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Commentary

'Writing across' as a mode of research

'Writing across' as presented in this special issue can be understood both as a verb as well as a noun. It can be seen as a complex mode of doing research as well as a language of description. It involves the holding of an investigative idea across persons, locations, and timeframes. As a concept it sits within, and beyond established representational structures, seeping into material objects and requiring diffractive modes of comprehension to untangle its meanings. Linking 'writing across' to emergence problematises the very nature of writing as stable symbolic text with representational coherence. If writing is linked to emergence this means a deeper entwinement between meaning and the encounter with the production of text. In that context the everyday becomes more important.

These articles make a case for shifting, even in research focused on a single site, from a 'writing-in' to a 'writing-across' perspective, and making a move from a focus on learning writing as a single mode to a focus on writing as unavoidably entangled with dialogic modes of semiosis and non-representational forms of becoming. No linguistic or visual tools or methods are fully adequate to capture these theoretical aspirations. Every representation (however complex) deflects other dimensions of the complexity that is being approached. These themes of becoming and emergence can also be seen as heuristics through which to think about the field of writing and literacy studies. This special issue therefore can be understood as sitting with a wider field which recognises the dialogic nature of the theories proposed here but also acknowledges the turn to a less representational world. The idea of emergence as a proposition with the potential to scale writing and in turn literacy beyond its current position within schooling and rational thought is present within this special issue (Truman 2019). Here are some thoughts from the field:

Writing 'with'

Writing 'with' is felt, affective and moves in and out of representational logic (MacLure 2013). Calls to a non-representational anthropology of writing present a whole new set of challenges. Ehret (2018:70) writes,

> In a nonrepresentational anthropology and education, thinking and living, teaching and learning are simultaneities wherein every moment matters to who we are becoming and to how we are becoming differently together and apart.

If we present feeling 'with' and becoming 'with', as integral to any process of writing, the complexity of understanding what writing is across the sites that are discussed in this special issue becomes more complicated. Wargo (2018) asks us to address this by,

> …witnessing writings' withness-ing, a relational assemblage made possible by the mingling of forces, energies, technologies, and affects (p.2)

This then presents a challenge to representational logics that trace linear paths across these stories of becoming. The articles in this special issue signal this coming together and apart in their processes of description and definition.

Emergence, entanglement, digressions, diversions

The opening introduction to this special issue recognises the importance of the work of Massumi in acknowledging the need for a new onto-epistemological stance – that of affect (2002). The horizontal pathways of the everyday can be described both inside and outside language. Some of this language draws its current meaning from older epistemological stances – the idea of dialogic thinking from Bakhtin (1981) threads through these articles. However, the articles also engage with a new the relationship between meaning and the material world of objects. Digressions and diversions and non-linear narratives, the stuff of writers such as Sterne in the eighteenth century, of Dickens from the nineteenth century, and of Joyce in the twentieth century, resurface here in the twenty-first century, across time, and in online spaces. These narratives move from experimental biology records from Uganda, to the precise modal space of the laser-cutter. The modern world is alive with the re-enchantment of objects (Bennett 2010) but these objects are re-entangled, technologically diverse and epistemologically complicated. Writing 'across' as an idea describes the potential of what could emerge from the encounters between writing and the world as instantiated within these articles – revealing the expansive nature of the texts and how we read them within the world.

Writing/research as a verb

If literacy is on the move (Stornaiuolo, Smith, and Phillips 2017) what does that mean for research methods? The articles in this special issue suggest the need to be agile in methods and consider, 'what comes into view when we unmoor the typical fixed gaze of research that

depicts literacy as a social practice located in the immediate details of situated events and settings (Smith, Hall & Sousanis, 2015)' (Prior and Smith, this volume). Writing becomes a 'verb', like culture is also a verb (Street 1993). Literacies are embodied and sensory (Enriquez et al 2016). Ideas lie across and are located in the everyday, opening out new modes of thinking about patterned practices. As Prior and Smith acknowledge in their introduction to the special issue, this approach requires a much more diffuse set of research practices, or 'thinking devices' to look at writing on the move. Research methods have to be agile to make sense of these processes, requiring a new horizontal mode of inquiry. This might mean re-doing research ethics so that children and young people become agentive in what gets researched and how, and they themselves can become part of writing research as it unfolds in their midst. In these articles, literacy moves, or rather writing moves and research moves with it. A flat CHAT perspective opens up a new landscape for research, one that is moving with research subjects and is itself changed by practice as much as informed by theory.

Writing across theory

Theory moves too. How can we think with theory and how can theory move us? This requires thinking about ways in which theory can become important, and then not so important as literacies are lived and experienced, often on the move (Nordquist 2017). It is then possible to come close to the practice as it unfolds and then to move into a theoretical mode, thinking with the practice, becoming of the world and then not of the world. One word for this is 'worldizing'. Steve Pool, artist, describes this idea in a text message sent in March 2018:

> Worldizing is a way for something to be there but not draw all the attention, and the point with sound is that it is the quality of the sound not the volume; it is not like worlding, which is just putting it in the world, it is a recognition of the way we as humans interact with it. In a film it is in the background but when people talk it drops away, so in some of the projects, like the adventure playground, it's in the background but in others it becomes a thread that becomes part of the greater sense-making' (text message sent by Steve Pool on 15 March 2018). (See Pahl and Pool 2018:18)

This highlights how theory can become important, and then fade away into the background as and when it is needed. Tracing these articles' relationship with theory is complex. These articles work with many theoretical ideas which speak to the wider field of literacy research.

Many of the ideas that the authors work with are resistant to any approach that creates a divide between the world of things and the world of ideas. The idea of 'writing across' offers the potential to understand the complexity of the world. These articles are both caught up in theory, in this case the theory of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and they move in and out of the implications of this theory, but they are also outside the theory, the writing drifts beyond theory into modes of practice that find their own way to theory. Reading them again I am struck by the dynamism of the language of 'writing across'. Practice is opened up, shifts and transmutes across sites.

Becoming the subject, being in the moment
Writing about writing is a reflexive practice that is both objectified and becomes the subject in the process of writing (Grenfell and Pahl 2019). Reflexivity this makes this a contemplative activity as the articles are written about writing and writers such as Alexandra shape the written page (Roozen, this volume). The writers in this special issue amplify writing; it becomes resonant with meaning. They find different ways to respond to writers. Sometimes this involves changing how they respond, and the 'stickiness' of this process led to following this interest across time and space (Ahmed 2014). Research methods become attuned to the writers' patterns of thinking and writing. Context rises to the surface and changes how the writing is done and how it is shaped.

Many of the phenomena studied here, such as making, blur the boundaries of what is studied – making is a boundary blurring practice and resists categorization as one thing. Participants become 'with' in these articles, and their surfacing in the text is an act of creation within the space of the articles. The writers of these articles co-construct the worlds of the makers and writers under discussion, rather than observe them from a distance. The process of researching throws up new challenges for what can be termed literacy and language practices across sites. These forms of description can become shaped by new literacy practices. Coalescing in these new sites are different ways of describing what is found in those sites. Paying close attention to emergence throws up moment by moment shifts in writing practices that are messy, complex and attuned to many different factors all at once. Fine-grained analysis of such interaction creates a multifaceted, teeming and complex picture. Part of this involves an attentive-ness to the 'now' of research, its present-ness. As Nora, one of the writers described in this special issue, articulates,

…because I had said that- that- being, "it's so calming to like be in the moment, it's like meditation", and at that time I had done no meditation, yeah, but it just was sort of like, so in some ways it was like my first insight into how to like be in the moment, (Nora in Smith and Prior, this volume)

Being in the moment is also the mode of doing research. Research methods can become a meditative dance between theory, and practice. As Bloome and Green (2015) express this here,

Literacy cannot be separated from what people are doing, how they are doing it, when, where, under what conditions and with whom they are doing it; metaphorically, there is no separation of the dancer from the dance (cf Yeats 1962). (p.20)

In this special issue theory is entangled with practice. It stays with its subjects, and in doing so, becomes changed and other. By working in the space of writing, that space, the language of description, and the practice of research, becomes changed and other. Moving, the writers move, and the dance continues. Trying to grasp 'writing across' is both a moment of entanglement but also an endeavour that can never be fully successful in words. What is good about this special issue is that it develops the conversation further and asks more questions than it answers, leaving the reader with infinite conversations to come (Blanchot 1993).

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