

# CCCC\_2011

## No Such Thing as Community

Scholars in rhetoric and composition have long been aware of the problematic nature of “community” for writing programs, stemming (at least in part) from their position within hierarchical academic structures. The goal of creating supportive communities for writers has long existed in an uneasy relationship with the perceived need for academic assessment and evaluation, which can suppress and sometimes even destroy the potential value of a shared community identity.

We see, in this year’s call for proposals, an opportunity to explore the ways that writing programs are conceptualized as groups of distinct entities, often in binary oppositions:

- expert and non-expert instructors
- disciplinary and non-disciplinary experts
- developmental and non-developmental writers
- student-writers and teacher-scholars
- beginning and advanced writers
- teachers and students
- teachers and administrators

We argue that these conceptual structures, with their emphasis on categorizing the nature of “writing” and “teaching” into a range of separate, hierarchical identities, work against both the creation of community identities and the kind of productive learning that such communities might generate. Thus, our argument that there is “no such thing as community” in first-year writing. Ultimately, the rapport of teachers and students within a single classroom is not an adequate tool for creating the kind of environment needed to build community. And writing programs, as political and social entities whose functions include both separating identities and evaluating the perceived quality of writing, do not provide support for an ongoing interactive dialogue about learning-in-progress across these different identity categories.

This dilemma is certainly not a new subject of debate in our field, but the continuation of the dialogue illustrates that the creation of community, although elusive, remains important to practitioners. As a contribution to this ongoing discussion, this panel will offer a range of interactive assessment practices designed to encourage a strong community identity within individual classrooms, among instructors and students as writers, across multiple sections of writing courses, and as a basis for a university-wide writing identity.

Ultimately, this model of interactive formative assessment, the data it can produce, and the interactions it can encourage, can help to shape a community identity – the sense that learning about writing is a shared activity that extends beyond the limited roles of student, teacher, or administrator. These models are also compatible with work that seeks to extend and refine a genre studies approach for writing instruction.

### **Speaker One: Interactive Formative Assessment and the Turn to Genre Studies in First-Year Composition**

Speaker one will discuss the turn towards a genre studies approach to teaching composition and the ways that interactive formative assessment can help to bridge the gaps between teaching approaches advocated by rhetorical genre studies (Bawarshi, 2003), English for Special Purposes (Tardy, 2009; Cheng, 2006), and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Using research collected at Illinois State University's Writing Program, this presentation highlights how the study of genre, as a key goal for introductory composition, can be enhanced by interactive assessments that invite students and instructors to negotiate their relationships with writing, with the academic context within which they learn and teach, and with each other. At a programmatic level, interactive formative assessments can work to create shared goals in the study and practice of writing situations, as well as to break down barriers of the individual classroom space as a boundary for the creation of communities.

### **Speaker Two: Fostering Instructor Expertise through Professional Learning Communities**

Many scholars within the field of composition studies agree that creating a "community" among first-year composition GTAs is an effective model for offering new instructors practical training and support (Latterell, 1996; Long et al., 1996; Dobrin, 2002). Within this model, theoretically, WPA and GTAs share administrative responsibilities; further, GTAs mentor and provide professional development for one another. In reality, however, current models for creating community among instructors lack specificity, and they also fail to allow for the creation of community between instructors and WPAs, and between teachers and students.

This presentation focuses on research related to the use of Professional Learning Communities among first-year composition instructors. Speaker Two's research illustrates the ways that PLCs can help instructors focus on student learning, openly collaborate on best practice methods, and provide evidence of student learning through interactive formative assessment. Speaker two will discuss PLCs as a specific method for including instructors as active participants in their own professionalization process. She will also offer administrators resources for creating such a model within a first-year writing program.

### **Speaker Three: Interactive Formative Assessment in the Classroom**

Speaker three will work to answer the following question: How can we be explicit in establishing systematic, practical, and continuous assessment without becoming prescriptive in our teaching methods or presenting a "correctness" model for students as they explore and negotiate genres? This presentation will explore the ways that interactive formative assessment can help a group of writers (with the instructor as facilitator) study writing-in-action, identify skills and concepts that need to be learned, and to assess, both for themselves and as a group, the progress they might expect to make during the course of a writing project. Speaker three will then provide examples of a range of interactive formative assessments that allow writers to experiment with and evaluate the "learning-in-progress."

Works Cited:

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Latterall, Catherine (1996). "Training the Workforce: An Overview of GTA Education Curricula." *WPA* 19.3 (1996): 7-23.

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