

### 3 How Other Nations Approach Reading and Writing

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In her work, “‘Internationalization’ and Composition Studies: Reorienting the Discourse,” Christiane Donahue (2009) challenges us to look out from behind our own lenses to examine differing perspectives on the power of reading on the writing process. She suggests, “We might focus on internationalizing by opening up our understanding about what is happening elsewhere to adapt, resituate, perhaps decenter our contexts” (p. 215). To accomplish this, American educators may wonder how other countries regard reading as an influence on writing. Is it a bountiful relationship that marries literacy, job acquisition, use of technology, educational policies, etc.? Or, are they divorced acts, whose individual acquisition serves the purpose of functionality in an educational system that wishes for mastery of two separate skill sets? What influences student achievement in the international arena? Which countries are steering their students in the right direction? What can we learn?

It is the purpose of this chapter to aid in our understanding of international policies regarding the connections between reading and writing. We can merge this information with that of my fellow authors, who suggest that literacy is a combination of skills in both reading and writing—skills that should be applicable in any genre and context. How could data from Europe, Asia, South America, and Australia benefit us as writing and rhetoric instructors in the US? Through an international view, we can glean more understanding of how reading and writing are taught. A sample review of research studies and policies suggests that internationally, reading and writing tend to be treated and taught as separate skills.

## GLOBALLY SPEAKING

In this chapter, I focus on three major studies that provide insight into how reading and writing are studied and taught internationally. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures the accomplishments of fifteen-year-olds in several content areas. The Adult Literacy and Learning Survey (ALL) study by Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development profiles literacy in multinationals from ages sixteen to sixty-five. The third study, International Reports on Literacy Research, by Mallozzi and Malloy (2007) from the *Reading Research Guide*, profiles foreign countries with data directly from the classroom.

### PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Several nations have been evaluated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. This study, conducted every three years, is called the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and involves fifteen-year-old boys and girls from thirty-four countries. The study measures and reports on young people's ability to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges (OECD, 2009).

The parameters of the study include the following:

- Policy orientation, which highlights differences in performance patterns and identifies features common to high performing students, schools and education systems . . . .
- Innovative concept of “literacy,” which refers both to students’ capacity to apply knowledge and skills in key subject areas and to their ability to analyze, reason and communicate effectively as they pose, interpret and solve problems in a variety of situations.
- Relevance to lifelong learning, which goes beyond assessing students’ competencies in school subjects by asking them to report on their motivation[s] . . . .
- Regularity, which enables countries to monitor their progress in meeting key learning objectives.
- Breadth of geographical coverage and collaborative nature, which, in PISA 2009, encompasses the thirty-four OECD

member countries and forty-one partner countries and economies. (OECD, 2009, p. 3)

The latest version, from 2009, offers intriguing findings about the reading and writing habits of a variety of international, multinational students. Korea, Finland, and Canada are producing the most competent readers. Their students score well above a proficient level in writing and several sub-categories of reading—levels ensuring the successful use of their socioeconomic status to lead productive lifestyles. Some of the determining factors include: quality teachers with varied experience, rather than a high quantity of mediocre teachers; high teacher salaries that affect student successes and achievement more than small class sizes; student-teacher relations and a strong, positive teacher attitude that ensures higher performing readers.

A student's gender can sharply affect his or her skills as a reader and writer. The PISA found that "Girls outperform boys in reading skills in every participating country"; in fact, girls scored almost four times as high when measuring reading and literacy skills (2009, p.7). In some countries, the research suggests, it was as if the girls had experienced one full year of additional instruction than the boys. In particular cases, the difference was as much as six years.

The PISA study found that students who talked with their parents about life issues and current events had a better and wider knowledge overall. Using one's parents as a sounding board for discussion seemed to contribute to a well-rounded reader and writer; "The more discussion, such as in Turkey and Lithuania, the more literate the students proved to be" (p. 10).

The PISA study also revealed a great deal about the importance of transferring reading skills. Results showed that students who enjoyed reading the most performed better than those who enjoyed reading the least; reading a variety of materials, not just fiction, makes for intelligent readers, and online reading and searching makes for better prepared readers than those who did not conduct these online activities. This study acknowledges the vital nature of reading readiness and accepts it as a contributor to success in other realms, as countries with students who do not read for pleasure at all scored lower on all points of reading testing. Lastly, high-performing countries are also those whose students generally know how to summarize information.

The PISA indicates that the highest functioning students are able to utilize sophisticated skills that stem in reading and writing, but

flourish in research. Singapore, Shanghai, China, and New Zealand have a scant 1% of students who can access information in a new genre, understand secondary concepts not presented in material, gather data from multiple sources, manage new forms of text, synthesize several forms of data, and locate relevant text.

### *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL), conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2003), is a report by thirty nations designed to investigate how one achieves skills in reading and writing and how those skills may be lost over time (p. 3). ALL is concerned with “assist[ing] individuals, educators, employers and other decision makers in four areas,” including:

- Removing skill deficits that act as barriers to innovation, productivity and high rates of economic growth;
- Limiting and reversing social exclusion and income inequality;
- Reducing the unit cost of delivering public health care and education services;
- Improving quality in a broad range of contexts from public services to quality of life. (OECD)

ALL profiles several international learning environments, including those in Canada, Italy, Norway, and Mexico. They evaluated numeracy, information, and communication technology, and further describe four factors that may influence reading, writing, and researching skills:

- Prose literacy—the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts, including editorials, news stories, brochures, and instruction manuals.
- Document literacy—the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and charts.
- Numeracy—the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage the mathematical demands of diverse situations.
- Problem solving—Problem solving involves goal-directed thinking and action in situations for which no routine solu-

tion procedure is available. The problem solver has a more or less well-defined goal, but does not immediately know how to reach it. The incongruence of goals and admissible operators constitutes a problem. The understanding of the problem situation and its step-by-step transformation-based on planning and reasoning, constitute the process of problem solving (OECD).

The list above shows the necessity of having experience with text. Students must be made familiar with forms, maps, and brochures so they can, in turn, create their own when the time comes, either as an academic assignment or in the working world. In this way, reading and writing must be synonymous, and the reading must be varied and rich. These exposures will help build, in a budding writer, a foundation of knowledge from which to draw upon during intense problem-solving.

Overall, the results reflect an optimistic view of literacy and its practices in the marketplace:

The footprint of good policy is evident in all countries surveyed. Bermuda is highly skilled and its population reports the highest level of health. Canada has succeeded in building equitably distributed [literacy] skills that have boosted productivity and growth. Italy has realized the most rapid improvement in skills benefiting the entire population. Norway has achieved uniformly high levels of skill, an inclusive society and is the closest to realizing lifelong learning for all. Nuevo Leon in Mexico has managed the most marked improvement in the quality of recent education output. Switzerland has lifted the performance of the least skilled the most. Proportionally to population size, the United States has built the largest pool of highly skilled adults in the world. (OECD, 2010, p. 4)

## INTERNATIONAL REPORTS ON LITERACY RESEARCH

In 2007, Christine Mallozzi at the University of Kentucky, and Jacquelynn Malloy of George Mason University, surveyed foreign educational systems as part of the International Reports on Literacy Research to assess their use of a reading-writing relationship and subsequent successes and failures. While these results are not all-encompassing, they offer educators interested in global data a wide range of

international perspectives. Global achievement in reading and writing serves as a framework for my discussion, and thus, several regions are profiled here: Italy, Hong Kong, Argentina, and Australia. These four countries provide a snapshot of varying regions of the globe.

Ten questions were used by Mallozzi and Malloy (2007) to gather data:

1. In your region, are reading and writing related in terms of literacy practice and research? If so, please describe how. If no, please explain why not.
2. How often are reading and writing given equal regard in terms of curriculum in your region?
3. How often is writing a focus of literacy instruction in your region of the world?
4. How often are reading and writing taught together in your region?
5. Do language differences influence writing instruction in your region?
6. Is writing instruction a major factor in assessment?
7. Are digital forms of writing included in the curriculum?
8. Do teachers in your region use digital technologies to teach writing?
9. In your region, does socioeconomic level influence students' purposes for writing?
10. What other comments might you wish to make about writing instruction in your region? (p. 161)

These questions were sent to international research correspondents (IRCs) in each region. The IRCs—all educators at the secondary or college levels—acted as reporters for their colleagues and institutions, compiling answers while crafting responses of their own classroom experiences.

Generally, these countries view reading and writing as disparate acts, a view that can be detrimental to shaping a skilled writer. Technology in the writing classroom is often lacking in these regions, and socioeconomic factors play a role in student success. Most notable here is the disparity with which the acts of reading and writing are viewed and practiced.

It helps to read and understand these countries' efforts to unite reading and writing skills with the following in mind. In 1997, Spivey proclaimed that

in relation to the students' achievement levels, it is important to emphasize the fact that, not only in Chile, but also in several other Latin American countries as well as Spain and the United States, teaching practices currently in use do not seem to lead to the expected levels of language performance. (as cited in Parodi, 2006, p. 240)

Such disheartening observations lead one to believe that instruction in reading and writing must go beyond the state-mandated guidelines. Countries that do not exceed these guidelines are failing their students. The discussion below identifies the weak connections of reading and writing currently in practice around the globe.

International students need a place where literacy is a social practice, not just a technical skill to be practiced. It is about knowledge: The ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being (Street, 2001). We understand these to be fundamental in social culture.

### READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION IN ITALY

The report out of Italy states that reading and writing practices are two separate domains in both research and instructional practice. We discussed this concept earlier in Allison Harl's chapter on the historical practices of uniting reading and writing. Concurrent with the definitions put forth in this volume, Parodi (2006) claims that reading and writing are psycholinguistic processes. There is scant research, especially before 1970, but Parodi reports that significant correlations are found, and that the strongest links are detected at the levels of local cohesion and the micro structural. Parodi notes:

Reading was essentially conceived as a receptive skill while writing was a productive one, so they were taught independently. Early testing focused on the wrong issues, thus it is important to point out that the concepts of discourse, comprehension, and production have evolved dramatically during the last few years. Modern concepts of written discourse

assign a central role to mental processes and the role of the reader/writer's previous knowledge. (p. 228)

Thus, according to Parodi, in Italy, the teaching of writing especially recognizes that texts inform one another. Spivey (1990) argues that if a written text is produced from particular sources, then the reader becomes a writer because the source text is transformed into a new text. The writer, while using other texts in the creation of a new one, employs constructive operations of organization, selection, and connection to elaborate meaning (Parodi, 2006). There is a complexity to the writing process we have not yet seen in other profiles. The layering of texts as information for future texts is a sophisticated skill for college writers.

Italy sees a movement toward reforming educational policy to include such nuanced and innovative concepts. Parodi (2006) notes that steps will be taken

towards the consideration of discourse practices as the nucleus of the construction of meaning. Argumentation should be the focus of much investigation and the development of better teaching strategies. Also, the discourse approach in education should bring greater freedom in the access to knowledge and society. (p. 240)

Parodi must then agree that composition is best when preceded by discussion to flesh out topics and investigations. Yet, in the 1980s, Italian educators urged "text production rather than a writing process," giving way to writing as a discipline itself (Mallozzi, 2007, p. 165). Reading, as a central component, was not fully recognized as a substantial component of the learning to write process.

Grabe and Zhang write elsewhere in this volume that reading and writing are traditionally taught separately, and that reading is addressed more explicitly. The IRC in Italy reports that teachers see this relationship of reading to writing, yet make no strides to integrate them for struggling readers. Perhaps concurrent reading and composing could be a solution for Italy's student writers, as Belanger (1978) suggests. As early as the 1970s, he wrote,

reading can provide a motive for writing. As one of many reasons for this to be a profitable relationship, students who are



readers are in fact writers. Thus, exposure and inspiration are ways reading is being used in the international classroom. (p. 73)

European teaching styles integrating reading/writing differ widely. For example, Isabel Sole (2001), an educator and researcher in Barcelona, Spain, experiences and reports on the relationship of reading and writing. They

are procedures; to master them is to be able to read and write in a conventional form. To teach the procedures it is necessary to show, or demonstrate, their independent practice. In the same way teachers show how to mix paints to obtain a specific color, or how one should proceed to register the observations on the growth of a plant, they should be able to show that which they do when reading and writing. Some authors call this model demonstration. In essence, it is to offer the [student] the techniques, the secrets that the teacher uses when reading and writing, so he can gradually make them his own. (p. 54)

While acknowledging that mastery is the ultimate goal, Sole here advocates the appreciation of reading and writing as separate acts before they can be successfully combined by writing students. In accordance with the work of Boyarin (1993), Sole, along with her European counterparts, sees that writing skill develops with time and experience rather than with the more American-appreciated skills of exploration and attempt.

IRC reports that there is an effort in Italy to relate the instruction of reading and writing to literature studies. And while there is a conscious effort to give context to that type of instruction, writing and composition is conversely used as an “evaluation tool rather than outcome of a specific instruction” (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007, p. 165). This design may still be at the forefront of international writing instruction, but it tends to differ from the ostensibly process-oriented writing instruction currently taught in American universities.

## READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION IN HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, students are expected to attend fourteen years of compulsory education, the final two of which bear resemblance to the first two years of U.S. college education. Instructors report that reading

and writing are not often taught together during these final two years (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007). Kucer (2009) identifies

one of the most critical goals of the writer is to build internal coherence on a global level. As writers evolve their discourse, they attempt to work out the general semantic framework within which their more local meaning can be developed and attached. (p. 185)

In Hong Kong, integrated lessons are seen as complicated to teach and more demanding for many students; the effect is a failure to make a strong connection between reading and writing instruction (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007). And while writing might show evidence of academic achievement, these scores and student knowledge could be increased by an integrative approach. This type of compartmentalized learning, instead of a holistic approach, may produce acceptable test scores, as national achievement scores are emphasized in this culture. One reason to maintain the high quality is that the allocation of funds at the local level is dependent on student achievement scores. Theoretical skills must be pragmatically applied so that today's writing students can, in the future, be adult writers. Hong Kong's students are also being prepared for a myriad of other writing tasks—especially those in the workplace.

## READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION IN ARGENTINA

Argentinean approaches to reading and writing also tend not to be integrated. According to the IRC, writing is not a part of literacy studies in Argentina, and reading and writing are not given equal treatment in the national educational plan (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007, p. 164). If we use Horning and Kraemer's definition of reading (found earlier in this book), we can see that the focus of literacy is on perception and production, and that reading is the "same fundamental activity whether it is carried out with paper or digital texts." The Argentinean IRC reports that seldom are digital technologies used, and subsequently, students are unable to utilize their literacy skills in digital environments; thus, the blending of texts is difficult.

According to the IRC report, in Argentina, writing tends to be the completion of a written exercise; it is not the expression of content that allows students random, rather than processed, thoughts. Frequently,

the creative aspect of writing—writing for answer, writing for pleasure, or writing for exploration—does not exist. Therefore, it is difficult to develop one's own voice, tone, and attitude toward a topic, issue, or problem. Developing writers do experience pressure, both in formulating their views and in writing about them, claims Badley (2009). Authenticity is then a matter of individuals of Argentina who are coming at things differently, taking hold of, owning, and using resources in their own ways.

We can also explore autonomous texts created by first year writing students and by individual experience to see how other countries function. Students in Argentina write with “decontextualized strategies.” They organize their writing practice to produce autonomous texts. In contrast, Geisler (1994) reported on the perceptions and the transformations in British composition coursework. In the U.K., writing is assumed to lead to a deeper understanding, and reading and writing are measured by “competency, not . . . expertise” (p. 164). College writers are asked not for exploratory pieces, but to demonstrate their knowledge for a teacher or examiner. Geisler reports that 72% of student compositions rely on teacher prompts, and that 27% of student writing comes from personal experience.

Argentinean students are asked to complete written exercises as a form of writing. Mallozzi and Malloy (2007) report no elaborate envelopment in a traditional (by U.S. standards) writing process, and instead students are given less than one minute as prewriting for in-class assignments. Unfortunately, like so many other countries in the Mallozzi and Malloy survey, Argentinean students do not practice digital composition due to access. Literacy is an indicator of opportunity and status. Advantages clearly shape the path to literacy. In Argentina, literacy is a cultural practice (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007).

By comparison, access to literacy opportunities in England is widely available. The British educational system does appreciate the movement to expand the writing process and its relationship to reading. Geisler (1994) reported evidence of skilled and practice-level writing, and that at the extreme, some students are “remarkably unengaged in the process of reproducing their knowledge in autonomous text” (p. 37). Britons understand that a developed text can lead to a deeper level of processing, but writing instructors are not seeing a deeper level of processing. They may be turning to modeling as a writing activity to direct students onto the right path of expression.

## READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION IN AUSTRALIA

Australian reading and writing programs were evaluated at both the state and national levels; thus, the survey area included metropolitan and rural areas that observe variation in household incomes. Related to potential disparities at these two levels, Hall (2008) is concerned with achievement that might be measured in student learning when family income is low—rightly so, as accessing resources is a vital part of becoming a literate reader and writer. As Fleming points out elsewhere in this text, access to a variety of differing reading materials can sharpen reading strategies. Without exposure, students may suffer.

There are opportunities to write that appear only to the student who knows how to seek them out. Hall (2008) recognizes that students with more educational resources have more learning opportunities they can profit from, while wealthier students are already using these resources effectively. Students who understand how to gain access may be utilizing resources for writing activities that are based on higher-level thinking and collaborative work. Such access may make for better writers. So, can writers truly understand writing if they are not talking about it, planning it, compromising it, and constructing it—whether together or as peer writing tutors in what American classrooms have come to term the “writing workshop”? Hayes and Flower explore three components of writing in a workshop: planning, translating, and reviewing. Access to these “writing spaces” is dependent on quite a great deal of modification and discussion (as cited in Wengelin, Leitjten, & Van Wase, 2009). Workshop settings help readers in Australia to focus, sharpen, and then re-focus their audience and purpose, but only if they can find their way to it.

Astonishingly, in Australia, “writing” was reported from one instructor still as handwriting rather than composition; thus, many do not emphasize a relationship between reading and writing. Similarly, the national educational program describes literacy as reading alone. It is difficult to understand how these disconnects manifest in the classroom. Is the teacher caught between policy and theory? The IRC reporter for Australia writes that teacher knowledge is related to gaps in achievement, and the instructors who know audience and purpose stress the meta-language of writing (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007). In “Critical Literacy in Australia: A Matter of Context and Standpoint,” Allan Luke (2000) writes that

Teaching pragmatic practices involves enabling students to read contexts of everyday use, assess how the technical features (e.g., genre, grammar, lexicon) of a text might be realized in these contexts and size up the variables, power relations and their options in that context. (p. 9)

Other tactics may be used, and as Wengelin, Leitjten, and Van Wase (2009) write, reflexive reading helps a writer understand their own writing. She suggests that reading while composing can accomplish clarity and develop inspiration. The college student writer is making constant decisions—constant connections—and needs to develop a terminology and ease that only some Australian writers are privileged to learn. So, as freshman writers are encouraged to participate with their own texts, they are reviewing their own work and reading to facilitate other parts of the writing process than revision. If a college writer, Australian or otherwise, reads their own emerging text as an approach to writing, they might look at their text to prompt content generation, to manage references, to maintain cohesion, and to engage in metacognitive strategies for revision (Wengelin et al., 2009). This connection, for simplicity's sake, could be labeled self-writing and self-reading. Yet, the Australian IRC reports that in classroom practice, gaps between ideal practices like self-reading and writing, and actual literacy practices, are wide and, at this moment, unmoving.

Australian students are subjected to assessment focused on writing. Fundamentally, the assessment is focused on the end product rather than any dynamic writing process (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007). This equation, one that emphasizes the “functionality of writing of the quality of writing,” seems askew to those of us who teach in American universities (Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007, p. 163).

## CONCLUSION

By examining these four countries—Italy, China, Argentina, and Australia—we recognize the struggles of other countries as they work against educational policies, unequal access, social and economic issues, and a pedagogy that divorces reading from writing. Evidence from Mallozzi and Malloy (2007) shows a strong push to develop academic writers, yet the above struggles—and most specifically, an un-

equal approach to instruction in reading and writing—leave students suffering as weak writers.

Factual data from the PISA study and the ALL survey prove that there are readers and writers with highly specialized skills in international countries, yet they must be supported and reinforced to maintain said skills. PISA data reiterates the need for autonomy when developing curricula that unites reading and writing to produce skilled communicators, and curriculum design that can be revisited, as we've learned that skill levels are not fixed for life.

A thoughtful way to close this examination might be to question what Americans are doing to strengthen the threads of the reading and writing bond and what can be learned from our international counterparts. We gain from an understanding of international writing, studies, and students; thus, we recognize their learning culture. Christiane Donahue (2009) suggests that “contrastive rhetorics have been primarily discussed from a U.S.-centric or at least Western Point of Departure,” and hopefully, the emerging perspective will be slightly more global (p. 225).