Practicing What We Teach: A Pedagogical Approach to Interdisciplinary Collaboration Among Faculty

Why study interdisciplinary collaboration?
- College graduates need to collaborate within and across disciplines
- Stakeholders remain invested in WAC/WID initiatives that support cross-curricular literacy
- Lack of institutional support demands individual faculty initiate and sustain interdisciplinary collaboration

What do we need to know?
- How to engage in day-to-day interactions with colleagues in other disciplines
- How to achieve characteristics of successful interdisciplinary relationships
- How interdisciplinary collaboration takes place on a discursive level
- How interdisciplinary collaboration happens in cross-curricular literacy contexts

Research Question: How does interdisciplinary collaboration happen between writing specialists and disciplinary content experts in the context of cross-curricular literacy projects?

Methodology
- Interdisciplinary collaboration as pedagogical activity
- Social constructionism
- Sociolinguistics

The Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Post-Secondary Institutions</th>
<th>Writing Specialists</th>
<th>Disciplinary Content Experts</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Private, 1,300 UG Only</td>
<td>-WAC Directors (2)</td>
<td>-Art Education</td>
<td>-Surveys</td>
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<td>-Catholic, 6K</td>
<td>-Dir. Campus Writing Program</td>
<td>-Health Professions</td>
<td>-Recorded Meetings</td>
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<td>-Public, MA, 9K</td>
<td>-Dir. of Writing</td>
<td>-Political Science (2)</td>
<td>(13+ hours)</td>
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<td>-Research, 31K</td>
<td>-Dir. of Freshman Communication</td>
<td>-Chemistry</td>
<td>-Interviews (21+ hours)</td>
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<td>-Research, 55K</td>
<td>-Grad. Student Admin</td>
<td>-Computer Science</td>
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<td>-Undergrad Wtg Assoc.</td>
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Data Analysis

Discourse Analysis
- How participants’ language grows from disciplinary discourses
- How specific discursive moves enable or constrain interdisciplinary collaboration

Grounded Theory
- Systematize knowledge about phenomena of interdisciplinary collaboration
- Generate imaginative interpretations that shed light on practices and actions central to interdisciplinary collaboration
Initial Findings: Writing specialists use a range of discursive strategies for the purpose of persuasion.

1. **Making Connections:** Writing specialist builds trust and “comradeship” by relating to a faculty member.

   DCE: And I’ve noticed that as I get older and adopt more of a maternal style...I’ve gotten more positive feedback on evaluations.

   WS: [I]t's neat to hear you to say that...as I've worked with the students in the college of education, which again, in some ways I see so similar [to nursing students you teach] ...I think it is somewhat of a maternal - I care so much about not just them and their education, but knowing they are going to be impacting--you know, the exponential effect that you have on people is pretty significant.

   *I have the agenda to connect with them. There are times when I will tell stories about students who frustrate me or things that students did that angered me because I'm trying to establish a sense of identification with what I perceive to be a frequent or normalized faculty discussion.* (WS Interview)

2. **Affirming:** Writing specialist upholds, supports, or validates a practice or behavior about which a faculty member is unsure.

   Computer science faculty member discussing a first-year seminar he was teaching on 1980’s music culture:

   DCE: Like I said, I'm so playing it by ear to see what I'm going to get...

   WS: Well, some musicians in the 1980's, did they play by ear?

   *For her to affirm that the amount of writing that I expect is about appropriate and, you know, for her to say that she liked the ideas that I came up with for the syllabus. I found that really helpful in moving forward...so sort of instead of questioning everything I kind of felt good about the feedback that she’s given me. (faculty interview)*

3. **Reframing:** Writing specialist shifts perspective on an idea or practice.

   DCE: I do see my role as helping [students] refine their clinical writing skills...helping them to see that you can be writing professionally in an informal style and writing professionally in a formal style...and that you should understand those two types.

   WS: Mm-hmm. And that you're also using writing for them to learn content as well. So they're not only writing within the discipline, figuring out what that looks like, but also it looks like the writing is helping them figure out the content.

   *Any opportunity I can have to help faculty think about the thinking and learning of content that goes on in the act of writing that...It's so much more than just completing an assignment...It's really about thinking and learning. That's where, I guess, my underlying agenda in any of my interactions with faculty would be coming from that perspective. (WS Interview)*