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## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

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### **Dimensions of Literacy: A Conceptual Base for Teaching Reading and Writing in School Settings (2nd ed.)**

*Stephen B. Kucer*

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005, 353 pages

This book has been written for both teachers and teacher educators involved with English literacy instruction in K-12 classrooms. The author states that his primary goal is to conceptualize literacy in a more harmonic and holistic manner, as he views literacy as a multidimensional process. He accomplishes this with a thorough overview of the four historical/theoretical/research-based views on literacy development, namely, the cognitive, linguistic, sociocultural, and developmental dimensions. In addition, Kucer fully explores the philosophical and instructional controversies that have influenced, and are still influencing, literacy instruction in K-12 classrooms today. He ends his book with a final chapter addressing what he believes are the relevant instructional/educational implications for classroom literacy teaching and learning.

In the first section Kucer provides an overview of the theory and research related to the linguistic dimension by examining topics areas such as the nature of language, oral, and written language relationships and ends with language variation. The second section deals with the cognitive dimension of literacy, where a discussion of the constructive nature of perception, reading processes, as well as the relationship between reading and writing are explored. The third section deals with the sociocultural dimensions of literacy, where Kucer sets out to explain how literacy and identity (inside and outside school) and power are intertwined. In the fourth section, he outlines the developmental dimension of literacy, with attention to the patterns and principles in literacy development, including the interrelationships between reading and writing development. Kucer sees literacy as an additive process for the reader or writer, involving four interrelated roles, across all four dimensions: as a code-breaker (linguistic), meaning-maker (cognitive), text-user and critic (sociocultural), and last as a scientist/construction worker (developmental). Moreover, he views literacy development as a lifelong process of becoming literate.

Throughout each of the above sections Kucer addresses the philosophical/theoretical debates that have influenced literacy instruction. Noteworthy are his discussions on language variation—standard versus nonstandard dialects (linguistic dimension), dense processing versus selec-

tive sampling views of the reading process (cognitive dimension), autonomous versus sociocultural views of literacy (sociocultural dimension), and last, the reading wars—the decoding skills versus whole language instructional reading debate (educational dimension) and their effects on English-language literacy teaching and learning.

In summary, to the author's credit, this book provides a concise and balanced overview of the theory and research related to English literacy teaching and learning in an accessible format for teachers and teacher educators in K-12 classrooms, with specific reference to the United States context (e.g., *No Child Left Behind* 2001 legislation). Although Kucer does not devote much of this text to a discussion of the teaching-learning needs unique to ESL students, he does offer some discussion on the theory and research related to the reading process for biliterate learners. Although one text cannot be everything to everyone, this book does offer much.

*Deborah Yeager-Woodhouse*

#### *The Reviewer*

Deborah Yeager-Woodhouse is an assistant professor in the Applied Linguistics Department in Brock University. Her research interests include sociocultural issues related to literacy and ESL/EFL teacher development.

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### **Language Learning: A Lifelong Process**

*Joseph Foley and Linda Thompson*

London: Arnold, 2003, 294 pages

Joseph Foley, a professor in the Specialists Department at the Regional Language Centre in Singapore, and Linda Thompson, a professor of education in the University of Manchester, have produced a text that leads us, their readers, from the basic question of *What is language?* to an exploration of how our cultural biases and social contexts influence our knowledge and use of language. It is meant both for readers who have ELT experience and for neophytes. The chapters are detailed, and the use of repetition ensures that the writers' point of view is clear.

As the authors state, "A central aim in this book is to outline a description of language development that is central to human development" (p. 255). Each of the 11 chapters clearly focuses on various aspects of language development. Chapter one looks at the essentials of language itself (phonemes, lexis, grammar, syntax), and chapter two explores language learning (from the physical manifestations of how language is produced to a discussion about some of the pioneers of language learning such as Piaget and Chomsky). Chapter three evaluates language theories (schema, frame, and script theory), and chapter eight looks at writing as a form of development of

educational knowledge. The 11 chapters each begin with an overview and end with a summary and suggestions for further reading. This is useful, as the repetition of information helps prepare the readers and introduces them to the authors' unique point of view.

Some general things that I appreciated about the text are its organized layout, lists of tables and figures, chapter divisions and subsections, and appropriate visuals. Tables, figures, and clearly delineated dialogues aid the visual learner, and chapter divisions and subsections provide easy reference. The table of contents and index are also easy to use.

I liked that questions were asked throughout the chapters under the heading "Points to ponder." This really encourages the reader to stop and reflect on what has been written. Too often we read texts without processing new information. The authors do their best to ensure this does not happen. Sometimes they offer tasks for the reader to do, and other times they simply ask general questions or attempt to challenge what they expect their readers might believe about their subject matter.

Foley and Thompson have written a book that is quite accessible to readers. It is a good overview for ELT professionals and a solid introduction for newcomers to the field.

*Sandee Thompson*

Sandee Thompson is the Director of Studies and a CELTA tutor as well as an IELTS examiner in Halifax, NS, in the International Language Institute. She is presently working on her distance master's degree in TEFL from Birmingham University, UK.

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## **Second Language Writing Research: Perspectives on the Process of Knowledge Construction**

*Paul Kei Matsuda and Tony Silva (Editors)*

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005, 270 pages

Anyone interested in research into second-language writing will find this book a useful guide. Sixteen researchers from various parts of the world were invited by the editors to contribute articles. Each of the 16 expresses the reflections of these researchers on their own research projects, thereby "providing insights into key methodological issues in research on second language writing" (cover). The result is a collection of articles that help demystify the research process.

The editors' inspired contributors to write about their experiences in what the editors consider an often neglected field—second-language writing research—by reflecting on research projects they had completed. In their preface they point out that many other books create "false impressions that research methods are discrete and transportable from one context to another" (p. xi). Matsuda and Silva hold that researchers more often combine

varying methodological tools and experience complex decision-making processes during the research process. The articles illustrate these beliefs by highlighting key issues, assumptions, questions, and strategies in second-language writing research. The audience includes somewhat experienced novice researchers, graduate students, and established researchers to wish to expand their “methodological repertoire” (p. xiii).

The book is organized into three main sections: *Research as Situated Knowledge Construction*, *Conceptualizing L2 Writing Research*, and *Collecting and Analyzing Data*. A Coda concludes with one article, “Tricks of the Trade.” The presentation is scholarly, with an author index, subject index, detailed list of contributors, and extensive up-to-date reference lists after each article.

In the first section the reader learns about various methods of research design such as empirical (qualitative and quantitative) and hermeneutic. The novice reader might struggle with the terminology of this first chapter, but will benefit from the expertise of the author. Another chapter explores several perspectives on the uses of narrative in L2 writing research. The next provides an interesting historical inquiry into second-language writing, promoting the idea that every researcher should be aware of his or her place in the historiography of second-language writing research.

Atkinson introduces the idea of “reflexivity—the notion that one is not using correctly what one uses uncritically” (p. 49). He urges researchers to be “constantly interrogating, doubting, hedging, and complexifying what it is we are doing” (p. 63). Weissberg describes “cross-modality research and second language speaking/writing connections” (p. 93); he shares insights into the intersection of L2 writing and speech and subsequent problems in his research. Haswell recommends a “tool for seeing the invisible,” which involves shifting attention “from the *application* of writing criteria to the *grounds* for writing criteria” (p. 106). He argues convincingly against holistic or profile scoring.

In the third section, Parks discusses key issues that researchers struggle with: the emerging design of the study, the representativeness of the data, the researcher’s stance, and the role of theory. Her concerns about the substantiality of the genre she was examining, nursing notes and nurses’ care plans, express worries felt by many. Blanton extols the virtues of stocktaking at the end of a research project: “how to proceed, how not to proceed in future projects” (p. 149). Brice shares the various ways she tried to code her data and why the first way failed and the second succeeded. In the final section Ferris gives advice based on her own considerable experience.

*Second Language Writing Research* is not a handbook of successful research techniques: it is not a step-by-step simplified guide. It is a collection of experienced researchers’ reflections on what worked and what did not work during their research projects. As such it is an invaluable compendium of

ideas that will help second-language writing researchers plan their future steps and find their way when they lose sight of their goals.

*Ellen Pilon*

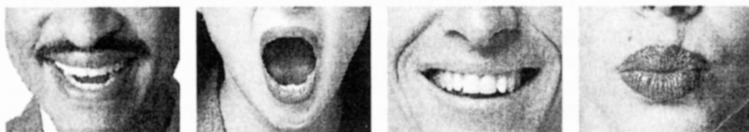
*The Reviewer*

Ellen Pilon is a senior teacher in the International Language Institute in Halifax, NS. An enthusiastic lifelong learner with three master's degrees, she is currently immersed in the Distance DELTA.

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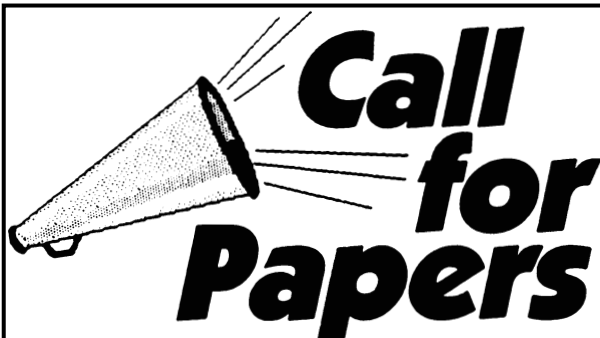
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