

Researching for the Grassroots Journal

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The Grassroots Writing Research Journal Editorial Staff

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What does it mean to "do writing research?" At the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, it means people observing, investigating, critiquing, and even participating in the activities that humans engage in that involve literate practice.

But what does it really mean? In more practical language it means finding some situation where humans are doing things that involve language (which *can* mean oral, aural, visual, etc. Not just writing on paper) and thinking, "hey, that looks interesting," and then taking the time to investigate that practice in some detail.

But this kind of research isn't just about people. It's really about what we call "activity systems," which just means that we want to learn about all kinds of complicated interactions. Not just what a particular kind of text looks like, or what a particular person does when they produce a text (although we're interested in those things). We also want to know about the interactions between people as they produce texts, and the interactions between humans and their tools, practices, and different kinds of textual productions. And we're interested in how certain kinds of texts work to shape our interactions, for example, the ways the genre of resumes might shape how people interact in the activities of finding and offering work.

To help citizen researchers who might be thinking about or engaging in literate practices that they'd like to investigate, we've created this very brief list of the types of research projects we think might be interesting or appropriate for the *GWRJ*.

Investigating Genres

These kinds of research projects usually investigate the nuances of particular genres. How they are made and who makes them, the distinctive features they might have, who uses them and how and where they are used, and how they do particular kinds of communicative work in the world. This research is often kind of straightforward, and in our early issues, this kind of genre investigation might also have a little bit of a "how to" feel to it, because many of the authors creating these pieces are also trying to learn how to produce that genre. However, genre investigations can move far beyond a "how-to." There are countless ways that genres can be examined related to how they do work in the world, that include technological and social implications that our readers would be interested in. "Following" genres to see where they go and the kinds of work they are made to do can take an author well beyond simply describing the feature of a particular kind of text. One issue related to this kind of research that is of concern to

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the *GWRJ* editors is that genre investigations often tend to “fix” genres – to talk about them as stable productions that are always the same. So we encourage researchers to consider the ways that genre constantly move and shift over time and in different situations.

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

This kind of research is often closely connected to **genre investigations**. Authors examine their own practices to discover how they learn to produce certain kinds of writing in certain situations, or they investigate particular kinds of composing practices, such as different practices for engaging in research or learning to revise. Again, these kinds of projects sometimes have a “how to” focus, as authors learn to thinking about (and explain to others) the things they know (or are coming to know) about different literate practices.

Composing Practices

This kind of research looks at particular kinds of composing practices, invention (coming up with ideas), research, revision, etc. It often overlaps with **Personal Exploration Research**, because authors are often investigating their own practices. However, this research could certainly involve interviews or observations of how other individuals or groups engage in these practices. One issue that sometimes concerns the *GWRJ* editor is that this kind of research can lead to assumptions that these composing practices are “universal” (that is, that they work in similar ways across all kinds of genres and writing situations). While it is possible to trace similar kinds of literate practices across different situations (and it can be really interesting – see, for example, Kevin Roozen’s writing research, “Tracing Trajectories of Practice: Repurposing in One Student’s Developing Disciplinary Writing Processes.” *Written Communication* 2010 27: 318) – it’s important to remember that we really can’t talk about “revising” (for example) as if it’s something that a person does the same way in every kind of situation.

Literate Activity In the Wild

While writing in classrooms or for school setting can often seem very cut-and-dried, these practices are really more complicated than they seem. Part of the reason we don’t see the complications of many kind of literate practices is that, once we become “embedded” in the activity it no longer seems complicated (we just know how to do it). Another reason is that there are “tropes” or particular ways of defining/understanding these practices that make them look simple and straightforward. An example of this is the activity of “writing a paper,” which can bring up very stylized and simplistic images of how one just sits down, does some research and then writes a paper for a particular class. But in fact, not only are the acts of researching and

composing much more complicated than this limited view might offer, but this kind of literate practice is actually much more interactive (that is, not done in isolation) than we might generally think. The *GWRJ* is very interested in investigations that try to look at specific situations/locations where all kinds of literate acts are happening. We want to see researchers “unpacking” what is actually happening when people try to compose particular kinds of texts in particular situations. We are very interested in research that looks at the ways that textual production is interactive – how it involves all kinds of interactions between different people and different objects, tools, and other entities over time. This kind of research can involve the interactions of people and genres and different cultural norms and practices.

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

This type of research focuses very closely on particular individuals and the kinds of literate practices they engage in in their daily lives. Some of the current research (already published in the journal) in this area includes research into the ways an individual learns to interact with a particular genre or particular literate situation. But we are also very interested in research that looks at literate practice more broadly and deeply. So, for example, how does an individual take composing practices from one situation and apply them to another? How does an individual learn to interact with a particular setting in which different types of genres are being produced (so, say, a new kind of work environment)? This kind of research can be constructed as a collaborative process. Where one researcher acts as observer, while the other engages in an exploration of his/her personal practices.

Linguistic Writing Research

The work that currently exists in the journal in this area tends to focus most specifically on grammar conventions or the usage of particular kind of stylistic or punctuation devices. However, we really want to encourage research in this area that is more robust and complicated. Projects that explore computational linguistics (projects that use a collection of data to look at particular kinds of textual practice) or socio-linguistic (projects that look at the particular ways that human use language within social systems)

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

The *GWRJ* has not yet been able to solicit much research on literate practices as they move across cultural or geographical spaces. However, we’re very interested in research that studies the ways that people and textual practices move across these boundaries.