

Review

Beard, R., Myhill, D., Riley, J., & Nystrand, M. (Eds.) (2009).
The SAGE Handbook of Writing Development. London: SAGE
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1. Presentation

It is a well-known fact among writing researchers that there is less research on writing and writing development than on reading and reading development. As pointed out by the editors of this book research on writing is a relatively young research area which so far has had limited impact on instructional design and pedagogy. Moreover, it is a research area which is cross-disciplinary and characterized by different theoretical frameworks with different methodological approaches, each of which has its own research community, its own discourse and, to certain extent, its own publication outlets. In this book Beard, Myhill, & Riley argues that there are three main frameworks within which writing research is conducted: the psychological approach which focuses on how the writer as an individual manages the complex cognitive operations involved in the process of writing, the sociocultural approach looking more for answers to the question of how writers are shaped by their contexts, and finally the linguistic approach with focus on how language works in texts and contexts to create meaning. According to the editors of the SAGE handbook of Writing Development the intention is "to offer a broad and balanced account of research in writing and writing development" (p 17) and they hope that the "impact of the Handbook will offer far-reaching implications for children and young people". The book originated in a UK seminar series called "Reconceptualising Writing 5-16: cross-phase and cross-disciplinary perspectives" which was planned in response to national concerns about children's writing in English schools.



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The book contains 38 contributions written by leading writing researchers from all over the world, but mainly UK and USA. It starts with a chapter of David Olson on the history of writing followed by four different sections. Section I, which is the largest section of the book, covers theories of writing representing the three perspectives outlined by the editors. Sections II and III are both concerned with writing development. According to the editors section two provides an overview of the development of writing in early childhood while section three is primarily concerned with longitudinal notions of development. The last section (section IV) identifies and examines challenges in research on writing development. Each section is introduced with a short summary of its content.

The section on **theories of writing** contains 12 contributions. The first four of these present *cognitive aspects of writing*. In the first chapter (2), Alamargot and Fayol argue that a developmental model of writing should predict both the course of the writing processes and the characteristics of their outcome – the finally edited text. They point out that no such model exist and provide a critical and detailed analysis of the main developmental models (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Berninger and Swanson, 1994). Their main conclusion is that research on writing development needs to view formulation as a central component of the writing process and that future research needs to focus on the development of formulation. The subsequent three chapters (4, 5 and 6) deal with the three subprocesses of writing that occur in more or less all cognitive models of writing: idea generation (Galbraith), translation (Hayes) and revision (Chanquoy). In his overview of how cognitive models have explained writers' idea generation, Galbraith argues that most of the existing explanations have reduced idea-generations to retrieval from long-term-memory. He suggests an alternative model (the dual-processing model) which includes writers' creating new ideas during the writing process. In the subsequent chapter Hayes outlines the pathway from ideas to texts and points out that an important gap in cognitive writing research is that we still don't know how language bursts in written language production are formed from the proposed ideas. Finally, Chanquoy reviews cognitive research on revision and addresses the difficulties by developing writers in acquiring editing strategies. One of her conclusions is that while earlier revisions research as focused on error detection and correction we need to focus more on structural and meaning-related revisions and the question of whether these lead to improvements in text quality.

The cognitive chapters of the theoretical section are followed by four chapters (6,7,8 and 9) that together provide *an overview over sociocultural theories on writing*. These all deal more or less with the interrelationships between writing, language, justice and power. Koustouli (chapter 6) introduces *Critical analysis of Writing Practices* inspired by critical discourse analysis (e.g. Chohiariki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995). She explains the political agenda of in Critical Analysis of Writing practices which is to uncover how social asymmetries, power hierarchies and ideological models are reproduced and/or contested in classroom contexts. In her concluding remarks she

argues that research on writing development need to take into account the dialogical nature of writing and writing development. Smidt (chapter 7) calls for an ecological theory of writing and reviews three classroom studies asking what these may tell us about writing development as personal negotiation of cultural genres and values. He concludes that they contribute to our understanding of how writers develop their own writer identities as they position themselves in textual roles in sociocultural worlds. In chapter 8 Janks follows up on the discussion of identity and argues that learning to write and developing as a writer are intimately connected with issues of social identities, language and justice. Finally, Street introduces the ideas of New Literacy Studies which draws upon ethnographic perspectives that study literacy practices across different cultural contexts. He concludes that writing development requires schools to find connections between community and home literacies and conventional schooled literacies.

The final chapters (10, 11, 12 & 13) of the theoretical section represent *the linguistic perspective* on writing development. This section has two main focuses. The first two chapters (10 and 11) focus on different kinds of texts and their relations to children's experiences. Rose (chapter 10) outlines the genre-based approaches to the teaching of reading and writing, known as the Sydney School. The research base of the pedagogy has been concerned on the one hand with mapping genres through which control of the social and the natural worlds is exercised and on the other hand action research aiming at the design of pedagogic strategies that will enable learners to make these genres part of their own repertoire. In chapter 11 Kress and Bezemer widens the concept of writing from linguistic mastery in a traditional sense to competencies that go beyond the control of verbal language. They outline the changes in writing practices during the 21st century and point out the potential disjuncture between children's experiences of written language and the demands of the writing curriculum. The second focus of this section is represented by grammar and its place in theories of writing development and writing instruction. Locke (chapter 12) addresses the controversy of whether the teaching of grammar impacts positively on students' writing development. He reviews the debate in New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain and the United States and concludes that the debate needs to be recast. He suggests that we focus on questions such as how genre influences the interplay between the different stages of the writing process, what kinds of implicit and explicit linguistic knowledge contribute to the successful accomplishment of a particular stage and how the development of such knowledge can be supported pedagogically. The theoretical section ends with a chapter by Hancock in which he gives an overview of different "schools" of grammar and their relationship to writing instruction. He poses the question of how linguistics can inform the teaching of writing and argues that we need to get rid of the traditional prescriptive "school grammar" view of grammar as an error-correction tool. Instead he suggests a more functional view of language as an important tool for writing and emphasizes the relationships between form and meaning.

The section on **writing development in early childhood** (chapters 14-21) contains 8 contributions, covering 8 different angles. Wells Rove (chapter 14) reviews research on early writing from the 1930s to 2008, with a specific focus on the two last decades. She concludes that the field of early writing research is moving toward a view of child writing as amore semiotically complex, more socially and culturally situated and more ideologically positioned. In the following chapter (15) Haas Dyson puts childhood experiences at the centre of literacy development. She presents classroom data indicating that schools and teachers need to recognize to what extent children as learners are influenced by their lives within their social communities. Parr, Jesson and McNaughton (chapter 16) focus on the relationship between spoken and written language. They describe the theoretical rationales for the role of talk in writing and suggest that more focus should be put on making intertextual connections explicit. In chapter (17) Read deals with the acquisition of alphabetic writing. He argues that the two most critical components of alphabetic literacy are the acquiring of phonemic awareness and learning that spellings represent speech sounds. He also asks the important questions of whether there are stages in the development of writing and argues that more research is needed on this issue. Hall (chapter 18) continues the discussion about the more formal aspects of writing and focuses on punctuation. He reviews evidence from existing studies of how children develop early understanding of punctuation and claims that teaching of writing tends to focus on punctuation as a set of rules rather than a set of tools for writers to make their meanings clear and thus "fails to imbue children with a real interest in it" (p.281). Christensen (chapter 19) discusses the role of handwriting in the development of text production and explores the controversial issue of a continued need for handwriting skills in a technological age. She argues that handwriting is a kinesthetic capability which enhances the production of ideas and text generation. The important question of motivation in writing is dealt with by Boscolo in chapter 20. He investigates in what situations beginners and experienced writers become engaged and sufficiently motivated to understand the task and hence become more proficient. He concludes that a motivated student is not necessarily one who 'likes' writing but one who values it as a tool that can be used when needed, and gains satisfaction from using it. In the final chapter (21) of this section Marsch reviews research on the use of popular culture in written texts in the classroom and outlines key issues and questions that need to be taken into account when considering the relationship between popular culture and writing in schools. Her conclusion is that the most urgent of these is to review the nature of the writing curriculum itself in a digital age.

The next section on writing development, **Conceptual and empirical issues in writing development** (section III, chapters 22-30), builds on section II by discussing how the form, structure, and content of writing may develop at different points in our lives and in different contexts. The section begins with a chapter (22) on morphemes and children's spelling. Bryant and Nunes ask whether morphemic spelling rules play any

systematic part in children's literacy acquisition and present studies supporting this case. They conclude, "morphemic spelling rules are a valuable but neglected resource for learning to be literate" (p. 346). In the subsequent chapter (23) Hudson deals with the issue of linguistic maturity. He reviews measures of vocabulary and syntax and argues that some of these are so sensitive to quality that they are comparable to human examiners. However, he points out that we still need more research on how to translate the results from these measures into teaching policies. In chapter 24 Smagorinsky attempts to make a case for a broadened notion of textuality. He suggests that the quality of writing is a function of readers' and writers' relationships and expectations. His conclusion is that understanding cultural expectations is essential for understanding quality judgments. Doecke and McClenaghan (chapter 25) are concerned with the content of students' writing. They explore what can be gained from focusing on *what* pupils and students want to communicate and the social spaces *where* they want to communicate, and illustrate this with cases of students' writing. In chapter 26, Wilson focuses on a specific genre of school writing: poetry. He presents a small study of the poetry writing of young children and uses Bereiter and Scardamalia's concepts of knowledge-telling and knowledge-transformation to synthesize writing and creativity theory with insights about the children's use of language in poetry. Reminding us that writing development in young children has received more attention than writing development in writers above the age of 11, Myhill (chapter 27) reports a two year large-scale project involving linguistic analysis, classroom observations and post-hoc interviews of the writing of secondary school writers. She suggests that writing development in these ages involve moving from speech patterns to writing patterns, from declaration to elaboration, and from translation to transformation. Also Lavelle (chapter 28) focuses on older writers. Her chapter reviews research on the role of self-efficacy in writing and extend those ideas to the teaching of college writing. Her conclusion is that self-efficacy serves as a major moderating variable in the writing process. Huot and Perry (chapter 29) reviews the literature on responding to student writing, arguing that to date assessment has been an under-researched aspect of the teaching of writing. In their chapter they discuss ways in which assessment can be a positive component of writing pedagogy and provide some new language for the discussion of writing assessment. In the last chapter (chapter 30) of this section Rijlaarsdam and colleagues discuss the role of readers in writing development. They present observational studies that strongly support the idea that actual readers and actual reading processes play an important role in writing instruction. Their claim is that by getting to know their audiences and by getting real responses to their texts, students can make discoveries about what works and what doesn't work in communicative tasks.

The final section of the book, **Challenges in writing development**, contains eight contributions and introduces questions of multilingualism, and different types of writing difficulties, but also questions about how new media influences text production and

our concept of what a text is. In chapter 31 Matsuda and colleagues review studies on different aspects of second-language (L2) writing and suggest further empirical research on teacher preparation, curriculum design, placement and assessment in different institutional and political settings. They also point out that most studies of second-language writing have dealt with English as a second language and calls for more work on L2 writing in languages other than English. The multilingual issues are also discussed by Canagarajah and Jerskey (chapter 32). They limit their chapter to adult writers in academic settings and describe the critical debates relating to how the issue of literacy competences in tertiary education has been addressed. One such issue is the debate on L1 as a problem or a resource in the development of second-language writing. They conclude that a western monolingual and unimodal tradition still is the dominant norm for writing instruction in tertiary education and argues that we need to also learn from other literacy traditions from non-western backgrounds. In chapter 33 Dockrell addresses the issue of delays and difficulties in writing development. She argues that descriptive studies of writing difficulties are insufficient to develop interventions and calls for a model of writing development, which explains the cognitive processes that underpin writing and provides a framework for examining the component skills, which may constrain the acquisition of writing. Starke-Meyerring (chapter 34) discusses the implications of digital environments for writing development. She argues that a critical understanding of digital network technologies is vital to the study and teaching of writing in digital environments and addresses three questions related to digital spaces that have implications for writing development: equal access to digital writing spaces, the possibilities for writers to share and draw on each other's work, and the question of surveillance and monitoring of digital spaces. In chapter 35 Haas and Wickman continue the discussion on writing and technology by reviewing recent research on hypertext and hypertext writing. They find commonalities across the studies in approaches, theories and publication venues but notes that there is strikingly little cross-citation in the works they review and suggest more linking between separate programs of research. Chapter 36 (by Sainsbury) is concerned with questions of high-stake assessment of writing. What is assessed, how it is assessed and what are the consequences of the assessment? She argues that "A writing assessment must lead to valid inferences about students' actual writing ability, not just their ability to produce a specified performance under test conditions." (p. 557) She concludes that school professionals need to develop a thorough understanding of assessment, in order to be able to place testing in its professional context rather than being intimidated by it. Moss' chapter (37) is called "Writing in the Wider Community". Moss asks questions about writing in non-school settings and the transition towards multiliteracies that she suggests is taking place in writing studies. She concludes that the research on writing in the wider community provides us with opportunities to understand the complexity and richness of writing traditions in the lives of everyday people, and urges researchers in this area to "speak to the concerns of stakeholders across the education landscape" (p. 571).

In the final chapter of the book (chapter 38) Grundlach reflects on the future of writing development. He argues that the use of digital technologies for written communication will most likely change the character of writing development in ways we cannot predict today. However, he concludes that writing development will most likely remain a matter of composing messages that readers can deconstruct and comprehend even when writers and readers are not present at the same time or place.

2. Review

Although several collections of writing research has been published during the last 30 years, perhaps most recently the Handbook of writing research, this Handbook is unique in that it focus on writing *development* – not writing in general – and all through the book, irrespective of author perspective, it is made quite clear that we lack good theories of writing development. The book is a gold mine for prospective doctoral students, containing numerous interesting and important suggestions for future research.

The Handbook includes an impressive collection of papers, balancing quite well the three theoretical perspectives on writing suggested by the editors, as well as on the different phases of writing development from primary to tertiary education. As pointed out by the editors. the insights that the different perspectives on writing can offer have only rarely been jointly exploited. A joint handbook like this is an important first step but, in order to fully understand writing development we – in the writing community – need to consider how to meet the challenge of taking this one step further than a joint book. What are the possibilities and limitations for joint research?

Moreover, just as could be expected from a good handbook, most of the chapters include thorough literature overviews of their respective areas. This makes the Handbook very useful to scholars who are new to the field of writing and to writing researchers who are interested in widening or changing the direction of their research.

This is a book I enjoyed reading and will recommend to colleagues as well as to motivated students, although I don't really understand the structure of the book, after the theory section. What is for example the rationale behind the division between section II and section III?

Another question that was raised when I read the Handbook was to what extent this really is an *international* handbook. In the first sentence of the Handbook the editors let us know that the origin of the Handbook is an international seminar series, that was planned in response to national concerns in the UK about children's writing. These national concerns may explain why 42 of the authors are active at English-speaking universities, in English-speaking countries, conducting research on writing in English. Although the authors cover four continents and thus could be considered an international group, I would have appreciated insights from non-western cultures and writing systems as well as from western research on other languages than English in an international handbook.

Finally, I would like to address the ambition of the editors that the Handbook "will offer far-reaching implications for children and young people". In a perfect (?) world handbooks like this would be useful not only for researchers but for practitioners and advanced students. That is an almost impossible task but this Handbook comes quite close in that many of the chapters give thorough overviews of their fields, clearly pointing out also what we don't know. Several of them also manage to point out non-simplified indications for work in the field. I find the book extremely useful and I will no doubt use it in advanced courses. However, if I (as a university teacher) was allowed to dream about a second edition, I would wish for an even more student-friendly version, not by changing the chapters but through even more thorough introductions to the book as well as to the separate sections, perhaps even including some reading instructions.

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