

This is supplementary material for the webtext “Review of *Teachers Talking Writing* by Shane Wood” published in *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*, 30(2), available at <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/30.2/reviews/vankooten>

Transcript for Review of *Teachers Talking Writing* by Shane Wood  
Review by Crystal VanKooten

### **Part 1: Intro to *Teachers Talking Writing*, What It Does, and the Book as a Multimodal Text**

[Piano notes from Frederic Chopin’s Scherzo no. 4 in E major, Op 54 play and continue while Crystal speaks]

Crystal: Hi all! This is Crystal VanKooten, Associate Professor at Michigan State in the Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures department. And I’ve just finished reading and listening to Shane Wood’s anthology, *Teachers Talking Writing*. If you’re listening, this is my review of the book—in audio form. It’s part podcast, part review essay, and part conversation. [piano music fades away]

Let me start with describing *Teachers Talking Writing* to you. *Teachers Talking Writing* is a unique anthology about composition pedagogy. It’s a collection of *conversations* about teaching in our field of Rhetoric and Composition—that’s the way that Wood describes it in the introduction, as conversations. The collection is organized around *Places* where teaching happens (places like 2-year college, HBCUs, and HSIs or Hispanic Serving Institutions). Second, it’s organized into *Pedagogies* (or what we do in our classrooms, things like assessment, multimodality, or how we engage with disability, for example), and third, the third section is *Programs*. So, structures like Writing Program Administration, Basic Writing, Second Language Writing, WAC, and the Writing Center. [piano interlude, and music continues]

What I appreciate about this anthology are the ways that Wood has intentionally highlighted various voices—the voices of women, scholars of color, teachers who work at community colleges and different kinds of institutions, colleagues who have published widely in the field, *and* colleagues who have *taught* widely in the field.

I also value the open approach to the collection: Wood guides us a *tiny bit* in the opening and closing of each section so that we might get a handle on each focus area of the field that the book is about and what the major themes and conversations are, but Wood doesn’t tell us what to think and he doesn’t draw conclusions for us. Instead, he asks lots of questions, summarizes just a little bit, and suggests areas that we all should think more about. To really get into the nitty gritty of each section, you have to listen, and read, and hear about the topics and sub-topics from the mouths of the interviewees. [piano interlude, and music continues]

This collection is also a hybrid, multimodal text. Not only can we read the words from interviewees on the page, but we can click and listen to their voices and to Shane’s interview questions as part of the *Pedagogue* podcast. As Shane notes in the intro, “readers and listeners can navigate between textual and digital mediums to survey composition studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (that’s a quote from p. 21). [music fades down and continues]

And I did just that when I picked up the collection! So I read, I listened, I read. There is a lot here in *Teachers Talking Writing*. And there is a lot of information about aspects of the field that I didn’t know much about before reading. I’m a white, cisgendered woman, working at an R1 as a writing program

administrator. Thus I'm appreciative of the chance to not only read, but to *hear* the voices of colleagues who embody identities and whose work is in areas both similar and different from my own—they work at places such as HBCUs, HSIs, two-year colleges, and sites of inquiry that include Disability Studies, Community Literacies, and Basic Writing, all things that I need to learn more about. And bonus—there are so many fantastic citations woven into these interviews. Each time I read or listened, I found myself looking up at least one article that an interviewee was discussing, and then skimming the article alongside *Teachers Talking Writing*. [piano interlude, and music continues]

## **Part 2: Suggestions for How to Read *Teachers Talking Writing***

So here are some recommendations for you all as you think about how you might read and use *Teachers Talking Writing* as a resource for your own scholarship.

So, suggestion number one: I suggest dipping into specific sections when you want to learn more about a topic or sub-area of the field. I did not do this when I read the book for this review. Instead, I started at the top of the book, and I read everything in order—but that was a long process. There is so much in the book. The book is wonderfully big and long and inclusive, and there are many minutes of interviews that you can potentially listen to. Thus, I encourage you to treat *Teachers Talking Writing* as a reference book and to dive in and out of the text where you want to learn more.

Suggestion number two: I encourage you to listen and read in combination. I started the book with the intention that I would always listen to the audio when a link to *Pedagogue* was provided—I didn't want to miss anything. I wanted to hear the voices of so many smart folks in the field. And I also wanted to think through what affordances listening to the audio provided. So I listened exclusively (with and without reading along with the PDF) for the first few sections of the book. But I soon learned that while listening provided rich access to scholars' voices, it was much SLOWER than my print reading process was.

The slower pace for listening is due in part to the way *Teachers Talking Writing* is mediated—when you click a link to listen, for example, you'll be taken to the *Pedagogue* podcast. And then you'll need to find the starting point for the passage you want in the audio player that's there. Then you'll need to readjust your windows if you're reading along on a computer like I was. Then you might need to navigate around a bit in the podcast episode itself to find the specific edited clips that are used in *Teachers Talking Writing*. I found this process doable, but time consuming and occasionally frustrating. I would love to see scholars in the field—and here I'm talking to myself as well, myself included—exploring and inventing new hybrid formats where we can do this, where print and audio can live and reach audiences together. *Teachers Talking Writing* is a great first step, but I think there's a lot more that we can do here to marry these modes in ways that we can listen, and read, and use them together.

So, if and when you have time and want to get to know scholars in the field through their inflections and cadence and the timbre of their voices, if you want to immerse yourself in a conversation—I encourage you to *listen* to the excerpts from *Pedagogue*. If you have less time, or if you want and need to cite details, or if you're jumping in and out of several topic areas, then I do suggest reading. Or, you could try both, depending on your needs in the moment.

Suggestion number three: I urge you to read and listen to some interviews that aren't in your area. I was super excited for the multimodality section, for example, and the WPA section, since those things are the things that I do. However, I learned more from other sections, of course, that weren't exactly what I do.

To illustrate what I mean about looking and listening outside of your area, let me point to Chapter 3 in *Teachers Talking Writing*, which is about Hispanic-Serving Institutions, or HSIs. This section taught me a lot of information about these schools, which are different in some ways from predominantly white institutions, or PWIs, like the school where I work. I learned from *Teachers Talking Writing* that there are 500 Hispanic-serving institutions in the U.S., and Hispanic populations are the second largest demographic group and one of the fastest-growing minority groups in the U.S. And of course Hispanic students are not all the same, which is a point that the different scholars and teachers in this section emphasize. Hispanic students can be bilingual or translingual, but there are many who aren't bilingual as well. Because of this diversity, connections between language, race, class, and identity are important for teachers of Hispanic students to consider. Also, promoting students' linguistic and cultural resources comes to the fore as an important consideration in these spaces.

The section on HSIs in *Teachers Talking Writing* reminds me that there are so many interesting and important conversations going on in the field, and that sometimes, we as teachers and scholars get stuck in *our* bubble where others are discussing what *we* do, our interests, the scholarship that we know, and the issues that directly affect our own students in our local context. But there is *more* going on, and *Teachers Talking Writing* in its expansiveness is a great place to seek out and hear a snippet—or several snippets—of that *more*. Learning about and even joining the conversations outside of our direct area expands what and how we know, and there are ways to adapt and apply knowledge from other sites to what we do in our more familiar spaces.

### **Part 3: A Call to Join the Conversation(s)**

That last suggestion brings me to what I'm calling the conversation section of this review. I was inspired by Wood's framing of the entire book as a conversation, and his explanations of conversations as a site for scholarly inquiry. So often, I think, we think of scholarship as polished, published prose that is carefully articulated; it's revised; it's perfectly worded. But we learn much and can even shape new knowledge through talking with and listening to others—we do this at conferences, in webinars, in hallways outside of our offices, and we can do this on a podcast. [piano interlude, music continues]

So I want to close my review by highlighting—and joining—a conversation that I felt was really productive for me to read and hear in *TTW*: the conversation about HBCUs from Chapter 4. I chose this conversation about HBCUs because this is not my area, but I learned a lot by listening and reading, and I hope you can, too.

So, when I was a master's student back in 2004 and 2005, I was new to the field of Rhetoric and Composition. I was taking classes with Vicki Tolar Burton and Lise Ede at Oregon State University, and both Vicki and Lisa talked with us about learning to *join the conversations* in the field. One of my assignments was even entitled the Joining the Conversation paper. I bring this up because it was a wonderful and non-intimidating way to invite new voices and novice scholars into the field. So we didn't have to be revolutionary. We didn't have to fill a gap, quite yet. We just had to join the conversation—to listen, and maybe add a comment or two that occurred to us.

So, joining the conversation is how I'm approaching my review here in these last minutes. I'm going to take one of the conversations started by Wood and the scholars interviewed in *Pedagogue* and *Teachers Talking Writing*, and I'll add my own voice—literally—to the mix. I'm joining the conversation, and I'm doing it here with audio editing. So I invite you, too, to join the conversations. Listen through to the end of this review for some new (or maybe familiar) info on HBCUs. I'll cite and clip and remix and add to some of what you can hear in *Teachers Talking Writing* on that topic. Then go and listen to and read *Teachers Talking Writing* and *Pedagogue*, and join the conversations with Shane Wood and others there on all the other topics in the book. [piano interlude, and music continues]

#### **Part 4: A Conversation on HBCUs with Karen Keaton Jackson and Alexandria Lockett**

[piano interlude, and music fades] So, I'm white, and I work at a PWI, so many of the students I teach are white, but not all of them. I also don't know much, if anything, about what's going on with writing and rhetoric at HBCUs. But I feel like I should, though, and that colleagues teaching at HBCUs have a lot to teach us at PWIs about designing instruction for our diverse, non-mainstream students, and really, for all of our students. Karen Keaton Jackson works at an HBCU, North Carolina Central, and she starts the conversation on HBCUs in *Teachers Talking Writing*. Karen, can you share with me some basics about HBCUs, what they are, and who they serve?

Karen Keaton Jackson [from *Pedagogue*]: HBCUs are so complex. Our student populations are so heterogeneous. [...] I think overall, for most HBCUs, the general number is about 70% of our students are African American. The other 30% can be international students, White, Hispanic.

Crystal: So what is one way you work with and support these diverse students in their writing classes?

Karen Keaton Jackson [from *Pedagogue*]: There's a lot of time, like on a regular basis, spent really stepping into this kind of mothering role—a mentoring role that's totally outside of academics. It's a totally normal part of the day. I mean, it's just like teaching class, so it's not like this one off, or oh, I had this moment that I don't normally have. It's pretty consistent that students are searching for that kind of mentoring but with a little love mixed in there as well. So in this other mothering kind of space, we're constantly weaving in the academics with this affective component of learning, that's just naturally woven into HBCUs just like any other part of your syllabus or your class.

Crystal: I like this idea of mentoring and mothering, even though it's really different from how I usually approach my teaching, and I'm going to think about what that means for me and my classroom. Often, I tend to want to separate my classroom and the work there from students' personal lives, and especially from my own personal life, but thinking about ways to mentor and maybe even mother, if I want to say that, *the whole student*—I think we need more of this for today's students, who are disconnected or absent, and sometimes struggling with mental health—these students need mentors who care about all of them. So I'll be thinking some more about that, thank you Karen!

Alexandria Lockett also spoke about HBCUs in *Teachers Talking Writing*. Alexandria, talk to me about why, perhaps, the field doesn't know much about HBCUs and their approach to writing instruction, and why I didn't really read much about them when I was in grad school?

Alexandria Lockett [from *Pedagogue*]: Well, we have been continuously producing scholarship, but it's very marginalized and it's very little if you look at the scope of production. [...] There is a kind of

competition in this field to be recognized and there's an insecurity about visibility and recognition that leads to the coinage of terms and the barring and appropriation of knowledges from other disciplines without an acknowledgement of interdisciplinarity that then leads to a kind of reproduction of a discipline that is really empty and shallow.

[...] HBCUs all the while have been doing what HBCUs do: Educating our people the best way that we know how. We definitely can say that the programming in our institutions is diverse, and when we start trying to borrow from the mainstream institutions, it doesn't quite work as well because our students are very much about that practical education. They want to know, what is going to help me in this next class? What is going to help me get into grad school? What is going to help me?

[...] My sense of HBCUs is that we are marginalized, but with everybody's attention on race, with everything hitting a fever pitch, with racial violence, and it being very apparent that education has to change fundamentally if it's going to service diverse students, now, people are more interested in, "Well damn, all this history of composition everywhere, where were the HBCUs? What were the HBCUs doing?" Oh, you guys weren't publishing their work is what it was. So I think that the field owes a huge debt to HBCUs.

Crystal: I feel convicted by that, and I want to start reading more. One place I have started is with Karen Keaton Jackson, Hope Jackson, and Dawn N. Hicks Tafari's "We Belong in the Discussion: Including HBCUs in Conversations about Race and Writing" article, which was published in *CCC* in December 2019, issue 71, volume 2. Shane and Karen talk about this article in *Teachers Talking Writing*, and I just actually read through it—you all should too if you haven't before. Karen talks more about the mothering philosophy of teaching that she uses at her HBCU in that article.

Thank you so much Karen, and Alexandria, for talking with me today. [piano interlude, and music continues]

So this wraps up my review of *Teachers Talking Writing*. I hope I was able to give you a sense of the book, some practical suggestions for reading and listening to it, and a persuasive invitation to join the conversations in the field—perhaps in an area that's not your regular area. As Shane Wood, and *Pedagogue* podcast, and this book *Teachers Talking Writing* demonstrate, there's a lot of talking and listening going on in our field, and we want you in on it, too.