

INTRODUCTION

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Overview

This book was first conceived during a coffee break at a conference in New York City in 2003. As often happens in a community that centers around texts, we were two strangers who first learned about the other through reading each other's works. We then met in person by chance at the conference when the nametag rang a bell, and we started to talk about cooperating on projects of shared interest. It was a casual, free-wheeling conversation. While sipping coffee, with no particular prompt from Chris, Xiaoming mentioned the recent suicide of a friend's daughter at an American university and deplored the heavy price many international students often paid for trying to succeed in English-dominant institutions of higher learning. Chris sympathized, commiserated, but recalled the difficulties that she, too, a white, middle-class female and native speaker of English, encountered in graduate school. We survived, we agreed, not because we were smarter, but lucky to be at the right place, studying with the right professors, and finding, haphazardly, the coping strategies that worked for us.

What has already happened to students who have experienced great difficulty cannot be undone. But is there anything we can do to convince those who are just beginning to acclimate to life in graduate school and those who are contemplating the prospect of entering graduate school that they are not alone? There and then, we decided to first plan a conference panel and then to co-edit a book on doing graduate school. Our panel on "learning to do graduate school" at the 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication marked the official start of this adventure. As is the case for the notion of learning how to "do" gradu-

ate school, our conceptualization of literacy practices in this book's title is intended to connote more than an interest in how graduate students learn the textual features and conventions that characterize academic reading and writing. With the term *literacy practices* we include as well the tacit expectations and unwritten rules of participation, the interpersonal relationships between advisors and advisees and among peers, and the impact of enculturation and interaction on student and faculty identity. In short, this collection brings to light the textual, social, and political dimensions of graduate study that tend not to be talked about, still less written about for publication. Rare exceptions are an edited collection on the dissertation experience in the field of composition and rhetoric (Welch, Latterell, Moore, & Carter-Tod, 2002) and some portions of Gesa Kirsch's (1993) earlier book on "women writing the academy." We add our voices to this important endeavor and expand the disciplinary horizon to include second and foreign language-related fields.

We intend the book to be, mainly, a practical and inspirational resource book for graduate students, a "textual mentor," so to speak, in the sense that experienced researchers and graduate students in the midst of their studies communicate in direct and accessible ways with readers who are joining them. However, the rich descriptions of the lives of graduate students and faculty from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the tracing of their intellectual and social trajectories should be a resource as well to scholars of academic and disciplinary socialization. Faculty members and advisors/supervisors who are teaching classes that concern introduction to graduate study and who themselves mentor graduate students will also benefit from reading this collection, as we have from assembling and editing it.

Little did we know at the time we began this project that we were to join others in a "flurry of attention" paid to graduate education (Golde & Dore, 2004, p. 19). Concomitant to official reports that focused on the structural changes in response to changes in the job market, some scholars interested in the social dimension of graduate study examined the high attrition of graduate students, which is, to paraphrase the opening line of one study, the best kept non-secret (Lovitts, 2001, p. 1). It is reported that "the overall rate of doctoral student attrition in the United States has consistently been estimated to be around 50 percent" since at least the early '60s (p. 2). In a smaller sample of nine departments, the rate was found to be higher in social sciences and humanities disciplines than in natural sciences, and much higher in the urban than in the rural university (p. 12). The study by Golde (1998) finds that attrition during

the first year of graduate school “accounts for nearly a third of all doctoral student attrition” (p. 55). The figure, we believe, is probably even higher for the so-called marginal groups: non-native speakers of English, the 1.5 generation of immigrant students, minority students, and other non-traditional students. Many reasons account for this attrition, as Golde (1998) explained, most having to do with students’ expectations not being met and with poor integration into departments, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

The result, however, should not surprise anyone who knows the challenges one faces in graduate school. Golde (1998) characterizes what students experience at graduate school as “an unusual double socialization”—that is, the direct socialization into the role of graduate students and the preparatory socialization into a profession. Graduate students, according to Golde, need to accomplish four distinct but interrelated tasks: intellectual mastery, learning about the realities of life as a graduate student, learning about the profession, and integrating oneself into the department (p. 56). These challenges are difficult for all graduate students, but they are particularly daunting for non-native and non-mainstream speakers of English as they have to cope with triple socialization, the third being the immediate socialization into a language and culture that their mainstream peers have been immersed in for a life time. In all cases, learning to become a member of a graduate school academic community requires that students become familiar with new cultural, literacy, and sociopolitical practices while under the pressure of time, financial hardship, and possibly unclear authority relationships with faculty members. No single chapter in this collection addresses all four challenges, but each addresses at least one, and more important, all detail how the authors met the challenge and survived.

The contributors to this collection, current and former graduate students (now faculty), come from diverse English-dominant graduate programs in North America, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom. They generously share their personal experiences; ruminate over lessons learned in hindsight; explore the hidden structures, expectations, and opportunities they stumbled on but often missed at the time; and offer some sort of a “cognitive map” (Lovitts, p. 44) for navigating the social, political, and literacy practices of graduate school. Besides a diversity of approaches and the use of personal narrative, another distinguishing feature of this collection is the pairing of advisor-advisee co-authors in some of the chapters, which provides multiple perspectives and voices on particular aspects of the graduate school adventure.

These unconventional features of writing result directly from our desire to reach the primary audience of novice graduate students in engaging ways, but also from a deliberate and collective effort to experiment with new forms as a way to break the monopoly of the citation-heavy, emotionally barren, formulaic, impersonal, and often slumberous prose, which is the standard bearer of academic writing. We were all in new territory with the endeavor. As it turned out, some chapters are more formal while others more conversational, but all are eminently accessible. Some authors were also more adventurous and imaginative than others, but with each revision, all eventually found the form that fit the content and the personae of the authors. The result, we feel, is high quality and sometimes unconventional writing throughout the collection.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Intended as an inspirational resource book, most chapters in this collection tread lightly on theory, but they all proceed from a set of concepts and constructs that can be grounded in certain theories. Here, we will discuss briefly some major theoretical frameworks that underlie this project: *communities of practice* and the related concepts of legitimate peripheral participation and situated learning; *genre studies*; and *identity*. We do not provide a thorough literature review of work in these areas. Rather, our discussion serves to link the chapters to some larger issues.

First, *community of practice*. Lave and Wenger's notion of "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998) is one of the central concepts of this collection. What is the significance of viewing the academic community as one of practice, parallel to communities discussed by them, such as insurance claim processors or midwives? As Lave and Wenger explain, the significance of their coinage lies in "shifting the analytic focus from the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world, and from the concept of cognitive process to the more-encompassing view of social practice" (1991, p. 43).

This sociocultural perspective (cf. Vygotsky's work, Lantolf's adaptation to second language development, and Engeström's adaptation of Leont'ev's Activity Theory) highlights the situated nature of learning and the importance of learners' access to the experts in real time and in contexts not limited to formal school settings. The co-participation, legitimate but peripheral, of new members with more expert members is

thus central to “the fundamental process of learning” (Barton & Tusting, 2005, p. 2). As shown in this collection, Lave and Wenger’s theory provides a way for some of the advisors and their advisees to perceive and structure their relationships as less unidirectional and more participatory. This is most evident in the co-authored chapters in the section “Mentors and Mentees,” but also in the chapters that mention study groups, joint projects, and other small, spontaneous, and creative co-participation. The point is that the authors depict learning to do graduate school as learning to participate in local communities of practice as legitimate if peripheral members. All learning is taken to be situated in local contexts.

Lave and Wenger’s constructs are not without critics. Actually much of the criticism has been directed at the notion of “communities of practice” itself. Some find it frustratingly “slippery and elusive,” and others question whether the non-hierarchical, conflict-free, homogeneous, relatively static, open and welcoming space to all, as often implied in Wenger’s work in particular, is a realistic portrayal of any workplace, including the academy (cf. several chapters in Barton and Tusting; Haneda, 2006; Kanno, 1999). The chapters in this collection complicate this simplistic reading by challenging the unidirectional assumptions of learning behind an apprenticeship-style model, and by documenting the complex interactional nature of participation in academic literacy practices.

Second, *genre studies*. Unlike traditional genre study, where genre is portrayed as “fixed and immutable” “textual regularities in form and content,” the later generation of genre studies sees genre as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (Miller, 1984, p.159). From this perspective, genre has a distinct social and rhetorical orientation from the beginning (Bazerman, 1994). Since the mid-1980s, the field of genre studies has produced an impressive array of works and grown into a brand of inquiry that encompasses a range of theoretical affiliations and practices. Two approaches pertain to our project in that they deal with academic contexts. Swales’s work (1990) uncovers the *sui generis* features and constituents of academic and research papers. The influence of his investigations can be seen in many of the dissertation-related discussions in the collection. The other approach is represented by the “social-cognitive theory of genre,” which views genre “as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities” (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 3). The object of such studies is, thus, the interplay between the social contexts and the actual genre users; the research examines both the written products and the processes of learners’ socialization into different

academic disciplines. A number of contributors to this collection have published significant works with comparable theoretical orientations (Casanave, 1995, 2002; Paltridge, 2002; Prior, 1998).

Notably, in the works of some authors who frame their studies with community-of-practice or genre theory, the analytical lens is often focused on the experiences of non-native speakers of English in academic disciplines where English is the medium of instruction and writing. This focus highlights the experiences of second language (L2) writers that typify and dramatize the challenges of socialization that novice participants undergo to become members of a new discipline. The chapters in this collection by authors from linguistic and cultural backgrounds outside the English-speaking countries can be read in the same way. However, the perspectives of mainstream authors reveal that the challenges are not unique to L2 speakers.

Third, *identity*. Identity, an underlying theme of all chapters, is a converging point of various theories of socialization, some already mentioned. Literacy theorists and educators (Ivanič, 1998; Lave & Wenger; Wenger; Gee, 2001; Norton, 1997, 2000) have argued, quite persuasively, that to become a member of a community of any kind entails a change in one's identity. For as one accepts and internalizes a set of values and practices, semiotic or material, one's "internal plane of consciousness" (Leont'ev 1981a, p. 57, cited in Prior, p. 21) is invariably modified or reshaped in the process.

The transformation, however, is not a one-way assimilation through which the dominant social, cultural, and historical forces impose their values and practices on hapless individuals. A number of chapters in this collection show that participants, while socialized into academic disciplines, are also active agents of change. They transform the communities by critically and consciously resisting and changing the existing ways of doing things, and, more often, by simply being who they are, by bringing their ways of living and coping into the mix.

It should be apparent from this brief discussion that the theories and analytical constructs this project employs—situated learning in communities of practice, genre studies, and identity—though different, overlap a great deal. Each stresses certain aspects of disciplinary learning, but they converge and complement each other at places. The social orientation of these theories, after all, befits our time's heightened awareness of the interconnection and mutual impact between what we do locally and what happens globally. It is, however, the social (and necessarily political) aspects of learning to participate in graduate school literacy practices that

tend to remain tacit, given academe's more overt interest in cognitive and intellectual processes. Our collection aims to raise awareness of some of academe's more social, yet tacit, participatory activities that contribute to the ongoing learning of both students and faculty.

Content and Organization of the Collection¹

The chapter themes in this book overlap in many ways, making our section divisions somewhat arbitrary. We therefore urge readers to select chapters that interest them—there is no beginning-to-end progression. We urge readers as well to connect issues and themes from different sections rather than be overly influenced by our choices of how to group the essays. All the chapters deal in one way or another with identity and with learning to participate in particular kinds of academic literacy practices, and many address mentor-mentee relationships and other kinds of guidance and support.

In Part 1, *Learning to Participate*, the authors discuss some of the tacit rules and practices they struggled to figure out at various stages in their doctoral study. Christine Pearson Casanave and John Hedgcock, both middle-class mainstream educators, reflect on the challenges they faced in learning how to read and write in graduate-level work in the absence of explicit instructions on how to do so, demonstrating that it is not only non-native speakers of English who face these challenges. Xiaoming Li discusses her journey from mainland China to a doctoral program in the United States, where she had to learn the unfamiliar practice of participating in written academic conversations that have an "argumentative edge." Mayumi Fujioka learned that graduate school means not only learning to participate in academic literacy and research practices, but also learning to negotiate relationships with powerful people—dissertation advisors and committee members. In the last paper in this section, Tracey Costley narrates her discoveries about the hidden assumptions behind labels such as "first generation student" (U.S.) and "nontraditional student" (U.K.) and how she gradually learned to participate successfully in academic literacy practices in ways that defy the labels.

¹ In keeping with our desire to maintain the voices and identities of the contributors, the spelling conventions in the chapters alternate between American and British style, according to the preferences of the authors.

In Part 2, *Mentors and Mentees*, paired graduate student–faculty authors offer valuable insights, from the perspectives of the mentor and the one mentored, of their shared journeys in doctoral work. Steve Simpson and his advisor, Paul Kei Matsuda, reveal how the mentor-mentee relationship can be viewed as one involving participation in a field’s many professional activities, in which the mentee gradually takes on more responsibilities. Yongyan Li and her advisor, John Flowerdew, describe how Yongyan found her way into a very different kind of dissertation, a qualitative case study, from the original quantitative one she had planned. Alan Hirvela and his advisee from Korea, Youngjoo Yi, discuss their negotiations on the results chapter of Youngjoo’s dissertation, revealing that the advisor-advisee relationship can be complex, balanced, and collegial. Rui Cheng and her advisor, Wei Zhu, with backgrounds in China, similarly discuss their long and difficult negotiations on Rui’s literature review chapter. In all four of these chapters, we find guidance, interaction, and a refreshing balance of negotiating strategies and decision-making. In the chapter by Yanbin Lu and her advisor, Gayle Nelson, we see a reflective look on the part of both authors at the changes they underwent as they engaged in an academic literacy practice that was completely new to Yanbin and relatively new to Gayle, that of “online posting,” as they wrote the chapter for this book. Finally, Lu Liu brings a variety of her mentors on board (Irwin Weiser, Tony Silva, Janet Alsup, Cynthia Selfe, and Gail Hawisher) to comment from each of their perspectives on Lu’s development from a graduate student to a budding professional academic.

In Part 3, *Situated Learning*, we placed essays that view learners, both faculty and graduate students, as concrete living people, entangled in human relationships that are situated in specific local environments and historical moments. To no one’s surprise, not all this embodied learning takes place within the institution or concerns learning to write a doctoral dissertation. Natsuko Kuwahara takes us through the challenges she faced in her first year of a doctoral program. She provides examples of resources and survival strategies, especially for international students, that can be actively sought both within and outside the institution itself. She stresses the need for connections with others. Marcia Buell and So Jin Park, Marcia’s peer in another discipline (anthropology), describe the mutual assistance they provided each other in their graduate work, weaving in their connections as mothers of young children. Their stories unravel the stereotypical dichotomies of researcher-researched and of native- and non-native speaker. Jun Ohashi, Hiroko Ohashi, and Brian

Paltridge reveal the many ways, both in the institution and at home, that a doctoral student (Jun) can receive support as he goes through the high-pressure experience of trying to finish his dissertation after having taken on a tenure-track position. Participatory and embodied learning not only stemmed from the positive psychological support he received but also included the difficult and emotional political lessons that come from negotiating department politics. Paul Prior and Young-Kyung Min write from their respective positions as an established faculty member and a graduate student in the throes of redefining her identity and reshaping the path of her life. Each reflects on the practices, trials, and joys that emerge in the interstices between the formal, official surfaces of literate work in academic worlds and the everyday events and emotions that happen under, beyond, and around that work. Finally, Hanako Okada, a doctoral student in Japan, tells a moving story of her battle with chronic illness and the joys that graduate work has brought to a life that would otherwise be unbearably bleak. Her life as a graduate student, researcher, and teacher can never be separated from her bodily experiences, and her coping strategies, theorizing, and reflecting should inspire all readers.

Onward

And now, as you begin this journey, which for us was four years in the making, we hope that you will document your own adventures in graduate school, whether you are student or faculty, and share them with others. Much of what is hidden and tacit in the graduate school adventure does not need to be experienced in silence. The more we can bring untold stories to life, the less alone we will all feel on the difficult and life-changing journey that is graduate school.

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