Book review

Developing research writing: A handbook for supervisors and advisors, **Susan Carter, Deborah Laurs (Eds.). Routledge, New York, NY (2018). 258pp+iv.**

To earn a PhD degree for starting an academic career, doctoral students have to complete their PhD theses, pass examinations, and publish their research either in academic journals, as a chapter in an edited book, or as a monograph with a reputable publisher. Undoubtedly, this expectation imposes great pressure not only on these research students, but on their supervisors. In spite of being excellent researchers, some of these supervisors, unfortunately, may not have adequate experience in scaffolding their own students' academic writing (Bitchener, 2017). Against this backdrop, Carter and Laurs' new book, *Developing Research Writing*, is a timely addition to the available literature in the field. Combining research, literature, and experience, this book is poised to advance supervisors' expertise and supervisory practices, with an ultimate aim of improving their students' research writing skills.

Comprising nine parts with 32 chapters, Part I concentrates on how to establish a supervisory relationship in writing. Bitchener, in the opening chapter, provides supervisors with four strategies to help their students draft a solid literature review in a research proposal. He especially encourages the employment of a mind-map and Table of Contents as guides. By doing so, students can have a better understanding of the relationships between topics and the macro organization of the argument. In the subsequent chapter, Kumar and Stracke alert supervisors to the linguistic and textual features of research writing. In order to improve students' performance in these two aspects, they recommend that supervisors initiate dialogical feedback between/among peers. Grant and Xu's Chapter 3 emphasizes the importance of explicit talk in supervisor-supervisee communication. Specifically, they believe that such a practice can benefit both supervisors and students in terms of dismissing any misunderstanding and shared expectations. To end this part, Lee integrates two frameworks to shore up students' writing. She thinks that this combined framework prompts supervisors to anticipate their students' needs in different phases of the writing journey, and doing so can improve students' self-efficacy.

Aside from supervisors, research students should access other resources to help with their writing. This is what Part II aims to achieve. Chapter 5 by Laurs highlights the role of learning advisors, suggesting that advisors be involved along the way in developing students' research writing skills. Chapter 6 by Johnson and Haines and Chapter 7 by Guerin and Aitchison demonstrate the importance of generic writing workshops and peer writing groups, respectively. Mewburn and Thomson in Chapter 8 show what online support and resources that students can obtain to facilitate their writing in this information technology era. Part II as a whole provides a variety of external resources and encourages students to make good uses of them in order to promote their writing proficiency.

Part III deals with matters on style in research writing. Sword gives tips for delivering feedback on issues related to grammar and style in Chapter 9. In response to grammatical errors, she thinks that it is inadvisable for supervisors to engage themselves with correcting them. As for possible challenges, it is recommended that supervisors share good writing with their students and ask them to emulate it. In Chapter 10, Cayley stresses that early supervisory feedback should prioritize the structure, focus, and flow of writing. Such supervisory practices can assist students in understanding the nature of academic writing. The concluding chapter by Gopen introduces a Reader Expectation Approach as an advisory technique, by which students can identify and steer away from their bad writing habits. As such, students can improve the clarity in their research writing.

Part IV is specific to supervising English-as-an-additional-language (EAL) students' academic writing. Bitchener's Chapter 12 discusses the types of feedback that he tends to offer to EAL students in their early drafts of the doctoral thesis. Lee (Chapter 13) draws upon the integrated framework presented in Chapter 4 to identify what EAL doctoral students expect from their supervisors' feedback and also to inform their supervisors of how to provide such students with feedback. The final chapter by East reports a study, which investigated the areas to which supervisors gave priority when responding to EAL learners' academic writing. He found that the literature review and the methodology chapters are what supervisors tend to prioritize when making decisions on which section should be offered feedback. The three chapters in this part, based on supervisors' personal experiences and research findings, can be taken as reliable guidelines by supervisors who lack experience in providing support to their EAL students' research writing in English as the medium of instruction.

Parts V and VI focus on the supervision of smaller research projects (i.e. Master's and Bachelor's Honours theses) and publication/performance-based theses. The three chapters of Part V detail the application of a project management approach to framing supervisors' feedback and support (Chapter 15 by Lum), underscore three steps to reinforce the support from supervisors (Chapter 16 by Beddoe & Maidment), and advocate a "whole school" approach to developing master's degree students' writing competence (Chapter 17 by Nicol & Cornelius). The contributors to Part VI devote many of their discussions to how to provide doctoral students with effective support for a thesis by publication or a thesis by performance. Specifically, Guerin (Chapter 18) reveals the merits and drawbacks of completing a thesis by publication; Sharmini (Chapter 19) puts forward several suggestions from experienced examiners, informing supervisors how to scaffold their students in writing a publication-based thesis; Bolt (Chapter 20) proposes constructive principles of supervising a performance-based thesis (i.e. the combination of creative work and a written thesis).

Issues relevant to keeping students motivated and inspired are addressed in Part VII. To prompt students to write systematically, Silvia (Chapter 21) recommends that supervisors share good practices with, and set themselves as role models for, their students. In the next chapter, Murray puts an emphasis on setting up a "drafting-feedback-revising" cycle and carrying out short-time writing activities. Carter in Chapter 23 presents strategies to prevent students from being demotivated and driven by negative emotions.

Part VIII turns the spotlight onto examiners, the gatekeepers for the quality of theses. In Chapter 24, Wisker and Kiley explicate the Threshold Concepts and ask supervisors to provide feedback on students' research writing accordingly. Next, Carter shares her understanding on how to anticipate examiners' concerns and address them prior to the oral defence. The last chapter by Starfield identifies what would be regarded as important by examiners and further reminds supervisors that their feedback should be in line with examiners' expectations. There are useful ideas for supervisors to take away from this part, which may help them generate more relevant and effective feedback.

This book concludes with discussions on research students' identity and authorial voices. Among the six chapters in Part IX, Chapters 27 (by Aitchison), 29 (by Laurs et al.) and 32 (by Paré) address issues related to research writers' identity, including the importance of developing an identity as academics, the influence of culture on identity, and the transition of identity through rhetorical practices. Chapters 30−31 (by Brodin & Frick; Peseta & Barradell, respectively) are concerned with authorial voices, which have been well documented as significant (see e.g., Xu & Zhang, 2019). Chapter 28 by Oliver presents a model (i.e. the SISA matrix) that is supposed to be used by supervisors for enhancing the creativity and originality in their students' research writing.

Overall, this book has several commendable features. Firstly, it is featured by its comprehensive coverage of almost all possible topics on supervising research writing. The nine parts span different aspects ranging from addressing stylistic issues in academic writing to offering EAL students written feedback, and keeping students' momentum in thesis writing. Additionally, within each part, three to six chapters are included to provide multiple approaches to, and different perspectives on, the same topic. The comprehensiveness of this volume is also mirrored by the fact that many of the chapters relate to supervision of both native English-speaking and non-native English-speaking research students. This practice is conducive to narrowing the native/non-native gap and enables supervisors to realize that in supervising native and non-native English-speaking writers, they may face similar challenges and difficulties other than just language problems.

In addition, the contributors to this volume present many insightful and feasible suggestions to supervisors, which should be of great value in improving their advisory practices, particularly novice supervisors, who may lack experience in supervising research students. Such suggestions can be nicely incorporated in their specific contexts to maximize the efficacy of their supervision. Moreover, although this book primarily targets supervisors and advisors, it can also benefit research students. Parts II and VIII, in particular, serve as good examples. As advised in these two parts, students can access assistance and resources to improve their research writing and understand examiners' expectations when their PhD theses are evaluated.

As a whole, the editors should be applauded for having such a unique reader-friendly format of short chapters with concise ideas. Each part is structured in such a way that it begins with the editors' concise introduction. Various tables, figures, and examples deserve mention, as they make it easier for readers to catch the gist in each chapter promptly. Another laudable feature is the editors' effort to conclude each part with a summary of things to do that functions as a reminder checklist. Such a checklist provides supervisors with opportunities for deep reflections and thought-provoking discussions. It also functions as principles for guiding their actual supervisory practices.

Despite the above strengths, this book appears to be very ambitious, with 32 chapters arranged into a single volume. The limited space for each chapter might have posed difficulty to contributors, who might not have been able to expound their ideas. For example, in Chapter 28, Oliver presents many tables, but the necessary details are absent and readers might be more interested in these details in order to have a thorough understanding of what the author intends to convey to the readers. Additionally, more pages could have been devoted to the difficulties and challenges faced by supervisors when supervising their students, although this is not the main focus of this book. Doing so can demonstrate that suggestions provided by this book are pinpointed and necessary. Nonetheless, these minor shortcomings do not dim the value of the book. Drawing upon the insights and expertise from front-line doctoral supervisors from many countries, the editors appear to have adopted an inclusive approach. Unlike previous books on the same topic, which examine research writing *per se* (e.g., Oliver, 2014; Parija & Kate, 2018), this book brings different supervisors' perspectives to the fore.

As a supervisor, I as the second author of this review echo these supervisor perspectives. Therefore, it will be useful to those colleagues who are interested in helping their students tackle the challenges in thesis writing, for the book offers them

theoretical knowledge and hand-on guidance to enhance their supervision of research writing. Also, cross-cultural communication is such an important phenomenon that it might be a good idea to have a chapter that focuses on issues arising from communication breakdowns in supervising research writing (Zhang, 2016). Supervising EAL students' research writing also involves cross-linguistic considerations, including issues relating to rhetoric transfer (e.g., Wei, Zhang, & Zhang, 2020). I believe that future editions will benefit from including chapters on these matters.

Research students will find the book equally valuable. Equipped with good advice from this book, they may smoothen their writing journey and gain deeper insights into supervisors' and examiners' expectations of their research writing so that they can earn their research degree ultimately. The first author of this review, as a PhD student, would like to share some of his personal experience, which resonates with the chapters in this book. For example, Chapters 9 and 10 recommend that supervisors should not focus their attention on correcting grammatical errors, and they should show more concern with global issues of their students' academic writing in feedback provision. Such recommendations are taken up by his supervisor, who does not correct each linguistic error, but emphasizes how to make arguments effectively and how to structure them in an appropriate fashion when providing feedback.

Both of us as writers of this book review are also impressed by the content in Part VIII that focuses on what examiners expect. As an experienced external examiner, the second writer tends to share with his students examiners' requirements or reviewers' expectations for a good thesis or journal article. Also, he advises his students on how to respond to the concerns raised by examiners and reviewers in a professional and skilful manner so that they can have a better understanding of their writing problems and address them to improve the quality of their writing.

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