BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Amy A. Childers, North Georgia College & State University

Bryant achieves what has been sorely needed in the study of voice: the collection and analysis of real case studies from which are derived inductive insights into the construction of written voice. With a foreword by Peter Elbow, this book establishes Bryant as a knowledgeable voice in composition studies. Bryant clearly places herself in the theoretical traditions of student-centered pedagogy, social constructionism, and postcolonialism (11) through the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, L. S. Vygotsky, Walker Gibson, Donald Murray, Gloria Anzaldúa, David Bartholomae, Mary Louise Pratt, Wendy Bishop, Kenneth Bruffee, Peter Elbow, Patricia Bizzell, Ken Macrorie, Toby Fulwiler, Min-Zhan Lu and Mike Rose. Unlike Darsie Bowden who holds that voice is not a helpful theoretical term, Bryant argues that the concept of constructed voice as a border zone is very useful pedagogically to the writing teacher when focusing on process rather than product (7-11). Briefly, Bryant argues that teachers must give students room to experiment with voice, to construct a new voice that is appropriate to academic circles and yet still true to the individual. In all, this text is very useful, both pedagogically and theoretically. Bryant displays a thorough knowledge of the related compositional theory and applies her theoretical knowledge clearly to student case studies.

Her argument, as established in the introduction, rests on the methodological premise that case studies are as necessary to the study of voice-in-writing as theoretical discussions. In her studies, she discerns a tension between what she calls “home voices” and “school” voices, applying two of Elbow’s voice categories, “dramatic” and “authority,” to further characterize this tension (4, 9). Her goal is to document the progress of two students, Jason and Leah, who attempt to integrate these two (or more) voices into an acceptable, and individual, academic voice. Her methodology involves oral transcriptions of class discussion and written portfolios (9).

Chapter 1, “Disruptive ‘Sexual’ Voices in English 101,” is an insightful and practical chapter that offers help to teachers who have been stymied by student resistance in the classroom. Bryant begins by narrating a class experience involving sexual innuendo. She decides that silencing the “inappropriate” language inadvertently silenced the class’s construction of their new academic voices (16). She borrows from Mary Louise Pratt the phrases “pupil-
ing”—student resistance and subversion—and “contact zone”—a metaphor for the discomfort experienced when home/colloquial/dramatic voice meets school/academic/authoritative voice (17, 18). Bryant concludes that by speaking inappropriately, the students were attempting to join in the academic discourse by using the only critical voices they had (19). Instead of silencing, Bryant (and all teachers) could have maximized the teaching moment by discussing the linguistic role of “one-upmanship,” “power relations,” or “subversion” (20).

Chapter 2, “Jason’s Voices,” provides a clear example that Bryant’s approach to teaching writing is beneficial to students, and that the “contact zone” metaphor makes real sense in classroom behavior. Bryant introduces Jason, who combined sarcasm and political science. At this point in Bryant’s teaching career, she had committed herself to encouraging her students’ voices rather than silencing, allowing even vulgarism as part of the construction process. She notices in Jason’s work the use of parentheticals, inserted personal comments, as explored by Arthur L. Palacas in “Parentheticals and Personal Voice.” Jason struggles to include an academic voice in his colloquial voice, which often took the form of long lists (27). Jason balked at providing analysis or a thesis. Bryant concludes that it was her responsibility to give Jason the room to explore the distance between the two voices. By the end of the semester, Jason was successfully able to provide an argument for his lists and focus his discussions, without sacrificing his home voice.

Chapter 3, “Leah’s Story,” is perhaps the most compelling chapter (Leah returns in the afterword to write a sophisticated letter to the reader, which implies that she now has firm control of her voice). Bryant introduces Leah, who already possesses a creative, “barnyard” voice which she struggles to combine into an academic voice (46). Leah denies her own authority, and focuses on her home voice, telling stories instead of drawing conclusions (42). Leah demonstrated a dependence on rhetorical questions, further divorcing herself from a voice of authority (48). Bryant describes Leah’s situation as nepantla—an Aztec word Anzaldúa defines as meaning “torn between ways” (49). Leah’s path to voice was recursive, not linear (71).

In chapter 4, “Studying Our Voices,” Bryant continues her discussion of the recursive process of constructing voice and outlines her own struggles in coming to an academic voice. This chapter could be judged as too personal or even self-indulgent in its confessions; however, Bryant upholds her process as she studies her own voice history. Although she risks revealing so much of her own struggle, she accomplishes just what she asks other teachers to do: examine the path that led to your scholarly voice. She suggests that each teacher should inventory his or her own voice development, should study theory, and should support students in their voice construction (72). She explains her difficulties in graduate school: at the master’s level she was encouraged to create a teach-
ing voice as her academic voice (75). However, at the doctoral level, when she tried using teaching stories to address theoretical concerns, she struggled to combine her pedagogical voice with a new Ph.D-level scholarly voice (82). She likens her resistance to the choices made by Toby Fulwiler and bell hooks who both chose to keep a strongly personal voice (83). Bryant’s struggle to remain true to that personal voice is evidenced throughout her book: she includes her own poetry, as well as an imagined dialogue with herself debating which voice to use in the book—personal or scholarly (84). Largely, the scholarly voice wins out, but the personal periodically breaks through. Bryant seems to have achieved her goal of forging a new voice that combines the personal and the scholarly. She largely accomplishes this by embracing risk and experimentation, just as she encourages her students to do.

In chapter 5, “Voice as Process,” Bryant doggedly persists in “bridg[ing] both sides of the border,” even to the point of disrupting what could easily have been a smooth scholarly text (103). She exults in “hybrids and mestizas” that escape the five-paragraph theme, or the lock-step formula of tenure and promotion (105, 101). She further clarifies her argument by noting that there are six “activities” in the voice process, a circle of “encountering, engaging, navigating, negotiating, rejecting, and integrating” (88). This recursive process involves a great deal of “parroting” on the student’s part, just to begin negotiating the demands of academia (91). Bryant likens this phenomenon to David Bartholomae’s concept of inventing the university. The student constructs a new voice based on first learning the sound of academic voices, and then risking a similar voice of his or her own. Bryant completes her argument that we should move away from Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zone” and towards the metaphor of “construction zone.” She points out that Pratt’s metaphor does not address “dissenting student voices” (95). Bryant’s construction zone accounts for a negotiation process in the creation of voice, rather than one voice conquering the other. The negotiated result may not be purely academic, but should not be rejected on that basis alone. Bryant returns to arguing for her own approach to scholarly writing in this book—that is, to focus on her personal struggles with an academic voice and to connect to her students’ struggles.

In chapter 6, “A Pedagogy of Voice as Process,” Bryant leaves us with the compelling insight that the creation of an academic voice can be individually meaningful. She encourages writing teachers to allow students room to take risks with their voices, giving them space to navigate the changes. She ends by sharing her personal approaches for encouraging student experimentation: have students create a persona, have students use more “academic action verbs,” discuss and characterize author voices—in the vein of Walker Gibson, and recognize stylistic techniques that create voice (112-16). In addition, she
suggests that teachers respond with more acceptance to students’ inappropriate language and learn to recognize the construction process (113). One way to do this is to reward risk taking with grades (114). Further, she suggests a few exercises that help students consider audience and changing voice.

Bryant concludes by noting, “Many students have not had inviting experiences” (122). Bryant believes that modeling her experiences in creating an academic voice encourages students to explore their own. She ends her book with an afterword by Leah, her former student, who concludes: “We’re all trying to make the squiggles on the page make sense” (132).

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Reviewed by Jessica Enoch, The University of New Hampshire

*Archives of Instruction* is, as the authors suggest, “a book about books” (1). But in being a book that investigates the traditions of rhetorics, readers, and composition texts, it offers the field a new perspective on nineteenth-century literacy practices and rhetorical education. *Archives* is the result of thorough and painstaking archival work by its three authors, Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille Schultz, and the findings they offer are significant. Overall, the authors argue that scholars and teachers of rhetoric, composition, and literacy need to look more closely at what nineteenth-century textbook traditions have to say. Throughout *Archives*, the writers make it clear that these textbooks are complex, revealing, and surprising, that they deserve attention and reconsideration. But even though *Archives* offers much in exposing the peculiarities and regularities of these nineteenth-century textbook traditions, the greatest strength of the text is in the way it teaches contemporary readers to read these materials. Carr, Carr, and Schultz offer insightful archival advice in terms of where to look, what to notice, what to think twice about, and how to interpret not only the textbooks themselves but also their authors and their material production. This aspect of the *Archives* makes it a “must read” for scholars invested in histories of rhetoric, composition, and literacy.

*Archives* is structured around three major textbook traditions, and each of its main chapters takes up a detailed discussion of rhetorics (chapter 1), read-