

DISCIPLINES, LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES, CULTURES

Perspectives on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education from France
and the United States

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Abstract. This issue offers a preliminary yet in-depth introduction to research about the teaching and learning of literate activity across the disciplines in higher education in France and the United States: its academic values, educational principles, and genres. The contributing authors represent the forefront of research in each culture; the contributions identify history and evolution, current frames and questions, and a glossary of relevant terms. The issue thus foregrounds convergences across the cultures in terms of the rejection of a “transmission” model of literate activity and a symbiosis between language and disciplinary content. It foregrounds divergences in terms of theoretical frames, disciplines informing the research, and degree of attention paid specifically to higher education. The contributions lay out valuable future research paths.

French

[translated by Christiane Donahue]

Ce numéro spécial présente une introduction préliminaire mais approfondie aux recherches concernant l'enseignement et l'apprentissage des activités de lecture-écriture à travers les disciplines dans l'enseignement supérieur en France et aux États-Unis : leurs valeurs académiques, leurs principes éducatifs, leurs genres. Les auteurs représentent les domaines de recherches dans chaque culture ; les contributions identifient l'histoire et l'évolution, les cadres théoriques et les questions actuelles, et un glossaire des termes pertinents. Le numéro met ainsi au jour des convergences entre les deux cultures par rapport au rejet d'un modèle de « transmission » effectué par la lecture et l'écriture et par rapport à une symbiose entre activités langagières et savoirs disciplinaires. Il met à l'avant des divergences par rapport aux

1

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cadres théoriques, aux disciplines qui informent les recherches et au degré d'attention prêtée à l'enseignement supérieur spécifiquement. Les contributions suggèrent de futurs chemins de recherches prometteurs.

1. INTRODUCTION

This special issue is focused on key cultural contrasts and commonalities in post-secondary L1¹ teaching of writing and reading in France and the United States. In particular, it explores and exposes some of the educational principles, academic values and genres related to L1 teaching and learning across the disciplines and the role and place of such learning in higher education, as relevant to disciplinary construction of knowledge in these two countries.

We believe that scholars of writing in higher education are searching for cross-cultural work that moves beyond reductive catalogues of the features of writing in different countries. We also believe that all L1 teachers and researchers are focusing on understanding the generic and specific aspects of writing instruction and research about that instruction in different disciplinary settings. This has occurred partly because shifting populations in higher education have thrust to the forefront issues of student integration and student language ability, and partly because these issues are cropping up in disciplinary settings as much as in the more generalized “language instruction” settings to which teaching students to write effectively has been relegated in the past.

We offer here our exploration of aspects of these questions through a cross-cultural lens. This exploration began through five texts presented at a day-long conference at the Université Charles de Gaulle Lille III in France, in June 2005, between members of the French research group THEODILE (*Théorie et Didactique de la Lecture-Ecriture: Theory and Teaching Theory of Reading and Writing*) and three United States writing researchers who work with composition and writing in the disciplines questions. It has continued in the exchange and review of the texts presented here. We present this collaborative exchange as a potential model for other groups wishing to create the best possible in-depth approach for cultural comparison, while focusing on particular issues, including the evolution of each field, the role of assessment in writing across the disciplines, and frameworks for studying writing and disciplinary knowledge construction. The United States researchers involved in this exchange find particularly telling the focus in France on reading, writing and speaking across the disciplines as a natural mode of inquiry. The French researchers find particularly insightful the attention in the United States to disciplinary communities and the existence of a full-fledged field of study focused on many of the issues raised – a field not without its own internal tensions and disciplinary challenges.

Briefly, we will now set the stage for the discussions by offering an overview of French and United States structures of higher education and of research support. In

¹ The term “L1” and its iterations are the subject of strong debate in France: “maternal” or mother tongue, “first” language as spoken in one’s surroundings, socially recognized first language, and first language at school.

France, higher education is the right of all students who successfully complete the national *baccalauréat* exam, although that right does not extend to a guaranteed spot in the discipline of the student's choosing.

- Students aiming for a traditional university degree path work first towards a *licence* (three years of study) in a discipline, and then might pursue a *masters* (two more years) and a *doctorat* (three additional years). Students take coursework in a discipline with little room for elective courses in other fields or “general education”-style courses. This focus is partly due to the student's pre-university studies and type of *baccalauréat*, already specialized in literature, the arts, sciences, or professional and technical studies. This focus has prepared the student for a particular post-secondary track, which, right from the start, is organized in disciplinary fields.
- Students preparing for diplomas offering immediate job possibilities in specific professions might choose a professional institution after the *licence* (for example, nursing school) or might enter directly after secondary school into a technical or professional institution of higher education, earning for example a technician's *brevet*.
- A very small percentage of students attempts the elite higher education track of a two-year “*classe préparatoire aux grandes écoles*” followed by a competitive entrance exam for access to the *Grandes Ecoles*, at which a student can specialize in humanities, social sciences, sciences, engineering, government, and so on. Some of these are public, like the *Ecoles Normales Supérieures* and *Centrale*, others are private, for example some of the commerce schools. Students who do not succeed at entering the *Grandes Ecoles* can apply their two years of study towards a licence, thus recycling into the traditional university path.

In all of these paths, writing is both everywhere and nowhere: the mode used for students' examinations and papers, but in general not taught explicitly (see details in B. Daunay's contribution).

The French structures for supporting educational research are tightly linked to the government-funded university systems. Researchers belong, following a scientific model, to *laboratoires*, groups of researchers united by a set of common themes and funded in four-year cycles by the government. These researchers may be working on independent or collaborative projects, but share their work with the group. Teams are often primarily constituted by members from a particular university, although not always, and might be highly discipline-specific or interdisciplinary. Research groups can also apply for external funding for particular projects, from government agencies, university special project funds, etc. Some researchers join the CNRS (*Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques*) for a career or a specific period of time or belong to national research groups like the INRP (*Institut National de Recherches Pédagogiques*).

In the United States, higher education is delivered through a variety of institutions. The most common are the private and public two-year “junior” or community colleges, the four-year colleges and universities, the colleges and universities offering in addition masters and doctoral degrees, and the technical institutions. Required writing courses are a part of most of the programs offered in these various institu-

tions. These courses are taught by a variety of members of the higher education community: full time professors in rhetoric and composition (rare), full time faculty in English (literature), creative writing, or occasionally another field, full time instructors who are not professors and whose background might be English, composition, creative writing, or another field, part time instructors with the same kinds of background, and graduate students in relevant fields (both MA and PhD) who have received some form of preparation.

The research context in the United States, in the fields of composition, rhetoric, English, or related humanities and social science fields, is quite different from the structured setting in France. Researchers work independently or in loosely-associated networks of exchange. They are hired into departments where they may have colleagues in the field or not. They collaborate with other researchers for the duration of specific projects. Funding, when there is any, comes from the University at which the researcher works, competitive government grants, private foundation grants, or small grants offered by professional organizations such as the College Conference on Composition and Communication.

Section one, Histories, focuses on the evolution of the field of teaching writing (and thus reading) in and across disciplines at the post-secondary level in each country: theory and practice over the past thirty or forty years. Each country has seen the evolution of theorized language instruction come into its own.

B. Daunay, faculty member at l'Université de Lille III-Charles deGaulle in the Education Sciences department, specialist in French education, discusses how the field of «*la didactique de l'écriture*» (French theory for teaching writing, applied from kindergarten through graduate studies) has evolved in France, with specific reference to recent developments in studying discipline-specific writing, reading and genres. For many years now, the issue of language practices (and in particular writing practices) in the disciplines has taken a front seat in the field of «*la didactique de l'écriture*». Daunay presents a brief history of this emerging domain, considering in particular the key moments of introduction of the issue of language practices across the disciplines in the context of the «*didactique du français*» (theorization of the teaching of French in general). He explores the epistemological conditions that enabled or favored this development and the consequences that this has had on the reconfiguration of different disciplines and on the links between the «*didactique du français* » and the «*didactiques*» of other disciplines.

The contribution by J. Brereton, director of the Calderwood Writing Initiative at the Boston Athenaeum as the capstone of a career in writing research and writing program administration, examines a few key strands of the work defining the field of rhetoric and composition in American universities in the past few decades, first in communication with the field of Education and then progressively separated from this field. It starts with the explosion of work under the rubric of “process” in the late 1960s, under the influence of British researchers in secondary education, and examines how this “process” movement became an integral part of American writing instruction in colleges. Though “process” approaches to the teaching of writing caught on within English Departments, they did not immediately connect with the work of Writing in the Disciplines, which was still governed by older paradigms. The contribution reviews additional key strands of qualitative research about writ-

ing, and concludes with an exploration of the kinds of questions the field has under-researched, thus suggesting potential avenues for future research and exchange.

Section two, Current Conceptual Frames, focuses on current innovative theoretical frames for studying reading and writing across the disciplines in France and the United States. In this section, the first contribution by Y. Reuter (faculty member at l'Université de Lille III-Charles deGaulle and director of the THEODILE research group) and D. Lahanier-Reuter (faculty member at Lille III in Education Sciences, specialized in mathematics education) explores the relationships between discursive practices and the construction of disciplinary thinking in the classroom through three conceptual tools: writing universes, disciplinary configurations, and disciplinary awareness. Writing universes are socio-cultural systems (such as school) in which the shaping practices of students' learning activities are structured; disciplinary configurations actualize the knowledge and know-how of a given discipline; they are sub-structures within a discipline that prioritize one set of activities over another (spelling, grammar, literary analysis, textual production...) because of different priorities, grade levels, purposes, and so on. The disciplinary configuration in use determines to a great degree how much and what kind of writing gets done. Finally, disciplinary awareness is the student's reconstruction and representation of various school disciplines and impacts his or her ability to create a relationship over time with learning situations, objects and objectives; students' relationships with writing in each discipline are connected to disciplinary awareness. These three conceptual tools, Reuter and Lahanier-Reuter argue, enable us to gain insight into students' discursive practices in disciplinary situations. They present examples of some research projects that show how written texts are heterogeneous formations of compromise in unstable balance, how student subject positions at post-secondary levels are often a delicate balance between expert and apprentice, and how genres and practices among different disciplines can come into conflict in institutions.

For J. Monroe, professor of Comparative Literature and recently the director of the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines at Cornell University, current questions that must be raised include how congruent or divergent the criteria are for what counts as "good" writing from field to field, or even within fields. Is it possible, even desirable, he asks us, to construct a single rubric that would have something like universal value for assessing the quality of reading and writing within and across disciplines as diverse as anthropology, biology, city and regional planning, film studies, government, mathematics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology? Do university faculty understand themselves as "representative" of the writing practices of the fields in which they have undergone their professional acculturation? To what extent do they function self-consciously as disciplinary "legislators," exemplifying and (re)shaping their discipline's discursive practices? How do the norms of particular fields shape the writing practices of individual faculty and what similarities or differences exist between the kinds of writing faculty do professionally and the kinds of writing they assign their students at various levels of the curriculum? How much and in what ways do their expectations vary? Do the goals and genres of writing assignments change significantly from level to level? Do they demonstrate a clear progression – and should they – from the first year through graduation? Through case studies drawn from Cornell University's four-year Study of Student

Writing, Monroe explores responses to these and related questions by Cornell faculty who have taught discipline-specific courses administered through the First-Year Writing Seminar, Sophomore Seminar, and Writing in the Majors programs administered by Cornell's John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines.

Section three, Glossary of Writing Research and Teaching Terms, provides an annotated glossary of key composition theory terms relevant to learning literacy as they are used and explained in each country. This glossary draws on the other four articles for examples of the cultural complications and frames in play. C. Donahue, faculty member at the University of Maine-Farmington and member of the THEODILE research group at l'Université de Lille III, points to key terms apparently shared by reading and writing researchers and teachers in both countries, but in fact serving as obstacles to understanding because of their culture-specific, discipline-specific or institution-specific uses—terms such as argument, didactics, social construction, genre, discourse community, literacy, and writer. The contributor's experience working on composition research in both cultures allows her to highlight these differences and the ways in which they can prevent useful exchanges about theoretical frames and pedagogical practices. The differences are specifically explored as tools for inter- and intra-cultural reflection, for opening up conversations, for understanding research in each country and for enabling sharing of research across disciplines and cultures.

The cultural issues raised by the individual articles presented here, the discussion at the symposium in June 2005, and subsequent correspondence among the authors can be grouped into the following themes:

- 1) parallels and convergences in the evolution of the study and teaching of language practices in the two countries;
- 2) divergences in these areas;
- 3) complications and challenges for future discussions.

The relationships among disciplines, language activities and cultures remain the overarching theme, seen through the lenses of specific issues raised by individual articles.

We would first like to point out some practical differences. The kinds of writing being asked for at the university level in each country are simply different. A quick comparison of the assignments mentioned in Monroe's study and Brereton's and Daunay's histories will show us that writing assignments in the first-year writing course in the United States can be of an astonishing variety, and can target an equally diverse range of learning objectives. It is not until students begin to write in their field, after the first year of college, that the forms settle into more normed disciplinary genres. University courses in the United States that focus on teaching writing certainly do not all look the same – the Cornell model J. Monroe presents, in contrast to the more typical experiences J. Brereton describes, is a good example – but there is some degree of coherence in intent and in student population, while in France any university writing course is not likely to look like another such course, even in the same institution, and the teachers of the courses that do exist are often not in dialogue with each other through professional organizations or faculty development programs. Within the disciplines, we also encounter internal differences in definition of a discipline's parameters or theoretical references, which in turn impact

on each discipline's language activities (see for example the comments on the field of statistics in J. Monroe's contribution).

The development that faculty in the disciplines receive in the United States as preparation for or motivation to pay attention to writing is generally intentional and can occur through workshops or through the dialogic assessment process J. Monroe calls for. In France, these models do not currently exist, but the collaborative research work being done in research groups focused on *la didactique de l'écrit* seems to us to be a form of faculty development, engendering similar cross-disciplinary exchange and inquiry.

It is clear that writing is both taught and researched in higher education in France and the United States. We find parallel concerns in "*la didactique de l'écrit*"² and in composition theory and its subfields of writing across the curriculum/writing in the disciplines. We see, for example, several clear parallels in the evolution of teaching, researching, and assessing language practices across disciplines in France and the United States. Both have developed extensive theoretical exploration of and extensive teaching practice related to the writing process and writing work in pairs, small groups, and classroom exchanges. Both systems are facing increasing pressure from external forces, in particular those related to new kinds of students with very diverse language practices coming to higher education. The imbrication of language and thought is clearly understood the same way in both countries (although explored at different times in the evolution of the field, and studied more carefully in different fields or at different grade levels). The rejection of knowledge "transmission" is described by both B. Daunay and J. Brereton in their historical reviews of the fields in each country. J. Brereton points generally to the influence of Marxist educator Paulo Freire in this movement, while B. Daunay cites F. Darras and I. Delcambre about the specific relationship to disciplinary knowledge and convention:

Each discipline is thus invited to question (and to question itself about) the types of discourse it produces. Thus, for each text – narrative, descriptive, argumentative... -- the question must be asked, what is its specific status as seen in the way it is inscribed as a discursive act in a discipline: a narrative text is not to be read or written with the same orientation in history, in French, in the sciences. (p. 21, this issue)

This frame directly correlates to Monroe's concerns about disciplinary ownership, responsibility, and expertise as related to both teaching and assessing language practices. He argues that no meta-discipline should be able to impose its values or methods on writing instruction and assessment in individual disciplines. Each discipline maintains the right to represent itself to itself and to others: "...questions of value and assessment are at their core questions of disciplinarity and disciplinary affiliation" (p. 63, this issue). The assessment tensions between college writing researchers and psychometricians, mentioned in Brereton's review, offer a different insight into this question. Writing experts are pursuing assessment methods, through portfolios, that they believe are far more accurate than the one-shot high stakes tests supported by assessment "experts."

² Many of the terms introduced here and used throughout this special issue are defined in the glossary of "false friends."

A related issue, the inseparability of the quality of writing and the quality of intellectual inquiry cited by J. Monroe in his contribution, is echoed in Daunay's review of the evolution of studying thinking and language practices (in particular, writing) in France; Monroe goes one step further, suggesting that assessment of writing competence must thus also be carried out by members of disciplines. While assessment of writing competence in and of itself is not directly part of the French university experience, the issue as evoked ties to the shared larger question, **who owns** expertise in writing instruction or assessment? What are the disciplines of L1 English and French, and how are they related to the other disciplines? Researchers in both countries are clearly in a search for disciplinary identity: what is the actual domain of L1 language teaching in higher education? What is its "content"?

Additional parallels are seen in the historical roots of interest in research into L1 language and writing questions in both countries, 1) beginning in secondary education, and later moving to post-secondary education, and 2) beginning in cognitive frames and moving to other areas (genre study, social and ethnographic study, rhetoric, didactics).

While the first-year writing course described in J. Brereton's contribution has been offered in the United States since the late 1800s, he makes it clear that widespread research about reading and writing in higher education came later. We will see, by comparing this to Daunay's overview, that major trends have followed some similar paths. Brereton cites J. Emig as the first to consider student writing as worthy of study, and she is notably a researcher in Education who focused on secondary students. Both the field of systematic writing or communication studies generally pegged as beginning in the 1960s in the United States and the more recent field of *la didactique du français* moved from considerations in the cognitive domain (consider, for example, the influence of Flower and Hayes in both countries) to studying the social domain. This parallel also signals, however, a key difference in the understanding of "the social"; see the section on divergences below.

Research into language and knowledge across disciplines in higher education in France and the United States shares several challenges, as well. The effort to impose evaluation of the quality of students' writing and the success of writing instruction from outside the discipline, evoked by the discussion Monroe will offer of assessment of writing across the disciplines, seems echoed in something none of the authors here treats directly: French research groups' difficulties with government "experts" assigned to evaluate their work and approve funding without any background in their specific disciplines and theoretical stances. The field of writing studies itself remains marginalized in both countries. The L1 departments of English studies or French studies in universities manifest (or in the United States have manifested) a similar disinterest in the teaching and research work of writing studies or communication studies. The experts in teaching or researching writing in higher education in France tend actually to be discipline-specific experts but not writing experts. B. Daunay and J. Brereton both explore the common and widespread assumption that writing is a technical skill separate from disciplinary content and that the narrative form is a less intellectually or cognitively challenging form while analysis is the true objective, a perspective supported in France through widespread reading of United States researchers Bereiter and Scardamalia's work.

The contributions show that the language issues *in and across the disciplines* are a natural format for intercultural discussion – between the United States and France – but also for teaching and assessing language activity in higher education. We see United States theory developing communication across the curriculum or in the disciplines much later in their history as a field, and primarily in higher education (although there has been some work in middle-secondary education contexts as well); we see France researching these forms early in the field’s evolution, even though the field itself got its start comparatively more recently. In addition, we see French research begin with a focus on primary and secondary grades, to then move into higher education, while US research that began with secondary schools and Education researchers split off into higher education composition research and pre-university Education research, for the most part, as J. Brereton lays out. Both B. Daunay and J. Brereton show that these across-the-curriculum/in the disciplines elements occur in, or grow out of, larger contexts.

Both J. Monroe and Y. Reuter offer us frames for thinking about and studying disciplines, disciplinary difference, the relationships among influence, power, and politics, formation of disciplines and disciplinary knowledge, all *through and with language*. Monroe’s disciplinary frame questions Reuter’s proposed “meta”-position, however, by pointing to the implicit hierarchy among different disciplines in the academy as well as highlighting the tensions between those who would proclaim themselves a-disciplinary experts and those who are deeply inscribed in the disciplinary consciousness and world-view that Reuter studies. The value of a certain discipline’s writing, Monroe reminds us, comes in part from a discipline’s position in the overall university hierarchy. In France, the study of language in disciplinary contexts is considered research rather than assessment, which means that it generally carries more institutional weight and is regarded with less suspicion. Monroe links the question of disciplinary ownership of assessment and its research value to scholars’ and teachers’ understanding of their own disciplinary membership and language uses. The questions Monroe’s study asks of Cornell faculty (pp. 76-80, this issue) could be asked of university faculty in France, and the grid developed by Reuter (p. 52, this issue) could be used in Cornell’s assessment discussions to help faculty develop more awareness of the givens of their field and the ways that writing reflects and builds on those givens. Each brings to the other a set of insights about language’s indissociable work across disciplinary frames, and a way of recognizing the value of studying that work within the disciplines themselves.

We also see clear divergences in the evolution of these questions within and across cultures. While the overall pattern of evolution has been from seeing language as the uniform, transparent expression of ideas, to seeing language as a discipline-specific tool for expression (and thus accepting responsibility for working with and assessing language use across disciplines), to finally seeing language as constructing knowledge, generative and inextricable from content, the theoretical frames and specific explorations and timetables diverge sometimes extensively. Writing, reading, and speaking are studied in tandem in France; research about communication across the curriculum is advanced, even though not necessarily specific to higher education. In French teaching and research, Daunay exposes how writing and reading activities were first considered tools (in a “skills” model) across

the disciplines, but are now understood as constitutive of disciplinary meaning-making. Monroe's Cornell model is working towards re-attributing to the disciplines what had been separated from them, the right and responsibility of each discipline to teach and assess reading and writing in its field; Brereton's explanations of writing across the curriculum and in the disciplines reinforces this understanding, while lamenting the loss of the cross-disciplinary sharing of educational research perspectives with researchers in composition. Researchers in the 1980s were at first still focused on doing the work of cataloguing features of writing in different disciplines, thus emphasizing the role of language in expressing thoughts. But the later 80s saw the shift to exploring language as epistemic in the United States, a shift that in the 1990s in France has been a point of departure for new studies of writing, meaning-making, and disciplinary work.

No doubt the most significant difference between French and United States contexts for the research described here is found in the focus, as presented by B. Daunay, on language across all grade levels, pre-primary to doctoral level. This is in contrast to the United States claim, made by composition as a discipline, on the first-year university experience as the central interest, as J. Brereton points out. We note emphatically that the fields in question are *la didactique de l'écrit* and composition – a field which, over time, separated from the field of education in the United States. We are not treating, here, the research done in the US context of the field of education; we are focusing on writing in higher education, which can be discussed in the US independent of writing research in education across all grade levels, while in France it cannot.

Contrasts can also be seen in terms of similar evolutions that occurred at different times. The authors of reference are occasionally shared but for different reasons (Freire, Foucault, and Flower & Hayes come to mind). The source of various movements differs (for example, J. Brereton traces “process” in the United States to Rohman first, but Daunay traces it in France exclusively to Flower and Hayes). This cross-cultural comparison brings out other interesting twists in the evolution of thinking about language and knowledge. For example, Flower and Hayes were first cited in France by researchers exploring writing production in primary school, while Brereton points out that in the United States, they were the first to talk about university-level students.

The reading/writing/speaking language relationship appears much more clearly delineated and studied in France than in the United States. From B. Daunay's history, we can imply that these interrelated language activities are treated as part of the learning system, while J. Brereton explicitly suggests that connections among these language activities are under-explored at the university level. But then, the research relationship in France is to **school** disciplines and in the United States, to **academic** disciplines (notice, for example, in B. Daunay p. 19, this issue) the barely perceptible slip towards school disciplines). This is an important distinction that might help us to account for B. Daunay presenting writing as transdisciplinary, essential across all subjects, owned by all, while J. Monroe presents it as perceived as marginal to a discipline's “real” work, especially in the sciences. This is a frame that he then resists, and it is clear that his own frame is in fact far closer to the French perspective, as reviewed by B. Daunay.

In terms of the research to be carried out within each country, focused on writing in higher education, both Y. Reuter and J. Monroe propose frames that move into new domains, building from the current thinking as described by B. Daunay and J. Brereton. What can the frames described in this volume bring to each other? They work at the question, “what is ‘disciplinarity,’” both in terms of writing across or in disciplines and in terms of the research disciplines themselves: composition or communication studies and *la didactique du français* or *de l’écrit*? How might J. Monroe’s assessment questions and Y. Reuter’s analysis framework intertwine or complement one another? J. Monroe calls for moving beyond rubrics, “engaging questions of writing and disciplinarity at the highest level of reflection” (p. ___); he rejects the possibility of a meta-expert in writing who might be able to evaluate in all fields, in order to instead situate the responsibility for teaching and learning squarely within each discipline. Y. Reuter provides a comprehensive and flexible grid for studying language activities. Y. Reuter’s rubric has the objective of “developing a subtle relationship between teaching plans and modalities of learning, between the ways language practices work and the ways appropriation (or not) are effected.” His “rubric” is open to huge diversities in form and type; it allows readers to specify what is actually going on in the classroom and identifies not static “disciplines” but dynamic “disciplinary configurations” and the presence of (importance of) students’ disciplinary awareness. The two pieces together suggest that somewhere in between, on the one hand the unsatisfying psychometricians’ one-shot test “assessment” activities referenced by J. Brereton, and on the other hand altogether unexamined language teaching practices, there might be a middle path towards critical, productive *writing research*. What is assessment, who is held accountable, how is it in fact research, and how might United States and French universities respond to this changing scene? We believe the exchanges among these authors as presented in this issue also suggest the value of future exchanges about evaluation and assessment: clarifications of these activities in cultural context and discussion of the relationship between research activities in France and some forms of assessment activity in the United States.

This collection represents the beginning of ongoing collaborative explorations between groups of researchers in France and the United States. We believe that the dialogue we offer here will enable long-term fruitful exchange, and we hope to broaden the exchange over time to include other countries and other traditions.