

Book Reviews

The authors fail, however, to consider that complexity is *itself* likely to have an underlying basis in cognitive traits. I refer not to general intelligence or “g,” but rather specific reasoning-related abilities that I believe based on my reading of the *Talented Teenagers* may be the root “primary” abilities that facilitate learning cognitive skills supportive of either differentiation or integration. Although Csikszentmihalyi et al. acknowledge the intellectual roots of such reasoning systems in William James’ writings (in their discussion of his “sister passions,” p. 257), they nevertheless fail to update and relate these constructs to present-day trait-based approaches to reasoning abilities. However, there is now substantial evidence that there exist two systems of reasoning (Slovan, 1996, who also cited James’ discussion of the two systems) for which there exist indicators in readily available cognitive test batteries (e.g., the *Ball Aptitude Battery*; The Ball Foundation, 1995). More generally, I remain unconvinced on the basis of the research reported in the book that aptitudes are not one of the major factors affecting the talent development of adolescents, including gifted ones.

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VICTOR VILLANUEVA, JR. (EDITOR). *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A reader*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English (1997). 786 pp. US\$34.95 (NCTE members US\$24.95). ISBN 0-8141-0809-1.

This long overdue book is a compilation of greatest hits from the young discipline of composition studies. The 41 essays it contains chart the chronological and intellectual growth of the discipline from its birth roughly 30 years ago to the present. The editor of the collection, Victor Villanueva, claims a modest readership in his Preface, limiting the audience to teachers and students of writing. However, although the book has clearly been prepared with a graduate composition course in

mind, it deserves far wider attention, because under its surface discussion of composition theory and pedagogy lie all the currents and conflicts of contemporary education.

Historians of the discipline generally locate the origins of composition studies in the mid-1960s, when the attention of writing teachers and researchers turned from the product of writing, that is, the words on the page, to the linguistic, intellectual, and social processes that shape the physical text. By expanding the focus of their study beyond the printed page, those first compositionists opened a whole new world of inquiry. Initially, the expanded focus shone most brightly on the writer, and early work sought to understand the creative and cognitive forces at work in the effective writer and to teach neophytes how to replicate that successful process. But increasingly, as the pervasive cultural influence of writing was recognized, the purview of the field widened, and it is now difficult to locate the outer limits of composition. The essays in *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* describe that evolution, from Donald Murray's plea to "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product," to James Berlin's claim, in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," that the proper focus of the composition classroom is the relationship between writing and ideology.

The book is organized into six sections. The first, with essays by Emig, Perl, Sommers, and others, addresses what Villanueva calls a "given" in composition studies: that writing is a process. The second section explores the philosophical, rhetorical, and linguistic nature of the written product in contributions from Kinneavy, D'Angelo, Britton, Braddock, and others. Section Three advances the claims for and critiques of a cognitive theory of writing, with key essays by Flower and Hayes, Lunsford, Shaughnessy, Bizzell, Berthoff, and Rose. In the fourth section, Bruffee, Myers, Trimbur, and Schuster focus on writing in society. Section Five covers a wide range of topics that Villanueva collects under the heading "Talking about Selves and Schools: On Voice, Voices, and Other Voices"; reprinted here is the debate between Elbow and Bartholomae of the teaching of academic discourse, as well as important essays on gender and composition (Flynn and Brodkey) and pedagogy and power. The last section contains essays by Berlin, Flower, Bizzell, and Ohmann that consider the social and political implications of composition.

Reading the essays brought back to me the excitement and sense of purpose I felt when I first came upon them in such journals as *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*. There is in many of the early essays a tone of sincere and profound conviction that students, through writing, will find themselves and their place in the

world, and once out there will use writing to change that world for the better. As one reads through the book, the discipline's growing political awareness complicates that naive belief, and later essays situate students, teachers, and schools within intricate webs of culture and ideology. Nonetheless, even the most sophisticated recent essays included here are hopeful and inspirational, and should fill the teacher and student of writing with a sense of the importance of their work.

Readers from outside composition will recognize in this book the local manifestation of issues that have affected all of education over the past three decades: concerns about textual and cultural literacy, the relative value of direct and indirect instruction, the relationship between product and process, the precise nature of the "basics," and the influence of race, gender, and class on classroom life. In addition, as a case study in the birth of a discipline, the book captures the intellectual evolution of composition as it moved from its position as poor cousin to literacy studies and province of remedial or "bonehead" English to a full-fledged academic discipline, with international associations and conferences, dozens of journals, university department status, and a healthy publishing industry.

I hate to do this to a book that I feel is so valuable, but I do have some quibbles. In a brief Preface and even briefer introductions to each section, Villanueva offers a commentary that seeks to contextualize the essays and link them into something resembling a coherent pattern of disciplinary development. Unfortunately, some of the sections achieve coherence only by virtue of headings that are so vague they could quite comfortably contain almost anything. And I think the book would profit from fewer essays and more commentary explaining the larger intellectual, educational, and political issues and trends that contextualize the essays and more discussion of the relationships and tensions between and among essays. Finally, there are gaps in the book, some acknowledged, others not. Villanueva justifies the absence of essays on evaluation and writing across the curriculum by saying that the book is comprehensive, not complete. Fair enough, and those topics come up directly and indirectly in some of the essays included, but a more serious omission is the complete lack of attention to workplace writing.

Having muttered my few reservations about the book, however, I need to be clear again in my praise. There are other collections that seek to capture the scope of composition, but none as ambitious, as thorough, or as important as *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*. It deserves wide reading.

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