

explored. I have suggested ways in which a textbook can be an object of research and inquiry, of interest to both students and discipline-specific faculty. Though there is much more that we need to understand about genres and the relationship of this concept to particular texts, roles and contexts, it still presents rich possibilities for exploitation in the development of academic literacies and in understanding what motivates texts.

4 *Discourse communities and communities of practice*

Membership, conflict, and diversity

If there is one thing that most of [the discourse community definitions] have in common, it is an idea of language [and genres] as a basis for sharing and holding in common: shared expectations, shared participation, commonly (or communicably) held ways of expressing. Like audience, discourse community entails assumptions about conformity and convention (Rafoth, 1990, p. 140).

What is needed for descriptive adequacy may not be so much a search for the conventions of language use in a particular group, but a search for the varieties of language use that work both with and against conformity, and accurately reflect the interplay of identity and power relationships (Rafoth, 1990, p. 144).

A second important concept in the discussion of socioliteracies is *discourse community*. Because this term is abstract, complex, and contested,¹ I will approach it by attempting to answer a few of the questions that are raised in the literature, those that seem most appropriate to teaching and learning in academic contexts.

1. Why do individuals join social and professional communities? What appear to be the relationships between communities and their genres?
2. Are there levels of community? In particular, can we hypothesize a "general academic community" or language?
3. What are some of the forces that make communities complex and varied? What forces work against "shared participation and shared ways of expressing?" (Rafoth, 1990, p. 140).

I have used the term discourse communities because this appears to be the most common term in the literature. However, *communities of practice*, a related concept, is becoming increasingly popular, particularly for academic contexts (see Brown & Duguid, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the term *discourse communities*, the focus is on texts and language, the genres and lexis that enable members throughout the world to maintain their goals, regulate their membership, and communicate efficiently with

¹ Some of the contested issues and questions are: "How are communities defined?" (Rafoth, 1990); "Do discourse communities even exist?" (Prior, 1994); "Are they global or local? Or both?" (Killingsworth, 1992); "What is the relationship between discourse communities and genres?" (Swales, 1988b, 1990).

one another. Swales (1990, pp. 24–27) lists six defining characteristics of a discourse community:

1. [It has] a broadly agreed set of common public goals.
2. [It has] mechanisms of intercommunication among its members (such as newsletters or journals).
3. [It] utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.
4. [It] uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.
5. In addition to owning genres, [it] has acquired some specific lexis.
6. [It has] a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise.

The term *communities of practice* refers to genres and lexis, but especially to many practices and values that hold communities together or separate them from one another. Lave and Wenger, in discussing students' enculturation into academic communities, have this to say about communities of practice:

As students begin to engage with the discipline, as they move from exposure to experience, they begin to understand that the different communities on campus are quite distinct, that apparently common terms have different meanings, apparently shared tools have different uses, apparently related objects have different interpretations. . . . As they work in a particular community, they start to understand both its particularities and what joining takes, how these involve language, practice, culture and a conceptual universe, not just mountains of facts (1991, p. 13).

Thus, communities of practice are seen as complex collections of individuals who share genres, language, values, concepts, and "ways of being" (Geertz, 1983), often distinct from those held by other communities.

In order to introduce students to these visions of community, it is useful to take them outside the academic realm to something more familiar, the recreational and avocational communities to which they, or their families, belong. Thus I begin with a discussion of nonacademic communities before proceeding to issues of academic communities and membership.

Communities and membership

Social, political, and recreational communities

People are born, or taken involuntarily by their families and cultures, into some communities of practice. These first culture communities may be religious, tribal, social, or economic, and they may be central to an indi-

vidual's daily life experiences. Academic communities, on the other hand, are selected and voluntary, at least after compulsory education. Therefore, this chapter will concentrate on communities that are chosen, the groups with which people maintain ties because of their interests, their politics, or their professions. Individuals are often members of a variety of communities outside academic life: social and interest groups with which they have chosen to affiliate. These community affiliations vary in terms of individual depth of interest, belief, and commitment. Individual involvement may become stronger or weaker over time as circumstances and interests change.

Nonacademic communities of interest, like "homely" genres, can provide a useful starting point for student discussion. In presenting communities of this type, Swales uses the example of the Hong Kong Study Circle (HKSC),² of which he is a paying member, whose purposes are to "foster interest in and knowledge of the stamps of Hong Kong" (1990, p. 27). He was once quite active in this community, dialoging frequently with other members through HKSC publications.³ However, at this point in his life, he has other interests (birds and butterflies), and so he is now an inactive member of HKSC. His commitments of time and energy have been diverted elsewhere.

Members of my family are also affiliated with several types of communities. We are members of cultural organizations, such as the local art museum and the theater companies. We receive these communities' publications, and we attend some of their functions, but we do not consider ourselves to be active. We also belong to a variety of communities with political aims. My mother, for example, is a member of the powerful lobbying group, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). The several million members pay their dues because of their interests in maintaining government-sponsored retirement (Social Security) and health benefits (Medicare), both of which are promoted by AARP lobbyists in the U.S. Congress. The AARP magazine, *Modern Maturity*, is a powerful organ of the association, carefully crafted to forward the group's aims. Through this publication, members are urged to write to their elected representatives about legislation, and they are also informed about which members of Congress are "friends of the retired." However, members are offered more than politics: Articles in the magazine discuss keeping healthy while aging, remaining beautiful, traveling cheaply, and using the Internet. AARP members also receive discounts on prescription drugs, tours, and other benefits.⁴

2 Note that most communities use abbreviations for their names and often for their publications. All community members recognize these abbreviations, of course.

3 These written interactions are impossible for the noninitiated to understand, I might point out.

4 When I asked my mother to drop her AARP membership because of a political stand

Recently, my husband has become very active in a recreational discourse community, the international community of cyclists.⁵ He reads publications such as *Bicycling* ("World's No. 1 Road and Mountain Bike Magazine") each month for advice about better cyclist health ("Instead of Pasta, Eat This!"),⁶ equipment to buy, and international cycling tours. Like most other communities, cycling has experts, some of whom write articles for the magazines to which he subscribes, using a register that is mysterious to the uninitiated: "unified gear triangle"; "metal matrix composite." Cyclists share values (good health, travel interests), special knowledge, vocabulary, and genres, but they do not necessarily share political or social views, as my husband discovered when conversing with other cyclists on a group trip. In publications for cyclists, we can find genres that we recognize by name but with community-related content: editorials, letters to the editor, short articles on new products, articles of interest to readers (on health and safety, for example), advertisements appealing to readers, and essay/commentaries. If we examine magazines published for other interest groups, we can find texts from many of the same genres.

As this discussion indicates, individuals often affiliate with several communities at the same time, with varying levels of involvement and interest. People may join a group because they agree politically, because they want to socialize, or because they are interested in a particular sport or pastime. The depth of an individual's commitment can, and often does, change over time. As members come and go, the genres and practices continue to evolve, reflecting and promoting the active members' aims, interests, and controversies.

Studying the genres of nonacademic communities, particularly those with which students are familiar, helps them to grasp the complexity of text production and processing and the importance of understanding the group practices, lexis, values, and controversies that influence the construction of texts.

Professional communities

Discourse communities can also be professional; every major profession has its organizations, its practices, its textual conventions, and its genres. Active community members also carry on informal exchanges: at conferences, through e-mail interest groups, in memos, in hallway discus-

the organization took, she said, "I can't, Ann. I get too good a deal on my medicines through my membership."

5 Those of us who are outsiders call them "gearheads." Often, terms are applied to insiders by community outsiders.

6 Brill, D. (1994, November). What's free of fat and cholesterol, costs 4 cents per serving, and has more carbo than pasta? Rice! *Bicycling*, pp. 86-87.

sions at the office, in laboratories and elsewhere, the results of which may be woven intertextually into public, published texts. However, it is the written genres of communities that are accessible to outsiders for analysis. We need only to ask professionals about their texts in order to collect an array of interesting examples. One of the most thoroughly studied professional communities is the law. In his *Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings* (1993), Bhatia discusses at some length his continuing research into legal communities that use English and other languages (pp. 101-143). He identifies the various genres of the legal profession: their purposes, contexts, and the form and content that appear to be conventional. He also contrasts these genres as they are realized in texts from various cultures.

However, there are many other professional discourse communities whose genres can be investigated, particularly when students are interested in enculturation. For example, students might study musicians who devote their lives to pursuing their art but who also use written texts to dialogue with others in their profession. To learn more about these communities, I interviewed a bassoonist in our city orchestra.⁷ Along with those who play oboe, English horn, and contrabassoon, this musician subscribes to the major publication of the double-reed community, *The International Double Reed Society Journal*. Though he has specialized, double-reed interests, he reports that he and many other musicians also have general professional aims and values that link them to musicians in a much broader community. He argues that all practicing musicians within the Western tradition⁸ share knowledge; there is a common core of language and values within this larger community. Whether they are guitarists, pianists, rock musicians, or bassoonists, musicians in the West seem to agree, for example, that the strongest and most basic musical intervals are 5-1 and 4-1, and that other chord intervals are weaker. They share a basic linguistic register and an understanding of chords and notation. Without this sharing, considerable negotiation would have to take place before they could play music together. As in other professions, these musicians have a base of expertise, values, and expectations that they use to facilitate communication. Thus, though a musician's first allegiance may be to his or her own musical tradition (jazz) or instrument (the bassoon), he or she will still share a great deal with other expert musicians - and much of this sharing is accomplished through specialized texts.

What can we conclude from this section about individual affiliations

7 I would like to thank Arlan Fast of the San Diego Symphony for these community insights.

8 Knowledge is also shared with musicians from other parts of the world, of course. However, some of the specific examples used here apply to the Western musical tradition.

with discourse communities? First, many people have chosen to be members of one or a variety of communities, groups with whom they share social, political, professional, or recreational interests. These communities use written discourses that enable members to keep in touch with each other, carry on discussions, explore controversies, and advance their aims; the genres are their vehicles for communication. These genres are not, in all cases, sophisticated or intellectual, literary or high-browed. They are, instead, representative of the values, needs, and practices of the community that produces them. Community membership may be concentrated or diluted; it may be central to a person's life or peripheral. Important for the discussion that follows is the juxtaposition of generalized and specialized languages and practices among these groups. Musicians, lawyers, athletes, and physicians, for example, may share certain values, language, and texts with others within their larger community, though their first allegiance is to their specializations. Figure 1 illustrates this general/specific relationship in communities.

In the case of physicians, for example, there is a general community and a set of values and concepts with which most may identify because they have all had a shared basic education before beginning their specializations. There are publications, documents, concepts, language, and values that all physicians can, and often do, share. The same can be said of academics, as is shown in the figure. There may be some general academic discourses,⁹ language, values, and concepts that most academics share. Thus faculty often identify themselves with a college or university and its language and values, as well as with the more specialized areas of interest for which they have been prepared.

This broad academic identification presents major problems for scholars and literacy practitioners, for although it is argued that disciplines are different (see Bartholomae, 1985; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Carson et al., 1992; Lave & Wenger, 1991, among others), many faculty believe that there is a general academic English as well as a general set of critical thinking skills and strategies for approaching texts.

Because this belief in a general, shared academic language is strong and universal, the next section of this chapter is devoted to this topic.

Academic communities

What motivates this section more than anything else is its usefulness as a starting point in the exploration of academic literacies and its accessibil-

⁹ For example, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and several pedagogical publications are directed to a general academic audience.

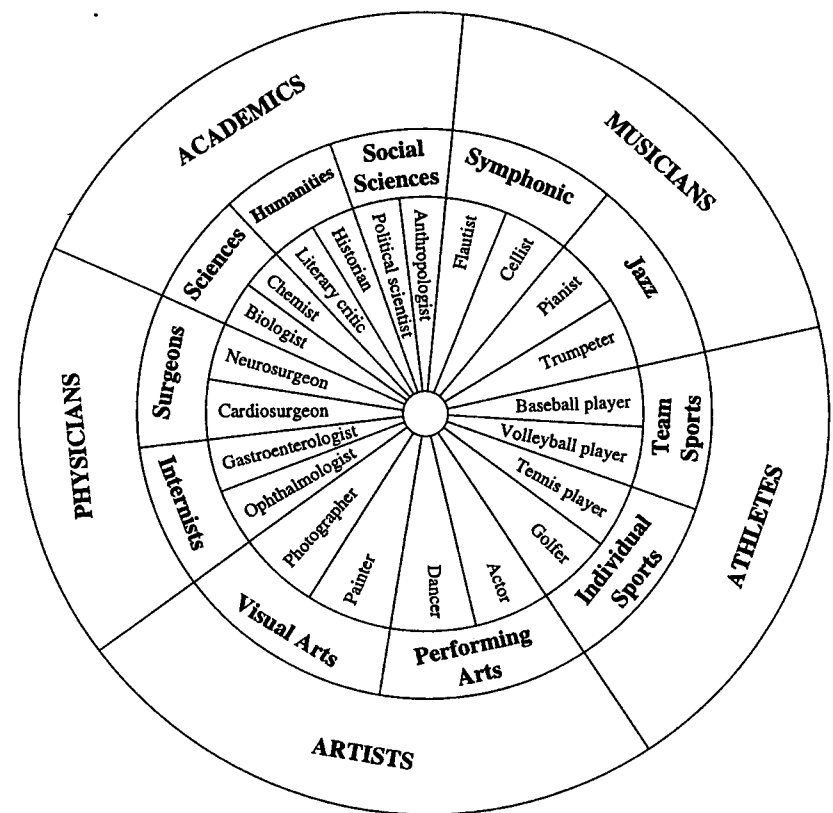


Figure 1 *Levels of community.*

ity to students at various levels of instruction who need to become more aware of the interaction of roles, texts, and contexts in academic communities. Many literacy faculty have mixed classes of students from a number of disciplines or students just beginning to consider what it means to be an academic reader and writer. For these students, and even for some of the more advanced, a discussion of what are considered to be general academic languages and textual practices is a good place to start their analyses – although not a good place to finish.

In the previous section it was noted that professionals may affiliate at various levels of specificity within their discourse communities. They often share language, knowledge, and values with a large, fairly heterogeneous group, though their first allegiances may be with a specialized group within this broader “club.” This comment can apply to individuals in academic communities as well. Faculty have their own discipline-specific allegiances (to biology, chemistry, sociology, engineering); none-

theless, many believe that there are basic, generalizable linguistic, textual, and rhetorical rules for the entire academic community that can apply.

Discipline-specific faculty who teach novices at the undergraduate level, and some who teach graduate students as well, sometimes complain that their students "do not write like academics" or "cannot comprehend" academic prose, arguing that these are general abilities that we should be teaching. The discussion that follows acknowledges their complaints and sets the stage for discussions of more specific academic issues and pedagogies in later chapters.

LANGUAGE, TEXTS, AND VALUES

This section on academic textual practices draws principally from three sources: "Reflections on Academic Discourse" (Elbow, 1991); *Words and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Geertz, 1988); and *The Scribal Society: An Essay on Literacy and Schooling in the Information Age* (Purves, 1990) (see also Dudley-Evans, 1995). Elbow and Purves are well-known composition theorists from different theoretical camps who were cited in Chapter 1. Geertz, an anthropologist, has studied academic communities and their genres for many years. All three of these experts live in the United States, and this may affect their views; however, in many universities in the world in which English is employed, these beliefs about general text features are also shared, except perhaps in literature and some of the humanities disciplines. Following is a composite of the arguments made by the three academics about the nature, values, and practices in general expository academic prose, including some commentary on each topic.

1. *Texts must be explicit.* Writers should select their vocabulary carefully and use it wisely. In some cases, such as with certain noun compounds, paraphrase is impossible because specialized academic vocabulary must be used. Citation must be constructed carefully. Data analysis should be described and discussed explicitly. The methodology should be stated so clearly that it is replicable. Ambiguity in argumentation should be avoided.

Comment. Faculty often complain that students are "careless" in their use of vocabulary, in their citation practices, and in their argumentation and use of data. Because many literacy classes value the personal essay and because many readings in literacy classes are in story form or are adapted or specially written for these classes, students are not exposed to the exactness of some academic prose. One of our responsibilities in developing socioliterate practices is to expose students to authentic academic texts and to analyze these texts for their specificity.

2. *Topic and argument should be prerevealed in the introduction.* Purves says that experienced academics, particularly when writing certain

kinds of texts, should "select a single aspect of [a] subject and announce [their] theses and purposes as soon as possible" (1990, p. 12).

Comment. Finding the argument in a reading and noticing how data, examples, or narration are used to support this argument are essential academic abilities that are praised by faculty from many disciplines. In like manner, understanding and presenting a clear argument that is appropriate to a genre are writing skills that appear high on faculty wish lists for students, particularly for those who come from diverse rhetorical traditions (see Connor, 1987). Most faculty require that arguments and purposes appear early, generally in an introduction. One of the discipline-specific faculty with whom I work tells her students not to "spend much time clearing their throats." She wants them to "get right down to the argument."

We must be aware, however, that the pressure to reveal topic, purposes, and argumentation early in a written text may be a culture-specific value and apply only to certain kinds of texts within specific communities. There is considerable discussion in the contrastive rhetoric and World Englishes literature about the motivations for text organization and content and the necessity (or lack thereof) for prerevealing information. Local cultures and first languages, as well as academic disciplines, can influence how and where arguments appear.

3. *Writers should provide "maps" or "signposts" for the readers throughout the texts, telling the readers where they have been in the text and where they are going.* By using a variety of tactics, writers can assist readers in predicting and summarizing texts and in understanding the relationships among topics and arguments. Most of these tactics fall under the metadiscourse rubric.

Comment. Metadiscourse is defined in the following way:

It is writing about reading and writing. When we communicate, we use metadiscourse to name rhetorical actions: *explain, show, argue, claim, deny, suggest, add, expand, summarize*; to name the part of our discourse, *first, second . . . in conclusion*; to reveal logical connections, *therefore . . . if so . . .* to guide our readers, *Consider the matter of* (Williams, 1989, p. 28).

Literacy textbooks for both reading and writing often emphasize the understanding and use of metadiscourse in texts. However, it is important to note that language and culture can have considerable influence on the ways in which metadiscourse is used. For example, in countries with homogeneous cultures, academic written English may have fewer metadiscoursal features (Mauranen, 1993) than in heterogeneous, "writer-responsible" cultures (see Hinds, 1987) such as the United States, Great Britain, or Australia. As in the case of all texts, academic discourses are influenced by the cultures and communities in which they are found, often in very complicated ways.