

# Building a culture of response in the workplace

## Introduction

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2. year out of three

Why am I here?

Apologies for repeating myself

Professional writing as a field does not exist in Denmark

Purdue is a leader within composition and rhetoric

Partitio:

- 1) brief introduction to my Ph.D.-project
- 2) Background information: the Rhetoric Program in Copenhagen  
Inspiration for my Ph.D.
- 3) Plan for my Ph.D. – throw some ideas at you

## Intro to Ph.D.-project

Second year

Three years including coursework and teaching

Present working title:

Building a culture of response in collaborative and workplace writing

Have completed pilot study of one collaborative writing process (interviews only)

Next: ethnography/action research study in one organization

shadowing several writing groups and writing processes.

My main interest is response

How is it given and received

Potential room for improvement

That interest comes from pilot study:

What jumped out from the interviews

the response situation was very problematic and painful

Writers felt hurt and hard done by when receiving response

according to supervisors and managers, failed to revise to meet organizational standards.

I come from a very different writing culture and response culture  
At the Rhetoric Section at the University of Copenhagen

### **Rhetoric Section at University of Copenhagen**

Full Rhetoric program  
Undergraduate and graduate study  
Probably the only one in Europe

### HANDOUT

Total of five years  
most students will complete both at the section

The program covers both oral and written rhetoric  
insists on a combination of theory and practice:  
students must practice as well as study rhetoric

A couple of notions are key to what I call the ideology of the Rhetoric Section  
Any academic department has its ideology, this is ours:

#### 1) *The Rhetorical Situation*

Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" is obligatory reading, first year  
students read Bitzer's article and Vatz' reply  
discuss exigence and constraints  
how to apply on any communication situation  
using them as tools to see the uniqueness of each rhetorical situation  
to look at different ways in which the rhetor may respond

Situatedness is at the heart of rhetoric  
Aristotle wrote about it too  
but Bitzer so neatly lays it out for us  
easily digestible for a first year student  
The rhetorical situation becomes the backbone of everything the students do

rather than studying genres  
view a range of genres from the perspective of each genre's rhetorical situation  
and what that text sets out to achieve

(As graduate students, they'll read Carolyn Miller's "Genre as Social Action").

2) *The emphasis on production*

in addition to analysis and academic endeavors  
a variety of genres, not only academic  
speeches and perform them in front of the class  
not only rhetoricians, but also able rhetors

3) *The culture of response.*

Students expected to and taught to give and receive peer response  
On their own drafts and on example texts  
out of class, in groups, in pairs, oral and in writing

Becomes a culture

Share work outside of curricular requirements

Texts written for many occasions

Job applications, cvs

Assignments for which response is not required by instructor

a. Simple slogan

drilled into their heads

coined by our professor, Christian Kock

In Danish: Konkret, konstruktivt og kammeratligt – the three Ks  
(connotations are not lost on Danish students)

Deconstruction

Memoria is a funny thing –makes it easy to remember)

In English: Concrete, Constructive and Kind

Ask any student or graduate knows by heart

b. Kind – crucial for making response work

an emotionally sensitive situation for any writer

even the severest critique should be offered kindly and respectfully  
praise

No writer ever improved from having their text viciously torn to pieces

Not being told anything nice

c. Concrete is what is most often neglected

When pointing out something that needs improvement

responder must always be concrete

Where is it exactly?

Which sentence, which paragraph, which word?

Why is not as good as it could be?

Describe, be precise, think!

d. Constructive is totally obligatory

suggestions on improvement,  
having pointed out what exactly the problem is  
becomes a scene for learning for both the writer and the responder  
The writer is in no way obliged to follow the suggestions.

*3) Response informed in theory and research*

refer to theory

make use of the entire rhetorical framework that they have picked up

Becomes more and more sophisticated

Comment on and give constructive advice on

everything from invention and topics

to arrangement and style

to delivery and voice (on speeches)

Two points to make about this 'ideology':

1) Response, theory, practice all reflect on each other

In response, rhetorical theory comes to life

rhetoric comes to life

Amazing and almost unlimited space for learning

Students and graduates always becoming better rhetoricians, rhetors, responders

2) All this work somehow turns into a culture of response, permeating the whole section  
(at least the students' work. Not the staff, sadly)

Students collaborating in the finest sense of the word

Graduates report back to us that response is the single most useful thing they learnt  
their employers agree

**Plan for Ph.D.**

No coincidence that results from my pilot study:

response/review was causing problems

Next: collecting material for analysis

– fieldwork at a specific organization

My initial plan: An ethnography, in-depth qualitative data  
One year in organization

Combine ethnography: Some steps toward building a culture of response  
Action research

An experiment  
Far too little experimenting in humanistic research

Give writers tools to give and receive response  
practice in doing so  
create a base for the continuation of response once I have left  
create a base for continued situated learning

These are the ideas:

### Workshops

Conduct workshops in the organization  
Small groups of writers  
Give response on drafts and texts that none have contributed to  
Space for learning less threatening  
Close to classroom teaching  
Problematic: I cast myself as teacher *and* researcher/observer

Prefer to avoid, but think it is necessary

- a way into the organization
- a way of making the act of response real and tangible
- carving out a space for response
- Kickstart the process of change

Goal: to enable individual writers to act as responders  
to build a space for response to happen among writers

### Organizational documents

*Organizational rhetoric:*

Organization's own rhetorical ideals  
Identify, develop, discuss, name and perhaps discard  
local rhetorical ideals, goals ambitions

*Heuristic of response:*

Issues that must be addressed when responding to a draft  
Closely linked to the ideals  
except the heuristic points out the rhetorical building blocks in the text:  
what we as rhetoricians would call invention, disposition, elocution etc.

*Ethics of response:*

Ground rules for giving response  
At Rhetoric section: KKK  
Good as well as bad  
praise as well as criticism  
Address how supervisor-to-employee  
as well as peer-to-peer act of response/review should take place

Could be all in one document, five documents, three documents

How many is beside the point

The point:

Create a shared language  
a vocabulary, a framework  
a meta-language

What students at Rhetoric section get from rhetorical theory

Electronic community

Community / blog on the organizational intranet  
Create a community that can work with and discuss response online

Electronic response: tool in collaborative writing in the workplace

Some research: giving and receiving response electronically works better than face-to-face  
Depends on the situation – should be explored

My own blog in my own ph.d.-writing process  
Invite org writers to visit  
Rhetorical example of botched and terrifying writing process  
Create a connection to their own writing processes  
Become more accessible as a researcher

Methodologically: all sorts of problems, but even so  
That is a given for all qualitative research

**The last argument**

A problem within humanistic research, at least in Denmark

Organizational communication research:

Identify and theorize on problems in the workplace

Result: guidelines/ideas at the end of our papers on how to improve the situations

Or seek to change academic programs and curriculums

so that future graduates have the necessary skills and tools to avoid such problems

Almost never go out and actually try to work with the organizations

Rarely constructive "in the field", but still under the constraints of academic work

That is limited to consultants

– or when we as academics work as consultants "part-time"

And then do not have to behave as academics

I think that we should, also as academics,

conduct experiments and implement improvements in the workplace itself

rather than just in programs and curricula

Reach out to those professional writers that have left university, and are not coming back