

2020

Classroom place: New Materialism as a way to view, discuss, and use the composition classroom

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**Classroom place: New Materialism as a way to view, discuss, and use the composition
classroom**

by

Michael Ponders

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2020

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ABSTRACT

Composition studies texts discuss the classroom as a physical and metaphorical space and place. However, they lack consistent language which creates incoherent communication and implementation of the affects classrooms, as a place, have. Similarly, composition teaching texts have a disconnect from composition studies texts in that the teaching texts discuss, in less detail, the classroom as a place. In this project, I argue New Materialism provides a critical lens to view, discuss, and utilize the classroom as a place. Students and teachers create a sense of place in a classroom, and, this sense of place results in the classroom affecting the people within it. Therefore, creating a common way to view, discuss, and communicate the classroom as a place is beneficial to both composition theory and practice. In this project, I first explain what New Materialism is and how I use it as a critical lens for analysis. Then, I examine composition studies texts to find patterns and commonalities for how the classroom as a space and place are discussed. After examining composition studies texts, I transition to an examination of composition teaching texts. Here is where I noticed a distinct gap between the studies and teaching texts. While the composition studies texts inconsistently discuss the classroom as place, that concept is not communicated to new composition instructors through teaching texts. I argue, first, that New Materialism is a beneficial critical lens through which to view a classroom. Second, I argue that while composition studies texts discuss the classroom environment, the texts lack consistency and coherence. Third, I argue that composition teaching texts have a gap in their instruction; specifically, they do not, in enough depth or coherence, discuss the classroom as a place. Lastly, I argue that concepts, space and place, from geography and echoed in New Materialism, provide a common language with which to view, discuss, and communicate how the classroom functions as a place.

CHAPTER 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I went to a high school that did not have a lot of money; the building was run down, the books were old, and the classrooms, in some parts of the school, had an odd smell like the bleach was just barely doing its job. Junior year, I signed up for AP Literature. I remember looking at my class schedule and a double-digit room number. In my previous two years, I only ever had rooms in the 100s or 200s, never double-digit. Then it hit me, my AP Literature class was being held in the basement. The main levels of my school were old and dingy; so, when I saw my class schedule, my mind imagined a dungeon-like basement where I would have to go every other day for English class. My mind was right.

The basement was dimly lit, very small, seemed like no one ever went down there, and, of course, had that same bleach smell from the main floors, only intensified. Our classroom, if you want to call it that, was the size of a bedroom- roughly 12 feet by 12 feet. We would later come to find out that the “classroom,” was an old custodial closet. Our room had 15 chairs bolted to desks, but, only around 12 fit comfortably in the tight space. The lighting in the room was centered, but the edges of the room were dim, like that part of the room was forever in twilight. There was a small chalkboard on one wall of the room, but it was not a chalkboard that covered the whole wall, only about half. Somehow, the chalkboard simultaneously looked worn and new. I suspect now that the board was found in storage and hung up in this old custodial closet for this class. Lastly, the teacher’s desk was oddly normal; it was a large metal desk with drawers below and enough space on top for books, papers, laptops, and anything else needed for teaching. The entire room was a diorama version of a normal classroom, but the teacher desk was the same size as normal.

Walking down the stairs to get to the basement and seeing the door to the room, before I ever looked inside, the classroom had an effect on me. I immediately felt that this class was going to be uncomfortable. When I walked to the doorway and saw the miniaturized room with creepy lighting, my suspicion that the class would be uncomfortable was only amplified. The classroom, before a single instructional word was spoken, communicated to me that I would feel uncomfortable, that our class was not worthy of an upstairs or normal-sized room, and that I did not want to learn here. The classroom had agency.

My teacher must have realized what us students were feeling and how the classroom affected us because what he did over the next few classes set the stage for his incredible class. We only had 10 students in AP Literature, so Mr. S, my teacher, immediately moved five desks into the hallway to give students room to breathe. Next, he propped the door open so the light from the hallway could illuminate our room better. Also, Mr. S. encouraged us to work in the hallway, on the floor, anywhere we wanted to go so we could be productive. In my high school, with armed security guards patrolling the halls, being in the hallway during class would normally get students in trouble. But, no one came down to our dungeon room, so at the recommendation of Mr. S., we claimed the basement as our own. Later in the week, he rearranged the seats so we were in a semicircle, or U-shape, facing what used to be the back wall. Because the walls were white cinder blocks, he was able to project documents onto them rather than using the dingy chalkboard. Lastly, Mr. S. did something I had never experienced before in a class—he made his desk available for students. Because this basement room was not his “home classroom,” like the students, he carried what he needed for the day into the room. His materials, a laptop, book, or notes only occupied a third of the large teacher desk. So, the remaining space was available for

the students. We used it like a round table for small group discussion. We used it to make posters for assignments. And, sometimes, we used it to just sit and listen to lectures.

I remember walking down stairs in my school and the classroom communicated to me that AP Literature and I were afterthoughts. Also, I felt uncomfortable and unmotivated to learn. In less than two weeks, Mr. S. customized, rearranged, and structured our classroom to create a place that communicated to me, and my fellow students, that we mattered, that we had authority, that we had freedom, and that learning was worthwhile.

The classroom, before Mr. S restructured it, was a place that affected me in an immediate and negative way. It created a sense of place that affected my attitude, feelings, and, if it went unchecked, eventually it would have affected my learning. However, because Mr. S customized the classroom, it became a place that affected me in positive ways. My AP Literature classroom created a sense of place in that made me excited for class, feel comfortable with my classmates and teacher, and improved my capacity to learn. The classroom is a powerful place; it is up to teachers to harness and use that power.

Exigence

Place, specifically, one's sense of place is a powerful factor in determining a person's behaviors, emotions, and mindset. In terms of composition pedagogy, a student's sense of place of a classroom impacts their behaviors, emotions, and ability to learn and write. Therefore, understanding place, specifically sense of place, as a rhetorical and pedagogical concept can benefit composition instruction. Composition studies scholarship and resources created for new teachers discuss how place can affect learning; however, there is a gap in the consistency of the language and communication used in this theory. Additionally, there is a larger gap between the composition studies texts and teaching texts. While composition studies texts discuss the classroom as a space and place, the instruction text—the texts designed to prepare new

composition teachers—lacks sufficient detail in communicating how the classroom is a place, the sense of place for students, and how the student’s sense of place affects learning. In this project, I explore how composition studies text analyze and discuss the classroom as a space and place in order to find commonalities and patterns across composition studies texts. Then I analyze how composition teaching texts discuss the same concept. Finally, I argue that using New Materialism as a critical lens to view, discuss, and use space, place, and sense of place to provide a common language, derived from geography, for compositionists and can bridge the gap between studies and teaching texts. Ultimately, I contend that New Materialism can fill the gap for how compositionists discuss the concept of place and offers an opportunity for composition instructors to implement the theory of place and sense of place in instruction.

I will first discuss the critical lens of New Materialism. Then, I progress into how, according to geography theory, a space can transition into a place. Finally, I explain how New Materialism describes sense of place. Once place and sense of place are explained, I focus my next chapter on analyzing how composition studies texts discuss place and sense of place, concluding with a description of the patterns I find. Next, I transition into composition teaching texts to analyze how they discuss place and sense of place; again, I conclude with patterns I find. My final chapter offers a creative suggestion for what a chapter discussing place and sense of place in a composition teaching text may look like. I conclude my thesis with limitations of my study and a call for future research. Place, specifically sense of place for a student, is a powerful agent in a composition class, including it in composition teaching texts can benefit future instructors.

New Materialism

Connected to cultural theory, New Materialism is a broad critical lens that encompasses many concepts—rhetorical ontology, assemblages, space, place, and sense of place—which will

be discussed throughout this project. The primary way rhetoricians use New Materialism is through rhetorical ontology. Ontology, stemming from several disciplines such as geography, archaeology, psychology, and other social sciences, is the study of being; however, rhetorical ontology narrows and “highlights how various material elements—human and nonhuman alike—interact suasively and agentially in rhetorical situations and ecologies” (Barnett and Boyle, 2016). In essence, rhetorical ontology studies how humans and nonhumans interact cyclically and both with agency. “The interdisciplinary reassessment of things recognizes that we do not simply point *at* things but act *alongside* and *with* them” (Barnett and Boyle, 2016). New Materialists, using rhetorical ontology, see “things” as something not only to analyze but also to work with. Because, in New Materialism, things have “being,” they then have the agency to work alongside or impact the person doing the analysis. Rather than viewing agency as something that *enacts* change, view agency as something that *causes* change. As Barnett and Boyle state “Things provoke thought, incite feeling, circulate affects, and arouse a sense of wonder” (Barnette and Boyle, 2016). New Materialism explores how things cause change, not how they consciously enact change.

New Materialism is the critical lens that encompasses rhetorical ontology; however, it also includes more abstract nonhuman things, such as space and place. The distinction between space and place did not originate with New Materialism; rather, the concepts of and distinction between space and place are largely accredited to Tuan, a human geographer, and Relph, a geographer. Both men saw and studied a difference in space and place. Tuan explained place as an area with meaning and space as an area without (Tuan, 1978). Relph examined how a person feels within a certain place and how that can impact meaning (Cloke et al, 1994). Although working independently, Tuan and Relph studied the difference between space and place. The

language from geography about space and place is echoed in New Materialism. The overlap between rhetorical ontology, geography, and human geography's language suggests how a New Materialist views the world: humans and nonhumans affecting one another in meaningful ways.

New Materialism is not always so linear—one thing affecting another. Nonlinear affects, or causes by nonhuman “things,” is called assemblage thinking. Assemblage thinking, stemming from New Materialism, is the act of nonhuman “things” and humans working cyclically. Nicotra, professor of rhetoric and composition, argues that thinking of rhetoric in terms of assemblages improves rhetorical studies. Nicotra contends “[u]nderstanding a thing that takes place as being caught up in assemblages—rather than as a product of linear cause and effect—points the way toward providing a richer framework for rhetorical action” (Nicotra, 2016). To better understand New Materialism, imagine walking down the street. On one side, the street has a light and the other side does not. This may cause someone to cross the street for better lighting. The street light illuminating one side of the street better than the other (cause), influenced the person walking (effect). One cause impacting one effect represents a linear way of thinking about rhetorical ontology in New Materialism. However, thinking in terms of assemblages, similar to a web, complicates the implications.

The construction of the street light may have been influenced by underground plumbing on one side of the street rendering that side unsafe to build. Therefore, the underground plumbing influenced the construction workers to build street lights on one side of the street; this later influenced a walker to decide which side of the street to walk down. Now, walking down the side of the street with lights, this person feels safer. After walking down that street several times, the person develops a habit—they walk down this particular side of the street, regardless of day or night. Habitually walking down the same side of the street every day, this person sees

and interacts with people on this side of the street. If they walked on the other side, they would see and interact with different people. These interactions become more common and relationships begin to form.

The underground plumbing on one side of the street caused construction workers to build streetlights on the other side. The streetlights only being on one side of the street influenced a person to walk on the illuminated side to feel safer. This feeling of safety evolved into a habit where the person continued to walk down the same side of the street even during daylight when the streetlights were off. Walking on the same side of the street created opportunities for this person to see and interact with people along their walk. These interactions eventually can turn into relationships. In assemblage thinking, the underground plumbing, nonhuman and unseen to pedestrians, influenced feelings (safety), behavior (walking on the other side of the street), habits, interactions, and relationships. Assemblage thinking argues that nonhuman things affect humans in complex webs.

Assemblage thinking challenges us to expand impacts of a singular cause. Imagine the same cause: underground plumbing on one side of the street resulted in that side of the street being unable to have streetlights. The lack of streetlights on that side of the street makes that side very dark at night. Imagine someone who works late and rides their bike to and from work. While taking this street home from work is the quickest way, the biker feels they are too difficult to see because of the lack of lighting on the street. Some people would take a different route home from work, resulting in a longer commute and different. Additionally, other people might insist on taking the quickest route home but decide to buy reflective clothing to make them more visible as they ride home on the dark side of the street. Even still, some bikers, although legally

required to ride on the right side of the street like a vehicle, might choose to bend the law and ride on the left side where the street lights make them visible to cars.

New Materialism, in terms of assemblages, recognizes that both nonhuman “things” and humans interact together, influence each other, and are connected in a variety of ways, much like a web. As Nicotra illustrates, the central concept to focus on in New Materialism is this: humans are affected by nonhumans. Nicotra contends that habits, thoughts, and actions can all be changed because of nonhuman things and experiences. In short, with a New Materialistic view, everything, human and nonhuman, is connected, influential, and impactful to everything else.

The critical lens of New Materialism includes behaviors as well. As discussed by Alexis, a professor and writing center director, where and with what writing occurs affects writers. She states, “in some ways, possessions physically extend the self- by using a certain instrument, we are capable of performing an otherwise impossible action” (Alexis, 2016). Alexis contends the habits and habitats of writers impact their writing and tell a story of who they are as writers. Alexis’ core argument is that writing places impact writing behavior. Alexis concludes by saying “when a writer picks up a particular object, this is in part a matter of aesthetic-sensory preference; it is also a response to sociocultural scripting of idealized notions of what it means to write” (Alexis, 2016). Experiences, writing habits, and writing habitats impact writing and writing behavior; Alexis is arguing that nonhuman things have impact and agency, specifically affecting human behavior.

Impact and agency from nonhuman things are not beholden to an individual; they too can impact people. New Materialism, as argued by Fleckenstein, a writing and rhetoric pedagogy professor, is rhetorically powerful. Said by Fleckenstein, “a material orientation invites a consideration of the rhetorical role enacted by artifacts, especially their rhetorical agency,

defined as the ability to act and shape attitudes in the world” (Fleckenstein, 2016). Through her research on how the stereoscope impacted vacation patterns of 19th century Americans, Fleckenstein’s central argument is that people were directly affected by stereoscope illustrations and the rhetorical power of New Materialism. People’s vacation decisions and behavior were impacted because of a nonhuman image. The nonhuman images persuaded mass amounts of people and affected their lives. The nonhuman images acted rhetorically, specifically influencing behavior and interaction among a wide number of people.

As Barnett and Boyle, Nicotra, Alexis, and Fleckenstein discuss, New Materialism is a critical lens used to observe and explain how humans are influenced by nonhuman “things.” Nonhuman “things” can affect a person linearly and more complexly through assemblages. Additionally, the affect that results from nonhuman “things” can be experiential, emotional, and interactional. A person may have a certain experience, behave a certain way, and interact to a certain degree all because of how nonhuman factors affect the person.

In a classroom, the experiences, emotions, and interactions of students as individuals and collectively are influenced by the classroom itself. As discussed above, the writing experience specifically is susceptible to the physical environment in which one writes. Although New Materialism did not invent the relationship between humans and nonhumans, nor did it create the original distinction between space and place, it does provide a beneficial lens through which to view a composition classroom so instructors can understand and positively affect how the environment impacts the students and the writing inside the space. Once composition instructors can view the classroom as a space with agency, they then can manipulate the space to create a positive place for which students to write.

Space vs Place

In an early work, briefly addressed above, Tuan, a geographer, explains the relationship between space and place as “the meaning of space often merges with that of place. ‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place.’ What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan, 1979). Tuan argues that space is more abstract, whereas place is more significant as it relates to meaning. Tuan continues to argue that place occurs when one stops moving to “settle” within a place. Conversely, space occurs when one continues to move, never settling within a particular space. For example, while walking down the street, a person—while moving—is in space. Once the person stops walking, they are now in a place. Place is definable, according to Tuan, based on the ability to identify a particular area as where a person “is.”

Business scholars, Goel, Johnson, Junglas, and Ives echo the contentions of Tuan, when they explain space as “a not-yet-known environment or site” (Goel et al., 2011). As a result, a space exists in the abstract. As a person gets to know it in terms of its content and what can happen in it, endowing it with value, it becomes a place. The idea of endowing a space and its content with value entails giving them meaning. A place emerges as a space is ascribed with meaning.” (Goel et al, 2011). According to Goel et al, space is unaffected by people, existing in the abstract until someone places meaning on the space. Once a space has meaning, it becomes a place. As Tuan and Goel et al all claim, space is undefinable, abstract, and meaningless; place is definable, identifiable, and meaningful.

Using the arguments from Tuan and Goel et al as a lens to view a classroom, the important detail is that a classroom is simply a space until meaning is placed upon it. Once meaning is given to a space, it becomes a place. Once a classroom becomes a place, actively or inactively, it has the agency and the ability to affect those inside. The students and teachers in a

composition classroom are affected by the place in which they learn, write, and instruct.

Therefore, it is vital to understand how a space becomes a place so that composition instructors can create a positive place for learning, writing, and teaching.

Moving from Space to Place

Spaces, as explained above, can become places, but the process that creates this transition requires a semblance of meaning attributed to a space. In essence, a space cannot become a place until the space has some meaning. The process for creating meaning within a space is achieved when a person is attached to a certain space. Once a person is attached to a space, it becomes a place. As explained by Goel et al, there are two possibilities for a space to obtain meaning. First, the person “has had activities that are meaningful within its boundaries; [second,] features of the place have shaped, constrained, and influenced the activities that are perceived as able to happen within it” (Goel et al, 2011). Goel et al’s first premise for how a space becomes a place is interactional past.

Interactional past is when a person has interacted within a space in a meaningful way. Once this meaningful interaction occurs, the person is attached to the space through the interaction; and, therefore, attributes meaning to the space. This attribution of meaning transitions the space into a place. For example, while walking down the street, the street is a space- meaningless and void of interaction. However, if the person walking trips and falls, that “space” is now the “place” where the person tripped and fell. The person interacted with the space in a meaningful way; this meaningful interaction caused the setting to transition from space to place. Interaction does not have to just be between the space and a person, it can be between people as well. For example, walking along that same street, a person may see another person and strike up a conversation that leads to a relationship. That previously meaningless

space is now the place where two people interacted in a meaningful way. Once more, this meaningful interaction, the interactional past, caused the space to become a place.

Interactional potential is the opportunity the space provides for interaction and meaning making to occur. Goel et al explain, “Features of a place that describe interactional potential include objects and their layout in the place that favor sociability as well as visual appearances that suggest what might be acceptable behaviors in that place” (Goel et al, 2011). Therefore, Goel et al argue, that if a space has a layout that represents and promotes interaction, the space has the potential for interaction and therefore can become a place.

Interactional potential has two key factors—the place is constructed to promote interaction and that interaction potential is communicated through the place to the people within it. First, to explain the construction of a space into a place, think of a workspace. If the workspace is sectioned off into separate cubicles and offices with walls and doors, the space does not promote interaction; rather, it promotes seclusion. Now imagine a workspace with no cubicle, no separate offices, just an open room with tables. The first workspace with walls and separate offices has a low interactional potential because of the physical barriers in the space. The space communicates and encourages solitude among the workers. However, the second workspace is more open; therefore, the interactional potential is higher. The second space communicates and encourages interaction and collaboration to the workers. In both cases, because each workspace has some interactional potential, it can become a place when an interaction occurs, the likelihood of the interaction, the likelihood of the space becoming a place, and what type of place the space becomes is determined by the interactional potential of the physical space.

Regardless if a space becomes a place due to interactional past or potential, once a space becomes a place, it has meaning. Because “a place emerges as a space is ascribed with meaning,” once a space transitions to a place, it automatically has meaning (Goel et al, 2011). Once a space has meaning and transitions into a place, the place has agency. As New Materialism teaches, nonhuman entities can affect people. As Barnett and Boyle state “Things provoke thought, incite feeling, circulate affects, and arouse a sense of wonder” (Barnette and Boyle, 2016). The “things” Barnett and Boyle discuss are “things” with agency. Therefore, since a space becomes a place when meaning is attached to it, and once meaning is attached to a space, making it a place, the place gains agency. A New Materialistic lens, drawing on geographic language and theory from Relph, would dictate that a place is capable of “inciting feeling, circulating affects, and arousing a sense of wonder” (Barnette and Boyle, 2016). Once a person attaches meaning to a space, the space develops an interactional past or interactional potential. From one or both of these interactions, a space becomes a place. Once a space becomes a place, it has agency. Agency then allows for the place to rhetorically incite emotions and behaviors from the people within the place.

Applying this understanding to composition creates a clear importance for how a place is constructed and the impact it has on the students and teachers inside. Composition, as a discipline, strives to teach writing, communication, and analytical thought. Often, these skills are taught and developed through an intimate classroom experience which relies on a positive environment where students feel safe and secure. A composition classroom strives to be a safe place for students to learn and write. Transitioning from a bare and meaningless space into a place that positively impacts student learning and writing is a vital first step toward creating a positive learning and writing environment. Students will view a composition classroom as a

place because of interactional past or potential, whether the students' perception of the classroom as a place is positive or negative depends on how the space transitioned into a place and what the students' sense of place is.

Sense of Place

Once a person or group of people interact with a place meaningfully, a sense of place develops. The sense of place is developed by the interactions of a person within a place, often referred to as "experiences" or "relationships." According to Tuan, "Experience can be direct and intimate, or it can be indirect and conceptual, mediated by symbols" (Tuan, 1979). Direct and intimate experiences are akin to one's knowledge of a home. A person is intimately familiar with their home and has direct contact with that place. Conversely, an architect building a house would have an indirect and conceptual experience with the house. The architect is familiar with the structure of the house, but the experience of the architect is limited to an indirect and cerebral connection. The varying degrees of experience are on a metaphorical spectrum. Explained another way, "Experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality" (Tuan, 1979). Similar to interactional potential, the intensity of a person's sense of place is determined by the interactions that occur within the place. The more important the interaction, the higher degree of sense of place. Despite the varying degree of a person's sense of place, once a person interacts with a place, the person develops a sense of place. *Figure 1*, from Tuan, illustrates the spectrum of a person's sense of place.

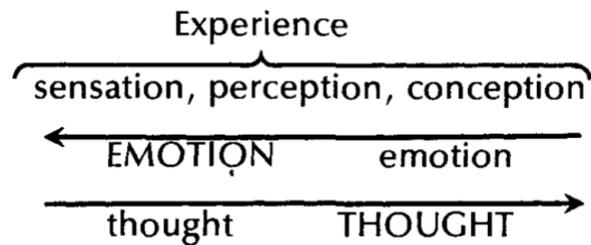


Figure 1

Tuan, Y.-F. (1978). Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. *Contemporary Sociology*, 7(4), 513. doi: 10.2307/2064418

As *Figure 1* indicates, the type of experience, intimate to more detached, is directly connected to the level of emotion compared to thought within the experience. Tuan argues that the most intimate experience has the highest degree of emotion with the lowest degree of thought. Similarly, the least intimate experience connects to the least emotion and the most thought. When interacting with a place, the level of emotion compared to thought—the type of experience—influences the person’s sense of place. An experience regardless of the emotional or thoughtful components within a place will create a sense of place. The specific type of experience will dictate the specific degree of the sense of place.

Sense of place is created by a person’s experience(s) within a place; however, the relationship continues once the sense of place is created. Harrison and Dourish explain that a sense of place is a “communally held sense of appropriate behavior, and a context for engaging in and interpreting action” (Harrison and Dourish, 1996). Building on Harrison and Dourish, psychologists Lentini and Decortis state “sense of place is conceived as the result of the appropriation of culturally defined norms and expectations that frame behaviors” (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). Lentini and Decortis argue that a sense of place affects how a person behaves

within that place. They continue to contend that “sense of place is what makes a space specific, and generally relates to the physical characteristics of the environment, the affect and meanings (including memories and associations), and the activities afforded by the place including the social interactions associated with the place” (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). Said another way, connecting to Goel et al, a sense of place expands on the interactive past and interactive potential of the place to impact behavior.

Lentini and Decortis explain the influence of the sense of place as impacting the affect and meanings (including memories and associations). Lentini and Decortis describe a sense of place as being capable of influence based on previous history in that place. Similarly, they describe a sense of place as being influential due to “the physical characteristics of the environment [and] the activities afforded by the place including the social interactions associated with the place” (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). Lentini and Decortis argue that a sense of place can affect the person within the place because of the structure of the place and the potential for social interaction that structures allow. Through interactive past and interactive potential, one’s sense of place gives meaning to that place. In return, that place, with agency from past or potential, affects how a person interacts and behaves within the place.

How a person behaves at work and behaves at home provides an example for how a sense of place influences behavior. At work, a person may behave more professionally; while at home, a person may behave more comfortably. This distinction can go deeper. A person may be sullen and closed off at work because their sense of place is negative. However, if their sense of place is positive at home, that same person may be energetic and talkative. A person’s unique sense of place, as argued by Lentini and Decortis, influences the behavior and emotions of a person.

While Goel et al conclude their analysis with the argument that place can and does affect the people within it, Lentini and Decortis go further to explain that the sense of place affects relationships, emotions, and social interactions specifically. They state that “sense of place is thus a concept for capturing people’s relationships with the physical environment in which they act [...], this notion actually evokes our emotional relationships with places: the feelings we develop toward places (either positive, negative or ambivalent) and the meanings we thereby assign to them” (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). In this argument, Lentini and Decortis hold that places have the agency to affect the people in the place. More specifically, through a person’s relationship to the place (interactive past), a place elicits an emotional reaction from the person. A place only has agency if a person gives the place meaning, so an emotional reaction to a place does not happen everywhere, only in places with meaning to a person. For example, person one may feel sad and hurt in a certain place because they experienced a traumatic event in that place. Conversely, a different person may feel happy and blissful in that same place because they had a previously positive experience in that place.

Continuing, Lentini and Decortis explain that an experience within a place is not beholden to a singular individual. Rather, a person’s experience within a place can be impacted by social interactions had within that place as well. Further complicating sense of place, Lentini and Decortis argue that “interacting with other people in a face-to-face way plays in the evolution of our relationships with places and in the development of place meaning” (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). Therefore, a person’s sense of place is also influenced by the interactions had within that place. Continuing with the example from above, where two people have opposite emotions in the same place, if the person who experienced a traumatic event in a place interacts with and shares their experience with the person who had a positive experience in that same

place, the person with the previously positive sense of place may now have a more negative sense of that same place.

As discussed, a sense of place is developed by interactive past, interactive potential, and social interaction within a place. Once a space becomes a place, some meaning is attached to it. However, once a person develops a sense of place, their emotions and behavior are affected by the physical place. Students in a composition class will develop a sense of place of their specific classroom through their unique and collective experiences within the place. Their sense of place directly affects their emotions and behaviors within the classroom. Therefore, understanding how a sense of place is developed is a key tool for composition instructors to have so they can help cultivate a positive sense of place. If a positive sense of place can be cultivated, the emotions and behaviors will also likely be positive. Additionally, happy students who behave in a positive way create a positive learning environment. Lastly, a positive learning environment produces a more successful class and more successful students. Therefore, composition instructors should understand how to view a classroom as a place so they can guide the place to create a positive sense of place for the students which can improve the learning environment and success within the classroom.

Conclusion

The following sections examine composition studies texts to find patterns and commonalities for how the classroom as a space and place are discussed. After examining composition studies texts, I transition to an examination of composition teaching texts. As I've argued above, using New Materialism as a critical lens to view the classroom as a place with agency to affect the students and teachers, through interactional past, potential, and sense of place, can create a more positive learning environment capable of improving learning, writing, and instruction. I argue in the following chapters that composition studies texts take the first step

in discussing the classroom as a place but, ultimately, lack a common language to do so.

Secondly, I argue that, possibly due to the lack of a common language, composition teaching texts do not, in enough depth or detail, include instruction on how new composition instructors can understand the classroom as a place. Finally, in my last chapter, I provide an example of what a chapter in a composition teaching text may look like, what it may include, and how it may be used to better communicate to new instructors how to view the classroom as a place and the benefits of doing so. Ultimately, there is a gap between composition studies texts and composition teaching texts in how the classroom as a place is understood and communicated. I argue a New Materialistic understanding of space and place, drawing on rhetorical ontology and geographic theory, provides a common language to bridge the gap.

CHAPTER 2. COMPOSITION STUDIES TEXTS

I chose to analyze composition studies texts because their purpose and contribution to composition is to inform practical and teaching texts, which I discuss in Chapter 2. The composition studies texts in the following sections create a foundation of knowledge often used in shaping composition pedagogy. Pedagogy, steeped in theory, impacts composition classrooms, writing, and learning. Therefore, the composition studies texts, the ones analyzed below, directly affect the writing and learning of composition students.

The following sections are examinations of touchstone composition studies texts. I chose to include Grave's *Writing*, Grego and Thompson's *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspace*, Nagelhout and Rutz's *Classroom Spaces and Writing Instruction*, Powell and Tassoni's *Composing Other Spaces*, and Yancey's *Delivering College Composition*. Rather than chronologically, I chose to order the text thematically from least akin to New Materialism to the most similar. I am using the phrase "composition studies texts" as the category for the following books because each discusses writing or composition. I specify "studies text" because none of the books in this section specifically detail a practical approach to teaching writing; rather, these texts discuss the theory of writing instruction. Additionally, I selected the texts because most of them discuss, at least in part, how writing instruction is a function of or functions in the classroom as a physical environment. Each analysis of each text is accompanied by the rationale for including the text, how the texts communicates to its reader what the physical design of a composition classroom is and its implications, and what meaning can be derived from said communication. Finally, after the composition studies texts are examined individually, I provide a section detailing important commonalities and distinctions among the texts.

My primary argument throughout Chapter 1 is while the composition studies texts do discuss the classroom as a space and place, the discussion among the texts lacks consistent language and, therefore, consistent analysis and implementation of the concepts. While all of the scholars below understand the classroom affects teaching and learning, no two scholars discuss this impact in the same way. Rather, composition studies scholars use several terms to refer to the same concept. Secondly, I argue that the use of New Materialism as a critical lens can provide consistent language and terms for composition studies texts to use when theorizing the impact the classroom as a place has on writing process, product, and instruction.

Writing

Writing, by Graves, is older, focused on elementary, middle, high school level composition. It also has concepts that are less relevant due to modern technology. Even so, I decided to include this text in my analysis to provide historical context. Graves published this text in 1983 to “assist teachers with children’s writing” (Graves, 1983). The book, broken into five sections, serves to aid new writing instructors on what to expect and how to adapt while teaching composition. While the text is a host of information, for the purpose of this project, I will only focus on Graves’ subsection “Organize the Classroom for Writing.” This subsection specifically rests in the realm of composition theory because Graves analyzes a classroom without providing practical advice on how to change composition instruction based on the analysis. Additionally, while the literal advice given in this subsection is often outdated—discussions of paper and pencil, tangible writing folders, and other strategies for an age prior to the everyday technology common in composition classes today—the concepts discussed provide an interesting insight into how the physical environment of a classroom was viewed in 1983.

Graves begins the section, “Organize the Classroom for Writing,” with an anecdote of the classroom guide for a composition class. Sally, the classroom guide, explains the organization of

the classroom by saying “[w]hen we finish our writing we put it over here, then we sign up for a conference with the teacher, which probably comes before the day is out. Now, over here is where we put the published books and over here is where we work on the new covers for the books” (Graves, 1983). As the short anecdote indicates, the classroom, in which Graves was an observer, had a set structure and organization. Graves notes that the structure and organization was purposeful. Bangs, the lead teacher of the composition class, realized that writing is often an independent endeavor but does not happen in a vacuum. Therefore, as Graves explains, the classroom had to be organized in such a way that students were given the space to work independently, allowed for the teacher to aid and guide small groups, and still functioned efficiently with less constant oversight.

For the sake of quality writing, the classroom has to be structured like a well-oiled machine. Graves sums up Bangs’ philosophy in a succinct quote- “sloppy class, sloppy thinking” (Graves, 1983). The largest obstacle Bangs’ shared with Graves was getting students to work independently. He reflected on the challenge of wanting to help students who asked for help while trying to balance helping other students who were less likely to reach out. Bangs valued conferences as part of the writing process; but, every time he tried to do them in class, he was met with interruptions from other students asking questions. In order to create order, to organize the classroom structure, Bangs created, what I call, localization routine. Bangs simply called his organization a routine; but, I noticed that the routine was centered around specific locations around the classroom. Bangs explained his routine as such: “1. I had one place where paper was kept. 2. Writing folders were kept in one box and returned after using. 3. A signup sheet, 5 unscheduled conferences a day” (Graves, 1983). Through Bangs’ routine, students knew where to go to organize their own writing process. This routine limited the number of questions Bangs

had to answer so that he could focus on scheduled conferences. Similarly, if a student was stuck, the student knew to go to the unscheduled signup sheet rather than interrupting an ongoing conference. Students learned routine, independent writing, and how to organize their writing process through a routine centered around locations in the classroom.

Graves concludes his section with a reflection, specifically noting two key concepts. First, “Bangs worked hard to establish specific areas of information.” Second, “of equal importance with individual territory and place is the overall group itself” (Graves, 1983). These two quotes from Graves’ reflection provides a helpful summary of how Graves and Bangs view the role of the space of a classroom in composition instruction. As shown throughout, routine helps not only the students during the writing process but also helps students feel autonomous enough to work on their writing while the instructor conducts conferences. Bangs successfully implemented this routine by creating locations in the classroom where students knew what was expected and where to get information to help them. Bangs, through his classroom example, in 1983, expressed an underlying argument that the physical organization of a classroom aids in the writing process and writing instruction. Without the localized routine, specific locations with specific purposes, Bangs found the writing process for the students to encounter frequent obstacles. Subsequently, these frequent obstacles interrupted writing instruction during one-on-one conferences. However, routine developed through location served as an elixir to create a well-oiled machine of a classroom with improved writing process and instruction.

While Graves never discusses the classroom as a space, only identifies the classroom as a general “place” in his reflection, and does not directly argue for the physical place of a classroom affecting writing process and instruction, in 1983, Graves does consider how an environment can impact routine, and how that routine can impact writing process and instruction. While Graves

does not use any particular way of describing the classroom as a space, place, or environment, he does express the value of utilizing locations to benefit composition process and instruction. This use of locations to affect students and their writing process aligns with the rhetorical ontology concept within New Materialism that places, specifically classrooms, have agency. While Graves does not use this language, his concepts mirror similar concepts discussed in New Materialism and later in this project. Therefore, dating back as far as 1983, the physical structure of a classroom was considered a valuable variable in how composition can be taught. Additionally, Graves argues that considering classroom structure impacts students directly affects composition process and instruction.

Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces

As the title indicates, Grego and Thompson's 2008 text, *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces*, is a composition studies book designed to discuss the theory involved in teaching writing, specifically in relation to thirdspaces. Beyond the title, this text was published in CCCC with the included justification in the preface stating "[t]he aim of the CCCC Studies in Writing & Rhetoric (SWR) series is to influence how writing gets taught at the college level" (Grego and Thompson, 2008). For the purpose of my project, I will focus on Grego and Thompson's second chapter, "Institutional Critique and Studio as Thirdspaces."

In their second chapter, Grego and Thompson first respond to Burke's pentadic analysis and apply it to the classroom. Later in the chapter, Grego and Thompson delve deeply into "thirdspace," and how it is a factor in what they call the "studio" (Grego and Thompson, 2008). Throughout, they explain that their use of studio is any location where writing occurs. While a large part of their analysis considers writing in a composition classroom, also identified as a "studio," Grego and Thompson recognize that writing is not beholden to academia. Therefore, they chose the word studio to encompass all locations where writing can occur.

To better understand the rhetorical situation of the classroom, Grego and Thompson use Burke's concept of scene. Beginning with a response to Burke's pentadic analysis, stating that the pentad creates a rhetorical situation within a product, of a speech, Grego and Thompson claim that "such rhetorical analysis is the kind that most college writing course promote for student writers" (Grego and Thompson, 2008). The purpose of Burke's pentad, as explained by Grego and Thompson, is to create a sense of audience and purpose inside a text or speech by a rhetor; that creation is what is later rhetorically analyzed by rhetorical scholars. Grego and Thompson, drawing from Burke, describe the sense of audience and purpose within a text or speech as a scene, something constructed by the rhetor. Grego and Thompson specify that the scene is created by the rhetor with the purpose of commenting on the social, often the world outside the classroom. Specifically, they argue for scholars and rhetors to "imagine the classroom as a privileged dematerialized location from which to act on the social. In moving from 'classroom' to 'social,' the institutional location that would materialize composition's work is ignored" (Grego and Thompson, 2008). By viewing the classroom as a component of the social, Grego and Thompson explain the classroom can act as a local scene.

Similarly to Burke's concept of scene for the social, Grego and Thompson's local scene of the classroom considers students as rhetors acting and creating within an active environment. The classroom environment, or local scene, is influential not only "with its variety of people, programs and points of connection to worlds both inside and outside the academe but also to the complexity and influence of the institutional location" (Grego and Thompson, 2008). In essence, Grego and Thompson apply Burke's concept of the pentad to discuss how the local scene, the classroom, affects the people within it, which, subsequently, affects the social, or outside world. While writing is often taught to students as considering agent, act, agency, purpose, and scene

with the scene often being the “real” or “outside” world, Grego and Thompson argue that “scene” can be local, specifically the classroom. They contend that a rhetor can write to influence the classroom in which they write. Akin to rhetorical ontology within New Materialism, although never directly referenced, the local scene, the classroom, can influence the rhetor as well. Grego and Thompson provide more detail for how a local scene can influence the rhetor when they discuss their concept of thirdspace.

Thirdspace is explained, by Grego and Thompson, as a theoretical filling of the gaps, a metaphorical location in the margins that is difficult to identify. Explained most effectively through a metaphor “thirdspace exists in the interstices- between and inside- on the border; it is like the beach: the space between ocean and land that is sometimes ocean and sometimes land, a space that is both/and” (Grego and Thompson, 2008). Grego and Thompson use this concept of thirdspace in several ways. They describe it for composition instructors as a “space/place in their respective higher education disciplines, if not their specific institutions” (Grego and Thompson, 2008). And, they describe it for students as the space/place where students act on the presence or absence of emotions while or through writing (Grego and Thompson, 2008). For Grego and Thompson, thirdspace is not a physical location, rather an abstract or theoretical middle, an intangible area where lines are blurred, there is a gap in power, and the relationship among entities is unclear. In short, thirdspace is a catchall term for an immaterial space where people have to navigate nebulous relationships.

Grego and Thompson do not specify what those relationships are limited to; however, they focus largely on three types. One is the relationship an instructor has within an institution. Another is the relationship that institution has within academia. And, lastly, the relationship students have within a studio. Importantly, Grego and Thompson indicate that these relationships

are not separated, rather, they are intertwined like a web. Aligned with Nicotra's concept of assemblage thinking, the metaphor of a web once again is used to describe the agency of a place. With assemblage thinking and Grego and Thompson, things and people share a connection that weaves among several variables, intertwining both inanimate and animate objects alike. For example, how students write in a classroom can affect the way an institution values the instructor of that writing class. Grego and Thompson use thirdspace to explain the intersections in immaterial spaces where relationships are not clearly defined or identifiable.

Specific to composition, Grego and Thompson apply thirdspace to the emotions students feel when writing. They contend that “[e]motion names a space/place of exclusion that will manifest itself in different ways, depending on the class, discipline, structure, and hierarchy of the specific institutional site from within which studio interactional inquire is being used” (Grego and Thompson, 2008). Echoing New Materialism, Grego and Thompson argue that the environment in which students write affects their emotions; then, those emotions affect the writing process and product. While the majority of Grego and Thompson's use and argument of thirdspace addresses the status of writing programs within an institution, as the above quote shows, they also recognize that the metaphorical location of a, as they call it, studio affects the emotions of a writer. Connecting back to Grego and Thompson's realignment of Burke's pentadic analysis, a web is created in thirdspace where the writing environment is impacted by other composition influences (instructor, power, and place) affects emotions of the students which affects how and what they write.

Grego and Thompson do not have a consistent way of expressing the physical environment in which students write; instead, they hedge their description by writing “space/place.” Additionally, without explicitly connecting to the theory in New Materialism that

a place has agency, Grego and Thompson argue that the concept of thirdspace affects the writing process and product. Lastly, when applying Burke's pentadic theory to a classroom, Grego and Thompson use the term "local scene" to describe a physical environment that cyclically is affected by the rhetor while the environment also affects the rhetor. Once again, the symbiotic relationship between person and place is a key theory discussed in New Materialism.

Specifically, rather than interchangeably using space/place and local scene, a language derived from geographic theory and mirrored in New Materialism, can concisely use space or place-space not having agency and place having agency to affect those within it. Furthermore, when Grego and Thompson discuss how emotions are affected by a space/place, New Materialism provides a term, sense of place, that represents the same argument. While several of Grego and Thompson's views, arguments, and theories surrounding composition application and instruction align with New Materialism, they lack concrete and consistent language in describing the concepts discussed. New Materialism can provide that consistent language without affecting how the views, arguments, and theories are used.

Classroom Spaces and Writing Instruction

Similarly to Grego and Thompson's *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces*, Nagelhout and Rutz's title provides an overview of the focus of their book- how writing instruction functions in classroom spaces. Nagelhout and Rutz, in this edited collection, provide a more in depth explanation on how they imagine the book to be used. This book "makes an initial foray into the ways that space –literally and figuratively- mediates or affects the many things that writing teachers do in classroom spaces [...] in order to promote ongoing analyses of the work done in classrooms by students and teachers" (Naghelout and Rutz, 2004). Interestingly, Nagelhout and Rutz emphasize that this book can be used to understand how space functions literally and figuratively for writing instruction. They specify their research interests further by writing: "We

are most interested in the everyday practices of teachers of writing, with writing classrooms as those lived spaces intimately tied to thinking, learning, and writing” (Nagelhout and Rutz, 2004). Nagelhout and Rutz include both writing instruction and learning in their intended purpose for their text, uniquely including the students as variables in composition- factors affected by the writing space and factors affecting the writing space.

Beginning with chapter 1, “Mirtz reminds us that writing classrooms in higher education settings tend to be undifferentiated, poorly furnished rooms that convey institutional attitudes of neglect and disdain. The material conditions produce a ‘contested space’ for teaching and learning” (Mirtz, 2004). She argues that a classroom communicates to the students within it; furthermore, Mirtz critiques the common composition classroom which she contends is so barren the students struggle to produce while the instructor struggles to teach.

Mirtz begins her chapter with two small anecdotes- one where a fellow instructor was surprised at the cramped, as Mirtz describes as coach airline style, seating in his classroom. The other story was of a group of students who refused to join the circle of seats in the classroom, organized for the purpose of discussion and, instead, sat outside the circle in a, as Mirtz illustrates, tumor-like attachment to the class. Through both stories, Mirtz’s central argument is “classroom furniture and its movement, or more specifically its lack of movement, are physical manifestations of important issues of authority and resistance in our teaching and in our students’ learning” (Mirtz, 2004). Mirtz continues to argue that the amount of furniture, its ability to be moved, the frequency of movement, who decides the movement, and its general location directly communicates a power dynamic in the classroom. Due to the power of space, Mirtz’s central argument is the inertia of classroom furniture “can not only support but push the teaching and learning taking place” (Mirtz, 2004). As Mirtz contends, moving classroom furniture can have a

positive impact for teaching and learning; however, she also admits that few teachers take this opportunity and even fewer, herself included, are satisfied with the outcome if they do. She argues the lack of satisfaction stems from the students' unwillingness to challenge or ignore the perceived power dynamic the space in the classroom creates.

Chapter 2 includes Hoger's agreement with Mirtz in that he also agrees the structure of a classroom communicates certain expectations to students. Specifically, Hoger claims "hierarchical spaces invite hierarchical pedagogies and fixed seating impedes collaboration" (Hoger, 2004). Hoger, in her chapter, explores the struggles colleges face when attempting to create a classroom that simulates a business environment. While not specifically a composition-specific argument, Hoger echoes the arguments made by Mirtz. Specifically, she argues "in acontextual classrooms, instructors and students have some power to simulate real-world situations as needed without denying the essential nature of the classroom as classroom" (Nagelhout and Rutz, 2004). Hoger contends that the power dynamic in a business, between boss and subordinates, is difficult to achieve. While Mirtz argues the power dynamic in a classroom can be an obstacle, Hoger expresses that business education strives to replicate boss and employee power dynamics without sacrificing the ability to learn. Jobs often emphasize production; conversely, while education values product, much of time spent in the classroom is learning and process focused. Therefore, striking a balance of power that values both product and process is challenging. Because most of Hoger's chapter continues with specific ways to achieve simulated business situations in a classroom, the only aspect of her argument I will include is that, as Mirtz also argues, the classroom, as a space, creates a delicate balance of power between teacher and student. Further, that power can be altered through classroom design and layout of the furniture.

Mirtz explores the conundrum of, on one hand, the theory that moving classroom furniture can communicate a specific and positive message to students; yet, on the other hand, in practice, students often resist the movement and end up further away from the teacher than before. Mirtz notes a possible reason for students, when asked, moving away from the front of the room is because the front of the room is “teacher space” (Mirtz, 2004). Despite what the teacher says or encourages, Mirtz argues that students are reluctant to move to the front space of the room because that is where the powerful teacher resides. If the deterrent for students to move near the front of the room is steeped in power, that also means that students feel subordinate in their “student space.” Similarly, Hoger, drawing on Parker Palmer’s classroom paradoxes, recognizes that classrooms can exist within a paradox- “bounded and open, hospitable and charged, invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group, honor ‘little stories of the students and ‘big’ stories of the traditions, support solitude and community, and should welcome both silence and speech” (Hoger, 2004). Parker Palmer’s classroom paradoxes, aptly named, illustrate the difficult balance of power within a classroom, often dependent on how it is designed and structured. Hoger contends the paradoxes are only further complicated with the layout and space of the classroom.

While Mirtz, in her chapter, primarily discusses the benefits of moving furniture and the ways to successfully do so, for my project, two other arguments are important to highlight. First, that classroom furniture impacts student learning and instructor teaching. Therefore, aligned with New Materialism, Mirtz agrees that inanimate objects have agency, or the ability to affect humans. Furthermore, working toward her second argument, the space within a classroom has meaning (New Materialism calls this “place”). Specifically, the space at the front of the room has power and the spaces throughout the rest of the room don’t. Combining Mirtz’s first argument,

that inanimate “things” have agency, and her second that there is a specific power dynamic created by imaginary and undefined lines, it is reasonable to conclude that the classroom space contributes to the power dynamic between teacher and student. So, in a composition class, where, as Mirtz discusses, a goal of the instructor is for the students to find their voice and independent agency, one must first consider what the classroom is communicating to the students and how that affects the power, or lack thereof, for the students as well.

Lastly, while Mirtz and Hoger explore what the classroom communicates to the students, Nagelhout and Blalock shift directions to “address the complication and contradictions of the classroom itself: a space that both harbors and subverts the ‘activities’ of writing and writing instruction” (Nagelhout and Rutz, 2004). Nagelhout and Blalock explore, in their chapter, not just what the physical space communicates to the students but also how it impacts writing and teaching. Nagelhout and Blalock defend the need for space and place research in composition by saying “the activity of writing instruction is best understood ‘where’ it takes place- the complex, constructed space(s) of our classrooms. However, among the factors that determine the choices we make as teachers, our classroom ‘space’ is one of the least acknowledged” (Nagelhout and Blalock, 2004). Specifically, Nagelhout and Blalock argue that much of writing instruction is steeped in activity; and, therefore, the construction of the classroom space should encourage and cultivate collaboration through activity. Because of his contention that space impacts the opportunity for collaboration, Nagelhout and Blalock argue that “space is a central feature of the activity of writing instruction” (Nagelhout and Blalock, 2004). Furthermore, Nagelhout and Blalock argue that writing does not occur in a vacuum; so, the benchmark students should strive for is the ability to write in any writing situation or environment. However, the current status of writing instruction is contradictory to the goal. While, according to Nagelhout and Blalock, the

goal of composition is to produce writers who are flexible and can write successfully in a variety of space, the space we teach writing is rigid, structured, and severely limiting. Through this contradiction, “we render the classroom either invisible or not worthy of attention” (Nagelhout and Blalock, 2004). Nagelhout and Blalock challenge the idea that students need to write for the “real world” without considering the classroom as a “real space” worthy of writing in and for.

To view the classroom as a worthy “real space” for writing, Nagelhout and Blalock first argue that “classroom spaces are always more than their physical and material attributes” (Nagelhout and Blalock, 2004). The physical space of the classroom holds power, agency, and influence over the students and teachers writing and teaching. Rather than viewing the classroom as an invisible and insignificant space where writing happens to be used outside in the “real world,” they encourage classrooms to be viewed as environments for writing to be produced and for writing to exist. Similarly to the geographic theory concepts overlapped in New Materialism; but, once again using less clearly defined terms, Nagelhout and Blalock argue that the classroom space has agency and should not only be recognized but utilized for writing. Mirtz and Hoger offer suggestions for how to use the classroom for writing by shifting power dynamics through rearranging furniture within the room and deconstructing student space and teacher space. Nagelhout and Blalock contend the space of a classroom should be seen as “real space” capable of power and influence. Regardless of the tips provided, the primary takeaway from *Classroom Spaces and Writing Instruction* is that spaces have agency that directly impact power dynamics; however, that agency can be manipulated and used by students and instructors alike.

Composing Other Spaces

The next text I chose to examine specifically under the composition studies umbrella is *Composing Other Spaces* edited by Powell and Tassoni. Published in 2009, this book “explores the politics, pedagogy, and practice of college composition in its spatial dimensions, an

exploration that leads to a diverse range of places” (Powell and Tassoni, 2009). Powell and Tassoni explain the purpose for their text is to discuss the spatial dimensions leading to a diverse range of places in composition. Theory centered, as all the texts in this chapter, several voices combine to produce the edited collection.

While *Composing Other Spaces* provides several interesting and unique perspectives of the relationship between writing and space, the following analysis will focus on the introduction and Part III as they are the sections relevant to my central question- how do composition studies texts discuss the classroom as a place? While there is more to the collection, I am focused on the sections, introduction and Part III, that most directly address the physical space of the classroom.

Powell and Tassoni begin their edited collection with an extended introduction explaining and justifying the research in the following chapters. “This volume explores the extent to which the often neglected or marginalized spaces of university writing pedagogy might themselves be described as academic heterotopias” (Powell and Tassoni, 2009). Heterotopias, as first coined by Foucault, and explained by Powell and Tassoni, are “real places.” Heterotopias function to explain places that are often overlooked or disregarded because of their contrast to the utopian idea of what the place should be. As Powell and Tassoni respond and explain Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia,” they provide an interesting way of viewing places- places can be distinguished by their perceived and real value to the world. While places are constructed with a particular intention, Powell and Tassoni argue that intention may be unachievable. Therefore places, often universities and within universities can become heterotopias, or places unlike what the space was intended to be. I include this description of heterotopia for two reasons. First, it is relevant to include how Powell and Tassoni view heterotopia because it provides insight into how composition studies scholars view and discuss place. Secondly, heterotopia aligns with the

geographic theory that overlaps with New Materialism in that they both distinguish between space and place. New Materialism echoes the theories from geography that draws the line between space and place on the basis of meaning—space is an area without meaning and place is an area with meaning. Heterotopia creates a contrast between the real and the imagined. The real place, the heterotopia, is what the place actually is. The imagined space is what the place was supposed to be but not achieved. Although heterotopia distinguishes between space and place differently than one using New Materialism as a critical lens, the commonality is that both see a difference between the two.

While Part III does not discuss heterotopias any further, Nagelhout does explore the relationship between the construction of a space with writing. According to Nagelhout, “[o]ur classrooms situate students in specific physical spaces, constraining or restricting the movements of students and teachers. This casts students into roles of passive instruction followers, writers who produce what they are told to produce” (Naghelout, 2009). While Powell and Tassoni deal primarily with the theoretical distinction between space and place, Nagelhout explores the more practical impact classroom construction can have on composition. As the quote details, Nagelhout argues that the current common structure of a classroom produces a particular kind of student and a particular kind of writing- passive and unimaginative. Because of how the space of the classroom, students have a predetermined understanding of their expectations and roles as writers. Similarly, the instructor fills a predetermined role as well- the sole leader with the power. Nagelhout continues further in this chapter to discuss how, in part because of the classroom design, students become product focused on essays. However, the connection to my research resides in Nagelhout’s argument that the classroom as a place affects the students’ expectations and product.

Through a New Materialistic lens, I've argued that the classroom as a place affects the writing process, product, and instruction within a composition class. Nagelhout agrees with this argument, although he does not connect to New Materialism. Similarly, Powell and Tassoni, building upon Foucault, also align with a cornerstone New Materialistic geographical concept discussed earlier—space and place are and should be discussed as concepts with separate meanings. I argue the lack of connection to New Materialism is not an oversight or conscious choice, rather a lack of a consistent language for scholars to discuss space and place.

Interestingly, Powell and Tassoni admit to a lack of a consistent language even within their own edited collection. They write in their introduction, “[t]he idea of place as a concept is central to every chapter in the volume, although the various authors are not necessarily of one accord about what that concept is or how it works” (Powell and Tassoni, 2009). Strikingly honest, Powell and Tassoni recognize the importance of the concept of “place” but realize the concept is ambiguous among scholars. As I've previously argued, and will again state, using New Materialism as a critical lens to view space and place can provide a consistent language for understanding space, place, and sense of place. Space is an area or location without meaning attached to it. Place is an area or location once a person or group of people attach meaning to it. Lastly, sense of place is the particular emotions, behaviors, and experiences one realizes within a particular place. These three concepts from geography and understood with a New Materialistic lens can provide the accord Powell and Tassoni recognize as lacking among space and place scholars in composition.

Delivering College Composition

Finally, in 2006, Yancey edited *Delivering College Composition* to update the information for the 5th, and newest edition. Once more, the title alone explains the intended purpose of the book, to discuss college composition theory. However, Yancey provides additional direction for the reader by saying:

“[this volume] takes a look at college composition in diverse institutions and regions of the country, using the lens of delivery as a way of thinking together about what it is that we hope to achieve in teaching college comp. For our purposes, delivery is defined as site, as agent (faculty), and not least, technology” “we see that the composition of the twenty-first century will indeed take very different forms than its cousin in the twentieth- because of digital technology, yes, and because of new ways of defining the teacher, and because of new ways of understanding both curricular and physical spaces” (Yancey, 2006).

The above quote helps direct Yancey’s edited edition to include physical spaces as an area of specific emphasis when studying college composition both from the student and instructor perspective.

Delivering College Composition takes a step toward the direction of understanding and discussing the physical environment of composition and the impacts of that environment.

Yancey begins with the writer's perspective and experience of college composition’s relationship with physical spaces. “Classroom writing in new environments has also led to new definitions of writing, ones that are often heavily influenced by special notions of production and circulation.”

Yancey goes a step further to explain the role space plays in writing by quoting Johnson-Eilola who wrote “writers are not individuals (or even groups) who produce texts, but participants within spaces who are recursively, continually, restricting those (and other spaces)” (Yancey, 2006). Spaces impact writers just as writers (Johnson-Eilola calls them participants) impact the spaces.

While the previous texts analyzed stop after recognizing the affects space and place have on writers, Yancey goes further still to explore the effect a specific design a classroom has on composition. Yancey argues, building upon the work of Barker and Kemp, that the design of a classroom stipulates a particular way of instructing within that classroom. Furthermore, Yancey continues, that the design of the room is not the only factor, the kind of furniture in the room and the placement of that furniture communicates certain expectations for learning. Yancey contends

“the instructor delivered and the students received in a space designed perfectly, it seemed, for a product-based model that effaced *composing*. Inside that space, this construction of learning was reiterated by the kind of furniture provided as well as by its placement- fixed (and often uncomfortable) chairs with little desk space on which to write, set in rows facing the front, almost as in imitation of the church, with the teacher at the front, of course, as priest” (Yancey, 2006). While Yancey realizes the powerful effect the classroom space has on instruction and learning, she criticizes the current common structure and composition of those spaces. While composition is taught as an organic subject matter, one where freedom and creativity are encouraged, the classroom design and furnishings do not communicate nor encourage freedom and creativity. Rather, as Yancey argues, the space communicates rigidity and subordination.

The remainder of *Delivering College Composition* is an edited collection of several voices in composition studies. Taylor provides an interesting chapter, “Design, Delivery, and Narcolepsy” where he explores who instructs and how composition classes are instructed. Taylor begins with how a classroom is designed, stating “my thesis here is that a study of the tactile design of typical, contemporary composition classrooms reveals that one of the primary problems our pedagogical delivery system aim to address is that of keeping students focused and on task” (Taylor, 2006). Norman’s *The Design of Everyday Things*, which includes four essential design principles, provides Taylor with the lens to analyze a classroom. Taylor, following Norman’s work, continues to say “a good design is transparent in the sense that almost anyone can apprehend at first glance how it works and what they are to do” (Taylor, 2006). Taylor’s depiction of a traditional composition classroom is the instructor is the sole speaker at the front of the room with students passively listening, or not listening, to the lecture while sitting in rows. Compared to a contemporary composition classroom, students and the instructor move

throughout the space and seating arrangements to encourage discussion or group work. Taylor argues that “if the design problem is delivering composition in a way that improves student writing, then at least twenty years of linguistic and composition research demonstrates that the teacher-centered approach does not work” “In contrast, a student-centered delivery seems to follow Norman’s advice for the effective design of everyday things” (Taylor, 2006). Taylor criticizes the design of traditional composition classrooms because it communicates to the students that the instructor epitomizes perfection, is omniscient, and the best way to learn writing is to listen to the omniscient model of perfection lecture on how to write well. Conversely, Taylor praises the contemporary composition classroom for designing a space where students have the freedom to explore writing, make mistakes, learn, and interact with their own unique processes.

While much of Taylor’s criticism of traditional composition instruction is situated on *how* the information is delivered, the foundation for his argument echoes Yancey’s: composition instruction and learning are directly impacted by what the design of the classroom communicates to the students inside. Despite *how* the instructor may teach a class, the structure, design, and furnishing within the room communicate immediately to the students a certain set of expectations.

Yancey and Taylor have a very similar perspective of classroom space and place as New Materialism. Without using the same language or terms in the same way, both Yancey and Taylor share similar concepts and arguments with New Materialism- classroom space, design, and components communicate to students, affect instruction, and direct learning. The primary difference between Yancey and Taylor and New Materialism is the way each describes the structure of the classroom. Yancey and Taylor use terms such as space and site while the

geographical theory overlapped in New Materialism uses space, place, and sense of place. While I am not arguing that Yancey and Taylor's way of analyzing the composition classroom is wrong, I do contend using New Materialism, drawing from geography, provides consistent terms with clearly defined and understood meanings. Taylor himself recognizes a need for consistent language in composition classroom analysis. He says "Yancey's opening chapter establishes a vocabulary for questions of college composition delivery. One of her most prominent terms is *site* and many of these chapters explore different or emerging locations of delivery- some literal, some figurative, some virtual. Yet, compositionists lack the kind of detailed vocabulary that architects or designers have for discussing physical sites" (Taylor, 2006). These terms- space, place, and sense of place- can be used without changing the arguments made by Yancey and Taylor. New Materialism, drawing on geography theory, provides an answer to Taylor's call, a consistent language to understand and discuss physical sites.

Patterns Among Composition Studies Texts

Graves argues that environment can impact routine and that same routine can impact the writing process and instruction. Additionally, while he does not use phrases such as space or place, he does advocate for considering location during instruction. Ultimately, Graves argues that considering the physical design of a classroom is valuable. More specific than Graves, Grego and Thompson use "space/place" as an indicator for all physical environments; however, they do not clarify or define what "space/place" is or is limited to. While their phrase "space/place" is broad, Grego and Thompson do narrow their focus when discussing "thirdspace." They claim that "thirdspace" is the gap among already identified spaces, the undefined, and has importance and influence in the writing process. Furthermore, Grego and Thompson use the phrase "local scene" to describe how "space/place" affects a person and how a person can affect "space/place." Lastly, they argue that a writer's emotions are affected by

“space/place” while writing within the “local scene.” Similarly to Grego and Thompson, Nagelhout and Rutz also provide a preliminary phrase for describing the physical environment of composition classrooms, they choose “real space” as their phrase. “Real space” categorizes the composition classroom as a space in which students write, but also, the “real space” has power to impact students and instructors during the writing process. Nagelhout and Rutz divert slightly to use the phrase “environment” when discussing the classroom as a space for producing a product. Powell and Tassoni further complicate the concept of composition classroom by using space and place interchangeably. They also introduce Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia,” to explain the classroom space and place further. Altogether, while Powell and Tassoni switch between space and place without definition, they do argue for seeing space and place as separate concepts with their own meaning. They admit, while the distinction between space and place is valuable, the division between the two is undefined. Lastly, Yancey argues the classroom design, space, and the components within it communicate to students, affect learning and writing, and impact instruction. Without using the term, Yancey includes many of the arguments for the classroom having “agency,” or the power to affect. Similarly to Powell and Tassoni, Yancey uses the terms “space” and “site” interchangeably, although she favors “site” more.

Similar to assemblage thinking, the way composition studies scholars discuss the classroom is like a web. At the center of the web is the composition classroom. All the scholars included above agree the classroom is important and worthy of analysis; however, they take different approaches when discussing the classroom. The language they use sometimes connects to each other. For example, some concepts, like Grego and Thompson’s “space/place” connect to others, like Nagelhout and Rutz’s “real space.” All four scholars see the classroom as place that impacts learning. However, the web expands because Grego and Thompson narrow their focus to

thirdspace and Nagelhout and Rutz transition to environment. The web overlaps in some instances where composition studies scholars understand and discuss the classroom in similar ways, but the web grows in opposite directions when the conversation lacks consistent language. Nevertheless, all the scholars do agree on one central concept—the center of the web—the classroom is powerful and affects teaching, learning, and writing. Beyond the center of the web, overlaps in perspective and language occur at times but lack consistency. I argue that the critical lens of New Materialism can untangle the web and help provide a common language, drawing on geography, for composition studies scholars to view, discuss, and understand the classroom as a space and place.

Conclusion

As the above section illustrates, across five composition studies texts, spanning from 1983 to 2009, composition has no clear terminology for studying the classroom as a space or place. While most of the scholars have similar arguments, centrally that the classroom design and structure impacts writing, learning, teaching, process, and product, no two scholars use the same terms or definitions. Without clear terminology and ways to define what we are researching, the research itself can struggle. Ideas and concepts can be lost in translation, and compositionist can experience obstacles in communicating among one another. Ultimately, without a common language for studying the composition classroom, the research will, at best, progress slowly. I argue that the critical lens of New Materialism, including geography's terminology of space and place, provides a common language that is clearly defined and applicable to composition studies. In terms of a composition classroom, space is the room prior to students or instructors attributing meaning. Place categorizes the classrooms after meaning is made. And, lastly, sense of place identifies the cyclical relationship of affect between person and classroom. Altogether, New Materialism continues the same line of argument as the scholars above- the composition

classroom is important, the design and layout is impactful, and the room has agency that affects the people within it. New Materialism, using language from geography, aligns with the same arguments made by the scholars above while providing a common language for those scholars to communicate with each other and with new composition instructors.

CHAPTER 3. COMPOSITION TEACHING TEXTS

In this chapter, I argue that there is a gap between composition studies and teaching texts. While the composition studies texts need a common language when discussing the classroom as a space and place, the scholars included above all value viewing and understanding the classroom as a space and place. They all contend the affect a classroom, as a space and place, can have major implications on the writing process, product, and instruction. The following composition teaching texts also need a common language for discussing the classroom as a space and place; however, unlike the composition studies texts, the teaching texts place significantly less value on the classroom as a space and place. The lack of value is shown by barely including the theory of the classroom as a space and place along with minimal guidelines and explanations for how to use the theory. The lack of value will be discussed further in the following sections. Composition teaching texts are designed to guide and instruct future or new composition teacher, but I contend that they do not have a consistent language for discussing the classroom as a space and place, nor do they include sufficient information on *how* to utilize the classroom as a space and place in instruction. Therefore, composition instructors are unaware of the benefits of viewing and using the classroom as a place can have on writing process and product.

In the following sections of Chapter 2, I will explore three composition teaching texts: Bushman's *The Teaching of Writing*, Tate, Taggart, Schick, and Hessler's *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, and *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing* by Glenn and Goldthwaite. I selected these three texts because they provide the reader with guidelines, explanations, and examples of how to teach composition. Furthermore, each of these texts, in part, touches on the classroom as place when considering how to teach composition. I am using the phrase "composition teaching texts" as the category for the following books because each

discusses writing or composition. I specify “teaching text” because all the books in this section detail a practical approach to teaching writing and each are written for new composition instructors. While I recognize that these three texts are not the only composition focused pedagogical books, they are the only three I found to qualify as a composition teaching text and specifically address the classroom as a space and place.

The analysis of each text is accompanied by the rationale for including the text, how the texts discuss and recommend using the classroom as a space and place, and what meaning can be derived from said recommendations. Finally, after the composition teaching texts are examined individually, I provide a section detailing important commonalities and distinctions among the three.

With New Materialism, a composition classroom space is a classroom prior to students or instructors attaching meaning to it. A composition classroom place is a classroom after the students or instructors attach meaning. And, finally, once the composition classroom becomes a place, the students and teachers develop a sense of place which affects the emotions and behaviors within the composition classroom.

The Teaching of Writing

As in the first section of Chapter 1, I am choosing to begin my textual analysis with a composition teaching book from 1984 to provide historical context. Bushman’s *The Teaching of Writing: A Practical Program to the Composing Process that Works* qualifies as a composition teaching text for three reasons. First, as the title indicates, the text is directed toward the teaching of writing, or composition. Secondly, this text provides a program for how to teach writing, focusing more on the practical rather than the theoretical. Thirdly, Bushman explains “the joy of discovering effective language and of manipulating that language to express an idea creatively is the goal that should be attained and cherished in every writing class. This book strives to help

teachers achieve that goal” (Bushman, 1984). To help teachers achieve the goal set forth by Bushman, the text provides chapters aimed at helping composition instructors create and conduct their classes. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus solely on a small, two page, section of chapter 2- “the physical environment.” While the entire text provides helpful and interesting information on how to teach writing and the writing process, this is the only section which considers the physical structure of the classroom; and, therefore, is the only section relevant to this project. Specifically, I include an analysis of Bushman’s “the physical environment” to provide historical context and perspective, to compare how a composition teaching text from 1984 considers the classroom as an environment with how more modern compositions teaching texts do the same.

Bushman begins this section by arguing the “task of teachers is to create a physical environment conducive to establishing a positive classroom” (Bushman, 1984). From this quote alone, Bushman echoes the sentiment of the scholars I analyzed in chapter 1- the physical environment directly affects the classroom (students and teachers alike). Additionally, Bushman implies that teachers have the ability to manipulate the physical environment to achieve a desired atmosphere. Lastly, Bushman uses the phrase “environment” rather than space or place without defining the term nor providing limitations. It is possible that Bushman’s focus on the practical ways of creating and manipulating the environment outweighed the importance of defining the term; however, the lack of consistency in terms is noticeable. Bushman uses the term “environment” to describe the classroom. Graves, the author analyzed in chapter 1, who also wrote composition texts in the 1980s, uses terms such as “territory” and “place” to describe the classroom. I feel it is important to note that a lack of consistency among terms for describing the classroom as a space or place seems to extend back over 30 years.

Although Bushman describes the classroom as an environment without defining what an environment is, he does provide specific ways to achieve a “positive classroom.” He states, “[t]o encourage learning, then, the classroom should be well lighted, and a comfortable temperature should be maintained. It should also be decorated as attractively as possible with plans, posters, and bulletin boards [...] displaying student work encourages students to perform at their highest level and to be neat” (Bushman, 1984). Although brief, Bushman’s recommendations are riddled with assumptions and implications of the classroom, or, as he calls, the environment. First, Bushman argues that the way the classroom environment, the physical space, can encourage learning. The way the classroom is organized and furnished, he continues, dictates the degree to which learning is encouraged. Specifically, if a classroom is bright, comfortable, and includes attractive furnishings, Bushman implies the students are more likely to learn. Going further, the mere presence of student work, publicly displayed as a goal for other students to strive toward, encourages not just learning but a higher performance. While college composition classes today likely do not have the option to decorate their rooms or display student work, Bushman’s underlying rationality from 1984 can and, I argue, does still apply.

Bushman’s contention that the physical space of a classroom affects the learning of students aligns not only with the composition studies texts analyzed earlier, it also aligns with New Materialism. As stated earlier, New Materialism argues that inanimate objects have agency and, therefore, ability to affect humans. Classrooms are included under the umbrella of inanimate objects with agency. Bushman, the scholars from chapter 1, and New Materialism are all in agreement that the classroom affects learning because the classroom has agency. Even if Bushman did not use the term from New Materialism, his subsequent arguments support this claim. Bushman argues that “[a]rrangement of classroom furniture is still another factor to

consider. Rows of desks that require that students constantly look at the back of other students' heads do not encourage getting to know each other in any meaningful way or sharing ideas. Students need to be able to see each other's faces if successful discussions are to take place" (Bushman, 1984). As Mirtz, Hoyer, Taylor, and Yancey also argue, seating arrangements are a powerful factor in influencing particular emotions and behaviors from students. Bushman made this same argument in 1984; specifically, he argued that rowed seating discourages participation, socialization, and successful discussion. He continues further to provide advice to future composition instructors that "the day's task should dictate the seating arrangement for that day, and seating arrangements can, and should, be changed frequently" (Bushman, 1984). Bushman continues to suggest circle and horseshoe seating arrangements if discussion is the goal for the day, group or pod seating if coloration is the goal, and actually facing the wall if solitary and independent writing is the focus of instruction.

Bushman's advice aligns with New Materialism in that both agree that physical objects and the placement of those objects affect emotion and behavior. Bushman contends that seating arrangements encourage particular types of learning and writing from the students. Although he doesn't use the term, Bushman is arguing for composition instructors to understand and use a student's sense of place to encourage a particular type of learning and level of socialization in the writing process.

Although Bushman wrote published his composition teaching text in 1984, uses the term "environment" without any definition or limitation to what the word includes, and much of the information is outdated—such as his encouragement for a typewriter to be in the classroom—some of his suggestions and many of his underlying arguments are modern. Primarily, inanimate objects within the classroom and the classroom itself have agency; specifically, they have the

agency to affect student emotion, behavior, and encourage varying levels of socialization. The following two composition teaching texts I will analyze are much more contemporary; however, as I will show, the lack of consistency in terms, the minimal focus on the classroom as a space and place, and the understanding of how to utilize that space are all very similar to Bushman. Unlike composition studies texts, this means, although Bushman's text is 36 years old, the consistency in terms, detail, and way composition teaching texts discuss the classroom as a space and place has not progressed. I argue this lack of progression is an opportunity to bridge a gap in composition teaching instruction. Additionally, I argue that New Materialism can provide beneficial progression in how composition teaching texts and teachers view, discuss, and utilize the classroom as a space and place to, ultimately, benefit composition instruction as a whole.

Guide to Composition Pedagogies

Continuing with a much more contemporary composition teaching text, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, written by Tate, Taggart, Schick, and Hessler in 2014, qualifies as a composition teaching text firstly due to its title. Tate et al wrote this text with the intention of helping future composition instructors to better teach composition. Specifically, “[e]ach chapter presents a different argument and body of knowledge for how and why teachers should draw from that particular pedagogy (often in combination with others) as they teach” (Tate, 2004). Additionally, Tate et al continue to say “[e]ach chapter is a bibliographic guide written primarily for new comers to the field, especially graduate students, but also for scholars looking for an overview of pedagogical scholarship” (Tate, 2004). In short, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* provides its reader, intended to be composition teachers, with a compilation of step-by-step pedagogical suggestions that work independently and together in order to improve composition instruction.

In Tate et al's text, they include several fascinating pedagogies—collaborative writing, community engaged, critical, feminist, new media, and many more—with subcategories for how to use them, what they may look like, alternatives, complications, and other information that a teacher would practically have to know prior to experimenting with one of the pedagogies. However, in the entire 312-page book with 16 different pedagogies and numerous subsections within those pedagogy chapters, the consideration and discussion of the classroom as a space is only included in one chapter—basic writing.

The “Basic Writing Pedagogy: Shifting Academic Margins in Hard Times” chapter, written by Mutnick and Lamos, provides an overview of what a basic writing course is, key approaches to teaching it, unique and more specific approaches to teaching basic writing, and issues or obstacles basic writing courses face. Overall, Mutnick and Lamos describe the goal of basic writing pedagogy by quoting Salvatori's description as “a pedagogy that imbues in students the ability ‘1) to understand first of all, 2) to interpret that understanding, and 3) to apply the knowledge gained in the activity of reflexivity...to the subject matter under investigation and to life experiences” (Mutnick and Lamos, 2014). While this is the overview of the basic writing chapter, it makes no mention of the classroom as a space or place; however, this is the only section to consider or discuss the concept.

In the basic writing chapter, under the subsection “Spatial Approaches to BW Instruction,” Mutnick and Lamos explore how “spatial approaches combine some of the interests of the aforementioned critical approaches to BW with an explicit focus on the dynamics through which pedagogical and institutional spaces are constructed and operate, both literally and metaphorically” (Mutnick and Lamos, 2014). Mutnick and Lamos begin with two important claims. Firstly, they argue that spaces in pedagogy function literally. Secondly, they claim the

space operates. The space functioning literally implies that the space does something quantifiable during composition teaching. Additionally, Mutnick and Lamos write the space operates rather than is operated in which implies that the space has the autonomy to be the agent of operation rather than the environment in which other agents operate. Mutnick and Lamos discuss the metaphorical implications of basic writing space by arguing that the concept of basic writing and its status in the university is detrimental to student learning. They contend that by creating a space where students are categorized as lesser than their peers, it is more difficult and challenging for those students to progress in their writing. Similarly to confirmation bias, where a researcher may force data to match a predetermined outcome, Mutnick and Lamos express concerns that student writers struggle to be anything other than “basic” if the space in which they write is designed for “basic” writing and expectations.

Mutnick and Lamos conclude their short section on the spatial approaches to composition, specifically basic writing, by stating “spatial approaches to BW display a profound concern with the ‘wheres’ and ‘hows’ of literacy instruction. Teachers who share this concern aim in some cases to alter the conditions in which BW students learn by shifting the physical and/or curricular location of instruction” (Mutnick and Lamos, 2014). Surprisingly, in a text designed to give specific and practical examples for composition teachers on how to implement suggestions, Mutnick and Lamos never provide examples for how to alter the physical space of the classroom. They provide detailed suggestions only for affecting the metaphorical; small group meetings rather than a full class meeting was the most interesting suggestion. While Mutnick and Lamos argue that the space in which writing instruction occurs is concerning at times and can be shifted to alleviate this concern, they do not provide any examples or suggestions. They agree with scholars above that the classroom space is important and influential to composition instruction.

They go further to argue it is an issue in basic writing instruction, but they do not provide any suggestion to how to use the classroom space for instruction or any solution for how the physical space of a classroom can fix the issues they illuminate in basic writing. Mutnick and Lamos discuss space in the most basic terms, similarly to how previous scholars used terms such as space or environment to describe a classroom. Additionally, they contend the physical space of the classroom can and should be altered to improve instruction. Yet, again, they provide no advice on how to alter the space.

Tate et al only include, in their entire *Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, discussion of the classroom space in the “Basic Writing” chapter. While I am not stipulating that Tate et al argue that the only instance of a classroom’s physical environment being beneficial to instruction is in a basic writing course, they do, likely unintentionally, hide the little information about the classroom space in a chapter that may not be accessed by all composition instructors who bought the book. Likely, although it is an assumption, composition instructors who do not teach basic writing, are less likely to read the basic writing chapter; therefore, they might not see Mutnick and Lamos’ information on the classroom as a space. Those readers who do open the basic writing chapter would read that Mutnick and Lamos argue spaces in pedagogy function literally. They argue, similarly to the composition studies texts above and New Materialism, that space has a real impact in writing instruction. It is important to note that while Mutnick and Lamos argue that space functions literally, that some of the composition studies texts use other terms like environment or location while geography theory, applicable through New Materialism, argues that only place functions literally. Even without a consistent agreement on the terms, Mutnick and Lamos connect further with composition studies texts in that they argue that space operates. Said another way, space can have agency, the ability to affect those within it. Once

more Mutnick and Lamos say space has agency while New Materialism argues only place has agency and composition studies text use a variety of terms.

Mutnick and Lamos use the term “space” to describe the status of a classroom with and without agency. They use space when discussing the classroom prior to the teacher and students attaching meaning to it, and they use space again after that meaning is developed. This can cause confusion for new composition teachers trying to understand how to use the classroom space and as a place. I argue, as I have throughout this project, that discussing the classroom, through a New Materialistic lens, provides consistent language so new composition teachers can better understand the difference between the classroom space (without meaning) and the classroom as a place (with meaning).

Regardless of the incoherence of language, Mutnick and Lamos include in their chapter, “Basic Writing,” arguments that the composition classroom has a real impact on learning because of its ability to affect the students and teachers in the room. Unfortunately though, this is where Mutnick and Lamos stop; they do not provide examples of what that effect may look like nor explanations for how instructors can control the effect of the classroom. I will, in Chapter 3, provide an example of what a composition teaching text chapter might look like when the concepts of space and place are expanded to include examples and suggestions. I feel it is vital to first have consistent language to describe concepts, then, instructor new teachers on how they might use those concepts in their own classes.

The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing

The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing, written by Glenn and Goldthwaite, self-explains that the “book was written to help you plan your writing classes and help you teach your students to become better writers” (Glenn and Goldthwaite, 2014). The explanation, along with the title of the text, support my categorization of *The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing* as a

composition teaching text. While the categorization of Glenn and Goldthwaite's book as a composition teaching text is straightforward, their specific inclusion of this book, helping teachers to teach students to become better writers, is significant. While the goal of the previous texts was to help composition teachers to teach composition, Glenn and Goldthwaite specifically state the expectation, the way to measure the quality of the composition instruction, is for students to become better writers. Thus far, I have argued that viewing, discussing, and using the classroom as a place impacts student emotion and behavior which, if positive, improves the writing process and product. In short, I agree with Glenn and Goldthwaite that the measure of quality composition instruction is to measure the writing quality of the students. In order to achieve higher writing quality, I argue for more attention to be paid to the classroom as a place, Glenn and Goldthwaite take steps in that direction.

The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing first discusses the physical space of a classroom in their third chapter, "Everyday Activities," where they explain and analyze common everyday activities that occur in a composition class. Glenn and Goldthwaite specifically discuss the affect seating arrangements have on class ethos. They describe a common situation in composition classes where the students in the front of the room are more attentive, social, and participatory compared to those in the back of class who may be distracted, antisocial, and unwilling to participate. Rather than ignoring the students in the back or specifically calling them out to make them participate, Glenn and Goldthwaite suggest a subtler use of classroom space to balance the dynamic within the room. They propose that "you [the instructor] can ask those front-sitters to take seats in the back so that there's a kind of seat rotation, or- if the chairs are not fixed to the floor- you can arrange them in a circle" (Glenn and Goldthwaite, 2014). By moving seats, either front to back or in a circle, Glenn and Goldthwaite suggest utilizing classroom space

to affect the attentiveness of the students within the room. They argue that “each student must feel like a necessary and important part of the class, of class discussion, of deliberations on assignments and due dates of group work” (Glenn and Goldthwaite, 2014). Without directly arguing that the classroom has agency, Glenn and Goldthwaite do recognize the power and influence the classroom space has on learning, specifically the class ethos. By understanding the classroom space, its function, and its tendencies, Glenn and Goldthwaite found a way to improve classroom attention and participation without alienating students. Glenn and Goldthwaite advocate for the use of classroom space to improve composition learning and instruction.

It isn't until much later, in chapter 10, that Glenn and Goldthwaite once again include the consideration of the physical space of the classroom for composition instruction. In chapter 10, while focusing on delivery, Glenn and Goldthwaite cite Yancey's *Delivering College Composition*, included in chapter 1 of this thesis, for the purpose of “consideration of material conditions that affect the teaching and learning of composition” (Glenn and Goldthwaite, 2014). They later clarify “material conditions” to mean “physical space.” Along with citing Yancey, Glenn and Goldthwaite also cite Taylor's “Design, Delivery, and Narcolepsy,” also discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, to “argue that attention to such elements [student priorities] might lead to profitable changes in matters ranging from classroom design to what time the school day begins” (Glenn and Goldthwaite, 2014). In Glenn and Goldthwaite's citations and explanations of Yancey and Taylor's work, Glenn and Goldthwaite provide important clarifications and arguments about the classroom space. First, Glenn and Goldthwaite argue that the physical space, as they call it, has the ability to affect teaching and learning of composition. Second, they argue that the consideration of the classroom design should stem from the priorities, the needs, of the students. In both cases, Glenn and Goldthwaite argue that the physical space of the classroom

is worthy of analysis because of its ability to affect learning and teaching, and has a relationship with student priorities, or needs. Similarly to New Materialism, although, again, without the same consistency of terms, Glenn and Goldthwaite recognize the agency and influence the classroom has on composition. They feel so strongly that new composition instructors should understand, and, eventually, learn to use the classroom space strategically that they provide a writing exercise to better understand how the classroom space functions.

“Write about the physical space of the classroom: its size, the presence or absence of climate control (a usable thermostat); the presence or absence of windows (and whether they open); the proximity of the classroom to other classrooms, hallways, buildings, offices, streets; the number of chairs/desks, their arrangement (rows, circle, half-circle), their size, and whether there are any for left-handers; the presence age, and arrangement of other equipment in the room (chalkboard or whiteboard, TV/DVD, projector, screen, document camera, computers, clock, and so on); whether any equipment is outdated, distracting, or seldom used; the location of doors; the kind and quality of lighting; the extent to which the room is accessible, to those with disabilities (learning disabilities, mobility impairment, blindness, deafness)” (Glenn and Goldthwaite, 2014)

“Read your responses [...] and make a claim concerning the extent to which the physical space of the classroom shapes, interrupts, and/or aids your learning. What specific improvements might be made by you, you teacher, or those who have control over the physical space of the classroom” (Glenn and Goldthwaite, 2014).

Glenn and Goldthwaite provide an interesting writing prompt that accounts for several factors of composition learning and teaching within the classroom and the classroom itself. They go further to ask the writer to reflect on their list to explore how those factors may impact the writing process and product. Finally, they challenge the writer to consider how to use the space of the room to benefit writing.

Throughout this entire project, I have argued that it is beneficial for composition instructors to view, discuss, and use the classroom as a place to improve writing process, product, and instruction. Glenn and Goldthwaite make the same arguments through their sample activity. They first challenge the writer to catalog everything in and of the room; they ask the

writer to view the room. Then Glenn and Goldthwaite prompt the writer to reflect on the influence the objects have; they prompt the writer to discuss the classroom space. Lastly, Glenn and Goldthwaite challenge the writer to propose ways to improve writing learning and instruction; they challenge the writer to use the classroom as a place. They contend that “this exercise may make you aware of students’ learning needs and how your use of classroom space and technology can help you address students’ concerns. The immediate benefit of this exercise for students is that it can [...] help them recognize the ways that not only individuals but also objects and physical spaces influence communication” (Glenn and Goldthwaite, 2014). Glenn and Goldthwaite contend that the exercise above helps the writer realize the effect the classroom has on writing and the ways students learn writing. Writing does not occur in a vacuum, nor does writing instruction; therefore, understanding the space and place in which composition learning and instruction occurs is vital for all composition instructors.

Although Glenn and Goldthwaite use the term space, leave it undefined, and lack consistency in terminology, their writing prompt embodies and exemplifies two arguments of this project. First, that the classroom place has agency and influence over those in the room. Second, viewing, discussing, and using the classroom as a place positively can improve writing process, product, and instruction.

While Glenn and Goldthwaite provide the closest example of what I call for, I still argue that their text, along with all the texts included above, still lacks a consistent language for discussing the classroom space and place. I contend that New Materialism and geography provide that common language. Further, I maintain that the detail and depth to which composition teaching texts, *The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing* included, explain how to view, discuss, and use the classroom as a place can be improved.

The Divide

I argue, as I have previously, that while composition teaching texts briefly include a section on the physical space and place of a classroom, they do not provide enough depth in their discussion of the space nor enough detail in their recommendation on specifically how to use the space. I showed that composition studies texts, although incoherent in their terms and definitions, value and defend the value of viewing, discussing, and using the classroom as a space and place in composition. However, the theory from the composition studies texts ends in theory because composition teaching texts do not adequately instruct future composition teachers on how to understand and practically implement the theory of the classroom as space and place. Specifically, composition teaching texts do not help new composition teachers to view, discuss, and use the classroom as a place. Composition teaching texts have the responsibility to help new instructors see the space of a classroom as an environment that impacts the writing process, product, and instruction. Once new instructors can see the classroom in that way, the composition texts need to provide detailed discussion about the classroom space and place. Specifically, a coherent set of terms used among compositionist when discussing the classroom would be beneficial to the discipline. Lastly, composition teaching texts need to provide, in detail, specific ways for new instructors to use the classroom space and as a place. With more common language, texts could more easily build upon one another to construct ways to use the classroom as a space and place.

As I've shown above, that while composition studies texts accomplish much of what I call for in composition instruction theory, there is a divide in connecting the theory to the practical. Composition teaching texts do not, in enough detail, explain how to see the classroom as an impactful agent during instruction. Composition teaching texts also do not develop a common language or defined set of terms to discuss the classroom as a space or place. Lastly,

composition teaching texts, because of a lack of emphasis on the importance of the classroom and an incoherence among terms, do not provide adequate examples for how to use the classroom as a place. While composition studies texts at least theorize how the classroom can be viewed and used, a divide occurs between studies and teaching texts where the teaching texts do not use the theory the studies texts provide. I argue New Materialism can help bridge that divide.

The Bridge

A core argument in New Materialism is that inanimate objects have agency; further, that inanimate objects can be locations rather than singular items. Therefore, New Materialism can help composition teaching texts and instructors conceptualize and view the classroom as having agency to affect students and teachers alike. Additionally, New Materialism, drawing from geography, can provide the coherence among terms for composition studies texts to view and discuss the physical composition classroom. Geography theory clearly explains that a space is a location that the person or people within it have yet to attach meaning. A place is a location in which meaning has been attached by the people or person within it. Lastly, once that meaning is attached and a space becomes a place, people develop a sense of place. Sense of place is how a person feels within and about the place in which they are. Therefore, New Materialism and geography provide the terms necessary to understand how to discuss the composition classroom in terms of space and place.

Lastly, New Materialism, specifically its theory on sense of place, provides beneficial insight for composition teaching texts on how to use the classroom as a place. While composition studies texts largely agree that the classroom affects student emotions and behaviors which affects writing process, product, and instruction, composition teaching texts do not continue discussing these affects. Therefore, new composition instructors are not taught about the

classroom as a place; and, subsequently, do not utilize the concept to benefit the writing process, product, and instruction. I argue geography not only provides the common language for these discussions and that composition teaching texts should use this language to communicate to new instructors how to use the classroom as a place; but, also that New Materialism can be a tool to help composition teaching texts use the classroom as a place and student sense of place. Because a sense of place affects behaviors and emotions and behaviors and emotions affect the writing process, product, and learning the ability for composition teachers to use the classroom as a place to develop a positive sense of place for their students is vital to composition learning and instruction. I will provide a specific example of what this may look like in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

New Materialism is not the answer to all struggles that students and teachers face in composition classrooms but, it can benefit the writing process, product, and instruction through helping students develop positive behaviors and emotions about the classroom through a positive sense of place. For new composition teachers to be able to view, discuss, and use the classroom as a place to help students develop a positive sense of place, I contend the first step is updating the composition teaching texts commonly used to prepare new teachers. Composition teaching texts, like the ones included above, are a wealth of information that is valuable to both new and current composition teachers; however, they should use New Materialism to provide necessary detail and depth on viewing, discussing, and using the classroom as a place. As I have shown, while composition studies texts lack consistency of language and terminology for discussing the classroom as a place, composition teaching text lack detail of theory, examples for guidance, and consistency of terms as well. New Materialism can provide the consistent language with clearly defined terms, explains the theory behind the terms, and gives a way for teachers to use the theory practically in the classroom. New Materialism, in a composition teaching text, can

provide new teachers the ability to view, discuss, and use the classroom as a place to improve the writing process, product, and teaching of the class through creating more positive behavior and emotions developed through a positive sense of place. In the following chapter, I provide an example of how a New Materialism chapter in a composition teaching might look and what it may include.

CHAPTER 4. GENERAL CONCLUSION

The previous two chapters resembled a traditional thesis with a central argument that New Materialism, drawing from geography, provided composition studies and teaching texts with the necessary common language to better view, discuss, and use the classroom as a place to help composition instructors create a positive sense of place resulting in improved writing process, product, and instruction. I claimed that composition teaching texts included, only in part, small sections about *how* to use the classroom as a place. Therefore, I am maneuvering away from a traditional thesis structure to provide what I believe is a nontraditional but helpful third chapter. In this chapter, I provide an example of what a chapter in a composition teaching text that, in detail, explores how to view, discuss, and use the classroom space and as a place. Similarly to the composition teaching texts from earlier, I intend this example chapter to qualify as “composition” because it will specifically discuss writing and the teaching of writing. Additionally, I justify it being a “teaching text” because it is written specifically for composition teachers, new or experienced, who can add to their writing instruction through viewing, discussing, and using the classroom as a space or place. Ultimately, I intend this chapter to exemplify how a chapter in a composition teaching text specifically explores and explains the classroom space, place, and the sense of place of students so that composition instructors can help add another layer to their pedagogy.

I imagine this hypothetical composition teaching text chapter to be used primarily by first-year composition instructors, those with minimal or no teaching experience. While each university is unique and each composition classroom different than the others, in this chapter, I imagine a composition classroom focused on interactional instruction and writing. Because writing is so inimitable and personal, I advocate for a composition class to emphasize

comfortability within the classroom through an encouragement of interaction. By students familiarizing themselves with their peers and the instructor, ideally, they will feel connected to and conversant with their audience. The following chapter will argue and provide suggestions for how to view, discuss, and use the classroom as a place that inspires interaction. I will discuss ways to breakdown power barriers between teacher and students. I will include ways to organize the classroom in ways that increase interactional potential. And, I will suggest using localized routines to help students feel comfortable in the classroom. Ultimately, each suggestion I make is positioned under the assumption that writing can improve with the comfort and familiarity gained through an interactional classroom.

I organize my chapter with subheadings, or signposts, so the reader can easily navigate throughout the chapter and select relevant sections for their teaching. I will begin with a brief explanation and justification for the chapter, explaining its purpose and connection to composition theory and pedagogy. From here, I will take the arguments from earlier in my project and show how they might practically be used. I will start with a common language, explaining, briefly, what New Materialism is, the language geography provides, and a justification for why a common language is valuable. The next section will be on the classroom space. Within this section, I outline how instructors can view the classroom space based on the New Materialism concepts of interactional past and potential. After the classroom space section, I progress to a section on the classroom as a place. In this section, I build upon the space section to discuss how new instructors can view and use the classroom as a place to develop routine, flexibility, and ethos within the classroom. I also include the findings of a study on classroom seating arrangements as an example. Lastly, I end with a section on the sense of place students develop within a composition class. I argue, as I have previously, that a positive sense of place

yields positive behavior and emotion from the students which results in a benefit to the writing process, product, and instruction.

I Say, You Say, We Say: Developing a Common Language

Whether you've been teaching composition for years or are reading this book because you are a first-year teacher, understanding the classroom in which you teach can benefit not only your instruction but also the writing process and product for students. Many of us have tried to learn something but struggled because the teacher did not articulate the material well enough, the concepts were so challenging that we gave up, and some of us have even struggled because the environment in which we were trying to learn was not compatible for learning. While teacher articulation and the selection of manageable and appropriate material are important factors in composition pedagogy, this chapter will focus solely on the classroom. However, before beginning any implementation of a concept, the field must first agree on how that concept can be defined. Because there are differences in the terms people in the field use, I'm going to use language from geography, which gives us some useful definitions, such as, space, place, sense of place, interactional past, and interactional potential. Before you can run, you must walk; before you can implement, you must define.

New Materialism is a rhetorical lens that "recognizes that we do not simply point *at* things but act *alongside* and *with* them" (Barnett and Boyle, 2016). New Materialism views things, inanimate objects and locations, as having agency, or the ability to affect people. Imagine sitting on a chair in a classroom that has uneven legs. The uneven legs distract you because you cannot sit comfortably or balanced. This distraction becomes so much that it either engulfs your focus so long that you ignore part, or even all, of the ongoing lecture. Or, the uneven legs of the chair are distracting enough to cause you to stand up and move to a different seat in the class. This sudden movement may cause the students around you or even the instructor to become

distracted. As New Materialism contends, the chair, and inanimate object, caused a reaction and affected the human or humans within the classroom. The chair has agency.

Space, Place, and Sense of Place

Space exists, it is real and tangible. But, it exists in the abstract. Space is everywhere you are and are not so long as you have no connection to that space. Imagine, again, a classroom, the classroom in which you teach. By the midway point in the semester, this classroom has meaning to you. You know the intricacies of the room, such as one chair is uneven and your students know not to sit in it. You know that the room stays cool on hot days but gets unbearably hot on cold days because of an overeager radiator. After your experiences, the classroom develops meaning for you. Now, imagine the room down the hall from yours. You know it exists, you know classes are taught there, but you have no meaning attached to it. You've never seen the inside, aside from walking past it. You've never taught there, you don't know if there is a broken chair, you don't know the temperature, you don't know anything about the room. For you, the room is meaningless. For you, the room is a space. It exists, but to you, is without meaning.

Place, as hinted at above, is a space that develops meaning. As the space section includes, meaning can be cultivated through experience- knowing the broken chair, knowing the temperature, knowing specific and impactful aspects of the room that further create a meaningful place. Once a space becomes a place, it has the ability to affect you as much as you affect it. Similarly to the chair causing a distraction for the student, when a location affects the people within it, it becomes a place. The classroom down the hall, a space, is meaningless to you because it does not affect nor has not affected you. However, if that room shared a wall with your room and constantly interrupted your lecture with loud shouts and cheers, that classroom is no longer a meaningless space but a meaningful place. The classroom affects you and your class; therefore, the classroom is now meaningful to you which means it becomes a place.

Place can also be created by past experience or the potential for experience. New Materialism describes two terms, interactional past and interactional potential, as two key components in transitioning a space to a place. As explained by Goel et al, there are two possibilities for a space to obtain meaning. First, the person “has had activities that are meaningful within its boundaries; [second,] features of the place have shaped, constrained, and influenced the activities that are perceived as able to happen within it” (Goel et al, 2011). Interactional past, said another way, is the experiences one has in a type of place that influences their concept of place for all similar places. For example, if a student taking your composition class has only ever had poor experiences in English classes, he will enter your class, before ever seeing the room or listening to you, with predetermined opinions of composition classes, their value, and their purpose. His concept of place of composition classrooms is negative; therefore, his behavior and emotion will be that of someone in a situation they do not wish to be in. He may be sullen and closed off, unwilling to participate in the class because his sense of place has communicated to him that composition classes are not worth the time or effort. Goel et al’s first premise for how a space becomes a place is interactional past. The second premise is interactional potential.

Interactional potential is the opportunity for someone to attribute meaning to a space, make it place, and develop a place. For example, continuing with the student from above who has a negative sense of place due to his interactional past, you, as the instructor, can change his feelings toward compositions with interactional potential. The way you teach the class, the way you interact with him and the rest of the students, and the way your class connects with the students all have the interactional potential to create a positive place for everyone in the room, even the student with a poor interactional past. Therefore, learning how to use the classroom as a

place is so vital to all pedagogy but, specifically composition pedagogy because much of a composition class relies on the dynamic, behavior, and emotions among teacher and students. The feelings and emotions cultivated by interactional past and potential is called, in New Materialism, sense of place.

“Sense of place is what makes a space specific, and generally relates to the physical characteristics of the environment, the affect and meanings (including memories and associations), and the activities afforded by the place including the social interactions associated with the place” (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). Said another way, one’s sense of place is their particular and unique way of viewing a place, interacting within that place, and feelings about that place. In regard to behavior, a unique sense of place is a “sense of appropriate behavior, and a context for engaging in and interpreting action” (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). In terms of emotion, a sense of place “actually evokes our emotional relationships with places: the feelings we develop toward places (either positive, negative or ambivalent) and the meanings we thereby assign to them” (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). Interactional past and potential, one’s previous experiences and potential for new experiences, influence one’s sense of place, specifically, their emotions and behaviors when in a certain place.

The Classroom

Imagine this, on a warm summer day, as you sit in your home or on campus office lesson planning for the upcoming school year, preparing to teach your first ever composition class. An email interrupts your work, the title says: classroom assignments. You feel a rush of excitement and anxiety. You’ve never taught a composition class before and have no idea what building or room in which you’ll get to experience teaching this class. Before you open the email, the classroom, your classroom, is just a space. You don’t know its location or how close or far away it is from your office. You don’t know if the room runs hot or cold. You don’t know if it has a

chalkboard, whiteboard, or smartboard. You don't know if it is well-lit or dim and dreary. You don't know if it is easily accessible to those with disabilities. You don't know if the desks are new and mobile or old and bolted to the chairs. You don't know if there is a desk for the teacher. You don't know if there is a window to allow light. You don't know anything about this room, it is a space without meaning; yet, the simple knowledge that it exists already has an effect on you.

Students feel a similar rush of emotions when they are told where their composition class is, especially if they are unfamiliar with the building and room. For them, as well, the classroom is a space- without specific meaning due to a lack of specific connection and knowledge of the space. Nevertheless, just like you, your students will likely have their curiosity peaked and either wonder what the room is like or go explore to find it for themselves.

From the moment a room is assigned to the composition instructor and students, opportunities are presented. The classroom, for some students, is a space, without meaning or influence. For other students, based on their interactional past in classrooms overall or composition classroom specifically, the classroom has already affected them and their behaviors and emotions. It is your responsibility as an instructor to use the opportunities provided by the classroom to maximize the learning experience for each student in your class. You accomplish this by first understanding that the classroom, although inanimate, has agency and once students attach meaning to make the classroom space a place, the classroom will affect them and their learning. So, you, as the instructor, must do all you can to create a classroom space that guides students toward developing a positive sense of place to encourage positive behavior and emotion. If students behave in a positive way and feel positive about the class, then their writing process and subsequent product will benefit. But how? How do you take a meaningless space, a space you likely had no choice in selecting for your class, and make it a place that communicates to

students your desired message? How do you use the classroom as a place to develop a positive sense of place for your students? The short answer is that positive interactional potential, created and nurtured by you, can overtake a previous negative interactional past to help students redirect previous negative feelings, or direct students with no previous feelings about composition, toward a positive learning and writing experience. But, that answer is far too abstract to be practically helpful.

The following sections will provide explanations and examples of how you can create that positive classroom place. These suggestions are not the only possible ways of creating a positive classroom place, nor are they guaranteed to work. Rather, they are suggestions, rooted in research, of ways you *might* transition a classroom space to a place which affects students in a positive way. First, I will discuss how to view the classroom as a space. Specifically, I will suggest things to consider within a classroom so the students first encounter with the space is as positive as possible. Second, I discuss how to view and use the classroom as a place. I provide examples from previous scholars for cultivating routine, flexibility, and ethos from the physical space of the classroom. Finally, I discuss how to develop a sense of place for your students that encourages positive behavior and emotion to benefit their writing process and product. I conclude with a call for future research to test, or in some cases replicate, the suggestions I will make. No two classrooms are the same; but, as composition teachers we have similar goals for our students and can use the classroom to help achieve those goals.

How to View Classroom Space

Teaching at a university, you likely did not choose your composition classroom, you likely did not choose the building, and, if you are a first-year teacher, you likely are unfamiliar with the room itself. Until you walk into the room, your composition classroom is just a space—without meaning. For your students, they will likely be similar to you: unfamiliar with the room,

its layout, and its furnishings. Therefore, you have the opportunity to have your room make a good first impression. Just like in any introduction, a first impression lasts. Students will immediately begin attributing meaning to your room, immediately transitioning the space to a place, and immediately developing sense of place. It is your responsibility and opportunity to direct the meaning they make so their sense of place is as positive as possible. I encourage you first to answer the question- what kind of class do you want your composition class to be? Lecture? Participatory between teacher and class? Participatory between students? A combination of the three? Once you choose the type of class you want to have, you can begin customizing your classroom so the space students walk into is designed to help them, eventually, view it as a place that communicates your goal.

Most composition classes I have been a student in and the way I prefer to teach composition is a classroom designed for participation and collaboration; specifically, a room designed for students to feel comfortable and confident enough to take risks with their writing and break from their comfort zone with class discussion. Therefore, I design my classroom space so that once students start analyzing it to create meaning, they are directed toward a place that communicates confident participation and comfortable collaboration.

To achieve your goal, you need to view the classroom space, literally and physically. What is the room like? Where is it located? What is in it? What can I change and what is required to stay? Catalog, by hand or mentally, the components of the space. Take catalog of everything in your classroom: the door, the lighting, the number of seats, the way the seats are organized, the desks, if the seats are attached to the desks, the walls, the windows or lack of windows, the artwork or lack of artwork, the temperature, the surrounding noises, the smell, the teacher's desk, the projector screen, the chalkboard, the whiteboard, the smart board, the outlets,

and everything else you see in your room. As students attach meaning to the space, all of these components of your classroom will eventually affect your students' learning. For example, if the classroom is overly cold, students may be less willing to move around the room and interact because they are uncomfortable. If the teacher's desk is large and imposing, students may see the front of the room as a place too intimidating and will not ask questions after class. If there is a projector screen which covers half of the chalkboard, you as the teacher have less room to teach using the chalkboard which will change your teaching style or require students to take notes before you erase the board to make room. These are just some examples of how the classroom space will become a meaningful place that affects instruction and learning. Therefore, you have the responsibility and opportunity to structure the room and affect the space so it influences the students in a way that helps you achieve your goal for the class. Once you see the classroom space and everything in it, you can begin to see it as a place.

How to View the Classroom as a Place

The classroom, as a place, affects the instruction, learning, and writing that will occur throughout the semester. Every part of the room you cataloged has the potential and agency to affect student learning and writing. For example, if the room has a poor internet connection, on research workshop days, students may become frustrated and discouraged because they are unable to use the internet. If the student desks are small and bolted to the chairs, students may only be able to have a laptop or notebook out, not both, which can restrict their writing process. (I for one prefer to take notes, brainstorm, by hand and then type it on my laptop). If the desks are bolted to the chairs, moving the desks around for group work may be more challenging and discourage participation with peers. Each characteristic and object in your classroom combine to create the classroom as a place; then, that place affects students' learning, writing process, and product.

To begin to see the classroom as a place, you need to think about the interactional potential of the classroom. Many students will enter your room with a wide variety of interactional pasts, a wide variety of preconceived notions of what composition is, its value, and its function. While the classroom will still be a space to them, they may look for familiarities to confirm their previous experiences. In an ideal world, you would know the positive ways students view composition so you can continue them and the negative ways so you can avoid or correct them. However, you will not know what your students think or how they feel about composition, you will not know their international past. Therefore, I recommend viewing your classroom space as a blank slate, an opportunity for all students to see the interactional potential of the room as a space designed for your teaching goal- my suggestion is still confident participation and comfortable collaboration.

By now, hopefully, you see your classroom as a space that, once it becomes a place, can and will impact instruction and learning. So far, you see the classroom as a space, have cataloged all the aspects and objects within it, have a goal for your class, and see how once the space becomes a place that it will affect your students' learning, writing process, and product. In the next section, I write about examples for ways you may use the classroom as a place to benefit your students. These examples are not exhaustive and are not guaranteed to work; however, they are steeped in scholarship and I selected them because I've personally experienced them as being successful.

How to Use the Classroom as a Place

In this section, I expand the suggestions of other composition scholars to exemplify how to use the classroom as a place, specifically looking at routine, flexibility, and ethos. I hope, as you read the works of these scholars and the suggestions I make, you take note of which sound appealing to you. Thus far, you have a goal for your class and a catalog of your classroom, the

next step is to decide how use the aspects and objects you've cataloged to achieve your goal. Your goal may be to use locations in the room to help students develop a writing routine, or process. You may decide flexibility is important, specifically, move seating arrangements to encourage more socialization and participation among students. Or, you may reimagine specific places within the classroom to refocus the ethos of the teacher and students. When using the classroom as a place, in any capacity, previous composition scholars, myself included, decided on a goal, then worked toward that goal by using the classroom as a place with agency and influence. I encourage you to do the same.

Routine in Place

On teaching days, you might arrive at your classroom a few minutes early. You might write your agenda on the board and set up your laptop for lecture. Your students file in, some arriving early, and some late. They all tend to sit in the same seats and have the same pre-class routine. In fact, most people have a routine. These routines are often automatic and habitual, but powerful and an opportunity. As a teacher, you can use your classroom to create routines.

Routines in a place can have positive effects on students and their writing process.

Graves, author of *Writing*, provides a useful example of how this might be achieved. He observed a teacher, Bangs, who realized that during workshop days, his students often reached obstacles in their writing. Whenever they reached an obstacle, the students either stopped writing or came to him with questions. The issue he faced was that during the designed independent work time for the students, Bangs scheduled conferences to help the students with their writing. However, his conferences continually were interrupted with students asking him questions or with him having to help students refocus on their task. He was unable to conduct effective conferences about writing process, ironically because students struggled with their writing

process. Bangs realized the issue was students not having a place to go when they reached an obstacle; he noted “sloppy class, sloppy thinking (Graves, 1983).

The lack of designated places designed for help in the classroom caused students to only see him as the locus for assistance. For students to get the help they needed, Bangs implemented a routine steeped in certain locations in the classroom. Bangs explained his routine as such: “1. I had one place where paper was kept. 2. Writing folders were kept in one box and returned after using. 3. A signup sheet, 5 unscheduled conferences a day” (Graves, 1983). Through Bangs’ routine within specific places, students knew where to go to organize their own writing process. This routine limited the amount of questions Bangs had to answer so that he could focus on scheduled conferences. Similarly, if a student was stuck, the student knew to go to the unscheduled signup sheet rather than interrupting an ongoing conference. Students learned routine, independent writing, and how to organize their writing process through a routine centered around places in the classroom.

As composition instructors, we have days designated to individual parts of the writing process. For example, a syllabus may say that Monday the class will brainstorm ideas and create a web to spark inspiration for their writing. Wednesday, students will transform the web into an outline for more structure and direction. And, Friday is a day specifically designed for doing research for the paper. Routine is commonly used in composition classes; but Graves, using Banks’ class as an example, advocates for routine through classroom places. Bangs’ success of using the classroom as a place, attributing meaning to particular areas within the room, depicts how the classroom can be used as a place to benefit writing process through routine steeped in place.

Writing process is a unique and often personal experience for all writers, how I write differs drastically than how you write; yet, we are both writers. So, I feel requiring students to follow a specific process schedule can hinder more than help. Instead, an option to help students with their writing process is to expand upon Graves and Banks' idea of routine through place. Rather than Monday, Wednesday, and Friday having specific process benchmarks, perhaps that the entire week is "writing process week." Then, within the classroom, students have specific places where specific parts of the writing process can occur. For example, at the front of the room (typically has the most space), 10 students per day will have a 5-minute writing conference scheduled with the teacher. This conference can be about any aspect of the paper because the starting point for one student may not be the same as others. I suggest not having a sign-up sheet like Banks, where students sign up for a second in-class conference; rather, have the sign-up sheet for students to use your office hours for any follow-up guidance.

Next, have a place, ideally near outlets, where students do online research. This area only needs desks near the outlets because most of the work will be done on laptops. The students are near outlets in case they need to charge their device. Finally, if possible, be sure to have class laptops available for students who may not have their own.

The next section needs to be further away from other places because collaboration is encouraged. This place is a brainstorm and peer review area. Students should be allowed to deliberate, discuss, and dissect each other's ideas and papers so they can get another's perspective or talk through any obstacle. If possible, have desks and chairs that face each other or a table that seats multiple students. If collaboration is the goal, the seating needs to be a place that aids students in discussion.

Finally, the rest of class is designed for independent writing. Because this writing does not require extra space or special accommodations like outlets, the only location suggestion is to put them as far away from the collaboration area as possible to help the independent writers focus without distraction. If possible, allow students to use two desks so they have space to use a laptop and notebook simultaneously. This place in the classroom should be designed to isolate students as much as possible and discourage noise or talking.

Students are not expected to turn in a product showing they were productive. You are teaching college-level composition. You can place trust in your students that they will either be productive in or out of class; if not, their final product will reflect their choices. While this may sound harsh, the goal of this classroom construction is to give students the autonomy to write with their own process but have places setup to help them if needed. Because of student autonomy, students are not expected or required to visit each place in the classroom. Students choose if and when they want to use the places available to them. Your role as the teacher is to provide them help if students need it, it is the role of the student to reach out if necessary.

In this suggestion, the classroom is divided into four places which communicate specific expectations for behavior and goals for writing. Place 1, conference area, is where the place communicates an opportunity for discussion with the teacher and the goal for writing can be anything the student needs. Place 2, research area, is where the place communicates independence and solitude where the goal for writing is to bolster the papers with research. Place 3, collaborative area, is where the place communicates collaboration and participation with peers where the goal for writing is to get the perspective of another writer to help with an obstacle in the writing process. Finally, place 4, writing area, communicates to the students quiet and

independent writing, and the goal for writing is for students to begin creating a final product. In each instance, the routine and the way the place is structured communicates to the students.

Flexibility in Place

I explained, to you, how you might dissect and organize the classroom into smaller areas designed to construct specific routine and expectations to help students with their writing process. In this section, I suggest how to use seating arrangements to create a classroom place which communicates to students the desired level of participation for the day.

Yancey, editor of *Delivering College Composition*, argues that the design of a classroom stipulates a particular way of instructing within that classroom. Furthermore, Yancey continues, that the design of the room is not the only factor, the kind of furniture in the room and the placement of that furniture communicates certain expectations for learning. Taylor criticizes the design of traditional composition classrooms because they communicate to the students that the instructor epitomizes perfection, is omniscient, and the best way to learn writing is to listen to the omniscient model of perfection lecture on how to write well. Finally, Bushman, author of *The Teaching of Writing*, argues that rowed seating discourages participation, socialization, and successful discussion. Bushman continues to suggest circle and horseshoe seating arrangements if discussion is the goal for the day, group or pod seating if coloration is the goal, and actually facing the wall if solitary and independent writing is the focus of instruction.

Yancey, Taylor, and Bushman all argue that seating arrangements directly affect the students in writing classrooms; specifically, the seating arrangements communicate to the students a particular set of expectations and designate roles for the students and the teacher. Yancey and Taylor agree that the traditional rowed seating communicates to students that they are subordinate to the teacher and should silently watch the teacher teach while they learn. Sometimes, lecture, even in a composition class, is a necessary way of delivering material;

however, as Bushman points out, what and how we teach change often, sometimes we lecture, sometimes we collaborate, and sometimes students work independently. So, seating arrangements should change to best accommodate the style of teaching for the day.

An example of how instructors can use the classroom as a place, specifically seating arrangements, to achieve a desired goal is from a study conducted by McCorskey and McVetta. They argued “it has been reasonably well established that student affect toward a class is related to student learning, student attitudes toward classroom arrangements are a matter of no small concern when determining a choice of classroom arrangement” (McCorskey and McVetta, 1978). Exploring three forms of arrangement, rowed, U-Shaped, and Pod or Module, McCorskey and McVetta found that students prefer rowed seating in required courses but U-Shape in electives because “students are aware of both their own desired level of participation and the participation demands and opportunities of different classroom arrangements, and they desire arrangements compatible with their desire (or lack of desire) for participation” (McCorskey and McVetta, 1978). The conclusions drawn by the above researchers suggest that face to face seating, like that in a U-Shaped arrangement encourages participation but students only prefer that arrangement if they feel the need or desire to participate.

As I have suggested thus far, teachers have the responsibility and opportunity to customize their classroom to achieve their desired goals for the class. If, as a composition instructor, you wish for your class to be more participatory, organizing the seats in a U-Shape encourages students to feel more comfortable participating. This is just one example of how a teacher can use the classroom space to achieve their desired goal for the class. As your teaching goals and delivery styles change, so should the seating arrangements in your class. Additionally, the seating arrangements in a composition class have the agency to affect how students behave

and learn; so, as a composition instructor, it is imperative that you consider how the students are seated and maneuver the seats as needed.

Being flexible as a teacher is a valuable skill— thinking on your feet, rearranging the class schedule after snow days, and doubling back to re-teach material that your students need help understanding. Also, flexibility within the classroom place is valuable, specifically for composition teachers. Unlike many other classes, our curriculum and delivery can change daily. Sometimes you'll teach about the structure of a paper and lecture for the entire period. Other days, you'll have a workshop where you speak very little and let the students run the class. Other days, you'll have a combination of teacher and student lead classes. Flexibility is not an option but a requirement for composition instructors; so, it is important that you consider how your classroom can be flexible too.

I suggest, after you lesson plan, try to imagine who will be leading the class. Then consider if the class is structured in a way where everyone can easily follow their lead. Going further, are those leading in a place conducive to leading and are those following in a place conducive to follow? You should consider questions such as these when lesson planning. Composition as a subject requires flexibility, this extends to your classroom, as an agent, too.

Ethos in Place

The last suggestion I will provide in this chapter is how to use the classroom as a place to redirect the ethos of the students and teacher. Often, the teacher is seen as the person with the power and the students are seen as those without power. This can manifest in writing; students can feel hesitant to include their ideas because they do not feel they have the credibility to do so. Further, students can feel reluctant to offer their ideas, specifically ones that disagree with the teacher, because they do not feel they have the authority to do so. In composition classes, we as teachers strive to help our students find their voice- how they say what they want to say and also

the confidence to say it. Earlier, I shared my goal for when I teach composition, part of it was helping students to have the confidence to participate. Participation occurs during class discussions but also participating in scholar discourse. Students should, in your class, begin to feel confident that they can add to the ongoing discussion in regard to about their writing focus. However, unless students feel they have the credibility, the ethos, they cannot develop that confidence. One way to help students build their internal ethos is to break down the perceived difference in power between teacher and students.

In Nagelhout and Rutz's edited collection, *Classroom Spaces and Writing Instruction*, both Hoger and Mirtz explore the power dynamic between teacher and students created by the classroom structure. Hoger claims "hierarchical spaces invite hierarchical pedagogies and fixed seating impedes collaboration" (Hoger, 2004). Mirtz argues that students are reluctant to move to the front space of the room because that is where the powerful teacher resides. Mirtz states, students often resist the movement and end up further away from the teacher than before. Mirtz notes a possible reason for students, when asked, moving away from the front of the room is because the front of the room is "teacher space" (Mirtz, 2004). If the deterrent for students to move near the front of the room is steeped in power, that also means that students feel subordinate in their "student space." Both Hoger and Mirtz contend that the place in the front of the room, where the teacher lectures and the largest desk in the room resides, is reserved for the only person in the room with ethos- the teacher. Meanwhile, the students are crammed into an audience of outranked writers who have little to no ethos. Even though the classroom is level, many students see the place at the front of the room as unobtainable and reserved only for the person with power and ethos, both attributes they do not have.

The issue with students feeling a lack of ethos in their classroom partially stems from the classroom as a place. The classroom place communicates to students that they have less power than the teacher which results in them having less ethos to disagree during a discussion and insert their opinions in their writing. A composition classroom full of students who feel they have ethos has the potential for more fruitful discussions with respectful back-and-forth, and higher quality writing because students feel they have the authority to be writing in the first place. I suggest two very simply ways to use the classroom as a place to help students feel they have ethos. First, remove the teacher desk or move it to the back of the room. Most composition instructors use a laptop or a notebook for lectures or notes. The large desk is not necessary for instruction because your laptop or notes can easily fit on a student desk. On the surface, it may seem trivial; but, the large desk juxtaposed to the much smaller desk of the students communicates two things. One is that you are more important than your students, your importance and value warrants a larger desk. This means you have power that your students do not. Therefore, students may feel incapable of voice their contradictory opinions in a discussion because they do not have the power to do so. Second, if you teach behind a large desk, you are creating a barrier between you and your students. You are separating yourself from them and this communicates to them that they should remain in their “student space.” So, students may feel less inclined to come up to the front of the room, to the “teacher space” to ask you questions.

My second suggestion is to get students, through class activities, to come into the “teacher space” at the front of the room. This can help students realize the front of the room is just another area in the room or it may even give students a sense of power and importance that is typically associated with the teacher in the front of the room. In either sense, an unnecessary and unhelp division of ethos can be broken down or student ethos can be built up. The places

throughout the classroom are powerful; yet, making changes like moving the teacher desks and getting students to come to the front of the room are simple. The goal is to create a balance of ethos between teacher and students and to help students build their individual ethos so they feel powerful and confident enough to participate, both in discussion and writing. Using the places in your classroom can help you achieve this goal.

Whether you choose to use your classroom as a place to help students create routine for their writing process, rearrange seats to match the delivery of the class, refocus places within the class so students can cultivate their ethos, or you find another way for the classroom to help you achieve your goal, it is important that you use the classroom's agency in some way to help you teach and your students learn. The classroom is a place that will affect your students in a variety of ways whether you influence the room or not; so, take the opportunity the classroom provides and create a place that helps you achieve your goals as a composition instructor.

How to Develop Sense of Place

The unique ways you customize your classroom to direct its function as a place impacts your students' sense of place. Sense of place is akin to the relationship a person has with a place, specifically how they behave and feel because of and within that place. Harrison and Dourish explain that a sense of place is a "communally held sense of appropriate behavior, and a context for engaging in and interpreting action" (Harrison and Dourish, 1996). Sense of place is conceived as the result of the appropriation of culturally defined norms and expectations that frame behaviors" (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). Later, Lentini and Decortis state that "sense of place is thus a concept for capturing people's relationships with the physical environment in which they act [3, 26, 34]. According to Manzo [33, 34], this notion evokes our emotional relationships with places: the feelings we develop toward places (either positive, negative or ambivalent) and the meanings we thereby assign to them" (Lentini and Decortis, 2010). In both

quotes, Lentini and Decortis explain that a sense of place is a unique relationship a person has with and within a place. This unique relationship causes people to behave and feel a certain way depending on the place they are in.

Your students are no different. The place you created, your classroom, causes students to begin to develop a sense of place immediately. Their behaviors and emotions about and within your classroom directly connect to the place itself and the affects it has on your students- their own unique sense of place. If you arrange the seats into a circle and have students interact through the whole class, one student may feel anxious about that much socializing and having to face the whole room so he behaves more shyly and closed off. Still another student may enjoy the face to face seating and socialization so she feels excited by your class.

Each of your students is a unique person; therefore, the way the classroom affects them and their own sense of place will be unique. So, what do you do? You have a class of 25 students and you have never taught composition before. So far, if you have followed my suggestions, you have cataloged your space, made a goal for your class, and used the things you cataloged to make the space your desired place; now, unique students will be affected by the place in unique ways and create unique senses of place. I suggest two strategies. First, trust the place you created. You created your classroom in a specific way for a specific purpose that you believe will help your students learn and write. Give it time and trust that what you did was for the right reasons: your students. This is difficult to do, but some students need time to develop their sense of place and the positive effects of your classroom may take time. Second, talk to your students. If possible, ask them what they like and what they want to see changed. Writing is such a personal and inimitable exercise that what you assumed would help your students to write may hinder them. Maybe the flexibility discussed earlier, moving seats around to match your lesson,

actually causes students to feel foundationless; they would prefer to know exactly what they are walking into for each class. You may never know how your students feel if you do not ask them. I suggest, when applicable, informally talking to them or more formally conducting a formative survey where you ask students to anonymously compliment and critique the class. As college instructors, we have our students respond to the class with end-of-year surveys, but those occur too late to help your current students. And, because of the idiosyncratic nature of writing, what one class prefers may not apply to another. So, talk to your students. Ask them what they think and feel. They will tell you, without realizing it, what their sense of place is. From here, you can re-customize your classroom, if necessary, to improve your students' sense of place.

A positive sense of place stems from a positive relationship with the place. This positive relationship creates positive behavior and emotions while in the place. If you can create a place that affects students in a positive way, they will feel positive about your class. Further, when students are happy and enjoy a subject, they are more willing to participate in learning that subject. In your case, if you can create a positive place for students to learn and write, they will learn and write more successfully because they have a positive sense of place.

Conclusion

The classroom is a powerful factor that often goes overlooked in composition teaching texts. But, as you can see from this chapter, the classroom affects your students just like your assignment selection and way you deliver your lessons. The classroom starts as a space, meaningless and unfamiliar to your students. This presents an opportunity for you to customize the space into a place where your students will be affected in a positive way, develop a positive sense of place, and improve their writing process and product. Where you teach is just as important as how you teach. Take the opportunity, use the classroom as a place, and have a great semester.

CONCLUSION

Composition texts, both studies and teaching, are not inadequate nor incomplete; rather, these texts can grow by using consistent language to expand on their understanding of the classroom space, place, and student sense of place. The scholars included above, ranging back as far as the 1980s, understand and express the value of the classroom in composition pedagogy. However, while several scholars share similar concepts, they use a variety of phrases to discuss and teach the concepts of space and place. This inconsistent language creates a gap in communication among compositionists and understanding among future composition teachers. New Materialism and geography can bridge this gap by providing a common and consistent set of terms to more accurately and succinctly view and discuss the composition classroom. By using a common language to improve communication, those reading composition studies and teaching texts can understand and expand upon the concepts discussed. This is what I strove to do in my third chapter: demonstrate how a composition teaching text might look when using New Materialism and geography to draw on and provide a common language to instructor future composition teachers about the classroom space, place, and student sense of place.

As discussed throughout the project, and emphasized in chapter 3, the classroom is a space. As a space, the composition classroom is meaningless but full of potential. Interactional potential, the opportunity to customize the classroom in a way that benefits composition, guides how the classroom becomes a place. As a place, the classroom is connected to those within it. Students, through their interactional past and potential, see the classroom as a place, as something meaningful. This meaning provides the classroom with the agency to affect the people within it. Specifically emotions and behavior, the classroom as a place affects the students and teacher alike. The unique ways in which the students and teacher are affected creates their own unique sense of place. Sense of place describes one's unique feelings of and behavior within a

certain place. As composition teachers, our goal is to create a class that helps our students become better writers.

I argue that improved writing and writers stems from interactive classrooms. Because writing is inimitable and personal, students can benefit from a balanced relationship with their instructor and a comfortable and familiar relationship with their peers. Decreasing the power dynamic between teacher and student, through classroom design, signals to the student that they have a voice and autonomy to use that voice in class and in their writing. Furthermore, students comfortable and familiar with their peers are more likely to collaborate and work alongside each other, using peers as resources to improve writing. Without considering the classroom as a place, specifically through increasing interaction in that place, can result in unbalanced power dynamics and a group of students unfamiliar with each other. This limits the opportunity for a positive sense of place.

One's sense of place is a powerful factor in the success of learning and writing. A positive place can positively impact the quality of learning and writing for students. Similarly, negative environments have the inverse affect. Therefore, viewing and using the classroom as a place is not something to overlook as a composition instructor, rather, it is an opportunity to improve writing instruction and learning. As discussed at length in chapters 1 and 2, people are affected by inanimate objects. Going further, as New Materialism indicates, people's emotions and behaviors are affected by places as well. The classroom is no different. Students' emotions and behaviors will be affected by the classroom itself. Fortunately, by looking at the classroom through the critical lens of New Materialism, composition instructors can wield the power and influence the classroom has on students by creating a positive sense of place. Viewing, discussing, and using the classroom as a place to create a positive sense of place for our students

can help them feel positive and behave in a way that benefits writing. Writing, being so personally orientated, demands that teachers understand that how one student learns and writes may be different than his or her peers. Creating a place that is flexible to accommodate all students can help them develop a routine and cultivate their own ethos as writers. Therefore, viewing, discussing, and using the classroom as a place provides composition instructors with another tool, another opportunity, to improve the learning and writing of their students.

Limitations

While I strove to emulate what a composition teaching text might resemble, I recognize that my research and suggestions are not absolute. I analyzed several texts within composition; however, the research would benefit from analysis of more texts. Additionally, the suggestions and arguments I make are steeped in theory, it would be interesting and beneficial to create experiments to test my suggestions and arguments. Finally, my third chapter includes hypothetical classrooms and classroom situations, teaching is much more unique and nuanced. So, further studies researching and testing other ideas would only add to our understanding of how a classroom affects students. Ultimately, I see my project as a crack in the door that separates composition teachers from using their classroom as an agential place in instruction. Being on a crack, I hope other scholars continue to push on the door and collectively open it so composition instruction can continue to evolve and improve. As teachers, we should take every opportunity to improve the learning experience for our students, using New Materialism as a critical lens to view, discuss, and use the classroom is another opportunity for growth in composition instruction.

Final Thoughts

Before we, as composition teachers, can teach our students how to improve their writing, it is imperative that we consider what affects their ability to learn and their ability to actually

write. The place that which students learn and write affects their ability to learn and write; therefore, it is our duty to customize that place, the classroom, to affect our students' learning and writing in positive ways. New Materialism and geography provide us the common language to share and understand ideas; but, it is up to you, up to us, up to all composition teachers and scholars to implement the concepts described by New Materialism in meaningful and productive ways. Just as my high school teacher, Mr. S, saw an old custodial closet, not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity, so to do we all need to see our classroom as a place and opportunity to positively affect our students' ability to learn and write.

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