

David Gold

Remapping Revisionist Historiography

Rhetoric and composition historiography has recently undergone a rapid transformation as scholars have complicated and challenged earlier narratives by examining diverse local histories and alternative rhetorical traditions. This revisionist scholarship has in turn created new research challenges, as scholars must now demonstrate connections between the local and larger scholarly conversations; assume a complex, multivocal past as the starting point for historical inquiry; and resist the temptation to reinscribe easy binaries, taxonomies, and master narratives, even when countering them. This essay identifies and analyzes these challenges, posits responses to them, and suggests exemplars for future practice.

For historians of rhetoric and composition, these are the best of times. Just over a decade ago, Linda Ferreira-Buckley could lament our field's lack of methodological breadth and depth and Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams the narrowness of our subjects of inquiry. In her 1999 *College English* essay "Rescuing the Archives from Foucault," Ferreira-Buckley suggested that rhetoric and composition scholars had a poor understanding of historiography proper due to secondhand readings drawn from postmodernist critique. Attempting to decouple research practices from the ideological determinism then pervading English studies, she argued that "[r]evisionist historians depend upon traditional archival practices" (581) and called upon scholars to master

CCC 64:1 / SEPTEMBER 2012

these as well as “emerging research methodologies” (582). That same year, in their *College Composition and Communication* essay “History in the Spaces Left,” Royster and Williams argued that in the pursuit of “official” narratives of the field’s origins, scholars had excluded and erased African American and other minority voices from the historical record. They thus called for historical inquiry that examined “points of view other than dominant academic perspectives” as well as acknowledging the extent to which historical narratives are “ideologically determined and articulated” (581).

In part due to calls such as these, rhetoric and composition historiography has since witnessed a dramatic transformation. First, scholars have complicated and challenged the conclusions drawn by more general earlier histories by con-

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sidering alternative rhetorical traditions and sites of instruction and production.¹ Second, the field has begun to reassess its ideological inheritance from scholarly work of the 1980s and 1990s, becoming more reflective about its practice. Finally, the field has begun to turn attention to

research methodologies, formerly a somewhat ad hoc affair. Historiographic practice is now commonly treated in methods syllabi, conference workshops, and journals, and two recent edited collections, Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan’s *Beyond the Archives* and Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L’Eplattenier, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo’s *Working in the Archives*, respond directly to Ferreira-Buckley’s call for more robust methods and better training in them. To borrow a term from Cheryl Glenn, the field of rhetoric and composition historiography is undergoing a rapid remapping.

Yet even as our subjects of inquiry have become more diverse and our methodological sophistication has grown, we remain frequently constrained by those very histories we seek to complicate and challenge. In the 1980s, as composition was trying to establish itself as a discipline, it was perhaps necessary to emphasize our disconnect from the most regrettable pedagogical practices of the past. In the 1990s, with the rise of critical theory and cultural studies, it seemed natural to explore the historical links between ideology and pedagogy. In the early 2000s, the ascent of race, class, and gender studies made it natural to revisit our past in the hopes of recovering neglected voices. Now that our recovery projects have gone forth—and multiplied—we face a new set of challenges. While the work of scholars such as James A. Berlin (*Rhetoric and*

Reality; Writing Instruction), Sharon Crowley (*Composition in the University; Methodical Memory*), and Robert J. Connors has called attention to the role of ideology in pedagogy, provided a useful taxonomic framework for describing pedagogical practice, and offered us historical master narratives to respond to and resist, contemporary research needs demand that we do more than speak back to this earlier scholarship.

At this crucial juncture, it seems worthwhile to reflect on so as to further refine our practice. This essay analyzes the current state of revisionist scholarship, identifies key research challenges and posits ways to respond to them, and suggests recent exemplars for future practice. In this newly emerging revisionist landscape, rhetoric and composition historiography faces two primary challenges: *integration* and *fragmentation*. How do we map new scholarship onto existing scholarship, and how do we do so in a way that allows us to draw from a shared body of knowledge?

I argue that rhetoric and composition historiography must not simply recover neglected writers, teachers, locations, and institutions, but must also demonstrate connections between these subjects and larger scholarly conversations. Further, we must better incorporate recent advances in recovery work, thus *beginning* with the assumption of a complex, multivocal past as our starting point for historical inquiry. Finally, we must recognize a more fluid interaction between ideology and pedagogy, resisting the temptation to reinscribe easy binaries, taxonomies, and master narratives, even when countering them.

Persistence of Memory

Despite the increasing interest in diverse local histories, as a field we have not always drawn on the deep well of revisionist historical work long available to us. Indeed, the facade of the master narrative began to crack almost as soon as it had been established. In her fiery 1992 *Journal of Advanced Composition* essay “The History of Composition: Reclaiming Our Lost Generations,” Robin Varnum argued that in our attempt to cast a heroic origin myth of modern composition studies, we had presented a narrow, reductive, and inaccurate picture of our past: “No one has catalogued the methodological alternatives

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which were available to teachers during this reputedly monolithic period. . . . The phrase ‘current-traditional rhetoric’ has become a terministic screen that no one has attempted to see through” (47). Her 1996 local history *Fencing with Words* did just that, challenging the dominance of the Harvard model and Berlin’s taxonomies through a study of the composition program at Amherst under Theodore Baird.

Other important revisionist histories followed. Among these were Thomas P. Miller’s 1997 *The Formation of College English*, which “challenge[d] the tendency of disciplinary histories to assume that change begins at the top among major theorists in elite universities and is then transmitted down to be taught in less influential institutions” (6); Charles Paine’s 1999 *The Resistant Writer*, which should have forever put to rest the notion of Harvard’s Adams Sherman Hill and Edward T. Channing as simple villains indoctrinating their charges with a “positivist epistemology” (31); Lucille M. Schultz’s 1999 examination of writing in the schools, *The Young Composers*, which demonstrated an eclectic mix of instructional approaches as well as the influence of European reform traditions; Jacqueline Jones Royster’s 2000 *Traces of a Stream*, which expanded the territory of rhetorical historiography by describing literacy acquisition among African American women both within and outside of institutions of higher learning; and Susan Kates’s 2001 *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education*, which demonstrated the presence of critical pedagogies at colleges created for previously disenfranchised communities. That same year, Julie Garbus in a cogent *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* review essay of Paine, Kates, and other recent histories could describe them as belonging to a “third wave of revisionist historiography” that “complicat[ed] our discipline’s new official picture” (120).

Recent scholarship drawing on these works has further complicated our historiographic landscape. David Gold’s *Rhetoric at the Margins* and Jessica Enoch’s *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, both published in 2008, seek to expand our view of what constitutes rhetorical education by considering the distinct rhetorical traditions emerging from underexamined communities and locations, with Gold studying instruction at black, women’s, and normal colleges, and Enoch examining the pedagogy of women teachers of black, Native American, and Chicano/a students. Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz’s 2005 examination of nineteenth-century school readers, rhetorics, and composition handbooks, *Archives of Instruction*, broadens our view of composition history by placing it within the wider cultural context of literacy instruction and text production, while Patricia Donahue and Gretchen

Flesher Moon's 2007 edited collection *Local Histories* further challenges the Harvard myth of origins through detailed archival examinations of multiple sites of instruction that suggest, as Moon writes in her introduction, not one unifying "narrative of composition history but . . . several potential alternative histories" (Moon 3).

Our "dominant" narratives, I would suggest, are dominant no more. We can no longer assume that little or nothing has been written since Berlin, Crowley, and Connors; that Berlin's taxonomies accurately map the field; that current-traditional rhetoric and the Harvard model have been historically and universally dominant and that both are synonymous; that current-traditional rhetoric, a "theory" without theoreticians, can be easily classified, identified, and dismissed; that epistemologies entail ideologies and pedagogies that in turn directly enact these ideologies; or that a social constructivist stance on knowledge making is adequate to address our pedagogical challenges.

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Why then, do such assumptions still persist? One reason (suggested by an early reviewer of this essay) may be the paucity of good general histories: teaching *Rhetoric and Reality* allows one to cover the twentieth century in a course in rhetorical history or the historical portion of an introduction to composition studies. This situation is just now changing with publication of the second part of Thomas P. Miller's history of English studies, *The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the Postmoderns* (2011), and recent edited collections of bibliographic essays that take into account the field's recent remapping, including Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt H. Wilson, and Rosa A. Eberly's comprehensive *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies* (2009) and the substantially revised and updated third editions of Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Winifred Bryan Horner's *The Present State of Scholarship in the History of Rhetoric: A Twenty-First Century Guide* (2010) and James J. Murphy's *A Short History of Writing Instruction: From Ancient Greece to Contemporary America* (2012). Anyone reading these volumes will come away with an excellent base understanding of both recent strands of historical recovery and how they fit together.

A second reason for the persistence of totalizing narratives may be that even as we have diversified our subjects of inquiry, we have not yet fully engaged the ideological premises of earlier scholarship, particularly the epistemological taxonomies of James Berlin. If Western philosophy, as Alfred North Whitehead suggested, can be treated as a "series of footnotes to Plato" (39), then rhetoric

and composition historiography might be considered a series of footnotes to Berlin. As described by Berlin, writing instruction in early twentieth-century American colleges fell into three classifications: current-traditional rhetoric, emphasizing utilitarian ends; the rhetoric of liberal culture, emphasizing beltrism and self-expression; and the rhetoric of public discourse, emphasizing engagement with social and political issues (*Rhetoric and Reality* 35–36). For Berlin, these competing rhetorics were grounded not merely in aesthetic, procedural, or even ideological differences, but *mutually exclusive* epistemologies: objectivist, locating truth in the external world, discoverable through empirical observation; subjectivist, locating it in the individual, discoverable through experience or insight; and transactional, locating it in the interactions between elements in a rhetorical situation, discoverable through rhetorical acts (6–19).²

The influence of this insight on writing studies cannot be overstated. Through his taxonomies, Berlin helped give shape to what had previously seemed to be a fragmented intellectual history, providing composition scholars with a framework with which to study the history of writing instruction. Moreover, his application of postmodern theories of knowledge making encouraged the field to recognize the role of ideology in pedagogy, strengthening its theoretical underpinnings. Indeed, his work has been so influential that it has had a normative effect; it is not uncommon to witness instructors still describe their classroom practice using vocabulary he developed or historiographers assuming the universality of the master narratives he helped establish. Yet Berlin's own theories were themselves socially constructed, emerging out of particular historical exigencies, most notably the concomitant ascent of both cultural and composition studies in the 1980s, the former driven by postmodern and Marxist readings of history, the latter by a burgeoning self-awareness and desire for academic legitimacy. How then do we write him into the historical narrative he helped create?

Future scholarship will increasingly require not merely extending our disciplinary inquiries into a more diverse and representative range of institutions than Berlin studied, but also interrogating both his categorizations and the teleological line he drew between ideology and pedagogy. This latter line of inquiry has not received the attention it deserves but is critical to placing Berlin in historical perspective. For example, in the years since Varnum suggested the limitations of Berlin's terministic screen, Charles Paine and Raúl Sánchez have both questioned Berlin's ideological determinism, Paine reminding us that contemporary understandings of literacy do not allow us to draw a "nice, clean

cause-and-effect relationship between ideology and practice” (40) and Sánchez that the route from ideology to pedagogy is not a one-way street, with rhetoric “merely the distributor of hegemonic goods” (56). Patricia Roberts-Miller has further suggested that Berlin meant his taxonomies to be treated as a heuristic device, not a hermeneutic lens:

His intention, almost certainly, was not to promulgate the taxonomy, but to raise the issue of the relation between epistemology and rhetorical practice. He therefore succeeded to the extent that people became more self-conscious about epistemological assumptions implicit in various practices . . . rather than to the extent that people used his categories. In my darker moments, however, I think he succeeded more in the latter than the former—that, for many people in rhetoric and composition, he settled the very question he was trying to raise, and his categories are set in stone. (221)

Along these lines, Byron Hawk has argued that as Berlin’s taxonomies became accepted, then reified, the historical context that gave rise to his mapping was lost (76). Together these scholars encourage us to resist treating Berlin’s categorizations as an *idée fixe* or, as Hawk cautions, mistaking the map—and mapping—for the territory.

In *The New Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest that argument does not arise so much from discrete systems of opposing values as competing hierarchies of interconnected and often-shared values; “a particular audience is characterized less by which values it accepts than by the way it grades them” (81). Rather than seeing the taxonomies as fixed and mutually exclusive, it may be more useful to treat them as fluid and intersecting, and, returning perhaps to Berlin’s original intentions, as historically contextualized practices rather than *a priori* categorizations. If we treat Berlin’s taxonomies as representing less zero-sum epistemologies or ideologies and, rather, following Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, as particularly ordered hierarchies of values, many of their tensions and contradictions dissolve. Under an epistemological model, one cannot hold mutually exclusive positions in relation to knowledge making, and each position implies a specific ideological end; under a values model, one can hold to intertwining and even incompatible ends. Under an epistemological model, contradiction appears schizophrenic; under a values model, it appears inevitable, even necessary. Under an epistemological model, a pedagogy enacts a corresponding ideology; under a values model, any given pedagogy may represent the concrete expression of a number of abstract values or commonplaces, implicit and explicit.

It may also be helpful here to invoke the work of William G. Perry Jr., whose stage-model theory of intellectual development received a brief term of attention from composition scholars in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Bizzell; Slattery). Though Perry is sometimes read as positing three mutually exclusive stages of development, from dualism to relativism to commitment, categories that map neatly onto current-traditional, expressivist, and epistemic rhetoric, it may be more valuable, as Davida Charney, John H. Newman, and Mike Palmquist have suggested, to see these positions as “parallel epistemological styles that can mix in varying concentrations,” depending on the topic at hand (303). A given rhetoric or pedagogy thus might simultaneously display features of current-traditional, expressivist, and epistemic rhetoric—or something else entirely. Not only did transactional as well as objectivist rhetorics exist at various locations and times, but they may have existed in the same locations, even the same classroom, and on the same day.

From Varnum on, numerous historiographic studies present overwhelming evidence of teachers engaged in the day-to-day struggle of attempting to *balance* curricula, engaging with the philosophical struggles of their day and attempting to reconcile and synthesize multiple theories, aims, and ends within particular institutional circumstances. Berlin’s own careful historical research—often overshadowed by our focus on his seductive metanarratives—suggests as much. The lively debates in the pages of early twentieth-century composition journals that Berlin reports on in *Rhetoric and Reality* suggest a period of intensely contested pedagogical theories—and intermixing ones. These various strands of pedagogical practice were compelling to teachers because the theories met exigencies they faced and embodied values they shared: that is, wanting to transmit culture, wanting to develop students’ individual capacities to succeed in that culture, and wanting to offer the students the tools to critique that culture, themes that continue to remain resonant. Rather than seeking out the ideologies embodied in pedagogies—or assuming that easily classifiable pedagogies follow from given ideologies—future historiographic research will increasingly seek to locate pedagogical practices within their wider spheres of historical development, better understand the interplay between local and global patterns, and acknowledge the mixed goals and hybrid forms that most often mark classroom practice.

Reimagining Recovery

In their recent *CCC* essay on the state of feminist rhetorical inquiry, Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster suggest that feminist scholarship is mov-

ing beyond the tropes of “rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription” (642). The same might be said of historiographic practices within rhetoric and composition as a whole. As historians of rhetoric and composition, we are no longer complicating an overly simplified past; we are complicating an already complicated one.

We now know that long before the emergence of contemporary theories of discourse, pedagogy, or knowledge making, school and college English instructors sought to empower students through language instruction, link rhetorical instruction to democratic action, and develop locally responsive pedagogies

that took into account the needs and desires of diverse communities. Indeed, an examination of any given volume of *English Journal* in the early twentieth century or *College English* or CCC mid-century will evidence a vibrant and diverse contemporary pedagogical discourse, rich with historiographic possibilities. We have also begun to look well beyond first-year composition for evidence of rhetorical education—instruction in reading, writing, and speaking—that students experienced, both in the classroom and out, leading to a further remapping of our field as we reconsider and reframe what constitutes evidence and fit subjects for inquiry.

While much remains to be recovered, honest scholarship demands that we acknowledge the significant body of recovery work that has come before and our relation to it. Doing so will help us to avoid the disciplinary fragmentation that the pursuit of alternative, underrepresented, or local histories might otherwise engender. In recent years, it has become almost a commonplace for revisionist rhetoric and composition historiographers to acknowledge that we are studying histories, not history, illuminating moments and locations, rather than crafting comprehensive master narratives. Yet like any terministic screen, this pursuit has the potential to obscure as well as reveal. Writing in 2000 of the emergent historiographic trend in rhetoric and composition toward diverse recovery work, Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen warned:

There is power in specialized histories . . . but we know that the flip side of this power is parochialism. Will the compositionists reading about Paine’s Harvard also read about Logan’s churchwomen and Mattingly’s temperance advocates? Or are we all teaching (preaching) to increasingly smaller, more homogenous audi-

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It is, of course, not possible to read everything, even within narrowly defined subdisciplines. But in the necessary pursuit of local histories, we may miss significant work that has already complicated the territory we seek to examine.

Thus it is crucial that we read across and beyond our immediate research boundaries; by setting seemingly disparate and divergent locations and rhetorical traditions in dialogue we can often illuminate their significance, both locally and nationally, past and present. For example, anyone interested in the shifting discursive limits and possibilities entailed by nineteenth-century gender norms or the entrance of women into the academy would be richly rewarded by both Lindal Buchanan's examination of women students on the platform at the private, midwestern liberal arts colleges Oberlin and Antioch (54–76) and Beth Ann Rothermel's examinations of rhetorical instruction and literary society activities at the public, northeastern normal college Westfield State ("Our Life's Work"; "Sphere of Noble Action").

Moving beyond recovery also means that we can also no longer afford simple narratives of heroes and villains. It is not enough to simply point to the past for evidence of practices that align with our own constructions of what is progressive, what is reductive; rather, we must examine how historical actors responded to their own contemporary exigencies, both micro and macro. In some ways, this makes our work easier, as we need not reinvent the historiographic wheel. But it also presents us with a methodological challenge as we must now apply what Kirsch and Royster call "critical imagination" to discover how our subjects *themselves* "frame . . . the questions by which they navigated their own lives" (648). What would such practice entail? It might require temporarily suspending our theoretical frames—and desire for closure—as we encounter primary sources. Empirical researchers sometimes make a distinction between discovery and verification modes. In the first, one knows little and works inductively to find patterns; in the latter, one works deductively to test hypotheses. In comparing what he terms "positivist" and "constructivist" forms of inquiry, Egon G. Guba argues that an emphasis on verification as the real work of science discounts the importance of discovery and that we should instead see these modes as part of a "continuum of inquiry" (23). It may also be helpful to posit our research as additive, rather than oppositional, to imagine scholarly synthesis, rather than antithesis, acknowledging the terrain we have traveled on our way to the new paths we hope to create.

All historiographic research, whatever its mode, at some point will require what Susan C. Jarratt calls “speculative leaps,” the means by which we bridge the space between “factual claims and interpretive assumptions” (“Rhetoric and Feminism” 391). As Carol Mattingly reassuringly predicted, the filling in of the historical record over the last decade now allows us to leap, or simply step, with greater confidence. But gaps remain, particularly where archival sources are thin. We can thus also apply critical imagination not just to our subjects but also to our archives; that is, asking what reconfigurations or uncharted sources might help us to illumine the lives of our subjects, especially in the absence of more conventional materials. Jessica Enoch, for example, examining rhetorical education at schools in the border town of Laredo, Texas, found evidence of instructional practices as well as contemporary debates over language and literacy by looking at the city’s Spanish-language newspapers (“Changing Research Methods”). Enoch, Richard Leo Enos, and others, have also spoken of the insights to be gleaned from the historiographer’s physical presence at a site of study.

Another way to avoid historiographic myopia is to employ what a number of scholars, following anthropologist Clifford Geertz, call *tacking*, which Geertz describes as the process of gaining perspective by shifting between local and global, concrete and abstract, or simply two theoretical positions. In an oft-quoted passage from his 1974 “From the Native’s Point of View,” Geertz describes the essence of ethnographic scholarship as “a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view” (in *Local Knowledge* 69; see also 170).

Closely associated with tacking is Geertz’s concept of *thick description*. Though sometimes treated as a loose synonym for simply detailed observation, for Geertz, thick description depends on careful *interpretation*; responding to what he considered overly reductive cognitive and structural approaches to ethnography that in seeking to explain “what the natives ‘really’ think” missed what informants actually *did* (*Interpretation of Cultures* 11), Geertz called for approaches that more carefully attended to “the meaning particular social actions have for the actors” under study (27).³

Within history proper, Geertz’s principles are embedded in the methodologies of what has come to be known as history from below and, later, microhistory. Though advocates of microhistory diverge in their goals and claims for the approach, they share common tendencies: ideologically, they are

interested in the lives of those traditionally “left out” of historical narratives; methodologically, they work on smaller, more local scales “to elucidate historical causation on the level . . . where most of real life takes place”; epistemologically, they typically assume a two-way interaction between individuals and cultural forces (Muir xxi; see also Levi). The key to understanding microhistorical approaches, exemplified in texts such as Natalie Zemon Davis’s *The Return of Martin Guerre* and Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, is that they do not merely describe a local scene, but use the local to illuminate larger historical questions.

Furthering the Conversation

Fortunately, there is no shortage of scholarship within rhetoric and composition historiography embodying these principles of moving beyond recovery, integrating and building on previous scholarship, demonstrating ideological flexibility, and connecting the local to larger conversations.

Tacking from the local to the global, Kathryn Fitzgerald’s examinations of a cache of student essays at Wisconsin’s Platteville Normal School, the 2002 “Platteville Papers” and 2007 “Platteville Papers Revisited,” do not merely illuminate composition history through providing a counterpoint to a master narrative, but open a window onto a wide range of nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural traditions. Through Fitzgerald’s “concentric circles” of study (“Platteville Papers” 273), we learn about a particular school, normal school traditions; genre expectations for nineteenth-century writing assignments; nineteenth-century inscriptions of frontier ideology and constructions of gender and civic identity; the ideological work of writing assignments in any era; and, perhaps most importantly, the intersections among these subjects. Productively tacking among subjects and disciplines, Susan C. Jarratt’s 2009 study of student writing at three historically black colleges, “Classics and Counterpublics,” speaks simultaneously to scholars in African American studies, the history of education, rhetoric and composition, and communication, demonstrating what we can bring to our field by looking to adjacent ones, but also what our particular focus on rhetorical education and production and our interest in student and teacher voices can offer other scholarly conversations. Jarratt presents as her exigence not merely absence but also presence: a gap in our knowledge of student voices within an already extensive scholarly discourse on black education, in particular the tension between liberal arts and vocational approaches. At the same time, she locates her study within

critical conversations in rhetoric and composition over both the history of the discipline and the liberatory potential of education for marginalized groups. By seeing beyond the boundaries of rhetoric and composition, she advances the conversation within the discipline.

A model local history, Suzanne Bordelon's 2010 *CCC* article "Composing Women's Civic Identities during the Progressive Era" uses a site-specific study—student commencement addresses at Vassar from 1910 to 1915—to illuminate larger historiographic and theoretical questions about the social function of epideictic rhetoric and the platform as a site of education. Grounding her work in a rich body of scholarship on women's rhetorical education, including that of Lindal Buchanan, Catherine Hobbs, Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald, and Carolyn R. Miller, Bordelon demonstrates how these college women used the epideictic occasion of the address as a vehicle through which they "discovered the 'available means' to construct their civic identities to speak in public" (512). Bordelon connects her local institutional study not only to the history of women's rhetorical practices, but also to historiographic methodology, suggesting that "these addresses provide a revealing way to investigate pedagogy . . . represent[ing] virtually untapped archives" (527). Though her data set is small, her exploration of this niche opens up further research space by suggesting how we might incorporate a new genre into an extant scholarly discourse. She's not just reading commencement addresses because no one has before. Likewise, her 2010 *Rhetoric Review* essay "Restructuring English and Society through an Integrated Curriculum," on Ruth Mary Weeks's contribution to the NCTE's 1936 *A Correlated Curriculum*, an early interdisciplinary project to integrate writing across the curriculum, does not simply call attention to a heretofore neglected figure. Rather, it illuminates a vital moment in our field's turbulent history of reform and reconsolidation, when the reform efforts of the Progressive Era encountered the anti-Progressive backlash of the Cold War and trends toward collectivism gave way to individualism, tensions with which we still wrestle as scholars and teachers.

Sarah Hallenbeck's 2009 dissertation "Writing the Bicycle: Women, Rhetoric, and Technology in Late Nineteenth-Century America" (winner of the 2010 Rhetoric Society of America Dissertation Award), though not a "local" history, demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of historiographic location. Through a finely grained archival analysis of a narrow yet rich corpus of work—the popular discourse surrounding women's adoption, adaptation, and appropriation of the newly emergent technology of the bicycle—she ad-

dresses important questions in several subdisciplines of rhetoric, including material rhetorics, women's rhetorics, and rhetorical theory. By exploring the "material and rhetorical agency of users in shaping technologies beyond their initial design and distribution phases" (ii–iii), Hallenbeck embodies Kirsch and Royster's call to employ "critical imagination" in treating historical actors. Her work also echoes Susan Miller's insistence that "we endow agency and dignity" on our subjects "by making them 'relevant' to contexts we already find greater than the sum of their parts" (3) and John C. Brereton's call to examine "the everyday fabric of history as lived" (xiv). Her work does not merely respond to an exigence; it helps generate one.⁴

Shannon Carter's 2007 *College English* article "Living inside the Bible (Belt)," though not a historiographic essay, is grounded in local history and rich in local context, and thus it speaks to wider historiographic concerns. Carter teaches in rural north Texas, where many students come to campus immersed in biblically based, evangelical faith traditions and literacies and sometimes see the academy as "hostile to their faith-based ways of knowing, being, and expressing themselves." Echoing scholars of African American literacies such as Geneva Smitherman and Lisa Delpit, Carter advances what she terms "a pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity," encouraging students "to use literacies they already possess" to find analogues with those expected by the academy (573–74). By doing so, she argues, we can create a space for students to maintain both their faith- and academic-based literacies without giving up one or the other.

Carter grounds her teaching practice in a rich understanding of the historical mission of her institution, founded by a maverick educator, William Mayo, who was deeply committed to the personal and professional development of his students, many of whom came from rural communities and were the first in their families to attend college. Yet the school and its environs were also segregated, with the town's African American residents shut out of local higher educational opportunity until 1964, a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Carter mines these tropes with her students, sharing with them both the history of the college and the activist efforts of local black community organizations as well as encouraging them to reflect on their own literacy practices through ethnographic and archival examinations of local literacies.⁵ Carter has since turned these historically grounded explorations of community literacy into an NEH Office of Digital Humanities–funded project, "Remixing Rural Texas," which seeks to engage both scholars and citizen-stakeholders in digitizing archival materials significant to the histories of race and race relations in the region. Of course, not every institution maintains clear ties to its

historical roots or is the convenient subject of scholarly inquiry. But we can still gain from Carter's example in imagining ways we might turn to history to examine and enrich our own local contexts.

Maps to the Future

As these works demonstrate, this is an exciting time to be doing rhetorical history. Our subjects of inquiry are becoming increasingly more diverse, our methodologies more sophisticated, our conclusions more nuanced, our work more incorporated into the wider discipline. An emerging scholar might be forgiven, however, for feeling perhaps that these are the worst of times. With historical revisionism the norm, how does one stake out a position as a historical revisionist? Without a definitive master narrative to resist, how does one claim a niche?

Fortunately, the process of revisionism is ongoing, ever creating new exigencies. It's easy to forget that our now-contested master narratives were themselves a form of revisionism, calling attention to a long-neglected history.⁶ They illuminated a need for more finely grained local and alternative histories.

These in turn have made us aware of the traditions we still neglect; for example, it is only recently that our field has taken seriously religious and politically conservative rhetorical education and activism

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or attended to speaking education with any of the degree of attention we have applied to writing. We still know too little about postwar traditions (see Masters), and we are ripe for a reassessment of germinal moments of the last quarter century. Historical work has inspired and been inspired by other areas of inquiry within the larger field of composition and rhetoric, such as the turn toward civic pedagogies and contemporary ethnographies, and can further contribute to these conversations.

Moreover, we have only barely begun to scratch the surface of possibility inherent in the digital humanities or make use of quantitative data. And we still have much to learn from our colleagues in history and education, where scholars continue to work through the implications of postmodern critiques of knowledge making, narrative theory, microhistorical approaches, and technology, as well as continue to evolve research methodologies in response.⁷

Though emerging historiographic scholarship in rhetoric and composition will look quite different from that of a generation ago, one methodological constant will remain: whatever its subject of inquiry, ideological stance, theo-

retical grounding, or archival sources, the best work will evidence what Linda Ferreira-Buckley calls the “painstakingly slow work” of archival immersion (“Serving Time” 28). Emerging digital resources make such immersion easier but also raise the stakes. In her teaching practice, Ferreira-Buckley stress close attention both to the immediate archival material at hand and its broader historical context, urging her students to read deeply and widely both *in* the period and *on* the period they are studying. Or as Deborah Brandt advises her students, to be a scholar, one has “to know real things and study real things.”

But, fortunately, not everything. Our historiographic practice has also been freed by an increasing acknowledgment among rhetoric and composition scholars that our work will never be done. Indeed, to write a history of writing instruction is “an impossible assignment” (Gere 93); we cannot hope to get the story “exactly right” (Glenn and Enoch 11). That does not mean, of course, that we should not try. The map is not the territory—but it does allow us to explore.

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Notes

1. Though the debates of the 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication panel “Octalog III” suggest persistent points of friction and perhaps even fracture within the field, they also speak to the expansion of historiographic possibility engendered by the voices of 1997’s “Octalog II.”
2. Though Berlin employed a range of terminologies to describe various pedagogies at particular times, he remained consistent in seeing pedagogy through the lens of epistemology.
3. Geertz himself adopted the term *thick description* from British philosopher Gilbert Ryle.
4. Interested scholars may download the full text from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries (<http://www.lib.unc.edu/>) or see Hallenbeck’s recent *Rhetoric Review* essay, “Riding Out of Bounds.”
5. See Carter’s presentation with James L. Conrad to the Norris Community Club, “Because We Live Here: Why the Local Matters to Historians, Archivists, and Rhetoricians” (<http://www.shannoncarter-blog.org/presentations/norris-community-presentation/>) and her English 102 resources page (<http://shannoncarter.wordpress.com/teaching-english-102/>).

6. Early composition itself can be seen as revisionist pedagogy; as Connors points out, “composition-rhetoric” emerged in the late nineteenth century in response to “pressing social problems demand[ing] solutions” (11), most notably a widely perceived literacy crisis at a moment of cultural flux.

7. Peter Burke’s edited collection *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* remains a valuable introduction to these issues; see also the journal *History and Theory*. For recent discussions within education, see Paul H. Mattingly et al.’s 2004 *History of Education Quarterly (HEQ)* roundtable, “Renegotiating the Historical Narrative,” and the 2011 *HEQ* special issue, “Theory in Educational History” (51.2).

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David Gold

David Gold, an associate professor of English at the University of Michigan, is the author of *Rhetoric at the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873-1947*, winner of the 2010 CCCO Outstanding Book Award. His recent work includes essays in *College Composition and Communication*, *History of Education Quarterly*, and *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*. He is currently at work on *Educating the New Southern Woman: Rhetoric, Identity, and Race at the Public Women's Colleges, 1884-1945* and an edited collection on women's oratorical education with coauthor Catherine Hobbs.