# Adapting Writing about Writing: Curricular Implications of Cross-Institutional Data from the Writing Transfer Project

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## Abstract

*Writing about writing (WAW), an approach to teaching first-year writing (FYW) that focuses on engaging students in metacognitive reflections about their own writing choices while immersing students in writing studies concepts and literature, offers an approach to teaching FYW that emphasizes transferability: WAW attempts to prepare students to write successfully in the writing contexts they'll encounter after they leave FYW. Not all writing programs can implement a WAW curriculum, however. This article reports on the results of a three-university study, where two universities used writing studies course readings in their writing classes, while the third university—whose local context did not allow implementation of a WAW curriculum—used a theme-based approach to teaching FYW. Our results suggest that some transfer-related factors (including metacognitive reflection on writing choices and attention to audience in particular rhetorical situations) can be taught using a variety of pedagogical approaches, but that students may need explicit, writing studies–based curricula to learn the transfer-focused factor of genre awareness.*

## Introduction

In 2007, Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle wrote an article that gave name to a growing area of interest among teachers of writing: the idea that composition has content, and that this content should focus on scholarship and research within writing studies. That name was "writing about writing" (WAW). The concept wasn't new. Scholars have long articulated concerns that first-year writing (FYW), as taught at many U.S. universities, uses a general writing skills instructional approach, when general writing doesn't

actually exist: there is only writing embedded in disciplines (Crowley), activity systems (Russell), or discourse communities (Beaufort). Instead of this general, arhetorical, and purportedly pre-disciplinary approach to teaching writing, WAW immerses students in the disciplinary context of writing studies as they read writing scholarship, write in response to the field's scholarly conversations, and reflect on their own writing choices, in an attempt to facilitate writing transfer.

While WAW's focus on writing transfer makes it a compelling approach for first-year writing (FYW), whose purpose is to prepare students for writing in diverse future contexts, not all FYW programs are positioned to adopt it. As Debra Dew acknowledges, FYW instructors trained in English literature may resist teaching writing studies scholarship. Moreover, when part- or full-time faculty, rather than graduate students, teach FYW, writing program administrators attempting to impose a WAW curriculum may be perceived as violating faculty academic freedom.

In programs where a WAW curriculum doesn't fit well, could a pedagogy that adapts some of WAW's transfer factors, but uses non-WAW course materials, convey some of the anticipated benefits of WAW? In other words, could small-scale, WAW-inspired curricular changes in FYW programs produce at least some of the benefits attributed to full WAW curricula?

The Writing Transfer Project, a cross-institutional study of student writing using a mixed-methods design, investigated this question, among others. All participating students wrote reflections designed to promote metacognition regarding their writing, a common WAW practice. In the portion of the study reported here, however, two universities followed WAW curricula, while a third (whose institutional context didn't support a WAW approach) followed theme-based curricula.

Literature Review

What benefits do WAW curricula offer? To date, few empirical studies demonstrate whether such curricula better promote transfer than do other FYW curricula. One attempt at such an investigation, Elizabeth Wardle's two-year study following seven students who had taken a WAW FYW course, could not assess the WAW curriculum's longitudinal effectiveness because students reported either avoiding subsequent courses that required challenging papers or completing writing tasks with skills learned in high school. Kathleen Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak's "Teaching for Transfer" (TFT) curriculum—a FYW curriculum that, like WAW, takes writing studies scholarship as its content via a focus on eleven key terms from this scholarship—does provide qualitative research supporting

its impact on writing transfer. In this two-semester, comparative study following seven students across three sections of FYW, two of the three students in the TFT section reported that their FYW course content helped them to think about writing in subsequent contexts. These two students "had a language that facilitated their application and reworking of knowledge and practice from one [writing] site to another" (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 99). That language—the eleven key writing studies terms the class emphasized—became a "passport" that guided students across the borders of what Lucille McCarthy called the "strange lands" students face when entering new classroom writing contexts. Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak's empirical study joins other—primarily theoretical—scholarship on writing transfer showing that a writing studies curriculum promotes writing transfer.

Robert Haskell defines educational transfer as "how previous learning influences current and future learning, and how past or current learning is applied or adapted to similar or novel situations" (23). Research on educational transfer suggests that several practices promote successful transfer. David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon's research on "high road" transfer suggests that students need to engage in "deliberate, mindful abstraction" of the skills and principles learned in one context to recognize the usefulness of those skills and adapt them to new contexts, when new contexts differ significantly from the original (22). Writing transfer research, in particular, suggests that such metacognition, often taught via student reflections (Schön; Yancey), can help students both to abstract transferable principles and to undertake forward-reaching learning, by prompting students to anticipate connections to future work (Schwartz, Bransford, and Sears; Nelms and Dively).

While teaching students to abstract the skills or principles useful in future learning is key preparation for writing transfer, once students move from original contexts into new ones, cueing and adaptation become key transfer facilitators. "Cueing"—using prompts that activate prior knowledge—can help students recognize that skills or knowledge learned in earlier contexts might be relevant to new contexts (National Research Council). Such reflections are inherently metacognitive, rather than cognitive, a distinction highlighted by Howard Tinberg in *Naming What We Know*. Taczak extends this distinction to student reflections on writing, defining "cognition" as students naming "*what* they are doing in that particular moment" and "metacognition," as students "considering *why* they made the rhetorical choices they did" (78, emphasis added). In relation to writing transfer, Angela Rounsaville, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi argue that reflections promoting metacognition can help students access

prior knowledge, such as writing knowledge learned in high school. Once students recognize that prior knowledge might be usefully mobilized, they must adapt their prior knowledge to meet the new rhetorical demands (Haskell). Students who transfer past writing skills or genre knowledge wholesale, without adaptation, are much less likely to succeed (Reiff and Bawarshi; Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey). Adaptation requires metacognitive attention to the rhetorical demands of new writing contexts. Rebecca Nowacek argues that genre itself can strongly cue for writing transfer, noting, "genre is the exigence for transfer" (28). Rhetorical analysis of a writing situation, then, can both cue writing transfer and guide the adaptations necessary when moving into new contexts.

Recent work on threshold concepts in Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know* speaks to the importance—and challenges—of teaching genre awareness. In this collection, Charles Bazerman elaborates on the challenge a school setting can pose when attempting to teach students to recognize genre as a social act, as a typified response to a recurrent situation. He notes, "much learning of writing is in school, where stylized and repetitive classroom relations and situations, teacher authority, and student display of competence prevail" (37). In other words, in school settings, the rhetorical situation is so prescribed and circumscribed—the audience is the teacher; the purpose is to display competence; the genre is a form that responds to the "classroom relations and situation"—that it can be difficult for students to see connections between genre conventions, audience, and purpose. Genre thus becomes associated with yet another set of prescribed rules. As a result, Bazerman notes, when students leave school, they often impose academic conventions upon their new work genres, even when those conventions aren't suitable. Without the skills to reflect on and adapt genre knowledge to new contexts, students will continue to struggle when faced with new writing tasks.

WAW curricula promote many of the transfer-related factors reviewed above. WAW courses typically assign reflective writing designed to prompt metacognitive reflection on student writing choices—past, present, and future—by eliciting reflection on prior knowledge, on students' current adaptations of strategies from prior writing contexts, and on the skills or strategies learned in the current assignment that might aid in future writing. Thus WAW can prompt forward-reaching learning. While students' future instructors may not provide explicit cues to activate students' FYW knowledge, FYW instructors can prime students to undertake adaptive transfer in future contexts by emphasizing how each writing task's specific audiences and purposes shape genre.

Given WAW's strong potential to support writing transfer, this article asks whether transfer-related skills and knowledge can be taught using non-WAW content in a FYW course. To answer this question, this article discusses data gathered from three universities.[1] Students at all three universities wrote structured reflections designed to prompt metacognitive reflection on writing choices, creating a common dataset.[2] Two participating universities followed WAW curricula; one used non-writing-studies course materials in theme-based curricula. The non-WAW university's participants comprised two groups: one using a WAW-inspired approach that emphasized rhetorical analysis (analysis of audience, genre, purpose, and context) of the theme-based course readings, as well as the students' own writings and their peers' writings, an approach our team labeled "rhetorical pedagogy"; and one using a non-WAW-approach that did *not* emphasize rhetorical analysis. Having two different participant groups from a single local context allowed us to investigate measurable differences in student reflections, comparing reflections by WAW-inspired, rhetorical pedagogy students with those by non-rhetorical pedagogy students. We hypothesized that students who experienced a rhetorical pedagogy approach would reflect with greater frequency and sophistication on the transfer-related factors connected to rhetorical analysis, such as audience, purpose, and genre.

The rhetorical pedagogy participant group at the non-WAW university was limited to those students required to engage in rhetorical analysis of the course readings *and* the student writing produced in the course (including peer review). We took this approach because, within a WAW curriculum, students experience full immersion in writing studies concepts: they read and discuss writing studies scholarship, write responses to it, and then draft peer reviews of their colleagues' contributions to that scholarship. Thus they engage all semester with writing studies concepts. To match that immersive experience, only those students whose faculty required analysis of the rhetorical situation in a sustained way for *all* writing discussed in the course (course readings and student-produced writing) were included in this participant group.

This article focuses exclusively on student reflections gathered during the first semester of a broader, two-semester writing transfer study, and seeks to find similarities and differences in the frequency and sophistication of the students' reflections regarding factors identified within writing studies as potentially helpful for writing transfer. This article thus cannot speak to whether the differences in the four study groups' reflections correlated with changes in the students' writing over time. Later articles based on data from our broader study will report our findings regarding which factors correlated significantly to gains in writing as students moved from

one writing context to another, and which factors presented barriers to such writing transfer.

Methods

*Study Sites and Participants*

The three universities differed substantially in undergraduate student demographics and average student ACT scores:

- **Wayne State University** is a large Midwestern, public, urban, R1 doctoral research university with an entering first-year student ACT score of 22.8. Its racial demographics include 21.1% African American, 7.7% Asian American, 4.1% Hispanic, 0.4% Native American, 2.9% International, and 53.4% Caucasian ("Fall Enrollment Report" 11).
- **Oakland University** is a large Midwestern, public, suburban, R3 doctoral research university with an entering first-year student ACT score of 23.3 ("Average High School"). Its racial demographics include 10.6% African American, 6.5% Asian-American, 3.6% Hispanic, 1.5% Native American, 1.5% International, and 76.2% Caucasian ("New Student Profile").
- **The George Washington University** is a large Mid-Atlantic, private, urban, R1 doctoral research university, with an entering first-year student ACT score of 29. Its racial demographics include 6.3% African American, 9.9% Asian American, 7.7% Hispanic, 0.2% Native American, 9.5% International, and 58.4% Caucasian ("George Washington University").

While these demographics differ substantially across the universities, the portion of the study reported here measured the impact of instruction in areas where students were likely to be equally unprepared, because high school English classes don't typically focus on rhetorical analysis of audience, purpose, and genre.

Students in five general education writing (GEW) courses taught by participating instructors were invited to participate in the study. Those GEW courses included FYW sections from two universities, a sophomore/junior-level writing course that fulfilled an Intermediate Composition requirement, and a sophomore/junior-level writing course on peer tutoring at another university using a WAW approach. While these courses included first-year students to juniors, all fulfilled GEW requirements. No incentives were used to recruit students for this stage of the study.

To establish a common dataset, researchers collected from participants a shared homework assignment and a series of reflections written in the study's first semester. The homework assignment asked students to reflect on a text they'd composed *before* the semester (usually a piece of high school writing, which they submitted with their reflections). Additionally, students responded to reflective prompts paralleling this homework assignment as they wrote each major paper. These prompts asked about students' writing processes, use of key writing concepts in their writing, any writing challenges encountered, and targeted audience. An end-of-semester reflection asked how students would undertake writing an unfamiliar genre in a future writing context. (See the appendix for the homework and reflective prompts).

The homework assignment was submitted within the first two weeks of the semester to capture students' pre-semester reflections. Responses to the reflective prompts accompanied each major paper; the number of reflections thus varied depending on the number of major papers assigned in a class (ranging between three and five). Because researchers couldn't control the number of major papers and hence the number of accompanying reflections required at the different universities, we only included in our final dataset—the material actually coded—the responses to the homework assignment, the first reflective prompt, and the final reflective prompt. This method captured student reflections at stable intervals across the study sites: within the first two weeks of the semester (the pre-semester reflection on a piece of writing completed before the class began), an early semester reflection that accompanied the first major piece of writing in that course, and an end-of-semester reflection that accompanied the final project.

Table 1
Reflection sets collected and coded from the four different study groups.

| Institution and Curricular Approach | Students per study group |
|---|---|
| Wayne State: WAW | 41 |
| Oakland: WAW | 32 |
| George Washington: Rare Rhetorical Pedagogy | 15 |
| George Washington: Frequent Rhetorical Pedagogy | 26 |
| Total | 114 |

At the George Washington University, all instructors teaching FYW during the study's first semester were invited to participate. Eleven of thirty-seven instructors volunteered. To determine which FYW sections would be classified as frequently or rarely engaging in rhetorical pedagogy, researchers conducted a post-semester faculty survey reporting on the frequency with which faculty asked students to analyze audience, genre, purpose, and/or context in three areas: the theme-based course readings, the students' own writing, and their peers' writing. Since these instructors come from a variety of disciplines—not necessarily writing studies—the label of rhetorical pedagogy was not used. Because the IRB agreement for this site's portion of the study promised anonymity to the participating faculty, it was not possible to collect syllabi or conduct classroom visits. That faculty anonymity, however—and the researcher's introduction of the study as examining the faculty's current practices, whatever they might be—meant that there was no pressure on participating faculty to conform to any particular narrative about their classroom practices when filling out the survey.

Three of eleven instructors, teaching a total of eight sections, reported that they "always or almost always" required rhetorical analysis (analysis of audience, genre, purpose, and/or context) of course readings, of students' own writing, and of peers' drafts. Students in these instructors' "frequent" rhetorical pedagogy sections read and wrote about a common theme—e.g., the Holocaust, global warming, or community service projects—but consistently undertook rhetorical analyses.

In contrast, two George Washington instructors, teaching a total of four FYW sections, reported that they rarely required their students to analyze the rhetorical situation of course readings, their own writing, and their peers' writing. Students from these sections constituted the GW–"rare" rhetorical pedagogy group.[3] Data from students whose instructors did not fit definitively in either the "frequent" or "rare" rhetorical pedagogy groups were excluded from this portion of the study.

*Coding*

In the research project segment reported here, researchers asked whether students taught writing via a WAW curriculum would reflect on transfer-related factors more or less frequently than students taught using theme-based course readings. We also hypothesized that in a comparison of the two participant groups from the George Washington University, students whose instructors frequently engaged in rhetorical pedagogy would reflect on the rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, context) more often.

To answer these questions, researchers developed codes in eight categories to analyze students' reflections: (1) rhetorical knowledge, (2) metacognition, (3) writing knowledge, (4) transfer-focused thinking, (5) dispositions, (6) identity, (7) genre awareness, and (8) use of sources. Each category included multiple codes and subcodes that totaled 98 coding categories.

This article focuses on the codes of "audience" and "genre awareness." To calculate the composite code of "audience"—where students' reflections mentioned addressing an audience in their writing—researchers counted the five related subcodes presented below.

1. Classroom audience invoked (i.e., the teacher or peers in the class)

2. General audience invoked (i.e., "the reader" or "the audience")

3. Specific audience beyond classroom invoked (i.e., "my parents," or "other women in sororities")

4. Audience shapes the writing. This code marked places where students discussed how their awareness of their audience shaped specific aspects of their writing. For example, S22 from Oakland University wrote:

   > The target of my original [paper] was any students in my position who know they wanted to look into a sales career. That audience needed to know what their job would be like, what education they would need, and what skills they would need to be successful in this career field. I made sure I included all of these answers into my essay.

5. Change in perception of audience noted. This code marked a change in student perception of audience over time. For example, S43 from the George Washington University wrote:

   > I feel as though I definitely have a better understanding of what to focus on while writing. I never used to consider my audience while writing before and even though I always thought I was conveying the purpose clearly, I realized I usually wasn't.

In addition to the composite variable of "audience," this article also reports findings regarding the composite variable of "genre awareness," where students discussed genre as not just a formal set of conventions, but rather as a form of writing shaped by particular purposes and/or audiences' needs. To calculate this composite code, researchers counted four subcodes and included both positive and negative weighting of the subcodes to mea-

sure the highly variable range of student reflections on genre. An example of each subcode is provided below to clarify the kinds of genre reflections coded:

1. Failure to recognize genre when specifically asked about it (a negative subcode). This code marks student inability to recognize genre, even when directly asked about it in the study's end-of-semester reflection prompt. In their responses, a number of students failed even to recognize genre as part of the question. For example, S75 at the George Washington University wrote:

   > I would approach this situation [writing in a new genre in a new discipline] very similarly to how I approached many of the assigned essays in this . . . course. I would first take a deep breath, and then I would simply begin my research. The revision process would rest high on my priority list as well.

2. Describing genre only in terms of rules/conventions (a negative subcode). This code marks a rule-bound discussion of genre as a series of fixed conventions. For example, S38 at the George Washington University invoked genre conventions as "formats" and "style," but showed no understanding of those conventions' purposes or of audience needs:

   > If I was somehow forced into a biochemistry class and asked to write a research lab report, I would take all of the concepts I learned in this class in terms of different formats of papers and apply it to my biochemistry paper. I would also make sure to research papers of the same style online so I could understand and interpret the format I should be writing in.

3. Recognizing genre as linked to audience or purpose (a positive subcode). This code marks reflections where students move beyond discussing genre purely in terms of conventions to recognizing that different genres serve different audiences and purposes. In a shallow example of this code, S20 at Oakland University wrote: "I was able to easily identify the written genres that I use on a daily basis and to analyze them for what their purposes were."

4. Describing a change in perception of genre over time (a positive subcode). This code marks a change—in the case of our study, that change was always a productive deepening—in the student's

perception of genre over time. For example, S30 from Wayne State University wrote:

> Prior to writing the rhetorical analysis, I thought of genres as simply methods of organizing and formatting a paper; now, I have begun to see the important role each norm plays in creating a persuasive text in a given discourse community. For example, while analyzing the three texts during the rhetorical analysis, I found that footnotes–devices I previously thought were only used to standardize citations –are widely used throughout the I[nternational] R[elations] discourse community to provide contextual support to the discussion.

> This student has shifted from discussing genre purely in terms of genre conventions ("organizing and formatting a paper") to discussing those conventions as connected to the discourse community the genre works within, and the purposes and needs of that discourse community (such as the purposes citations serve in International Relations).

To calculate the composite code of "genre awareness," researchers tallied applications of the two positive subcodes (#3 and #4 above), because both signaled an advanced discussion of genre, and subtracted applications of the negative subcodes (#1 and #2 above), because they signaled inadequate or counterproductive discussions of genre. Thus students could have composite scores that were negative.

Coding the reflections required two multi-day sessions: one in summer 2012, with 24 graduate student coders; and one in summer 2013, with 31 graduate student coders. In both summers, we trained coders for at least one full day, based on Matthew Lombard, Jennifer Snyder-Duch, and Cheryl Campanella Bracken's approach, and maintained a minimum intercoder reliability standard of 80% agreement. In summer 2012, due to time and funding limitations, researchers helped code. In 2013, support from two grants funded coding entirely by graduate students. The same core documents—training and norming materials—from summer 2012 were used in summer 2013 to ensure consistency between the two years.

## Data Analysis

To determine which statistical calculations to use, we checked the normality of participant groups' data; for the cross-institutional comparisons, the results were outside the range of normal distribution. We thus employed a nonparametric equivalent of analysis of variance (ANOVA)—specifi-

cally, the Kruskal-Wallis test—to compare the effects of using or not using a WAW curriculum on student code frequencies across participating universities.

*Results*

Our research team asked how reflections by students taught WAW curricula would compare with reflections by the two George Washington University groups taught theme-based curricula. Recognizing the different versions of WAW curricula, we also asked whether there were measurable differences in the data from students whose universities taught two different WAW curricula.

Regarding audience awareness, we found that students studying Wayne State's WAW curriculum made statistically significantly fewer mentions of target audiences than did students in the other three groups. A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that there were statistically significant differences among the four participant groups in relation to the composite code of "audience," $\chi^2(3, N = 114) = 38.34, p < .001.$[4] A follow-up series of nonparametric pairwise tests indicated that the Wayne State study participants made statistically significantly fewer references to target audiences than did the participants in both participant groups from the non-WAW university. Importantly, both of the non-WAW university's "frequent" and "rare" rhetorical pedagogy groups had the highest means for mentions of audience per student among all the universities. There was not a statistically significant difference between the "frequent" and "rare" rhetorical pedagogy groups. Interestingly, Wayne State's students referred to audience statistically significantly fewer times on average than did students from Oakland University, who had also followed a WAW curriculum, which may suggest that not all WAW curricula produce the same effects.

These results indicate that, at least for the three universities in this study, a variety of approaches—from theme-based curricula to WAW curricula—can teach concepts related to audience effectively, when audience is a major focus of the class. (The different groups' approaches to teaching audience will be presented in the Discussion).

However, within our study, student reflections on genre showed serious limitations in the non-WAW curricula. A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that there were statistically significant differences among the four participant groups in relation to the composite code of genre awareness, $\chi^2(3, N = 114) = 31.75, p < .001.$[5] A follow-up series of nonparametric pairwise tests indicated that Wayne State University's students showed a statistically significantly higher frequency count for genre awareness than did the

participants from both of the non-WAW university participant groups. In fact, both of the non-WAW university participant groups showed mean frequency counts in the negative numbers,[6] so while the "frequent" rhetorical pedagogy group did have a statistically significantly higher mean composite score for genre awareness than did the "rare" rhetorical pedagogy group, the overall inability of both of these participant groups to discuss genre in sophisticated ways—or at times even to recognize it—suggests that genre is a complex concept and that students may benefit from reading writing studies materials on genre.

Moreover, when comparing the participant groups from the two WAW universities, the students from Wayne State University—whose WAW curriculum focused heavily on genre—showed statistically significantly higher genre awareness than did the Oakland University students—whose WAW curriculum did not focus on genre—which again suggests that different WAW curricula can produce different effects.

The study's qualitative results show even more clearly students' struggles to understand genre. At the non-WAW university, among the "rare" rhetorical pedagogy students, in whom we expected to (and did) see the least genre awareness, over half (8 out of 15) of the participants utterly failed to recognize the concept of genre, even when directly asked about it. In response to the final reflection prompt that asked how students would approach writing in a new genre in an unfamiliar discipline, the George Washington University participant S165 stated, "I would approach the situation by doing research, then writing up a draft, revising, and then writing the final piece." On the other hand, all of the 41 Wayne State University students recognized genre as a concept when answering this question, a result that seems likely to be related to Wayne State's heavy emphasis on teaching genre in its WAW curriculum.

While all of Wayne State's students recognized genre in their reflections, even at this university a few students struggled to go beyond basic discussions of genre; these students continued to emphasize generic conventions and rules over connections to audience and genre. For instance, Wayne State student S01 wrote:

> Before submitting the R[eflective] A[rgument], I was unfamiliar with genre knowledge and how disciplines acquired their own set of genres. During an in-class-assignment we had to identify genres in another D[iscourse] C[ommunity] outside of our own. I was not able to identify genre knowledge. After revising the rough draft of the RA, I understood the different genres that are in my DC, and how it is important to know the different genres to be a member in my DC.

> To show that I fully understand genre conventions I will use a quote from my final RA. "Genre in business management consist [sic] of memos, complaint letters, reports, business plans, etc."

While this student speaks—at length—about having learned about genre in relation to discourse communities, the student repeatedly describes genres in terms of simply recognizing or knowing them: witness the self-quotation where the student simply lists the different genres associated with business management. This student discusses genre in very basic ways—as typified formats that follow specific conventions that can be learned by novices—but not as conventions shaped by audiences, specific purposes, or goals.

### Non-Significant Findings: Metacognition

The statistically significant differences among the three universities' participant groups clustered around audience and genre. Because this article asks whether non-writing-studies curricula can have similar impacts to WAW curricula, however, the lack of statistically significant differences in the students' metacognitive reflections is worth exploring.

The study's metacognitive codes included subcodes that examined how students reflected on prior knowledge; evaluation of writing choices related to audience, purpose, and exigence; and connections between their writing processes and particular writing tasks. Participants from all four groups were coded as engaging in these metacognitive reflections. The lack of statistically significant differences in the code frequency counts in these areas suggests that, at least for the four participant groups in this study, different pedagogical approaches weren't deciding factors in the students' metacognitive reflections.

### Discussion

Before interpreting the results presented above, we note the complexity of researching writing instruction and hence our findings' limitations. Many factors can impact a student's knowledge of writing, from broader curricular approaches like those we investigated, to individual instructor effects, to students' different levels of prior knowledge, and more. We do not claim that all evidence in students' reflections was attributable directly—or sometimes perhaps at all—to curricular approaches. Nevertheless, as we show below, it seems likely that the curricular approaches discussed did help shape students' reflections.

Within the limits of our three-university dataset, our findings suggest that a variety of pedagogical approaches—from non-rhetorical, theme-

based approaches, to WAW curricula—can successfully teach the rhetorical concept of audience and how to pursue metacognitive reflection. In part, these results surprised us, as we had anticipated that the George Washington University's "rare" rhetorical pedagogy group would discuss audience and purpose less frequently than participants in the "frequent" rhetorical pedagogy group; we had also wondered whether the "frequent" rhetorical pedagogy group's meta-analysis of course readings and student writings would result in more frequent metacognitive reflections (e.g., on prior knowledge, evaluation of writing choices related to audience and exigence, etc.). We did not find such differences.

While the students in the "frequent" rhetorical pedagogy group did recognize genre more frequently, we did not see that result as indicating success, given the fact that both non-WAW participant groups received composite genre scores in the negative numbers. Broadening this analysis of genre awareness to the four participant groups of the study, our data suggest—as we'll discuss below—that genre awareness may require explicit course readings on genre and/or discourse community to enable students to articulate this concept effectively in reflective writing.

### The Multiple Curricula of WAW

Our findings suggest that different WAW curricula can produce different impacts. For instance, while both Wayne State and Oakland University followed WAW curricula, Wayne State University's students wrote statistically significantly more frequent and sophisticated reflections on genre, while Oakland University's students reflected on audience with statistically significantly greater frequency.

What types of WAW curricula may have contributed to these results? The Wayne State University program emphasized the concepts of genre and discourse community; genres were introduced to students as forms of communication used to enable discourse community interactions and work. Wayne State University students selected discourse communities to research and explore, investigated those discourse communities by interviewing experts, and then identified and analyzed example texts of particular genres specific to their fields in light of the course readings on discourse communities and genre. Within this teaching context, students often wrote sophisticated genre reflections like the following from Wayne State University student S10:

> Social workers write and read case studies not as a method to determine causation or correlation, but as a method of providing a detailed and oftentimes ongoing record of events . . . This mode of genre

is extremely useful to social work discourse community for several reasons. As social workers oftentimes do not see their clients more than on a monthly basis, the ongoing case study provides a summary of previous events, which can refresh the memory of the worker in regards to the case. Furthermore, the case study provides the worker with a list of all of the services that have been recommended for the client, and can be used in subsequent visits as a checklist to see what services have been utilized. Lastly, the case study provides those new to the case (other social workers, psychologist, medical professionals, adoptive parents, attorneys or judges) with a detailed recorded history of prior events in the life of the client. The case study genre is particularly interesting in that it employs a specialized style of writing that completely eliminates the writer of the document (the social worker) from the personalized case of the client. The studies are never written in the first person, but rather in the third person omniscient point of view, which takes a panoramic, bird's eye view of the clients, and in describing the overall picture.

Here, the student clearly connects case study genre conventions (lists of recommended services and details from the client's past history) with their purposes and audiences (i.e., providing new audiences, from other social workers to judges, with basic information about the client) within a particular discourse community. While not all students at this university discussed genre's connections to discourse communities with this level of detail, overall this group discussed genre in rich and nuanced ways. Wayne State University's students also read course readings focused on audience, purpose, and exigence, but these factors were discussed more briefly, as aspects of genre, which may have contributed to this participant group not reflecting on audience as frequently as did participant groups whose pedagogical contexts emphasized audience more.

In contrast, the Oakland University FYW program associated theories of genre and teaching genre with the teaching of current-traditional modes, and thus de-emphasized discussions of genre within faculty workshops and in the curricula. Instead, the Oakland University FYW instructors focused course readings and assignments on the rhetorical situation (including audience) and reflective writing. A typical example of student reflections about audience from this university comes from student S14:

> While working on my open-ended project I intended the audience to be for parents of special needs students. I decided to do a web-site because it is easy access for parents while at home. The purpose of my web-site is to help parents whom may not recognize what their

> child(ren) are going through. It also helps parents understand how to
> help their child(ren) at home with different ideas and a great under-
> standing how to keep the child(ren) focused and on task.

This reflection identifies a target audience beyond the classroom (parents of
special needs students) and discusses the elements of the project that were
shaped by the student's awareness and analysis of that audience's needs,
from the genre selected (a website, because it would be easy for parents to
access from home), to the materials included (strategies for helping keep
children "focused and on task"). This university's curricular attention to
audience seems likely to have contributed to the frequency of this partici-
pant group's reflections on audience, especially in comparison to Wayne
State University.

While both of these universities implemented WAW curricula, their dif-
ferent emphases on audience and genre appear to have contributed to dif-
ferent areas of interest in the students' reflections: one group reflected more
often on audience and the other more often and deeply on genre. The impli-
cation is that different WAW curricula can have different impacts depend-
ing on the writing program's focus and goals.

*Genre Awareness*

In relation to genre awareness, what were the impacts of the WAW curri-
cula when compared to the George Washington University's theme-based
curricula? In the Wayne State curriculum emphasizing genre and discourse
community, students reflected more frequently and in more sophisticated
ways on genre. Yet even in Wayne State University's genre-rich WAW cur-
riculum, some students continued to struggle to discuss genre as more than
forms of writing structured by rigid rules and conventions. Witness the
Wayne State student who quoted his or her final assignment to demonstrate
that he or she "fully" understood genre: "Genre in business management
consist [sic] of memos, complaint letters, reports, business plans, etc." If we
view genre as a threshold concept—as argued by scholars in *Naming What
We Know*—it becomes easier to see why this concept is so challenging to
teach and learn.

In contrast to Wayne State University's students, at the George Wash-
ington University, over half of the participants in the group that received
little to no explicit instruction in genre—the "rare" rhetorical pedagogy
group—failed to recognize genre even when prompted to reflect on it.
While the "frequent" group did have a significantly higher mean composite
genre score than did the "rare" participant group, both groups' scores were
in the negative numbers, indicating that both groups struggled to under-

stand genre. Unfortunately, our research team couldn't conduct follow-up inquiries among the George Washington University–"frequent" rhetorical pedagogy faculty regarding how they taught genre, per the terms of the George Washington University's IRB (which anonymized faculty's participation). What we know is that these faculty required attention to "genre, audience, purpose, and/or context" for almost every course reading and student writing assignment. It may be that these faculty focused less on genre than audience, purpose, or context, and thus a more explicit attention to genre—while still using non-writing-studies-related course readings—could have strengthened student discussions of genre. It may also, however, be that given the complexity of genre as a concept, an explicit writing studies curriculum might be necessary to teach it effectively. How to do so remains an open question requiring further research.

### Audience and the Impacts of "Public Writing"

Both of the non-WAW university's participant groups had the highest mean number of references to audience in their reflections, compared to the other two participant groups. Why did these two participant groups refer to audience in similar ways, given that the "rare" rhetorical pedagogy instructors assigned rhetorical analysis infrequently?

The George Washington University's FYW program emphasizes public writing. The program has long held a semesterly student writing event: a two-day conference where multiple student panels give professor–nominated former FYW students the opportunity to present their work to other students, faculty, and librarians. As part of this broader interest in public writing, a number of the study's participating faculty have also arranged student writing opportunities outside the university, from service learning where students write for community organizations; to a partnership with the Holocaust museum where students contribute to ongoing archival work; to open blogs inviting the scientific community to engage with the students in discussions of global warming. Even faculty who don't have students write directly for external audiences generally emphasize the public nature of writing. For instance, one professor asked students to select an academic journal to target while writing their research papers and required in-depth analyses of that journal's conventions, including article length, citation style, and use of subheadings. This writing program's attention to public writing addresses some of the challenges Bazerman highlights regarding teaching genre. School genres can be difficult vehicles for teaching attention to audience and purpose, because their rhetorical situations are so prescribed. Public writing creates contexts where analyzing audience

and purpose matters, as witnessed by reflections where students connected the audiences they were targeting and the choices they made as writers. As S51 from the George Washington University wrote,

> In writing this piece, what I found most difficult was determining how to craft it in a way that would earn the respect and attention of the [community organization] leadership. This included presenting the information in an unbiased fashion and figuring out what was most important.

The implication of these findings is that a variety of teaching approaches—from WAW curricula, to rhetorical pedagogy, to public-writing, theme-based curricula—can successfully convey concepts of audience.

## Conclusion

This study suggests that you get what you teach: the different WAW curricula followed by Oakland University and Wayne State University appear to have impacted students differently, based on whether course materials emphasized concepts of genre and discourse community (Wayne State University), or the rhetorical concept of audience (Oakland University). Similarly, both of the non-WAW university's participant groups frequently attended to audience, possibly because of that university's focus on public writing. These different curricular emphases seem likely to have contributed to significant differences in which themes predominated in students' reflections.

Similarly, our study required all students to respond to reflective prompts designed to promote metacognition. The lack of statistically significant difference in the metacognition code frequency counts suggests the different pedagogical approaches of the four participant groups didn't impact the frequency of metacognitive reflection, and thus that metacognitive reflections can be embedded in a variety of FYW teaching approaches.

Given the national reality that most first-year writing courses are taught by instructors without explicit training in writing studies, we see this initial study as suggesting that some of the transfer-promoting advantages of WAW curricula, such as the incorporation of metacognitive reflections, *can* be borrowed by alternative curricula, such as theme-based FYW courses. Moreover, a variety of pedagogical approaches—from WAW's attention to audience, to the theme-based courses' attention to "public writing"—can promote the transfer-focused factor of attention to rhetorical situations. However, the theme-based approach produced the least benefit in teaching genre. Perhaps to teach this complex concept, explicit instruction grounded in course texts and/or assignments focused on genre is necessary. Further

research is needed. In the meantime, in local university contexts where a WAW curriculum can't be implemented, WPA's and teachers of FYW can borrow at least some of WAW's approaches—its focus on metacognition and attention to rhetorical situations—to better prepare students for writing in new contexts.

NOTES

1. The broader Writing Transfer Project includes data from four universities, but because this article focuses on cross-institutional comparisons, the data from one had to be excluded: the small number of participants (*n* = 7) from that university did not allow for comparative quantitative analyses.

2. Demonstrating the messiness inherent in multi-university data collections, two homework assignments were required at two of the study sites, but the third university's students—from the George Washington University—did not complete the first homework assignment. That first homework prompt's questions ultimately focused on areas not reported here, so the omission did not impact these findings.

3. While the majority of students in the GW–"rare" rhetorical pedagogy group "rarely or never" analyzed the rhetorical situation of course readings, one faculty member (whose students contributed 10.5% of the analyzed reflective documents and 25% of the pre- and post-semester, year 1 paper samples) noted *occasionally* having students analyze the rhetorical situation in course readings—but never having students engage in such analysis for their own or their peers' writing.

4. The effect size associated with the differences in audience, as measured by Cramér's *V*, was .33. Using Cohen's criteria, this coefficient was indicative of a large effect size.

5. The effect size associated with the differences in genre awareness, as measured by Cramér's *V*, was .30. Using Cohen's criteria, this coefficient was indicative of a large effect size.

6. The GW–"frequent" rhetorical pedagogy group showed a negative mean frequency count for genre awareness (*M* = –0.50, *SD* = 0.91); the GW–"rare" rhetorical pedagogy group's mean frequency for genre was even lower (*M* = –1.13, *SD* = 0.64).

APPENDIX: REFLECTIVE PROMPTS

*Homework Assignment (given within the first two weeks of the semester)*

Find a research paper that represents your best writing from high school/last semester. If you have not done a research paper, please find a paper that is based on at least one text.

  1.   Describe the assignment and course in which you wrote the piece.

2. Why did you choose this piece?

3. What did your teacher do, if anything, to assist you in writing this assignment?

4. Please describe your writing process for this assignment. This may include prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, peer reviews, the research process and interaction with your instructor, writing center, and/or others.

5. Was there something you found difficult to do in writing this piece? Please describe it and how you dealt with this difficulty.

6. What purposes do the sources serve in this piece?

7. What went well when writing this assignment?

8. What knowledge/skills learned from writing this paper do you plan to take into this course?

*Paper Reflection (accompanied each major paper submitted)*

1. Please describe your writing process for this assignment. This may include prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, peer reviews, the research process, and interaction with your instructor, writing center, and/or others.

2. What key writing concepts, if any, were important factors in how you approached or carried out this writing assignment?

3. Was there something you found difficult to do in writing this piece? If so, please describe it and how you dealt with this difficulty. If you didn't find the writing task difficult, why was this piece easy for you to write?

4. When shaping this project, what audience—other than the teacher—were you targeting, if any? What values and/or needs did that audience have? How did you shape your writing to target that audience? What purpose did you hope to achieve in targeting this audience?

5. Did you "frame," contextualize, or contribute to a conversation in some way? If so, how did you do so?

6. What knowledge/skills can you take with you to future writing projects?

7. What purposes do the sources serve in this piece?

*Final Reflection (NOTE: the final reflection—collected with the final major paper—included the "Paper Reflection" questions presented above and ended with the two questions below.)*

1. Describe your level of confidence in your writing when you entered this class as compared to now.

2. Imagine that you are in an upper-division course in a field different than your own (for instance, you might be an education major taking a biochemistry course) where you are asked to write in a genre that you have not worked in before. How would you approach this situation?

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