THE ADVANCED WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM WORKSHOP: THE PERILS OF REINTRODUCING RHETORIC

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The idea for this essay grew from an observation and a related question. First the observation, which should come as no surprise to Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) coordinators: faculty response to the introductory writing across the curriculum workshop at La Salle University is almost uniformly positive. Teachers seem eager to explore the potential of writing as a tool for learning and grateful for more effective ways of designing and evaluating writing assignments. A math professor's comments are typical:

> The writing project workshop was for me an enlightening experience. Before the workshop, I had never considered using writing assignments as a learning tool in mathematics and physics . . . Also, my assignments were too loosely defined. I have much more appreciation now

for the care that must go into an assignment. The discussions on evaluating student writing nicely pointed out problems in grading I had never considered.

In contrast, responses to the advanced workshop "Critical Thinking, Writing, and the Major," designed for faculty who had participated in the introductory workshop, tend to be mixed, ranging from very enthusiastic, to surprise, and occasionally, to disappointment. For example, on the positive side,

> "I believe that the workshop provided an important starting point to a process which has the potential for influencing the entire campus community if, as intended, the group continues to meet."
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> "The sessions raised numerous questions about how various disciplines see writing and its relation to thinking."
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> "The main insight I got from the workshop is the understanding of critical thinking, not as an isolated intellectual process or skill, but as part of a larger social context: the discourse of the discipline, the students' own culture, the bridge between the two."
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> "The workshop was more work than last year. I mean more mental work."

On the other hand, from less satisfied participants,

> "We the participants, tried to see the resemblance of the workshop ideas to critical thinking, even though the thrust of the presenters was to the contrary."

Now the question: Why was the response to these two workshops so different? What happened in Workshop II that was so significant to some faculty yet unsettling to others? After all, the purpose of the second workshop was to explore understandings about the nature of thinking and writing which we assumed were self-evidently related to ideas in the basic workshop. However, they were perceived as being quite different.

Perhaps the introductory workshop, and possibly many first stage WAC programs in general, enjoy widespread acceptance, because although WAC challenges some traditional assumptions about writing and teaching, it presents little threat to other, more

basic assumptions about college teaching. This essay will attempt to identify some characteristics of first and second stage WAC programs, using La Salle as an example, and suggest a possible solution for addressing some of the problems which seem to beleaguer some second-stage programs at four year liberal arts colleges.

At the risk of oversimplification, our basic WAC workshop, like the one in many WAC programs, is based on four premises:

1. Writing is a complex intellectual process. If teachers learn theoretically sound strategies for assigning and evaluating writing, students will learn more from writing assignments and write better papers.

2. Pre-writing and revision are important stages in the writing process.

3. Expressive writing, equated with the notion of writing to learn, stimulates thinking and learning.

4. Highlighting the conventions of disciplinary writing is desirable for teaching students to write for an academic audience, since these conventions reflect the way experts in the discipline think and express themselves.

La Salle's basic WAC workshop, like many at other schools, is framed by the two dimensions which remain the major theoretical concerns of writing across the curriculum: the function of language and the audience (Kinneavy, "Writing Across" 368). As they are interpreted in the introductory workshop, however, neither is very controversial. The expressive function of language, presented primarily as a tool in the invention stage of writing, or advocated in the context of non-graded writing such as journals or classroom summaries and reflections, does not pose a major challenge to the instructor's previous writing assignments or teaching practices. The idea that explaining things to ourselves in a conscious way helps us explain them to others seems eminently reasonable to most faculty.

As a result of the workshop, some faculty at La Salle adopt teaching methods which encourage expressive writing: they may add expressive, ungraded writing to their courses; or, more unusual, they substitute journals and other assignments with an expressive aim for their former assignments.

It is common WAC knowledge that the "functions of language notion," derived from the concern in the London Project that students were writing too many informative essays (Britton)

and supported by the theoretical contributions of Macrorie, Elbow, Emig and others, has led to a heavy emphasis on expressive writing as a tool for thinking and learning in WAC programs. Toby Fulwiler's description of the Vermont program reflects this focus, but links the benefits of expressive writing to improved exposition: "Our approach to the WAC concept emphasizes the writing that faculty are least familiar with—the informal or expressive; as a result we spend proportionately less time on the expository . . . but we are careful to point out the relationship between the two, especially noting it's hard to get improved writing without first or simultaneously getting improved learning" (54). Precisely because many faculty view expressive writing as preparatory, rather than as respectable discourse in its own right, they are willing to introduce expressive writing into their classrooms.

The question of audience, also addressed in the London Project with the intention of having students write to other audiences besides the teacher, has often found expression in WAC workshops by construing the disciplinary community as primary audience and the students' peers as an intermediate audience. In general, the audience issue in many WAC programs has been dominated by the notion that different departments are made up of discourse communities with varying assumptions, logical criteria, sense of evidence, and stylistic conventions. Thus, to teach students to write effectively for that audience, the WAC workshop urges faculty to redesign writing assignments to make more explicit the conventions of the professional discourse of the discipline, and recommends peer review or editing partners during the drafting process to ensure better writing. This approach leads to faculty revising the way assignments are presented, rather than changing the aim and audience for the assignment, which often remain the same. For example, if a book review of a history text has been assigned previously, the instructions may now include a more explicit explanation of the reasoning process for evaluating history texts and the rhetorical conventions of professional reviews of history texts. A peer review session may be added, probably as a means of achieving a better product. Audience in this context presents no great challenge to established practice.

The Advanced WAC Workshop

As is often typical of second-stage WAC Workshops, the "advanced" WAC workshop at La Salle attempted to relate

writing to critical thinking. The workshop, "Critical, Thinking, Writing and the Major," was developed in response to several campus concerns. La Salle was in the process of strengthening programs in the major at the same time that faculty concern about students thinking skills was increasing. Furthermore, the school had recently approved a writing-emphasis course requirement which included in its rationale the statement: "Students should be made aware of the different purposes and audiences for writing in their major. This awareness can lead them to understand the social, political, and ethical dimensions of their field of study. The informative responsibility of a discipline or a profession should be taught by the practitioners of that discipline." We saw the opportunity for a workshop on writing in upper division courses, framed in the context of a rhetorical view of critical thinking. We reasoned that writing assignments in advanced courses could teach students to write for different purposes and audiences than those stipulated by traditional assignments in other courses. A workshop, based on the following assumptions about critical thinking and writing, seemed to offer an excellent opportunity to broaden the faculty's understanding of critical thinking and its relation to the two primary theoretical dimensions of WAC mentioned earlier, the purpose and audience function of communication.

1. Critical thinking can be viewed in terms of the capacities students need to participate in a variety of communities, professional, public, and private communities.

2. Critical thinking involves learning to think in ways appropriate for different rhetorical aims. Different discourses (expressive, exploratory, scientific, persuasive, poetic) represent different ways of thinking.

3. Writing assignments can help students master different modes of thinking and their related discourse patterns.

Readings on the social model of intellectual development, the role of language in this process, and the classical rhetorical view of the relationship between thinking and discourse were used to introduce these ideas. These included among others, "Two Ways of Thinking About Growth" (Williams), which explores the curricular implications of the social model of intellectual development, and "Inventing the University" (Bartholomae), which defines the problem of discourse community initiation in terms of the students' need to master the dialect of the university.

However, James Kinneavy's theories on the classical rhetorical tradition of thinking and discourse became the workshop centerpiece. The idea that thinking critically can be interpreted as the ability to effect different rhetorical aims, and that different discourse patterns represent these ways of thinking, became the workshop's major themes. Kinneavy argues for the relevance of this tradition today; he says, "It is not enough for us if we wish to be critical thinkers to be trained in axiomatic logic. We must learn to think dialectically, in exploring many topics and in making political and ethical decisions. We must learn to think aesthetically both in making our own creations and in appreciating those of others . . . We must learn to think rhetorically to persuade others, sometimes to allow us to be persuaded or not persuaded by others . . . and each of us must learn to think expressively . . . to articulate our aspirations and values, and desires in emotional intense credos and testimonials and be willing to listen and appreciate similar expressions from other individuals and groups." ("Thinkings and Writings" 178).

In the workshop we singled out exploratory discourse as an example of a kind of discourse which demonstrates the value of modes of thinking and writing other than the demonstrative or expository. In contrast to expository writing, which states a thesis and usually tries to prove it through deductive or inductive thinking, exploratory writing emphasizes questions and suggests tentative answers. Unlike the thesis-support paper which ends on a definite note, the exploratory paper often concludes with a tentative statement and an invitation to keep thinking. Using James Kinneavy's description of the logic of exploration (*Writing in the Liberal Arts* 170-204), we demonstrated its possible uses, such as helping students understand how theories are challenged, how we think and talk to one another prior to the stage of proving an idea, and finally, how exploratory logic, similar to dialectical reasoning, is useful for discussing unprovable ideas. For example, ideas about political and social issues often fall into this classification. Definition papers, on topics such as "What is Progress," often follow an exploratory structure.

One of the most successful activities in the workshop required the faculty participants to identify exploratory discourse in their own fields. Faculty in the nursing department discovered that literature dealing with current social issues in nursing is often written in the exploratory mode. This activity reinforced

the idea that disciplinary communities are not unilogical or unilingual, but are constituted by different kinds of thinkings and discourses. But a substantial number of the participants could not see the relevance of these understandings for transforming writing assignments, although faculty who did revise their assignments commented on the profound effect the workshop had on their teaching. (See Soven and Sullivan "Demystifying the Academy: Can Exploratory Writing Help.")

Conclusion

What conclusions about second-stage or advanced WAC workshops can be drawn from our experience at La Salle? Many faculty are initially attracted to WAC workshops for instrumental reasons. We agree with Toby Fulwiler that "the reason that most faculty attend [WAC] workshops in the first place is to get help assigning and evaluating their students' formal writing. They are tired of complaining about poorly researched term papers, weak critical essays, unfocused lab reports and a host of general problems including misspellings, incorrect punctuation, and inadequate documentation" (54). Some may even perceive the workshops as opportunities to learn how to implement course objectives more effectively while helping students become better writers. We know less about faculty's reasons for participating in advanced WAC workshops. At La Salle they signed up for the advanced workshop to learn how to construct assignments that provoke students to use higher order critical thinking skills. However, when they were presented with a rhetorical view of critical thinking which suggests that "tasks" or content cannot be divorced from the aim or function of language, and that the classical aims of language reflect kinds of thinking not assumed under the traditional definition of "critical," (which to many faculty has something to do with problem solving or analytical skills that they see as divorced from language), we rocked the boat . . . perhaps in just the way Britton had intended, when he urged instructors to assign less transactional (expository) writing and introduce students to other aims for writing.

Unlike the introductory workshop, the advanced workshop poses a serious challenge to traditional writing assignments and more importantly to the contents of a course. Expanding the "functions of language" dimension of writing across the curric-

ulum theory is hardly a neutral act. By advocating an expanded repertoire of purposes for writing, one is promoting various kinds of thinking, such as expressive and exploratory thinking, besides demonstrative or scientific thinking as ends in and of themselves, rather than as stages preceding "real" thinking. Even the idea that there is more than one kind of "thinking" is unsettling to some. Kinneavy explains why such views are considered revolutionary when he reminds us that "the prestige of axiomatic logic and its typical form of expression, exposition, has made other logics such as the dialectical or exploratory appear soft and less legitimate." (See "Thinkings and Writings.")

As many WAC programs enter their second decade, WAC specialists are grappling with the question, Will WAC Survive? In "Where Do We Go Next in Writing Across the Curriculum," Jones and Comprone link the survival of WAC at comprehensive universities to research "that tells us what is actually going on in academic and professional discourse communities, and how what is going on should influence WAC curricula and faculty development programs" (63). But what about survival of WAC at four year liberal arts colleges like La Salle University? These schools have many of the same problems which confront WAC at comprehensive universities-lack of permanent funding, staffing, and administrative bases, and they too can benefit from Jones's and Comprone's recommendation to "integrate areas of program administration, pedagogy, and research" (63).

However, research which reveals the conventions of academic discourse in different disciplines is probably not as important at these schools as it may be in the comprehensive university. There is growing belief that at four year liberal arts colleges assignments in different disciplines may, in fact, be quite similar. At La Salle, for example, the analysis essay, the book review and the research paper travel with surprising frequency across the disciplines.

What comprehensive universities and liberal arts college schools with second-stage WAC programs have in common is that they offer the opportunity for faculty to become more reflective about the question David Russell says all WAC programs ask, "In what ways will graduates in our university use language and how shall we teach them to use it in those ways?" (70). This question leads to examining anew the purpose and audience for writing assignments and the form and style appro-

priate to those purposes. Or to put it another way, in both universities and liberal arts colleges faculty are being asked to consider the validity of rhetorics other than the expressivist and expository. Some of these rhetorics are discipline-related. However, as Kinneavy suggests, at liberal arts colleges the more pertinent research may be examining writing assignments as they relate to the objectives of a liberal arts education rather than through the template of academic disciplines.

Perhaps if faculty were to reflect upon their assignments in light of these objectives, they could see the rationale for introducing purposes and audiences other than those assumed by the expository essay and for legitimating expressive writing beyond its role in the planning stage of writing. Kinneavy reminds us that "the liberal arts if the words mean anything—must connote the preeminence of the freedom of the individual. And this freedom begins with the freedom to express his or her emotional aspirational goals" (181).

The brief summer faculty workshop may not be equal to this task. As we discovered at La Salle, this kind of inquiry will inevitably lead to questions about the aims of courses. Perhaps nothing short of a semester-long seminar which permits serious study of the traditions of the liberal arts, and the place of rhetoric within that tradition, can serve as a background for questioning deeply embedded assumptions about the purposes of education.

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