

Chapter 6

Discussion

To summarize, the emergent themes that arose from the graduate student interviews included: (1) a general disagreement about the place of FYC in English Studies and whether or not knowledge creation or transmission exists in FYC; (2) a preference on the part of graduate instructors to use those conduits for knowledge transmission that allow for personal contact (either online or face-to-face) and / or that provide immediate access to the information and, finally; (3) the existence of personal and institutional barriers to knowledge transmission (those aspects of FYC that are perceived to discourage the sharing of information between instructors). The faculty members interviewed also wondered about the place of FYC in English Departments but were far more concerned about the need for adequate and appropriate mentoring of graduate instructors. Many of the views expressed by the graduate instructors regarding barriers to information transmission were seen by faculty members as representing an early stage of professional development or even an early adult stage of psychosocial development.

Certainly, the results of the study were quite different than what I expected at the outset. My intention was to explore those conduits that allow for the transmission and creation of tacit knowledge about grading in a large FYC program. Given that TOPIC and ICON allow for a systematic look at those aspects that instructors in any FYC program utilize to gain information, my expectation was that the interview subjects would discuss the actual process of knowledge transmission. It was somewhat surprising, then, that most of the interview subjects chose to discuss perceived barriers to knowledge transmission and that only three conduits for knowledge transmission (out of the many program features in TOPIC / ICON) received significant discussion. Strauss and Corbin (1990) note, however, that one of the strengths of a grounded theory approach is that it allows some rather surprising information to emerge as the approach allows subjects to express their own understanding of

events. Thus, our discussion focuses on the barriers identified by the research subjects. I want to consider, then, what a discussion of perceived barriers to knowledge transmission might tell us about the role of tacit knowledge in FYC and about tacit knowledge transmission in general. The results allow us, then, not only to look at tacit knowledge in FYC but, also allow us to use FYC as a “lens” through which we might explore various aspects of tacit knowledge itself. On the other hand, one thing I think important to explore is the notion that a discussion and exploration of the perceived barriers to tacit knowledge transmission might help to better define what we mean by tacit knowledge in the context of FYC.

At this point in the discussion, I think it is fair to offer two observations about the results. First, while it may be tempting to look to the hybrid delivery system TOPIC / ICON employed at Texas Tech as the source of or the reason for the perceived barriers to tacit knowledge transmission, it is important to consider that faculty and administrators in other programs and at other universities identified many of the same phenomena discussed by the present research subjects. Second (and I will return to this idea later in the discussion), perhaps there is a temporal aspect of tacit knowledge transmission. Perhaps, the present subjects were so involved in the rather messy business of creating and transmitting grading knowledge that they would not have been able to perceive that knowledge was being created or transmitted. Perhaps, it simply takes time.

Initially, it might be interesting to consider what the results of the study might tell us about tacit knowledge in general. I argue that, even with the interest in tacit knowledge expressed in the domain of organization behavior, most organizations have a paradoxical, if not a conflicted view of knowledge itself. Take, for example, the expressed view of information at Texas Tech University. First-Year Composition at Texas Tech (and, indeed, at any large university) involves a series of procedures based upon a few shared assumptions.

As Kikoski & Kikoski (2004) suggest, administrators in any field (even those in education who might take be attracted to post-modern or post-process approaches to writing pedagogy) still adhere to the “modern” organizational paradigm. Such a view presupposes a number of things:

(1) that learning should be constructed according to the structure of the scientific method; “hard” data is analyzed to explain the problems of an objective and immutable world;

(2) that language is held to be most effective when it is linear, when it “accurately” represents objects, persons, and events; thus, as a genre in such an organization, instructions and procedures are privileged;

(3) that there is a focus on the physical world; analyses will, thus, tend to be those of a quantitative type;

(4) that there is a focus on the individual; individuals are the “discoverers” of knowledge and the creators of successful enterprises;

(5) that expertise is privileged; there will be a hierarchy of those who know and those who do not;

(6) that administrators are problem-solvers; their goal is to restore homeostasis to an organization that is “out of balance;” and, finally,

(7) that there is one correct answer to a problem, however provisional that answer might be.

This set of assumptions seems at odds with current trends in writing pedagogy. There seems a genuine dissonance between the notions that “scientific” management (and I would argue here that this includes criterion-based assignments as a way to deal with the dynamic environment of FYC) and pedagogies that involve the social construction of knowledge (e.g., Kent 1999). If we accept that the needs of FYC students continue to

evolve as the make-up of freshman classes change, then we must assume that our pedagogical strategies must themselves evolve. These strategies can (and should) be socially constructed and, thus, there seems to be a role for tacit knowledge in this paradigm. Indeed, TOPIC and ICON at Texas Tech University contain so many features that make the transmission of information easy that, by not fully exploring the use of these features, we run the risk of missing new ways of doing things that might enhance the acquisition of sound and effective pedagogical practices and we risk leaving ourselves unable or at least slow to respond to the needs of our undergraduate writing students. With this apparent conflict between what we know about writing (that it is situated and socially constructed) and how we approach pedagogy (that it is explicit, incorrigible, and criterion-based), there is little wonder that much of the subject matter of the interviews dealt with confusion about knowledge, per se, and barriers to tacit knowledge transmission. I suggest that FYC programs such as the one at Texas Tech might do well to begin thinking of themselves as “knowledge organizations” and consider the role tacit knowledge plays in effectively teaching our undergraduates.

Given the discussion of barriers to tacit knowledge transmission, then, by both of the research samples represented in the study (graduate instructors and faculty), one might ask if, indeed, tacit knowledge “matters” in FYC or, alternately, if it does, whether writing program administrators can effectively harness it in any systematic manner. While I certainly believe that knowledge organizations ignore tacit knowledge at their own peril, it is certainly a question that some in academia might express little interest in. Part of the answer here concerns itself as much with how we define tacit knowledge in FYC as it does with who is creating and transmitting this knowledge. This might be a good place to discuss the latter concern and ask what we know about these graduate instructors. Indeed, adequately defining the concept of tacit knowledge in this or

any other context is the far more difficult task. Howells (1996) suggests that, because tacit knowledge is both a concern and a creation of dynamic environments, there is a “drift” that occurs in terms of how it is defined. In other words, there is more to tacit knowledge than the simple transfer of procedural information. Bundled together with this procedural or task information are concerns about technology, media, and institutional matters. Let’s briefly explore what we know about graduate instructors (those involved in the knowledge transfer) and save concerns about the definition of tacit knowledge in humanities departments for later in this chapter.

First, although there is some evidence to suggest that younger graduate instructors in the humanities are precisely the type of students who would enjoy teaching in hybrid environments such as TOPIC / ICON, Dede (1995) suggests that the picture is not so clear and is perhaps counterintuitive. Indeed, the introversion that we often associate with graduate students in their 20s might counteract with their extreme rigidity of outlook to produce a “suboptimal” outcome in such environments. Dede does suggest that the creation of a “virtual culture” in such environments is essential for encouraging effective performance, offers little in the way of any concrete suggestions. However, it may not be the nature of the technology itself that ensures success and satisfaction for graduate students. Wang and Newlin (2000) suggest that there may be other personality differences between graduate students who might be attracted to online education (as a student or worker) and those who would not. They suggest that those attracted to online education or online work exhibit a greater locus of control, a generalized belief regarding one’s personal efficacy. Such people are characterized as internally motivated, maintaining a belief that performance outcome is contingent on their own behaviors. Liu, Lavelle and Andris (2002) suggest that changes in locus of control can occur as a result of students’ participation in online learning. Yet, even they maintain that success

in online environments is determined to a great degree by fairly permanent personality characteristics.

Given some evidence, then, to support the contention that there are differences between those students attracted to online education and those who are comfortable with more traditional approaches, the question can be raised as to whether English departments who teach in particular ways (e.g., hybrid delivery systems, distance education) might be well-advised to recruit students sympathetic to or attracted to their preferred modes of instructional delivery. But, as Wang and Newlin (2000) note, we might shortchange the other expectations of the particular academic department (e.g., in research and scholarship) if recruitment is too heavily tied to one particular aspect of English department life, no matter how important that aspect might be. English departments do many different things and it is a difficult case to make that the teaching of FYC trumps everything else. Clearly, we run the risk of losing potential scholars in English studies if we privilege too heavily those aspects of any FYC program that are technologically-based or “innovative” in other ways. Consider, for example, Coppolla’s (1999) discussion of resistance to multiple reader portfolios.

Yet, there are researchers suggest that we can, indeed, create online environments conducive to satisfaction for graduate students in the humanities, particularly in settings where they must take courses or work online. For example, Picciano (2002) found that satisfaction and performance in online environments were correlated positively with perceptions of the quantity and quality of interaction. More than these variables, however, Picciano suggests that the creation of a “social presence” online for students in their 20s in order can help to achieve a high degree of satisfaction and superior performance. To that end, he suggests online chats and “internet cafes” where graduate students can meet “virtually” away from a course-or workspace to discuss aspects of

their work. He suggests these cafes be unmoderated as much as possible to achieve maximum results. Similarly, Rovai and Jordan (2004) suggest that hybrid environments (half face-to-face and half online) seem to create better outcomes than purely online environments. Yet, as FYC at Texas Tech employs a hybrid instructional delivery system and possesses features such as the chat box that arguably assist in the creation of online “presence,” we might ask why such a high degree of dissatisfaction was expressed by the subjects in the present study.

Some of the dissatisfaction expressed in the present study may have less to do with technological issues and more to do with how the personality variables these instructors manifest interact with the technology. There may be, as Basu and Weil (1998) suggest, a danger during periods of innovation of conflating knowledge transfer with technology transfer. Still, assuming that TOPIC / ICON represents a technology that improves certain aspects of instructor grading and allows workload challenges to be more easily met, there are still factors in the personality make-up of graduate students that warrant discussion. Friedman (2004) found that graduate students in the humanities typically exhibit many of the following traits: thinking introversion, response bias, altruism, autonomy, complexity, and theoretical orientation. While all are valuable traits for success in higher education, particularly for success as scholars and researchers, these traits might tend to inhibit success as an instructor for some graduate students. Indeed, Rushton (1982) found that those attributes that determined success as an instructor (liberal, sociable, showing leadership, extraverted, nonanxious, objective, supporting, non-authoritarian, non-defensive, intelligent, and aesthetically sensitive), were diametrically opposed to the traits often correlated with success as a researcher (independent and non-supportive). Paulsen and Wells (1998), similarly suggested that graduate students in the humanities, while less likely to hold “naïve” beliefs

about the certainty of knowledge, also showed some disdain for “applied” knowledge, believing that it is either trivial or facile. Thus, incongruence between one’s role as a student and one’s role as an instructor may account for some degree of the dissatisfaction and the barriers to knowledge transmission expressed in the present study.

A related explanation may be found in Holland’s Theory of Vocational Choice (1973). Briefly, Holland suggested quite simply that people are drawn to work environments that fit their personality types and outlooks. The central premise of the theory is that vocational and educational stability, satisfaction, and success are contingent on the congruence or “fit” between individuals’ personality types and their work or educational environments. Holland’s theory and the associated instruments used to assess the personality types of individuals and the nature of their work and educational environments have been widely used by researchers and counselors in their efforts to assist individuals select work and educational environments in which they have the greatest likelihood of persistence, satisfaction, and success. Holland’s research suggests that “bad fit” between a graduate student’s personality and their environment is perhaps (next to financial concerns) the biggest predictor of attrition in doctoral programs. Indeed, as Lindholm (2004) suggests, while those who are drawn to academic work typically learn about the work through a series of classroom experiences, what attracts them has little to do with the actual work of teaching. Those who pursue careers in higher education report that they do so because they are seeking to fulfill an inherent personal need for autonomy and independence, a talent for understanding particular concepts, issues or phenomena within their respective fields and an increasing, often externally-reinforced, sense that their talents would be well-suited to the culture and demands of academic work. Paradoxically, they learn about scholarship and research in the very classroom settings in which many have no particular

interest in working. Yet, as Huws (2005) suggests, disappointed expectations about what a job entails are a powerful source of employee dissatisfaction and resistance. In the case of TOPIC / ICON, because it looks so different from “traditional” models of instructional delivery, there may be an increased risk of having it become the source of these disappointed expectations. The very “fixedness” of the classroom and the instructor’s office become the things that new instructors associate with the job because these settings provided the initial experience they had with the field of higher education. Indeed, Huws suggests that putting work online that was either traditionally face-to-face or was performed using an older technology might actually increase a sense of precariousness that workers feel about their jobs. While TOPIC / ICON is certainly “liberating” in that it allows instructors to perform grading tasks at whatever hours seem convenient to them, it may be the very “asynchronicity” of the grading that creates an atmosphere in which traditional occupational boundaries are not fixed and, therefore, the entire enterprise appears threatening to novice instructors. Returning to Holland’s theory, then, for many novice instructors, TOPIC / ICON might look like a “bad fit” because it features few of the associations that new instructors expect.

Knowing the somewhat contradictory preferences and approaches (and their personality traits, perhaps) of those drawn to advanced study in the humanities, the question becomes one of how to create different job expectations for novice graduate instructors. The MA and PhD programs at Texas Tech University now feature a recruitment program that brings potential graduate students to campus during the month of April prior to their fall matriculation. A more extensive and realistic preview of grading and instructional responsibilities might serve to make the hybrid delivery system seem less foreign when new graduate instructors finally take on instructional duties in the fall semester. Faculty in the various sub-disciplines (creative writing, literature, technical communication) of

the department might participate in these previews to create the impression that this “strange” hybrid system is, indeed, a feature of graduate life at the university and an integrated part of the department. While such previews might dissuade some potential candidates from attending, perhaps those who agree to attend will do so with greater knowledge (and perhaps some facility in) the instructional delivery system.

The fact that TOPIC / ICON liberates new instructors from traditional grading concerns and allows them the autonomy to integrate grading into their personal schedules as they see fit may potentially create another set of problems for novice graduate instructors: isolation and incongruity. Golde (2005) studied a sample of graduate students in the humanities at Midwestern State University and, in a series of interviews with these students, identified six emergent themes that might lead to attrition in these programs. While perceptions about the strength of the job market and personality conflicts with one’s advisor were seen as important risk factors for attrition, incongruence between job expectations and the reality of being a graduate instructor was the risk factor most often identified. Students in the humanities were often surprised to discover two aspects of graduate student life. First, many are surprised to learn that knowledge is represented differently at the doctoral level than it is at the Bachelor’s or Master’s level. There is the expectation that doctoral students “create” knowledge while those at earlier levels acquire and transmit knowledge. For many students, this transition is something they are ill-prepared to do. Second, students are often quite surprised to learn that they are not simply entering a field of scholarly endeavor. They are actually training to enter a profession and, for some of Golde’s subjects, this created a powerful sense of incongruity. Not surprisingly, these factors are of less concern for graduate students in the “hard” sciences as the laboratory experiences they encounter as an undergraduate are in many key ways similar to those they will participate in

as graduate students. Similarly, the laboratory seems to be a far more intimate setting offering more mentoring opportunities.

The experience of structural isolation seems to also be a factor that leads to some degree of dissatisfaction for the current subjects. Gillingham, et al (1991) suggest that isolation is a powerful determinant of both satisfaction and attrition for graduate students in a variety of domains. The subjects in the present study suggested that they saw little in common between themselves and their peers, even between themselves and those peers in a different sub-discipline of English studies. Additionally, these subjects perceived themselves as competing individually with their peers for scholarships and fellowships. Knowing that graduate students in the humanities are often motivated by the opportunity to engage in individual study, the findings of Gillingham and her associates might seem somewhat counterintuitive. If individual scholarship is what motivates graduate students in the humanities, one might think that structural or social isolation would play little role in attrition. Yet, because graduate students must adapt to life as students and as workers (often with different demands and expectations for these roles), social and structural isolation seems a factor that cannot be ignored. Here, it seems warranted to discuss these two different but related sources of isolation in greater detail, particularly in terms of how they were manifest and reinforced by the FYC program at Texas Tech.

Social isolation here refers to the perception that graduate instructors have of themselves as being: (1) part of a rigid hierarchy in which they perceive themselves in a management-labor relationship, and (2) atomistic elements in a larger context. In the first case, Carter (2005) has argued eloquently for a change in how graduate student “labor” is represented. Yet, the expectation of graduate students entering into a mentoring relationship in graduate study provides a powerful and (I would argue) relatively intractable perception. Allen, et al (1997) suggest that the opportunities inherent in particular career fields

(higher education, for one) for mentoring provide a powerful attraction for people with particular personality characteristics. In other words, those who expect to be mentored will gravitate toward those fields that present themselves as featuring mentoring relationships. In the case of FYC at Texas Tech, it seems that, because graduate instructors perceive the program as a rigid hierarchy (with “incorrigible” directives and procedures), there is a high degree of disappointment. Again, this finding is quite paradoxical as graduate instructors seem to simultaneously welcome rather well-defined procedures even as they complain about the lack of mentoring relationships in the FYC program. Daugherty and Funke (1998) showed that new instructors in an online delivery system (distance learning) decried the perceived lack of support they received from more experienced instructors. Further, they worried that online instructional delivery might also lead to isolation (rather than dialogue) on the part of their students, concerns that are remarkably similar to those expressed by the subjects in the present study. Autonomy, well-defined procedures, and personal support are all things that the novice instructors in the present study wanted and none need exclude the others.

Mentoring was identified as a primary concern, in terms of scholarship and teaching. Of course, teaching and research are two separate domains for graduate students, each with a separate set of expectations. Yet, there seems to be a rather marked tendency for the subjects in the present study to conflate the two. Additionally, the very features that might make grading on TOPIC / ICON more attractive than more “traditional” single-grader or even multiple grader portfolio methods might be those things that lead to a sense of isolation between instructors. New instructors (and certainly those in the present study) bemoaned what they perceived as a lack of guidance from administrators and more experienced cohorts. And, although TOPIC / ICON provide features such as the “chat box” that allow instructors and administrators to consult with each other,

it was again quite possible that new instructors require more of a “high touch” approach. Now, it may be important here to define what we mean by mentoring. Monaghan and Lunt (1992) define mentoring, thusly:

- (1) It exists in a work or an organizational context,
- (2) It is a relationship between two adults,
- (3) It contains elements of “power dependency” (i.e., one participant in the relationship has greater knowledge and possesses more institutional power), and;
- (4) It is concerned with on-the-job practice.

Levinson, et al (1978), however, argue that, while mentoring is a phenomenon of the workplace, it is not solely concerned with practice. They suggest that mentoring must be viewed as arising from a need for transition in that particular work context. Novices must be encouraged to make the transition to positions that feature greater responsibility. Thus, mentoring is a formal process with the acquisition of knowledge represented as a series of well-defined steps.

I suggest that, although the FYC program at Texas Tech provides much information related to grading and instructional tasks, the lack of what they perceived as a mentoring relationship was one felt keenly by many of the subjects in the present study. This sense of isolation seemed to create a good deal of confusion about such things as whether knowledge can actually be created in FYC. Despite the popularity of approaches such as LeFevre’s (1987), instructors express that they remain uncertain about the possibilities of social construction in FYC because of the isolation that was seen as a by-product of working in TOPIC / ICON. This was especially unfortunate as the system had much to offer as far as knowledge creation in FYC was concerned. This sense of isolation in conjunction with the personality traits of novice graduate

instructors ran the risk of leaving TOPIC / ICON untapped as far as its capabilities are concerned. More of a concern, however, was that, without something that approximated mentoring, potentially skilled graduate instructors may not have had the opportunity to teach FYC to the best of their abilities and to create new knowledge and understanding in the field.

But, mentoring is a time-consuming and often tedious process. University English departments are dynamic venues. Not only are these the places where the instructional challenges of FYC are encountered, but faculty and students face other challenges related to the several roles both must play. Faculty members teach other graduate and undergraduate courses and engage in research and scholarship (and often administrative) endeavors. Graduate students teach, take courses of their own, and engage in independent scholarship. There are expectations of departmental service for both. This is a reason that, in many fields such as nursing, there are “contract mentors,” (Monaghan and Lunt, 1992). These are mentors who, in recognition of the time-consuming nature of mentoring, receive work release considerations for their mentoring duties. Such “contracts” may be well-nigh impossible at English departments at large state universities. Still, by not mentoring novice instructors, we run the risk of short-changing them and the undergraduates we ask them to instruct.

A possible solution to the problem comes out of the work of Lave (1988) and Lave and Wenger (1991). While recognizing the power inherent in the mentoring relationship, Lave herself views the representation of knowledge in such a traditional relationship as incorrigible. As stated previously, “incorrigibility” has no pejorative connotation in this context but instead refers to knowledge that is immutable and acontextual. We think, for example of an equation such as $2+2=4$ as incorrigible. We believe that, in every instance, the understanding represented by the equation is shared because it represents something “proven.” Lave, however, complicates this understanding of

mathematics but that is beyond the scope of this study. In this vein, mentors transmit “incorrigible” or “correct” ways of performing tasks, they teach the rules of the game. While an apprentice-mentor relationship ensures that an apprentice will in many cases acquire those tacit components of a particular job that are associated with mastery in that occupation, Lave and Wenger believe that such a relationship features inherent limits in how it represents knowledge. Because the relationship is dyadic, there are few opportunities for knowledge creation, the sort of creation that takes place in larger and more dialogic groups. And yet, novices cannot engage in dialogue as if they were peers simply because they do not possess the requisite knowledge.

Lave and Wenger suggest an approach they term “legitimate peripheral participation.” Such an approach combines the intimacy of mentoring (and its opportunities for tacit knowledge transmission) with the rigor of formal employee training. Here, novices enter the work group and are given a series of specified expectations for performance as novices. There are a series of progressions they must go through in order to reach “mastery.” At each step they are instructed by and engage in dialogue with those who have mastered the novice expectations and with those who have greater experience in the occupation. Thus, after a novice is no longer a novice, he or she is expected to “mentor” those novices who enter after they do. At each progressive step, a worker will act as both trainer and student and, as that worker progresses toward mastery, he or she is expected to share their insights regarding what has been learned. In that way, Lave and Wenger suggest that the ongoing dialogue is where knowledge creation occurs.

This approach is seen in a variety of settings and provides powerful results in terms of goal attainment and knowledge creation. For example, Lave and Wenger studied Ghanaian tailoring guilds and found that the process leads to progressive improvements in the way clothing and blankets are created. They

argue that such a process is at work in self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous where novices work with sponsors and in the group and are themselves expected to sponsor other novices after one year's sobriety. Again, members engage in structured and (somewhat) public dialogue about their insights with the goal of helping other recovering alcoholics to achieve successive milestones in their sobriety.

Would such an approach work in FYC? Wenger (2003) suggests that dynamic environments with rapid (and expected) turnover are those that seem to benefit from the approach as they can maximize tacit knowledge transmission and creation. Knowing what we know about novice graduate instructors, an approach that promotes autonomy while offering a degree of peer mentorship might lead to a higher degree of willingness on the part of novices (and more experienced instructors) to create and share grading and other instructional knowledge. Indeed, FYC at Texas Tech, the 2006-7 academic year brought in many of the features of legitimate peripheral participation with non-tenure track instructors leading training sessions and more experienced graduate students leading online and face-to-face discussions. While it is far too soon to make any assessment of the quality of the work produced, grading backlogs are fewer and instructors are participating in the modification of assignments and grading criteria. These features of legitimate peripheral participation are those that Senge et al (1999) suggests turn workers into transmitters and creators of innovation and that lead to a greater willingness on the part of workers to share insights and innovations as they create a sense of “ownership” in the outcomes of the work process.

Perhaps, this is what is required to encourage the transmission of tacit knowledge in a dynamic environment such as FYC at Texas Tech and, indeed, in many large FYC programs. The second question alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, however, still remains unanswered. Namely, how do we define tacit

knowledge in FYC? If it is simply a series of procedures for delivering instruction, then perhaps these approaches are sufficient. Rushton (1982) and Friedman (2004) point out that, given the role conflicts experienced by graduate students (student and instructor), an approach that privileges one role over the other runs the risk of encouraging a higher degree of attrition. Indeed, Golde (2005) reports that nationally 40% of doctoral candidates in the humanities fail to complete their programs. Perhaps, if we concentrate on the transmission of instructional procedures alone, we are still at risk for high rates of attrition. Here, we might do well to explore what we mean by tacit knowledge in FYC and, indeed, in other organizational and institutional contexts. In other words, we must consider if tacit knowledge, per se, involves only procedural and “task-specific” knowledge or whether it contains a more global sense of “practice.”

Searle (1969) suggests that knowledge can be understood by considering two different sorts of “facts,” one that he terms “brute” facts and, the other, institutional. An example of a “brute fact” might be something along the lines of “I weigh 175 pounds.” An institutional fact might include a statement such as “Representative Smith was convicted of obstruction of justice.” The latter depends upon an understanding of the rules of an institution, of certain constitutive rules. To describe Representative Smith’s legal troubles as a series of brute facts gives rise to a picture of irregularities. To understand the workings of our legal system, however, along with the values that underlie that system is to enhance our understanding of what Smith actually did and the consequences of his action. Now, a problem with Searle’s analogy here is that our legal system is comprised of a series of rather explicit rules. Additionally, his model presupposes a degree of intentionality. When Smith took the oath of office, he stated that he intended to abide by the explicit rules of the legal system. Obstruction of justice is a charge levied against Smith that can be understood as a violation of a matrix of rather transparent rules. What Searle fails to account

for in this dichotomy between brute and institutional facts is the unmistakable notion that institutional facts are often tacit. For example, Searle's model fails to account for how we understand a "fact" such as "Representative Martinez was named to no committees because she lacks the necessary collegiality." We cannot explain Martinez' failure to be named to a committee by referring to brute facts and, yet, "collegiality" cannot be explained by explicit institutional rules. So, while Searle's model does suggest Lave's distinction between incorrigible facts and social practice, it cannot entirely account for all the complexity inherent in the subject matter of the present study, that of graduate instructors acquiring, transmitting, and creating grading knowledge in the context of a dynamic FYC program. There are rules and procedures, certainly, and there are features of the program that graduate instructors must learn but there is so much more.

One of the concepts that may be lacking in an understanding of knowledge creation and transmission in an organizational setting is that of the "everyday." Roberts (2006) defines the "everyday" as a space that is both "daily" and contingent, hegemonic and dynamic. It includes the non-explicit assumptions and practices of the organization or institution but does not dismiss the agency of the members of the organization. It is at once an adherence, conscious or unconscious, to the practices of the organization as well as an understanding that practice in the organization is evolutionary and organic. Roberts suggests that the everyday provides an organizing principle; it is in the context of these practices and assumptions that practice itself evolves. But, it is the notion of exactly how we come to share the everyday that is lacking here and this notion can only provide us with a partial understanding of what must comprise the knowledge, tacit or otherwise, that we ask instructors to create, transmit, and acquire.

Perhaps some of the difficulty inherent in defining tacit knowledge in the case of our graduate instructors in the present study arises from a need to assess the

work of humanities departments in universities. Billett (2006) suggests that work such as that performed by university faculty can be best understood in relational terms. That is, there is an ongoing relationship between individual and social agency and suggestions. It is in this relationship that a constant negotiation between the social suggestion and individual intent takes place. As the faculty member seeks a balance in the negotiation, organizational knowledge is created. We can understand successful innovation in this way. Those innovations that employees appropriate in a particular work setting would seem to be those that arise from a consideration of the social suggestions and needs of the organization. Innovation without such a consideration is based solely on individual agency and is often destined for failure. For Billett, this is particularly true in educational settings in which the work is truly what he terms “relational.” By relational in this context, he refers not solely to the fact that relationships are created between participants (students, fellow faculty, etc.) but that the work itself stems from a relationship between individual and social agency.

Perhaps, it is time to reconsider the work of the university and of English departments. I argue that the dynamic environment in which universities find themselves is paving the way to a sort of paradigm shift. Those departments in which graduate instructors perform the bulk of freshman instruction must begin to conceive of themselves as “knowledge organizations.” Enrollments will not decline and graduate instructors will continue to be transient. These departments must find ways to capture pedagogical information as it is created and transmitted. It is these departments that might well benefit from becoming “communities of practice” (Lave, 1988). But, understanding the need for such a transformation is problematic unless we can unpack the rather troublesome notion of “practice.”

Lately, there has been much scholarship on the notion of practice, which unfortunately, at times, tends to conflate “practice” with “tacit knowledge” and “social organization.” At times, these terms are often used synonymously.

Nicolini, et al (2003) suggest, however, that, from a phenomenological point-of-view, such conflation is understandable. Using Wittgenstein's concept of *dasein* or "being-in-the-world" as a starting point, they assert that language (both explicit propositions and speech acts) is as much a part of practice as any other type of action within a given practice. In the case of carpentry, the propositional knowledge of how to make a table, while different from the practical or tacit knowledge of "making a chair," coexists with the tacit knowledge and is similarly socially constructed within the domain or the practice of carpentry. Additionally, these two sorts of knowledge are as much a part of the practice of carpentry as is the procedural knowledge of when to use a hammer and when to use a saw. And, yet, as Turner (1994) suggests, practice is often difficult to see and elusive to define because it is composed of these dynamic elements. Thus, according to Turner, an assessment of the social and individual aspects of practice is often hard to assess.

Indeed, both "practice" and "tacit knowledge" seem to have an embedded character that even the most sophisticated scholarship in tacit knowledge and organizational behavior tends to overlook. This difficulty can be viewed as analogous to the problem we experience when we attempt to understand an object apart from the language we use to describe it. The thing described is so closely bound to the things that explain that we may begin to doubt that we have an explanation at all. In a related sense, and similarly, tacit knowledge and practice are themselves intertwined with each other and with the things we use to describe them. Gomez, et al (2003) describe knowing and practice as arising from day-to-day experiences, both individual and social. To separate practice from experience and from the context in which it occurs is every bit as impossible as attempting to separate knowledge from practice.

Of course, this view of embodied knowledge (and embodied practice is not universally shared. Turner (2002) argues that social constructionist approach

and the related concept of embodied knowledge are themselves arguments based too heavily on analogy as the source of their epistemology. He suggests as well that attempts to define these concepts are conflated with the notion of habitus which itself resists the attempt to provide a purely social and contextual explanation to practice. For Turner, practice has far less to do with shared experience than it does with the idiosyncratic habits of individuals. To wit, there is too little emphasis on the cognitive dimensions of practice and this lack is inherently problematic. Still, theorists such as Bell (2005), while allowing for the problems in drawing the line between individual and shared experience, point to the successes that organizations experience when they adopt an embodied view of knowledge and of practice.

It stands to reason, then, that tacit knowledge in a humanities department might also have an embodied character and might itself be inseparable from practice in these departments. Tacit knowledge, whether understood from an individual or departmental standpoint, would seem to include the practices of those who work in English and other humanities departments. The management of tacit knowledge must include what we can call “professional development,” the expectations that go along with working in higher education. The English department at Texas Tech has instituted a formal program in professional development that is mandatory for all new graduate students and I argue that this is a step in the right direction. This program features participation by faculty in all the sub-disciplines and features small group discussions. The program might be a place that instructional duties could be discussed in a manner that approximates some of these proposed features of legitimate peripheral participation that FYC has already implemented. Juggling the responsibilities associated with these conflicting roles (scholarship and pedagogy, graduate student and instructor) means success as a graduate student and as a future faculty member. Perhaps, tacit knowledge in this context needs

to include not simply how to perform the instructional duties expected by the organization but also how to be a member of the institution. English departments exist in the context of “the academy.” Faculty members share a set of values and attempt to meet the challenge of a set of expectations. Perhaps, it is this highly contextual and embodied knowledge that we should seek to transmit to novices in English departments.

Indeed, much of the literature in tacit knowledge transfer and creation seems to give the impression that the implementation of such programs and the development of certain conduits is an easy “fix” for a dynamic institution. Such strategies fail to address just how contextually-bound tacit instructional knowledge really is. And, there is another rather naïve assessment that much of the empirical and theoretical scholarship in tacit knowledge seems to make. Baumard (1999) and Bordum (2000), among others, are enthusiastic in their assessment of tacit knowledge conduits. The experience at Texas Tech, however, suggests that the transmission of tacit knowledge is an all-too-human endeavor, one that features a degree of conflict. Future scholarship might do well to address what might be a necessary degree of such conflict in tacit knowledge transmission. Additionally, future research might address the temporal aspects of tacit knowledge transmission. Studies such as those performed by Collis & Winnips (2002) seem to suggest the potential for long-term value for any organization that seeks to undertake projects involving the management of tacit knowledge. Indeed, their suggestions regarding the creation of “best practices” archives argue for the view of knowledge management as something that should be a part of any organizational strategic plan. Yet, there is very little empirical research that follows these knowledge strategies over time. Future research for any organization should explore the effects of long-range knowledge management strategies. For FYC as well, we must consider knowledge creation and management as a long-range process in much the same way that certain

industries consider these tasks. It may be too soon to offer an assessment just as we may become focused on the inherent difficulties in the process and fail to see areas in which progress is attained. First-Year Composition programs might do well to take the “long view” and study the transmission of instructional knowledge over time. We know that harnessing tacit knowledge makes a difference in other organizations. We must take a measured and long-term approach to evaluate its potential in First-Year Writing.

Finally, let us consider the possible significance of exploring tacit knowledge in FYC for Writing Program Administrators. With enrollment trends continuing to increase and reliance on technological solutions (such as TOPIC / ICON) to meet these challenges, the study of knowledge management in FYC programs, whether it involves the creation of archives, the exploration of new media or simply the use of the most effective face-to-face practices for knowledge transmission, might well be a fertile area for scholarship and a means of allowing FYC programs to meet the challenges in such a dynamic educational environment. Baumard (1999) and Bordum (2000) suggest that we ignore the potential of tacit knowledge at our own peril. Perhaps, it is time to explore and exploit its value in higher education, in general, and FYC, in particular.

So, the development of communities of practice composed of graduate instructors and full-time faculty members in FYC programs would offer some promise in ensuring the transmission of tacit knowledge. Further, encouraging face-to-face contact, as much as is possible in a particular FYC program might also lead to greater satisfaction for new instructors. Creating an environment in which the day-to-day practices of an FYC faculty can be transmitted and developed through widespread practice might also help to ensure that novice (and, indeed, all) instructors can commit to necessary innovations. For those FYC programs that rely on graduate student labor, seeking to incorporate graduate students into the “composition faculty” in terms of decision-making might allow

the graduate students the opportunity to see themselves as members of a team and transmitters of knowledge. The good news at Texas Tech was that many of these things were instituted after 2006 and the innovative practices described in this book have become part of the teaching of English at that university.

