

Review

The Second Stage in Writing Across the Curriculum

Linda Brodkey. *Academic Writing as Social Practice* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1987) 206 pp., \$32.95.

David A. Jolliffe, ed. *Advances in Writing Research: Writing in Academic Disciplines* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1988) 258 pp., \$32.50.

Susan H. McLeod, ed. *Strengthening Programs for Writing Across the Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988) 138 pp., \$12.95.

Herbert W. Simons. *Rhetoric in the Human Sciences* (London: Sage, 1989), 240 pp., n.p.

Writing across the curriculum (WAC) is on one hand practical composition pedagogy and on the other an adventure into the uses of written language outside the primrose paths of belles lettres where we were so willingly led by Hugh Blair and George Campbell, who promised us class mobility and respectable cultivation. As was the case with Blair and Campbell, the pedagogic motive of WAC comes first, but the success of the pedagogic task in the long run depends on the success of the scholarly, critical task. The four books under review here mark the end of the first stage of WAC, driven by the missionary zeal of composition and the institutional designs of administrators looking for broad structural fixes, and the beginning of the next stage, based on a realistic assessment of the roles written language actually takes in disciplines and disciplinary classrooms.

As essay after essay in the useful volume *Strengthening Programs for Writing Across the Curriculum* attests, familiar assumptions about composition have been challenged by the realities of classrooms across the curriculum and the in-

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telligences of their disciplined-based teachers. To survive and prosper, WAC must offer more than the conversion of every class into a writing laboratory; it must attach itself to the lifeblood of communication by means of which disciplines and professions organize themselves. This volume, edited by Susan McLeod, provides a good overview of the current status of WAC programs, thoughtful analyses of practical problems that must be addressed, and many ideas for guiding programs through the political complexities of academic bureaucracies. It also provides an extensive catalog-directory of 427 writing across the curriculum programs in place as of Fall 1987. However, the book only hovers on the edge of the substantive knowledge that we need to develop to make WAC more than an administrative arrangement. Just one essay, "Models for Collaborative Research in Writing Across the Curriculum" by Lucille McCarthy and Barbara Walvoord, begins to step into the deep water of the disciplines, yet only far enough to examine research methods.

Another recent volume, *Writing in Academic Disciplines* edited by David Jolliffe, steps more boldly into the classrooms and the disciplines behind them. It opens with a review essay by Chris Anson examining the relationships of three domains of WAC research: the actual writing of the disciplines, the writing pedagogy in disciplinary classrooms, and the role of writing in the development of individual students. The three together reveal the disciplines as dynamic, transforming fields regenerated by new students developing according to their own inclinations, as they are engaged by teachers transmitting those things they value.

The five essays that follow all confirm that writing varies with subject, classroom, and student knowledge. A few of the essays move beyond this basic claim to begin exploring the dimensions within which difference can be revealed and the structures of each situation's particularity. Anne Herrington, for example, in examining writing in a literature course, finds connections between specific types of claims appearing in successful student papers, intellectual growth within the students, and the teachers' goals for the course. Making the connection between particular textual forms and the intellectual activity fostered within a classroom can become a powerful analytic tool with many practical consequences. Kristine Hansen, by examining two kinds of social science writing on a similar topic, examines characteristic differences between qualitative and quantitative work. Because the qualitative-quantitative dichotomy is one fostered by the social scientists, they have self-consciously organized their discourse in polar ways. Thus Hansen can understand many features of the texts just by following explicit guideposts in the social science literature. But there are also deeper questions to be examined here about how disciplines generate dichotomies and slogans to orient their discourse and whether these disciplinary folk-beliefs provide a fully satisfactory account of disciplinary discourse.

At their best the essays in Jolliffe's volume help us see what is taking place in disciplinary writing, both for the individual and for the discipline. That is precisely what we in WAC need now, to be able to understand more deeply the dynamics of the texts with which our students work. As we see more, we can understand better how to introduce people into the mysteries of these specialized

domains of literacy. To add to our vision, we would do well to attend to other academic groups who also perceive a stake in exploring disciplinary writing: rhetorical theorists, literary theorists, linguists, and rhetorically self-conscious practitioners of various disciplines. These heterogeneous groups intersect in the rhetoric of inquiry movement, which is represented by the volume *Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, edited by Herbert Simons.

A number of the articles in Simons' collection provide concrete analyses that help reveal the mechanisms of specialized writing techniques or the character of writing in particular domains. An example of the former is Tamar Katriel and Robert Sander's "The Meta-communicative Role of Epigraphs in Scientific Text Construction." Following a functional linguistic approach, the two authors reveal how epigraphs allow writers to extend the claims and domain of a text while avoiding direct responsibility for explicit claims. In the process, they reveal the standard rules of the game. This essay allows us to see how a special feature of academic writing works and how we can think about it more fruitfully. Linda Brodkey's "The Value of Theory in the Academic Marketplace" reveals the character of writing in a particular domain. Using critical tools from literary theory, Brodkey shows how academic reviews of one book on literary theory were structured more to create a taste for theoretical discourse than to pass judgment on the particular work under review. From this essay we learn that it is wise not to assume a simplistic monofunctional model of any genre, but to attend to the kind of work academic texts actually do. The essay by Barnett Pearce and Victoria Chen, "Ethnography as Sermonic: The Rhetorics of Clifford Geertz and James Clifford," comes, as the title suggests, out of a classical rhetorical tradition and reveals how the placing of rhetorical stances and activities serves to embody moral purposes in ways more fundamental than realized, even by these two paragons of rhetorical reflexivity in anthropology.

Several other essays in Simons' collection—such as those of Peters and Rotherbuhler, Czubaroff, Prelli, and Gross—take more general conceptual approaches to disciplinary discourse and contain some intriguing ideas. The usefulness of such essays depends on how they help us cope with concrete analytical problems of reading and writing.

Less useful to teachers of writing are those essays directed to particular disputes about the validity of specific claims in specialized fields. The least useful for WAC interests are those essays presenting sweeping proposals about the foundations of rhetoric and broad statements of resistance against disciplinarity. The attempt to reestablish rhetoric as the queen of the sciences may perhaps be an exciting temptation for those of us who have lived at the fringes of the academy, but they do little to advance our cause. What will advance rhetoric and hold back the threat of unwarrantedly hegemonic discourse is not polemic but detailed knowledge which people can incorporate into their daily literate interactions. We will be valued as we provide value.

An intriguing but inconclusive study of academic writing appears as the last chapter of *Academic Writing as Social Practice*, a collection of essays by Linda Brodkey. The shorter and more generally speculative early chapters of the book (some of which have seen print, including one in this journal) contain some

shrewd observations about academic writing and the particular plight of the discourse of interdisciplinary studies, especially women's studies. The last chapter, however, is a much longer full-scale ethnographic study of a collaboration between two professors of English attempting to write an essay exploring the differences between a male's and a female's responses to a set of literary works. The writing (and non-writing) is intertwined with complexes of the personal, political, institutional, and disciplinary forces that stand behind and between the words. In a confusion of motives, perceptions, and disagreements, the collaboration coalesces, transforms, and then falls apart in opposition. Many lessons may be learned here and many issues pursued—about collaboration; about disciplinary and inter-disciplinarity; about how individuals position themselves with respect to transforming disciplines; about how individuals within disciplines enter into special dialogues among themselves; about how difficult it is to write upon the shifting sands of self, partners, ideas, and disciplines. But Brodkey leaves us the story with no explicit moral nor any particular analytic lesson. Thus, although she says she casts the story as a Brechtian *Lehrstück*, it seems to me more of a *cinema verité* of ethnography.

As we start to turn the microscope on academic disciplinary writing, it will take us a while to know what we wish to concentrate on and how to get our analytic tools in focus. Now we are rightfully searching for striking details, intriguing possibilities, and organizing patterns. As our experience in WAC grows, some details, ideas, and patterns will be recurrently useful to us in orienting ourselves to the variety of discourse we find ourselves in. It is too early to prejudge which concepts will produce the most useful analyses.