

International writing research across the curriculum: The WAC/WID mapping project.

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Writing Research Across Borders Session H
Saturday, February 19 2:45-4:15pm

H1

Cognition and context: Are there grounds for reconciliation? (Part I)

Steve Graham, Vanderbilt University, U.S.

Anthony Paré, McGill University, Canada

David Galbraith, Staffordshire University, U.K.

Deborah Brandt, University of Wisconsin, U.S.

Charles Bazerman, University of California, Santa Barbara, U.S.

Karen Harris, Vanderbilt University, U.S.

Nancy Nelson, University of North Texas, U.S.

J.R. (Dick) Hayes, Carnegie Mellon University, U.S.

In 1989, Linda Flower wrote that “English studies are caught up in a debate over whether we should see individual cognition or social and cultural context as the motive force in literate acts” (282). She was responding to a growing divide in writing theory and research between what Berlin had called “cognitive rhetoric” and “social-epistemic rhetoric,” and to a series of critiques aimed at the basic premises and research methodologies of those who were seeking to develop a cognitive theory of writing (e.g., Berlin, Bizzell, Rose). Flower warned that “theoretical positions that try to polarize (or moralize) cognitive and contextual perspectives... may leave us with an impoverished account of the writing process as people experience it and a reductive vision of what we might teach” (282). Her solution was to work toward “a far more integrated theoretical vision which can explain how context cues cognition, which in its turn mediates and interprets the particular world that context provides” (282).

So now, over two decades later, have we developed that theoretical vision? Do we have accounts of writing that seek to explain the relationship between cognition and context? Is there some common ground between those inner-directed researchers who attempt to learn more about what happens in the head while writers produce texts and those whose outer-directed perspective looks for the social and historical forces that shape the activity of writing? Or are these “theoretical camps,” as Bizzell called them, still divided, still insular, and still hostile?

This panel offers 8 reflections on the cognition-culture schism in Writing Studies. The panellists will comment on their view of the divide and locate themselves in the debate, but each will also comment on the potential for common ground and the possibility of the “integrated theoretical vision” that Flower called for in 1989. Those coming from a primarily sociocultural perspective will talk about how cognition and affect fit into their view of writing and what kinds of psychology seem to provide an account of those phenomena that might be imaginable or useful from their perspective. Similarly, those studying writing and cognition will give a view of what they see as the role of society, culture, and history in writing, and what models seem to articulate well with their understanding of writing. A brief summary of each speaker’s position follows:

H13

International writing research across the curriculum: The WAC/WID mapping project

Chris Thaiss, University of California, Davis, U.S.

Paul Carlino, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Patricia Iglesia, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Magnus Gustaffson, Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden

Since 2006, the International WAC/WID Mapping Project has been collecting data from institutions of higher education around the world to show where and how writing by undergraduates and graduate students is taught and learned, assigned and supported. From 2006 to 2009, almost 400 respondents from more than 50 countries completed the Mapping Project survey about writing in their institutions. (A separate survey studied writing in U.S. and Canadian colleges and universities.) The questions the international respondents answered were as follows:

1. Where are students writing in the institution, in either a first language of instruction or in English? In what genres and circumstances?
2. Who cares in your institution about the improvement of student writing or student learning through writing?
3. Is improvement in student writing an objective of certain courses in a discipline or of the overall curriculum? How and why?
4. Have any teachers in/across disciplines met to talk about these issues or made an effort to plan curricula in relation to student writing?
5. What is the source of their interest and what models of student writing/learning development (e.g., articles, books, other documents), if any, help guide these discussions?

The picture that has emerged from the data shows that, by and large, students at the tertiary and post-graduate levels around the world are being required to write in their academic programs in disciplines across institutions, often in a variety of genres. For graduate students, there is consistent pressure to write publishable material in their fields, often in English. However, there is tremendous disparity across institutions and regions in the degree to which writing is regarded as a subject of study in itself—and the degree to which the teaching of writing is regarded as a suitable use of institutional funds. Whereas in some universities, as the survey data show, there has been growing support for writing centers, required or optional writing courses and modules, and/or efforts to train teachers across disciplines to be effective assigners of and responders to student writing, in most of our informants' institutions there is just beginning to be awareness that student writing development may be in some sense an institutional responsibility.

This panel will (1) summarize and generalize from the Mapping Project data and (2) describe regional and local examples of how writing in and across disciplines is conceptualized and supported. A separate panel at the conference will describe the next

phase of the Mapping Project's work, the forthcoming book *Writing Programs Worldwide: Profiles of Academic Writing in Many Places*.

Chris Thaiss, who directs the University Writing Program at the University of California, Davis (US), and who is lead researcher of the Mapping Project, will outline the objectives and background of the project, describe its methods, summarize its brief history, and analyze the demographic data and the diverse responses to the five core questions (listed above). In outlining the objectives and background, he will place this research in the context of changes in writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) theory and practice since prior programmatic research in the 1980s, which was focused on U.S. institutions, and in comparison with the companion survey of U.S. and Canadian institutions.

Paula Carlino is a researcher with the CONICET at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and a primary contributor to the Mapping Project. In this presentation, she will describe her work with researchers and writing program builders at a range of universities in Latin America and Spain. She will describe the variety of program structures she has observed: writing courses, linked courses, writing centers, team teaching (a writing teacher and a disciplinary teacher working together), teacher development, "sewed" writing in the disciplines, "interwoven" writing in the disciplines, academic meetings and networks. Carlino will highlight the regional controversies between learning to write and writing to learn: what students write about, who gives them feedback, what feedback includes, and the purposes for which they write in higher education.

Patricia Iglesia is a member of the faculty of biological sciences at the University of Buenos Aires. For more than a decade, she has incorporated writing as resources for student learning about cellular biology. In this talk she will present the difficulties that students face when writing about biology, the advances that she and colleagues have made in implementing these strategies, and the challenges they continue to face as professors committed to their students' learning. She writes, "The results that we are obtaining in terms of the number of students who pass the class, in the quality of texts they write, and in the students' commitment to their own learning are evidence that it is a worthwhile endeavor." With her colleague Ana de Michaeli, she has co-authored a chapter on this research for the forthcoming *Writing Programs Worldwide: Profiles of Academic Writing in Many Places*.

Magnus Gustafsson directs the Center for Language and Communication at Chalmers University of Technology, Göthenburg, Sweden. He will describe the history and growth of the Center into a "writing in the disciplines" (WID) program, which delivers courses and modules for many degree programs in engineering, thus allowing students multiple encounters with language and communication, as well as gradual and challenging progression through sequencing interventions, assignments, and entire courses. Given this integration and progression, the Center's language and communication activities are never isolated from the disciplines and communication becomes a dimension of disciplinary knowledge.