

Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

International Perspectives on Writing Curricula and Development: A Cross-Case Comparison

By Jeffery, J.V., & Parr, J.M.

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Introduction

Jeffrey and Parr, both internationally-recognized for their research on teacher knowledge, pedagogy and assessment of writing, and on policy, standards and large-scale assessments of writing, bring together writing researchers from New Zealand, Chile, United States, Uzbekistan, Germany, England, Denmark, and Norway and the Chinese special administrative region of Hong Kong. Their book offers an international cross-case comparison of the curricular representations of “good writing” and expectations for students’ writing development and competence that guide the teaching of writing. Each country’s case is developed through inductive and deductive content analysis of performance criteria, learning progressions, performance standards, and approaches to assessing writing found in curriculum documents and accompanying pedagogical resources. Research on classroom practice within each jurisdiction is synthesized as part of each case.

In their introductory chapter, Jeffrey and Parr review theoretical perspectives on the teaching and assessment of writing and describe Ivanič’s (2004, 2017) model of the discourses of writing and teaching writing, which frames the deductive analysis process of each case. Subsequent chapters present each case, in order of latitude measurements, starting in the southern hemisphere with New Zealand.

In the concluding chapter, Parr and Jeffrey identify the following themes arising from their cross-case analysis.

Cognitive Discourses Tend to Be More Influential than Affective/Sociocultural Discourses

Across the nine case study jurisdictions, the *skills discourse*, which reflects a view of writing as a product that conforms to spelling, grammar and punctuation conventions, and the *process discourse*, which highlights the cognitive activity involved in writing, together with the *genre discourse*, have generally been more influential than the creativity, social practices, sociopolitical (Ivanič, 2004) and thinking discourses (Ivanič, 2017). Some curricula (e.g., New Zealand and Norway) define genre as a sociocultural text created for an intended purpose, but many curricula define genre as a text form that requires conforming to templates. Although the relative influence of each discourse of writing varies across grades within each jurisdiction, there is a clear trend toward curricular views of writing as a cognitive process involving the learning of conventional forms and skills, rather than as a social practice. Authors lament the “impoverished view of writing” (p. 232) taken up in many case study jurisdictions’ curricula (e.g., Germany, Hong Kong, Chile and England), where writing is viewed as error correction, copying, answering questions in phrases or following formulaic structures. A balance of the cognitive and sociocultural discourses within Ivanič’s (2004, 2017) model is evident in very few jurisdictions (e.g., New Zealand, Norway).

Local and International Contextual Factors Shape Writing Curricula and Pedagogy

The individual case studies provide a window into contextual factors, such as the historical, cultural and geopolitical environment and the organization and features of the schooling system, that influence curriculum and teaching. Cases study authors juxtapose local “educational traditions or philosophical leanings” (p. 224), such as viewing writing as integral to moral and civic development, as well as to everyday work, school and home life (as in the cases of Norway, Denmark and Germany), with the broader roles of writing across international borders.

Cross-case analysis reveals how highly influential international standard-creation initiatives have been to curriculum development and the complexities of their influence on teaching, assessment and professional development. Jeffrey and Parr give the example of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s document detailing key competencies (2005) as being highly influential in guiding large-scale assessments

at the international, national, and provincial/state levels. The ostensible outcome of such initiatives is increased rigour of assessment and teaching with a concomitant increase in student competence.

In case study jurisdictions, however, the prominence of standardized assessments is associated with a narrowing of teachers' instructional focus to the measurable aspects of writing in state, provincial or national assessments. Jeffrey and Parr explain that research has not found these pedagogical practices to be consistent with enhanced student writing competence. Many case studies show that student writing performance in their jurisdictions continues to fall short of expectations, despite the widespread large-scale testing. However, Jeffrey and Parr explain that trends in large-scale assessments can be used as a basis for parents and teachers to question and put political pressure on policy and curriculum developers, researchers and teacher educators. Additionally, the planning of targeted professional development in the teaching of writing can be based on trends in student performance.

Inconsistencies Between Curriculum and Pedagogy

Patterns across the case studies regarding alignment between curriculum and pedagogy are not as apparent as they are for the other two themes. In some jurisdictions there is a paucity of research on classroom practice. The limited role of writing in some curricula (e.g., where writing is narrowly defined as copying or short answers to questions) means that little writing instruction is actually taking place. Additionally, an emphasis on the teaching of reading in initial teacher preparation programs in some jurisdictions has led to a lack of teacher knowledge about teaching writing. Under-prepared teachers may struggle to align their teaching with curricular conceptualizations, particularly when curricula assume robust teacher knowledge and afford considerable professional autonomy in their interpretation and implementation.

Audience and Contributions of this Book

The contributing authors make a significant contribution to conversations amongst academics, researchers, policy makers and curriculum designers in the literacy field. Questions, themes and issues arising from the cross-case analysis offer fruitful lines of research and important insight into how innovative policy and research can better support students' writing development across the school grades.

References

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