

Section 3. Nurturing *Homo Scribens*: Puzzles of Writing Instruction

As writing has become central to economic, social, and personal well-being, writing instruction has become ever more important to human development. While simple symbols recording agricultural production could be learned rapidly in the field, over time more elaborate writing skills needed to be nurtured in organized settings. People needed to learn to specify details, form arguments, use evidence, organize ideas, make messages consistent, find effective phrasing, make strategic choices, interpret and use texts written by others, and many other skills. These more advanced writing skills also became intertwined with the knowledge, practices, regulations, and relations of different domains, such as law, medicine, finances, philosophy, or theology. Schools emerged as distinct locations and social institutions with distinctive practices to prepare people for specific forms of work.

Consequently, in the 21st century CE, around five millennia since the emergence of writing, literacy and writing instruction are complex subjects with their own bodies of knowledge, research, and practices. Many teachers are currently engaged throughout the world with teaching literacy and writing within different education systems with different education orientations in different regions. This section presents some of my thoughts on teaching and researching writing along with my thoughts on some of the challenges facing us today as we try to understand writing.

The section starts with “Writers Use Language, but the Teaching of Writing Requires More Than the Teaching of Language” to consider the complexity and multidimensionality of writing instruction as we support our students to discover the many potentialities that writing affords. This chapter was initially prepared as a talk for language instructors in Argentina who were trained as linguists and largely saw their work as teaching students the forms of language. This presentation reminded them of how much more is involved to help students to write effectively. No matter what region each teacher might come from, they are trained in one tradition or another, and it is useful to remind ourselves of the multiple dimensions of learning to write.

The second chapter in this section, “The Value of Empirically Researching a Practical Art,” contests the common idea that writing is relatively simple and all we have to do is share obvious skills with our students. In the over half century that I have been teaching writing, research has radically changed our view of writing. Because of this research we understand much more about what writing is, how it works, how we can go about doing it, and how writers develop. Yet there is still much more to know, and the continuing inventions of new ways of using and producing writing in new social and technological configurations suggest that writing may change in the future in ways far beyond what we might imagine

now. This essay is meant to remind readers of some recent advances, both so we act in consonance with them and so we remain humble as we go forward, not thinking that even our most recent discoveries are the final word.

The third essay “A? Developmental? Path? To? Text? Quality?” was written as a response to a special issue of the *Journal of Literacy Research* proposing curricula based on common assumptions about what constitutes growth in writing. This chapter calls into question some difficulties in our current common reduction of writing development to the assessments of texts in school contexts. Through a series of questions, the chapter destabilizes many of the assumptions that guide understandings about testing, curricula, and their relation to actual writing development.

Similarly, the fourth chapter in this section, “What Does a Model Model? And for Whom?” is a response to a special issue of *Educational Psychologist* offering articles conceptualizing writing. This chapter calls into question assumptions surrounding our attempt to build models that encompass all of writing. While there are important places for both assessments and models, they each need to be understood better to determine their places, uses, and limitations. Writing is remade, or made afresh, by every person in order to meet what they view as their circumstances and needs. The models of writing that count most are the models that writers themselves use to guide their perceptions, processes, and products. Humans can be creative and purposefully clever when they are not constrained by what others tell them they ought to do or how they should go about doing it. Rather we as instructors may be most effective in fostering growth when we offer meaningful challenges, provide options for writers to choose among in fulfilling challenges, and ponder with writers the implications of each choice.