

Review

Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2007.

Thomas Deans, Mandy Suhr-Sytsma, and Alisande Pipkin

Anne Beaufort's *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction* arrives as we are experiencing a swell of interest in an Introduction to Writing Studies approach to first-year composition (Downs and Wardle). Given Beaufort's focus on how novice academic writers develop (or more often don't develop) expertise and on how they transfer (or more often don't transfer) skills from one course to another, she is likely to feed enthusiasm for that movement. She argues that writing courses should be more deliberately attentive to social context, skills transfer across contexts, and meta-awareness of how genres and discourse communities work. She pairs that argument with a longitudinal study of one student, Tim, as he journeys from freshman writing through courses in history and engineering to the beginnings of a post-college professional life. Ever pragmatic, Beaufort, by the end of the book, cycles what she learns into specific suggestions for first-year and discipline-based writing curricula.

Beaufort has a theory to promote, one built on the shoulders of genre, activity, and discourse community theories but distinct from them in the way she posits that the expertise of writers can be sorted into five overlapping knowledge domains: discourse community knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, process knowledge, genre knowledge, and subject matter knowledge. This taxonomy offers a functional vocabulary for defining where and how expert and aspiring writers need to focus their energies: on the ability to respond strategically to a given audience (rhetorical knowledge); on participating in the social networks and composing habits appropriate to a given task and context (process knowledge); on using genres as tools to get the work of writing done (genre knowledge); on mastering the content written about (subject matter knowledge); and on projecting an

insider's—or at least apprentice's—sense of the values, habits and conventions of a given organization or community (discourse community knowledge). Discourse community knowledge serves as the catch-all category; the other four are more tightly defined, represented visually as the overlapping circles of a Venn diagram resting on the larger platform of discourse community knowledge.

Beaufort's endorsement of using the discourse community as a unit of analysis doesn't take us anywhere new, but her claim that we can productively unpack writing expertise by focusing as well on the four distinct but inter-related sub-domains—rhetoric, genre, process, and subject matter—proves quite innovative and useful. This “theoretical lens” supplies us a durable heuristic, a manageable way to isolate elements of writing expertise and analyze them (or, just as often, the absence of them).

The five-part model made its first appearance in Beaufort's earlier book, *Writing in the Real World: Making the Transition from School to Work*, where it emerged from rich ethnographic data she gathered on four college graduates making their way in a non-profit agency. Where that book proceeded with a mainly anthropological and inductive approach, *College Writing and Beyond* offers thinner data on its subject, Tim, and takes a more deductive tack. At the outset Beaufort remarks that her book is “a blended genre of both ethnography and argument” (6), but she more frequently employs the term “case study” to name her accounting of Tim's experience. That strikes us as the more apt descriptor. She leads with theory and argument; the case study of Tim is woven in as illustration and support. The good news is that the five-part model does its job well and most of Beaufort's claims are convincing. The bad news is that her curricular reform agenda predisposes her to emphasize the impediments to Tim's development rather than his growth.

The opening chapter frames the book as a response to fundamental problems in university writing instruction. It revisits the “general writing skills” critique of freshman writing, agreeing with those who claim that composition lacks a vital context beyond the course itself. Interestingly, Beaufort extends that claim to writing-in-the-disciplines courses, which are usually insulated from such critique. Most writing courses, Beaufort argues, fall far short of their potential to foster transfer of writing skills or move students toward authentic expertise.

Chapter Two, “The Dilemmas of Freshman Writing,” describes Tim's freshmen writing course, which was keyed broadly to an environmentalism theme but invited a new topic with each assignment. The course involved writing from personal experience, composing with sources, and doing a journalistic service-learning project. While Beaufort acknowledges that

the course introduced sound rhetorical principles and that Tim found the course personally rewarding, even liberating, she problematizes the class by examining its practices in relation to each of her five knowledge domains. She is especially concerned that the writing habits rewarded in freshman writing will not serve Tim well in other contexts.

In the brief chapter that follows, Beaufort compares freshman writing with Tim's introductory history course. She compares the reading and writing expectations implied by the assignments and teacher feedback in each course, concluding that the literacy expectations contrasted rather sharply, especially with respect to the relationship of reading to writing (tighter reading-writing integration in history), the role of personal voice and experience in making claims (encouraged in freshman writing but not in history), and the depth of subject matter knowledge demanded (much more in history). Tim had a sense of these differences but only a vague vocabulary for describing them. His focus remained on pleasing each teacher.

In Chapter Four, "Learning to Write History," Beaufort tracks Tim's progress deeper into his history major. Even though Tim did fine as a student, Beaufort argues that he showed little real progress in grasping the genre, rhetorical or discourse community practices of his major discipline. Tim did not travel a progressive path toward insider status; he could adopt the ethos of a good student but never that of a practicing historian. This is in part, Beaufort argues, because the kinds of writing assignments Tim encountered in advanced history courses differed little from those in his introductory courses, and in part because the assignments and instruction did not make the features of the academic history discourse community explicit to Tim. A related concern is that Tim was often assigned "school genres" rather than genres authentic to history scholarship. Beaufort asserts that Tim's freshman writing experience offered him little help as he negotiated the demands of the courses in his major. In fact, she makes a point of documenting negative transfer from freshman writing.

Chapter Five, "Switching Gears: From History Writing to Engineering," outlines another abrupt shift for Tim as, late in his undergraduate career, he decided to pursue a second major in engineering. As Tim responded to the demands from his engineering professors to write with precision and concision in standard engineering formats, he gained ground in discourse community, subject matter and genre knowledge. He also came to see his history writing in sharper relief. Still, the predominant rhetorical situation remained getting the assignment done for a grade. By graduation, Beaufort acknowledges, Tim was a more able academic writer but was far from expert in either history or engineering.

Following through on the promise of the book's title to look beyond college, Beaufort interviews Tim two years after graduation, as he is working as a medical engineer. She discovers that it was not until he was immersed in the workplace that Tim arrived at a mature understanding of the kinds of rhetorical, process, genre, subject matter, and discourse community knowledges that engineering requires. Beaufort prods, "What, in the four years of his university experience, could have led him to be better prepared for the workplace writing he would do?" (141). She sees plenty of wasted opportunities.

In the final chapter Beaufort draws on the case study to leave us with three charges: 1) for researchers to study student writing and administrators to train teachers and tutors with attention to all five knowledge domains, 2) for teachers in all fields to teach skills that help learning transfer, and 3) for academic administrators to create vertical writing sequences that help students to develop in their writing across courses in a major.

Beaufort includes an epilogue that features an interview with Carla, Tim's freshman writing teacher. The dialogue gets prickly as Carla reacts defensively to critiques of her course. It was gutsy of Beaufort to include this transcript of Carla's response to the book manuscript. It not only makes Beaufort's methods more transparent but also introduces counterinterpretations to several of her key claims. Perhaps more significantly even if not intentionally, however, the interview reminds readers of some big holes in the data on Tim. We learn not only that ten years elapsed between Tim's freshman year and completion of the book manuscript. More tellingly, we learn that Beaufort collected no data from the second half of Carla's class, the part for which Tim and his classmates wrote academic research papers. Beaufort therefore did not hear any of the conversations Carla, Tim, and the rest of the class may have had about the different contexts of the personal writing from the first half of the course as compared to the research papers in the second half. One has trouble understanding how Beaufort can claim with such confidence that Tim's problems with academic writing in history result from negative transfer of personal writing habits from freshmen writing. Readers are also reminded, albeit indirectly, that Beaufort had access to only a handful of Tim's undergraduate courses and papers, even if through interviews she got his global reflections on his own writing development.

In addition to the epilogue, the book includes three appendices: one reproduces two of Tim's undergraduate papers, referenced in earlier chapters; another details Beaufort's methodology; and another anticipates readers who might be thinking "How can I take what I learn in this book back to my own classroom?" by sharing thirty pages of Beaufort's own assign-

ments and classroom activities. The assignments aim to enculturate students into a vocabulary of genre, process, rhetoric, discourse community, social context, and comparative analysis. For example, she teaches genre awareness by having students chart the subject matter, rhetorical, formal and stylistic features of obituaries vs. journal abstracts; she defines “discourse community” for students and has them operationalize the term by comparing various academic discourse communities; she suggests assigning a process journal, a literacy autobiography, and mini-ethnographies of discourse communities; she lists heuristic questions keyed to the five domains of writing knowledge. All the assignments prompt meta-awareness of the context-driven nature of writing.

In *College Writing and Beyond* Beaufort confirms the main conclusions of her earlier book: that instruction in rhetoric is not enough to move writers to expertise; that genre knowledge plays as large a role in composing as genre theorists claim that it does; that demonstrating mastery of the subject matter is more important to the success of a text than most composition courses let on; that transfer of writing skills from school to work is dubious; and that the road to expertise is long and usually not realized until one is immersed in the workplace. But there are also new claims: that most traditional first-year writing courses—especially those that take an expressive approach, that presume a general writing skills agenda, that do not invite explicit reflection on genre and context, and/or that skip across several different topics—are fatally flawed; and that the current lack of vertical sequencing of writing tasks within a major curriculum marks yet another lost opportunity. Both books ultimately return to the supreme importance that provoking and scaffolding meta-awareness can play in speeding both cross-contextual transfer and progress toward expertise. The particular brand of awareness that Beaufort aims to promote—among both instructors and students—falls in step with the five knowledge domains that she emphasizes throughout the book.

Beaufort does not focus on ideological questions. When her argument gets theoretical, it traffics in genre theory more than critical pedagogy. Her concerns are ultimately quite practical, and the book opens and closes with simple but ever important queries: Why are we doing what we are doing? What really works? How might we teach better for skills transfer? Transfer gets surprisingly little sustained attention in composition studies but Beaufort reminds us that it is always on the minds of our colleagues across the disciplines. They, along with deans and provosts, ask: Why don't graduates of freshmen composition handle the writing that they do in other courses more competently? Why don't we see as much writing progress as we would like when students travel through a major? Are we spending our writing

program dollars wisely? Isn't there a better way? Beaufort returns us to refreshingly fundamental questions about how to do what we promise the university we will do.

WORKS CITED

- Beaufort, Anne. *Writing in the Real World: Making the Transition from School to Work*. New York, NY: Teachers College P, 1999.
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