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Guest Editorial

Selected papers from the 12th Conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing

The 12th conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW) was held at Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Winterthur, Switzerland, on 5–7 June, 2023. The conference, highlighting the theme "Writing Technology, Thinking, and Learning: What Tutoring, Teaching, and Learning of Writing Mean in a Digitized University", attracted over 275 delegates from nearly 30 countries. As with previous EATAW conferences, the program offered a range of topics and presentation formats, including workshop sessions, panels, keynotes, and plenaries. After the hiatus caused by the COVID pandemic, which forced the 2021 conference to be held online instead of in person in Ostrava, Czech Republic, delegates were able to enjoy the full exchange of knowledge, audience participation, and social activities that are the hallmarks of being gathered together in a physical space.

After the conference, a team of special issue editors, working alongside the editorial staff of the Journal of Academic Writing, issued a call for papers delivered at the conference to be prepared for publication. Of the submissions, seven were invited, peer reviewed, and revised. Five articles report on empirical studies of topics relating to the theme, and one article is more practice-oriented, focusing on pedagogical issues and strategies in the context of classroom experimentation. An initial symposium article brings together revised versions of brief talks made by five scholars on a plenary panel (two of whom, also working on this special issue, recused themselves of any involvement in the review of the symposium article). Contributions to this issue showcase the work of scholars in Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In little more than two years, writing and the teaching of writing have been undergoing the single most dramatic period of evolution in the history of literate practice. First, the invention of printing with moveable type in the 15th century revolutionized the dissemination of written text, furthering access to information and knowledge and promoting the spread of literacy. A second revolution—the creation of the Internet—profoundly increased both production and access by adding digital text to what had been primarily physical in the form of scrolls, broadsides, books, journals, newspapers, and magazines. In both cases, producing the text to be mass duplicated or made massively available online still required humans to transform ideas into written symbols. But now a third writing revolution—generative AI—is fundamentally altering what we mean by composing, supplementing and, in some cases, bypassing the rhetorical and linguistic processes required to string words together to create coherent text for human understanding. Questions the community of writing scholars have been addressing about the effects of GenAI on writing—indeed, questions tackled at the conference and in this special issue—will sustain our focus for years to come, even as AI-based technologies affecting written communication will continue to expand and improve at lightning speed. Contributions to this special issue demonstrate the prevalence of such questions concerning GenAI across national and regional boundaries, languages, and types of higher-education institutions.

Setting the stage for a range of issues now confronting the educational writing community, the opening symposium asks deliberately wide-ranging questions. Where does GenAI fit in the evolution of literacy and what are its advantages and limitations? **Cerstin Mahlo** situates GenAI

historically as fostering a new kind of literacy, arguing for its enabling features such as supporting and extending reading and writing skills; providing greater access to literate activity; and enhancing the need for interpreting and critically analyzing outputs. At the same time, she points out, the writing community needs to know both the affordances and limitations of GenAI to support effective pedagogy. But what kinds of knowledge are entailed in the development, use, and critique of GenAI? Extending Cerstin's contribution, **Alice Delorme Benites** points to broader socio-cultural shifts in what we mean by textual expertise. In some ways, she argues, the assumed expertise of writing scholars is supplanted by "lay users" who often lack formal training in writing studies, "leading to a superficial grasp of AI's capabilities and limitations". Drawing on the Dagstuhl Triangle framework, she describes the need for multiple sources of knowledge: the technical perspective of computer and data scientists ("how it works"), the socio-cultural perspective of writing scholars ("what are its effects?"), and the user-oriented perspective of early adopters ("how do I use it?"). The question to be considered is how much of each perspective is needed to effectively integrate GenAI in writing instruction. Turning to instruction, **Chris M. Anson** asks whether it is true that GenAI "does all the work for the writer". Confronting this as a false assumption, he notes how little work on GenAI has focused on the complex processes of reading. Based on his and a colleague's current research that tracks expert and novice writers' processes of composing prompts, generating outputs, and then critically reading and revising those outputs, he argues that writers' "meta-linguistic, meta-rhetorical, and genre-related skills drive a host of productive decisions at the intersection of (re)reading, composing, and revising". Effective instruction in the reading and revising processes have the same basic rhetorical and linguistic goals as writing without the assistance of GenAI. But even acknowledging these parallels in learning, are there not questions about academic integrity that still must be confronted? Shifting to these questions, **Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams** reports on a consultation at her institution that sought to collect views of what constitutes students' appropriate uses of AI tools. The analysis and discussion facilitated a movement from a "compliance- or regulation-based" approach to one that takes a broader "teaching-and-learning" view that can inform writing programs and centers as well as academics and students across the curriculum. Among the most central processes in both writing instruction and writing center support is the question of how GenAI responds to student writing. **Heidi A. McKee** offers a more specific focus on writing feedback from the perspective of the "machine-in-the-loop" that augments peer and teacher feedback. Between the "rejectionist" frame that GenAI has little to offer writers and the "fatalist surrendering frame" that sees GenAI as all-powerful lies a broad middle ground requiring careful, critical considerations of its usage.

In light of the theoretical and instructional questions raised in the symposium, the first empirically-based article in the issue asks about the needs for professional development among faculty in AI-related pedagogies. Viewing professional development through the lens of the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu), which describes the requirements for digitally proficient educators, **Sandra McGury, Nadja Wulff, and Anja Häusler** surveyed 192 students at universities in 15 countries to gauge their perceived level of competence in their use of AI tools as well as how they integrate them into their writing processes and what challenges they face. Some key results showed that students use AI tools widely in their academic work; that they express a generally high level of self-confidence in their digital literacies; that a majority (81%) have used AI tools in their academic work; but that their desire for support leans toward self-learning in DACH countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) compared to more mixed forms of support in non-DACH countries. These and other results of the study demonstrate the need for an adaptive approach to faculty development in different countries and regions, but that these forms of development should be prioritized and implemented continuously regardless of context.

What, then, have we also learned about students' experiences using GenAI more longitudinally? In "A Year of Generative AI: Observations from a Survey among University Students in Estonia," **Ilona Tragel, Liisa-Maria Komissarov, Eleriin Miilman, Nele Karolin Teiva, and Marri-Mariska Tammepõld**'s survey of students at the University of Tartu showed an increase in usage of GenAI tools over time, with more popularity among students in science and technology than in the humanities. In addition, undergraduates were more likely to use GenAI tools at the initial stage of the study than graduate students, but this result reversed itself

by the later stage of the study. Considering genre, the study showed that the use of GenAI to assist in summaries or overviews almost tripled. Clearly, as AI tools become more ubiquitous and as students and faculty become more acquainted with them, we will need to keep track of changes in their adoption and adaption to a range of academic situations.

While the first two research articles in the special issue employed surveys or questionnaires to gauge how students use GenAI tools and how their usage changes over time, the third article by **Karla Csürös, Claudiu Gherasim, and Mădălina Chitez** asks whether an intervention—in this case, AI-driven corpus-based methods—can enhance writing acquisition for L2 students. Forty L1 speakers of Romanian divided between L2 learners of French and L2 learners of English were trained to use LexTutor, a web concordancer, to point to their language errors in a controlled writing task. In this case, a more refined tool (than, for example, ChatGPT) could provide analysis of the students' linguistic data that supported their learning: the French L2 students' syntactic precision and academic terminology improved, while the English L2 students showed more varied phraseology and stronger lexical accuracy. In addition, the students expressed positive feelings about their experiences working with the corpus AI tool.

So far, articles in the special issue have taken GenAI tools at face value, that is, focusing on what students do or think about the tools, or using a tool as an assistant for learning. But what about the integrity of the tools themselves? How firmly can we rely on their mechanisms even when outputs are analyzed, revised, and incorporated into writing projects? In the fourth research article, **Kristin I. Terrill and Elena Cotos** ask how effectively large language models can identify and classify content in research articles as part of a potential process of generating literature reviews. This question is especially important in the context of criticisms that GenAI tools often "hallucinate" when working with sources or when assembling references. In this study, the authors hypothesize that some processes of writing literature reviews might be automated, such as synthesizing and classifying content. But experimenting with GPT-3.5 and GPT-4o, the authors found that their outputs were often questionable when compared statistically with human-coded content. Until these systems are further developed, it is wise to take a cautionary stance toward their ready adoption for helping students to practice writing literature reviews.

In light of these findings, what results are obtained from the use of GenAI tools in the ways that students might search for sources in academic writing? **Tine Wirenfeldt Jensen and Søren Wirenfeldt Jensen** report on a study testing five student-centric prompting strategies ranging from simple source requests to requests for sources that are highly cited or that are assured to be real and not fictitious sources. Prompts were tested across three disciplines using ChatGPT-3.5 and -4o. Results showed inconsistencies in the quality and usefulness of the sources generated by the two GPT versions, with GPT-4o generally outperforming GPT-3.5. The results have important implications for students' use of GenAI in sourcework, especially in different disciplines and with different prompting strategies.

Turning to pedagogical applications, are instructors trained in the integration of GenAI into their teaching doing so effectively? In "A Case Study of Mindfully Integrating AI Tools into Writing Classes", **Gea Dreschler, Abby Gambrel, and Jens Branum** describe classroom experiments with the use of GenAI in the context of different stages of a "writing pie" that includes managing the process (planning, revising, etc.); working with content; articulating ideas in words; and working with sources. An outer circle of the pie shows the extent to which GenAI can replicate any of the inner components. The context for the case study was a first-year course on academic writing enrolling 250 students taught by six teachers. By cyclically experimenting with different prompts and exercises focusing on genre, the authors show not only that there can be value in incorporating AI tools into writing classes but that students need to critically evaluate outputs and that AI-based activities should be seen through the lens of learning goals.

As the 12th EATAW conference underscored, writing in the digital age continues to evolve in response to the technological advancements afforded by the rise of GenAI. This special issue reflects the diversity of perspectives and research emerging from the conference, capturing critical discussions on the intersections of AI, literacy, pedagogy, and academic integrity. From empirical studies on students' AI usage to pedagogical frameworks for integrating AI into writing

instruction, these contributions illustrate both the opportunities and challenges facing writing researchers and educators today. As AI technologies continue to develop, the field must remain attuned to their implications, fostering dialogue, research, and informed pedagogical practices. The conference and this special issue serve as essential steps in that ongoing conversation, emphasizing the need for adaptable, critical, and ethically grounded approaches to writing in an AI-mediated world.

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