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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

TANJA JANSSEN* & MARTINE BRAAKSMA**

**University of Amsterdam ** Education Council of the Netherlands*

This issue of L1 is a special issue in honor of Gert Rijlaarsdam, who, at the end of 2018, will retire as Professor of Language Education at the University of Amsterdam. In preparing this Introduction we dearly would have liked to ask him for advice on how to tackle it. After all, Gert was editor of *L1 – Educational Studies in Language and Literature* for many years, and he is an expert in writing. Moreover, he has an extraordinary talent for bringing people together and enthusing them to take part and collaborate in projects and networks, both nationally and internationally. For obvious reasons this was not possible. Instead we offer the following as tribute to the man and his work.

Writing intervention research

The teaching of writing has undoubtedly been the main focus of Gert's scholarly work, ever since his PhD thesis on the effects of peer response on students' writing (Rijlaarsdam, 1986). His interest in writing is reflected in his co-founding of the *Journal of Writing Research*, a journal related to the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI). In 1994 he also co-initiated *Studies in Writing*, which has become one of the most influential book series in the field of writing research, resulting in more than 30 volumes. For many years Gert was series editor.

Gert's own writing research encompasses all educational levels, ranging from primary school to secondary education and academic writing in higher education (at the University of Antwerp). In particular, he is interested in observational learning as a key learning activity in writing education. Gert explains the beneficial effect of observational learning by the 'dual agenda theory'. That is, learners who perform a complex task such as writing have to juggle with two agendas: a writing agenda (a

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text must be produced) and a learning-to-write agenda (knowledge or skills must be acquired). Observing others enables students to put more cognitive effort into the learning task than when they have to struggle with the writing task at the same time. As a result, they learn more by observation than by performing the writing task themselves (Rijlaarsdam & Couzijn, 2001).

Gert often illustrates this phenomenon by this picture (Figure 1):



Figure 1. Students learning how to write (© Bart Westerman, 2002).

Writing lessons should therefore not focus on the role of the writer only, in Gert's view, but also on the roles of the reader and learner. Input for learning may focus on Writing, Reading, or the Interaction between Writer and Reader (see Figure 2).

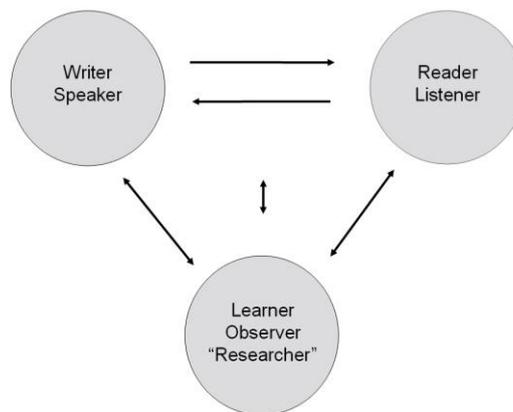


Figure 2. Student-as-Learner Participation Model (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2008: 58).

Observation can be used as a pre-writing activity (observing the writing processes of peers, to develop awareness of strategies), or as a post-writing activity (testing your text by observing readers trying to make sense of your text).

Over the years Gert Rijlaarsdam and his colleagues have conducted numerous studies based on this model, which supported the effectiveness of observational learning for improving students' writing performance (see for overviews: Rijlaarsdam et al., 2008; Rijlaarsdam et al., 2011).

Writing processes

In his research, Gert does not focus solely on the effects of writing interventions on the quality of students' final texts, but also on the effects of intermediating processes. In basic, fundamental research he studies students' writing processes and their distribution over writing as a whole; the effects of the particular tasks and language (L1, L2, FL) on writing processes, and the relation between processes and the quality of the resulting text. His cooperation with Huub van den Bergh, professor at Utrecht University, proved to be very fruitful, and still is (Van den Bergh et al., 2009; Rijlaarsdam et al., 2005).

To illustrate the large individual differences between student-writers in their writing approach, Gert often uses this graph (Figure 3), which he calls the 'spaghetti-model'.

Figure 3 shows that most students engage in generating activities during the beginning of their writing process, and this decreases later on. However, clearly not all students follow this pattern: some students tend to generate ideas in the middle of their writing process, or at the end as well.

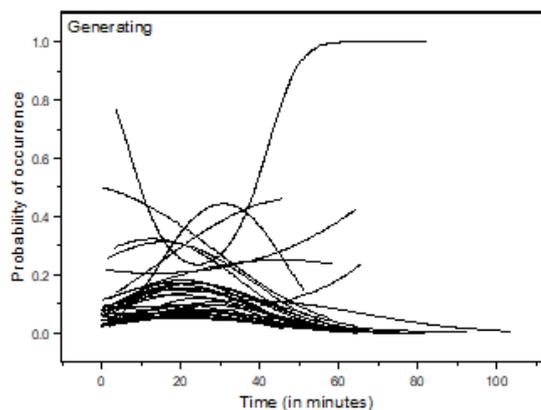


Figure 3. Spaghetti-like temporal distribution of generating ideas during the writing process of individual students (data from Breetvelt, Van den Bergh & Rijlaarsdam, 1994).

Literature education

Gert conducts and supervises studies of writing processes in many different contexts and genres: argumentative texts, synthesis writing, hypertext writing, writing in L2 and FL, creative writing and poetry writing. The second love of his professional life, after writing, is the teaching of literature. What strategies do students apply in attempting to make sense of literary texts? What do students actually take away from literature lessons? How does students' literary competence develop over the years? How may we foster students' critical literary reading skills and insights into human nature in the literature classroom? These are some of the questions of literature projects that Gert initiated and supervised over the years (e.g., Witte et al., 2006; Koek, et al., 2016; Schrijvers, et al., 2016).

The methodology Gert developed for studying writing processes came in handy in studies of students' literary reading processes. Findings showed that good and poor readers tend to rely on the same set of reading activities, but differ in flexibility, or in the extent to which they change their activities both within and between short stories (Van den Bergh et al., 2009).

Bridging the gap between research and practice

Gert was a teacher of Dutch language and literature in a secondary school for 19 years, and draws profusely from this experience in his work. From the start of his career, his mission has been to build bridges between research and practice, long before the term 'evidence-based' was in vogue, and at a time when Dutch teachers were not yet stimulated to study their own practice, as they are nowadays.

It is Gert's firm belief that doing practice-oriented research may contribute to teachers' professional development. By doing research, he argues, teachers may take a step away from the daily hassle of the classroom, acquire knowledge, gain important insights and make discoveries regarding their own practice.

As head of the postgraduate institute for teacher education at the University of Amsterdam, Gert developed a curriculum in which doing practice-based research formed an important part of the pre-service training of student-teachers. In addition, he played a crucial role in the creation of so-called Academic Professional Development Schools. In these schools, student-teachers, teachers, teacher trainers and researchers collaborated in 'communities of learners'. The mission was threefold: to train student-teachers at the workplace, to provide professional development for teachers, and to innovate and develop education by doing practice-oriented research in the schools. Teams of four to eight teachers tackled issues that were important in the school's context, such as how to adapt lessons to differences between students, or how to foster active learning. Gert coached several of these teams, and, in doing so, inspired teachers to study and improve their own practice.

His theories about, and reflections on, teachers doing design research have been published in a number of books and articles (e.g., Bimmel et al., 2008; Rijlaarsdam et al., 2017).

Building communities

As said before, Gert has a special talent for setting up communities and networks of researchers and practitioners. In 1996 he and Ken Watson set up the International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education (IAIMTE), renamed the International Association for Research in L1 Education (ARLE) in 2014. In a nutshell, the mission of this association is:

“(1) to build and maintain a network of specialists in research on L1 education and (2) to create an international network of national and regional associations of similar associations. The Association encourages good teaching and learning in languages, literatures and literacies on a sound scientific basis.” (<http://www.arle.be/about.html>)

Gert organized the first three conferences of IAIMTE in Amsterdam, in 1997, 1999 and 2001. The conferences were highly successful and well-attended by teachers, teacher educators and researchers from many different countries. The success of these conferences kicked off bi-annual conferences in Lisbon, Albi, Exeter, Toronto, Hildesheim, Paris, Odense and Tallinn. The association kept growing: since 1997 the number of members has more than tripled.

Furthermore, in 2001 Gert co-founded *L1 – Educational Studies of Language and Literature*, the scientific journal of IAIMTE/ARLE, that has ever since formed an important outlet and platform for the international L1-community. From 2001 to 2018 Gert was editor and general manager of the journal, and still functions as its mentor and patron.

By establishing IAIMTE/ARLE and the journal *L1*, Gert has created unique fora for international exchange on the teaching and learning of languages, literatures and literacies. As he argued, national work to improve language, literature and literacy education is often done ‘in splendid isolation’ (teaching French in France, German in Germany, Dutch in the Netherlands, etc.), while national efforts to improve L1 education may benefit enormously from international exchange.

At a national level, Gert established the Research Lab in Innovative Language, Literature and Arts Education at the University of Amsterdam (<http://www.rtle.nl/index.html>). About 20 PhD-students and senior researchers participate in this research network and meet on a weekly basis. The general aim of the network is to contribute to the improvement of language, literature and arts education, by conducting process studies (of writing processes, literary reading processes, creative processes), and studying the effects of interventions in regular classrooms.

A special club founded by Gert is the Yummy Yummy Club. This is not a society of gastronomes or cooking enthusiasts, but an informal group of L1 teachers and researchers who design and test writing lessons. Its basis is in the so-called Yummy Yummy lesson scenario, developed by Gert and Martine Braaksma: this is a sequence

of writing lessons in which students investigate themselves what makes a text effective, to raise awareness about rhetorical strategies and the quality of communication. The lesson scenario has been adapted to, and tested in, many different contexts, and presented at conferences and teachers' gatherings all over the world. (<http://www.gertrijlaarsdam.nl/Smikkelclub/smikkelclub.htm>).

Communication virus

It is Gert's conviction that learning to write is above all learning how to communicate. During his training as teacher of Dutch in the 1970s, he was highly influenced by the communicative approach to language teaching, which focused on enhancing language in meaningful communicative situations instead of studying language as a system. Publications that shaped his views were Moffett's (1968) influential work on discourse, Elbow's (1974) *Writing Without Teachers*, and Van Lints (1973) article 'What does this bloke want from me?'

'I am infected with the communication virus', Gert once wrote jokingly (Rijlaarsdam, 1986: 6). He referred to the contents of his teaching of writing at secondary school, but we believe that it also applies to his research, his own communication skills and his aptitude for coaching students, teachers and researchers in the many clubs he has founded and supported.

The present special issue

Gert's 'communication virus' has proven to be quite contagious. Over the years he has inspired many teachers and researchers of L1 and L2 education, and he is still doing so, as this special issue of *L1 – Educational Studies of Language and Literature* may show. The research papers in this issue are written by friends, colleagues, and former PhD-students of Gert, both from the Netherlands and abroad. In their contributions they explore different dimensions of L1 and L2 education, related to Gert's research interests and scholarly work. Four main themes can be discerned: the teaching and learning of Writing, Reading, Literature, and the use of L2 (English) as a medium of instruction in Dutch education. Below we present a short preview of the contributions.

Writing. Linda Allal reviews Gert's research on learning-by-observation in writing classrooms. She summarizes key findings from his research and discusses three avenues for writing instruction and for future studies on observational learning: 1) what instructions should be given to students to optimize their learning from observation of models? 2) can interactive forms of modeling contribute to the quality of students' writing? and 3) in what ways can peer observation and peer interaction be combined?

In their contribution, Debra Myhill, Helen Lines and Susan Jones investigate the use of texts as models for scaffolding students' learning about writing. Based on an in-depth analysis of teachers' practices, they examine how learning from models is

implemented in the classroom. Whether text models are enabling or constraining, appears to depend on the approach of the teacher.

Francis Kox and Huub van den Bergh examine the effects of writing strategy instruction for writing in L2 in a quasi-experimental study. In the experimental condition Dutch 10th grade students were taught a strategy for how to write letters in German as a second language. Key instructional elements were peer collaboration, peer feedback, modelling and direct instruction.

Lindy Johnson and colleagues argue against writing instruction based on a general model of the writing process, in which writing is presented as a set of fixed phases with publication as the final goal. Instead, they advocate a critical approach that provides instruction in task-specific and genre-specific procedures. In this approach not publication, but taking social action is the ultimate goal of writing instruction.

In their literature review, Daphne van Weijen and Tanja Janssen address the question which domain-specific and more general teaching variables are characteristic of high-quality writing instruction in Dutch primary education. To answer this question, they reviewed both theoretical models of high-quality teaching, and empirical studies on the effectiveness of writing interventions. In addition, they examined which variables are incorporated in existing assessment instruments.

Jannet van Drie and colleagues focus on writing in the disciplines, in particular on the teaching of argumentative writing in history classrooms. They examined the effects of three writing interventions, designed by secondary school history teachers, on students' metacognitive knowledge of writing and the quality of their argumentative texts. All three interventions featured prewriting activities and modelling; some interventions also included collaborative writing and peer feedback.

Reading. Wilfried Admiraal and colleagues examine the teaching of reading strategies in science and social science classes in order to improve students' reading and understanding of subject matter information, such as assignments, texts and other verbal subject-related sources. In their study, eight science and social science teachers designed and implemented lesson series in the upper grades of a Dutch secondary school to support students' reading strategies.

Literature. Irene Pieper and Bianca Strutz report on a think aloud study, aimed at getting insight into the strategies secondary school students (Grade 6 and 9) use when reading and responding to metaphorical poems. Each student (N = 69) read three different poems while thinking aloud. Their level of metaphorical understanding and strategy use were analysed.

Tanja Janssen and Martine Braaksma examined students' verbal and written responses to a short story, to explore whether writing may lead to "knowledge change" or a deeper response, as is assumed in writing-to-learn theories. Ten 16-year old Dutch students participated. They first read the story while thinking aloud, then responded verbally to the story as a whole, and finally wrote a short review. Responses were analysed and compared.

L2 as medium of instruction. In a literature review, Iris Breetvelt addresses the issue whether the use of English as medium of instruction in Dutch higher education may have a detrimental impact on the quality of teaching and on the academic performance of Dutch students. Few empirical studies have been conducted of the impact of L2 on students' performance, and findings are inconsistent.

Finally, Ton Koet and Huub van den Bergh examined how native and non-native listeners judge English speech produced by Dutch speakers. Previous studies indicated that Dutch listeners are highly critical of the English produced by other Dutch persons, in particular if these persons are teachers. Dutch listeners may be influenced by aspects of the speaker's native language which may interfere with the target language. In the study, Dutch and English listeners were asked to judge English speech of Dutch speakers, and their judgments were analysed and compared.

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TABULA GRATULATORIA

The following persons were involved in the preparation of the special issue as authors, reviewers, and/or editors. They respectfully dedicate it to Gert Rijlaarsdam on occasion of his retirement in December 2018.

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