often so much intellectual space to negotiate between the first and last day of the term that students can find the experiential learning of college a tough boundary to cross (in Reiff and Bawarshi’s [2011] terms). In an attempt to help other teachers overcome that boundary, we offer examples of curricular arrangements that teach each of the four subject areas for threshold concepts noted as important for FYC courses.

#### Human Interaction (Rhetoric)

A number of readings in rhetorical theory and discourse/literary studies can provide a foundation for the discussion of human interaction in writing: Keith Grant-Davie (1997) and Lloyd Bitzer (1968) on rhetorical situation and James Corder (1985) on rhetoric as love, for example. Others readings can offer practical examples in which a writer has successfully navigated the rhetorical situation (i.e., *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*, by Martin Luther King Jr. [1963]) or considered its impact (i.e., Gloria Anzaldua’s [1987] “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”). In-class work can include analyses of rhetorical situations, rhetorical summaries, close examinations of the elements within the rhetorical situation that might be at work in a piece (i.e., purpose,

audience), and the study of examples of academic and everyday writing genres that address a rhetorical situation.

### Textuality

A number of relevant readings in rhetoric, linguistics, discourse analysis, literacy studies, and activity theory are available to assist teachers in presenting ideas on textuality. Such readings might include James Porter (1986) on intertextuality, Haas and Flower (1988) on rhetorical reading, and David Russell (1995) or Russell and Yañez (2002) on activity theory or genre systems. Course work might focus on reading responses, workshopping of drafts, and other activities that illustrate the provisionality and constructedness of meaning (i.e., a reading self-protocol).

### Epistemology (Ways of Knowing)

Epistemology might be explored through readings like Donald Murray's (1991) "All Writing is Autobiography," chapters from John Swales's (1990) book on genre analysis, James Gee (1989) on discourses, Margaret Kantz (1990) on "using textual sources persuasively," Walter Fisher (1984) on narrative knowing, the National Research Council's (2000) *How People Learn*, Michael Carter's (2007) "Ways of Knowing," or Kathleen Blake Yancey's (1998) *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. In the classroom, reflection can be used not just as a process tool as it is often seen but also as a tool for learning—as leading to metacognition, as helping create a framework of knowledge, and as a vehicle by which students might transfer these ways of knowing to new situations. Research also supports ways of knowing, especially any research project framed as *generating new knowledge via primary research*.

### Process

Process should be practiced as well as studied theoretically through readings that might include Paul Prior's (2004) piece on process (composition and inscription), Carol Berkenkotter and Donald Murray's study of Murray's writing processes (Berkenkotter and Murray 1983), Nancy Sommers (1980) on revision, and Yancey (1998) on reflection as part of the revision process. Assignments to illustrate process as both declarative and procedural might include process analyses, self-observations, invention activities, revision exercises, and reflection that is reiterative and sustained throughout an entire semester so it becomes embedded in process.

## CONCLUSION

Threshold concepts for FYC are not overly ambitious, nor are they too theoretical for first-year students, as some instructors might think. But they do represent a different way of approaching the design and experience of FYC curricula, a difference we embrace. Transfer research demonstrates the need for students to develop a framework of knowledge (Beaufort, 1999; 2007) they can bring to new writing contexts that have varying, often unclear, expectations of successful writing. Threshold concepts can provide that framework to which students can transfer revised or reimagined prior knowledge, from which they can transfer new or reconceptualized knowledge to a wide range of writing situations, and with which they can understand that the nature of learning (especially that which they'll see throughout college) is inquiry based and troublesome yet potentially transformative, thus opening themselves to greater potential for that learning to occur. When students understand the end goal is learning how to learn to write (Bergmann and Zepernick 2007) for any future context, rather than learning the right way to write, they will be more successful at writing in all contexts. Threshold concepts as an approach to FYC offer both students and instructors the opportunity to experience the troublesomeness of knowledge about writing and the teaching of writing, as well as the transformation learning through threshold concepts affords.

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