

From PhD to book: Brief notes

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While a few publishers will publish PhD theses with little change (but at considerable cost), for most there are a number of challenges in turning a PhD into a book. We are fortunate that Multilingual Matters is a publisher committed to, well, multilingual matters. While they are therefore interested in publishing work on language and literacy in diverse contexts as part of their agenda, the publisher, the author(s) and we as series editors are also interested in books being widely sold and read. Part of our goal as series editors too is not so much to help turn unpublished theses into unread books, but rather to make good, critical scholarship on language and literacy available to as wide an audience as possible. These notes are designed to help authors to revise a thesis for potential publication.

There are two main concerns: Style and scope. A thesis is generally written as something of a ‘display,’ a demonstration that the author has read all that needs to be read (the ‘literature review’), knows how to do research (‘methodology’) and has conducted a thorough, extensive, yet narrowly defined piece of research that has been ‘written up’ with care. While this background work may still be the backbone and strength of a good book, it usually also needs considerable revision (depending, of course, on how closely it followed the standard thesis format to start with). As well as discarding some of the extras that almost inevitably get tacked on to a thesis (the ‘put everything in’ view of research writing), such as appendices, tables, questionnaires and so forth, a book needs to operate with a different audience in mind: The goal is not to demonstrate to examiners the worthiness of the writer as a researcher, but rather to entice a much wider audience to read about this work. In order to do this, a book may need considerable revision, from a lightening of style throughout (a general readership may be slightly less interested in our mastery of heavy academic prose) to a reordering and reworking of chapters. Research data may be introduced at the very beginning, for example, and can be spread across a wider range of chapters, each of which may seek to address a particular topic, domain or issue. While some methodological concerns may still be important, there is less need to engage with this at length. Above all, the author needs to ask not: ‘How will people who are paid to read this (supervisors and examiners) judge it?’ but rather: ‘How can I encourage people to pay to read this?’

The question of scope is a hard one. The strength of good ethnography is always in its specificity. And in many ways, good ethnographies have much more potential as a book than, say, experimental studies, whose findings can often be better compressed into articles. But the problem from the point of view of a publisher is how to make this particular study of this particular community appeal to a wider audience. Who cares about adult literacy in this village in this region of the world? Of course, all research has to locate itself within a broader set of concerns, but the move from a thesis to a book often requires a bigger step. The first issue may be the title, though this is part of a larger

process of reorientation. Whereas a very specific title may work for a thesis – ‘An ethnographic study of children’s bilingual literacy development in out-of-school settings in a remote fishing community on the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam’ – for a book, the title needs to have broader and more immediate appeal, something more like: ‘Fishing bilingually: Literacy development and community practices’. The book itself needs to reflect this changed emphasis: While the specifics of the ethnography remain at the heart of the book, it needs to try to reach out to a wider audience, to locate the study within broader issues, to make more connections. Once again, the challenge is to ask not: ‘Will people who are paid to read this (supervisors and examiners) consider my treatment of the topic adequate?’ but more something along the lines of: ‘How can I persuade someone with no specific interest in this community and topic to buy and read the book anyway?’

This rewriting and refocusing can be quite demanding, but it should help in producing a more open, appealing and readable text. Perhaps one day we will be able to get theses and books to converge more, but this will surely be through changes to the ways in which doctoral dissertations are written and conceived. Until then, there is a lot of work to be done in bridging the gap. It may be useful to look at books that have been based on theses to see how they have been constructed. Three recent books published by Multilingual Matters that have made this transition are listed below. Several forthcoming books in the *Critical Language and Literacy Studies* series have also been developed from doctoral dissertations. There are also various reference books addressing these themes. Worth consulting are:

Germano, W. (2005). *From dissertation to book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Harman, E., Montagnes, I., McMenemy, S., & Bucci, C. (2003). *The thesis and the book: A guide for first-time academic authors*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Multilingual Matters books developed from dissertations:

Backhaus, P (2007) *Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

Menken, K (2008) *English Learners Left Behind: Standardized Testing as Language Policy* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

Rosowsky, A (2008) *Heavenly Readings: Liturgical Literacy in a Multilingual Context* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters