CHAPTER SIX

REVIEWING FINNISH STUDIES ON WRITING IN BASIC EDUCATION: TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY FOR DIVERSITY

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Introduction

Productive literacy skills of young students are becoming more and more important within pedagogical contexts as multifaceted writing itself becomes an increasingly everyday activity both in and out of schools. At present, literacies are more participatory, collaborative, and distributed than conventional literacies (Lankshear and Knobel 2007). Interestingly, the European Commission's indicators of school education quality state that reading is one of the most important factors, but make no mention of the productive skills (EC2000). In addition, international PISA-tests regularly reveal the functional reading skills of certain age groups comprising adolescents, but there is a lack of such tests for writing—perhaps due to the complexity of testing writing competence and the problem of culturally bound text genres.

It is well known that Finnish 15-year-olds have performed well in large international studies on reading (OECD 2004; 2010; 2014). In addition, younger fourth-grade Finnish students have shown good reading skills in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Kupari et al. 2012). In contrast with such studies, national Finnish assessments of young students have shown weakening competencies in producing texts (Lappalainen 2008; 2011), or the competences have proved to be heterogeneous (Harjunen and Rautopuro 2015). Based on these arguments, there is a need for a systematic review of writing studies in order to develop a research-based writing pedagogy.

The importance of gaining an overall picture of current writing studies is even greater in the context of the digital age, which has led to a proliferation in the ways in which we write. Writing has become a 21st century skill that is essential for coping with the various virtual environments and meaning-making strategies, and which are required in the composition of multimodal texts (e.g. Kress 2003). In fact, written modes of meaning-making can be complemented or even replaced by other methods such as visual or oral modes of text production (Kalantzis and Cope 2012).

In addition to the multimodality of texts, another multifaceted aspect is the diversity of the various methods of meaning-making within different cultural, social, or domain-making contexts. According to Kalantzis and Cope (2012), texts vary enormously depending on social context; variance factors include the writer's life experience, subject matter, disciplinary domain, cultural settings, and gender identity; in other words, we use communication to move between different social spaces with different social languages. As stated by the New London Group (1996), the scope of literacy pedagogy should account for the differences between culturally and linguistically diverse, but increasingly globalised, societies. In fact, according to Kalantzis and Cope (2012), negotiating these social language differences and their patterns has become crucial in literacy learning. The two multidimensional perspectives are not separate, as social diversity in literacy is closely related to multimodality—the proliferation of communications channels and media supports and extends cultural and subcultural diversity (New London Group 1996).

In literacy studies, diversity is seen as multilingualism in education (e.g. Lotherington et al. 2008; Lotherington 2007), and as cultural and linguistic diversity (e.g. Mills 2006; 2007a). This diversity matters, as Mills (2007b) has shown that culturally and linguistically diverse groups may have different kinds of access to multiliteracy. In addition, social diversity can refer to different types of learners (e.g. Ikpeze 2012). In this study, we distinguish three dimensions of diversity, namely linguistic, cultural, and social. In some cases these perspectives can intertwine, for example, language is deeply embedded in culture. On the other hand, cultural diversity could be described as being more contextual in nature as it includes the ways one interacts with an environment (Kerwin 2010). And social diversity is related to gender as well as other kinds of social backgrounds.

There have been a few systematic reviews on writing in this century so far, however they seem to represent the pedagogical contexts of English-dominated countries; Juzwik et al. (2006) concentrated on writing research in a particular period, Graham et al. (2012) reviewed writing instruction in elementary schools, and Stagg Peterson (2012) conducted an analysis of discourses on writing and writing instruction in curricula across Canada. If considered in the light of diversity, Juzwik et al. (2006) drew the conclusion that social context and writing practices, as well as bi- or multilingualism and writing, were among the most actively studied themes in their study—while literacy modalities, for example, received less attention.

Due to the strong shifts in textual practices, the concept of multi-literacy has been heavily integrated into the Finnish core curriculum for Basic Education of this century (2004; 2014). Overall, the focus has moved from individuals' skills to general literacy practices in communities and networks, and from the restricted and gradually developing skill of reading and writing to multiple literacies. The current trends in literacy pedagogy highlight the variety in semiotic resources and practices in producing texts, tools for planning, producing and evaluating multimodal texts, and the reading and writing processes of various communities (Finnish Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014). This pedagogical emphasis not only requires the reconsideration and remodeling of the current methods of teaching writing in schools, it also challenges the objectives and practices of literacy research (cf. Holm and Pitkänen-Huhta 2012). There is a clear need for research-based knowledge on how to support writers' various competencies within changing environments and writing tasks. Beyond this, there is also a need to encourage students to use their many linguistic resources when producing texts.

In order to study this turning point of multiliteracy in text production and its visibility in Finnish writing research and in an effort to achieve a more general view of Finnish writing studies, this chapter presents a systematic analysis of writing skills, and the pedagogy of writing, in Finland. The aim of our review was to explore the nature and quantity of research into these matters in Finland in the 21st century. More specifically, we look to determine the age groups that are most prominent in the studies, the type of data used, and the areas covered. In an earlier article (Kauppinen et al. 2015) discussing the present data, we analysed the results in Finnish, looking at the National Core Curriculum. In this study, we aimed to broaden our perspective to take in multifaceted aspects within a multiliteral framework by identifying aspects of diversity in the data.

Methods

The first phase of our data collection included defining key-words in English and Finnish (e.g. writ*, writing, literacy, spelling in combination with, e.g. learning, pedagogy, teaching, Finn*). We limited our search to peer-reviewed studies, including journal articles, dissertations, and licentiate theses, published after the year 2000 (until 2014). We concentrated on studies that focused on basic education (grades 1–9), including pre-school. Beyond these academic studies, we also included national evaluation reports of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature, as they likewise adhere to scientific criteria in terms of sample size and analysis. The search was updated—after initial publishing of results (Kauppinen et al. 2015)—to include studies published by August 2015. The data

was retrieved using major search engines in the field of education, linguistics, psychology, humanities, and the social sciences as follows: Primo Central Index (PCI) covering ERIC, LLBA, Project Muse and Psycinfo. In addition, we used Scopus, Web of Science Arts and Humanities -index, and the Finnish search engines Arto and Melinda. Despite careful cross-checking using different search engines, it is possible that we did not locate all the studies fulfilling our criteria.

The second phase of data retrieval included careful identification of the studies by checking the topics, tables of contents, and abstracts. We excluded studies with Finnish as a second language as well as Swedish, Sami, Romani, or Sign Language as a mother tongue as their aims and contents in terms of language as a curriculum subject differ from those written with Finnish as a mother tongue. We also excluded studies concerning writing in high school because of the recent extensive study by Kauppinen et al. (2011) on that theme. Studies that fell in a "grey area" (cf. Harden and Thomas 2010, 754–755) were discussed and carefully considered—for example, psychological studies on dyslexia, which often focus on reading rather than writing. Those studies on dyslexia which included "spelling" in the keywords or abstract were included in the data (e.g. Torppa et al. 2011). The final data consists of 61 refereed articles, 3 licentiate theses, 9 monographic dissertations, and 11 national surveys, making a total of 84 studies (a full list of the data and keywords is provided in Kirke 2015).

In the analysis, we followed the principles of qualitative content analysis. We first coded the analyses of population age groups, methodology, data, theme areas, and main results into tables. We aimed to rely on the authors' own terms and formulations. This proved challenging, however, especially in the analysis of methodology, due to the different scientific fields the studies represented; we resolved this by categorising the studies into quantitative, qualitative, or both. After sorting the data into tables, we integrated the results regarding the various topics as transparently as possible, by making summaries on a more abstract level (cf. Harden and Thomas 2010). After formulating tables and figures to illustrate the results, we combed through the coding to identify signs of social diversity. Before the analysis, we outlined three main perspectives of diversity: social, cultural, and linguistic. We started the analysis from the main research questions and results, and from there exhaustively noted and interpreted all the signs that we believe shed light on the question of diversity in writing studies. In addition, the data and the common research frame were carefully considered from the perspective of diversity. Finally, we looked more closely at those studies which had the potential to increase our knowledge on this issue.

Investigator triangulation was used to ensure reliability (cf. Flick 2006). All six authors worked together during the entire process, from data identification to interpretation of the results. All are experts in the areas of writing and writing pedagogy, as all teach and study themes related to writing. This meant that it was important to deconstruct our various assumptions regarding writing, in order to reach a common understanding.

In the following sections, we will first give a short overview of the age groups, data, and methods in the Finnish writing studies examined, before proceeding to an analysis of the theme areas and a discussion of the diversity in the data.

Results

Age groups, data, and methods

The age groups investigated in the studies were classified based on school grade-level, as is typical for studies of school children. If the data was collected from several age cohorts, as is often the case in longitudinal studies, all data sets were marked in Figure 6-1. The results show that current Finnish writing research concentrates on younger children, from preschool to the 1st and 2nd grades of elementary school (Figure 6-1). The 4th to 9th grades were less studied; studies of these class groups mainly consisted of national evaluations of learning outcomes after the 6th and 9th grades. Additionally, in four studies, junior high school students were not the main age group; instead, they were part of a longitudinal study or served as a control group for younger students. "Adults" in Figure 6-1 refers to data collected from parents and teachers; however, this was a rare event. It should be noted that Kettunen's (2005) study is excluded from Figure 6-1 as it concerned 7–10 year old children in a special education class.

Figure 6-1. Age groups in Finnish writing studies (N=83). (Modified from Kauppinen et al. 2015)
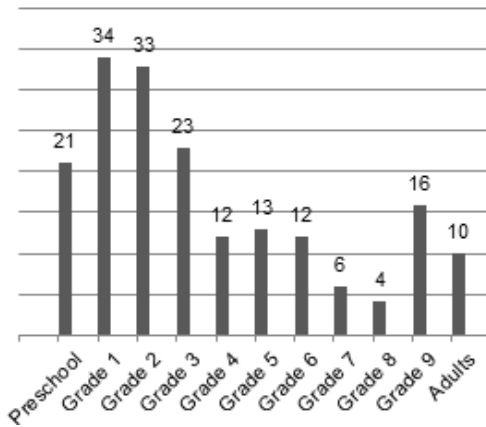
The most common types of data collected included spelling (N=40) and stories (N=14). Spelling is a typical way to measure early writing skills, especially in the psychological field (e.g. Leppänen et al. 2006), while the story is a traditional text genre in school pedagogy in Finland (e.g. Pajunen 2012). There were a few studies that used written essays or questionnaires; however, several types of data were only used in individual studies, e.g. written feedback or textbooks.

Methodologically, there was an emphasis on quantitative studies (N=43) over qualitative studies (N=26) and studies using both research strategies (N=15). Similar to the use of data, methodology is connected to the fields of research. Most of the quantitative studies were psychological follow-ups from preschool to first grades at school (e.g. Mäki et al. 2001). In this kind of study, writing was usually examined in relation to other variables such as phonological awareness and naming ability (e.g. Torppa et al. 2013).

The qualitative studies assessed were more sporadic, and were mostly analyses of students' texts (e.g. Kauppinen 2008). A few concerned writing pedagogy, e.g. the writing process (Murtorinne 2005). Some studies based their quantitative analysis on qualitative grounds (e.g. Kulju and Mäkinen 2009), or made qualitative estimations of numeric data (Luukka et al. 2008).

Theme areas

The analysis of the age groups, data, and methods had already anchored the studies within different scientific fields and, as seen in the following illustration (Figure 6-2), the analysis of data theme categories confirmed the grouping of the studies into psychological, linguistic, and educational fields. Although some of the theme areas overlapped regarding, e.g. the relationship between motivation, attitudes, and writing, these main scientific fields characterise the studies in the present data.

Psychological studies seem to focus on the relationship between writing and reading, or other factors such as rapid naming, phonological awareness, or the development of writing skills. Writing itself is seldom the focus, and it is mainly seen as a spelling skill that is easy to quantify based on writing errors. This trend explains the large number of quantitative studies in the data and the emphasis on the youngest age groups and spelling.

The problem categories within the linguistic fields are mainly related to phonological features in writing, or textual skills such as genre features in students' texts. These studies represent a school pedagogy, which is characterised by attempts to develop students' writing skills through teachers' feedback. In this sense, the textual features of students' writings serve as indicators of their writing skills (Kauppinen and Hankala 2013). Despite this, the selection of text genres is quite limited in these studies.

The problem categories within the educational field are centered around school practices (e.g. Nurmilaakso 2006)—a particularly weak and scattered field—where the general aim seems to be the development of tools for writing pedagogy, for example by exploring the writing process (e.g. Murtorinne 2005). There are only a few studies concerning writing pedagogy in the light of digital literacy, for example the impact of computer-based intervention (e.g. Saine et al. 2011). One of the rare studies that concerns modern technology in writing studies is the work by Kanala, Nousiainen and Kankaanranta (2013) on the use of mobile applications.
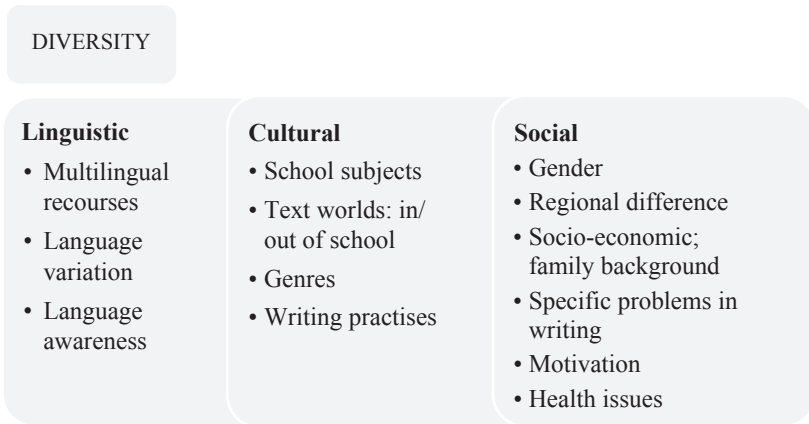
Figure 6-2. Theme areas of Finnish writing studies (N=84) (Modified from Kauppinen et al. 2015)
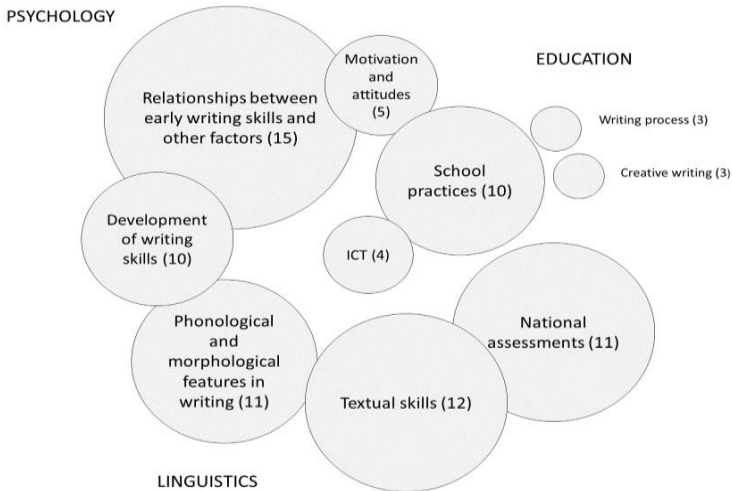
Diversity in writing studies

Despite the fact that diversity was not a focus in any of the studies, we aimed to use it to interpret the data. There were various manifestations of diversity within the studies, due to the multi-layered nature of the concept. Therefore, it was required to consider the aims of the studies, research questions, data or data collection, as well as the main findings. Figure 6-3 illustrates the aspects of diversity found in the present data. This data falls into three main categories: linguistic, cultural, and social diversity. It is to be noted that some of the signs of diversity were weak in the data; that is, the category is based on only a few studies. Nevertheless, we attempted to draw an overall picture in order to envision the possible future aspects of diversity in writing research. The categories also overlap as, for example, the use of language is intrinsically linked to cultural aspects.

Figure 6-3. Traces of diversity in Finnish writing studies of the 21st century

DIVERSITY

Linguistic
- Multilingual recourses
- Language variation
- Language awareness

Cultural
- School subjects
- Text worlds: in/ out of school
- Genres
- Writing practises

Social
- Gender
- Regional difference
- Socio-economic; family background
- Specific problems in writing
- Motivation
- Health issues

Linguistic diversity concerning studies on writing. Linguistic diversity is examined via several routes in the research on writing. There were some studies in which multilingual resources were used by pupils in text production. For example, Elomaa (2000) studied the effects of a Swedish language immersion on the writing of Finnish pupils. In a few studies, pupils' many linguistic resources were also examined from the perspective of language variation (e.g. Halonen 2009). The case of linguistic continuum, that is, when pupils move from oral to written text production, was investigated in the study of Poskiparta et al. (2003). There were also research frames that contained many kinds of language variation concerning classroom practices in literacy instruction, according to both teachers and students (e.g. Luukka et al. 2008). However, there were only a few studies in which standard language was enhanced to encompass many varieties of language when producing texts.

In addition to studies on multilinguality and linguistic variation, there were a number of comparable studies of writing between language groups, including linguistic diversity. Georgiou et al. (2012) explored different orthographies (Finnish, Greece, English) and their effect on the early stages of writing. Lingual comparison was also included in the research frame of a study in which Finnish and English children's style and register in text messages was investigated (Plester et al. 2011)—in this same research we could also see an added dimension of linguistic diversity, namely language awareness. The aim of these types of studies is to promote pupils' multiple linguistic resources for text production and to enhance their metalinguistic sensitivity.

Cultural diversity concerning studies on writing. Writing literacy practices can be accessed for all kinds of learners through the choice of a learning culture. Studies relating to these issues can be divided into the following categories: writing as part of academic skills in different school subjects, text worlds in and out of school, and classroom writing practices.

The multimodal representations of different school subjects have been explored in a couple of studies, and this kind of interdisciplinary orientation to writing is clearly a new development in Finnish writing research. Examples of this phenomenon include the studies of philosophical essays and their argumentation as a writing skill by Sääskilahti (2008), and text production in mathematics instruction by Joutsenlahti, Kulju, and Tuomi (2012).

With the exception of the investigation of writing as classroom practice, writing was studied in terms of different textual environments, such as hospitals and schools (Suvilehto 2003; Suvilehto 2008) and in club activities (Korkeamäki and Goman 2012). Writing research in these environments can be connected to a new concept of writing in which it is seen as a social, creative practice in local contexts where the formal and informal learning environments merge (Mertala 2015). Gee (2008) refers to secondary discourses, which are language patterns into which pupils are socialised outside the home, for example in school or clubs. Gaining an awareness of these secondary discourses is vital for the development of writing instruction (cf. Mills 2010).

In addition, the studies on writing that use digital tools and e-environments demonstrate how traditional methods can be rejuvenated by breaking down the barriers of formal learning environments. For example, Kumpulainen, Mikkola and Jaatinen (2014) focused on the social and blended practices of students who created a school musical script on laptops. Besides bridging the gaps between different learning environments, writing research has identified the potential to enlarge the scale of produced text genres. In addition to narrative texts, pupils have produced reviews (Kauppinen 2008) and arguments (Sääskilahti 2008) among other writing projects.

In short, through the choices of text worlds and writing practices as a part of the research frame, it should be possible to further study the writing capacity of those pupils who do not benefit from traditional writing literacy instruction.

Social diversity concerning studies of writing. Some aspects of social diversity within the data were clear, as they represent traditional categories of writing studies. One such category is gender, which frequently appears in national reports (e.g. Lappalainen 2008; 2011; Harjunen and Rautopuro 2015). As a part of this diversity, gender is seen to play a factor in the various skill levels of both girls and boys (e.g. Pajunen 2012), for instance, Routarinne and Abetz (2013) and Merisuo-Storm (2006) relate gender to attitudes, as girls seem to be more likely to report that they like school and enjoy writing. Gender differences may have long-lasting effects. For example, the effect of reading and spelling skills on secondary education choice was much stronger for boys (Savolainen et al. 2008).

Apart from gender, family background and socio-economic status are other forms of diversity which have long been taken into account as research variables in writing studies, especially in the psychological field. One example might be the educational level of mothers (e.g. Leppänen et al. 2006) or parenting styles (Kiuru et al. 2012, cf. Lerkkanen et al. 2010). These types of factors, as well as the socio-economic status of families, appear to be related to self-efficacy among other issues (Routarinne and Absetz 2013).

One trace in the data regarded specific reading and writing problems: We have interpreted that dyslexia could be a form of social diversity as it may play a role in forming groups, especially within the school context. For example, children with dyslexia could be less motivated than others (Lerkkanen et al. 2010). Writing studies in special education classes present another aspect of social diversity that has to do with learning difficulties (Kettunen 2005). It is also clear that health issues can play a role in diversity (cf. hospital schools in Suvilehto 2003; 2008). In conclusion, gender, family background, and reading and writing problems may impact social diversity, including varying levels of motivation to learn to write.

Discussion

In this chapter, we explored the latest writing studies using systematic review methods to form an overall picture of the current state of writing literacy research. To summarise, the main thrust of recent studies have focused on developmental issues in early literacy or individual students' skills with printed texts. Greater attention should be paid to other age groups, for instance, from the 4th to 9th grade, as writing skills are connected to choices made after basic education (Savolainen et al. 2008). There is also a call for concern about the limited selection of data. For example, interviews, textbooks, observations, writers' diaries,

and video recordings were seldom, if at all, used, even though these kinds of data could offer more profound insights into writing processes (cf. Kauppinen et al. 2015.) Most studies' theme areas were related to spelling skills in connection with other factors, or to linguistic features of produced text. There are surprisingly few studies on writing situations, or on the processes or creative sides of writing (cf. Juzwik et al. 2006). In the future, therefore, the scale of communicative acts, such as instructing, arguing, or affecting in authentic situations should be taken into account in text composition.

The writing studies are scattered into the research fields of psychology, linguistics, and education. This leads to challenges when trying to systematically develop a researchbased pedagogy of writing literacy. In the future, the range of studies could be more versatile in considering other academic fields and methods. For example, long-term projects that combine knowledge of developmental psychology, linguistic understanding of texts, and educational objectives would cover the complexity of writing skills and pedagogy in a more holistic manner. In addition to this, the features of situated writing practices (e.g. in transdisciplinary instruction) could be merged by means of design research and interventions.

By exploring the age groups, data, methodology, and themes, we were able to identify areas that require further research. As things stand, the studies analysed provide only limited guidelines for a development of a writing pedagogy in the scope of diversity in multiliteracy. Multiliteracy is often understood as the use of various genres, including those that differ from traditional written genres such as spoken, visual, or auditive. In this chapter, we attempted to recognize signs of diversity that more widely relate to text production, as originally construed by New London Groups (1996).

As pointed out by Kalantzis and Cope (2012), variations of language should be taken into account more often. Instead of studying writing from the separate viewpoints of the mother tongue, F2, or other languages, a multilingual aspect of language use and text production could prove fruitful. The study of pupils' multicultural capital and multilingual resources in the production of texts would yield a wider perspective, which would also help to define writing skills (from the perspective of equality). In this way, pupils' multiple voices could also be heard in formal learning settings.

An aspect which almost seems to be entirely missing from the data is the multiplicity of discourses in writing classes (cf. Gee 2008; Mills 2010). Future writing studies should shift from textual productions to discourses in writing

activities both in and out of school. This may even reveal reasons for the declining writing skills of boys in particular, and, in addition, this type of research would shed light on motivational acts, as one aim would be to get all students interested in developing their literacy skills.

From a cultural perspective, there should be more writing studies relating to the instruction of different school subjects. Traditionally, writing and texts are connected purely to Finnish language and literature, but in a multiliteral framework this should be broadened not only to all school subjects but also to text genres outside school in order to attain a more versatile perspective of social diversity.

A multidisciplinary field that enables researchers to study writing from their own interests could be seen as a strength in exploring the social aspect of multiliteracy. For instance, the highly discussed psychological field could serve to highlight the social aspect of diversity, with one such example being the effects of family background and motivation, which should receive greater attention when developing research on the school pedagogy of writing. Moreover, aspects of diversity overlap: the example above would also help from a linguistic point of view. In fact, from a social perspective, methodological choices for background variables may also reveal cultural aspects. For example, gender differences and differing types of cultural textual practices among boys and girls seem to share some relationship.

To sum up, by taking into account the gaps in the current research and by connecting it to the orientations of linguistic, cultural and social diversity, we may be able to develop pedagogically inspiring studies. Diversity intertwines in many ways within writing literacy research. The concept itself is complex, creating challenges for categorisation. In the future, in order to get a more complete overall picture of Finnish writing studies, the data for systematic analysis should be broadened to include studies focusing on Finnish as a second language and Swedish-speaking students. That being said, this paper is the first contemporary Finnish study to highlight the current trends in writing studies and offer some guidelines for future research.

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