Writing Across the Curriculum in Schools: An Academic Article

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**Introduction**

Natural sciences, the humanities, and the applied fields are everywhere in our lives. They can be similar because they all look at life from different perspectives. Music, Biology, and Nursing seemingly have very little in common. However, in many ways, the writings in these fields are very similar. Some specific ways that they are related is through their similarities in parts of the structure, language, and reference. The structure is how a writing is set up or split. Different parts of the writings in each field are seen in the other fields as well. The language is specific wording used in each field. Some of the same jargon is used across the disciplines but much of it is unique to the fields. Reference is how each field gives credit to others who have done work that they looked off of to come to their conclusion. Writing across the curriculum looks at these specific sections of writings and looks at how they are similar. This allows for an easier transition between the writings of different fields to allow a larger range of people to be able to understand the writings.

**Writing for Learning: A Literature Review on Writing Across the Curriculum**

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), is a new way of looking at writing in universities to allow for students to be able have opportunities to improve their writing skills in their own field as well as draw connections with other fields. Having a tool like this gives students the opportunity to have a better understanding of what a teacher expects from writing as well as allowing the teacher to not feel the need to focus on how to teach their students how to write in their class, but just enforce what they already know. Learning how to write across curriculum not only benefits students’ writings across the fields but also improves the writings in their own major field of study.

**Writing Improvement Over Time**

A student’s writing changes throughout their career in school and beyond. By introducing writing across the curriculum into teaching writing, many students’ writings improve as well as their overall knowledge of the subject. In “A Stranger in Strange Lands,” Lucille McCarthy follows one of her students through the first couple years of college and collected writing samples to watch the improvement over time especially after WAC was introduced. This study has become a basis for much of writing across the curriculum and how it is supposed to improve a student’s writing for every class, not just one. Another study that followed students was the 2004 study at Harvard by Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz of around 400 freshmen. They followed these students through their undergraduate time at Harvard asking questions about their writing and how they were able to write all of the different variety of writings. What they found is that most students feel as though the challenge of writing has allowed them to process more information about subjects that they had thought would be more difficult to grasp. They bring up the start of the idea of “writing to learn.” One of the most recent studies done on writing across the curriculum was Johnson and Krase’s 2012 study of students’ writing over the course of a semester. Pieces were pulled from their first-year composition class and a piece after this class specifically on Writing Across the Curriculum. Sommers and Saltz use some of the research of other proffessionals to show that WAC is meant to help students long term with their writings by looking at the complexities of how to extend a students’ knowledge of writing like how McCarthy interviewed the student and teachers about how the writings can connect from other classes as well as how it improves his current writing. Writing across the curriculum is a good way of giving students different ways to improve their writing over time as well as give them a skill to continue to build upon throughout their career.

**Definitions and Rules**

Over time, writing across the curriculum has evolved and changed to be a better fit for helping students. As writing across the curriculum was first becoming popular, McCarthy followed a student and came up with four big rules for how to write across the curriculum well. Those four rules were good quality, appropriate quantity, strong relation, and professional manner. Looking at these four things allowed a good rubric to be calculated for writing in any field so that students are able to use the same skills from one class to another. More research in 2000 has made many of these rules more specific and narrower by focusing more of the teaching aspect of WAC. By looking at WAC as a way to teach writing as a learning tool, much of the focus would likely be on what the teacher emphasizes in their expectations for their students’ writings. Some rules for the teaching of WAC that McLeod and Maimon have put together include a “delivery of information” model of teaching, as well as including faculty development, adding to curriculum, student writing support, improved assessments, and a change in administrative structure and budget to change the focus of writing classes to include more writing across the curriculum. In 2010, Chris Anson looked back at many years of writing journals to try to find how WAC has affected the overall focus of writings in many disciplines. He looked for a change of focus from writing for skills development versus writing for learning (WAC). Overtime, many of the journals began to focus more on writing across the curriculum and less on skills development. Many of the ways that the journals have switched their focus is by choosing more articles that are more expressive, input-based, informal writings that were often written as a writing to learn or discover piece that the author wrote more for themselves than to specifically convey information. The overall goals for writing across the curriculum are for improved learning in a subject, easy communication across genres and disciplines, and allowing for works to be informally assessed so that the most focus is on learning, not being perfect.

**Conclusion of Literature Review**

Writing across the curriculum is an important skill for young writers to learn to be able to communicate across the disciplines and communicate information to others. Writing across the curriculum also helps students in learning what they are writing about. The continuation of writing across the curriculum being taught in schools will greatly improve writings across all disciplines and possibly allow for more things less focused on writing to be taught. By teaching more students how to write across the curriculum early in their schooling, less time will be needed in each class to teach students how to write in specific classes. If Writing Across the Curriculum continues to be used across all fields and disciplines, it should allow for more time to be spent on other research and teaching.

**Methods**

Writing the literature review gave me a better insight into why writing across the curriculum is important. It has shown me that WAC is what allows so many people be able to communicate ideas and information even if they are not as familiar with the specific field or exact style of writing. I chose to analyze Music, Biology, and Nursing because I am a music major and I wanted to see how my field connected to other common fields at Longwood that seemed very different from my own. This has proved to me that they are not as different as I had originally thought. I found my pieces online through the online sources on the library website as well as other professional articles found online. I downloaded or bookmarked all of the articles so that I was able to easily look back at the articles. I also took notes on the parts I wanted to focus on so that I was able to easily organize my thoughts between all of the articles in one place. I focused my reading on the language, structure, and reference styles of the articles by paying attention so specific parts of the writings. I looked for unique words in each article specific to the topic or field and compared with the articles outside of the field to check for similarities. I also looked for IMRaD in the structure and if any parts were focused on more in different disciplines. I also looked for citations either in the writing or at the end to see the reference style.

**Reference**

The way Nursing, Music, and Biology reference other works and research is very similar. At times, all three will use APA format for referencing but it is possible to see other styles especially in the humanities. The most common way of referencing, however, is APA. All of the articles use APA referencing with the only difference being that all of the articles except for the “Bedside Shift-to-Shift Nursing Report” do not have the references on a separate page. Using APA gives the article a sense of unity with other fields within the same discipline as well as across disciplines. By using this style, the most people are able to understand how the writing is set up. Another difference between some of the articles is the order of the references on the references page. Most often, APA format calls for the references to be in alphabetical order. However, there are times especially in writings often done in music with a specific order, where a good change would be to put the references in chronological order of when it was referenced in the writing. This is done in Kratus’s article on music education and each reference is done through notes in the article. This organization would also be good to use when there are many authors who should be grouped together for similar ideas like in a nursing report.

**Structure**

The general structure throughout these articles is very similar, however, there are some larger differences especially with the humanities. Nursing and Biology most often use IMRaD as a way to be able to express findings as well as be specific in their process so that it is able to be repeated by others. Music does use IMRaD in some ways especially when trying to prove a point. The music education article does not use the IMRaD structure but instead focused around a thesis. The humanities are mostly thesis driven, but IMRaD can still be used especially when concluding a writing and drawing conclusions like in the music therapy article.. Nursing and Biology can also use a thesis to hold the writing together and keep it focused on the main point of the experiment or research. The final difference between these writings is the use of headings. Through most of the articles, the only times headers were used was in Nursing and Biology. However, there are times when headers can be useful in writings for Music as well. It is most often used when the article has multiple specific topics to visibly split the sections, which was used in all of the articles but most noticeably in the “Cell-growth Promoting Activity…” article. It is also used in the humanities when IMRaD is also part of the structure.

**Language**

The language used in writing often is different between disciplines. The closest writings are often between applied fields and the natural sciences. Nursing and biology are very closely related in their learning, so their writing language is also often similar. Some of these similarities include the specific language used in reports for both biology experiments and nursing patient reports. The Leary and Sturmey article as well as the Liaschenko and Peter article talk about ethics in nursing as well as biology. There are also similarities between applied fields and the humanities. Music and nursing have similar language when talking about people and their feelings. Music writing is often personal and explaining feelings in some way. Nurses must note how patients feel as well as take care of patients with problems in expressing emotions. One big similarity between all groups is the use of professional language and very little first person. Using professional language allows for others in the field to know that they are a credible resource. It can make it harder for some other professionals from other fields to understand but that is often how the language is in most professional writings. By also using very little first person, writings are able to be more objective when trying to specifically report facts especially in the natural sciences and applied fields. First person is used more in the humanities because it is often more personal, but it can also be used on rare occasions for more personal writings in other fields as well.

**Discussion**

Writing in the university can seem like a very daunting task to many people but as I was doing this project, I began to realize that it is not as difficult as many people seem to think it is. There are many similarities across the different disciplines and even many of the differences only change because it is needed to get the point across. My research study can add to the knowledge of WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) by showcasing similarities between fields and disciplines with seemingly very little in common, especially focusing on music, biology, and nursing. The similarities help students to understand what writing across the curriculum is based on. They are also able to use these similarities to take the knowledge of writing in their own field and apply it to many other disciplines. Extended research could be done by following students of different majors to further see which fields have closely related writings and what some of those similarities are. This would greatly help students who are thinking of changing majors or adding a minor so that they are able to fit in with the other students who may have focused more on a specific field.

**Annotated Bibliography**

McCarthy, L. (1987). A stranger in strange lands: A college student writing across curriculum. *Researching in the Teaching of English.* 21(3), 233-265.

In this article, McCarthy talks about her study on how students adjust to writing requirements in different classes across fields. She followed one student around for his first couple years of college and looked at his writing samples for each of his classes. She also interviewed him and his teachers to figure out not only what his writing looked like, but also what work it took to make it work for each class.

This article has become one of the original basses for any new experiments in studying writing across the curriculum. This experiment in particular was the first big experimental research done on this subject.

Saltz, L. & Sommers, N. (2004). The novice of expert: Writing the freshman year. *College Composition and Communication.* 56(1), 124-149.

In this article, Saltz and Sommers followed the Harvard class of 2001 to see how students think writing matters to them. They receive many primary resources from much of the class of 2001 to compare how their writing improves as a student grows older and wiser about writing.

Many students bring up the idea of how the high writing expectations help them improve their writing as well as learn more about the subject that they write about. They also bring up the idea of how writing is not only used to convey information, but also to learn.

Maimon E. & McLeod S. (2000). Clearing the air: WAC myths and realities. *College English.* 62(5), 573-583.

In this article, Maimon and McLeod talk about the different ways that writing across the curriculum is often done wrong and how to fix it. They describe the difference between WAC and WID. They also give the main three premises that most WAC classes will focus on. Much of their information comes from the studies of others.

This article is useful because it gives many problems that people have writing in this style, but it also gives solutions and guidelines to follow.

Anson, C. (2010). The intradisciplinary influence of composition and WAC, 1967-1986. *The WAC Journal.* 21. 5-19.

In this article, Anson talks about his study of 14 journals from different disciplines and how they have all used WAC principles in their own writing. He references some of the most cited authors in all of these journals including Janet Emig as well as Elaine Maimon. He goes on to explain the difference between writing to learn and writing for skills development. This article is a combination of research from others as well as personal observations.

This article is important because of the look at the data over time and how writing has changed. It gives good information for both WAC as well as just writing to learn.

Johnson, J. & Krase, E. (2012). Articulating claims and presenting evidence: A study of twelve student writers, from first-year composition to writing across the curriculum. *The WAC Journal.* 23. 31-48.

In this article, research is done by following twelve students through their first semester of college and how their writing changes based on curriculum. These students were from many different majors and were tested at the beginning and end of the semester to be able to compare the writings. For many of the students, the writing in their own major at the end of the semester was most successful compared to the beginning of the semester as well as the WAC piece. Some students were able to be successful with the WAC piece, but others still were not.

This article is important because it follows the students not only in WAC classes but also through their major classes.

Evans, D., Grunawalt, J., McClish, D., Wood, W., & Friese, C. R. (2012). Bedside Shift-to-Shift Nursing Report: Implementation and Outcomes. *MEDSURG Nursing.* 21(5). 281-284.

In this article, research was done to try to improve the communication between nurses who are working with patients needing 24 hour care. This new way of reports from shifts left at the bedside helps the nurses to just be able to report directly to their patient.

# Leary, C. & Sturmey, R. G. (2020). Metabolic profile of *in vitro* derived human embryos is not affected by the mode of fertilization. *Oxford University Press.*

# This article is research from an experiment with human embryos and how the profile of certain embryos is effected by different modes of fertilization.

Viggo, K., Nordanger, D. Ø., & Stige, B. (2018). Music therapy: Building Bridges Between a Participatory Approach and Trauma-informed Care in a Child Welfare Setting. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy.* 18(4).

This article is based off of research done through interviewing social workers and asking them about their view of what they think the advantages and disadvantages are to using music therapy with children.

Hayakawa, T., Yamashita, K., Ohuchi, E., & Shinagawa, A. (1994). Cell growth-promoting activity of tissue inhibitor of metalloproteinases-2 (TIMP-2). *Journal of Cell Science.* 107. 2373-2379.

This article is based on the research around how a certain tissue inhibitor can promote cell growth activity.

Liaschenko, J. & Peter, E. (2003). Nursing ethics and conceptualizations of nursing: profession, practice and work. *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* 46(5). 488-495.

This article talks about the limitations of ethics in the nursing profession and how it connects to their practice and work.

Kratus, J. (2007). Music Education at the Tipping Point. *Music Educators Journal.* 42-48.

This article is about how music education has changed overtime and what changes must happen in order to keep up with the world and how people themselves are changing.