

21st-Century Makerspaces: English in the Two-Year College

From the Editors

If pre-conference buzz is any indication, many attendees of the TYCA-PNW and PNWCA 2013 conference in Seattle anticipated this year's keynote with curiosity, including a healthy dose of corollary questions ranging from "Exactly what is a makerspace?" to "How does DIY apply in the writing center context?" Jentery Sayers answered many of those questions in his thought-provoking keynote address, "Why Do Makerspaces Matter for the Humanities? For Writing Centers?" At the same time, he urged conference-goers to ask ourselves finer-grained questions that sound the intellectual depths of the do-it-yourself (DIY) movement. One that arose for us was, "How do we promote and foster DIY mindsets and cultures at our home institutions given our rapidly changing institutional contexts?"

After all, October's event also found presenters revisiting the ongoing battle to productively navigate the fluctuating political and economic terrain in our two-year colleges. The drivers of America's education reform initiatives have, if anything, doubled-down in their efforts to quickly institutionalize emerging transformations to our national educational context over the past year.

In response, faculty and administrators throughout the Northwest are struggling to cope with the intense challenges brought to bear by mandates such as Oregon's Senate Bill 253, better known as the "40-40-20" completion goal, as well as by national programs like Race to the Top. The theme re-emerged from last year's conference, echoing throughout the day in sessions on developmental English education and acceleration, with a focus on how to shrink the former and grow the latter while at the same time continuing to cultivate rich learning experiences for community college students. Thus, it is side-by-side with inspiration that the challenges facing us as English educators in the two-year college continue to grow.



Keynote speaker, Jentery Sayers

It may just be, however, that this very difficult context presents us with a rich opportunity, even the most fertile ground, for promoting and fostering DIY mindsets and cultures at our home institutions. After all, as this year's call for TYCA-PNW proposals notes, key components of DIY philosophy include:

- Seeing constraints as opportunities for invention rather than as limitations
- Approaching production as an act of "tinkering," "bricolage" or "hacking" — opportunity for low-stakes play that emphasizes trial and error rather than success or failure

- A privileging of peer-to-peer, collaborative learning which promotes intrinsic motivation and takes control of production out of the hands of institutions

At many institutions, the constraints that have emerged in the wake of aforementioned educational reform efforts have indeed been re-interpreted as opportunities for invention. As a result, administrators, writing instructors, and writing tutors have taken to tinkering with the old and hacking new iterations of developmental writing curricula, for example, becoming bricoleurs in their production of different methods and new courses, trying out alternative pathways, which offer students the possibility of going "further faster" to greater academic success.

More than ever, though, students' continued success, alongside the viability of the very programs we continue to invent, produce, and reinvent to promote their success, demands this DIY fundamental: "the privileging of peer-to-peer, collaborative learning which promotes intrinsic motivation and takes control of production out of the hands of institutions." Creating opportunities, making space for students to engage with us and with each other as writers and thinkers, as well as making space for our own professional collaboration on this critical work, may just be the crux and indeed the future of English in the two-year college: a 21st-century makerspace.

And once again, the TYCA-PNW and PNWCA Conference 2013 offered just this kind of opportunity—to meet, mingle, and meditate with our colleagues from across the Northwest in ways that brought a much-needed infusion of energy and inspiration to our work. We thank you so much for being part of that.

— **Siskanna and Jeannie**
Lane Community College, OR
and Spokane Community College, WA

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SUBMISSIONS: We encourage submissions for four of our columns: *PRACTICAL MATTERS*, which gives specific classroom activities; *STUDENT TALK*, providing a student's perspective on learning; *GUEST SPOTLIGHT*, addressing thoughts on theory or philosophy of teaching; and *POETRY*, a spot where colleagues can exhibit their creative side. Submissions should be between 200–400 words and sent electronically in an attached document form (preferably Word). Be sure to include your school affiliation along with your name, address, phone, and email. Spring submission deadline: May 5, 2014.

TYCA-PNW Chairs

In the months following our October conference and the DIY theme, we are even more mindful of how integral collaboration is to our most innovative and successful practices in the classroom and writing center. “Do It Yourself,” on first glance, seems to underscore individual effort; however, even singular pursuits most often include some form of interaction with others: We might create a new writing assignment, but perhaps we draw from the smart ideas of colleagues or authors of books with whom we’ve been in “conversation,” and most certainly we are thinking of our students’ learning needs or at least trying to anticipate them. As a faculty member, we may design a study for research, draft new curriculum, compose a proposal to an administrator, yet we find inspiration from our students, seek input from our colleagues, and are otherwise guided by the



Friday night Knowledge Cafe Workshops

voices we’ve internalized—in addition to our own voice—to get the job done, whatever it may be. In short, we seldom if ever think, write, or work entirely alone. So maybe it’s more accurate for us to consider the maker mindset of “Do It Yourselves” in the plural sense. For collaboration with students and colleagues is what keeps many of us invested and in high spirits. Collaboration is what makes us so glad to be part of TYCA-PNW. Our exchanges of ideas, our in-it-together sensibilities, create a conference that is joyful as well as beneficial. We hope that the DIY innovations shared at our October conference have stimulated your own teaching and scholarship and that the year ahead is filled with new learning for both you and your students.

With collaboration in mind, if there is a faculty member in your department, either full-time or adjunct instructor, whom you would like to nominate for a Lisa Ede award, be sure to do so. TYCA-PNW is soliciting nominations through June 1, 2014.

— **Dodie Forrest, Chair**
Yakima Valley Community College

— **Cheryl Siemers, Assistant Chair**
Kenai Peninsula College

News from National TYCA

The annual NCTE Conference in Boston celebrated the theme of (Re)Inventing the Future of English. And there was significant reason for PNW to celebrate: our own Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt (past chair of TYCA) was the featured speaker at the very well attended College Celebration on Friday night. Using



her equestrian expertise as analogy, Carolyn taught us about reading the animal, recognizing how our cues mislead, and detecting problems in the environment, the beast, and ourselves. Carolyn used the results of her national survey of developmental English students to learn more about students’ definitions of success. In the current charged

climate of the Completion Agenda, it’s important that students and not just policy makers have a voice; fortunately, Carolyn listened to their voices and their accounts of success. She reminded us of the richly interesting, complex, and sometime difficult lives our students live, celebrating the role two-year English teachers play in those lives.

At the day-long TYCA Executive Committee meeting Saturday, we got down to business, pushing again for greater visibility for two-year instructors to be a regular part of the two-tiered vetting process for the CCCC program. Executive Director of NCTE Kent Williamson reported that the pace of declining

membership throughout NCTE is slowing and that the organization enjoys fiscal health thanks to a good return on investments this past year. Kent thinks that membership will increase if we switch from What can TYCA do for you? to What can we make happen together with your help? All regions need to nominate programs for the Diana Hacker/Outstanding Program awards—so if you teach in a program doing marvelous work, please nominate your college. If you win, it could certainly mean travel funding to the CCCC as well as good will and recognition from your administration.

Harvard University experimental psychologist Steven Pinker (*The Better Angels of our Nature* and *The Language Instinct* among others) served as the college luncheon speaker; his next book will be *The Sense of Style* which he previewed in an amusing, erudite talk.

It was bracing to hear an academic discuss style in a way that was neither mired in jargon nor full of the vitriol of self-styled language mavens. All that and a visit to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum made the dreary Boston weather feel hospitable.



— **Alexis Nelson,**
Spokane Falls Community College



CONFERENCE NEWS

“Do It Yourself” was a terrific theme for the 2013 annual conference of TYCA-PNW & Pacific Northwest Writing Association. The presentation topics for “piecing it together, making, and tinkering” were invaluable for practitioners in higher education. As a first-time conference presenter, I have concluded that the two-day event itself could best be described as “Let’s Do It Together!” Seldom have I interacted with such a collegial, motivated, hard-working, and intelligent group of conferees.

The interactions began the first evening, with Knowledge Café Workshops. I participated in the TYCA discussion of “Emerging Technologies & Issues of Expertise: What does it look like? Who owns it? Are we prepared to change and share?” Here it was, a balmy night in Seattle, a city with boundless charm and attractions, yet instead of wandering off to enjoy the bright lights, there we all sat, in our Cornish College classroom: veteran instructors, new teachers, young, old, men and women—thoroughly engaged in the discussions, which ranged from profound to insightful to practical, to downright silly. It was then I remembered what I had been told about TYCA: “Oh, that’s the happy group.” I had not understood the description at the time, but I certainly did now. The discussants were happy to be there; to be interacting, sharing, and learning.



Joy Barber, Montana State University and Jeff Klausman, Whatcom Community College present “‘Framework for Success’ to Bridge Developmental Writing and First-year Composition”

Conference organizers ensured we were happy socially as well. Friday concluded with an evening social, featuring the Cornish Visual Arts Collection and music by Cornish Music Department students. In addition, discounted tickets were offered to various theater productions in the area.

While I, like many conference participants, enjoyed a late night out, the vast majority of us were awake and attentive for the early Saturday morning keynote address: “Why Do



Laura Read, Spokane Falls Community College and Connie Scott, Spokane Falls Community College present “Composition Teachers: DIY with Poetry”

Makerspaces Matter for the Humanities? For Writing Centers?” By Jentery Sayers of the University of Victoria. Then began the six presentation sessions, which ran from morning through early evening. All were well-attended. Audience members appeared fascinated with what their colleagues had to share: from the very philosophic to the very practical. When a session called for participation— audience members happily took center stage. In fact, once audience members got into the participation mode, they were a bit reluctant to disengage. The only way I got my audience to stop was to call out, somewhat inappropriately, “All right, stop learning right now!”

As the conference drew to a close, there was a flurry of email and phone number exchanges. I found the follow-up rate impressive. I have heard from nearly all the people with whom interaction promises had been made. Some have provided clarification and advice regarding their presentations. In one case, I have been granted full and free access to a project: a complete series of online citation tutorials (thanks Michael Follansbee, of Yakima Valley Community College).

It is clear that my first-time experience at the TYCA-PNWCA conference, with all its DIY ideas, has had a positive and lasting effect. It will come as no surprise that next year, I will happily be registering for the conference — and I suggest you “Do It Yourself,” too!

— **Janice M. High,**
Kenai Peninsula College, Alaska

PRACTICAL MATTERS: Teaching Audience

Often, as students prepare for their final research project in English 101, I'll assign a group project that includes some preliminary research that feeds into each student's final (more specific) research paper. Each group presents the preliminary research to the class. Presentations are on general topics and students team up according to overlapping themes. For example, a 101 class that has "risk taking" as the topic for the final research paper is divided into teams with regards to the general category their more specific topic will fit into, such as risk taking in sports, careers, or religious quests.

As teams form they are asked to prepare a proposal in which they define their general topic, say risk-taking careers, and declare their ideal audience. When choosing their ideal audience, students are asked, "If this presentation were to be an article in a journal or magazine, which publication would you like to see it in?" Then they are asked more specific questions concerning the audience's needs. "What information is this audience likely to have regarding the subject, meaning information that may only need a brief mention?" And, "What information will be new and interesting to this group, and what specific information might you want to include to make it appealing to this audience?"

This project has a couple of benefits from the perspective of working with audience. The first is that students benefit from ideas and insights of other members in their group. Another benefit is that, because the topic is still sufficiently general, students can begin to think of audience in a way that is familiar, by considering how periodicals target specific audiences.

Katherine McKenna
Spokane Community College



This year's TYCA Conference goes enjoy Friday evening performance by Music Department students

I enjoy using old advertisements or advertisements from a variety of countries for the same product to help students better grasp the idea of meeting the expectations of an intended audience. I use these ads in a variety of ways related to audience in my writing courses. Sometimes I have students focus on a product — like cigarettes — and look at ads for the same product over time, then explain how the ads changed as the expectations of their audiences changed. Sometimes I have them look at ads for the same product in different countries and then try to figure out why the ads do/do not change significantly based on the audience in their country of distribution. Other times I'll have them look at ads for male/female versions of the same product — such as razors, body wash, clothing — and talk about how the gender of the audience affects the way the advertisements are attempting to appeal to the audience. I especially like this approach because it can be easily modified to help students achieve different "depths" of understanding of intended audience.

Sarah Lushia,
Lane Community College

To teach audience, I ask students to pay attention to the actual and intended audience in each text they read, and to consider how authors appeal to these specific audiences through word choice, etc. Based on a workshop staged by Radford University's writing program, I've also begun to utilize the following writing activity, in which students have to write three separate, short notes for different audiences. For example, in one scenario, they are asked to imagine they've fallen asleep at the wheel and crashed their car. They have to write a note to a police officer explaining what happened, an email to a friend asking them to pick them up, and another note to a wealthy relative asking for money. Afterwards, we discuss how and why the notes differed (or were similar). How did they describe the accident? What level of formality did they choose to use? How did they begin and end each note?

Aryn Bartley
Lane Community College

Composition theorist Peter Elbow in his article "Closing my Eyes as I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience," says that thinking about audience can stifle beginning writers who already are battling low self-esteem and performance anxiety. Elbow says that even if student writers have a target audience in mind, it can make for better writing if they close their eyes and go deeper inside themselves, searching for exactly what it is they want to say. Even though written discourse is both internal and social, he feels writing is best improved by a writer engaging him or herself more. However, this is not an either/or situation, and sometimes writers need to ignore audience and sometimes carefully address one.

Sandy Johnson,
Lane Community College

Lisa Ede Teaching Excellence Award

Virginia Schwarz

Thank you, Lisa Ede and TYCA for your award. Lisa Ede, you are one of my scholar-heroes. TYCA, I feel incredibly lucky to be a reading and writing instructor at the community college level and at Portland Community College—this gratitude is present in my teaching every single day and during every single class session. I have met some amazing, dedicated, wonderful students, and they inspire me to keep improving my own skills. My primary career goal is to facilitate a system of higher education that is more accessible, more socially just, and more equipped to address the real experiences of those who have been oppressed and historically excluded from the benefits of the academy. I'm enrolling in a PhD program in Composition and Rhetoric in the fall and plan to continue teaching (and researching) basic skills and developmental education students at the two-year college. Your recognition is truly an honor.



*2013 Award Winner:
Virginia Schwarz,
Portland Community
College*

Erin Toungate

Thank you so much for the incredible honor! I am so pleased to be an instructor at Spokane Falls Community College and to work alongside a group of wonderful faculty, under an excellent dean, and with class after class of striving students. Thank you for your encouragement.



*2013 Award Winner:
Erin Toungate, Spokane Falls
Community College*



CALL FOR NOMINATIONS!

Lisa Ede Teaching Excellence Award

- Do you have a colleague you regularly consult when you're vexed?
- Does someone in your department bubble up with ideas and approaches to working with students?
- Do you know a teacher who works quietly behind the scenes to help students in subtle ways?
- Do you know an adjunct who's full of energy, ideas, and diligence—and whose paygrade doesn't measure up to his or her value?

If you answered yes to any of these, then please nominate that colleague for the Lisa Ede Teaching award. The \$500 award is lovely and the plaque is priceless.

Submission deadline: June 1, 2014

To submit nominations, please send an email to Dodie Forest at dforrest@yvcc.edu or ckdavis@kpc.alaska.edu. Include your name, college affiliation, and contact information along with the nominee's name, contact information, status (adjunct or full time), and a 250–500 word statement about why the nominee represents outstanding teaching and scholarship. Award criteria are noted on the PNW-TYCA webpage: <http://tyca-pnw.org/edeaward>



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TYCA-PNW Membership Form • 2013-14

- Enclosed is my check for US \$20 payable to TYCA-PNW for a one-year membership
- Enclosed is my check for US \$10 payable to TYCA-PNW for a one-year student membership
(students, part-time faculty, retired faculty)

(Membership includes discounted conference fees at TYCA-PNW's Annual Conference)

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Check one area you'd like to be active:

- Membership Newsletter
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Are you currently a member of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)?

- Yes No

Thank you for your membership.
Are there any comments you'd like to make?

Send to: Betsy Lawrence
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