

Teaching Writing in a Multilingual Environment

We invited faculty to participate in an exchange of ideas in the inaugural issue of the zine on the topic of teaching writing in a multilingual environment. The topic was the following:

“Queens College is an extraordinarily diverse and multilingual environment. As teachers, we engage students as readers and writers. In teaching in such a multilingual context, we are inevitably faced with interesting, sometimes perhaps even perplexing, challenges and opportunities. With specific reference to your work with students as readers and writers, please reflect on the challenges and opportunities of working in a multilingual space in your own teaching practices and experiences at Queens College.”

Roberto Abadie, Writing Fellow

Once upon a time, many years ago, there was a university whose students were literate, proficient writers. These students impressed their professors as articulate thinkers and enthusiastic disciplinary learners. Conveniently, these students were also respectful of the authority of the professor as they were of the canons and conventions in their disciplines. Now, academic teaching has slipped into a different reality punctuated by widespread illiteracy among students, who unable to articulate the most basic disciplinary conventions in their writing, show

a cynical or instrumental relationship with their professors and elected disciplines. This could be, in a nutshell, a representation of a mythical past in which literacy practices among students were seen as unproblematic and the role of college education was apparently internalized and unchallenged by students. I won't discuss here the connections or disconnections with this myth from “reality.” What seems clear is that we now have at Queens and at CUNY at large, a different student body than we had thirty or forty years ago -- and even five years, one year or one semester ago. Students are more multicultural and more diverse than they were at any time in our past. They come

from different countries, different cultures, different ethnic groups and different class positions than the more homogeneous, white, male, working-class students CUNY supported and nurtured historically. In particular, this multiculturalism poses new challenges to Queens College and to the CUNY system. How can the university continue to play its historically progressive role in this new social context? In particular, how should faculty and writing fellows deal with the issue of multiculturalism on the campus through this zine and many other sources? I am comforted by the fact that there is probably no single answer to this issue—so complex and multifaceted. I hope, however, that through this zine and our periodic interactions among faculty and writing fellows, we will continue a dialogue that will lead to more questions and more openings on an issue that not only is here to stay, but also, judging from the census data of the United States and New York City, will be more pronounced in the years and decades to come.

Rhona Cohen, Writing Fellow

Recently, I was asked by a colleague how I might respond to student writing that argues “God’s will” in an opinion paper and in an ongoing online discussion about the recent decision in France to ban religious garb in their academic halls. In this communication, my colleague flagged the fact that this student is multilingual and that there were many grammatical issues that “interrupted” her reading. While I understand that my colleague wants this student to learn how to use other discursive strategies, and even agree with this aim, I also appreciate this student’s desire to use a familiar discourse to argue her opinion in an attempt to persuade her audience. Certainly the goal of theological writing, and perhaps even more so of the sermon, is to persuade a listening or reading public of an opinion. And so, as teachers, we find ourselves again in the always interesting though sometimes scary position of translator. The trick will be to use this student’s choice to discuss audience, to examine different rhetorical stances, to coax into everyone’s consciousness the choices that writers make all of the time. In this instance we have an opportunity for growth or the possibility of “interrupting” that growth by focusing on those elements that we see as unarguable errors. Language is so malleable, and in any classroom that encourages writing, the chance for ambiguity increases exponentially. Sure it might be easier to look at grammatical and syntactical choices as errors, to assign blame, rather than to look to student writing for the chance to broaden our own thinking about our disciplines and our own writing. But when we

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...From the Editor...

By Dara Sicherman

It is with great pleasure that I am able to participate in this inaugural issue of "Revisions: A Zine on Writing at Queens College" published by the Office of College Writing Programs. It is our hope that this semiannual zine will provide a forum for students and faculty alike to discuss issues, concerns, practices, understandings, pleasures, and struggles that are encountered by all writers--students, faculty, staff--at QC.

Our inaugural issue focuses on the topic of writing, and teaching and learning, in the multilingual environment at Queens College. Together, faculty, staff, and students offer an exchange of ideas that reflect the benefits and challenges of teaching writing and learning within such a diverse community of multiple languages and multiple literacies. In addition, Maddalena Romano and Rhona Cohen each review the two Queens College Writers at Work events that we sponsored this past semester and Sean Egan reviews Art Young's Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999).

Our Fall 2004 issue will address the topic of plagiarism in the classroom and beyond. We hope to include thoughts pertaining to this multifaceted topic from faculty and students alike. As with the topic of multiple languages, we hope that the zine can become a catalyst of new thinking, encouraging new ways of imagining topics with which we might have assumed an easy familiarity, a fixed way of knowing. In addition, the next issue will offer some resources on how to avoid and how to identify plagiarism.

One of the things we really want to achieve with "Revisions: A Zine on Writing at Queens College" is a conversation that does not end within the pages of a zine. As a result, we have started a WEBLOG as a way of continuing our conversation. Please join the conversation at:

<http://qcpages.qc.edu/Writing/weblogs.html>.

We hope that you will find this zine informative and hope that it will foster an ongoing conversation about writing at Queens College.

—DS

Writing Across the Curriculum

As a university-wide initiative, WAC at CUNY began with the 1999 Board Resolution endorsing the centrality of writing to a university education.

The Resolution asked each college to accept the responsibility of integrating writing instruction into the curriculum in every department and academic program across the University.

The Board Resolution also called for the creation of a new program, the CUNY Writing Fellows. The Fellows are advanced graduate students assigned to support the WAC initiative at every campus.

WAC is now established at all 17 campuses and the Law School. The WAC team at each campus is led by a faculty coordinator, who supervises 6 or 7 CUNY Writing Fellows and serves on the University WAC Committee.

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do, we miss an opportunity that, as scholars, we embrace in other settings. Maybe when we as teachers show angst about teaching in multilingual settings what's really making us uncomfortable is the ambiguity of our own discursive practices and desires.

Susan Croll, Psychology

Teaching writing in a multilingual environment presents some interesting opportunities, as well as a number of challenges. I have found that, while native Americans have a greater fluency in writing, it is often those who learned English as adults who are most cognizant of the rules of grammar. During writing exercises, I will often pair students who are native speakers with those who are not, and will ask them to edit one another's writing. Those who are native English speakers can help the non-native speakers with their fluency and phrasing, while the non-native speakers can identify violations of grammatical rules. By working together, all students receive both advantages. In addition, I try to encourage students to read their work aloud. I find that doing so helps native speakers to recognize awkward phrasing, and non-native speakers to practice reading and speaking English in a formal context.

Jennifer Eddy, Foreign Language Education, Secondary Education and Youth Services

I am happy to respond to this question because it bears great significance on the course I teach called "Language, Literacy and Culture." This is a required course for all secondary education candidates. In the course, we discuss issues of diversity, social justice, multicultural education, and literacy across the curriculum. Taking a fact-based, informational style approach alone will not affect the level of understanding I believe we are hoping for in teacher candidates. We examine multiculturalism and our view of the world by looking at our experiences, knowledge, and expectations through our own cultural lens. Candidates need to examine this lens and acknowledge different perspectives. In this way, they can also see pedagogically there are multiple ways to approach a subject, a problem, and that culture is not static and fixed.

In the course, I use various techniques to encourage reflective writing. Students need to respond to issues such as censorship, prejudice, immigration, multilingualism, and diversity. They are encouraged to write from their experience and apply what they learn to those experiences. Students write reflective essays in response to readings, film, discussion, case studies, and cross-cultural awareness simulations. They also develop lesson plans that address all learners, using different tasks and assessments as evidence of understanding.

I have teacher candidates of every cultural background in this course. I find it to be a very enriching, engaging course because of the diversity of the students. Their response to



Above: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The "Little" Tower of Babel*, c. 1563. Oil on panel, 60 x 74.5 cm; Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

issues is genuine and their depth of understanding greater than what I see in their writing and responses to readings in class.

Hugh English, Coordinator of College Writing Programs

What happens when we start to name language differences differently, when we shift our understanding of our social context away from thinking of English with many ESL language users and toward seeing the extraordinary opportunities and challenges for teaching and learning in a multilingual environment?

We might start not merely to think about standard English and the many--locally and globally-- who are "deficient" in it, but rather to think about the multiple languages of our teaching and learning environment within which we communicate primarily, but certainly not exclusively, with a shared set of historical English language conventions. Here we have a close parallel, then, to thinking about how there are also multiple literacies and the many ways of reading, writing, and speaking about written language that we call "academic" are only some relatively privileged, context-specific ways with words among many. In the former case, we begin to see all of our students and colleagues for whom English is not a first language as contributing to the social diversity of teaching and learning at Queens College; in the latter case, we can see our students not as "deficient" in literacy--in any general, singular, absolute, or historically and socially abstracted sense--but rather as unfamiliar with some particular ways with words, even while they already regularly engage in other multiple and varied literacies.

Can we effect this kind of change in attitude toward all of those milling around in our local/global tower of Babel, a

change toward valuing, listening to and appreciating this richness, which is of course the richness of our planet's and species' cultural and biological diversity?

Certainly, we still need to find ways to introduce our students to standard American English (or, better: edited standard American English); to help them to practice using our particular *lingua franca* and our varied conventions; to understand the intellectual and communicative opportunities of a shared language, while still valuing the richness of language and literate variety; and to understand explicitly how language differences are themselves related to social power (i.e., why it matters, in many contexts, to know and to use the standard dialect). How do students learn to use edited standard American English? Through repeated and extensive practice in reading and writing; through learning a repertoire of writing processes and practices, including editing and proof-reading; through teachers' helpful responses to their writing, especially when those responses are themselves based on an understanding of the different, yet related, registers of developing thinking and communicating in the standard dialect; through an introduction to how writers use a good handbook (I prefer Janice Peritz and Elaine Maimon's A Writer's Resource (McGraw-Hill, 2003) for a variety of reasons, including their frequent inclusion of tips for multilingual students throughout their helpfully divided sections on editing (Clarity, Grammar Conventions, and Correctness); and through working closely with teachers and tutors not "to learn grammar," but to learn the particular patterns of error that they make and to learn a wide variety of syntactical, diction, grammatical, and rhetorical choices as responses to those patterns of error.

We will do more to teach such rhetorical consciousness of ways with words with our multilingual students through understanding and valuing our tower of Babel than we could ever do through simply assuming the naturalness of our "standard" language. As Patti Smith affirms in "Land": "(at that Tower of Babel they knew what they were after)/ (they knew what they were after)" (Horses, 1975).

Duncan Faherty, Director of Composition, English

Most of us who teach at Queens are aware that our student body is one of the most diverse in the nation. Indeed, many of us have struggled to develop strategies for teaching students from many different cultures and with wide-ranging levels of ability. Yet, I wonder if we work hard enough at making our students engage with the diversity of the academy itself: do we, in fact, fruitfully underscore the manifold "cultures" of the academy for our students? Our own disciplinary conventions can seem so natural to us that we often fail to recognize the difficulties others have when trying to "discover" them. Queens is a multilingual space in many different ways, and as a result we have a unique opportunity to challenge our students to interact with the polyvocality of the academy itself in really interesting ways.

We have to be careful not to be so grounded in our own disciplines that we lose sight of the possibilities of a diversity of ways of reading and writing. We must actively try to provide our students with tangible lessons in the value of redrafting, rebuilding, and revising. We must do this in all of our classes, so that our students understand that there is no such thing as one academic discourse. The challenge we face as teachers is how to model the potential of such academic multilingualism for our students. We need to pay even closer attention to writing and reading practices – to the processes by which students construct knowledge – not just in Writing or Writing-Intensive courses but in all courses. Rather than soliciting manufactured responses, or prompting students to replicate a few prefabricated examples, we need to encourage them to see their work as an element in larger webs of thought.

Many teachers think that the frontier between their students and themselves is so expansive that the rhetorical situations they confront lack a common denominator. While there are differences in the two positions, it is more fruitful to recognize points of intersection, beginning with the fundamental truth that all writing involves negotiating difficult terrain. Moreover, I think we need to make clear the possibilities of different approaches when surveying an intellectual issue. To put it another way, we need to invest as much time and effort in thinking and talking about the production of texts (the different lenses that we might employ at disparate moments in time) as we devote to their consumption. Means are more important than ends; what we learn along the way trumps the telos that we pursue.

It is essential that students do as much writing as possible, that they write in response to different kinds of rhetorical situations, and that they begin to understand how to use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating. We need to provide our students with a grounding capable of supporting a lifetime of redrafting and revising. For that to happen, we need to communicate the richness of poly-vocality, and to recognize that revision is the heart of the matter. In other words we need to help our students understand the complex diversity of academic discourse and to embrace the possibilities inherent in our expansive curriculum.

Elaine Klein, Linguistics & Communication Disorders

While multilingual diversity is a central part of my role at the college -- as I am a linguist -- the diversity that has probably had the greatest impact on my students' reading and writing is that of their English dialects. Many students write with the informality of their spoken, conversational dialects, and are challenged by the requirements of an entirely different genre expected in academic writing. Similarly, in this internet, video age, new dialects are

emerging that are quite interesting, but often conflict with what is required in the college classroom and I wonder whether, as academics, we need to be more attuned to these changes than we are. Add to this the layers of multilingual and multicultural differences that exist at Queens and it's a tower of Babel that can offer exciting challenges for literacy, particularly thinking and rhetorical styles that vary from culture to culture.

Wasi Mekuria, Writing Fellow

Working as a writing fellow and interacting with both faculty and students who are multilingual has been an interesting context for exploring the ways that having access to different forms of "knowledge making" can enrich the writing culture at Queens College. I consider the ability to negotiate between various cultural conventions to be an opportunity for stimulating the imaginative possibilities in the discovery and generation of ideas. Within such a learning environment, imagining the path to knowledge, as an uncharted terrain can also be a useful pedagogical tool for incorporating eclectic teaching perspectives to aid in the cultivation of the creative process.

Barbara Simerka, Hispanic Languages & Literatures

For a faculty member teaching in the department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures, teaching composition in a multilingual environment entails two separate considerations. First, the Hispanic Lit in English translation courses that I teach mirror most writing courses across the college, in that students write essays in English, an idiom that is the heritage language of barely half of the students in most classes. As a speaker of Spanish who previously taught in a bilingual university community in TX, I had been proud of the strategies that I had been able to develop to help students whose writing challenges often stemmed from "interference" of Spanish. Because I was well acquainted with the linguistic differences, it was easy for me to function as trouble shooter. However, at Queens College, many of the students speak languages with which I am totally unfamiliar, so that form of diagnosis is impossible. Instead, I have learned to let the students serve as my guide, as they explain the interferences and help develop their own strategies for meeting their greatest challenges. After two years at QC, I am starting to believe that this approach, which empowers students to take a more active role in their own growth, is actually more effective in many instances.

The second consideration is teaching writing intensive courses within a "foreign language" department, where students will write in a language other than English. Some may question the benefit of such a course if the goal of the writing program is for students to write well in English. Here, it must be emphasized that writing "error free" prose is only one aspect of the writing curriculum. Many other goals, including the development of research strategies, organization, and critical thinking skills, are applicable to all

writing situations, in any idiom. I believe that allowing students to pursue writing fluency in two languages is an excellent way to support a diverse community of students. One of the greatest challenges facing this approach to writing is to provide resources so that writers of many languages will benefit from a level of support comparable to what writers of English receive through the Writing Center. Within the "foreign language" class, multiculturalism presents a unique face. Students pursuing a major in a language may have been born and received their secondary education in a country where the target language is spoken, or they may have been born in the US and speak the language at home, or they may be students of any nationality who wish to study a language and culture different from their own. Each of these groups faces its own unique set of linguistic challenges, which a multicultural college must seek to address. These are just a few of the challenges that we must address in order to best serve the needs of the Queens College community. However, I must also emphasize the benefits of studying writing in such a diverse environment. The experiences students gain in writing classes, as they workshop their ideas, compare strategies and techniques, solve problems, and gain trust in fellow members of the collaborative classroom, are a living and breathing example of the ideal of multicultural communication.

Zhigang Xiang, Computer Science

Being a member of the computer science community, I use programming languages to specify the logical steps for a computer to process information, and I use English (an example of the natural languages) to explain the scientific underpinnings of programming to my students. One of the challenges in reading, writing, and discussing computer programs is that we have to think in such a mind set that is both rational (for analytical reasoning) and algorithmic (to mimic the computational process). To this end, the effective use of languages to articulate problems and ideas is an integral part of our study of computer programming as well as other areas of computer science.

The deficiency in English certainly has negative impact on our "non-native" students, as it will take longer for them to read an exam question and to write down a verbal answer - and there is no way to make up this lost time. However, this impact is relatively limited because we use English mostly to the extent that we can convey the scientific contents in a way that is as clear and as straightforward as possible. There is virtually no "reading between the lines," no culture-dependent material, etc.... Most (if not all) of them can follow along, and adapt to this type of "technical English" in one semester or two (just enough to handle lectures and course work), long before they can write a smooth letter to ask for a change of grade.

Queens College

Queens College Writers at Work is a program sponsored by the Office of College Writing Programs. Every semester, we feature Queens College faculty at events where we discuss writing practices. Our flyer illustrates some of the more commonly addressed topics: "How does a writer imagine a subject, gather information and find the right language and form? What are a writer's habits and practices? Where and when does she or he write? How does she or he draft, revise and edit?"



Above: Dr. Hugh English (left) interviews Dr. Murphy Halliburton (right) about his writing practices. Photography courtesy of Queens College Writers at Work, 2004.

Writers at Work, 26 Feb. 2004

By Maddalena Romano

On 26 February 2004, Writers at Work featured guest speaker Dr. Murphy Halliburton. Murphy Halliburton (Ph.D. CUNY 2000) joined the Anthropology Department in Fall 2000. His specializations include Medical Anthropology, South Asian ethnography, and cross-cultural psychiatry. He was awarded a Queens College Faculty Writing Fellowship for Fall 2001 to develop the course Anthropology 208: Peoples of South Asia as a Writing-Intensive Course. More recently, he received a PSC-CUNY Research Award for "Regimes of Innovation and Ownership: Ayurvedic Medicine, Intellectual Property and the World Trade Organization."

After a short introduction by Anthropology Department Chair James A. Moore, Murphy Halliburton took the podium and began by first reading from his recent article "The Importance of a Pleasant Process of Treatment: Lessons on Healing from South India" (*Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 27: 161-186, 2003). In this work, he discusses the positive

and negative aesthetic qualities of undergoing allopathic psychiatric treatments (commonly referred to as "western medicine"), ayurvedic psychiatric treatments (part of the medical system called ayurveda, indigenous to South Asia), and religious healing. He closes the discussion of this article by asking for a reconsideration of the concept of the "cure" for describing the accomplishments of therapeutic healing. This discussion was intriguing, and did inspire commentary from the audience, which Halliburton gladly entertained.

Following this reading was a more anecdotal piece written about a friend named Aachan, who had passed away a few years back. He admitted to a change in his accustomed writing style, but was willing to share this "work in progress." This piece, noticeably different in tone, attempts to explain his close friendship: "Subtle and wise, a 'philosopher' despite himself, I think he liked to think of himself as pragmatic and down-to-earth, which he was, though he was at the same time disarmingly original and comfortingly familiar, all this without trying, it seemed."

When the applause settled, it was then time for the discussion of his writing practices. This began by some word association, lead by Dr. Hugh English, Coordinator of College Writing Programs. Halliburton discussed his reactions to such words and phrases as "revision" (which he found both intimidating as well as comforting, and a process which he found computers now aid), "run-on sentences" (where he commented that, ironically, good writers break the rules that students are told to follow—and which he admitted to doing more often in his anecdotal piece than in his journal article) and "student writing" (where he finds—from conversations with students—that there exists a worry about "getting it right" even when students are told to take ownership of the knowledge and interpret it for themselves).

It was at this point that the floor was opened for questions on his writing process, and where the discussion became more intricate. Questions followed by English, as well as by Writing Fellows Roberto Abadie and Wasi Mekuria (both doctoral students in the Department of Anthropology at the Graduate Center,

Writers at Work

CUNY). These questions delved more deeply into the discussion of how, where, and when Halliburton writes, as well as the topics of procrastination, writing rituals, audience, the “purpose” of revising, anthropological writing as a genre, how writing is “taught,” translation in writing, originality of thought in writing.

In considering an audience for one’s writing, Halliburton finds that he writes more to the preference of specific individuals than to a large group, but also points out that writing is a negotiation—meaning that there is an implicit understanding in the post-critique writing process that not all of the suggested changes can be incorporated into the next revision. He finds that students sometimes find this a difficult concept to grasp, and attributes this to the student focus on the teacher and the grading process as the audience. Also of note were his comments on the purpose of revision in academia. It is thought to be an exercise in polishing one’s writing, but he commented that it also establishes a certain homogeneity in the writing styles of authors in a particular field. This process, then, functions as a sieve, but he also mentioned that “original” writing need not necessarily be sacrificed just because there exists a need to adhere to a more conforming style in the early stages of academic life.

Writers at Work, 4 May 2004

By Rhona Cohen

In the second and final spring semester Writers at Work event, Dr. Rikki Asher and Dr. David Gerwin presented some of their work in the fields of Art and Social Studies Education and then talked about their

writing processes. The Writers at Work series opens up the possibilities we have as teachers and as writers by initiating a conversation about writing and about teaching and learning through writing in which we rarely have the opportunity to participate. And once again this forum yielded some inquiry worthy of further investigation. Here I want to share with you some of the discoveries that Dr. Asher’s and Dr. Gerwin’s presentations and conversation produced for me.

Dr. Asher began by reading from two articles published in School Arts, a magazine of special interest to Art educators involved in teaching classes from elementary school through college. The first article, “Planned and Unplanned,” from which she read focused on her process as an artist and as a teacher. The title refers the reader to the multi-dimensionality of urban environments, the elements of which become apparent when we observe the planned and unplanned effects of urban development. This piece was very reflective, exploring the how of her creative process and the why of her teaching practices, an appropriate topic for this event that set the tone for the guided discussion about writing practices that would follow. The second article, “Telling Community Stories” had been produced through a collaborative effort with Dr. Gerwin and Dr. Terry Osbourne. In this article, she presents the processes she utilized to produce a mural in collaboration with a QC graduate class of future art educators. This mural hangs in the Rosenthal Library and merits not only a personal viewing but also possible classroom viewing and reading if you find yourself discussing, for instance, the history of

Queens, urban planning, history, the practices and processes of ethnographic study, migration... In short, this mural and the research that went into its production (also archived in the library) provide rich texts which could lead in various productive directions for teachers in various disciplines. In “Telling Community Stories,” Asher points out the many ways that this is so as well as providing for the reader an interesting narrative about her processes as teacher and artist in the creation of this particular piece.

Dr. Asher’s reading was followed by Dr. Gerwin who read from his recent book Teaching US History as Mystery (co-written with Dr. Jack Zevin). He read from three sections of this book. In the first section, “David and Jack Duke it Out,” we hear two voices, a conversation or an argument about whether the “minor mystery,” the who, what, where, and when of historical investigation yields the most valuable classroom conversation. Jack asserts in this section that the “major mystery” is value laden, so to speak, forcing conversations about the meanings of the who, what, where and why issues which historians are charged to comprehend. The second selection from this book opens with a question, “What is a “fact” or “evidence” or “data”? In this section Gerwin and Zevin’s voices are merged into one and they ask us to consider the data that we collect, examine and analyze. Instead of presenting “facts,” Gerwin and Zevin want teachers to counsel and teach students to investigate evidence. This might allow for a more fluid understanding of the past and the flexibility to see that all kinds of data could ultimately produce lucrative

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Simplifying Writing Across the Curriculum

by Sean Egan

Review of *Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum* by Art Young (Prentice Hall, 1999). [Full text available online at http://wac.colostate.edu/books/young_teaching]

Art Young's short guide to teaching writing across the curriculum (WAC) provides an easy-to-use introduction to the thinking behind WAC programs and some of the most common and effective practices employed by instructors across the disciplines. Young's aim is to make WAC seem straight-forward, sensible and useful. For the most part the introduction of writing into courses across the disciplines is sensible and very useful, but it is not always as straight-forward as Young (and other proponents) sometimes make it out to be. Young does acknowledge that integrating writing into a course is a complicated task that obliges an instructor to think about his or her teaching goals and how writing might help in reaching them. However, his introduction to

thinking about WAC tends to oversimplify his subject by relying too much on thinking about writing in terms of two categories. It might seem unfair to criticize the author of an introductory booklet for oversimplifying (since, after all, you have to start somewhere), but Young's oversimplification misses a chance to give instructors intellectual tools which would be more useful to them in thinking about writing and their teaching than the breakdown he offers. But, to be fair, I will start by addressing the strengths of Young's gentle lead-in to writing in the disciplines.

A Useful Introduction

One of the good things about Young's introduction to WAC is that it begins with a conversation between faculty members. He starts with a conversation between a biology professor and himself about a particular student's writing and, in doing so, is able to address the misunderstandings and misconceptions that can arise between WAC proponents (such as writing coordinators or writing fellows) and faculty members in disciplines where writing instruction is not a big part of the curriculum (Young mentions his experiences with students and faculty in the hard sciences and engineering).

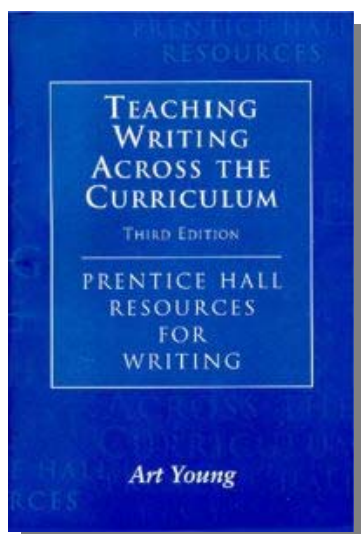
Young's description of his interaction with a biologist at his college will sound familiar to anyone who has been involved in enough discussions about writing in college. The biologist was unhappy with the writing ability of a senior in his class and contacted Young, who had been the student's instructor for freshman composition, to discuss the problem. Young shows how discussions like this can be a dead end in some ways. For one thing, they pit writing people (usually the English department) against everyone else, on the assumption that they are the only people who can or should do writing.

Young uses this particular student and conversation to make one of the standard rationales for teaching writing across the curriculum: that people in all the disciplines are responsible for writing (otherwise no one is). Or to

"If writing only gets done in English classes then the students get the impression that paying attention to writing is a specialized activity (like recognizing iambic pentameter) that only matters in English classes and not an essential activity in learning..."

put it another way, if writing only gets done in English classes then the students get the impression that paying attention to writing is a specialized activity (like recognizing iambic pentameter) that only matters in English classes and not an essential activity in learning, which is how practically all college instructors would see writing. Young gets to this point without straying too far from his illustrative anecdote. He says that after discussions with the biologist and the student involved, "We came to believe that writing was integral to a professional education in biology (and every other discipline) and not simply a generic skill easily mastered in one or two courses and then transferred effortlessly to all disciplines" (Young 1999, 3).

Young uses the same inductive approach as he moves on to introduce the practices of WAC: he starts with particular assignments, examples of student writing, and faculty responses and develops from them some general concepts and approaches to writing. It is at this point that Young divides the kinds of writing students do into writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate. He begins with writing-to-learn assignments, which, aside from the obvious, are meant to allow students to use writing as a tool to explore course material and their ideas about it in a context other than an exam or report. There are plenty of creative and useful examples in this section for which Young provides the all-important mundane details of how these assignments are given, collected, evaluated, and made use of. The assignments include: letter writing, one-minute essays, poems (including examples from the unlikely



Publication Information: Young, Art. 2002. *Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum, Third Edition*. WAC Clearinghouse Landmark Publications in Writing Studies: http://wac.colostate.edu/aw/books/young_teaching/ Originally Published in Print, 1999, by Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey. Publication Date: May 29, 2002. For more electronic resources on this subject, visit the WAC Clearinghouse for Landmark Publications in Writing Studies <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/landmarks.cfm>.

disciplines of accounting and computer science), journals, collaborative notes, and more. I won't try to go into details here. If you are interested I would recommend looking through Young's explanations of these writing ideas.

The next sections deal with writing-to-communicate, which consists for the most part of the traditional essay and paper assignments. Young's emphasis here is on structuring assignments so that they allow for actual communication from student to instructor, meaning a paper should contain some of the students' insights and ideas and not just report information that the instructor likely knows already (and as a result has very little interest in reading). Young provides lists of ideas for structuring a paper assignment into many small assignments or activities at different stages in the writing process. Both of these sections are potentially useful (the writing-to-learn section probably more so since it contains more novel and creative assignment ideas), but the usefulness of the division itself is worth considering.

Two kinds of _____ in the world. Dividing complex phenomena into two categories is a bit like having fast food for dinner: it's quick and convenient, and there are times when it's the best option, but it's better not to make a habit of it. Young divides writing into writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate. He asks his readers to think about writing this way and follow along as he presents his argument for the creative approaches to writing he presents, and for someone who is completely new to thinking about writing this way the simplicity of the division is a virtue. Unfortunately, Young leaves his readers with this division

"Dividing complex phenomena into two categories is a bit like having fast food for dinner; it's quick and convenient and there are times when it's the best option, but it's better not to make a habit of it."

and the only way to think about writing, which is limiting. This division is not an innovation of Young's; it has in various forms become standard in WAC literature. In Young's formulation, writing-to-learn is writer-based writing. It is done for the writer's own purposes, to advance his or her understanding of a concept or to help think through ideas on a topic. Writing-to-communicate is done with the reader in mind. The writer has to keep the audience in mind when trying to convince them of something or to communicate with them. Young makes the appropriate caveats when introducing these categories: he notes that there are many kinds of writing that fall into both categories and mentions that any piece of writing lies on a continuum somewhere between the two extremes. Nonetheless, the division is still there and his booklet is structured around it.

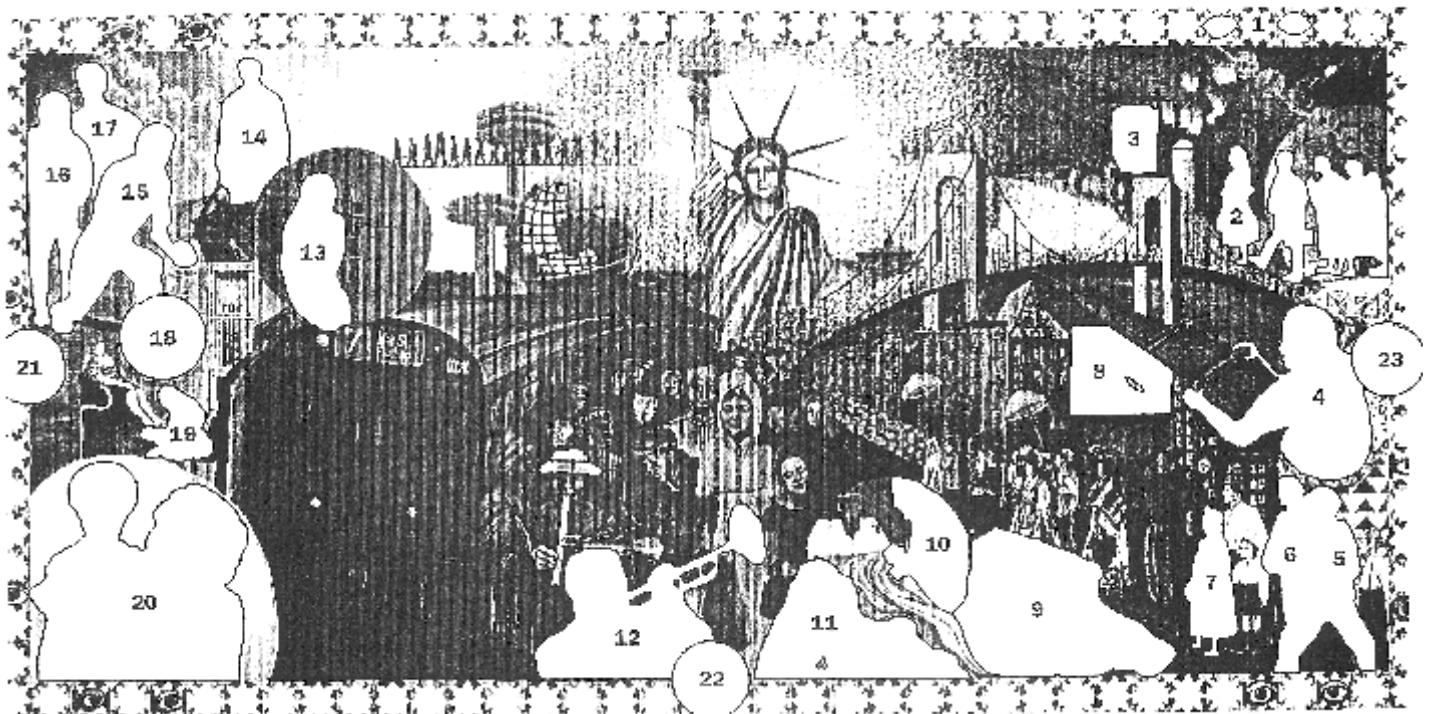
So what is the problem with this division? The first is that it is not very convincing. Writing-to-learn is written to "please the writer" writing-to-communicate is written to "please the reader." This makes it sound like writing-to-learn is arhetorical, that we don't shape writing that we write for ourselves according to established patterns and for particular purposes. We do of course. We just do so with patterns and for purposes that are so familiar to us that we are barely aware of them. When Young introduces writing-to-learn, he gives as an example a short informal writing assignment. The instructor told his students that this was an informal piece of writing, but it was still collected, and it would have been hard for the students think of the assignment as for themselves and not for their reader, the instructor. They certainly wrote it according to the standards they had for writing assignments that teachers will read. And I don't think it is easy to get them to stop writing that way--just telling them that it won't be graded or that they should write for themselves is not likely to do it since they often won't believe us (and often we don't really mean what we are saying.)

Young extends this problem by including "notes and rough drafts" in the writing-to-learn category. This leads to the second problem with his categories: they tend to hide some very important lessons about what we need to do when we write. We *do* learn when we write rough drafts, but we don't write them for ourselves, and it would not be helpful for us or our students to think of them that way. They are early attempts to write something to please an audience. It is just this complicated question of the writer's relationship to the reader (or readers) that gets ironed over by the writing-to-learn, writing-to-communicate division. The audience for a rough draft may be literally the same as for a final draft, usually just the instructor, but the relationship with that audience is different because the drafts will be read for different purposes.

An alternative to this division is to think in terms of purpose and audience, the concepts which underlie the writing-to-learn versus writing-to-communicate distinction. Thinking in terms of purpose and audience could be useful to instructors who don't see how the writing they do in their course or their discipline fits into either of Young's categories. The important element that Young's division introduces is that the purpose of a piece of writing determines how an instructor should respond to it and make use of it. Every piece of writing doesn't need to be responded to as though it were the final draft of a formal report. Ultimately, however, getting past the writing-to-learn, writing-to-communicate division is most helpful to the students, who I suspect will find the distinction even less convincing than most instructors. Students have the most to gain from thinking about the purpose and audience and the effects they have on what they write. The ability to understand that different writing situations will oblige them to pay different levels of attention to their tone, correctness, wording, and so on is probably the most portable and valuable lesson in writing that a student can get.



Above: *Procession*. Dr. Rikki Asher's Graduate Art Education Mural Painting Class explored the subject of immigration and migration in Queens and composed the 16 x 8 ft. mural art at the Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library, Queens College, CUNY. Muralists: Anya Borysenko, John Filardi, Laura Fradella, Cheryl Gallagher, Monica Goetzen, Emily Greenberg, Lesley Malar, Lyne Molinari, Doris Poris, Donna Theobald, Damon Tommolino.



Above: A "map" of the *Procession* mural: 1. Hellen Keller's eyes; 2. Jewish Immigrant Families from Russia, Hungary, Poland and Lithuania; 3. Chinese Girl Who Hid from the Red Army on a Train; 4. Guatemalan Immigrant; 5, 6, 7 Polish Immigrant Family; 8. Joseph Cornell, Assemblage Artist; 9. Chester Carlson, Investor of the Xerox Machine; 10. Doretta Paris' Italian Grandmother Lucy Amore; 11. Monica Goetzen's Polish-born Sister, Husband, and Child; 12. Louis Armstrong, Who Migrated from New Orleans and lived in Corona; 13. Lena Horne, Jazz Singer; 14. Italian American Immigrant; Bricklayer; 15. Italian Bocce Player; 16. Custodial Worker—Holocaust Survivor; 17. Christopher Walken, Actor; 18. Billie Holiday, Jazz Singer; 19. Korean Immigrant Woman: Nail Salon Technician; 20. Japanese Immigrant Family; 21. Clock Tower Built as a Civil Rights Memorial to James Earl Chaney, Queens College Student Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner; 22. Seal of the City of New York; 23. Seal of the Borough of Queens; 24. Seal of the State of New York.

(Continued from page 6)

findings. What importance does the lunch we eat today or tomorrow have to the historian or social scientist? Ultimately, Gerwin explains that many pieces of data that might seem unimportant to us today might produce compelling and relevant meanings about myriad topics in the future. Finally, Gerwin read from a portion of his book that takes on what issues might be historically significant. Here Zevin and Gerwin are discussing a decision that teachers must make, asking, "On which historical events or figures should the history teacher focus?" But ultimately the book is wrought through with questions of importance to historians, researchers and teachers alike, Questions about history and about the ways that historical investi-

gations can be connected and utilized in the history classroom, in the study and understanding of social research, and in our lives outside of the classroom as well.

After the readings, Hugh English, Dara Sicherman, and Robin Harper led our two speakers through a fascinating conversation about their processes as writers. By investigating their individual and complicated process we all, I think, made discoveries about our own writing practices, needs, and expectations as well as discoveries about writing in the classroom and what we are demanding of our students when we ask them to write for us. I couldn't even begin to write down all that we discovered together, so I think that instead I will end this reflection by ask-

ing you to reflect for a minute in the same way that we asked Gerwin and Asher to at this event. One of the interviewing techniques we utilize at our events is a word association game about the writing processes of our participants. And so I end here with this same practice here. What do the words "academic writing," "revision," and "deadline" mean to you?

Finally, I'd like to invite you to join us at our next Writers at Work event, where we can all take a minute to reflect on our practices as writers and how they might affect our classrooms and our lives.



Above: Steps of the Flushing Branch of the Queensborough Public Library, inscribed with many languages. Photo courtesy of Sean Egan, 2004.

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Dr. Hugh English, Coordinator of College Writing Programs
Lisa Georgian, College Assistant
Fri - April 30, 10:37 PM

Welcome to the website for the Office of College Writing Programs, Queens College, City University of New York.

We have recently undergone website renovations in order to create a more useful and user-friendly site. We intend to be not only a resource for faculty and students, but also a forum for expression. Here are some new site features you will see:

- ↑ Above each page is the contact information.
- ← Links and search engine are to the left.
- ↓ Bookmark, email, print and closing links are at the bottom.
- News bulletins and office hours for our Writing Fellows are on the right, but only on the homepage.

If you are looking for information on the CPE exam, please see the [CPE information website](#).

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