RESEARCH IN WRITING, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, 1984-2003

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Abstract: This review of research in college composition divides the field into research focused on the student writer, the teacher of college composition, and the contexts of writing. The period under review is characterized by the "social turn," an effort to situate the writer within social, political, and other contexts in which teaching and writing take place. The author finds that, early in the 21st century, the field of college composition lacks the sort of monolith – such as the "current rhetorical" tradition that has now been largely abandoned – that galvanized teachers and researchers of college composition in the past. As a consequence, the field presently lacks a clear focus or direction.
Key words: college composition, writing research

Chinese

《写作的研究，中学后的教育，1984-2003》

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撮要

本文回顾了有关中学作文的研究文献，并把研究领域的焦点分别集中在学生作者、中学写作课的教师，和文章的脉络。本文探讨的时期被描述为「社会转移」，即教学与写作进行期间，致力将作者处于社会、政治和其它背景的状况。作者发现，早在廿十一世纪初期，中学写作的研究领域缺乏庞大的主流——例如现已不多被采用的「流行修辞学」传统——激发起过往的教师和研究中学写作的研究员。故此，现时整领域缺少一个明确的焦点或方向。

(Abstract translated into Chinese by Shek Kam Tse.)

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French résumé Cette revue de question sur la composition à l'université comprend des recherches centrées sur l'étudiant-auteur, l'enseignant et les contextes d'écriture. La période examinée se caractérise par un " tournant social ", un effort pour situer l'auteur dans les contextes, social, politique ou autres, dans lesquels l'écriture et son enseignement prennent place. L'auteur constate que, au début du 21e siècle, la recherche sur la composition à l'université perd son caractère monolithique –comme la tradition de la " rhétorique classique " maintenant en grande partie abandonnée– qui a tant enthousiasmé les enseignants et les chercheurs dans le passé. En conséquence, ce domaine de recherche manque actuellement d'une centration, ou d'une orientation, claire.
(Abstract translated into French by Laurence Pasa.)
Mots clefs : composition à l'université, recherche en écriture

Portuguese resumo. Este levantamento da investigação sobre composição no ensino secundário divide o campo de análise em investigação centrada no estudante escrevente, no professor de composição no secundário e nos contextos de escrita. O período em análise é caracterizado pela "viragem social", um esforço para situar o escrevente em contextos sociais, políticos e todos os outros em que o ensino e a escrita têm lugar. O autor considera que, no início do século XXI, o domínio da composição no secundário não tem o carácter sólido – como, por exemplo, na tradição "retórica contemporânea" que foi agora largamente abandonada – que galvanizou professores e investigadores no passado. Por isso, falta neste campo um rumo ou focalização claros. (Abstract translated into Portuguese by Paulo Feytor Pinto)
Palavras-chave: composição no secundário; investigação sobre escrita

1. INTRODUCTION

When I started teaching at the University of Cincinnati in 1987, the library's composition and rhetoric holdings took up only a couple of shelves and included mainly classroom textbooks, many of them relics of what Berlin (1982) calls *current traditional* teaching – i.e., within the positivist perspective – from the 1950's and 1960's. Now, in 2004, the composition and rhetoric holdings require almost a full row of prime library real estate. The holdings now contain a much smaller proportion of textbooks and consist primarily of scholarly and theoretical texts. These texts often, but by no means always, focus in one way or another on the teaching and learning of written composition at the college level, as the field of writing research has gone far beyond a narrow focus on pedagogical concerns to address questions of literacy from rhetorical, philosophical, socio-cultural, political, gender studies, and historical perspectives, sometimes all in the same study. Even more research on literacy, mainly dealing with primary and secondary educational contexts, can be found in the library's education holdings, in addition to studies of organizational literacy in the business section. In the years since the mid-1980's, the number of book series and journals has grown dramatically, new presses focusing on many different aspects of literacy have appeared, and leading publishers have significantly expanded their lists.

The present essay will review the prodigious output of postsecondary studies from 1984 through 2003. Because one salient development in this period has been a sharp decline in empirical studies of writing at the postsecondary level, in favor of more humanisticially-grounded theoretical and critical work, I will also include such non-empirical studies in my review when they make an important contribution to the field. In addition, I will include pedagogical and programmatic works that draw substantively upon composition research. The chapter will examine the particular ways in which postsecondary composition inquiry has developed over the past twenty

years, investigating the topics, issues, and controversies that have dominated scholars' attention; the disparate theoretical and methodological frameworks writing specialists have employed in their investigations; and the ideas, events, and historical developments that have influenced work in this growing field. There exist numerous possible ways to organize a discussion of twenty years of research on writing: by methodology, by the theory governing the inquiry, by the topic of the study, or by chronological order, to name just a few. I have chosen to arrange the chapter according to how scholars working in the field over the years have constructed, and also problematized, the following key aspects of postsecondary writing: the student writer, the instructor, and the contexts for writing. In the sections that follow, I will cover each of these areas of inquiry in turn, concluding with some insights on what has been learned from these past 20 years of research and with a consideration of promising new areas of inquiry.

2. THE STUDENT WRITER

Little published work has thus far looked in a systematic way at the development of composition studies as an academic field, as opposed to the history of composition teaching, which has its own rich literature. With foundational texts, such as those of Britton (1970), Corbett (1965), Elbow (1973), Emig (1971), Kinneavy (1973), Murray (1968), and Shaughnessy (1977), appearing mainly in the late 1960's and 1970's, the field of composition studies simply is not yet old and venerable enough to have inspired a well-developed interest in its history. However, some historically oriented discussions have appeared (e.g., Harris, 1997; Lindemann & Tate, 1991; Tobin & Newkirk, 1994) usually by way of introducing a particular study or a new line of inquiry, or in publications introducing the field to newcomers. These discussions tend to describe the field of composition studies since the early 1980's as moving its focus from a cognitive examination of process to a more social, ethnographic, and political examination of context. This way of discussing "the social turn," as the move to examine context is generally known in composition studies, is, in my view, an oversimplification. Even in the headiest days of writing process pedagogy and research, many authors, including some process adherents, took a wider interest in the scenes of writing and showed a marked concern for the politics of writing instruction. And in the current climate of composition studies, which is dominated by political and social concerns, often to the exclusion of all aspects of pedagogy, an examination of individual writers and their processes is sometimes still a part of composition inquiry. Yet it is undeniable that, over time, social, political, and economic considerations have become more and more central in all areas of composition studies, and scholars have increasingly tended to define student writers in light of such considerations.

In her study of composition authors' representations of student writers, Helmers (1994) argues that composition specialists mainly define students in terms of their shortcomings. A reading of published work in composition in the decade following this book suggests that the rather negative ways of depicting students continue, yet with a certain difference. Before the social turn began to influence composition

scholarship in the late 1980's, the shortcomings highlighted by authors mainly had to do with writing and thinking skills, a certain lack of discipline and intellectual tenacity, and a tendency to conform and avoid risk. With the social turn and the increasing emphasis on political awareness and action, students' weaknesses are often portrayed as more ideological than academic, linguistic, or literary.

2.1 Academic Discourse

Much composition scholarship in the late 1970's and early 1980's focused on writing processes, but starting in the mid- to late-1980's, researchers began examining college students' initiation into academic discourses and ways of thinking. These studies built upon the foundation laid by process research to examine the demands of the specific writing tasks and situations students encountered in the university, and how they understood and coped with college writing generally. Some of the most important and lasting work in this area was influenced by the writing across the curriculum/writing in the disciplines movement, moving beyond a concern with first-year English composition to investigate students' experiences in other disciplines and provide a fuller picture of the college student as writer. With the exception of some survey studies that attempted to determine the type and extent of writing required in different disciplines (e.g., Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984), this work for the most part eschewed experimental methods in which student participants respond under controlled conditions to a prompt supplied by the researcher.

Instead, researchers typically adopted a more "naturalistic" approach influenced by qualitative and ethnographic methods just beginning to appear in literacy studies. For example, McCarthy (1987) documented the vastly differing writing assignments and expectations a first year student in a small private college encountered in English, biology, and history classes. Zooming in on one discipline and focusing more on students' approaches rather than possible shortcomings of instruction, North (1986) used a hermeneutic methodology to examine the journal writing of three students in a philosophy course, finding that students' preconceived notions and willingness to engage the subject matter greatly affected their ability to apply course concepts. Herrington (1985), using case study methodology, focused on the demands of writing in chemical engineering courses, again finding that instructors expected students to approach their writing very differently than they were taught to write essays in English, but often without giving students a clear sense of these differing expectations. Similarly, Chiseri-Strater (1991) contrasted two advanced undergraduate students' writing for an upper level composition course with the writing in the students' own majors, art history and political science, respectively, where students were expected to conform to narrow structural requirements and were often discouraged from drawing upon their own prior knowledge or interests in approaching writing tasks. The picture that emerges from these studies is one of some perplexity, as expectations are not clearly explained and the ground rules underlying teachers' evaluations are largely implicit.

Another set of studies attempts to understand how students approach the demands of particular kinds of writing activities across the college curriculum, what

types of learning writing can promote, and how instructors can best structure such activities. Walvoord (1986; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990; Walvoord, Hunt, Dowling, & McMahon, 1997) examined classes in a variety of academic disciplines in which she had worked with faculty on incorporating writing activities. Findings show that students work more effectively when task demands and expectations are explicit, assignments broken up as much as possible into discrete steps, and peer and group work incorporated. Greene studied students in a college history course (1993), a first year writing class (1995), and a history of science course (2001) to show the active meaning making strategies students employed in learning course subject matter and the ways in which writing activities substantially aided student learning. Mathison (1996) investigated writing of critiques in a sociology course, finding that students did better when basing their responses on disciplinary knowledge and close reading rather than on personal opinion.

Penrose and Sitko (1993) published an edited book of studies in the Flower and Hayes cognitivist tradition but rooted more in the analysis of actual classroom contexts and with a strong emphasis on pedagogical concerns. The chapters in this book depict college student writers as complex problem solvers and focus on such areas of cognitive analysis as the rhetoric of reading, writing, and learning, using secondary sources in writing, research processes, collaborative writing, audience awareness, and student-teacher conferences. Of particular note is Nelson's investigation of research writing (see also 1990), in which she examined ways in which students, desiring a compact and efficient writing process, subverted activities intended to require complex critical thinking by finessing the more difficult steps.

Following upon North's (1986) initial foray, several further investigators have examined student writing in philosophy. Fishman and McCarthy (1992, 1995, 1996, 1998; McCarthy & Fishman, 1991), employ a Deweyan perspective to examine how students, through writing, reading, and discussion, find ways to make philosophical concepts meaningful and valuable in their own lives and education. The authors use case studies to uncover the most effective ways of helping even the most potentially alienated and uninterested students, who view the class as merely a requirement to survive and check off on the way to graduation, to engage with course material. Geisler (1996) focused more on how students learned the disciplinary and procedural knowledge needed to write acceptable arguments and interpretations in philosophy, contrasting advanced graduate students and first-year college students to see how philosophers develop an authoritative voice in philosophical argument.

While literacy researchers such as Fishman and McCarthy, Walvoord, and Greene continue to investigate the teaching and learning of writing across disciplines, the great bulk of research on college students and their writing is located in the field of English, and most still centers on the first-year composition course. A number of composition scholars have examined ways in which writing in general and the composition class in particular can serve as a vehicle for students' personal and intellectual development, self-understanding, and creative expression. For example, a series of studies by Newkirk (1984, 1995, 1997) explores the uses of what could be called a student-centered pedagogy, in which students come up with their own topics for writing, meet frequently with the teacher and with fellow peers to develop and hone their texts, and are encouraged to write about what is most impor-

tant to them. In his work from the mid-1980's, Newkirk shows that students evaluate student writing very differently than their composition instructors, and he argues that teachers need to be very explicit about their expectations if they wish to have students provide peer feedback. Newkirk (1997) employs Goffman's (1959) notion of the various "masks" that people employ to display themselves in public to examine how students approach personal writing tasks, arguing that students do their best thinking and writing on personally meaningful material. Tobin (1991, 2003) examines a very similar pedagogical approach but from a more psychoanalytic perspective, arguing that the teacher-student relationship is fraught with conflict, sexual tension, and competition.

2.2 Writing Development

Several other scholars examine student writers using a developmental lens. These authors compiled years of data on students' writing that they examined systematically and with clear theoretical frameworks. Each seems eager to put as positive a spin on students' writing and intellectual development as possible, in part to counter negative representations of student writers from both inside and outside the field. Haswell (1991) takes a mainly academic and linguistic approach, investigating mainstream, middle-class, mainly white students' mastery of writing conventions and sentence level features. His longitudinal study does show, however, that even after students master a difficult construction and move on to try something new or wrestle with complicated points, they are likely to revert back to earlier mistakes, at least temporarily.

Sternglass (1997), longtime writing director at City College of New York, has a political purpose that she explicitly acknowledges and defends in her book, a detailed study of open admission students' writing and learning at CCNY. Working in part to counter the accusations of widespread failure of students of color at City College (e.g., Traub's (1994) critique of remedial instruction in which he recommends that such instruction be eliminated from the college), and the very real pressure from city officials to disband her program, Sternglass provides a much more positive depiction of student efforts. She shows, focusing closely on one particular student, that even those from very underprivileged backgrounds, with little previous success in school, and with very demanding out of school situations, can make enormous strides in their writing and learning. Even if their writing may often still lack certain features of polished academic prose, such as perfect sentence level correctness, Sternglass argues that such is often the case with middle class students who began the journey with far less distance to cover.

Herrington and Curtis (2000; Curtis & Herrington, 2003) focus mainly on personal development and its interrelationship with college writing in their long-term study of four students' varied experiences in college. The authors examine a gay male with a background of abuse, a woman whose father was an alcoholic, a Vietnamese immigrant, and a fiercely independent African American from a working class, Spanish speaking, immigrant background. Herrington and Curtis thoroughly examine how students' backgrounds, personalities, interests, emotions, and relation-

ships affected their college writing, as well as how the writing helped students develop a sustaining personal identity.

2.3 Politics, Culture, and Student Writers

The social turn in composition might be said to begin with Bartholomae's (1985) close reading of entering college students' placement essays. Bartholomae argues that students writing a placement essay must recreate, or invent, the university as an academic discourse community, not so much in terms of sentence level conventions as through the types of arguments they make and the attitude of budding expertise they convey. He shows how the strongest student writers put forward commonplaces that they go on to problematize, arguing that this way of dealing with complexity characterizes intellectual work in the academy. Bartholomae's work represents a social view of students as beginners attempting to enter an unfamiliar and in some ways unwelcoming discourse community; he argues that students typically put forward Herculean efforts to write the way they think college instructors wish them to.

Soon after the appearance of Bartholomae's (1985) essay, a more politically oriented brand of inquiry began to appear in composition studies. This work was influenced by work in the larger field of English studies drawing upon Marxist criticism (including Paolo Friere's pioneering discussion of the teaching of critical consciousness to Brazilian peasants, 1970), as well as British socialist Raymond Williams' analysis of socialism, class, and capitalist society, (1958), cultural studies' radical critiques of the educational system (e.g. Giroux, 1983, 1988), and poststructuralist theory (e.g., Berlin, 1988; Brodkey, 1987; Brooke, 1987; Chase, 1988; Paine, 1989). These studies position the student in a first year writing course, not as disadvantaged him or herself, but rather as a somewhat privileged middle class person in need of greater awareness about social inequities and improved ways of critiquing dominant discourse for the purpose of uncovering such inequities and helping to effect change. Typically abstract and theoretical in their presentations, these authors occasionally cite examples from their own classrooms, but they almost entirely avoid systematic empirical analysis of the politicized classroom approaches they advocate. While the authors, to varying degrees, take pains to argue that they wish to develop students' critical faculties, not to indoctrinate them to a particular ideology, these authors are clearly eager to, in the words of one writer, "influence (perhaps manipulate is the more accurate word) students' values through charisma or power" and "inculcate into our students the conviction that the dominant order is repressive" (Paine, 1989, p. 564).

A plethora of articles and books appear at the beginning of the 1990's exploring the radical composition class and the student's role in it, a movement in composition studies that continues to the present day. Several edited collections early in the decade examine the intersections of writing and politics and declare the need to expose students to progressive views, even, in some cases, to try to move students away from conservative, consumerist attitudes. Hurlbert and Blitz's (1991) collection contains essays by leading scholars along with transcripts of their discussions on literacy and politics from a day-long workshop devoted to radical pedagogy at the Con-

ference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Chapters discuss various possible approaches to introducing students to oppositional thinking, critical discourse, and questioning of the status quo within the context of the composition classroom.

The contributors to Berlin and Vivion's (1992) edited collection consider ways of using cultural studies theories imported from Britain's Birmingham School (e.g. Hall & Jefferson, 1976) to help bring students to consciousness. Bullock and Trimbur's (1991) edited book envisions the kinds of activities and approaches that a progressive composition course could embody. Individual chapters consider such aspects of composition as grading, curriculum development, program administration, the academic job market, writing across the curriculum, women's struggles as both students and teachers, and basic writing issues. Bizzell (1992) speaks for a number of radical or critical pedagogy advocates when she describes her primary purpose in teaching her students at an expensive Catholic college, "to interest them in a social justice project for which they may not presently see any compelling reason" (p. 30). Harkin and Schilb's (1991) edited collection applies postmodern and feminist theory to the writing classroom in order to argue for a more politically focused pedagogy.

Throughout the 1990's up to the present, following these early, groundbreaking works, a great many journal articles, edited collections, and single-authored books have focused on the explicitly political composition class. Many of these studies consider students' receptivity to such pedagogy and argue for addressing more directly students' reactionary tendencies. The specific view of politics advocated is rarely spelled out in elaborate detail but generally involves an acknowledgement of middle class privilege; a critique of consumerism; an awareness of class, race, and gender discrimination; a willingness to question injustice; and a desire to try to correct inequities (Berlin, 1996; Brodkey, 1996; Fitts & France, 1995; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993; Shor, 1992, 1996; Sullivan & Qualley, 1994). Other salient politically oriented publications from the 1990's include Mortenson and Kirsch's (1993) examination of authority in writing; Fishman and McCarthy's (1996) presentation of a progressive pedagogy based on Dewey's educational philosophy but applied to critical thinking and learning in college; and Cushman's (1996) discussion of the rhetorician as an agent of social change and the implications of this view for literacy instruction at all levels.

In more recent years, this emphasis on the classroom as a political space and on students as in need of exposure to progressive views has continued. Prominent studies include Bizzell's (1997) article on a first-year English curriculum using documents discussing cross-cultural contact, conflict, and resolution throughout American history to teach progressive forms of persuasive discourse; Anderson (1997) on composition teaching as confrontation between progressive teacher and conservative student; Adler-Kassner (1998) and Spiegelman (1998) redefining the notion of student "ownership" of their writing in a more political context; Welsh (2001) on resistance theory and composition teaching; Trainor (2002) on helping middle class composition students deal with their "whiteness"; Herndl and Bauer (2003) on using liberation theology in composition instruction to show how marginal groups, such as oppressed minorities, can change society; and Roberts-Miller (2003) on the philosophy of communitarianism as a composition pedagogy. All of these publications rep-

resent students as comfortable, advantaged, and in need of a serious wake-up call to recognize their own privilege and to work to make society more fair and equitable. Further investigations have examined issues affecting female (Kirsch, Maor, Massey, Nickoson-Massey, and Sheridan-Rabideau, 2003), African American (Gilyard, 1999), working class (Lindquist, 1999), and gay and lesbian students (Malinowitz, 1995).

Another set of studies has questioned the value of such confrontational pedagogy. Durst (1999) looked empirically at first-year students in a politically oriented English class and found students extremely resistant to the views advocated by the instructor and the course reader, entitled *Rereading America* (Colombo, Cullen, & Lisle, 1989). Students sought and found ways of choosing topics that allowed them to avoid the political subject matter at the center of the course. He advocates a pedagogical theory known as *reflective instrumentalism*, in which the instructor accepts students' desire to gain practical skills and certification, but then works to add a critical dimension to students' pragmatic views. Smith (1997), and Durst (2003) also critique confrontational pedagogies as ineffective and alienating, and offer alternative approaches.

3. THE TEACHER

Research on postsecondary writing instruction over the past twenty years shows the teacher of composition moving, at times uneasily, between a focus on theory and one on praxis, between the conflicting roles of gatekeeper and liberator, indoctrinator of institutional values and iconoclastic social critic, supportive writing coach and confrontational advocate of an opposing world view. Theories of pedagogy emphasizing political awareness and action, a quest for social justice, and an emphasis on equality for the less privileged have dominated the field since their introduction in the late 1980's. Rather than focusing primarily on developing writing abilities, the curriculum increasingly calls upon instructors to develop in students—through reading, writing, critical thinking, and discussion—a certain sensibility, a way of looking at the world or disposition of mind in which the student writer is taught a commitment to community service, an awareness of inequities, a critical stance toward authority, and a questioning nature regarding established ways of thinking. This political emphasis in the teaching of writing has changed over the past decade and a half with the evolution of the social turn in composition studies. Teachers also wrestle with marginal status in current studies of composition, as adjuncts or graduate student lacking institutional power or security, or in terms of their ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

It is perhaps a measure of how greatly the field of composition studies has changed over the past two decades that, presently, studies examining or comparing specific instructional approaches make up a surprisingly small part of composition inquiry. The field is currently dominated by articles and books that relate writing to social forces and institutions outside the academy and has been for about a decade and a half. But Hillocks (1986) focused approximately three quarters of his 369-page review of writing research on studies of classroom instruction. His quantitative

meta-analysis of research on composition teaching found that an *environmental* approach emphasizing direct instruction of specific writing skills led to significantly more improvement, as indicated by traditional measures of writing assessment, than a *natural process* approach emphasizing student-selected topics and personal experience writing with minimal teacher interference, or other approaches.

3.1 Politics and Writing Instructors

Berlin (1988) expanded upon his concept of *epistemic rhetoric* in his effort to reveal the political realities of writing instruction. He had originally viewed this rhetorical approach as a way of looking at writing and the teaching of writing as not simply about recording reality but about using language to create that reality and to make sense of the world. In this essay, "epistemic" has become "social epistemic" and now refers to a rhetoric and to a writing classroom that "offers an explicit critique of economic, political, and social arrangements" (p. 490). More explicitly political than his previous discussions of the teaching of writing, Berlin argues here for a course whose subject matter is social inequities and students' implication in an unjust system. Berlin argues that "[e]very pedagogy is imbricated in ideology" and that "the point of this classroom is that the liberated consciousness of students is the only educational objective worth considering" (p. 492), setting the stage for a major shift in emphasis for composition studies as a field. Entering the 1990's, the intertwining of politics with the teaching and learning of college composition is becoming a central topic of pedagogical inquiry and discussion.

Since then, composition scholars have increasingly argued that the teacher needs to be more and more concerned with a broad array of social, cultural, political, and economic factors. Numerous pedagogical studies, articles, and books have constructed the classroom as a political space in which the teacher has as a primary responsibility the task of introducing students to larger social issues. In the Afterword of Bizzell's (1992) collected essays, she asks the question, "What is to be done?" She answers that "[s]tudents can be encouraged to see themselves as moral agents" and adds, "I want to range over the values my students are exploring and try to find those that could be used persuasively to turn students to my egalitarian values" (p. 292). Bizzell's pedagogy here comprises a reading and writing curriculum involving analysis of materials in United States history that document situations in which different groups came into contact and conflict and "there was a plurality of contending voices" (p. 293), to show that "Americans have very often been concerned about social justice, that if we do not often achieve it, neither can we forget about it" (p. 294). While allowing students to attempt to persuade her with their own "discriminatory views", she argues that the composition teacher must be willing to "prophecy for social justice" (p. 295).

Thus, in these early years of the social turn in composition studies, scholars were struggling to figure out how best to develop a "social justice" curriculum that would enhance students' literacy. Several authors consider feminist approaches, such as Lamb's (1991) discussion of less confrontational methods of argumentation and Jarratt's (1991) opposing argument that students who resist feminist approaches

should be confronted about their views by teacher and fellow students. Other gender oriented work includes Bauer (1990) on feminist notions of classroom authority, in which she argues that "political commitment—especially feminist commitment—is a legitimate classroom strategy and rhetorical imperative" as "the feminist agenda offers a goal toward our students' conversions to emancipatory critical action" (p. 389). Additional feminist oriented publications from the early 1990's include Hollis (1992) on feminist pedagogy in the writing workshop, and a Braddock Award winning piece on the nature of authority in writing (Mortensen & Kirsch, 1993) which advocates teaching a more inclusive, less oppositional notion of authority. Fitts and France's (1995) collection includes several chapters discussing feminist approaches, including Wise on "hands-on feminism" and Rosenthal on feminist approaches to collaborative writing. More recently, investigations have examined the many contributions to the field by African-American composition teachers and scholars, as well as the difficulties facing such instructors (Royster & Williams, 1999; Smitherman, 1999). Smitherman's study focuses on the role of African American compositionists, including, prominently, herself, in the development of the CCCC policy statement on Students' Right to their Own Language, in the mid-1970's.

3.2 Cultural Studies

Many in composition, beginning in the early 1990's, championed a pedagogy of cultural studies in the writing class. George and Trimbur (2001) review the scholarship on cultural studies and the teaching of composition. This pedagogy is influenced by Frankfurt School theoreticians Adorno, Benjamin, and Horkheimer (see Arato & Gebhardt, 1978), British scholars such as Williams (1958), and their American counterparts Grossberg (1997), Johnson (1987), and Ross (1988). As an academic movement, cultural studies proponents sought to re-define culture away from its elite and exclusive sense or as a high-low binary, while taking seriously the cultural pursuits of everyday people and showing the relation of those pursuits to people's social class consciousness. A cultural studies approach to composition thus focuses upon cultural artifacts such as popular music, art, film, television, architecture, advertising, and other forms of consumption, as well as other aspects of culture such as work, politics, gender, and race relations. Students read, explore, and write about the nature and significance of these cultural artifacts.

Primary advocates of cultural studies in composition include Trimbur (1989), who was the first to link these two fields by focusing on the history of working class access to higher education and attitudes of the elite toward this access. Berlin (1991; Berlin & Vivion, 1992) used cultural studies theory to interrogate the discipline of English, which historically has privileged literature while keeping rhetoric subordinate. And rhetoric, Berlin argues, properly used can help empower students to become aware of social inequities through a cultural studies approach and then question and fight the status quo. Several other composition specialists examine cultural studies through the lens of postmodernist theory (Faigley, 1992; Harkin & Schilb, 1991; Schilb, 1996), with its critique of modernist epistemology.

3.3 Collaboration

From the mid-1980's a substantial number of studies have examined collaborative writing in the composition class and the teacher's role in shaping and engaging in the collaborative process. This sub-area began with Bruffee's (1984) use of epistemic rhetorical theory to argue for the importance of talk and interaction, the social dimension of language use, in developing written meaning. This early work mainly stressed the benefits of paired and group discussion in helping writers figure out what they wanted to say and how best to say it, through forms of written and oral feedback and interaction that stressed peer review and reciprocal feedback (Forman, 1992; Gere, 1987; LeFevre, 1987). In addition, a rather substantial body of work discussed the nature and benefits of collaborative writing, as a way of helping students learn to work constructively with peers and consolidate different perspectives in a piece of writing (Ede & Lunsford, 1990).

But fairly early on, as part of the incipient social turn in composition studies, some began to look critically at what they viewed as an undertheorized and overly positive assessment of collaboration. As the composition class was beginning to be theorized as a site where political ideas and beliefs were to be expressed and assessed, Bruffee's (1984) emphasis on agreement and resolving differences seemed problematic. Trimbur (1988) was the first to argue that current approaches to collaboration too strongly emphasized consensus and unanimity of view, suggesting that for collaboration to be most beneficial, opportunities for disagreement and expression of divergent ideas need to be built in. The critical tradition he established was followed by Harris's (1989) rejection of the term "community" in favor of the less consensus-driven idea of the city, and his view of the classroom as a site where dissensus is not only tolerated but encouraged and explored. Other critical analyses of collaboration were published by Bleich (1995) and Ervin and Fox (1994).

Spiegelman (1998) examines the concept of ownership in the context of peer review groups, arguing that, depending in part on specific economic and social conditions, student writers tend to vacillate between an individual and a communal perspective on authorship, leading to ambivalence about the very idea of working in peer groups. Yancey and Spooner (1998) consider the disconnect between composition studies's celebration of student collaborative work and the institutional structures of academia that often discourage or forbid it. Howard (1999) investigates evolving notions of plagiarism, considering both teachers' and students' attitudes and approaches toward incorporating other voices in their writing. In addition, a review essay by Howard (2001) surveys developments in collaborative pedagogy. On the whole, work in this area is a microcosm of the larger field, illustrating the move from a focus on using collaboration to help students get stronger feedback and improve their writing to an emphasis on the politics of collaboration, the benefits of disagreement and dispute, and the dangers of consensus.

3.4 Critical Pedagogy

The most common depiction of the college composition instructor in published work over the past 15 years is as a critical teacher, shaping students' literacy, intellectual,

and cultural development through pedagogies of social justice and political analysis. Much influenced by Dewey's (1916) pedagogy of progressive education and Friere's (1970) Marxist approach to helping Brazilian peasant farmers learn basic literacy, critical pedagogy as applied in the United States takes as its instructional goal the raising of students' consciousness of their social and political situatedness. In one popular approach, Shor (1992, 1996) and other proponents (e.g. Bizzell, 1992; Hooks, 1994; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993; McLaren, 1989) advocate organizing a nontraditional classroom in which students work with the teacher to develop curriculum and set class rules and procedures. The class subject matter as laid down by the teacher focuses on aspects of culture and politics, such as fast food consumption or patterns of employment, but students decide collectively how to organize their own work in the course and even how it should be evaluated. The idea is to empower students to take responsibility for their own learning, and while doing so, to teach not only reading, writing, and thinking, but also a more critical, sophisticated political analysis and a higher level of engagement in action for social change.

4. CONTEXTS

This section looks at contextual factors affecting postsecondary writing, focusing in particular on three important areas of study: assessment, technology, and the academy itself as an institutional and cultural setting for college writing.

4.1 Assessment

Evaluating the quality of student writing, whether as a placement strategy, during a course, or at the exit point, has been and remains a major part of writing instructors' activity and researchers' inquiry. A core group of specialists publish regularly in this area, and important advances, such as the multiple uses of portfolios (Black, Daiker, Sommers, & Stygall, 1994; Daiker, Sommers, & Stygall, 1996) and development of new approaches to teacher response (Broad, 2003), have taken place in the past twenty years. Yet composition scholars, particularly those who focus on pedagogy, often show considerable discomfort with the emphasis upon assessment. Negative associations with the act of evaluating for the purpose of grading are common, such as Belanoff's (1991) reference to grading as "the dirty thing we do in the dark of our offices" (p. 61). Indeed, one often stated benefit of portfolio assessment is that grading can be deferred until late in a course and students can ostensibly focus instead on developing as writers and thinkers, without being distracted by worrying about the dreaded grade. Other scholars have countered that students' concerns about assessment are never far below the surface, no matter how much instructors seek to deemphasize grading, and that evaluation anxiety may be most intense in courses that offer the least feedback on student performance (e.g., Tobin, 1991). Two major reviews of published work in writing assessment have appeared in recent years (Huot, 2002; Yancey, 1999). Salient developments in the field of writing assessment in the past two decades, in addition to studies of portfolios and teacher response as mentioned above, include recent attempts to place assessment in wider social, political,

and pedagogical contexts (Gleason, 2000); critical examination of the role and meaning of reliability and validity in assessment (Yancey, 1999); continued analysis of techniques for holistic scoring (White, 1995); and increasing discussion of reflection as a learning and self-assessment strategy (Yancey, 1998).

4.2 Technology

Research in this area has mainly focused on the increasingly diverse uses of – and larger issues surrounding – computer technology in composition. Over the past twenty years, a steady stream of technological developments has thrust computers into an ever more prominent role in the teaching, learning, and uses of literacy. The journal *Computers and Composition* has been presenting this work since 1983. The new technology – from ever more efficient forms of word processing to computerized classrooms, e-mail, chatrooms, MOOs, listservs, bulletin boards, distance learning systems, digitalized archives, online data bases, and the myriad web applications – has created major transformations in the environments in which people read, write, and learn. At the same time, the growing importance of computer-based applications has had implications not just for practice but also for the dominant theories of literacy, and technological development has raised numerous social, political, and pedagogical questions for literacy scholars to investigate. An overview of this scholarship by Selfe and Selfe (2002) outlines the major theories and key studies on technology-related topics, and this section of the current chapter draws heavily upon the authors' synthesis. An historical analysis of computers and the teaching of writing in American higher education from the mid-1990's also provides a valuable frame of reference with which to understand technological developments and their impact on literacy pedagogy (Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran, & Selfe, 1996).

Critical analysis of practical applications for computer technology, both inside and outside the classroom, constitutes a large and important strand of inquiry, as writers and readers are using forms of this technology in more and more contexts. Pedagogical possibilities in computerized college classrooms and labs are the focus of numerous studies (Bruce, Peyton, & Batson, 1993; Castner, 1997; Faigley, 1992;). Other works examine the intersection of technology and the writing center, including the development of online centers for students who cannot or choose not to be physically present for a tutorial (Coogan, 1999; Inman & Sewell, 2000; Selfe, 1995). Another body of work investigates distance learning environments (Reisman, Flores, & Edge, 2003; Stacy, Goodman, & Stubbs, 1996). Web-based writing and reading activities are an increasingly critical area of inquiry (Gresham, 1999; Gruber, 2000). Many studies center specifically on the nature and role of e-mail, listservs, and MOOs in literacy teaching, learning, and/or use (Blair, 1996; Moran, 1994; Porter, 1998).

Another large set of studies examines social and political issues surrounding the relation among literacy, technology, and pedagogy. Many of these works focus on questions of access to technology and explore the issue of the "digital divide" in which low-income people, including a disproportionate number of people of color, and, to a certain extent, women, face barriers to their use of the more sophisticated

technical applications. The literature on gender, literacy, and technology includes a rapidly growing body of work, much of which looks not at access but at the distinctive uses many girls and women are making of new technical capabilities (Hawisher & Sullivan, 1998; Sullivan, 1997). Other studies focus on racial and socioeconomic class issues in technology and literacy (Moran & Selfe, 1999; Taylor, 1997). A related body of research investigates the intersection of sexual orientation, technology, and literacy, looking at the distinctive online communicative forms, discussion venues, and means of self-disclosure gay and lesbian students have developed (Alexander, 1997, 2002; Banks, 2003; DeWitt, 1997; Spurlin, 2000).

5. CONCLUSION

Looking back over the past twenty years of composition scholarship, I would argue that the field presently finds itself in something of a rut. With a broad consensus on the most effective teaching methods, few composition specialists seriously challenge the approaches put forward by writing process adherents in the 1970's and 1980's, continuing to emphasize prewriting, revision, collaboration, conferencing, and critical reading. The perennial debates over such matters as the use of literature and the value of personal writing in the composition class still spark occasional discussion in the professional journals, but the debate has lingered too long to be called a controversy. Similarly, to judge from published work, composition specialists have largely accepted the social turn in the field, regularly organizing courses around (and publishing works on) topics of political and cultural import and linking their courses with service and community work. In addition, many compositionists protest developments outside the field that affect what we do, such as the increasing reliance on standardized testing in American education; the growth of non-tenure track faculty positions in the academy; and attacks on minority access to higher education at CCNY and elsewhere. Yet presently, the field lacks a defining feature or powerful orthodoxy within composition studies to work against, such as current-traditional teaching or the cognitive emphasis. And in the past, it has been the idea of working against an oppressive status quo that most strongly motivated composition scholars to develop exciting new interpretations and approaches.

However, despite the lack of major shifts in the landscape, some smaller fissures are evident. One promising area connects composition and the interdisciplinary field of disability studies. Recent publications focus on student writers with a variety of disabilities and examine ways in which the academy and the larger society construct and stigmatize disability. Many, though not all, scholars working in disability either have a disability themselves or have a family member with a disability, and much of the most powerful and compelling work in disability includes a reflective, autobiographical component which moves toward interpretation and theory. Two such scholars stand out. A leading literary researcher as well as a disability theorist, Lennard Davis, the hearing son of deaf parents, has published a memoir (2000) and an edited collection of essays on theories of disability (1997). A composition researcher working in the area of deafness, and a hearing impaired person herself, Brenda Brueggemann, has published a study exploring writing pedagogy and disability

(2001) and an essay arguing that increased awareness of disability in composition studies can productively disrupt conventional notions of writing while challenging normal/not normal binaries (Brueggemann, White, Dunn, Heifferon, & Cheu, 2001). Other studies examine visible physical disability (Mossman, 2002), learning disability (White, 2002), and embodiment theory and disability (Wilson & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2001). Given the increasing awareness of disability, work in this promising area seems to be only scratching the surface.

Another noteworthy trend is the growing internationalization of composition studies, as scholars seek to place theory and practice of American college writing in a larger global context. While Muchiri, Mulamba, Myers, and Ndoli examined the teaching and learning of academic writing in African universities in a Braddock Award winning 1995 CCC article, more recently a host of other publications on postsecondary writing throughout the world have appeared. I will simply mention two noteworthy books originating on different sides of the Atlantic. David Foster and David Russell's 2002 edited collection discusses college writing curricula, preparation, and expectations in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and by doing so sheds light on U.S. composition contexts. Three British scholars, Carys Jones, Joan Turner, and Brian Street, edited a 1999 book which contrasts European and American perspectives on academic writing. Members of the writing special interest group of the European Association of Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI) have published a book series on writing studies since 1996 with Amsterdam University Press and Kluwer Academic Press. While European critical theories have long held significant influence in U.S. literary and literacy studies, it is time United States scholars increased their awareness of the growing body of research on writing in international contexts.

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