Writing and Learning in Cross-national Perspective: Transitions From Secondary To Higher Education

David Foster

David R. Russel

Iowa State University, drrussel@iastate.edu

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In most national education systems, students' writing development plays an important—though often unacknowledged—role in the crucial transition from secondary school to university. There is a great deal at stake, for both individual students and the societies involved, in how and how well students write. In most nations, whether students can enter and remain in higher education—and thus move into positions of greater responsibility and status in society—depends in large part on whether and how they have developed their writing. Thus, writing development is bound up with questions of equity in access to higher education and to powerful roles in society. And in a larger sense, written communication is essential to the successful continuation and future development of important institutions—professional, governmental, industrial, commercial, and nonprofit—that increasingly depend on specialized written communication in a global environment.

Writing and Learning in Cross-National Perspective presents research studies from six nations on academic writing development in the “mother tongue,” or, rather, in the dominant language of schooling (each of these nations has significant numbers of students—a majority in South Africa and Kenya—who do not speak the dominant language of schooling as their mother tongue). The chapters focus on:

- **China.** Xiao-ming Li analyzes the writing of secondary students in Chinese classrooms in terms of the struggle between ancient traditions of exam writing and the demands of modernization. She then presents results of a survey of university students that was designed to reveal their perceptions of their secondary school experience in light of university writing demands.
• **England.** Mary Scott looks at the mutual misperceptions of students and teachers in the discipline of English literature as students move from secondary school assumptions about literary criticism in a humanist tradition to university literature courses that critique those assumptions in a domain of contested theory. She carefully analyzes the ways students negotiate their own “interests” with those of the changing discipline through their texts.

• **France.** Christiane Donahue examines student writing in the transition from secondary to higher education in France’s very centralized system, where the demands of early specialization and the ideology of egalitarian access collide in the writing-based examination system. She finds that secondary school students in general learn to write a few genres very well and make a smooth transition to the similar university writing—but with clear costs.

• **Germany.** David Foster presents data from interviews with students and faculty from institutions on both sides of the old East-West divide in order to consider the different kinds of authority students must develop as writers when they make the transition from the relatively more nurturing environment of secondary school Gymnasien to the pressures of seminar pedagogy in higher education.

• **Kenya.** Mary N. Muchiri looks at the special problems of developing student writing in a multilingual, multicultural education system still dealing with the legacy of colonialism. She sees writing development in terms of a deep contradiction between indigenous values of community solidarity and the demands of a higher education system structured on notions of Western individualism and commerce.

• **South Africa.** Suellen Shay and Rob Moore describe three students from different social and educational backgrounds writing in a university history course on colonialism, within the context of a newly integrated university undergoing dramatic reforms. The authors see students struggling to create meaningful agency through the writing tasks of new curricula designed in a time of rapid social and political transition.

We conceived this collection to give cross-national perspective to issues of writing development, issues that many nations face with the growth of higher education worldwide. We invited contributors who have done significant research in their own nations but who are also familiar with other education systems,
mainly that of the United States. Individual chapters use a variety of empirical research methods, qualitative and quantitative. These include surveys; interviews with students, teachers, and university faculty; discourse analysis of student texts and official documents on curriculum, teaching, and assessment; classroom observation; and analysis of historical studies. We chose contributors to represent a range of national systems—large and small, Western and non-Western, English-speaking and non-English-speaking. Several of the nations represented here have a robust tradition of research on writing, which the authors draw on for their studies. Had space permitted, other nations might also have been chosen, such as Australia, which has seen a great deal of innovative research into writing in the secondary education to higher education transition.

Indeed, researchers around the world have addressed the problem of articulating secondary/higher education writing within the context of their individual national systems. Yet there has been little cross-national dialogue on these issues. This is understandable. Research in mother-tongue writing development in secondary and higher education—what is called in North America “composition”—is very much local in origin, responsive to particular cultural and institutional needs.

While composition studies have flourished in U.S. education, for example, these studies have tended to focus on issues related to the special status of general writing courses and programs in U.S. schools and universities. U.S. composition studies have paid little attention to insights that might emerge from cross-national comparisons of writing development and pedagogy, given that general college composition courses largely do not exist outside the United States. This collection is a step toward filling this gap by making a variety of non-U.S. perspectives available to U.S. readers, and to others around the world, who are looking to rearticulate the articulation between secondary and higher education writing development.

Although there has been some important cross-national research on writing, that research has shown the limits of direct cross-national comparisons of student writing. In the 1980s, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational
Achievement (IEA) sponsored a major project comparing student performance on a range of writing tasks in fourteen countries (Purves et al.). This ambitious effort to compare student writing cross-nationally was in one significant respect a “failure,” the project director says, because “what was thought to have been comparable . . . has proved impossible to achieve” (199).¹

At the outset, the IEA project team assumed that writing was “a general cognitive capacity or activity” that could be studied apart from culture and ideology—what Brian Street calls the autonomous view of literacy. Instead they discovered that it was impossible to find useful comparisons in ostensibly similar statistical findings among participating educational systems. Although the writing tasks in the study were designed to be similar in each system measured, the researchers found it difficult to assess results in any standard or uniform way. Because of the national and local variations in teaching and evaluative practices, even “common qualities of handling content . . . and style” in writing samples had “national or local characteristics” (Purves et al. 199). As a result, the editor concludes, “the construct that we call written composition must be seen in a cultural context and not considered a general cognitive capacity or activity. Even the consensus on goals and aims of writing instruction masks a variation both in ideology of teachers and in instructional practices” (199).

This central lesson of the IEA study is the starting point for this collection. If cultural-historical differences prevent direct comparisons, then in order to learn from other nations we must look closely at the cultural-historical factors in each nation that shape writing development. By understanding the differences, we may be able to rethink our own national and local institutions, and perhaps find common issues that can help teachers, researchers, and policymakers rearticulate writing development in their own institutions and nations, informing further research, curriculum development, faculty development, and educational policy debates. That is what we attempt in this collection.

Of course, this makes generalizations difficult and deceptive. Studies and comparisons provide no firm lessons, much less one best way to develop students’ academic writing. Not only is each
Introduction: Rearticulating Articulation

national system different, but also each nation exhibits profound
differences in writing development. Likewise, different regions
within a nation show differences, as Foster points out in his com-
parison of schools and universities in the eastern and western
sectors of Germany. In every nation, institutions display differ-
ences in status, mission, and goals. And within every institution,
disciplinary differences also shape writing development. Thus,
the studies in this volume do not pretend to make systematic
comparisons, nor do we in this introduction.

Although systematic comparisons of the type attempted in
the IEA study seem fruitless at this stage, we nevertheless believe
that informal and admittedly unsystematic comparisons are use-
ful. This collection should give readers new perspectives for un-
derstanding their own practices as teachers and writers. Our
comparisons are tentative and offered as heuristics for rearticu-
lating national and local practices, not for drawing conclusions
about “best practice” or ranking the quality of learning and teach-
ing in various systems. We hope readers will also want to make
their own comparisons and judgments based on their situations
and experience.

In this spirit of exploration and understanding, we suggest
that all of the systems face some basic issues. Though the chap-
ters focus on a variety of issues, levels, and disciplines, each ex-
amines functions common to all systems: instruction, evaluation,
and placement at the secondary level; how students make the
transition as writers from the secondary to the university level;
and how they meet the challenges of academic writing in the
university. These discussions offer various “lenses” for viewing one’s
own national and local practices in light of others’ practices.

In this introductory chapter, we outline ten common themes
that surface again and again in these studies and others. These
themes are useful in examining the role of writing in the transition
to higher education from a cross-national perspective. The
first five themes take up issues affecting writing development in
the context of an entire education system, and we use the U.S.
system as a reference point because it is the only system that has
widespread university-level general writing courses. We hope that
U.S. readers will see how radically different other systems are in
their response to similar issues.
The point at which students specialize into disciplinary majors, and the effects of early and late specialization on writing development

- The effects of educational traditions and ideology
- The degree of centralization/decentralization and its effects on efforts to develop students' writing
- The roles that writing plays in tracking and selection, particularly examination writing
- Attitudes and orientations toward writing

The last five themes take up specific issues of teaching and learning in classrooms in relation to assessment and professional access:

- Identity and authority in making the transition to disciplinary conversations
- Problems students have handling intertextuality: citation, synthesis, and plagiarism
- Assessment, especially gatekeeping and the consequences of examinations for pedagogy and writing development
- Language policy and traditions
- Teaching—whether it is done explicitly or implicitly

We then conclude by posing questions that the cross-national perspective of these essays raise for teachers, researchers, and policymakers, in order to help them find ways of rearticulating the secondary-higher education transition in terms of writing development.

The Roles of Writing: Local, Systemic, and Cultural Issues

As Muchiri, Mulamba, Myers, and Ndolo have argued, writing development is, like all academic work, situated within complex national, regional, and local environments. And although academic work is increasingly international in scope, with "journals,
conferences, publishers and research projects” all “linked by e-mail, photocopies, faxes and airlines,” Muchiri et al. suggest that “this apparent globalization is deceptive.” After all, “everyday academic work is still overwhelmingly determined by national settings. The funding, the geography, the politics, the national ideology determine daily concerns like hours, class size, assessment, careers. And access to that global network of contacts is by no means equally apportioned” (Muchiri et al. 194).

All of these local factors produce traditions of writing development and pedagogy that seem transparent or even inevitable, second nature for students and teachers in their respective systems. As the IEA study points out, the terms educators in various countries use to describe practices are often the same (e.g., essay, composition, clarity, argument), but “the nuances and values given those terms are a part of the national culture that makes such sharing superficial at best” (Purves et al. 200):

Students adapt to and become members of a rhetorical community that shares a number of assumptions and beliefs, only some of which are explicit: the kinds of writing valued, the approach to the activity of composition that is desired, the relative importance of convention and individualism, the models of text and text practices that are considered appropriate in the school. (200)

As already noted, the most striking difference between writing development in the U.S. educational system and writing development in most other national systems is the prevalence in U.S. universities of general writing courses. This ubiquitous tradition in the United States—perhaps the only curricular common denominator in what is otherwise a sprawling and diverse higher education system—strikes many teachers in other nations as strange. Similarly, U.S. educators are often surprised that students in other nations learn to write without general composition courses. U.S. readers of this volume will find it irresistible to compare the singular U.S. reliance on general writing instruction courses with the widely differentiated settings for students’ development as writers found in other systems. Several factors have influenced this important systemic difference—factors that affect
different countries and systems in different ways. Understanding the differences makes it possible to see more clearly the ecology of general writing instruction and its impact on its unique U.S. habitat, and by contrast to understand better how other systems develop writing differently. The following factors are most important in thinking about these differences generally.

**Time of Specialization**

In the United States, students specialize (choose a major) very late compared to students in other nations. Students in many countries (such as France and England) specialize as early as age sixteen or seventeen, in the second two years of secondary school. U.S. students are admitted to a university rather than, as in most of the systems discussed in this collection, to a department. U.S. students aren’t expected to choose a profession until late in their higher education—or even until graduate school or entering the workforce. Late specialization provides a longer period of general or liberal education and a curricular space for general composition courses that can teach a wider variety of genres than those of one specialty (e.g., informal personal essays). Early specialization, by contrast, allows for greater focus on the genres of one or a few disciplines, which brings students more quickly into a deeper engagement with the discourse of a field. There is no clear space for general composition courses, and any formal university writing instruction (many systems have little or none) must come from within the disciplines or in special student support units (similar to U.S. writing centers). Late specialization is costly to society, keeping millions of students in higher education longer than in other nations. (The United States spends far more per capita on higher education than any other nation, partly due to what has been called “the composition industry.”) But late specialization also provides the possibility of a broader education and certainly more time for making choices. It is interesting to note that some higher education systems are beginning to move toward wider access and later specialization, as the United States did almost a century ago. As they do, they are hearing calls for instituting general composition courses, or at least institution-
wide writing support units, which we will discuss when we focus on recent changes in education systems.

I **deology and Educational Traditions**

Traditions and ideologies play a huge role in writing development. In the late nineteenth century in the United States (and somewhat later in Europe), technological developments spurred by corporate capitalism produced rapid professionalization that was accomplished through credentialing in the new modern higher education systems. Individual accomplishment was seen as the product of individual merit rather than of parentage or social class (see Ohmann for a critique). But this meritocratic ideology played out differently in different education systems. The U.S. tradition of egalitarian individualism, for example, has for over a century viewed formal education as a route to social advancement, and the U.S. system has moved toward wider and wider access, with more and more chances for individuals to enter and remain in a very decentralized education system—and receive formal writing instruction designed, in theory, to make new chances possible (Russell, *Writing*). By contrast, France has tended toward an egalitarian view that works to provide, in theory, an identical education for all in a very centralized system, but with few second chances (though democratic pressures have in recent decades increased enrollments in secondary and higher education). Students are tracked relatively early and there is an emphasis on examination writing. In Kenya a deep cultural tradition of *harambee*, or communal pulling together to meet others’ needs, coexists in deep contradiction with an individualistic, meritocratic ideology of Western higher education that was imposed during colonial rule, with significant implications for writing development in terms of the social processes students use for writing—and in the constraints of Western notions of individual authorship and plagiarism, as Mary Muchiri argues in Chapter 5. Indeed, in all of the systems described in this volume, traditions and ideologies are constantly contested in the ways students write and learn to write.
The United States has a huge and extremely decentralized system of education, both secondary and postsecondary, public and private (see Figure 1). Enrollments in secondary and higher education achieved levels by the 1930s that most other industrialized nations did not reach until the 1970s, and the United States still enrolls a far higher percentage of students in higher education than other nations (Day and Curry).

The U.S. primary and secondary educational system is organized by local districts within each state. The postsecondary system is equally decentralized but in a different way, with local, state, and regional public institutions coexisting with a wide range of local, regional, and national private institutions.

This system is sprawling and complex, with some 3,535 higher education institutions of amazing variety: prestigious, highly selective private research universities; small private colleges; and government-funded institutions. There is no centralized control, apart from voluntary accrediting organizations, or direct funding at the national level. State and local government institutions account for only 17 percent of institutions but enroll 80 percent of students, from huge state research universities to a large number of two-year colleges, mainly public, with no graduate programs and low or no tuition.

Other nations generally have smaller systems (China excepted), and all have more centralized control, with a far smaller private higher education sector. In other nations, the national government controls admission to higher education and funds it, unlike the United States, where individual institutions or local and state governments control admissions and funding. Students in other nations generally pay much less than U.S. students, with the government footing most of the bill. This leads other nations to focus on specific disciplines, often in specialized institutions, and therefore generally to focus on discipline-specific writing development. There is less perceived need for an introduction to university writing, whereas in the United States, the general writing courses fit into a general education component of higher education.
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Figure 1. United States of America: Structure of the formal education system.

Tracking and Selection

Because most U.S. students specialize (and are selected for specialized training) later, curricular requirements are broad and educational choices remain continuously available—at least officially—as students move through secondary school into university or even graduate school. Students do not need to be selected on the basis of their ability to write (or speak) the discourse of a discipline or disciplines when they enter higher education. Machine-scored examinations of general “ability” or, less common, tests of general “writing ability” are the norm. In secondary schools, students are typically sorted into tracks or “ability groups.” These tracks sort students “destined” for higher education (and for more selective postsecondary education). Though all students take courses in roughly the same subjects, the content of the required subjects, as well as expectations of students, varies widely by tracks, and social sorting (and preparation for
higher education) is accomplished without formal assessments of writing beyond those in individual classrooms. Extended writing is not required on the most widely used nationwide U.S. college entrance (or “aptitude”) examinations, though many institutions and professions are beginning to demand written examinations because students’ writing is perceived to be inadequate. Thus, the stakes for writing development are comparatively low in the United States.

By contrast, European educational systems (which are largely the models for African and Asian systems) have emphasized earlier specialization and selection, and the ways students write in a discipline (or two or three) are crucial. Accordingly, examinations in other nations emphasize extended written (or oral) performance, and there is very little multiple-choice testing. Students must typically write examinations in a discipline to enter the second phase of secondary school, to enter higher education, to continue in higher education, and to receive an undergraduate degree. The stakes for specialized writing development are very high in these systems.

Again, there are complex trade-offs. U.S. students lack the intensive, specialized experience in disciplinary writing that European students get in academic-track secondary school as they prepare for the extended writing required in examinations (and the courses that prepare them for those exams). But students in other nations rarely have a university writing course to help them make the transition to writing the specialized discourse of the disciplines and professions—or the opportunity to write in a wider range of genres with fewer stakes attached.

**Orientations toward Writing Development**

Throughout the essays that follow, we can see many attitudes or orientations toward writing being contested and negotiated, tacitly and explicitly, in the various national systems and institutional programs described. Drawing on Lea and Street’s categories (“Writing”), we can distinguish three general orientations: study skills, academic socialization, and academic literacies. The study skills orientation treats writing as a single, generalizable set of skills learned once and for all, usually at an early age. Though
this orientation focuses on writing, it separates writing from the social, disciplinary, and personal dimensions so crucial to success, as twenty years of writing research have shown. And it too often carries a remedial stigma (often with ethnic or class overtones) for students who do not learn the “code” early. This has been the dominant orientation in the United States for the last century, though it has been greatly contested for the last thirty years by U.S. composition, and it operates in complex ways in many other nations as well.

The academic socialization orientation sees writing development as a tacit aspect of an apprenticeship in a discipline or social practice: writing is an embedded element of disciplinary learning. Although this view takes account of the social and disciplinary dimensions of writing, it tends to make writing disappear as an object of attention for teachers, students, and policymakers. One sees this orientation most strikingly in European systems, though it is common among professors across the curriculum in the United States. In this view, there is no need to teach writing per se, either in a disciplinary course or a separate writing course, because in learning the content students are learning to write—almost automatically, it is assumed. From their first semesters at university (or later secondary school), they are required to write the analyses and interpretations, reports, seminar papers, and examinations that will mark their progress in their fields of study, and writing appears to be an ability they come by as a matter of “course.”

Despite such expectations, however, students in European systems do not necessarily move readily and smoothly into the discourse of their disciplines. The studies in this book indicate that they struggle with exams and papers in their disciplines just as U.S. students struggle in courses across the curriculum. U.S. students, by contrast, do have general writing instruction before (and sometimes during) their encounters with discipline-specific discourse in their major fields, but this direct instruction may have little to do with students’ personal learning goals in a discipline. And there are many accounts of U.S. students who have had composition courses struggling mightily with disciplinary writing requirements, as European students do (Russell, “Where”).
The academic literacies orientation—the least common of the three—has developed in the last decade to explain why many students do not meet the expectations for writing after having had study skills instruction and/or time in a discipline. It views writing neither as a set of generalizable skills nor as an unteachable, natural part of entering a discipline, but as an immensely variable, developing accomplishment that is central to the specialized work of the myriad disciplines of higher education and to the professions and institutions students will enter and eventually transform. Each new specialized genre a student or new employee encounters means learning new practices—ways of thinking and acting that have become second nature to old-timers (Russell, “Where”). In this sense, writing development is bound up with issues of identity, authority, and motivation, conditioned by ideological assumptions, institutional structures, and disciplinary epistemologies. Questions of agency, identity, and authority are lurking behind textual choices students make. If writing is not autonomous but instead integral to disciplines, then choosing to write in a particular way is choosing to be one of the people who write that way, to link one’s identity, one’s future, to these people. Often students resist, or opt out, or fail. The academic literacies orientation asks how writing works differently in various practices and how students move from one to another using writing. A central question of writing development becomes how to simultaneously raise the awareness of students, specialized academic staff, and policymakers to the powerful and varied role of writing in learning, teaching, work, and citizenship, while at the same time integrating efforts to develop writing into the specialized studies and activities that writing mediates—instead of segregating writing development and keeping it on the margin. Each of the essays in this volume addresses these questions from an academic literacies orientation.

The Roles of Writing: Classrooms, Assessments, and Professional Access

Students moving from secondary to higher education are in a liminal state, as Mary Scott reminds us in Chapter 2, situated at
the threshold. They are between worlds, and their writing reflects this transition. Generally, students are leaving a more nurturing environment in secondary school and entering an environment of greater responsibility and greater personal challenge. In most systems, students must orient themselves to new institutional expectations, the challenge of disciplinary discourse, and new structures of learning and writing. David Foster describes, for example, how students in Germany must “build new habits and attitudes,” often with little feedback from professors (p. 194). German students must learn to work within new institutional and material spaces, develop new rhetorical masteries, and negotiate freedom and autonomy in learning and writing. In Suellen Shay and Rob Moore’s account of South African students, the transition to university means negotiating a system in transition, in which deep historical differences in education systems—African, Colored, and White—meet in traditionally White universities that are rapidly expanding to meet postapartheid demands. Scott describes how in England this transition often means shifting from the “pastoral care” of secondary schools to a theory-laden disciplinary environment.

In terms of writing development, students entering higher education are moving out of the relative comfort of writing for teacher, examiners, and classmates, where the conversations are limited to the world of education. They are on the threshold of entering a professional world in which they are preparing to write for other professionals in business, industry, government, and nonprofit sectors. (We use the term profession here in the broad sense, as work that ordinarily requires higher education, as well as credentialing from a governmental or professional organization—law, medicine, nursing, and engineering, of course, but also teaching, mortuary, accounting, and literally thousands of others.)

The expectations implied in the genres and activities of secondary school writing are—often without warning—challenged by a different set of expectations from the genres and activities of disciplinary discourse. These expectations are sometimes made explicit for students, but often they remain tacit, folded into the reading and writing required by course work and examinations. In much the same way people learning a foreign language experience what has been called “interference” from their first language,
students carry unconscious habits of writing into the university environment—until they experience the shock of difference, and often failure. These misperceptions lead to dissonance and struggle as students reexamine their choice of profession and their identity as learners/writers. They must decide if they want to be one of the people who write in these new and as yet unfamiliar ways. They must appropriate the discourse of a discipline and/or profession, a process made more difficult in highly multilingual countries such as Kenya and South Africa, where they must often use a language not their mother tongue. (Professors also often misperceive student writing, but because of the power differential, they can define what is appropriate writing without listening carefully to students’ views expressed in nondisciplinary discourse).

Yet much more than schooling is involved in these textual choices, which are also ultimately life decisions, decisions about identity. Student decisions about what to make of writing in formal schooling grow out of their whole experience, not just their experience of secondary schooling. The IEA study, like this collection, suggests that the students’ family, community, gender, ethnicity, and social class are constantly in play. Such “home variables,” as the IEA study calls them, are one of the most powerful predictors of successful performance, particularly on the more academic tasks, such as persuasion (Purves et al. 201). Indeed, the IEA study found that “what goes on in [elementary and secondary] school does not account for the differences in ratings of student writing. . . . What seems to make the difference is what goes on in the home” (201).

What emerges . . . is that for writing, as for many other school subjects, the reinforcement of the home of the values of writing and participation in a “scribal culture” (Purves, Scribal) appears in the rated performance of the students. The schools exist within an ethos of particular forms of literacy that is part of the historically literate culture of a country; when children come from families that participate in that ethos, they tend to be seen as “good” writers. (Purves et al. 202)

And when they do not, writing presents particularly complex challenges, which may explain much about which students enter
professions and which do not. Shay and Moore’s study of the writing readiness of three students from different racial and cultural backgrounds in South Africa, for example, illustrates the importance of family culture in the acquisition of schooled literacy. A central theme that emerges in this collection is that writing involves negotiating identity and authority in the intersection of students’ experiences in school and outside of it, which in higher education, at least, also means inside and outside powerful disciplinary and professional networks.

Identity and Authority in the Transition to Disciplinary Conversations

The liminal state in which first-year university students find themselves, on the threshold of disciplines and professions, is most evident in the way they approach argument. The development of new identities and authorities as writers is a major challenge for students in their transition to university. The uncertainty of their new situations as writers manifests itself, for example, in their uncertainty about, and frequent resistance to, the difficulties of entering disciplinary conversations that require them to use the theories of various fields. Students are expected to enter disciplinary and/or professional conversations and eventually to make a contribution to a profession or field after they leave higher education. This is the goal of their university teachers in their own research, and teaching others to do so is an ultimate goal of their teaching.

Students entering university studies must learn to exercise what Foster calls a different kind of authority as writers (Chapter 4). They must make arguments within not only the social system of the classroom, among peers and teachers—as in secondary school—but also within the system of disciplinary debates, entering conversations between and with experts. This involves framing problems in the theoretical terms of the discipline and thus in terms of its fundamental questions, methods, and epistemologies. This is a tall order for students entering higher education, something for which their secondary school has often not prepared them.

U.S. researchers (Russell, “Where”) have described students’
struggles with academic writing in similar terms, as students try to accommodate their own rhetorical resources to the unfamiliar demands of university writing. They are like "strangers in strange lands" (McCarthy) who must "invent the university" (Bartholomae) as they go, wondering how these new ways of writing will fit with their previous ways of using language and with their futures, personal and professional. Similarly, Foster describes German university students who, aware of their borderline command of disciplinary discourse, decide they must use disciplinary terms and concepts they don’t fully understand in order to "maintain authority" in the new environment. In the stress of choosing, there is sometimes resistance, or opting out, or failing.

Shay and Moore’s study is especially revealing about students’ struggles with the rhetorical demands of university-level writing. They describe three South African students whose history professors expect them to practice and display theory-based historical methodological skills by becoming constructors themselves of positions and arguments. Students struggle to move from reproducing “single truth” (textbook) accounts of history as “information retrieval” to a “far more active writer role” that requires them to understand “the disciplinary field of history as a debate made up of multiple and contending narratives” that have to be adjudicated (p. 282). Their instructors, as representatives of a discipline, tacitly expect students to act as agents in the discipline, to construct history—but out of theory-based and therefore authoritative accounts. Yet, say Shay and Moore, university instructors, taking disciplinary authority for granted, are often “silent about how students can develop this agency in relation to the authoritative canon.” “On the one hand,” they say, “they [students] are asked for their own opinions, but in reality [as one professor put it], ‘we want [their] opinions about a historical process, [not] about moral issues,’” as students’ secondary school writing had led them to expect (p. 294). Yet the students sometimes resist writing in these “disciplined” ways because those ways of writing seem to disallow their moral and political stances. Students in the transition between school and university cannot yet fully negotiate the various imperatives at play: voices warning against plagiarism, voices of personal experience and resistance, voices of textbook authority, and voices of competing theories in
the discipline. Their only resort often seems to be a hollow imitation of the voices of academic texts.

Students find it difficult to develop a personal investment in writing—and motivation beyond getting a good grade—when the discourse requires distance or even detachment from the personal interests and questions that brought them to the course, whether this distance is labeled "objectivity" or the familiar injunction not to use the first person "I." Shay and Moore's study reveals that the South African students are better able to construct an authorial role when they work from primary sources rather than from authoritative secondary sources. They feel and exert greater agency when they are not competing with the theorized voices of professional historians. But the students in Shay and Moore's study don't have the rhetorical and linguistic resources to create the rhetorical authority desired by their professors. Thus they often produce an "authorless text" about a naturalized world—writing that does not show them as potential meaning-making agents in the discipline of history (p. 294).

Students' difficulties in making the transition from the controlled rhetorical settings of school writing to the more complex rhetorical demands of disciplinary discourse are also reflected in Scott's study of British students entering university in literary studies. Scott's study finds that students entering university must develop a more distanced and theory-laden subjectivity in order to succeed. They have been taught to write essays in secondary school based on a model of literary criticism that university professors no longer hold (or hold in disrepute): the old Arnoldian, Leavisite model of literary analysis as an argument about "human thought and meaning," which values paradox and ambiguity but does not discuss theory explicitly. Arriving at university, students encounter a new disciplinary epistemology and a set of methods that the newer disciplinary model (tacitly) requires in writing about literature. Their university instructors (often without saying so) expect students to acknowledge and discuss competing literary theories in a "contested space" in the discipline, as they harness evidence to support a particular theory. There is again a profound mismatch between teachers' and students' expectations.

Scott's study, for example, traces the struggle of a student who writes about a short story set in the former colonies not in
terms of postcolonial theory—which requires identifying “the other” in nuanced political terms—but in terms that seem to the tutor to sound as though the student views colonization as natural. Unfortunately, the student does not mention her own sense of “otherness” as a member of a minority group from a former colony, even though this revelation might have allowed her to discuss issues of contested postcolonial identity. Another student wants to write about “feminine experience” in a poem but essentializes this in a way unacceptable to her instructor, who operates out of a much richer network of competing theories of feminism. The novice university students hear “the voices of past experience” in the essay questions they are given to write on, but these voices are not the voices the tutors expect or want the students to hear.

Scott proposes ways that secondary school teachers can lead students to appreciate the ambiguities and paradoxes of their own writing about literature as well as the ambiguities and paradoxes in the literature they analyze. This reflection on their own writing might move them into a zone of proximal development in which the complexities of theory could become accessible. But such a move will take a much fuller appreciation on the part of the instructors of the complexities of student writing.

In China, expectations for university writing are also radically different from those for secondary school. Instead of writing in a few genres stressing literary effect, imagery, and sensibility, as they did in secondary school, university students must adapt to writing that emphasizes rationality, logic, and “depth of thinking” in discipline-specific argument (p. 76). University papers are much longer, stress theory, and require intertextual reference beyond the standard works taught in secondary school. To write such papers, students need a good command of theory and specialized information, a difficult task that can be accomplished only by much reading and hard thinking. “University writing,” one of Xiao-ming Li’s sources concludes, “is different from high school in that there is more room for developing one’s own ideas, more leeway for one’s own inclination, more books to consult, and few restrictions on what to write” (p. 76).

In the United States, high school and college composition teachers often value personal sensibility and expressiveness in
writing and see these qualities as freeing. In contrast, many Chinese college students find that the personal sensibility and expressiveness valued in their high school writing is actually restrictive because it closes off the political and social analysis possible with disciplinary discourse. The debates of discipline-specific argument allow students an “openness to diverse ideas” and provide a sense of freedom to address matters of substance, neither of which they had in high school. In the words of one of Li’s respondents, “High school writing has fixed structure and fixed thinking,” while in college, “the style is looser, content more substantial, and import more profound” (p. 77). Another student described college writing as “more practical, freer to express one’s own ideas without being judged ‘good’ or ‘bad’” according to unwritten (and often unconscious) stylistic expectations (p. 76).²

France has the only system among the six represented in this book in which the transition in writing from high school to university—and the mismatch in expectations—seems less pronounced. High school (lycée) students are relatively well prepared for university writing for several reasons, Christiane Donahue argues in Chapter 3. First, students not only specialize during secondary school (as in many other nations), but they also are expected to do extended, theory-based writing in their secondary school courses. Second, there is a much narrower gap between the training and expectations of secondary and of university teachers. Indeed, both are called “professor.” Third, the genres of secondary school writing and examinations are very similar to those of the first university cycle. The major difference is in length.

The most difficult transition for French students in writing comes for students who move from the first university cycle to the second and to the elite “grandes écoles,” where they are expected for the first time to make a serious contribution to their fields. Many in France wonder if this early specialization and narrowing of the writing problems to manageable proportions is good, but it certainly has the advantage of providing a smoother transition to higher education.

As the studies in this volume show, students in most educational systems must adapt to major new challenges as writers when they enter university studies. They must inhabit new institutional
and material spaces, negotiate the intimidating texts and sometimes-incomprehensible lectures couched in new terminologies, and adapt to the dangerous freedoms of unstructured work time. And whether the secondary school has as its aim “single-truth,” monologic, textbook-style accounts (South Africa) or complex personal response to primary sources (Germany, England, China), students must also adapt to major new challenges as apprentice writers in their disciplines, immersing themselves in the multivocal—and often theoretical—discussions of various authorities in their disciplines.

Handling Intertextuality: Synthesis and Citation

Another issue that recurs in the studies that follow is the difficulty new university students have in handling intertextuality—paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing, and citing sources for writing—while avoiding plagiarism. Though handling intertextuality may seem at first glance to involve a mechanical set of tasks, it actually goes to the core of many students’ problems in making the transition to higher education—how to locate their writing and themselves in terms (literally, in the words) of powerful institutions and professions. And it raises a question for their teachers as well—how to represent their specialist knowledge so that students can have progressively deeper access to it and engagement with it.

Because students in higher education are expected to negotiate disciplinary discourse in their reading and writing, they must learn to synthesize the various voices of disciplinary authorities and operate within a much more complex intertextual system of citation and paraphrase. German students in Foster’s account, for example, find that the most difficult challenge at university is “learning how to bring together published scholarly voices from the discipline” (p. 219). In navigating the more diverse and complex rhetorical terrain of university discourse, students discover that the personal views often encouraged by high school teachers—however well thought out—become less important. What becomes more important is the ability to integrate views of authoritative others skillfully and coherently into a more complex, multivocal perspective. Some students perceive this as learning
the most effective textual strategies, but others see it as a loss of voice to the "impersonal logic of wissenhaftlich [scholarly] authority" (p. 221), a silencing of students' personal values and viewpoints.

Similarly, South African history students struggle in selecting from preconstructed authoritative accounts in theory-based secondary sources in order to produce a single account giving their "own" view. As Shay and Moore's study shows, they often fall back on knowledge-telling strategies and are unable, at least initially, to synthesize sources in the knowledge-making way their professors expect.

Chinese secondary students must move from a deeply embedded Confucian tradition of citing canonical texts to the newer and more diverse disciplinary communities of specialized higher education. As Li says, knowing history and "being able to draw instructional or cautionary lessons from history has long been regarded as a salient quality of a good . . . scholar" (p. 67). But the ability to weave together allusions to culturally shared texts only indirectly prepares them to synthesize texts from a disciplinary textual field in order to make an argument that has logical coherence and import in a particular textual field of a discipline in higher education.

French secondary students, as Donahue's study suggests, also learn to write for readers using a relatively narrow range of canonical texts in the disciplines they study. Exam questions often set a passage to comment on, requiring students to use a "reprise modification" structure as a way of building on the passage's main proposition. Intertextuality is common but, as in China, students are trained to give concrete examples from cultural references: "the reflection of rich and varied human experiences, constituting a quasi-infinite reservoir of examples related to every academic domain," as one writing handbook puts it (p. 169). Because the first two years of postsecondary education demand the same kinds of writing as the later secondary years (lycée) but with more elaboration, French students have an easier time making the transition as writers—though they may experience shocks similar to those of German students when they enter later stages of higher education (analogous to U.S. graduate school) and are expected to operate within a narrower field. The same
classroom genres that students practice in lycée—especially the dissertation and, to a lesser degree, the commentaire composé or other close-reading versions of text explication—will be the two dominant forms in the first years of university. The general expectation for student writing in the university tradition, says Donahue, has been either to “do the same thing [as in the lycée] but better,” or to “present roughly the same material as in the secondary cycle but in postsecondary form” (p. 176). The French system thus circumscribes for students the problem of handling intertextuality.

Examinations and Writing: Broadening Access, Maintaining Distinctions

Examinations are the most important—and vexed—issue in articulating secondary and higher education. And writing plays an extremely complex and contested role in the educational institutions of each of the nations represented in this collection. Assessments of students’ writing often determine who gets into higher education and who completes it—though discussions of access and selection often ignore writing development, focusing instead on what is tested rather than how (and how students are prepared to write).

As knowledge and work become more technical—more specialized and professionalized—nations and professions seek ways to increase the numbers of people entering higher education, where students are selected and prepared to take up specialized positions. Moreover, as democratic ideals spread, governments and institutions of higher education feel greater pressure to increase the numbers in higher education. In one sense, as we noted, these pressures are contradictory. Broadening access runs up against the desire of professions to select only those students who will, the professions believe, make the greatest contribution to their work. And because that work depends—more and more—on specialized writing, the selection process continues in most countries (the United States being the notable exception) to be dependent on extended writing as the main form of assessment.

Thus, written examinations are at the heart of the selection process. But we should note here that the desire to find those
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people whom the professions believe will make the greatest contribution is a legitimate and ultimately ethical motive. Professions could not serve others effectively if they admitted everyone who wished to enter. Selectivity and qualification are essential to ensure competence. And entrance examinations, particularly written ones, can serve as a motive for individual growth and writing development, for spurring action toward worthwhile goals. For these reasons, examinations are constantly under scrutiny by various stakeholders who represent ethnic groups, business groups, various professions (including teachers), and so on. Indeed, examinations always bring with them a history of language use that was formed along class lines and (in all the nations represented in this collection) those of gender, race, and ethnicity. The effects of examinations on individuals, as well as on identifiable social groups, are never simple.

The United States has the longest history of broadening access (and, not coincidentally, of widespread professionalization; in 1997, 87 percent of twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-olds had completed high school [Day and Curry]). But in many nations, including those represented here, higher education enrollments are skyrocketing at a rate that will equal that of the United States in the next decade or two. Similarly, increasingly global economic and communications systems are making writing in specialized professional work even more important—and the stakes in written examinations higher. All six of the countries discussed in this study are negotiating these pressures in various ways as they continue to shape the roles that writing plays in the transition from secondary to higher education.

Examinations as Gatekeepers

Questions of access surface dramatically in the transition from secondary to higher education. Indeed, writing plays its most important role in the nations represented in this collection in the examinations that qualify students for higher education, in which extended writing is the main—often the only—method of examining students. Clearly, not all who wish to enter a profession—or any work requiring expertise for its safety and effectiveness—are allowed to do so. (We want our surgeons, for
example, to have gone through rigorous selection and training.) Specialized reading and writing allows people in specialized practices to learn and to do their work together safely and effectively. But the question of whether and how selection should involve writing assessment is very much contested, in the United States and elsewhere, and rightly so. For written (or any other) assessment can prevent people from entering the roles they desire for reasons that have little or nothing to do with their potential to learn or perform some specialized work well.

Though a few states and districts in the United States have recently instituted high-stakes examinations that incorporate extended writing, admission to higher education is still almost exclusively based on the average of grades in individual courses and nationally standardized multiple-choice, machine-scored tests. Similarly, undergraduate degrees in the United States are granted on the bases of accumulating a certain number of course hours and maintaining a certain grade average. With a few exceptions, written examinations are not required outside of individual courses. Even admission to graduate school (e.g., M.A. and Ph.D. programs) is based primarily on accumulated grades and machine-scored aptitude examinations (e.g., GRE, MCAT, LSAT). In general, students are not required to present an extended piece of writing until graduation from a Ph.D. (and often a master's) program, although both national testing companies, ACT and SAT, as well as a number of professional certification exams, have introduced writing components, usually optional, and are continuing to develop written and other alternative assessments.

In contrast, all of the nations discussed in this study require students to do numerous pieces of extended writing in order to enter higher education—often in a range of disciplines, including mathematics—and to do extended writing in order to obtain a university degree. Though the pervasiveness of writing in the transition from secondary to higher education in other nations may surprise Americans, educators in other nations are often incredulous at the U.S. system, for a variety of reasons. Foster notes, for example, that a German university professor simply could not understand why anyone would study his students' writing in an upper-level seminar. He commented that it really “didn't make
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sense.” After all, he said, all you have to do is look at how the system of seminars and examinations works in order to prepare students to write (p. 192).

Writing ties assessment to teaching and learning in ways that multiple-choice tests cannot, allowing teachers and students (and sometimes other stakeholders) to share expectations. In most nations, examinations are assessed by examining boards made up primarily of teachers and former teachers. In China, France, and Germany, for example, being chosen to grade examinations is an honor for teachers. They are given the freedom and charged with the responsibility to make appropriate evaluative judgments. This means that teachers and other stakeholders must agree on the kinds of writing it is most important to assess. In England, for example, a component of the secondary school leaving (exit) examination is often a portfolio of course work, which is graded by teachers of the subject in the individual school; a sample of portfolios from each school is evaluated by teachers from other schools, in a system called “moderation.” The positive effects of moderation on teachers’ professional development have been well documented (Gipps). Similarly, in Germany teachers are formed according to discipline into district and regional reading committees that have freedom, within education ministry limits, to interpret assessment criteria as they deem fit. In this way, teachers both use and share their expertise in the grading of examinations. Though human-scored written examinations have less scoring reliability and cost more than machine-scored exams, most nations have judged that the advantages—especially validity—outweigh the disadvantages.

Because in most nations assessment and thus selection have for many decades (and in some cases centuries) been tied to extended writing, cultural values have come to be expressed in examination writing and grading. Thus examinations in many countries are a cherished (critics would say fetishized) part of the culture and therefore resistant to rapid change—just as multiple-choice exams are ingrained in the United States’ meritocratic ideology of education and therefore resistant to change. In China, for example, examination writing dates back to the Confucian era, and as Li shows, the genres of secondary leaving essays still have the
moral purpose and even at times the generic structure of that ancient tradition. In England there was an uproar in the press and the Ministry of Education when some teachers proposed that not all students be examined on Shakespeare. In France the ideology of democratic égalité lies behind the centralized national examination system. For students to have a fair chance at success in the exams, the French generally believe, then it is reasonable to think that all students need an equivalent education. Though to Americans centralization may seem rigid, undemocratic, and antithetical to individual freedom, French teachers often consider the U.S. system undemocratic because, they argue, it masks a system of social sorting under the guise of scientific objectivity and individualism, hiding human decisions and social responsibility for sorting. The French generally view centralized, standardized written examinations as a primary way to offset the inequalities of class and economic privilege as they affect schools and learning. As they see it, only a standard written examination can ensure an immigrant student of color from a working-class district an educational opportunity equal to that of a white student from a privileged middle-class family, though statistics show this is extremely rare, and criticisms of examination bias are increasingly common.

Consequences of Examinations for Pedagogy and Writing Development

Of course, written examinations, like all other examinations, have consequences for pedagogy—“washback,” as it is sometimes called. Tests push students to study certain things and not others, and push teachers to teach those things. “Teachers teach to the test,” whether their own or one developed by a range of stakeholders over time. There will always be sorting mechanisms, including assessments of various kinds. The trick is to negotiate among stakeholders a test worth teaching to, one that will balance the demands of equity with the demands of disciplinary excellence. If there is collaborative assessment of student writing, then individual teachers must to some extent align their teaching (and the writing they have their students do) with the shared expectations represented by the test.
In one sense, this produces a negative washback called “curricular crowding out,” a tendency to exclude from curriculum important genres and content because they are not on the test. And it can also produce alienation in students, who find exam writing and preparation a “dispassionate and perfunctory exercise of finding the information and organizing it acceptably,” as Shay and Moore describe one South African student’s reaction (p. 302). Chinese writing teachers call such writing ying4 shi4 wen2, or exam-coping writing. In writing for university admission, Chinese students must typically display knowledge rather than explore or question it, an approach that attempts to win approval and avoid provoking or offending the reader/judge. Such writing is “rule abiding and conformative” in nature, and explains, Li argues, the persistence of genre expectations over centuries, even millennia (p. 73). But in another sense, shared expectations provide a common core of knowledge and accomplishment that allows students to learn well some genres and develop a sense of accomplishment and cultural solidarity. In this sense, written assessment can balance the demands of equity and excellence. As Foster points out, teachers in German high schools (Gymnasien) actively seek continuity between course work and writing through classroom practice.

In every system represented here, there is debate over the choice of genres to be included in written examinations and the relative importance in the university selection process of examinations as opposed to the judgments of teachers. In Germany, for example, secondary teachers are held in high regard, and a primary element of selection for higher education is based on the collective judgment of teachers in individual schools about students’ course work. In other nations, by contrast, selection is based almost solely on students’ written performance as judged by outside examiners—as in Kenya, for example, as Muchiri’s essay suggests. In England the conflict between the role of the local teachers’ collective judgment versus that of outside examiners has been a matter of fierce contention between teachers and the government. But in all cases except that of the United States, writing is central in the selection process leading to university matriculation.

Examinations using extended writing become the focus of
debates over the content and direction of education in ways that don’t often occur in the United States, where multiple-choice exams produced by national testing companies and grade point averages calculated from students’ final grades in individual courses form the primary basis for selection, reducing the need for extended writing and debate about it. In China, moves to modernize the economy have elicited pressure to extend the examination genres to more communicative, “practical” writing. In Germany the recent unification provoked debates about the role of individual versus official interpretation in student exam writing. Similarly, in France a controversy over the relevance of exam genres led to a revision of the genres available to students on the baccalaureate, the secondary exit and higher education entrance exam, though recent studies show that exam readers in France still favor students who answer literary questions over those who answer the new nonliterary questions.

Debates continue over whether preparation for secondary leaving exams is good preparation for university writing. Foster, for example, suggests that German students’ interactive participation in a responsive rhetorical setting in secondary classrooms, which provides them with a familiar, “well-defined rhetorical situation,” does not necessarily prepare them for the more formal and agonistic environment of the university seminar-style classroom (p. 208). Li finds that in China university students, “in an almost unanimous voice . . . dismiss high school writing as ‘writing for exams,’” and describe it as “utilitarian,” “programmed,” “formularized,” “dry and rigid” (p. 79). More individualistic than the older generation, they may view that kind of education as limiting personal freedom.

As the essays in this volume attest, these debates over writing focus attention on the character of both secondary and higher education, and thus can be healthy for reexamining education at both levels. When writing is a major element of assessment and selection within a nation’s educational system, it can illuminate issues important to crucial national discussions about a country’s educational directions, though this comes at the price of virulent disagreement among stakeholders.
Language Policies and Traditions: The Debate over Writing in School and Society

Questions of writing development are conditioned by tacit traditions of language use as well as explicit language policy. All the nations represented in this volume are increasingly multicultural and multilingual. Just as the United States has experienced controversies over the teaching of writing to speakers of other languages and dialects, particularly in the form of disputes over bilingual education and English-only movements, other nations have seen similar conflicts over language policies. In Kenya and South Africa, where many languages are spoken (nine official languages in South Africa alone) and where most people speak at least two languages, language policy poses major challenges to writing development in secondary schools and at university. In Kenya, says Muchiri, “code switching . . . is a way of life” (p. 258), which can create serious difficulties for students matriculating at university who are unaccustomed to functioning in English, the dominant language of education in Kenya. Students often attempt to render phrasings from their native tongue (Kiswahili, for example) into written English, only to discover that such renderings do not work. “Code switching,” she concludes, “may affect writing at both the lexical and grammatical levels,” making it difficult at times for students and teachers to understand each others’ meanings (p. 259).

The challenges to educational access are particularly sharp in countries where native speakers of languages other than the dominant language—immigrants, guest workers, migrant laborers, formerly enslaved peoples, and marginalized native peoples—begin entering secondary and higher education in significant numbers. When this occurs, writing for educational access and academic success becomes a particularly contested issue. In countries such as Kenya, the need to negotiate multilingual environments creates difficulties for students and teachers at all levels when well-intentioned efforts to standardize writing and speaking punish those not sufficiently fluent in target languages. Resistance to allowing access for users of nonstandard languages also emerges in areas where a once-dominant language cherished by
the majority becomes a potent symbol of political and cultural identity. In France, for example, writing French correctly and elegantly is held in such esteem that applicants for jobs are often required to provide handwriting samples to be analyzed for indications of the applicant's personality and character. Indeed, efforts to broaden notions of what is "standard" French may run counter to deeply held assumptions about social and educational equity. As Donahue points out, French national policy is that every child "must have equal access to the same tools and experiences, and one standard must be used to judge his or her work." Moreover, "the national exams at the core of every stage of French education are the accepted basis for that one minimum standard. . . . Because [most of these] exams are heavily essay based, writing ability is one of the keys to advancement" (p. 138). The emphasis on correctness can signify to non-native speakers that educational and professional access may still be grounded in long-standing educational customs.

In many nations, as in the United States, written correctness—a general marker of social class—becomes a specific signifier of fitness for high-status work. In the United States, language correctness as a component of general "aptitude" examinations plays a distinct role in the selection process for colleges and universities and for postbaccalaureate professional and graduate programs. In this sense, language correctness determines which candidates can "write like ladies and gentlemen," who is "college material," and who has the "quality of mind" to pursue higher education according to the linguistic constructs underlying the examinations. Clearly, any national emphasis on social equity or economic opportunity will incur debate over whether such policy-grounded correctness should remain an important marker of educational advantage and how students from excluded groups can be drawn into the mainstream.

Writing Development and Processes of Writing, Learning, and Teaching

Students develop their writing in a host of ways, tacit and explicit. Tacit traditions of writing instruction that emerge in course
work affect this learning, as do explicit instructional guidelines in educational policy documents and other venues such as examinations. All vary widely across nations. As this collection reveals again and again, what is common sense in one education system may be simply unthinkable in another. And it is in this taken-for-granted dimension—what Stephen North in the United States has called “lore”—that formal writing instruction operates most powerfully and enduringly. As Li’s study of China’s educational system dramatically shows, for example, millennia-old Confucian genres, pedagogies, and attitudes persist in the most humble of student compositions—whether or not they are officially sanctioned or even acknowledged. In the United States, general composition courses are so pervasive that teachers in other disciplines sometimes assume that they themselves don’t “teach” writing or even that their students don’t “write” when they compose genres such as laboratory reports instead of compositions or essays. Through cross-national comparisons, the familiar can indeed come to look strange, as Geertz puts it.

Writing and Learning to Write: Implicit and Explicit Values

Because writing is so deeply embedded in modern education in the form of lecture notes, exams, reports, journals, research papers, and countless others, it tends to be transparent, an element that in many systems cannot be separated from the larger work of learning. It often disappears, becomes unavailable as an object of discussion, as do discussions of its teaching. But writing is being taught nevertheless, often in tacit and unexamined ways. Elementary school teachers around the world are held responsible for teaching their students to write their native language at the most basic levels. But in the United States (and in many other nations), teachers at higher levels—except secondary English teachers and English professors specializing in composition—often do not view themselves as having direct responsibility for helping students improve their writing about the subject matter of the courses they take. In the United States, because access to higher levels or tracks (“ability groups”) of education depends largely on machine-scored aptitude and achievement tests, writ-
Teaching Methods

Teaching methods also vary greatly among the nations discussed in this study. In the United States, the traditional (and still dominant) methods of instruction in secondary and higher education...
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are lecture and a form of recitation designed to elicit the responses the teacher has in mind (sometimes erroneously called whole-
class discussion, even though there is little open dialogue) (Nystrand 6). U.S. teachers—including English teachers—have
inherited a tradition of textbook recitation from the nineteenth
century, when teachers with little training relied on textbook
questions to structure the discourse of overcrowded classrooms.
Studies go back to the 1860s, when one observer remarked,
"Young teachers are very apt to confound rapid questioning and
answers with sure and effective
A 1909 comparison
with European teachers concluded that European teachers “build
up new knowledge in class,” whereas U.S. teachers act as though
they were chairing a “meeting, the object of which is to ascertain
whether [students] have studied for themselves in a
textbook.” And a long series of studies suggests that things have not changed
much (Nystrand 6). Similarly, in most South African and Kenyan
secondary schools, large classes, underprepared teachers, and lack
of adequate materials have produced a tradition of textbook-
based lecture and recitation with little extended writing, and that
writing is mainly “single-truth” accounts of textbook knowledge.
In China, Li argues, a secondary school tradition of teaching
writing based on the close study and memorization of models,
combined with ethical teaching, seems to crowd out the rela-
tively freer examination of ideas and expression of views that
Chinese students value in university writing.

England, Germany, and France, by contrast, have long tradi-
tions of valuing students’ opinions, at least in secondary school
literature and mother-tongue language courses, though the no-
tion of “opinion” differs among the educational cultures of each
country. Students are expected to share their views of texts and
engage in a great deal of open dialogue and critical analysis before
writing. In England, for example, “talk” is central to much sec-
condary school teaching in English courses. Students are expected
to share their views in large and small groups before and during
writing. In France there is much “pre-text” (prewriting) discus-
sion. In Germany students are “pushed to articulate” opinions
orally and in writing in the classroom, and articulating their own
ideas is a crucial goal (p. 207). In China students read about
twenty model essays each semester, mostly excerpts from literature, and there is much memorization of poetry and line-by-line explication.

The genres of student writing also vary greatly, though in all these nations students typically write in only a few genres in each subject. In the United States, school themes (sometimes called essays) dominate English courses, with summaries of facts (called research papers) most prevalent in other courses. Some fields have specialized genres, such as book reports in history and laboratory reports in the sciences (Applebee). In France there are only two or three genres in each subject, and these are codified by the examinations. In England, however, there is some movement toward allowing a wider range of genres in student portfolios, though a few traditional classroom genres dominate the timed examinations—and often the teaching.

Writing processes are also taught in various ways, mainly implicit. In U.S. writing pedagogy, at least in high school and first-year university composition courses, an explicit emphasis on “process,” conceived as stages of composing (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, publication) is increasingly prevalent (see Applebee and Applebee et al. for evidence of the growing focus on process). But in other nations, various processes of writing are for the most part tacitly embedded in the pedagogy. In England, at least in English classes, there is a thirty-year-old tradition of writing fewer pieces (perhaps only four or five a year) but polishing these for a course work portfolio over a long period of time, with much revision along the way.

In Germany, France, and China, the emphasis is on extensive preparation for the one-draft writing that is useful on examinations—and in much workplace writing. In these countries, students repeatedly practice the examination genres in timed writing over a period of months or years, until students get good at them. The writing process embedded in this pedagogical practice emphasizes writing in a few genres well, for timed examinations, but it restricts the genres available. In education systems emphasizing timed written examinations, one-draft writing is king.

Several educational systems represented in this collection have evolved structures as part of the general work of teaching and
learning in many disciplines that help students develop as writers. In the United States, there has been some movement toward small-group work in some disciplines and schools. The U.S. writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) movement (profoundly influenced by British theory and pedagogy) has begun to encourage greater awareness of the wider range of roles that writing can play in learning in all disciplines. In Germany the seminar format of discussion generally begins in the first year of university. Students discuss work together and write papers over a long period of time—often longer than the seminar itself. They have the time (for some students, too much time) to do extensive reading as preparation for writing and to reflect on it individually and in discussions. Similarly, English universities often provide a system of tutoring for each course, either individually (in the most elite institutions) or in small groups. Tutorials focus on the writing students do, whereas lectures focus on the reading. Informal structures also help to develop students’ writing. In Kenya, for example, the community ethos of the society leads students to create informal study groups, which support students’ writing and learning outside the purview of formal instruction.

In each of these traditions, students generally develop their writing (or fail to) without benefit of much explicit writing instruction. Writing development is usually folded into the activity of a discipline without becoming a conscious and formal component of the curriculum—for better or worse (or a bit of both). Recently, however, writing has become a more explicit focus of education.

Conclusion: Toward New Articulations

We began where the IEA study concluded:

We suspect that writing is not as unitary a construct as many national assessments and writing researchers would have it. . . . We cannot say that someone is a better writer than someone else. All we can say is that at this particular time we think a person wrote a good composition on this topic. (Purves et al. 200)

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This collection suggests that even this formulation is not strong enough. The "we" making the judgment of a student text is a variable and dynamic construction, dependent on a dynamically shifting articulation of institutional organization, selection structures, and traditions of teaching, learning, and language policy. Indeed, the essays here point to the need for a broader and deeper understanding of what has often been called the "articulation" between secondary and higher education. In their writing, students "articulate" their differences, and in doing so negotiate the difference between secondary and higher education. Writing is central even where (as in the United States) writing is not usually a direct part of the official sorting and teaching mechanisms.

Increasing access to higher education has sparked a worldwide interest in writing development, and many nations have begun organized efforts to address the perceived problem. In England student support units that formerly served only international students are being rapidly expanded to serve "home" students from nontraditional backgrounds. Many support units offer courses and programs for writing development, and there is now a professional organization for writing support staff—Writing Development in Higher Education (WDHE)—that represents some eighty institutions, supports its own publications, and holds an annual conference. The Ministry of Education has begun a major WAC initiative, influenced by the U.S. WAC movement, to raise the awareness of secondary teachers across the curriculum about the role of writing in learning (SCAA). Additionally, an Academic Literacies organization for higher education supports an ambitious program of research. In Scandinavia there is a wide range of curricular and research efforts. In Germany approximately one-third of educational institutions have some course or program to support student writing development. South Africa is seeing a young but burgeoning effort, with writing-across-the-curriculum programs often attached to student support units. Kenya has for two decades systematically addressed the problem of writing development through national curriculum reform initiatives designed to develop courses and programs that support student writing development. Even in France, there is a budding effort to address student writing development with courses and programs.
Writing development is now an international effort. In Europe the International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education sponsors a biennial conference and supports a large research effort (see http://www.ilo.uva.nl/development/iaimte). The recently formed European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing specifically addresses writing in higher education, and brought together program developers and researchers for its first annual conference in 2001, in conjunction with another new organization, the European Writing Center Association (http://www.hum.ku.dk/formidling/eataw). Though these efforts sometimes look to the older efforts of the United States, they are bringing original perspectives to the problems of articulating writing in secondary and higher education that grow out of their own national and local experiences. And as higher education expands enrollments to traditionally excluded groups, and as specialization of work—and writing—for graduates of higher education expands with the globalizing economy, these efforts will surely expand. Indeed, the increase in students demanding help with their writing has been a major factor in the increased administrative and faculty interest in academic writing.

We end this introduction by proposing questions we believe are central to new secondary-higher education articulations, questions raised repeatedly in the chapters that follow and answered in many different ways. We offer them both as heuristics for teachers and policymakers considering rearticulations and as questions for cross-national research— theoretical, historical, qualitative, and quantitative.

What contradictions are created in writing development through early versus late specialization? Early specialization allows teachers to focus on particular genres, engaging students more deeply in the conversations of a discipline by the time they begin higher education. But such focused disciplinary socialization may mask subtle differences in disciplinary discourse between secondary education and higher education unless there are conscious attempts to articulate writing development between secondary and university courses. Moreover, the disciplinary socialization model tends to make
the role of writing invisible and thus provides little conscious support for writing. Late specialization provides more opportunities for general education—and for writing in a wider range of genres, perhaps in courses and programs specifically devoted to writing. But it is costly, and the relation between general writing instruction and writing in specific disciplines is also difficult to articulate—as U.S. WAC programs have found (Russell, Writing).

**What contradictions in national traditions and ideologies of education affect writing development?** Each national system and each institution embodies traditions and ideologies in tension, such as those we’ve noted: for instance, general/liberal education versus professional training, social equity versus disciplinary excellence and status, individualism versus communitarian solidarity. We might productively analyze these in cross-national perspective to see what possibilities exist for rearticulations in debating fundamental stakes, forming alliances, mobilizing stakeholders, and forging compromises. Comparative historical studies may prove useful here.

**What are the trade-offs in centralization versus decentralization?** More centralized systems can make writing development a priority, mobilizing resources quickly and massively, as with England’s language-for-learning initiative (SCAA), but centralization can also inhibit innovation. More decentralized systems can breed many local innovations but may have difficulty disseminating and sharing best practices, as in U.S. composition. It will be interesting to see what distance education can do for (or against) writing development, as it may be used both to centralize educational control and to decentralize control, to spread innovation either from the top or from the bottom.

**How do tracking and selection affect writing development?** The IEA study highlights the fact that “the institution of the school serves not only to educate a portion of the population, but to sort the student population as well,” and concludes that we need further exploration of “how best to teach these
students who are not in the academic tracks. [The IEA study] calls into question the system of tracking itself. It also suggests that teachers probe more deeply into their beliefs and practices as teachers of writing to all kinds of students to see whether they are in fact helping them succeed” (Purves et al. 202). This collection suggests that we must also take into account the writing development that happens (or fails to happen) in higher education, in order to ensure greater equity in both education and selection for education. Do assessments in secondary education take into account the needs of students in higher education, and vice versa? What is the “washback” of assessments, written or not, on students’ writing development at both levels and between levels?

What contradictions exist in institutional attitudes toward writing development, and how do these influence the structure of programs and allocation of resources for them? The educational systems discussed in this collection are undergoing rapid and far-reaching changes as they expand their higher education systems in response to social and economic changes. There are widespread efforts to improve students’ writing in order to make university access and success more likely for previously excluded groups. In educational systems that do not support composition courses (the great majority), for example, study or communication skills centers are being established to deal with the problems of writing and access to higher education (and have led to much nation-specific research, as this collection reflects). These efforts uncover deep-seated attitudes toward writing development. Will such efforts move toward (and fund) general skills instruction (perhaps ignoring the social, disciplinary, and personal dimensions of writing development), toward academic socialization (perhaps ignoring the institutional, cross-disciplinary, and civic dimensions of writing development), or toward academic literacies (and undertake the very complex and potentially costly effort to balance tacit disciplinary and explicit formal instruction)? Cross-national research can illuminate potential problems and propose solutions—particularly through comparisons with the United States, which has a longer his-
What kinds of support do students need to gain authority and identity as academic writers when making the transition to disciplinary conversations? In what ways is writing used to help students enter disciplinary conversations and, conversely, to restrict students’ access to professions? New articulations of writing development must take into account the profound mismatch in expectations of teachers in secondary and in higher education. The goals of the two are often different, and this may well be necessary and right, given the responsibility of higher education to select and prepare people for specialized work and greater responsibilities as citizens. But if teachers, examiners, and policymakers on either side of the secondary/higher education divide do not talk to each other, directly and/or indirectly, about student writing and writing development, then the mismatch will continue—and may grow as specialization in higher education increases. Trade-offs between general/liberal education and professional training will have to be continually renegotiated for students’ writing development, particularly as access to higher education widens.

What kinds of support do students need in handling intertextuality—citation, synthesis, and plagiarism—and when? Instruction in the mechanics of citation, documentation, and paraphrase is only the first step in handling the complex intertextual conversations that make up academic discourse. Yet this is often the only explicit instruction students get. We know very little about how students develop the ability (and motivation and authority) to successfully carry on written conversations in a discipline over time. How might we, in Mary Scott’s phrase, “move students on” from the more general and personal written responses, to the reading typical in many secondary schools, to the complex conversations mediated through intertextuality in the disciplinary specialties of higher education? And because the epistemologies of vari-
ous disciplines are often radically different, students must develop a chameleon rhetorical capacity to move from one to another, to converse differently in different networks of people through their written response to specialist reading and talk. A great deal of work needs to be done across disciplines and nations to understand these problems and formulate pedagogies that go beyond the typical writing textbook formulations of intertextuality as a set of discrete mechanical skills.

*How, where, and when are students assessed through writing?* There will always be assessments, which will always enable and constrain the work of teachers and students. The goal is to create assessments worth teaching to, assessments that have the greatest positive and fewest negative consequences for teaching, learning, and writing development. Each teacher, institution, profession, and national education system must continually negotiate those assessments among the many stakeholders—at each level of education. Should writing play a role in assessments in various fields, or in general writing instruction only? Should extended writing be a high-stakes part of assessment early (as in most nations) or only late (as in the United States)? Who has a say (and how much) in the kinds of writing assessed and the evaluation of it? For all these questions, cross-national research can illuminate local and national practices, but only if such comparisons take into account the particular cultural-historical factors that make assessment of and with writing so difficult and so contested.

*What are the effects of language policy and traditions on writing development?* Economic and business structures, nongovernmental organizations, professional associations, and academic research are increasingly global (with English the dominant language). This means that students will increasingly write across cultures and languages when they leave formal education. But at the level of teaching, national and local language policies and traditions condition writing development in powerful and increasingly contested ways. As
students move from secondary to higher education, language policy and tradition intersect with the demands of selection. How do language policies and traditions enable and constrain writing development, opening and closing opportunities for students—particularly those from previously excluded groups—to enter and succeed in the new networks of global communication?

What mixture of explicit and implicit support for writing exists—and might exist? As we noted, writing is often "taught" implicitly, as an apprenticeship or disciplinary socialization, with little conscious attention to writing per se. General composition courses and writing support (tutoring) units often teach writing as a set of general skills. The essays that follow suggest that some mixture of the two approaches might provide more effective articulation between writing development in secondary and in higher education. As with the U.S. WAC movement, efforts in several nations represented here (Kenya, South Africa, the United Kingdom) to improve writing across the curriculum involve faculty in the disciplines working in partnership to make writing development a more conscious part of teaching and learning, while at the same time recognizing and valuing the varied and specialized nature of writing in both secondary and higher education. But we know very little about how these programs work and how they might work better. By sharing insights across nations, we might learn, for example, how faculty and students in various disciplines come to see writing as integral to teaching and learning: what is best made conscious, explicit, and open to critique and what can be left unsaid, or unconscious, about writing.

Just as it is common for writing researchers in various nations to talk past each other, so also it is easy for us as teachers in secondary and higher education to talk past each other and miss the crucial role that writing plays in students' work and in the transition from secondary to higher education. We hope these essays will spur broader and deeper discussions among teachers,
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researchers, and policymakers that will help bridge the divides and rearticulate the differences. The international studies offered here come at a time of increasing international interest in writing development, assessment, and pedagogy. We hope they will stimulate readers to examine their own assumptions about the roles that writing plays in the transition from secondary to higher education and thereby generate more reflective practice. It is essential for educators to explore the often tacit traditions of writing and learning that shape each new effort at reform. We believe it is vital to continue the dialogue begun by the IEA study and the few cross-national studies since then and to encourage the global circulation of writing research, innovations in pedagogy, and a reexamination of educational policies that shape and are shaped by writing pedagogy.

Notes

1. Also, two collections on mother-tongue education have been published, one for western European countries (Herrlitz et al.) and one for English-speaking countries (Britton). Though these studies provide useful context for this collection of research, they do not specifically address the transition from secondary to higher education.

2. See Cope and Kalantzis for a similar critique of Australian and U.S. expressivist writing pedagogy.

Works Cited


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