

QEP Literature Review Team Notes

Linda Rowland

Reading Notes:

Berrett, Dan. *An Old School Notion: Writing Required*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. 19 October 2012.

This article is part of a *Special Report: College Reinvented* published in the Chronicle that responds to several magazine articles/covers published in September 2012 that, overall, seemed to outline the decay of higher ed. *The Utne Reader*, in particular, asked...“What is a college degree really worth these days?” A profound question, to be sure, and Berrett attempts to provide an answer...but he begins with a question:

“What if colleges, in their search to more clearly demonstrate how much students are learning, insisted on an old-fashioned requirement: writing?” (A4)

He goes on to say, “Writing works exceedingly well as both a way to assess learning and a means of deepening that learning, according to experts who study its effects on students” (A4)

“That’s because writing is uniquely able to ‘make thinking visible,’ says Julie A. Reynolds, associate director of undergraduate studies at Duke University.” It lays bare students’ thinking, showing how well they grasp the subject matter in ways that a multiple choice or short answer test—or even a discussion section—simply can’t” (A4).

“Anywhere we can make their thought process visible is where faculty can have the greatest impact in their teaching” Reynolds says (A4)

“Short, frequent assignments to which faculty respond can have a profound effect” (A4)

“Just as particles gain mass as they move through the Higgs boson field (says Christopher Thaiss, chair of the writing program at University of California at Davis), student learning gains heft as students interact through writing with the subjects they are studying.” (A5)

Overall, this article suggests that writing is crucial to learning...not just in the writing classroom, but in all classrooms. The key point the article makes that seems relevant so far as our considerations of the QEP go...is that Comp I and II aren’t enough! Writing has to be sustained throughout the curriculum if students are to really “get it.” Berrett writes, “We know you can’t

get it right in 15 or 16 weeks...It's so highly developmental that we can't assume students will somehow learn it once and apply it brilliantly in the upper levels of the curriculum" (A5).

Tyre, Peg. *The Writing Revolution*. The Atlantic. 26 October 2012.

This article is really about how one high school (New Dorp, a high school on Staten Island) improved student success by developing a Writing Revolution on their campus. While some of this isn't relevant...much of it is.

New Dorp's principal (Deirdre DeAngelis) began investigating why their students were failing at such a high rate. "She and her faculty [came] to a singular answer: bad writing. Students' inability to translate thoughts into coherent, well-argued sentences, paragraphs, and essays was severely impeding intellectual growth in many subjects. Consistently, one of the largest differences between failing and successful students was that only the latter could express their thoughts on the page" (2).

"New Dorp's Writing Revolution, which placed an intense focus, across nearly every academic subject, on teaching the skills that underlie good analytical writing, was a dramatic departure from what most American students—especially low performers—are taught in high school. The program challenged long-held assumptions about the students and bitterly divided the staff. It also yielded extraordinary results" (2).

The process begins at the elementary school level...where students "will be required to write informative and persuasive essays. By high school, students will be expected to produce mature and thoughtful essays, not just in English class but in history and science classes as well" (3).

"Good essay writers, [a] history teacher noted, used coordinating conjunctions to link and expand on simple ideas—words like *for*, *and*, *nor but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. Another teacher devised a quick quiz that required students to use those conjunctions. To the astonishment of the staff, she reported that a sizable group of students could not use the words effectively. The harder they looked, the teachers began to realize, the harder it was to determine whether the students were smart or not—the tools they had to express their thoughts were so limited that such a judgment was nearly impossible" (4-5).

The investigation also showed that students struggled with “dependent clauses, like although and despite, which signal a shifting idea within the same sentence” (5).

Time passes...as students begin to develop a fuller understanding of the parts of speech...their reading comprehension grew! As one student said, “The more writing instruction I got, the more I understood which words were important” (7).

Overall, it seems this article maps out a key issue that may be a barrier to successful writing instruction at the college level...we can’t assume students come in understanding coordinating conjunctions or the various parts of speech. Thus, we can’t assume they are “not smart” when we find that they cannot write well. It may be a matter of helping students un-learn and re-learn how to read, comprehend and write in order to help them succeed at the university level.

Reading notes

Mary Crone-Romanovski

Assigned Texts:

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2nd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

Elbow, Peter and Pat Belanoff. *Being a Writer: A Community of Writers Revisited*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003.

Herrington, Anne and Charles Moran. *Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the Disciplines*. New York: MLA, 1992.

Shared concepts that emerged from this group of texts:

The most successful strategies for teaching writing use assignments and activities that build-in stages with early and often instructor feedback. Each of the texts provided examples of assignment and course design that required students to complete small writing tasks that later informed a larger research project, or to complete and turn-in the stages of a larger assignment as smaller assignments in themselves (for example, a thesis statement, an outline or pre-writing, an initial draft, a summary of secondary research, and a final paper would each be submitted and graded as individual assignments). Bean extends this concept to the overall curriculum within a discipline, explaining “the key is to integrate into early and middle courses in the major the instructional modules and scaffolding assignments that prepare students for capstone projects in their senior year” (253). In other words, students develop competency in the knowledge and skills required for expert writing in a discipline by learning and practicing such knowledge and skills step-by-step through beginning, intermediate, and advanced courses.

All three texts also emphasized the regular use of short, low-stakes writing tasks both in and out of the classroom. For Bean, these types of writing tasks should be used to encourage critical thinking about the course material by creating an active role for students in courses that traditionally use discussion and lectures (204). For Elbow, writing workshops are the building blocks for formal assignments, allowing students to explore their writing process, knowledge, and skills as they develop a longer piece (xxii).

Each of the texts suggested that collaboration (or “sharing and responding” or “peer response groups”) is necessary for developing writing skills, disciplinary knowledge, and critical-thinking, but this is difficult to integrate successfully into a writing course or assignment. According to a study by Marsella, Hilgers, and McLaren, students in peer groups often fail to present enough work to receive useful feedback, are unable or unwilling to provide thorough feedback on their classmates’ work, or are unable or unwilling to use classmates’ feedback when revising their own work (176). Despite these challenges, all three of the texts maintained an emphasis on collaboration as an integral part of academic writing.

Specific insights that we might want to consider as we move forward:

Royster, Jacqueline Jones. “From Practice to Theory: Writing across the Disciplines at Spelman College.” Herrington and Moran. 119-131.

In describing the challenges and successes of implementing a college-wide program for writing across the curriculum, Royster explains that one of the first steps was to implement a faculty development program of workshops and seminars that provided strategies and resources for faculty members to incorporate more writing into their courses (119). Depending on what types of courses or experiences FGCU develops, something like this will likely be necessary, especially if we are going to be asking non-writing teachers to teach a lot more writing. She also notes that, early in the program, students demonstrated more positive attitudes towards the requirements and regularity of writing expected of them, but faculty did not perceive much improvement in writing in terms of the quality of ideas. The program had to shift its focus to critical thinking in later curriculum and objectives (120). We will want to make sure that we keep the goal of writing for critical thinking at the center of any strategies that we develop.

Marsella, Joy, Thomas L. Hilgers, and Clemence McLaren. “How Students Handle Writing Assignments: A Study of Eighteenth Responses in Six Disciplines.” Herrington and Moran. 174-188.

This study demonstrated a significant gap between professors’ ideas about how students approach writing assignments and what students actually do when completing a writing assignment. Students’ approaches to writing are typically determined by three factors: the professor’s specifications for the assignment, strategies for academic writing that have worked for the student in the past, and a web of external competing priorities like coursework, jobs,

family, and belief systems (178). Basically, while professors use writing to foster their students' learning, students approach writing by trying to find the "most efficient way to complete this assignment and get the highest grade" (181). This difference in the objectives for completing a writing assignment seem fundamental to many of the challenges of teaching writing, including those related to collaboration or peer response. Instructors successfully narrowed the gap between instructor and student approaches by treating assignments in stages, providing a lot of feedback, and giving students opportunities to practice strategies for writing and collaboration (187).

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2nd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

This text provided more practical advice for linking critical thinking and writing when designing assignments, courses, and even program curriculum. In particular, Bean begins with the concept that critical thinking is rooted in students' engagement with a problem, and he focuses on teaching writing by getting students interested in a problem or question that is central to their field of study (2). He explains that writing is particularly important to critical thinking because in writing to address a disciplinary problem, the writer actually must solve two kinds of problems: a subject matter problem (the thesis statement offers a solution or interpretation) and rhetorical problems of audience, purpose, and genre (4). In courses designed for developing critical thinking, problems or questions are the point of entry into a subject and the motivation for sustained inquiry, assignments are the focus rather than text and lecture, content is put to use rather than just acquired, students must formulate and justify ideas in writing, and students collaborate on problem solving (5).

The insight from this text would support the implementation of an introductory course in each discipline where students would explore both the central questions of their field and the expectations for writing within that field. Bean emphasizes this type of curricular approach by suggesting that departmental communities need to work together to design a curriculum that integrates the knowledge and skills of an expert in the discipline (253). He explains that the knowledge and skills required for writing what he calls "expert insider prose" involves "subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, discourse community knowledge, information literacy, rhetorical knowledge, and writing process knowledge" (254). Departmental communities must then work together to create curriculum that focuses on the appropriate skills for their discipline. As Bean puts it, "When disciplinary faculty appreciate the complexity of academic research writing in general, and the specialized practices of their own disciplines in particular, they see why the skills required for undergraduate research need to be taught within the major" (262).

Comments from Kristoph Kinzli

Written Communication/Writing Across the Curriculum

Allen, Mary J. (2004). Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

“Assessment allows us to determine which pedagogical approaches work and for whom”

-Must have measurable learning objectives for writing across the curriculum. These objectives need to appear in multiple classes and be consistent between classes. The curriculum must be structured to meet the objectives (It seems to me that we need to have more oversight in the comp program to ensure this happens)

-Progression exams for writing across the curriculum? (If you don't pass a standardized writing test you cannot move from being a 2nd year to 3rd year student)

-Maybe a final exit writing exam for all students. If you can't write you can't graduate. This would force students to focus on writing the entire time at FGCU

“Collegiality among program faculty is essential. Agreeing on learning objectives, checking for program alignment, developing an assessment plan, collecting data, using results, and examining assessment practices are not tasks for one person”

-must have a benchmark for our students to achieve

-we need a strong mission statement for writing across the curriculum and critical thinking

-write program learning objectives using Bloom's taxonomy

“In this era of accountability we no longer have the luxury of being vague about what we expect from our graduates”

-all courses need to be aligned to avoid redundancy or omission (More oversight for the program. This requires a ton of coordination). Essentially we need to know exactly what writing elements are being taught in each course (all courses need to be the same) and set up an overarching plan as to how the comp classes and Colloquium plus some other writing intensive course fit together to address writing across the curriculum

-complex writing assignments should be assigned throughout the curriculum if we want our students to write well

-Rose Hulman Institute of Technology – Curriculum Map that ties course objectives to campus wide objectives (really cool spreadsheet – we do something similar in engineering where we link all of our course objectives to our program outcomes) - The book has some great examples of how to do this on pages 43 – 46

“Assessments should lead to incremental improvements in the program and these should be documented in a written record”

“Faculty may decide to use an assessment center” I think this is a great idea. To improve writing at FGCU we need to establish several positions that are purely focused on assessing writing across the curriculum. If we leave this up to the faculty (which are already swamped) it will be an added burden and

there will be minimal oversight. Having a few people dedicated purely to assessment would allow us to actually incrementally improve the program. Also this might allow us to hire assessment experts.

“ A pilot study is strongly recommended” I agree with this statement. In order to set up assessment with lesson objectives linked to an overarching writing across the curriculum program a pilot study might be the way to iron out some of the kinks. Maybe we can set something up for 5 or 10 composition classes for next year?

-we need direct quantitative measures for assessment of “writing across the curriculum”

-assessment should involve multiple formats such as fill in the blank, essay, matching, multiple choice, and true/false

-writing portfolios offer a way to assess the writing of seniors and if students have attained the general education writing requirements. (This would be a great idea for writing across the curriculum. Students could put together a portfolio including writing from comp I and II, Colloquium, and another writing intensive course. This portfolio could be graded and be a requirement for graduation. Placing high emphasis on such a portfolio would make clear to students that learning to writing well is one of the most important things they need to accomplish during their time at FGCU.

-Exit interviews about experiences in writing intensive classes

-Focus groups (structured questions on page 121)

-Reflective essays about their university experience (page 124). This could include assessment aspects

Making Sense of Assessment Data:

-content analysis and coding with a number system (page 135)

-scoring rubrics for essays (page 139) (I know that we already use these type of rubrics but they need to be consistent across the curriculum, especially for multiple sections of the same course)
Rubrics linked to Learning Objectives (page 142)

-We need to establish standards for our program objectives (i.e. 90% of graduating seniors can successfully write a thesis statement)

-Support:

-Some campuses offer faculty release time for performing assessment

-Some campuses appoint an assessment committee by discipline

-Hire more instructors instead of adjuncts. We can't ask adjuncts to do assessment because we pay them so little. Also we cannot train adjuncts because of the high turnover rate

-Assessment training

-Must show an institutional commitment to assessment

SIX STEPS for successful assessment of writing across the curriculum:

- 1) Develop learning objectives
- 2) Check for program alignment
- 3) Develop an assessment plan
- 4) Collect data
- 5) Use results to improve
- 6) Examine assessment processes

Baldwin, Doug (2004). “A Guide to Standardized Writing Assessment. Educational Leadership 62.2: 72-75.

“Policymakers, advisory groups, and educators increasingly view writing as one of the best ways to foster critical thinking and learning across the curriculum”

-Rapid growth of writing assessment

-Increasingly students asked to write for tests (SAT etc)

-Higher order thinking skills linked to writing, such as logical connections, compare and contrast solutions to problems, support arguments and conclusions (Chapman, 1990)

-Some states assess the writing process (brainstorming, first draft, editing, and final draft_

-National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) model assesses different writing genres (narrative, expository, persuasive)

-Scoring guides and rubrics in Wisconsin

“Despite the broad divergence in the writing skills they measure most U.S. states have one thing in common: Almost every one of their K-12 education systems has, or will soon have, some kind of direct writing assessment and accompanying scoring guide”

-Holistic evaluation – scorers give a score based on their impression of the overall quality of the writing.

-Modified Holistic Scoring – norm referenced scoring plus criterion referenced scoring

-Always pilot test scoring rubrics and train graders for consistency. Calibrate graders using example papers

-Each essay graded twice – average of scores. If large discrepancy third grader

Technology: Automated essay scoring with software E-rater. Graduate Management Admission Test essays receive one E- Rater and one Human score

-“Automated grading would allow teachers to assign more writing”

-students can create their own rubrics (This does not sound like a good id