of Knowing,'' all of which explore the relationship be-
practices and teachers' ''personal, historic, intellectual,
tic perspectives'' (Anson 8). As Phelps points out, this
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ory, Practice and Research and *Thinking, Reasoning,*
ditions to the library of pedagogy. Both firmly establish
a framework for generating new theories and practices
monstrating the power of theoretical paradigms bor-
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ot of both to reveal the process of dialogue at the heart
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Comment and Response

Two Comments on ''A Common Ground: The Essay in Academe''

I agree with much in Kurt Spellmeyer's essay ''A Common Ground: The Essay in Academe'' (*CE*, March 1989). I agree, most fundamentally, that students need to recognize the strength of their own voices before they can enter into conversation with academic voices. Unprepared, rapid immersion in alien disciplinary writing can result in students' loss of bearings and adoption of the protective colors of empty mimicry. If students are to become engaged, deeply involved participants in their professions—the kinds of participants who bring their own concerns and insights to bear on professional problems, the kinds who bring their heteroglossias with them and do not check them at the door—they need to develop a personal sense of the ways in which disciplinary conversations contribute to their own personal concerns.

Many genres, located within the domestic atmosphere of the classroom or within the broader humanistic tradition, may provide discourse space in which students can articulate their own interests and perspective and then develop personal engagement with the powerful, if not intimidating, discourses of the contemporary professions. I am also glad that Professor Spellmeyer sees that ultimately academic discourse must be addressed by our students in some ways, because we are situated in a world where academic discourses are institutionally and intellectually powerful. Academic and professional writing provide many of the statements that shape our lives and establish the playingfields upon which our students will create their work in the world. If we do not teach our students to engage with disciplinary discourse, we will leave them powerless and subject to what will then be oppressive hegemonies.

Precisely because of these many points of agreement, I am saddened that Professor Spellmeyer casts me and a number of my colleagues interested in reading and writing across the curriculum as not providing space for students to develop their interests, voices, and selves. One of the major pedagogical themes of *The Informed Writer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981, 1985, 1989) is the dialectic between the students' discovery of their

own intellectional, emotional, and personal commitments and the positions met with in reading. Reading journals, opinion papers, essays drawing on experience, essays using ideas from reading as a filter with which to understand new experience, and many other personally based assignments alternate with text-based assignments such as summary, analysis, and synthesis. Indeed several of the assignments ask for essays that look remarkably close to the example Professor Spellmeyer presents as the kind of writing he wishes to foster among his students. Disciplinary writing is only presented in the latter half of the book, once students are fully comfortable with participating within literate communities, in which they recognize themselves and their experiences as essential elements. Throughout the book, practice in making personal sense of reading, in defining the use to be made of reading, and in responding to reading provides students with a powerful sense of self which will carry to whatever literate domains they might enter.

In the two passages from my book which Professor Spellmeyer quotes disapprovingly, I was simply pointing out to students some characteristics of discourse which Professor Spellmeyer elsewhere in his article seems to endorse: 1) that consciousness is influenced by the language we hear, that we appropriate parts of the heteroglossia we live among to help construct our beliefs and language of the self; and 2) that in our society there are powerful knowledge-creating institutions which have developed out of the interactions of many individuals, which are themselves highly developed heteroglossias operating within regularized spaces negotiated by the participants over history (see *Shaping Written Knowledge: the Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988)). To participate in those discourses students need to be aware of the special ways of using language developed to meet the projects and dynamics of the disciplines and professions. I am hardly suggesting enslavement to alien powers. Quite the opposite: I want students to find the keys to the kingdom.

If Professor Spellmeyer were to look more closely at the pedagogy here and in other across-the-curriculum texts and if he were to look more closely into the research into disciplinary discourse, he might find a very great concern for the intersection between self and society, a concern as great as his. Although he quotes statements out of context that sound to him like naive social determinism, a more considered reading of the pedagogy will show a more thoughtful position than he grants.

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Because I too have wrestled with how the problematics of human subjectivity touch on practices in writing courses, I was intrigued by Kurt Spellmeyer's "A Common Ground: The Essay in the Academy" (*CE*, March, 1989). In his essay, the problematics of subjectivity are very appropriately placed in the space where we make freshman writing assignments. Professor Spellmeyer's defense of choosing to assign essays argues that "while teachers committed to a heuristics of process misconstrued the writer's situatedness by denying the historicity of language and audience, I believe that many teachers today have misconstrued this situatedness in the very opposite way, by insisting that the right to speak must be learned—or perhaps more accurately, earned—through what is essentially the effacement of subjectivity" (265). Targeting Bizzell, Bazerman and other "discourse theorists" (271), he identifies this second mistake as the "submissiveness" required by pedagogies that isolate, describe, and assign writing that characterizes specific discourse communities. "English 101," he says, "with its tolerance for essayistic introspection and digression, is probably the last opportunity most students will ever have to discover the relationship of mutual implication, a relationship fundamental to all writing, between the self and the cultural heritage within which selfhood has meaning" (269).

Professor Spellmeyer's advocacy for "personal" writing, its "voice," its authors' "intentions," and for its personally created (not "discovered") meanings easily appeals to proper concerns that we not turn our courses into simple-minded "Forms and Formats." I can appreciate his desire to retain the autonomy of the *Cartesian* speaking subject, a close contemporary of Montaigne's, in the person of the writer of essays. In "the simplest terms," he says, we cannot "pretend that writing . . . is not created by persons" (269). And it makes sense, from the hermeneutical, anti-material perspective he adopts, to point out that we *distinguish* some people's writing (e.g., Foucault's, Burke's, Gadamer's) from others' because individuals have unique powers.

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