

Writing in research education. Working with discourse and identity challenges faced by doctoral students.

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Cita:

Carlino, Paula (Febrero, 2011). *Writing in research education. Working with discourse and identity challenges faced by doctoral students. Writing Research Across Borders Conference II. George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia.*

Dirección estable: <https://www.aacademica.org/paula.carlino/198>

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Writing Research Across Borders II Session L
Sunday, February 20 1:00-2:30pm

~~L1~~

~~Research on Total Integration of Writing and Subject Matter Instruction in the Disciplines: An Interim Report from National and International Perspectives~~

~~Michael Carter, North Carolina State University, U.S.~~

~~Magnus Chalmers, University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden~~

~~Jane Burge, Miami University, U.S.~~

~~Paul Anderson, Miami University, U.S.~~

~~It is widely recognized that 21st-century college graduates around the world need strong communication skills to fulfill their roles as professionals and contributing members of their local, national, and global communities. Yet, studies continue to report that colleges are falling short in this important educational area [Hor05, IFM08, Wei09]. In regions like Europe that don't have a tradition of including writing instruction in higher education, an increasing number of universities are instituting writing-for-academic-purposes, writing-for-special-purposes, and similar programs [citations] to develop students' writing abilities. In the United States, many colleges have established writing across the curriculum, writing in the discipline, or writing-intensive course programs that supplement the required first-year writing course with additional attention to writing in advanced subject-area courses. What they share in common, in most cases, is a focus on two or three classes. Proponents of these programs believe that the writing in these disciplinary courses increases students' mastery of course content in addition to their communication skills. However, doubts have been raised about the quality of the evidence demonstrating their efficacy [Aek94, Oeh04]. Complaints about the writing of college graduates continue unabated.~~

~~We propose to report on first-year results from a three-year study in which an interdisciplinary group of 35 faculty from 14 universities explores a much more comprehensive strategy for integrating writing into higher education. Sponsored by an \$800,000 grant from the United State National Science Foundation, the study involves fully integrating writing and disciplinary instruction in a sequence of six courses that extend from the basic introduction to the senior capstone class in undergraduate programs in Computer Science (CS) and Software Engineering (SE). As students progress through the sequence, they will build their writing abilities in a developmentally progressive manner that parallels development of their technical skills. Instruction in writing will be inextricably tied to technical instruction. SE/CS faculty will deliver both. Students will learn the discipline's genre and writing conventions through instruction and assignments that are deeply embedded in the technical context of their future careers.~~

~~The project's research goals are as follows:~~

- ~~• To investigate the feasibility of developing model curricula that can be adapted by CS/SE programs throughout the United States and elsewhere.~~

L3

Postgraduates' Writing Practices and Challenges in Human and Social Sciences: Examples from Argentina, Brazil and Spain

Writing in research education: Working with discourse and identity challenges faced by doctoral students

Paula Carlino, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

This paper analyses a postgraduate writing seminar designed to help doctoral students deal with some of the challenges experienced when trying to join an academic community. In addition to acquire the academic knowledge required to become a researcher (the current disciplinary discussions, the methodological tools to contribute to them, and the writing practices inherent to scientific genres), there are emotional and identity capacities that need to be fostered if graduate students are to enter in the collective conversations that disciplines entail. These are mostly neglected by graduate programs. Students who survive have developed them on their own and sometimes with great suffering, as many studies show.

On the contrary, the question I address in this action research is how writing or “text work” can be explicitly linked to “identity work” (Kamler & Thomson, 2004). With this purpose, I examine a 30 hour writing seminar developed through 20 months with 3 cohorts of part-time Education doctoral students (N=18) in which I accompanied them through the process of writing, group and peer reviewing, and rewriting two scientific texts. During the first year of candidature, when they had not even defended their thesis proposal, they were asked to write a dissertation abstract as if their dissertation were finished. The purpose of this task was to encourage writing as an epistemic tool to plan their theses work as a whole and to think of the coherence among purposes, research questions, methods, intended results, and relevance of their prospective study. A year later, they had to write a paper with work in progress regarding their dissertation and find an appropriate conference to submit it and present it. Additionally, they wrote two non academic but “subjective” texts: an initial autobiographical account of themselves as writers and a final portfolio in which they documented and reflected on their work in the seminar.

The analysis of these reflective writings, together with the course assessment students carried out, reveal some of the discourse and identity tensions doctoral graduates face when trying to take part in the disciplinary community they aspire to enter. Their reflective texts also show subtle ways in which the writing seminar gave them the chance to learn technical knowledge and participate in new scholarly genres, as well as develop social and emotional tools to dare to do it. Making their feelings of incompetence explicit and receiving support to overcome them through writing, feedback, and rewriting was experienced as an opportunity for a long-term reflection on who they were and who they desired to become.

References

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L3 (continued)

Postgraduates' writing practices and challenges in human and social sciences: Examples from Argentina, Brazil and Spain

Authorship and intertextuality

Desiree Motta Roth, Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Brazil

A paper recently circulated on the internet (*World Science*, 04/24/2010, at http://www.world-science.net/othernews/100424_publish) has once more raised the issue that “Careers are judged based on the sheer number of papers someone has published, and on how many times these are cited in later papers—though this is a hotly debated measure of scientific quality”. Regardless of the quality issue, the growing importance of writing in scientific and personal development all over the academic world is a fact. In Brazil it becomes apparent in the pressure to publish among university faculty and students, as financial support to post-graduation education is differently allocated in programs depending on their index of publication. The increase in the rhythm of publication does not come without a great amount of difficulty and stress in accommodating the generation of original ideas and reading and writing practices in a reduced slot of time in order to comply with teaching and administrative tasks. The difficulties seem even more emphatic in a relatively young research system such as the Brazilian (where post-graduation education has been consistently ran by Ph.D. nationals since the 70's) and especially in Applied Linguistics, an area where conceptual variation and paradigm disputes are the norm and where research problems, data, results and solutions are not exactly concrete, but are essentially discursively constructed. One of the problems recurrently discussed within this context is how to define, teach, encourage, exert and give credit to authorship. In this presentation, first the issue of authorship is conceptually defined and then data collected with written questionnaires submitted to post-graduation students of an Applied Linguistics research group from Southern Brazil are presented. The data is analyzed for the Applied Linguistics group's discursive representations about their writing practices, what writing means to them, how writing and publishing are conducted in their research group, how productive the practice is perceived to be, how a better practice would look like, how professors and students define, teach, encourage, exert and give credit to each other's authorship. The results might show that authorship practice is perceived as an individual challenge, that giving credit to others for ideas and texts is a controversial practice, that writing must be more productive in the social and human sciences and very soon clear criteria for collaborative authorship need to be established if the number of papers published and cited are to be the sole measure to evaluate academic productivity.

L3 (continued)

Postgraduates' writing practices and challenges in human and social sciences: Examples from Argentina, Brazil and Spain

Writing and Reading to Write in Postgraduate Studies

Maria Isabel Sole, Universidad de Barcelona, Spain

There is very little explicit teaching of reading and writing strategies in postgraduate studies, and in general, in Spanish universities. The mistaken, albeit fairly widespread, belief among the educational community that students learn to read and write during the earlier stages of their school careers and that they will be able to “apply” these skills later on to a diversity of texts and tasks is responsible for this situation.

However, we know reading and writing are concepts that are socially constructed by participating in different textual communities –such as the academic community- which share specific texts and practice particular ways of interpreting and producing them. Their impact on cognition and learning is not direct, but depends on the social practices in which they intervene (Carlino, 2005; Kozulin, 2000). So, in certain conditions, reading and writing lead not only to knowledge telling, but to knowledge transforming (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987).

Over the past few decades there has been a considerable growth in research on the epistemic dimension of writing, especially in the upper educational levels. Somewhat paradoxically, however, such research has often ignored the fact that the demands made on students to write mostly require them to *write after having read one or more texts*. When this happens –for example, when they prepare a research report or write an essay- students are faced with a *hybrid reading and writing task* (Spivey & King, 1989). In performing such tasks, students repeatedly alternate between the roles of writer and reader in a dialectic that helps to explain the knowledge-transforming potential of these exercises (Tierney, O’Flahavan, & McGinley, 1989). Having to integrate information from other texts into an academic text of their own, supported by the sources from which it is drawn, and at the same time to construct an original text based on complex disciplinary knowledge, demands new competences of the students. Mastery of these competences requires them to learn to write texts that are typical of the academic community and master particular ways of reading (exploratory reading, elaborative reading, critical reading) involving specific supervision and monitoring strategies. In my exposition I shall explore in greater depth the requirements of highly complex hybrid tasks, such as those involved in making a written synthesis of information from various sources (Segev-Miller, 2004), that are extremely frequent in postgraduate studies. I shall examine the characteristics of reading processes necessary to carry out this type of tasks and look at some of the difficulties students appear to encounter in performing them. I shall discuss some strategies that may contribute to an adequate understanding of academic texts as a necessary, though not sufficient, requisite for learning to write in academic contexts.

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