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## Review of *Textual Dynamics of the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities*

*Stuart Greene*

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Charles Bazerman and James Paradis, eds. *Textual Dynamics of the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities*. (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991), 390 pages.

On any given day, tutors in a writing center often find that their attention must shift from writers struggling to make sense of a Shakespearean sonnet, to writers attempting to marshal evidence in writing an argument in philosophy, or to writers trying to unravel the complexity of legal and technical writing. We are, perhaps, familiar with some of the obvious differences between the forms and conventions of writing in literature, philosophy, or any other field, but what are the assumptions and values that inform what it means to read and write in different disciplines?

Research growing out of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement has begun to examine these assumptions in order to explain the social functions of different genres, as well as the dynamics of constructing knowledge that include social, cognitive, and rhetorical acts. In effect, this body of work has helped educators to reconceive the process of learning. More than acquiring or creating knowledge, learning to read and write in the disciplines entails acquiring a specialized form of literacy that consists of knowing the discipline's discursive practices. This knowledge also consists of understanding the issues and problems under discussion in a field, the relevant concepts and their relationship to one another, and the research programs and methodology that a community acknowledges as legitimate.

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The collection of fifteen essays in *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* demonstrates how these principles of learning are played out in different ways in both school and the workplace. Each study provides a lens through which to understand the social roles that texts play in defining a community's identity. In short, writing is seen as a form of social action. Moreover, a number of studies in this volume show how the discursive practices of a given discipline or profession guide the processes by which people learn specific rhetorical and linguistic conventions in order to achieve their own purposes as writers. For many of the authors, learning is an intertextual process of forging links between one's own ideas and a social network of knowledge that constitutes and defines the work of a given community. No text exists apart from other texts; texts refer to prior texts for their subject matter and purpose. Thus, those who become enculturated within a community must learn the ways in which different genres respond to rhetorical situations, the techniques of reference that reflect a community's acknowledgment of authority, and the epistemological assumptions that circumscribe the discursive practices that define membership.

*Textual Dynamics of the Professions* is a broad-ranging and diverse book. In fact, the subjects range from molecular biology, literary criticism, philosophy, law, and mental illness to tax accounting, sociology, and the art of letter writing in the Middle Ages. My sense is that these perspectives on reading, writing, and learning can provide writing tutors with a more thorough understanding of the different assumptions and values underlying the construction of knowledge across disciplines. By deepening our understanding of these concerns, we will be in a better position to help advanced students situate their work within a given community's forms and conventions. In the remainder of this review, I will concentrate primarily on those sections of the book that are most likely to be of interest to writing center tutors and those who are involved with planning tutor training.

The authors in this collection focus on the "textual side" of the socially constructed nature of concepts and institutions, revealing a fundamental relationship between text and context. For the editors of this volume, the production of texts is shaped by context, a complex matrix of social, historical, cognitive, and rhetorical activities. At the same time, the editors point out that texts "precipitate" various contexts and actions that constitute the work of a given community. This approach to studying text and context marks an important departure from traditional modes of literary criticism that focus on single texts isolated from their "social and intentional origins" (3). The notion that writing is a form of social action can be understood if

we explore the historical, ideological, and rhetorical factors that influence patterns of cooperation in the construction of shared knowledge.

Organized in three sections, *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* covers a broad range of theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical issues. The first section, "Textual Construction of the Professions," examines some of the ways in which texts shape how members of a community structure experience. In "How Natural Philosophers Can Cooperate," Charles Bazerman places scientific writing in historical perspective, focusing on Joseph Priestly's 1767 book, *The History and Present State of Electricity*, as a way to understand the textual mechanisms writers use to establish a sense of cooperation. From this perspective, texts give shape to and stabilize meaning, thus providing a means for integrating past, present, and future work in the field. In this case, the review of the literature is one genre that defines a community's problems and principles relative to "a corpus of communal experience" (16). Importantly, Bazerman's analysis not only demonstrates that theories and questions are historically bounded, but that individual assertion contributes to community formation. Reaffirming the social function of genre, Greg Myers also focuses on the review of the literature as a lens through which we see the shaping of a field. In "Stories and Styles in Two Molecular Biology Review Articles," he points out that reviews provide an unfolding narrative that tells a story of a discipline's progress, establishes consensus, and frames the work that still needs to be done. Together, Bazerman and Myers' analyses provide historical and rhetorical explanations of the function of literature reviews that writing center tutors can use as they work with students in the sciences.

Also noteworthy in this first section is Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor's chapter, "The Rhetoric of Literary Criticism," one that calls attention to the persuasive power of certain topoi, or commonplaces, in literary criticism. These include identifying the ubiquity of certain images in texts that are not readily apparent, the unification of apparently irreconcilable differences between interpretations, or the distinction between appearance and reality. The authors observe that literary critics often use spatial metaphors to enforce this latter distinction as they "reach through or behind the textual facade to a hidden reality" (86). Fahnestock and Secor suggest that these topoi affirm shared values within the literary community and define accepted modes of argument. I would suggest that these modes of argument often remain hidden from students attempting to write their way into the literary community. Thus, this chapter goes a long way toward demystifying some of the implicit forms and conventions in literature that can, in turn, be conveyed to students as explicit strategies for writing literary analyses.

The second section, “The Dynamics of Discourse Communities,” includes a set of studies that help to demonstrate what is involved in learning the ways of knowing in a given community. These studies contribute to an understanding of how readers and writers construct meaning. In doing so, they provide both a cognitive and social perspective, one that suggests how people build a representation of a complex domain in reading and assume the role of authors in writing. In this section, we also begin to see how learning discursive models guides the process of enculturation. This latter point is at the center of Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman’s chapter, “Social Context and Socially Constructed Texts.” Using the procedures of discourse analysis, they analyzed the introductions to papers that one writer composed during his first year in a Rhetoric Ph.D. program as a way to determine the extent to which he learned the discourse conventions of the research community he sought to enter. A key assumption in their work is that part of the initiation process is learning to use the appropriate linguistic conventions within a discipline’s forums. Such an assumption underscores the need to teach students both content knowledge and the appropriate moves to use in a given rhetorical situation. One way to conceive of these moves is to consider the argument structure of a text, which Cheryl Geisler takes up in her study of experts and novices writing about philosophical issues. In “Toward a Sociocognitive Model of Literacy,” she points out some key differences in expert and novice’s representations of the field, differences that are marked by their sense of authorship. In reading, experts tend to identify arguments with positions held by authors; in turn, when these experts assume the role of writers they structure their arguments accordingly, characterizing, critiquing, and distinguishing different approaches by authorship. In contrast, the construct of authorship or point of view is not a part of many students’ representations of the field. In short, a key difference is that experts see their work as part of an intertext. Previous work defines and gives shape to their own response. Though not included in this section, Amy Devitt also provides a very fine discussion of the intertextual nature of writing within a community. Echoing Geisler, she points out that entry into a community, in this case tax accounting, entails being able to adapt one’s discourse to a rhetorical situation that is shaped by historical and social forces. To do so means understanding the function of different genres as responses to rhetorical situations and the patterns of reference that establish one’s authority in writing.

Though it may be unreasonable to expect that a writing center tutor will know the forms and conventions in these different fields, the studies in this second section again point to the social and rhetorical functions of texts that

we can make explicit to the students with whom we work. For example, we can help students to “read” situations in order to see their options and make appropriate choices in light of a given situation. We can also help students understand that their use of citations is part of an argument, showing them ways in which they can position their own ideas amidst what others have said.

Finally, the third section, “The Operational Force of Text,” suggests how texts influence human action. Here we see how in technical writing the authority of expertise is transformed in ways that affect the choices and decisions that individuals make in different situations. In “Text and Action: The Operator’s Manual in Context and Court,” James Paradis focuses on the extent to which a technical manual adequately transforms and describes expert knowledge in ways that enable individuals to use and adapt that knowledge appropriately. Of interest are the rhetorical and ethical questions that constrain issues of writing. After all, a technical manual not only provides a framework to guide human action, but must be accountable as well for the social consequences of human action. Questions in this section also explore the relationship between communication and social structures (Herndl, Fennell, and Miller’s “Understanding Failures in Organizational Discourse”), as well as the epistemological and textual consequences of how clinical documents can influence what a physician attends to in his or her diagnostic work (Lucille McCarthy’s “A Psychiatrist Using DSM-III”).

Even though the emphasis is upon text analysis in this collection, the research presented in *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* is, to some degree, methodologically diverse. This is important since there are limitations to any study that attempts to infer rhetorical intention from texts alone. After all, only a small portion of discourse conventions can be revealed through text analysis. As Robert Schwegler and Linda Shamoan argue in their chapter, “Meaning Attribution in Ambiguous Texts in Sociology,” we need to examine the interactions between readers and writers. As a consequence, we will be in a better position to talk about the assumptions concerning what constitutes evidence and validity, what formal conventions are followed, and what is an appropriate area of study. Other researchers also employ converging evidence from interviews, observation, and case studies as a means of examining the assumptions that guide the work in a community.

In many instances, discussions of methodology in conducting research can be translated into strategies that writing center tutors can convey to students who are learning to read critically in a given field and who are beginning to assume the role of writers. As Herndl, Fennell, and Miller suggest in their essay, reading and writing depend on developing an aware-

ness of the standards for language use that is established and maintained by a community. One means for coming to terms with these conventions is to explore the relationship between language and social structure through formal linguistic, pragmatic, and argument analysis. Linguistic choices can provide one index for membership in a community; pragmatic analysis examines the context of language use (e.g., the social role and status of the speaker); and an analysis of argument (e.g., the movement from data to claim by means of a warrant) can reflect the different ways that practitioners in a field think about problems.

Similarly, Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman provide a useful tool for studying the rhetorical moves writers make in representing a social network of ideas and contributing their own solutions to problems a field has identified as both important and significant. These moves can entail establishing the scope and importance of one's subject, situating this work amidst what others have written, identifying a gap in the field, and then introducing one's work as a possible solution to a problem or answer to a question. Not only can writing tutors show students how writers in different fields employ these kinds of rhetorical moves in entering a disciplinary conversation, but we can help students adapt their knowledge in these ways as they write their way into a community.

Let me end by suggesting that *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* is an important book, particularly because it attempts, if only implicitly, to broaden our knowledge about reading, writing, and learning in the disciplines. I recommend this book to tutors in a writing center and those involved in training tutors for this reason and because this collection raises tough questions that we need to address. For example, how much discipline-specific knowledge does one need to have to help students in different disciplines? And a related question, are there general strategies for teaching students to read and write that cut across disciplines? For that matter, what are these strategies? If for no other reason, *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* is a useful sourcebook because it gives us ways to think about helping students adapt and transform what they know in different rhetorical situations.

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