Abstract

College students of the new millennium face a future of increasing regional and global economic disparity, the depletion and destruction of natural resources, international political upheaval, off shore labor outsourcing, rapidly shifting job markets, and forced migration patterns. The uneven distribution of wealth, services, and resources across social groups represent the primary challenges facing future national and local leaders. Through the teaching of rhetoric and writing, WAC, Writing programs and Writing Centers have the opportunity to facilitate the civic, academic, and professional access of students into a complex ecology of human relationships and discourse communities.

This paper argues that traditional models of WAC too narrowly privilege academic discourse over other discourses and communities shaping the worlds in which our students live and work. Whereas WAC seeks to make visible the codes, genres, media, and purposes of the knowledge-making systems of the university to novice writers, historically WAC has not been called to interrogate the knowledge-making systems and discourses students seek to acquire. WAC replicates and reaffirms dominant discourses by socializing new writers into established systems without cultivating critical awareness of the ways that literacy practice remains embedded in ever-shifting sets of economic, political, social, cultural, and linguistic factors.

Writing Across Communities represents a shift in paradigm informed by New Literacy Studies and sociolinguistics (David Barton, James Paul Gee, Norman Fairclough, Barbara Johnstone, Ana Zentella). A Writing Across Communities approach to writing program reform foregrounds dimensions of ethnomuclear diversity and civic engagement in contrast to other models of WAC currently institutionalized across the nation. This approach to college writing instruction invites students to consider how an understanding of the dimensions of cultural diversity enhances their ability to write and communicate: Appropriately (with an awareness of different conventions); Productively (to achieve their desired aims); Ethically (to remain attuned to the communities they serve); Critically (to learn to engage in inquiry and discovery), and Responsively (to negotiate the tensions caused by the exercise of authority in their spheres of belonging). Reconceptualizing WAC from cultural ecology model can help to frame new conversations about WAC and the dimensions of intercultural communication shaping the writing contexts in which students exercise authority. The underlying assumptions of Writing Across Communities assert that:

- Our students arrive already embedded in complex discourse communities;
- Membership in different discourse communities is a dynamic (ever expanding and receding) process as students shift between the communities to which they already belong and those to which they seek to belong;
- Each student brings his/her idiolect and sociolect that is subject to change with contact;
• Agency in language does not begin or end in the college classroom;
• WAC, Writing Programs, and Writing Centers should serve as advocates of literacy and language awareness for speakers of English as well as other ethnolinguistic communities present on and around campus.
• Teachers in WAC program, Writing classrooms, and Writing Centers serve an important role as cultural mediators between the academy, students and their home as well as their target discourse communities.