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INTRODUCTION

Like many who teach college writing for a living, I started my career as an adjunct faculty member, first in California, then in Maryland for a few years, then in Massachusetts. In my first year, 1989, I was a California “freeway flyer,” driving my old Volkswagon Squareback between Menlo Park and San Jose, from first-year writing at several community colleges to basic writing at San Jose State. When my car died one day on the Junipero Serra Highway, a piston seizing in an engine that leaked oil like the proverbial sieve, I then took the commuter rail and strategically parked a bicycle at each train station, scurrying to class with a messenger bag full of books and student papers.

I upgraded my commuting arrangement once I moved to Maryland, where I drove my wife’s Toyota Tercel some 400 miles a week to teaching gigs at several community colleges and at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), an arm of the University of Maryland system that catered to working adults and members of the military, with, at the time, 95,000 students worldwide. UMUC was a pioneer in distance education, and the great bulk of this teaching was done by adjunct faculty.

Once we moved to Massachusetts in fall 1992, I was a full-time student in a doctoral of education program and continued my life as an adjunct, pushing that Toyota Tercel through the last two years of its life to teaching gigs at colleges in and outside of route 128 and through the city to UMass Boston. That teaching ranged from creative writing for learning-disabled adults to research writing in a competency-based degree program to first-year composition and literature in an all-women’s (at the time) college.

This variety of courses marked my life as an adjunct, as it does for most adjunct instructors, willing to take on what we are given. Typically during this period, I was handed a curriculum complete with readings, writing assignments, due dates and, in some cases, prerecorded lectures on audiocassettes (it was quite a while ago). I liked teaching these classes, perhaps because I liked the curriculum and felt that I was learning the material alongside my students, whether the subject was Victorian literature or business communication or twentieth-century

film (and, of course, such “teacher-proof” materials ensured that a wide swath of adjuncts would be able to teach these classes). I could also be creative about how to structure students’ learning experiences around and within this curriculum, whether that was how I used class time or, for classes that were essentially independent learning with few structured whole-class meetings, how I responded to students’ drafts in order to encourage revision and a reengagement with that curriculum. In other words, I was in control of how I taught, in control of pedagogy, putting into practice what I believed were the best ways for students to interact with and learn from that curriculum. I was a writing teacher whose training in writing process pedagogies allowed me to do what I felt best equipped to do: ensure that students engaged in invention, drafting, and revision; structure discussions, debates, and interactions with the course material; respond to students’ writing as a reader genuinely interested in students’ ideas and how they might better express those ideas in subsequent drafts or in the next writing assignment. At this point, just a few years and a handful of classes into my teaching career, it was a relief to be able to focus just on these pedagogical elements. The curriculum was chugging along just fine without me.

Nearly thirty years later, I’m not so sure.

On the most basic level, the difference between curriculum and pedagogy is the difference between what is taught and how it is taught: between content and instruction. However, curriculum is not merely assigned texts and topics for reading and writing, and pedagogy isn’t just about classroom or tutoring strategies. Instead, curriculum is dynamic and socially constituted, the process and product of the interaction between teachers, students, and materials, and the result of strategic choices in and outside of the classroom. Curriculum is influenced by textbook publishers, state legislators, schoolteachers and principals, college faculty and their committees. Curriculum is how education in the United States can be an assertion and replication of the status quo while also presenting a challenge to status quo values and hierarchies. It is both authoritarian and transgressive, constraining and enabling, hidden and transparent. The dynamic between pedagogy and curriculum is how a teacher scaffolds students’ learning experiences, and how students bring to bear their previous knowledge and goals for their own learning to create new knowledge. In short, pedagogy and curriculum are interrelated, and progress is not possible if we are attentive only to one and not the other.

Most important, however, is that curriculum and pedagogy do not have equal weight—the scales are decidedly tipped in favor of

curriculum. At my university, we have “curriculum committees” at department, college, and university levels; we do not have “pedagogy committees.” Curriculum is what college faculty “own,” develop, debate, vote on, and approve. It’s what accrediting agencies scrutinize. It’s a large part of what disciplines are defined by—the constructed knowledge that reaches back to those who came before and forward to new dimensions of knowledge making not yet imagined. Teaching practices—pedagogies—are certainly important to the enterprise of disciplinarity, but on their own they have little authority. This doesn’t refer merely to the old saw of the brilliant scientist who is an awful teacher; it speaks to the ways teaching is largely devalued by a system of higher (and K–12) education that strives to pay as little as possible for teaching expertise and is dependent on an economic model in which the majority of teaching—particularly the teaching of writing—is performed by adjunct, part-time instructors, ones who rarely have any role in the development of curriculum.

Let me back up. The problem is not necessarily that we in the field of writing studies leave curriculum largely unchallenged or in the hands of textbook publishers, school boards, and state legislators (though we largely do). The problem is that we do not distinguish between curriculum and pedagogy or, more critically, that we are reluctant to address curriculum. In classrooms from kindergarten to college, writing teachers have largely come to a common understanding of pedagogy in their teaching. More specifically, a belief in “writing as a process” or the “process movement” or the very sensible notion that most writing requires periods of idea generation, writing, and revising—all dependent on meaningful feedback—has taken hold over the last thirty-five years. Of course, such sensibilities clash with onetime high-stakes writing exams, standardized assessments, and labor conditions in which a single high school or two-year college teacher is faced with responding to the drafts of her 125 students. While the conditions for ideal process-oriented classrooms and school systems remain elusive, I would bet that a glimpse into a classroom in which writing is the primary endeavor would look pretty similar from the late 1970s to now. In other words, in writing classrooms, we have carefully developed and can largely agree on “writing process pedagogies,” or the activities we ask students to engage in and the practices of learning and teaching writing, but *what* students might be reading and writing about and the relationship between those topics for writing and our teaching practices are far less defined. Our inattention to curriculum ultimately hampers our effort to enact meaningful reform and to have an impact on larger conversations about education and writing. In

short, the barrier to reform that I focus on in this book is our field's conflation of curriculum and pedagogy when we should be treating the two as separate and important (though thoroughly intertwined) components.

The current educational climate seems ripe for reform efforts, the latest version of Johnny can't write, think, compute, or calculate. Writing (or the lack thereof) comes into particularly strong focus in Arum and Roksa's *Academically Adrift* (2010), in which we're told that most students do not write or read much in their first three semesters of college and consequently do not show improved performance by the end of their sophomore years—at least on the Collegiate Learning Assessment. This push-pull of educational reform—efforts to improve responding to evidence of failure—is seemingly hardwired into the system. Back in 1985, Mike Rose ascribed the cause of these recurring cycles to “the myth of transience,” or the belief of English teachers and policy makers that “the past was better or that the future will be. The turmoil they are currently in will pass” (356). This belief, in Rose's words, “blinds faculty members to historical reality and to the dynamic and fluid nature of the educational system that employs them” (356). Other writers have taken up Rose's “myth of transience” to explain the lack of progress in writing reform, perhaps most notably David Russell (1991) in his history of writing across the curriculum (27). The belief in the myth of transience—for teachers, would-be reformers, and critics—contributes to a situation in which the next “crisis” in students' literacy skills always seems imminent, in which professional organizations and national commissions repeatedly call for change, but in which real change rarely takes hold.

While no doubt powerful, the belief that the present moment is not connected to the past or future does not seem enough to explain the ways that student writing performance seems always in crisis, imperiled by lax standards, informality, and the allure of technology (whether radio in the 1930s, television in the 1960s, or Reddit and Snapchat in our present age). Understanding the persistence of *the problem* of student writing—and thus *the problem* of writing instruction—requires more than belief in a myth—instead we must understand the very real barriers to institutional and instructional reform, whether those barriers are political, institutional, pedagogical, curricular, or personal.

Perhaps this reluctance to engage in curricular reform is the legacy of previous largely unsuccessful curricular efforts, such as the post-Sputnik, federally funded Project English in the 1960s (Lerner 2009, ch. 5) or the recent P-16 movement to align curriculum from preschool to college (Davis and Hoffman 2008) or the long-standing belief that curriculum is largely a local issue—or at least within the bounds of state standards and

curriculum guides. Or perhaps our reluctance is an effect of the 1980s and 1990s culture wars over curriculum in the college writing classroom, whether radiating out from Linda Brodkey's experiences at University of Texas, Austin (1994) and the associated writing studies debate over the role of "politics" in the composition classroom (e.g., Hairston 1992), legacies of 1980s "great books" bromides from E. D. Hirsch (1987) and William Bennett (1996), or the successful movement to fill local school boards with conservative standard-bearers. Whatever the causes, our expertise with pedagogy and "writing as a process" emerges as the staple of the field, and that conclusion is considered perfectly tolerable in a climate that allows "writing as a process" to somehow define an entire discipline. But such definitions are only partial, only the shell of a discipline without substantial disciplinary content and certainly without any means to enact meaningful institutional reform.

To look for evidence of our field's attention to pedagogy versus curriculum, I ran a Google Ngram search (<https://books.google.com/ngrams>) for the occurrence of the phrases "writing process" versus "writing curriculum" from 1900 to 2000. As shown in figure 0.1, neither term appears with much frequency in the Google books database until around 1950, when "writing process" begins to take off and then dramatically increases from around 1970 until the late 1990s, when it levels off; "writing curriculum," however, never receives more than a few mentions.

In literature intended to represent the collected knowledge of the field, writing curriculum similarly receives short shrift in comparison to writing pedagogy. For example, the second edition of *The Guide to Composition Pedagogies* (Tate et al. 2013) was released in 2013 (the first edition came out in 2000); however, a companion *Guide to Composition Curriculum* does not exist. Further, the edited collection *Keywords in Composition Studies* (Heilker and Vandenberg), published in 1996, includes "pedagogy" as one of those keywords, but not "curriculum." In that volume, attention to the processes of writing comes with the words "composing/writing," "process," and "revision," but one is hard-pressed to discover what it is that students might be composing/writing/processing/revising. More recent articulation of writing studies as a discipline as represented in the collection *Composition, Rhetoric, & Disciplinarity* (Malencyk et al. 2018) similarly gives short shrift to curriculum: the term does not appear at all in the index, while "pedagogy" garners five references. Indeed, in their introduction to the book, the editors note that "we are today a pedagogically focused field" (7). A concomitant declaration of the curriculum of the field, an essential component of what might constitute a discipline, does not appear.

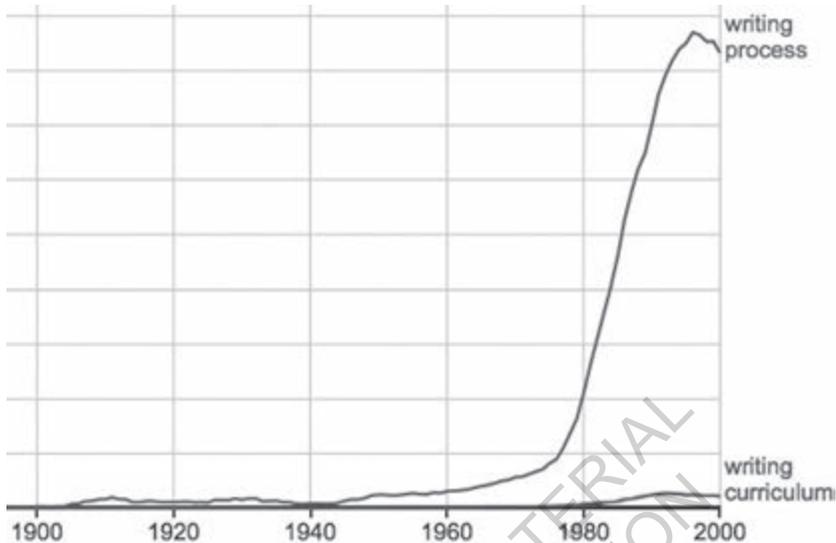


Figure 0.1. Google Ngram comparison of frequency of occurrence of “writing process” versus “writing curriculum,” 1900–2000

Perhaps articulation of curriculum might be found in another recent collection, *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015), which draws from Meyer and Land’s (2003) notion that a “threshold concept” is “a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress” (1).¹ The “something” referred to in this collection might offer evidence as to what curriculum might look like in writing studies, particularly a curriculum essential for entry to and progress in the field. Indeed, convincing readers to teach the threshold concepts is the primary project of this book (and perhaps even more so in the subsequent “classroom edition” [Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2016]). This codified body of knowledge represents a strong disciplinary claim: writing studies, like any discipline, is built on “threshold concepts,” and such conceptual knowledge should be the core of continued study in the field, just as it is in more visible and established fields.

Still, what troubles me about this approach to creating curriculum is the absence of students’ input and the regulatory inevitability of codified concepts (despite Yancey’s claims in the book’s introduction that threshold concepts do not represent a “canon” but instead are “contingent” [Yancey 2015, xix]) as well as a lack of attention to the relationship between pedagogy and curriculum. One might teach

threshold concepts in first-year writing, for example, as Downs and Robertson (2015) describe in this collection, making “threshold concepts the declarative content of the course” (105). The intended curricular outcome is a “framework to which students can transfer revised or reimagined prior knowledge, from which they can transfer new or reconceptualized knowledge to a wide range of writing situations, and with which they can understand that the nature of learning (especially that which they’ll see throughout college) is inquiry based and troublesome yet potentially transformative, thus opening themselves to greater potential for that learning to occur” (119).

The knowledge being referenced here is knowledge about how writing “works” or has worked in students’ prior, present, and future experiences. Not described, however, is what exactly students might be writing about other than analysis at the metaconceptual level (as well as a lack of concrete evidence that such an approach might be more effective than any other). There’s a decidedly evangelical angle here: the explicit goal of having students become true believers in the applicability of the threshold concept framework to any subject or to future classes in which writing will play a strong role. The message is that it is not merely students’ knowledge about writing that might be “revised,” “reconceptualized,” or “transferred”—their very identities as learners might be similarly transformed. These ambitious goals, however, largely take a deficit stance toward students (i.e., they need to be “revised” and “reconceptualized”) and largely ignore the many resources students bring to their writing, namely, the passions, interests, histories, and aspirations that offer “personal connections” and that might make their writing meaningful (Eodice, Geller, and Lerner 2016). A truly collaborative and consequential approach to curriculum in first-year writing—or any class in which writing plays a significant role—needs to make central what students bring to their learning and the ways that these “incomes” (Guerra 2008) are strongly connected to meaningful writing experiences.

I also believe that attention to curriculum in writing studies is essential for delivering on writing studies’ intentions to make our classrooms, writing centers, and community spaces inclusive of diverse learners. While the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) endorsement of students’ “right to their own languages” dates to 1974, the essential role of students in determining the curriculum (or the “right to their own curriculum”) of their college writing courses is far less articulated or acknowledged. While students might have some degree of choice when it comes to topics for writing (though navigating “banned topics” lists is commonplace, particularly in first-year writing),

they are typically writing in highly constrained environments, ones in which they had little to no say in what those constraints might look like. The curricular partnership with students that I am calling for in this book starts with the negotiation between our goals as teachers and students' goals as learners, between our histories as writers and teachers of writing and students' histories as writers and as family and community members, and their hopes and dreams for what their educations might produce. While K–12 educators have spent decades developing “culturally relevant curricula” (Aronson and Laughter, 2016), in post-secondary education, particularly in required writing classes, what often prevails is curriculum driven by the mastery of particular forms of writing, with occasional spaces for students to insert their interests and passions—as long as the fit conforms to the given spaces.²

As I describe throughout this book, articulation of curriculum—or at least a process by which we transparently create curriculum alongside our students—is essential to fulfill writing studies' disciplinary aspirations. Perhaps more important, however, is that curriculum is an assertion of values. Such assertions can easily be found in our professional statements, in our commitments to social justice, diversity, and inclusion, and in our research that shows the powerful roles that writing plays to shape/limit/make possible individual and communal agency. We work at odds with our good intentions when our design of curriculum and the curriculum itself do not reflect these values. The result is an uncomfortable relationship between who we are as a field and who we want to be, a gap that can account for the continued failure of our reform efforts.

In *Reformers, Teachers, Writers: Curricular and Pedagogical Inquiries*, I explore the distinction between curriculum and pedagogy in writing studies—and how failing to attend to that distinction largely results in the failure of educational reform. My sites of inquiry for these explorations are many and varied: current professional statements about college readiness and assertions of curriculum for “writing about writing”; stories from the first third of my teaching career when I was a student teacher in two San Jose–area high schools and then an adjunct writing instructor in community colleges and universities, teaching students ranging from basic writers in community colleges to nuclear power plant employees to Ford automotive technicians; descriptions of two students from my history as a teacher, both of whom embraced the “extracurriculum” —or took curricular matters into their own hands, so to speak—and are both now serving federal prison sentences for terrorist activities; the late-nineteenth-century Holyoke, Massachusetts, public schools,

where a newly hired superintendent would stress instructional reform, namely, individualized and “laboratory” approaches to instruction, only to be run out of office by an entrenched status quo uneasy with reform; contemporary Holyoke High School, where a majority minority student population and their junior-year English literature teacher struggle to fulfill the curriculum requirements of a literary analysis project; contemporary writing centers or sites best known for their pedagogical approaches to teaching writing but where a largely invisible curriculum shapes every interaction. I conclude with what I hope to see as the future of writing studies and educational reform.

This mixed-methods approach—using quantitative, qualitative, textual, historical, narrative, and theoretical methods—reflects the importance and effects of curriculum in a wide variety of settings, whether writing centers, writing classrooms, or students’ out-of-school lives, as well as the many methodological approaches available to understand curriculum in writing studies. I believe that the richness of this approach allows for multiple considerations of the distinction (and relationship) between pedagogy and curriculum. Thus, what might seem at first to be disparate considerations are instead brought together by the central focus on curriculum and its importance in the many contexts in which writing plays a role. Further, I group chapters into three parts: (1) disciplinary inquiries, (2) experiential inquiries, and (3) empirical inquiries, exploring the presence and effect of curriculum and its relationship to pedagogy in multiple sites, both historical and contemporary, and for multiple stakeholders.

PART 1: DISCIPLINARY INQUIRIES

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS CURRICULUM, ANYWAY? Drawing on educational theory, in this chapter I offer a robust definition of curriculum, including what an instructor might intend based on an example syllabus, as well as what she does not intend but what students might experience. An important distinction is between the curriculum that is “delivered” and curriculum that is “developed,” with the latter offering opportunity for student agency and consideration of student “incomes.”

CHAPTER 2: READY OR NOT, HERE WE CURRICULUM. As examples of the lack of definition of curriculum in the teaching of writing and its consequences, in this chapter, I turn to three recent efforts: (1) *The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project 2011), our professional organizations’

attempts to assert expertise in national conversations on the topic of “college readiness”; (2) the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ “Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” (2014); and (3) the effort to create content and curriculum for first-year writing via the “writing about writing” (WAW) approach (Wardle and Downs 2014). My critique of each of these examples primarily centers on the long-standing tendency to blame students for their lack of learning, their lack of readiness, their lack of engagement, or their lack of knowledge transfer. The overwhelming message is that responsibility is an individual one—these efforts place responsibility for success clearly with the individual student, not the social context, not the classroom, not the institution, and just barely with the teacher.

PART 2: EXPERIENTIAL INQUIRIES

CHAPTER 3: LEARNING TO TEACH AS A FREEWAY FLYER. My career as a writing teacher began with two semesters of student teaching for my high school English credential and then eight years of adjunct assignments in higher education. From northern California to the Washington, DC, area to Boston, I taught as many as seven classes a semester and worked with students from Ford automotive technicians to nuclear power plant operators to community college returning adults to university freshmen. The ways that these experiences emphasized pedagogy, often at the expense of curriculum, particularly when curriculum was largely out of my hands as a “freeway flyer” quickly moving from one teaching gig to the next, offer a challenge to our field, given its strong reliance on part-time adjunct teachers.

CHAPTER 4: TEACHING AND TUTORING TERRORISTS. Biswanath Halder was convicted in 2005 of terrorist activities, including manslaughter, when he stormed a building on the campus of Case Western Reserve University and shot an innocent bystander. Tarek Mehanna was convicted in 2012 of “conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists.” Both men are serving federal prison sentences. Biswanath Halder was a writing center client of mine when I worked as a writing consultant at Boston University. Tarek Mehanna was a student of mine at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences in Boston. Both of my former students took curriculum into their own hands, albeit in different ways, both using writing as a means of seeking justice and action. This chapter considers the role of the extracurriculum, or the writing curriculum outside of our classrooms, and the ways that the consequences of our teaching can never quite be known.

PART 3: EMPIRICAL INQUIRIES

CHAPTER 5: PRESTON SEARCH AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM. This archival inquiry into the relationship between pedagogy and curriculum is set in Holyoke, Massachusetts. As the superintendent of schools in Holyoke in the mid-1890s, Preston Search brought radical ideas of teaching reform. Specifically, he advocated nonauthoritarian, student-centered classrooms, ones built around students' individual needs, rather than mass instruction in what the system deemed most worth knowing. In the largely immigrant urban Holyoke, his ideas met resistance from the entrenched political elite, and his stay as superintendent was relatively brief. One lesson from Search's story is that pedagogical reform has as many limits as curricular reform, particularly given the politics of urban schooling and the strength of the status quo.

CHAPTER 6: LEARNING TO WRITE AT HOLYOKE HIGH. This chapter presents a qualitative study of one semester in the life of a Holyoke High School English teacher. As was true in Search's time, contemporary Holyoke is a city of immigrants, and Ms. T, in her second year in the school, finds that her largely student-centered and creative pedagogy conflicts in large and small ways with the traditional curricular requirements and students' own reluctance to make the curricular materials their own.

CHAPTER 7: THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF WRITING CENTERS. This chapter offers a quantitative and textual analysis of curriculum in what might be an unlikely place: the university writing center. In what is seen as largely a pedagogical space (Boquet 1999), the presence of curriculum is nevertheless strong, particularly in the co-construction (and potential clash) of knowledge that is at the heart of the writing tutorial. More specifically, I analyze online, synchronous writing center sessions for the presence of knowledge claims by tutor and student and the ways those claims range from monologic to dialogic and assert knowledge about tutor and student roles, about the writing process, and about the role of emotion in writing and tutoring. Bringing visibility to writing center curriculum offers the opportunity for writing centers to "name what we know" and assert a disciplinary presence.

CHAPTER 8: THE FUTURE OF CURRICULUM IN WRITING STUDIES. In this book, I have shown that a significant barrier to change is our lack of attention to curriculum or the conflation of pedagogy with curriculum. In this final chapter, I outline possible directions for needed attention to curriculum, representing a commitment to co-construct curriculum with students, colleagues, and institutions.

NOTES

1. In the interest of full disclosure, I need to note that I am a contributor to *The Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, 2nd ed, to *Naming What We Know*, both the full edition and the classroom edition, and to *Composition, Rhetoric, & Disciplinarity*.
2. A counter to this classroom environment filled with constraints are the long-standing calls for language difference, particularly the relationship between students' home languages and the languages of schooling, to be central to what happens in a writing classroom (though it is quite rare for these authors to describe their recommended approaches as "curricular"). See, for instance, Alexander and Rhodes 2012; Canagarajah 2006; Horner et al. 2011; Kinloch 2005; Lu 1998; Smitherman 2003; and Villanueva 1993.

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