Book review
Understanding Young People's Writing Development

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The purpose of the book

The chapters in this edited collection are authored by Danish scholars (the book is built on studies previously published in Danish but revised to address an international audience). Often, an edited collection can be difficult to review as the contents may range widely around a loose theme, encouraging a reader to "cherry-pick", by chapter title. However, this collection can and should be read as a whole; it has a masterly coherence that arises from several sources. The overarching purpose of the book is to explore the value and meaning of school writing for students. It aims to "create new knowledge about how students learn subjects through writing and learn writing through subjects" (p. 4).

Chapters draw on the longitudinal research project "Writing to Learn and Learning to Write". Specifically, data come from the second phase of that project that researched writing in a common context, the upper secondary school. Here there has been a focus on writing in the various disciplinary subjects. The book draws on richly detailed studies of eleven writers, followed for periods ranging from two to four years, exploring from their perspective their developmental trajectories and challenges in different subjects and at different educational levels.

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Contextual, methodological, conceptual and theoretical threads

Methodologically there is coherence through the use of a text-oriented ethnography approach whereby the texts from the students were systematically collected and analysed as elements in 'constellations. These constellations included the interaction between the writing purpose (prompt), the student text produced and teacher response. The interaction was viewed through recurring interview conversations with students, together with field observations and contextual data from the schools' learning platforms.

Conceptual underpinnings: The Nordic tradition

The book has coherence conceptually. It speaks to shared Nordic educational ideals about literacy and about writing and the position of writing in schooling. Those of you reading this review in the *Journal of Writing Research* will not need to be convinced of the argument that writing is a "skill of critical consequence" and, further, one with potential "as a site of intellectual, moral, and civic development…" (after Brandt, 2015, cited p. 1). Two notions encapsulate the underlying shared Nordic ideals in relation to this view of writing. One relates to "the new textual society" (a translation of the Nordic term for vast changes in mass literacy whereby working life, education and everyday life have become dependent on the written word "to an unprecedented degree"(p.2); ideas that have markedly influenced the framing of literacy, and particularly writing, in curricula in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The other concerns Bildung, a perspective that pervades the collection. The editors position notions of competence and Bildung as having parallel aims. Competence has entered the educational discourse around more concrete curricula outcomes, emphasising student abilities to apply knowledge widely, beyond schooling. Bildung refers to the idea that education aims to produce students to "function as enlightened citizens in a democratic society" (p. 42); to develop cultural values of general knowledge, democratic citizenship and freedom of spirit.

The concept of development

In the first chapter, Jakobsen and Krogh outline the broad concept of development enshrined in Danish law governing education, namely, the development of "academic insight and study competence", "personal maturity" and preparation for participation in democratic society and to contribute to "development and change", noting the roots in the European Bildung tradition.

This latter tradition that underpins philosophies of education is reflected in the view of writing developments in which the various studies presented in the chapters, are grounded. This view is that "students' capacity to develop their writing is closely interlaced with their capacity to develop as writer, that is, to develop writer identities" (p. 13). And, the use of the plural, developments, signals that the authors do not see one general path, but, rather, different paths to

development. These paths are shaped by the social and cultural lives of the students and their diverse experiences with writing both within and outside school. The complexity of development is what is explored in the cases presented in the chapters.

The theoretical framework that binds the chapters together is presented in the first chapter where Jacobsen and Krogh lay out the framework for conceptualising writing and writer development from theoretical, methodological and individual perspectives. The authors use what they call a "presentational approach" in which theoretical, reflection and methodological models are woven together with observations, interpretations and findings from the studies associated with the project. To elucidate the complex developmental processes, the authors draw on socio-cultural theory, specifically the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin on semiotic mediation and dialogue, respectively, viewing these notions "as contributing to an understanding of development as embedded in the social space of school and simultaneously as a possibility for change and transformation over time" (p. 17). The issue of the relationship between writing development and writer development (particularly the latter) is considered from an ecological perspective, including examining 'general heuristics' for exploring writing and writer development from this perspective. A reader will find much of interest here.

The discussion culminates in the presentation of a Writer Development Model which represents one of the main findings from the research project on which the book is based. It came from the dialogue between theory and the research; the authors liken it, after Lillis (2008) to the notion of "ethnography as deep theorizing" (p. 26), whereby the empirical data were analysed and reflected upon in the light of theories of writing, learning and development.

Contexts and cases

With these clear contextual, methodological, conceptual and theoretical threads in mind, a reader can then delve into the specific contexts and cases presented in chapters two to eight. Further to writing's pivotal role in achieving competence and contributing to Bildung, it seems that these two ideas come together in the case of writing organised across subject areas. In the discussion of the two writers whose trajectories are presented in chapter 2, Krogh explains that "the term 'general Bildung' is associated with new interdisciplinary notions of knowledge and competence, to be able to apply and combine established knowledge or disciplinarity of different subjects in competent ways" (p. 42). This is reflected in the writing that is organised across subjects and connected to curriculum mandated interdisciplinary studies. The two cases provide evidence that the extended formats with their physical-organisational time/space construction were promising for the teaching and learning of content, developing knowledge through writing and making "crucial epistemic jumps" (p. 61). The students

recognised and appreciated the significance of their struggles with content and experiences with construction in writing. Krogh concludes that the distinction between writing and writer development is, analytically, a fruitful one.

The chapters continue with their differently focussed lenses, each of considerable interest to writing researchers. Note writing (which I initially, and mistakenly, thought would refer to notetaking/notemaking of the traditional decoding, remembering and storing variety) is framed in a Baktinian sense as an utterance and an answer, primarily to self as learner but also to the wider academic community. A broad definition is used to encompass all kinds of temporary texts but the assumption is that there is always a creative aspect to them. The author, Christensen, is interested in the meaning of note writing, the purposes and practices, from a student perspective. The resulting analytic frame was inspired by the Norwegian scholars' 'Wheel of Writing' (Berge et al, 2016) which identified three major purposes with respect to the knowledge aspect of note writing: organising and storing knowledge, knowledge development and identification with/against knowledge. Christensen compiles these purposes with the synchronic and diachronic functions. This illustrates another contribution of the book, to theoretically-informed, more specific analysis frameworks for writing and writer development.

The expansion of writing to include images and other representations along with words has implications for assumptions about writing and writer development and, in chapter 4, Nikolaj Elf explores how digital technology shapes writing as two students transition to upper secondary school. The argument, in line with the underpinning social and social semiotic theory whereby technology is seen as socially shaped and as shaping semiotic resources, is that the reform of upper secondary education in Denmark supported an expanded notion of technology in writing and writer development. The chapter explores, through two cases, how technology, within subject-specific school writing practices, both enables and constrains development; how "it co-shapes and, at the same time, is co-shaped by students' writing and writer development" (p. 89). As Elf notes "… most importantly for this study, which privileges student perspective- we find a high degree of variety when comparing how students use and identify with technology for writing and writer development on an ontogenetic timescale" (p. 103). And, as with many more recent studies of technology, it problematises the 'too optimistic' claims often made in the rhetoric on teaching and learning.

Another factor to consider in a trajectory of writer development is the point at which writers are in their life experience and chapter 5 examines two young adults returning to formal schooling. The tracing not only of their success (or lack of it), particularly in developing a writer identity, is fascinating. Hobel, the chapter author, describes them both as experiencing "identity without identification" (p.118). Their writer identity was not offered or accepted by their teachers who failed to reflect on the fact that they were "negotiating" with young adult writers.

These teachers appeared to be challenged both by the diverse group of young adults and by new mandatory interdisciplinary subject requirements that required collegial planning. Subject teachers, who had supposedly assumed responsibility for teaching writing in their subjects, responsibility which has traditionally been that of the first language subject faced a further challenge. This was to develop a less general and more subject-specific profile of writing in Danish. Arguably, the resulting relatively formulaic and narrow genre orientation limited the personal voicing of narrative, "a way of experiencing and thinking" (p. 123), and of creative writing.

This conundrum is further explored in chapter 6 through the lens of two students in the subject Danish. It traces their paths through three years of upper secondary schooling, particularly in terms of the choices they make in their texts, with a focus on narrative texts. The author, Piekut, considers what characterises writer development and how and why narrative writing seems significant in development. Interestingly, but perhaps not unexpectedly, the conclusion suggests the writers use narratives, as everyday discourses, as "key strategies" (p. 140) to participate in disciplinary activity. The data from the chapter show how this happens.

Identity work in maths and how this contributes to shaping student's mathematical writing is the focus of a chapter by Iversen, chapter 7. Iversen argues that through constructions of different linguistic voices in their mathematical texts, students can take on varied writer roles and, in doing so, access different mathematical discourses. Writing development is seen to involve identity work, after Gee (2001), whereby students work to construct and establish social identities that are regarded as knowledgeable in the writing cultures within which mathematical writing occurs. And, a confident, authoritative persona is important in convincing a reader-assessor. The chapter explores the construction of different writer identities in the mathematical texts the two students produce through an operationalised concept of voice at both the macro and micro level of text. The notion of texts being characterised by certain voices enables the dominant voices to be identified. Continuing the theme of identity and development, Jakobsen, in chapter 8, argues that, in young people's search for an identity, writing plays a mediating role. It has a Bildung potential, mediating between the societal demands and the individual's wishes. To understand this potential and its support of development, the author argues that a new and multi-faceted concept of creativity is required. Creativity is not simply a textual phenomenon but is connected to practices. Schooling contexts and practices frame the possibilities to explore writer identities and "selfhood" (p. 161) and this is examined through the writing experiences of two upper secondary natural sciences students in the subjects of English and German. The author notes that the potential of creative writing experience to foster awareness of, and reflection

on, writing as a tool in a social context is heightened in second and foreign language writing.

Pedagogical implications

The final chapter in the book takes on the task of extrapolating from the project on which the book is based, in terms of the challenges that the findings pose for pedagogy. Though the project, which was essentially designed to present a student perspective, did not focus on teaching, possible implications can be drawn. The authors select five areas to discuss. The importance of schooling transitions and the new experiences that accompany them, in students' development is highlighted. The role of genre in the disciplinary writing that characterises upper secondary school and how it "governs and fashions" writing (p. 188) is viewed in relation to the opportunities to develop writer voice and identities. The question of whether writing is employed to document or to construct knowledge (and the answer that it is probably not realising the second of these, knowledge construction) is a further area with implications for pedagogy. What the data suggest about the patterns of response to student writing is a limited use of assessment for (or as) learning by teachers, clearly a missed opportunity in terms of student participation in their learning. Finally, the notion of student-initiated writing is discussed as holding "unexploited pedagogical potentials" (p. 194) and such are explored.

Contributions of the book

The book contributes to ideas of complexity, illustrating the capturing of adolescent's writing and writing development in terms of uptake of opportunities offered; the individual and collective resources they have access to and apply, and complexity inherent in different subjects, writing projects and time and spaces. The importance of identification in writing and writer developments is highlighted. Development is shown to be dependent on "whether students consider writing meaningful in the light of their writing experience and whether writing helps them develop a disciplinary, engaged, and personal voice that extends beyond the time and space of the school" (pp. 7-8). Each of the chapters illuminates aspects of these ideas. The resulting Writer Development Model, and its trajectory of development, is a significant contribution to writing research.

References

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