

# **“I Realize Writing Is a Part of My Daily Life Now”: A Case Study of Writing Knowledge Transfer in One Section of ESL Writing**

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Most college and university students must complete first-year composition (FYC), including English as a second language (ESL) students. Many researchers in the field of composition and rhetoric question, though, whether FYC prepares beginning undergraduate students for courses they will take later in their academic careers. The question of FYC’s effectiveness is heightened when considering its effect on ESL students, who must grapple with learning to write in a second language as they try to transfer their writing knowledge from FYC to their other courses. This paper examines the components of a successful FYC course for ESL students and whether students in a specific section of FYC for ESL students can transfer their writing knowledge from FYC to other courses they are taking the same semester.

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First-year composition (FYC)’s role in the college curriculum is under constant scrutiny because of uncertainties as to whether the course is actually beneficial to new college students. One of the major reasons for speculation about FYC’s value lies in ambiguities surrounding the transference of writing knowledge. Scholars in the field of composition and rhetoric are unsure if students are transferring what they learn in FYC courses to the writing they complete in courses across the curriculum—some researchers are concerned that the courses might not facilitate the application of learning outcomes for students writing in later courses.

There are many reasons to believe there is a lack of learning transfer in FYC courses, and scholarship that emerged from what is called the “abolitionist movement” in the field of composition and rhetoric exposes these reasons. “Abolitionists” are scholars who find FYC to be flawed and seek dramatic changes to it. Sharon Crowley’s article “A Personal Essay on Freshman English” served in the early 1990s as an inspiration for the abolitionist movement as many scholars embraced her critiques of FYC’s role in colleges and universities. Crowley asserts that problems in FYC are curricular, finding that students are not even learning the “traditional essay” but rather are being drilled on their grammar skills via rote memorization. They cannot develop as writers because their focus on the mechanical aspects of writing impedes their ability to look at writing as a whole and develop rhetorical awareness (157).

While the current abolitionist movement can be traced to Crowley’s essay, this movement has grown quite diverse in its goals. Maureen Daly Goggin and Susan K. Miller tackle some of the aspects of this abolitionist movement in their article “What Is New about the ‘New Abolitionists’: Continuities and Discontinuities in the Great Debate.” They establish that many abolitionists, rather than seeking to abolish FYC, are calling for a dramatic reconstruction of it in colleges and universities. In this new model, instructors move beyond the typical framework of the academic essay. Some of the suggestions people have made in this new movement are

- (1) replacing first-year composition with writing intensive courses; 2) replacing first-year composition with freshmen writing seminars; 3) linking writing courses to other general education content courses; 4) reforming first-year-composition through specifying a content for it. (96)

All these suggestions offer a variety of writing opportunities to students. Goggin and Miller find new abolitionists split into three main groups: those who want to abolish FYC requirements, those who do not want to abolish the requirement but rather want to reinvent the course, and those who want to move the course out of the first year (97).

The abolitionist debate covers a wide spectrum of FYC programs and certainly contributes to arguments about lack of learning transfer; however, none of these abolitionists include English as a second language (ESL) students in their research. The effectiveness of FYC for ESL students is certainly a topic worth pursuing, as ESL students are routinely entering American colleges and universities. The beliefs that shape the abolitionist movement also carry over into the discussion of the effectiveness of FYC for ESL students. Ilona Leki has argued provocatively against requiring FYC or EAP (English for Academic Purposes) programs for ESL undergraduate students. In “A Challenge to Second Language Writing Professionals: Is Writing Overrated?” Leki tackles five pro-writing claims which people in academia frequently make concerning the value of writing. Among these: “Writing can be, is, or should be personally fulfilling” and “Students will have to do a lot of writing in other courses in college in English” (318). Leki finds the first claim to be highly exaggerated because learning to write in English can be very stressful for ESL students, and they will find nothing fulfilling about it (319). Leki also believes the other claim is false. Based on her longitudinal study, Leki found that students she had worked with were not doing much writing outside of their composition courses. Further, if writing was required of them, it was often two years later, and many students no longer retained the information they had acquired in first-year composition courses (321). While Leki does not directly discuss learning transfer, her research indicates there is a lack of writing knowledge transfer from students’ early undergraduate careers to their late undergraduate careers.

Keeping in mind the criticisms of FYC for both native English speakers (NES) and ESL students, below I will examine the effectiveness of an FYC course geared to instructing ESL students. I will combine a literature review and a case study of an FYC section designated for ESL writers, breaking both down into four major components to analyze writing knowledge transfer. Ultimately, I argue that writing knowledge transfer can occur if certain conditions are established and maintained.

### **Exploring FYC Transfer**

While there is debate about whether FYC and EAP-type instruction is successful in promoting transfer, there does seem to be agreement by abolitionists, supporters of FYC, and ESL composition researchers that certain strategies are more effective than others in promoting transfer. Based on my literature review, I developed a framework for the essential components of a university writing program that supports writing transfer. I argue that in order to promote the transfer of students’ writing knowledge, ESL students should be enrolled in a university writing program that requires them to write often and in a variety of genres for a variety of rhetorical situations; learn writing strategies transferable to many different writing tasks; receive explicit writing instruction; and experience a positive campus atmosphere supportive of writing.

### **Writing Often and Variously**

Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges ESL students encounter in their acquisition of writing knowledge is the infrequency of their chances to practice writing, as Lee Ann Carroll encounters in her research on FYC for NES students. “[T]he number of opportunities, outside of composition courses, that students have to practice in response to complex literacy tasks is very inconsistent from semester to semester” (51). While Carroll focuses on NES students in her research, the problem she presents would certainly have a negative impact on ESL students too.

Such inconsistency makes it difficult for students to practice transferring their writing knowledge.

As important as frequent writing is the need to write in a variety of genres for a variety of rhetorical situations. While students might not need to write in all genres during the rest of their undergraduate careers, the experience of writing in a range of genres better equips them for encountering new writing tasks. One way of exposing students to a variety of kinds of writing is to implement a program in which the writing course is linked with a content-area course. Ann M. Johns discusses the effectiveness of linked courses in her article “Teaching Classroom and Authentic Genres: Initiating Students into Academic Cultures and Discourses.” Johns’s university offers what she refers to as a “transition package” (281), in which English adjunct classes are attached to classes from the core curriculum. Johns finds that in FYC students are often taught “classroom genres” such as research papers and annotated bibliographies (282). She fears many students will not move past classroom genres and learn “authentic genres,” texts “that serve real communicative purposes among professionals in the discipline” (283). Johns believes the linked courses at her university will promote effective writing in both classroom and authentic genres. She concludes that linked English courses prepare students to

ask appropriate questions of content faculty . . . understand the limited purposes of CGs [classroom genres] . . . understand the nature of authentic genres and the purposes they serve within communities . . . be flexible—not cling to one referencing style, one summary style, or one text organization . . . [and] begin to understand the importance of audience in writing. (289)

Of course, an FYC course does not have to be a linked course in order to establish the variety of genres that Johns’s linked courses promote. FYC teachers of ESL students can elect to teach a variety of “authentic genres” rather than the typical “classroom genre” alone. As authentic genres are simply those that serve real communicative purposes, an example could be something as simple as writing a brochure.

### **Explicit Instruction**

Dana Lynn Driscoll believes instructors can play an integral role in promoting students’ writing transference skills. In “Connected, Disconnected, or Uncertain: Student Attitudes about Future Writing Contexts and Perceptions of Transfer from First Year Writing to the Disciplines,” Driscoll outlines six suggestions for writing instruction to promote transfer. One is “Do not assume transfer occurs—always directly address transfer through explicit teaching.” Essentially, instructors should demonstrate to their students how their writing knowledge can transfer from course to course. Driscoll also suggests that instructors “ask students to think directly about, or engage with, writing situations they will encounter outside the writing classroom,” “ask students to learn about how writing is done in their chosen professions by asking them to investigate writing in their fields,” and “ask students to bring in and talk about the kinds of writing assignments they are doing in other courses.” All of these approaches can help students make concrete connections between different writing situations, which will help them transfer their writing knowledge.

Mark A. James, a linguist who specializes in ESL writing transfer, is also an advocate for explicit teaching for transfer in ESL writing courses. In “‘Far’ Transfer of Learning Outcomes from an ESL Writing Course: Can the Gap Be Bridged?” James found, “Transfer can be stimulated by factors like explicit instruction in a task prompt . . . or the explicit structure of a task prompt” (78). Not only can instructors make explicit connections in course content and discussion, they can also implement explicit instruction on the actual writing prompts by giving clear specifications and providing definitions for any complex words within the prompt (79). Based on research conducted by Driscoll and James, then, it seems instructors should explicitly explain to their students how what they are learning in the class can transfer to other courses.

## Teaching Strategies

Many comp/rhet scholars deem it difficult to anticipate the writing genres and assignments that undergraduate students, both ESL and NES, will complete during their undergraduate college careers. Though it may be difficult to transfer writing knowledge in the sense that one might never write in a specific genre again, it is possible to transfer writing strategies and various approaches to writing.

Carroll believes it is FYC instructors' ability to teach students writing strategies that makes it a useful course. She argues that if the tools students learn in FYC "help the novice writer take on more difficult literacy tasks in the time and space of the first-year composition course, then these strategies have value in this setting even if students do not continue to use them in quite the same ways in the future" (75). Here, Carroll emphasizes the importance of FYC, postulating that there can be transfer even if that transfer is not overt. Carroll believes FYC is "most valuable, then, not in teaching one particular genre of writing but in creating situations in which students must consider different forms of writing for different, often complex, purposes and employ the kinds of writing strategies that enable them to complete challenging literacy tasks successfully" (78). If instructors create these situations for their students by requiring students to write in different genres and discuss writing strategies (e.g., drafting) that could be applied across these genres, their students should be able to transfer this knowledge from one writing situation to another.

Iona Leki is not an advocate for requiring ESL students to write frequently as undergraduate students ("A Challenge" 318). However, in her article "Coping Strategies of ESL Students in Writing Tasks across the Curriculum," she examines how students use writing strategies to negotiate various writing tasks in courses across the disciplines. While her article was not meant to advocate for FYC, the strategies Leki identifies serve as examples of writing strategies worth teaching in FYC classrooms. They consist of clarifying strategies, focusing strategies, relying on past experiences with writing, using current experience or feedback to adjust strategies, and using current or past ESL training in writing, among many others. Clarifying strategies involve students talking specifically to teachers in order to understand an assignment better and, in turn, understand the teachers' purposes for assigning it (247). Focusing strategies involve students reading assignments over many times, even sometimes writing an essay question for themselves to reach a better understanding of the assignment. Relying on past experiences helps students gauge how to approach a writing assignment (248). When using current experience or feedback to adjust strategies, students look at the assessments they received on shorter assignments from earlier in the semester as they construct longer pieces of writing. Only one student out of five in Leki's study said he/she used current or past ESL writing training when developing strategies for writing for other courses. Although Leki reported that three of her students did not see a link between their English courses and the writing demands across the curriculum, I argue that teaching these "coping strategies" in a FYC course for ESL students would promote transfer in writing for courses across the curriculum. It seems that the students in Leki's research did invent and "employ the kinds of writing strategies that enable them to complete challenging literacy tasks successfully," as Carroll suggests; thus they did employ knowledge transfer, whether the students were conscious of it or not.

## Positive Campus Culture

ESL research indicates that the classroom atmosphere or "transfer climate" is also important to learning in the class and learning transfer. The attitudes of instructors and classmates can have a significant impact on what students learn and retain. Classroom atmosphere is not important only in FYC and EAP courses, but also in courses across the college curriculum. James argues it is important for the instructor to understand students' perceptions of writing in order to create a classroom environment that will promote transfer. James conducted studies on classroom environments

at his university and, unfortunately, found many instances of a negative climate for transfer. ESL students stated that many of their peers made negative references to the course they were taking, including comments that writing was “a waste of time.” Students also became discouraged because instructors did not value certain qualities (like proper grammar usage) of student writing (“Transfer Climate” 140). Students encountered limited amounts of writing across the curriculum, and they found that the writing they were doing for their major was unrelated to their current course (141–42). Overall, James determined that students may not be “receiving the message that learning outcomes from an EAP course might help. . . . Students may or may not feel support for transfer of learning outcomes from EAP courses” (143). James’s troubling findings indicate how important a university’s atmosphere is for writing knowledge transfer. A university needs to establish a campus-wide atmosphere that encourages writing for all students, regardless of their English-speaking backgrounds, and instructors need to create positive classroom environments and educate their colleagues across the curriculum about positive writing development.

### **Implications**

The sources I consulted in my literature review did not present a consensus as to whether writing knowledge transfer is consistently occurring in FYC courses. However, they do demonstrate a *potential for* learning transfer to occur. I established the previously outlined framework while keeping in mind what each scholar’s examination of FYC and ESL students suggested. This framework will serve as the basis for the following case study, in which I examine how one section of FYC for ESL students adheres to the beliefs and arguments surrounding writing knowledge transfer.

## **Methodology**

### **Setting**

This study occurred in the fall 2011 semester at a medium-sized suburban state university. Students in the study were enrolled in single section of Writing Rhetorically (ENGL 101), the first class in a two-semester FYC sequence at the university. Students who pass ENGL 101 in the fall take Writing Rhetorically with Sources (ENGL 102) in the spring. ENGL 101 focuses on the writing process and persuasive writing, while ENGL 102 focuses on research methods and incorporating source material into various genres.

The ENGL 101 class in this study is a targeted section of the course offered to ESL students. The targeted course is offered to students who score low on the Accuplacer reading test and an in-house writing assessment. These sections have the same learning outcomes as other sections, but students get an additional course credit for participating in a weekly book club and writing consultant meetings. ESL students placed in a targeted course have the option of self-selecting into the section of 101 reserved for second-language students. In this section of ENGL 101, students complete an array of writing assignments including a personal narrative, a persuasive op-ed, a profile, and a collaborative review article.

### **Participants**

A total of nine people participated in this IRB-approved study: seven students (representing 63% of total enrollment), a peer writing consultant for the class, and the instructor of the course. All students in the study were in their first semester of their freshman year. Language backgrounds included Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Spanish. The peer writing consultant is a senior in the English department who works for the university’s writing center.

## Data Collection

Primary research for this study included classroom observations, surveys, and interviews. Data was collected throughout the semester. Classroom materials included assignment descriptions, syllabus, course readings, workshop materials, and the course Blackboard site. I attended the ENGL 101 course six times in order to understand the classroom environment. Midway during the semester, I handed out surveys to the students, which they had two weeks to complete. The purposes of the survey were to learn the students' perspective on what they were learning about writing from this section of ENGL 101, to determine what students were writing for their other courses, and to determine if students were transferring their writing knowledge from one course to the next. The questions were multiple choice and, in most instances, students could select more than one answer.

In addition to the survey, I conducted in-depth interviews of approximately thirty minutes with two of the students. These allowed me to elaborate on my data from the surveys and reach a greater understanding of the students' experiences with writing. In addition, I conducted individual thirty-minute interviews with the peer writing consultant and the course instructor. The interview with the peer writing consultant provided insight on the students' writing experiences not only in ENGL 101 but in their other classes as well, because the instructor encouraged the students to bring the peer consultant writing from all of their courses. I interviewed the instructor to better understand her philosophy and approach to writing instruction.

## Research Objectives

I used the framework I developed through my literature review to analyze data from the above sources. I reviewed notes I had taken, course materials, information on the university's website, interview transcripts, and survey results. I then mapped this information onto the four pieces I had outlined in my literature review—frequent writing, explicit instruction, teaching strategies, and campus writing culture—and was able to draw connections between the literature I read and the observations I made.

## Analysis

While conducting primary research in Dr. Maggie Jones's FYC course for ESL students, I observed many aspects of positive writing instruction. (All names used in the case study are pseudonyms.) My data from survey results and interviews contributed to the positive feedback I was receiving about the course. After connecting my observations from the case study with my notes on the secondary research, I concluded that transferable knowledge was being taught in Dr. Jones's course. In the analysis that follows, I organize my data into four sections linked to the four key components I have identified that promote transfer.

## Writing Often and Variously

*“Dr. Jones is asking you to write, write, write, all the time.”*

The students in this study wrote very frequently, and they wrote in a variety of genres and for a variety of rhetorical situations, both in their courses across the curriculum and in this course. The university puts a strong emphasis on writing and the writing process through its writing across the curriculum (WAC) program, which scaffolds writing throughout students' undergraduate studies. As a part of the general curriculum, students are required to take a writing-intensive (WI) first-year seminar, a WI or speaking-intensive second-year seminar, a WI general education course, and a WI upper-level course within their major. In WI courses, students are also required to complete at least fifteen pages of writing during the semester, which can be broken up into separate papers amounting to or surpassing fifteen pages. These fifteen pages of writing can include journaling, free writes, and homework activities in addition to formal writing assignments. WI courses also have to

incorporate peer or instructor feedback during the writing process. WI classes are offered across numerous disciplines so students have frequent exposure to writing, and the WAC program offers a variety of faculty development opportunities throughout the academic year, contributing to a campus-wide culture of writing. The FYC writing program at the university is meant to provide a foundation of writing knowledge and skills that students can use in these WI courses. With this program in place, students write consistently during their undergraduate careers; however, none of the students in this study were taking first-year seminars or WI courses during the semester the survey was conducted. Regardless, many of the students indicated they were writing in a variety of genres and writing often in their other courses. Five of the seven students who completed the survey reported they had graded writing assignments in other courses in a variety of modes and genres:

<b>Modes or Genres of Graded Writing Assignments</b>	
<b>Number</b>	<b>Types of Writing</b>
0	Presentations (e.g., PowerPoint)
0	Analytical
0	Narrative
0	Creative
1	Case studies
1	Reviews
1	Persuasive
2	Lab reports
2	Journaling
2	Compare/contrast
2	Summaries
3	Research
3	Argumentative

Based upon these results, it appears students were writing in a range of genres across the curriculum at this university.

Not only were the students writing frequently and in a range of genres in other courses, they were also writing a substantial amount for Writing Rhetorically. Dr. Jones implemented a variety of writing assignments, both informal and formal. The following are some from the syllabus that were essential assignments of the course:

**Reading Reflections:** For each set of readings, write a reading reflection—a 300-word reflection that makes connections among the readings and reflects on the question I pose in the syllabus. After you write this reflection, post it in Blackboard in the appropriate forum and print a hard copy for an in-class activity: inkshedding. Inkshedding is an activity in which we will read each other’s reflections and give written feedback. Here’s the process: Pass your reflection to the right. Read your neighbor’s writing all the way through and then underline a sentence or two that stands out as interesting or intriguing. Then, flip the page over, and write a response. This response should not be evaluative (i.e., “good job!”), but written to continue the conversation on paper—to continue the writer’s thinking, pose questions raised by the writer’s thoughts, reflect on what the writer said . . .

**Snapshots of Our Literacies:** The first writing project of the course focuses on the writing process. During this project, you will write and revise a number of pieces, choosing from a list of writing prompts about writing, reading, language

communities, discourse communities, and literacies. At the end of the project, you will select about five of these short pieces to develop a “snapshot” essay and write a cover letter about your writing process.

**Op-Ed Letter:** The second project makes use of persuasive writing. An op-ed letter is a type of letter to the editor that is featured in an editorial section of a newspaper or magazine. In comparison to other letters to the editor, an op-ed letter is relatively long (700–1000 words), opinionated, written to persuade a particular audience on a timely issue, and draws on evidence to support its claims. I will ask you to focus on a target audience and publication venue. If you take the extra step and send your op-ed to that magazine or newsletter, you will get extra credit.

**Profile:** The third project asks you to write in a genre common to newsletters: a profile. This genre is rhetorically complex to write, as you will be representing another person and another person’s words in writing. You may choose to profile a Bridgewater State University writing studio consultant, tutor, graduate student, staff member, instructor, or professor. During this project, you will develop a list of interview questions, conduct a face to face interview and a follow-up interview, and compose a focused and cohesive 3–5 page essay about this person.

In the survey, most of the students cited the “Snapshots of Our Literacies” and the op-ed letter as contributing to their development as writers. All of the students cited “Reading Reflections” and brainstorming activities in class as contributing to their overall course knowledge, too. In interviews, students voiced their pleasure with the quantity of writing and many types of writing they were exposed to. When I asked one student, Michael, if he liked the variety of writing in the class, his response was:

Yeah. I think this is why as a writer we can say that we have the skills that we can write about anything we want. . . . You’re not writing all the time the same thing, the same style, or the same voice. You change the voice all the time in every assignment, you change the voice, you change the type of writing. I think it’s good. It kind of balances your writing skills.

This balance seems likely to help students transfer their writing skills across different genres and different courses. When asked about the amount of writing required for the class, Michael immediately had a positive response: “Some people may see it as annoying when Dr. Jones is asking you to write, write, write all the time . . . all the time I am writing. I think this practice with writing is very important . . . this practice really helped me, you know, and I like it. I think it’s good.”

The peer writing consultant also saw the value of the continual writing process and the variety of genres implemented by Dr. Jones. When I asked her if the students’ improvement in writing could be attributed to Dr. Jones, she responded, “Professor Jones is the main core to their improvement . . . because of the styles of writing she has had them do. She has had them do very different styles of writing.” The consultant believes the students learn more about the writing process with each piece of writing. Between the writing-intensive program implemented by the university and the writing students are completing in Dr. Jones’s Writing Rhetorically section, students experience frequent writing and a variety of types of writing in their first year as college students as well as in the remainder of their college careers.



## Explicit Instruction

*“She has faith in them . . . she knows they can succeed.”*

Explicit instruction also plays an integral role in students’ writing transfer. In the FYC section I studied, there was explicit instruction about the writing process in other settings. Dr. Jones would frequently begin her classes by asking her students what types of writing they were completing in their other courses, and students would vocalize different problems they encountered. Dr. Jones then led the class through a discussion of how the students could negotiate these challenges, leading them to reflect on which of the strategies they were learning in ENGL 101 were effective for them and could be transferred to other courses.

While it was important for Dr. Jones to discuss the aspects of her course that could be transferred to other courses, her students would not have been able to transfer their knowledge of writing had it not been for their concrete understanding of what was being taught to them about writing and its different modes and genres. Dr. Jones believed in the importance of clear expectations for her students. With each writing assignment for the course, there was a lengthy drafting process involved. Dr. Jones provided student and professional samples of the genres her students were working on at the time. When students were beginning to work on writing profiles of members of the university community, she introduced this assignment using “Soup,” the *New Yorker* essay that inspired the “Soup Nazi” episode of *Seinfeld*. After this activity, Dr. Jones handed out the assignment description, which told students specifically what she wanted them to do and gave them student examples from previous courses. In the survey, six out of seven students indicated that student writing samples contributed to their course knowledge and writing development. Conversely, four out of the seven noted that a lack of such samples in other courses impeded their ability to write. Students were able to transfer their writing knowledge to other courses because Dr. Jones provided them with such an in-depth perspective into genres to begin with.

Whereas clear expectations and explicit instructions helped students write for ENGL 101, the lack thereof in their other courses contributed to the struggle students experienced when writing for these courses. One student I interviewed, John, characterized writing instructions in other courses as vague, which was problematic for his writing. “I have to write twenty emails to my professor to ask every single thing because . . . it’s on the syllabus, the assignment, but it doesn’t really say . . . what should be included. So it’s just like, write about this and that and it’s due this date.” John’s confusion from the beginning of the assignment led to confusion throughout the project as he was not able to approach his work with the confidence he brought to his ENGL 101 class assignments. If students are unable to determine what is being asked of them in a writing assignment, they may not have an idea of how to approach this writing genre. This could prohibit students from using knowledge gained in ENGL 101 to help them write for other courses. But Dr. Jones would never allow such a thing to happen. The peer writing consultant told me, “She [Dr. Jones] has faith in them . . . she knows they can succeed.” Dr. Jones knew her students could succeed in other courses even if her students did not have instructors who had clear expectations for their students. In order to combat any discrepancies, Dr. Jones used explicit instruction to help students realize how their writing knowledge will translate, and thus her students were able to successfully complete writing tasks across the curriculum.

## Teaching Strategies

*“As a writer we can say that we have the skills that we can write about anything we want.”*

Perhaps some of the most important aspects of an FYC course that teaches for transfer are the writing strategies students are taught and the instructional methods the teacher uses. Those were successful aspects of Dr. Jones’s ENGL 101; in my survey, students were given a checklist of strategies that were implemented in their other courses.

**Do your other courses use any of the following writing strategies or instructional methods to support your writing? (Check all that apply.)**

0	The teacher asks us to bring in early drafts for peer review sessions.
0	The teacher requires that we make an appointment with the writing studio to get feedback from a tutor on our writing.
0	None
1	Writing about course readings (such as reader response or notes in a specific format)
1	Journaling
1	The teacher provides sample student essays for use as models for writing assignments.
1	The teacher provides sample published or professional essays for use as models for writing assignments.
1	The teacher asks us to hand in an early draft so that the teacher can provide written comments.
2	The teacher creates opportunities during class to discuss an upcoming writing assignment.
2	Prewriting (such as freewriting or listing) to brainstorm in preparation for the first draft of a writing assignment

Five students completed this part of the survey, and the most checks any given category received was two. With the small numbers for each selection, it appeared teachers were not giving students class time to develop their writing. Although the writing strategies being implemented in their other courses were limited, no student selected “none” as an option, indicating all students were having at least one strategy taught to them or implemented when they wrote in their other courses.

While the strategies and useful instructional methods were limited in other courses, students did use knowledge of strategies taught in ENGL 101 to complete writing elsewhere. The survey asked students what writing strategies they used in their other courses voluntarily, and many students reported using strategies from Dr. Jones’s class in their other courses.

<b>Strategies from ENGL 101 Used Voluntarily in Other Courses</b>	
0	None
0	Used journaling to reflect on course material
0	Formed a writing group with friends in other classes
1	Used writing (such as note-taking strategies) while reading assigned texts to better understand and remember the material
1	Asked the teacher to provide sample student essays written for the same assignment
1	Asked the teacher to meet in order to discuss an early draft
1	Asked the teacher to give written feedback on an early draft
2	Formed a writing group with other students from the same class
3	Looked for samples of the genre on your own when given an assignment for an unfamiliar type of writing
3	Used writing (such as freewriting or listing) to brainstorm before writing a draft

Based on these results, students appear to be taking the initiative to use writing strategies from ENGL 101 in order to help them write for other classes. While many of the options show only one or a few students transferring the strategy, none of the students who completed this survey elected the option of “None,” indicating that all students were transferring at least one strategy from ENGL

101 to their other courses. So while a given approach to writing might show limited transfer, every student responding to this portion of the survey was transferring at least some portion of ENGL 101 learning elsewhere in the undergraduate curriculum. The strategies included voluntarily forming a writing group, which takes a lot of effort on students' parts. (These results are similar to the coping strategies Leki refers to in her article "Coping Strategies," as these students were contacting their professor for guidance and looking for writing samples on their own.)

The survey concluded by asking students, "What have you taken from ENGL 101 that has been helpful in preparing you for the writing completed in other courses?" This was another question with multiple answer options, and this survey generated a lot of positive reinforcement from the students, further establishing the importance of FYC.

<b>What have you taken from ENGL 101 that has been helpful in preparing you for the writing completed in other courses?</b>	
2	I am able to critically respond to course readings.
3	I am able to determine what genre I should be writing in before I approach the assignment, and I know the rhetorical approaches of the genre.
3	I am a more independent writer.
3	I plan ahead and am able to manage my time for writing assignments.
3	I learned to go to the writing studio when I need assistance with an assignment.
3	I am able to define who my audience is without the instructor telling me.
3	I am able to develop a thesis and support it through argument and evidence.
3	I am able to develop my own voice in my writing.
4	I am more confident in writing for other courses.
4	I know how to ask questions when I do not understand a writing assignment.
4	I construct multiple drafts before handing in a final copy.
4	I feel that I am better able to communicate my ideas.

Four of the five students who were concurrently writing in courses across the curriculum reported that they felt more comfortable writing for other courses after taking this course. Four out of five students also stated they now knew how to ask questions when they did not understand a writing assignment, and how to construct multiple drafts before handing in a final copy. These are two essential aspects of the writing process. When students do not understand a question, they may feel insecure about the writing assignment; however, their FYC course provided them with the knowledge they need to ask questions so they can approach an assignment with confidence. This kind of learning and transfer of knowledge about writing might be missed in a transfer study that looked only at a student's writing itself or focused only on *what* students wrote—but it is crucial knowledge about the nature and activity of writing that would seem to be among the most important principles students could learn in ENGL 101 and transfer.

The interviews I conducted with the students also indicated that they were using writing strategies from ENGL 101. When I asked Michael if he used strategies from Dr. Jones's course in his writing, he excitedly replied, "That is what I do! 'Cause, you know, in the English 101 class, we covered a lot of things, a lot of styles of writing. I've learned a lot. . . . I got the skills so when I need to write something I say, okay, this is what I am going to write. . . . Those things I have learned from English 101." When Michael receives an assignment, he immediately analyzes the prompt or requirements. John mentioned without my prompting that he incorporated some of the techniques from FYC in his anthropology course. When I asked him for details, he replied, "Like incorporating the research . . . for like the review article, and the profile essay we kind of added quotes from people and, you know, different points of views. I never did that before and I think it is like, so cool.

I actually did that on my essay and my professor thinks that's really unique." FYC has taught John how to incorporate secondary and primary research into his writing, a skill that will surely help him for the remainder of his undergraduate career.

In my interviews with John and Michael as well as with their peer writing consultant, all stated that the writing tasks they encountered across the curriculum were not similar to the writing they were completing in their FYC course. However, according to the data collected from my research, the students were nonetheless able to use the writing strategies they had learned in order to complete such assignments with success.

### **Positive Campus Culture**

*"Dr. Jones uses a strategy to make her connected to her students."*

The classroom and campus cultures in this study fostered positive learning environments. Bridgewater State University, where this study took place, offers a lot of writing support to students through its writing center, a resource frequently used by Bridgewater's ESL students, as confirmed by the writing consultant. It promotes student writing through its general education requirements and WAC programming. I've noted the university's WAC program requirement of three writing-intensive courses with at least fifteen pages of writing during a semester; it also offers workshops for faculty who are implementing writing in their courses. There is also a well-funded undergraduate research program, which offers numerous avenues of publication and presentation opportunities for students. The opportunity to publish and present one's own work would certainly qualify as the kind of "authentic" writing genre that Ann Johns refers to, as writing that is published does serve "real communicative purposes." Bridgewater offers a midyear symposium and an undergraduate research symposium, both of which allow students to present their written work. The midyear symposium is specifically designed for first- and second-year students to showcase their work, offering an encouraging writing environment for students early in their undergraduate careers. Not only are students encouraged to present their work on campus, there are also opportunities for students to present their work nationally. The university also offers publication opportunities for students. Students can get their work published in the university's undergraduate research journal as well as in the first-year writing program's annual volume of student work, the student newspaper, and the student literary journal. All of these wonderful opportunities reinforce the value of writing.

In addition to the positive campus culture was a very warm and welcoming classroom atmosphere. There were only eleven students in Dr. Jones's course, and they all formed close relationships. The writing consultant reported that she frequently saw students from this class eating together in dining halls. The students were continually offering advice and constructive criticism on each other's writing. For example, when students were discussing the person at the university they wanted to interview, one student did not know whom to profile. The whole class discussed this issue and offered numerous suggestions. Finally one student, who had planned to interview the class's writing consultant, told his classmate she could have that opportunity and he would find someone else.

Adding to the positive classroom environment was students' relationship with their professor. In my interview with Michael, I gained great insight into how the students viewed Dr. Jones. Michael smiled as he recalled his first day in her class: "When she was teaching that first day, I could not stop smiling, you know, because I felt comfortable. This is exactly what I was looking for, a professor who was comfortable with the students, telling them what we are going to do for the semester and the things we are going to do and the things we are going to cover . . . and I was like, oh God, thank you, God!" He also went on to say, "Dr. Jones uses a strategy to make her connected to her students." While the students in James's study ("Transfer Climate") faced negative

attitudes from instructors, the students in this class did not encounter this problem. Dr. Jones's positive attitude reinforces the importance of writing.

In our interview, Michael continued to compliment his instructor: "One thing I like about her [is] she not only cares about her class . . . she just wants you to succeed in every class you are in. . . . You know, it is kind of interesting when another professor [is] asking you about another class you are taking. . . . She show me she cares about me, not only her class, so she want us to succeed in other classes, so I think it's good." Such support from the teacher encourages students to feel that they can approach her for help with their writing development not just in her class but in all classes. Michael expressed a fundamental indicator of the positive classroom atmosphere Dr. Jones established with her ESL students: "She's a professor [who is] easy to talk to. You don't need to be afraid. Even though I have an accent as an ESL student, she doesn't care about your accent. She wants everyone to participate in the class." Although many students may feel self-conscious of their accent, this problem is eliminated in Dr. Jones's class because of her welcoming attitude. After witnessing Dr. Jones's impact on her students and hearing these statements, I do not think transfer would have been possible without her extraordinary teaching. While my framework and a thorough curriculum makes transfer possible, it is equally important to have a competent and enthusiastic instructor.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

This article began with a brief outline of arguments against first-year composition then moved to the problems ESL students encounter with FYC programs. Based on the framework I created and evidence from my case study, I assert that it is indeed possible to develop an FYC course that will promote writing transfer among ESL students. Many of the grounds FYC abolitionists have offered for the ineffectiveness of mandatory comp instruction simply did not appear in the case I studied. For example, Dr. Jones did not teach the "mythical" classroom genres or "traditional" classroom essays criticized by Crowley; rather she incorporated many different genres that required students to become familiar with the characteristics of many different styles of writing. In addition, many of the abolitionists' suggestions for improving FYC were already in place at this university, such as writing-intensive courses or freshman writing seminars. Here, eliminating FYC would eliminate some of the writing preparation for these WI courses. Leki criticizes FYC when an institution's students will complete little other writing during their undergraduate careers; however, my study demonstrates how, as a part of this university's overall writing climate, even courses not designated as WI require significant writing from students. In these ways, both the university at large and Dr. Jones's course defy many of the criticisms of writing in college put forth by FYC abolitionists.

What both such criticisms and my research do suggest, however, is that in order to develop an effective FYC course for ESL students, universities must first have a successful writing across the curriculum program in place. An effective WAC program will benefit not only the writing development of ESL students but also the writing development of NES students. Still, while a positive campus culture conducive to writing is the first step to a successful writing program that will promote transfer, it cannot determine what occurs in the individual sections of a course, so individual section factors are also important. When preparing individual sections of FYC targeted for ESL students, teachers should create a curriculum that will help students transfer their writing knowledge and successfully grapple with the challenges of writing in a new language. To do this, instructors must have their students write continually throughout the semester, and they should always be encouraged to use prewriting and drafting activities. Instructors should provide an array of writing assignments so their students have the experience of approaching and analyzing new genres. Explicit instruction should be used to teach students particular writing skills

and how to consciously transfer them to new writing situations. As in John's case, not all writing assignments given across the curriculum will have explicit writing instruction, which will lessen the benefit. However, the goal of him writing lengthy papers for courses outside of an English class does indicate promise for WAC and the potential of writing knowledge transfer if explicit instruction is provided.

I close with two quotes, the first from John and the second from Michael:

The course should still be part of the English department and they should keep it running so not only it can help us but others as well and international students too. It's very helpful for us. I like it.

Thank God I had English 101 with Dr. Jones. Now I am not scared of any writing assignment. Honestly, I am telling you I was scared to write before, even in high school I was scared to write in my language . . . because, you know, it's different when you write something for the professor. She might not be satisfied . . . but now since I have this confidence in myself I have these skills. . . . I am not scared of any assignments . . . she covered everything.

Both these students volunteered to meet with me for an interview. They were not required to do so, but they wanted to share their positive experiences from the course. John and Michael did not have one negative thing to say about the course, and they both wanted me to know how much the course meant to them. Michael told me in our interview, "I realize writing is a part of my daily life now." This quotation cements just how important this course has been in the students' development as writers. These students came into class insecure about their writing abilities, and they left not only confident about their writing abilities but also proud. They considered themselves writers.

There are certain teachers whose impact transcends their immediate classroom setting, and I think it fair to label such teachers as "inspirational." Dr. Michelle Cox is undoubtedly one of these inspirational teachers. She graciously agreed to be my mentor for my senior honors thesis. Without her, I would have never been able to develop this study. Dr. Cox encouraged me to submit my thesis to *YSW*, something I never would have had the confidence to do on my own. I owe immense gratitude and thanks to her. I would also like to thank all my research participants, especially John and Michael. These two students enthusiastically agreed to meet with me on their personal time. Their enthusiasm for writing is infectious, and I sincerely believe they will develop into fantastic writers. Lastly, I want to thank Dr. Doug Downs, my faculty advising editor from *YSW*. Dr. Downs eagerly agreed to help me develop my paper further and make it ready for publication. His suggestions during revision and editing were extremely helpful, and he was enthusiastic throughout the editing process. It was a privilege to work with him.

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# Discursive Agency and Collective Action among Lubavitch Hasidic Women

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Analysis of discursive agency in the writings of Lubavitch Hasidic women reflects complex collectivities that are simultaneously group and “serial” (the latter a concept created by Jean-Paul Sartre and further developed by Iris Marion Young). Agency and identity negotiation, as inherently communal, complicate collective action and thus complicate the nature of collective discursive action. I present a theoretical intervention that enables discourse theorists to place collective action in more than two categories and that offers alternate ways to read collective action—particularly action related to religious rituals and religious discourse.

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The man “goes out” in search of G-dliness, the woman cultivates G-dliness. The man provides the seed to create life; the woman bears life. The man teaches his children how to live; the woman is life.  
—Proverb from the Chassidic Masters

I would describe myself as a Chassidic feminist. The two terms are not mutually exclusive, though their combination is not without tension.  
—Rivkah Slonim

Each Friday night, eighteen minutes before the sun sets, Orthodox Jewish women and girls light candles and recite a blessing that ushers in the Sabbath. This short ceremony is a time set apart specifically for conversation with God (Daum and Rudavsky). According to Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the leader of the Lubavitch sect, the primary purpose of the candle-lighting mitzvah is to “emit a spiritual light that permeates the home and indeed the world” (Klein 27) and thus overcome the state of spiritual darkness that currently envelops the world. Hasidic communities believe that all women desire to fulfill the commandments given specifically to them (25), which leads to the most fulfilling and satisfying life. The keeping of the candle-lighting mitzvah is an exceptionally powerful expression of agency: its importance and communicative power is recognized not only by members of the community, it is also believed to be recognized by God. Women thus have agency in their communities and also with God. Religious actions such as this one are agential on a number of levels: personal, communal, and spiritual. Discourse from this community written by women emphasizes the potential for holiness and goodness that comes from embracing the female Hasidic identity, and it also underscores that women in this group have a particular spiritual and religious exigency with God.

In this article, I demonstrate how an intertextual reading of women’s writing from the Lubavitch community reflects complex collectivities that are both group and serial. More specifically, I argue that agency and identity negotiation, as inherently communal, complicate collective action and thus complicate the nature of collective discursive action. In “Gender as Seriality,” Iris Marion Young notes that Sartre defines collective action as action resulting from a group’s conscious collective efforts towards an agreed-upon end (723). According to Young and Sartre, only groups are capable of this sort of collective action. Young writes, “Unlike a group, which forms