

Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing. Barbara Kroll (Ed.). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. xvi + 342.

Part of the Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series, *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing* is, like Kroll's previous anthology *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom* (1991), a welcome addition to the growing body of literature in the field of second language writing. In this edition, Kroll provides pre-service and post-secondary teachers with a collection of 13 jargon free, relevant, and timely chapters covering a gamut of topics from acknowledged leaders in the field to help new teachers "understand the framework of concerns within which the field and its key constituents operate" (p. 7).

The book's 13 chapters are organized into five areas (the field of second language writing, voices of key stakeholders: teachers and students; writers' finished texts, contextualities of texts; and technology), and each is preceded by a short introduction which highlights its focus, explains how the chapter(s) relate to the theme of the section and/or other sections, and provides additional background information. The authors further help provide consistency through the book by providing intertextual links to one another's topics.

The first part of the book lays the foundation for the rest of the text by providing an overview of both the history and research in the field. Paul Kei Matsuda provides a clear outline of the history of North American

composition and language teaching since the 1940's, to include the birth of CCCC and TESOL. Charlene Polio illustrates how research in the field has exploded over the last 25 years, by introducing teachers to a variety of studies that focus on writers' texts, the writing process, participants, and the social context as well as the research designs used in each. The chapters in this section indeed provide a firm grounding and an invaluable primer for teachers new to the field.

Part 2 focuses on teachers and students' experiences. Alister Cumming interviews 48 teachers from six countries where writing is taught in ESL or EFL contexts and illustrates the similarities and difference in their curricula. He notes that similarities may be due to teachers' behaviors (participation in international graduate education, professional networks, and conferences; reading of publications; and use of commercial textbooks), and that the differences may be attributable to the general or specific focus of their courses and whether the courses are taught independently or as part of a larger curriculum rather than differences in language environments. Tony Silva, et al. invite five successful L2 writing students, to include a 1.5 generation learner of French and one whose L1 is American Standard Sign Language, as co-authors to tell their stories in first person narratives to give new teachers a "firsthand longitudinal look" at each L2 writer and at different stages their writing ability" (p. 85). These chapters, too, are

indeed helpful in that they introduce pre-service teachers to the conditions they will face once they enter in the field.

Part 3 shifts to student texts to explore feedback, grammar instruction, and assessment issues. Dana Ferris revisits research from the 1980's which earlier found written teacher feedback ineffective and cautions readers to consider methodological restrictions of studies which use only a product model when revisiting the issue. She then examines more recent work to illustrate the benefits and drawbacks of written as well as peer and teacher feedback activities and suggests additional elements that could facilitate the adoption of all three. Frodesen Holten investigates the formal grammar instruction debate, both early research that claimed isolated instruction was harmful and more recent studies that focus on intervention during the writing process, to encourage teachers to take a combination of research, experience, and the needs of different types of L2 populations into account to incorporate a combination of "proactive and reactive grammar lessons" (p. 156). Hamp-Lyons helps teachers get a "firm understanding of how assessment works" (p.183) by reviewing validity, reliability, and other issues pertinent to several types of assessment tools--scoring systems, portfolios, and computer-based writing tests. Readers will find the articles in this section enlightening because each engages teachers in the very necessary act of questioning and making choices rather than just accepting research data and ideas.

Part 4 addresses the “contextualities of texts” (p. 191): genre, contrastive rhetoric, the reading/writing relationship, and the use of literature in the L2 writing composition. Ann Johns explores the place of genre in the teaching of composition and contrasts and compares three approaches: The Sydney School, English for Specific Purposes, and The New Rhetoric. Ulla Connor “orients new teachers” (p. 220) to contrastive rhetoric (CR) through textual examples from a variety of authors to illustrate differences across L1’s and cultures, tracks the growth of CR from Kaplan’s seminal study, notes it was intended only for essays, and then expands its focus to other genres. William Grabe begins with an exploration of the long standing L1 and more recent L2 interest in the reading/relationship and then includes relevant hypotheses as well as research deficits, instructional developments, and a set of “guidelines for instruction” (p. 255). Stephanie Vandrick looks into using “literature in the teaching of second language composition.” To make a case for literature in the second language writing classroom, she summarizes historical arguments for and against its inclusion in writing classrooms, offers counterarguments for the use of literature in both L1 and L2 writing classes, and concludes with a very responsible discussion of appropriate material and its use. As with each of the sections in the book thus far, readers will learn a lot from examining the progress that has occurred in most of the chapters in this section. With regards to Vandrick’s arguments, however, growth is less apparent. She does indeed

offer convincing support for the use of literature in ESL/EFL classrooms, but the activities she suggests for the L2 writing classroom--"response journals" to analyze literature and "traditional English papers offering literary analysis and interpretation" (p. 280)--may not, as has often been argued in L1 environments, meet the needs of L2 writing students in academic environments.

Part 5, although the shortest section, containing only one chapter, addresses an area that always draws a great deal of interest for new teachers: "The impact of the computer in second language writing" (p. 287). In this chapter, Martha Pennington reinforces the notion that "the modern ESL writing teacher needs to understand the nature of electronic writing media, the kinds of impact these media have on the students' writing, and the ways they can best be employed in the teaching of writing"(p. 287). She also provides a helpful list of resources. While much of what Pennington presents is by no means new, it is nevertheless a very important part of any teacher's introduction to the field and a valuable part of the book.

The editor ends the text with an epilogue and yet another chapter. Kroll begins with a provocative point: "What is not questioned, perhaps, is the extent to which the skills promoted in L2 writing courses actually assist the students enrolled in them with their long term needs" (p. 311). To which, Leki in the last chapter offers a sobering response:

[W]riting is only one among several ways of becoming educated, doing our jobs, or making the world a better place to live. For most people, even those who lead perfectly fulfilling lives, writing is not the core activity to any of these ends. For this reason, those of us who teach L2 writing must keep what we do in proper perspective, not exaggerate the importance in our students' academic work, or personal lives of what we have to offer, and perhaps think of our work modestly in terms of its *potential* (author's italics) usefulness. (p. 328)

As unsettling as Kroll's point and Leki's response are, they certainly could double as a prologue for both the book and our field as a whole.

In conclusion, all texts have deficits, and this one is no exception. The title, as other reviewers have also noted, leads readers to believe that the book deals with second language writing as a whole (see Prochaska, 2004; Williams, 2004): Despite the examples L2 users in Silva et al's chapter, the text deals almost entirely with writing English as a second language.

Nevertheless, despite this shortcoming, new teachers and those who train them will certainly find this to be a valuable text which can serve as a stand alone research reference or used in conjunction with practical texts such as Ken Hyland's *Second Language Writing* or Ferris and Hedgcock's *Teaching ESL Composition*.

References

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