

*Pedagogical Perspectives on Cognition and Writing*, edited by J. Michael Rifenburg, Patricia Portanova, and Duane Roen. Parlor Press, 2021. 361 pp.

Reviewed by Anthony Lince, University of California San Diego

In the early 1970s, the field of rhetoric and composition turned its attention towards using cognitive theories for the teaching of writing; however, much of this attention only lasted through the 1980s. In *Pedagogical Perspectives on Cognition and Writing*, the editors—J. Michael Rifenburg, Patricia Portanova, and Duane Roen—assert that this interest was not “...simply of a moment...” and “...that cognitive theories still have great influence in writing studies and have substantial potential to continue reinvigorating what we know about writing and writers” (back cover). Indeed, the editors and contributors of this book—by focusing on writing-related transfer, metacognition, and the habits of mind within the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*—call attention to some of the rich, and also problematic, potential for when we set our disciplinary sights on cognitive theories of writing.

*Pedagogical Perspectives on Cognition and Writing* is divided into four sections: “Cognitive Theory and Writing Pedagogy,” “Classroom-Level Engagement,” “Program-Level Engagement,” and “Writing Center Engagement.” The book also contains an afterword, written by Asao Inoue, which calls special attention towards examining the *Framework’s* habits of mind as “...coming from a particular white racial history of education and educators...” (329).

In her foreword, Susan Miller-Cochran (who took part in drafting the *Framework*) details how the *Framework* came to be and how adopting the *Framework’s* habits of mind in her own writing classes was a “game-changer” for her pedagogical approaches (ix). Since the *Framework’s* habits of mind, especially metacognition, play such a prominent role in the book, this opening context is helpful, particularly for readers who may not be all that familiar with the document. Pulling from the *Framework* document itself for a definition, “This *Framework* describes the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success” (1). And the habits of mind—curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition—“...refers to ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students’ success in a variety of fields and disciplines (1). This document, as Miller-Cochran describes, was born out of a collective need by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP), to not let federal academic agencies and states solely define what “college readiness” was but that teachers needed to have a say in these conversations as well (viii).

Once the habits of mind were adopted in her own classrooms, Miller-Cochran noted that she moved away from focusing “...solely on the achievement of outcomes...” and, instead, helped her students “identify their habits of mind/strengths...to build upon them to develop as writers...” (ix).

The first section of the book, “Cognitive Theory and Writing Pedagogy,” features three chapters. “Readiness Redefined: Toward a Pedagogy of Here and Now,” written by Peter H. Khost, Wendy Ryden, and David Hyman, opens the section with some compelling ideas about how when too much emphasis is placed on the past or future in writing courses (e.g., college readiness, high-stakes writing tests, etc.), the attentiveness for the present moment diminishes (21). They argue for a cognitive approach that calls for a writer to be rhetorically present (28). The second chapter in this section, “Metacognition: Crossing the Information and Writing Thresholds,” links the ideas of threshold concepts and metacognition together, asserting that students are better prepared to learn challenging concepts by using metacognition. The final chapter in this section, “What Do You Experience When You Read and Write? Diversity in the Experience of Inner Speech” authored by Airlie Rose, uses ideas on cognition to explore how writers and readers experience inner-speech.

The second section of the book, “Classroom-Level Engagement,” includes four chapters. Gita DasBender’s opening chapter for this section, “Recall, Reframe, Reflect: Threshold Concept Pedagogy and Metacognitive Practice in First-Year Writing,” echoes many of the ideas around metacognition and threshold concepts explored in section 1, chapter 2. Thomas Skeen’s chapter, “Cognitive Psychology and the *Framework* for Success: Teaching Genre as a Design Problem,” draws on cognitive theories to think about writing as an ill-structured problem and genre as a design problem (111). Courtney Patrick-Weber’s chapter, “Creating a ‘Language’ of Trauma: Exploring Trauma Theories and Trauma Narratives in Multimodal Writing,” highlights the importance of narratives in writing courses, especially as they relate to trauma theories. Lastly, Michelle Stuckey, James Toweill, Sean Tingle, Heather MacDonald, and Jessica Harnisch end the section with their chapter, “Cognition and Community: Using the Habits of Mind to Engage Students in Community-Focused Writing.” These authors explore the ways in which online first-year writing classes can be engaged in community-based writing practices.

“Program-Level Engagement,” the third section of this book, moves beyond the classroom to focus on how cognitive theories might be implemented on a much broader level. Christine Cucciarre’s chapter, “The Space Between: A Statewide Effort Using the Framework for Success to Bridge High School and College Writing,” discusses the ways in which the *Framework* was used to connect high school and college level writing in the state of Delaware. Tonya Eick and Gregg Field’s, in “A Metaphor-Based Curriculum: Fostering Inquiry,”

interestingly describe how they infuse the ideas from the *Framework* to build a curriculum that is metaphor-based. Melvin E. Beavers, Subrina Bogan, Harold Brown, Caleb James, and Sherry Rankins-Robertson, in “Pedagogical Practices of the Habits of Mind,” discuss how they linked a summer-bridge program to draw heavily on the *Framework* in order to help first-year students best prepare for college-level writing. Lastly, in this section, Martha A. Townsend’s chapter, “The Effects of Metacognition on Student-Athletes’ Academic Performance,” pushes back against the stereotypical labels that are often associated with student athletes. She uses qualitative methods to demonstrate that these students use metacognition in sophisticated ways to develop their literacy abilities.

The final section of the book, “Writing Center Engagement,” has three chapters, all of which highlight the importance of including writing center personnel in these discussions around cognition and writing, especially as it relates to the *Framework*. As Morgan Gross and Kelsie Walker note in their chapter, the *Framework*, which was developed by the CWPA, NCTE, and NWP, “surprisingly does not mention writing center” professionals/consultants/students as an audience (251). In Gross and Kelsie’s chapter, they provide findings from an empirical study on a tutor-training workshop, which was heavily set within ideas around the *Framework*. William J. Macauley, Jr. explores some necessary critiques of the *Framework*, how it can’t possibly account for differences that students “bring to higher education” (297). He also argues in his chapter that students need to be agentive student writers in order to fully engage with the *Framework*. The writing center, as he argues, can help students get there (297). To conclude this section, Bronwyn T. Williams argues that the writing center is uniquely positioned to create “...emotional experiences for writers...” that will offer them a greater “...sense of control, meaning, and simply being heard” (318).

Overall, when thinking about cognitive theories and writing courses, this text pushed me to think deeply about narratives in relation to trauma theories, why I should try to prioritize the “here and now,” and how I can best help students become agentive writers. Courtney Patrick-Weber’s chapter illuminated why narratives are so important in writing classrooms, especially when considering trauma theories. After reading that chapter—and when considering how the COVID-19 pandemic has created so much trauma for students—I now might place more emphasis on narratives throughout the semester, now having a better cognitive understanding of the ways students might want to share their personal narratives. Furthermore, Khost, Ryden, and Hyman’s chapter helps me think of the ways I want my courses to prioritize the here and now, and put a little less significance on the past or future. In doing so, I could help students become rhetorically present (28). And, when I consider my role not just as a lecturer but also a Writing Center mentor, how I help

tutors see the benefits of thinking about the *Framework* and the potential it has for students to become agentive writers, which is something Macauley, Jr. nicely illustrated in their chapter (297).

With that said, I do have a couple of minor hurdles with the book. That is, since I'm already someone who values metacognitive practices in my courses (as I'm sure many educators do), I didn't get a lot of new information from some of the chapters that emphasized metacognition. Instead, I was reminded that what I'm doing in my own courses is good practice. Not necessarily a bad thing; however, I do also wish that some of the chapters explored other ideas related to cognition.

In spite of these minor drawbacks, there's some really good work here for all types of educators to explore, be they coordinators or program directors, classroom teachers, and/or writing center personnel. This book has provided two things: a reminder on how important this type of work was and still is, and some ideas on how to move forward with cognitive theories in writing.

*San Diego, California*

## **Works Cited**

Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project. *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*. CWPA, NCTE, and NWP, 2011. [files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED516360.pdf](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED516360.pdf).