Transformations at the Edge: Writing Research, Discourse, and Pedagogy

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Preface

The 2013 conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse in Writing (CASDW) was held June 1 to 3 on the beautiful campus of the University of Victoria as part of the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Although the following papers in this set of proceedings represent only a small portion of the nearly five dozen presentations and roundtables at the CASDW conference, they offer a glimpse into the range of studies on discourse and explorations of pedagogical concerns pursued by our members.

The proceedings open with a study by Marshall, Brin, Shapiro, and Spoel investigating how journalists think about the process of verification in their professional practice, followed by a paper in which Chen uses corpus linguistics to reveal the political dimensions of word choices in newspaper accounts of the Libyan Civil War. In the following section of the proceedings, Freedman and Knott describe how they have transformed their writing workshops and classrooms by giving speech a central role, while Revie reports on efforts to transform her writing classroom through the use of professionalism grades, based on an apprenticeship model of learning. The final two papers in this collection problematize the traditional boundaries of university writing centres. Makmillen, Aubé, and Fitzgerald share their experiences in pushing the boundaries of their respective writing centres to better meet the needs of Aboriginal students, while Trowse, Beer, and Asayo explore the ways in which writing centre architecture can unintentionally discourage student visits to the centre.

I hope you enjoy reading—and learning from—these papers as much as I did. For more information about CASDW and for information about our future conferences, please visit http://casdwacr.wordpress.com/

Jo-Anne D. Andre, editor
September 2013
Abstract

A concern for accuracy through verification lies near the heart of journalists’ professional identity. To better understand how journalists understand this aspect of their professional practice, we conducted qualitative interviews with award-winning and semi-randomly selected Canadian newspaper reporters. Journalists’ epideictic rhetoric about verification praises a semi-scientific method, but when they are invited to describe the process of verifying, they are more likely to use spatial, temporal, and visual metaphors than the language of the laboratory. The language used by the English-speaking journalists in our sample not only confirms the centrality of verification to the profession but also suggests that journalists may construct verification as an embedded but shifting, adaptable heuristic process that both acknowledges and addresses the situational contingency of “facts” and “accuracy.” This discursive ambiguity also reflects a tendency for journalists to account for their work not only with reference to verification but with a view to an alternate identity as storytellers, for whom it is a stock in trade to envision shifts in character and landscape.

Introduction

A concern for accuracy through verification lies near the heart of journalists’ professional identity (Bogart, 2004; Deuze, 2005; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007; Shapiro, 2010). To better grasp how journalists understand this aspect of their professional writing practice, we conducted qualitative interviews with 28 award-winning and semi-randomly selected reporters working for Canadian newspapers. We found that journalists speak about verification as an ambiguous but strategic ritual that often requires practical compromise. The journalists expressed passion for the norm of

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verification in general but revealed a wide variety of practices (Shapiro, Brin, Bédard-Brûlé, & Mychajlowycz, 2013).

As we acknowledged in reporting on that first phase of our research, we were relying for our findings on the journalists’ own accounts of verifying a selected work of journalism. This was necessary and useful to understanding what they said they did but of course had the disadvantage of providing little insight into how their conception of verification stood up to the way they verified in practice. Nevertheless, we assume that discourse by itself reveals a great deal about people’s values and identity. Therefore, in the second phase of our research, on which we report here, we have turned our attention from the practices described by the interview subjects to the language with which they describe those practices. When journalists speak about this pivotal, but ambiguous, aspect of their work, how do they speak of it? We have used the tools of rhetorical analysis to gain insight into the ways that journalists themselves understand verification as a journalistic practice and how this conceptual understanding compares to their own descriptions of their processes.

**Our Previous Research**

This paper is part of a comprehensive study of how newspaper journalists describe and evaluate their own verification practices. Although the criteria for quality journalism have traditionally been tacit, intuitive, and varied rather than codified or standardized (Ruellan, 2007; Schultz, 2007; Shapiro, 2010; Shapiro, Albanese, & Doyle, 2006; Soloski, 1989), several studies have shown that, even across cultural and socio-demographic lines, journalists tend to share core professional values (Pritchard & Sauvageau, 1999; Weaver & Wu, 1998). The trend toward a unified set of values has been associated with globalization (Hanitzsch, 2007) and professionalization (Deuze, 2005). And the single most frequently and clearly stated value expressed in journalists’ self-identification is a drive for accuracy (Bogart, 2004; Cleghorn, 1990; Davies, 2008; Franklin, 2006; Gladney, Shapiro, & Castaldo, 2007; Meyer, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2006).

This focus on accuracy as a key identifying characteristic of journalists in turn requires that journalistic methodology be centred to some degree on verification. In what rapidly became a widely lauded handbook on quality journalism, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) wrote that “the essence of journalism is a discipline of verification” (p. 71).
In our previous research, we were interested in finding out whether working journalists agree with Kovach and Rosenstiel's assertion and the extent to which, and ways in which, they conducted the search for accuracy in their reporting processes. We interviewed 14 award-winning Canadian journalists as well as a “control” group of 14 other journalists, about their approach to verification in semi-randomly selected news reports and feature articles published in the main news sections of 10 daily newspapers: La Presse, Le Devoir, Le Journal de Montréal, Le Soleil, Le Nouvelliste, La Voix de l'Est, Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, The (Montreal) Gazette, and the Ottawa Citizen. Interviews were conducted generally in person, rarely by phone or video link, and each one was 60 to 120 minutes long.

Although they were informal in tone, the interviews followed a similar pattern. To begin, we asked the journalists in a general way for their views on accuracy and verification, through open-ended questions, and for some basic information about their background and experience, and how the chosen story came about. Participants were then led through a detailed reconstruction of where, how, and why they verified the reported information in the story—first, with reference to groups of facts of similar type (people's names, dates, dollar amounts, etc.) and then with reference to each paragraph of the story in turn, asking how each piece of factual information was ascertained. We then asked a few concluding questions, including whether the selected article was a typical example of their work in terms of verification, time constraints, and prepublication review. Finally, the respondents were asked to comment on Kovach and Rosenstiel's above-mentioned statement that “the essence of journalism is a discipline of verification” (Shapiro et al., 2013).

Method

To better understand how journalists understand verification as part of the professional practice of journalism, we returned to the dataset from our earlier study on journalists’ accounts of their processes of verification (Shapiro et al., 2013). We started by employing tools of sociolinguistic discourse analysis to pose questions about our transcripts that served to isolate potentially significant rhetorical choices. Our efforts were guided by leading texts (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; De Fina & Schiffri, 2006; Gill, 2000; Johnston, 2008). Discourse analysis is based on the ideas that language is not merely a neutral way to describe things and that discourse, both dialogue and written text, shapes social interactions. Previous discourse analyses have looked at how discourse contributes to the construction of the professional
identity of academics, lawyers, and even tennis players (Babii, 2011; Kjær & Palsbro, 2008; Szyncer, 2010) but not yet of journalists.

Given the demonstrated centrality of verification rituals to journalists’ professional identity, it seemed reasonable to assume that the transcripts of our interviews would provide rich examples of the manner and tone in which journalists speak about their responsibilities as truth-seekers. To force ourselves to attend to the persuasive purpose of chosen terminologies, we self-consciously put aside our own familiarity with some of the terms that people in general, or journalists in particular, might or might not be prone to use (Gill, 2000, pp. 176-177). Working with the understanding that discourse constructs the speaker's understanding of the world (Gill, 2000, p. 173) and our presumption that this would be especially true when describing the speaker’s active role in the world, we took special care to note verbs and other action words. We looked at individual words or short phrases, not complete sentences or structural form, and focused on the use of figures of speech. We then looked for trends occurring in answers to the same question and for larger trends across all the answers.

Once we had noticed significant language choices, we turned to the constructs of rhetorical analysis to explore how these choices might shed light on the ways that journalists themselves understand verification as a journalistic practice and how this conceptual understanding compares to their own descriptions of their processes. Rhetorical analysis investigates how people (conceived as rhetorical actors) use language to constitute understandings of the world, to name and communicate “reality.” Language is a form of symbolic action (Burke, 1966; Gusfield, 1989, p. 11) that shapes knowledge, values, and attitudes and influences actions. Rhetorical criticism concerns itself with the situated uses and effects of language (or symbolic action) by particular human agents (or rhetorical actors) in particular times and places and for particular purposes. Like discourse analysis, it is an interpretive method of research that does not aim to produce broad generalizations or be comprehensive, but instead works from the assumption that “discourse is always occasioned—constructed from particular interpretive resources and designed for particular contexts” (Gill, 2000, p. 186).

The terms we use to describe the world, therefore, constitute a kind of filter that directs attention to particular aspects of reality rather than others, thus creating different, rhetorically constituted interpretations of the situation. Burke’s metaphor of “terministic screens” foregrounds the role of language in shaping—or filtering—what we understand reality to be. The different terminologies that we use to name the world
at once reflect, select, and deflect “reality” (Burke, 1966, p. 45). Each terminology, he proposes, is like a “screen” that colours our knowledge and experiences of the world. As Gulbrandsen (2010) explains, “terministic screens . . . are a matter of appeal, of aligning and articulating one’s interests and expectations in cogent terms and as part of a set of relationships” (p. 5).

In turning our attention from the substance of what our subjects had said about verification practices to the language they used, we studied the broad (phonetic) transcription we had produced for each of the 14 English-language interviews. Specifically, we selected for our dataset the answers to 10 questions from each interview—half from the beginning of the interview (before the detailed reconstruction exercise) and the other half from the end. The questions were as follows:

A1. What are your first thoughts about what verification means to journalists or to you as a journalist?
A2. What is your general approach to capturing interview information?
A3. How did you verify people’s names for this story?
A4. How did you verify place names for this story?
A5. How did you verify dates, times, and ages?
B1. Has there been any part of this interview which has led you to have any new thoughts concerning the verification process?
B2. How typical or different do you think this story was from other stories you have done, from the point of view of the process or ensuring accuracy?
B3. How often, if at all, do you show pre-published material to your sources?
B4. It has been said that the essence of journalism is a discipline of verification. Do you agree?
B5. Do have any comments or suggestions for our future interviews, for our future research?

The rhetorical analysis was conducted by reading each of the 140 answers individually.
Findings

In reporting our findings, we identify participants by an alphanumerical code, with the first character indicating the sample group (C: control, E: elite), followed by the language of the interview and then a number. Thus, CE1 designates the first coded interview with an English-speaking participant in the control group. In the following paragraphs, we will explore how the journalists describe verification as central to their professional identity, as a process that moves through space and time, as a way of seeing by visualization and interpretation, and, ultimately, as an action necessary for the purpose of storytelling.

(1) Centrality of verification

The language used by participants lent further weight to the earlier finding that journalists see verification as an inherent and critical aspect of their professional identity. Indeed, the line between verification in particular and reporting in general is blurry (EE2, EE3, EE4, CE3, CE6), with some journalists using the two concepts interchangeably (EE6) or describing them as inseparable or simultaneous: “... You’re gathering, you’re verifying. It’s part and parcel” (EE4). EE2 commented that verification is “rooted in the actual reporting.” CE6 said verification is “part of the process” of journalism; it is a “given.” CE6 described verification as a necessary tool in the profession: “if you’re digging a hole, you have to have a shovel.” For CE3, verification is “so fundamental and so ingrained” that “there’s no point in being a journalist” without a willingness to verify, and “you cannot be a journalist if you don’t verify.” The use of “you” implies that CE3 extends his verification standards to everyone.

Five journalists (EE4, EE6, EE7, CE1, CE4) agreed with the statement that “the essence of journalism is a discipline of verification,” while three disagreed (EE2, CE5, CE7). The remaining six neither agreed nor disagreed (EE1, EE3, EE5, CE2, CE3, CE6): they either edited or added to the statement. Storytelling (see below) or other reader-oriented essences like creativity (EE7), curiosity (EE2, EE3), and credibility or accountability were proposed alternatives to verification in summing up the essence of journalism (EE5, EE7, CE5, CE6).

(2) Movement through space

Journalists are on the move: participants used motion and movement terminology to characterize some of the typical strategies they employ in their individual processes of verification. Journalists discuss their “first pass through” verification (CE2),
going to “great lengths” (EE1) and “going with the flow” (EE5), and being “way more on the go now” (CE6).

But what specific kinds of movement through space are associated with verification?

Participants characterized verification as a process involving levels and vertical movement. While no exact verification process was outlined, several journalists implied that verification is a process comprised of “steps” (EE2, EE3, CE1, CE4, CE5) or “layers” (CE2, CE5). The word “step” implies a process that moves upwards or forwards, each additional step moving closer to the end. Verification appears to involve climbing a ladder or traversing a long distance. The journalists’ use of the word “layer” can be interpreted in two ways: verification may be seen as an action that involves adding to complete a whole or stripping away to reveal a core. It is interesting that the movement through “layers” and “steps” never has a distinguishable end; there is always another step to take or layer to consider.

Verification was also characterized as a horizontal process. For CE2, verification involves moving “back and forth.” For CE4, verification is “straightforward.” EE5 referred to the “paper trail” followed while verifying and discussed the value of following a less popular route because it exposes something different: “Everybody’s running this way but I think I’m just going to go in the opposite direction and look at something else.”

For two journalists, verification is cyclical: it is “looping back in upon itself” (EE2) or it “revolves around” something (CE1). The use of circular imagery alludes to a commonly shared idea of verification being inherent, or central, to journalism.

In all cases, verification seems to be in perpetual motion. EE6 rhetorically asked, “To what lengths do you go to make sure you’re not misrepresenting what went on?” The distance a journalist must travel while verifying, regardless of direction, is portrayed as indefinite, maybe infinite.

It is also worth noting that while journalists may describe themselves as on the move in the process of verification, they described standards as falling downward. For some, “verification has slipped” (CE6), and using new technology for verification is called “a slippery slope” for journalists (EE4). Journalists commented on dwindling help from copy editors due to changes in the newsroom: “there isn’t somebody to clean up after the parade” (CE2), implying that writing a story is a messy process. CE1
even said that “newsrooms are sort of retracting,” which conveys the idea of the industry pulling backwards instead of barreling onwards, forwards.

(3) Movement through time

Several journalists described verification strategies that involve movement through time (EE4, EE6, CE2, CE3, CE5). Most use a “timeline” (CE2, CE3) or “chronology” to verify (EE6, CE2, CE5). These strategies help to untangle “a convoluted history” (EE6). Two journalists referred to their chronologies as well as timelines made by a source (CE2, CE3). For EE6, organizing time as physical distances between events “teaches you something that you hadn’t thought of.” Hence, timelines help journalists understand information and can also reveal something new. EE4 implied that a single document may be inconclusive: “you see it on paper, it’s a snapshot in time, but you don’t know what existed before how it got be that way.” Facts are like photographs, but stories span time. Verifying a story is presented as a process that involves not only today but also the past. Knowing what happened and in what order is vital to verification because “otherwise you might write nonsensical things” (CE2).

Most of the participants spoke about the value of going back (e.g. EE2, EE4, EE5, EE6, EE7, CE2, CE6) and clearly implied not only reversal in space but also a positive “opportunity” that allows journalists to revisit facts, as if rewinding time to return to the beginning: as CE2 put it, “I go back to the first page.” EE4 said that when he was verifying, he “wanted to go back into the history.” He called verifying the past a “backcheck” and aligns looking into the past with “deep” journalism: he said his verification methods change “depending on how deep [he’s] going, how far back.”

In a more complex vein, journalists not only move through time, but are also restricted by it. Because time is the journalist’s most precious “luxury” (EE7), “wasting time” (EE1) or doing something that is “very time-consuming” causes anxiety or embarrassment, especially around editors (EE5). Deadlines influence how a journalist decides to capture interview information; “a tight deadline” means verification and the story will be “not perfect,” noted EE2, who suggested that deadlines are a profession-wide stress by posing a hypothetical situation: “You can imagine you’re working on a tight deadline . . . ” (note the universalizing word, “you”). According to CE2, “sometimes stupid stuff gets into the piece because you didn’t have time to just kick it out.” Time also interferes with the quality of a journalist’s interactions with a source. If not for the limit of time, EE6 would “talk to people for the rest of [her] life.” Being given more time makes her feel “very lucky.”
Sometimes the journalists try to cheat or manipulate time to get more of it, often by sacrificing personal time for quality work: EE6 “went three days without sleep” to complete a story. CE6 called attention to how time is more limited now than before: “I didn’t have the time to do what I used to do.” Ultimately, there is a contrast between how much verification journalists want to do and how little time they have to do it.

(4) Vision

The terminology of vision figured prominently throughout the interviews in two major ways. First, the journalists suggested that facts can be seen; they are available if the journalist only (re)looks carefully enough. Journalists can verify with their eyes. Second, participants used visual terminology to communicate that verification involves interpreting what they see by visualizing beyond facts.

Seeing as believing. Except in the case of names, documents are presented as the most reliable way to verify. Journalists look at microfilm, court documents, and literature as means to back up information from interviews or other sources. Documents are considered a “very strong tool” (EE4). Sometimes they are not only the backbone of verification but, as EE1 put it, “all I can rely on.” More than one document is preferable since one will provide only a “snapshot” of what is happening, said EE4, who sings the praises of following a “paper trail”: documents provide direction, a path, guidance. EE3 recalled using nine paper sources in verifying an article. Documents provide details that might otherwise be unavailable: “they’re chock full of details that even ordinary human beings don’t remember” (CE5). Talking to someone gives good information, but having a document can help the journalist steer the interview in a specific direction: they are “fabulous” for both informing the journalist and reminding the source (CE5). EE4 expressed a preference for documents: “I prefer to see things on paper, or on official records. Black on white, so to speak.”

Beyond documents, direct observation—through physically visiting places or people—is an important way to verify. CE2 made the distinction between writing that is “observation driven” and that which is “fact driven.” His story was based on observation, which indicates that visual experience is as valuable as documents when it comes to reporting. Documents may be “black and white” (EE1) or “black on white” (EE4), but observational details add colour to a story (EE7, CE5). And documents aren’t perfect: “Sometimes [there] could be a nuance you’re not, that you don’t see, you don’t gather, you don’t glean from the documents”: “What you see on paper . . . can be misleading” (EE4).
Journalists also use photographs, videos and Google Maps as observational material for verification. EE2 even checks a source’s signature to ensure he uses the source’s preferred name spelling. What journalists are looking for also influences their interview techniques: as one journalist put it, “it depends on whether I’m seeking facts and information or I’m seeking comment” (EE3).

There is, however, one type of seeing that might help verification, but that is never permitted. As we have briefly reported earlier (Bédard-Brulé, Brin, Shapiro, & Mychajlowycz, 2012), there is a general consensus that journalists “never” let sources see their work until it is published (EE1, EE3, EE6, EE7, CE2, CE3, CE4, CE5, CE6, CE7). The journalists who did not specifically say “never” either said “no” (EE2) or said they might “rarely” show a section, but never the entire story. CE6 doesn’t “think any reporter would ever send a whole story to someone.” This is a shared general “adage” (EE1), “policy” (EE1, CE2), “rule” (EE1, EE3) or “firm line” (EE6). CE5 said, “You don’t do that,” indicating that it is common knowledge among journalists. Two journalists stressed that it is taboo to send any of the copy by email and said they prefer to read copy over the phone if necessary (EE1, CE3). However, EE7 will sometimes email fragments of a rough draft to experts. If there is one clear code that emerges from these interviews, it is the understanding that journalists should not share unpublished stories because they will inevitably have to fend off censorship from their sources. The issue of sources wanting to change their quotes was presented as a common problem that arises from sharing an unpublished story (EE1, EE7, CE1, CE3, CE6, CE7). EE7 recognizes this as the “real danger” of sharing unpublished work; CE1 described sharing work as likely to “just open up a can of worms.” The journalists discussed how they are under no obligation ethically or otherwise to share or adapt the story to the source’s preferences. Some emphasized that they only speak with the source to double-check facts, as we reported briefly in our earlier research (Shapiro et al., 2013).

**Seeing as interpretation.** Participants used visual terminology to describe the process of interpreting information. The visual terminology aligns journalists with photographers: they use angles, lenses and capturing to describe the verification process. EE2 and EE6 described looking through a “lens” when they verify. More than one lens is used: “That lens is different according to what aspect of the piece we’re talking about” (EE2). The fact that this journalist has lenses specific to different parts of the story suggests that he has more than one way of looking at things and that he is conscious of the value of adjusting how he looks for verification depending on the
context. EE6 described research as “a couple of lenses on a fence.” This expression is a little obscure, but it suggests that information journalists see is already subject to interpretation: sources have their own bias. Having a variety of sources allows the journalist to be aware of these biases. EE3 and EE4 look at things from different “angles.” This implies that they value looking at facts from a different perspective or location: “the more ways you can verify anything from different angles, the better” (EE3). EE4 is constantly aware of alternative ways to see information: he is “also looking for any other angles.” Several journalists said they want to “capture” information, which also has film connotations (EE5, EE6, EE7.)

Interpretation is presented as the verification step or layer after seeing. Journalists are interpreting data they find in a way similar to that of scientists or detectives. It is the journalists’ vision that gives facts meaning: “you’re looking at the exact same facts, but you’re seeing very different things in them” (EE5). Interpretation is vital because “facts can be construed to say a lot of different things” (EE5). Being able to see without preconceived notions is essential to verification: openness is called a “core foundation” of journalism and having an “open mind” is critical (EE6). CE2 reviews all her work and then tries “to make sense of” everything she has found out: this process is “internal.”

Seeing the big picture is as important as checking individual details. EE6 said it is vital to avoid the “mischaracterization of the degree of importance or the significance of things.” Others mentioned how it is wrong to quote someone saying something incorrect: “it doesn’t matter if you put it in quotation marks, it’s just wrong” (CE7) and “it still makes you wrong or stupid” (CE5). Journalists also discussed the difference between gathering facts and noting the “nuances” of an interview (EE1, EE4, EE5, EE6). Taking notice of what is happening beyond the actual words being spoken is critical to preserving the atmosphere of a situation and accurately portraying a person.

Journalists were concerned with seeing patterns and trends that arise from the facts. CE2 was looking for “cause and effect, patterns that emerge” and described a story as “very observation driven. It’s not fact driven” (CE2). CE2 admitted that what he writes is coming from his “interpretation” of interviews—there is a subjective element involved in the information gathering. CE6 implied that mistakes are less severe if the overall trend being reported is not sacrificed: he would “qualify mistakes according to their level of severity” and described one error as “very minor” because the overall
message wasn’t lost (CE6). EE5 said interpretation of the facts is more important than merely verifying the facts. Facts can be “construed” in many ways, said this participant, giving the example of how identical facts can been seen differently by conservative versus liberal thinkers: “you’re looking at the exact same facts, but you’re seeing very different things in them.” Facts on their own, and thus verification alone, “have no meaning, it’s really what you make of those facts” (EE5).

(5) Storytelling

The journalists who did not agree that verification is the “essence of journalism” often focused on engaging the reader as an alternative essence. “Good storytelling” is the essence of journalism for CE5: the narrative is more important than the facts. Other journalists discussed verification as related to storytelling (CE2, CE5, CE7) and called themselves “storytellers” (CE2) or writers of “narrative” (EE5, EE6, EE7, CE2, CE7). CE2 talked about how a storyteller must “arrange a narrative.” EE2 compared organizing the story on paper to editing for television: “I’m really religious about making sure that I’m not recutting, interpretively, if you know what I mean, which is sort of a TV drink.” CE7 set himself up as a storyteller because he is “making a scene” or “can build a scene.” This involves taking information from what people have said and what you know about the location. It is okay to create this scene “as long as you don’t take too many leaps.” EE5 wants to “put people in the world” of her source. EE7 talked about an event as a “scene.” Not only does EE6 “love” writing, she values her role as storyteller: “you can’t wait to tell the story.”

Journalists expressed a desire to create interesting writing: for example, CE7 said journalists have a “job to make the news interesting.” EE5 called facts “bald,” which implies they are naked without a narrative. EE7 values creativity: “I like to present my stories in a creative kind of way. In a colourful way.” For EE7, facts are the “bones” of the story, but writing is “the meat.” Further, an engaging presentation gives a story more impact: “the highest impact journalism is what you do with that verified story you have, and how you present it. How you roll it out there” (EE7).

Journalists distinguished their writing from the work produced by other professions. EE5 doesn’t want her work to “read like a police blotter.” CE5 said that journalists are different from “boring lawyers” or “dictionaries” or “encyclopedias” or “boring scientific journals.” The repetition of the word “boring” and the focus on academic or scholarly sources create the sense the CE5 sees entertainment as necessary for journalism.
Analysis

Journalists’ epideictic rhetoric about verification as a feature of their professional identity praises a semi-scientific purpose, but when they are invited to describe how they seek to achieve that purpose, they are more likely to use visual, movement, and storytelling language than discourse invoking the scientific method. They construct verification as an embedded but shifting, adaptable heuristic process that both acknowledges and addresses the situational contingency of “facts” and “accuracy.” Verification is presented as a central but not systematic or rule-based form of professional communication practice.

This apparent disconnect between a dispassionate, inferential ideal and a contingent, heuristic approach is reinforced by journalists’ use of the language of the quest, rather than of the laboratory, to construct the location of verification within their acts of movement and vision. They describe a process that moves not only in three dimensions (back and forth, up and down, and around) but that reaches forward and stretches backwards in the fourth dimension: time.

This four-dimensional journey of verification is navigated by means of two types of vision: the physical seeing of objects and the cognitive interpretation of connections. Journalists look and move, interpret and assemble, but the precise methodology and the exact technique are presented as secondary to a four-dimensional object or the sum of the parts.

Verification is, then, a prominent, dynamic figure in the stories that journalists tell of their work. In all 14 works of journalism that the transcripts discuss, verification is the common protagonist that drives the actions of the journalists and defines the direction of the story. And once this protagonist is seen as the servant of storytelling, rather than as a laboratory assistant, the reliance on metaphors of vision and movement is perfectly apt: storytelling involves organizing events on a timeline and in space. It entails visualizing locations, setting scenes, and transporting (relocating) audiences. Hence, it strikes a delicate balance between inference and creativity.

On the other hand, this is storytelling with a key distinction, which lies precisely in the story authors’ quest for truth. Whether or not they actually say verification is the essence of journalism, all of their discourse reveals an ongoing awareness and concern for verification as a necessary foundation for their work. Journalism is “storytelling based on fact” (CE7) or “non-fiction storytelling [because] we’re telling the truth” (CE5). For that reason, the participants are more likely to align journalism with history than
fiction. EE6 said journalism is “like history” because they are both “a story that somebody wrote.”

Ultimately, verification and good journalism (or journalists) are given value because of what they can do, because of the actions inherent in their description. That is to say, a good journalist, like good verification, exists to provide a story that is worthy of reading.

References


Abstract
This paper reports a comparative analysis of the news coverage of the 2011 Libyan civil war in two national media (China Daily and The New York Times). The 2011 Libyan civil war attracted wide attention and was extensively covered by various media around the world. However, news discourse regarding the war was constructed differently across various news agencies as a result of their clashing ideologies. Based on corpus linguistics methods, two small corpora with a total of 22,412 tokens were compiled and the comparative analyses of the two corpora revealed the following results. First, although the two corpora shared a lot of commonalities in word frequency, differences still exist in several high ranking lemmas. On the one hand, words such as “Qaddafi” and “war” ranked similarly in the two corpora’s lexical frequency lists; on the other hand, the frequencies of the lemma “rebel/rebels” were much higher in The New York Times corpus than in the China Daily corpus, which indicated that the image of the rebel received more attention in the reports by The New York Times than in those by China Daily. Second, although the word “Qaddafi” achieved similar frequencies in the two corpora, a follow-up collocation analysis showed that the images of “Qaddafi” contrasted with each other in the two corpora. In The New York Times corpus, the words and phrases collocating with “Qaddafi” were mainly negative descriptions and highlighted the pressure on Qaddafi whereas many neutral and even positive descriptions of Qaddafi appeared in the China Daily corpus. Based on these findings, the paper further discusses how discursive devices are applied in news coverage of warfare, as well as some methodological implications of the case study.

1. Introduction
The year 2011 witnessed the rise of the “Arab Spring,” the revolutionary wave of protests, riots, and even civil wars across the Mideast. Starting on December 18th, 2010, this democratic movement fundamentally has changed the political landscape of many Arabic countries, and there is no doubt that the Arab Spring should be regarded
as one of the most significant news events of 2011. Among all the protests and conflicts during the Arab Spring, the Libyan civil war was the most eye-catching news event as it occurred in a country well known for its authoritarian leader, Muammar Gaddafi, and ended with a dramatic civil war lasting for nearly seven months.

During the Libyan civil war, governments of different countries held differing or even contradictory political stances regarding foreign intervention in Libya's internal conflicts. For instance, Russia and China were strongly against the military intervention proposal by NATO at the initial stage of the Libyan crisis. Nevertheless, as the Libyan crisis eventually turned into a bloody civil war, both countries made concessions and agreed with NATO on military intervention. Nonetheless, it needs to be pointed out that both the Russian and Chinese governments held a neutral stance on the Libyan crisis and maintained that NATO's intervention was inappropriate until the end of this conflict. As indicated by previous studies (e.g. Bhatia, 2006; Hackett & Zhao, 1994; Salama, 2011; van Dijk, 1988, 1993), a government's political stands have significant influence on its national newspapers' reports of news events. For the same news events, there may be different or even contradictory press reports by various news agencies owing to their host countries' clashing ideologies. Therefore, for the Libyan civil war, the same news events with different news narratives can be expected due to the conflicting diplomatic struggles behind the civil war, which provides an interesting research topic: what discoursal strategies were employed by different news agencies to manipulate their readers' impression of the Libyan civil war?

This paper reports a comparative analysis of the news coverage of the 2011 Libyan civil war by two national media: China Daily and The New York Times. These media were targeted as they represent two clashing ideologies, namely socialism and liberalism. Based on corpus linguistics methods, the current study investigated how conflicting diplomatic stands regarding the Libyan civil war were realized at the discoursal level.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews previous studies on war rhetoric and the theoretical debates on applying corpus linguistics methods in critical discourse analysis; Section 3 provides methodological information about the current study; and Section 4 presents the preliminary results and discusses their implications for future studies.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be defined as “discourse analysis with critical stances,” which concerns “real and often extended instances of social interaction that take a linguistic form or a partially linguistic form” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). According to Mautner (2009), there are at least three essential principles in CDA: (1) discourse constitutes society and culture; (2) power relations are discursive; and (3) CDA has a commitment to study discourse of urgent social issues. In short, CDA aims at providing interpretations and explanations of social phenomena from a discoursal perspective.

One central debate in critical discourse research over the past decade relates to the application of corpus linguistics in discourse analysis. Following the interpretive tradition of language analysis, CDA tends to be a qualitative research discipline, which is not inherently connected with corpus linguistics. Early influential CDA literature (e.g. Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 1988) has repeatedly adopted self-solicited research data with an emphasis on the significance of data authenticity and contextual information about collected discourse material. As a result, the decontextualized language data in many early established corpora (e.g. the British National Corpus and American National Corpus) lacks contextual information needed for in-depth CDA. In addition, many discourse and genre scholars have argued that corpus linguistics methods are inappropriate for discourse studies due to the conflict between “bottom-up” and “top-down” processes of analysis. For instance, Swales (2002) points out that interpreting genre and discourse structures essentially requires a “top-down” process for interpreting macrostructures of texts, which makes many corpus linguistics methods (e.g. lexical/phrasal frequency and concordance) incompatible with genre and discourse studies due to their bottom-up processes of analysis and the lack of contextual considerations.

However, recent developments in corpus linguistics have offered a promising perspective for corpus-driven critical discourse studies. The innovation of corpus linguistics software (e.g. the Word Smith Tools 6.0) allows for more accurate and quick elicitation of specific lexemes and phrases with their sentential contexts. The rapid expansion of the Internet has also changed the situation of online text availability. In particular, most newspapers today have been digitized, which facilitates data collection and corpus compilation processes. As discussed in Flowerdew (2005), with
rigorous research designs, corpus linguistics methods can be an effective tool for discourse and genre research. Recent studies (e.g. Baker et al., 2008; Prentice & Hardie, 2009; Salama, 2011) have suggested several key advantages of applying corpus-driven methods in critical discourse studies, including the reduction of research subjectivity and the triangulation of research data as well as the improvement of research validity through the incremental effect of discourse.¹ In short, current trends in corpus linguistics seem to suggest that corpus-aided critical discourse analysis will become more prevalent in the near future.

### 2.2 War rhetoric and media discourse

War rhetoric studies emerged as a subfield of rhetorical and discourse analysis from the early studies of the language use in Nazi propaganda and the rhetoric of the Cold War (van Leeuwen, 2006). In general, studies on war rhetoric can be divided into the European approach and the American approach, which differ from each other in their theoretical foundations. The European approach to war rhetoric has followed the legacy of critical linguistics since the mid-1970s, focusing not on words and phrases, but on the construction of particular ideas through discourse; by contrast, the American approach is based on traditional rhetorical analysis, with explicit reference to Aristotle and Kenneth Burke (van Leeuwen, 2006). However, recently the two approaches have grown closer together in terms of research methods.

Many recent studies of media discourse of warfare have focused on the justification of war through the construction of “enemy narratives.” For instance, Graham, Keenan, and Dowd (2004, cited in van Leeuwen, 2006) analysed George W. Bush’s declaration of the “war on terror” and identified the following common strategies in call to war speeches: (1) referring to an ultimate moral force to legitimize the war; (2) providing historical and cultural discourse to rally the addressed audience together as “us”; and (3) constructing the enemy as an evil other. Many previous studies have confirmed that various textual features (e.g. narrative stance, metaphors, tone, and argument strategies) can contribute to the construction of different images regarding the same news events. For instance, Hackett and Zhao (1994) analysed newspapers published during the first two weeks of the Gulf War and found that newspapers with

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¹ A specific genre or particular type of discourse is a collection of texts sharing common lexico-grammatical and discoursal features. Corpus linguistics methods, with the application of corpus analysis programs, are particularly good at revealing language patterns by processing large text collections.
different political stances presented contrastive images of the anti-war protests by implementing various textual strategies (e.g. syntactic, lexical, and metaphoric choices). Similarly, Thetela (2001) studied the news reports on the 1998 Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) military intervention in Lesotho and concluded that the application of discoursal strategies by mass media played a significant role in constructing images of Lesotho’s two rival social groups (i.e. the supportive group and the protest group for SADC’s interventions). In a recent study, Salama (2011) combined corpus linguistics and CDA and explored the lexical collocations in Islamic media regarding complicated Wahhabi-Saudi Islam issues. The results of this study showed that statistically significant collocations can accurately reveal opposing political voices in Arabic media. In sum, rhetorical devices play a crucial role in war propaganda as they create effective storylines to legitimize the use of military force and construct evil enemies to fight.

Although previous studies have extensively addressed questions regarding media discourse on warfare, the majority of these studies used qualitative data analysis methods, with very few exceptions such as Salama (2011). As discussed above, there has been a strong trend of combining corpus linguistics and CDA in discourse scholarship over the past decade. Maunter (2009) proposes that corpus linguistics methods can effectively support quantitative and qualitative research into discourse analysis and thus need to be further explored by future CDA studies. Inspired by Maunter’s proposal, the current study implemented corpus linguistics methods to compare the news coverage of the 2011 Libyan civil war in two national media with clashing ideological backgrounds: China Daily and The New York Times.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

This study focused on news reports on the 2011 Libyan civil war from two national media, China Daily and The New York Times. The choice of the two media was based on two considerations. First, the 2011 Libyan civil war represents how warfare is covered in a new media era, and the enormous attention paid to this conflict provides sufficient data across different mass media to conduct corpus-driven analyses. Second, English media published in China have been rarely studied. Thus, China Daily, as one of the leading official English media operated by the Chinese government, presents a valuable case for investigation. It is interesting to explore whether opinions expressed by China Daily dramatically differ from those found in western
media such as *The New York Times* since the newspaper's opinions are influenced by the Chinese government as well as its target reader group, westerners living in China.

There were three research questions in the current study:

1. Is there any significant difference in terms of lexical frequencies and distributions between *China Daily* and *The New York Times* in their news coverage of the Libyan civil war?

2. What are the collocation patterns of the lexeme “Qaddafi/Gadhafi” in *China Daily* and *The New York Times*? Is there any significant difference in the image of Qaddafi expressed by the two media?

3. If differences of image expressions exist, what factors caused these distinctions?

### 3.2 Data collection and analysis

The data consisted of 20 news reports on the Libyan civil war randomly selected from *China Daily* and *The New York Times* (10 from each). The selected articles were published between March 1, 2011, and October 23, 2011, covering all the major news events of the conflict. Two small corpora, the *China Daily* (CD) corpus and *The New York Times* (NYT) corpus, were subsequently built, including a total of 22,412 tokens. The articles in *China Daily* had an average length of 1,000 words whereas the average article length in *the New York Times* was 1,200 words.

The data analysis of the two corpora included two stages. First, with the application of WordSmith Tools 6.0, lexical frequency lists of the two corpora were generated and compared. Then, the lexeme “Gadhafi/Qaddafi” was targeted for a collocation analysis as Muammar Qaddafi played a pivotal role during the Libyan civil war. Collocation can be defined as “the phenomenon that certain words often co-occur with each other” (Baker, 2006, p. 96). The collocations of a target word can provide valuable information about semantic preferences attached to it. Table 1 shows some sample collocation lines of “Qaddafi” generated by WordSmith Tools 6.0 from the collected data.

In the current study, collocations of “Gadhafi/Qaddafi” were further coded into four categories: (1) Negative Description, (2) Description of Pressure, (3) Neutral/Positive Description, and (4) Other. These categories are defined in Table 2. The

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2 “Gadhafi” was used by *China Daily* whereas “Qaddafi” was used by *The New York Times*. 
Table 1

Sample Collocation Lines of “Qaddafi” from the Collected Data

In Tripoli, Musa Ibrahim, a spokesman for the Qaddafi government, conducted a bizarre news conference in front of a ridiculous audience of foreign journalists whom the Qaddafi government had invited to Tripoli, Mr. Ibrahim and Libyans as an alternative to Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi’s four decades of freakish rule. But events thus far have been mixed as it solicits help from abroad to topple Colonel Qaddafi. Rebels were dealt military setbacks in Zawiyah, and local governments. “I am Libya,” Colonel Qaddafi boasted after the uprising erupted. It was standa

Table 2

Coding Scheme for Collocation Lines of “Gadhafi/Qaddafi”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Descriptions</td>
<td>Derogatory lexemes collocating with “Qaddafi” or direct negative comments on Qaddafi or his military force’s behaviour</td>
<td>“Qaddafi’s regime”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Qaddafi terrorized and intimidated Libyans”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Pressure</td>
<td>Descriptions of Libyan rebels’ movements or NATO’s political and military pressure on Qaddafi or his military forces</td>
<td>“NATO has been bombing Gadhafi’s forces . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/Positive</td>
<td>Neutral or positive comments on Qaddafi and his governance in Libya</td>
<td>“Under Gadhafi, Libya made considerable eco-nomic and social progress”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other phrases collocating with “Gadhafi/Qaddafi”</td>
<td>“Gadhafi’s hometown”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results of the lexical frequency analysis

Table 3 shows the top seven content lexemes of the CD corpus and the NYT corpus. It can be observed that the two compiled corpora share many commonalities in top-ranking content lexemes. For instance, in both corpora the lexeme “Gadhafi/Qaddafi” is the top content lexeme while the lexeme “government” ranks low (seventh). On the other hand, the results in Table 3 also indicate several differences between the CD corpus and the NYT corpus. In particular, the lexeme “rebel” and its plural form “rebels” have much higher frequencies in the NYT corpus than in the CD corpus. Although the NYT corpus has nearly 80% more tokens than the CD corpus (14,395 vs. 8,017 tokens), the NYT corpus has a total of 158 tokens of “rebel/rebels,” which is more than two times that of the CD corpus result (40 tokens of “rebels” and 27 tokens of “rebel,” the frequency of “rebel” is not shown in Table 3). Another difference between the two corpora is the rankings of the lemma “Libya/Libyan.” The lexeme “Libya” ranks second and the lexeme “Libyan” ranks fourth in the CD corpus. By contrast, the NYT corpus has Libya ranking only fifth in its list. It is surprising to find that the total token quantity of “Libya/Libyan” is higher in the CD corpus than in the NYT corpus despite the fact that the NYT corpus has many more tokens than the CD corpus.

Table 3

*Top Seven Content Lexemes in the CD Corpus and the NYT Corpus*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Lexeme</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Lexeme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>Gadhafi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>Qaddafi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>said</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Colonel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Libyan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>rebels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>rebels</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Libya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>forces</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>rebel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.2 Results of the collocation analysis

Table 4 shows the collocation analysis results of the CD corpus and the NYT corpus. For the lexeme “Gadhafi/Qaddafi,” the analysis of the CD corpus generated a total of 108 collocation lines while the result of the NYT corpus was 170. As shown in Table 4, there are many differences in the distribution of collocation lines between the two corpora. In particular, the NYT corpus has a much higher percentage of collocation lines in the “Negative Description” category than the CD corpus (31.31% vs. 13.84%). By comparison, the CD corpus includes a higher percentage of collocation lines in the “Neutral/Positive Description” category than the NYT corpus (39.23% vs. 31.31%).

**Table 4**

*The Collocation Analysis Results of the Lexeme “Qaddafi/Gadhafi”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>CD</th>
<th>NYT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Description</td>
<td>18 (13.84%)</td>
<td>57 (31.31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Pressure</td>
<td>43 (33.07%)</td>
<td>51 (28.02%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/Positive Description</td>
<td>51 (39.23%)</td>
<td>57 (31.31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18 (13.84%)</td>
<td>17 (9.34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Some collocation lines in the CD and the NYT corpora were coded as both “Negative Description” and “Description of Pressure” (e.g. “the Gadhafi regime must be overthrown”).

### 4.3 Discussion and Conclusion

The results in both Tables 3 and 4 provide evidence supporting the research hypothesis that the same news event (the 2011 Libyan civil war) was presented differently in *China Daily* and *The New York Times* via the implementation of various discoursal strategies. The results of the CD corpus suggest a neutral political stand whereas results of the NYT corpus indicate clear support for Libyan rebels and for NATO’s military actions against Muammar Qaddafi. To be specific, the high rankings of the lexeme “Qaddafi/Gadhafi” in Table 1 suggest Qaddafi was regarded as playing a central role of the Libyan conflict by both *China Daily* and *The New York Times.*
Meanwhile, the low rankings of “government” in Table 1 imply that both media recognized the Libyan government's ineffective role in the direction of the war.

On the other hand, the ranking differences between the two corpora in the lemma “Libya/Libyan” and the lemma “rebel/rebels” indicate the political and narrative stances of China Daily and The New York Times. The results of Table 3 demonstrate that The New York Times paid much attention to individual rebel figures during the war and provided much exposure of the rebels’ military and political actions whereas China Daily described the war from the Libyan government's perspective, and its major concern was the future geopolitics of the Middle East. In short, the rebel groups of the Libyan civil war were somewhat neglected by China Daily. The above finding is further supported by the results in Table 4, in which we can see that many more negative descriptions of Qaddafi can be found in the NYT corpus than in the CD corpus. The portrait of Qaddafi in The New York Times was of a ruthless dictator who brutally conducted genocide on Libyan civilians. However, such highly negative adjective phrases cannot be found in the CD corpus, which described Qaddafi as a neutral or even somewhat positive political figure who, despite some minor political errors in his home country, still received lots of support from the Libyan people and bravely fought against NATO’s military intervention.

In sum, although the current study's data is limited in size and thus prevents any strong conclusion, the data analysis procedure clearly shows the potential of implementing corpus linguistics methods in CDA to reveal how salient textual devices are adopted to present mass media’s different or even conflicting ideological stances. The clashing ideological backgrounds between China Daily and The New York Times may be the major cause for the differences observed in the data analysis, and the findings of the current study suggest methodological implications for future studies on war rhetoric that take a quantitative approach.

References


Centring the Modality of Speech?
Pedagogical Issues and Program Design

Leora Freedman and Deborah Knott

Abstract
Recent research on linguistic development centres the modality of embodied speech as a component of academic literacy (Williams, 2008; Yang, 2010). This paper explores the importance of orality and considers how it might be maintained as a pedagogical component in a large university with many multilingual students. We pay particular attention to the early stages of the composing process, which has been less examined in second language writing literature (Strauss & Xiang, 2006) as well as to the roles of speaking and listening to embodied speech in enhancing students’ writing development. The dialogic speech characteristic of writing centre pedagogy is considered, along with the results of some recent applications of this pedagogy in content courses. This paper attempts to articulate what is missing for students in forms of writing or language instruction that do not involve embodied speech. We propose a re-examination of pedagogical practices in order to thematize orality.

Orality is everywhere, because conversation insinuates itself everywhere, organizing both the family and the street, both work in a business and research in a laboratory. Oceans of communication have infiltrated everywhere, and are always determining, even where the final product of the activity erases all trace of this relationship to orality. Conversation probably takes its inferior theoretical status from being natural and necessary in all its places. How can one credit the ruses of so ordinary a practice with intelligence and refined complexity? (de Certeau, 1998, p. 253)

With a high percentage of students learning English as an additional language in our institution, our teaching of writing always has a strong component of language learning. This is true whether or not language learning is articulated as the goal of a course, assignment, or writing centre session. Recent research has explored the strong and complex links between oral and written literacy in an additional language (Williams,

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Yet many of the current constraints in higher education decrease our students’ chances for oral practice. The prevalence of large lecture-based classes, and even large tutorials, means that students may receive writing instruction primarily in the form of increasingly elaborated assignments printed on handouts or posted on websites and through written feedback. The purpose of this paper is to question the impact of the mainly silent ways students’ writing and language learning are supported. We want to raise the question: What effect does the loss of opportunity for orality have on student writing? We are especially interested in how speech builds the capacity for linguistic invention.

Language-learning pedagogy traditionally demands a central place for speaking, which it sees as a main component of linguistic socialization and of improved competency in the other modalities of reading, writing, and listening (Huang, 2010; LeLoup & Ponterio, 2005; Yang, 2010). To understand the importance of speaking, it is essential to know what speech really is, as well as what it is not. We would claim that speech is not a neutral vehicle for delivering ideas, or even arguments. To see speech in this way is akin to seeing reading as the passive absorption of information, or writing as neutral reportage, a transparent window on content (Turner, 2011). Indeed, these are the misperceptions students may have about reading and writing that frequently hold them back from developing their own ideas and voices in their writing. We believe that critical speaking has an equally central role to play, alongside critical thinking, reading, and listening, and that it can be an equally major catalyst for language and writing development.

In language teaching, the capacity for inventive expression is often seen as being built through fostering automaticity. This means that students must internalize as much of the language as possible and use it automatically, to free up mental capacity for the expression of higher-order thoughts, as well as for the absorption of new language. Yet many of our multilingual students are graduates of systems in which English was learned by rote and with an emphasis on surface correctness. They have often had little experience of deep or “messy” discussion. As we know, in the impromptu discussion of challenging academic topics, surface correctness and even clarity cannot always be achieved, even by skilled speakers. The problem becomes even more acute in the case of multilingual students, who frequently engage in mental translation or rehearsal before daring to speak in an academic setting. Research shows that this is one reason many of our students, particularly the
multilingual ones, are silent even when given the chance to speak (Hafernik & Wiant, 2012; Zamel, 2004). A theme that emerges in many discussions with multilingual students is the need for oral English practice that is impromptu and penalty-free—activities which “force” students to bypass the dual temptations of internal translation and rehearsal. Thus Casanave and Soza (2008) emphasize the importance of engaging students in talking about difficult subjects as a medium for building the inventive linguistic capacity needed for writing.

Writing centres are one location in our institution (and perhaps in yours) where speech and dialogue are still a primary means of learning and teaching—though we seldom bring this aspect into thematic and systematic focus in our daily work: “How can one credit the ruses of so ordinary a practice with intelligence and refined complexity?” (De Certeau, 1998, p. 253). About 50% of our sessions annually address the pre-drafting or early draft stages of writing. This is likely because even first-year assignments require creative thought, and talking through ideas is one of the most productive means of linguistic invention and idea generation. In these early stages, ideas are rapid and fleeting, neither fully articulated nor sequential. At the same time, the writing project has a pattern: students must grasp and work within a defined analytic task and its available genres. Oral discussion facilitates the fluidity required by these circumstances of creative work. Speech sets up a process both structured and open; a writing centre instructor elicits a succession of alternative ideas from a student and the student’s possible written expression is explored. Following John-Steiner in Notebooks of the Mind, this creative process is “an open system, where the initial conditions do not determine the final outcome” (1997, p. 220).

We have attempted to make these writing centre practices and insights migrate to other learning environments, in particular initiatives to integrate language development within content course tutorials. Recently, we’ve experimented with training TAs to lead intensive small-group critical discussions of course material. This has been done in selected tutorials, over a period of three terms, during which reading strategies and writing instruction were also introduced. This approach was a deliberate attempt to move away from the more typical practice in which the goal of a tutorial was for the TA to answer questions and in effect restate the lecture or reading material. In these tutorials, instead of listening passively, students must orally piece together the meanings of the course texts as well as their own critical thoughts about these
readings. Results included consistent attendance at tutorials as well as a perception among TAs that students’ paraphrasing and other writing abilities improved.

If embodied discussion is part of a credit course, students have the advantage of hear**ing** a model of critical speaking on a course topic, with contextualized vocabulary, tone, register, and other elements of academic speech **to which they can immediately and “automatically” respond.** More than this, they hear multiple examples and become more aware of how ideas emerge verbally, in many voices. It is this back-and-forth, this multiplicity of language that helps students in paraphrasing and other tasks requiring a deep internalization of linguistic possibility.

We’ve also experimented with a type of “peer review” early in the writing process, before students have written a first draft of a research essay. Since the students were all working with the same sources, they were asked to bring a trial thesis to share and also to be prepared to discuss various ways they planned to use the sources in their essay. Each student’s writing was in turn the focus of an intensive discussion among peers about the central concept of his or her paper, and the uses which could be made of the source materials in relation to that particular idea. As Strauss and Xiang (2006) point out, there has been relatively little attention given to the early stages of the composing process among multilingual students. It is apparent even through our limited experience that these early stages are prime sites for engagement with an inventive dialogue that provides support for writing.

The role of orality becomes more complicated when we consider written dialogue, particularly technologically mediated forms of writing that take conversational exchange and invention as their model. “Orality,” as De Certeau says, “infiltrates everywhere” (p. 253). Weissberg (2008) does caution us that not all adult language-learners find the medium of oral speech of primary value in their own development. These students may in fact find the visually embodied media of chat, threaded discussion postings, blogging, and so forth more helpful modes of language practice. It is wise for instructors to provide diverse means of language practice. Yet we should not deceive ourselves into assuming that these visually embodied media reproduce speaking and listening, as these media are easily adaptable to the “internal censor” or the “internal translator.” We both have long experience as writing centre instructors to whom students bring intensively worked-over blog, journal, or threaded discussion posts. These exercises, while valuable in themselves, cannot replace oral commu-
communication, with its built-in automaticity, risk-taking, rapidly scaffolded generation of alternate expressions, and heard models of literacy.

We have both participated in planning writing initiatives or programs in which orality was not thematized at all, whether the oral interaction in fact played a role in the pedagogy we were designing or was minimized in favor of a circulation of texts. Our opening reference to De Certeau's work on everyday practices signals that there are much larger social and institutional contexts for such lapses of attention (Lillis, 2001; Selfe, 2009). There is also a long history of philosophic debate about the status of orality, as detailed by Noe (2007). In the Phaedrus, Plato extols the primacy of orality and gives highest place to the moral principles that in his view may be “graven in the soul” through speech. For Plato, this highest form of speech is “the true way of writing.” In our time, as Coward (1991) points out, Derrida appears to overturn this hierarchy by articulating a primary place for writing, which he separates and distinguishes from speech, seeing writing as “the essence of language” (p. 141). However, Coward sees this reversal of assumptions as Derrida’s attempt to escape Western hierarchical dichotomies: “Derrida’s critique is not aimed at reversing this value system, and showing writing to be superior to speech. Rather, his critique attempts to dissect the whole system of metaphysical opposition upon which the speech versus writing debate is grounded” (p. 143).

Thus, the question of oracy, as well as literacy, in our academic systems may be weightier than we tend to realize in our everyday work. In his research on ESL student writing, Weissberg (2006) has written about the mysterious orchestration between writing and speaking which emerges as the “voice” on the page, and which may or may not correspond to a student’s audible voice. Researchers have not fully explored these dynamics, yet we would all likely agree that the spoken voice often plays a critical role in the verbal production of meaning. Speaking should be, therefore, a key element in the design of writing instruction.

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Professionalism Grades and the Apprenticeship View of Teaching

Linda L. Revie *

Abstract

Using Pratt’s (2002) apprenticeship view of teaching, my paper questions how his notion of transformation can be graded or measured in a non-discipline-specific “catch-all” course like First Year Composition. I modify aspects of Wells’ (2008) professionalism marks to show how the professionalism grade can be used as an effective formative assessment tool useful in planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning. Ultimately, I argue for a learner-centred approach that asks students to self-assess and reflect on their own professionalism grades. This not only helps to shift the emphasis away from marks and onto the apprenticeship process and development of competence, it also helps to enculturate a metacognitive awareness in students of themselves as critical thinkers and responsible, accountable learners.

It’s not about teaching novels, poems, short stories or plays, nor does it engage in literary theory or apply any kind of cultural studies methodology; instead, in First Year Composition, a non-discipline-specific English or WAC (writing across the curriculum) course at Red Deer College that usually takes the subtitle Critical Reading and Academic Writing, we ask students to synthesize arguments and to develop their own thesis in relation to them, through assignments aligned to measure growth so that outcomes and assessment are tied together. We use checklists and rubrics to guide learning strategies. Some of the guiding processes with plenty of feedback to build up to the grading stage include brainstorming, mind mapping, collaborative writing, peer

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reviewing, drafting and workshopping. We also routinely ask students to assess their own work and the work of their peers: procedures that can help develop critical thinking skills in relation to the basic tasks such as proofreading and revising.

First Year Composition is a core course offering at most post-secondary institutions; however, with the changing demographics of the student population, and with a more consumer- or client-centred culture, students often feel they shouldn’t have to take subjects they are uninterested in. Their self-reflections on First Year Composition¹ indicate this lack of engagement:

- I know I seem like a bad student, but I try to care about something I don't want to do.
- There are days I don’t participate very much due to fatigue or, on occasion, disinterest in the topic.

Nor do students want to take a course that focuses on what they already don’t want to do (yet know they should!). For example, this comment represents a sampling of students’ attitudes about editing, proofreading, and spelling words correctly:

- I do think I need improvement in spelling and grammar which could be from not proofreading.

So how do we overcome this resistance in our students and convince them to buy in as stakeholders to the formalities of essay writing and the process of their own learning?

In his article about teaching practices, education professor Daniel D. Pratt (2002) identifies five pedagogical perspectives. He also provides a link to a Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) quiz so that you can assess yourself on which of the five approaches is your dominant one and which are your back-ups (Pratt & Collins, 2001/2013). This TPI, which helps identify “frames” that fit specific subjects, indicates ways to “reframe” approaches too. The third category of teaching, “An Apprenticeship Perspective,” is the approach I want to work with here. Pratt and Collins (2001/2013) state that the philosophy behind this view means good teachers are highly accomplished practitioners and their teaching reveals the inner workings of skilled performance which they translate into accessible language. Good teachers help learners develop through ordered sets of tasks and sequences that usually progress from

¹ Students’ self-reflections throughout this paper are paraphrased samplings from a variety of classes.
simple to complex. Good teachers, in other words, set out to build cognitive structure and develop skilled competence (Pratt & Collins, 2001/2013, Interpret tab, apprenticeship section). Additionally, Pratt (2002) claims that teachers using the apprenticeship perspective also try to effect a “transformation” of students’ identities which occurs “as they adopt the language, values, and practices of a specific social group” (p. 10). But to what extent can a “catch-all” course like First Year Composition that is not discipline-specific transform identity or, as Pratt (2002) puts it, “enculturate” learners into “a new community of practice” (p. 10)?

What follows is my attempt to integrate ideas about an effective formative assessment tool—the professionalism grade—into this apprenticeship view of teaching with the aim of charting students’ metacognitive awareness of themselves as critical thinkers and responsible, accountable learners. In the process, I argue that professionalism grades are not only part of students’ apprenticeship into critical thinking, they can also be an important platform in the “scaffolding” of work and learning. Based on one of the principal strategies of apprenticing, “scaffolding” is defined as “breaking the performance or work into tasks and sequences that progress from simple and marginal to complex and central to the work of the community” (Pratt, 2002, p. 10). The professionalism tool that I propose acts like a “scaffold”; that is, a step or a stage in the apprenticeship into a more professional “community of practice.” Providing students with diverse starting places, this professionalism grade also makes them aware of and, in the best cases, guides them through the enculturating process so they can exercise more mature approaches to the work and their roles within the institution.

As music professor Elizabeth A. Wells (2008) explains, the professionalism grade is not only a good assessment tool, it “reflects the true gestalt of each student” (p. 116), capturing their attitudes, levels of engagement and, motivation. As Wells explains, many professional schools have a professionalism mark (i.e. music, business, nursing, and medicine, to name a few). Usually, these marks are used as a punitive grade—a list of don’ts for the classroom that penalize students. In fact, Wells’ own approach often borders on a rather Foucaultian focus on micro-penalties and surveillance, as she describes in this short essay how she keeps a spreadsheet beside her to record “lateness, absenteeism, inappropriate behaviour and participation” for each student every class, then at the end of term adds up the checkmarks and grades students out of 15% (p. 118). I have tried to adapt some of her ideas to fit a learner-
centred pedagogy. After consulting with learning designers in the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Red Deer College and conducting research into learner-centred assessment strategies suggested by Karet and Hubbell (2003), Lombardi (2008), O’Neill and McMahon (2005), and Weimer (2012), I modified Wells’ model and made the professionalism grade into a mark out of 10% that all students self-assess. I ask them to do this assessment during the first month of classes, and once they have determined their own mark, I ask them to maintain that standard—whatever it is they chose—for the duration of the course (or until they re-assess themselves, or I consult with them and re-assign a different grade). As part of the process of self-assessment, if students are also required to reflect on their own professionalism mark to describe how they earned it, they start thinking about the act of learning, and they start defining their own motivation, conduct, and attitude in relation to the class and the subject matter.

The checklist below is an example of how I define the professionalism grade. The format proves useful for students to check off items. It is also a good way to list expectations for the class as it clearly defines the type of behaviours expected from students and the type of learning environment that needs to be created. Other options for implementing a professionalism grade may see it as a learning contract set by the class (with the criteria and standards negotiated with the instructor). In any case, the focus of the professionalism grade should be on preparation, engagement, and respect (in and out of the classroom):

**How to Earn Professionalism Marks**

Besides attending all classes, being on time, staying for the duration, and being engaged, you

- Read all the instructions for assignments and tests before formulating your questions about them
- Make sure your written assignments are proofread for spelling and grammar
- Think of questions and comments that would help to generate class discussion and engage others
- Always show attentiveness and respect to the comments of the instructor and other students

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2 The average self-assessed professionalism grade from a variety of classes is consistently in the B+ to A- range. Obviously, for this sampling, that’s the type of student most aspire to be.
How to Lose Professionalism Marks

Besides missing class, arriving late, leaving early or packing up before class ends, you

- Monopolize class discussions, hold side conversations, allow a cell phone to ring, or make disparaging/disrespectful remarks about the class, the instructor, or other students (verbal, written or electronic)
- Ask for higher grades before carefully critiquing your own work
- Treat the instructor or other students with a lack of respect
- Fail to pull your weight in team/group work

When required to reflect on this list, students often reinforce the codes and emphasize respect. Their thoughts about the professional behaviour expected from them also aid in classroom management. Depending on the depth of reflection, this processing can help the instructor to assess the students’ unique “starting points” in their journey to increased professionalism:

- I never leave class early because it is a respect sort of deal. Give it and receive it back.
- One thing I need to work on is not disrespecting other students who are eager to learn and have to be right about everything.
- I view all students as ambitious professionals who aspire to achieve great things, therefore I respect them.

Depending on how detailed students’ reflections are, the instructor can engage learners individually in their “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Pratt, 2002, p. 10) and find places to “bridge them in” (Pratt, 2002, p. 8)—to help engage them or understand their capacity to engage. For example, the following student comments provide openings for encouragement or discussion between the instructor and the student:

- I don’t really participate in class discussions or ask questions, which is a personal thing that I just don’t like doing.
- I’ve figured out that participation marks are the easiest to get and could be the deciding factor between grades. So I say why not have some fun in class.
- I could improve my mark by trying to engage more in class discussions and get over the fear of being wrong.
While professionalism grades are marks the student can control, with some learners it is appropriate to push a little, to encourage group work. With the feedback from the self-assessment tool, timid or reluctant students can be shifted from what Pratt (2002) identifies as “the periphery (as novice or beginner) to the center (as experienced members) of the social life and practices of a community” (p. 10). There can be different points of entry into this “community,” depending on student capability and comfort level. If learners do end up progressing from the periphery to the centre, this can be an achievement they feel proud about, and the “transformation” through participation can be a clear way to measure enculturation.

Even though the apprenticeship perspective supports collaborative learning, with some students it is wiser to discourage “community” interactions. The students who need to constantly hold side conversations are often more than willing to confess their negative engagement, as the following comments reveal:

- I have realized I can be distracting because of talking. I have tried to become a better student by listening.
- I need to de-engage with my fellow classmates to fully embrace what this class has to offer.
- I know that in this class I have to try to hush those around me.

If some students continue being annoying, or disruptive, it is useful to ask them to reflect on the checklist again. This “fresh look” approach helps reinforce a professional attitude, and it also resets the parameters for expected classroom behaviour.

Because we are asking students in post-secondary institutions to produce knowledge, not reproduce it, being prepared for classes involves some higher order professional thinking in addition to the basic skills involved in critical reading and writing. This transition into higher level thinking is often part of their self-reflections:

- One thing I need to improve on is reading the class material the day or night before.
- I tend to handle small assignments with little effort and so get lower marks on them.

If engaging with the “community of practice” is a crucial identity-shift for some students, disengaging with cell phones or other electronic devices is an integral transformation for others. As the following student comments illustrate, the electronic world seems to suck their attention away:
• One thing I need to work on is participating more in class discussions and refraining from using my phone to check the time.
• Doesn’t hurt that my electronics stay put away to the end of class.
• I plan on keeping up with the readings, to work on finding confidence when it comes to speaking out in class and forgetting my cellphone exists.

Further student reflections on being engaged, like those offered below, can help instructors read their learners’ points of entry, identify specific issues, and work with those issues in class to find the right balance between “zones of development” and “scaffolding of work.”

• The thought of misspeaking in front of the class invokes a large amount of anxiety in me.
• I also think I need to participate in group work a little better and help my classmates more.
• I need to be more confident in sharing my thoughts/answers with the class.

I have found that one of the best features of the professionalism mark is that students can regrade themselves at any time—they are formative assessment partners. In order to chart how students have reached their professionalism goals, every few weeks they can self-assess or have a conference with the instructor. During this respectful conversation, it is helpful to go over with the student what issues need to be addressed, and how. If used in this way, the professionalism grade, and the self-reflections associated with it, can be an instructor’s continuing strategy, useful for “checking in” and assessing the dynamics of the classroom, and effective for planning, monitoring, and evaluating each student’s process of enculturation. Perhaps even more importantly, students begin to internalize the values embodied in being professional, as the following comments reveal:

• This class is not just a grade to me. I wish to apply the concepts learned to my other courses as well.
• I feel that some students don’t want to think for themselves, so I contribute when I can, and that moves the class toward the goal, particularly when some are unwilling to talk.
• I plan to improve my professionalism grade to make the classroom more valuable and the college/university a welcoming environment to all members of society.
In conclusion, based on this set of guidelines about what students can do to act mature and give themselves better marks, I have found the professionalism grade defines the best practices of learning and encourages First Year Composition apprentices to become post-secondary professionals.

References


Supporting Aboriginal Students in Academic Writing: Decentring the Writing Centre

Shurli Makmillen, Meghan Aubé, and Heather Fitzgerald

Abstract

Canadian universities are increasingly being called upon to make their campuses more welcoming to Aboriginal students and more responsive to and accepting of Indigenous epistemologies and protocols. Writing centres are also hearing and responding to this call. The discussion here brings perspectives from three British Columbia writing centres alongside relevant research on indigenization, on Aboriginal student writing, and on writing centre theory and practice. The authors report on how they have each come to realize the ways in which they have needed to decentre writing centre space, practice, and pedagogy in order to even begin to meet the needs of Aboriginal students on our campuses.

This paper brings perspectives from three separate writing centres in British Columbia to share insights and provide direction for further research, presented in the form of a roundtable. As we came together to share experiences about our writing centres’ efforts to address both the anxieties associated with university writing and the barriers to writing centre use by Aboriginal student communities, we identified three commonly held themes, in the form of strategies that embrace a non-hierarchical approach to writing centre instruction: decentralizing writing centre services (or decentring the centre spatially); embracing improvisational or unconventional pedagogical practices (or decentring writing centre pedagogy); and investigating language and genre ideologies (or speaking to the constraints of standard academic genres and how we see the role of writing centres within these constraints). We also addressed some of the tensions that can arise from being white, Western women working and researching in Aboriginal spaces. A “pedagogy of discomfort” (de Freitas & McAuley, 2008, citing the work of Boler, 1997, and Boler & Zembylas, 2003) and examination of privilege and

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race have been a necessary part of this process for all of us. We walk a fine line between institutional mandates to indigenize, wider calls for reconciliation and recognition of Indigenous rights in Canada and beyond, and our own sometimes uncertain knowledge of local histories, traditions and protocols. And we take heed of Paulette Regan (2010), who, in her *Unsettling the Settler Within*, warns of Western scholars resting too comfortably in the position of ally or peacemaker (p. 235) as we seek to learn about and honour Indigenous epistemologies and support students who aim to do the same in their university writing.\(^1\) Below are our tentative first steps in this process, and we utilize the format of the sidebar to each tell our individual stories and reflect on our successes and our missteps. We offer them in the spirit of adding to the conversation with other writing centre workers across Canada.

**Overview of Our Writing Centres**

The UBC Writing Centre offers a free tutorial service (both appointment-based and drop-in), along with self-learning resources, writing groups, and tutor-led workshops. We work out of two main locations: the Writing Centre office in an annex building and the more central Chapman Learning Commons. We have one full-time coordinator, a program assistant, and 18 peer tutors (graduate and undergraduate) from a variety of faculties. Our approach to tutoring focuses on process, discourse, genre, and literacy; we aim to empower students to become fluent in writing for their specific academic audiences without devaluing other writing and linguistic traditions.

The Writing Centre at Emily Carr University of Art & Design serves art and design undergraduate and graduate students through one-on-one appointments, group writing programs, and in-class workshops. We offer appointments in three locations: the Writing Centre hallway (located in a tucked-away corner of a studio building); the library for drop-in evening appointments; and the Aboriginal Gathering

\(^1\) Ruana Kuokkanen discusses protocols of recognition such as those engaged in by universities to acknowledge indigenous territories: “we cannot allow such gestures to become proxies for ongoing repressive tolerance or benign neglect of indigenous issues, concerns and epistemes” (p. 93) or for “avoiding any responsibility for doing the homework of finding out about things that are unfamiliar —a way of closing the doors and windows rather than granting an unconditional welcome” (p. 91). McWilliam (1997) describes how such gestures can often be mired in a “self-congratulatory and somewhat evangelical tone” (p. 221) and argues that we should “refuse [a] final vocabulary” (p. 221). Recognition that operates within the “logic of the gift,” says Kuokkanen, entails reciprocity and an ongoing responsibility, and has as a precondition the recognition of Indigenous peoples’ relationship with land, and with the non-human world (p. 145).
Place. We employ one full-time coordinator, one part-time ESL Specialist, and a combination of faculty and undergraduate tutors who work on a casual (hourly) basis. Our approach to writing pedagogy is shaped by our institutional context: we aim to help students discover the connections between the work they make in their studio classes and the writing they do in their academic ones.

The University of the Fraser Valley Writing Centre, now in its 24th year of operation, employs one full-time and four part-time faculty and takes a rhetorical genre approach to responding to student writing. We all work one-on-one with students, collaborate with other faculty on in-class workshops, assignment and curriculum design, support writing initiatives across campus, and pursue research in the field of Writing Studies. We are planning an upper division credit course on writing centre theory and practice with the hope of mentoring students into the field.

We are not able to reliably estimate the numbers of Aboriginal students using our centres: though we encourage students to self-identify, this information is entirely voluntary. We are fairly confident, however, based on anecdotal student reports and the reports of Aboriginal faculty and staff, that this is an underserved group.

**Research on Writing Support for Aboriginal Students**

Research in Canada on the experiences and needs of aboriginal students in our universities has recently become more widespread (Bazylak, 2002; Lanigan, 1998; Morissette & Gadbois, 2006; Walsh-Bowers & Johnson, 2002), but few if any studies focus on writing, and even fewer address writing centre work directly. American research in this area is somewhat further advanced (Carr, 2005; Dyc, 1994; Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet, 2007), though a substantial amount of the more recent work is buried in unpublished dissertations and theses (e.g. Komlos, 2011). In her unpublished dissertation, Komlos (2011) concludes that, while many of the challenges that Native American students face are common to all novice writers (little attention to planning or revision, undue emphasis on sentence-level issues over organizational or logical issues, etc.), some aspects of culture, in particular orality and storytelling, do influence the academic writing of some Native American students. Writing by these students, Komlos found, includes more repetition and circularity than that of their non-Aboriginal peers. Komlos also found that Aboriginal students are significantly less likely to use writing centres and other academic supports on campus, choosing to privilege personal relationships over expertise if a choice has to be made between the two. The importance of relationships and an atmosphere of trust
has been a central thread in the research, ranging from research on high school graduates (Bazylak, 2002) to students in counselling programs (Morrissette & Gadbois, 2006). As a result of our research and practice in this area, building the foundations for strong relationships has become central to all of our writing centre practices, even those outside of Aboriginal spaces.

To make the university a more welcoming place for Aboriginal student writers, Komlos (2011) suggests that more open-mindedness from faculty and tutors as to what constitutes academic writing might allow Native Americans to feel more confident in their writing. Writing centre research in the US recommends other ways to build the confidence and skills of Native American students. Olson (2000) reports on a pilot project intended to raise awareness of Native American communication styles and the need for Native American tutors; and in her study of academic literacies amongst the Lakota, Gloria Dyc (1994) acknowledges the ways in which students might want to remain “moored to the cultural values and commitments of [their home] community” (p. 222) rather than adhere too closely to those of the academic community. In a context of such aims that might challenge the norms of academic writing, Brice (1996) suggests that writing centres could function as “safe houses” (p. 3) for Aboriginal students. In Canada, writing centre theory and practice is only just beginning to focus on First Nations students (Absolon 2009); Laurier Brantford University, for example, has adopted the medicine wheel “as a visual instructional tool which relates how life’s interconnectedness also applies to the processes of writing and studying at the post-secondary level” (Rudrum, 2010, p. 9). In all three of our writing centres, we are aware of the need to

Meghan: In placing tutors at the Longhouse, the First Nations House of Learning, we had to find people who were willing to take the time to build relationships and to value those relationships as much as the actual tutoring exchange. Tutors who were open about themselves and willingly engaged in social positioning, even questioning their own privilege in conversations with students, had the most meaningful interactions with students. Tutors who worked in the main open area where students study and who struck up non-tutoring conversations with students were in great demand. Early in the school year, these conversations and “tutoring” sessions tended to be more relational than writing-focused. Once students were comfortable with the tutors, they began to share their writing and their concerns about it. This is in stark contrast to the less effective tutors who may have held on to the more traditional writing centre model, which has the student approaching the tutor, who is in a position of power/expertise.
make literal and philosophical space for Aboriginal perspectives and students, both in response to the separate but similar mandates at each of our institutions to indigenize and in response to our own observations and realizations. As the numbers of Aboriginal students on our campuses grow, we are not seeing a concomitant rise in numbers of Aboriginal students using our writing centres. Much of our motivation to embark on this project was to discover why these students are less likely than other student populations to use writing centre services, and what we can do to make writing centre services more accessible and responsive to Aboriginal students' needs. As Komlos (2011) reports, Aboriginal students are much more likely to favour trusted, known relationships, but in many typical writing centre appointment contexts, students can be randomly assigned to often varying part-time faculty and tutors. One of our challenges, therefore, was to foster these kinds of relationships between the writing centre and Aboriginal communities and spaces on our campuses.

Trying to avoid the helicopter approach—or what some have called “the missionary position” (McWilliam, 1997, pp. 220-221)—we have learned to begin with 

- first, to the stories of how the legacy of residential schools and mainstream Eurocentric schooling practices have delegitimized traditional modes of learning and centralized the role of writing in learning (Cavalcanti, 2004; Smith, 2012, pp. 61-80);
- second, to how this leaves some First Nations students in a complex position in relation to how

Heather: Student perceptions of the tutor’s accessibility were also critical at Emily Carr. Initially, the tutor met with students in an office that was physically separated from the main spaces of the Aboriginal Gathering Place (AGP), and use of appointments was quite low. But when the tutor and students began meeting in the open studio area where other students were working, more students became aware of the tutoring services and participated, sometimes informally, in tutoring appointments. What started as an individual appointment sometimes transitioned into a group appointment as other students working on similar assignments joined in with questions. As more students got to know the tutor and she became a familiar face in the AGP, a few students even felt confident enough to visit her in the writing centre.

The decision to move tutors into the AGP was rooted in feedback about low student usage. At our first meeting, Aboriginal Programs Coordinator Brenda Crabtree revealed serious and ongoing concerns from
they choose to participate in the university’s forms of knowledge making (e.g. Walsh-Bowers & Johnson, 2002);

- third, to Indigenous writers and researchers who have addressed these issues in their scholarship (Kuokkanen, 2007; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Wilson, 2008);

- fourth, to students who share their goals and successes, many of which they may view differently than the university and/or their non-Aboriginal peers do (Bazylak, 2002; Oloo, 2007); and

- lastly, and most importantly, we are learning to listen to local elders and Aboriginal leaders on our campuses for guidance on how to proceed (Rains, Archibald & Deyhle, 2000, p. 339).

In many respects, this focus on listening follows a principle that Brice (1996) calls “learn before you teach” (p. 3), but nonetheless it must come with some caveat in this context: Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) draws on Gayatri Spivak to identify a less than ideal form of listening, one she calls “listening-as-benevolent-imperialism,” or “listening through the dominant discourses and epistemes and therefore not hearing what is actually said” (p. 75). In her *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift*, Kuokkanen argues that as educators we need to embrace “multi-epistemic literacy” to broadly include “an ability not only to read and write, but also to listen and hear” (p. 155). Modeling this multi-epistemic literacy is called for in developing a truly student-centred practice, ensuring respect, and working with Aboriginal and other students towards *their* goals, as opposed to teaching a specific skill set aimed at student retention and other traditionally Eurocentric university values.

Heather (continued):
Aboriginal students about writing centre services: students disliked feeling rushed through 30-minute appointments, they felt distrustful of the “revolving door” of tutors, and they felt no confidence that the tutors in the writing centre could help them. Most students preferred to take advantage of private tutors, however inexperienced they might be, because these tutors were arranged and introduced through the Aboriginal Programs Office. The relational aspect of tutoring was the foundation of our decision to offer tutoring through the AGP. One of our peer tutors had already been working privately as a tutor with a first-year Aboriginal student through the AGP. The fact that this tutor was known both to one of the students and to the Coordinator was demonstrably important to other students: several of them asked to be introduced to her through one or both of these people. What was most interesting, though, was that the relationships formed from this shift were not limited to the students in the AGP and this tutor: because of the new cross-over between our opera-
So we have started our inquiry with the goal of listening, but we recognize the irony inherent in the attachment to text that this article represents. One of the conclusions we have come to is that building relationships in face-to-face contexts is more important than all the pamphleteering, posterling, blogging, and other written genres that we have traditionally used to reach out to students. A quote from 19th century Lakota Chief Four Guns puts our Western obsession with writing into perspective historically:

Whenever white people come together, there is writing. . . . The white people must think paper has some mysterious power to help them on in the world. The Indian needs no writing. Words that are true sink deep into his heart where they remain. He never forgets them. On the other hand, if the white man loses his paper, he is helpless. (cited in Dyc, 1994, p. 215)

This is a telling account of what the traditional European dependence on writing can look like outside its sphere of naturalization. More locally and recently, Stó:lō scholar Wenona Victor and SFU’s criminal justice scholar Ted Palys noted a similar suspicion of writing among some elders on Stó:lō territory in a restorative justice process:

Heather (continued):

tions, faculty and staff of the writing centre and the AGP had opportunities to know more about one another’s services and spend more time with one another. The tutor became a bridge between our spaces on campus, entering and participating in both and bringing what she learned in one context into her work in the other.

2 Initiatives to advertise services to Aboriginal students on campus are usually developed and delivered in published (public) written genres—posters, emails, blogs/websites, pamphlets, etc. Biographical information of faculty and tutors typically includes elements of social positioning, sometimes in the form of an acknowledgment of the indigenous territories that sustained us and our families historically, and sometimes in the form of our own family histories. Nonetheless, faculty and tutors can often be a sea of white faces, in keeping with the “dominant metaphor for writing centre spaces” historically, which McKinney describes as the white middle-class home, “associated with upper- and middle-class White ideas of comfort, the feminine and feminism, and a refuge from the institution” (cited in Babcock & Thonus, 2012, p. 64). And as much as we might indigenize the actual writing centre space, for example, through artwork and including material in local Indigenous languages, many would argue this is only symbolic inclusion at best. Our movement towards decentring our writing centres spatially is an attempt to go beyond symbolic inclusion in a practical way.
The emphasis on paper records and 'case processing' can create conflicting demands for [Stó:lō]. On one occasion, for instance, a Smóyelhtel [a Stó:lō leader or guide] was publicly chastised by an elder for having notes written on paper in the circle. The elder reminded the circle participants that everyone there was equal and that by having written notes a Smóyelhtel could, however unintentionally, relay the message that he or she was more important than the others. (Palys & Victor, 2007, p. 27)

As well as putting our own attachments into stark relief, these reminders give insights into why Aboriginal students might have some extra ambivalence when it comes to a focus on writing—an ambivalence that may hinder their writing efforts in regular classrooms before they even think about coming into the writing centre. As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) put it, “Writing and especially writing theory are very intimidating ideas for many Indigenous students” (p. 29). As we have explored these ideas through research, we have considered and implemented new practices that are aimed at working with this ambivalence productively, rather than combating it or setting it up as a “wrong” way to view writing. In the following sections, we will focus on our relocation and decentralization, relationship-building, and reshaping how we think about our various forms of practice in these new contexts.

**Improvisational Spaces**

Space and context are two of the themes that recur in the literature, as well as in our experience as writing centre workers looking to support Aboriginal students. Morrissette and Gadbois (2006) discuss the
need for a support system that recognizes and respects Aboriginal student lifestyles, values, goals, and ways of knowing; our universities have, by and large, already provided these spaces in the form of an Aboriginal Gathering Place at Emily Carr, a Gathering Place at the Chilliwack campus of UFV, and a First Nations House of Learning within the First Nations Longhouse at UBC. These physical locations provide students with access to Aboriginal staff, faculty and elders, a community of other Aboriginal students, and other general academic and personal resources. In all of our experiences, we are learning that engaging with these spaces and the people in them is key. Building relationships in Aboriginal spaces is a best first step in supporting students who seek writing support.

Indeed, the importance of Aboriginal spaces and the centrality of these spaces to Aboriginal students’ experience on campus were reiterated time and time again in our conversations with students. In addition, the importance of having consistent, familiar faces cannot be underestimated and illustrates the results of others’ research (Carr, 2005; Komlos, 2011; Morrissette & Gadbois 2006; Olson, 2000) concerning the role of relationship building in any kind of work with Aboriginal students. Taking ourselves outside of the writing centre comfort zone (scheduled appointments, resource libraries, “our” comfort zone) can destabilize our experiences, but to truly go beyond a “one size fits all” approach to working with Aboriginal students—as Oberg, Antoinette, Blades, David, and Thom (2007) point out—it is not enough to simply have a welcoming attitude towards Aboriginal students or to seek to create a safe space for those students. Working in Aboriginal spaces, on the other hand, fosters engagement with lived experience, which may involve ongoing and active conflict and...
discomfort. This paradoxical “comfort with discomfort” is akin to what Geller et al. (2007) describe as inhabiting the role of Trickster (or Coyote) in Native American story: “Trickster nudges tutors and students from their comfort zones to acknowledge new voices and countervailing forces within texts, arguments, and research findings” (p. 27). This can be difficult, but learning to listen and engage with student experience may ultimately reshape our understandings of the relationship between these writers and their writing (Lanigan, 1998).

Taking the writing centre to the students in their content courses—through workshops on assignments, or peer review workshops—can involve us more centrally in course delivery while leaving the centre behind, making the perils and possibilities of writing part of the ongoing conversation in the classroom. Course designers can be encouraged to include writing centre support in various forms, at minimum to work one-on-one with students on their drafts in peer-review-focused classes. As spokespeople for writing across our campuses, we are in a good position to put issues to do with the consequences of indigenization for genres of student writing on the table as part of our regular outreach. Both faculty and students will then know it is on our radar. But anticipation for fruitful collaborations must be modest. Indeed, experience has suggested to all of us that the quality of collaborations is more important than the quantity.

Lastly, focusing on an electronic medium rather than on creating traditional texts (in the academic sense) and focusing on telling a story about one’s own writing and learning can help Aboriginal students to experience writing in a new way, one that is more

Heather: At Emily Carr, the Aboriginal Programs Coordinator described the Aboriginal Gathering Place as a “home away from home” for students and as a refuge or “safe haven” where students were “free to be themselves.” The site of the building (indeed, of the entire campus) is also significant historically, situated as it is near the site of the village of Snauq, one of the last of the Squamish villages to be destroyed by colonial settlers in Vancouver (Maracle, 2010).

Shurli: One strategy we tried in front of a class of mostly Aboriginal students was to role-model what getting feedback on writing looks and sounds like; we set up a class in which writing centre instructors gave feedback on the course instructors’ writing drafts. Responders modeled non-judgmental feedback, and instructors displayed not just their foibles and uncertainties, but also their active engagement in the revision process. Afterwards, most students sought out feedback—from each other, from course

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flexible and more amenable to a tradition of orality. The addition of an e-portfolio component to the class, for example, where students are encouraged to collect their drafts and reflect on their own learning can also help to focus on the idea that a piece of writing is continually in motion, rather than a static and perfect end product (Romova & Andrew, 2011). Writing centre workers can support this process through feedback, questioning, and continually directing students to focus on the process, rather than the product. This has also proven useful for underscoring the importance of writing as a tool for active learning, not simply a means of providing answers or demonstrating what one has already learned.

**Improvisational Pedagogy**

Writing centre methods for responding to student writing could be described as already improvisational; they are typically based on a situated reader’s experience, which dialogizes the relationship between writing and reading and works to equalize the relationship between the responder and the student writer. Some models focus on the experience of a generalized academic “reader-at-work,” who is making efforts after meaning, and linking the text to context (the rhetorical and disciplinary situation) and to the writer’s intentions towards their readers in this situation—a social constructivist approach that leaves room for discussion and negotiation of meaning (Giltrow, 2002). This approach aims to be non-hierarchical,³

³ See Isabelle Thompson’s (2009) “Scaffolding in the Writing Centre: A Microanalysis of an Experienced Tutor’s Verbal and Non-verbal Tutoring Strategies” for a discussion on relationships between tutor and tutee, in particular where she cites the scholarship on directiveness. Although typically and widely admonished against in writing centre tutor training manuals, directiveness, it is argued, is both unavoidable and expected (p. 418). But even in a tutor/student relationship that is inherently asymmetrical (tutors are most often not seen as “peers”), conditions for learning can be enhanced. She outlines three strategies: direct instruction, cognitive scaffolding, and motivational scaffolding. Yet elsewhere, Bruffee writes, “peer tutoring is the systematic application of collaborative principles to that last bastion of hierarchy and individualism, institutionalized education” (cited in Lerner, 2004).
and also to deflect as much as possible a focus on sentence-level correctness. In theory such an approach can support Aboriginal students. But given the North American intolerance for silence, for example, responders could be tempted to jump in to answer their own questions or reformulate a statement if a student does not respond within the three seconds of silence immediately following an utterance, rather than accommodate Aboriginal students' comfort with and expectation for much longer pauses between dialogic utterances (Carr, 2005; Olson, 2000; Scollon & Scollon, 1980). The “wait and listen” approach as described by Olson (2000) works particularly well when it is coupled with accessible times and spaces; in other words, faculty and tutors who are working in student spaces rather than in the writing centre proper, and who are willing to work outside the traditional session time constraints, may have an easier time adjusting to differences in session dynamics.

**Improvisational Genres**

Kuokkanen (2007) argues that Indigenous students in Western universities risk being misunderstood or dismissed if they attempt to express themselves through and from within their own epistemic conventions. Indigenous people might be encouraged to attend and work at the university, but many find it difficult to make themselves heard once they arrive. The doors and gates are open, but because the epistemic foundations of the academy are narrow, the discourses that control what can be said and what is understood are set to function only within certain parameters. (p. 74).

In reasoning through this dilemma, she proposes a solution: the university must see speaking in Indigenous epistemes as a gift that is received and understood. To do this we need “to revise the dominant forms of reason” (p. 87) that have so much currency in academic discourse. For First Nations communities, for example, memory is often valued over literacy (Archibald, 2008, p. 70), and storytelling itself is a form of critical theory (p. 75). What we are learning about the role of “storywork” as an aspect of indigenizing methodologies from Archibald and other Aboriginal scholars (e.g., Lanigan, 1998) poses a challenge to our thinking and our writing centre practices—not only in terms of writing consultants and tutors taking the time and having the willingness to listen and share stories, but also in terms of how much, if at all, such storywork or personal narrative might be welcomed into or even tolerated in the writing assignments we see in the writing centre.
An approach to thinking about language ideologies, correctness, and the genre constraints of the academy comes to us from Queer Theory—the idea that there are certain performances one undertakes to “pass” in hostile mainstream society. In approaching university writing as a type of “code switching” (Denny, 2005) that will allow students to “pass” within the university, rather than privileging North American standard academic writing as correct or specifically desirable, efforts can be made to ease Aboriginal student ambivalence and stress related to working in this medium. This pairs strategically with the importance of story and storytelling in consulting contexts, if our intent is to raise the status of the story within an academic context as a way to highlight what Shawn Wilson (2008) refers to as the potential fluidity and permeability of academic research and writing, then are we not beholden to embrace it in our own practice? We are, as Geller et al. (2007) advocate, working to destabilize both writing centre and institutional practices to open them up to alternate epistemologies, at the same time supporting students in their choices about how to proceed. As Daniel Heath-Justice (2004) argues, the academy “can also be a site of significant cultural recovery work, a place where all people who are disconnected from their histories can begin their journey homeward” (p. 102).

Meghan: Tutor training and the tutoring practice itself often focus on writing “correctly” rather than writing appropriately for a certain genre, field, audience, etc. A focus on correctness can devalue Aboriginal student writing and epistemologies in ways tutors don’t realize. As I have been listening to reasons Aboriginal students may be resistant to the act of writing and to seeking feedback on their writing, the idea of feeling devalued, as thinkers and, by extension, as students and people, has surfaced more than once. I am challenged to help tutors find new ways of talking about writing with students so as to avoid inherently valuing one type and devaluing others (in spite of the very real value of marks), and integrating this philosophy about language and writing into our writing centre practices has been valuable.

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4 This position recalls those who have argued for writing centres as sites for student advocacy. Babcock and Thonus (2012) cite Grimm, for example, who discusses how writing centres at their inception “took an oppositional stance to classroom practices of the homogenization of student voices. . . . Student empowerment became the central goal of formative assessment along with the transformative power of the Writing Center for academic reform” (p. 6). This contrasts somewhat with the commonly held perception of writing centres as sites of institutional surveillance—for the policing of language and for the monitoring of genre boundaries.
Conclusion

It is often cited that when doing research on Indigenous communities one needs to embrace the four R's: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. It seems there is reason to embrace them in writing centre practice as well, especially being open to reciprocity in terms of the gifts of teaching and learning. At our three universities, we have tried a few initiatives and have presented them here in the hope that they may be useful as strategies to ameliorate any anxieties Aboriginal students may have about writing and writing centres. We have all made efforts to make our writing centre services more inviting, often working in consultation with elders and Aboriginal advisors, including displaying the artwork of First Nations artists, providing information about Aboriginal resources and events to all students, making more public our own identity positions, reducing the bureaucratic demands on students in how they make appointments, and loosening up the boundaries of what constitutes an appointment, in terms of both when and where they happen. In so doing, we hope to create a writing climate in which Aboriginal students feel supported in developing their version of what Stó:lō educational advisor Shirley Hardman calls “writing back with an aboriginal pen” (personal communication, March 19, 2012). But we will always wonder, as does Komlos above, if our openness to genre shift will be shared in the larger university community. Writing centres are often in this position: helping students negotiate the requirements of the assignment, while hoping that they see themselves as participants with agency in scholarly communities of practice. If we can foster a sense of empowerment about how their own critical literacies can involve them in more than just compliance with genre norms, but also with changing those norms in response to their different knowledge systems and methodologies, then we will perhaps move our students and our centres one step further in the direction of “writing back.”

Shurli: The Aboriginal students I have worked with have come from a variety of backgrounds. Many were leaders and teachers in their home communities, and they spoke at length in oral genres to create profound meanings for their audiences, including those of us non-Indigenous faculty who were tasked with the job of “teaching” them. It has been a humbling experience working with them.
References


Abstract

Writing centres have always been "@the edge" of institutional life in the post-secondary world. Singh-Corcoran and Emika (2012) ask whether writing centres might be “non-places,” marked by “access, not proximity” to needs, not situating students in a community of writers. Drawing on an archive of daily logs from the UFV Writing Centre, we address the implications of being “non-space,” examining issues of spatial access and linking pedagogic efficacy to the rhetorical and physical conditions in which writing centre work is practiced.

Writing centres have always been "@the edge" (electronically, administratively, and indeed spatially) of institutional life in the post-secondary world. Of course, there is a long history of both celebrating and deploring writing centres, regardless of the spatial position they inhabit. And, while writing centres make acknowledged contributions to post-secondary education, a sense of liminality or non-centrality is always present and in need of exploration. At the University of the Fraser Valley Writing Centre, we are presently considering the idea of centrality and liminality as explicitly space-related and rhetorically powerful, asking how space matters for writing centres and for student writing success. Some researchers (e.g. Bemer, 2010) have considered quite literally the effects of where on campus students actually write. What seems to demand further study, however, especially considering administrative impulses to go virtual and diminish “bricks and mortar” instruction generally, is the value or meanings of the physical space or situation of a writing centre itself and its ability to support student learning about writing in that space. In Researching the Writing Center: Towards an Evidence-based Practice, Rebecca Day Babcock and Terese Thonus (2012) confirm our intuitions about the relationship between practice and space. They also report that

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little research has been published on writing centres' location or design. But they cite Levin (2007): “Accounting for writing center space is a current pursuit not only for administrators seeking to practice intentionality in their centers, but for anyone involved in writing center scholarship,” suggesting an area of concern by which research may be motivated (p. 267). Our goal here is to see what spatial rhetoric might be doing and not doing to the reach of our writing centre regarding the outcomes of our practice and activities.

Examining writing centre usage patterns as they respond to the rhetoric of space or the spatial rhetoric of writing centres' physical situation therefore seems a useful step in this direction. Our findings are to this point that the physicality of this “centring” or rather “de-centring” is linked to the perpetuation of “mysterious barricades” (Berthoff, 1999) to productive writing centre usage. Ann Berthoff has considered barricades and their mystery at the level of syntax and explored impediments to language efficacy and understanding. Our research notes ways that actual spatial barricades too are read rhetorically and are just as mysteriously effective at impeding writing centre usage. We present here some persuasive “snapshots” of this exploration.

We have examined several years’ worth of daily logs from the University of the Fraser Valley (UVF) Writing Centre, to track the intersections of space-related rhetoric and features of Centre usage that have arisen and been noted by our work-study students. For the last several years, the UFV Writing Centre has had a part-time front-desk at which a work-study student is situated, intentionally presenting a friendly face to incomers and their questions and at the same time tracking access, unmet needs, usage patterns, and their changes. Simultaneously, we have moved to an online appointment booking system: while appointments are booked online, consultations typically take place in our Centre, face to face, and the disconnect between an electronic appointment and showing up for the face to face experience apparently can cause challenges. Since then we have tried to understand how all these features facilitate or interfere with students making appropriate use of the Writing Centre.

Discussions of writing centres usually begin with two questions: What is appropriate use? What is unmet need? This is an ongoing debate in the writing studies community, but this discussion highlights two concerns: over-usage and under-usage that may relate to spatial rhetoric. Over-usage, the condition of students developing a “dependency” on writing centre services, is a concern, but a small one, due to the
formative, non-editing, nature of our pedagogic practice. Over-usage issues also include too many students vying for too few appointments, a situation that prompts students to stop trying to make appointments because of perceived scarcity of appointments. Under-usage describes the lack of student usage due to a complex set of concerns dealing with difficulty accessing the service generally (e.g. because there are not enough times available, or it is poorly located for student needs, under-equipped or unavailable in some way), difficulty with the service itself (incompatibility of service with need, incompatibility with pedagogy, incompatibility with practitioners), and difficulty with overcoming the internal barriers (e.g. students' fear of embarrassment, fear of exposure as not smart or academically appropriate enough, fear of admitting to oneself that help would be a good thing). First, though, students need to find the writing centre.

Singh-Corcoran and Emika (2012) ask whether writing centres might be “non-places” in the sense that Augé (2000) describes, marked by issues of “access, not proximity” to needs, not situating students in a community of writers, but appearing to offer a remedial service: not a place fostering engagement. Our writing centre data lets us isolate for observation the challenge of spatial rhetoric to appropriate usage, paving the way to consider pedagogic efficacy and the rhetorical and physical conditions in which it is practiced. That is, we notice how student writers need to decode the complex paths of access in order to begin a process of feeling they belong to a community of support for writers, a burden that frequently counteracts our pedagogic intentions. Any place, that is, is a non-place if you can't seem to get there from here.

Our work-study students have collected and examined a great deal of data that helps to provide a spatialized lens on ripples or difficulties in access and usage patterns, matters of significance for analysis of the messages given by the space in which we work. Rhetorical theory (indeed new rhetorical genre theory), activity theory, critical discourse analysis and what Lillis (2001) describes as New Literacy Studies all are useful tools for further understanding on the level of its spatiality why our space at the UFV Writing Centre works, why it sometimes does not, and why it matters to observe the psycho-social pedagogic situation of writing centres.

A verbal snapshot of the spatial (bricks and mortar) approach to our writing centre is in order here. A visitor first encounters a short hallway off another hallway, intersecting with yet another hall (making an “H”). At the intersection, we see a diagonal beam on which the words “Writing Centre” appear in 16-inch letters. Under
this beam (the open spaces of which are transparent glass), we glimpse a door beside a bulletin board. The door is glass and has a glass window beside it with much welcoming signage, as shown in Figure 1.

The bulletin board says “Writing Centre” atop and has information on it about how the centre works, pictures of consultations, a testimonial from a successful former student, and handouts about how to make an appointment. The single door gives access to the centre itself at the northeast corner from which point a visitor sees a row of computer stations, several consultation tables and chairs, file cabinets, some paintings, handouts, and the work-study/administrator desk, which is only intermittently occupied, due to economic constraints. There is much signage of various sizes and brightness proclaiming that this is indeed the Writing Centre and welcoming people to enter it. Usage patterns suggest the aforementioned textual messages are completely invisible, a fact that our work-study students’ observation logs clearly brought to our attention.

We are observing here Bitzer’s (1980) rhetorical situation—the context in which speakers or writers create (or cannot create) discourse as well as the epistemologically salient aspects of this creating—through the spatialized lens of access and usage patterns. The work-study students act as the friendly face of the Centre, a visual rather than discursive mediating message of welcome and reassurance.

Further, as interpreters, they offer their collected data and anecdotes showing clearly rhetorical features of situation and how visitors to the writing centre (of course mostly but not exclusively students) negotiate the mysterious barricades to access of meaning, of service, of interpretation.

Two kinds of representative anecdotes have been selected to illustrate the problems or results of our spatial rhetoric. Work-study student logs report a high per-

![Figure 1: Entry to the UFV Writing Centre. (L. Asayo photo)](image)
The percentage of people coming towards the Writing Centre door and veering off again, some agitated, some just uncertain, some persisting in the vicinity, and some leaving altogether: not entering the door. The abundance of such accounts indicates that many people thus are reading the open door as somehow closed, unapproachable, not for immediate entry, regardless of signage, openness, and smiling faces. If there is a no-show for an appointment, the work-study students frequently emerge from the Centre and ask people standing about or sitting on adjacent benches within a 12-foot radius of the door if they are there for a Writing Centre appointment. More than 50% of the time, people waiting outside are indeed there for an appointment and are would-be first-time users of the Centre.

The second kind of anecdote involves the invisibility of messages within the Centre about appropriate use, once students have broached the mysterious spatially rhetorical barricade. About a year ago we ended the free printing for all policy in the Writing Centre computer lab and restricted the free printing to people printing assignments for discussion in a consultation. There is abundant signage indicating this by each computer, by the printer, by the door, and on the walls. However, these signs are effectively silent, invisible, and unpersuasive; difficult conversations have ensued for the work-study students and for faculty. The spatial rhetoric in this case seems to be that the history of free printing, though long past, has infused the space, so that this historical behaviour is more significant than any wordings, in however large a font. What is interesting is that those who do not read the signs are not for the most part previous student visitors to the centre who might be expected to retain a yearning for the former free service, but people with whom we are unfamiliar. These people read the visual information that some people are working at computers and printing their work, and that spatially situated message (in combination with students’ need to save money of course) trumps the signage. These would-be printers express surprise, not usually disingenuously, when the policy is verbally presented to them.

What seems important regarding spatial rhetoric and our Writing Centre is that the space makes rhetorically persuasive moves at odds with our goals, regardless of our attempts to manage them through discourse. That is, no amount of signage, however well positioned, no number of words, no amount of announcements through various electronic messaging to students overcomes the persuasive claims made by the itself space. Regarding the issue that people feel uncertain about entering, it seems clear that the diagonal girder and glass feature assert that admission is limited.
The intervening mini-hallway also challenges people arriving regarding their certainty about where they are going: "not so fast!" The next set of windows and corner-door make ethos and pathos appeals at odds with our intentions of inclusion. They say, "Ok . . . we can JUST about squeak you into a corner, funnel you in, unworthy though you may be," offering very limited encouragement indeed. While the plethora of explicitly welcoming signage tries to persuade people they are heading in the right direction and moreover are warmly invited to discussions of writing, the spatiality argues the opposite, persuading potential visitors that there are major limits to their welcome. And, regarding the apparent inaudibility of the signage controlling printing, it seems that once people have mustered resistance to the spatial messages of restricted entry and gotten through the door, no amount of persuasive signage will convince them to amend other features of their interactions or behaviours within the Centre.

Rhetorical activity still requires, as Aristotle put it, "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (p. 181). However, our enthusiasm for using language may keep us from noticing non-discursive features actually doing the persuasion. Non-discursive–i.e. spatial features–appear to be powerfully argumentative. Hadfield, Kinkead, Peterson, Ray, and Preston (2003) argue that “the environment where interaction between and among people occurs is crucial as it affects the way people feel and, therefore, the way people interact,” yet the scholarly writing community has only lightly touched on the influence of space on our pedagogy (p. 175). More research is clearly needed to understand how spatial rhetoric can be made to persuade students of our actual intentions. The unintentional physicality of our space and its mysterious barricades is, like speaking loudly and with certainty in a debate, more persuasive than the too-quiet competition: our intentional signage and interpersonal discourse. An awareness of the boundaries of rhetorical interpretability, whether electronically or spatially effective, can beneficially sharpen our focus of attention and hence our practice. Non-discursive features embodied in our work landscapes are powerful, situated, and act to place people just as or perhaps more surely than words of direction or admonition can do. How to avoid non-place status due to the discrepancy between intention and placement or other institutional features clearly is a question to which we have yet to find an answer. But the impact of this non-place situation will also clearly continue to impact pedagogical outcomes and thus demands our serious consideration.
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