

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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## The mutual challenge of writing research and the teaching of writing

### Introduction: Lessons from antiquity

As teachers of writing we belong to a profession which has a long history. The teaching of communication skills is an ancient art, surrounded with considerable controversy. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates attacked writing as a false art, which would lead young people away from the honest pursuit of truth. He questioned the motives of the would-be-writer as someone who wished to persuade an audience of a predetermined conclusion. Writing was a one-way communication which did not open up for dialogue. We know that the setting of Plato's critique was his fight against the sophists, who could be said to be the first composition teachers. They used their knowledge of rhetoric not only to compose speeches themselves, but wrote and sold handbooks containing techniques of speech writing. Plato saw these handbooks of persuasive devices and the sophists' advice to writers morally indefensible because the better people became at manipulating language, the less regard for truth (Faigley et. al. 1989).

Aristotle, as we know, sought to provide a different kind of defense of this art by relating the art of persuasion to the discovery of knowledge. While Socrates wanted to keep the knowledge of persuasion away from students in order not to corrupt them, Aristotle's antidote to the power of sophisticated rhetoric was *to teach students the art*. He believed that if people understood how skilled writers attempt to manipulate them, they would be less manipulable and they would be able to detect false arguments. The ability to write well could be used as a means of promoting truth as well as promoting falsehood. Only if people understood good writing could they be alert to the difference between honest uses of rhetoric and dishonest ones.

Aristotle taught writing in a different way from the sophists. While they taught rhetoric as a bag of tricks, a set of persuasive techniques, Aristotle taught rhetoric as an *intellectual*, rather than as a *technical skill*. *For him it was an art of searching for the best available reasons for believing something, and for arranging those reasons in logical order and in a clear style.* "For Aristotle rhetoric and dialectic were parallel arts, - both were means of *discovering knowledge in the realm of ideas* where absolute truth is beyond reach" (Gage 1996, p. 12, cited from Faigley et al). For me Aristotle's position in this respect is still viable.

In this controversy of antiquity, three ideologies of composition are represented, three different answers to the questions "Why write?" and these still give rise to competing teaching methods.

- For the sophists writing was a skill needed to get ahead, to manipulate the beliefs of others and to get power
- For Socrates writing was an obstacle to knowledge of the truth
- For Aristotle writing was a means of discovering knowledge

Behind these lay different theories of knowledge and how one gets it. We encounter these controversies in different forms, but the basic issues persist.

The sophists were the marketoriented people of their times, they provided *marketable* skills. But from the point of view of Aristotle, *writing is about ideas and knowledge*. "If writing is good for the writer in any other than a utilitarian sense – if it serves to clarify or improve the writer's understanding – then it must provide the occasion for genuine inquiry and the exercise of responsible judgement.." (Faigley et al 1989). Aristotle's defense of writing becomes a defense of education in humanistic terms: *Students improvements as thinkers, - writing understood as a means of clarifying problems and inquiring into potential solutions.*

Why do I go back so far in my introduction to a new forum for European teachers of academic writing? First of all because of our cultural ties to antiquity, secondly because one of the main points I want to make in this speech, is that we must never forget that *writing is primarily about creating and communication ideas, even in times when institutions of higher education are full of complaints about student writing, and the expectations of writing teachers often is for a quick fix of what is seen as student's literacy deficits*. Learning to become a better writer happens in the same way that learning to become a better thinker does. Writing is thinking-made-tangible. Writing is a process of finding and structuring ideas. Writing is having something to say. Writing is not just the search for the right words and the right order, but also for the right reasons (Ibid.). Writing is also about identity formation and about negotiating a discursive self in the midst of a disciplinary context where the students are seen as apprentices.

### **Different orientations to the teaching of academic writing today**

There are different ways of labelling approaches to the teaching of writing as practiced in Europe today. The British writing researchers and teachers Mary Scott (1996) and Mary Lea distinguish between Study skills orientation, Academic socialization and Academic literacies approach. I find this a useful distinction, which may set the scene before I take a short historical look at writing research which has influenced the teaching of writing.

- **Study skills orientation** treats writing as a generalizable set of skills, and separates writing from the social, disciplinary and personal dimensions of writing. This has been the dominant orientation in the US for the last century, "though it has been contested mightily for the last 30 years by US composition" (Russel & Foster p. 8). At European universities students have generally been expected to master the study skills, including writing, when they enter university.
- **Academic socialization**, according to Scott and Lea, treats writing as a *tacit* aspect of learning to be a member of the discourse society of a particular discipline. In European tradition this has been the strongest. The negative side of this is that writing disappears,- it has been assumed that students pick up writing just by studying and that no special teaching of writing is necessary. Even though a majority of European universities have changed from elite institutions, they have not drawn the same conclusions as in the US, where a massive teaching of writing was deemed necessary. Often professors point to themselves as examples: "We have not been taught writing, and see how well we have succeeded". Aviva Freedman's research study (1987) on how law students acquired proficiency in writing provides support to the view of learning to write 'by osmosis'. This is, however, strongly contested.
- **Academic literacies orientation** has developed the last decade and views writing as a complex developing accomplishment which is closely tied to the character of each discipline and the knowledge claims made by each discipline, as well as by the work and the institutions they train for. Writing is seen as crucial to the understanding of a disciplinary field and is bound up to questions of identity, authority and agency (Scott 1996). I will return to these labels later in the speech.

### **Research which has influenced writing teachers: a micro enquete**

As an introduction to the topic of mutual challenge, I want to share with you the result of a very small and very informal search I made over the last few weeks among fellow writing teachers in Europe about what specific writing research has influenced them most. I will, first briefly present some findings, and then I will use the names and the titles these teachers gave me in a short historical overview of the last decades of writing research. I will highlight three major theoretical positions on composing research, using the labels proposed by Lester Faigley (1989), *literary, cognitive and sociocultural* views. For each of these I will ask: What is the relevance and the challenge for writing teachers?

Categorizing the names, I found that surprisingly many mentioned names which signalled *theoretical perspectives* on knowledge and learning or on language. Others dealt with the *writing processes*, the *contexts*, the *writer*, the *teaching of writing* and *writing to learn*. It was quite fascinating to see both the names and the explanations. The first noticeable finding, is that the majority of names

are American, not surprising, given the strength of this research field in the US. But it also mirrors my English language bias, and lack of knowledge of colleagues on the Continent, except Scandinavia. (It thus testifies to the need of a conference like this.) The second finding was that many mentioned the same names, which signals that there are some classics, which have had a major impact in the field. I actually found most of them in my own bookshelf. The third is that, on rereading some of them, I found that they are still good sources of knowledge. This shows that we are *accumulating a knowledge base*, which is one of the signs of an emerging academic 'field'.

## I. Different theoretical positions on composing research and their relevance for teachers

### Literary views of composing (the romantic, expressivist)

Literary views of composing have traditionally prioritized research on texts. A basic idea has been that discovery involves mysterious processes which could not be investigated, and certain attitudes and methods of teaching writing follow from this. "First, purpose of invention is the discovery of truth. Second the truth can be learned but it cannot be explicitly taught" (Faigley et al p. 15). *These assumptions motivate 'expressionist' teaching methods*, such as Elbow (1973) and Macrorie (1980), which "eschews the writing teacher's conventional role as an instructor of rhetoric and style", and the use of models, and instead emphasizes strategies which call upon the unconscious creative powers of the writer. Even though Elbow has placed himself in the expressionist camp, I think he has a much more complex view of writing. *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) and *Writing With Power* (1981) have had a great influence on many writing teachers. One example is the excellent work of Lotte Rienecker (1991, 1998). The distinction between writing to explore and writing to communicate, has certainly been extremely beneficial for myself, both as an academic writer and as a teacher of writing.

Writing Across the Curriculum as a pedagogical movement has its origin in the research of James Britton, Nancy Martin and their colleagues at the University of London. Their advocacy of utilizing the linguistic resources of the students' own language and integrating expressive writing into a wide range of academic disciplines was developed in the USA by for instance Toby Fulwiler and Art Young. They became standard bearers for a *journal-centred pedagogy*, which at times was very much at odds with *the teaching traditions of formal academic expository writing*.

What are the challenges to academic writing from the literary and expressivist camp? Most writing teachers in higher education distinguish what they do from 'creative writing' courses aimed at fiction writing; but no doubt creative processes, no matter the form of the product, have much in common. In Norway one of the major advocates of teaching writing to all university students, Sissel Lie, is simultaneously a professor of French literature and a successful author of numerous novels, and she draws on European philosophers of language and literature as well as on her own experiences as a writer when she focuses on using all kinds of expressive strategies of creative writing also in academic writing.

In Europe we need to value the crossfertilization of these two ways of teaching writing in academia, combining the best of both approaches. In a new Master of Philosophy in Education course at the University of Bergen we have systematically built in journal-inspired types of informal writing as stepping stones towards writing more formal genres, with very good results. Our students return to the university after from 5-12 years practice, and they are unanimous in finding this a very good way of writing themselves into an academic discourse. We advocate this approach for instance in the compulsory first year philosophy course, with its heavy discourse traditions. The teachers have more problems than the students. In the sciences some teachers see the importance of this kind of informal and reflective writing for the Introduction and Discussion part of the IMRoD structured article, while others are afraid it will ruin students' ability to write short and precise texts.

### Cognitive writing research and the teaching of writing

The focus of cognitive psychology is on the internal processes of the individual mind, and cognitively based writing research has had a profound influence on the teaching of writing.

There is an interesting connection between classical rhetorical interest in invention and cognitive research on knowledge structures and idea generation.

The important point here is that a continuity of assumptions exists between classical rhetoric and much contemporary research in composing. In spite of often large fundamental differences among varying positions, most researchers of writing processes assume that writers use identifiable strategies for composing, that these strategies follow a developmental sequence, and that an understanding of these strategies can be directly applied to the teaching of writing" ( Faigley et al. p. 17).

For my generation of writing teachers the research on writing processes led to what many would call a paradigm shift in the teaching of writing, from a onesided emphasis on correction and comments of finished products to a focus on process approaches. One of the most influential studies of writing which signalled this shift was Rohman and Wlecke's investigation in 1964 on the effect of students' use of journals on their writing, as well as their three stage linear model of composing: pre-writing, writing, rewriting, which became a popular representation of the composing process. The research of James Britton, from London and Janet Emig at Harvard university showed that composing processes vary with the kind of writing the student is doing. Britton distinguished three kinds, poetic, expressive, and transactional, and the overemphasis of transactional writing in schools, provided justification for a more varied writing pedagogy.

Cognitive writing research focused on the individual, on what goes on in the writer's head, using research techniques like protocol analysis. The most influential research on writers' strategies was Flower and Hayes studies, combining a cognitive psychology point of view with a linguistic one, and resulting in the much used Flower and Hayes model of Composing (1981). One of the most important arguments in the Flower-Hayes-model is that the writing process is *recursive*, not linear, - which means that the writer can access task environment and long-term memory and switch from one writing subprocess to another at any time. The writer does not plan everything first and that done, writes about it, but planning and writing is integrated in one another. To me the recursive nature of the writing process and how to combine this knowledge with structured teaching has been one of the major challenges from writing research.

In light of the enthusiasm of the process writing movement in the USA, also at university level, Hillock's large scale metastudy of writing research was sobering and very useful for writing teachers, especially his clear findings on the advantages of structured process instruction over natural process. Arthur Applebee's research on how the writing process was actually taught, resulted in a reconceptualization of process instruction. In Europe Lennart Bjørk has done groundbreaking work in adapting the writing process approach to higher education as the first one in Scandinavia, and his and Raisanen's book on *Academic writing* is an excellent example of how research on the writing process can be put into use for writing teachers. The same is true for Christian Kock and Lotte Rienecker's work in Denmark. I want to use this opportunity to highlight the importance of 'translating' research into classroom practice and thus making it know to larger audiences.

The new importance given to the recursive quality of composing led researchers like Nancy Sommers' focus on revision, as the whole complex of activities of rereading, valuating, making smallscale and large scale changes in the text. Unsuccessful writers, this research has told us, understand revision just as an activity at the end of the composing process, therefore a pedagogy which introduces continual revision of texts, and gives adequate time for rethinking, is better.

Today there exist quite a variety of competing cognitive models, of which David Galbraith's is just one example. European writing research has a very strong cognitive and psychological strand, and much of it is basic research with no immediate implications for practice. For writing teachers it is important to have knowledge about the mental processes. But it is not easy for writing teachers to keep abreast with this research and even more difficult to see the implications for teaching. One problem with much of the cognitive and the neuroscience research is the distance between the theoretical models on the one hand and the microanalyses which are needed in order to get accurate results, on the other - both of which are very difficult to translate into practical applications and often it is couched in inaccessible language.

*Writing-to-learn* has become a rich research field in the US, and European researchers are now making major contributions. In Finland, for instance there is a lot of research on writing in higher

education from a cognitive and a sociocognitive perspective, for instance Lonka & Ahola (1995), Slotte & Lonka (1998, 1999, 2000). Their focus is on writing as a study skill. Paivi Tynjälä (1998, 1999, 2001) and Tynjälä and Laurinen (2000), Tynjälä et al (1997) include sociocultural perspectives as well. In Italy Pietro Boscolo and Lucia Mason's (2001) work on writing to learn has its empirical basis in elementary school, but is theoretically interesting also for higher education. This has also been one of my own fields of research interests, first in secondary school and later at university level (Dysthe 1993, 1996, 2000). (With two colleagues at the universities in Trondheim and Oslo I have written a research based book for students whose title translates: *Writing to learn. Writing in higher education*. It is now being translated into Swedish and Danish.)

## **Sociocultural perspectives on composing**

### **Central theoreticians**

In my small search for influential research I found several names which signal *broad theoretical positions*, like Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Rommetveit, Lave & Wenger; and more specific writing research in such areas as the *sociology of knowledge and genre research*, like Bazerman, Swales, Rubin, Myers, Berkenkotter, and recent studies on *writer identity*, especially Ros Ivanic, who combines dialogue and linguistic theory with empirical case studies. Halliday's functional linguistics has provided Australian writing teachers with a common theoretical platform which both American and European writing pedagogy lack. Halliday is possibly the most striking example of how linguistic research represent a direct challenge to a whole profession.

Research into the social, cultural and political influences on students' composing have taken many directions. While some of this research has been in opposition both to the personal style pedagogy and the cognitively based pedagogy, some researchers have seen their work as an extension of a too narrow cognitive orientation. They focused on the social perspective instead of, or in addition to, the individual perspective, and borrowed methodologies from several disciplines. It started as an attack on Flower and Hayes' exclusive interest in the *how* of composing, leaving out the *why*, the social context of writing. The alternative approach is based on the Soviet cultural historical tradition from Vygotsky. A quote from his contemporary Luria poses the change in perspectives clearly.

*"In order to explain the highly complex forms of human consciousness one must go beyond the human organism. One must seek the origins of conscious activity and "categorical" behavior not in the recesses of the human brain or in the depths of the spirit, but in the external conditions of life. Above all, this means that one must seek these origins in the external processes of social life, in the social and historical forms of human existence"* (Luria, 1981, p. 25, in Faigly et al. 1989).

### **Some characteristics of sociocultural perspectives**

Some of the main characteristics of sociocultural perspectives can be highlighted in few key phrases. If we substitute writing for knowledge and learning, we will have some basic tenets of writing pedagogy at all levels in the educational system.

1. writing is situated
2. writing is fundamentally social
3. writing is mediated
4. writing is participation in communities of practice
5. textual focus is on the utterance as semantic unit (meaning making in context)

I would like to point out that in sociocultural theory there are two separate but intertwined meanings of the word 'social'. One focuses on the understanding that all texts and practices are embedded in cultures and cannot be studied in isolation, the other meaning focuses on interaction, dialogue, collaboration and negotiation.

### **Different approaches within sociocultural perspectives**

Sociocultural perspectives comprise many traditions or approaches, each of which have their own emphasis. It needs to be remembered, however, that persons who are associated mainly with one

approach, may also use others. One example is Cole who combines cultural psychology and activity theory and Rommetveit, who calls his own project a "sociocognitively based dialogical alternative" (Rommetveit 1992). (The names in parenthesis are the theoreticians, the other names examples of writing researchers using such theoretical approaches.

- *Socio-constructivist and socio-interactionist* views Nystrand 1992, Nystrand & Brandt, 1989
- *cultural psychology* (Schribner and Cole 1978, Cole 1986, Bruner 1990)
- *activity theory* (Engeström 1987), see David Russel's 1997 review of studies in writing that use cultural-historical activity theory)
- *situated learning or learning as membership in communities of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger 1998), the Lancaster Group
- *dialogism* (Bakhtin 1984, 1986) Kay Halazek 1999, Norwegian writing research (from 1990 onwards)

Sociocultural perspectives provide a view of knowledge, a view of learning and a view of language which is very different from both behaviorist and cognitive traditions, and increasingly this provides a basis for both teaching and research of writing in higher education.

### **Sociocultural aspects of writing: Writing as participation in discourse communities**

Of all the possible sociocultural aspects of writing I could talk about, I choose to focus mainly on *what it means for a writer to be a participant in a community of practice and what it means for the teaching of writing*. I will start with suggesting that we need to debate the controversial concept 'academic discourse communities', which we find in so much research on academic writing and teaching, including research on genres. Because most of the writing at European universities is writing in specific disciplines, and not in general composition courses, we are constantly met with questions like: What are the *general* characteristics of academic discourse and what are discipline specific characteristics? Is learning to write in a discipline learning the genres and the conventions or is this a simplified view? What does inculturation into discourse communities actually mean? Do our experiences coincide with the Australian writing teachers and researchers Brigit Ballard & John Clanchy (1988) who wrote: "*When students in higher education fail writing, it is not primarily because they lack linguistic or rhetorical skills, but because they lack insight in the context where their text is to function.*"

'Discourse community' became one of the key terms in academic writing research in the US in the 80-ies. Bazerman's studies in the sociology of scientific knowledge viewed writing as a social act taking place in established contexts, for instance the academic disciplines. Bazerman (1981) compared three journal articles from science, social science and humanities and he attributed differences in writing conventions to 1) *the nature of knowledge* 2) *the traditions for relating new knowledge to existing literature* 3) *the extent to which language is penetrable to the outsider* 4) *the nature of the technical* (Parry 1998: 274). This research on the differences in writing between academic disciplines depending on differences in the nature of inquiry in disciplines or fields, has been very influential in the ways we think about and understand writing in higher education. In England Becher published what became a bestseller on "Academic tribes and territories" (1987). He argued that textual practices in the disciplines are due to both social, cognitive and epistemological influences.

Several researchers have tried to define the particular problems the academic discourse communities pose for basic writers. One example of a small research study which had quite an impact, also because of its catchy title, was David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University", where he showed how a new student at the university had to adapt to very different demands of writing while moving from one discipline to another. Students' problems are seen as trials to approximate discourses which are unfamiliar to them. In Norway students may encounter four different disciplinary discourse communities in their undergraduate year. While Bartholomae took the concept itself for granted, later research has shown it to be rather complex, and some question its usefulness (Bizzell 1992).

Many research studies have aimed at producing a description of the conventions of each discourse community. Such descriptions are much sought after, as they could be used to teach apprentices the conventions. *Studies of this kind do offer writing teachers and other academics useful*

*insight in the disciplines, but they should be used with caution, because the conventions, however powerful, are not static, and are not universal* (Ivanic 1998, p. 81).

Some studies have focused on the rhetorical dimensions of disciplinary writing.

(Myers 1985, Bazerman 1987, Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman 1988). Others have been more concerned with the social elements of language as represented in different discourse communities (Bartholomae 1985, Faigley & Hansen, Bizell 1989).

My own research has confirmed the growing uneasiness with the term 'discourse communities' and shown the complexity of academic discourses. In three small research studies on *Writing and supervision in three disciplines* I focused on the conventions and norms in a Humanities, a Social science and a Natural science discipline. One finding was that teachers and supervisors have a lot of tacit knowledge about writing in their disciplines, but this is very rarely made explicit to students. Another finding was that there did *not* exist a monolithic discourse community but quite a number of them within each discipline, not only related to subdisciplines, but to different theoretical orientations within each of these. The challenge to the teachers of writing was therefore not so much to teach set conventions to graduate students, as trying to make them aware of the choices open to them, which included an insight also in power games and ideological disciplinary disputes, which also play a part in the ways of writing. This very clearly ties on to the issue of what identity the student want to take on.

#### *Research on genres*

Genres was the topic of an international conference in Oslo in May 2001, and the widespread interest in genre is just one example of the shift from cognitive to sociocultural and discursive approaches both in teaching and research. But as the Australian literacy researcher Terry Treadgold (1989) stated, the concept of *genre has both a conservative and a revolutionary potential; it may lead to form-centred prescriptivism or to transformative textuality* (Oliver 2001). John Swales' much used research on introductions to the research article, for instance, can be used prescriptively or it can be used as a stepping stone for discussing academic discourse conventions in different contexts and what writer identity the students wants to project by choosing different ways of introducing their own contributions.

Bakhtinian inspired genre research challenges the writing teacher to find the balance between the need for students to be inculturated in the conventions of the discourse community of their discipline, and what Bakhtin calls their need to 'appropriate the word', "adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intentions, ... making it his own"(Bakhtin 1981, 293-294).

#### *About the terms 'academic socialization' and 'academic literacy'*

At the beginning of this speech I outlined three different approaches to writing in higher education, Study skills orientation, Academic socialization and Academic literacies orientation. If we accept Mary Scott's definition of the second orientation as focusing on the tacit aspects, we could say that much of the research I have mentioned have aimed at making the various discourses within academia, explicit. To me the terms 'academic socialization' and 'academic literacies' are not clear as descriptive terms of two distinctively different orientations, as 'socialization' may be easily confused with the view of inculturation into an academic community and an 'academic literacy' orientation. I fully share the situated view of literacy practices which undergirds the latter orientation, but it is also a problem that 'literacy' has no translation in Scandinavian languages. I have no suggestions of better terms, but terminology is important, so maybe we should discuss them.

#### *Issues of power and politics*

Issues of participation and access, power and politics are certainly not irrelevant for us as writing teachers, as they are closely bound up with the genres we teach, how we teach them and what questions we choose to discuss with students. Researchers like Patricia Bizzell in the US, Brian Street and Mary Lea in the UK raise such questions and challenges us as writing teachers to think through how we deal with them. The academic genres are traditionally premised on elite communities communicating with themselves and selecting a small intake of new initiates every year. What happens to these genres in a world of mass access and participation, for instance? What happens to the non-traditional students learning to write academically?

*Writer identity in academic communities of practice*

The recent work on *writer identity* by Ros Ivanić and also Theresa Lillis was mentioned by several of my informants as providing new insights and new challenges. Both of them look at non-traditional students learning to write academically. This is a group of students that is going to increase in the years to come, when life long learning becomes a reality. Kay Halasek touches on the same issues, also using Bakhtin's ideas on dialogue and of appropriation and internally persuasive discourse to show how individuals can make their own way into and through academic writing. Ivanić's distinction between an autobiographical self and a discursive self is very useful, and her case studies give detailed examples of how students construct their identities through their writing, which help the writing teacher reflect about this complex issue of writer identity.

**Some challenges from dialogical perspectives**

For myself and several other Norwegian writing researchers, Bakhtin's dialogicality has become fundamental both for our research and our teaching, and therefore I choose to mention a few recent writing researchers who have discussed his relevance. Kay Halasek's book *A pedagogy of possibility. Bakhtinian perspectives on composition studies* (1999), provides a stimulating discussion of Bakhtin's impact on the teaching of writing.

Ros Ivanić discusses plagiarism versus 'multivoicedness', which is a central concept in Bakhtin. Ivanić (1998) has documented in her case studies of 6 student writers their problems of negotiating the authoritative texts in a discipline with their need to find their own voice. There is a fine line between intertextuality and plagiarism, but this way of thinking about plagiarism, remove it from the province of moral outrage. Instead it is about the way writers adopt voices from their experience and make them their own (p. 84-88). Ivanić's use of 'voice' is not the romantic notion from the expressivist viewpoint, but the Bakhtinian notion of voice, which is simultaneously personal and social.

Rob Oliver (2001) has elaborated on Bakhtin's ability to combine the individual and the social and points to the relevance for writing teachers like this:

"For me, as a writing teacher attempting to encourage individual engagement in writing *and* guide students towards an understanding of the discursive capital available for that engagement, the force of Bakhtin's work on genre is its co-recognition of the personal – the individual speech will, the emotional-volitional work of the speaking subject – with the social/institutional – the relative stability of generic forms and traditions on which the subjects draws – in the relational act of the utterance. ... It offers a strong sense of personal agency without the corresponding exclusion of social forces (Oliver 2001).

Some of the Norwegian writing research has focused on the *dialogical and interactional processes* of knowledge production. Learning is seen as a process of gradual internalization of routines and procedures available to the learner from the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place. Skills are learned by engaging collaboratively in tasks that would be too difficult for the individual to undertake alone, but that can be completed successfully in interaction with the teacher or with more knowledgeable peers. Torlaug Løkensgard Hoel's (2000) thorough study of writing groups which documents the capacity of students to learn the art of constructive peer response, draws on Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Rommetveit, Bruffee, Nystrand and many others. Her work, although dealing with response groups in secondary school, has considerable relevance also for higher education. At my own university we have quite a bit of experience with graduate students' writing groups in a variety of disciplines, including micro biology, economy as well as humanities and social sciences. It is more difficult to change the habits of the teachers and make them integrate peer writing groups than to actually do it with students.

What I have tried to do so far, is to show the three different theoretical orientations to composition have produced research which present writing teachers with different challenges; all of them important to our work as teachers. I have chosen to give most space to sociocultural perspectives, partly because

it is closest to my heart, partly because it is less well known. (Some of the literature mentioned in the reference section relates to areas which I mention, but not have elaborated on for reasons of space.)

In the next section I will briefly outline some challenges that the teaching of writing poses to research.

## **II. What kinds of research do we as writing teachers and our students need? Challenges to writing research**

### **At a general level**

I want to return to the characteristics of sociocultural perspectives and suggest that we need research relating to all these aspects of writing:

- writing is situated – How? in our local context, in the international context?
- writing is fundamentally social – The broader culture - the interaction?
- writing is mediated - How to use the new mediational tools: IC technologies, multimedia,
- writing is participation in communities of practice – Discourse communities?
- language is a central aspect– knowledge of texts, rhetoric, language?
- writing is also fundamentally individual in the sense that nobody can do it for us – cognitive processes, affective and motivational aspects?.

### **Two routes to research on the learning and teaching of writing**

#### **Formal research and studies by teacher researchers**

Formal research is an obvious need in our field as in all other academic fields, but here I also want to make a case for studies made by teacher researchers as well as action research.

Most of the research on writing in higher education has been carried out by researchers who also are teachers of writing. The small scale intervention based on an individual's observation in a particular context is a very valuable form of research in writing and need to be encouraged. Local research often has great impact on the processes of change .

Research grounded in practice is often referred to as "action research". It admits a wide range of data, including the anecdotal, as evidence to be interpreted in a manner not dissimilar to the critical reading of a literary texts. This kind of research has been criticized, especially the methods used to analyze findings. But I agree with Scott (1996) that it offers a critical and interpretive reading of particular practices in contexts, and this can both offer new insights for other practitioners and help them be more reflective of his or her own practices.

#### **Challenges to research from teaching and supervising graduate and postgraduate students**

In Norway there is a growing demand for courses in thesis writing as well as courses in writing as an integral part of research work for graduate and postgraduate students as well as courses for supervisors in how to teach writing and how to handle feedback on written texts. I have myself been directly involved with the teaching of writing to graduate students and teaching the teachers. My list of research challenges include:

- New academic research genres
- Long term writing processes
- Supervision
- Crossnational studies

#### **Challenges to research from teachers of first year university students**

The American first year general composition courses, which play a major role in American college education, has no counterpart in European universities. The reason for this difference is partly due to much earlier specialization in Europe, even though there is variations among countries (Russell &

Foster 2001). While American students may not choose a major until graduate school, in England and France they specialize as early as 16 and 17, and there is no obvious space for general composition courses.

Another difference is that English and Rhetoric departments in the US have focused on composition as a research field as well as offering course of study to students, and thus a great number of university graduates have a background for teaching and researching writing. In Norway mother tongue departments have been interested texts, but *not* in teaching or researching the production of text, and the same is true of other European countries. The question for writing teachers is therefore not only what research topics we find relevant, but *where* to send our challenges for writing research, to Education departments, where pedagogy of higher education now is a quickly emerging field, to Applied linguistics or to Mother tongue departments or to revived Rhetoric departments?

Here are my suggestions of areas of research which would be useful for teachers of first year university students:

#### *Writing in secondary school*

Those who teach students who are just entering higher education have to deal with students' difficulties in the transition phase from secondary school to university. Teachers in higher education need to understand the practices and experiences and the culture of writing that students bring with them, rather than just seeing school writing as a deficit to be remedied. Mary Scott's research (1996) on the mismatch between expectation of student literary essays in secondary school and at university, illustrates the usefulness and necessity of this kind of research. First year students encounter a new disciplinary epistemology and they are required to discuss competing literary theories and harness evidence to support one or the other. This is difficult even though you know the demands, but often the teachers are not aware of the mismatch and take for granted that students understand what they need to do.

The problems students face vary considerably from country to country. Each country need to know where their students come from, and with the increasing interchange of students within Europe, we also need to know more about each other. An international organisation of mother tongue teachers (IMEN) have already done some interesting crossnational studies in schools.

#### *Non-traditional students*

A second line of research is the particular problems encountering students who have been for in the workplace and return to higher education, or enter it for the first time. In Norway it is now possible to get access to university courses on the basis of 'realkompetanse', i.e. experiences *equivalent* to entry requirements. These students often lack academic confidence, and at the same time are very critical of academic discourse. It is not obvious that the same writing pedagogy work for them.

#### *Genre studies*

More *genre studies* are also needed, both in the tradition of John Swales (1990) and Bella Rubin (1998) but even more in the new genres which are emerging as a result of new technologies. Genres can be dealt with in a social, contextual way, or by more textually oriented approaches. We need studies of a *variety* of higher education genres, not just the traditional.

#### *Teaching methods*

Ethnographic studies of the use of different *teaching methods in higher education* are still far and few between There is for instance a lot written on academic argumentation (Andrews 1989), but what about different ways of teaching it? The text type approach to academic writing, advocated by Lennart Bjørk and Christine Raisanen, is appealing, but what about follow up research studies? Walword & Mc Carthy (1990) *Thinking and writing in college. A naturalistic study of students in four disciplines*, may serve as one example of very thorough applied research, but small scale ones also yield a lot of insight. Another example useful for teachers, is Torrance, Thomas & Robinson's comparison of three types of writing seminars (1993). This ties on to the type of research which can be labelled 'Programs that work' (Fulwiler & Young 1990).

#### *The teaching of writing in the context of 'learning to learn'*

At the universities today teaching a subject is not enough. University teachers will increasingly be expected to integrate writing into their courses as part of the general trend towards 'student active teaching'. John Bean's book gives pedagogic help to such teachers (1996), but as university teaching is supposed to be research based, there will also be an increasing demand for researching how this kind of writing works.

#### *Writing and the new technologies, multimodal texts and text production*

We all know that writing already is being combined with other modes of communication, creating a variety of hybrid or multimodal texts (Faigley 2000; Kress 2001), but we know way too little about them as genres and about the conditions for their production. There is a whole research tradition, also in Europe, on pedagogical use of information and communication technology, which we as writing teachers seldom come in contact with. Another of the keynote speakers, Mike Sharples, will focus on this (Sharples 1996, 1999). Here is definitely an area where crossfertilization is needed.

#### *Assessment practices*

We all know that assessment practices are extremely powerful, and when such practices change, as they are in Europe today, there is bound to be consequences for the teaching of writing. In Norway for instance, there is a great interest in portfolio assessment at all levels, and a cry for research based knowledge from other countries, as we have none ourselves so far.

### **A Norwegian example: new assessment practices – new demands on writing teachers**

As a way of conclusion I would like to offer a Norwegian example of how the changing climate in higher education represents new challenges to the teaching of writing. The Norwegian educational system provides a middle ground between the American and the French and English system. In France, with the early specialization, the lycee prepares their students well for university theory based writing. In Norway there is little specialization in secondary school, and traditionally the first university semester consisted of a compulsory, full time introductory philosophy course, assessed by a timed written exam. Even though it was possible to pass this exam using somewhat sophisticated knowledge telling strategies, it still came as a shock to many students who suddenly realised that the writing genres and the writing strategies they had employed in secondary school, were redundant, and they were now faced with new demands for which they were totally unprepared. The philosophy teachers did not see it as their task to teach writing, but to teach philosophy, and therefore writing research was of no interest.

Last semester this situation changed. Partly due to an unacceptably high failure rate, it was decided to combine lectures with compulsory group work, to put more emphasis on teaching and coaching students in academic writing and to assess students on a portfolio of papers produced during the semester, combined with a very short sit down exam. More or less overnight there was a need for on the one hand research based knowledge of *what characterized writing in secondary school*, and on the other hand *what characterized so called 'academic' writing*, if there indeed exists generic qualities. The teachers, who now had to discuss written drafts of papers in the groups and tutor individual students, found that they needed to know "where the students come from", what assumptions of good writing did they hold and what practices were they familiar with. A third category of research based knowledge which the philosophy teachers saw that they needed, was *pedagogical*. Could we provide evidence that some ways of teaching were better than others?

### **A new breed of European writing teachers?**

If Norway in any way is typical of the trend, there will be a much greater demand on the teaching of writing in all disciplines. Does this mean that we will develop a new breed of writing teachers with dual qualifications, both in their disciplinary area and with a subspecialty in writing?

New competencies are in demand: teachers who are proficient in their discipline (like philosophy), and who at the same time are knowledgeable in teaching writing. My qualified guess is that more and more disciplines will realize that explicit teaching of the genres of their disciplines is necessary. At the same time we find that not all teachers in the disciplines want to have this responsibility, and there might be academic positions created for persons with this dual qualification, and we will get a new breed of university teachers, and they need to be taught by us!

On the one hand there is a growing realization that tacit learning is not enough, and at the same time there is the demand that all university teaching should be research based. We should advertise this combination of disciplinary qualification and qualification in writing theory and research. If we are successful, we may in Europe avoid the situation in America where the large force of writing teachers has a lower status than the rest of the faculty. Humanities majors who teach writing in the sciences will have problems getting the same status and regard, they are likely to be outsiders. I therefore offer this future scenario of the "European Writing Teacher" to you as a discussion topic.

### Concluding remarks

Writing researchers and writing teachers need the mutual challenges I have talked about. Summing up: More research grounded in sociocultural theory. More future oriented research on multimodality and how to teach it. More research of teaching which combines various approaches, I adhere to Bakhtin's "both – and" instead of either or.

*The invisibility of writing has been characteristic of the situation in European higher education institutions. A wind of change is certainly blowing, taking with it the dust of generations of academic myths about writing, revealing student problems and faculty inadequacies, but also revealing the pleasures and potentials of varied forms of teaching writing in academia. This conference testifies to this wind of change. As a participant of this conference each of you is an asset to your institution.*

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