Rhetorical Reading and the Development of Disciplinary Literacy Across the High School Curriculum

James E. Warren, University of Texas at Arlington

Abstract: Education researchers and literacy specialists have responded to declining reading scores among high school students by calling on teachers across subject areas to teach "disciplinary literacy," which introduces students to the ways discipline-specific knowledge is produced and communicated and teaches students to apply different reading strategies depending on the discipline from which a text originates. Disciplinary literacy programs have the potential to raise reading achievement among high school students, but they put English Language Arts (ELA) teachers in a paradoxical position: on the one hand, ELA teachers are discouraged from teaching general reading strategies that fail to account for discipline-specific text features, but on the other hand, ELA teachers are discouraged from teaching the discourse conventions of math, science, history, and social studies because they lack the specialized knowledge of teachers in those subjects. This paper proposes that "rhetorical reading," a construct that sparked a flurry of CAC studies some twenty years ago but that never influenced high school instruction, could be the solution to this impasse. Rhetorical reading is a strategy common to all academic disciplines but by its very nature demands discipline-specific adaptations when applied to specific subject areas.

Those of us who help train future English Language Arts (ELA) teachers are often frustrated by the isolation of English instruction in high schools. Generally considered a discrete subject area, ELA has rarely influenced literacy practices in other subject areas such as math, science, or social studies. This situation may be changing with the emergence of "disciplinary literacy," a term coined recently by education researchers and literacy specialists (e.g., Lee & Spratley, 2010; Moje, 2008; NCTE, 2011; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008) to describe programs that introduce students to the ways discipline-specific knowledge is produced and communicated and teach students to apply different reading strategies depending on the academic discipline from which a text originates. Disciplinary literacy programs have taken off in recent years, and their influence can even be found in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which not only require literacy instruction across content areas but also recommend that this instruction account for the discipline-specific nature of academic texts. For example, the math standards ask students to "construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others" (2010b, p. 6), whereas the science standards expect students to "analyze the author's purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text" (2010a, p. 62). The history/social studies standards call for students to "evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and

Across the Disciplines wac.colostate.edu/atd
A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing ISSN 554-8244
DOI: https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2013.10.1.01

evidence" (p. 61), while the literature standards require students to "analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text … contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact" (p. 38).

Despite this building momentum for disciplinary literacy, ELA teachers will find themselves in a paradoxical situation as high school curricula shift toward disciplinary literacy: on the one hand, they will be discouraged from teaching general reading strategies that fail to account for discipline-specific text features; on the other hand, they will be discouraged from teaching the discourse conventions of math, science, history, and social studies because they lack the specialized knowledge of teachers in those subjects. This might not be a problem if ELA were thought of as just another content area, but ELA teachers in most high schools are considered the "language people," those responsible for teaching communication across disciplines. What ELA teachers need, then, are reading strategies that are common to all academic disciplines but that by their very nature demand discipline-specific adaptations when applied to a specific subject area. Rhetorical reading is one such strategy.

Many CAC scholars will recall "rhetorical reading" as a term introduced by Christina Haas and Linda Flower (1988) that motivated subsequent research by scholars such as Davida Charney (1993), Cheryl Geisler (1994), Ann Penrose (1994), Richard Haswell (1999), and Haas (1994) herself. Rhetorical reading is a metacognitive process in which the reader constructs a conceptual frame that includes the author's identity, his or her purpose, the discursive and situational context to which the text is responding, and the intended audience. Advocates of rhetorical reading contrast it with "the ideal of the autonomous text," which holds that meaning is fully explicit in the words on the page, equally available to all competent readers regardless of their historical moment or background knowledge. CAC scholars twenty years ago argued that teaching rhetorical reading strategies to college students could help displace notions of textual autonomy acquired in elementary and secondary school, but this research never influenced high school reading instruction. Now that the concept of disciplinary literacy has gained traction among secondary literacy researchers, the time is ripe for CAC researchers to revive the concept of rhetorical reading for a new audience: ELA teachers. Introducing this concept to ELA teachers would usefully complicate the ideal of the autonomous text, which remains a dominant paradigm in secondary education.

The Myth of the Autonomous Text

Before I discuss the relationship between rhetorical reading and the development of disciplinary literacy, I first need to describe the main textual obstacle to CAC practice in high schools: the ideal of the autonomous text. David Olson (1977) coined the term "autonomous text" to refer to a textual ideal in which meaning is represented fully and explicitly by the words on the page, thus requiring no extra-textual knowledge on the part of readers. As I argue in this section, most secondary students believe in the ideal of the autonomous text, and this belief hinders the development of skills essential to disciplinary literacy.

In tracing the origin of the autonomous text, Olson (1977) describes how oral "utterances"—with their reliance on the wide range of contextual cues available in face-to-face encounters—were transformed into increasingly explicit written "texts." Olson notes that oral traditions did not assume that meaning was "in" the text. Rather, oral literature such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was laced with mnemonic devices whose main purpose was to aid the memory of the speaker, not to convey explicit meaning. Also, due to the limits of memory, speakers had to rely on contextual clues (e.g., visual cues, gestures, intonation) and the prior knowledge of audiences to bring out the full meaning of oral texts. With the development of writing, oral statements could be stored as permanent artifacts, but the first

written texts were far from autonomous: because early pictographic, phonetic, and syllabic systems did not attempt to replicate the sound patterns of speech, they could not be mapped onto spoken language exactly. It was not until the Greeks' refinement of a phonetic alphabet that writing could finally represent speech more or less exactly, but even then written texts did not immediately shed all the conventions of the oral tradition. The construction of fully explicit texts required not only semiotic innovations but also conscious efforts to eliminate implicit premises and the potential for idiosyncratic interpretations. Such explicitness emerged, according to Olson, from two main developments: the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century and the essayist technique adopted by the Royal Society of London in the seventeenth century. Because printing made texts available to wider, more diverse audiences, it became less plausible to assume that readers would share contexts and prior knowledge. Thus, the need for greater explicitness became imperative. Later, members of the Royal Society of London came to view writing as a method for establishing and consolidating objective scientific knowledge. They advocated a fully explicit style in order to preserve scientific knowledge and make it equally available to all readers for all time. This technique, which Olson argues still characterizes scientific writing in particular and academic writing more generally, charged writers with making textual meaning fully explicit and required readers to determine meaning through logical analysis of words on the page.

Although Olson (1977) traces the historical development of the ideal of the autonomous text, he does not address the question of whether textual autonomy is theoretically possible. CAC researchers, however, have argued that the autonomous text is an impossible ideal even for scientists. For example, in a piece significantly titled "The Myth of the Autonomous Text," Cazden (1989) analyzes both seventeenth-century scientific texts from the Royal Society and Watson and Crick's 1953 report on the structure of DNA. She demonstrates that all these texts rely on metaphor and intertextual references, presume significant prior knowledge on the part of the reader, and draw on shared assumptions between writer and reader. Though from a certain vantage point texts may *seem* autonomous, Cazden argues that "what is said or written is only explicit with reference to, and in relationship to, what is unsaid and unwritten but presupposed about the audience" (p. 116). In other words, even texts intended to be autonomous are geared toward specific audiences and require rhetorical reading skills for adequate comprehension. Similarly, Geisler (1994) reviews the research on the writing and reading practices of scientists and concludes that the autonomous text remains "a driving myth, the paradigmatic accomplishment toward which scientists strive" (p. 26). Geisler describes a sort of rhetorical game scientists play in which writers transform the rich contexts of scientific inquiry into decontextualized texts, only to have readers attempt to reconstruct the specific circumstances of those inquiries (e.g., lab conditions, methodological techniques, biases of particular researchers, etc.). This game works for scientists because the writers and readers of scientific texts are the same people: the scientist who attempts to construct autonomous texts in her role as writer actively *de*constructs colleagues' texts in her role as reader. We can conclude, then, that scientists are aware (even if only unconsciously) that the autonomous text is indeed a myth, and this rhetorical savvy allows scientists to read and write (pseudo) autonomous texts effectively.

The autonomous text may function as a useful fiction for scientists, but it poses a problem for adolescent readers who are unaware that the autonomous text *is* a myth. Several researchers (e.g., Armbruster, 1984; Beck, McKeown, Sinatra, & Loxterman, 1991; Davison & Kantor, 1982; Geisler, 1994; Haas, 1994; Olson, 1981) have observed that texts designed to teach academic content in elementary and secondary schools attempt to realize the ideal of the autonomous text. As Olson puts it, these texts present "the authorized version of society's valid knowledge" (p. 108) in language that seems "to originate in a transcendental source" (p. 109). Because scientists are intimately familiar with the process of constructing texts that suppress contextual information, they are well-positioned

to read the work of colleagues with an eye toward what is *not* mentioned: the broader contexts of scientific inquiry. Students, on the other hand, do not write the same type of academic texts they read. They may understand that the written artifacts they produce for school, when read in isolation, give little indication of the broader contexts of their production ("The teacher can't tell I pulled an all-nighter!"). But students have no reason to believe that the same applies to the "official" academic texts they read. Instead, the discursive features of these texts encourage students to treat them "as the fully explicit source for academic knowledge" (Geisler, p. 33).

In summary, I am making three important claims in this section. First, the cultural ideal of the autonomous text is, of course, a myth: all texts presume extensive prior knowledge on the part of readers and require rhetorical reading skills for interpretation. Second, the myth of the autonomous text poses little problem for practicing scientists (and more generally, academics across disciplines) because, at least on some level, they understand that it is a myth. Academics draw on extensive content knowledge when they read, and they understand how academic texts function because they occupy the dual role of reader and writer. Put another way, expert academic reading *is* rhetorical reading. Third, students are not equipped to read rhetorically because they are unfamiliar with the processes by which academic texts are produced and are denied the sort of contextual knowledge on which academics depend.

The Autonomous Text, Content Area Literacy, and Disciplinary Literacy

Having addressed the influence of the myth of the autonomous text on school texts, I now want to describe how elementary and secondary students are taught to read such texts. Reading research in the past thirty years (e.g., Bean & Steenwyck, 1984; Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997; Berger, 1989; Bulgren, Deshler, Schumaker, & Lenz, 2000; Bulgren, Deshler, Lenz, & Marquis, 2002; Chi, de Leeuw, Chiu, & La Vancher, 1994; Commander & Smith, 1996; Kingery, 2000; Paris & Oka, 1989; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996) has demonstrated that certain general, metacognitive strategies increase comprehension and recall of school texts for elementary and struggling secondary students. Currently pre-service ELA teachers are trained to use tools such as double entry journals, graphic organizers, and anticipation guides that teach students to activate prior knowledge, set goals, make and test predictions, monitor comprehension, re-read, summarize, etc. These tools appear to be effective because, according to the U.S. Department of Education, reading achievement among elementary school students has improved markedly over the past twenty years and ranks high internationally (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005; Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005).

Separate, explicit reading instruction has rarely extended past elementary school, though, perhaps due to the widespread assumption that "basic reading skills automatically evolve into more advanced reading skills" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p. 40). This assumption has not been borne out by data, however. Beginning around eighth grade, reading scores among U.S. students plateau, and by the time these students graduate from high school, they perform worse on reading assessments than their counterparts twenty years ago and fall into the bottom half of international rankings (Grigg, Donahue, & Dion, 2007). A recent policy brief by NCTE (2011) summarizes the situation bluntly: "Fourth graders in the U.S. score among the highest in the world on literacy assessments, but by tenth grade the same students score among the lowest" (p. 15). To address flagging reading scores among secondary students, in the 1990s a number of state and national policy initiatives (e.g., the U.S. Department of Education's "Striving Readers" program) attempted to make "every teacher a teacher of reading" by incorporating reading instruction into subject area classes like math, science, social

studies, and history. The predominant approach of such "content area literacy" programs was for subject area teachers to reiterate the general comprehension strategies taught in elementary school, but with students applying these strategies to the increasingly complex, subject-specific texts they read in high school.

Content area literacy programs have proven grossly unpopular and ineffective for two interrelated reasons. First, they reinforce the myth of the autonomous text by suggesting that all academic texts are essentially the same, that texts possess inherent meaning that can be extracted with the right all-purpose strategy. But however helpful general strategies may be in facilitating basic comprehension and recall, secondary students are asked to do more with autonomous academic texts than simply comprehend them on a basic level. High school students must analyze abstract concepts, synthesize information within and between texts, evaluate claims and evidence, and produce a variety of written responses that do more than simply demonstrate learning (Lee & Spratley, 2010; Moje, 2008, 2011; NCTE, 2011; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012). In other words, as high school students progress toward graduation they must begin to read school texts more and more like academic experts. Second, subject area teachers are reluctant to teach reading comprehension because they feel ill-prepared to do so and because they believe it takes time away from content instruction (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Lesley, Watson, & Elliot, 2007; Moje, 1996, 2008; O'Brien & Stewart, 1990; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Reehm & Long, 1996; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012; Simonson, 1995). I say these two reasons are interrelated because a focus on general reading strategies makes literacy seem separate from content. Consequently, subject area teachers see time spent on reading comprehension as time spent away from the content knowledge they are trained to teach.

To more fully integrate literacy and content learning, in recent years literacy specialists have developed an approach to content area literacy known as "disciplinary literacy." Disciplinary literacy programs foreground the different discourse conventions among academic disciplines and expose the myth of the autonomous text in the process. Rather than focus on general-purpose reading strategies, disciplinary literacy programs teach students the "norms of practice for producing and communicating knowledge in the disciplines" (Moje, 2008, p. 100). Students learn how disciplinary experts read and write texts in their field and "how the disciplines are different from one another, how acts of inquiry produce knowledge and multiple representational forms (such as texts written in particular ways or with different symbolic systems or semiotic tools), as well as how those disciplinary differences are socially constructed" (Moje, 2008, p. 103). By showing how academic texts are deeply situated in disciplinary contexts and how they embody discipline-specific social practices and epistemological assumptions, disciplinary literacy gives lie to the notion that all academic texts are essentially the same. Once it becomes apparent that disciplines differ not just in their subject matter but also in their textual practices, it becomes difficult to sustain the notion that academic texts are fully explicit, their meaning equally available to all competent readers.

Early research indicates that content area teachers are much more receptive to disciplinary literacy programs than content area literacy programs because "someone who aspires to be a science or mathematics teacher is much more interested in replicating what science or math educators usually do rather than appropriating routines from reading education" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012, p. 14). Also, the first empirical studies of disciplinary literacy programs (De La Paz & Felton, 2010; Greenleaf et al., 2011) have produced impressive results in the areas of reading achievement and content knowledge. The building momentum for disciplinary literacy is reflected in the fact that the two most influential policy-making organizations in ELA have endorsed this approach. The National Council of Teachers of English published a policy research brief in 2011 calling for expanded disciplinary literacy instruction, and, as mentioned earlier, the CCSS require teachers in math, science, social

studies/history, and ELA to teach reading strategies that are tailored to their respective content areas.

The emergence of disciplinary literacy is a welcome pedagogical trend for future ELA teachers because it distributes responsibility for literacy instruction among teachers in all content areas. No longer would the ELA teacher be solely responsible for teaching students how to read everything from a statistical report to a scientific article to the U.S. Constitution. However, despite the superiority of disciplinary literacy programs, content area literacy—and its reliance on the autonomous text—does offer one clear advantage for ELA teachers: a more clearly defined role, albeit a role that makes nearly impossible demands. After all, if academic texts require no specialized disciplinary knowledge but instead simply require the right comprehension strategy to unlock their inherent meaning, then ELA teachers with expertise in comprehension strategies become the most important literacy specialists on campus. Not only can ELA teachers teach students these reading strategies but also they can train subject area colleagues in how to teach them. But in disciplinary literacy programs that depend on the specialized knowledge of subject matter teachers, the role of ELA teachers threatens to dwindle to teaching the discipline-specific reading practices of literary scholars. Even if ELA teachers were content with this more limited role, the fact is that they are generally charged with much more: teaching literacy *per se*. There is a danger, then, that ELA teachers, despite the unrealistic demands of staying in role that makes them responsible for all ELA learning, will revert to general reading strategies, thus reinforcing the presumption of textual autonomy these strategies entail, unless they are equipped with authentic disciplinary reading practices that are applicable across disciplines and customizable to specific disciplinary practices.

Rhetorical Reading as a Gateway to Disciplinary Literacy

In their original study of rhetorical reading, Haas and Flower (1988) asked college freshmen and graduate students to read and make sense of an excerpt from an educational psychology textbook minus any information about the text's author, purpose, topic, or intended audience. The freshmen paid careful attention to the text itself, summarizing content as it was explicitly stated and attempting to "bank" as much information from the text as possible. The graduate students also read the text itself closely, but in contrast to the freshmen, they used textual and contextual clues to construct a representation of the author and her purpose, the larger world of discourse in which the text was participating, the intended audience, and the actual effects the text would have on readers. In other words, they constructed a representation of the text as a genuine rhetorical act. As a result of this practice, graduate students recognized and assimilated more of the author's claims, earlier in the reading process, than did freshmen. Haas and Flower won the Richard Braddock award for the outstanding article in *College Composition and Communication* in 1989, and their article sparked a flurry of CAC studies that used the construct of rhetorical reading to compare faculty with graduate students in evolutionary biology (Charney, 1993), a graduate student in philosophy with a college freshman (Geisler, 1994; Penrose & Geisler, 1994), a biology major's freshman year with her senior year (Haas, 1994), and, in a replication of Haas and Flower's original study, graduate students from different disciplines with college freshman (Haswell, 1999). All these studies found that more experienced readers constructed richer rhetorical frames for texts than did less experienced readers, and these frames facilitated deeper comprehension and more critical analysis.

Rhetorical reading may serve as a catalyst for campus-wide disciplinary literacy programs in high schools or, in the absence of such collaborations, as a solid foundation for the indirect, "natural" development of disciplinary literacy. One reason rhetorical reading fits so well into disciplinary literacy programs is that it is not so much a content area "strategy" as it is a disciplinary "practice." I am borrowing the distinction between "strategies" and "practices" from Moje (2008), who clarifies

that general reading strategies are analogous to tools—they may aid in the acquisition of knowledge, but they do not *constitute* aspects of that knowledge (Moje & Speyer, 2008). For example, a common strategy in content area literacy programs is the use of KWL tables, in which students record what they "**k**now" about a topic, what they "**w**ant" to learn from a text, and what they "**l**earned" after reading. KWL tables may aid comprehension of a difficult text in, say, biology, but biologists do not use KWL charts as part of their work in biology. It might be argued that biologists have automated a sort of KWL process and thus this strategy is a valid disciplinary habit, but KWL tables, like most general reading strategies that characterize content area literacy, were developed by reading researchers to facilitate comprehension and recall among beginning readers (Ogle, 1986). In other words, KWL tables were not developed inductively based on observations of expert readers and were never intended to simulate a habit of experts.

In contrast to strategies, practices are more like habits—routine activities that are essential components of an area of knowledge. A practice of biologists, for example, is to read disciplinary texts selectively and nonlinearly (Charney, 1993). Rhetorical reading appears to be a universal practice among disciplinary experts, as it has been observed in studies of physicists (Bazerman, 1985), lawyers (Lundeberg, 1987), historians (Wineburg, 1991), literary scholars (Graves & Frederiksen, 1991), biologists (Charney, 1993), social scientists (Wyatt et al., 1993), and philosophers (Geisler, 1994). This universality notwithstanding, rhetorical reading by its nature is adaptable to discipline-specific conventions. For example, historians tend to account for political bias in their representations of authors (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Physicists, on the other hand, are not concerned with authors' political biases, but they carefully consider their methodological biases (Bazerman, 1985). The commonality here is that, in contrast to most students, neither historians nor physicists focus exclusively on the text with little regard for the source.

Can high school students learn to read rhetorically through explicit instruction, or is this a practice that must develop over time? An answer emerges from recent research into successful disciplinary literacy programs, which appear to facilitate rhetorical reading practices, even though this is not their explicit aim. For example, a successful apprenticeship program integrating literacy and biology instruction taught students to consider what motivates science writers and the "discourse rules" they choose (Greenleaf, et al., 2011); to investigate "related texts and topics" that form the discursive and situational contexts for texts that are read (p. 657); and to think about the audience for science texts and "why people read science materials in the ways they do" (p. 657). Similarly, after completing a program in "thinking like a historian," students began to think of historians as arbiters of the past, to consider the multiple contexts that influence interpretations of historical events, and to analyze the ways scholarly audiences filter the inevitable biases of historical writing (Hynd, Holschuh, & Hubbard, 2004). Neither of these programs used the term "rhetorical reading" to describe the practices they aimed to instill, but, as these examples indicate, participants began to read rhetorically as part of their development of disciplinary literacy. These results are significant not only because they demonstrate that rhetorical reading is an essential component of disciplinary literacy but also because they suggest that the development of expert reading practices can be accelerated through explicit instruction. We know from reading research that rhetorical reading is a universal habit of academic experts that seems to develop "naturally" as one is socialized into an academic discipline, and it would be foolish to think that we can replicate this process in the classroom. But this observation can lead to passivity among English instructors, to a feeling that rhetorical reading and disciplinary literacy "will happen or it won't, with or without us." Early research on disciplinary literacy programs indicates that we can do more than sit back and wait.

Another legitimate question—the elephant in the room of contemporary high school education—is whether rhetorical reading squares with what students need to know to succeed on standardized

tests. Unfortunately, current standardized tests of reading epitomize the myth of the autonomous text. Consider, for example, the AP English Language exam, which can exempt students from first-year rhetoric and writing courses at most colleges and universities. This exam requires students to read passages and answer multiple choice or essay questions based on these passages. Students do not know in advance who authored the passages, so they cannot investigate the writer's life, body of work, political views, values, historical and cultural context, etc. The exam itself provides, at most, a few sentences about the author (some passages on the AP exam fail to include even the author's name!). Similarly, students do not know the topics of passages ahead of time, so they cannot develop topic knowledge or learn what others have written about a topic. Finally, students are not informed of the real or intended audiences for the passages, so they cannot determine how the passage appeals (or fails to appeal) to readers. Absent any rhetorical context for passages, these exams can only test students on "the words on the page," the intrinsic properties of an isolated text. This might appear to make rhetorical reading irrelevant, but it is precisely in situations like those on a standardized test—when readers lack contextual information—that rhetorical reading may be most valuable. Recall that the graduate students in Haas and Flower's original study coped with the absence of contextual clues by constructing a hypothetical rhetorical frame for the text. The undergraduates, on the other hand, limited themselves to the words in front of them, and as a result had difficulty recognizing the author's claims. In other words, rhetorical reading may very well be an effective test-taking strategy.

Furthermore, students may benefit from reading standardized tests themselves—not just the passages in them—as rhetorical acts. In many ways large-scale assessments exemplify the myth of the autonomous text. Bearing the stamp of some state or federal agency, with no authors' names listed, standardized tests can seem un-authored, as if test questions were simply plucked from the ether. But teachers can help demystify these documents, and thus give students a measure of agency, by pointing out that they are written by specific human beings, using humanly-constructed assessment methods, with a clear purpose in mind: to measure what students know and what they can do. Such demystification is particularly important for the one section of these tests that, at least for the time being, is scored by human beings: writing. Students should know that they are writing for an audience of educators that is not particularly interested in what they have to say, but rather in rating their essays accurately according to highly standardized, specific criteria. Teachers can make the scoring rubrics an object of instruction so that students gain a clear sense of audience expectations. Reviewing several model responses from prior exams can familiarize students with the writerly persona they need to project, the style they need to adopt, and the content they need to cover. Although on its face this may seem like the worst kind of "teaching to the test," in fact it exemplifies the sort of rhetorical analysis that students should apply to any writing task. In fact, when taken too far, an aversion to teaching to standardized tests can reify them as autonomous texts. Unless students learn to read standardized tests rhetorically, they may assume that these tests are necessarily transparent, fair, and impervious to analysis and critique.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with a word about the political implications of rhetorical reading and, more broadly, CAC scholars' role in training future ELA teachers. As Geisler (1994) points out, one of the most pernicious effects of the myth of the autonomous text is that it teaches "students to hold themselves accountable as 'bad readers' when their interpretations fail rather than encouraging them to question the ideal of the autonomous text itself" (p. 36). After all, if the meaning of texts is fully explicit in the words on the page and equally available to any competent reader, then comprehension breakdowns must be attributed to the reader's shortcomings. This can be particularly discouraging to students whose native language or dialect is vastly different from

academic prose and whose personal and cultural knowledge diverges sharply from academic content. Rather than thinking of academic discourse as something like a foreign language to be learned, these students often believe academic texts are "over their heads," the exclusive domain of "smart" people. Learning to question the ideal of the autonomous text and practice rhetorical reading can thus demystify academic discourse by exposing it as just another instance of symbol-using animals doing their thing.

Scholars of reading, writing, speaking, and listening across the curriculum are well-positioned to meet the needs of ELA teachers because of their rich knowledge of the commonalities and differences among disciplinary discourse practices. By teaching pre-service teachers to read rhetorically themselves and to teach rhetorical reading to their students, CAC scholars could provide ELA teachers with a teaching tool that helps them balance a commitment to disciplinary literacy with their obligation to teach general reading skills.

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Contact Information

James E. Warren
University of Texas at Arlington
Department of English
Box 19035
Arlington, TX 76019-0035
Email: jewarren@uta.edu
Phone: (817)368-8628

Complete APA Citation

Warren, James E. (2013, June 11). Rhetorical reading and the development of disciplinary literacy across the high school curriculum. *Across the Disciplines, 10*(1). Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/articles/warren2013.pdf