Speaking-Writing Curricula: New Designs on an Old Idea

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Relationships between speaking and writing have interested, and puzzled, educators for a long time. We say that good writing projects "voice" and good writers have an "ear," and we encourage students to read their papers aloud when revising. Perceived similarities between speech and writing can quickly dissolve into differences, however: The writer who says, "My problem is that I write the way I talk" usually doesn't, and the speaker who talks the way he writes usually shouldn't. When speaking and writing instruction is constrained by separate assignments, courses, and departments, as it is in many institutions, students do not experience the complementary nature of oral and written language. The reasons for this separation, along with current trends which argue for greater integration, deserve more attention from program administrators.

There is now a sizeable body of research on relationships between oral and written language, but the impact on writing programs is hard to discern. For example, recent composition textbooks show little indication of a trend toward integrated speaking-writing instruction. Elsewhere, though, there is interest and activity. Two recent titles published by NCTE, *Perspectives on Talk and Learning* (1990) and *Talking to Learn* (1989), show an abiding professional interest. In addition, the annual CCCC call for proposals frequently lists relationships between speaking and writing, and evidence of innovative speaking-writing assignments, courses, and programs in schools and colleges is not hard to find, as we will show in the results from a national survey we conducted. For program administrators who have developed or perhaps only pondered ways of relating speaking and writing, we examine forces that separate speaking and writing instruction, purposes for integration, and finally, options in assignments, courses, and programs based on our survey of writing program administrators.

Forces of Separation

At the college level, the division of instruction between speech and writing has tended to follow departmental boundaries. This division appeared in

the split between NCTE and its speech contingent in 1914, but its roots go much deeper. In "Where Do English Departments Come From?" William Riley Parker noted that modern-day English departments trace their origins to the ancient study of rhetoric. In the nineteenth century, rhetoric became associated with oratory and then elocution. This thinning of the curriculum led eventually to the demise of elocution and speech training in American colleges and a flight of teachers away from oratory toward imaginative literature. Eager to disassociate themselves from elocution yet unhappy about their lack of representation in the NCTE, the founders of the Speech Association of America in 1914 left composition--rhetoric not intended for oral delivery--to English, which was consolidating its identity in literature. By the early part of this century, English had relegated composition and whatever speech instruction it retained to orphan status. Right or wrong, a perceived separation of speaking and writing persists, as reflected in the Engineering Accreditation Code, which states that speech courses are considered skill-centered and cannot count toward graduation. The Code requires nine hours of composition, though, which is listed as a humanities rather than a skills course.

Over the years, curricula for introductory speech courses have evolved differently from those for freshman composition. As Russell Long has explained, speech retains its classical focus on agonistic discourse, which operates in a world of competing theses and antitheses (222). The result is often an adversarial model for discourse that teaches students how to structure arguments, identify fallacies, and refute counterarguments.

Composition studies have, of course, brought renewed interest in rhetoric, including speech (for example, Elbow, 1985). In her 1985 CCCC convention address, Maxine Hairston urged composition faculty to reaffirm connections with speech departments in order to forge alliances for the teaching of composition. Composition has adopted rhetoric on its own terms, however, and so the typical speech curriculum may be seen as out of step with contempory college writing (Tchudi and Mitchell 283-4). Not surprisingly, most current textbooks in speech and in writing--rough gauges of prevailing practices--pay little attention to speaking-writing relationships, though notable exceptions have been Bruffee's *A Short Course* and Katula, Schultz, and Schwegler's *Communication*. Introductory speech texts typically concentrate on platform speeches delivered from formal outlines prepared as homework, while freshman composition texts now promote a multitude of planning strategies and publishing alternatives.

Perhaps the greatest differences between speech and composition curricula lie in different approaches to intervention and evaluation. It would be wrong to suppose that the field of speech communication is unfamiliar with the notion of process. Process models of communication revolutionized that field in the 1960's (Berlo) and are well represented in the theory chapters that begin many speech textbooks (see Lucas, for example, as one of the most widely used texts). Nor would it be correct to imagine that speech teachers are unfamiliar with the conferencing roles that many writing teachers use; many speech teachers use face-to-face meetings with students in selecting topics and providing feedback. Still, speech teachers have a single, fast-fading performance to observe, and speech classes often become preoccupied with performance-*cum*-product and with a single summative evaluation. (Perhaps as a partial antidote to this problem many speech instructors religiously require written outlines, often submitted days in advance.)

Writing teachers, by contrast, are privy to students' notes, jot lists, journal entries, and drafts, often relying more on in-process evaluations than on summative evaluations of final products. In fifty hours of class time, the composition class spends much time *form*ing text, the speech class in *per*forming text. In a class of twenty-four students, it takes about four one-hour periods to complete a single round of seven-minute speeches. And that crucial difference implies a wide gulf separating the in-class roles of writing teachers and speech teachers.

Purposes for Integration

At the pre-collegiate level, integrated language arts curricula have been important for decades. According to Arthur Applebee, in 1940 the NCTE committee on Basic Aims for English Instruction in American Schools emphasized the four fundamental language arts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, noting that language "is a basic instrument in the maintenance of the democratic way of life" (159). Today, many states now mandate instruction in speaking and listening as part of the language arts curriculum. In NCTE's 1986 *Recommended English Language Arts Curriculum Guides K-12*, sixty percent of the recommended guides involve speaking and writing, and forty percent explicitly mention integrated speaking and writing.

Interest in speaking-writing curricula at the college level may be growing, often now as part of theoretical developments and the general thrust toward literacy education. Writing researchers have recognized that traditional separations between speaking and writing instruction undermine vital connections. As Richard Stack has noted, the essence of good writing, both in its form and process, is conversation: "As writing moves away from conversation, as it ceases to be aware of being listened to, as it ceases to incorporate the responses of the other..., it moves away from its center and origin" (377). To this could be added the idea that speech, in its various manifestations, is essential to thought. As Kenneth Bruffee observes,

> our task must involve engaging students in conversations among themselves at as many points in both the writing and reading process as possible.... The way they talk with each other determines the way they will think and the way they will write. (641-2)

The potential instructional uses of ordinary conversation in the classroom (NCTE's *Talking to Learn*, for example) and in teacher-student conferences and peer tutoring (Harris's *Teaching One-to-One* and Reigstad & McAndrew's *Training Tutors*, for example) have been illustrated in detail. In addition, Ernest Boyer's Carnegie Commission report *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* calls for more resources directed at instruction in writing and speaking, while alumni and employer surveys regularly show that the ability to think on one's feet and to articulate ideas in a clear and cogent manner are highly valued. Some campuses have recognized the need. At the University of Minnesota, for example, the Robinett Committee wrote in 1982 that "writing and speaking professors must coordinate their instruction with disciplinary departments and share their special knowledge of language skills with faculty interested in incorporating speaking and writing into their classrooms."

For years, at teachers' meetings, workshops, and conferences, as well as in literature reviews of ERIC (we counted 87 "hits" in our ERIC search of speaking-writing theory and practices covering 1976 to 1985) and teaching-oriented journals,[1] a surprising number of instructors regularly claim to use speech activities and to be aware of important theoretical links between speech and writing. Several decades ago, the Rhetoric program at the University of Iowa gained distinction for combining speech and writing into a freshman rhetoric program. For the past 25 years at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, students have been able to fulfill their composition requirement by taking either the English

department's composition course (Rhetoric) or the Speech department's integrated speaking-writing course (Verbal Communication); the speaking-writing course enrolls about one-third of freshman students (Rafoth).

While most instructors understand the benefits of teaching both oral and written language, they may lack a sense of how to apply this understanding in their own courses much beyond involving students in discussion sessions or requiring a speech. Indeed, it can be difficult for course planners and program administrators in composition or elsewhere to locate any practical, rational framework for extending writing into speech. Existing speaking-writing courses have a relatively low profile in our profession. Moreover, it is sometimes hard to recognize, in the absence of familiar models, just how one's courses or programs are already engaged in speaking-writing instruction, or how to achieve greater influence over the naturally-occurring relationships between talk and writing that students are already immersed in.

Options for Organizing Courses

Any serious attempt to integrate oral and written communication must consider how factors like assigned work and its evaluation crystallize the roles of speech and writing. For example, if students are assigned an interview as part of a research paper, then the interview becomes a focus for instruction, such as scripting and role-playing an interview schedule.

These innovations require course restructuring, which may range from minor tinkering with course requirements to more radical design.

1. *Tacking speech assignments onto the composition course.* A superficial way of incorporating oral communication into composition courses is to replace an essay assignment with an informal speech. A better idea is to link the speech to an essay, as when, for example, a persuasive speech follows a persuasive or a deliberative essay. But because speech in this type of plan is plainly an add-on activity with little time given to the process of developing the speech, students can be expected to have many delivery problems, including stage fright, and to question why a writing course requires them to do speeches. The problem is similar to the kind of stilted, error-filled essays produced by inexperienced writers. Requiring students to give a speech without providing process-oriented instruction is likely to be as counterproductive as traditional writing curricula that simply require

them to produce essays. In short, it is likely that a tack-on approach will do more harm than good.

2. *Identifying oral communication activities that support composition.* Many oral activities are useful in promoting academic writing. Some use speech as an adjunct to writing, such as reading aloud to detect errors or conducting interviews to gather information. Some use speech to supplant parts of the composing process, such as peer questioning (for instance, How is your first sentence related to your second?) Some oral activities encourage what Peter Elbow describes as "live mental events" (298), which help students to get their meaning integrated more into their words and help readers to feel more involved in the transaction of meaning. Much of this sort of talking-to-write is already being done in composition classes. What's yet to be done, as Elbow makes clear, is to find ways of highlighting the importance of these activities and making them occasions for critical, reflective thinking about composing.

3. *Teaching discourse functions and processes across oral and written modes.* The most radical restructuring results when instruction is organized around the ways language functions: for example, to recount observations (reporting), to recount patterns of events (narrative, history), to unite individuals (audience appeal and identification), to argue for change (persuading), and so on. When functions become the focus, then the choice of speaking or writing depends not upon whether the course title is Speech or Composition, but upon the situation: Is it better to call or write, to meet or memo? How does one prepare for a meeting by orienting others with written materials provided in advance?

What makes this approach most radical, however, is the potential effect on thinking and learning at the level of process (Rubin). From the early stages of writing to final revision, speech gives verbal substance to fleeting thoughts without committing them to paper, while drafting gives permanence without having to go public. As Elbow ("Shifting") points out, writing and speaking can be both ephemeral and permanent, depending on when and how we use them.

It is not only students who must become adept at moving between speech and writing, though. Instructors must also attend to how learning functions in one mode or the other. Depending on the student, some things may be easier to learn in one modality than another, such as learning to argue first in speech and then in writing. In courses organized in this manner, students would sometimes write-to-speak and sometimes speak-

to-write. The point to be emphasized in all this is the developmental process one undergoes either in speech or in writing to draw out the best ideas, manifest them in a channel that is best for the situation, and understand ways of revising in both channels--through self-reflection, response, and learning from experience.

Examples of Programs and Resources

Curricula that incorporate speaking and writing must be tailored to local needs and resources. There may be no single, ideal way of going about it. In order to entertain alternatives, however, it may help to think about two dimensions for curriculum planning: the extent or scope of change and the specialized needs of particular fields of study. We describe below examples of both, based on materials we solicited in our survey. Our purpose is simply to report examples which seemed illustrative or otherwise interesting. (We use past tense in our descriptions because changes may have occurred since our survey.)

1. *Extent of change.* Speaking and writing may enter the curriculum through one assignment, one course, or an entire program. Consider one example of an assignment that integrated various kinds of speaking and writing. In an industrial psychology course taught by Henry E. Klugh at Alma College in Alma, Michigan, students were required to write abstracts of journal articles and then to make oral presentations that explain the research and answer questions. In the first two oral presentations, each student gave an informal presentation to a small group, followed by question-answer discussion. In the final two, the student stood before the class in a formal presentation with hand-held notes for a ten-minute delivery with hand-outs.

A course at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College in Richmond, Virginia, taught by John Fugate, shows how an entire course drew together speaking-writing relationships. The course, "Communications for the Justice System," was designed for prospective police officers and involved student-directed discussion, instructor lectures, report writing, watching films and taking observational notes, and role playing for testimony in a moot court. In these activities, students used written notes and documents to support speaking events, and speaking events to produce written notes and documents.

In some rare but notable cases, entire programs have been designed to embrace the synergy of speaking-writing. At the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, the Writing-Across-the-University Program, directed by Peshe Kuriloff, offered a number of courses under the rubric of Problem-Solving in a Human Context. One example was a course entitled Communications and Engineering Technology, where students participated in informal writing and speaking activities such as conferences, discussions of readings, responses to classmates' writing and speaking, collaborative writing and speaking, and compiling portfolios. The assigned readings in this course spanned a range of approaches, from James Adams' *Conceptual Blockbusting* to Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and Alan Trachtenberg's *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol*.

2. *The second dimension for curriculum planning involves specialized needs in particular fields of study.* The professional practices in any field often have conventions for speaking and writing different from those in other fields. As a result, faculty and students in majors courses often have difficulty transferring skills learned in freshman composition or introductory speech courses to the specialized writing and speaking in a given discipline. Moreover, atrophy occurs when there is too little practice after the introductory course.

This was the reasoning behind the establishment at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, of a discipline-based instructional plan for writing, quantitative reasoning, and oral communication. The intent was to give students opportunities to demonstrate ability in these areas during their four years. DePauw's Economics department, for example, developed specially- targeted courses for each of the abilities. Once students took or tested out of two developmental English courses, freshman and sophomores could enter an Economics writing course, where they would use prewriting activities like brainstorming and then write essays to reexamine their beliefs about economic practices. To enter the oral communication course in Economics, juniors and seniors first had to pass an informal screening procedure that involved instructors' recommendations combined with students' self-reports of their speaking and listening abilities; those who did not pass the screening were directed to an oral communication workshop or lower-level speech course.

Economics of Human Resources was one course where students who passed the eligibility screening could become "certified" in their discipline-specific oral communication requirement. The course had three oral activities required for each student: an oral presentation based on an assigned reading, one based on a research paper, and class participation.

Survey of Writing Program Administrators

In a national survey of college-level writing program administrators, we gathered data which indicates that speaking-writing curricula at the college level are not rare, and that they involve a range of communication activities--monologic, dyadic, small- and large-group. The results showed a variety of undergraduate courses or programs aimed at cultivating the intellectual, social, and aesthetic qualities that administrators believe that integrated speaking and writing instruction can promote. The survey also offered some sense of how far theories relating oral and written language have made their way into undergraduate curricula: the notion of inner speech as integral to the thinking required for writing (Vygotsky), the role of peer response groups for writing (Bruffee; Elbow), the enhancement of perspective-taking (Kroll; Rubin and Dodd), and so on.

The survey was mailed to the 410 writing program administrators who in 1988 belonged to the Council of Writing Program Administrators; fifty-nine percent responded (n=241). The purpose of the survey was to gain some sense of the kinds of speaking-writing activities that students are taught, to gather sample syllabi and course materials which describe these activities, and to identify obstacles which program administrators perceived in developing speaking-writing curricula. Respondents held a variety of administrative roles in writing or freshman writing (60%), writing centers (22%), writing across the curriculum (8%), developmental programs (3%), or "other" (e.g, creative writing, argumentation and debate, problem-solving) (7%).

Forty-two percent of the respondents indicated that their institutions offered courses in which at least ten percent of instructional time was devoted to speaking and writing activities integrated in a deliberate, theory-based manner. Another forty-three percent reported no such courses, and the remaining fifteen percent indicated insufficient knowledge to answer the question.

Respondents listed specific courses or programs which integrate writing and speaking. These included freshman and non-freshman writing courses (including advanced composition), technical writing, speech or

communications, and a variety of "other" (literature, seminars, persuasion, ESL, history, management, engineering). They also named writing center, tutorial, or workshop programs.

When asked about the kinds of speaking-writing activities students engaged in, *Group discussion for invention or revision* was the most frequent response, followed by *Oral presentations that also involve a writing assignment*. Other common responses among the options surveyed included *Peer tutorials, Interviews*, and *Reading essays aloud*. The least common responses included *Role-playing leading to writing* and *Lectures which compare/contrast speaking and writing*.

Conclusion

Administrators in our survey identified actual or potential obstacles for integrated speaking-writing instruction as involving too much class time, too much instructor resistance, too many problems of "turf," and too little know-how for designing such courses. With the exception of "turf," it may be worth noting that new-paradigm approaches to the teaching of composition once struggled against similar obstacles.

Ultimately, the question is not whether it is easy to change a curriculum but whether it is desirable to do so. No doubt integrating speaking and writing is one of many worthwhile innovations, and good composition courses require more than integration. We have tried to show that both theoretical and practical interest in this area is greater than might be expected, and that there are good reasons for further exploration.

Note

1. See, for example, Rafoth, Saunders, Klugh, Field et al., Meyers, Glassman and Farley.

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