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Author(s): Todd Ruecker

Source: *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 66, No. 1, SPECIAL ISSUE: Locations of Writing (September 2014), pp. 91-119

Published by: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43490902>

Accessed: 01-03-2018 17:41 UTC

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Todd Ruecker

Here They Do This, There They Do That: Latinas/ Latinos Writing across Institutions

Reporting on a year-and-a-half-long study of Latina/Latino multilingual students transitioning from high school to a community college or university on the US-Mexico border, this article explores how writing instruction was shaped across the three institutional locations by a variety of internal and external forces such as standardized testing pressures, resource disparities, and individual instructors. In concluding comments, the author suggests ways for composition teachers, researchers, and administrators to build connections between different locations of writing and facilitate student transitions between institutions.

On this side of town, they focus more on the TAKS because, I don't know if it's because we're Mexican or we don't speak that much of English, but yeah, I don't think it's worth it."

—Andrea, on the focus of high-stakes testing at her high school¹

Student populations and the institutions they pass through are unique. A writing classroom and the students within it are situated not only in a particular institution but also in particular geographic and sociopolitical contexts. Consequently, it is important for composition researchers and administrators to look both within and beyond individual classrooms, programs, and institutions to understand how writing instruction is shaped by location and the various

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forces at play within and outside various institutional locations. This article attempts to do just that. Drawing on a year and a half study of Andrea and seven other linguistic minority (LM) Mexican American students' transitioning from high school to a community college or university on the US-Mexico border,² I construct institutional portraits that depict how internal and external forces shaped writing instruction at each institution. Like Elizabeth Wardle ("Creative"), I find Pierre Bourdieu's analytical framework of habitus, capital, and field useful in exploring writing instruction across these institutions, the forces shaping this instruction, and the ultimate impact on students interested in pursuing a better life through attaining a college degree. This framework helps illustrate how instruction in individual writing classrooms is shaped locally, regionally, and nationally by teachers, administrators, students, politicians, and others. I conclude by articulating steps that composition researchers, teachers, and administrators can take to facilitate the transitions of diverse students through the multitude of fields they encounter on their educational journeys.

Researching Divides between High Schools and Colleges

Over the past several years, scholars such as Joanne Addison, Sharon James McGee, Brownyn T. Williams, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, and Kerry Anne Enright have drawn attention to L1 and L2 composition's focus on postsecondary education, especially four-year institutions. For instance, much of the work on writing transfer has focused on students transferring rhetorical knowledge across university environments (e.g., Beaufort; Leki; Wardle, "Understanding"); however, more research needs to focus on transfer between high school and college, as our field has produced limited knowledge of the types of writing students experience before entering a first-year composition (FYC) classroom.

The Conference on College Composition and Communication has begun recognizing the need for more research on high school-college connections, with the first project funded through its research initiative focused on investigating writing instruction in high school and college. In a 2010 article stemming from this project, Addison and McGee report that high school and college writing instructors generally had similar thoughts on "prewriting, clear expectations, and good instructor practices"; however, there were some significant differences such as college faculty being much less likely than high school teachers to "(1) provide opportunities for informal, exploratory writing or (2) have students read/respond to other students' work" (157). Addison and McGee also draw attention to Applebee and Langer's analysis of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, noting that with 40% of students writing

papers of only three pages or shorter, it is likely that many students in high school are not writing sufficiently to prepare them for college. Recent collections by composition scholars (e.g., Dixon; Hansen and Farris; Sullivan, Tinberg, and Blau) have also explored similarities and differences between writing instruction in high school and college, with chapters noting differences in areas such as how high school and college teachers read students' writing (Thompson and Gallagher) while also recognizing areas for connection (Yancey). Elsewhere, L2 writing researchers have found disparities in the length and expectations of assignments in high school and college (Lay et al.), the way students are identified and treated (Harklau), and the type of literacy instruction across high schools (Allison).

Divides between Community Colleges and Universities

Although much of our disciplinary work has remained oriented toward composition instruction at four-year institutions, our field has traditionally had a stronger connection with faculty in community colleges than with teachers in K–12 schools. As a whole, students like those profiled in this study, linguistic minority immigrants or children of immigrants, are more likely to start college in a two-year institution (Fry; Hassel and Giordano). With the nationwide transfer rate from a two-year to a four-year college hovering around 25% (Cohen and Braver 60–65), many of these students never make it to a four-year classroom, making it all the more important that rhetoric and composition researchers pay attention to instruction across all types of postsecondary institutions.

In general, community colleges depend on part-time labor more than universities, but less than for-profit universities do. According to Jeffery Klausman, 78% of the faculty in community colleges were in non-tenure-track positions in 2004, compared to about 68% of faculty overall in colleges and universities (364). As Audrey J. Jaeger and M. Kevin Eagan found, increased exposure to part-time faculty may lower student retention rates (they also report that exposure to instruction provided by graduate students, common at universities, can also lower retention rates). In addition to the challenges stemming from lack of time (teaching five or more classes or having a full-time job in addition to teaching), part-time faculty are constrained by a basic lack of material resources such as an office space in which to meet students (Hassel and Giordano 125).

Others at two-year colleges who may have better material conditions and the time to stay active in their respective discipline may lack agency to change their classrooms and programs in the face of administrators or outside forces such as accrediting agencies (Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf). Christina M. Toth,

Brett M. Griffiths, and Kathryn Thirolf also note that two-year faculty may be called to teach courses ranging from composition to literature and creative writing and consequently have limited ability to immerse themselves more fully in one discipline in contrast to their counterparts at four-year institutions. Nonetheless, university composition instructors do not always have it better. Universities often depend on TAs from a variety of disciplines including literature and creative writing to teach many of their composition classes. These TAs may have limited rhetoric and composition disciplinary knowledge, face challenges balancing teaching with being a full-time student, and have limited agency when working with tenured administrators.

Theoretical Framework: Location as Field

As noted recently by Elizabeth Wardle (“Creative”), Bourdieu’s framework of habitus, capital, and field offers a way to analyze the interactions between the micro and the macro as it provides a researcher with the tools to examine an individual in relation to larger social structures. For those unfamiliar with the concepts, *habitus* refers to the dispositions of an individual, *capital* to the financial and cultural resources the individual possesses, and *field* to the larger context, or contexts, in which everything plays out. The three are intertwined. Habitus is shaped by the fields through which one moves, but it also contributes to shaping fields. Capital also fluctuates with the field one is in, with its value varying in different fields (Bourdieu, *Reflexive*). Fields are “historically constituted areas of activity with their specific institutions and their own laws of functioning” (*Reflexive* 87). Fields are shaped by power relations and

In short, location matters: educational policies like No Child Left Behind, funding disparities, and other contextual factors shape the type of education different institutions provide, and consequently shape the future opportunities of students passing through them.

are consequently sites of struggle where agents with more power or capital have more impact on shaping a field (Bourdieu, *Sociology*).

In conducting the larger study, of which just one part is presented here, I considered students’ home, extracurricular, and educational settings as different fields;

however, for the purposes of this article I am focusing primarily on educational fields as well as selected fields surrounding them. A partial representation of these interconnected fields is mapped out in Figure 1, which shows how composition classrooms and their intersecting fields are shaped by a variety of agents and forces.

One of the primary arguments that Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron

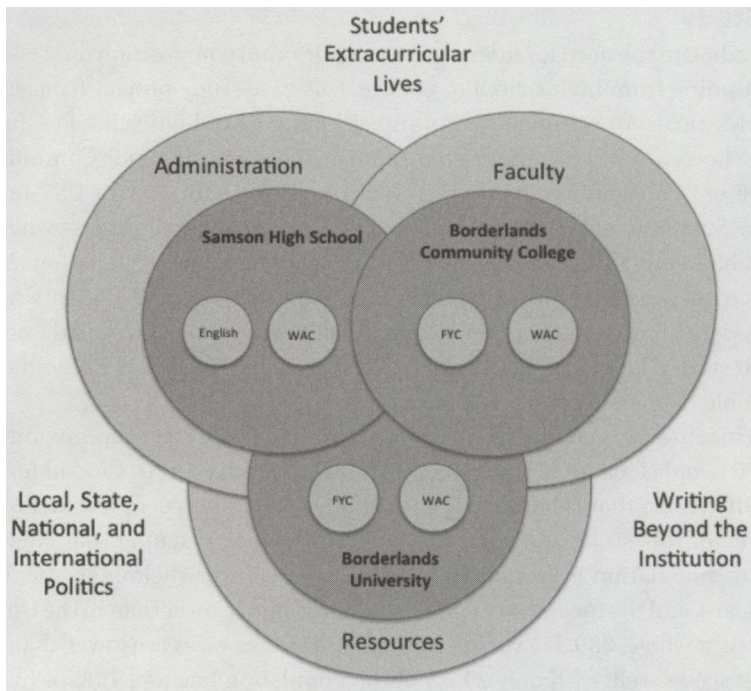


Figure 1. Composition classrooms and surrounding fields and forces.

make in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* is that educational institutions play a central role in maintaining hierarchies. Patricia Thompson articulates one way this occurs: “what kind of schooling people receive in the education field can make a lot of difference to how they are positioned in the economic field” (71). In writing about the impact of high-stakes testing on writing instruction, Wardle notes how the dominance of testing shapes student dispositions oriented toward neatly assessed “answer-getting” as opposed to the “messiness of deep learning.” Wardle recognizes that dispositions are “never simply individual; they are products of and contributors to the dispositions of educational, familial, and religious fields” (“Creative”). In short, location matters: educational policies like No Child Left Behind, funding disparities, and other contextual factors shape the type of education different institutions provide, and consequently shape the future opportunities of students passing through them.

The Study

Responding to the need for more work in rhetoric and composition on students transitioning from high school to college, this case study project focused on seven Mexican American students transitioning from high school (Samson High School, or SHS) to either a community college (Borderlands Community College, or BCC) or university (Borderlands University, or BU) on the US-Mexico border.³ Some students had spent their whole lives in the United States, whereas others had entered the US right before high school. Some were parents, and others regularly cared for younger siblings. Some were B or C students while others were in the top 10% of their class. All but one, Daniel, identified English as their second language, although Spanish was regularly used in his home life. (See Table 1 for an overview of participants.)

This study was conducted in El Paso, Texas, a border city of approximately 800,000 people located in southwestern Texas. It is adjacent to Ciudad Juárez, a city in Mexico that is home to approximately 1.5 million people and, during the time of this study, the epicenter of drug violence plaguing that country. El Paso's population is around 80% Latina/Latino (overwhelmingly Mexican American), and the median household income is much lower than in the United States as a whole, \$39,573 versus \$50,502. Education rates are lower than the US average as well, with only 20.7% of the population having a B.A. or higher compared to 28.5% nationwide.⁴

For this study, I followed students during their last semester in high school through their first year at college. The primary data come from 103 interviews conducted with the study participants (three times a semester at each institution they attended), their writing teachers (9 at the high school, 6 at BCC, and 8 at BU), and selected administrators. In order to immerse myself more fully in the unfamiliar high school context and make connections with teachers and students, I volunteered at the school for a year before formally collecting data. During this time and through the study period, I took a participant observer stance as I spent two or three days a week at the high school, providing feedback on individual student work while leading the occasional lesson in English classes. At the college level, I was a more traditional observer, visiting participant writing classrooms three times a semester. Across all sites, I collected writing samples from students and other relevant materials from teachers, such as syllabi. As a participant observer, I also offered tutoring to the study students, although only a few (Carolina and Yesenia) regularly took me up on this offer. The interviews were transcribed, inductively coded, and

Table 1. Overview of Study Participants

Participant	Years in US (start of study)	Family status	HS Senior English	HS GPA	FYC 1	FYC 2	College GPA 1st /2nd semester
Bianca	Whole life	Guardian of 3 siblings, lives in US	B-	B	C	B	2.57/not reported
Carolina	4	Lived with mother and siblings in US	A	A+	A	A	3.42/3.75
Daniel	Whole life	Lived with grandmother in US, parents separated	A	B-	B (dev.)	Dropped	0.0/0.0
Joanne	Whole life	Lived with cousin in US, then with parents in Mexico	B	Not reported	No writing class	No writing class	0.0/0.0
Mauricio	0	Lived with parents in Mexico	A+	A	B	A	3.0/4.0
Paola	11 (always attended school in US)	Lived with parents, later with boyfriend in Mexico	A	Not reported	A	Dropped	4.0/0.0
Yesenia	9	Lived in US with mother and siblings	B	B+	B (dev.)	B	2.66/2.57

Note: Due to IRB restrictions, this information was self-reported by the participants. Andrea, quoted in the epigraph, is not included in the table because she did not matriculate to college and thus was not followed for the entire study.

triangulated with the other data. Drawing on these sources, I construct institutional profiles that depict the very different locations of writing that students experienced during their journey from high school to college.

Exploring the Institutional Locations of Writing *Samson High School: Political Impacts*

Home to approximately 1,300 students, SHS is located within walking distance of the US-Mexico border. It consists of several one- or two-story brown buildings centered on a large courtyard where students gather between classes. Like many

schools, there are also a number of temporary classroom trailers. Its student body is over 99% minority (overwhelmingly Latina/Latino), with over 90% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. Around 40% are given the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) designation, and 80% are labeled “at risk.”⁵ Of the three institutional fields through which students passed, SHS was most obviously affected by external forces. As the US-Mexico border was increasingly militarized in the early 1990s via “Operation Blockade,” the Border Patrol had a

The dominant feature of writing instruction during the time I spent at SHS was preparation for the primary Texas K–12 assessment, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

strong presence around campus and was successfully sued for unduly harassing SHS students and faculty.

The dominant feature of writing instruction during the time I spent at SHS was preparation for the primary Texas K–12 assessment, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). For a number of years leading to this study, the school had missed its annual yearly progress (AYP) goals, which meant that students were not demonstrating proficiency on the state exam. When I began visiting, the school was at the point of having to turn to what the Texas Education Agency referred to as “Alternative Governance,” which is explained in the following way:

Necessary arrangements should be made to carry out the previously selected restructuring option for Stage 5:

1. Reopen the school as a charter school.
2. Replace principal and staff.
3. Contract for private management company of demonstrated effectiveness.
4. State takeover.
5. Any other major restructuring of school governance. (Texas Education Agency, “Title I”)

The option was clear: find a way to help more students pass the TAKS or submit to “Alternative Governance,” a process in which the teachers would likely lose their positions and have to reapply for them.

Given this context, it was perhaps unsurprising that teachers generally felt the impact of testing in everything they did as the administration went to great lengths to improve test scores. In the words of the notoriously strict and demanding first- and second-year English teacher Mr. Flores: “Testing has changed. Now it’s testing on a statewide basis. It used to be testing on units and

certain fundamentals on those units. Now it's become testing on a benchmark basis and a statewide basis and TAKS is a key word here. TAKS, TAKS, TAKS and more TAKS. We live and die by the TAKS." Junior-level teachers shared stories of not being able to finish books or follow state curriculum standards because of overwhelming pressure to save the school.

To understand the main focus of literacy instruction at SHS, it is important to understand the TAKS test itself. From 2003 to 2011, the TAKS assessed students on their literacy skills via short stories followed by multiple choice questions and a few types of writing: paragraph-long responses to expository prompts and an explanatory essay. In part because it was modeled by state benchmark papers, the explanatory essay tended to be taught and treated as a narrative (Beck and Jeffery); additionally most teachers at SHS taught the narrative mode because it was perceived as the easiest way to bring students up to the level of a passing grade, a formidable challenge for students who had only been in the United States a few years.⁶ A typical prompt would be, "Write an essay explaining how a person can feel connected to a special place."

In this high-stakes, high-stress environment, teachers were monitored constantly to make sure they were preparing students for the test.

In this high-stakes, high-stress environment, teachers were monitored constantly to make sure they were preparing students for the test. Ms. Padilla, a teacher at the school, described how this occurred: "I've had the lady from the state get me in such a state of panic to where I knew what her heels sounded like when she was walking, and you know it was like we would do whatever she thought was best . . . One time she also came in, she ripped my lesson plan." This teacher lamented the fact that she had to leave at the door what she learned in her teacher-training program: "When I first came here I thought we were supposed to be doing the things we learned in school—the lessons that we came up with and the teasers—but apparently that's not case here, so I got a hard awakening of what this is about." Teachers like Ms. Padilla knew that more could be done to engage students and prepare them for college, but because of certain mandates, they were restricted from doing so.

External pressures associated with testing created internal hierarchies within the school. Whereas mainstream English teachers had freedom at the senior level, those teaching in AP or dual credit classes had freedom at all levels since their students were expected to easily pass the graduation-required TAKS. Ms. Lopez, who taught both kinds of classes, noted this difference: "With my

regular English students, everything is TAKS related. So we teach more of the narrative, that's because that's what they expect more on TAKS . . . with my AP students I'm preparing them for that AP exam. . . . We focus a lot on rhetorical devices, strategies, all of the rhetorical terms they're going to see on the test, and we focus on the writing—which is a literary analysis, it's an argumentative essay, the persuasive essay and the synthesis.”

Because junior year was the graduation requirement testing year, senior English classes also generally escaped the brunt of the testing focus. Students in the senior English classes during the year I spent at the school wrote a personal statement for college, analytical essays on *Beowulf* and *Lord of the Flies*, and, reminiscent of some of the earlier work that they did, narratives that were part of a process to test students out of the limited English proficiency (LEP)

Students generally felt that they were not being adequately prepared for college.

designation. The consequences of years spent writing personal narratives were evident in the struggles that the students faced in writing more analytical essays, whether in incorporat-

ing textual evidence or figuring out how to write an essay longer than one to two pages. The mainstream senior English teacher, Mr. Robertson, and I provided scaffolding and feedback over a period of several weeks as students wrote these essays, having them draft thesis statements, introductions, outlines, and more; however, as time ran out, many students resorted to plagiarizing their essays by drawing extensively from online sources like SparkNotes. Time was further constrained due to last-minute class cancellations or shortening attributed to events such as college-related presentations or pep rallies (aimed at not only winning athletic events but also passing standardized tests).

Students generally felt that they were not being adequately prepared for college. Daniel, who spent a brief time at another school, commented: “here they give you a little bit of work, but over there, everyday there was something new. And if you didn't show up for one day it's like missing a whole week.” Mauricio reported a similar experience. Andrea, a participant who did not matriculate to college, noted, “when I was sophomore I think I heard that at Franklin they wouldn't put much pressure on the TAKS because of the language. Because if they would give us a question, then they would give a Franklin student a question, they would understand it right away, and we would struggle with some of the words because they're not the words we would usually use.” As evident from comments from Andrea and other students, these differences could be attributed in part to the need to focus on testing at SHS but also to a culture

of low expectations surrounding many Latina/Latino students. For instance, interviewed teachers commented that the administration recommended that teachers not assign homework because of SHS students' difficult home lives. The administration also made it difficult to assign low or failing grades, something the students were very aware of.

In sum, the writing instruction at SHS generally was very constrained with a narrow focus on preparing students to write one particular type of essay for a high-stakes test mandated by the state. While high school teachers are often blamed for students not transitioning ready to write in a variety of college genres, it was evident that these teachers had knowledge of what students needed to know for college but were not given the agency to teach in more effective ways.

Three of the seven study participants, Daniel, Joanne, and Paola, started college at BCC. They made this choice largely for reasons of cost, with tuition at BCC approximately one-third of BU's tuition.

Borderlands Community College: Resource Limitations

Three of the seven study participants, Daniel, Joanne, and Paola, started college at BCC. They made this choice largely for reasons of cost, with tuition at BCC approximately one-third of BU's tuition. Joanne and Paola were somewhat ambivalent about college in general, so it seemed to make sense for them to go somewhere where Pell Grants would cover their educational costs. Daniel cited other reasons as well, saying BCC was where his family wanted him to go (at the time of the study, he had sisters there who later dropped out). He also thought it would be more like high school because it would not have the large lecture halls common at universities. He, like the others, identified with the school's slogan that it was "best place to start" and felt that "the basics were the same" at BCC and BU.

BCC served around 30,000 students on five campuses spread throughout the city and also partnered with some local school districts on early college high schools. Like BU, it was a Hispanic Serving Institution, but with a slightly higher percentage (85%) of Latina/Latino students. The three students in this study all attended the same campus near the downtown and BU, BCC Colorado. Colorado was one of the smaller campuses, serving a high number of students who crossed regularly from Mexico because of its proximity to the border. Compared to the flagship campus, where I observed the classes of one student who later dropped out of the study, the resources were fewer: the buildings were older, the library was smaller, and computer labs were limited.

During Daniel, Joanne, and Paola's first semester of college, the Colorado campus offered 12 developmental writing sections, one of which was taught by a tenure-line faculty member. Of the 21 FYC classes offered, 9 were taught by tenure-line faculty. The remaining classes in both areas were taught by adjuncts. Of these three students, Paola was in a mainstream writing class, the first semester of a two-semester sequence. Daniel entered in a paragraph-level developmental writing class after scoring poorly on the Accuplacer, a machine-scored placement exam. Joanne did not have a dedicated writing class her first semester but was in a first-year seminar, which was where BCC participants were most likely to do writing outside of their composition sequence.⁷

The first-semester FYC class, English 1301, generally appeared to be taught in a traditional fashion. The syllabus provided by the college-wide curriculum committee specified that students write five 700- to 1000-word essays that "focus on a thesis statement, with introduction, multiple body paragraphs which develop the major points indicated in the organizational plan of each essay, and an appropriate conclusion." Paola's 1301 class was taught by Dr. Thompson, one of the three tenure-line faculty at the Colorado campus, and the only one with a PhD in rhetoric and composition, which he completed in the early 1990s. His syllabus centered on a modes-based curriculum, with the following essay sequence: personal narrative, definition exemplification, comparison/contrast classification, cause/effect argumentation. Interviews with another tenure-line faculty member and two adjunct instructors along with reviews of syllabi posted online confirmed the prevalence of this approach. Daniel's first semester developmental writing teacher, Ms. Mariscal, an adjunct teacher who had a literature MA, commented that it is pretty much "standard written English" because "you're either comparing or contrasting something, or cause and effect, or persuading." For those with more rhetoric and composition disciplinary expertise, this model seemed in place primarily not because it was valued but because of the lack of time to stay apprised of current disciplinary knowledge and innovate. Dr. Thompson felt the modes approach was not the best, but he attributed his use of it to a full-time teaching load of five courses a semester that typically included three different class preparations.

Although Paola dropped out approximately a month into her second semester, I had the chance to interview her 1302 teacher, Ms. Flores, another tenure-line faculty member at Colorado, and conduct the planned observations. This course (ENG 1302) focused on research and literary analysis. For the first part of the class, students were expected to write a research paper oriented around the topic of their choice (Paola had chosen to focus on Egyptian my-

thology). According to Ms. Flores, this was typically 8–10 pages long in most classes, but she was more demanding in requiring 15 pages, 15 sources, and 45 pages of notes. For the literary part of the class, students were expected to “use literary terminology,” “[d]emonstrate analytical insight and appreciation of two literary types (short stories, poetry, drama, or film),” and write at least two essays with an interpretive/analytical emphasis. During this time, I observed a class in which Ms. Flores was working with the students on analyzing sonnets and poems, noting that her passion for teaching literary analysis was evident in her teaching.

As noted earlier, Daniel started in a paragraph-level developmental writing course with Ms. Mariscal. Here, he was expected to write “eight paragraph-length compositions of approximately 150–200 words each” along with four short reflections on textbook stories, although Ms. Mariscal encouraged students with higher abilities, like Daniel, to write more. The essays were also in the modes tradition: narration, description, process, definition, classification, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and argument. Ms. Mariscal did work to provide some context for these essays, with one prompt asking students to do the following:

You and your family have a foreign exchange student with you this year. The traditions surround American holidays are very strange to him/her. Your foreign exchange student is expressing interest in learning about our holidays. Write an essay telling the student of the customs and traditions we follow in this country for one of these holidays: Halloween [sic], Thanksgiving or Christmas.

In response, Daniel produced a handwritten essay slightly over a page that detailed his family’s Christmas traditions.

Ms. Mariscal cared deeply about her students and was generally very understanding of the challenges they faced, especially because a number of them lived in Mexico and would cross the border to attend her class. She made exceptions for lateness because of these border crossings and, in the case of Daniel, let him handwrite his essays when he had trouble with his printer. She was Daniel’s only teacher who would follow up with him after class when he missed or came late to class. Beyond the essays, the class had a relatively strong grammar component mandated by the department. Students were expected to complete a certain number of hours with online grammar drills, so each Friday the class would meet in the computer lab and, at the end of the semester, take a grammar exam. Overall, Daniel felt ambivalent about his placement in the class, which he explained: “Cause like, they’re trying to get students to write

paragraphs, but I already know how to write essays. And so I mean, with the grammar and stuff like that, I still have to learn that cause I really mess up, other than that, it's really boring." On the other hand, he saw it positively: "because like it was the first semester of college . . . I didn't want to get like overwhelmed, you know what I mean, when I first start."

Although Daniel dropped out by early March, his second semester writing class was also developmental, albeit at the essay-writing stage. His teacher, Mr. Madison, also had an English literature MA and was an adjunct at multiple BCC campuses and for an online for-profit school. He originally was a high school teacher but soon made the switch to college because he felt it was more "laid back" and gave him more opportunities to teach students how to think instead

Overall, SHS students at BCC who transitioned into mainstream classes appeared to have been challenged beyond what they did in high school, writing more frequently in a variety of genres, although the modes-based curriculum may have been limiting.

of prepare them for standardized tests. For Mr. Madison's class, students would write three take-home and three in-class essays, although the focus was not quite worked out yet since this was the first time he taught the class. Because of his previous experience teaching the paragraph-level course, Mr. Madison said he took a strong grammar focus in giving feedback.

Overall, SHS students at BCC who transitioned into mainstream classes appeared to have been challenged beyond what they did in high school, writing more frequently in a variety of genres, although the modes-based curriculum may have been limiting. On the other hand, students like Daniel who place in a developmental writing sequence may be held back from quicker development given that the writing asked of him seemed at a lower level than what he did in high school.

Borderlands University: Disciplinary Knowledge and Material Resources with Instructional Inconsistency

Like BCC, BU was a federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution, and around 80% of its 22,000 students were Latina/Latino. The tuition was approximately three times that of BCC, and it was part of the primary state university system. During the time of this study, the university was on a several-hundred-million-dollar building boom, adding major buildings and updating some existing ones. Most of the composition courses were housed in computer labs in the student technology building. It was also home to rhetoric and composition

MA and PhD programs and associated faculty with the knowledge, time, and resources to keep up with advances of disciplinary knowledge.

During the study students' first semester of college, BU offered 27 developmental writing sections (which included 6 one-hour workshop classes to accompany students enrolled in FYC courses needing extra support) and 80 FYC sections. Of the developmental courses, over 80% were taught by full-time lecturers. Of the FYC courses, approximately 50% were taught by TAs, 40% by full-time lecturers, and 10% by adjuncts. No tenure-line faculty taught courses in either area. Of the four students who started college at BU, three (Bianca, Carolina, and Mauricio) entered mainstream writing classes, and one, Yesenia, entered a developmental class. Unlike their counterparts at BCC, students generally did some extended writing in most of their classes across the curriculum, especially in their first-year seminars and history classes.

In the years surrounding this study, the FYC program underwent a major redesign that culminated in being awarded a CCCC Writing Program of Excellence designation. With support from a \$50,000 grant, the WPA at the time worked to move the program away from a modes-based curriculum that had been in place for decades to a new curriculum aligned with the WPA Outcomes Statement (Council) and Anne Beaufort's work on discourse communities. These influences were evident in the FYC curriculum detailed in the program guide: "Understand a theory of discourse communities," "Address the specific, immediate rhetorical situations of individual communicative acts," and "Develop technological literacies as they pertain to researching and composing in the 21st century."

Students in the first semester course, ENG 1311, mapped their discourse communities, completed traditional and multimodal assignments such as a rhetorical/visual analysis, a community problem report, and a video or brochure. Despite attempts to standardize the curriculum across the 1311 classes around a community-based focus, there were some variations on this. For instance, Carolina's first-semester teacher, a TA completing an MA in rhetoric and writing, took a pop culture focus, Carolina completed various assignments focused on the *Twilight* phenomenon, and Bianca's teacher took a peace-themed approach. While these generically themed models might be critiqued by many in rhetoric and composition (e.g., Adler-Kassner; Downs and Wardle; Ruecker, "Reimagining"), Carolina identified her 1311 writing as the most interesting she was doing because she enjoyed writing about *Twilight*.

The second semester course, ENG 1312, was a hybrid model (with both face-to-face and online meetings) that included assignments like a genre analy-

sis, a literature review and primary research report, and digital assignments such as a video documentary, online opinion piece, and a website. Despite the time and resources dedicated to aligning the curriculum across classes in the program, it was evident that students' instructors shaped their experiences.

Despite the time and resources dedicated to aligning the curriculum across classes in the program, it was evident that students' instructors shaped their experiences.

For instance, Carolina had one of the most celebrated program instructors, Ms. Reyes, a full-time lecturer. Ms. Reyes, with an MA in rhetoric and professional communication and years of teaching and professional experience, played a central role in the program redesign. Her

knowledge was evident as she talked about the rationale behind the redesign:

I think that was one of the things that went behind creating the assignments is to value the student more and value the student specifically in terms of their connection to communication in their world, which . . . is now, much more digital, and to kind of bring in that type of—those type of communication skills and try to hone those skills as best as we could. What else went behind creating the assignments? To make them fun, to make them something much more that the students would want to participate in, that had a dual purpose where they would also be applicable for—I guess transferable, you know, between their different classes, but something that the students could feel proud to have participated in, rather than just something for a class.

In talking about assignment choice and design, Ms. Reyes's rationale is different than that quoted by Dr. Thompson earlier. She does not mention the same constraints on time and resources that seemed more common at BCC. By thinking through multimodal composition and transfer to other classes, she appeared to be better positioned to align her teaching with current disciplinary practices than instructors with less rhetoric and composition disciplinary knowledge. At the same time, she was admittedly one of the best instructors at BU, something seen by Carolina, who had taken classes with both a relatively new TA and this seasoned lecturer:

We can tell from the very beginning that she knows what she's doing, what she's teaching. And then, she has all things all over the place with good information to make the assignment what she wants and she keeps a lot of information. I think I found like three papers that she wrote, aside from the guide, to help us. I think it's a good thing for her . . . for us because I think she didn't have to do that and then she spent her time doing that for us.

In contrast to Carolina's general satisfaction, Mauricio was disappointed with his 1311 and 1312 instructors, both TAs, the first in the rhetoric and writing MA program and the second in the creative writing MFA program. In the classes I observed, his 1311 instructor would lecture from PowerPoint slides, giving the minute details of APA style, the program-required style. In the words of Mauricio, "he was really boring. He would just talk and talk and talk." The second semester, his instructor seemed to lack confidence and was generally disorganized, forgetting to leave time in the calendar for the final assignments. Although he stated that she was very nice, Mauricio felt that her passions were elsewhere, saying, "the other day we were at the lab and she said, 'I won't ever do 1312 again.' She'd rather have creative writing, I think." A talented and dedicated student in high school, Mauricio would often skip his FYC classes because they did not interest him.

Yesenia was the only study student at BU in a developmental course. In this class, she wrote a discourse community assignment, assessment memo, application essay, review essay, and opinion piece. As noted by Yesenia's instructor, Ms. Baker, and as evident from the discourse community and opinion assignments, the developmental writing courses were aligned with the 1311/1312 curriculum with the goal of helping students be successful in the redesigned courses. In part because of her own drive⁸ but also because of higher-level writing demands, Yesenia appeared to grow as a writer more than Daniel in her first year at college. While Daniel was writing about Christmas traditions and food, Yesenia was composing projects like a memo assessing the value of Blackboard and a research paper on Nelson Mandela. These different paths are suggested by the writing samples from their senior year of high school and their second semester of college provided in Table 2:

Looking at the first essays, both on *Lord of the Flies*, we see that Daniel had a stronger command of grammatical structures (a benefit from spending his whole life in the United States and identifying English as his first language) but shared formality problems with other students like Yesenia. We also see evidence of both struggling to integrate textual evidence in the lack of signal phrases and the choice of quotes that could at least in part be paraphrased. Turning to the second essays, it is important to note that Yesenia was in a mainstream writing class while Daniel was still in developmental writing; however, the difference in the type of writing they were doing was striking and speaks to the way institutional choice, placement tests, and individual dispositions can shape the type of writing students engage in at a particular point in time.

Table 2. Writing samples from Daniel and Yesenia during their second semester of senior year and their second semester of college.

Daniel	Yesenia
<p>Jack tries to get the majority of the boys to go with him by bribing them. "Listen all of you, me and my hunters; we're living along the beach by a flat rock. We hunt and feast and have fun, if you want to join my tribe come and see us. Perhaps I'll let you join. Perhaps not." After he said that he got like half of the group to go with him. The next day Jack taught he was big and bad so he called his own assembly.</p>	<p>The conflict starts since the beginning of the book. Ralph has of the power because he was elected by the majority of the kid. "All right who wants Jack for chief?" With dreary obedience the choir raised their hands "who wants me" every hand outside the choir except Piggy's was raised immediately" (23). Ralph had notice that Jack wasn't too happy with him being the chief. Jack gives food to everybody and did a party, that way all the kids will be with him. That shows a shift of powers back and forth from Jack to Ralph.</p>
<p>Food is important to me and my family because one it keeps us like able to do things so it gives us like energy. Second it helps us remember our culture with things like; tortillas, Mexican rice, beans, and pan de dulce. Just like in the old days when some people had only beans, rice and tortillas.</p>	<p>One of the ways that Mandela used to achieve his dream of peace in South Africa was his assumptions and he had four of them. The first one was <i>The Struggle for Black Liberation must be conducted by Black South African Alone</i>. This first assumption is based on keeping white South African communist out of the ANC. Mandela want this because he thinks that racism has spread deeply in to South Africa because of the whites. Stephen Brookfield said "he felt that if whites initially involved as equals in the movement, this early equality would quickly be superseded by whites moving into leadership positions" (Stephen Brookfield, 2008, P.99).</p>

In addition to a stronger rhetoric and composition disciplinary orientation of the writing curriculum, a major difference between the curriculum at BU and the other institutions was the emphasis on multimodal composition. Due to having the right people in the right places, BU's decision and resources to build a technology-enabled student center, and the move to hybridize the 1312 classes, the vast majority of FYC classes were held in classrooms where every student had a computer with the necessary software to support a strong multimodal composition focus. While I occasionally observed the traditional PowerPoint lecture, more often students would use wikis, have trainings in

iMovie, and learn principles of visual design. In contrast to Daniel, who felt he used computers less in college, Bianca noticed a big difference: “In high school . . . we used a little bit, just a little bit of computers, but here everything’s in the computer. It’s really different.” Although a few students questioned the technology focus, Bianca valued this work: “it’s good because it helps you like have more like experience. Like for example with the wiki or for the documentary, we had to learn how to do a movie type of thing . . . So it’s really helpful.”⁹

Overall, the writing instruction that students experienced in FYC classes at BU seemed more in line with current disciplinary practices than that at BCC, although this was a recent shift. It was apparent that the presence of recently trained faculty, some talented lecturers and TAs, and resources necessary to enact a new curriculum offered BU opportunities that were not as present at BCC; however, as seen in the dependence on TA labor, the quality of instruction across classes was inconsistent.

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Writing across Locations and Student Dispositions

Bourdieu focused extensively on how educational institutions play an important role in maintaining societal hierarchies. In *Academic Discourse*, Bourdieu, Passeron, and Saint Martin give the example of scores on a language test, noting that they do not just measure students’ language abilities, but much more: “they reflect the history of each student group, and in particular the differential elimination from the education system that each group has experienced by comparison with other groups having different characteristics” (40). As students like Carolina, Daniel, and Yesenia move between educational fields and into professional ones, they carry with them particular histories. These histories are continually shaped by the educational and non-educational locations through which students pass, locations that are shaped not only by individual writing teachers but also by program administrators, politicians, and other agents hundreds or thousands of miles away.

In learning about writing instruction in the English, developmental writing, and FYC classes across the three schools profiled in this article, we witnessed a variety of factors shaping the way writing was taught and practiced in these different locations. The dominant feature of writing instruction at SHS was preparing students for the TAKS, which consequently meant an overwhelming emphasis on narrative writing. Although this emphasis on testing

and the personal narrative never truly became unquestioned doxa, as most SHS teachers saw it as problematic, it did define the literacy experiences of these students as they progressed through high school. As Wardle observes, students develop a habitus, in this case adapted toward a narrow type of writing (personal narrative) designed to pass a test (“Creative”). Students who were placed in the AP and dual-credit tracks were given opportunities to read and write more often in different genres, giving them a different habitus than students in the lower tracks. Consequently, when students like Daniel were asked to try different types of writing, such as an analytical essay on a novel, they struggled with the formality that the new genre required along with the conventions of integrating source material into their writing. Yesenia explained why she felt that high school did not give her the habitus from practice or capital in the form of knowledge necessary to prepare her for the field of college:

Because in high school, it's all like getting to like the TAKS, TAKS, TAKS, TAKS. They don't really teach you like, oh, this is how you're supposed to write a paper. And like they teach you like the introduction, thesis statement, and conclusion, and body paragraphs. That's it, the main part of an essay. But they don't tell you like, oh, you have to cite this and you have to do that in APA style and long essays. Like we never do long essays in high school like we do here. So it's like it doesn't—and like it's hard. The transition from the way you write in high school to college is like really, really different.

Although Yesenia passed all her first-year classes at BU, it was not without a certain amount of hysteresis, which Bourdieu explains as something that occurs when individuals' habitus “incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted” (*Outline* 78). As evident from this study as well as in works like Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps*, students coming from an educational field containing many students with low amounts of capital are typically prepared differently for college than their counterparts coming from more privileged fields. Some students make it through this hysteresis; however, many do not.

Turning to the college level, we saw large variations across institutions and across individual classes within a specific institution. An overview of the writing curricula across the two institutions found BCC's approach leaning toward a more traditional approach, with the modes-based model dominating in first-semester courses and second-semester courses oriented in large part toward literary analysis. Similarly, decontextualized grammar drilling played an important role in some BCC developmental writing courses.

This adherence to a traditional curriculum at BCC appears to have stemmed from factors connecting back to what Bourdieu has identified as the most powerful form of capital: economic. Schools like BCC are allotted and spend less per student than counterparts like BU, which contributes to the situation we found at BCC: overworked full-time faculty, dependence on part-time labor, limited disciplinary expertise, and limited material resources.¹⁰ Even though Dr. Thompson expressed ambivalence with the modes approach and had a PhD in rhetoric and composition from a respected program, he lacked time to innovate. He also had reservations about not incorporating more technology in the classroom but identified time and inconsistent availability of technology in classrooms as the primary culprits.

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This being said, it is important to realize that while aspects such as program design and the availability of technology are important in shaping the locations of writing, the power of individual instructors to shape student dispositions for better or worse remained a defining factor across the two post-secondary institutions, where instructors were generally less constrained and monitored than their high school counterparts. At BCC, instructors such as Ms. Mariscal cared deeply about their students and would reach out to students like Daniel when they were lagging behind. Faculty like Ms. Flores held high expectations for their students, having them write a fifteen-page research paper, a project that sounded more demanding than much of the work students did at BU. In contrast, while the standardized curriculum at BU seemed more aligned with our discipline's current orientation toward genre-based instruction, it would often change in the hands of individual instructors. Inexperienced and disorganized TAs meant that students like Mauricio might become disengaged with their classes. On the other hand, experienced instructors with the disciplinary knowledge to teach writing, like Carolina's second-semester teacher, have the chance to engage their students and help them grow as writers. BU had the resources and structure to host a TA pedagogy class as well as monthly workshops required for all instructors, whereas BCC had fewer possibilities to offer consistent training across its predominately adjunct workforce spread across five campuses; however, as Bourdieu notes, shaping one's habitus and capital is a slow and time-consuming process, one that likely requires more time

than monthly workshops over the two-year span of a typical master's program.

It is also important to consider the diverse extracurricular locations students inhabit beyond institutional locations. Faculty teaching at minority-majority institutions like those profiled in this article were constantly rethinking their classroom policies to accommodate students who worked forty hours a week, who missed a bus, who had to wait two hours at the border crossing, who lost a family member in drug-related violence in Mexico, or who could not find childcare on a particular morning. Scholars in applied linguistics and education such as Ilona Leki, Jim Cummins, and Yasuko Kanno and Manka M. Varghese have made the point that these broader sociopolitical inequalities are too often ignored in studies on students transitioning through educational environments. The reality is that unexpected political and social policies affect what happens in the writing classroom. Unfortunately, social inequalities are often ignored by advocates of education reform, who prefer to focus on a "broken" education system rather than a broken social system.¹¹

Facilitating Transitions between Locations of Writing

What then, can composition teachers, researchers, and administrators do to facilitate the success of students like those in this study as they transition between institutions? As Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano note, writing instructors often teach "high contact" small courses, and because of our disciplinary orientation, we have an "intellectual, scholarly, and moral obligation" to help students succeed in college (127). To this end, our actions can begin with the recognition that writing classrooms are interconnected with a variety of fields, some of which we will never have full control over; however, there are some possibilities, two of which I briefly discuss: initiating collaborations with stakeholders across institutions and preparing faculty to work with an increasingly diverse student population.

It is vital to recognize that the traditional focus of composition studies on the four-year college means that we are ignoring large populations of students, as many never make it beyond high school or community college. However, as Eli Goldblatt and Jeffrey T. Grabill illustrate, relations between universities and other community partners are often difficult to create, in part because of the resource disparities that exist between institutions. Representatives from universities have often approached these relations with a "we know better" mentality, leading stakeholders in K-12 institutions or two-year colleges to be naturally suspicious of partnerships. A healthy collaboration begins in

recognizing that everyone stands to learn from it, whether it is university faculty learning about the challenges faced by high school or two-year college faculty or high school faculty learning about the types of writing expected in the writing program at the college or university. Discussions on differences and challenges can lead to change over time, and if these collaborations are approached humbly and inquisitively, those coming from universities will find more receptive arms than if they come in with plans to “fix” the problem or with a predefined research agenda.

The outcomes of forging these connections can vary, but we do have some existing models. For instance, Chris Jennings Dixon’s collection shares lesson plans that resulted from collaborative workshops involving middle, high school, and college teachers across eight states. Kristine Hansen and Christine R. Farris’s *College Credit for Writing in High School* and Patrick Sullivan, Howard Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau’s *What Is “College-Level” Writing*, volume two, include chapters from K–12 teachers and administrators along with college faculty. In the concluding chapter to the latter, Kathleen Blake Yancey suggests one way high school and college faculty might move forward is by exploring our differences while centering our work on a set of shared terms: “writing processes, genre, and rhetorical situation” (309). Elsewhere, Michael Olendzenski shares an example of how faculty at three community colleges, a state college, a university, and a maritime academy came together to develop a set of shared outcomes, a process that could have also involved high school teachers. In response to calls by such scholars as Christina M. Toth, Brett M. Griffiths, and Kathryn Thirolf, it is also important for graduate programs to think about preparing their students to teach in different environments, which could mean supervised teaching opportunities for graduate students in high schools and two-year colleges, much as is done in traditional teacher training programs.

Even at minority-majority postsecondary institutions, many teachers across the curriculum still have a sink-or-swim attitude toward their students, with drop rates for first-year courses in some disciplines disturbingly high. With a history of student-centered advocates like Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, composition has long been more aware of the needs of diverse student populations. Nonetheless, as Paul Kei Matsuda has pointed out, many composition TAs and faculty still lack training in working with linguistically diverse populations (“Myth”). Moreover, because those in the academy often come from privileged backgrounds, they may lack the dispositions to fully understand how to respond

to students who have accumulated a number of absences due to challenges like a delayed bus, having to take grandmother to the doctor, or an abnormally long line at a border crossing. In educating current and future composition teachers and scholars, graduate programs need to provide opportunities to work with

In educating current and future composition teachers and scholars, graduate programs need to provide opportunities to work with students from linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse backgrounds. This means familiarizing graduate students not only with second language writing scholarship, but also with work exploring issues surrounding social disparities and college access.

students from linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse backgrounds. This means familiarizing graduate students not only with second language writing scholarship, but also with work exploring issues surrounding social disparities and college access. Preparing graduate students and faculty to implement pedagogical innovations such as dual-language models commonly found in elementary schools (Collier and Thomas) and the bilingual professional writing courses at BU (Fredericksen) has

the potential to engage linguistically diverse student populations while building their multiliteracies.¹²

Final Thoughts

As evident throughout this article, what happens beyond an individual classroom and institution, whether in the form of high-stakes testing mandated by state or national legislatures or the workings of poverty that limit a student's ability to focus on writing, matters. By working for change within our immediate fields and then moving beyond them, we can help challenge the ways that societal structures like education systems and those who shape these systems perpetuate an unequal society. In doing so, we have the opportunity to improve the lives of students like Bianca, Carolina, Daniel, Joanne, Mauricio, Paola, and Yesenia, students whose future opportunities are shaped by the locations through which they pass as they strive for a better future for themselves and their families.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kathleen Blake Yancey, Kate Mangelsdorf, Beth Brunk-Chavez, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, and the reviewers for their editorial guidance. I would like to recognize the University of Texas at El Paso Graduate School for funding this research via two dissertation research grants.

Notes

1. The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was the primary high-stakes state assessment used in Texas during the time of this study. It has since been replaced by the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR).
2. *Linguistic minority* typically refers to US residents who speak a language other than English at home. I use *Mexican American* when referring specifically to the participants in this study since that most accurately represents their identities. I use *Latina/Latino* when referring to US Latinas/Latinos in general, as this diverse population is often grouped together in governmental and nongovernmental studies. I use *Hispanic* only when making a reference to the official federal designation Hispanic-Serving Institution.
3. IRB approval was secured from all three institutions, and all institutional and participant names are pseudonyms. I provide more detail about each of the three institutional sites as I profile them in their respective sections.
4. Data taken from BCC's website.
5. An *LEP student* is defined in the Texas Educational Code (2012) as "A person who is in the process of acquiring English and has another language as the first native language." In 1988, the Texas legislature created an official definition for an *at-risk student*, which was defined as a student meeting one or more of the following conditions: "the student had been retained one or more times in Grades 1–6 based on academic achievement and remained unable to master the Essential Elements at the current grade level; the student was two or more years below grade level in reading or mathematics; the student had failed at least two courses in one or more semesters and was not expected to graduate within four years of entering ninth grade; the student had failed one or more of the reading, writing, or mathematics sections of the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), beginning with the seventh grade" (Texas Education Agency, "Secondary" 102).
6. Researchers generally agree that it typically takes five to seven years to gain academic fluency in a new language (e.g., Cummins).
7. It's worth noting that writing across the curriculum seemed limited in students' first year at BCC. Outside the composition classes and first-year seminars, students did not report any extended writing.
8. Yesenia came to me regularly throughout her first year for feedback on writing.
9. See Ruecker, "Exploring," for more on the differences in technology usage in writing instruction across institutions.
10. According to the budgets published by the respective institutions during the time of this study, BU's expenditures per student were around twice as much as BCC's. Tamar Lewin notes that average spending per student in higher education

has remained relatively flat at approximately \$10,000 per student. Private research universities spend much more than this figure, averaging \$36,000 per student, an increase of \$7,500 per student over the last decade.

11. For more on this aspect of my study, see *Transiciones: Pathways of Latinas and Latinos Writing in High School and College*, forthcoming from Utah State University Press.

12. I refrain from advocating recently popularized translingual pedagogies because of my concern that this movement may do students a disservice in a few different ways, namely by ignoring or misrepresenting a rich history of second language writing knowledge (Matusda, "Lure") and by possibly delaying students' attempts to learn standardized language varieties. I recognize that it is important for teachers to validate students' multiple language resources in classrooms and for researchers to challenge the privileging of standardized varieties in areas like assessment; however, students like those in my study typically enter college classrooms with a clear purpose: to learn a privileged standardized variety of English. When students have busy lives outside the classroom and have much to learn to increase their academic fluency, it is important to be cautious when encouraging the use of a pedagogical strategy being uncritically pushed by many without the requisite expertise in the processes of language acquisition.

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Todd Ruecker

Todd Ruecker is an assistant professor at the University of New Mexico. His research focuses on exploring the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of educational institutions and developing innovative ways to support student success. His work has appeared in a variety of journals including *Composition Studies*, *Computers and Composition*, and *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. A book based on this project, *Transiciones: Pathways of Latinas and Latinos Writing in High School and College*, is forthcoming with Utah State University Press.