



Writing Games: Multicultural Case Studies of Academic Literacy Practices in Higher Education. Christine Pearson Casanave. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002. 311 pp.

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Writing Games offers an interesting challenge to the reviewer. In at least one chapter Casanave challenges academic writers to bend the rules and expand the strategies and genres of their usual practice. Throughout her book she also displays a reflexive awareness of herself as an academic writer. However, how does a reviewer honor the genre expectations of a book review--to summarize and assess--and at the same time honor a study that calls for expanding self-awareness and the importing of new strategies into the games of academic writing?

To accomplish this contradictory task, I plan to imitate (a sincere form of flattery) some of Casanave's moves. I will summarize her series of studies, as she does, then provide an assessment and finally shift into slightly new territory--the effect of her research on me as a teacher, researcher and writer.

Throughout *Writing Games*, Casanave offers advanced organizers or outlines for the book and each chapter. The book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides a theoretical overview that grounds the entire study. In clear language Casanave explains her three key concepts--(1) academic writing as a "serious game" (Ortner, 1996, p.12) filled with strategic action; (2) the transitions from undergraduate to graduate student to professional practitioner that are so marked, and so filled with symbolic significance in academia; and (3) the identity formation or enculturation that characterizes any field but especially academia. With its integration of structuration theories (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1991), genre theory (Freadman, 1994; Freedman, 1993), and theories of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), this chapter is worth reading as a separate unit.

Chapters 2 through 6 embody Casanave's key concepts. Each chapter in sequence examines a different stage of academic enculturation from the experiences of undergraduates, master's students, doctoral candidates, new faculty, bilingual faculty, to seasoned professionals. Each chapter also follows the same pattern: beginning with Casanave's personal experiences, moving to a detailed review of relevant literature with an intense focus on case studies that relate to Casanave's own research, then shifting to Casanave's case studies, and concluding with a section called Chapter



Reflections where she asks thought provoking questions. In Chapter 2, for example, Casanave questions the effect of teaching composition skills to students who are not immersed in the social networks that characterize academia. She suggests that undergraduates could be viewing these courses as games of survival. Each of these chapters will resonate differently with readers depending on their position in the academy; all are worth reading as individual units. In her final chapter Casanave reflects on her reflections and concludes that the serious games of academic writing consist of "making choices and constructing selves" (p. xix), and that, paradoxically, the main game consists of acknowledging complexity while seeking "coherence," (p. 279) a personal and yet disciplinary sense of ephemeral order.

Writing Games is well worth reading for a number of reasons. Qualitative researchers will find Casanave's work compelling as she demonstrates that the results from case study research need not be localized to a particular study and can be interwoven to create convincing arguments and the ground for other case studies. Composition researchers and teachers will also find her work a corrective to the implied promise in some composition courses that the skills of academic writing can be conveyed in one or even several undergraduate courses. Finally, literacy researchers, especially those in English for Academic Purposes, will appreciate a study so grounded in the research as well as in data that focuses on the experiences of non-native speakers. My only caveats are small indeed. In one chapter, Casanave's own data were a result of case studies conducted in her own Master's program. In my view, it is difficult to adopt a truly critical stance when the data are so close to home. I also thought that the study might have profited from a closer look at rhetorical theories of genre that assert genres are not fixed systems, as Casanave implies on several occasion, but rather constellations of rules and resources that savvy writers use strategically.

I must admit that, unlike many academic books I have read, *Writing Games* affected me personally. Casanave's reports on the difficulties faced by academic writers in their careers resonated with my own experiences. In the section on bending the rules and the need to bring new narrative resources into academic writing, for example, I sympathized with her description of herself as a white middle-class woman of fluctuating confidence (a WMCWFC) as she fought to find the identity and courage to locate those resources. I also admired her unwavering respect for academic writing. I, too, believe that, despite some current post-modern critiques, academic writing--as long as it is not conceptualized as a fixed set of techniques--offers valuable ways of seeing and analyzing events in our world. Finally, I found myself rethinking some of my teaching practices in the light of Casanave's research. I have been promising too much, and I need to tailor my claims to the achievable in one short semester.



I recommend *Writing Games*. It is a good academic read.

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