

Ostergaard, Lori and Henrietta Rix Wood, editors. *In the Archives of Composition: Writing and Rhetoric in High Schools and Normal Schools*. University of Pittsburgh P, 2015. 264 pages.

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Lori Ostergaard and Henrietta Rix Wood's edited collection, *In the Archives of Composition: Writing and Rhetoric in High Schools and Normal Schools*, challenges dominant historical narratives in the field of composition by drawing from local archival sources. The editors' mission is to add complexity to disciplinary narratives by including the many voices of teachers and students operating in different institutions such as high schools (chapters 1-4), normal schools (chapters 5-8), and programs that connect these two institutions (chapters 9-11). In addition to this overarching mission, the editors also identify additional goals for their collection, which include offering a local perspective on pedagogy and employing a method of "doing history" in order to revise dominant narratives by integrating histories from marginalized spaces. This review will consider the extent to which each of these goals is met in the book.

Although the collection does not specifically identify the dominant narrative each chapter is responding to, hints of these narratives exist throughout all the chapters. Many of the chapters respond to pervading disciplinary narratives crafted by well-known composition historians such as Robert Connors and James Berlin—narratives that primarily take their evidence from elite educational spaces. Connors is most cited for his text *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theories and Pedagogies*, wherein he traces the birth of composition in American educational institutions from the mid-1800s onward. He moves away from calling this period "current traditional rhetoric," because it is simplistic and inaccurate, as instructors were not only "autocratic [and] error obsessed ... [teachers] who assigned formulaic themes" (31). Instead, he proposes the notion of Composition-Rhetoric to describe this period and those working in it. He explains that instructors focused on errors because of their intensive labor loads and suggests that these same instructors were unable to advocate for better working conditions because of these labor loads. He uses the term Composition-Rhetoric to demonstrate how rhetoric, as the practice

of oratory, and composition, as the practice of writing, were separated with the entry of women into educational spaces, effectively suggesting that women initiated the downfall of oral and argumentative rhetoric. Another disciplinary narrative contested in this collection is one developed by James Berlin in *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*. Berlin posits that the economic and ideological superstructure changed the way writing was taught in American colleges. More specifically, he argues that this history is marked by a shift from entrepreneurial to corporate capitalism which meant that “rhetoric was replaced with an emphasis on practice training in mechanical skills” for success in the sciences and business (186).

According to several of the scholars in this collection, the problem with these two disciplinary histories is that they do not capture the localized nuance that exists in composition instruction outside of white, male-dominated spaces. Although Connors’ history gives validity to the field of Composition-Rhetoric as one that has its own theories, pedagogies, and traditions, chapters by Henrietta Rix Woods, Melissa lanetta, Lori Ostergaard and Whitney Myers, directly challenge Connors’ assumptions about this period, its characteristics, its instructors and its students by examining archival materials from institutions other than public research universities or elite liberal arts colleges. Edward J. Comstock directs his critique at Berlin’s history by considering student self-reports and teaching materials housed in archives outside of Harvard to argue that the shift in composition instruction Berlin notes is due to students’ internalization of pedagogical disciplinary practices rather than to larger economic and ideological changes. Many chapters in the collection also indirectly challenge both Connors’ and Berlin’s histories by selecting educational spaces that their narratives omit—spaces that were co-educational, located on Indian reservations, and/or created under segregationist conditions.

The majority of the chapters draw on research done in or through a local archive, while the rest use sources that are not necessarily local but still work to articulate a perspective localized to one area. Archival sources include personal diaries, interviews, student class papers, student newspapers, yearbooks, and teacher-authored curricula, among others. Henrietta Rix Wood, in her chapter “The Rhetorical Praxis of Central High School Students, 1894-1924,” examines writings from student newspapers published at Central High School, which served middle-class students in Kansas City, Missouri. From these local perspectives, Rix argues for the efficacy of “composition-rhetoric” wherein she claims that “composition-rhetoric” was “not a period of relative stasis” as Connors would have his readers believe, but was instead a period when “student[s] react[ed] to potent social needs” as evidenced by their writing published in student newspapers (37, 30). Another example comes from Melissa lanetta’s chapter “Stand ‘Mum’: Women’s Silence at the Lexington

Academy, 1839-1841." lanetta analyzes two diaries outlining the pedagogical activities of a classroom in one of the first schools to admit women, the Lexington Academy. More specifically, she explores the diaries of Cyrus Peirce (a teacher at Lexington Academy) and Mary Swift (his assistant). Through her interpretation, lanetta counters Connors' supposition that women's entry into higher education necessitated the "downfall of classical oratory" as women are "innately non-confrontational and [only use] collaborative discourse" (98). Through her incisive analysis, lanetta demonstrates that women's performance in higher education could be attributed to schooling and pedagogy, specifically to a "lack of training in argument and opportunity for practice," instead of a "biologically driven need for cooperation" (110).

As sites of analysis, scholars use these local histories to "do history" where they question dominant narratives in order to create space for diverse voices, demonstrate an array of pedagogical approaches (e.g., experiential and personal writing), illustrate the institutionalization and democratization of writing instruction, and delineate the origins of contemporary pedagogy. In her own chapter, Ostergaard "does history" by tracing the professional trajectory of June Rose Colby, whose modest career was understood as a "failure" because it was outshined by other faculty members in her department at Illinois State Normal School. Ostergaard questions this label by highlighting Colby's career successes and, in the process, challenging Connors' history of composition, which assumes that early compositionists did not have the wherewithal or authority to improve their working conditions. Ostergaard uses Colby to rebut Connors by illustrating that at least one composition instructor was able to improve her working conditions by arguing for curricular reform—as Colby successfully argued for the separation of writing and literature (127). Another chapter that "does history" and that demonstrates how this doing can undo dominant narratives is Beth Rothermel's chapter "'A Home for Thought Where Learning Rules': Progressive Era Students and Teacher Identity at a Historic Normal School." Rothermel counters the dominant narrative that normal schools developed teachers by "drill[ing] students in their subjects, verify[ing] that they were of good moral character and teach[ing] them how to keep order" (140). Instead, Rothermel draws on student essays and outlines from Westfield State Normal School between 1903-1911 to argue that student-teachers created classroom personas that were not authorities or experts but instead "facilitators." As facilitators, pre-service teachers cultivated identities through self-reflective writing that allowed for "social critique, learning and collaboration" (132).

Another goal of this collection is to bring diverse voices from localized spaces into disciplinary narratives. Whitney Myers' chapter "'Raise your Right Arm / And Pull on Your Tongue!' Reading Silence(s) at the Albuquerque

Indian School” and Candace Epps-Robertson’s chapter “Radical, Conservative, Extreme: The Rhetorical Education of the Prince Edward County Free School Association, 1963-1964,” are examples of scholars seeking to include diverse voices by exploring the marginalized voices of American Indians and African Americans under reservationist and segregationist conditions, respectively. Myers uses three student yearbooks and a school assessment report to advance an argument about the pedagogical practices employed at the Albuquerque Indian School. More specifically, she claims that these practices, “grounded in revision, which included interrogating genre conventions, analyzing audiences and receiving detailed feedback,” were designed to accommodate linguistically diverse students (50). Similarly, Epps-Robertson “does history” by examining the language arts curriculum at Moton High School in Prince Edward County. This curriculum included a traditional skills-based approach that addressed concerns from students’ home communities (63).

Other chapters in the collection make clear the many benefits of expanding disciplinary narratives to involve local histories, such as revealing an array of varied approaches to teaching writing. Curtis Mason’s chapter “Project English: Cold War Paradigms and the Teaching of Composition” traces assorted approaches to curriculum as he investigates archival resources from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the University of Nebraska’s Project English Center and conducts an interview with a former Nebraska English professor. It is important to note that “Project English” grew out of a response to the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). English teachers, faced with the NDEA’s overwhelming support for science and math, argued for their discipline’s importance in preparing and protecting the citizenry. Mason discovers that the facilitators of Project English suggested a varied approach to the English curriculum, which involved scaffolding lessons from year to year and required the students to learn composition by “analyzing published works and then by acting as professional writers” (217). Mason argues that the Project English curriculum exemplifies variation as it moved from “teaching grammar to teaching form and function of language” by focusing on process pedagogy (217). A chapter that also illustrates a “varied curriculum” is Nancy Myers’ chapter “Adapting Male Education for a Nation of Females: Sara Lockwood’s 1888 *Lessons in English*.” Myers finds that Lockwood combines two early composition curricula to create her textbook—current traditional rhetoric from Harvard and a belles lettres approach from Yale. Written by Lockwood to use in her high school classroom in New Haven, Connecticut, this textbook was also adopted at various co-educational high schools throughout New England (168). According to Myers, Lockwood fuses the two curricula because current traditional rhetoric teaches students to “more effectively communicate with the diverse citizens of the country,” while the belles lettres approach

advocates “reading literature for cultural and literary enhancement” (171). Ultimately, Lockwood’s varied curriculum was designed for female students to develop rhetorical skills and to encourage them to live a life outside the home as a form of social agency.

Selecting local histories as artifacts of analysis offers glimpses into the use of the personal and the experiential in writing instruction. In “Be Patient, But Don’t Wait!”: The Activist Ethos of Student Journalism at the Colored State Normal School, Elizabeth City, North Carolina, 1892-1937,” Elaine Hays explores writings from two student publications, *The Normal Magnet* and the *Normal State Banner*. In her analysis, she finds that these students “redefine what it means to be a normalite” by encouraging their peers to live according to Christian principles, to use their writing to engage in local issues, and to work as leaders and activists in their communities and on campus (153). Other chapters, such as Edward J. Comstock’s chapter “Toward a Genealogy of Composition: Student Discipline and Development at Harvard in the Late Nineteenth Century” also involve analyzing personal, experiential writing. Comstock explores students’ self-reports of their own writing assignments and considers how these reports encouraged students to internalize disciplinary techniques and explain their writing deficiencies in terms of personal failure and failure of their preparatory schools (196).

Ostergaard’s chapter on June Rose Colby and Myers’ chapter on Sara Lockwood’s *Lesson in English* highlight another benefit of including local histories in the field’s disciplinary narratives: they can shed light on the democratization of writing and its institutionalization. According to Ostergaard, Colby raised the stature of composition when she successfully argued for separating the teaching of writing from the teaching of literature. Although Colby’s early pedagogy resembled current traditional rhetoric, she became an advocate for a writing-across-the-curriculum approach later in her career. Her efforts to focus the curriculum on writing and to promote writing in various contexts effectively meant that she democratized the teaching of writing and institutionalized it through her publications and in her addresses to the Illinois State Normal School Faculty. Myer’s chapter on Lockwood similarly illustrates a democratization of writing instruction and an institutionalization of these practices. Lockwood’s *Lessons in English* helped to democratize writing by inviting women into the practice of composition by integrating female-specific pronouns, including examples from women’s lives, and requiring assignments that spoke to experiences many female students had. This effort to include women in the writing curriculum was institutionalized as this text made its way across the country and was adopted by many academic institutions.

Each chapter in this collection illustrates how local histories can enrich disciplinary narratives by providing a better understanding of the origins of

contemporary pedagogical practices, but Epps-Robertson's and Greer's chapters arguably do this best. Epps-Robertson finds that the pedagogy developed at Moton High foregrounded "emancipatory rhetoric" wherein marginalized students were taught the rhetorical strategies of those in power in order to use these strategies to advance themselves. Additionally, Epps-Robertson discovered that the teachers at Moton High employed a skills-based approach (called for by Booker T. Washington) that was grounded in a particular context, which paid attention to the students' home communities (called for by W.E.B. Du Bois). This blended curriculum anticipates composition's contemporary attention to critical pedagogy and to respecting the knowledge students bring with them from their home communities. Similarly, Jane Greer's chapter "'These Parts of People Escaping on Paper': Reading Our Educational Past Through the High School Diary of Pat Huyett, 1966-1969" demonstrates how historic local practices of writing instruction prefigured modern pedagogies—specifically, constructionist and expressivist pedagogies. In her chapter, Greer considers the personal experiences of Pat Huyett, a female, high-school-aged student from Kansas City, Missouri, who writes extensively in her personal diary. According to Greer, Huyett's diary illustrates that she knows how to "position her work within broader textual networks, seek feedback on her work-in-progress, hone her style, and evaluate her progress" (85). As readers, we learn that Huyett's writing knowledge is conditioned by social contexts as she demonstrates how her work fits in relationship to others, shapes her diary with attention to genre, and develops standards for effective writing. From her analysis, Greer posits that Huyett's diary combines lessons she learned from two pedagogical strands, expressivism and social constructionism, as it showcases a "high school student using expressive writing to engage with the social realities that shaped her world" (90).

The editors and contributors to this book should be commended for crafting a collection that is well organized and innovative, specifically in its focus on "localized" narratives that "do history." Not surprisingly, there are limits to the "local" nature of the histories in this collection, as some of the histories analyzed go beyond the local—such as Myers' analysis of Sarah Lockwood's *Lessons in English* or Mason's chapter on Project English. Various academic institutions throughout the northeastern United States adopted Lockwood's textbook during the late 1800s, which meant that its influence extended outside of New Haven. Mason explores the archives at the University of Nebraska to offer a more localized perspective, yet this perspective is tempered by frequent references to findings from the national NCTE archives. Also, throughout *In the Archives*, attention to the "local" inevitably focuses on the particularities of some locations while ignoring histories from other places. For example, the collection dedicates two chapters to composition history in Kansas City (in

Kansas and Missouri). While the authors justify why it is important to include these narratives and the narratives vary in their content, it is striking that most of the narratives come from certain areas of the country (Midwest and Eastern Seaboard) while other locales in the United States are not as well represented (e.g., parts of the West Coast and Inter-mountain West). Ultimately, this observation is less of a critique than a challenge to the editors, contributors, and other scholars interested in our disciplinary history to conduct future research in overlooked locations.

Together, the chapters in this groundbreaking collection set the stage for future research on composition in spaces outside of higher education—this research might include projects focused on the teaching of writing and rhetoric in religious institutions, other secondary institutions (e.g., middle schools), or even charter schools. This book will be of interest to any graduate student or faculty member in rhetoric and writing who is interested in a more multifaceted understanding of our discipline's origins. It would work especially well in graduate courses on composition pedagogy and history, teacher training courses, or as an exemplar in an archival research methods course. Ultimately, *In the Archives of Composition* is a thoughtful and cohesive collection that functions to reshape how scholars understand rhetoric and composition education and its history.

Works Cited

- Berlin, James A. *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*. Southern Illinois UP, 1987.
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About the Author

Tiffany Kinney is a PhD candidate in the English Department with a specialization in rhetoric and writing studies at the University of Utah. She is interested in feminist studies, rhetorical practices, and archival research. More specifically, her work examines how discourse shapes the lived experiences of women in ways that are both restrictive and productive.