

# **POINTS OF DEPARTURE**

*Rethinking Student Source Use and Writing  
Studies Research Methods*

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## Introduction

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### THE RISE OF RAD RESEARCH METHODS FOR WRITING STUDIES

#### *Transcontextual Ways Forward*

Tricia Serviss

*Today's research in composition, taken as a whole, may be compared to chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy: some terms are being defined usefully, a number of procedures are being refined, but the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations. Not enough investigators are really informing themselves about the procedures and results of previous research before embarking on their own. Too few of them conduct pilot experiments and validate their measuring instruments before undertaking an investigation. Too many seem to be bent more on obtaining an advanced degree or another publication than on making a genuine contribution to knowledge. . . . And far too few of those who have conducted an initial piece of research follow it with further exploration or replicate the investigations of others. Composition research, then, is not highly developed. If researchers wish to give it strength and depth, they must reexamine critically the structure and techniques of their studies.*

—Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and  
Lowell Schoer, *Research in Written Composition*, 1963

*Braddock et al. proceeded by summarizing existing research and by identifying five exemplary comparison-group research studies. By contrast, contributors to this volume review very little research except insofar as it helps explain the new lines of inquiry being developed in their chapters. Further, when authors in this volume describe anticipated or ongoing research studies, they are not concerned with illustrating conventional methodologies. Rather, their intent is to suggest what seem like useful ways we might begin to lift ourselves out of our ignorance.*

—Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell, *Research on  
Composing: Points of Departure*, 1978

**INTRODUCTION: REPLICATION, TRANSPARENCY,  
AND THE SEARCH FOR METHOD**

Investment in data-driven research and the writing-education reforms it might allow dominated conversations about research methods and methodology in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Chris Anson argued at the Council of Writing Program Administrators 2006 conference, and in print two years later (Anson 2008), that the field of writing studies needed to attend to data-driven research if we hoped to reach audiences beyond ourselves, referencing what Rich Haswell (2005) calls “RAD,” or “replicable, aggregable, data-driven research.” In addition to speaking to those outside the discipline, such data also challenges some of our own assumptions about student writing, expanding theories about how writing works and pushing us to find better pedagogies and therefore productive relationships with our students. Data-driven research, as Haswell (2005), Charles Bazerman (2008), and others have demonstrated, can move our discipline in more effective and informed directions, but for too long we neglected such research, to our detriment, as Haswell (2005) and Anson (2006) contend. Yet what seems apparent now is that these conversations also exposed a further desire to reprioritize research methods themselves; calls for data-driven research (what we are generally calling *RAD research* in this collection) are also calls to fortify our methodological practices so different genres of research become plausible options for scholars in our field.

The interest in coding methods and RAD research at recent conferences, most notably the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), suggests a significant ongoing shift in writing studies research. We are turning quite explicitly toward research methods themselves as crucial sites of inquiry and as acquisitions necessary for the field’s health and expansion. Too much research still focuses exclusively on the originality of the research site and on the results, with only a brief discussion of research methods and little critical reflection about them. This kind of imbalance makes it difficult to replicate existing studies, both because the methods are not sufficiently clear (as Karen Lunsford [2013] observed) and because our field still does not value replication as much as originality, a predicament that leaves us where Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer found us in 1963. It is, of course, important that innovative research be defined by the originality of its site and the uniqueness of its approach; however, this collection argues that the design, transparency, and potential expansion of the research via presentation of methods is equally important. The call to replicate research in writing studies is most

fruitfully a call to develop our research findings together rather than striving to do alone what none have done before.

Emerging graduate student-scholars and experienced researchers in writing studies alike are hungry for greater transparency and accessibility to research methods so they may replicate and directly respond to other research; too often what we find is a discussion of methods that describes what was done but is not detailed enough to allow replication or adaptation of that method by other researchers. This lack of detail occurs with good reason, perhaps, because, too often, to present methods—including the initial failures and adjustments that mark the development of pilot studies—is to invite critique rather than the refinement and revision Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) present as part of the process healthy research communities engage in together. At the same time, the need for “original” research as part of one’s professional credentialing causes many to fear (often correctly) that replication of other research will be perceived as less important work. In the field of writing studies, questions have too often been perceived as resolved once one study has been published, however provisional the results. But the calls to research arms issued by Anson, Haswell, and others throughout our disciplinary history are too important to ignore. Those calls have propelled us to develop a collection of chapters that describe research mostly in the form of the pilot as Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) imagine it. The authors in this collection make their methods visible to allow for adjustments; they present and discuss them in detail to encourage refinement and reproduction.

*Points of Departure* works to capture *how* research happens in particular instances, concretizing processes of research design and the pivotal role of the pilot study by focusing on research methods—practices, mechanisms, strategies, artifacts, lessons learned—rather than solely highlighting research findings. In this way, the collection hopes to challenge and inspire readers to create the kinds of research called for by Anson (2006), Haswell (2005), Bazerman (2008), and Lunsford (2013). The collection also calls on readers to explore research methods and build on the work of other important edited collections in this conversation including those by Cooper and Odell (1978), Lauer and Asher (1988), Kirsch and Sullivan (1992), Smith (1999), Smagorinsky (2006), McKee and DeVoss (2007), Kirsch and Rohan (2008), Ramsey et al. (2010), Schell and Rawson (2010), Nickoson and Sheridan (2012), and Powell and Takayoshi (2012). This collection issues these challenges not from the standpoint of sanitized final research but from within what Adam Banks (2015) calls the “funkiness” of evolving research methods.

The chapters in this collection also present findings, in most cases provisional results at the end of a pilot project. Like the research methods, the findings are also in process, subject to revision and reproduction over time. Each chapter in *Points of Departure* presents initial research using a different method, but all are concerned in some way with the same question: how can we understand and better teach source-based writing? Many, but not all, of the research projects presented are derived from, complementary to, or expand on the work of the Citation Project (see chapter 1). But in addition to their originality, the chapters present their research so other projects may build on or from it. Authors featured in *Points of Departure* represent their research methods as transparently as possible, describing how the methods worked in practice. Contributors also imagine how such initial pilot studies might be revised and advanced into more substantial, more robust research projects in the future. Researchers in this collection work to expose the processes of research design and development rather bravely, inviting readers into the recursive worlds researchers must navigate as they establish research projects sound enough to extend beyond initial iterations.

It is our hope that presenting methods and findings in this way will

1. inspire a more nuanced conceptualization of research *as a process* that can develop only with methodological transparency; a process that depends on pilot studies, reflection and revision of method; and one that ideally leads to expanded transcontextual studies building on and strengthening initial studies;
2. generate discussion about how we talk about research methods in writing studies, making such conversation more holistic—including the failures and revisions—and more productive, offering points of departure for richer understandings of research and refined research methods;
3. invite readers to use these preliminary studies to deepen our understandings of student literacies, launching additional and expanded research projects that reproduce key aspects of these local studies transcontextually based on revised methods where necessary.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF METHOD IN WRITING STUDIES

### *Recurrent Calls to Methodological Transparency*

Calls to conduct particular kinds of empirical research are not new or novel in writing studies but rather a kind of recursive tension that cycles through our disciplinary consciousness with regularity. The development of the modern field of writing and rhetorical studies can be understood as a tale of methodological evolution. Founding documents—reports

on the first Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the first issues of *College Composition and Communication* (CCC), and research surveys like Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer's (1963) *Research in Written Composition* and Cooper and Odell's (1978) *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*—recount worries about our formation as a research community. Debates about research methods are central to these worries. The earliest CCC articles (Gerber 1950; Wells 1950) describe efforts to aggregate “known” research and best teaching practices in surveys and what Gerber calls “friendly correspondence” across institutions (Gerber 1950, 12). The blooming infrastructure of CCCC in particular is reportedly driven by a desire to compile existing and facilitate further research all at once. Research methods are quite secondary to the accumulation of knowledge itself in these earliest disciplinary moments. Throughout the 1950s, CCC articles embody a perpetual call to gather and document common, accepted knowledge, to create an organization to regulate and distribute such knowledge and therefore a discipline.

By the 1960s, CCC authors refine this stance toward research, moving from calls to aggregate existing knowledge toward the articulation of particular research agendas and questions. Robert Wright (1960) reports research prompts deemed “most pressing” by a CCCC subcommittee on research in composition, calling on CCC to begin publishing articles that present “research” in both design and findings as well as articles focused on pedagogical practices. Wright's call to prioritize research-driven discourse about writing typifies the first two decades of CCC articles, yet divergent voices also challenged this disciplinary trajectory. Taylor Culbert (1961) cautions compositionists about such research agendas, arguing that they—we—are ill prepared to conduct research of the kind being proposed. Compositionists, Culbert argues, are humanists who ought to stick to humanistic inquiry. In the paradigm generated by cross talk in these early CCC issues, authors argue that we don't have training in scientific methods and so ought to embrace humanistic inquiry. Yet humanistic inquiry is not attached to any particular research methods; as a result, a number of gaps have opened between research and disciplinary knowledge, research and resulting best practices, and research findings and research methods. What we know as a disciplinary community does not rest in clear relationship to research traditions or methods. This invisibility of research traditions and methods became an important affordance for the field's development in many ways, encouraging scholars to discover research traditions best suited for their particular questions. The invisibility of research design and methods also,

however, weakened—and continues to weaken—the coherence and therefore integrity of writing and rhetorical studies.

The roots of such angst about research methodologies and disciplinary identity are deep, and the field repeatedly addresses this weakness. The publication of *Research in Written Composition* in 1963 was the culmination of the work of the CCCC's Committee on the State of Knowledge about Composition, promising a cache of research dealing with “actual writing” and using “scientific method” to control experimentation and textual analysis. Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer disclose their own research methods (they start with 1,000 bibliographic citations and narrow it down to the 485 “best scientific” composition studies, half of which are unpublished) and in so doing reveal their own attitudes; they prioritize what they deem to be empirical research even while suspicious of it. The report is crucially important in two ways. First, it moves conversations from compilation of research to *generation* of research in writing studies; second, it calls on the field to return to methodological training, emphasizing the utility of designing pilot studies that are refined, through peer review, into more substantial studies. *Research in Written Composition* is often noted as a research charter for the discipline as it distinguishes particular *sites* of study for consideration; Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer's calls to methodological training are less celebrated. In fact, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer's (1963) research report highlights two pressing claims that *Points of Departure* contends are still ongoing concerns:

1. Researchers are not methodologically prepared to undertake pressing research questions in predictable ways.
2. Researchers are not collectively invested in arriving at transcontextual findings that might be accumulated and meaningfully connected to other research on a broad scale.

Yet the move from compilation of knowledge toward investigation and systematic generation of new, sound research with transparent research methods launched from the report. And it motivates this collection.

Conceptualizations of research practices, methods, and methodologies are greatly altered by the rise of varied research itself in writing studies scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s. Charles Cooper and Lee Odell's 1978 *Research on Composing: Points of Departure* is a second major compilation of research “knowledges” in writing and rhetorical studies. Cooper and Odell's collection brings together contemporaneous research findings just as Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer's did in 1963; Cooper and Odell argue in their introduction that research must come to be

treated as explicitly tentative (xiv). The book looks forward to the invention of new inquiry (in place of empirical research), new questions, and new procedures to replace a simple cataloguing of what we already know. Cooper and Odell (1978) refocus Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer's (1963) dreams of disciplinary knowledge, embodied in that historic moment by inquiry-based works of Jane Emig (1982), Sondra Perl (1980), and Mina Shaughnessy (1979).

By the time histories of our field emerged in the late 1980s (Berlin 1987; North 1987), the work of Emig, Perl, and Shaughnessy represented a movement toward inquiry-driven empirical research within writing studies. These early histories work toward solidifying research practices and debates into a few basic binary oppositions, grouping the individual work of scholars like Emig, Perl, and Shaughnessy together into, in North's telling, an era of "postivistic certainty" (North 1987, 204) and, in Berlin's history, an era of research defined by a scholar's ideological stance. The era between 1960 and 1975 is therefore explained in our disciplinary histories as a time of either methodological madness that, North claims, made us disciplinarily fragile with our eight isolated methodological communities, or ideologically problematic via Berlin's description of various rhetorical influences on our research questions, methods, designs, and findings, most famously transactional rhetorics.

The founding of the Research Network Forum (RNF) as an additional preconference event at CCCC in 1988 emerged as a potential remedy for the fracturing effects of such divergent research communities within writing studies. In his statement upon the founding of RNF, Bazerman (1989) suggests that researchers are isolated from one another largely through ideological differences rather than methodological ones; the solution implied is the transparent sharing of research practices, problems, and solutions through activities like the RNF itself. Geisler and Jarratt (1989) point out RNF's purpose as discouraging silencing "evaluations" of one another's scholarship in favor of learning about *how* we work as researchers. While not named explicitly, it seems that RNF was imagined as a place to encourage research transparency, a place to share methods and refine research projects together. RNF was chartered to host these conversations, highlighting points of intersection of these communities related to our ultimate shared purposes of student empowerment, the pairing of research and pedagogical practice, and community formation among compositions (Geisler and Jarratt 1989, 291).

The field journeyed on from those founding RNF moments of research-method transparency and debate. The same 1988 CCCC conference also showcased the first Octalog, a panel made of rhetorical



historians declaring methodological positions as ideological expressions (Octalog 1988). Panelists insisted upon the dialectic nature of historical research (Berlin 1987) just as they called for the recovery of lost voices (Jarratt in Octalog 1988). These official institutional efforts captured a movement in our disciplinary conversations about research that highlighted methodology and perhaps unintentionally dwarfed consideration of methods and practices. Yet at the same time, researchers like Gail Hawisher (1989) took inventory of ongoing research projects and made recommendations that continue to circulate in the field today. Hawisher (1989) challenged us to build new research in relationship to previous studies, plan for several studies to pursue research questions, and take a longitudinal approach to our research. These calls and efforts culminated in the methodologically driven debates about research as ideological framework that dominated the field in the 1990s.

Throughout the 1990s, articles in composition journals contested the role of empiricism (Charney 1996; 1997) and paid renewed attention to expanding the sites of our research (Cintron 1998; Gere 1994). Debates about our research identity throughout this era orbited around conversations about methodological stances rather than the practices of our methods (Berkenkotter 1991). Yet Rose and Weiser's 1999 *The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher* includes chapters focused primarily upon the methods and processes required to be successful writing program administrators (see Harris; Martin; Liggett; Weiser; Rose; Anson and Brown; Peeples; and Phelps in their collection), arguing that the methods and skills of research are necessary for writing programs to thrive and even continue to exist. *Composing Research: A Contextualist Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition* (Johanek 2000) articulates worries about the future of writing and rhetorical studies if we do not intervene more actively in the teaching of our research to new scholars—and the methodological training of those new scholars. Most significantly for the efforts of this collection, Cindy Johanek calls for a shift in our methodological discussions, suggesting that “instead of arguing . . . about *which* research method or *which* epistemological stance is sensitive to context, we must ask instead: In what context does that sort of argument make sense?” (90). Thus, conversations about *what*, *how*, and *where* in writing studies research opened expansive thinking about these modes and processes of research as the twentieth century ended (see also Barton 2000; Cushman 1999; Flinders and Eisner 1994; Kirsch 1992; Newkirk 1991).

At the start of the twenty-first century, these conversations shifted, prompted by changes in the North American academy. Calls to renew the rigor of peer review in scholarly journals across disciplines, and for

greater explication of writing studies' relationship to English studies and other humanities, proliferated. By the latter half of that first decade, these conversations bloomed to include discussions of research sites in an evolving educational landscape (Smagorinsky 2006), a globalizing world (Hesford 2006), and digital networks (McKee and DeVoss 2007) and collided with what *Points of Departure* contends is an explicit, strategic return to research methods (Anson 2008; Bazerman 2008; Haswell 2005; Howard 2014; Lunsford 2013). This wave swelled into our current decade as conference workshops, panels, collections, and articles focused on method abounded (Fleckenstein et al. 2008; Howard 2014; Mackiewicz et al. 2014; Mueller 2012; Nickoson and Sheridan 2012; Powell and Takayoshi 2012; Ramsey et al. 2010; Royster and Kirsch 2012; Schell and Rawson 2010; Serviss and Jamieson 2014; and many others). These conversations invigorated discussions of method, providing additional ways to think about our research sites, our research questions, our analyses of our research, and efforts to bring coherence to the expanse of writing studies.

At the same moment the discipline was reawakening to the possibilities of replicable and reproducible (RAD) research in writing studies, two different writing-research handbooks emerged—most notably Charles Bazerman's (2008) *Handbook of Research on Writing* and Charles MacArthur, Steve Graham, and Jill Fitzgerald's (2006) *Handbook of Writing Research*. Both texts are provocative guides to writing research past and future, compiling research traditions through categorization of research sites (historically in the classroom, in the workplace, etc.) and depicting methodological traditions through examples of research premised upon those methodological traditions. MacArthur, Graham, and Fitzgerald's 2006 *Handbook* brings together experts from across categories including writing assessment, histories of writing, and the cognitive development of child writers. Their collection offers an extremely useful overview of research in those areas, particularly for new researchers. Published two years later, *Handbook of Research on Writing* (Bazerman 2008) pursues a similar purpose; it is also organized according to different areas of inquiry (writing in society, writing in school, etc.). These research collections are both crucially important in that they collect research about writing, just as Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer attempted to do with *Research in Written Composition* in 1963. What all these endeavors are missing, however, is the kind of in-depth transparency of methods necessary for the development of international and interdisciplinary writing studies RAD research. While the handbooks offer wonderful summaries of research projects and their findings, what

the collections aren't purposed to do is make that research—the activities, methods, and processes of research—transparent or reproducible.

These handbooks highlight the relationships between disciplinary knowledge and our historically opaque research methods. They celebrate research findings and data analysis across different research sites, helping research communities recognize coherence across sites of research and design research projects and questions as intentionally *transcontextual*.<sup>1</sup> The handbooks are *an invitation* to join ongoing research conversations more than a methodological guide instrumental in the development of RAD research in writing studies. These handbooks illustrate the great potential for the refinement and innovative development of research methods that allow for the proliferation of RAD research projects in writing studies. Presenting research methods transparently along with findings helps researchers not only reproduce research and test theories about how writing works but also to connect research sites, questions, and projects more meaningfully, advancing what and how we think about writing.

Primed for conversations about research methods and methodologies across different research traditions, numerous crucially important books followed (see Kirsch and Rohan's 2008 *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*; McKee and DeVoss's 2007 *Digital Writing Research: Technologies, Methodologies, and Ethical Issues*; McKee and Porter's 2009 *The Ethics of Internet Research: A Rhetorical, Case-Based Process*; Ramsey et al.'s 2010 *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*). Eileen Schell and K. J. Rawson's 2010 *Rhetorica in Motion* captures the *processes* of feminist research as the development and use of methodologies and methods. Katrina Powell and Pamela Takayoshi's 2012 *Practicing Research in Writing Studies* offers what they call "theories of research," presenting methodological approaches such as grounded theory as well as powerful reflections about the pressing issues of research, particularly qualitative research. Lee Nickoson and Mary Sheridan's 2012 *Writing Studies in Practice: Methods and Methodologies* makes a tremendous contribution to this ongoing conversation, pursuing fundamental, emerging questions about what we still want to discover about writing and multiple promising ways forward. This proliferation suggests we are committed to fortifying our methods and methodological training as a discipline. *Points of Departure* celebrates and contributes to this commitment, highlighting that while we acknowledge RAD as one of many useful tools, it involves a significant, promising, and relatively unexplored set of traditions that contributors to this collection explore and expand. Directing our attention to shared and fully transparent research

methods within RAD traditions *as well as* attending to our research sites and findings helps us not only to fortify individual research projects' findings (through reproducibility and replication with similar results) but also to refine and innovate additional research tools that afford new transcontextual research projects and understandings.

#### WAYS FORWARD: TRANSPARENT RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS AS POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Research methods and research sites are most compelling when considered together, a sentiment that echoes across nearly every methodological text surveyed above. These conversations suggest a need for research findings that can deepen our understanding across different locations of writing; they also suggest a need for research *methods* that are flexible and applicable across contexts. For writing studies to truly flourish, *Points of Departure* argues, we need research to become more accountable via reproducibility, but we also need research designs that go beyond replication.

One way to achieve this is to work within and across gaps in our research that appear via our seemingly unrelated sites, our disparate research designs, or our unfamiliar methods and tools. By expecting, including, and then prioritizing discussions of research methods, sharing actual research mechanisms alongside findings in our scholarship, we not only allow for potential reproduction of research, we also encourage individual research projects to live beyond their original incarnation and evolve. It is precisely this kind of inclusion and prioritization of research methods, positioned as a crucial part of our pursuit and delivery of scholarship in our presentations and publications such as this collection, that allows for the intentional and strategic expansion of writing studies.

In addition to reporting mature findings, writing studies scholars need ways to report issues of design, methods, and piloting research. We need more than an abstract goal of producing dynamic research that illuminates discrete literate activities if we are to design, pilot, reproduce, refine, and expand meaningful research projects, and we need more explicit direction than research guides or published research findings in isolation can present. It is not sufficient to read the results of a study and be inspired to replicate it. If the research in our field is to continue to evolve, this collection contends, we must develop deeper knowledge of not only our research methods but also of the reiterative research processes that build those methods. Methodological finesse and expert

execution must be accompanied by an investment in better understanding, navigating, and sharing our own research processes, opening our research to not only review but, more important, to collaborative refinement. While research findings clearly and dramatically play a role in catalyzing this process, one dynamic way forward is to make the *methods and practices* of writing research as central as the findings reported from the research. Transparent representation and integration of our research methods into our analyses and publication of our findings is important, allowing for potential reproducibility and development. Without such transparency, the expansion and advancement of writing studies will be stunted and staled, a sentiment that echoes across so many of our texts (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer 1963; Cooper and Odell 1978; Lauer and Asher 1988; and more). Such transparency means exploring the struggles and failures that precede completed projects, minimizing the mysterious, unknown spaces between method and findings, the gap containing what Lunsford (2013) calls the “hidden” aspects of research.

As suggested earlier, this still undefined terrain represents one of the main struggles of writing studies as it stretches to expand into transnational, translocal, and transcontextual inquiries: how do researchers learn to navigate the messy spaces between learning about research processes and producing research themselves? There are currently several significant venues that strive to help writing studies researchers move through these questions and work through the complexities, modifications, and false starts that characterize the process of designing and conducting robust research projects. Most notable are the annual Dartmouth Seminar and the annual preconvention Research Network Forum, Qualitative Research Network Forum, and numerous workshops held each year at the CCCC. These meetings of scholars focus upon *how we conduct research*, and as such they allow researchers to share methods, seek out methodological preparation, and receive research-design advice from seasoned researchers. Yet we need even more access and infrastructure as we introduce and bring a vast network of research methods into maturity in writing studies. *Points of Departure* is designed with such infrastructure considerations in mind.

This collection takes the potential of transparent, refined, and potentially reproducible research in writing studies seriously, presenting pilot studies across research sites that study how students use sources, sharing research methods as transparently as possible to invite further development and transcontextual thinking about these individual yet linked projects. In these ways, this collection inserts itself into ongoing conversations focused on research methods as a crucial disciplinary tool, taking

up the same challenges issued by the founders of RNF and seeking to respond directly to Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer's (1963) direct critique and the many other indirect critiques of research. It responds to the need for ecumenical research about writing, research that expands and values work across contexts, research sites, research communities, and research methodologies. Calls to ecumenical approaches to research, what several scholars call the *little narratives of writing* (Brandt and Clinton 2002; Daniell and Mortensen 2007; Hesford 2006), might even be considered part of the constitution of the interdisciplinary and transnational formation of writing studies as we struggle to include many perspectives, questions, and strategies involved with the infinite questions we ask about writing itself: How do we write? How do we write with sources? How do we write with sources in an information-saturated, digital, networked world? This collection is a response to some of those questions and the little narratives behind them.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF THIS COLLECTION

*Points of Departure* emerged as researchers involved in the Citation Project (citationproject.net), a national study of undergraduate student source use, discussed our desire to understand how students engage with source material more deeply (Howard, Serviss, and Rodrigue 2010; Jamieson 2013). Many of the contributors to this collection were involved in initial Citation Project data collection and coding; involvement in the Citation Project led authors to develop research projects and methods that pursued the questions we shared as a research community: How can we best study how students incorporate cited source material? And, how can we go about studying people writing with sources across contexts with different kinds of tools, purposes, and audiences in ways that help us recognize transcontextual significance and meaning? As Sandra and I collected submissions and imagined the collection, we became driven by two particular questions about our research methods and processes.

1. How can we represent and engage with research still in formation within RAD research traditions, reporting provisional findings with the transparency necessary for replication?
2. How do we develop research methods and processes that are simultaneously robust and open for further development and revision as researchers learn more about their data and context?

*Points of Departure* addresses these big questions. All the chapters contribute to our evolving understandings of source-based writing.

Contributors also took these framing questions seriously, sharing not only their initial findings but also offering up their research methods and mechanisms in accompanying appendices; this collection is organized to invite readers into ongoing research projects in which readers and researchers can explore methods and processes together.

Explicitly focusing on research methods and processes allows us to share, exchange, and expand what and how we know about writing. As contributors share the foundations of their research studies in this collection, often in the form of pilot studies, they operationalize their research methods and designs, a key step in the development of research that we cannot only replicate but that we can also build atop previous research. Transparent operationalization of method traditionally allows research communities to *reproduce* and *replicate* the studies of their peers and therefore understand and explore research findings more fully. This tradition of transparency and reproducibility is a great asset for research communities, allowing teams of researchers to produce related data, compare results, and move from studying situated, single, discrete sites of literate activity to studying practices as situated activities across several sites, becoming what Brandt and Clinton (2002) call “translocal” research. Deeply invested in understanding the situatedness of literacy practices, Brandt and Clinton (2002) “theorize the transcontextualized and transcontextualizing potentials of literacy—particularly its ability to travel, integrate, and endure” (337), challenging us to think about literacy practices as *more than local* practices. “What appears to be a local event,” they write, “can also be a far-flung tendril in a much more elaborate vine” (347). While they use the term *transcontextual* to describe an orientation they want literacy studies scholars to adopt, the idea of transcontextuality itself reverberates loudly (and fittingly) beyond this context. Brandt and Clinton (2002) conclude that “we need . . . more complicated analytical frames—a ‘continual progression of inquiry’ (Latour 1993, 121) at sites of reading, writing, and print that can follow the threads of networks both into and out of local context and other contexts” (347–48).

*Points of Departure* is built on this foundation of transcontextuality, applying Brandt and Clinton’s argument that practices are always *both local and beyond the local* for RAD research in writing studies. Our research projects, designed and implemented within a local site and its context, must adopt Bruno Latour’s “continual progression of inquiry” that is a transcontextual research orientation. If transcontextual literacies are literacies simultaneously local and networked (making them translocal), so transcontextual writing studies research is local and networked



at the same time. In other words, if we want to develop transcontextual research methods necessary for the establishment of RAD projects in writing studies, we need research methods designed with a local context in mind but also accounting for networked, translocal research contexts beyond its origins. We can use transcontextual research methods to develop transcontextual research about source-based writing, in this instance, to advance our theoretical understandings of source use in the many simultaneous contexts in which it happens. Transcontextual understandings about how source use happens can result, then, in the development of translocal praxis and paradigms that propel our knowledges and strategies forward. Transcontextual research methods and findings can expand our accumulated knowledge about writing itself. The promise of research maturity this orientation might bring is powerful and important to harness as writing studies expands.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

*Points of Departure: Rethinking Student Source Use and Writing Studies Research Methods* is designed to invite readers into the research processes of the contributors and to inspire readers to consider developing projects that contribute to our knowledges about source-based writing in eclectic, transcontextual ways. To achieve these goals, we have divided the eight chapters featured here into three thematic parts framed by prefatory essays, which introduce methods of research at work in the chapters, and by reflective points of departure that close each part, discussing how the studies might be developed or expanded for further research.

Part 1, “Developing Transcontextual Research Projects,” explores how two research projects about student research and source-based writing developed to extend beyond one locality with RAD values and goals in mind. The interchapter “What Do We Mean by Transcontextual RAD Research?” begins this section, recognizing the value of transcontextual research orientations in fostering the productive and strategic expansion of writing studies even further. In the first chapter, “The Evolution of the Citation Project: Developing a Pilot Study from Local to Translocal,” Sandra Jamieson recounts the methodological history of the Citation Project, historicizing the development of methods necessary to expand the project to multiple sites. Following that, Katt Blackwell-Starnes and Janice R. Walker’s “Reports from the LILAC Project: Designing a Translocal Study” narrates the evolution of the pilot LILAC (Learning Information Literacy across the Curriculum) study of undergraduate students’ information-seeking behaviors in preparation



for a multisite, national study. Blackwell-Starnes and Walker describe how they used Camtasia software to capture think-aloud protocols and screen shots of students' search strategies and how they designed and circulated reflective questionnaires, forming a data set they analyzed using open-coding strategies. A brief reflection on the research questions and methods in part 1, "Points of Departure: Replication and the Need to Build on and Expand Local and Pilot Studies," concludes part 1, describing challenges and presenting strategies for creating scalable pilot studies from local research.

Part 2, "Building on Transcontextual Research," begins with the interchapter "What Does Design-Based Research Offer as a Tool for RAD Research in Writing Studies?," which introduces design-based research orientations as tools for conducting transcontextual RAD research that simultaneously inquires into and intervenes in student learning. Following that, in "The Things They Carry: Using Design-Based Research in Writing-Teacher Education," Tricia Serviss presents a pilot study of graduate-student writing that used citation context analysis as a tool to help novice writing teachers better understand their own academic writing. Drawing on coding methods of the Citation Project to both learn about and intervene in the formation of graduate students as writers and teachers, Serviss describes initial coding results alongside excerpts of individual interviews with participants. Crystal Benedicks's "Storied Research: Using Focus Groups as a Responsive Method" tells the story of three kinds of research-based pedagogical interventions: the initial participation of an SLAC in the Citation Project, the development of a student-survey mechanism to provide coded contextual analysis, and the evolution of both faculty and undergraduate focus groups designed to reshape institutional plagiarism policies. A student survey is also used in the next chapter, "Terms and Perceptions: Using Surveys to Discover Student Beliefs about Research," in which Kristi Murray Costello presents a pilot study of undergraduate student attitudes and conceptualizations of source use. Costello describes the refinement of a student survey to both learn about and influence student understanding of research practices. As with part 1, each chapter ends with an appendix, providing readers with citation analysis coding glossaries and sheets, writing prompts, and interview prompts (Serviss); student surveys and focus-group prompts (Benedicks); and survey materials and protocols (Costello). The reflective "Points of Departure: Developing Design-Based Local and Translocal Studies" concludes part 2 by emphasizing what we learn about RAD processes and methods in writing studies from Serviss's, Costello's, and Benedicks's pilot studies, outlining the promise

of design-based research orientations and prompting readers to imagine possibilities to develop those pilots further.

Part 3, “Exploring Information Contexts,” explores the relationships between research-project design and threshold concepts in writing studies, beginning with an interchapter that considers the question “What Does Threshold-Concept Research Offer Writing Studies RAD Research?” The chapters that follow demonstrate different transcontextual RAD research methods that collectively reveal the multiple ways threshold concepts can advance or block student researching and writing. The first chapter, “Research and Rhetorical Purpose: Using Genre Analysis to Understand Source Use in Technical and Professional Writing,” presents a pilot study inspired by programmatic assessment and a desire to understand the ways students use sources in papers for technical and professional communication courses. Authors Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch and Brian N. Larson coded technical and professional communications papers using the IMRAD schema developed by John Swales to help them understand the rhetorical purposes for which students used sources and the conceptual understanding that use revealed. The question of what students understand about the selection of sources is also taken up by M. Whitney Olsen and Anne Diekema in “Asking the Right Questions: Using Interviews to Explore Information-Seeking Behavior.” They describe the interviews they developed across two sites to extend their understanding of students’ online information-seeking behavior, building on previous research focused on information seeking in general and revealing the need for structured engagement with librarians and research expectations. In the final chapter in this section, “Just Read the Assignment: Using Course Documents to Analyze Research Pedagogy,” Elizabeth Kleinfeld explores why students do not articulate their information-seeking and source-use strategies in the ways we expect. Her transcontextual, multi-site research replicates and extends aspects of previous rhetorical studies of course documents, noting the principles and concepts instructors fail to explain and challenging us to rethink the way we frame our assignments and explanations. The final reflective section that ends section 3, “Using Existing Research to Think Beyond the Local,” synthesizes these chapters and offers points of departure for researchers who wish to take up and modify the research or research methods discussed in these chapters. The research described by Breuch and Larson, Olsen and Diekema, and Kleinfeld all drew on and extended research by others, demonstrating the model of RAD research as a process of refinement and sharing in addition to the need for the

kind of replication that allows us to make comparisons and generalizations. Appendices accompanying these chapters include coding protocols and artifacts (Breuch and Larson); interview artifacts (Olsen and Diekema); and a coding sheet and explanation (Kleinfeld).

The collection ends with a final afterword, “Teaching Hybridity in Graduate Research Courses,” by Rebecca Moore Howard, which discusses the state of methodological training in contemporary doctoral programs, focusing on the graduate education of emerging scholars as researchers posed to depart from and charter the future of RAD research in writing studies.

#### Note

1. *Transcontextual* is a term discussed more fully in interchapter I, “What Do We Mean by Transcontextual RAD Research?”

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## **PART 1**

### ***Developing Transcontextual Research Projects***



## Interchapter 1

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### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY TRANSCONTEXTUAL RAD RESEARCH?

*One of the most powerful motives of quantitative researchers is the desire to publish representations of the real world that can be challenged . . . [and therefore] to publish quantitative research takes, among other things, courage.*

—Richard H. Haswell (2012, 191–92)

Many researchers in writing studies resist quantitative research because they feel unprepared in statistical methods or lack the time required to learn and then conduct such research. This worry is hardly new, though. It has been repeatedly articulated by those struggling to develop research methods since the earliest days of our national conferences and journals (see Serviss, introduction to this collection). Members of our discipline, particularly WPAs, often employ qualitative or quantitative research, or a combination of the two, in response to local institutional need, but when those local questions are answered, they move on to the next issue. Sometimes they share their findings through conference presentations or publications in the same way compositionists have traditionally shared locally based ethnographic or text-based research; however, too often all they do is write and file a final report. Frequently, they do not share their results more widely. The (re)turn to quantitative research in recent years has brought with it the renewed hope that such research will be shared—and shared in a way that helps us answer more global questions about writers, writing, and our work between and beyond local, singular sites.

Such RAD-conceived research is developed with other contexts and applications in mind, expecting replication and expansion. For this to work, it is crucial that we share methods to invite others into the inquiry



and thereby generate the refinement that comes with reproduction and expansion of a study. Instead of researchers sharing a brief description of methods to frame their findings, RAD researchers share methods for an additional reason: for replication and expansion. Making methods transparent, however, often takes courage because of reasonable fears that the method will be challenged and the results questioned as readers dismiss the project entirely rather than considering the larger, ongoing goal and suggesting ways to revise the method accordingly. These fears are all too familiar to many students, but as they prepare to submit drafts we, their supportive writing teachers, encourage them to trust readers to be active participants in the writing process, to be co-inquirers who recognize that thinking evolves through constructive feedback. In this collection, we editors argue that RAD research in writing studies should be treated the same way; sharing research methods ought not be small acts of courage but part of a shared effort to understand student writing better and challenge unhelpful assumptions that can emerge from limited observation and formulaic expectations.

Conceptualizing RAD research this way means pilot studies are not just spaces to “try out a gamut of dimensions with a few participants or texts in order to trim hypotheses and variables,” as Richard Haswell (2012, 194) puts it. Instead, they are opportunities for research to emerge—along with the refinement of methods and initial analysis of provisional data that are in turn generative of additional research. That sharing can take the form of publication, as did Howard, Serviss, and Rodrigue’s (2010) study of patchwriting (see Jamieson’s discussion of the evolution of that pilot study in chapter 1 of this collection), or conference presentations and workshops like those used by the LILAC Project to refine their study (see Blackwell-Starnes and Walker’s description in chapter 2). Both these research projects evolved from other studies they revised and replicated; however, it isn’t just this replication that makes these studies significant as RAD projects. Equally important is the acknowledgment of the processes of method refinement across sites and time. This premise—that research is a process as much as writing is a process—challenges part of the RAD paradigm. For example, advocating for RAD research, Haswell recommends newer researchers start by replicating existing studies because the “design and statistical procedures are already established” (194). We resist that stance in this collection, arguing that the relationship between researcher and design must remain dynamic and responsive in writing studies RAD-oriented research. The emergent stances adopted during pilot studies ought to continue. (A pilot study inherits the etymology of the word *pilot* that

includes pilots as leaders of expeditions, piloting a vessel through dangerous terrain, as well as pilots as experimental trails designed to be revised and refined. Pilots are complicated and crucial—not just objects to deploy but processes that teach us about research itself.)

Committing to a responsive approach means approaching all research as recursive and contextual processes. Engaged researchers may even find themselves recoding data beyond the typical pilot phase (as shown in chapters 1 and 2). Such an approach generates more reliable findings and also opens the possibility of further adaptations, apparent in the various research projects extending Citation Project research (see chapters 3–5). It is within this paradigm of mindful research that we call not just for replicable, aggregable, data-driven studies but also for studies that adopt transcontextual research approaches presented in this collection.

#### DEFINING TRANSCONTEXTUAL RAD RESEARCH

Within the context of their article, *Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice*, Brandt and Clinton (2002) ask literacy-studies scholars to revise their studies of literacy as social practices happening translocally across and within several contexts simultaneously, accounting for a transcontextual sense of literacy. We editors extend their paradigm of transcontextual literacy studies in this collection, suggesting that this idea of transcontextuality is not just applicable to local literacy studies but is also a valuable way to think about writing studies research itself. We extend Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton's call to transcontextuality and argue that researchers should apply this idea of transcontextuality not only to our thinking about how writing happens but also to our research projects and findings. A transcontextual orientation toward research asks scholars to imagine not only literacy practices as transcontextual but also research studies themselves, including individual studies. We contend that locally situated writing studies research continues to be valuable for local problem solving, and sharing it *beyond the local* origins of the project is equally valuable; presuming that research is useful beyond local contexts creates generative connectivity that dissolves isolationist tendencies across research contexts, fostering the expansion and strengthening of our cumulative understandings of writing while also remaining mindful of contextually specific differences.

The term *transcontextual*, as Brandt and Clinton (2002) use it, refers to the “limits of the local” and the importance of studying socially situated literacy practices with an understanding that literacies are both

local and beyond the local. In other words, literacies happen translocally. Transcontextual literacy practices, they argue, ought to be an anticipated premise in studies of literacies; we argue that the same translocal understanding must be anticipated in the study of source-based writing. Research parameters must be extended to account for *not only* the local but also for the networked and expansive ways source-based writing is developed and practiced. Brandt and Clinton's (2002) approach to literacy studies as the study of transcontextual literacy practices has been embraced in literacy and writing studies quite widely. Many in the field now expect writing studies researchers to account for the translocality of writing practices across different communities, genres, spaces, tools, purposes, occasions, time, and multidimensional contexts. We celebrate this orientation as we ask, what can this transcontextual approach *afford* us as researchers investigating source-based writing?

Transcontextuality, taken from Brandt and Clinton's conceptualization of literacy practices, invites writing studies scholars to value individual research studies as part of ongoing, connected inquiries about writing even when the contexts and sites of research appear initially unrelated. In this context, RAD research in writing studies ought to be continuously evolving rather than simply being reproduced and verified via replication. We describe the research in this collection as *transcontextually oriented* because contributors share their methods in great detail as well as some findings, acknowledging the local context of their research while also imagining its potential value and contribution beyond their local context. We highlight the *transcontextual value* of the research in this collection by (1) presenting studies in relationship to one another and (2) offering their methods as useful not only to the locality that prompted them but as part of Bruno Latour's (1993) "continual progression of inquiry" that transcontextual research enables.

The research projects described and discussed in chapters 1 and 2 became *transcontextually oriented* when their methods and research processes were designed or redesigned to maintain their integrity as they travel beyond original sites. In this transcontextual paradigm, research is designed and presented as emerging from specific places, problems, and needs while also emphasizing that these contextually specific studies exist in dynamic relationships with other research projects and methods in the past, present, and future. A transcontextual research orientation accounts for the local origins of research while also expecting some unanticipated applications and relationships to emerge from a site-specific inquiry. Transcontextually oriented RAD research, then, is research designed to allow for yet-unknown relationships among seemingly

unrelated or disparate research questions, designs, methods, and sites to thrive. As a kind of RAD research, transcontextual projects embrace transparency and explication of research processes specifically so others can synthesize, connect, or mobilize them to develop theories about writing; yet those research projects themselves may typically be imagined as discrete and original because of their local contexts.

In this way, transcontextual research can compel us to move from mere replication toward loftier goals for our research as networked and translocally influential *by design and transparent presentation*. To create research traditions and communities that work transcontextually we must embrace two premises.

1. Research is a set of processes that are recursive and reiterative; like writing, research is never *finished*. Acknowledging, circulating, and appreciating such developing research is an important part of RAD research traditions.
2. Research emerging from failure, refined by disciplinary conversation, and documented through its adolescent development is *as valuable* as research presented only after maturation. In fact, a transcontextual orientation urges researchers to imagine *all research* as in the midst of awkward adolescence, sets of working methods that help us study and theorize about how writing happens.

#### RETHINKING RAD RESEARCH THROUGH THE TRANSCONTEXTUAL

Our understanding of translocal and transcontextual methods dovetails with traditional notions of RAD research, which has, at its heart, the ideas that data can be collected from more than one site using the same method and that as a result of replicating the method, researchers can compare aggregated findings across contexts. A transcontextual orientation expands RAD by valuing the findings of those local sites in and of themselves in addition to their importance as part of a larger data set. Chapter 1 shows what happened when Citation Project researchers applied a revised version of the method developed locally by Howard, Serviss, and Rodrigue (2010) to student research papers from sixteen institutions. The data from the single-site study revealed a total lack of summary, yet when the method was refined and developed into a transcontextual study, the researchers found some summary in the collected student writing (Jamieson and Howard 2013). This discovery led to the revision of some initial conclusions drawn by Howard, Serviss, and Rodrigue (2010) while also confirming that study's larger conclusion that when working with sources, students write from the sentences in the source. The most

revealing way to study student source use was studying that activity across a wide range of intentionally disparate contexts—institutional contexts, regional contexts—brought together by the commitments of researchers to explore and connect those local data sets and analyses in synthetic ways.

We see a similar connection between local data and research contexts at play in chapter 2, which describes a research project exploring the sources students select and use. The Citation Project also coded sources in a separate study (Jamieson 2017) and, like the LILAC Group, took the same local study by McClure and Clink (2008) as a point of departure. The Citation Project replicated the coding categories to address other questions about source use (Jamieson 2017), and chapter 2 explains how the LILAC Group took up the same research question and expanded it to ask what students do when they are seeking sources and what they think they are doing. As they developed research questions, LILAC researchers also drew on findings from transcontextual research by Project Information Literacy (PIL), as did the research described in chapters 4 and 5 of this collection. This development of research within the context of a dynamic web of relationships between isolated local studies and already translocal and transcontextual research exemplifies the kind of transcontextual RAD research we are proposing.

Unlike the Citation Project, the researchers in the LILAC Group developed an initial pilot study at a single institution but with an eye to both the translocal forces at work and ways the project could be expanded to other institutions. The chapter leaves those researchers in the process of making refinements to and expanding on their project but also concludes by suggesting other research that could “spin off” from the initial study. As researchers attend to the multiple and intersecting literacies always already embedded in a research site, these kinds of networks and new directions for research emerge. Chapter 2 provides a narrative of the work of the LILAC Group, showing how it expanded from other research and making it possible for others to join, replicate, or revise the methods it shares. It also demonstrates the rich possibilities opened up by transcontextual RAD research.

The kind of transcontextual RAD orientation we propose in this collection, illustrated by chapters 1 and 2, positions the shared results and methods of local and pilot studies not as reports of finite truth but as points of departure for further and perpetually ongoing research. We call on researchers who publish valuable local (qualitative and quantitative) studies to share their research processes and methods with this transcontextual orientation in mind, allowing others to treat local pilot

studies translocally while also refining them toward reproducibility and expansion. Understanding emergent local research and pilot studies in this way, as part of a process that makes space for deeper and broader understanding, means that sharing possibly imperfect initial studies ought not require bravery but should be celebrated as part of a process that is itself the sustenance of writing studies research.

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