

Book review

Bazerman, C., Krut, R., Lunsford, K., McLeod, S., Null, S., Rogers, P., and Stansell, A. (Eds.). (2010). *Traditions of Writing Research*. Routledge. New York, NY/Abingdon, UK | ISBN-10: 0415993385. ISBN-13: 978-0415993388

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The editors of *Traditions of Writing Research* have put together an eclectic collection of short essays based upon proceedings from the 2008 conference, *Writing Across Borders* (henceforth WRAB). Therefore, to understand the logic behind this collection, I reproduce some of the text from the original WRAB Call for Papers: "This conference brings together the many writing researchers from around the world, drawing on all disciplines, and focused on all aspects of writing at all levels of development and in all segments of society. This will be an opportunity to learn from different research traditions, share our findings, seek common agendas, and lay the groundwork for future communication and alliances" (<http://www.writing.ucsb.edu/wrconf08/>). Since the WRAB is a conference meant for inventing new research paths and connecting seemingly disconnected ones, the collection of essays in this volume resists familiar or traditional categories we might expect to see in a handbook or anthology. True to their objective to cross borders, this volume includes voices not typically placed side by side in one collection.

The 31 entries are written by scholars working out of institutions from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, France, Mexico, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US. There are five sections in the book, and none of those sections map onto discipline-specific categories, neither particular research methods, nor theoretical frameworks. Some of the chapters contribute a synthesis of research literature, and others report original research projects. There is a variety of types of research contributions within this volume.



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In this review, I explain the five categories that organize the 31 articles in this book and how the articles support those categorizations. I close with a few observations about the book as a whole and its contribution to the field.

The editors claim that the book is meant to be a “wide-ranging sampler of the best writing research currently under way in the world, at least as it was represented at the 2008 WRAB conference” (Bazerman et al, xi). I found that the book does read like a sampler, with chapters allowing readers to “taste” a particular research area and explore a perhaps unfamiliar bibliography. I offer very brief summary statements of each article in order to explain the section headings and the contents of the book.

Part 1: Approaches in Various Regions

There are six articles in Part 1, “Approaches in Various Regions.” All of them give presence to projects or research literature from educational policy or systems from diverse geographical regions in the world. From the beginning of this volume, it is clear that the editors wish to communicate that writing research is an international phenomenon and is not confined to any country, language, or even continent.

Of the six articles, four are syntheses of different traditions not usually seen grouped together in the research literature. These include Huijun’s discussion of “Writingology” in Chinese writing studies; Delcambre and Reuter’s explanation of French didactics from grade school to university; Araújo’s overview of genre research in Brazil; and García et al’s description of writing instruction in Spain for student writers with and without learning disabilities.

Two of the six articles report on instructional improvements that have occurred as a result of national agendas to improve writing in schools. In Norway, Dysthe explains how positive changes have resulted from “top-down” institutionalized reform. In Portugal, Pereira and others in her research group explain how various interventions have improved writing instruction.

All of the entries in this section describe academic writing within school contexts and draw upon very different sets of research literature.

Part 2: “Writing Education in Political and Historical Contexts”

In this second section, “Writing Education in Political and Historical Contexts,” the editors have selected four articles that report on writing and literacy instruction in either post-totalitarian or postcolonial contexts. In these contexts the authors draw attention to how writers negotiate their power and position as they negotiate their language and writing. By using the term *political*, the editors allow us to consider the dynamics of power relationships and how those connect with literacy and education. The editors’ use of the term *historical* refers to a temporal dimension that the various authors address by documenting change or collecting data over time in writing education.

Two of the essays discuss writing education in post-Soviet areas, Poland and Armenia. Ornatowski chronicles the educational approach between 1945-1999, and

claims that Poland moved away from a Stalinist socialist agenda toward a more individualist and critical one. Harootunian explains a two-year study of Armenian students writing in English at Yerevan State University, who over the course of three semesters moved from imitating what he calls “Western-style pedagogy” to mediating those methods for their own purposes (p. 99).

The other two essays in this section study South American contexts. Sílvia Cintra explains how in Brazil, individuals’ accessing and practicing literacy directly relates to their negotiating the tensions between the rural and the urban. González Pinzón describes the process of what she calls a return to reading and writing education in Colombian universities and how within the higher education context, curriculum needs to emphasize literacy practices for knowledge building and not only reading comprehension.

All of these essays address how hidden, ideological assumptions shape pedagogical practices for teaching and developing literacy.

Part 3: Research in Primary and Secondary School Practice

This third segment groups together eight articles about literacy research in primary and secondary schools. While all of the articles are connected to a grade school context, not all of them discuss student learning. The topics in this section include student writing development and language acquisition processes, teacher education, and cognitive process.

Five of the essays report findings about primary and secondary students’ writing processes. Four of these are based upon classroom research on specific pedagogical interventions or methods. Castedo and Ferreiro explain how under appropriate direction, even younger students can engage with revision processes for their own texts and for their peers. Álvarez Angulo and García Parejo report on how 6th grade student writing improved after particular interventions, and Romero and Walker describe how students who wrote for a bilingual radio project could better conceptualize their voice in written English because of the multimodal interactions of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In an article about Moroccan and Chinese 5-8 year olds learning Catalan, Tolchinsky and Salas explore to what extent developing second language learners relate spoken language to written language in their L2. One article addresses cognitive processes in developing writers. Hayes and Berninger report findings that transcription methods (e.g., handwriting, typing) might very well interfere with children’s ability to produce ideas in writing.

The three remaining articles in Part 3 address issues related to teacher development and education. Null argues through two representative cases that since teachers negotiate and shape instructional texts for their own objectives, teachers should be identified as the power behind change in the literacy classroom, rather than curriculum materials. In a similar vein, Faulkner, Rivalland, and Hunter report on the Writing Project in Australian schools, particularly how teachers learned and used knowledge

about writing in order to teach and assess their students. Finally, in the last article of this section, Whitney claims that the National Writing Project in the U.S. has shaped teachers into authors because it has provided the kind of social and professional support that helps teachers manage the obstacles challenging their ability to write about their teaching.

I should note that while the focus and research literature of the articles shifts almost abruptly at times during this section, all of the articles provide frameworks that are supported by interesting data.

Part 4: Research in Higher Education Practice

This collection of articles from Part 4, “Research in Higher Education Practices,” begins with Thaiss’ preliminary report on survey results about Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)/Writing in the Disciplines (WID) offerings from 275 institutions outside of the US and Canada. The Thaiss essay is a useful starting point because in this section all of the articles focus upon literacy practices in courses beyond first-year composition. However, like the other four parts in this book, the various essays can be subdivided in multiple ways.

Three articles present research on particular course writing tasks and students’ performance. Wake, focusing on recent developments in Australian universities to better meet the learning needs of international students, argues that dialogic discussion allowed students in a capstone economics course to tackle complex rhetorical tasks. Also discussing issues related to improving student learning, Inglese claims that native and nonnative Italian speaking students wrote better texts when they were exposed to multimodal representations of social science authors through print and television interviews. From a beginning oceanography course in the U.S., Kelly, Bazerman, Skukauskaite, and Prothero demonstrate a rigorous textual analysis to argue that students are able to take on some science genre conventions for building evidence through writing.

Three of the essays in this section critique the academic institution’s assumptions about literacy, which typically remain hidden from students. Liew and Ball expose norms within the academic context that assume students must bring a kind of academic literacy for informal social interactions, for example, students’ writing and posting texts electronically for the purpose of dialogic exchange. Carlino, by collecting various materials and perspectives from students and teachers in Argentine universities, demonstrates how literacy instruction and practice in the social sciences remain, in his words, “taken for granted” (p. 285) and identifies some contradictions between how interviewees view literacy instruction and how they actually practice it. In the final article in this section, Starke-Meyerring critiques the digital writing environments such as the *Wiki*, *Scholarpedia*, and *OpenWetWare* in order to expose the tensions between what types of institutional values and social genres get privileged over others as knowledge gets written in the so-called “free environment” of the Internet. All of the

arguments in this section prompt us to rethink our assumptions regarding the tasks and processes we assign to our students.

Part 5: Theories and Methodologies for Understanding Writing and Writing Processes

In this final section of the book, the editors give us six essays that promote particular frameworks, methods, and very different units of analysis for research. The diversity in this section is nearly disorienting, yet studies of writing do range in precisely the ways that the articles do in this segment. Hence, in keeping with the WRAB conference theme, this range seems reasonable.

Russell carefully explains how a combination of activity theory and phenomenology can allow for understanding genres as part of social practices for not only researching but also teaching students how to write for various workplace and academic contexts. Next, Rogers presents a very useful synthesis of qualitative longitudinal studies of writing to offer significant factors that researchers might explore for future work on writing development. I would note that due to the timing of this publication, the author claims that there has been only one longitudinal study of student writing in second language writing. However, the last few years have given rise to new reports of longitudinal studies in second language writing, for example, Ilona Leki's (2007) *Undergraduates in a Second Language: Challenges and Complexities in Academic Literacy Development* and Christine M. Tardy's (2009) *Building Genre Knowledge*.

Two of the articles describe real-time process research through statistical modeling and measuring eye movements. Perrin and Wildi argue that statistical modeling of keystroke data is a method to manage large corpora of data that researchers must aim to collect in order to gain a robust understanding of what writers do in real time and in natural settings. Concerned with how writers manage their writing processes, Torrance and Wengelin propose a combined methodology of tracking eye movements and recording keystrokes in order to study writers as they write.

Nelson and Grote-Garcia's chapter explains the relationships between methodology and epistemology within writing research. For beginning researchers and graduate students in writing studies, Nelson and Grote-Garcia's work provides a way of understanding how researchers make choices for designing projects and for analyzing data.

Finally, Huckin writes the last chapter of this section and of this volume, offering a framework for critically analyzing and teaching textual silences. The editors' decision to end the book with this argument about the importance of silences is both artful and challenging as we consider what is missing and *who* is missing from this collection. In light of Huckin's work, it should be noted that of all the entries in this final section on theory, not one author hails from an institution outside of Europe or the United States.

Conclusion

Traditions of Writing Research represents writing studies in the manner the editors in their preface claim the book should: as a sampler. The editors have admirably included many voices to represent a global rhetorical and linguistic context for writing research rather than a western European or U.S.-centric context only. Within this volume, the languages included within writing research are Catalan, Chinese, French, Norwegian, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, English, and Italian. Moreover, there are a few studies of second language writers: Armenians writing in English; Chinese and Moroccan students learning Catalan; Mexican immigrant students learning to write in English; nonnative Italian speakers writing in Italian.

Moreover, the editors have included a range of methodological and theoretical frameworks for this collection. To name a few of the methods represented in the book, the authors have employed surveys; ethnographic interviews; critical, functional, and rhetorical discourse analytical methods; real-time cognitive process tracing through keystroke and eye movement data recording. Not surprisingly, there is a strong presence of Vygotskian and generally sociocultural analytical research in this collection.

This volume, because of its range and multidisciplinary, shows that studying writing is complex and intellectually challenging anywhere in the world. Yet this volume also shows the difficulty of defining this discipline, and perhaps more framing from the editors would help readers interpret the categories that group the essays throughout the book.

In the future, we should look forward to how the WRAB conference and its editorial board will find authors whose interactions de-familiarize what is familiar about our traditions for studying writing.

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