

The Outcomes Book, edited by Susanmarie Harrington, Keith Rhodes, Ruth Overman Fischer, and Rita Malenczyk. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005. 240 pages.

Reviewed by Carol Rutz, Carleton College

In *Science in Action*, Bruno Latour reminds us how the story of antiseptic surgery is typically told: Joseph Lister “had the idea” that infection might resemble fermentation, which implies that open wounds are best treated by killing the germs on the surface and applying dressings that allow oxygen to reach the wound for clean healing. Latour details the social history behind Lister’s “idea”: the long years of testing the connection between infection and fermentation, and the many scientists and surgeons who contributed to the development of antiseptic surgery. Latour particularly notes Lister’s generosity in crediting Louis Pasteur’s work on fermentation as an inspiration. Pasteur’s influence notwithstanding, historians of science cite Lister’s famous idea as a breakthrough in surgical procedures. Other participants in the consolidation of that idea are omitted, and Lister’s name alone is attached to antisepsis as an approach to healing (118).

The Outcomes Book anticipates a Latour-like critique by telling the story of the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” (OS) as a compendium of ideas, conversations, debates, frustrations, and impulses among a collective of professionals engaged in teaching writing to college students. Chronology is set next to definition which, in turn, is set next to theory, and all of that is interpreted through practice, institutional limits, and forward-looking challenges. Individual voices contribute segments of the story and fade into the background as other voices take the stage, extending the narrative, while sometimes reviewing or revising what has been already told. Throughout, the credit cycle (as Latour might label it) is described, celebrated, shared, and, to some degree, finessed in favor of a result—an outcome, as it were—designed to be further developed by practitioners. In short, *The Outcomes Book* speaks to the social construction of a document and shows how social systems, mostly within higher education, employ or adapt that document.

Those unfamiliar with the OS should know that it has been published both in *Writing Program Administration* and *College English* as an official document of the National Council of Writing Program Administrators (adopted in 2000). Designed as a framework for assessing learning in first-year writing courses, the OS contains an introduction explaining that the “statement articulates what composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory.” The outcomes are then arranged in sections: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading and writing; processes; and knowledge

of conventions. Each section is followed by a transition: “Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn”—specific extensions of the outcomes applicable in the disciplines. The OS format, therefore, lends itself explicitly to WAC and WID programs.

Prefaced by the OS itself, *The Outcomes Book* is divided into four sections, all of them arranged to foreground the multiple considerations that played into the statement’s development. In part 1 (Contextualizing the Outcomes Statement), the players are introduced in the context of the primary debate: outcomes vs. standards. Respect for the variety of teaching situations informs an emerging consensus that general outcomes of first-year writing courses, while important for assessment and curricular growth, do not match or replace standards, which are necessarily local measures. Implicit in this section is a call to institutions to articulate standards for their first-year writing courses. An explicit tension is examined in detail: the place of technology in the OS, a category that was not directly addressed in the version eventually published. Cindy Selfe and Patricia Ericsson advocate a larger place for technology, pointing to the electronic composing environments that are increasingly the norm for students, faculty, and workers alike.

Part 2 (The Outcomes Statement and First-Year Writing), places the OS in institutional contexts for varying purposes, including Stephen Wilhoit’s interesting application of the OS to a brand-new WAC initiative in a high school. In that particular case, the epistemic nature of the OS proves productive for working with faculty, tutors, and an entire school district. The whole of Part Two demonstrates the document’s elasticity as applied to socio-educational structures.

In part 3 (The Outcomes Statement Beyond First-Year Writing), contributors specifically explore the built-in impetus toward WAC and WID in contexts such as upper division writing, technical communication, and institution-wide assessment. Furthermore, Rita Malenczyk places the OS next to the Boyer Commission’s *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Universities* (1998). Malenczyk argues that making common cause with other national initiatives in higher education benefits students, even if the terms of various initiatives vary in emphasis. In this respect, the origins of the OS in rhetoric offer a flexible, ethical platform for supporting progressive pedagogy, recognizing that pedagogical decisions will necessarily be responsive to local contexts.

The final section, part 4 (Theorizing Outcomes), challenges the profession to undertake more adventurous work in the spirit of the OS. Peter Elbow would like to see more attention to a ubiquitous writing problem, invention, which he connects to writers’ development of methods of self-assessment. Richard Haswell complains that by universalizing the OS for

all post-secondary situations, the statement necessarily ignores any and all developmental frames. Are the students in first-year courses assumed to be 18-year-old high school graduates? Given the range of educational settings, assumptions about first-year students in the aggregate are risky at best. If the OS is deployed as part of a writing curriculum that is insensitive to students' needs, the pedagogical benefits could be compromised.

An afterword, written by Kathleen Blake Yancey, recapitulates the community origins of the OS, noting that the conversation about the document was unusually public throughout its development. Now that the OS is part of the pedagogical apparatus available to composition teachers, Yancey predicts stronger links between the OS and assessment, and therefore, curriculum. Local adaptations of the OS lend themselves to such connections within institutions.

The Outcomes Book is self-consciously social and collective in nature, which can make the reading experience a bit disjointed, because of inconsistency of voice and emphasis. Nevertheless, the overall effect produces respect for a laudable process of inquiry, conversation, and debate coupled with a generous attitude toward present and future applications. Everyone in the OS collective endorses review and revision of the OS from time to time. If the tone is occasionally self-congratulatory, that can be forgiven in light of a creative, substantive contribution to pedagogy.

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Computers and Writing: The Cyborg Era, by James A. Inman. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. 304 pages.

Reviewed by Eliot Rendleman, University of Nevada, Reno

James Inman's *Computers and Writing: The Cyborg Era* defines the computers and writing community; argues for a conception of our current

Susanmarie Harrington, Keith F. Rhodes, Ruth Overman Fischer, Rita Malenczyk. Political Science. 2005. The WPA Outcomes Statement represents a working consensus among composition scholars about what college students should learn and do in a composition program. But as a single-page document, theâ€¦ Continue Reading. View PDF. Cite. Save. â€¹ 1. The Outcomes Book relates the fuller process by exploring the matrix of concerns that surrounded the developing statement itself, and by presenting the experience of many who have since employed it in their own settings. For departments, programs, and individuals, this collection levers the Outcomes Statement in all its simplicity and complexity into a rich discussion of the programmatic essentials of writing theory and pedagogy--and what these look like at writing programs informed by the Outcomes Statement.Â Harrington, Susanmarie; Rhodes, Keith; Fischer, Ruth; and Malenczyk, Rita, "The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement" (2005). All USU Press Publications. 154. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress_pubs/154. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005. 240 pages. Reviewed by Carol Rutz, Carleton College. In Science in Action, Bruno Latour reminds us how the story of antiseptic surgery is typically told: Joseph Lister â€œhad the ideaâ€ that infection might resemble fermentation, which implies that open wounds are best treated by killing the germs on the surface and applying dressings that allow oxygen to reach the wound for clean healing.Â Furthermore, Rita Malenczyk places the OS next to the Boyer Commissionâ€™s Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for Americaâ€™s Universities (1998). Malenczyk argues that making common cause with other national initiatives in higher education benefits students, even if the terms of various initiatives vary in emphasis.