

Theme introduction

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Across Scandinavia, national curricula for upper-secondary school have put rhetoric back on the syllabus for language arts teaching. For the first time in two centuries, rhetoric has a significant role to play in developing the communicative abilities of students in this educational context. Thus, there is a need to understand and develop its potential. Traditionally the reserve of ruling class men, rhetorical education today can be made available to all citizens regardless of race, gender, disability, or religion (Glenn 2004).

Rhetoric may be defined as the critical understanding and conscientious production of persuasive language. It is both an investigative discipline and a productive art. As an investigative discipline, rhetoric offers students opportunities to develop analytical abilities that enable them to critically assess persuasive discourse in specific contexts of communication (Foss 2009). Its educational aim is to enable students to respond well and appropriately to a broad range of texts and communicative situations in civic, working, and academic life (Lamb 2010). As a productive art, rhetoric offers students opportunities to develop communicative abilities, and to cultivate ethical sensibilities, that enable them to take efficacious and ethical action. Its educational aim is to promote rhetorical agency, that is, the capacity to act and effect change by making effective choices about communicative practices, based on an assessment of what is appropriate to write or say in a given situation. Central to both the investigative and productive sides of rhetoric is the insight that communicative acts and artifacts are shaped by the rhetorical situation in which they are produced and received (Bitzer 1968). Therefore, teaching students to think rhetorically entails cultivating awareness of the rhetorical situation (Grant-Davies 1997; Rives & Olsen 2015) and the ethics of discursive practice.

Since antiquity, rhetoric has been taught as civic art, concerned with equipping future citizens (historically, aristocratic men) for productive engagement in public discourse. For Roman rhetorician Quintilian, the goal of rhetorical education is to cultivate the ideal orator-citizen, “a good man speaking well.” Robert E. Terrill explains that Quintilian is referring to the cultivation of civic virtue, the capacity and inclination to speak well in public life, acquired through extensive training and practice in the rhetorical arts: speaking, listening, reading, and writing for the purpose of engaging in public discourse. Quintilian conceived of rhetoric as a faculty for discerning the means by which effective communication may be achieved in specific instances of public discourse (Terrill 2016, p. 168). The educational program that resulted from this conception of rhetoric, presented in *Institutio oratoria*, aimed at providing training so extensive and comprehensive that rhetoric would become a habit of mind. David Fleming (1998) describes Quintilian’s educational program as “a rich and rewarding a course of study whose end is the development of a certain kind of person: engaged, articulate, resourceful, sympathetic, civil—a person trained, and conditioned by, and devoted what once called *eloquence* (p. 172). Its goal is “neither a material product, nor a body of knowledge, nor technical proficiency in achieving pre-determined ends; it is to become a certain kind of person, one who has internalized the art of rhetoric, and who possesses what Quintilian called ‘*facilitas*’ ‘the capacity to produce appropriate and effective language in any situation’” (Fleming 1998, p. 179).

Rhetorical theory today enquires into the relationship between rhetorical actors and their socio-political contexts while retaining the classical commitment to equipping students with skills, knowledge, and attitudes that prepare them for active engagement in public life. Building on the classical understanding of rhetoric as a civic art, but mindful of the socio-political dimensions of discursive power, feminist theorists of rhetoric have explored the sociocultural conditions of efficacious speech. This is Karlyn Kohrs Campbell defining rhetorical agency in an article entitled “Agency: Promiscuous and Protean,” published in the midst of the poststructuralist critique of the subject

Whatever else it may be, rhetorical agency refers to the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community. Such competency permits entry into ongoing cultural conversations and is the *sine qua non* of public participation, much less resistance as a counter-public. Those of us who teach public speaking or composition understand that artistry of this kind is

craft learning, like the cookery disparaged by Socrates, learned stochastically through trial and error under the guidance of mentors, that emerges ideally as an ability to respond well and appropriately to the contingencies of circumstance. (Campbell 2005, p. 3)

Like Quintilian, Campbell defines rhetorical agency as communicative competency that is realized in action, cultivated through training, and ideally manifested in the ability to adapt to communicative context. However, Campbell also recognizes that communicative competency is no guarantee of entry into public discourse. To be recognized and heard by others, the rhetorical agent must claim a voice by negotiating a subject position within the discourse community (p. 5). Rhetorical agency does not imply intentionality or autonomy; it is “constrained by externals, by the community that confers identities related to gender, race, class, and the like on its members and by so doing determines not only what is considered to be ‘true,’ but also who can speak and with what force” (Campbell 2005, p. 3). By the same token, rhetorical agency is also inventive. Writers and authors are not the originators of discursive power; they invent it by “negotiating among institutional powers” (p. 5).

Even as it recognizes the power dynamics of rhetorical relationships, rhetorical theory today continues to explore how rhetorical training can equip students for productive engagement in public discourse. For example, Wayne C. Booth and Krista Ratcliffe argue that “rhetorical listening,” a stance of openness to alternative views, can generate the understanding needed for cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution (Booth 2004; Ratcliffe 2005). John Duffy argues that the first-year writing class can “stand as a model of principled resistance” to “fake news” and “alternative facts” in the post-truth era (2019). By teaching argument as social practice, the writing class can introduce students to the principles of ethical argumentation, teaching “values and virtues like honesty, accountability, fair-mindedness and intellectual courage.” Cheryl Glenn proposes a theory of rhetorical feminism that engages, addresses, and supports feminist values such as openness, dialogue, and deliberation through activism, mentoring, and teaching (Glenn 2018).

Glenn describes rhetorical feminist pedagogy that works toward a more equitable future by empowering marginalized students. William N. Denman articulates a similar view in a discussion of rhetorical education in America. He writes,

It is particularly essential that we give power to the voices of those who have hitherto been voiceless in American life. The voiceless are those who have historically been unheard, as well as those whose early education, upbringing, and cultural roots have discouraged active participation in civic life. Those whose rhetorical recourses have been constrained can find their voices through the practice of rhetoric and participation in civic life as these things can be taught in communications classes. It is time to bring the “citizen-orator”—and the citizen-writer—back into the college curriculum. (Denman 2004, p. 12)

This is where rhetorical education can actively support the democratic mission of school—creating educational opportunities that enable all students to develop their rhetorical resources through the practice of rhetoric and civic participation. In classical rhetoric, this would involve cultivating rhetorical skills through the practice of imitation, which encourages students to adopt and adapt the rhetorical resources of exemplary texts in an existing public culture. Glenn (2018) describes a feminist alternative in her account of rhetorical feminist pedagogy—acknowledging the power of the rhetorical resources that students bring with them to the classroom, “their vernaculars, experiences, and emotions” (p. 130). Glenn (2018) reminds us of the power of teaching and its concomitant responsibilities: “Teaching matters, what with its power and responsibility that can be harnessed for creating—or thwarting—a good and just future. For rhetorical feminists, teaching is hope embodied. It is a forward-looking endeavor, one that has power to change lives—our own, our students’. To present it otherwise is irresponsible” (p. 125).

There are now explicit references to rhetoric in the national curricula for language arts teaching in upper-secondary school in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Broadly speaking, their aim is to improve communicative ability through the study of persuasive language. For example, the Norwegian curriculum refers to rhetoric as a set of tools for argument analysis and persuasive appeal in presentations (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2013). The Swedish language arts curriculum in upper-secondary school stands out from the rest in its conception of rhetoric as an approach to effective communication, one which takes rhetorical awareness as its guiding principle. One of the goals of the Swedish subject is to give students insight into what it calls the “rhetorical work process,” defined as the ability “to plan and carry out spoken and written compositions that take into consideration purpose, audience, and communicative situation” (Skolverket 2011c, p. 161). An explication of this term in the commentary material produced by the Swedish Ministry of Education reveals that the

rhetorical work process is modelled on Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*, in which the canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) serve both as a guide for crafting powerful speech and a template for judging effective rhetoric. The commentary material describes the rhetorical work process as a rhetorical approach to process writing, consisting of six phrases (Skolverket 2017b). The initial phase is “intellectio,” defined as the formulation of a purpose based on an assessment of a communicative situation. The subsequent stages develop that purpose through the canons of rhetoric: invention (“finding appropriate material and sound arguments”), arrangement (“the appropriate ordering of material and arguments”), style (“choosing language and style”), memory (“effective use of scripts and presentation aids”), and delivery (“appropriate delivery with the help of body language and the voice”) (Skolverket 2017b). There are references to various phrases of the rhetorical work process in the core content and knowledge requirements for all three courses in the Swedish progression, where they are applied to reception as well as production and associated with effective communication in academic, professional, and civic contexts. A specialized course in Rhetoric, which students can elect to take after Swedish 1, details all six parts of the rhetorical work process as core content, including those parts that specifically refer to speech and public performance, referencing effective use of visual aids under the heading of memory and body language and voice under the heading of delivery. The rhetorical work process is also listed as core content in the syllabus for a specialized course in Writing, which is focused exclusively on argumentative and creative writing, in other words, writing in the civic and cultural domains. Just as it is in Quintilian’s educational program, its underlying aim is to cultivate in students a faculty for rhetoric that enables them to discern the means by which effective communication may be achieved in specific instances of public discourse.

An alignment with Quintilian’s goals for rhetorical education can also be seen in a progression focused on developing communicative ability in speech. One of the overarching goals of the Swedish subject is to cultivate in students the ability to speak well—that is, both effectively and ethically—in public discourse. Teaching in the subject should give students opportunities to develop the ability “to speak before others in a manner appropriate for the communicative situation and to participate constructively in discussions and debates that require preparation” (Skolverket 2017c, p. 160). This goal is reflected in the core content of all three courses in the Swedish progression. Core content for Swedish 1 lists the ability to give an oral presentation that is adapted to an audience and to respond to others as appropriate to

communicative context. Core content for Swedish 2 lists the ability to speak in and before groups in the investigative and argumentative modes of discourse. Core content for Swedish 3 lists the ability to apply the rhetorical work process to the planning and delivery of a speech. Core content for all three courses lists the ability to use visual aids to enhance the effectiveness of a presentation, which adds a multimodal dimension to the subject's goals for spoken composition. More fundamentally, core content for all three courses allude to rhetorical facility—the ability to adapt to communicative context—as the focus of communicative training. Teaching in the subject should enable students to adapt to a rhetorical situation in terms of language (Swedish 1), style and arrangement (Swedish 2), and effective use of the persuasive appeals (*retoriska verkningsmedel*) (Swedish 3) (Skolverket 2017c, p.176). The specialized course in Rhetoric focuses exclusively on developing the communicative abilities needed for effective and ethical speech in civic discourse. Core content includes debate about socially contested issues, argument analysis, and the ethics of civic discourse, including “active listening” and “the art of giving constructive response,” both of which can be taken as references to rhetorical listening (Skolverket 2017d, p. 14). In its commentary material, the Swedish Ministry of Education describes the social significance of these speaking skills in terms of the democratic mission of the school:

The ability to give an oral presentation is an important skill in working life and higher education. Being able to convey a message with the goal of informing or persuading others is also an important part of citizen competence (*medborgarkompetens*). One of the important tasks of the Swedish subject to promote the development of pupils as democratic and responsible members of society. (Skolverket 2011b)

As in Quintilian's *paideia*, the goal is to cultivate citizen-rhetors who are able to communicate effectively in public discourse and who can do so responsibly. The ability to speak well is described as a civic virtue, being valuable for both students and society.

Comparable references can be found in the English subject syllabus for upper-secondary school, where the aim is to develop all-round communicative ability in English as a lingua franca. As in the subject syllabus for Swedish, the subject syllabus for English takes the rhetorical view that effective communication is characterized by flexible adaptability to context. One of the goals of the subject is to give students opportunities to develop the ability “to adapt language to different, purposes, recipients, and situations” (Skolverket 2017c,

p. 54). The goal is developed through core content listed under the heading of production such as the ability to communicate in speech and writing for various purposes and the ability to revise spoken and written compositions with the aim of improving expression, structure, and adaptation to genre and communicative situation. Corresponding core content listed under the heading of reception includes the study of a broad range of text types and texts written for various purposes in various communicative contexts. This progression culminates in explicit references to rhetoric and style. Core content for English 7 includes the study of “how stylistic devices and rhetorical tactics (*stilistiska och retoriska grepp*) are used for various purposes” (Skolverket 2017d, p. 9). Students should be given opportunities to study how these are used in model texts of various kinds and employ them in their own spoken and written compositions. The correspondence of core content listed under the headings of reception and production suggests an apprenticeship approach to composition, in which developing writers study exemplar texts with the goal of discovering how they achieve their communicative objectives, another classical design that has its roots in Quintilian’s educational program. In contemporary composition theory, apprenticeship pedagogy is recommended for teaching rhetorical awareness and conscious control of communicative options (Flower 1994). It enhances literacy by helping students develop strategic knowledge of effective communication. Other allusions to the rhetorical awareness can be found in core content progressions that align with subject goals pertaining to strategy use and expressive ability. For example, core content for English 6 includes “spoken and written production and interaction in different situations and for different purposes where students argue from different perspectives, apply, reason, assess, investigate, negotiate, and give reasons for their views” and “strategies for contributing to and actively participating in arguments, debates, and discussions in civic and working life” (Skolverket 2017c, p. 61). Like the Swedish subject syllabus, the English subject syllabus emphasizes the communicative skills needed for active participation in public discourse. The general aim is to prepare students for active participation in civic, academic, and working life.

Now that rhetoric is back on the syllabus for language arts teaching in upper-secondary school, what do teachers need in order to realize and develop its potential? Teachers of the language arts deserve insight into rhetorical theories of teaching and learning so that they are better able to achieve educational goals such as the promotion of critical thinking, literacy and language acquisition, and effective communication in speech and writing. They also deserve insight into the principles of rhetorical pedagogy so that they have the option of

implementing these as they design and sequence lessons and align learning activities with assignments and assessment practices. Finally, teachers deserve insight into the role that rhetorical education can play for achieving the democratic mission of the school, that is, how it can help prepare students for higher education, the workplace, and an active life as citizens.

The aim of this issue of *Education & Democracy* is to help address these needs. The essays and articles published here derive from a conference that took place in 2017 at Örebro University, Sweden. The goal of the conference was to bring together researchers in rhetoric, literacy, and education to explore and develop the educational potential and democratic impact of rhetoric in upper-secondary school and higher education. Presentations explored various aspects of the central theme of the conference, how rhetorical education—inspired by the rhetorical tradition and modified and updated for education in the twenty-first century—can enhance language arts teaching today. How can rhetoric revitalize the language arts? How can it enrich students' literacy experiences across the disciplines? How can it help students develop communicative agency and carry it into the public sphere—at work, at university, and in civic life? A number of researchers elected to develop their arguments in the essays and articles published here.

In RHETORICAL EDUCATION AND THE MAKING OF GOOD CITIZENS, *Cheryl Glenn* explores the personal, academic, and labor-market value of the rhetorical arts, arguing that rhetorical insight—in addition to offering a system of knowledgeable active citizenship and an ecology of personal satisfaction—is as valuable as scientific, technical, and business expertise for creating a sustainable economy. In THE PROBLEM OF WRITING IN MASS EDUCATION, *Deborah Brandt* argues that democratizing writing in mass education requires a reconceptualization of writing as craft, which is best promoted through apprenticeship to a master craftsperson. Brandt advocates putting teacher-writers at the center of writing instruction to promote apprenticeship relations in schools. In LINGUISTIC CHOICE AS EMPOWERMENT: TEACHING RHETORICAL DECISION-MAKING IN WRITING, *Debra Myhill* underscores the importance of encouraging a sense of authorship in the language arts classroom, advocating a rhetorical approach to the teaching of writing that aims to empower developing writers by drawing attention to the relationship between linguistic choice and rhetorical effect in model texts. Myhill identifies the pedagogical principles of this approach and shows how it can be implemented in lesson planning and activity design. In THE IMPORTANCE OF RHETORIC AND ARGUMENTATION IN SCHOOLS, *Richard Andrews* explores the role of rhetorical education from a curricular perspective, arguing for the restoration

of rhetoric to the core English curriculum for language arts education as an overarching theory of communication for the twenty-first century. Writing of the Scandinavian educational context, *Jonas Bakken* examines some of the problems that emerge when curriculum development challenges educational tradition. In *THE INTEGRATION OF RHETORIC INTO EXISTING SCHOOL SUBJECTS*, Bakken analyzes how rhetoric is presented to the students in textbooks designed for teaching Language Arts in Norwegian upper-secondary school, finding inconsistencies that can be problematic for teaching and assessment practices. In *INQUIRY'S ROLE IN RHETORICAL ENGAGEMENT*, *Jessica Enoch* considers the role of inquiry in rhetorical education in the context of higher education, arguing that explorative heuristics can help promote civility in academic and civic writing. Enoch describes the design of an undergraduate writing course in which explorative heuristics help students craft questions that propel and shape their thinking, writing, and arguments.

The issue concludes with a summary of the roundtable discussion with which the conference concluded. This discussion focused on two themes: (1) how rhetoric can enhance teacher education and (2) areas of research that hold promise for enhancing the democratic impact of the school. The authors contributing to this issue of *Education & Democracy* contributed to the roundtable discussion, offering their perspectives from their respective fields: rhetoric, literacy, and education.

Notes

1. For an analysis of conception of rhetoric in the Norwegian subject syllabus for upper-secondary school, see the article by Jonas Bakken in this edition.
2. All translations of passages cited from the Swedish national curriculum and commentary material are mine.
3. Of the five rhetorical canons, only style receives special mention in the English subject syllabus. Although this emphasis is not explained, the implication is that the study of style helps students develop the ability to “express themselves with variation and complexity” (Skolverket 2017c, p. 53). As that part of the art of rhetoric concerned with the effective expression of ideas on the sentence level, style seems especially well suited for helping language learners realize such expressive goals.
4. See, for example, Linda Flower’s social cognitive theory of literacy, which argues that literate action involves socially situated problem-solving that recognizes the importance of rhetorical situation (Flower 1994).
5. There are comparable references to rhetoric in the specialized courses for Language Studies (*Språk specialisering*), which are intended to give upper-secondary school students well-developed communicative abilities in a language other than Swedish, that is, English or another modern language studied in compulsory school.

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