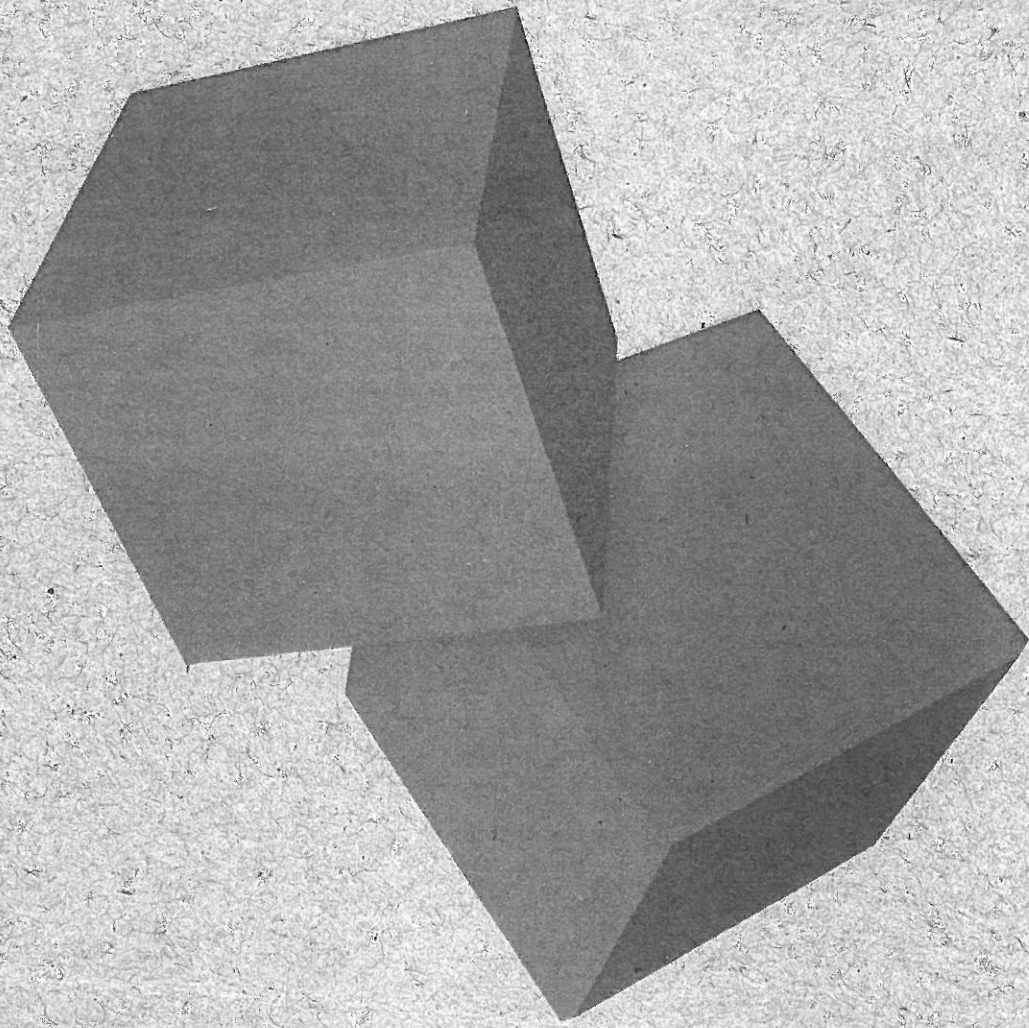


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STUDENT WRITING AND WRITING EDUCATION IN NATIONAL CONTEXTS: CONTINUING A DIALOGUE

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RESUMO

Textos são relações sociais-são escritos em momentos e circunstâncias específicos e lidos em momentos e circunstâncias específicos, realizando, assim, interações sociais concretas. Como tal, a instrução para a leitura varia de país para país e de sistema de ensino para sistema de ensino, com base na história local e na configuração das instituições. A história institucional, social e ideológica da escrita na escolarização norte-americana fez surgir abordagens pedagógicas e de pesquisa dentro estudos contemporâneos sobre a escrita. Também no Brasil, uma análise das condições da escrita pode fornecer caminhos para compreender e fazer avançar a instrução para a escrita

ABSTRACT

Texts are social relations--written in specific circumstances at specific times and read in specific circumstances at specific times, thereby realizing concrete social interactions. Since Writing is so situation-specific, writing education varies from country to country and school system to school system based on local histories and institutional arrangements. The institutional, social, and ideological history of writing in North American schooling gave rise to pedagogic and research approaches in contemporary writing studies. An analysis of the conditions of writing in Brazil may provide ways to understand and advance writing education in Brazil.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Pedagogia da escrita, história da escolarização, contextos nacionais, interações sociais

KEYWORDS

Writing pedagogy, schooling history, national contexts, social interactions

In February 2005 I had the honor and pleasure of addressing the ABRALIN conference on “Analyzing the Multidimensionality of Texts in Education.” In that talk I made the point that written texts pervade the educational process, the educational system, and the policy and political processes that shape education. Therefore to understand and improve educational processes at all levels we need appropriate, multidimensional, and subtle methods of text analysis. There are certainly well-known and well-honed tools of analysis tied to instruction and evaluation of student writing that provide students a familiar repertoire of tools for interpreting the texts they read, with a particular focus on literary texts. Nonetheless, these represent only a small subset of the analytic tools for examining texts. Further they assume certain roles and stances towards text as natural. The many other things we may learn about texts if we step outside these roles and assumptions remain hidden to us, unless we defamiliarize these deeply habituated habits of looking at writing and reading. Analysis of texts can help us understand many things in addition to language arts pedagogy, such as

- students’ interaction with texts as part of developing knowledge and intellect;
- the role texts take in classroom activities in all subjects and in the adult activities school is preparing them for;
- the implications and practical consequences of instructional guidelines and standards and how they link to classroom practices;
- the ideological underpinnings of policy movements;
- how teachers and administrators form links with parents through texts;
- how public opinion is formed by journalistic reports and how journalistic representation influences politics, policies and community relations.

Understanding the role, function, and consequences of the varied texts in education requires forms of analysis different is

aided by having a wide repertoire of text analysis tools..

In that talk I then presented some varieties of text analysis ranging from content analysis and multimedia analysis through intertextual, rhetorical, genre and activity systems analysis. I considered these in relation to questions they might help us answer. As these methods and their uses are surveyed in a soon to be published essay (Bazerman, forthcoming) and are expanded in much greater detail in a volume I recently coedited (Bazerman & Prior, 2004; see also Barton & Stygall, 2003 for a complementary set of essays) I will not elaborate here. Rather I want to now consider how this way of looking at texts can give us a fresh perspective on familiar curricular and student texts. When we teach writing we are very interested in getting students to inscribe thoughts correctly and precisely within the available appropriate sign systems, and we evaluate them on how well they do this. But why we focus on particular tasks and view our roles in the way we do usually escapes our attention because we take our school forms of writing largely for granted. We tend to think that if students learn to write these particular kinds of texts to our evaluative expectations, then they know how to write. Furthermore, if students succeed in these forms of writing, they think all writing is of this character. Because writing in school is almost always surrounded by evaluation, writing overwhelmingly can seem to students to be a performance for recognition and reward (whether gold stars, high grades, or opportunities for advancement). Insofar as evaluation focuses on formal correctness, people leave school with deeply seated anxieties about their ability to express themselves correctly. So from all the variety of functions writing can serve, all the roles and relationships it can enact, all the intellectual growth and community advancement it can serve, all the affective bonding it might achieve, writing comes to be viewed by most students as something to be evaluated and rewarded, measured against standards of correct-

ness—something filled with anxiety and aversiveness. As natural as this set of affairs may seem to us, they are not inevitable; they are the consequences of historically emerged sets of social arrangements. The ground breaking work of James Britton and his collaborators thirty years ago in the development of writing abilities (Britton et al, 1975) brought this message home to us when they documented how much writing functions, genre, and audience relations varied among school subjects and across the years of schooling, with the relationship of student writing to an examiner coming to dominate all in the latter secondary years.

Texts are social relations—written in specific circumstances at specific times and read in specific circumstances at specific times, thereby realizing concrete social interactions. While texts are alive socially and psychologically within complex events, the inscribed text that serves as the mediator of meaning seems itself stripped of its human action and location. It seems to carry meaning entirely within its signs, but those signs only come alive in the people who communicate. Nonetheless, in schooling our focus is on the correctness of the signs, rather than on the social relations. If we were to focus on the social relations we would become aware of how particular and unusual the school situation is which frames student writing. Moreover, that situation varies from class to class, grade-to-grade, and educational system to educational system.

I raise the question of the social arrangements embedded in our writing and writing instruction practices in part in response to the good fortune I had during this, my first, trip to Brazil to meet with writing educators in different parts of the country, to visit schools, and to begin to learn how the teaching of writing is carried out in Brazil. Learning about writing pedagogy in another country always defamiliarizes one's own taken for granted practices and helps one to see more in the comparison. The book "*Good Writing*" in a *Cross Cultural Context*, for example, studies the evalu-

ative criteria imposed by secondary writing teachers in China and the US (Li, 1996). A more recent volume edited by David Russell and David Foster *Writing and Learning in Cross-National Perspective* provides comparative descriptions of writing education in six countries in Africa, Europe, and Asia (though unfortunately not in Latin America) (Russell & Foster, 2002). The chapters in this volume make clear how influential the examination and student accountability structure is in defining the kind of writing taught and where, when, and how it is taught. (See also Freedman, 1994 for another cross-national comparison.)

This issue came home to me when two decades ago I taught in Singapore where much of the pre-university writing instruction centered on what was called the "general paper" for the A (advanced) level exam, which measured readiness for university entry. Even though Singapore was then independent for twenty years, because the education system was established under British colonial rule, the exam scripts were still sent off to the UK to be externally graded. In former British colonies the external exams may take on a power even greater than in Britain, for these exams are a point of contact with the authorizing system which is thought to guarantee standards. Indeed external examination throughout all levels of the educational system loomed important in authorizing the international quality of degrees, so notions of competence grow not out of local practice and needs, but the imagination of the standards of a distant authority. This imagination of a distant authority has a magnifying and distortive effect which then can further obstruct the communicative immediacy of writing, and the ability to connect up with local society and locally relevant institutions, as Janet Giltrow found in an ethnographic study of students and staff in a South Asian university (Giltrow, 2002). This concern for the opinion of an imagined distant cosmopolis is one of the remnants of empire that may fall away as countries come to see themselves as full

and equal players on the world stage. Whether the new world postcolonial globalized order will facilitate linguistic and educational confidence and autonomy of each nation or will foster a single or small number of centers of linguistic power that then in some ways authorize education, learning, and knowledge throughout the world remains to be seen. As I began to understand a bit of Brazil's history and current linguistic situation I was greatly heartened to witness the robustness of Portuguese and Brazil's recognition of its central place in the language. Brazil clearly has its own robust academic, intellectual, and popular press, its own entertainment industries that more than rivaled imports, and an education system seeking its own path, learning from the rest of the world but making its own choices for future generations of Brazilians. From Brasilia and Sao Paulo and Recife and Santa Maria global English hardly seemed a looming spectre,

I also noticed, nonetheless, that Brazil's early independence with only a limited revolutionary struggle left many questions still being sorted through about the legacies of the colonial experience. I particularly wondered about the division of practices between private and public education, a division that we have in the U. S., but one that appears to work out in a somewhat different way. I also wondered about the origins, legacy, and impact of the Vestibular on writing instruction in both the private and the public schools. I also noted, however, a recent push towards expanded public education has fostered much creative thinking, new national curricula, and institutional rearrangements. Also I noted that the national university system has expanded and taken on more of a research and graduate training function in recent decades. It seems a productive moment to consider Brazilian literacy education. But as I am still so deeply ignorant about the history and practices of Brazilian education, the uses of literacy in contemporary Brazil, and the dynamics and institutions of writing education, it is hard for me to say more.

Rather, to provide a contrast to your own educational system and the role of writing within it, I will tell you some of the things U. S. scholarship on the teaching of writing has found out about the history and arrangements of U.S. literacy instruction. At the least this may provide a frame to help you interpret the U.S. work on writing education you may come across. At the best it may give you some ideas about how to proceed in mapping your own stories. It cannot and should not, however, provide any direct advice for where you should go. If communicative practices including writing are situated within particular contexts—a belief I share with many of you—then the literacy and educational histories and needs of the nation should define the issues to be addressed, the forms of writing and reading to be taught, and the potentials for vibrant literacy.

First I need to point out that most early educational history in the United States has been written in relation to the eastern colonies under the most direct influence of Britain. The educational history of the southwestern states under the influence of Spain has barely begun to be written. In the largely Protestant Atlantic coastal colonies, reading was understood to be a general community obligation for both men and women almost solely for religious reasons, but writing was seen as of use to only a smaller subset of people, primarily male and primarily for business reasons. So while reading was taught to most children, male and female, in community based schools, writing was taught for the most part in private urban male-only business-oriented schools around record keeping and business correspondence (Monaghan, 1989). Higher education, based on the British Oxford and Cambridge model, was largely for social elites entering the clergy or the landholding classes, and thus was primarily male—with a focus on oral rhetorical performance, grounded in training of the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and classical languages. In this form of higher education writing was primarily a means

of scripting orations, and the most important presentations were oratorical—which were seen as a male domain. These patterns of education remained well past independence and into the nineteenth century (Kitzhaber, 1990; Johnson, 1991).

Only in the middle of the nineteenth century were substantial higher education opportunities offered to women and only gradually was it seen appropriate for women to engage in public oratory. The temperance, abolitionist, and suffrage movements (Mattingly, 1998; Lunsford, 1995) in the middle of the century provided the first substantial opportunities for women to engage in influential oratory. Similarly the abolitionist movement provided the first substantial opportunities for African Americans to take on public rhetorical roles (Logan, 1999). After 1865 some degree of educational opportunity opened up for African Americans, though in largely segregated circumstances for almost an additional century, with the consequence of some distinctive literacy traditions being developed (Royster, 2000). Immigration, as well, has challenged literacy instruction from the late nineteenth-century through today, with changing beliefs and practices concerning the relation between instruction in the first and second language.

Throughout the middle of the nineteenth century, nonetheless, rapid commercial expansion increased the need for writing and reading, often in relation to new technology based industries, with industrial journalism arising simultaneously with urban expansion and the rapid development of large-circulation urban newspapers. To serve the needs of the working and middle classes, community education expanded and began to include writing education, but since this was not based on the traditional elite model of the trivium, it looked to the progressive child-centered ideas of romantic educational reformers like Pestalozzi (Schultz, 1999; Carr, Carr & Schultz, 2005). From this developed a strong tradition in the school years of reading and writing being about the world familiar to children, expressing their

interests and experiences. Nonetheless secondary education in the college preparatory academies remained largely male, elite, and classical. Two major changes in the middle of the nineteenth century, however, affected the university, which were in turn to reorganize secondary, and to some degree primary education. First, to serve the needs of the growing society in 1862 Congress passed the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act establishing state run universities in the mechanical and agricultural arts. Because of separation of church and state in the U.S. these were entirely secular universities, aimed at advancing practical arts. This coincided with the importation of the German research model of the university, with a focus on doctoral degrees, a concern that the teaching faculty should also be trained as researchers, and perhaps most significantly, a reorganization on departmental lines following the divisions of research disciplines (Veysey, 1965).

Although the traditional model of advanced personal development remains alive to this day in small liberal arts colleges, the reorientation towards both practical and research oriented knowledge and disciplinary organization gradually pervaded higher education. Consequently, advanced teaching of reading and writing was not the heart of any of the disciplines. Philology and literary studies gained control of the curricular space devoted to teaching of English, and rhetoric lost central place in education (Parker, 1967). Then when it was viewed that students admitted to this new university needed additional language skills, particularly writing skills, this was assigned to the departments of literary and philological studies, as an adjunct remedial function—to be taught not by professors but by graduate students and other adjunct labor. As a result of this marginal status dominated by a research discipline not interested in the substance of writing education, for almost a century with a few notable exceptions there was little advance in teaching, with in-

struction focused on grammatical correctness and genres dictated by a nineteenth-century psychological model that saw modes of text organizations such as narrative, contrast, description, and analysis associated with intellectual capacities that could be strengthened through the practice of these discourse modes (Connors). Pursuit of these intellectual disciplines also favored a concise and clear style without much attention to rhetorical relations with audience or figures of speech. Nor was there much attention to the writing practices of the separate disciplines of the other university departments, even as they were developing distinctive practices and activities in pursuit of their particular forms of knowledge. Nor was there much attention to the practical forms of writing in the growing corporations, industrial world, and governmental bureaucracies. To serve these special needs smaller business and technical communications programs developed in connection with engineering and business programs (Russell 1991, Adams 1993).

To prepare students for the new universities, secondary education became reorganized as comprehensive high schools organized on disciplinary lines, with language education relegated to the subject area of English and language arts (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). As literary reading was a central task of high school English instruction, writing took a back seat to reading, particularly of literary texts. Neither was writing foregrounded in any other areas of learning such as history or the sciences.

The focus on correctness and meeting formal expectations was heightened by a national obsession with testing and measurement, particularly in public K-12 education as a guarantee of accountability and standards. The need for students to be able to produce brief essays in short time periods for examinations in all areas as well as to produce general displays of their writing skills under such examination conditions has led to an enduring presence of the so-called five-paragraph essay and its variants,

consisting of an introductory paragraph setting out a thesis with three subpoints developed in three middle paragraphs, and a conclusion repeating the major points (see Hillocks, 2002).

Short answer, true false, and multiple-choice mechanically scorable examinations became popular after the introduction of psychometrics during World War I. Such exams tended to further atomize notions of correctness to make it easily and uniformly scored; they also decreased the use of writing as a means of extended thought and communication in the various subject areas. The most significant institutionalization of this practice was the near universal use of the multiple-choice Scholastic Aptitude Test as a college entrance examination (now called the SAT in an attempt to avoid issues concerning the definition of aptitude and achievement). Only recently has the SAT reintroduced a twenty-five minute writing sample as a required element.

While the regimes of state and national testing along with the focus on college entrance provide constrained contexts for writing, particularly in high schools, higher education provides far more autonomy for the instructor, with few centralized or common examinations. Further, extensive paper assignments requiring research and argument frequently form a large part of the grade. Such writing assignments can also be closely aligned to instructors' goals for the course and the intellectual problems they wish students to address. This difference between higher education and secondary school writing assignment has led to major differences in the kinds of writing students do and the expectations for student skills. The required first year composition course at most universities is aimed at helping students write for the different set of expectations they meet in higher education.

A large expansion of the higher education system following World War II also meant a large expansion of the responsibilities of the first year writing course. As college graduation levels moved from 3-4% of the population prior to the war to over 20% in the

next several decades (currently over half of all students have some amount of higher education), students of more varied backgrounds, classes, and quality of education needed to be introduced to college level writing. In this period composition emerged as a professional field, producing pedagogical advances, professional organizations, scholarly journals, and increasingly sophisticated research. Professors began to identify with the field and to devote their research publications to it. By the late 1970's graduate programs developed in rhetoric and composition. This ferment produced new teaching methods, classroom research on the impact of alternative methods and the processes of student learning, linguistic research on the characteristics of mature writing, and investigation of writing processes. There also began to be more thorough investigations in the kinds of writing students needed to do throughout the university curriculum and in their careers after they finished the university. This concern with the varied forms and practices of writing in the various disciplines of the university, professions, and workplaces has been the central motivator of social research and theory about writing, with a focus on genre and activity theories (See Dias et al, 1999; Bazerman & Paradis, 1991; Bazerman & Russell, 2002)

Because many professors who identified with this field were initially trained in literary studies and because many of them were employed within English Departments, they also drew on rhetorical studies and carried out historical work in rhetoric, which complemented traditional forms of literary study. As critical theory and cultural studies gained presence in English departments these also became popular in composition and writing studies. However, as the field grew more robust, graduate programs developed, and some writing programs became independent of English departments, methods of study from the social sciences such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics also gained substantial presence.

This growth of writing studies in higher education, however, remained largely distinct from literacy research and curriculum in K-12 schooling that was centrally focused on reading. Again there have been a few notable exceptions (see Hillocks 1986, Dyson 1997), particularly concerning the involvement of writing within emergent literacy and on writing in younger students' lives (Hall, Larson & Marsh, 2003). The one substantial channel of communication that developed between higher education teachers of writing and language arts teachers in K-12 schooling was the National Writing Project with its many regional affiliates (www.nwp.org). Recently having celebrated its twenty-fifth year, the NWP has focused mostly on teacher development, so that the teachers could create a positive and creative environment for their students writing, with a strong emphasis on writing process. Because of the focus on teacher development and development of teacher-writer communities, there has been less focus on research nor on systematic curriculum and program development, although now the NWP is engaged in major research initiative to study the project's impacts.

There is nothing privileged about this history, only particularity and peculiarity. It perhaps explains the approaches to teaching of writing and writing research in the U.S. It also may explain the genres we ask students to write in, what our orientation to those texts are, and the kinds of social transactions that are mediated by such texts. Thus it helps us understand what students are doing and learning as they write for us in school contexts. It also reveals to us how students may or may not connect writing in school with meaningful tasks and skills that they see as relevant for their lives and that they will pursue once outside the school building. Brazil has its own story to tell about where its interests in writing lie, what the forms and practices of writing are that should be required and supported, about the aspects of writing to be investigated. I look forward to continuing dia-

logue with colleagues in Brazil to learn from each other about the creative and multiform presence of writing in our societies and schools.

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