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This book is largely about reflection—the reflections of L2 writing researchers on projects they have done. This involves self-disclosure—telling the story behind the study. My chapter is also a story about a project—the story of how I have come, over the past 25 years, to the opinion that it is important and necessary to look at the philosophical bases of inquiry in L2 writing. In a sense, this story is about me. However, I do not believe that it is idiosyncratic. In fact, I believe that, to a certain extent, it parallels the development of the field with regard to its view of the relationship among theory, research, and practice.

FROM PRACTICE TO THEORY

I began work in second language studies as a teacher concerned primarily with how to teach better, more effectively. I did not see a need for research, theory, or philosophy in my work. In fact I gave such matters little, if any, attention.

As a graduate student, I was exposed to empirical research and at first resisted it because it seemed largely irrelevant to my teaching. Also, it was hard to understand. It involved thinking in a different way. It involved acquiring the vocabulary of empirical research. It involved grasping abstractions like validity and reliability. It involved understanding alien concepts and terms like means, standard deviation, t tests, ANOVAs, multiple re-

I now move on to the central objective of this chapter: to lay out some of the conceptual and terminological apparatus necessary for talking and thinking about the inquiry process in the area of second language writing at the present time. Another caveat: In this chapter, I voice my particular views, some of which may not necessarily reflect those of the other authors whose chapters appear in this collection.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

I would like to ground this chapter in the classical western philosophical tradition—not because I see this as the only or best tradition, but because it is the only one I know well enough to talk somewhat intelligently about. Specifically, I would like to begin with a contrast of some of the work of two ancient Greek philosophers/rhetoricians: one extremely well known, Plato, and one fairly obscure, Gorgias. I do this because I think the clash of their views in many ways mirrors oppositions in today's intellectual climate.

I begin with Gorgias, also known by some as "the nihilist," who was actually from Sicily, but is best known for strutting his rhetorical stuff in Athens and throughout ancient Greece. He is said to have achieved fortune and fame by teaching his disciples the practical art of persuasion, which some (e.g., Plato) would define as the ability to make a convincing argument on a particular topic or issue without really knowing anything or much about that topic or issue—that is, as favoring style over substance, rhetoric over reality.

Gorgias's most well-known work is called On nature or On the nonexistent (Freeman, 1957). Here he makes three basic points in a straightforward manner: (a) nothing exists, (b) if anything did exist, it could not be known, and (c) if anything did exist and could be known, it could not be communicated. Now you see why they called him the nihilist.

He argues his points thus: (a) if anything exists, it must have had a beginning; also it must have arisen either from being or not being; if it arose from being, then there is no beginning, and arising from not being is impossible because something cannot arise from nothing; (b) because sense impressions differ in different people (and even in the same person at different times), the object as it is in itself (i.e., a physical reality) cannot be known; and (c) knowledge (seen as a product of physical sensation or sense perception) has meaning only for a particular sensor/perceiver, and thus cannot be communicated in any meaningful way to others (Freeman, 1957).

What are the ramifications of this view? Taken to its logical limits, paralysis, chaos, and, eventually, anarchy. Imagine that someone has burned your house down and this someone has Gorgias on retainer. In court,
Gorgias argues: "Your honor, this house never existed; if it existed we could not know it, and even if it did exist and could be known, we could not communicate it." Case closed.

Plato, a native Athenian, came from a well-to-do and well-connected aristocratic family. (Interestingly, however, I have never heard anyone refer to him as "the aristocrat.") Plato did believe in a reality, a permanent and unchanging reality, a reality of universal truths and idealized eternal forms and substances.

Although Plato did not completely reject the validity of sense experience and, thus, empiricism, he did see the knowledge arising from it as second best—that the objects of sense experience are changeable phenomena in the physical world, and thus not objects of proper knowledge. Proper knowledge (i.e., certain, infallible knowledge) could only be attained via reason developed by dialectic—the rational pursuit of truth through questions, answers, and more questions (in other words, via the Socratic method). For Plato, empiricism produces opinion; dialectic, properly used, produces truth.

In his work on politics, Plato was also an idealist. He claimed that the ideal society would have three kinds of citizens: merchants (to generate wealth), soldiers (to provide security), and philosopher kings (to provide leadership). The philosopher kings would be the most able—those who could grasp the truth and thus make the wisest decisions. (Guess which group Plato identified himself with?) Where Plato was going was toward a totalitarian state run by an aristocracy. Here is Plato in his own words from Laws:

The greatest principle of all is that nobody, whether male or female, should be without a leader. Nor should the mind of anybody be habituated to letting him do anything at all on his own initiative, neither out of zeal, nor even playfully. But in war and in the midst of peace—to his leader he shall direct his eye and follow him faithfully. And even in the smallest matter he should stand under leadership. For example, he should get up, or move, or wash, or take his meals . . . only if he has been told to do so. In a word, he should teach his soul, by long habit, never to dream of acting independently, and to become utterly incapable of it. (Cited in Popper, 1962, p. 7)

One day I was grazing on Amazon.com's Web site and somehow wound up looking at reader reviews of Plato's work, Republic or Laws, I forget which. The first review described this work as "the insane ramblings of a proto-fascist." In light of the foregoing, that works for me.1

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1 I recognize that there are other, more sympathetic readings of these passages from Plato and Gorgias.

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1. PHILOSOPHICAL BASES OF INQUIRY

So will it be nihilism (leading to anarchy) or idealism (leading to totalitarianism)? Fortunately, these are not the only choices. To look into this, I would now like to move on to a tighter focus on matters of ideology.

IDEOLOGY2

I define ideology as being constituted by ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, and I offer definitions for these terms. Ontology is the study of the nature of being and the structure of reality. Epistemology is the study of the origin, nature, and limits of knowledge. Axiology is the study of the nature of value—of what is good. Methodology refers to the means of inquiry into a given subject—the procedures for constructing knowledge.

From ideology are derived paradigms of inquiry—basic sets of beliefs that guide action and generate research. I address what I see as the three most influential contemporary paradigms, and I do not pretend that I do not have a favorite.

INQUIRY PARADIGMS3

Positivism, the dominant perspective in the philosophy of science during the first half of the 20th century, is now typically used as a term of ritual condemnation or derision. That is, labeling someone a positivist typically constitutes an act of vilification, of name calling. Positivism's ontology is realist; that is, reality or truth exists "out there" and is driven by unchanging natural laws and mechanisms. These laws and mechanisms are presented in the form of general statements and are seen as being unaffected by time or context. Some generalizations take on the form of laws of cause and effect. Positivism's epistemology is objectivist; that is, reality can be known objectively and completely. This connotes that it is both possible and necessary for the inquirer to adopt a distant, noninteractive posture. Personal values and other biasing or confounding factors are thus excluded from influencing the outcome. In terms of axiology, positivism values certain knowledge and absolute truth. Positivism's methodology is experimental and manipulative. Hypotheses, arrived at via induction, are

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2 See Table 1.1 for a tabular representation of ideological positions and inquiry paradigms.

3 For the sake of clear presentation, I sharply distinguish these paradigms here. I recognize, however, that, in practice, these distinctions are not always so clear cut. For the basic work on the notion of inquiry paradigms, see Kuhn (1996); for an overview of particular paradigms (to which my formulation owes much), see Guba (1990).
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stated in propositional form and subjected to empirical tests under carefully controlled conditions. The aim of positivism goes beyond description and explanation to prediction and control.

Relativism typically has a constructivist ontology, whereby realities exist in the form of mental constructions that are socially and experientially based, local and specific, and dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them. Relativism's epistemology is subjectivist—reality is solely a creation of the human mind. With regard to axiology, what relativism values most is consensus. Relativism's methodology is hermeneutic (i.e., interpretive, depicting individual constructions as accurately as possible). It is also dialectic (comparing and contrasting these constructs). Individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically and compared and contrasted dialectically with the aim of generating one or a few constructions on which there is substantial tentative agreement. Relativism requires the replacement of positivism because it holds that reality exists only in the context of a mental framework or construct for thinking about it, that no unequivocal explanation is possible, and that although there may be many constructions, there is no foundational way to choose among them.

The third paradigm is typically referred to as postpositivism or critical rationalism. I am not comfortable with either of these terms. I find postpositivism rather uninformative and opaque, as is the case with other terms prefixed with post. The term critical, in my view, has been overserved and underdefined to the point of meaninglessness. I also find its use condescending in that it often seems to me to imply that views not explicitly labeled as critical are necessarily uncritical and, by extension, naive and unworthy of serious consideration—that is, they are simply wrong. In my view, this usage reflects a positivist orientation.

Therefore, I label this third paradigm as humble pragmatic rationalism (HPR). No, I am not kidding. Hume reflecting the limits of one's knowl-

edge and pragmatic in the sense of a pluralistic and eclectic approach that accommodates different worldviews, assumptions, and methods in an attempt to address and solve specific problems in particular contexts. Given the complex nature of the phenomenon of L2 writing and the serious consequences that learning how to write in a second language often entail, I believe that humility and pragmatism are in order.

In any case, HPR's ontology is that of a modified realism; that is, reality exists, but can never be fully known. It is driven by natural laws that can only be incompletely or partially understood. HPR's epistemology is interactionist—a result of the interaction between subject (researcher) and object (physical reality), wherein a human being's perceptual, cognitive, and social filters preclude any totally objective or absolute knowledge. Regarding axiology, HPR values knowledge—knowledge that is tentative, contingent, and probabilistic. HPR's methodology is multimodal—

Involving the integration of empirical study (qualitative as well as quantitative) and hermeneutic inquiry (the refinement of ideas through interpretation and dialogue, through conjecture and refutation). 3

In my view, a strong positivist orientation for second language writing research is not viable because of its inductive basis; its lack of recognition of perceptual, cognitive, and sociocultural screens through which reality is filtered; and its bias toward the so-called "hard" sciences (i.e., dealing with inert matter is a lot easier than dealing with people, who are more complex entities affected by a lot more slippery variables). A rigid relativist orientation is also unacceptable, in my view, because there really seems to me to be something out there—a physical reality that can be understood, if only partially, and because consensus alone will not make something so (e.g., a group of people can develop a consensus that human beings are immortal, but this will not keep them from dying). HPR is attractive to me not only because it accepts the notion of the existence of a physical reality, but also because it recognizes that this reality can be seen, albeit through a glass darkly. I see HPR as well balanced in the sense that it has not only what it takes to generate viable theories of complex phenomena, but it is also pragmatic enough to be useful in addressing real-world problems and concerns.

**TYPES OF INQUIRY**

I would like to move now to an examination of types of inquiry within HPR, the two basic types being hermeneutic and empirical. I use the term hermeneutic to refer to interpretation via reasoning, logic, and dialectic. It

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1 Contrast this "kinder, gentler" rationalism with that practiced in, for example, the generativist tradition, wherein the views of those not behind the program are often harshly and summarily dismissed.

2 My formulation here owes much to the work of philosopher of science, Karl Popper, and to O'Shea's (1991) application of Popper's ideas to the area of composition studies.
is implicated, for example, in philosophical, historical, and narrative inquiry. It is the most common way research is done in the Humanities. It involves identifying a motivating concern, posing questions, developing answers via deductive and analogical reasoning, creating a new theory or hypothesis, and testing and refining that theory through argumentation. Because hermeneutic approaches to inquiry are addressed by other authors in this collection (Casanave looks at narrative inquiry, Matsuda at historical), my major focus in this chapter is on empirical research. I define empirical research as the construction of knowledge by means of systematic observation, analysis, and representation of behavior and/or its artifacts. All that said, I would like to note at this point that hermeneutic and empirical research are similar in that they both identify concerns, pose questions, investigate, interpret results of the investigation, and theorize on the basis of those results. These two types of inquiry also interact with one another—historical studies often use empirical evidence (artifacts); empirical research is also inevitably hermeneutic to some extent. They are probably better understood as differing emphases, especially within the framework of HPR

**TYPES OF EMPIRICAL DESIGNS**

Research designs are typically categorized as descriptive or experimental. Descriptive designs examine variables without manipulating environments. Descriptive designs include case studies (studies of the behaviors of one or a small group of individuals), ethnographies (examinations of particular contexts), surveys (sampling of groups to extrapolate to larger populations), quantitative descriptive research (analyses of relationships between variables—e.g., correlational studies and factor analyses), and prediction or classification studies (analyses of individual characteristics to predict future behavior—e.g., regression analyses).

Experimental designs are said to identify cause-and-effect relationships. Experimenter manipulate contexts by forming experimental and control groups, applying different treatments to these groups, and measuring the results of these treatments. Experimental studies include true experiments (which use randomized samples), quasi-experiments (which work with nonrandomized, intact samples), and meta-analyses (analyses of the cumulative results of a number of experiments).

I think it is important to note at this point that many, if not most, empirical studies done on L2 writing use a mixed methodology—that is, they

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6My account here owes much to Lauer and Asher (1988). See Fig. 1.1 for a pictorial representation of research designs.
combine both qualitative and quantitative designs, that quantitative designs need not be positivistic in orientation, and that qualitative designs can be positivistic. For me it is all a matter of researchers’ epistemologies; that is, studies are positivistic if researchers assume implicitly or claim explicitly that their findings provide certain knowledge or absolute truth. Such a positivistic orientation is often implicit in the terminology researchers use—for example, patterns emerging from data or analyses revealing new insights (i.e., shifting agency from the subject to the object).

MULTIMODAL INQUIRY

I am working from an assumption that research questions should drive and determine the type of inquiry and design used in a particular study in second language writing. Simply put, different jobs require different tools. Therefore, I believe that second language writing researchers: (a) can and should study second language writing from the perspectives of the social sciences, humanities, and even the physical sciences; (b) can and should mix modes of inquiry where appropriate to overcome the limitations of any single mode and add breadth and depth to a study; and (c) can and should reject (what I see as profoundly unproductive) arguments about the superiority of quantitative or qualitative empirical research methods and feel free—and be encouraged—to use any type of existing design, to modify designs, to combine designs, and/or to develop new designs. I see quantitative and qualitative designs as complementary rather than oppositional, and I am encouraged that it is becoming more and more difficult to find studies which do not employ more than one type of design.

In light of these beliefs, I find troubling the attempts by some second language studies journals to micromanage the research designs of potential submitters—that is, to specify (and thus prescribe and/or proscribe) in great detail what researchers need to do: how to conduct studies, how to report studies, how to analyze data, how to report data, how to interpret results, what statistical methods to use or not use, and so on. I believe that attempts to exercise such control over researchers are based on the assumption (conscious or subconscious) that research design is a static rather than a dynamic enterprise—that there are absolute and unchangeable rules that govern empirical research. I see this as dangerously limiting, stifling, and counterproductive—an unnecessary and unacceptable orthodoxy for a vibrant and evolving field of study.

In short, I welcome an ecumenical approach to inquiry and methodology, wherein any type of systematic inquiry—be it empirical (qualitative or quantitative), historical, philosophical, or any other type of analysis—can inform the knowledge base of second language writing.

THE INTELLECTUAL ZEITGEIST

Postmodernism to the rescue? Well, maybe not. To work into this, I need to first address modernism, postmodernism’s alter ego. Modernism is an intellectual current that is said to have grown out of the age of enlightenment, also known as the age of reason. Generally and reductively speaking, modernism sees truth as absolute, knowledge as certain, and language as an expression of thought. It values the notions of progress, optimism, rationality, depth, essence, universality, and totality. Postmodernism, in contrast, sees truth and knowledge as relative and contingent and language as deterministic of thought. It is identified with the notions of pessimism, irrationality, superficiality, difference, and fragmentation.

Although I believe it is important for second language writing professionals to engage with larger intellectual currents (like postmodernism), it is also important to consider whether such currents are truly current. Let me try to explain what I mean by quoting from theorist Mark Taylor’s (2001) The Moment of Complexity. In this passage, Taylor talks about postmodernism in terms of the work of Foucault, Derrida, and Baudrillard:

The theoretical resources informing social and cultural analyses for more than three decades have been exhausted, and alternative interpretive strategies have yet to be defined. Innovative perspectives once bristling with new insight by now have been repeated and routinized until they yield arguments that are utterly predictable and familiar. For more than thirty years, there has been a widespread consensus that the most pressing critical challenge is to find ways to resist systems and structures that totalize [function in a totalitarian manner] by repressing otherness and by reducing difference to sameness. So called hegemonic structures, it is argued, must be transformed by soliciting the return of repressed otherness and difference in a variety of guises. For many years, critics and writers who were preoccupied with the theoretical problem of alterity [otherness] were institutionally marginalized. . . . As critics who had built careers on the resistance to centralized authority assume positions of institutional responsibility, they frequently repeat precisely the kind of exclusionary gesture they once suffered. Accordingly, the Western canon now canonize noncanonical modes of analysis, thereby relegating other approaches to the periphery. As the marginal becomes institutionally central, the theoretical concern with difference and otherness is gradually transformed into a preoccupation with the same.

Though critics repeatedly claim to recover difference, their arguments always come down to the same: systems and structures inevitably totalize by excluding difference and repressing otherness. Since the point is always the same, difference in effect collapses into identity in such a way that this underinflated critical trajectory negates itself and turns into its own opposite. At this moment, theory, as it recently has been understood, reaches a dead end. (pp. 47–48; italics original)
Taylor adds that, therefore:

Any adequate interpretive framework must make it possible to move beyond the struggle to undo what cannot be undone as well as the interminable mourning of what can never be changed (p. 71) . . . while criticism is important, it is not enough to convey to students a wisdom that is merely negative. Nor is it sufficient for critical practice to have as its primary aim the production of texts accessible to fewer and fewer people, which promote organizations and institutions whose obsolescence is undeniable. A politics that is merely academic is as sterile as theories that are not put into practice. (p. 269)

In essence, the message is “meet the new boss—same as the old boss” (Townsend, 1971). In effect, that which was cutting edge is now status quo. However, I would not be as harsh as Taylor, not wanting to throw out the postmodern baby with its bathwater. I think that, despite its excesses, postmodernism still has interesting and important things to say. This chapter, after all, is to a great extent postmodern in its orientation.

It seems obvious to me that these intellectual movements parallel in many ways the inquiry paradigms of positivism and relativism. As with the inquiry paradigms, I do not believe it is necessary to totally buy into modernism or postmodernism or to exclude one or the other from consideration. Why should artists limit the number of colors on their palettes?

I believe that modernism is not acceptable because of its requirement of certain knowledge; my basic problem with postmodernism is its implication that knowledge has no relation to physical reality. In my view, a researcher strictly following one or the other current here would either be saddled with the unrealistic goal of divining transcendent and absolute truth or be doomed to perpetually stumble around in the dark. So why not an amalgam of modernism’s notions of progress, optimism, and rationality with postmodernism’s view of truth as relative and contingent and its recognition of the importance and necessity of honoring difference?

CONCLUSION

I am not suggesting here that one should avoid advancing one’s ideological agenda, but I believe it is necessary to keep an open mind, to avoid bandwagonism and exclusionary rhetoric, to be willing and even eager to listen to and honestly consider even drastically opposing views, and to adopt the attitude that honest people can disagree. In short, I believe that, in matters of inquiry, inclusivity is not a weakness and compromise is not capitulation.