

Review

Kroll, Barbara, ed. *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge UP, 2003. 342 pages. \$27.00 (paper; cloth available).

Jessie Moore Kapper

Think of Barbara Kroll's volume as the Fodor's guide to second language writing. Kroll compares entering a field of study to exploring a new territory, and she presents this edited collection as a guidebook that maps the terrain—the field's central questions, growth, and controversies—of second language writing for future teachers. Like any guidebook, the collection is infused by a set of assumptions about the field and its new explorers. This guidebook's writers share the assumptions that: the field of second language writing, while drawing on interdisciplinary roots, is autonomous; today's teachers must be knowledgeable about varied aspects of writing instruction; teachers need access to current scholarship; and writing instruction requires understanding and exploring multiple variables through an assortment of research approaches. Guided by these assumptions, Kroll and her contributors examine the field's boundaries, its stakeholders' concerns, responses to finished student texts, and an assortment of other issues faced by teachers of second language writing. Overall, the collection fulfills its purpose, directing writing teachers (and in tandem, although less explicitly, program administrators) to these field highlights and most-visited research questions.

Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing features five major sections, plus an introduction and an epilogue. In the first section, "Exploring the Field of Second Language Writing," contributors map the field's historical terrain (Matsuda) and the expansive scope of its research (Polio). Section two, "Exploring the Voices of Key Stakeholders: Teachers and Students," shifts attention to teacher's perceptions of their work (Cumming) and to second language writers' autobiographies (Silva et al.), capturing the participant perspective on second language writing and instruction. In "Exploring Writers' Finished Texts," section three, contributors focus on writers' texts, describing research in response (Ferris), grammar instruction (Frodesen and Holten), and assessment (Hamp-Lyons). The longest section,

“Exploring Contextualities of Texts,” corrals the topics—genre (Johns), contrastive rhetoric (Connor), reading and writing relationships (Grabe), and the role of literature in the writing classroom (Vandrick)—that do not fit neatly in the other sections but that still might interest teachers. A lone chapter on using computers in second language writing instruction (Pennington) makes up the fifth section, and an epilogue closes the collection with a challenge to second language writing professionals to self-assess our valuations of writing and writing instruction (Leki).

In sections one, two, and three, this volume’s organizational structure helps new and prospective members of the field identify several key areas of focus within second language writing: disciplinary history and scope, writers and teachers, and writers’ texts. In section four, though, the signposts created by this overall organization become less apparent since the section introduction earmarks the section’s content as simply “several additional factors that teachers and researchers must investigate in order to expand their understanding of what it means to teach second language writing” (191). Even as a reader more comfortable with the field’s terrain, I am uncertain about the exclusion of technology from these “contextualities of texts.” And as a member of the field, I note the absence of a section on writers’ processes in a collection that otherwise closely follows the categories of research foci (i.e., texts, processes, participants, and contexts) outlined in Polio’s chapter on the range of research in second language writing.

While this structure might cause some confusion for readers trying to understand the subject’s topography, the individual chapters provide a strong foothold for a sequential exploration of the covered topics. Ferris (chapter 5), for instance, highlights previous research on the area of responding to student writing and discusses implications for teaching. Her historical grounding in the first pages of the chapter contextualizes her discussions of research on teacher response and peer feedback. Likewise, Hamp-Lyons (chapter 7) introduces key terms in assessment before examining situational factors that teachers should consider when making decisions about assessment. These efforts to equip readers with the terminology and background needed to engage actively with ensuing discussions should help teachers new to the field of second language writing to identify quickly the issues and applications that are relevant to their teaching contexts.

At times, though, these rhetorical attempts to position new readers in the field’s conversations are uneven. Readers might become frustrated with the lengthy lists of research questions presented on genre (chapter 8, Johns), for example. Although these lists do demonstrate the breadth of questions that genre researchers examine, they may falsely presume that the reader will have the time and interest to look up the researchers’ findings. Leki’s strat-

egy of summarizing research findings from several areas of second language writing scholarship in *Understanding ESL Writers* presents more immediate applications for teachers. Ideally, for an audience of teachers new to second language writing, chapter authors would combine these strategies within each chapter—summarizing major findings from relevant studies and presenting a list of additional questions that researchers have explored in case readers want to learn more.

Silva et al. (chapter 4) achieve a successful adaptation of this balance. They present writer's autobiographies for five highly skilled writers, sharing these writers' self-assessments of their developments as writers and their current abilities to write in their second languages. The authors then discuss common threads among these autobiographies, before suggesting research questions that second language writing professionals should continue to investigate. This chapter configuration incorporates participants' voices, as well as commentary that is immediately accessible and relevant to second language writing teachers, even though Silva and his coauthors appropriately caution against making generalizations based on the five participants' experiences. The chapter's closing questions and discussion then allow readers to focus their continued exploration of the writers' experiences, processes, texts, and relationship to their readers through further reading or through teacher or administrator research.

Similarly, Leki's concluding chapter (chapter 13) presents a status quo and then challenges readers to reexamine it, thereby equipping readers with enough background to participate in her analysis and inviting their contributions. Leki identifies five assumptions that teachers and administrators make about second language writing instruction, and she investigates the implications of buying into those assumptions. For new and established members of the field, Leki's caution to keep the role of writing in students' lives in perspective encourages readers to approach the preceding chapters with reflective engagement.

Is this, then, to continue with Kroll's metaphor, the guidebook new and future teachers want to select as they embark on explorations of this professional arena? For those readers looking for brief summaries and more immediate applicability, not a sustained commitment to exploring the field's research and scholarship, the slightly dated but still relevant *Understanding ESL Writers* might serve as a better introduction to second language writers and their writing. Teachers and writing program administrators who already have a vested interest in learning more, though, likely will appreciate the breadth of the collection's coverage of subjects and the reasonably up-to-date examinations of each chapter topic. Despite its occasional inconsistencies, the collection provides an accessible introduction to second language

writing. The text also would pair well with *Landmark Essays on ESL Writing*, for readers who want a more thorough understanding of the field's historical development, or with *On Second Language Writing*, for additional perspectives on the state of its research, theory, and pedagogy. Hence, *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing* isn't the only guidebook I would pass on to colleagues and students embarking on a discovery of the field's terrain, but the collection serves as a helpful starting point for charting continued, reflective participation in the field.

WORKS CITED

- Leki, Ilona. *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1992.
- Silva, Tony, and Paul Kei Matsuda, eds. *Landmark Essays on ESL Writing*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2001.
- , eds. *On Second Language Writing*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2001.