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Evolving outcomes of the outcomes statement

Judith Miriam Holiday

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Evolving Outcomes of the Outcomes Statement

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Judith Miriam Holiday
June 2006
EVOLVING OUTCOMES OF THE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis rhetorically analyzes the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (OS), a document outlining curricular content of FYC. The OS’s primary purpose, to define and thus “regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition” (OS intro), emerged from a need to address a conspicuous lack of curricular consensus with regard to first-year composition both within and across postsecondary institutions. Analysis shows that the OS does not accomplish its mission because the document can be interpreted from both modernist and postmodern perspectives. In chapter one, the author sets a context for her analysis by chronicling the history of composition in order to describe the construction of its disciplinary knowledge and its theoretical transition from a modern to a postmodern orientation to language. The history also reveals that while composition theory changed, its pedagogy remained largely informed by its modernist origins as a service to the institution. Chapter two rhetorically analyzes the OS through the lens of postmodern theory in order to determine whether it fulfills its intention to both regularize and ensure the currency of composition
instruction. Rhetorical analysis reveals that it does not. Though postmodern undertones permeate the document, a lack of a clearly articulated postmodern context in both its introduction and subsequent four sections renders it easily interpretable from a purely modernist perspective. The author argues that since all praxis inheres theory, no unified praxis can be construed from a document filled with two competing discourses, unless a clear postmodern context is established as the superset. Chapter three discusses the analysis and offers suggestions for revision. Chapter four calls to compositionists to claim their disciplinary knowledge and to revise the OS by providing it with a unified theoretical rationale, actions that will prove to be especially significant and valuable within a current political climate that is attacking and encroaching upon the public space of the academy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first thank my parents, Carl and Wilma. Upon reflection, I am grateful for their having been my primary discourse; as a young child I was treated with reason and respect, and they exposed me and my siblings to thousands of secondary discourses, thanks to their tremendous eclectic interests, frenetic energy, broad assortment of friends and acquaintances, and affluence. This exposure has privileged me in many ways. I also thank them for their continued support of my formal education and for the educational and ethical ideals they introduced to me. Thank you, Mom, for taking me with you — as soon as I could write my name and was thus eligible for a library card — weekly to the public library to choose my own books while you chose yours.

Second, I thank my many faculty mentors — Mary, Carol, Ellen, Ron, Jackie, and Sunny — who have modeled and encouraged the educational ideals I had only imagined existed. Creating an environment of easy acceptance and respect, they encouraged my intellectual self, and gave me a language to express that self. In true social-constructionist fashion, I can say that, due to them, my best self — the one who is kind, curious, intellectually
rigorous and just—finds herself stronger and more confident. Whatever positive qualities I brought with me when I entered their instruction have been greatly augmented because of their tutelage. I only hope to carry on their tradition, for it has taught me the degree to which education is intertwined with the construction of the social individual. Knowing how much all my mentors have offered me, I must single out Mary whose mentoring went far, far beyond the call of duty and whose advice is expert, sound, and far-sighted. Mary: I am so fortunate to have been on the receiving end of your attention! And lastly, I must thank my love, my husband Michael, who always recognized my very best self even when she was still hidden, entranced, angry, and often unrecognized by others. Michael is my greatest fan, and I thank him for epitomizing self restraint and emotional support during my M.A. Subordinating his personal needs to mine, he treated the closed office door as sacrosanct and never interrupted my studies except to bring me water or a cup of tea, and I thank him also for grinning and bearing the forfeiture of our already insufficient "together time" in deference to my graduate work.
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CHAPTER ONE

COMPOSITION HISTORY: MORE MODERN THAN NOT

In 2000, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) adopted a document that many of its members worked on—the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (OS). Arising from a perceived need to address the lack of curricular consensus that typically marks composition programs within and across postsecondary institutions, this document purports to define and “regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition,” and outlines a general curricular framework that incorporates “the knowledge derived from several decades of research and practice in composition” (OS intro). Although the Outcomes Statement posits general goals describing what students exiting FYC should “know,” “understand,” and “be able to

1This lack of uniformity creates problems for transfer articulations that other disciplines do not seem to face. For example, a student who successfully passes basic algebra in one school may transfer to another school and receive transfer credit for the course, having learned the same algebraic fundamentals as any other American college student. Yet the same does not hold true for FYC courses whose content vary widely across a modern/postmodern continuum, including anything from a modes-based curriculum to a postmodern critical curriculum.
do,” the document does not prescribe specific curricular content. Its framers, a shifting collective of sixty-or-so writing program administrators (WPAs), known as the Outcomes Collective, wanted the OS to be flexible enough to accommodate varying course content, levels of achievement, and pedagogies (Rhodes et al. 11-12). The collective also understood that as a universally required course, FYC should contain universal objectives, and they worked to identify fundamentals and concepts that all students should learn in FYC, recognizing “the unpleasant fact [that] the term first-year composition varied widely in meaning” (Rhodes et al. 12). WPAs also understood the exigency for consensus: “if we couldn’t agree what first-year composition should be, how could we ever account for what we do?” (Rhodes et al. 12).

Consistency, the Outcomes Collective understood, would protect the field in two ways. For one, the description of the primary substance of FYC constructs composition as a discipline with its own specific knowledge construction. By sanctioning it as such, the Outcomes Collective sought to ensure the integrity of the field as well as the currency of instruction. Additionally, the declaration of disciplinary knowledge secures academic freedom by
protecting members of the profession from bullying by outside forces. Disciplinarity offers the “strength of professional validation” (10) as a defense against “nearly all ‘outsiders,’” who “believe the best approach to better writing is more grammar” and who “have a fundamentally different understanding of writing than [we] do” (15).

With their mission to thus “regularize” FYC without reducing it to a simplified curriculum and a lockstep approach that would deny instructors’ individual academic freedom, the Outcomes Collective chose to define general curricular outcomes but not standards or teaching methods, a choice discussed in The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement. According to the book’s contributors, outcomes, unlike standards, do not prescribe levels of achievement. Rather, outcomes allow for an understanding that students nationwide enter FYC with differing writing, reading, and literacy competencies and, therefore, standards should be established by individual institutions. According to WPA Ed White, the framers also chose not to outline pedagogical methods because “no one wanted to remove teacher initiative or creativity from the classroom” (6).
In trying to preserve academic freedom, the framers did not want to dictate curricula, but in their caution they thus failed to address the central question of what the purpose of FYC is or should be. This question remains an issue of disagreement in the composition community. Although six years have passed since the adoption of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, during which time many institutions have used it to (re)assess their writing programs and as a template for their writing curricula, current conversations on the WPA listserv (WPA-L) illustrate that the goals and objectives of FYC (and even its very existence as a required course) continue to be hotly and roundly debated. One listserv participant wisely pointed out that perhaps "we have not done a very good job of defining or conceiving the problem(s) that we are trying to address in FYC instruction. A poor definition or conception of a problem tends to produce poor solutions" (Schwalm).

This Master's thesis rhetorically analyzes the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, and my analysis demonstrates that the OS fails to unify FYC because the framers avoided addressing the central underlying question of what the purpose of first-year
composition should be. Though Rhodes et al. declare that "[t]hose of us who worked on the statement quickly found that our goals for our students diverged far less than anything else about us, from theoretical viewpoints to pedagogical methods," (15), their statement contradicts itself by implying that it is possible to accomplish identical goals employing varying theoretical viewpoints and teaching methods. Since how and why we teach influence the content and outcome of what we teach, we may expect that opposing theoretical viewpoints and teaching methods give rise to different curricula. This situation arose because the framers dodged the central issue of FYC, an issue that has forged and continues to shape FYC and composition history: is the philosophical goal of FYC service or agency? In other words, should FYC primarily act as a service to the institution to acculturate students to academic discourse and standard written English or should it act as an agent to cultivate students' communicative autonomy and their rhetorical awareness of

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FYC is not required for all students at all institutions. Most schools allow students to test out of FYC by attaining a certain score on the SAT, ACT, or Advanced Placement (AP) test in English. This institutional system continues to construct FYC as a course of remediation.
communicative tasks, whatever they may entail? Within composition studies, the answers to this question have largely depended upon whether one takes a modernist or a postmodernist view of language and rhetoric.

Unfortunately, by leaving this open to interpretation from various perspectives, the framers inadvertently created the conditions to undermine the very academic freedom that they wanted to protect. The history of composition provides a basis for understanding how this could happen. It also suggests that the subject of composition, including that of FYC classes, should be understood to include a disciplinary knowledge grounded in a postmodern orientation to language.

Supplying one’s reader with context early on in a thesis is, of course, a convention of such a genre, but I would like to purposefully foreground the concept of context because most contemporary language studies insist on a postmodern appreciation of language use as a social act always imbricated in meaning making, and meaning making, of course, always relies upon a context. Whether in the area of reception theory, reader-response theory, pragmatics, second language acquisition or the importance of student engagement, context drives meaning making. We
know that even when no context is given, the "reader" (listener, viewer, or what-have-you) will supply context in order to make meaning. From the constructivist perspective, everything we learn is filtered through our prior knowledge/subject constructs, or in the case of cognitivism, through our memory. As individual and social beings we, as "funds of knowledge,"3 are ineluctably shaped by what has come before. Nothing is truly decontextualized.

The OS also can be read as a collective fund of knowledge shaped by FYC's history as an institutional service designed to acculturate "remedial" students to writing for the academy. Despite the OS framers' assertion that they wanted to encourage academic freedom and avoid dictating the explicit terms of pedagogy, their framework ultimately lends itself to modernist interpretations of the field, at the expense of postmodern possibilities. This is particularly true in light of the fact that the document is designed to speak to both members of the field and to

3A term borrowed from literacy studies to mean "those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll and González 156).
representatives of the larger institutions in which we work.

Robert Connors, one of the most notable historians of the field, reminds us, "Only by understanding where we came from can we ascertain where we want to go" (Writing the History 218). In the remainder of this chapter, then, I take my readers on a brief historical road trip of FYC and the emerging field of composition, highlighting landmarks that are salient to my analysis of the OS. In pursuing this, I recognize (and hope my audience will as well) that this is one version of that history, commonly told in the field, and also subject to a variety of possible revisionings. Still, as the dominant narrative of composition's history, it also holds a certain cultural or disciplinary weight in defining the field and its knowledge.

The Birth of First Year Composition

Before 1862, American universities were small and affiliated with Protestant religions, solely educating gentlemen of the upper classes to be, generally, civic leaders, such as teachers and ministers. Essentially then, the primary educational goal of English language studies in
the classical college at that time “was to equip students with cultural capital that would accrue in polite society from their knowledge about America’s literary heritage, and to give them widely accepted standards against which they could measure and develop their own good taste” (Crowley 54).

The goals of university education changed right before the Civil War when an educated managerial and professional middle class was needed in order to support an “emerging corporate economy” (Russell 41). In response, the United States Congress passed the Morrill Act, which, according to Connors, “established the Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges, brought a large new population of students to American colleges and helped found the major state universities” (Introduction 324). The admission of women and the middle class to postsecondary education changed the academy’s philosophical mission (Crowley 54). Basing its changes upon the German research institution, the goal of postsecondary education was not merely the refinement of character, but now included research—the pursuit of knowledge based upon the Enlightenment ideal of scientific rationality and reason—giving rise, for the first time in the United States, to the existence of specialized
disciplines and the related departmental structures that would support them.

Even so, "university administrators did not abandon the older American tradition altogether" (Crowley 57), but rather added electives to a set of core requirements. We continue to see such influence in contemporary universities where both liberal arts and elective curricula are offered side by side in a bachelor of arts degree, which as Crowley points out, "is still thought to provide [students] with broadly defined civic sentiments" (Crowley 57). We can also see the legacy of such an attitude in FYC which, as a core requirement, continues to be predominately perceived as "social whitewash," a course to provide remedial students whose written literacy skills are deficient with "the language of the academy." Notably, unlike other introductory courses, such as algebra or sociology, FYC is not considered to introduce disciplinary knowledge but, rather, as Crowley reminds us, "is the only required course in which students are still asked, repeatedly, to express their opinions on a variety of topics not generated by their study of a field or subject matter" (57).

Somewhat ironically, it is this very perception of writing as a decontextual and transferable skill,
normatively applicable to any purpose, which enabled FYC to become a required general education requirement. Prior to the Morrill act, official study of English vernacular did not exist, for aristocratic gentlemen were expected to speak and write “pure English” (Crowley 63). But when university demographics doubled, many universities followed Harvard’s lead and began to require a written entrance exam testing for “correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling” (Crowley 63). The subsequent failure of so many students “raised the issue of what to do about students who could not pass the entrance exam in English but who had to be admitted nonetheless” (Crowley 67). Harvard, again leading the way, in 1885 initiated the first freshman English course, English A—a course that by 1900 would be almost universally required in American postsecondary education. Along with the birth of the course came the need for writing instructors who, as one of the original Harvard composition teachers explained “profess[...]) to teach nothing but what all the other teachers are presumed to know” (qted. in Crowley 60).

If the presumed corrective character of the course created composition as non-disciplinary, the conditions of writing instruction in the new university secured its low
status. Staffed by untrained teachers, often graduate students in literature who taught writing to classes of upwards of one hundred students, composition instruction quickly became reduced to formulaic pedagogies that focused only on the written end product. By 1900, this simplified course content—commonly referred to in the field as current-traditional rhetoric (a disparaging moniker)—was firmly in place. Reduced to the study of clarity and mechanical correctness, writing instruction became a classification scheme:

four modes of discourse (narration, description, exposition, and argument), the methods of exposition (process analysis, definition, comparison/contrast, classification and so on), the three levels of discourse (diction, sentence, and paragraph), the ‘narrow-select-develop-outline’ invention structure, the conception of the organic paragraph, the rhetorical and grammatical sentence types, and the static abstractions of Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis. (Connors, Introduction 326)
This standardized curriculum essentially remained in place until the 1960’s, and according to Connors, was “the only college-level course in which the teachers generally gained all their knowledge of the field from the same textbooks they assigned to students” (Introduction 328).  

Composition was thus constructed “as ‘remedial’—teaching students a skill that should have been learned in secondary school or before and not [as] developing involvement with social practices that used written discourses” (Russell 51). As such, composition was divorced from rhetoric whose emphasis on persuasive civic discourse was considered non-scientific. Moreover, accompanying the rise of scientific knowledge in the university, current traditional rhetoric was seen as the medium of expression for scientific knowledge as a language of objectivity that separated the subjective features of knowledge making from the knowledge that was made. Thus isolated, language was construed and represented as a neutral vehicle and

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4 There were some creative deviations from current-traditional rhetoric forwarded by composition teachers, such as Fred Newton Scott, Henry Noble Day, John S. Hart, and David J. Hill (See Connors, Crowley and Longaker). Still, as Connors and others show, current traditional rhetoric was the dominant approach to comp pedagogy until the 1960s.
effective writing as decontextual, a set of codifiable "skills" that can be taught and transferred to any writing task. It was this very modernist orientation to language which enabled the field of English "to construct itself through composition as a service to other disciplines within the university and indirectly to the emerging corporate economy" (my italics Russell 41).

A corporate economy, Mark Garrett Longaker explains in "The Economics of Exposition: Managerialism, Current-Traditional Rhetoric, and Henry Noble Day," requires "extensive organizational structure[s]" (510) and a managerial class that can write in a form "that appeared detailed, unbiased, and truthful, and that codified information to facilitate control" (510). This sociolect, termed expository or current-traditional, Longaker continues, "assumed an objective reality that can be represented accurately" as well as "a taxonomic arrangement reflecting a desire and an effort to control the 'objective' world by dividing it into manageable and monitorable parts" (513). This expositional sociolect, then, was considered objective and highly preferable to the classical emphasis on persuasion. Although exposition as a basis for persuasion was used as an instrument of control,
it was not socially perceived as such. Rather, language was merely seen as a neutral vehicle that transmits previously conceived thought and not seen as intertwined with thought.

Such a modernist perspective of language, that is, one devoid of a complex rhetorical perspective, became the ruling episteme of the middle-class and of the American school system (see Brodkey, Murphy, among others). It became the theoretical foundation of the institutional mission to acculturate students to formal edited English and the conventions of academic discourse. Although contemporary scholarship in the field seems to suggest that most compositionists do not view language from this kind of modernist perspective, such a perspective continues to undergird most other people’s language orientation, including college freshman, the public, and many academics across the disciplines. To argue that modernism is our default language orientation, one need only invoke the common truth that, most of us, no matter how intelligent, require a metanarrative in order to loosen modernism’s epistemological chains. In other words, self-reflection and common sense do not necessarily lead one to a rich and complex postmodern language orientation, an orientation
that more accurately describes the organic relationship between language and thought (as we will see in chapter two). For most of us who would wish to resist the influence of our modernist heritage, we must be explicitly taught about that heritage so it can be consciously examined. I say this, not to offend my readers, but as a reminder of an ever-present modernist context which, for me at least, I must continually resist, even as I perpetuate it by writing in an expository genre, attempting to achieve an authorial ethos of "objectivity."

The Beginnings of a Field

As a matter of historical record, writing instruction remained largely unchanged, limited by modernist practice for approximately seventy years. Writing instruction during this time narrowly focused on form, perpetuating modernist notions of an autonomous writer who employed a fairly simple acquired skill to deploy an "objective" discourse which was uniformly interpreted by an audience.

According to historians of the field, the 1950's marks the birth of "the new field of composition studies, as opposed to composition teaching" (Writing the History 205). Connors attributes the emergence of composition theory to
the General Education movement which advocated that students receive a broad-based educational background and which "sought to bring separated disciplines together" (*Writing the History* 205). In the areas of communication, Speech and English reunited in 1949 with the formulation of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC's) and the scholarly journal, *College Composition and Communication*. Within the pages of this journal, Connors claims, "writers on composition issues were beginning to reach out toward collateral fields, looking at the theory behind the practice, beginning to investigate rhetoric and linguistics in a serious way" (*Writing the History* 206).

Somewhat paradoxically, during these same years of composition's renewed alliance with linguistics and rhetoric, composition became estranged from ESL (English as a Second Language) studies when ESL professionalized. In "Composition Studies and ESL Writing," Paul Kei Matsuda tells how composition incorporated and attended to much ESL research immediately after World War II when there was a large influx of international students within writing classrooms. Matsuda claims that after World War II, the CCCC's conventions included regular sessions regarding "how to deal with international ESL students in the regular
composition course” (782). However, by 1967, such sessions were absent from the conventions’ scheduled events. Matsuda regrets composition’s and ESL’s resultant division of labor blaming it on “the myth of transience”—a modernist assumption held by both compositionists and ESL educators “that ESL writing can be broken down neatly into a linguistic component and a writing component and that the linguistic problems will disappear after some additional instruction in remedial language courses” (789).

Although composition separated from ESL, its reunion with rhetoric and linguistics allowed it to become a field of study. The 1960’s saw a burgeoning of scholarship in the 1960’s called “the New Rhetoric.” This scholarship animated the 1966 “Dartmouth Conference” and marked the beginning of the process movement, which moved the focus of writing instruction from the written text, the product, to the writing processes of the writer. The conference also disseminated the “new Dartmouth-model writing course,” representing writing instruction pedagogies that encouraged expressive discourse, collaboration, and students’ authentic voices—a radical move away from the traditional Harvard “banking” model based upon passive students receiving directive instruction and formulaic procedural
knowledge (Brief 2). Synchronously, scholars of the decade were researching "[t]he rebirth of classical rhetoric, the development of tagmemic rhetoric, the prewriting movement, and the writing-process movement," (Connors, Composition History 410), and it was all of these combined (and which, in hindsight, could be grouped together as the New Rhetoric) that created the necessary conditions for composition's birth as a discipline.

Into the Seventies

According to Connors, however, it was not until the seventies that the discipline emerged—when not only numerous books and research journals concerning composition theory and practice came into existence, but when, even more importantly, the composition doctorate, the primary means of reproducing the scholarship of a discipline, emerged. This same period brought the advent of open admissions, and with it an influx of a population of students who were viewed as unprepared to succeed in the university. As a result, members of the composition community began pursuing cognitive composition research modeled after the social sciences in order to determine the
essential and universal cognitive processes associated with the writing process of all writers. The expectation was that such knowledge would give rise to pedagogies that would more successfully outfit underprepared students with the kinds of literacies they needed to thrive in the university.

Writing instruction during this time generally took the form of either expressivist or cognitive process pedagogies, both of which focused on the writer and the writing process, albeit for different reasons. Expressivist pedagogies focused on the personal, on the releasing of the inner "true" voice of the writer, primarily by means of invention strategies. Cognitive process pedagogies meanwhile attended to providing students practice with prescribed process approaches to writing in order to help them generate the kinds of prose expected in their other university classes.

Ultimately, however, these pedagogies and programs fell short of their initial promise. By the end of the decade, mostly because open admissions had created a more culturally and linguistically diverse student population than had previously existed in the United States, researchers were beginning to realize the difficulty with
trying to break the human composing process into universally ascribable bits because people’s cognitive writing processes did not occur in isolation but involved social variables as well, such as culture and dialect. Sociolinguistic work “on dialectal variation helped writing teachers see that this new classroom population, in need of so much help with the requirements of academic writing, was not cognitively deficient but, rather, linguistically and culturally diverse” (my italics Brief 3). Linguistic researchers earnestly began to study second language acquisition, including affective filters developed by many students whose home language was not Standard American English (SAE) and who were stigmatized because of that unalterable fact. Finding pedagogical means to acculturate students to SAE and academic discourse, without alienating them, became one important goal of composition research.

The Eighties

These items of research mark the beginning of the “social turn” of composition, when it was at last widely recognized that writing was no longer a decontextualized skill that could be taught in isolation from context. Writing instructors and researchers were beginning to see
that helping students to find their expressive “authentic” inner voice was more difficult than had been anticipated, for students exhibited various voices, depending upon the situation. The writer as a solitary, unified, and coherent subject was being called into question, and the only logical answer was to be found in social-constructionist theory and the postmodern literary theories that were informing the field.

In short, social theories of discourse based upon social-constructionist theory had taken hold by the 1980’s, but not, according to Gary Olson, without a fight. During the seventies, he writes, the people whom we have come to call cognitivists and expressivists “battled between themselves over how the field should be defined, and in doing so, they both maintained tight control over the means of dissemination of scholarship: the few journals available to publish work in composition” (29). So, “out of frustration with being silenced”, Olson recalls, several scholars created “alternative venues for publishing composition scholarship,” such as PRE/TEXT, JAC, and Rhetoric Review (29). These journals, as well as the numerous books and journals that followed, did not merely focus on the teaching of writing but also published
interdisciplinary critical work concerning "how discourse works" (30). In other words, drawing on research generated in other disciplines such as linguistics, literary theory, sociology, postcolonial studies, and feminism, composition research in the 1980's had turned its attention to "the interrelations between epistemology and discourse" (Olson 24).

Generally speaking, social-constructionist theory holds that the accumulation of knowledge and the written expression of that knowledge are essentially social activities attributable to a life-long conversation in which all humans participate. An individual's knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs are constructed through an interaction with everyone who has directly or indirectly influenced that individual in any way. Individuals are not merely an aggregate of such interaction but rather, as members of any number of discourse communities or collectives (see Bizzell, Clifford, Harris), shift subject positions endlessly, and perhaps simultaneously, as they negotiate life. As such, people's worldviews, their

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5 This epistemological and discursive shift is commonly referred to as the "social turn" in the field. Indirectly influenced that individual in any way.
values, knowledge, and beliefs, rely heavily upon "received knowledge"—that to which they have been exposed—or more accurately, idiosyncratic combinations of their various "knowledges". James Berlin, one of the first-generation compositionists to discuss the discursive relationships among language, identity, ideology, and power, named what is now known as social-constructionism "social-epistemic rhetoric" and describes it as follows:

[T]he real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community (social group) in which the observer is functioning, and the material conditions of existence. Knowledge is never found in any one of these but can only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which all three come together . . . . Most important, this dialectic is grounded in language: the observer, the discourse community, and the material conditions of existence are all verbal constructs. (693)

Knowledge, in other words, is socially-constructed, embedded in language, and always ideological. As such it is also always situated, contingent, and interpretative, a product of any number of social forces, such as historical
time period, race, class, gender, location, and so on and so on.

Social-constructionism, the theory underlying postmodernism, thus renounces modernist theories of epistemology. It eschews foundationalism (grand narratives) and the positivist view that reality, as a disembodied objectivity, can be known outside of language and situated perception. A postmodernist views knowledge as always situated and, perhaps more importantly—since it is always partial and incomplete—interested (Brodkey 8). From this point of view, any discourse or cultural event is both interested and political, and therefore, can be deconstructed, or "read," for its underlying ideology. As Linda Brodkey puts it, postmodernism "is best thought of as an epistemology: a theory of knowledge in which knowing is contingent on discourses" (12), and knowledge, it was now understood, was created in discourse communities.

Because of its initial explaining power, the mere identification of discourse communities seemed to support the pedagogical notion that instructors need only socialize their students into academic discourse communities. However, almost as soon as discourse community scholarship appeared, observers noticed the coercive tendencies of such
communities. Assimilation via acculturative models was called into question as was the previously-held middle-class episteme of American education as fair and equitable - for clearly those students whose home language was not Standard American English (SAE) were frequently at a disadvantage. Language was no longer viewed as a neutral vehicle representing an external reality but rather as representing "a discursive reality" (Brodkey xiii), a reality which more often excluded than included the disadvantaged.

Composition research had thus revealed a discomfiting truth - composition's service to the institution as an acculturating force often silenced or excluded students, and thus worked at cross-purposes to writing instruction's alternate mission to foster student access to and engagement with scholarly or other discourse. To counter this "colonizing" tradition, educators found that critical pedagogies that foreground and disclose the power workings of discourse communities reduced minority students' otherness by providing the meta-means to understand how they have been othered. And educators found that by providing this critical perspective, they no longer acted as instruments of socialization but rather encouraged and
empowered student choice while simultaneously demystifying and presenting information about academic discourse.

The Nineties

Since the 1990’s, much composition research has focused on the ways in which language and discourse work in the construction of marking power and in the construction of hegemonic epistememes, ways of thinking that govern our perception, behavior, and thought. On a more local level, the practice of writing instruction in the classroom has also been seriously interrogated, since it is now understood that any and all practice inheres theory and thus ideology. As with any other discourse or cultural event, educational practice is always interested, always political.

So, postmodernism not only changed the way we (compositionists) looked at language and knowledge, but by the 1990’s, it had also deconstructed student identity and writing instruction. The understanding that students do not digest and construe information uniformly but rather are interactive agents whose various and multiple contexts play a large part in their construction of knowledge created new problems and challenges for writing instruction and
politicized the classroom. The classroom was now a site of “contact zones” and in 1991 Mary Louise Pratt, who coined the phrase, asked educators to create classroom environments and curricula “in which cultural groups of unequal power can interact under conditions that enable sharing and understanding” (Brief 7). Writing researchers and practitioners, recognizing literacy as John Trimbur puts it, as “represent[ing] an ideological arena and composition as a cultural activity by which writers position and reposition themselves in relation to their own and others’ subjectivities, discourses, practices and institutions” (qtd in Matsuda 73), turned their attention to the classroom as a site of “cultural, spiritual, geographical and linguistic difference” (Brief 7).

Writing instruction thus incorporated the position that student-centered pedagogies are theoretically justified while “top-down” views of language learning and teaching are clearly not.6

This increased attention to writing as a situated discursive practice, with all that entails, has since given

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6Akua Duku Anokye, program chair of the 2006 CCCC’s conference, boasts in his call for proposals that this embrace of student-centered pedagogy can be attributed to composition’s “groundbreaking research that places the student in the center of instruction.”
rise to new and numerous pedagogical approaches to the writing classroom. These include feminist, critical literacy, cultural studies, social-expressivist and genre pedagogies. Each of these orientations shares some appreciation of our theoretical attention to post-structural views of language. Most also incorporate the sense of writing as process — a process containing invention, arrangement, and revision strategies — but one which is recursive and idiosyncratic to not only the individual but to the given task. In addition to writing as a sense of process, most FYC classes also incorporate peer review, which is both an acknowledgement and a model of the fact that writers benefit from other readers since communication in all senses is a public and collaborative activity.

**Contemporary Tensions**

Still, though it may appear from this history that social-constructionist and postmodernist theories commonly undergird current FYC practice, this is certainly not so. For one thing, because of the heavy reliance on part-time and graduate student faculty who may have limited or no background in the scholarship of the field, simplistic
process and current-traditional approaches are still common in classrooms nationwide. Moreover, there are many compositionist Ph.D.s who ascribe a solely acculturative service mission to FYC. They consider writing instruction pedagogies grounded in a social context of language use too confusing and complex for first-year students, and, more importantly, as interfering with their acculturative mission.

Such instructors do not ground their curricula in postmodern theory. They ignore their theoretical knowledge in favor of their acculturative mission thereby creating the current dissensus that exists within the field. In "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century," Richard Fulkerson, a representative of composition's acculturative camp advocates procedural rhetoric, the acculturation of students to academic discourse, argumentation, and disciplinary genres, while fully acknowledging that it is in "the dominant tradition of composition in the 1970s and 1980s" (671). Yet this tradition, as we have seen from composition's history, is not primarily informed by postmodern theories of language. Rather, as this chapter chronicles, the "social turn" arose as a reaction to a modernist approach that sought to
normalize student populations at the expense of ignoring human epistemology. Clearly, our scholarly community is not unified in its support of our current theoretical knowledge as a basis for instruction.

C. Jan Swearingen also muses over the current pedagogical dissensus within the field, fearful that writing instruction may return to untheorized practice. In "Rhetoric and Composition as a Coherent Intellectual Discipline: A Meditation," she despairs over the current scene, concerned that composition, that is, writing instruction, may soon again be divorced of rhetoric, as "L'affaire Brodkey at the University of Texas at Austin" illustrates (21). Swearingen is concerned because "some compositionists have begun to repudiate theory quite loudly and propose returning to an untheorized, and even antitheoretical, pedagogy of 'care'" (14). "Care" in this case, refers to acculturative service, the teaching of writing as described by James Berlin in 1982: "as the imparting of a largely mechanical skill, important only

7 A WPA overseeing the Freshman English program at UT, Austin, Linda Brodkey designed a FYC curriculum based upon postmodern theory. The administration canned both the curriculum and Brodkey after a few professors criticized the curriculum and turned the issue into a highly public debacle.—See Brodkey's "Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only".
because it serves students in getting them through school and in advancing them in their professions."

Although the many histories of composition, including the condensed one I have told here, can easily be interpreted as a story of resistance – a collective intellectual enterprise resisting its service-oriented roots – the problem remains that the field has yet to resolve the tension between its acculturative and critical missions. As Swearingen asserts, "[t]heory and pedagogy have yet to define methods by which we can accomplish the goal of pluralism alongside the goal of empowering students to succeed individually and socially in the language of wider communications: standard edited English" (21).

Ironically, despite these ongoing tensions in the field, the Outcomes Statement and most of the WPAs who compiled The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement suggest that this modern/postmodern tension has already been resolved. In the next chapter, I provide a close analysis of the rhetoric of the OS in order to show how these tensions still circulate in the document and how the introductory choices its framers made ensured that this would be so.
That a theory is only a theory sounds sensible enough, but one of the dangers all researchers as well as theorists face [. . .] is forgetting that a theory is only an account of something, not the thing itself. While I doubt that anyone remembers all the time that the theory that they are working from is only an account, and a partial one at that, a theory that begins by assuming the nearly invisible influence of discourses over our ability to imagine and reflect on who we are in ourselves and in relation to others and the world is, to my way of thinking, difficult to forget as a theory.

--Linda Brodkey, Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only, 11
In Chapter One, I showed how the development of composition studies shifted the intellectual grounds of the field from a modernist orientation to language to postmodernist one. If my account of composition's history has accurately demonstrated that the dominant paradigm of the field has in fact moved to explain the discursive relationships among language, thought, and reality, then one might reasonably expect that this disciplinary knowledge should inform first year writing instruction. However, enacting such a shift in pedagogy would complicate the literacy practices traditionally taught in FYC, for what precisely does it mean to be able to read and write at a postsecondary level?

According to many of the OS framers, the OS resolves the issue of what should constitute post secondary writing instruction by defining the conceptual content of FYC. In the afterword to The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement, Kathleen Yancey clearly rejoices that "one of the questions that has vexed compositionists since the modern iteration of composition," that is, "the content of composition," (220) seems to have finally been answered. Yancey describes this curriculum in
which "a new construct of writing is created," and "which is not your father's composition" (218), declaring "[g]enre and language and rhetorical situation: they are the curriculum" (220). She also challenges her audience to seriously consider the idea that composition's disciplinary knowledge should be the primary subject of study for writing instruction. She asks, "Question: What would happen if we took this idea seriously and understood that we are a discipline after all, that composition is the content of (any) composition class and program? How much change might we see in student learning?" (220).

Although I agree with Yancey's proposition that writing instruction should be structured and conceived as a content course, as mentioned at the end of the last chapter, the community has not cohered around the purposes of FYC despite what current scholarship has shown. While many compositionists advocate FYC curricula that focus on composition's constructed knowledge, others still promote a solely acculturative service mission to FYC. In "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century," Fulkerson, himself a member of the acculturative camp, argues against "social" pedagogies that focus on interpretation, preferring "the writing of our students" as
"the focus (content) of the course" (665). Like many others, he reflects a position that eschews a postmodern focus, a position that is frequently evidenced in the WPA-L discussions surrounding the OS. I was surprised to learn that during the drafting of the OS, more resistance was expressed to the inclusion of the more theoretically and postmodern driven outcome "Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power" than to any other of the bulleted items. Various WPAs wrote in their posts that such an outcome was "too grand," "unnecessary" and "unreasonable," and some even expressed bewilderment by admitting that they themselves did not fully understand "the relationships among language, knowledge, and power." Such posts reflect the severe disagreement over the philosophical purpose of FYC instruction, as well as the OS's existence as, one WPA wrote, "an exercise in negotiation and compromise." By steering clear of such a fundamental disagreement, the framers leave the statement open to multiple interpretations and thus once again all teachers institutionally vulnerable. The OS consequently maintains the very status quo the statement was designed to challenge.
In this chapter, I rhetorically analyze the OS from a postmodern perspective to demonstrate how the document does or does not attend to the postmodern theoretical advances in the field. My analysis shows that while both modernist and postmodernist orientations to language might be read into the text, the mutually exclusive nature of these orientations coupled with the structure of the statement and institutional commonplaces about writing generally, ensure that the document will preserve modernist approaches to the writing classroom at the expense of postmodernist approaches. My discussion also addresses the issue of why a postmodern orientation to language should be viewed as preferable within the field and in the classroom.

Document Design

The Outcomes Statement is a short two-page document that opens with a three paragraph introduction to its purpose followed by four titled sections: 1) Rhetorical Knowledge 2) Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing 3) Processes 4) Knowledge of Conventions. Two bulleted lists follow each heading; the first list indicates what "[b]y the end of first year composition, students should" know or be able to do, and the second bulleted list suggests how
"[f]aculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation [. . .]." In keeping with the topic of my thesis, I will analyze only the sections that relate to first-year composition.

Section One of the Outcomes Statement

One might expect the rhetorical knowledge section to be the most attentive to language, context, meaning, epistemology, and other concerns related to the social constitutive nature of language. However, its overall tone suggests a more prescriptive than descriptive approach to the cultivation of rhetorical awareness. The text reads as follows:

Rhetorical Knowledge

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Focus on purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
- Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
• Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
• Understand how genres shape reading and writing
• Write in several genres

At face value, each bullet appears to taxonomize that which most writers do, supporting Fulkerson’s definition of good writing as that which is “rhetorically effective for audience and situation” (655). During my initial reading of the text, I resonated agreeably with each bulleted item, thinking “I do that, and That, and THAT.” Indeed, most effective writers consider purpose (step one) and audience (step two), by integrating purpose into whatever genre the anticipated audience expects, because they know that the form employed will rhetorically influence an audience’s reception of what is said. However, a deeper look at these "steps" as articulated suggests how they can be read variously and with attention to different values about writing.

For one thing, the term “genre” is a loaded term, one that becomes much richer and more complex the more one reads about genre studies. Admittedly, the framers of the Outcomes Statement were aware of the potential
complications of using such language, and after much
discussion about their own audience, chose, as they explain
in the introduction, to write for their primary audience—
"well-prepared college writing teachers and college writing
program administrators" to whom "terms such as 'rhetorical'
and 'genre' convey rich meaning that is not easily
simplified." Yet what constitutes "well-prepared"? In her
critique of the OS, "More than the Latest PC Buzzword for
Modes: What Genre Theory Means to Composition," Barbara
Little Liu astutely notes that those "doing the actual
work of writing instruction" include "WPAs, tenure-track
and adjunct faculty, and graduate teaching assistants
(whether trained in rhetoric and composition or in
literature, creative writing, or linguistics)" (72). Such
an eclectic group does not constitute an interpretive
community each of whose members similarly understand the
rich connotations of the word "genre," as the OS framers
would have us assume. That being the case, then, many
writing instructors are not "well-prepared," making the
implementation of the Outcomes Statement problematic.

At issue, Liu explains, is that many readers
(including those many writing instructors) unfamiliar with
contemporary genre theory misunderstand genre as synonymous
with form. Thus, the outcome "[w]rite in several genres," as well as an outcome in the Knowledge of Conventions section stipulating that students should "[d]evelop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics" could be easily misread and misapprehended because "'modes' or the phrase 'different kinds of academic essays' could be substituted for "genre" and make just as much sense" (Liu 73).

Even the outcome "Understand how genres shape reading and writing," which gets closer to a rich connotation of genre as a complex ever-unfolding and ever-changing dialogical interaction between writer, reader, discourse community, and historical moment, can be misread. There is nothing in the document to prevent a reduced "modes-based" reading of this outcome as well. An instructor may easily misunderstand the outcome to mean that students should learn about discipline-specific forms in order to prevent her students from choosing the "wrong" form (A.K.A. "genre"). In such a scenario, students are taught that they must pick the "appropriate" form for their audience, and by doing so, they persuasively shape their audience's reception, or "reading" of what they have written. While perhaps true, the goal of teaching students that they
should "respond appropriately to" the rhetorical situation (outcome number three of this first section) is merely acculturative and does not incorporate postmodern theories of discourse which describe how genres themselves are graphemic epistemes that "shape" and constrain our "reading" — hence our understanding, of the very disciplines that employ said genres. This richer understanding of genres would provide students with an appreciation of genres as social forces that change over time and place and as social constructions that, like epistemes, shape our worldviews. With such an understanding, students can both reflect upon ways in which their worldviews have been shaped by genre as well as understand their participation in the dialectical interplay of production and reception of texts.

Unfortunately, the writers of the document placed the only outcome that requires a postmodern awareness at the end of the section, thereby diluting its power and significance. As we know, context shapes meaning. Clearly, reading the first two outcomes, "Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation" and "adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality," before reading "understand how genre shapes
reading and writing" shapes how we read the latter outcome. Similarly, the use of "appropriate" conventions and voice clearly refer to discipline-specific writing, thereby creating an environment for the latter to be read and misread in the same vein. If, however, "Understand how genres shape reading and writing" were placed first on the list to indicate its primary importance, the other outcomes might contain a less acculturatively modern flavor.

Postmodern genre studies examine how the human need to classify (which is the very foundation and source of genre) produces normative and acculturative effects. Whereas the traditionally modern notion of genre categorizes the commonalities found in genres and sees them as static products, postmodern genre theories examine how genres operate. While describing the "social turn" in genre studies, Peter Vandenberg refers to Carolyn Miller’s seminal article "Genre as Social Action" which "argues that ‘a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish’" (533). Vanderburg explicates the significance of this postmodern turn in genre studies by declaring that "genre is important precisely in terms of its role in both regulating and enabling social action"
(533). That genre regulates, students will certainly and quickly learn in any solely and uncritically acculturative environment. Learning that genre "enable[es] social action" is another matter, one requiring a postmodern awareness that, for the most part, is not a common goal of our educational system.

Postmodern genre studies view genre as systems in which human "agency is acquired, negotiated, resisted and deployed" (qted in Vanderburg 534). Within this postmodern interpretive framework, one which would be more readily understood if the genre outcome "how genres shape reading and writing" were placed at the top of the bulleted list, students would be better guided to reflect upon their own choices regarding voice, structure, format, and so on, and examine how their choices operate. When students do so, they work within an agent/subject position rather than merely as subject to the socializing conventions of discipline specifics. In other words, students may develop the means to understand both the disciplines they are entering and the implications of participating within their terms.
Section Two of the Outcomes Statement

The second section of the OS attends to critical thinking, reading, and writing. That these processes have been separated from rhetorical knowledge suggest the ongoing modernism of the OS. However, despite this, this section proves to be the most richly informed section of the document.

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power

Kenneth Bruffee examines the relationship between language, thought, and the social construction of knowledge in his now famous article, "Peer-Tutoring and the 'Conversation
of Mankind’” which convincingly proposes “conversation” as a theoretical rationale behind the success of peer tutoring. He explains that since “reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized,” it follows that “the two are also related functionally.” Bruffee’s observation that “because thought originates in conversation, thought and conversation tend to work largely in the same way” (208) provides rationale for more than peer tutoring; it also theoretically justifies the first outcome of this section: “By the end of first year composition, students should Use writing and reading “for inquiry, learning, [and] thinking,” For it is generally well accepted and understood that both reading and writing—as forms of conversation—are inextricably linked with thought processes and, as such, not only add to one’s funds of knowledge, but are also effective thought generators. The organic relationship between conversation (internalized or externalized) and thought also explains why writing-to-learn is so successful, often surprising inexperienced writers.

This organic relationship between conversation and thought, understanding of which prompted the “social turn” as we saw in chapter one, also provides a postmodern explanation for the interrelatedness of the individual and the social, for the ways in which thought both enables and regulates, thus
providing a pedagogical rationale for the importance of teaching "critical thinking, reading, and writing." For if we accept that each individual is an idiosyncratic amalgamation of her many and numerous "conversations" and memberships combined with a sense of "self," that is, a unique combination of the individual and the social, a "site of contradiction" (39), as John Clifford coined it, then the multiple shifting subjectivities of the human experience result in contestations and collaborations not only among individuals but within a single individual both synchronically and diachronically. Encouraging the development of any kind of critical awareness, then, is primary to the development of a postmodern orientation to language, for critical awareness is the development of conscious (rather than unconscious) and reflective evaluative thought turned both inward and outward on the never-ending intertextualities around and within us.

For all appearances then, this section of the OS seems to support a postmodern context for the teaching of critical reading, writing, and thinking. The first outcome—"Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating" emphasizes an understanding of the interrelatedness of language and thought, and "communicating" situates an individual's literate
activities in the social sphere. And with this first outcome as backdrop, the second outcome - "Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources" can be read as pointing to the complex intertextual intellectual and material processes involved in the production of a student text. Students must "understand" that they are participating in a "Burkean" conversation that already takes place, a reason why they must not only "find" and incorporate ("synthesize") primary and secondary sources, but why they must also skillfully judge ("evaluate") and "analyze" (deconstruct in order to understand the construction) them in deem them appropriate and worthy of inclusion. As such students must not only "Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks" but also as a series of choices—choices that are their own to make. Making effective choices requires that students not only be immersed in the "conversation" but also that they understand how to effectively participate in the conversation (i.e., "[i]integrate their own ideas with those of others").

All of that notwithstanding, the first three outcomes in this section historically have been taught—and most
frequently still are taught — from a modern rather than a postmodern perspective. As a result, those who read the OS can easily interpret it as authorizing what has "always" been done. Without a clear theorized statement of context for such curricular generalities, the likely outcome of the OS is the promotion of modernist composition classes.

Such an outcome would be unfortunate and represents a lost opportunity for improved pedagogies because modernist approaches to writing frequently fail due to their prescriptiveness. In laying out rules to follow in order to socialize students to "academic discourse," modernist pedagogies typically limit what students can do and think, and thus can squelch intellectual curiosity and investment. Take, for instance, that epitome of academic writing tasks, the research paper. By foregrounding form, the traditional research assignment requires students to limit the integral first step of research — engagement and exploration of a topic — by demanding that students first choose and then narrow a thesis in order to argue it within the given page requirement. It is no surprise, then, that students will often argue a thesis that they either don’t support or don’t care about. Such a modernist pedagogy tempts few students to the world of scholarship but rather reinforces
superficial engagement with a topic. Moreover as Aviva Freedman notes, "[s]tudents who have not been sufficiently immersed in a context [. . . ] will not be able to ventriloquate, to respond dialogically" (129) within the terms of the discursive academic community within which they are trying to participate and will thus frequently turn “to the broader culture outside the classroom for models of persuasion,” such as the hortatory language of advertising (135). Although many students may try their best to fulfill such decontextualized and formulaic assignments, their insufficient content and discourse knowledge may lead them to resort to the “easy” ways out: picking easy-to-research but boring topics, plagiarizing, revising a previous paper to fit the present requirements, or oversimplifying an argument for ease of expression so as not to risk a lowered grade.

This type of formulaic learning, learning how to “appear” to converse in academic spheres by following a checklist encourages students to follow the rules but does not necessarily stimulate their intellectual involvement in a project. If they are to experience any real engagement with their sources, students must feel invested in their learning. As Anne Berthoff puts it, “unless and until the
mind of the learner is engaged, no meaning will be made, no knowledge can be won" (330). Although it has been and could be argued that welcoming and apprenticing students into various discourse communities can be empowering to students who can now enter communities from which they previously had felt excluded, composition history clearly shows that a purely acculturative mission serves only some students and even alienates many, especially those who feel marginalized or those who do not "see" a place for themselves in the production of texts.

In direct contrast, the teaching of critical thinking, reading, and writing skills within a postmodern context raises fewer affective filters\(^8\) within a diverse student population. A postmodern approach reaches across diversity by emphasizing critical interpretation as already and frequently practiced by all students prior to college, thus encouraging students to expand their already extant abilities in new forums. Moreover, helping students see that they already enter your classroom as communicative agents who contain many critical skills diminishes the

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\(^8\)A term used in L2 scholarship to refer to inhibitive emotional learning barriers.
chances of losing those students who are academically underprepared.

Unfortunately for the postmodernist, this Critical Thinking, Writing, and Reading section of the OS does not preclude other more traditional interpretations, especially if the first three outcomes are taught divorced from a conversational model and presented as if they were discrete skills practiced in the somber and arcane domain of "intellectuals." Without an appropriate context, these thinking skills can be taught as modes and grammar were for years—as discrete and learnable skills. Fortunately, though, that is a less likely possibility than in the past since the inefficacy of decontextualized teaching is now common knowledge. Students repeatedly demonstrate that when grammar and other skills are decontextually taught, most students will continue to perform such tasks decontextually, scoring well on tests, but not transferring and applying said skills when needed for other purposes. Decontextualized writing instruction does not work because writing is not a mechanical skill. Susanmarie Harrington deftly reminds us in "First-Year Outcomes and Upper-Level Writing" that "no one writes to practice; we write because
we have something to say. But how to describe this to students?” (132).

A postmodern context provides an answer to that question, by virtue of the fact that postmodernism presents the study of language in the context of meaningful use. Since language and thought are inseparable, all students already are meaning makers. Thus, the central issue with regard to writing in general and more specifically to the OS’s critical thinking section is the salience of apprehending our own thought processes in order to metaperspectively understand both ourselves as interpreters of knowledge and the interpretations (meanings) we make. Writing instruction, then, must incorporate not only the study of epistemology – ourselves as makers of meaning – but also the study of critical thought – ourselves as rational beings. For if we understand that knowledge is always partial and incomplete, and thus, our apprehension of reality is always an interpretation, never a full understanding, then, we must have some means to monitor, check, and control our own interpretive processes. Critical reason provides humans with the self-corrective means to check themselves and is the mainstay of positive, meaningful change and intellectual evolution. For this
reason, evidence and reason undergird academic conversations and are the currency of respectful and considerate interaction.

The clearest and most deliberate reference to postmodern theory in section two and perhaps in the entire Outcomes Statement, however, appears in the fourth bulleted outcome: “Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power.” A more accurate understanding of this outcome undoubtedly requires a postmodern awareness, and, as composition history tells us, this awareness was not part of the initial hypothesis of early cognitivist composition researchers who were investigating language and thought but rather grew out of research in a variety of distinct humanities disciplines, such as sociology, women’s studies, history, and geography, as well as the impetus provided by the multicultural classroom.

By now I hope to have made it clear that postmodernism and multiculturalism theoretically overlap. The acknowledgement of a culturally diverse student population combined with an awareness of the ways systems of thought create and maintain inequity have prompted researchers, in recent times, to examine the interrelationships among identity, race, gender, class, sexuality and so on, their
intention being to alleviate the fallout of such relationships — hegemony and oppression — as well as to understand the proclivity to form social institutions that arise from such interactions, such as patriarchy, capitalism, and neocolonialism. While examining various theoretical concepts that speak to the issues of power, such as perspectivism, border theory, and "the contact zone," Marilyn Edelstein discusses the intersections between postmodernism and multiculturalism, writing that "[i]f one accepts the ideas that each of us inhabits multiple and mobile subject positions and that all identities are intersectional and heterogeneous, the possibilities emerge for a variety of affiliations and alliances between and among people who, on the surface, might seem to be radically different" (33).

Edelstein’s desire for fairness and inclusivity for all, both in and outside the classroom, is, one would think, shared by most academics and by most people in general. The perceived possibility of that desire becoming a reality presupposes positive change and brings to the surface a still problematic educational issue — teaching and activism. Though Edelstein “share[s] the widely held view that multicultural education always connotes a
commitment to political and social change" (15), this position offends and threatens many people. This fact creates problems for compositionists because even though most agree that knowledge about "the relationships among language, knowledge, and power" sits at the center of their discussions of the shaping force of language and thought, many are also aware that it is precisely this knowledge that ironically has been the most attacked as being foundationalist and essentialist, a throwback to enlightenment ideology. Critics claim that postmodern instruction rests upon a liberatory ideology that threatens many students' primary discourses and imposes a unilateral liberalism, a narrow agenda of superiority promoting the overthrow of the status quo. Nevertheless, the interrelationship between education, as both a socializing and desocializing force, and its consequent influence on behavior as revealed by our discussion up to this point cannot be rationally denied.

While the fourth outcome evidences and encapsulates the extensive research of the past few decades, it also implies that instruction about the shaping force of ideology is integral to and inseparable from the study of composition and need not be indoctrinating. Joseph Hardin,
one of many compositionists who advocate that the teaching of writing be grounded in a postmodern context (an idea referred to as "critical pedagogy") agrees in his astute book *Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition*. In her review of Hardin’s work, Fiona Glade describes “how scholar-teachers, administrators, and students themselves might approach a vision of composition that foregrounds the production and consumption of textual matter as real work” (1):

He argues further that a postmodern theory of ethics, enacted in composition, has the potential to inscribe a critical metanarrative that eschews the absolute while disrupting the ‘ideological fixity’ (73) that fosters an acculturative pedagogy. In other words, he explains that critical pedagogy and the teaching of resistance is not simply the leftist project that opponents would claim; rather, it is the only method of teaching by which students actually have any choice about what to think. In this way, Hardin provides a way to discuss writing instruction that could be useful to students not only in
preparing for the job market, but also in personal growth and self-exploration. (2)

Though students, as possessors of human brains, always acquire some such metaknowledge, or "critical metanarrative," during their own reflective thinking outside the classroom, it is not always sufficient to help them reach their full potential for social and self critical awareness. To that end, I feel that composition pedagogy must offer the explicit teaching of human epistemology as the heart of textual interpretation. As Berthoff puts it, it is this "species-specific capacity for thinking about thinking that is the chief resource for any teacher and the ground of hope in the enterprise of teaching reading and writing" (329).

Perhaps, most importantly, Hardin's and Berthoff's work displays ways to enact postmodern composition pedagogies that do not conflate postmodern theory with liberatory pedagogies. This confusion is common even within the composition community and is one of the reasons why so many educators oppose what they consider postmodernism's "liberatory agenda." Hardin's and Berthoff's work is extremely important because it presents postmodern theory as that which it is - a theory - in other words, the
constructed knowledge of a discipline. What students do with that knowledge is their choice.

I am suggesting, as others do, that the ideals and goals of liberatory pedagogies need not be conflated with those of postmodern critical pedagogies. A critical pedagogy is one that involves the examination of the role of language in shaping knowledge and perspective and amplifies students' metaperspectives of these processes. Yet despite the potential richness of a pedagogy based upon this knowledge, the fourth outcome "[U]nderstand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power" does not necessarily drive the interpretation of this section for many composition practitioners.

In fact, some programs that have adapted the Outcomes Statement for their own purposes have dropped this outcome entirely. Touting their use of the Outcomes Statement as a template for devising a curriculum concerning critical thinking at Eastern Michigan University, Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem, in "Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing: A View from the Field," incorporate every outcome in this section of the Outcomes Statement except the fourth. Although they emphasize the interactive conversational processes that occur during reading and
writing, they reduce the intertextualities of reading and writing to self and audience, eliding the power relationships instantiated on grander scales, such as in the proportions of societies and institutions and the human race as a whole. Interestingly, EMU’s curricular FYC outcomes (found at <http://www.emich.edu/english/fycomp/curriculum/pdfs/curriculumguide.pdf>). do ask that “faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students to learn the relationships among language, knowledge, and power in their fields,” relegating such content to courses outside of first-year composition.

EMU’s FYC curricular outcomes illustrate the inefficacy of the Outcomes Statement to “regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition” (intro). Obviously, departments are interpreting the statement through various interpretive lenses. Even worse, EMU’s choice to obviate the fourth outcome contradicts the claim made in the Outcome’s Statement’s introduction that these outcomes articulate the best of theory and research and must not “be taught in reduced or simple ways.” By omitting the one outcome that encapsulates postmodern theory from their own OS, EMU enables a merely
acculturative pedagogy, and may even be unwittingly encouraging it. This lack of a clear interpretive framework permeates the WPA's "Processes" section as well.

Section Three of the Outcomes Statement

Though most of these outcomes summarize what has been learned since the Dartmouth Conference about the recursiveness of the writing process and acknowledge writers as conversational participants in larger social conversations, only the last two of these OS outcomes intimate a postmodern perspective that emphasizes writing as a social act. Intimation, of course, is not a declaration and what is merely intimated can be easily missed by many readers. While there is a static and decontextualized description here, the meanings of these sections might be interpreted from a more postmodern perspective because the scholarship in the field has been so fully attentive to social implications of collaboration and of technologies.
Processes

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part
- Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences

The implication of "learn[ing] to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part" drives to the heart of individual ethics. On the surface, it seems to refer to receiving revision
help from other readers (as most writers do) while being ultimately responsible that the effort involved in production can be claimed as one’s own, not anyone else’s. Interpreted from a deeper perspective, this statement alludes to the much profounder responsibility of assuming responsibility for one’s self in every respect. Such a responsibility requires a reflective metaawareness of the social construction of oneself as an evolving being. One must not only be responsible for one’s current actions but also take responsibility for one’s own continuing education, in other words, one’s own evolution. This outcome forcefully implicates students as participants actively influential in the social realm who, as such, have the responsibility to improve themselves as lifelong learners, and, by extension, seek to improve facets of that social realm with which they come in contact.

The final outcome in this section, “use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences” also might imply that students should acquire a postmodern metaawareness of themselves as users of tools and technologies, and again, for the purpose of civic action. From alphabets to computers, technologies—as with anything else viewed through a postmodern perspective—are interlaced
with worldviews that determine, for better or worse, how the world works. In “Expanding Our Understanding of Composing Outcomes,” Cynthia Selfe and Patricia Ericsson address the importance of acquiring certain “literacies” within this culture, and they stress the responsibility of WPAs to “help students of color and poor students compose rhetorically effective texts” (34). Acquiring and using literacies is not enough. Students, according to Selfe and Ericsson, must “be critically aware of their own and others’ rhetorical success in doing so”; if not, “they run the risk of being ‘have-nots’ in a culture that increasingly associates power with technological reach, of being passive consumers of electronic texts but not being able to produce these texts” (34). As with the final bulleted outcomes of each section, we again see a postmodern undertone permeating the Outcomes Statement, underscoring students as social users of signs and technologies who use their multiple literacies for various purposes — and who, more importantly, are responsible for the repercussions of their representations.

This subtle postmodern undertone also charges FYC educators with the responsibility of employing a pedagogy that encourages students to amplify their sense of
themselves as socially responsible. Quoting from the work of Marilyn Cooper, Selfe and Ericsson write that
"[r]esponsibility within postmodern contexts [. . .] rests not on modernist authority figures or value systems rooted in the Enlightenment, but rather on a personal 'willingness' to relate to other humans, on a personal 'impulse to be responsive to and responsible for' others, on a 'willingness' to approach authentic problems arising from the postmodern condition (Cooper 1999, 153) and to learn about their complexity with the help of concerned teachers" (35). Selfe and Ericsson's statement gets to the heart of what composition research has discovered—that we cannot talk about language and semiotic use without also interrogating the purposes of our use. Implicit in such discussions is an assumption that such an interrogation will lead students to want to "be responsive to and responsible for' others" (Selfe and Ericsson 34).

My examination of the fourth and final section of the Outcomes Statement, Knowledge of Conventions, will reveal it as fundamentally devoid of postmodern connotations.
Section Four of the Outcomes Statement

A postmodern approach to the teaching of conventions would situate conventions within a social and historical context. The OS clearly does not.

Knowledge of Conventions

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling

This section deals with conventions, and although it does somewhat acknowledge the mutability of convention for “different kinds of texts,” including their “surface features” such as “syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling” and implicitly acknowledges students as evolving learners who acquire strategies, these acknowledgements
offer, at best, the faintest whispers of postmodernism. Although knowledge of conventions can be (and often is) taught through rote and ritual, they also can (and in my opinion, should) be taught from a postmodern perspective. My own experiences as a student have made me grateful to those teachers who have modeled a postmodern pedagogy of convention, discussing the purposes and effects of convention and the ways in which intellectual property is culturally maintained, for they have provided me with details of the subtle and invisible workings of language and the ways in which I have been unconsciously taught to accept such conventions as neutral. These personal experiences add to the evidence that explicit instruction about something as seemingly rote as convention can expand one’s postmodern awareness and should therefore not be taught from a merely acculturative standpoint.

In fact, all acculturative aspects of writing can be taught within a postmodern context. Many detractors of critical pedagogy claim that it derails acculturative acquisition by focusing on the political. I argue to the contrary and hold that acculturation can occur under the purview of a postmodern context—my experiences in a Master’s of English Composition program that grounds its
curricula within a postmodern context certainly substantiate this claim. Indeed, if one theory can subsume another without excluding it, then it makes sense to choose the inclusive theory as the goal of the writing classroom. Postmodernism does not exclude acculturation but rather sets it within a larger context that includes a historical perspective that permits agency and change within it and accommodates every type of writing as well as every type of student.

However, this knowledge of convention section of the OS seems to contradict my perspective in that it lacks a postmodern interpretive framework. Moreover, postmodern awareness of the arbitrariness of convention helps students perceive the arbitrariness of all cultural artifacts— including themselves— leading them to a multicultural perspective, also glaringly absent in this section. In fact, the section almost seems as if it were tacked on as an afterthought, a reminder of the current-traditional “to do’s,” bereft of any discussion of the normative functions of convention that simultaneously enable easy encoding of information among its discourse members while acting as borders to non-members.
A greater faux pas in this section is pointed out in The Outcomes Book by Marilyn S. Sternglass who questions the expectation that students be able to "control surface features." Nonstandard speakers and ESL writers should certainly not be expected to have complete control of such features, and she reminds composition professionals of their supposed postmodern orientation to language that would prohibit such students from having "their work evaluated on the correctness of the forms rather than the sophistication of their ideas" (208). She suggests that the statement be revised to read that "students should have been practicing the conventions of syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling" and should, most importantly, be made "familiar with the patterns they are having difficulty in controlling" (209). She stresses the importance of explicit metalinguistic instruction regarding such errors so that students can differentiate "between those patterns they control automatically and those that still require specific attention" (208). In addition to her point that students should not be expected to be able to do anything but rather be merely aware of a concept and working toward acquiring it, she feels that instructors should understand
some of the differences between L1 and L2 writing so that they may consequently individually adjust their pedagogy.

It is interesting to note that ESL issues, especially since the ESL student population each year comprises an increasingly larger percentage of the FYC classroom, go entirely unmentioned in the Outcomes Statement. ESL students comprise three groups: international students, many of whom have extensive metalinguistic and grammar knowledge yet have little verbal fluency; immigrants, many of whom have little of either; and generation 1.5ers, those students who have acquired a great degree of conversational fluency through immersion because they have lived and schooled in the United States for any number of years, yet, whose written texts are peppered with first language transfer issues. Students in this last category often perceive themselves as both American and fluent and deny their categorization as ESL learners.

The absence of any mention of ESL in the OS may indicate an assumption that all composition instructors are versed in L2 writing issues and thus adjust their pedagogy accordingly. With respect to written comments, for example, William Grabe reminds us that "L2 writers welcome specific overt feedback from teachers on the form and
structure of their writing, and their writing improves as a result” (45). Yet, considering the disciplinary division that occurred between ESL and composition in the 1950’s and the subsequent attenuation of ESL discussion within the composition community as chapter one reveals, it is probable, as my experience discussing such issues with various FYC instructors confirms, that many FYC instructors are not well informed regarding L2 language acquisition and writing.

Grabe summarizes L2 research that distinguishes “influencing factors that are often invisible to many writing programs and teachers,” and he charges “English L1 writing teachers” to “understand the cultural dispositions” of their L2 writers. The differences these students bring to the classroom include “[e]pistemological issues (distinct cultural socialization and belief systems),” “[w]riting topics (personal expression and humanistic individualism as North American educational preferences),” “[k]nowledge storage (L1-based knowledge creates complexities for L2 writers),” “audience awareness (English L2 audiences sense may be culturally different from English L1 students),” and “Students’ right to their own language (whose English is right?)” (Grabe 45-6). Grabe holds FYC
teachers responsible to "be appropriately prepared to teach" L2 writers "effectively and fairly." Considering the extent to which nonstandard and non-native writers comprise FYC classrooms, I agree that FYC instructors need ESL training. I have frequently applied my ESL training in the FYC classroom to both nonstandard and non-native writers, not only with regard to issues of language transfer but also theoretical understanding of the differences and interactions between acquisition and learning, the need for immersion balanced with explicit meta-instruction.

The pedagogical obligation of inclusivity requires that teachers do more than merely have an awareness of L1-L2 differences. They must practice a pedagogy that embeds their curricula in a postmodern context. For how else but within a social paradigm does an instructor discuss cultural differences to a stratified student population without acting as an instrument of socialization? (Even within fairly homogenous student populations, one could argue such an approach for two reasons — 1) from a social-constructionist standpoint, no student population, nor individual student for that matter, is homogenously unified, and 2) especially within fairly homogenous student
populations, teaching with a social paradigm encourages students to self-reflectively examine their cultural predispositions and socializations.) I again remind the reader that a postmodern orientation to language acknowledges the imbrication of language and thought and hence the social construction of cultural norms of thought and behavior. Thus, all writing instruction must incorporate discussion of social-constructionism in order to expressly address any of Grabe’s listings, for example, “audience awareness” or “L1-based knowledge.” The OS expressly refers to such knowledge in outcomes such as “[r]espond to the needs of different audiences” and “[r]espond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations.” Doing either requires specific cultural knowledge, and instruction about such knowledge if presented from a merely acculturative perspective results in unfair practice because it normalizes the practices of the dominant majority who do not have to adjust their practices at all. To decenter and displace such privilege, Edelstein recommends that a multicultural education should move “toward a more relational model of cultures and identities” (15).
Although there is implicit endorsement of such a social paradigm in the OS, as we have seen from my previous examination of outcomes such as “understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power,” the lack of explicit endorsement of a postmodern pedagogical context enables the continuation of acculturative pedagogical practices that, intentionally or not, may exclude some students in the FYC classroom, including ESL students. Analysis of the Outcomes Statement reveals, then, the palpable interplay of the same two opposing discourses that we saw in chapter one at work throughout the history of composition, namely, the modern and postmodern, also known as the acculturative and the critical.

A similar debate over which approach to take—acculturative or critical—rages in the ESL community. ESL scholarship has traditionally taken an acculturative stance advocating that “L2 writing theory and practice should be driven by the pragmatic mission of preparing students for target situations,” resulting, for example, in such programs as EAP (English for Academic Purposes). There is, however, according to Sarah Benesch, “an emerging tradition in the field” that “address[es] the social context of
English language teaching," incorporating the politics of composition (161). Opponents to this approach either claim that it presents a "cognitive overload" for L2 writers or argue that "critical thinking is uniquely Western and that ESL composition teachers should therefore avoid imposing this type of thinking on their nonnative speaking (NNS) students" (162). Benesch rightly points out that these opponents do not, however, "argue that academic discourse is culturally determined and should also, therefore, be avoided," and she argues that their "sanction[ing] of certain types of thinking and writing" is clearly "a political choice" (162). Instead of a merely pragmatic approach, Benesch advocates, rather, "critical pragmatism" — a postmodern pedagogical approach that attacks the theoretical assumption inherent in pragmatism that "students' relationships to their native language and to English are unproblematic, that learners can simply add an additional language to their linguistic repertoire with positive results" (162).

Informed by varied ethnographic L2 research, critical pragmatism is informed by postmodern theory. According to Benesch, as with all other socially-constructed students, ESL students' "positionality (class, ethnicity, gender,
race) and agency (their active embrace and rejection of various facets of learning)" create "a complicated picture of learning English" that illustrates their struggle "with both wanting and resisting English" (164). Substantiating L1 composition research, L2 critical research also shows, Benesch argues, that "pragmatically teaching the demands of the target situation is an inadequate response to the complexities of L2 learning" (164). In addition to the social, cultural, emotive, and affective issues involved in learning, she adds that mere acculturative instruction "perpetuates the myth that some types of discourse are freer of cultural contamination than others and do not, therefore, impose on students; it also omits debates in the L1 and L2 composition communities about what skills, genres, and methods best prepare students for the demands of academic content courses" (166). Diane Belcher validates such a view, claiming that "critical writing will help students begin to see themselves as experts-in-training, to overcome their reluctance to challenge established authority, and to understand the social dynamics, or the ongoing dialectic, of their fields of study" (135).

It is, of course, no surprise to educators with a postmodern pedagogical orientation that both L1 and L2
education are riddled with the same issues, and the absence of any such distinction within the OS intimates support for the claim that postmodern orientation to language undergirds composition’s current disciplinary knowledge, exemplifying its “practice, research, and theory.” However, as rhetorical analysis of the Outcomes Statement has already demonstrated, the statement’s postmodern undertone is no more than that, an undertone, not a clear promulgation and promotion of postmodernism, as the following chapter will discuss.
The primary factor underlying the Outcome Statement’s unsuccessful attempt to “regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition” is its lack of a clear postmodern context. Though a postmodern undertone clearly exists in the OS (as we saw in various outcomes such as “understand how genres shape reading and writing” and “understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power”), the absence of any articulation in the introduction of “what composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory” clearly enables continuation of the same stratified theory and pedagogy that originally fomented the need to regularize FYC. Though the introduction claims that the OS document itself articulates composition’s “practice, research, and theory,” clearly my rhetorical analysis demonstrates the potential for various and contrastive interpretations of the knowledge acquired through such means, as do real life applications, as in the case of EMU.

In addition to lacking a clearly articulated theory for FYC practice in the introduction, the OS’s other
primary weakness is its listing of bulleted items as if each were of equal weight. Though the framers imply an embedded hierarchy, of a weighting leading from simple to complex with the latter items articulating a more complex and postmodern understanding of the writing process, the fact is that if context drives interpretation and meaning, the more complex items should be cited first for schema activation to occur.

Perhaps unwittingly, the framers taxonomize according to a developmental model that inscribes and promotes a modern rather than postmodern developmental model based upon linear procession from simple to complex. "The chief hazard of the developmental model," Berthoff reminds us, "is that it sanctions the genetic fallacy—that what comes first is simple, not complex, and that what comes after is a bigger version of a little beginning" (338). Developmental models that more accurately reflect the complexity of the learning process incorporate uneven, embedded, multi-directional advancement in addition to sequencing.

Additionally, much of the OS terminology does not reflect a complex developmental model, which again implies a modern’s positivist view of uniform linear development.
According to the OS, students should be able to “focus,” “respond,” “use,” “adopt,” “understand,” and “write.” Ruth Overman Fischer advises that, rather than assert that students should be able to do the above, the statement should read that students “‘should have demonstrated the ability to’” (italics mine) fulfill these functions because “students cannot be expected to have full command of any of these outcomes by the end of the course” (176). In other words, if a student is able to demonstrate her acquisition of these skills to some degree, then that is sufficient to show that she is “learning” the targeted tasks. As has been determined by error analysis and second language acquisition research, expecting more than that would be an indication that the OS’s outcomes for FYC charge instructors and students with accomplishing much more than is possible in merely a course or two.

Notwithstanding the mammoth charge it makes for FYC, the Outcomes Statement commendably evinces the complexity of learning to write in its incorporation of faculty sections that outline how faculty throughout the departments can help students expand and amplify their writing knowledge and abilities. The fact that faculty across the curriculum are charged with the responsibility
to teach writing refutes the myth that FYC can teach students to write for life in the space of a course or two.

FYC can and should, though, introduce students to the discipline of composition and its postmodern understanding of language. Such an understanding cultivates students’ metaperspectives of writing and discourse communities, providing them with valuable knowledge that they can transfer and apply to any number of situations. In support of Yancey’s challenge to her colleagues to view “composition [as] the content of (any) composition class and program” (220), I have argued throughout this thesis that knowledge of the intertextualities of life and ourselves as hermeneutic beings, then, should be the curriculum of composition. The field of composition and rhetoric—like other fields—has both a theoretical foundation and a substantive body of knowledge that can be introduced in FYC and cultivated throughout students’ postsecondary education. Sadly, though, Yancey’s claim that the OS clearly outlines the content of composition’s disciplinary knowledge as the curriculum of FYC cannot be substantiated by my analysis. The lack of a clear theoretical context in the OS potentially opens the door for any type of praxis, including theoretically outmoded
modern practices whose sole mission is to acculturate students to standard edited English and academic discourses even though our research has repeatedly refuted such approaches.

By refusing to directly address the tensions between modern and postmodern approaches to the field, the Outcomes collective has created conditions that will appear to professionally sanction the educational shortchanging of students. As my discussion in chapter two suggests, postmodern orientations to composition, whether pursued primarily in the spirit of acculturating students to academic discourse or in the spirit of encouraging student agency, do not essentialize student populations nor do they provide a diminished mechanistic and rule-governed view of language use.

Postmodern pedagogies offer historical, social, and cultural understandings of language use. Presented within the sociological context of humans as social animals whose communicative interactions have created varying-length conversations, some lost forever, some lasting forever and ultimately producing, for example, toasters, quantum physics, the zero, pop music, and lethal injection, and socio-political ideals ranging from the tyrannical to the
purely democratic, teaching in the context of a postmodern "conversational model" (Bazerman, Bruffee, Burke), encourages students to see themselves as integral participants in a myriad of lifelong conversations who would benefit from the cultivation and honing of their critical abilities. Whether evaluating which shoes to buy, which schools to attend, which political candidate most deserves one's vote, or how best to raise and educate children, the ability to find, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information in order to understand and articulate one's own position is invaluable.

Postmodernism does not necessarily require teachers to abandon their responsibilities to academic writing. Rather, it asks students to understand the nature of acculturation as discourse plays a role in it. A postmodern approach suggests that when academic conversation is embedded within a larger conversational context and within a context of discourse communities (that is, within a social paradigm), students who might not have otherwise perceived themselves as possible participants in certain academic, economic, public, and personal spheres may feel capable to take part. Why does it work this way? Firstly, because students' conscious awareness of their many other
discourse memberships acquired over their lifetime can provide them with the confidence to enter and assimilate more, allowing them to feel worthy of access. Second, their investigation of many of the critical thinking skills they have applied and practiced in their other communities encourages students to transfer and cultivate such skills within academic spheres. Such an approach permits all students to feel included, and when presented within a context of their having a purpose and of helping to solve a problem, even academic conversations that often seem like boring and useless endeavors to many young students become understandable, challenging, more interesting, and worth the effort to join.

Some critics of postmodernism claim that to understand ourselves as subjects of discourse, as Brodkey suggests in the opening quote of the second chapter, we negate the possibility of agency. On the contrary, I argue throughout this thesis that the cultivation of a postmodern awareness increases our agency by allowing us to identify and analyze the social forces at work upon us so that we may, as Vanderburg quotes, "acquire, negotiate, resist, and deploy" (534) any of these social variables. It is difficult to resist or deploy or negotiate that which we do not
understand. Conscious action enables students to both acculturate to and resist discourse communities as they wish. Therefore, a postmodern pedagogy is more inclusive than a modern pedagogy which, as we saw in chapter one, often silences students and works against literacy instruction’s mission to foster autonomy. Some opponents of this type of a critical education that asks students to examine socialization on both the individual and social level claim that postmodernists are nihilistic and eschew reason, one of “the guiding principles of the postmodern age” as no longer “viable, meaningful, or believable” (Santos 174). On the contrary, to many postmodernists, our ability to reason critically and direct such reason inward is the very means by which we can check our own bias and act to produce positive and meaningful individual and social change.

A central tenant of postmodernism is that bias is an innately limiting human characteristic. Language and the brain often work in contradictory and competing ways; in tandem, the two order, govern, regulate, and enable our thought. Over and above the instinct to survive that we share with most creatures, the instinct to make meaning may be a distinctly human trait. As information processing
models of the human brain demonstrate (Johnson 3-4), processes that involve both stored knowledge and newly acquired knowledge work together to categorize and order our thought "emically," thus allowing us to quickly process information and connect it to our prior experience, to make sense of what our senses apprehend. This human quality of apprehending knowledge by filtering it through prior interpretive frameworks stored in our long-term memory determines our individualities, creates our individual and group identities, and, ultimately, defines us as humans. These emic frameworks are interwoven with language which, according to Berthoff, "has two aspects, the hypostatic and the discursive" (338). "By naming the world," she elaborates, we enable the discursive; "we hold images in mind; we remember; we can return to our experience and reflect on it" (338). As this discussion of critical awareness affirms, based on my own research, I agree with Berthoff who claims that "[i]n reflecting, we can change, we can transform, we can envisage" (338).

"Language," then, "thus becomes the very type of social activity by which we might move towards changing our lives" much as the National Council for the Excellence in Critical Thinking instruction suggests in their declaration
that critical thinking is not the "mere use of those skills ("as an exercise") without acceptance of their results." However, the "hypostatic power of language to fix and stabilize" that which "frees us from the prison of the moment" and "recreates us as historical beings" (Berthoff 338) is also that which organizes and patterns our thought emically. These emic frameworks, interwoven with language, are such subtle forces that they must be scrutinized and explicitly taught. As rhetoricians continue to reveal, only some of the multifarious ways we have been socialized and indoctrinated have been examined.

The study of human epistemology and its imbrication with language makes sense as a subject of composition classes. The National Council for excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction promotes such understanding as an educational goal: "[e]ducation – in contrast to training, socialization, and indoctrination – implies a process conducive to critical thought and judgment. It is intrinsically committed to the cultivation of reasonability and rationality." They claim that since "there is an intimate interrelation between knowledge and thinking" and since "everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so" it follows that since "much of our thinking, left to itself,
is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced," we should cultivate our critical abilities. Postmodern language theory provides the theoretical context needed to explain human bias and perception and thus is a useful and sound theoretical foundation for composition pedagogy.

However, many members of the field do not feel it necessary to theoretically justify praxis. In “The Outcomes Statement as Theorizing Potential: Through a Looking Glass,” Fischer justifies an untheorized approach to praxis, citing Donald Wolff’s claim that “the suggestions which have led to the current Statement are themselves the products of wide reading in theory – too wide to begin to document in the Outcomes Statement – and a wide variety of approaches – too wide to essentialize and inevitably various’” (172). Quoting Wolff again, Fischer claims that theory is unimportant: “the Statement itself is not intended to lay out the theoretical grounds...Rather, the Outcomes Statement is for a broader audience [school administrators, the interested public, students], which ‘simply’ need to know that we have theoretical and practical grounds for suggesting these particular outcomes for FYC” (172).
If, then, the OS is merely a political tool to keep at bay the forces outside the academy that would otherwise dictate the content of FYC, how can a statement that, Fischer admits, can be read by readers who "ultimately 'see' which ones [theories] are present — or absent — through their own theoretical frames" (173) accomplish the formidable task of unifying and "regularizing" FYC? Having spent the last four years in a Master's of English composition program whose curricula are presented within a postmodern theoretical context, learning that "no education is neutral" and that all practice is grounded in theory whether consciously or not, I view the OS, as my analysis shows, as a cultural artifact palpitating with underlying theory, theories that, unfortunately, perpetuate those very historical modern/postmodern tensions that provoked its emergence. Blind faith that writing instructors' pedagogy, as Fischer avers, is based on "theory that they [instructors] have read, lived through and taught by, leavened by encounters with countless students" and that it is this theory "that informs the Statement" (172) essentially brings us back full circle to the conditions that caused the formulation of the OS—a lack of curricular consensus with regard to FYC instruction. This deficiency
is largely due to the fused efforts of a highly mixed group that, as was discussed earlier in this chapter, does not comprise a unified interpretive community. The OS introduction seems to acknowledge this fact in its claim that "the document is not merely a compilation or summary of what currently takes place." Yet reliance on the claim that the OS's underlying theory is that which FYC instructors "have read, lived through and taught by" contradicts the intro's assertion, leaving me unsettled by the circular logic of Fischer's argument, an argument that seems to be an attempt to justify an unjustifiable condition—the absence of a unified underlying theory in the Outcomes Statement.

Though the OS framers are to be commended for tackling the Herculean task of summarizing and condensing the skills, knowledge, and understanding that comprise the content of postsecondary writing instruction, the fact is that the deficiencies and inconsistencies their statement was generated to address still exist. I maintain that the OS has not yet done what it set out to do, and, even worse, has left itself vulnerable to attack, especially by those outside forces from which it was designed to defend itself.
In chapter four, I will discuss the significance of this lamentable circumstance.
CHAPTER FOUR

COMPOSITION'S TERRAIN: A MO/POMO BATTLEGROUND

The postmodern critique asserts that apolitical contemplation without cultural bias or social agenda cannot actually exist. This critique adds a most valuable conceptual instrument by which we may more accurately reconceptualize our understanding of the past and therefore, our own contemporary condition.

—Allsup, "Postmodernism, the 'Politically Correct,' and Liberatory Pedagogy," 270

Allsup's statement challenges us to utilize our metaawareness of human bias to interrogate our past in order to consciously cooperate to reconfigure our future. I have tried to meet such a challenge by using composition history and postmodern theory to rhetorically analyze the Outcomes Statement as a cultural artifact to uncover its underlying "cultural bias and social agenda" (Allsup 270). My analysis shows that, in many ways, the OS merely
reinstantiates composition as an acculturative service course and does not actively promote a postmodern pedagogical context for FYC or for writing instruction in general. With the hope of contributing to the reconfiguring of the future of composition, I have argued that a postmodern theoretical context should be clearly articulated in both the OS’s introduction and in its ordering of bulleted items. To that end, the purpose of my rhetorical analysis is twofold: 1) to contribute to the scholarly conversation among the WPA framers of the Outcomes Statement who have enjoined the composition community for revision suggestions and 2) to raise two questions I feel need to be addressed: if the document is partially designed to defend academic freedom as it relates to the construction of disciplinary knowledge and how that knowledge should be taught, what does it mean to claim and preserve that freedom? And why is it important to do so?

I hope to have demonstrated in chapters one and two what comprises and distinguishes composition’s contemporary knowledge construction as it is situated in and informed by many other disciplines. This knowledge establishes composers as social users of language and language as a dynamic and shaping epistemic force that both constrains
and enables. As Berlin might say, the composing process always involves four elements: "writer, reality, reader, and language" (255), and none of these elements can be, in reality, divorced from another. Viewed in this light, true student-centered pedagogy recognizes each individual student as a rhetor and encourages the development of self-awareness and self-expression required of that individual to act as a self- and Other-conscious rhetor. In "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own," Jacqueline Jones Royster claims that "the 'subject' position really is everything" and that "rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies as a field of study [. . .] embraces the imperative to understand truths and consequences of language use more fully" (611). If we agree with this imperative, then an essential focus of our pedagogy should be to share the specifics of writing instruction within a theoretical postmodern and critical context that highlights the epistemological and social aspects of language use and the consequent positionality of any ism (e.g., organism, nationalism, capitalism, creationism, postmodernism) within that framework. Why? Because we very rarely exist outside that framework, and never do as language users.
Yet a significant number of compositionists still challenge the efficacy of an FYC pedagogy grounded in postmodern theory, a pedagogy that cultivates students' metaperspective of themselves and others as language users whose reception and production of language and thought are continuously imbricated in processes of interpretation. Though theoretically unjustified, FYC pedagogy that does not focus on "the relationship between language and meaning" (Boland) and that presents composition merely in the context of learning new procedures and skills, still dominates FYC instruction. To the contrary, the CCCC’s position statement "Scholarship in Composition" clearly asserts that composition is about interpretation since composition "has taken as its subject the production, exchange, and reception of texts in a variety of settings" (1). If composition literacy requires an understanding of the intertextuality of texts and humans' deictic positioning to this web of intertextuality which necessitates the use of interpretive frameworks to make sense of any part of it, then how could anyone expect students merely to follow procedures to become conscious rhetors? Fulfilling such an expectation would require students to make a magical transition from followers of
procedural rules to interpreters of rhetorical situations. Clearly, learning "what’s appropriate" does not necessarily encourage critical thought, voice, and agency—requisites to conscious rhetorical action.

My rhetorical analysis of the OS, then, should be taken as a positive disciplinary self-assessment, an opportunity to adjust our praxis to fit our theory. In fact, as I have argued, presenting writing in a postmodern framework that includes discussion of the cultural positionality and historical flux of socially-constructed items such as genre and argument has the potential to remove the feelings of confusion that often accompanies students’ acquisition of a new writing literacy. It seems to me that any pedagogy undergirded by modernism and that is not grounded in postmodernism serves to perpetuate a deficiency model of student writing and promote the notion of FYC as a remedial course.

Most importantly, I argue, as others have, that if we continue to dodge the bullet and waste time and energy trying to accommodate outmoded theory that normalizes our student population rather than practice postmodern theory which is ample enough to support service and agency, we merely leave the field assailable to control by external
forces. Doug Hesse addresses this issue in "Who Owns Writing" and suggests that "those who teach writing must affirm that we, in fact, own it" (338). The reason we must affirm our ownership, he reminds us, is that, though all who would claim ownership might have good intentions, their intentions, "framed by worldviews as basic as what constitutes the good society and what makes the good life," always "bend through the nearly translucent lenses of social and economic interests" (354). In contrast, composition as a discipline has "the lens of research and reflective practice" (354-5). I heartily agree with Hesse that "with our knowledge comes responsibility" and feel that one of our foremost responsibilities is to defend our constructed knowledge, knowing it is incomplete, will change over time, and that, at times, it marginalizes and excludes potential contributions, but is nevertheless the current culmination of collective contemplation and rigorous inquiry – an up-to-date work in progress. For how can we consciously advocate critical thinking if we do not respect the results of our own contemporary and collective critical thought? As a cooperative effort, our continued inquiry into language study, though imperfect, provides us with the metameans to scrutinize and exert control over the
processes of being human and ultimately our collective social, political, and educational development as a species.

As our research and practice has shown, writing is inextricably suffused with who we are— and thus has a profound effect on who we might become. This is the reason why so many FYC program guidelines, as exemplified by my English department at California State University, San Bernardino, ask FYC practitioners to devise curricula that emphasize writing and reading as processes that we use “not only to communicate but also to generate thinking and to examine assumptions.” The examination of assumptions is common intellectual practice in many professional fields. The field of composition is unique in that such examination of assumptions is necessarily turned either inward toward the individual and/or outward to larger institutions and society as a whole in order to analyze and interrogate our position towards any given topic. For writing/composing about any topic requires that we understand how and why we have arrived at our interpretation of events in order to be able to justify our position(s). This operation is frequently and understandably uncomfortable and emotionally unsettling, for it asks us to examine unconscious practices
and learned behaviors that often, when scrutinized, are recognized as clearly unjustifiable. Dismantling our presuppositions about ourselves and our world is not easy, but taking shelter in familiar and cozy but often illusory concepts and beliefs is not what the business of education is about. Yet the fact that language and writing cannot be divorced from individual and societal worldviews, a fact that should be incorporated in FYC instruction, is one of the primary reasons the content of FYC is such a controversial issue.

Along with Hesse and others, I urge the composition community to claim our collective knowledge based on "research and reflective practice" (344-5) because it is precisely this knowledge about how composing is bound up with who we are (and thus ultimately effects who we will become) that makes FYC and writing instruction a disturbing issue for so many, especially those contemporary forces that have begun to demand classrooms devoid of ideology. Postmodern theory tells us such a demand is impossible. Yet clearly, our disciplinary knowledge is not common knowledge—as evidenced by the many state legislatures that have considered David Horowitz's "academic bill of rights" (ABOR), as well as the many student websites and local
student organizations that have begun to target "liberal" professors. ABOR charges academic institutions to maintain a posture of "neutrality" and constrains faculty from discussing their ideology or activism in a classroom. More importantly, it removes faculty evaluation and control from within the institution and places them outside of it. Horowitz’s evidence for the "one-sided" partisan nature of the academy consists of the fact that Democratic outnumber Republican faculty by about "30 to 1," and he goes so far as to accuse academe of "systemwide intellectual corruption."

Rather than reflecting unfair hiring practices, perhaps the predominance of "liberal" professors more accurately reflects the results of their education. Education changes us — most often to be more "open-minded" — to the extent that graduate and postgraduate education in most contemporary disciplines recognizes and often instantiates a postmodern awareness in its students, an awareness that impresses the interpretive aspect of human epistemology. Such an awareness has changed me and my worldviews, not as a consequence of any "teacher modeling" or being convinced by any of their individual views, but by prompting me to interrogate and justify my positions, many
of which, after review, I found unjustifiable and was therefore compelled to reject or reform.

After much practice, it is a great deal easier to examine my positions, many of which originated from my primary discourse and which I often accepted unquestioningly. And it’s always a profound experience for me to notice just how deeply this discourse runs in me. For example, I can still hear my father’s voice from years ago resounding in my ears: “Judy, the word education comes from ‘educare,’ to lead away from.” I had long assumed that his remark meant that education leads us away from our own ignorance; however, I now realize that, although my initial assumption encapsulates a value I still support, the word itself now carries an altogether different value, that of positionality. An education is never neutral and as such has the power and potential to enculturate a person with horrific values and or ideas (e.g., racial superiority and so on). An education can and does consist of many things, so to project the ideal of being led away from “ignorance” onto the word and concept of education is absurdly unjustifiable. (We never know when or how we will be aroused to question or re-interpret the influence of a previous influence.) An education, any education does,
however, always lead us away to a new subject position, a new literacy, and to understand this positionality is but one positive aspect of a postmodern awareness.

Another aspect, that all language use is epistemic, changed not only my orientation to language but to knowledge itself. Seen as deictic, then, knowledge for each individual varies. Recognizing this fact leaves anyone with a postmodern awareness no option but to accept diversity. I cannot think it a coincidence that people become more liberal and open-minded as a result of an education, for a vigorous education is, in many ways, the opposite of and the deconstructing of unconscious socialization and compels us to accept that each of us has been variously socialized. There can be little doubt that an education imposes change upon us, and thus resocializes us. Ideally, it also offers us the critical means to reflect and make conscious and more well-informed choices. This type of education leads us away from our unconscious assumptions and demands a critical look inward and outward.

Being "led away" from the familiar and into new territories always involves change and requires that we push the limits of our comfort zones to accommodate new ideas and new knowledge, and academic freedom protects this
knowledge-construction process within the disciplines. Any successful attempt by humans to improve any state of affairs involves experimentation and the freedom to do so. Our most reliable knowledge in any field has been acquired through patient investigation and refusing to ignore hard questions that require hard-thinking. It is the way professionals make progress in any field: old ideas give way to new discoveries which lead to new and better ideas and theories, and those new theories are tested to determine their validity and utility. Why should it be any different for composition? In order to be tested, theories must be put into practice and doing so requires freedom and support, and the protection of this intellectual process is the underlying foundation of academic support. Academics must have the freedom to continue to test new theories to determine whether they are viable and worthwhile and to embrace new ideas previously sealed off by ignorance or fear of change.

As Allsup's quote at the opening of this chapter suggests, much as with each of our personal histories, our composition history runs deeply in us and demands a collective assault on and deconstruction of our original merely acculturative mission. Our scholarship has accepted
the challenge and met those demands by claiming postmodern theory as a viable one that can comfortably subsume and accommodate all other approaches. Although many of our cultural artifacts, such as the Outcomes Statement, and many composition instructors' pedagogies still inhere modern theory, I advocate curricula firmly grounded in postmodern theory because my reason and experience, along with my research, have convinced me that it is a more inclusive way. As I mentioned towards the end of chapter two, the teaching of composition via a postmodern context does not have to promote any particular position or partisanship. Rather, as Hardin and others suggest, it can be presented from the perspective of intertextual consumption and reception that fosters and develops our awareness of humans as interpreters of the texts that reside within and around us and of ourselves as the users of interpretive frameworks to make meaning. I know this not only from reading composition's collective scholarship but also because I have been privileged enough to experience a graduate program that firmly and clearly foregrounds postmodern theory in its linguistic, literary and composition classes. I can proudly declare this approach more inclusive not only because I was acculturated
into a new discourse community, but because I was also taught how to better examine and distance myself from the ways humans are taught through language and discourse to normalize their thought and behavior, and was thus provided with greater agency than I had previously experienced. As the result of conscious action taken by the faculty of CSUSB's English department, the development of curricula grounded in postmodern theory has resolved compositionists' age-old divide between agency and service by providing both!

Such has been the evolution of this rhetor who, along with Hesse, says let's claim what we know as stakeholders in literacy education. We all may acquire one literacy after another in this life, but what differentiates a literacy education from the mere accumulation of literacies is acquiring and incorporating a metaperspective of human epistemology, of humans as interpretive beings who always make meaning, whether consciously or not. This is our subject - "the production, exchange, and reception of texts in a variety of settings" (CCCC's Scholarship in Composition), covering just about all of human endeavor, thought, and behavior. It's a hefty subject, to be sure, but it is ours and it requires a postmodern awareness to
ken it. Our scholarship has determined this to be so. However, my analysis demonstrates that to accurately reflect our scholarship, the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, though it doesn’t claim to promote a specific theoretical position, evokes two—the modern and postmodern—and, thus, is not accurately positioned from my view of the terrain.
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