INTRODUCTION

New Directions in Writing as a Learning Activity

Perry D. Klein, Pietro Boscolo, Carmen Gelati and Lori C. Kirkpatrick

Why a new volume on writing as a learning activity, and why now? Writing is a tool for communicating; it can also be a tool for reasoning and learning (e.g., Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004; de la Paz & Felton, 2010; Nückles, Hübner, & Renkl, 2009). However, this claim raises several questions: How much does writing contribute to learning? How, that is, through what processes, does writing aid learning? Most importantly, how can educators support and instruct people in using writing to learn? Some of these questions were explored in an earlier volume in the Studies in Writing series, titled Writing as a Learning Tool (Tynjälä, Mason, & Lanka, 2001a). However, over the past thirteen years, research in this area has evolved rapidly and radically. This volume presents and exemplifies this evolution.

To place these changes in context, Writing as a Learning Tool itself marked a turning point. During the 1970s and 1980s, several influential scholars held overlapping positions on the role of writing in learning. Central to these positions was the idea that writing inherently contributes to learning (Emig, 1977; Zinsser, 1988). For example, Britton (1982) exemplified the expressivist view that learning is best supported by informal, personalized writing, making the journal or learning log a favoured genre (cf., A. Thompson, 1990). However, several researchers soon questioned this view. Empirical research on the effects of writing on learning was limited (Applebee, 1984; Ackerman, 1993), and several early experiments on the effects of expressivist writing showed null results (Ackerman, 1993; Stotsky, 1995). A different and more tentative view held that analytic writing, in the form of argumentation, would encourage depth of cognitive processing concerning the specific conceptual relationships on which the writer focuses (Applebee, 1984). Few studies had investigated analytic writing, but these produced generally favorable results (e.g., Langer & Applebee, 1987; Wiley and Voss, 1996; see Klein, 1999 for a review).

Writing as a Tool for Learning (Tynjälä et al., 2001a) represented a newly emerging perspective on this field. The dominant tone of the chapters was not...
advocacy, but analysis. The authors foregrounded theories based on cognitive psychology, and presented them as hypothetical models rather than conclusions (Tynjälä et al., 2001a; cf., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Galbraith, 1992; Klein, 1999). At the same time, the influence of psychology was balanced by the influence of sociocultural theory (e.g., Tynjälä, et al., 2001a; Olson, 2001). The new norm for evaluating theoretical and educational claims was experimentation or detailed qualitative analysis (Hand, Prain, & Yore, 2001; Mason & Boscolo, 2001; cf., Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004). Several chapters methodically investigated the effects of specific practices, such as assessment methods and use of electronic technology, on learning (Hartley & Tynjälä, 2001; Linnakylä, 2001; Slotte & Lonka, 2001).

In the present volume, several purposes of *Writing as a Tool for Learning* have been brought closer to fruition. It is now clear that writing can contribute significantly to learning, although the size of its effects depend heavily on the writer and the task environment; more on this below (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Nückles et al., 2009). Initially, research on writing to learn focused on content learning in science, history, and English studies. Several chapters in the present volume extend research to new content domains. For example, Del Longo and Cisotto (this volume) investigated the effectiveness of an intervention focused on two types of argumentative discourse: persuasive essay writing and speaking in academic debates. Self-regulated strategies were explicitly taught to secondary students and writing tools were used to support them. The intervention proved to be successful, not only in improving the quality of persuasive essays writing, which became more organized and cohesive, but also in enhancing the quality of oral arguments, which became more coherent, organized, and connected.

Another chapter that extends writing to a new domain of learning is that of Dikilitaş and Bush (this volume), who analyzed the role of writing in improving second language vocabulary acquisition. A group of university students was taught to use sets of target words in writing both sentences and meaningful pieces of text; each activity was followed by a discussion with the whole class. The intervention showed that training students to use vocabulary in writing sentences and texts helped them learn this target vocabulary, as measured by a test of productive vocabulary, compared to a group that did not participate in the writing activities.

Similarly, Linnemann and Stephany present research on second language education, focusing on writing as a means of learning both mathematical language and mathematical reasoning. Their project exemplifies the rich teaching environments that characterize contemporary work on writing as a learning activity. They used practices such as authentic writing activities, explicit teach-