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AUTHOR Kirscht, Judy
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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with "insider" voices from disciplines that students in a writing program rarely encounter. As background, the paper muses on the theoretical and pedagogical potential of studying and understanding the rhetoric of inquiry in other disciplines as a way of arriving at a social constructionist view of knowledge. The paper notes that there is value in making faculty and students participants in conversations across disciplines and having them immerse themselves in the research processes that give rise to and shape the discourse of various fields. The paper focuses on the research process courses that students may take at either the sophomore or upper division level to satisfy the second quarter of the University of California, Santa Barbara's 2-quarter composition requirement. The paper points out that these are not courses in the research paper, but rather courses in the research process and the nature of disciplines. According to the paper, students begin by reading interviews that were conducted with faculty of different disciplines; then, in this section of the course, the students learn to move from a position or an interest to a research question. In the second section, the paper states, students learn how to research a question driven by library research; in the third section, students explore methodology, such as qualitative and quantitative research, field studies, or in-depth interviews. The paper contains illustrative comments which show student efforts in each of the sections of the course. (TB)

4Cs March 26, 1996

Judy Kirscht

CROSS TALK: OPENING DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES FOR FACULTY AND STUDENT ALIKE.

INTRODUCTION

Since the tile of this paper is "Cross Talk: Opening Disciplinary Boundaries," I'd like to open with voices other than my own.

> *For me it [research] is mostly conversations, because it's a matter of laying out the ideas in words, orally -- which is much more fluid than in a writing context because I think ideas have to be very formalized in writing -- that can be helpful as well. But in the stages of really developing exciting, basic, hard-to-describe ideas of research, oral conversations are to me the best.*
>
> --Julia Allen-Jones, Geography.
>
> *Well, it seems to me that when you do research, you never understand the problem that you are looking at, because you are always looking at a problem which is interesting because you don't understand it.*
>
> --Julia Allen Jones, Geography
>
> *...They're all ideas that answer problems which are philosophically and religiously and psychologically interesting to me personally....I warn my graduate students, once you start your dissertation, ... you are*

> *probably going to be with that topic for a long time....So beware and pick something that really does interest you personally and not just what your professor says is a live topic for the present.*
>
> -- Jeffrey Russell, History.

The voices you have just heard are coming from researchers in Geography and History at UCSB. They are insider voices talking about their work -- voices our students rarely hear. Back in 1983, Elaine Maimon wrote,

> *Our [the academic] community is defined by conversation. Our goal as teachers is to guide students into new communities and to help novices gain an authentic voice in our conversations. And we learn to talk with them when we understand the generic properties of their conversations.*

Six years ago at the Cs , John Reiff and I introduced these voices -- the results of interviews with faculty across the disciplines on their research process -- and spoke of the possibilities these conversations offered for transforming our students' ideas about research into an active dynamic exciting personal process -- a question driven plunge into the unknown rather than a defense of a pre-existing thesis.

Three years ago, John, Rhonda Levine and I presented papers at the Cs on the theoretical and pedagogical potential of studying and understanding the rhetoric of inquiry in other disciplines -- or in Elaine's terms understand the generic

properties of their conversations -- as a way of arriving at a social constructionist view of knowledge, because that view, we argued, would give us an understanding of the way language and textual conventions shape and are shaped by the knowledge formation processes of the disciplines.

Today we would like to report on the effects at UCSB of making ourselves and our students participants in these conversations across the disciplines, and in immersing our students in the research processes that give rise to and shape the discourse of the fields. Transformations have occurred at many levels: in the curriculum, in the Writing Program faculty, in the faculty of other disciplines, in the focus of our courses, in our students. This paper, however, will focus on the research process courses that students may take at either the sophomore or upper division level to satisfy the second quarter of UCSB's 2 quarter composition requirement. These are not courses in the research paper; they are courses in the research process and in the nature of disciplines. The first central difference between the two is the difference between the research topic and the research question.

FIRST TRANSFORMATION
THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE ITSELF
OR
WHAT IS AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH QUESTION?

Students begin by reading the interviews with one or two of the faculty you have heard, and so they search for topics against the background of Julia Allen Jones' voice saying that research means being in the middle of something you don't understand, against the urging of Jeffrey Russell to choose something of personal interest, a voice which exhoes Lili Velez's finding (from the first presentation) that people become engaged only in issues they find important. These course stress taking issues of personal concern and translating them into disciplinary terms. However, students often also have strong positions on such topics, and to move from what Michael Klein[1] has called the position of the gatherer of information to the hunter for answers, students must begin with a question or problem, not a position. This transition is difficult for them, and here the writing forms of the inquiry process help students make the transition. OVERHEAD A formal grant proposal asks for a Statement of the Problem for a study, not a position for a paper. This overhead shows how two fairly typical student topics become transformed because of the demands of the form itself.

[OVERHEAD]

Thesis: Affirmative Action should be abolished in California.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to analyze the social forces surrounding the current debate in California on Affirmative Action.

Thesis: California should be tougher on crime.

Statement of Problem.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of incarceration and to determine whether it is achieving the desired ends for which it was originally constructed.

The examples make clear, I think, that academic questions are "What's going on here questions, or "Why?" questions. Students do not find this shift easy; we have schooled them well in developing arguments -- starting with a personal belief and supporting it.

SECOND TRANSFORMATION
THE NATURE OF QUESTION DRIVEN LIBRARY RESEARCH

Furthermore, going to the library to explore the unknown is very different that going to look up arguments on a thesis. First of all, they must decide what field or fields might address their problem and how any particular field would frame the question. Students divide up into groups to discuss possible fields and possible ways those fields would ask a question with this grid to help. How will studying prejudice in legal institutions differ from studying it as an in group out-group behavior or an individual psychological condition. [OVERHEAD] The message here is that research is field specific. Students must come up with possible fields and explore the encyclopedias of those fields for the concepts and terms that will shape the study and debate on that issue in that field. Then they are ready to embark on their library research.

Once in the field, the voices of researchers model the experience. A political science professor describes it as a

narrow shaft that opens out at the bottom. A history professor follows the idea of evil through time, religion, mythology, and psychology as well as history.

> I'm trying to integrate two fields [within Social Psychology] that don't really talk to each other.
>
> --Diane Mackie, Psychology.
>
> To be at the cutting edge of your profession sometimes means taking a hard look at the accepted truths of your field.
>
> -- N. Chagnon, Anthropology.
>
> Scientific discoveries are often syntheses of already existing ideas that are just put together and arranged in a slightly different or unique way.
>
> -- Napoleon Chagnon

As students embark on this journey, their voices will echo those above in interesting ways. One, for example, became frustrated with researching the family in sociology -- asked what she wanted, she replied that she wanted to know where family began, whether it had always been -- her questions were those of an anthropologist, not a sociologyist.

Also, the product of this research is a Bibliographic essay or a literature review --not term paper. Again the difference of form produces difference in thinking; they are searching for conversations among scholars on their issue,

for what is agreed on, what is being debated -- not what answer is, not arguments for their pre-existing position. It isn't the end of anything; its goal to produce new research questions for next stage -- their research project.

Here is the voice of a student freewriting on the experience of such research at the end of the bibliographic essay unit. Her original question was on the effect of loss of culture (Native American) on self esteem and identity:

> *"The issues have shift slightly, not the issues, so much as the perspective (attitude may be a better word) with which they are viewed. After the paper's completion I find that I can discuss the topics from a different and more educated viewpoint than the paper itself was actually written. ... I could connect more sources and the questions I asked/answered would vary greatly from the original. Woulda, should, could. But that's neither her nor there.*
>
> *I believe there is much room for psychological analysis and interpretation into the topic I have chosen. If I had taken this method of research (identity of culture) the research would have been very different, but the outcome? How different would that have been?"*

As she moved to the next stage of her project, the Study Proposal form asked (demanded if you like) that she reformulate that problem. Here is what she produced:

[OVERHEAD]

Statement of Problem:

The purpose of this study is to test the hypothesis that the traditions of a culture do not die, but evolve curiously to survive in the ever-changing social structure. Literature suggests that the Native American culture has not died, but that the oppression or lack of acceptance the ethnicity received by the dominant culture allowed the Native American culture to re-shape, forced it to redefine its traditions and terms it was living by, parameters it was living within, in order to survive the negative repercussions received from the dominant culture. Thus, the resurgence of the culture and new recognition by the dominant society makes it possible for the NA culture to further develop traditions which were changed earlier and are now being further defined for its new place in society.

Here is another student, a political science major who wanted to research the "cult of personality" -- the emergence and success of such political leaders as Hitler and Stalin:

> *"Right now I feel pretty frustrated with my research because I couldn't find enough information on it. I feel like some of the information I ended up using didn't address the 'cult of personality' but rather authoritarianism or something along similar lines. Not enough has been done on my specific topic -- so I tried*

to draw together all I could that I thought pertained, but I might have been off-track. When I pulled it all together, I felt like some of the theories I was trying to compare didn't address exactly the same type of leader -- because one said 'tyrannical leader' and another said 'authoritarian dictator.' I guess now I should narrow down exactly what I am trying to question -- and decide what I can conclude a 'cult of personality' leader is -- what category he fits into, so I know exactly what information I feel secure comparing. I also think I need to narrow down what I want to find out. Instead of 'everything about it' I have to decide on one angle and stick with it."

When she reformulated her question, however, she had identified her problem differently:

[OVERHEAD]

Statement of Problem

In exploring the phenomenon of 'the cult of 'personality' or dictatorial rule, it is obvious that there is a lack of interdisciplinary study on the subject. Instead, various disciplines address different facets of the topic. The social psychologists look at the personality of the ruler and how that interacts with the public, as well as the social conformity that allows such a ruler to take power. The political scientists are interest in the phenomena of

power and the individual, whereas the historian addresses the question of how conducive the environment is to this kind of leader. Thus, there isn't a coherent analysis which takes all of the various disciplines together in an attempt to explain the phenomenon.

This student has discovered the difference between disciplines from the inside, and such discoveries are not at all unusual. Further, these are the voices of researchers in process.

THIRD TRANSFORMATION
METHODOLOGY

As soon as such questions are reformulated the student confronts methodology, and the method chosen will once again change and reform the formulation of the research question. Here the choice of method will reformulate the question. They must decide whether to engage in quantitative or qualitative studies, field studies (observation studies, surveys, experiments) or in-depth interviews. They work in groups again, talking again, to discover what each of a variety of methods will yield.

Actually engaging in such research demands that students internalize the methodologies they have already studied in their various majors. Students in Women's Studies, for

example, have learned that a specific methodological tool is 'emancipatory,' but what does that mean? What restraints are they being freed from and what do they gain? Lose?

We will concentrate here only on the in-depth interview method, because it is in this domain that students engage with professors, practitioners, and the public, producing a new set of interdisciplinary interactions. Also, it is a social science method commonly used for initial exploration of a topic -- a method that identifies the important forces or factors, not one that produces generalization. As such it become the appropriate method for students just beginning exploration of an issue.

Students first evaluate first whether they want a theoretician's, a practitioner's or a subject's point of view, the kind of knowledge each perspective will produce. Once they have decided that, they practice on each other to develop the skill needed to let the respondent frame the issue, speak their mind with the minimum of interference from the researcher. Students have successfully interviewed professors of all fields, therapists, social workers, teachers, firefighters, prison guards, dancers, musicians, artists, doctors, businessmen, lawyers, judges, and campaign managers, and candidates. The results are frequently unexpected, but almost universally rewarding.

In the field, they discover what Lily has already talked about -- that research is messy, requires all manner of problematic decisions and interpretations, on the spot revisions. Now is the time to remind them that the chief function of research is to provide better questions, better methods for more research -- not final answers. When they return to write their reports, the form of those reports will be determined by the method of the research -- not be any universal paper format. The relationship of the form to the assumptions and standards of the community is the topic of a paper in itself, so I will leave that for another time. The central point of this paper is the importance of other voices to us and our students, and our importance to them -- so I would like to close with the voices of a student interviewer and a Political Science professor:

"Before the interview with Dr. X, I had a certain plan, or rather strategy, prepared in advance. ...However, when I started interviewing Dr. X, the whole strategy somehow appeared irrelevant and I came up with new questions.

(From Interview) Dr. X was somewhat reluctant to be interviewed, because he didn't think he could be very helpful for my research. What bothered him was exactly the topic - the role of imagination in political science. He was quick to point out that some of his colleagues in the social sciences would indeed be offended by the very notion

of placing imagination with the scope of social science. He said that imagination conveyed linguistically the meanings of fabricating, even falsifying, along with its other meanings. Probably this broad semantic definition of the faculty of imagination made the social scientist uncomfortable with it.

In the social science, he went on to explain, everything is supposedly based on hard-core empiricism. ...Empiricism and induction are believed to be the cornerstone. It is understandable why imagination is not welcome in this framework...However, Dr. X pointed out that it may be possible that most of the scientific thought is deductive. We may have a pre-conceived notion of the emerging pattern or theory out of the statistical data. It is very often the case that the questions predetermine the answers....

This led us to the topic of imagination and its possible definitions with respect to social science. It is very important how we define imagination. Dr. X pointed out that it can be judgment, creative thinking, pre-conceived notions, empathy, etc. He suggested that imagination can be viewed even as understanding. The significance of the semantic analysis of imagination is that it affects its scope and extent in social science...

Dr. X claimed that imagination is time-bound as well as place bound. It may be encouraged or inhibited by certain "vogues," and the time and place may define the type of imagination. ...

Even if we accept the importance of imagination, Pro. X asserted that we much also recognize its academic borders. There are limits to the use of imagination in an academic research or theory. He also suggest that there are certain ways of using and exhibiting imagination in social science which are definitely very different from those characteristic of the arts and literature. He said that imagination may appear in very subtle ways and not necessarily be explicit. Of course, it would be inadmissible for a social scientist to "imagine" a statistical datum, but it is perfectly acceptable to arrange the statistical facts in a creative way. Imagination in social science has to do with the way facts are put together; it relates to form. ...How you tell a story, said Dr. X is already pre-determines the story itself.

And finally, the voice on the anthropology professor:
What I think ultimately that I do, and I don't like to admit this, is use both the philosophy of art and the philosophy of science to render the external world intelligible.

--Napoleon Chagnon

[1] [1]("What is It we Do When We Write Articles Like This One -- and How can We Get Students to Join Us?" The Writing Instructor, Spring/Summer 1987.

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Printed Name/Position/Title: JUDITH M. KIRSCHT, LECTURER

Organization/Address: WRITING PROGRAM, Univ. of CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA, SANTA BARBARA CA 93106

Telephone: (805) 893-8329

FAX: (805) 893-7699

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