Chapter 1

The Social and Historical Context for Writing Research

Martin Nystrand

The start of empirical research on writing in North America is typically benchmarked circa 1970, especially by the publication of Emig’s *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* in 1971 (Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993). This is not to say that no such studies had previously been conducted—Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, for example, reviewed such work in *Research in Written Composition* (1963)—but rather to note that such studies were isolated and unsupported by professional networks and support systems, including doctoral programs training writing researchers and overseeing dissertation studies, as well as refereed research journals and professional organization special interest groups devoted to such research. Cumulatively, these developments established Composition and Rhetoric as an academic discipline and research specialization in the 1980s.

With hindsight, we can see that the ideas about writing typically associated with the 1970s and 1980s were not altogether new. For example, articles about writing as a process had previously appeared as recently as Young and Becker (1965) and as early as 1912 in numerous articles in the *English Journal* (see Town, 1988), so Emig was not the first to conceptualize writing as a process. In addition, University of Chicago English professor Henry Sams promoted interest in invention in the 1940s. Yet his visionary efforts went nowhere amid the formalist literary currents in his department. For invention to be put into play as a topic with currency in the field, it had to wait 35 years after Sams to be discovered once again and put on the map at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (the 4 Cs) and beyond, especially by Richard Young at Carnegie Mellon University in the 1970s and 1980s, when the cognitive science climate there was receptive to ideas about invention in terms of cognitive plans and goals. The influence of the Carnegie Mellon school of cognitive rhetoric, exemplified by the research of Flower and Hayes, ultimately derives from the currency it achieved within the 1970s and 1980s receptive contexts of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the National Council of Teachers of English, new doctoral programs in departments of English, and federal research support, especially in the Center for the Study of Writing funded in 1985.

Many pioneering studies, like the researchers who conducted them, came from English education programs. Some of the most influential early writing researchers (e.g., James Britton and Nancy Martin in England), were English and language arts teachers who, despite their faculty and administrative associations with universities, had few if any graduate degrees. Both Britton and Martin were English Language Arts teachers at the United Kingdom’s Harrow Weald school in the 1930s and 1940s before...
joining the English staff at the University of London’s Institute of Education. Britton served there as department head from 1954 to 1969, followed by Martin, who chaired the department from 1970 to 1976. Some of the new voices were not even researchers; James Moffett (1968), for example, whose cognitive conception of writing figured prominently in the new discourse about writing, was an English and language arts teacher at Phillips Exeter Academy who eventually served on the faculties of Harvard University, the University of California at Berkeley, San Diego State University, and Middlebury College’s Bread Loaf School of English.

The new discourse about writing sought to describe how ordinary students write, not to prescribe either how they should write or what their texts were to look like; notably, the scope of this new discourse was theoretical, not pedagogical, or not just pedagogical. Instruction was to be based not on the arbitrary rules and maxims of traditional school rhetorics; rather, it was to be informed by empirical findings and basic research, which was the mission of the National Institute of Education’s new writing research program launched in the late 1970s and subsequently at the Center for the Study of Writing in 1985. The weakest writers came to be categorized in clinical fashion as Basic Writers (Shaughnessy, 1977), whose errors were approached not with worksheets and drills but rather with research agendas designed to uncover the history and logic of their writing strategies. Echoing psychologists all the way back to John Dewey (1884) and William James (1890), the new writing researchers posited the individual writer’s mind as the seminal organizing principle of writing; they sought to explicate the cognitive structure of writing processes that transformed thought and agency into text. By the early 1980s, writing was commonly thought most fundamentally to be a dynamic, meaning-making process. This chapter examines the rise of empirical research on writing in the 1970s and 1980s that came about largely as a result of the confluence of two major and powerful forces: An academic formative context cultivating new ideas and methods, and a sociocultural receptive context transcending the university and serving to valorize and refract the ideas generated there.

The Formative Context

The Dartmouth Seminar

Between 1900 and about 1970, discourse about writing in the United States was mainly an instructional affair focused predominantly on prescriptive text features of model prose written by exemplary writers. Midcentury (and earlier) thinking about composition focused on model texts of the sort collected in countless Freshman English readers, and most ideas about writing by far concerned expository writing and reflected prescriptive grammar and “current traditional” rhetoric (Young, 1978). Five-paragraph themes, stipulating three main points regardless of topic or argument, constituted the focus of expository writing instruction in most secondary schools. Postsecondary writing instruction typically occurred exclusively in departments of English and focused on the humanities essay genre. The character of this instructional discourse was largely captured in formalist rules and maxims of the sort offered by Lucas (1955), Strunk and White (1959), and Warriner (1950).

This traditional conception of writing and writing instruction was sharply critiqued at the Anglo-American Conference on the Teaching of English, commonly called the Dartmouth Seminar, held at Dartmouth College in 1966. Britton, Moffett, and other members of the seminar, which included academics in English, linguistics, psychology, and education, as well as other researchers and schools people from both sides of the Atlantic, argued that school writing too often consisted of formulaic “dummy runs,” and proposed an alternative structure emphasizing “personal growth” (Dixon, 1967). This new model viewed language—both writing and talking—as a cognitive and expressive process shaping and extending everyday experience by bringing it “into new relationships with old elements” (Dixon, 1967, p. 9). Drawing from philosophy (Ernst Cassirer, Suzanne Langer, and Michael Polanyi) and psychology (Jerome Bruner, George Kelly, Alexander Luria, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky), Britton subsequently elaborated this conception of language processes in Language and Learning (Britton, 1970). Borrowing from Piaget’s model of cognitive development and Basil Bernstein’s concepts of elaborated and restricted codes, Moffett
spelled out a K–13 pedagogical sequence of writing development based on increasing levels of abstraction at which the experience is handled—what's happening? (record), what happened? (report), what happens? (generalization and analysis), and what may happen? (speculation)—subsequently published in *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (Moffett, 1968). He argued that “the stuff to be conceived and verbalized is primarily the raw stuff of life, not language matters themselves” (p. 114).

This new model of English education sought to move the focus of curriculum and instruction away from traditional models of cultural heritage and skills. In their place, the reformers urged a bold and fundamental reconceptualization of instruction rooted in basic research about individual learning and processes of mind. Dixon (1967, p. 10) wrote:

> The question “What is English?” invites a different form of answer from, say, “What at our best are we doing in English classes?” If we wish to describe a process, composition for example, the first question will tend to suggest the finished product (the marks on the page even) rather than the activity of bringing together and composing the disorder of our experience. “What... doings” will suggest nominal forms of verbs (bringing, composing) and thus help to keep activities in mind.

Dartmouth seminar participants argued that effective reform required not new curricula or instructional techniques but rather a fundamental reconceptualization of the nature of English language education. Their thinking was motivated first by their belief that effective writing and reading instruction has less to do with teaching techniques and more with fundamental insights about language processes and learning. As Britton (1969) put it, “We teach and teach and they learn and learn: if they didn’t, we wouldn’t” (p. 81). To this end, the Dartmouth participants sought to downplay the concrete, “What is English?” outcomes of writing and reading, and instead foster the generative and active meaning-making processes of engaged writing and reading.

**The Cognitive Revolution**

Another source for the new discourse about writing, as well as both reading and learning, was the Cambridge Cognitive Revolution at MIT and at Harvard University. Chomsky’s seminal ideas on language as a rule-governed cognitive process (Chomsky, 1957, 1966, 1968) revolutionized linguistics, arguing that language performance (i.e., spoken utterances) transformed manifestations of underlying language competence. Because competence is innate, universal, and cognitive, he claimed, to study language was to investigate the structure of the mind, and linguistics was a branch of cognitive psychology. Inasmuch as Chomsky’s structuralist arguments validated mind as a legitimate object of scientific inquiry, his work gave new energy to psychologists laboring under the behaviorist paradigm of B. F. Skinner. Harvard and MIT linguists and cognitive psychologists both, and sometimes together, in the “the heady psycholinguistic atmosphere of Cambridge, Massachusetts” (Smith, 1971, p. x) in a discipline called psycholinguistics, undertook many new programs of research, each aimed at deciphering and writing rules (grammars) structuring and underlying human behavior, including language.

Unsurprisingly, many of the key principles of this new Cartesian approach to language and human behavior—especially the premise that humans order experience by formulating mental representations (or schemas), enabling them to (1) organize their perceptions, understandings, and memories of the past; and (2) focus their expectations for the future— influenced doctoral students at Harvard, both in the Graduate School of Education and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, especially those who were writing dissertations in literacy, literacy instruction, and language development, including both writing and reading. Students from Harvard took courses with Chomsky at MIT, as well as with Jerry Fodor and Edward Klima, both professors of philosophy and psychology. At Harvard, faculty from MIT often attended a Tuesday Colloquium at Harvard sponsored by Miller and Bruner’s Center for Cognitive Studies, part of the Social Relations Department.

During this time, a remarkable group of graduate students undertook research that eventually gained them considerable influence in their fields. These included Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) stu-
dents Janet Emig, John Mellon, and Courtney Cazden. Cazden was a human development student working with cognitive psychologist Roger Brown; Charles Read was a doctoral student in linguistics; and Frank Smith was a doctoral student in psychology affiliated with the Center for Cognitive Studies (CCS), part of the Social Relations Department, where he worked with cognitive psychologists George Miller, Jerome Bruner, and Roger Brown.\footnote{Dartmouth Seminar participant Moffett was a research associate with HGSE. Cazden (1972, 1988) went on to become a noted expert on child language and classroom discourse. Emig (1971) and Moffett (1968), mentioned above, concerned themselves with cognitive conceptions of writing processes. Mellon (1969) devised an instructional method based on Chomsky’s grammar called “transformational sentence-combining” for developing “syntactic fluency” (skill in manipulating syntax). Read (1971) uncovered the phonetic logic of preschool writers’ “invented spelling” in work that served as an important precursor to subsequent studies of emergent literacy. And Smith (1971) developed a widely influential cognitive model of reading processes.} Ironically, not one of these students trained in the area of his or her eventual influence. Emig and Mellon studied in the English education program; there was no program at the time in writing research or composition studies. Read trained as a linguist, and Smith, a psychology student, took no courses in either education or reading; Moffett, as noted, was not even a student.

The Receptive Context

The Literacy Crisis

If empirical research on writing had important roots in the Cognitive Revolution of the 1960s and was launched circa 1970, its influence did not immediately take off until at least the mid-1970s. We get some sense of this in Figure 1.1 charting the citation record of Emig’s *Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (taken from the Social Sciences Citation Index) between 1972 and 2003: Citations of Emig’s study are rare we see, till the mid-1970s, when they roughly double and then increase steeply in the 1980s. The upturn reflects several developments at the time, both within and beyond academia. In the mid-1970s, two influential articles that

![Figure 1.1](image-url)
appeared in the popular press bemoaned a
sharp decline in writing skills evident in
America’s colleges and universities, and her-
alded a literacy crisis in American schools.
Time’s “Bonehead English” (Stone, 1974)
attributed dramatic increases in remedial
freshman composition classes to sharp in-
creases in unprepared students. Newsweek’s
December 8, 1975, cover story, “Why
Johnny Can’t Write” (Sheils, 1975), blamed
the public schools for neglecting “the ba-
secs,” noting a “displacement” of writing in-
struction by too many “creative” methods
and “permissive” standards in too many
“open” classrooms. For the public, both ar-
ticles seemed to confirm the College Entrance
Examination Board’s 1973 report that SAT
scores had fallen sharply. Clifton Fadiman,
popular critic and longtime book reviewer
for the New Yorker, blamed the “unshackled
Sixties” (Fadiman & Howard, 1979, p. 10).

This was not the first literacy crisis in
America, nor would it be the last. Indeed, pe-
deric complaints about falling standards and
delaying writing and reading skills have
been perennial in any industrialized nation
where requirements for literacy continually
change. Such claims are common during pe-
riods of demographic and class economic
shifts, including our current globalizing soci-
ety. Miller (1997) shows, for example, how
the formation of college English in 18th-cen-
tury Great Britain was driven by a rise in lit-
eracy, brought about by an expanding, up-
wardly mobile middle class with enough leisure
time, interest, and money to take ad-

The Social and Historical Context for Writing Research

poor students of “capacity and character”
(Eliot, quoted in Douglas, 1976, p. 127), and
its mission was to meet a need for correct-
ness and clarity in written discourse posed by
the demands of growing industrialization
and the concomitant rise of a professional
management class. Writing skill, understood
as clarity, grammatical correctness, and
preferred usage, became a social grace—a
power button, as it were, a way of highlight-
ing one’s education, class affiliations, and
upscale ambitions in an industrial economy.

A century later, in the 1970s, American
colleges and universities oversaw even more
dramatic and often violent demographic
shifts. The Educational Opportunity Act of
1964, the Johnson administration’s War on
Poverty, and subsequent reauthorization of
the Higher Education Act in 1968, including
Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Special
Services, sharply increased numbers of first-
generation college students. William Angoff,
director of the College Board Program for
Educational Testing Service, attributed SAT
declines publicized by Time and Newsweek
to “the changing nature of the SAT popula-
tion” (Angoff, 1975, p. 10). College campus
Vietnam War protests exacerbated all these
changes. Peter Hawkes (1996) documents
how radical changes in writing instruction at
Brooklyn College of the City University of
New York (CUNY) were a direct response to
the daily ferment of social and political
change both on and off campus. Across
America, student demonstrations, strikes,
takeovers of campus buildings, smoke
bombs, vandalism, and fires were persistent;
police brutality against demonstrators was
common. The demonstrations were largely
about student draft deferments: Of Brooklyn
College’s 10,008 students in 1968, for exam-
ple, only 119 were black, and 42 were Puerto
Rican (Kihss, 1968, p. 48). Since few African
Americans and Puerto Ricans qualified for
student deferments, they were drafted in dis-
proportionate numbers and sent to Vietnam
to fight and often die.

In the fall of 1970, 6 months after four
Kent State students were shot dead by Na-
tional Guard troops, CUNY began its policy
of open admissions 5 years ahead of its
planned start in 1975; in the next 3 years,
Brooklyn College’s enrollments jumped from
14,000 to 34,000 students. There, much to
his surprise, it fell to Kenneth Bruffee, a
young and new assistant professor of British Romantic literature, to design and direct a new freshman composition program. His radical reforms included extensive use of response groups in the new courses, as well as a establishing tutoring program located in a storefront facility near the campus subway exit staffed entirely by undergraduate students.

In Manhattan, at City College of New York, Mina Shaughnessy, a colleague of Bruffee, revolutionized writing instruction by making research into the “logic and history” of students’ errors—not worksheet exercises in prescriptive grammar—an essential prerequisite to effective instruction (Shaughnessy, 1977). Like Britton and Martin in the United Kingdom, Shaughnessy had no graduate training for her work at City College. She had earned a BS degree in the Department of Radio/TV/film at Northwestern University, with additional coursework in theology at Wheaton College (Illinois), followed by a Master’s degree in English literature at Columbia University. These were her only academic credentials for her rapid rise through the CUNY system: In 1965, she served as the director of Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK), an experimental undergraduate program designed to bring small groups of minorities into the CUNY system. SEEK became the immediate forerunner of the subsequent open admissions program, and in 1970, with the formal start of Open Admissions, Shaughnessy became director of City College’s Basic Writing Program. Finally, from 1975 until her death in 1978, she served as dean of instructional resources for CUNY. In her systematic examination of the errors in 2 million words of writing by 4,000 basic writers, Shaughnessy took cues from sociolinguist William Labov’s (1972) *The Logic of Nonstandard English*. Shaughnessy’s was a strong voice putting writing research front and center in efforts to improve writing instruction in the new discourse about writing that gained influence in the 1970s and 1980s.

**Federally Funded Research and Development**

Education reforms in Britain in the 1700s, at Harvard after the Civil War, and in American higher education in the 1970s clearly made writing instruction a key response to macro-demographic and class cultural shifts in the larger societies. These pedagogical innovations and reforms shaped ideas about writing, how it was taught, and particularly why it was taught. The reforms of the 1970s, however, brought into play substantial, unprecedented programs of federally funded basic empirical research and development (R&D) about all aspects of education on the part of the federal government.

During the early 1960s, the social sciences gained considerable influence in education research, and indeed education research, as measured by membership and papers presented at the American Education Research Association, did not fully take off till the social sciences came on board. In 1963 Francis Keppel, who was dean of Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, joined the Kennedy Administration as U.S. Commissioner of Education and continued on into the Johnson Administration. Keppel argued for education reform based on sophisticated programs of empirical research. “Education,” he said, “is too important to be left solely to the educators” (Dershimer, 1976, p. 50):

> Our principal faults from the past are these: The most common form of educational research has been and is still the small, easily-mangaged project which focuses on miniature, obscure and non- controversial issues, which are seldom taken seriously by administrators or teachers. Education research has been and is still short of the best minds needed for the best possible results. Without the best of researchers, we have yet to show an innovative, creative vigor matching our counterparts in medicine, science, agriculture and industry. (Keppel, quoted in Dershimer, 1976, p. 60)

Keppel believed that education improvement was completely dependent on new research efforts undertaken independently of what he derisively called the professional “educationists,” whom he regarded as “the foe” (Dershimer, 1976, p. 61) and whose bureaucratic concerns and myopic curriculum and instructional methods projects had clearly made a mess of the schools. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Keppel and many others found much to admire in the then-recent National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded physics instruction for high schools known as Physical Sciences Study Committee (PSSC).
Physics, a federal response to Russia’s launch of Sputnik in 1957. Initial NSF funding totaled $445,000, increasing to $1.8 million by 1959. The director of this project was Jerrold Zacharias, an MIT physicist/scientist who had been at the Los Alamos Laboratory during the development of the atomic bomb in the 1940s. In 1960, Zacharias started Educational Services, Inc. (ESI), an education R&D facility concerned with all phases of education reform. Zacharias was increasingly regarded by Keppel and the U.S. Office of Education as a “prototype of the caliber” of needed new scholars in education (Dershimer, 1976, p. 60). If the “educationists” represented the mediocre past in education, scientists and scholars like Zacharias hopefully portended the future.

In 1963, Keppel was appointed U.S. Commissioner of Education, where he continued to expand the role of the federal government in education and favor well-funded research and development efforts. After the Kennedy assassination, federal investments in education were viewed as a critical part of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. According to President Johnson, a former schoolteacher from Texas, education was “central to the purposes of this Administration, and at the core of all of our hopes for a Great Society” (Johnson, remarks to the White House Conference on Education, July 21, 1965, quoted in Dershimer, 1976, p. 69). In 1965 Keppel said, “The educator is the captain in a nationwide crusade to improve the quality of life; goals that seemed unreachable have become practical and close at hand” (p. 167). The new attitude was that the can-do nation that had built the bomb and was well on its way to the moon could surely end poverty and fix the schools. In 1964 the U.S. Office of Education funded four new federal R&D centers at Harvard, Oregon, Pittsburgh, and Wisconsin. These were modeled after the Argonne Laboratories and the Brookhaven Laboratory, viewed by the President’s Task Force on Education as “the great national laboratories of the Atomic Energy Commission” (“Report of the President’s Task Force on Education,” p. 34, quoted in Dershimer, 1976, p. 65). Each R&D center was predicated on “the view that education research would make a difference, that if you brought knowledge to bear on social problems it would improve them” (Ralph Tyler, quoted in Dershimer, 1976, p. 65). The centers were budgeted to spend $300,000 to $1 million a year on long-term projects targeting significant, carefully defined educational problems; each project, involving a team of empirical researchers and research assistants, was to conduct basic research culminating in the development of new curricula, instructional methods, and materials ready for implementation by teachers. The research was to be conducted according to the highest scientific standards—in its devotion to rigor, replicability, and presentation of data, as well as in its need for building a community of scholars to adjudicate disputes, relate the work to public needs and policies, and, of course, to garner the funds needed to conduct the research” (David Goslin, summarized by Kaestle, 1992, p. 57). In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act expanded the programs of the R&D centers and added six more, for a total of ten.

During the late 1960s, numerous American scholars sought to bring scientific methods to the professional community of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Some of the earliest empirical research on writing dates from this time. Rohman and Wellecke (1964; Rohman, 1965) were the first writing researchers explicitly to conceptualize prewriting as a discrete stage in a process of composing unfolding over time. Richard Young and his colleagues elaborated a process-based tagmemic theory of rhetoric in numerous publications starting in 1965 (Young, 1968, 1969, 1978; Young & Becker, 1965; Young, Becker, & Pike, 1974). Rohman and Welke’s work was sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research. Young’s studies were sponsored and funded by the then-new U.S. Office of Education-funded Center for Research on Language and Language Behavior at the University of Michigan.

In 1972 President Nixon and the 92nd Congress built on such initiatives by expanding and transforming the Cooperative Research Projects into the National Institute of Education (NIE) in 1972. In many ways, the new Center for the Study of Reading (CSR) at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, funded from 1976 to 1991, was the paradigm of such efforts, explicitly harnessing powerful new cognitive models of reading processes, along with innovative research.
methods, to the critical needs of schools to reverse declines in reading skills, particularly in inner cities. The CSR generated 750 technical reports, including work by Richard Anderson (1984) on schema theory, Meyer and McConkie (1973) on text structure analysis, Alan Collins and Tom Trabasso on inferential reasoning (Collins & Loftus, 1975; Trabasso & Van den Broek, 1985), Nancy Stein (1982) on story grammars, and Adams and Collins (1979) on comprehension models (see Pearson, 2001).

In 1977, preparing to launch a program of writing research, the NIE sponsored a conference on writing in June 1977 at NIE's Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) in Los Alamitos, California. Speakers represented anthropology, psycho- and sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology, English education, English literature, and rhetoric, areas that would come to configure university faculty and programs that specialized in research on writing.

Among the first writing research sponsored by NIE was the cognitive work of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes at Carnegie Mellon University. Carnegie Mellon offered a timely context for the new empirical work on writing: The Department of English was chaired by Richard Young, an empirical researcher on tagmectics and invention (above). Hayes had been a fellow at Harvard's CCS, were he worked with Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Herb Simon on the cognition of problem solving (Hayes & Simon, 1975). Flower and Hayes (1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1984) developed a cognitive model of writing processes, identifying the components and organization of long-term memory, planning, reviewing, and translating thought into text. They derived their methodology from think-aloud protocols from Newell and Simon (1972).

In some ways, Flower and Hayes's research might seem to build on Emig's (1971) research: Common to both was a focus on cognitive writing/composing processes and the use of think-aloud protocols. But whereas Emig's case study work elaborated a conception of writing as a composing process, Flower and Hayes built a formal model delineating both the components and organization of writing processes; the two research initiatives drew from different sources. While Emig's study did not figure methodologically or conceptually into Flower and Hayes's work, it nonetheless shaped in departments of English a new climate that made those departments receptive to the work that Flower and Hayes did, laying the groundwork and opening a discursive space for sophisticated and rigorous empirical research in literary-oriented departments of English.

Other cognitive research on writing from the 1970s and early 1980s included Applebee's (1981) research on writing in the secondary school, Bissex's (1980) case study of her son's written language development, Bracewell, Frederiksen, and Frederiksen's (1982) study of writing and reading, Daiute's (1981) psycholinguistic study of the writing process, Faigley and Witte's (1981; Witte & Faigley, 1983) studies of revision, Kroll's (1978) study of egocentrism and audience awareness, and Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Goelman, 1982) studies of writing processes. By the early 1980s, writing was commonly thought most fundamentally to be a dynamic, meaning-making process, and had computers at that time had Windows desktops, the icon for a Composition Studies folder would surely have been Flower and Hayes's (1981) flowchart showing the underlying hierarchical organization of writing processes (see Figure 1.2).

The Social 1980s

As we have seen, Emig (1971) investigated writing as a cognitive composing process by interviewing Harvard professors about their writing styles and studying a few middle-class Chicago north-suburban 12th graders. Shaughnessy (1977) soon expanded the scope of the new discourse about writing by tracing the logic and history of errors in the writing of 4,000 New York City College basic writers, most of whom were first-generation college students. Showing that effective instruction of these writers required understanding the patterns and idiosyncrasies of the language of their speech communities, Shaughnessy inserted a clear social dimension into writing research and was the first composition scholar to claim that "writing is a social act" (p. 83). The power of this insight increased along with the increasing
diversity of postsecondary students as a result of open admissions and other new institutions that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s: By the late 1960s, a new community college opened every week (Graham, 1984, p. 223).

Writing researchers were not alone. During the 1970s, many important voices in linguistics began to challenge Chomsky’s cognitive conception of language and his concepts of linguistic competence and native speaker. Reacting to Chomsky, Dell Hymes (1974) elaborated a concept of “communicative competence” within an “ethnography of communication,” resituating syntax and autonomous language forms within the full set of “conventional resources” that speakers draw from to communicate within a given “speech community.” Probing aspects of communicative competence, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) wrote a grammar of situated—not universal—conversation moves. Chomsky (1957) had defined grammatical language as syntactic structures acceptable to “a native speaker.” Noting the diversity of American native speakers of English, William Labov (1972) wrote a grammar for black English vernacular (BEV), in effect asking, “Which native speaker?” These many sociolinguistic studies added a social dimension to academic discourse about language and discourse.

By the 1980s, this new social perspective gathered momentum within writing studies. Challenging the Flower and Hayes (1981) cognitive model of writing processes, Nystrand (1982) argued that “the special relations that define written language functioning and promote its meaningful use . . . are wholly circumscribed by the systematic relations that obtain in the speech community of the writer” (p. 17). Bizzell (1982), also challenging Flower and Hayes’s cognitive model, argued that “what’s missing here is the connection to social context afforded by the recognition of the dialectical relationship between thought and language. . . . we can know nothing but what we have words for, if knowledge is what language makes of experience” (p. 223). Echoing Hymes, Faigley (1985) argued that “within a language community, people acquire specialized kinds of discourse competence that enable them to participate in specialized groups” (p. 238). Other research elucidating social dimensions of writing in the 1980s included
(1) Sommers’s (1980) work treating revision in terms of writers’ anticipation of discrepancies between readers’ expectations and their own texts; (2) Heath’s (1984), Scribner and Cole’s (1981), and Smitherman’s (1986) studies of the impact of individuals’ membership in various discourse communities on their orientations toward writing and their abilities to meet the demands of typical school writing tasks; (3) Teale and Sulzby’s (1986) research on emergent literacy and Dyson’s (1983, 1984, 1988) studies of children’s writing; (4) research of response groups in writing instruction (e.g., Gere & Stevens, 1985); for review, see DiPardo & Freedman, 1988; for a bibliographic review of the social constructionist philosophical foundations of this work, see Bruffee, 1984, 1986); and (5) Nystrand’s (1986, 1989) reciprocity theory and his social-interactive model of writing.

The emerging focus on social aspects of writing, moreover, resulted from the very success of the writing process movement itself, which began to spread beyond departments of English as other departments and academic units incorporated more writing into their instruction. In discussions of academic writing, the premise that college writing was defined by the monistic Freshman English essay—Olson’s (1977) autonomous text—began to give way to ideas about disciplinary writing in all its myriad and sundry genres across the curriculum. The resulting Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement made problems of text, social context, and genre more salient and interesting to writing researchers, who, during the 1970s, had been interested in the composing process in some generic sense, Russell (1991) and Ackerman (1993) offered detailed accounts of the impact of WAC on the field’s emerging interests in social aspects of writing.

Williams (1991) argued that the novice–expert distinctions that Flower and Hayes (1980a) make, for example, are not categorical but vary from field to field as individuals enter new disciplines. Writing differentiates not once and for all, Williams argued, as novice freshmen writers become expert senior essay writers, but rather repeatedly, each time individuals accommodate themselves to the modes of discourse characteristic of the new fields they choose to enter.

Odell and Goswami (1982) documented a comparable phenomenon in writing in nonacademic settings. Studies from the 1980s explicated (1) the role of context in writing (e.g., Brandt, 1986; Nystrand, 1983), (2) relationships of writing to reading (e.g., Bazerman, 1980; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1984; Kucer, 1987; Nystrand, 1986; Tierney & LaZansky, 1980; Tierney, Lys, & Rogers, 1984), and (3) the relationship of writers to their discourse communities (e.g., Bizzell, 1982; Brodkey, 1987; Bruffee, 1986; Faigley, 1985). Research on writing and disciplinariness continued into the 1990s (e.g., Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Geisler, 1994; Prior, 1998).

Cognitive models of writing had depicted writers as solitary individuals struggling mainly with their thoughts; audience was viewed, at most, as an ancillary element of the writing process. As writing research became more social in the 1980s, however, the relation of writers and their readers came to be an important research problem. Emig had had little to say about writers’ readers; indeed, her conception of composing was one of language production rather than communication or a rhetorical act. For Emig, the writer’s significant other was not a reader but a teacher; composing started with a “stimulus” (a school assignment) to which the writer “responded.” In Flower and Hayes’s (1981) model, audience became “a relevant constraint” on, but not a central element, in writing processes; it was part of the task environment. In another paper influential in the 1980s, David Olson (1977) had argued that because writers, unlike speakers, could not interact with their readers, writers’ texts had to operate autonomously (by being completely explicit), with no reference to readers. Entire developmental theories of writing (e.g., Kroll, 1981) were based on the premise that learning to write required learning to produce “autonomous” texts that somehow had meaning only independently of writers’ interaction with their readers.

In the 1980s, many of these ideas were challenged. Increasingly the nature of writing, like all language, was viewed as inherently social and interactive. Each act of writing began to be viewed as an episode of interaction, a dialogic utterance (cf. Voloshinov, 1973, p. 82), ideally exhibiting intertextuality (cf. Porter, 1986) within a
particular scholarly community or discipline typified by particular premises, issues, and givens. For writing researchers, key questions now included the following: What determined the issues the writer examined? How much evidence was enough? Which evidence was essential? What was a suitable conclusion? To contend that it was the writer alone who determined each of these in accordance with his or her purpose did not adequately explain the principles involved in the behavior. Nor did postulating a black-box monitor as the key element of the composing process do more than beg questions about the organization of discourse. What criteria were relevant to the writer’s making these evaluations? What principles shaped the writer’s regulation of discourse? How did the character and possibilities of written text shape the writer’s options? What principles governed the production of discourse? How were we to characterize these principles?

Finally, it is noteworthy that dramatic increases in the production of PhDs in Composition & Rhetoric during the 1980s fueled research into writing as a social process, especially as the new scholars investigated contexts beyond departments of English—not only in WAC programs but also in writing-intensive courses, writing tutorial centers, and writing and technology facilities. Between 1969 and 1979, programs increased from seven to 20; by 1993, there were 72, a tenfold increase (Figure 1.3). Inasmuch as the new researchers directed the new sites for writing in colleges and universities, they began to calibrate their ideas about writing in the context of the diverse and pluralistic universe of discourse characteristic of colleges and universities (see also Faigley, 1999).

The Postmodern 1990s

Empirical writing research by Britton, Emig, Shaughnessy, and others, we have seen, was initially fueled by efforts to understand the nature of writing as a prerequisite to improving instruction. In time, the Big Question, “What is writing?” began to take on a life of its own. Academics in psychology, linguistics, and anthropology pursued projects on writing. In 1984, a new refereed journal, Written Communication, offered the first

quarterly forum for reports of research about writing, with no requirement to include discussion of pedagogical implications and applications. During this period, College Composition and Communication made anonymous peer review standard procedure for assessing submissions. Special interest groups on writing research were established at the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the American Educational Research Association conventions.

In the 1990s, however, the Big Question, What is writing?, became less an exclusive focus as research became more sociocultural and concerned more comprehensively with writing in all its situated contexts, especially beyond school: writing and technology in the workplace (e.g., Haas, 1996), writing and culture in communities and community centers (e.g., Brandt, 2001; Farr, 2000, forthcoming; Farr & Guerra, 1995; Fleming, in press; Flower, 1994, 1996; Freedman, 1994), writing and communication in industry (e.g., Barbas, 1990; Herrdl, Fennell, & Miller, 1991), and investigations of writing in numerous other nonacademic settings (e.g., Bracewell & Breuleux, 1992; Duin & Hansen, 1996; McNamee, 1992; Palmer, 1992; Schriver, 1992); popular literacy (Trimburt, 2001), and the rhetoric of everyday life (Nystzand & Duffy, 2003). In addition, the spread of empirical research on writing beyond North America to Europe heightened the sociocultural variability in writing research (see Coppock, 1998), even if the character of much of this research is more cognitive than sociocultural: in Finland (Tynjälä, 2001); France (Allal, 2000; Allal, Chanquoy, & Largy, 2004; Espéret & Piolat, 1990), Italy (Boscolo, 1989; Boscolo & Mason, 2001), Norway (Berge, 2002; Dysthe, 2002; Evensen, 2002; Ongstad, 2002; Smidt, 2002), and Sweden (Karlsson, 2001). Current research on writing, reading, and literacy increasingly intersects with sociocultural, historical, political, disciplinary, institutional, and everyday contexts, especially in the material world beyond the academy—each situated and domain specific. As Andrea Lunsford (1990) puts it, we have become a postmodern discipline, a postmodern profession (p. 77), with more nuanced perspectives than all that have preceded.

Notes

1. John R. Hayes, who would 10 years later collaborate with Linda Flower to elaborate a cognitive model of writing processes (Flower & Hayes, 1981), was a researcher at the Center for Cognitive Studies at this time.
3. Information about Mina Shaughnessy courtesy of Allen Streiccker, Assistant Archivist, Northwestern University Archives.
4. AERA was founded in 1915 as the National Association of Directors of Educational Research to improve schools’ efficiency; membership consisted of 8 men. In 1928, the name was changed to the American Educational Research Association, and by 1931 the organization had 329 members. Membership for the next three decades grew from 511 members in 1940 to 703 in 1950, and 1,774 members in 1960. In the 1960s, membership accelerated:
   - 1962: 2,210 members
   - 1964: 3,070 members
   - 1965: 3,789 members
   - 1966: 5,375 members
   - 1968: 8,350 members
   - 1970: 9,901 members
   By 1980, AERA had 12,737 members. See www.aera.net/divisions/sh.
5. According to Keppel, “the state departments of education were the feeblest bunch of second-rate, or fifth-rate, educators who combined educational incompetence with bureaucratic immobility” (quoted in Graham, 1984, p. 63).
6. The Center for Study of the Individual and Cultural Differences in Education. Courtney Cazden was a project assistant in this new center.
7. The Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC), still in operation.
8. The Wisconsin Center for Education Research, still in operation.
9. According to the Research and Development Center Program Act of 1963, the centers were “to concentrate human and financial resources on a particular problem area in education over an extended period of time in an attempt to make significant contribution toward an understanding of, and an improvement of educational practice in, the problem area” (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1963, p. 27).
10. According to the request for proposals, “More specifically, the personnel of a center will
1. Conduct basic and applied research studies, both of the laboratory and field type.
2. Conduct development activities designed to translate systematically research findings into educational materials or procedures, and field test the developed products.
3. Demonstrate and disseminate information about the new programs or procedures which emerge from the research and development efforts. These activities may include demonstrations in a natural, or operational setting, the preparation of films, tapes, displays, publications, and lectures, and the participation in symposia and conferences.

11. An important volume of cognitive papers on writing at this time was Gregg and Steinberg (1981). For reviews of cognitive research on writing, see Humes (1983), Kucer (1987), and Spirey (1990).
12. A Google search of “writing process” today (July 2004) brings up 610,000 Web pages, virtually all pedagogical, with no research citations, and aimed at teachers and students on preparing academic papers.

References


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of communicative influences in two classrooms. Paper presented at the sixth annual Conference on Reading Research, Atlanta, GA.


