

**University of Texas at El Paso**

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**From the Selected Works of Beth L Brunk-Chavez**

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## Research Overview

Beth L Brunk-Chavez



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Dr. Beth Brunk-Chavez

My research philosophy is reflected in these ideas expressed by Malea Powell in “Down by the River, or How Susan La Flesche Picotte Can Teach Us about Alliance as a Practice of Survivance”:

human beings learn to produce texts through both theory and practice, by listening and by doing; “successful” texts are collaborative and are meant for the community, not for the self; and through continued textual production the community (and the knowledge of its members) survives and gives thanks for its survival. (44)

Much of what I write and publish is a blend of the theoretical and the practical. I’m interested in producing scholarship that examines, complicates, and offers solutions to our discipline and our pedagogies. I envision a wide audience including administrators, faculty, and students. Secondly, I believe very strongly in collaborative research and writing. My experience has not been that collaboration is easier than writing alone, but I know that what I’ve accomplished has been made richer through the intersections of knowledge created through these collaborative experiences.

A primary area of my current research focuses on teaching writing with technology. I’ve co-authored one article, a book chapter, and several presentations and workshops with Shawn Miller, an Academic Technology Consultant at Duke University. Through our experience of developing the Hybrid Academy at UTEP (one of the first of its kind in the country) and co-teaching one of the first officially hybrid courses on our campus, we realized that a variety of issues required close examination. **“The Hybrid Academy: Building and Sustaining a Technological Culture of Use”** arose out of our experiences of training “late adopters” to teach hybrid courses. This chapter to be published this year in *Technological Ecologies and Sustainability: Methods, Modes, and Assessment* lays the groundwork for the necessity of a hybrid academy and details some of the processes we engaged to design, develop, and implement it. The webtext **“Decentered, Disconnected, and Digitized: The Importance of Shared Space”** published in *Kairos* was inspired by our experience of co-teaching the hybrid course. We conducted primary research for several semesters thereafter and concluded that “shared space” was required for effective hybrid courses. We chose to publish this work as a webtext for several reasons: the article is about teaching in digitized environments, so it made sense to publish in that same environment; we wanted the text to be both linear and fluid—our choices for design made that possible; we simply could not have done on paper what we could accomplish digitally—we archived our research, uploaded the original presentation, and included our collaborative exchanges. A search on the web indicates that this article has been added to bibliographies on collaborative digital learning and writing as well as taught in graduate courses. (For information about the significance of digital publications, please see the supporting documents in the research folder.)

A second area of my current research is centered on first-year composition. As I assumed the responsibilities of the Director of First-Year Composition, I conducted research with the past Director, Elaine Fredericksen. Anecdotal evidence that our students were less prepared to succeed in first-year writing lead us to examine the correlation between placement scores, diagnostic scores, and final grades. We learned that although much scholarship has been published on student success and retention in the first year, there is little specific to early identifiers of success in first-year composition. Our first study, **“Predicting Success: Increasing Retention and Pass Rates in College Composition”** has been revised and

resubmitted to *WPA: Writing Program Administrators*. A second article, for which we have collected and analyzed data, will examine first-year writing **student and instructor attitudes** as they correlate with success. This will likely be submitted to *RTE: Research in the Teaching of English*. We received a University Research Initiative grant to support this research.

**“What’s So Funny about Stephen Toulmin? Using Political Cartoons to Teach the Toulmin Analysis of Argument”** and **“The Journey Out: Conceptual Mapping and the Writing Process”** focus on innovative pedagogical methods. The former focuses on effective ways to teach a rhetorical analysis that can sometimes be tricky for both students and instructors. The latter provides a visual method of helping student track their writing processes.

Future research in first-year composition will be related to our **course redesign**. As a co-leader/member of a truly cutting edge redesign team that has reconfigured our second semester course significantly—hybrid delivery, electronic distributed assessment, and a new curriculum—I see many opportunities for data collection, assessments, and research. I have presented one conference paper, proposed another, and plan to continue to study and publish our results. Particularly, I plan to submit a book proposal to Parlor Press’s series on Writing Program Administration within the first two years of the program.

My role as co-PI on **The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Grant to improve students’ reading comprehension** also relates to my role as a writing instructor and Director of First-Year Composition. The purpose of this project is to create 14 digitized instructional modules designed to provide college-level faculty with effective strategies to improve reading comprehension skills in entry-level college courses across disciplines. The modules are designed for faculty not trained in reading comprehension. Of special note are the modules on reading rhetorically, reading electronic texts, reading visuals, and judging textbooks for effective comprehension. This competitive grant was awarded nearly \$250,000.

Finally, I am collaborating with Helen Foster on a first-year composition textbook, ***Explorations: Guided Inquiry into Writing***, to be published by McGraw-Hill. The book lays the groundwork for the inquiry-based writing student will do in a variety of rhetorical contexts: in the academy, in their lives; in their future professions; and in their civic participation. A “how-to” approach to writing in these varied contexts represents an impoverished view of rhetoric and writing studies scholarship, and significantly diminishes students’ potential to write effectively beyond the context of the composition course. Therefore, *Explorations* explicitly integrates rhetoric and writing studies scholarship into the course content. This knowing “why” coupled with knowing “how” can render students more effective writers in their college experience and beyond. (Please see the research supporting documents for a statement from the publisher.)

The remaining articles I’ve published, **“Structural Inhabitants in the Works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Remedios Varo”** and **“En Otras Voces: Multiple Voices in Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*”** reflect my previous backgrounds in ways that women create voices to write themselves out of struggle.

As mentioned earlier, the scholarship I engage in is intended for the community—an academic community of administrators, faculty, and students. I feel as though I have accomplished much by researching and writing about issues relevant to the work I do as a teacher and as an administrator. I hope to continue with this tradition I have enjoyed establishing for myself.