

Activity Theory and Its Implications for Writing Instruction

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The US is the only nation that requires of most students in higher education a course in what is known in the US as "composition." That is, a course in what David Kaufer and Richard Young have called "writing with no particular content," or what is often called in this anthology general writing skills instruction or GWSI . Other nations teach what Kaufer and Young term "writing with specific content" as part of the regular learning of a discipline and allot virtually no curricular space in higher education for formal writing instruction per se.

The US system has many benefits. It has the potential for making students more aware of the uses of written discourse in higher education and in society. It can and often does provide a curricular space for welcoming students to higher education and thus, potentially, for broadening rather than restricting access to those social roles colleges and universities prepare and credential students to enter. And in the last thirty years GWSI courses have provided a focus for an unprecedented research effort on writing in a range of social institutions.

But there are trade-offs. The fundamental limitations of GWSI courses in higher education have been felt since the courses were begun over a century ago, and many have called for the abolition of this peculiar US curricular institution. Seven years ago I published an article tracing the history of attempts to abolish first-year composition courses (1988). I discussed Albert Kitzhaber's famous 1960 article, "Death— or Transfiguration," as an anti-abolitionist argument, since it was written in response to Warner Rice's "Proposal for the Abolition of Freshman English" (1960). However, on rereading Kitzhaber's article in light of the last seven years of growth in writing-across-

the-curriculum programs and research into writing in academic and non-academic settings in the US and abroad, I now see his article in a different light. It is at bottom another call for abolition, and a very prescient one.

Let me summarize four of Kitzhaber's points, points that seem to me to describe the current state of first-year composition as well as they described its state three decades ago when Kitzhaber conducted his major national research study of the course, Themes, Theories, and Therapy (1963). First, he says, there is a "lack of general agreement about course content, so that depending on the prejudices of the teacher, departmental policy (or lack of it), or current fads, the course may center on . . ." There follows a list of 1950's approaches, for which one could supply an equally long and varied list of 1990's approaches. Second, the course cannot "be said even by the most charitably disposed critic to be on the same level of intellectual rigor and maturity as textbooks and class work in other freshman courses such as chemistry or economics" (367).

Third, Kitzhaber calls the aims of the course "over-ambitious – to eradicate, in three hours a week for 30 or 35 weeks, habits of thought and expression that have been forming for at least 15 years and to which the student is as closely wedded as he is to his skin; and to fix indelibly a different set of habits from which the student will never afterwards deviate." Fourth, instead of going on to defend the course, as one might expect in a rebuttal to an attack on it, Kitzhaber admits that those who have studied its effectiveness (and no one had studied this more than he) have "too seldom" been able to find "a comforting relationship between the degree of improvement and the quantity of labor expended." Such a relationship might exist, he says, but it is difficult to tease out of the complex of factors that make up the improvement of writing (367).

Kitzhaber goes on to argue that these problems are inherent in the course's institutional position in American education. That is, he does not argue that the course merely needs firmer content, more intellectual rigor, more realistic expectations, and greater effectiveness. The problems of the course cannot be understood by looking at the

course itself, but only by analyzing the relation of the course to the American education system. And Kitzhaber concludes by proposing, as I will repropose, what he calls a transfiguration of the first-year composition course, not another reform of it.

In this article I extend Kitzhaber's analysis of these long-standing problems of GWSI using the framework of Activity Theory. I first explain the theory and use it to analyze the problems. Second, I use the theory to analyze the institutional position of GWSI courses. Finally, I reexamine two reforms Kitzhaber suggests in the structure of secondary and higher education that, he argues, will permit the transfiguration of first-year composition courses as we know them. The first and most important is the expansion of writing across the curriculum. The second is the creation of a liberal arts course in the uses of writing in society, which would redeem the curricular space now occupied by GWSI for activities that may better accomplish the democratic goals of American higher education. I conclude by suggesting that through these reforms we might preserve and extend the many benefits that composition studies have given and continue to give to US higher education while overcoming the structural problems inherent in GWSI.

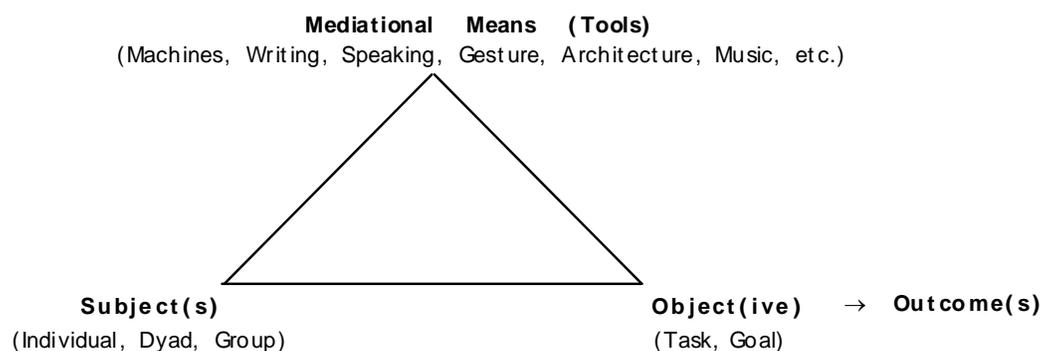
Activity Theory

Activity Theory is a tradition of psychological theory and research originating with the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky in the late 1920's and early 1930's. It was first developed by his colleagues A. N. Leont'ev, who coined the term, and A. R. Luria. Beginning in the 1970's, developmental psychologists and educational researchers in several other nations elaborated the theory and conducted empirical research, both quantitative and qualitative. In the US, Activity Theory first influenced studies of literacy through the work of Sylvia Scribner, Michael Cole, and others at the Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition. In the 1980's the theoretical tradition also became central to related lines of research into cognition in everyday life, particularly of adults

engaged in labor and the acquisition of labor-specific practices through apprenticeship (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1993). Though this tradition is by no means the dominant one in American developmental psychology, Activity Theory is an increasingly important perspective.

Activity Theory analyzes human behavior and consciousness in terms of activity systems: goal-directed, historically-situated, cooperative human interactions, such as a child's attempt to reach an out-of-reach toy, a job interview, a "date," a social club, a classroom, a discipline, a profession, an institution, a political movement, and so on. The activity system is the basic unit of analysis for both cultures' and individuals' psychological and social processes. This unit is a functional system (see Figure 1) consisting of a subject (a person or persons), an object(ive) (an objective or goal or common task) and tools (including signs) that mediate the interaction (Engestrom, 1987). I use the term object(ive) because it refers not only to persons or objects in a passive state (what is acted upon) but also to the goal of an intentional activity, an objective, though the objective may be envisioned differently by different participants in the activity system.

Figure 1: An Activity System



In an activity system, the object(ive) remains the same while the mediational means, the tools, may vary. In a very simple activity system, for example, a two-year-old child (subject) wishes to reach a toy on a high shelf (object[ive]). She might drag a chair

(one mediational means or tool) under the shelf and climb up to reach the toy. Or in frustration she might cry out for her father (another mediational means or tool – a verbal sign) who might get a chair for her. Or her father might point to a chair (another – an indexical sign), describe what to do (another verbal sign), or even demonstrate its use in this activity (another – a gestural sign). An invariant function (reaching an object out of reach) may be performed by variable mechanisms, but the functional system, the activity, is the same.

Though Activity Theory is very much open and developing, most theorists in the tradition recognize five key constituents of activity systems. Activity systems are 1) historically developed, 2) mediated by tools, 3) dialectically structured, 4) analyzed as the relations of participants and tools, and 5) changed through zones of proximal development.

First, activity systems have histories that are essential to their workings. For human beings, these histories are predominantly cultural (though phylogenic change may also play a role). New interactions with the present environment arise from a dialog with the cultural past, preserved in mediational means (artifacts, texts, etc.). Mediational means (tools) may consist not only of tools in the usual sense (hammers, computers) but also semiotic tools: speaking and writing, as well as gestures, music, architecture, physical position, naturally occurring objects, and so on (Engestrom, 1990; Smagorinsky and Coppock, 1994; Smagorinsky and Coppock, forthcoming). Texts are tools for carrying on some activity and they vary with the activity, just as hammers vary in their design and use depending on the work to be done using them. Variance in semiotic tools according to the activity we might call genre. The tools within each culture and each activity system within it have a history, and that history is reflected in their form and/or use, whether ordinary tools such as hammers, or tools such as the marks on a page called writing, or tools such as the moon when it is used, say, for navigation. For human beings (apart from the few instances of enfants sauvages), all mediational means are cultural, with

meanings arising from the history of their use. For those tools that are in the form of texts, meanings almost always arise in relation to previous texts (intertextually) as well as in relation to non-textual phenomena. Every word, as Bakhtin put it, carries with it its history (1986).

Second, as the example of the child suggests, changes in human behavior and consciousness, individual or collective, are mediated by other human beings through the use of tools (in the example: the chair, the child's cry, the father's pointing, etc.). No mind is self-sufficient. Activity systems are inherently social. Change occurs through the historically-situated interactions of people and tools over time. As Leont'ev says, an activity system is not "an aggregate of reactions, but a system with its own structure, its own internal transformations, and its own development. . . . If we removed human activity from the system of social relationships and social life, it would not exist and would have no structure" (1981, pp. 46-47). Human activities are complex systems in constant change, interaction, and self-reorganization as human beings collaboratively adapt to and transform their environments through their actions with tools (including writing). Thus, consciousness is not individual but intersubjective, networks of systems mediated by our tools of interaction. Indeed, to paraphrase Robert Frost, human activity is social whether we work together or alone, for even the writer alone in a study is formed by and (potentially) forming the actions of others through the tool of writing. The solitary writer is part of some activity system(s) that give meaning and motive to individual acts of composition.

Third, activity systems are dialectal. Change is not one-directional. It is accomplished through joint activity, whether cooperative or conflictual, face-to-face or widely separated in space or time. The participants in an activity system appropriate (borrow and transform) the tools and object(ive)s and points of view of others, leading to changes in the means of pursuing the object(ive) of the activity system. For example, a discipline may appropriate some terminology (and thus concept) from another discipline

and thus transform the way it goes about its work, just as it might appropriate a mechanical research instrument from another discipline. But in the process, it may also transform the terminology it has appropriated, investing it with new meaning, just as it might redesign for its own object(ive) mechanical research instruments appropriated from another discipline.

Fourth, the unit of analysis in Activity Theory is not the workings of an individual mind but the relations among the participants and their shared cultural tools. Thus, activity systems can be analyzed from multiple perspectives (of the various participants) and at many levels (from the individual to the broadest cultural levels). And an analyst can shift among multiple views to study an activity system, triangulating the various views (Engestrom 1990). A central question for Activity Theory analysis is choosing the most useful "lenses" or perspectives for analysis among the many possible ones (Rogoff, 1993).

Fifth and finally, Activity Theory explains change in terms of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): the object(ive)-directed interactions among people, where one or more of the participants could not, by themselves, effectively work toward the objective (Newman, Griffin, and Cole, 1989, p. 61). In these "construction zones" writing and learning take place as people, using their tools, mutually change themselves and their tools. All learning is situated within some activity system(s). And one learns by participating – directly or vicariously – in some activity system(s).

From this perspective, adolescents and adults do not "learn to write," period. Nor do they improve their writing in a general way outside of all activity systems and then apply an autonomous skill to them. Rather, one acquires the genres (typified semiotic means) used by some activity field, as one interacts with people involved in the activity field and the material objects and signs those people use (including those marks on a surface that we call writing). This Activity Theory formulation of the acquisition of writing resists what Brian Street (1984) has termed the myth of autonomous literacy.

Literacy is not learned in and of itself and then applied to contexts (activity systems). It does not exist autonomously, divorced from some specific human activity. Literacy is always and everywhere bound up with the activity systems that it changes through its mediation of behavior – and which change it, for writing is an immensely protean tool that activity systems are always and everywhere changing to meet their needs.

Activity Theory Analysis of GWSI as Writing with No Particular Content

What is the activity system of a first-year composition course? The subjects of the activity are clear: the students and the teachers, primarily. However, the object(ive) and the semiotic tools of the activity system are extremely ambiguous, and this ambiguity may help explain the four problems Kitzhaber noted. I will examine two traditional formulations of the object(ive)s of the course: 1) improving students writing in general and 2) teaching students a general academic or public discourse.

GWSI as teaching or improving writing in general

The object(ive) of GWSI is most often described as teaching students "to write" or to "improve their writing." If writing were an autonomous skill, generalizable to all activity systems that use writing, improving writing in general would be a clear object(ive) of an activity system. But writing does not exist apart from its uses, for it is a tool for accomplishing object(ive)s beyond itself. The tool is continually transformed by its use into myriad and always-changing genres. Every text is some genre, to paraphrase Bakhtin (1986), part of some activity system(s). Learning to write means learning to write in the ways (genres) those in an activity system write (though one must remember that this is complicated by the fact that activity systems and their tools – including genres – are always in dialectical change). From this theoretical perspective, the object(ive) of GWSI courses is extremely ambiguous because those involved in it are teaching and learning the use of a tool (writing) for no particular activity system. And the tool can be

used for any number of object(ive)s (in myriad activity systems) and transformed into any number of forms (genres).

To illustrate the ambiguity inherent in GWSI courses, let me draw an analogy between games that require a particular kind of tool – a ball – and activity systems (disciplines, professions, businesses, etc.) that require a particular kind of tool – the marks that we call writing. Many different games are played with a ball. The originators of each game have appropriated this tool for the object(ive) of each, the "object of the game." The kind of game (activity) changes the form of the ball (tool) – large, small, hard, soft, leather, rubber, round, oblong, and so on. The object(ive) and the history of each game also condition the uses of the ball. One could play volleyball by using the head, as in soccer, but it is much less effective in achieving the object of the game than using the wrists and hands.

Some people are very adept at some games and therefore at using some kinds of balls, while they may be completely lost using a ball in another game because they have never participated in it. (I play ping-pong pretty well, but my nine-year-old daughter laughs at my fumbling attempts to play another game with a ball of similar size – jacks.) However, ways of using a ball (ball-handling, if you will) are "generalizable" to the extent that in two or more games the tool (ball) is used in similar ways for similar object(ive)s. (A good croquet player might easily learn to put, or a good tennis player learn squash.) But there is no autonomous, generalizable skill called ball-using or ball-handling that can be learned and then applied to all ball games.

As one becomes adept at more and more ball games (and thus learns more ways of using more kinds of balls), it is more likely – but by no means certain – that one will be able to learn a new ball game more quickly, since it is more likely that there will be some ways of ball-using in the new game that resemble ways of ball using in a game one already knows. It may also be true that one may have "learned how to learn" ball games. That is, a person may have learned how to keep one's eye on the ball, how to monitor

one's movements in relation to the ball, how to watch more experienced players for clues on ball-handling, and so on. But this does not mean that person's "ball-using skill" is autonomous and general in any meaningful sense. It is the accumulation of some specific ball-using skills (and not others) learned in some specific ball games that bear some similarities.

To try to teach students to improve their writing by taking a GWSI course is something like trying to teach people to improve their ping-pong, jacks, volleyball, basketball, field hockey, and so on by attending a course in general ball-using. Such a course would of necessity have a problem of content. What kinds of games (and therefore ball-use skills) should one teach? And how can one teach ball-using skills unless one also teaches students the games, since the skills have their motive and meaning only in terms of a particular game or games that use them? Such a course would have a problem of rigor since those who truly know how to play a particular game would look askance at the instruction such a course could provide (particularly if the instructor did not herself play all the games with some facility). And it would also have a problem of unrealistic expectations, since it would be impossible to teach all – or even a few – ball games in one course. Finally, it would be extremely difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of a course in general ball-using since one always evaluates the effectiveness of ball-using within a particular game, not in general. And ways of using a ball that work well in one game (volleyball, for example) would bring disaster in another (such as soccer).

Let us apply the analogy to GWSI. Many different kinds of activity systems are carried on with writing (to many of them, writing is as indispensable as balls are to ball games). The kind of activity – its object(ive) and its history – changes the way the tool, writing, is used. The activity also changes the tool itself: the grammar, lexicon, format, and so on. These differences, as I noted earlier, we might call genres – historically-constituted ways of forming and using this tool called writing among the people who

carry on an activity. Some people are very adept at writing certain genres because they have participated a great deal in the activity system that uses them, while they may be much less adept (or even incompetent, from the point of view of an adept) at writing a genre from an activity system in which they have not participated. A Nobel laureate who wrote a world-changing scientific paper might fail miserably at writing a straight news account of the discovery for the front page of the local newspaper – though the scientist reads the newspaper every day. This is because scientists do not ordinarily participate in the activity system of journalism and have not learned its genres.

Like the handling of balls, the writing of genres is "generalizable" to the extent that written text is handled in similarly ways for similar object(ive)s. A person who can write a footnote in a history paper may find it easier to learn to write a footnote in a chemistry paper than a person who has never written a footnote (though the differences in citation purposes and practices may actually make it more difficult – what second language teachers call "interference.") (Swales, 1990). But from the Activity Theory perspective I am developing here, there is no autonomous, generalizable skill or set of skills called "writing" which can be learned and then applied to all genres/activities.

As one becomes adept at more and more activities that require writing and hence at writing more genres, it is more likely (but by no means certain) that one will be able to master a new genre more quickly, since it is more likely that there will be some features of the new genre/activity that resemble features in a genre/activity one already knows. It may also be true that a person may have "learned how to learn" new genres. That is, one may have learned to be alert to the role language plays in an activity system, to take instruction from an adept in the genres one is trying to learn, to notice the differences in writing processes of various activity systems, and so on. Indeed, research in second language acquisition suggests strongly that it is easier for adults to learn third language than a second, and perhaps the same is true for learning genres (Ellis, 1994).

But to try to teach students to improve their writing in general by taking a GWSI course is to encounter the problems of our mythical ball-using course, the long-standing problems Kitzhaber noted with first-year composition courses. (1) Disagreements over content spring from the inevitability of linking writing to some activity system(s) and thus certain genres. One must always choose genres – and hence choose the activity systems that give those genres meaning and purpose. But which genres and activities, out of the myriad? (2) Problems of rigor arise from the distance between the activity of GWSI teaching and the activities which gave rise to (and thus meaning to) the genres that are taught. Those who know well the activity systems from which GWSI's genres are drawn must inevitably find the coverage in those courses shallow since the genres are taught under severe time constraints and by faculty largely unacquainted with the activity systems for which the genres exist. It is not surprising that writing is treated as detached techniques or skills, divorced from the object(ive)s that give the genres their meaning. (3) Unrealistic expectations are inevitable when the course has as its object the teaching or improvement of all writing, because one can only introduce a tiny fraction of the possible genres. (4) It is extremely difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the course since, outside the activity system of GWSI, one always evaluates the effectiveness of writing within a particular activity system and its object(ive), not in general.

GWSI as teaching academic or public discourse

A second frequently-mentioned object(ive) for GWSI courses is that they teach students to write or to write better what is thought of as a universal educated discourse, a general kind of discourse that all educated (or truly educated) persons in a culture share. This hypothetical universal educated discourse, UED as I will abbreviate it, is most often termed "academic discourse" or, even more broadly, "public discourse." These formulations of the activity system of composition seem to narrow somewhat the genres (and thus the content) of GWSI, but like the myth of autonomous literacy, of which they are really a part, they also rest on a widely held myth about the nature of discourse, a

myth of universal educated discourse. From the Activity Theory perspective I am developing, there is no distinctive genre, set of genres, linguistic register, or set of conventions that is academic discourse or public discourse per se, because "academia" and the "public" are not activity systems in any useful sense for writing instruction. These categories create and preserve the false notion that there can exist "good writing" independent of an activity system that judges the success of a text by its results within that activity system, and that the teaching and learning of such writing can be divorced from any activity system beyond GWSI (Miller, 1991, chap. 2).

Academia in general has no object(ive) that those carrying on its immensely varied activities share. It exists to select and prepare people for a wide range of activity systems within and beyond institutions of higher education. From this perspective, academic discourse consists of the dynamic aggregate of all the many specialized discourses of all the activity systems (disciplines and departments) that make up academia. And the protean tool called writing is appropriated and transformed by each activity system according to its object(ive)s and the material conditions of its work to evolve myriad genres within academia. The genres of various disciplines within academia are much more usefully characterized by their differences in discourse than by the similarities. Disciplinary discourses vary immensely, and even when activity systems appropriate identical discourse features, they do so for differing object(ive)s and thus often use the features differently. For example, pointing to the footnotes in a theoretical physics article and those in an article from PMLA would not be very helpful to a novice learning to write both genres, as compared with pointing out the very different object(ive)s of the two disciplines' activity systems, the very different material conditions of their work, the vast differences in their histories – differences which explain the profound and crucial differences in their uses of citation and documentation (Bazerman, 1988).

Moreover, many of the genres written in institutions of higher education are not particular to academia, because many of the activity systems involved in academic

institutions are also involved in other, non-academic institutions, and with them their genres. Thus, any feature of academic writing that one might point to will also likely be found in a great deal of non-academic writing, and it is those connections – not the connections among academic departments – that are most important to those who use writing. Many texts written by chemists, engineers, economists, creative writers, musicians, and so on outside of academia are virtually indistinguishable from many texts written by their counterparts within academia, and vice versa. An activity system with its object(ive) and tools – including the tools I have called genres – is not confined to one institution but can be shared among several. For example, the writing of an ecologist in a biology department will likely have far more in common with the writing of people of engaged in studying and preserving the environment in a government agency or non-profit organization than with the writing of colleagues down the hall in history or engineering, because ecologists in various institutional settings share certain object(ive)s, a certain history passed on through their training, and certain tools of their activity (including genres) that have developed historically to meet those object(ive)s.

As in all institutions that bring together people from many activity systems, universities appropriate and evolve genres to carry on their common work: interdepartmental memos and proposals, course catalogues, policy and mission statements, forms, minutes of governing bodies, contracts, and so on. But these are not characteristically "academic discourse" either, as they resemble similar genres evolved for similar bureaucratic purposes in large governmental, corporate, and non-profit organizations.

In the same way that "academic discourse" consists of an aggregate of activity systems (and therefore discourses) that do not share an object(ive) or a discrete set of genres, "public discourse" consists of the all the dynamic, interacting, activity systems (and therefore genres) through which public life is negotiated: news stories, advertisements, position papers, trial testimony, transcripts of the deliberations of public

bodies, government reports, press releases by unions, by corporations, by consumer groups, brochures, confidential documents leaked to the press. These activity systems do not share a single object(ive). Their interests vary, and so do their genres.

These activity systems and their genres are constantly interacting dialectically as they pursue their different object(ive)s and negotiate their different interests. An activity system sometimes appropriates features of the genres of other – usually more powerful – activity systems in order to pursue its object(ive)s (e.g., contesting a law that affects it, replying to accusations of misconduct in the press, etc.). A discipline or profession appropriates a term or some other feature of a genre from another discipline or profession in order to accomplish its work.

Indeed, whole activity systems have developed to facilitate the dialectical interactions (and thus appropriation of discourse features) among activity systems: journalists specializing in science, negotiators and arbitrators, congressional aides, lobbyists, communications and public relations specialists. For example, the MLA (an activity system specializing in the study of discourse) in 1993 hired a public relations firm to explain its actions – and its discourse – to the press, after the MLA had been unsuccessful in countering press reports that had been damaging to its reputation. And such specialists in turn develop their own genres to carry on their activity of facilitating the interaction of activity systems. Sometimes these specialists even evolve academic programs to select and prepare neophytes (e.g., public relations, science journalism, etc.).

However, in these dialectical processes there is no overarching academic or public discourse that exists beyond the interaction of specific activity systems, no metalanguage into which one could "translate" the "jargon" of an activity system. A text is never academic or public discourse per se. It is, to appropriate Bakhtin's phrase again, "always some genre" – part of some activity system(s). And no single genre or subset of genres includes the whole of public discourse, for no activity that requires written discourse is shared by all citizens or even all educated citizens. Journalism perhaps comes closest, but

it too has its own techniques, its own discourse features ("jargon"), its own genres that require participation in the activity system of journalism to learn – and it has its own academic discipline and department.

Though no autonomous genre or discrete set of genres exists that can meaningfully be called "academic" or "public" or "educated" discourse, people nevertheless interact (speak, write, use numbers, etc.) in ways that other people recognize as "educated" or "college educated" or "uneducated." That recognition depends upon the history and activities of the group doing the recognizing. A person can participate (or have participated) in many activity systems. In modern or post-modern societies some powerful activity systems in, for example, government and the media, interact with a wide range of other activity systems (and their genres) to carry on their work successfully.

These powerful activity systems tend to select participants who have had a "liberal arts" education, not in the sense that they learned a general "academic" or "public" discourse, but in the sense that have been exposed to certain activity systems (and thus their genres) that are useful in these powerful activity systems: e.g., certain formulations of economics, US history, psychology, literary criticism, science, government, music, and so on. To successfully work, for example, as an editor for the New York Times or as a top congressional aide, one must be able to appropriate tools from various "educated" activity systems, including aspects of their genres. And people in these activity systems tend to be recruited from certain institutions of higher education that provide exposure to these activity systems. This analysis suggests that to learn to write "public discourse" is not to learn one kind of discourse but to learn many – those that are frequently appropriated by the most powerful activity systems in a society for the genres they use to do their work.

In sum, learning to write academic discourse means learning to write some more or less specialized genre or genres. And learning to write public discourse means learning to write some more or less specialized genre or genres, because all writing is specialized

in the sense that there is no overarching discourse of which others are merely subsets. Nor is there a generalizable skill or attainment called "academic discourse" or "public discourse" transferable to any academic writing situation or any situation calling for writing about public issues (Smagorinsky and Smith, 1992). To teach students to write "academic discourse" one must engage them in a specific activity systems – and therefore specific genres – where academic work goes on.

Similarly, to prepare students to write "public discourse," one might involve them in those activity systems upon which much public discourse draws: through "liberal arts" or introductory courses in the sciences, social sciences and humanities. One might also involve them in those activity systems – and therefore specific genres – where issues of public policy are negotiated, through professional courses that specifically train students to enter these activity systems. For example, in journalism and mass communication programs, students are taught the genres through which one may address the public at large through mass media. They learn to write a straight news story, a press release, a feature story, an advertisement, a direct mail solicitation, a sales or grant proposal. But these are not the genres of GWSI.

In US. English departments the myth of UED has been powerful. GWSI courses are often seen as teaching an overarching discourse, which other activity systems (disciplines or professions) ought to use instead of their own "jargon." Yet GWSI courses must select genres – and thus activity systems or "content" – to teach. Because of the history of GWSI courses, these genres tend to be literary analysis (or, more recently, cultural studies), from the dominant activity systems of English departments, or essays of the type published in upscale magazines (e. g., New Yorker), read by those in activity systems for which GWSI courses were originally designed to prepare students when the courses were first introduced at Harvard in the 1870s (Ohmann, 1976; Wall, 1994).

Of course some genres that are often taught in GWSI classes may bring students into contact with certain activity systems where issues of public policy are negotiated

(writing a letter to the editor or to a legislator, for example). So also GWSI courses – particularly those with a "writing-across-the-curriculum" emphasis – sometimes expose students to some genres of some disciplines. But because the teaching and the writing are taught separately from the activity systems, students are only peripherally involved in the intellectual, cultural, and political activity systems these genres help to carry on. By contrast, in courses designed to teach activities other than composition, students have more opportunity to learn who the participants in an activity system are, what they do, and how and why they do it – and thus what, how, and why they write the ways they do. In these "content" courses, students can learn to write in those ways eventually, or perhaps make an informed decision to resist those ways of writing – and acting.

Before GWSI courses became thoroughly institutionalized in the US, the assumption that one could teach writing per se, without being involved intimately with a discipline's activity, struck many educators as presumptuous if not foolhardy. In 1915 one educator wrote of composition courses:

The department of English is straining to become a forum of discussion of all questions that have assailed human intelligence. . . . Those instructors of English [who teach composition] are asked to become actively conversant with science, politics, philosophy. Though still devotees of belles lettres, they are also striving to speak with authority on every other subject. . . . Frankly the assumption is startling. May not a cog have slipped somewhere?

(Thurber, 1915, p. 328)

The cog metaphor is apt. Writing in GWSI courses is not engaged with the activity systems that give writing meaning and motive. It is, in other words, divorced from content. The problem of content lies behind the other three problems that Kitzhaber and many others before and since have found: lack of intellectual rigor, unrealistic expectations, and difficulty in assessing effectiveness. Rigor is the result of a history of using tools in certain ways for common goals, a tradition of shared expectations. Rigor is

a product of an activity system where goals are shared and behavior can be assessed in terms of those goals. If literacy is not autonomous and writing is not a skill that is automatically generalizable to other activities, then the expectations placed on GWSI courses are inevitably unrealistic. If expectations are inevitably unrealistic, then it is perfectly understandable that it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the course.

Institutional analysis of Composition as an Activity System

As an activity system interacts with other systems in a complex dialectic, contradictions arise that drive changes within activity systems (Engestrom, 1987) and thus within the genres that mediate their activity. GWSI is also an activity system, and its interactions with other activity systems – particularly disciplines and institutions of higher education – creates a fundamental contradiction in its object(ive). It must attempt to teach writing without teaching the activities that give writing meaning and motive, those of other activity systems.

Because of this contradiction at the heart of GWSI, the course is alienated in its institutional position. GWSI is not linked to an activity system that goes beyond the GWSI course itself in the way almost all other general introductory courses are linked to disciplines and professions. It is not part of a path that leads students further into an activity system, as, for example, general chemistry or psychology leads on to the activity systems of the disciplines and professions of chemistry or psychology, within and outside academia. Some institutions do have a series of writing courses in creative, scientific, business, or technical writing that lead to careers in those disciplines and professions. However, the GWSI course is not traditionally structured to introduce students to the activities of those disciplines and professions (Russell, 1991, chap. 4). In Activity Theory terms, the course's object(ive) is contradictory, since writing in GWSI courses must be an instrument of different object(ive)s for each of the different activity systems it "serves," with no activity system of its own beyond the course itself.

This fundamental contradiction, however, has been masked by the myth of autonomous literacy and its corollary, the myth of UED. These myths masks the contradictions in the relationships of composition with the other activity systems: with English, with other disciplines, with institutions of higher education, and with the education system as a whole.

To the institutional structure that usually houses GWSI, English departments, the course has often been seen as introducing students to or preparing them to enter its own activity system, literary criticism, and has thus served the object(ive) of that activity system (Carson, Chase, Gibson, and Hargrove, 1992). That object(ive) has conflicted with the object(ive) of higher education at large for composition: to help students "write better" for all courses. However, the myth of universal educated discourse has masked this contradiction by positing an overarching discourse that all disciplines (or all educated persons) use or should use. English departments have not generally had to confront the contradiction because the myth of universal educated discourse allowed them to teach primarily their own discourse (and thus values) in GWSI classes as if that discourse (and those values) were, or ought to be, universal.

The myth of UED reinforced the values of the activity system of English, values that justified its distance from scientific and social scientific activity systems (Graff, 1987; Russell, 1991). English was able to criticize other disciplines for their technical "jargon" without feeling an obligation to investigate or teach the genres of other disciplines. The myth of UED served to reinforce and reproduce the values (and genres) of the activity system of literary criticism. Given its departmental position, GWSI has rarely had to engage and confront the profound differences in disciplinary discourses, because its interactions with other disciplines have been minimal. Such engagement would have made the contradiction in GWSI evident. But such engagement would have been a distraction from the object(ive) of the activity system of literary criticism and a challenge

to its values (as it would have been to any other disciplinary activity system that housed the course).

Moreover, from the perspective of English departments with large graduate programs (in which most college English teachers are trained), a central object(ive) of GWSI is the financing and training of future college English teachers – the reproduction of the discipline. It is difficult enough to train graduate students in the discourse (and pedagogy) of one activity system (literary criticism, in this case); it is simply impossible to train them in the discourses of all activity systems. Thus, the myths of autonomous literacy and UED made it possible to teach the courses that financed the reproduction and expansion of the discipline.

Other departments have also rarely had to confront the contradiction at the heart of GWSI: teaching writing without teaching the activities that give writing meaning and motive. First, the "quality" of disciplines' own writing rarely became an issue of sufficient weight to prod them into action, because their writing was and is adequate to their object(ive)s. Their genres originally evolved to meet their object(ive)s, and thus their "jargon" served their purposes well. And when their genres did not serve, those genres evolved again. Second, disciplines were able to reproduce themselves (select and prepare future participants) without offering formal instruction in writing, through the normal, tacit process of apprenticeship in writing that goes on in any activity system that requires writing to function (Sullivan, 1988).

Writing tends to remain transparent, part of the "natural" daily actions of participants in a discipline – until something breaks down. Disciplines and professions consciously act to change the ways students acquire the writing of their activity system when they find that the kinds of discourse they socialize students to use are no longer adequate (as when employers complain) or when significant numbers of students do not learn in the usual ways to write the genres required for the activity system's work (as

when there is an influx of second language students or students from very different language backgrounds in the mother tongue).

GWSI helps to mask the role of writing in disciplines' work of reproduction: selecting and preparing students. The myth of UED makes it easier for a discipline to assume that when students from previously excluded language backgrounds fail to successfully write its genres, the discipline has nothing to do with that failure. The existence of separate and general writing courses encourages disciplines to mistakenly assume that they do not teach "writing" but only "content." When some students cannot "write" (by the discipline's standards), the fault must lie elsewhere: in the students who do not master the "content" or in the secondary school English or college composition teachers who did not properly teach (autonomous) literacy. Thus, the disciplines are absolved of responsibility for consciously adapting their organization of learning, their zones of proximal development, to the language and culture of students from non-traditional backgrounds.

Nor have universities, secondary schools, or the wider society had to confront the contradiction at the heart of GWSI, because GWSI courses mask the differences in disciplinary discourses, and, apart from WAC efforts, there are no other institutional structures to bring these to light, since disciplines largely carry on their activities (including writing) in departments (literally and figuratively).

Finally, GWSI helps to mask the whole system of social selection in the US. The vast majority of education systems select students for higher education on the basis of their extended writing in the disciplines, either in essay examinations, as with the French baccalaureate, or in course work portfolios, as with the English system of moderation (Russell, 1992; Russell, forthcoming). This writing in the disciplines is assessed collaboratively, by teams of examiners in the disciplines. Writing is thus tied directly to the curriculum and is visibly central to social selection, the object of intense attention and, often, controversy. But there are virtually no GWSI courses in higher education.

In the US, the role writing plays in selection is much less visible because writing is not directly tied to the disciplines or curriculum but viewed as a general, autonomous skill. The fact that first-year composition courses are general is crucial to their role in selection. Students are not assessed on their writing of some activity system's discourse within the curriculum; they are assessed on what is presumed to be their writing in general. Thus, a student's failure – or the limited success GWSI's unrealistic expectations lead to – gives the impression that the student is a poor writer in general ("remedial," is the common term) – not that a student has not yet had sufficient participation in a particular activity system(s) to learn its genres. In this sense, a required GWSI course that most students take just after admission is the written counterpart of a machine-scored, multiple choice "ability" tests that they take just before admission, and which form the core of the visible selection mechanisms in the US. These tests claim to measure students' general academic ability, not their ability to do certain actions successfully in certain specific activity fields, and they claim no specific relation to any curriculum. These examinations, like GWSI courses, have spawned their own activity field and industry, which serve disciplines and curriculum as an aid to selection.

By contrast, the written assessment model used by most other nations ties writing to the curriculum (disciplinary activity systems) of both secondary school and higher education. The genres – which is to say the expectations for participation – are announced from the beginning. Students write and revise course work, do practice examinations, and receive instruction on their writing in each discipline (though little of this instruction is explicitly conceived as writing instruction).

In the written assessment model, the standards for written performance are evolved and maintained by each discipline, and each must collaboratively arrive at both the discipline's standards and the score on each student's written performance. This is inherent in the written assessment model, where objectivity depends on multiple raters. Raters must negotiate and eventually agree on what makes writing good within their

activity system at each educational level. With some exceptions, in the US model standards for writing are arrived at individually, by each instructor (Coles & Vopat, 1985). This individualism and consequent subjectivity often allows the GWSI and the education system as a whole to continue without confronting the differences in discourse among disciplines or even among instructors within the same composition program. GWSI is thus alienated from other activity systems and prevented from forming a coherent one itself.

This lack of collegial written assessment in the disciplines and in GWSI has profound implications for first-year writing courses and for the role of writing in US education in general. The US model separates writing from the curriculum. To attempt to teach students all written discourse or even a UED is to attempt to initiate them into no activity system beyond that of a specific GWSI course. The US system encourages the notion that writing is peripheral to success in disciplinary activity systems, whereas in fact the writing of specific genres is crucial to successful functioning in academic and professional activity systems.

Two Approaches to Improving the Uses of Writing in Society

From the theoretical perspective I have been developing, the central goal of composition studies is not how to teach students to write better in general, nor is it how to write a general academic or public discourse, for these are unrealistic expectations given the nature of writing in modern societies. Instead the problem is how to improve, from some perspective(s), the particular uses of this immensely plastic tool called writing in specific activity system(s). From the perspective of a student, improving the uses of the tool of writing means using certain genres to choose, enter, become a full participant in, and eventually change for the better one's chosen activity system(s) – and in doing so empower one's self. From the perspective of a discipline or profession, improving the uses of the tool of writing means more effectively using and transforming its genres to

accomplish (and at times critique) its object(ive), including selecting and socializing newcomers into its activity system(s). From the perspective of educational institutions, the education system, and the society as a whole, improving the uses of the tool of writing in activity systems should also be a means toward greater social equity – helping those individuals and groups who have not been able to enter certain powerful activity systems to enter them and change them for the better.

I want to suggest here two ways of working toward this goal, ways that seem to me to offer more potential than GWSI courses, ways that avoid the myth of autonomous literacy and its corollary the myth of UED. These are not new ideas. Kitzhaber devotes the majority of his article to discussing them, and on each he follows in a long tradition. Nor are these untried ideas. Each has received unprecedented development in recent years. They are 1) writing across the curriculum efforts and 2) redeeming the curricular space now occupied by GWSI courses, which claim to teach students to write, in favor of a liberal arts course that, in a scholarly, principled way, teaches students about writing.

Facilitate Writing Across the Curriculum

The most important means of improving the uses of writing in the activity systems that make up higher education is what has been called writing across the curriculum (or, sometimes, writing in the disciplines): that is, efforts to systematically study, make conscious, and, where possible, improve the uses of writing in specific activity systems, especially those aspects of activity systems that select and socialize neophytes – primarily institutions of higher education. WAC programs operate where students learn the discourses of power, not in a separate activity system such as a GWSI course. But WAC's task is nevertheless daunting, for several reasons.

As we noted earlier, an activity system does not, under normal circumstances, go about teaching writing to neophytes in a conscious, formal way. Nor does it ordinarily need to, since it typically teaches neophytes to write certain genres as part of its normal functioning, though that teaching is often indirect, tacit, embedded in the everyday

actions of the participants in the zones of proximal development a discipline evolves for novices. A discipline uses writing as a tool for pursuing some object. Writing is not the object(ive) of its activity. Thus, writing tends to become transparent, automatic, beneath the level of conscious activity for those who are thoroughly socialized into it. Activity Theory, as developed by Leont'ev (1981) argues that using a certain genre of writing (a certain kind of semiotic tool) as part of an activity system is like using the gearshift of a car (a certain kind of mechanical tool) as part of the activity system of commuting to work. When first learning to drive (or write), one must devote much conscious effort to using the tool. After sufficient participation in the activity system over a period of time, these conscious actions become automatic and unconscious. They come to be thought of as "natural," though they only seem natural. As a result, experts may have great difficulty explaining these operations to neophytes. They may assume that neophytes can (or should be able to) do these things already, or that neophytes will "pick up" these things as a normal part of going about the activity – as indeed most neophytes do.

However, if neophytes have some skillful help from adepts in the activity system, through conscious – even systematic and explicit – teaching, they may learn to perform an action more quickly and more easily than if they simply "picked it up." Students might do better at learning to use the genres of writing in some activity system if they had specific, conscious coaching, mentoring, or formal instruction in those genres of writing. Activity Theory research suggests that by consciously creating more effective zones of proximal development, activity systems may be able to improve a novice's acquisition of the systems' genres, though that research is far from conclusive (e. g., Markova, 1979; Freedman, 1993; Williams & Colomb, 1993).

But such pedagogical efforts, whether formal or informal, require conscious effort and an awareness of the role of writing in the activity system – the very things that the daily functioning of an activity system tends to obscure. The WAC movement has nevertheless helped to make many faculty and students aware of the importance of

writing as a tool in their work, helping them better to use it for teaching and learning their activities. To borrow a term from another context, bilingual education, WAC programs facilitate mainstreaming of writing teaching. Students learn genres in the process of learning to participate in the activity system rather than being taught genres in separate "remedial" classrooms segregated from high-status teaching and learning. Like second language programs in mainstreaming schools, WAC programs are focused on students and teachers pursuing object(ive)s in specific activity systems using the tool of writing. Such experts consultants in language-in-use help both students and teachers examine and improve their interaction and the tools that mediate it – the genres of activity system. Thus the activity system(s) of WAC, unlike GWSI courses, has a clear object(ive): the study and improvement of the roles writing plays in teaching and learning in specific disciplines and professions. Research on writing in the disciplines is at last bringing to light the differences among disciplinary discourses – and exposing the myth of autonomous literacy. WAC programs are helping students choose, enter, become full participants in, and eventually transform for the better some activity system(s). WAC is helping disciplines more effectively use writing to accomplish (and at times critique) their object(ive)s, including selecting and socializing neophytes.

By raising the consciousness of participants in disciplinary activity systems, WAC may also improve social equity, in a way that GWSI courses cannot. Ultimately it is the disciplines and professions themselves – not higher education admissions officers – who select people for their activity systems and thus for the powerful social positions that go with them. And it is ultimately a discipline or profession – not colleges and universities per se – that excludes students from powerful social positions, based in part on their use of written language in the genres the discipline or profession values. Thus, gains in social equity due to writing instruction will not come primarily from raising the general level of writing (defined by the activity system[s] of GWSI), but from improving the ways writing

is used within and among the activity systems of the disciplines and professions as they select and prepare neophytes.

WAC programs can provide expertise to disciplines on the role of writing in learning, helping them use writing to facilitate rather than refuse entrance. WAC programs can work with faculty to evolve effective zones of proximal development between an activity system and neophytes from underrepresented backgrounds, in much the way second language experts in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs work with disciplines that mainstream students rather than segregating them into remedial courses. GWSI courses, by contrast, can only hope that they have helped to prepare individual students to weather the often difficult writing apprenticeship ahead.

Ultimately, disciplines (and the education system in which they participate) may make writing visibly central to that most crucial (and often most hidden) aspect of education: selection. Instead of selecting students through a combination of grades from individual teachers and from multiple choice, "general ability" examinations, disciplines might use writing as the basis of selection for higher education and employment. In the written assessment model, as I noted earlier, a discipline collaboratively negotiates standards for the work of students at various educational levels. Students produce work during the course of their learning that is then collaboratively assessed by those within the activity system: teachers and other related professionals. In this way, writing becomes visible, part of the negotiation of selection – not a separate, general skill. And the curriculum is constructed accordingly. Students must write (and thus learn to write) the genres that are important to each discipline; teachers may become more likely be aware of and consciously teach those genres. Thus writing becomes integral to the curriculum of each discipline (Resnick and Resinck, 1992).

Selection based on collaboratively-assessed writing requires disciplines to acknowledge responsibility for selection, including the role writing plays in it. When a student is not selected, it is because she has not been able to perform specific kinds of

actions related to a specific activity system, not because she lacks some "general" ability or "general" composition skill. Writing is tied to the curriculum and to selection in a way that allows students to set clear goals (genres) for their writing, goals that are directly related to their interests. Writing is not segregated into "remedial" courses where students are presumed to be preparing for any writing situation in general and none in particular.

The movement toward collaboratively assessed writing is well under way in certain professions in the US, such as law and medicine, which have added discipline-specific writing to national entrance examinations for professional schools. Written assessment in the transition from secondary to higher education is also being developed. For example, in the New Standards Project (O'Neil, 1993) secondary teachers across the nation are developing discipline-specific written assessment tasks. Thousands of teachers are learning to collaboratively assess portfolios with high rates of reliability, as teachers in many other nations have done for years. This development is promising. For until the kinds of texts (and thus knowledge and work) that each discipline values are taught, assessed, and made the basis for selection, the myth that writing is autonomous will help to mask the inequities in the US selection system. And disciplines will rarely feel the need to consciously reexamine the way writing works in teaching, learning, and selection.

Introduce students to rhetoric/language

A second way to improve the uses of writing in education is to directly raise the awareness of students, teachers, and the public about writing, its uses and its power – for good or ill – in the cultures and activity systems that employ it. I have argued that people learn (and know and work) with writing, as an immensely flexible tool, in many activity systems; and that people learn to write most effectively by participating in activity systems that use writing. But writing is also an object(ive) of study itself. Unfortunately, the traditional curricular site for studying language in use and raising the awareness of students to language, the discipline of rhetoric, became marginalized in the late

nineteenth century and was relegated to speech departments, where the focus was on oral rather than written communication. But in the last 30 years, a number of activity systems have formed within academia to study writing in society. Groups of scholars and researchers in a range of disciplines – not only in the revived discipline of rhetoric, but also in applied linguistics, semiotics, education, communication, psychology, sociology of science, literary theory, and so on – specifically study the role of writing in human activities. It is thus now possible and, I believe, desirable to teach a general introductory course about writing.

Such a course would not have as its object teaching students to write or improving their writing per se, any more than an introductory psychology course claims to make students better adjusted or a course in music appreciation claims to make its students better singers (though that might be one effect of the course). Rather its object would be to teach students what has been learned about writing in those activity systems that make the role of writing in society the object of their study. Such a course would continue to provide many of the benefits of the GWSI course, but in a way that directly uses the unprecedented research of the last 30 years. By looking at the research on academic discourses – writing and learning in the disciplines – students may become more aware of the uses of written discourse in their institution and of ways they can use writing to further their own exploration of the "strange lands" of various disciplines and perhaps facilitate their entry into one or more of them (McCarthy, 1987). By looking at research on workplace writing, students would be introduced the roles writing plays in professions that colleges and universities prepare and credential students to enter – and eventually transform. By looking at how researchers in cultural studies, critical discourse analysis, and the sociology of knowledge provide insight into the uses of texts, students would critically examine some ways writing shapes social processes and power relations, through corporate, media, and governmental uses of writing.

As with any good course, students should do a good deal of writing in it, writing of the kinds that the disciplines that study writing employ: genres such as discourse analyses, rhetorical analyses, ethnographic accounts, cultural criticism, and so on. But a course about writing would not claim to or attempt to improve students' writing in general, though that may be an effect, as it might be for any course that uses writing. And a liberal arts course about writing in society might be particularly useful in this regard, since it would give students insight into the ways discourses interact to create academic knowledges and public policies. Such a course may thus help students to enter (and even create new and better) sites for discourse – academic, public, and so on – when they are in a position to do so.

As with most other introductory liberal arts courses, a central goal of this course would be to raise the awareness of students – and, indirectly, of higher education and of the public – to the importance of its object of study (writing) in human life and work. In a course on writing in society, a few students might well become fascinated with the subject and choose to become full participants in one or more of the research traditions the course exposes students to. But the great majority of students will become aware of the role of writing in society and in their lives, to make more informed decisions about issues that involve it. This is another way of saying that the course would be a "liberal arts" course rather than "practical" or "professional" course. It would accomplish the goals of liberal education by introducing students to a wide range of activity systems from the point of view of writing – a point of view that is central to a critical understanding of their workings.

Moreover, by teaching what the research traditions that study writing have learned about it, the course may help remove the remedial stigma from writing and its teaching in academia. At the least, it would, as Kitzhaber pointed out, provide content, intellectual rigor, realistic expectations, and some means of judging its effectiveness. It may also, through making students more alert to the roles writing plays in their lives,

achieve those purposes GWSI courses have always excelled in: introducing students to higher education and making them aware of the importance of writing. Finally, it may enhance the status of those who have devoted their professional lives to composition studies, by giving their introductory teaching the same status as that of other faculty.

Implementing this proposal will not be quick or easy. There is not even, at present, a textbook that introduces the range of research in the subject to beginning students, as introductory textbooks in other disciplines do. And the myth of autonomous literacy (and of UED) is so entrenched – and so useful – in higher education that institutions may be loath to give up the convenient notion that writing is an autonomous and, for college students, remedial skill. But many GWSI courses already introduce students to research on the roles of writing in society, and with the burgeoning of research and upper-level teaching in rhetoric and composition, the transfiguration of first-year composition into a full-fledged liberal arts course may become an increasingly attractive option for many teachers and institutions.

Conclusion

I have tried to show that Activity Theory can clarify the problems Kitzhaber and many others have found with GWSI courses. Lack of content, lack of intellectual rigor, unrealistic expectations, difficulty in assessing effectiveness – all are inherent in the assumptions about the nature of writing that undergird the course and in the course's institutional position: the myth of autonomous literacy with its corollary the myth of universal educated discourse.

I have also proposed that educational institutions continue to improve the uses of writing in society in two ways: extend writing across the curriculum efforts and raise the awareness of students, the university community, and the public to the role of writing in society by having those who study writing teach an introductory liberal arts course on it. Both are important steps toward removing the remedial stigma attached to writing and

its teaching, and toward combating the myth of autonomous literacy that reinforces the remedial stigma.

The writing across the curriculum is now 25 years old and growing. And the large effort of the last three decades to study writing in society continues to generate courses at all levels of higher education that teach the methods and results of that study to new generations of students. These efforts will, I believe, increasingly challenge the myth that literacy is autonomous and activity systems do not teach (or should not "have to" teach) writing. As the current movements toward writing across the curriculum and research and teaching about writing expand, composition studies and institutions of higher education may conclude that GWSI courses should be "transfigured," as Kitzhaber put it, to teach first-year students about writing without claiming to teach students to write in general.

Mainstreaming writing instruction by expanding WAC efforts and transfiguring GWSI courses into liberal arts courses about writing will be a difficult decision for composition studies and for institutions of higher education. In the 120 years GWSI courses have been in existence, hundreds of millions of students have been helped to write some genres better (though we must always remember that students have improved their writing of genres in many other courses across the curriculum that use writing as a tool of teaching and learning). The question is not whether GWSI courses improve students' writing of certain specific genres. They do. The question is whether other means of organizing efforts to improve writing will do greater good and less harm to students and to the society those students live in and will recreate.

The tens of thousands of people now involved in writing instruction in higher education might well do more good and find greater rewards – in every sense – if they focused their efforts on 1) conducting research in the ways writing works in human activities at every level, 2) sharing that research in a practical way with disciplines and professions who need their expertise to improve their work (and widen access to

disciplines and professions), and 3) teaching what they have learned about writing, both in introductory liberal arts courses and through professional courses that prepare future generations to carry on the task of making writing more useful to students and to the society that they will recreate using this immensely flexible tool.

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List of Key Words for Indexing – Joseph: In the absence of directions otherwise, I left out names. Also, some of these terms are used in different forms, so I put in multiple forms in a few cases. Hope this helps.

abolition (of GWSI courses)
academic discourse
Activity Theory
activity system
apprenticeship
appropriation
assessment
assessment, written
autonomous literacy
Composition Studies
education systems, selection in
England, education system
English for Academic Purposes
examinations, multiple choice
examinations, written
France, education system
generalizable (ity) (of writing instruction)
genre
GWSI
intersubjective (ity)
liberal arts
mediat(ion)(al) (means)
New Standards Project
public discourse
remedial writing instruction
rhetoric
universal educated discourse
writing across the curriculum
zone of proximal development (ZPD)

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