# Book Reviews

### Developing writers: teaching and learning in the digital age

Richard Andrews and Anna Smith
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What does it mean to learn and develop as a writer? What is a multimodal text? How is writing different in the age of the internet and mobile phone, particularly in relation to teaching, assessing and researching writing?

Drawing on UK and US research and case studies, Richard Andrews and Anna Smith set out to explore these questions and to develop a new model of writing development that is relevant for the digital age. This is a bold enterprise indeed and, although some chapters present complex arguments in their overview of existing research and theories (for example, those exploring distinctions between product-related and process-related models), the authors are largely successful in this aim.

Trainee teachers of English will find the simplified overview in chapter 1 of teaching-of-writing approaches since the 1950s particularly clear and informative, putting current debates in their historical context. There are also refreshing and thoughtful reformulations of the relationships between reading, writing, speaking and listening (for example, how do writing and speaking interact?).

English-teachers will no doubt welcome the second chapter which asserts 'the tiredness of the text-based genre approach; exhaustion with targets and product-oriented assessment systems; a dis-connect between writing in the classroom and writing in the world at large, leading to a lack of motivation on the part of teachers and students; lack of professional development in writing for teachers'. These are key issues at a time when the Teachers as Writers movement is burgeoning, the National Curriculum is under review and the Expert Panel Report to the Government (DfE December 2011) states that 'constant assessment to levels … obscures the genuine strengths and weaknesses in a pupil's attainment … and weakens teachers' clear understanding and identification of pupils' specific weaknesses or misunderstandings'. Arguments about 'notoriously linear and deficit-based' notions of development are further developed in chapter 6 alongside issues of identity and motivation arising from the exploration of one US student's writing practices.

For teachers and emerging writers, who are exploring the possibilities of multimodal and digital texts, chapter 7 ('Writing within multimodality') and chapter 8 ('Writing in the digital age') provide a mesmerising overview of just how much writing has changed in recent decades. The authors argue cogently that we need to go beyond a genre theory that sees genres as text-types rather than as social action and whose approach leads to fossilisation and enervation. These ideas are drawn together in chapter 10 which gives a comprehensive account of how new technologies relate to writing, of how we live in an era 'marked by inventiveness and creative repurposing of text types and technology itself to create messages which function in complex ways'. This is exciting, inspirational stuff and in chapter 11 we are directly invited to examine our own teaching and writing practices. (So I am led to consider the processes that have led to the writing of this review: the handwritten notes on A4 paper; the manipulation of word-processed text; the cross-checking on **www.uel.ac.uk/riste** of reviews in previous issues of the publication you are now reading; my imagining of who might be reading this review; editing it down to around 600 words to fit the brief, etc.)

As befits a book about writing, *Developing writers* has a very clear structure: bold subheadings surrounded (perhaps self-consciously?) by plenty of white space, indicating each chapter's introduction, main sections and conclusion. The writing style and layout make this an accessible text on a challenging topic. And as befits a book about writing in the digital age we are invited to continue the conversation at **www.developingwriters.org.** I have a feeling this book will become a key text for those wishing to reflect on their practice as teachers of writing or as teachers as writers.

**John Wilks** is this month's guest reviewer and is General Secretary of the London Association for the Teaching of English and an Examiner for the English Speaking Board.

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