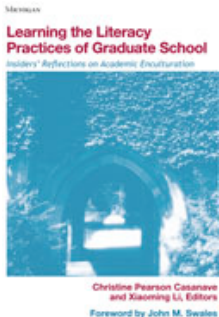


<i>Learning the Literacy Practices of Graduate School: Insiders' Reflections on Academic Enculturation</i>		
Author:	Christine Pearson Casanave & Xiaoming Li, Eds. (2008)	
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This collection's editors Christine Pearson Casanave and Xiaoming Li understand how difficult graduate school is, as they too were once graduate students in U. S. universities. Graduate students are expected to participate in the game of academic enculturation, though they often do not see themselves as legitimate players in their academic communities because the rules and expectations are not clearly spelled out and their sociopolitical status is not authoritative. They face challenges and struggles in textual, social, and political arenas. Mitigating those struggles by offering moral support through previously unreported stories—the more the better—that graduate students and their advisors tell is this book's goal. Casanave and Li hope that such reflections and resultant coping strategies will provide comfort and advice throughout present and future grad students' academic journeys and perhaps help them feel less alone. The book's intended audience embraces graduate students, faculty, and advisors, including both native speakers of English and the so-called marginal groups in English-dominant universities.

Theories reflected in this collection include community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the sociocultural approach (Vygotsky's ZDP and activity theory), genre studies, and identity construction. However, the editors and the contributors are aware of criticisms of the theories, so they complicate simple notions from the theories (i.e., apprenticeship, traditional view of genre, and assimilation in identity formation) by implanting them in various situations in which the complex sociopolitical nature of interaction between students and faculty exists. At least one theory or notion is embedded or explained in each chapter.

Casanave and Li organize the reflective stories into three sections totaling sixteen chapters. The three parts are (1) "Learning to Participate," (2) "Mentors and Mentees," and (3) "Situated Learning." The narrators are both native and non-native speakers of English, former and current graduate students (some later became faculty) and their

supervisors/mentors in graduate schools in North America, Japan, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

In Part I, "Learning to Participate" (Chapters 1 to 5), current scholars in second or foreign language education share their experiences learning about literacy practices when they were graduate students at U.S. universities. They share their challenges and hardships caused by unfamiliar participatory practices and hidden rules. Some of these difficulties include academic writing, often challenging for both native and non-native English speaking students. Students have to learn how to cite, argue, and refute in order to establish their authoritative position and contribute knowledge to the field. Also, power imbalance is embedded in the relationship between faculty (mentors) and graduate students (mentees), evident most strikingly in sociopolitical networks. In addition, as students do not have a full grasp of their field's language and do not understand specialized terminology clearly, they easily might feel insecure and intimidated during academic socialization.

In Part II, "Mentors and Mentees" (Chapters 6 to 11), advisors and advisees reflect upon their mentoring relationship. Tellingly, their interactions, conflicts, struggles, and lessons are occasionally presented unconventionally. Different from an impersonal and academic tone of writing, some chapters are written predominantly in the form of conversations, emails, or narratives. Presenting both faculty's and students' perspectives helps readers see what problems might occur during the dissertation advising period and how the relationship can be mutually developed. The advisors' roles are to guide their students in learning negotiation skills, empowerment, ownership, and socialization within their discipline. In Chapter 8, we read how Hirvela helped Youngjoo Yi grow as a qualitative writer with a sense of empowerment and ownership of her dissertation. A Chinese student, Yanbin Lu, reveals how he acquired, because of his professor's ongoing support of his writing, a new academic identity not only through the literacy practices he mastered in order to place postings on the WebCT learning management system but also as a result of achieving a sense of belonging as a student in a U. S. university (Chapter 10).

Part III, "Situated Learning" (Chapters 12 to 16), focuses on how particular graduate students survived the graduate school experience in varied uphill situations: a non-native English speaker, a tenure-track faculty member, a teaching associate, a student burdened with a chronic illness. However, despite the challenging situations, all the students successfully dealt with their difficulties because they thrived on learning and hard work. They understood their weaknesses and problems, sought out support, found solutions—all the while strongly determined to achieve success. For example, in Chapter 12, using available human resources and facilities as a support network helped Natsuko Kuwahara accomplish his goals. In Chapter 16, despite her chronic illness, Hanako Okada gained self-confidence and a feeling of energy and dignity in her academic life, no longer identifying as sick but, instead, as a growing self.

The editors argue that learning in and from graduate school requires more than just intelligence; strategic social, cultural, and political participation and constructing a pro-

professional identity are at least as important. With that combination in mind, this book can be used for courses in TESOL, literacy education, and second or foreign language education.

That said, I could see the efforts of the editors trying to expand the backgrounds of contributors and the scope of regions represented, not limited to North America. However, the majority of writers are East Asians (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) and North Americans. The editors could have invited contributors from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds, such as South Americans or Europeans. Also, the covered disciplines represented are limited to anthropology, TESOL, literacy education, and second or foreign language education. There are no contributors from the Natural Sciences, Arts, or Business, despite Casanave and Li's having dedicated their collection "to graduate students from around the world who choose to pursue their studies in English-dominant universities, at great personal and financial cost, and for whom the book was first conceived" (p. vii). Including contributors from a wider range of cultural backgrounds and majors would have brought more perspectives to larger groups of readers from a variety of disciplines.

As a graduate student, I wish I had read this book at an earlier stage of my graduate school experience so that I could have been aware of the untold expectations and noticed the hidden rules. I might not have felt the weight of my position as so great a burden and a source of insecure feelings. Especially graduate students but also faculty members should read this book. Both can benefit from the practical strategies revealed. However, knowing the strategies or expectations does not guarantee academic success; the trajectory of academic success differs from one student to another.

I, myself, appreciate each contributor's boldness and openness in telling her or his own story—at the risk of exposing weaknesses in public.

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