

Cross-Border Networks in Writing Studies, by Derek Mueller, Andrea Williams, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon. Anderson: Parlor P; Edmonton: Inkshed, 2017. 196 pp.

Reviewed by Chen Chen, North Carolina State University

Cross-Border Networks in Writing Studies examines the disciplinarity of Canadian writing studies using a “networked methodological approach” (6). Tracing the scholarly, social, and professional networks of the field from both distant and close perspectives, the authors explore the development of the Canadian branch of writing studies and its relationships with the U.S. discipline. This book contributes to our understanding of the challenges faced by Canadian writing studies in terms of both legitimizing its disciplinary identity and sustaining its disciplinary networks. Also, others can adapt its methodological approach to study a variety of disciplinary networks.

A major inspiration for a networked view of the discipline comes from Randall Collins’s *The Sociology of Philosophies*, which argues that intellectual activities are essentially networked ideas produced and enhanced through social engagements among scholars by way of “interactive rituals” both in writing and in face-to-face communication such as conferences, lectures, or workshops (qtd. in Mueller, Williams, Wetherbee Phelps, and Clary-Lemon 82). This view proves productive for the authors when they begin to investigate the characteristics of Canadian writing studies, including the history, development, disciplinary identity, and shape of its social networks. Canadian writing studies is still an emergent field because there are very few writing programs or departments in Canadian universities, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Many Canadian writing scholars have been trained in graduate programs in the U.S. before either working in Canada or staying in the U.S.; they have also been primarily publishing in U.S. journals. These institutional and national constraints and educational and professional experiences have led to many border-crossing activities—including mentorships, publications, and professionalization activities—and to the construction of complex disciplinary networks.

The authors argue that these unique border-crossing characteristics of scholarly activities call for a unique networked methodological approach to examine the history and development of Canadian writing studies. Informed by network studies, the authors have carried out a networked “series of operations” through related and coordinated interdependent methodologies (7), each distinctively presented in chapters two through five, and involving methods ranging from a qualitative survey and geographical data mapping, to qualitative interviews, genre analysis, and instrumental case study. This methodological

approach represents the principles of “networks” borrowed from Clay Spinuzzi, who describes them as “heterogeneous, multiply linked, transformative, and black-boxed” (8). Because the relationships and associations between participants traced here are heterogeneous and constantly shifting, research findings are often evolving as participants relocate for professional reasons (changing jobs, moving from graduate school to professorship), thus impacting their professional networks. The studies represented in this collection are linked in that results from one study inform the design of another, and one study may provide a magnified view of smaller parts of another. The networked phenomena constituted by people, texts, narratives, identifications, institutions, and locations are not stagnant; these phenomena are transformed as they circulate through the case studies, pointing to variations of interdependency between Canadian and U.S. writing studies. In this research process, certain complex black-boxed qualities, such as assumptions about participants’ national identifications, get unpacked, revealing the historical development of scholarly activities that constitute and maintain these identifications (9). Finally, the authors add a fifth principle focused on “deliberate, purposeful considerations of scale (distance versus close) and aperture (wide versus narrow),” that illustrates in more detail transformations of the networked phenomena (9).

In chapter two, Derek Mueller takes the most distant approach to map the professional networks of Canadian writing scholars, including the geographic reach of their self-identification, engagement with professional organizations, conferences, listservs and publishing, and the locations associated with their professional activities. Distant methods produce an innovative view of disciplinary that expands the traditional scholarship defining Canadian writing studies in the “context of teaching, writing, and research” (Clary-Lemon 99) by noticing its “time-sensitive patterns and emerging shapes” in the process of disciplinary formation (23). Visualized networks in these maps demonstrate that a scholar’s career can be both “emplaced and distributed” as illustrated by a map showing the networks of one scholar, Dale Jacobs, both diachronically throughout his career across the national border and synchronically connecting with other members of the field through mentorship (43).

Informed by Mueller’s survey results, in chapter three Andrea Williams examines more closely the scholarly and professional identities of Canadian writing studies scholars through in depth interviews about their interpersonal relationships built in broader professional contexts such as academic conferences and intra- and inter-institutional contexts. Williams argues that scholarly communities established and sustained in these contexts serve an important role in supporting the evolving identities of individual scholars, both new and experienced. For example, institutional hubs such as the Carleton group at Carleton University—the home of one of the few Canadian doctoral pro-

grams in writing studies (PhD in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies) and founded by Professor Emeritus Aviva Freedman—have produced many Canadian writing studies scholars through direct mentorship. Investigation into scholarly communities also reveals that other factors such as funding mechanisms and disciplinary structures in Canadian academia impact the evolving identities of scholars and the discipline because Canadian scholars often struggle with disciplinary marginalization and invisibility in their own institutions and/or nationally.

Due to this marginalization and invisibility, individual scholars and the rare writing programs suffer the lack of “presence” measured by peer recognition (84), which is usually acknowledged through conventional publications, not in the context of the dynamic, competitive environment that characterizes the Canadian disciplinary landscape. Therefore, chapter four and five focus on specific cases at the individual and programmatic levels respectively, where presence can be achieved through cross-border, interdependent activities and relationships. In chapter four, Louise Wetherbee Phelps examines how four scholars’ unconventional genres of publication contribute to the dynamic Canadian disciplinary networks even though they may not fit the model of the traditionally recognized disciplinary-based research. She argues that such genres should be considered scholarly disciplinary work. In chapter five, Jennifer Clary-Lemon’s case study of the only Canadian independent writing department at University of Winnipeg illustrates cross-border interdependent disciplinary relationships both diachronically and synchronically. In this case, departmental development is informed by models and scholarship from American writing studies but also influences both Canadian and U.S. writing studies by offering details on curriculum design that would be applicable in both countries. These case studies also illustrate the collaborative and recursive interdependent relationships between Canadian and U.S. branches of writing studies.

The concluding chapter offers suggestions to strengthen Canadian writing studies and its disciplinary networks. One is to build alliances among Canadian institutional hubs such as Carleton University and University of Toronto, which focus on research and teaching respectively (150), to help secure more research funding for writing studies north of the U.S. border. Opening institutional networks will also enhance the social networks of scholars built both through scholarly publications and through scholarly activities such as conferences and cross-institutional mentorship. However, the authors do note the challenges of sustaining Canadian writing studies publications, as most Canadian scholars have been publishing primarily in American journals. Furthermore, the book also suggests inquiries into other networked disciplinary activities. One example is to trace the development of a specific idea in Canadian writing scholarship through disciplinary networks. Finally, the authors argue that more graduate

programs need to be established in Canada to train writing scholars and writing teachers, which would continue to expand its disciplinary networks.

Traditionally, scholarship on the disciplinarity of rhetoric and composition has focused on the historical and professional development of the discipline, its epistemological shifts as reflected in the production of scholarship, and the history and the work of writing program administration. Only recently have we begun to venture into other ways to write our discipline. For example, in Bruce McComiskey's edited collection of the microhistories of rhetoric and composition authors bring into focus the previously neglected stories and accounts in the discipline that have contributed to our disciplinary development and challenged the dominant narratives of disciplinarity. Additionally, Jeremy Tirrell and Derek Mueller have both adopted distant methods to map the discipline's publications. This book presents yet another example of networked disciplinarity that focuses on the interrelations among scholars across geographical and institutional boundaries. Especially impressive are the authors' extensive "multi-scale/multi-scopic" (165) efforts to trace the expansive networks through the social and professional experiences of members in the field. They transform the ways we define disciplinarity and disciplinary work, informing research such as my own work on networked activities at CCCC and WPA-L, and accounting for the varied lived experiences of scholars and the constant shifting of the heterogeneous disciplinary networks. As rhetoric and composition continues to expand beyond the confines of the United States, which is already exemplified in scholarship on international writing research and exchanges at scholarly sites such as Writing Research Across Borders conferences, this methodological approach will be useful in studying various forms of disciplinary work and disciplinary networks.

Raleigh, North Carolina

Works Cited

- Clary-Lemon, Jennifer. "Shifting Tradition: Writing Research in Canada." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 39.2 (2009): 94–111. Print.
- Collins, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Cambridge: Belknap, 1998. Print.
- McComiskey, Bruce, ed. *Microhistories of Composition*. Logan: Utah SUP, 2016. Print.
- Mueller, Derek. "Grasping Rhetoric and Composition by Its Long Tail: What Graphs Can Tell Us about the Field's Changing Shape." *CCC* 64.1 (2012): 195–223. Print.
- Spinuzzi, Clay. *Network: Theorizing Knowledge Work in Telecommunications*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print.
- Tirrell, Jeremy. "A Geographical History of Online Rhetoric and Composition Journals." *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 16.3 (2012): np. www.kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.3/topoi/tirrell/. Accessed 8 July 2017.