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The Rise of Writing Redefining Mass

Literacy by Deborah Brandt: A Book Review

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Deborah Brandt delves deeply into the act and purpose of writing in her book *The Rise of Writing - Reinventing Mass Literacy*, which was published in 2015. She investigates what it is that individuals do with writing, how they come into contact with writing, and how they relate to writing in general. Written communication takes centre stage, with the reading component of literacy relegated to the background, and she provides numerous instances to demonstrate how writing has become an increasingly significant aspect of most people's lives. The novel is set in the United States and discusses the results of a massive research study that Brandt conducted over the course of a decade. When Brandt begins her book, she takes the reader on a journey through the history of American literacy, explaining how the emphasis has always been on reading and how literacy has been linked to the development of democracy and freedom of expression. Reading, rather than writing, has always been associated with high morals and intellectuality, whereas writing has traditionally been associated with a challenge to the established social order. The author also examines how both economics and technological advancements have increased the expectations placed on written communication, such as through the production of legal papers, agreements, and social communication purposes. When we look at it from a European or Swedish perspective, we can see the progress in literacy that she has described. Throughout history, there has been a significant emphasis on reading, and for a long time, writing has been left to the aesthetics of copying with beautiful handwriting. Similar developments to those mentioned by Brandt have occurred over the previous few decades. We can see how writing has become a vital talent for job and education and enjoyment throughout the last few decades.

Themes and topics covered:

In the introduction, Brandt describes her study as well as her research method, which is based on a realist perspective, narrative inquiry, and grounded theory, among other principles. "Explore how writing's differences from reading might be pulling mass literacy in new directions," she writes on page 7, after interviewing ninety people in the United States, to "see [...] whether people might consider writing a site for the same kinds of moral and intellectual growth that is habitually attributed to reading" (page 7). (p. 7). All of the participants have a strong connection to writing, whether it is as a part of their professional or personal lives or as a part of their leisure interests. sixty people who write at their place of employment and thirty youths who write as a creative or political act are among those who took part in the project. In the four chapters that follow, she gives her study of various subsections of the source material. However, rather than focusing on individual experiences, she sees her informants as witnesses to socio-historical transformation (p. 8), which brings to life an interesting historical and contemporary perspective on the importance of writing.

Brandt covers the status of writing (Chapter 1) and writing for the state (Chapter 2) in the first two chapters of his book (Chapter 2). This chapter focuses on writing for a living and how it affects the texts that are created, the writers, and their sense of personal authorship. In her writing, she demonstrates how workplace values, norms, and ethics not only shape the writing that occurs in the office, but also influence the expression of employers through writing that occurs outside of the workplace. When working for private companies or the government, writers must adapt to the material they are assigned to produce. They may even be challenged on material they publish informally on social media or in their personal blogs. Throughout the book, Brandt explores the depths of literacy and democracy, as well as the problematic nature of writing and writers' roles.

In Chapter 3, "Occupation – Author: Writing Precedes Reading in the Literacy Development of Contemporary Youth," Brandt first discusses the historical origins and current conditions of mass writing and mass reading, before focusing on the differences between the two. Writing has been and continues to be viewed as a secondary and auxiliary activity to reading in American society and education. Additionally, other sponsors have provided support for

both writing and reading. Mass reading has been promoted by the church and the state, while artisanship and commerce have aided in the development of writing abilities. As Brandt argues, the balance between reading and writing in contemporary American society has evolved in such a way that writing has surpassed reading in terms of importance. Brandt conducted interviews with 30 young individuals aged 15 to 25 who prefer writing over reading and who write on a regular basis outside of school in order to better understand the features of a writing-based literacy. After doing an in-depth interview analysis, Brandt looked for "any trends that were related to the sponsored heritage of mass writing" (p. 95). She was specifically looking for interview accounts relating to "craft, commerce, and publication" in this section (p. 95). Writer Brandt defines writing as "the common-sense notion of generating and inscribing words" (p. 92), leaving out of the analysis any transitory or conversational writing, such as texting on a mobile phone. The creative writing of the participants is the main focus of the workshop.

Brandt displays and analyses the experiences of the young authors by drawing on a plethora of examples from the interviews (the vivid interview stories actually motivate readers of her book to write themselves!). In her interviews with teenage authors, Brandt discovers that they share a shared perspective on literacy, which she refers to as "writing above reading." A strong preference for writing over reading emerged among the participants, for a variety of reasons, to begin with. Their writings express their desire to become professional writers, as well as their scepticism about their ability to achieve this aim in the short term. "Stepping into the public position of the writer, employing vocational props, and engaging the apparatus of publication," writes Brandt, is what is most beneficial to the literacy development of these young writers, rather than simply text creation in the traditional sense (p. 114). Second, Brandt employs the phrase "pursued their orientations to writing" (p. 96) in the analysis of how participants "pursued their orientations to writing" (p. 96) in circumstances in which they were being built as readers in the study. Such events have been experienced by the participants in a variety of contexts, including school, home, and in their interactions with their peers. Writing over reading is a tactic that participants employed to detach themselves from the position of the reader, and Brandt investigates this further in her third research study (see below). As a result, while reading a text written by someone else, they would refrain

from engaging in reading-related behaviours such as comprehension and critique. Instead, they would begin to plot out their own pieces of writing.

Brandt challenges the common concept of reading as an experience that defines literacy by presenting a theory of literacy that begins with the act of writing as the beginning point for knowledge. She raises the hypothesis that reading may not be absolutely necessary for the development of writing skills in the first place. In the interviews Brandt has conducted with young authors, there are examples of the improvement of reading skills through the act of writing. Furthermore, she asserts that a writing-based definition of literacy would be consistent with the evolving communicative landscape, in which all individuals are required to write on a daily basis. For people who write, Brandt exposes the potential that writing-based literacy can provide for their own self-improvement as well as their literacy growth. Moreover, she contends that a more in-depth knowledge of writers' experiences is required. Writing, according to Brandt, is not only an internalising experience, but it is also an externalising experience as compared to a literacy that is centred on reading. Putting one's views on paper and allowing others to see them might result in negative experiences such as "misattribution, parody, estrangement, libel charges, self-exposure, and the necessity for a pseudonym," according to the author (p. 133). However, in instructional settings, such ramifications of writing are rarely addressed.

After the first paragraph of chapter 4, when everyone writes, Brandt uses the phrase mentalities, which she aligns with Durkheim's idea social facts. Brandt focuses on "what everyone assumes to be the case, the conditions that people notice and work with as they notice others working with them as well," according to the author. (See p. 137.) Mindsets influence the conduct of individuals as well as the policies and practises of organisations. Each interview in the study was used to create this chapter, which is based on all ninety interviews and focuses on their experiences with mass writing, particularly experiences with writing in environments where other people are also creating work. Writing is scenic, according to the most frequently mentioned social fact in the interview accounts (p. 137). Others are physically present when the participants participate in writing, and the presence of others has an impact on the participants' perceptions of themselves as writers, according to the findings. However, in order to complete their task successfully, they need understanding

of other people's writing. Particularly important in the relationships between subordinates and their superiors was the ability to read and understand the writing of others. In addition, there is a portion in this chapter that looks into prejudices that are associated with writing. According to Brandt's findings, the stereotypes that are most prevalent among the participants in her study are those that are based on generational traits. The younger generation is perceived to be less literate than the older age, according to the survey participants.

Finally, Brandt outlines the writing careers of two participants, each of whom experienced a different influence as a result of the shifting mentalities around mass writing. On the one hand, there had an information technology entrepreneur whose "foresight, ideas, and job security were repeatedly surpassed" (p. 149) as people's habits of writing and interacting altered and web-based writing matured into widespread practises. The other participant was an elder care manager who shared her experiences from working in a field where these new writing practises had helped to strengthen and consolidate the writing environment in which she had to work. She described how these new writing practises had helped to strengthen and consolidate the writing environment in which she had to work.

Thoughts on the subject

Brandt draws attention to the distinctions, contrasts, and rivalry that exist between reading and writing in her work. In this regard, her perspective contrasts from the dominant perspective in the social practise paradigm, which places greater emphasis on the linkages, overlap, and interdependence between reading and writing in people's lives rather than on the differences between the two. She does, however, acknowledge that reading and writing are interwoven in the process of becoming literate. And as the reader becomes more familiar with her ideas, it becomes clear that her emphasis on differences and contrasts is a crucial step for her to take in order to shed light on writing, or, in her own words, to "bring writing out of the shadow of reading" as she puts it (p. 92). It is understandable and important that she concentrates her efforts on the differences and rivalries between reading and writing rather than on the linkages in this endeavour.

Brandt's book is written in the setting of the United States. As a result, the study's points of departure are the cultural history of the United States and the society of the United States. In her work, she emphasises the historical nature of literacy, and as a result, it is vital to position

it in the context of the place and period where the research is taking place. Nevertheless, because the authors of this study are based in a European and a Swedish context, it is also interesting for us to explore the distinctions and similarities between how mass literacy has developed and how it operates today in the European and Swedish contexts described by Brandt. Many commonalities, as well as some distinctions, can be found in the context of the Swedish language and literature. A desirable next step after reading *The Rise of Writing* would be to adopt a worldwide perspective on mass literacy, examining comparisons between the development and current condition for mass writing and mass reading in different regions of the world.

The chapters in Brandt's book cover a variety of interesting perspectives on writing and writers, and it raises a slew of interesting questions about both. What exactly is writing? What exactly is a writer? When it comes to writing, how much freedom does the writer have to start from their own interests and wants, and how much power does s/he have over the writing process because of dominating societal institutions such as economic interests, hierarchies, and legislation? When everyone is writing, who will be the one to read? How will those who have no or limited access to written literacy be influenced by the fact that they are living in a society that values deep writing? Where does writing go from here, since that technology has improved to the point where it is possible to communicate orally through sound as well as film, and private and public organisations are beginning to "support" oracy alongside (or in place of) literacy? It is undeniable that *The Rise of Writing* encourages further investigation into the field of writing.