

Anderson, Judith H., and Christine R. Farris, eds. *Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction: First-Year English, Humanities Core Course, Seminars*. New York: Modern Language Association, 2007.

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The relationship between first year composition instruction and literature has been continually shifting as different theories of teaching literature and teaching composition come and go. From the 1930s to the 1960s, first year composition was devoted primarily to teaching literary criticism. Then, the rise of composition as a field in the 1970s and 1980s led to a focus on teaching the composing process or expressivist methods. During that same period, the rise of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement sparked an increased awareness of the need to couple writing instruction with disciplinary content, raising questions about the viability of stand-alone first-year composition courses. These alterations were driven by a widening of the field around emerging literary critical theories, new rhetoric, media/cultural studies, business/creative writing—all associated with Scholes's (1998) call for a focus on "textuality" (Miller & Jackson, 2007).

Underlying these changes are ongoing debates that continue today regarding the role of first-year composition in relationship to literature and humanities instruction, particularly within English departments. Critics question whether writing about literature should be, as was the case in the 1950s–1970s, the primary means of teaching writing. They note that students often lack the critical reading strategies necessary to write confidently about a text. They note that students struggle when they write literary criticism, not necessarily because they lack writing skills, but because they lack critical reading strategies. They also note that students may not be all that engaged in writing about *Hamlet* compared to writing about non-literary topics. But the most serious charge is that organizing composition instruction around teaching literature perpetuates a teacher-centered approach

operating in the hey-day of New Criticism in which the teacher as master explicator lectured about ambiguities in poetry, with little time or attention given to writing instruction, particularly writing that was not literary criticism. Equally serious is the charge leveled by Sharon Crowley (1998) that the teaching of literature often reifies the traditional humanist notion of texts as a means for teaching eternal truths, as opposed to perceiving texts as reflecting truths operating in certain cultural contexts.

Critique of the role of literature in composition classes was the subject of a debate in the 1990s in *College English* between Erika Lindemann (1993; 1995) and Gary Tate (1993; 1995). Lindemann argued that, given all the critiques previously noted, the use of literary analysis to teach composition just doesn't work. In his rebuttal, Tate argued that moving away from literature reflects a shift away from a humanist focus to a more utilitarian notion of college education. He also argued that the ways of teaching literature during the New Criticism era do not necessarily mean that literature is taught that way in the present.

This debate, however, is built on a false binary between literature and composition as separate entities. Rather than separate literature and composition instruction as an either-or choice, literacy theorists seek to integrate literature and composition instruction by identifying literacy practices underlying both reading and writing. For example, the Bartholomae and Petrosky (2008) *Ways of Reading* first-year composition series involves students in critically reading and re-reading texts from rhetorical and social perspectives in ways that enhance their ability to read and assess their own writing. Engaging students in re-reading texts to entertain alternative perspectives can then link to fostering students' revision of texts. And teachers have increasingly integrated reading and writing instruction under larger umbrella approaches to teaching inquiry-based heuristics and critical perspectives that provide students tools necessary for engaging in arguments and analysis in academic contexts.

To engage students in acquiring these literacy practices, teachers in both first year literature/humanities and composition courses have largely moved away from teacher-centered pedagogies to

adopt more constructivist, workshop approaches that actively engage students in responding to and writing about literature. The focus now is on ways that composition instructors are employing or can employ engaging, interactive teaching methods that foster transfer of practices involved with reading to improving writing.

This collection of essays about using literature to teach writing in first-year composition courses, edited by Judith H. Anderson and Christine R. Farris of Indiana University, Bloomington, represents a significant step towards a recognition of how reading and writing intersect with and support each other. The contributors to this collection capture specific descriptions of innovative approaches to combining literature and composition that draw on a wide range of critical and disciplinary perspectives: rhetorical, genre, reader-response, and new-literacies/new media theories as well as feminist, New Historical, and neo-Marxist criticism and socio-constructivist/inquiry-based pedagogical theories. Instructors use these perspectives to teach literary analysis and to serve as heuristics for writing about everyday lives. For example, by acquiring a New Historical critical perspective, students can explore the meaning of events in terms of the historical contexts informing those events.

Contributors also argue that the act of responding to creative uses of literary language fosters students' creativity in their own language use, not as an exercise in mimicking "great writers" but as an invitation to experiment in playing with language. Helan Whall distinguishes between "writing about literature" and what Scholes, Comley, and Ulmer (2002) describe as "writing through literature":

we teachers make the mistake when we separate the writing done by students from the texts they write about. What literature has to offer us—teachers and students alike—is pleasure, information, and something else: the most powerful and creative ways to use language—those things that make our literature literacy. (Preface iii; p. 123)

Contributors also consistently emphasize the value of analyzing language use—in literary texts and in their own writing. They note that through engaging in close-reading of language use, students learn how meaning depends on how language is used in different rhetorical contexts. They also justify the value of close reading with helping students recognize how language mediates ways of thinking—how, for example, the language of religion mediates a particular way of thinking or discourse. Thus, Tamara Goeglein argues for the value of her students “knowing how figurative modes of language operate in nonliterary texts” given how “the figurative mode of language is an analytic habit of mind, as it is a way of knowing” (p. 172).

And learning how language varies according to context focuses students’ attention on social contexts for their writing. The contributors note that engaging social contexts in writing assignments enhances the quality of students’ argumentative writing. In describing assignments in his literature course that was part of the Earlham College Humanities Program, Gordon Thompson creates a social context in which students engage in social dialogue with authors and perspective. He asks his students to go beyond simply summarizing the arguments they find in texts to:

engage in a written conversation with each author in which they present their judgment of a text’s value. They may write about the validity of an argument, the power of a vision, or the beauty of a composition. They must put their own minds up against the writers’ minds. (p. 82)

For Thompson, having students challenge the authors helps them adopt “the habit of active reading. We want our students talking back to texts from the beginning of their careers and in all their courses” (p. 82). Thompson also broadens the context: students reflect on the implications of the texts’ arguments for their own lives, becoming increasingly engaged in their writing.

Thompson's approach, emblematic of the teaching methods described in this book, exemplifies the ways in which this book is a valuable resource for writing teachers. The teachers in this book perceive writing instruction as more than simply teaching writing processes or techniques. They also believe that writing instruction includes acquiring ways of reading, thinking, arguing, and critiquing, all of which mirror a shift from a process to a post-process focus on teaching inquiry-based heuristics and modes of argument (Kent, 1999). And, they believe that acquiring these ways of reading and thinking improves students' writing. For Thompson's students, having to interrogate authors' beliefs serves to bolster their confidence as writers who can argue with the best of writers.

The contributors also believe that students need to examine texts and their own writing as engaging in symbolic action. Lori Robison and Eric Wolfe focus on understanding and producing texts as:

social and political act...not merely reflecting but producing culture. Writing is understood as not merely reflecting but producing culture. As students analyzed the rhetorical approaches of the texts we read, they also became more cognizant of the position of their own writing as working, like the literary texts we read, both to replicate and to challenge our culture's ensemble of beliefs and practices; on that level, the content of the course was enacted through the students' rhetorical efforts. (p. 209)

Helping students frame their texts as "producing culture" fosters a critical stance towards not only texts and language, but also their everyday experience. As Rona Kaufman and Lee Torda note in their chapter:

reading creative texts...puts students in touch with that particular and elusive critical muscle that allows them to identify with (or not), interpret, and other make sense of

the world—not just of the books they read in class. A liberal arts education is supposed to develop this ability. (p. 276)

All of this represents a major challenge for first-year writing teachers. They face students whose previous writing instruction emphasized formalist approaches to organizing essays as opposed to using writing as a tool for exploring and developing their ideas. Noting the influence of high school composition instruction based on five-paragraph-theme templates, Allison Berg charges that this instruction:

predisposes them toward formulaic, or at least safe, forms of writing. Few have been challenged to come up with original interpretations of literature, to consider the larger implications of their interpretations, or to reflect on their own rhetorical choices as writers. Even fewer have had the experience of collaborating with a peer on a substantive intellectual project. (p. 250)

Margaret Vandenburg notes that for her Barnard students, “their superficial mastery of form exacerbates a profound failure of content” (p. 63). Vandenburg argues that through formulating arguments about literary works, her students acquire “content” through writing “as translators fluent in the language of the works [so that] their arguments develop organically” (p. 64). Underlying this approach on acquiring argument through interaction with texts is:

the premise that content is embedded in form. I would venture to say that at Barnard the idea that engagement with formally complex and nuanced literature produces more layered and sophisticated writing has ceased to be merely rhetorical. Since the inauguration of this new first-year English program, colleagues throughout the college have remarked that our students are more analytically circum-

spect than those previously trained more exclusively in rhetorical and research skills. (p. 65)

Other contributors note the need to challenge their students' absolutist thinking by presenting them with competing versions of the same text or event. Tamara Goeglein provides her students with different accounts of the Battle of Gettysburg, helping them move towards a critical awareness that "truths" are rhetorical constructions requiring interrogation of assumptions, evidence, and agendas. Learning to test out the validity of these competing versions then leads her students to assess the validity of different revisions of their own writing.

Given the eclectic range of different approaches represented in this collection, the book avoids endorsing any one particular approach for teaching writing. Rather, it demonstrates how faculty choose those approaches most suited to address the needs of their particular institutions—from large universities to small colleges—and their students—from future English majors to students with little interest in English. To help readers understand how unique approaches emerged out of particular institutional contexts, the contributors provide historical reviews of the development of their courses. As their courses evolved, instructors identified methods that needed to be altered or dropped based on program evaluations of the students' writing. Some programs, such as the one housed at the University of California-Irvine, relied on extensive program evaluations including analysis of student writing, surveys, and interviews to identify issues and make changes in their courses.

Key to the evolution of these courses was socialization of new faculty into the methods and philosophies of these programs. Given the fact that all English faculty at Holy Cross teach their Critical Reading and Writing Course, Patricia Bizzell created a summer seminar in which veteran faculty taught new faculty about the course. At the same time, newer faculty also brought newer literacy paradigms to these courses, leading to further revision.

Different Approaches to Teaching Writing through Literature

I have organized my discussion of the chapters in this book according to the predominant approach in a particular course: language analysis, reader response approaches, acquiring interpretive strategies/heuristics, and cultural studies approaches.

Language analysis. A number of contributors argue for the value of analysis of literary/figurative uses of language to foster students' understanding of how language mediates perceptions of the world. In Margaret Vandenburg's course at Barnard College, students analyze passages from texts, learning to perceive the limitations of their initial superficial readings and the need to explore alternative meanings of texts (Blau, 2003). Because her courses emphasize students' use of feedback, self-assessing, and revision, learning to revise their own multiple readings of a text then transfers to self-assessing and revising their own writing.

Helen Whall's Critical Reading and Writing course offered at the College of the Holy Cross emphasizes highly structured close readings of texts. Students are asked to "literalize" Shakespearean sonnets—to "make literal sense of what is happening in the poem" (p. 121), leading to a set of argumentative papers involving textual analysis. Students devote much of class time to practicing and sharing these close readings. Whall justifies what she characterizes as "this most old-fashioned of pedagogies" as serving "to teach the discipline of critical thought and conscious information retrieval" (p. 132).

The difference between Whall's approach and the application of New Criticism in literature courses in the 1950s-1970s is that her students are actively engaged in sharing their analyses in discussions and writing, whereas teachers employing New Criticism often simply lectured to display their skills as master explicators with little attention to extensive writing. Faculty who compared junior and senior essays of students who had and had not taken the course noted the value of learning such close reading practices, leading them to making it a requirement for English majors. It is

also the case that learning descriptive close-reading skills prepares students to provide their peers with reader-based feedback about specific aspects of drafts (Sawyer, 2005).

A key issue with courses which involve close-reading of literary language is whether writing about literary language prepares students to do other kinds of writing in other disciplines. Obviously, this focus on literary analysis leads to improvement of a particular *kind* of writing—literary analysis—valued in the English department, but maybe not improvement in other kinds of writing associated with the social or physical sciences. However, these formalist or genre distinctions around kinds of writing and reading may miss the underlying literary practices that are being acquired through close-readings—the close attention to the textuality of language use (Scholes, 1998) that serves to enhance the specificity of one’s argument regardless of the discipline.

Focusing on language as mediating perceptions also involves understanding how they mediate cultural practices. Judith Anderson describes a graduate course at Indiana University in which she worked with six student-instructors planning a first-year course focusing on the interaction among language, cultural metaphors, and thought. Anderson and the students collaboratively craft a syllabus based on activities that connect reading and writing around larger aspects of how language means and shapes perceptions of reality—activities such as analyzing dictionary word meanings and the arbitrary nature of categories. The course then examines how cultural metaphors shape ideological constructions of the world in texts, particularly literary parodies. Anderson argues that learning how cultural metaphors shape perceptions of reality is applicable for literature and for understanding how metaphors shape thought in other disciplines.

In teaching a Writing and Literature course at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Jeanne Marie Rose, drawing on Bakhtin’s (1986) theory of literature as ordinary language, focuses on the role of language in constructing and mediating characters’ and students’ own identities. In the course, students track characters’ uses of multiple voices across different borderland cultural

worlds, e.g., how Maxine Hong Kingston (1975) adopts different voices in *The Woman Warrior* given her competing allegiances to operating in Chinese, American, and Chinese American worlds. Students then study characters' and their own choices of different dialects through study of (for example) characters' uses of Black English in August Wilson's (1990) *The Piano Lesson*. They also examine how language mediates identity construction in virtual worlds with discussions of the email epistolary novels. The students compare their identity constructions through online versus face-to-face interactions to reflect on how they construct themselves in these different contexts. For Rose, reflecting on how characters' double-voice different social languages fosters students' awareness of their uses of different voices to construct persona in their own writing.

In their essays, Vandenburg, Whall, Anderson, and Rose argue that by learning close-reading strategies and the ways language use mediates reality, students acquire a more self-reflexive stance on language use in their own writing, leading them to be more open to self-assessing and revision.

Reader response approaches. Reader response approaches go beyond text analysis to focus on how textual meaning is shaped by readers' knowledge, beliefs, stances, and critical perspectives, as well as the social and cultural contexts shaping this transaction (Rosenblatt, 1995; Schweickart & Flynn, 2004). Helping students publicly express, elaborate on, and share their responses to texts leads to bolstering their confidence as writers in expressing and sharing their ideas.

One central goal of a reader-response approach is to foster students' engagement with literature. A number of the contributors express concern about the lack of student engagement with literature given presumed declines in college students' reading of literature (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004).

Helen Emmitt, Daniel Manheim, Mark Rasmussen, Milton Reigelman, Maryanne Ward, and Philip White of Centre College, Danville, Kentucky, worked across disciplinary boundaries among literature, art, music, theater, and the social sciences to frame

journal and essay assignments designed to promote their students' engagement with the humanities. They believed that by sharing their own enthusiasm for art or music outside their disciplinary focus in literature, they might inspire their students' engagement not just with the humanities but with their writing. As they note: "As students find their connection to humanities through writing, they also find themselves more connected to what they write and thus likely to become better writers" (p. 106). Because these faculty are working in a small, liberal arts college in which they are continuing interacting with each other across different disciplines, they could readily create interdisciplinary curriculum.

A reader-response approach also emphasizes that the meaning of responses is shaped by social dynamics operating in groups, for example, how participants position each other to adopt certain stances in small group discussions (Schweickart & Flynn, 2004). Rona Kaufman and Lee Torda describe their use of book clubs in courses at the University of Maine to enhance students' engagement with reading (For a description of Torda's use of book clubs at Bridgewater State University, see <webhost.bridgew.edu/ltorda/102pols.htm>). Students meet in small groups both inside and outside of class, share journal responses, and write short group papers. They use their writing to identify difficulties in interpreting texts and then discuss how they cope with these difficulties, for example, how they explain a character's seemingly inexplicable actions noting consistent patterns in those actions. Kaufman and Torda find that, through this collaborative problem-solving, students learn to appreciate their peers' insights and assistance in interpreting texts, enhancing their engagement with responding as a social act.

Gordon Thompson describes a 50-year-old Humanities Program at Earlham College based on a two-semester course sequence in which students wrote "dialogic papers" about a shared list of required texts as "written conversations with each author in which they present their judgment of a text's value [and] reflect on its implication for their lives" (p. 82). Through this dialogic response to texts, students "learn that their task is not simply to

agree or disagree with a text or to state their approval or disapproval of it but to reflect on its implications for their lives” (p. 82). Thompson also encourages dialogic interactions during individual writing conferences in which students dictate to him and he poses questions about their drafts, conferencing that reflects his philosophy that “writing is best taught one-on-one—that is, one teacher working with one student. Anything else is a compromise” (p. 93).

However, this program was discontinued in 2004 when the College reduced their requirements and moved away from a general humanities program to a series of specific, separate seminars, a trend that is not unusual. Thompson perceives this shift as a plus in terms of allowing for more instructor autonomy in framing curriculum and choosing texts, but a loss in terms of the lack of a shared experience with the same texts and with large numbers of faculty collaboratively planning curriculum. He also posits that some faculty were resentful of the time commitment to teaching writing required by participation in the humanities program, so that it was becoming difficult to staff the program—all of which mirrors a larger issue in first-year writing instruction—devoting long hours each week to conducting writing conferences with students can be demanding, particularly for newer faculty under pressure to publish.

A reader-response approach also fosters reflection on *how* one is reading a text—a metacognitive awareness of how one copes with difficulties in understanding a text through use of certain response strategies (Blau, 2003). Gaining awareness of one’s own ways of thinking is central to self-assessing uses of rhetorical strategies in one’s own writing. In his course at the University of Arizona, Clyde Moneyhun helps his students’ acquire this metacognitive awareness through use of a series of games that make explicit different ways of reading. The first game, “authorial intent,” requires students to cite textual evidence to intuit authorial intent—the student who finds the most evidence is the winner. Students also apply this analysis to identifying the intentions in their own stories. From playing the “authorial

intent” game, students begin to recognize the difficulty of imputing definitive notions of authorial intent to texts. This leads to the second “reader-response” game in which students are asked to connect experiences in their life to the text; winning is based on making the most connections. The third and final game, “text in context,” involves placing the text into an historical or critical context as a lens for interpreting the text, with the winner determined according to the most coherently defined contextual framework.

In these courses that adopt a reader-response approach, the contributors note that helping students describe their responses to specific aspects of texts then transfers to their use of “reader-based” feedback (Elbow, 1973) in peer conferences. In those conferences, students note instances in which they are engaged, caught up with a narrative description, confused, or puzzled by their peers’ drafts, responses that invite their peers to self-assess and revise.

Acquiring interpretive strategies/heuristics. Another approach related to reader-response approaches involves helping students acquire interpretative strategies or heuristics essential for formulating arguments in writing about literature. John Barton, Douglas Higbee, and Andre Hulet, of the University of California-Irvine humanities program, seek to provide students with inquiry-based heuristics for investigating and formulating ideas about a range of different literary texts. In their course, students assume the role of “reading detectives” (p. 176), analyzing how detectives sort through clues, explore alternative explanations, and test hypotheses in detective fiction. Detective fiction then becomes an analogue for framing their own inquiry processes in formulating and testing out their ideas about texts.

Faye Halpern describes her teaching an expository writing course as part of the Harvard Expository Writing Program (<www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos>; Sommers & Saltz, 2004) that focuses on formulating arguments about literature as a form of debate between competing readings of texts. She also has students focus on contradictions in texts as well as introspectively reflect

on the limitations of their own misreadings, fostering an inner debate between competing readings. For example, in writing about *A Modest Proposal*, she asks students, “are there places where ‘A Modest Proposal’ contradicts itself? Are there gaps in its logic? How should these self-contradictions or gaps change the way we think about the piece?” (p. 142). And she provides students with competing critical analyses by using, for example, the Graff and Phelan (1995) collection of critical essays about *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Halpern finds that having students grapple with critics’ competing interpretations enhances students’ abilities to formulate arguments and counter-arguments. Rather than simply summarizing critics’ opposing positions, students learn to interrogate the merits of their positions by citing textual evidence that supports or refutes critics’ competing interpretations. Halpern believes that learning “how to use details to generate alternative readings and have a thesis that argues why one is better than the other” (p. 147) transfers to any kind of academic writing that requires students to go beyond just summarizing other positions to formulating their own positions.

Another important interpretive strategy is the ability to use what one learns from reading a new text to return to and revise interpretations of a previously read text [Bartholomae and Petrosky (2008)]. In teaching “Identity and Community in African-American Literature” at James Madison College for public affairs students, a college located at Michigan State University, Allison Berg organizes her course around juxtaposing African-American literary texts. Students read one text based on insights gleaned from reading the other text. Having read the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Douglass, 1997), students then read Harriet Jacobs’ (2003) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and consider differences in these characters’ experiences in terms of gendered perspectives.

As do Kaufman and Torda, Berg emphasizes the importance of grappling with difficulties in texts. Drawing on Mariolina Salvatori’s (1988) notion of a “hermeneutics of difficulty,” Berg

has students working in small groups to identify difficulties in each other's response papers, discussions that foster explorations of dialogic tensions in their interpretations.

Another important interpretive strategy has to do with exploring and testing out competing explanations of the same event or phenomenon. From grappling with the contradictory versions of events contained in fictional and non-fictional accounts, students recognize how language and texts function to construct different versions of events. In Margaret Vandenburg's "Reinventing Literary History" course at Barnard College (see <www.barnard.edu/english/reinventingliteraryhistory>), the key term is "reinventing." Students "engage in written dialogue with literary history" (p. 63) through applying New Historical and feminist analyses to texts. Students acquire background knowledge about literary history and critical perspectives from attending lectures by Columbia University scholars, going to museums, and attending concerts. They then apply different critical lenses to analysis of specific passages from texts, contextualizing these passages in terms of cultural and historical frameworks.

Tamara Goeglein describes her use of historical fiction in a course taught at Franklin and Marshall College to explore competing versions of the Battle of Gettysburg, the Kennedy assassination, Malcolm X's life, and other historical events. Goeglein also includes analysis of cinematic constructions of events through study of Ken Burns's "The Civil War" episodes about the Battle of Gettysburg. Students examine how camera techniques are used rhetorically to construct different versions of historical events. Goeglein's assignments are reminiscent of Barry Kroll's (1992) writing assignments in which first-year composition students were given competing versions of the same Vietnam War battles. By tracking shifts in their writing, Kroll found that challenging his students' dualist, monological ways of thinking led them to be more open to competing perspectives in their writing. Similarly, the courses in this book that entertain alternative versions of texts and events represent an essential step

in students' academic socialization towards learning how to test out the validity of alternative perspectives.

Cultural studies approaches. A number of contributors employ a cultural studies approach to help students address what Lori Robison and Eric Wolfe pose as a key question: "What does it mean to read literary texts as working ideologically in the culture in which they were produced?" (p. 201). Michael Clark and Elizabeth Losh describe their Humanities Core Course at the University of California-Irvine as designed to provide students with analysis of texts within larger cultural contexts, including the "aural and visual experience in today's worlds...[as part of] the technologies of production and transmission that join them together in a global network that defies compartmentalization along traditional disciplinary or national lines" (p. 58).

Students apply cultural-studies perspectives to framing arguments in their writing as "ways to explore or discover ideas rather than the merely conventional exercises for leading readers to preordained conclusions" (p. 43). For example, for several assignments, students engage in causal analysis of alternative explanations of historical events requiring use of secondary sources to sort through competing cultural perspectives of events.

This course also makes extensive use of Web-based resources to model ways of connecting topics and ideas through making hypertextual links between texts, e.g., by drawing on the Perseus Project database in analyzing the *Odyssey*. Clark and Losh argue that learning to employ these hypertextual links in their writing provides students with "the experience of hypertext itself [that] challenges and obviates distinctions between production and reception—and, one might add, between the capacities of expert and novice, to make use of the resources available to scholars in the humanities" (pp. 47-48).

As previously noted, the UCI humanities program conducts extensive program evaluations that include analysis of students' background characteristics and of selected students' portfolio essays, as well as large-scale comparisons of students' writing. In one analysis, comparing students in the course with those in a

traditional stand-alone composition course found that students in the humanities course had higher scores on a writing sample and the MCAT verbal reasoning section than did students in the stand-alone composition course. And students who demonstrated substandard writing skills during the first quarter, rather than being assigned to a remedial grammar course, were enrolled in a second quarter section that focused on writing tasks similar to those in the course and one-to-one consultations. These students scored significantly higher on writing samples than did low-performing students who were not enrolled in this program. These program-assessment tools can serve as models for program evaluation for other institutions interested in determining whether a literature or humanities-based course actually improves students' writing.

In employing a cultural studies approach to teaching Writing on Cultural Boundaries at the University of South Carolina-Lancaster, Lori Robison and Eric Wolfe focus on texts such as "The Lottery" (Jackson, 1949) and *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 2000) that operate as "rhetorical praxis" (p. 197) on the boundaries of dominant cultural practices. Writing about how these texts challenge their own cultural schema leads students to grapple with the "limits that American culture establishes for individual behavior" (p. 207). In responding to *The Bluest Eye*, students analyze how physical beauty itself limits people, writing that challenges students' status quo cultural models.

Issues in Using Literature to Teach Writing

These different approaches to incorporating literature into composition courses effectively mesh current writing theory and pedagogy with innovative literature instruction. However, in doing so, they raise a number of issues that remain relegated to the periphery, issues that need more center-stage attention.

- A. *Curriculum design exploiting tensions between critical perspectives and texts.* While these courses promote rich interdisciplinary application of different critical lenses to

interpreting texts, there was less attention to making explicit and exploiting tensions among these perspectives. For example, using a reader-response approach to making connections between texts and student lives can conflict with a critical pedagogy approach that critiques institutional forces. In asking students to make connections between the portrayals of institutional racism in texts and their own experience of institutional racism, from a critical pedagogy perspective, students may need to recognize that they do not—or never will—experience institutional racism in their own lives given their privileged status (Lewis, 2000).

- B. *Web 2.0 digital writing tools.* These courses employ technology largely in terms of providing students with resource websites as opposed to use of “read/write” Web. 2.0 interactive technologies such as blogs and wikis (Richardson, 2006). In their chapter, Robison and Wolfe encourage students to perceive texts as rhetorical action to engage larger audiences, something that is more likely to occur when students are writing for online audiences other than just their peers or teacher (Beach, Anson, Breuch, & Swiss, 2008; <<http://digitalwriting.pbwiki.com>>). Students are more likely to perceive relationships between reading and writing when they are constructing online texts for these larger audiences.
- C. *Writing across the curriculum.* While students’ writing may improve through participation in these courses, if students engage in little writing in their other courses, their efforts may have little lasting impact as student’s engagement in writing dissipates. Given all the time and energy devoted to developing these courses, the faculty in this book argue for a strong follow-up writing-across-the-curriculum focus with writing-intensive courses required throughout a student’s academic career. As Margaret Vandenburg rightfully argues in her chapter,

“first year English programs will ultimately fail unless writing-intensive courses are interspersed throughout a student’s undergraduate career, in chemistry no less than anthropology” (p. 69).

- D. *The class gap in humanities background.* The contributors also express concern about students’ background knowledge of literature or the humanities—the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990)—they bring to these courses. In recent years, in lower socio-economic K-12 schools, students are experiencing an increased focus on reading skill and math instruction given the demands to prepare students for mandated NCLB testing in reading and math. This test-prep curriculum has led to a documented reduction in the time students devote to reading extended works of literature or their exposure to humanities, much to the frustration of K-12 teachers who are constrained by these top-down curriculum mandates (Anagnostopoulos, 2005; Au, 2007). The Centre College faculty, who work with students from lower SES backgrounds, argue that this narrowing of the K-12 English curriculum means that college teachers must now provide additional background knowledge about literature and the humanities, and challenge students intellectually in ways that depart from their test-prep high school English instruction.

All of this means that, in some cases, faculty may need to adopt a catch-up approach in working with students from lower SES backgrounds. A rich humanities curriculum in first-year programs can provide these students with what they may be missing in some K-12 schools. Rather than employ a traditional coverage approach, instructors may challenge what Julie Lindquist (2002) describes as students’ “what-is” orientation—the assumption that “this is the way the world operates” and there’s no value in entertaining

alternative perspectives. Through engagement with imaginative literature, instructors may seek to move students to adopt what Lindquist describes as a more speculative “what-if” orientation that leads students to use their writing to entertain alternative perspectives on status-quo practices in their lived-world experiences.

- E. *Variation in instructors’ paradigms and approaches.* Another more administrative issue has to do with TA training of first-year composition instructors. While it is important to provide instructors leeway in ways they teach different sections, instructors with primary scholarly focus on literature may teach these sections in ways contrary to the approaches adopted in this book. Jeanne Marie Rose noted in her chapter that in administering a program at a Penn State campus, she experiences “the gap between program policies, rules, and mission statements and the murky territory of day-to-day life in the classroom” (p. 243). In supervising instructors in her program, she finds that, in contrast to her own rhetorical, sociolinguistic perspectives, many “view literature as the exemplary language that has historically governed English studies.” As an administrator, she is then faced with challenging these assumptions while at the same time respecting instructors’ academic freedom.

TA training for first-year composition instructors needs to move beyond teaching methods to larger theories of literacy learning related to teaching critical literacy practices. This collection would serve as a useful text for such training in that it describes the relationships between specific methods and assumptions about students’ literacy learning. Christine Farris provides an example of such training in her discussion of a pro-seminar developed at Indiana University for instructors teaching an Introduction to the Study of Literature and Writing course. In that seminar, instructors collaboratively developed syllabi that examined the relationships

between theory and curriculum and focused on issues of pedagogy.

- F. *Conducting program evaluations.* The contributors also grapple with whether their approaches are improving students' writing, and, if so, what activities led to that improvement. While the University of California-Irvine program employs an extensive program evaluation to address these questions, and other contributors cite anecdotal evidence of changes in students' writing, what is still missing are more robust measures that capture student growth in terms of ratings of writing samples and in qualitative analyses of shifts in students' literacy practices over time, linking them to course activities that may have fostered such shifts (Beach, Thein, & Parks, 2007). There is also a need for students' portfolio self-reflections about their growth across these courses (Yancey, 2004), reflections that could bolster program evaluations.
- G. *Reframing the English department curriculum focus.* The courses in this book are housed in English/humanities departments that embrace teaching critical literacy practices through integrating reading and writing, a vision not always shared by English departments who perceive their primary focus as teaching literature. Innovative courses such as those in this book are more likely to flourish in English departments that reframe their curriculum around integrating reading and writing instruction within and across their courses.

One optional reframing of English departments and majors proposed by Thomas Miller and Brian Jackson (2007) would be around teaching literacy because the primary focus of English departments, as suggested by their survey data, is no longer exclusively on literature but rather increasingly on teaching writing. They also note that according to a recent study BAs in English

value writing and critical-thinking skills learned in their major.¹ Miller and Jackson argue that

Literacy studies center our field of study on our traditional concern for the crafts of reading and writing...We need to bring language, writing, and teaching together with literature at the center of our field of work in order to expand our discipline's learning capacities and political capabilities to address the changes that are coming at us. (p. 702)

These peripheral issues do not detract from my overall enthusiasm for this collection; given its focus on pedagogy, it represents a significant contribution to improving not only teaching literature, but also teaching writing in ways that move the field towards meshing a post-process perspective with alternative ways of interpreting and critiquing texts. As a roadmap for rethinking the first-year English/humanities curriculum, this book is an invaluable resource for faculty and administrators interested in integrating literature and humanities into first-year writing courses.

Notes

¹ The authors cite a study of English graduates from Lehigh from 1980 to 2000 that found that 69.7% of the respondents cited writing skills and 59.2% cited critical thinking skills, as contrasted to 22% citing literary appreciation (Beidler, 2003).

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