

Book Review

Deane, M. and O'Neill, P. (2011). *Writing in the Disciplines*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

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The role of writing in Higher Education is a problematic one. Part of every course in some way, shape or form, writing is most prominently used as a tool for assessment, through essays, exams or similar. But whether and how to include writing instruction into the curriculum to enable students to get the most out of their courses has turned into an issue in the UK, particularly with the change from an élite to a mass higher education system with a widening participation agenda.

This book addresses this problem by discussing the 'Writing in the Disciplines' (WiD) way of thinking, which suggests to locate writing practice (and instruction) within the specific disciplines under the responsibility of the subject specialist, and goes away from the more established ways of thinking about writing instruction as a bolt-on, remedial support or something that can or should be taught through an introductory course in the first term of a degree.

It is divided into three clear parts, the first providing a larger context of the mainly UK based WiD through looking at both the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) model that can be found in the USA and the Australian perspective of Developing Academic Literacy in Context (DALiC). Part II allows some glimpses into the practice with a series of case studies located in different subject disciplines and Part III focuses on the different types of expertise needed to realise WiD successfully, highlighting the teamwork between subject specialist and writing developers, as well as possible input from technology experts.

I was doubtful whether the middle part of the book would be applicable to my practice as a whole, and have to admit that I expected to be only interested in the chapter that was dealing with my specific context. But I was pleasantly surprised to find that pretty much all of the chapters gave me something to think about and inspiration for my own practice – recognising

strategies that I had already tried in the past as well as ideas of what might also work in my context.

This book makes an effective case for the necessity to consider writing not as a simple 'writing up' of fully formed thoughts for the purpose of an easy assessment on the tutors' part, but rather as a process of producing disciplinary knowledge. Writing assignments is, after all, rarely about simply summarising texts or documenting observations – they are an integral part of critical thinking. Using this take on writing in HE assignments can be designed that benefit from both formal and informal approaches in structure and make use of both subject specific content and subject specific genres of writing outcomes.

Writing in the Disciplines is a good introduction into the practice of WiD, presenting both examples and teams that demonstrate good practice when integrating writing into specific disciplines. It particularly addresses the subject specialists who might be against this development, which would see them in charge of writing, something they might not be familiar with and might be nervous about – not to mention a potential further burden where the individual's workload is concerned. The argument is made that through forming teams with writing development specialists as well as learning technologists if appropriate, it is possible to tap into the haptic understanding of discipline specific writing that the subject specialist possesses. This allows students to experience writing as part of the thought-forming process, it fosters deep and independent learning, which has not only the potential to actually reduce the teaching workload, but also results in better understanding – and grades.