Writing the World in a Foreign Language

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Decades of theorisation and research on the teaching and learning of second language writing have hardly created coherent theoretically profound and practically relevant understandings of writing instruction. This article discusses the possibilities and insights created by bringing personal meaningfulness into the realm of writing pedagogy. Briefly revisiting the mainstream landscape of second language writing theory and, more specifically, addressing aspects of (im)personal academic writing and publishing, we present an overview of the notion of wor(l)d writing, which implies the intimate interconnection of writing and the writer’s individual and social identity. Recognizing the role of linguistic forms, cognitive processes and socio-political situatedness of writing practices, such a perspective underscores the importance of balancing these elements and going beyond them by bringing the self of the writer into the writing practice. On this basis, we argue that language and literacy education may be enhanced by acknowledging the little-explored wonders of writing and understanding it as an act of composing and narrating the word-world of the self-other.

Keywords: writing pedagogy; foreign language writing; writing the world; theories of writing instruction

Writing lives is more than writing lines. Carl Leggo (2000)

Introduction

Writing is notoriously labeled as the last (possibly implying the remotest and the most impersonal) aspect of knowledge of a language even in learning one’s mother tongue. In learning an additional language, the stigma is compounded as the difficulty of composing texts is appended to the already challenging task of making basic sense in the new language (Hyland 2003, 2016; Shin 2003; Silva 1993; Torrance and Galbraith 2008). In mainstream language education, by embracing a view of writing as little more than an extended grammar exercise (Hyland 2003; Mazgutova and Kormos 2015) that silences of the learner’s voice and position, second/foreign language writers can hardly find the space to realize the value of their words and themselves as writers (Chambers et al. 2012;
Leggo 2004; Martin, Tarnanen and Tynjala 2018). This might be seen as a symptom of a modern disease of ironically separating the instrumental function of words used to express ideas and the personal dimension of the felt and lived meaning of those words (Fasheh 2007).

Notwithstanding such strictly form-focused perspectives of writing, the ability to write and to create texts that mirror the inner world of thoughts and feelings as well as the outer lived world of the writer may be perceived as a gift. It has been argued that it is part of human nature to write (Cameron 1998), as the desire to express is one of the basic characteristics of the human being (Graves 1994; Petrosky and Mihalakis 2016). Therefore, nurturing confident writers who take pleasure in their writing, who are able to put their original thoughts and experiences into their written language (Ai 2015; Elbow 1991; Martin et al. 2018), and who know the power of words in composing and expressing their own ideas (Leggo 2004) rather than merely composing them, may yield new insights into the act of writing (in an additional language).

As language educators, we might find ourselves obliged to obey the predetermined rules and structures of writing that turn into classroom assignments and make students ignore, hide, or even practically forget their presence in the words they choose to write. But a more profound and lifelike conception of the act of writing may bring the language teacher closer to learning in a true sense. In this article we discuss aspects of such an understanding in light of revisiting some of the theoretical debates on (second language) (academic) writing. We begin with two examples of the kind of writing we are advocating, both illustrating our own attempts at writing the world in a foreign language. The first text is taken from Kianfar’s (2010) MA thesis, entitled ‘A Qualitative Study of How Iranian English Literature Majors Craft the “Right to Write” in Writing Classrooms’, and the second comes from Mirhosseini’s (2013) PhD dissertation, ‘Ideologies of English Language Teaching Research in Iran’.

The remainder of the article will provide a rationale for the kind of writing that is reflected in these two pieces, arguing that the teaching of writing (in an additional language) should be reconceptualised to enable students to use the language as a personal resource for exploring experiences and issues that matter to them. Such a reconceptualisation of the act of writing can engage learner-writers in writing that is meaningful to them and provide the grounds for them to become involved in challenging and rewarding meaning-making activities that they find of significance, personally as well as socioculturally and politically.

Kianfar

In my world, being able to write, pouring out words that mirror my innermost thoughts, feelings and experiences on a piece of paper is Almighty God’s holy gift to me and all human beings. Looking for the origin of my writing, I took a peek into my childhood where a little girl is interested in drawing colorful pictures of her dreams on paper and on walls. She is explaining them to her parents, daydreaming about her lines, shapes and colours for hours and hours. As time passes, her interest in drawing changes to writing words. With the imagination of pictures in mind, I started converting them into words.

In Farsi composition classes at school, I was usually the one who volunteered to read her writings and the one who always asked for permission to write more and more. This writing created a familiarity with myself. I trusted the words since they emerged from the life events where I could show what I meant when I wrote them. I put the pen on paper and could start writing as freely as a
feather flying in the air. Words began to flow while it became impossible to stop the stream of words of my inner dialogue. It was like a miracle!

With my entrance into the world of (learning and, later, teaching) English as a foreign language, my writing changed. Perhaps, the inspiration for writing took a different direction. I sensed a huge rock blocking my writing river. This very big dam also influenced how I taught writing in my English classes – both adults and children. It was an area in which I felt I lacked expertise. I could not share, or help my students experience, the same freedom and joy I had experienced while writing in Farsi. Emphasis on accuracy and error-free grammar became the learning objectives of my English classes.

In those classes, my definition of writing changed to be a mirror of students’ grammatical and lexical knowledge. Like the way I learnt writing in English, I forced students to write on repetitive topics and focus on specific rules to reproduce texts in the form of models in their course-books. My way of teaching in those classes was highly influenced by all the past experiences as a learner of English. In a way, I encouraged the act of silencing my students’ voice and their positions in their compositions. Contrary to my own free-flowing and joyful nature of Farsi writing, I thought that a learner and teacher of English should conform to a view of teaching writing as prescribing a set of dominant written tasks and exercises.

Now reflecting upon those years, I confess there was a unique voice inside each of my students worthy to be shared with others in the classroom, but I could not notice or listen to it and, disappointingly, I was not aware of its existence. Now I realize that in those days I was a teacher acting as a technician who always tried to find errors and fix them so that my students write correctly, because a never-ending thirst for hunting and using different teaching methods without thinking had replaced my decisions and interpretations as a language teacher.

Therefore, my purpose in undertaking this study is to see how undergraduate English Literature students perceive their positions as authors of academic papers when they write in literary academic language in final exams, projects and papers. I also want to see how students challenge the belief of not being worthy enough to introduce and share their own ideas in their writing, and to further understand their language challenges in the process of writing in English as a foreign language. My hope is to observe how this kind of crafting writing may become a chance for them to challenge the idea of impersonal writing and to live their own self in their writing.

Mirhosseini
I set out the writing journey of this research with the illustration of a quick image of how I came to be here living with the particular worldview that I have brought into this study. Rather than sketching a mere sentimental biographical account of the one who has conducted the study presented here, this section will be a subtle argument for the idea that almost all research is, admittedly or otherwise, anchored in the social history of the researcher and the researched.

I was born into the two languages of Farsi and Mazandarani in a rural rice-farming area of Mazandaran in northern Iran and could speak both of the languages before being taught by any language teacher. Ever since, I have not had any
Mazandarani teacher but have learnt and continued to be with it through hearing, talking, experiencing and living the language of my mother’s honesty; the language of the dirt road to my grandmother’s house; the language of playing, play-working and, later, working in paddy fields; and the language of frogs, fruit trees, water and rain. I am, therefore, illiterate in Mazandarani, that is, rarely do I write or read Mazandarani words. However, while speaking Farsi, English and a bit of Arabic, I feel most at home with Mazandarani.

I was then sent to school to learn the language of schools. My own language was apparently not enough. The so-called top student, as I used to be labeled at school, did not seem to have any problems with school. When lulled by good grades, you do not see problems or ask questions. As all school-goers of that time I started with drawing rows and rows of various types of controlled curves and straight lines in my notebook as apparently prescribed by experts of education to help me control the movement of my hand for writing. The next step was to write letters of the Farsi alphabet and, later, to write so-called sentences.

Throughout the school years and well into the undergraduate university life, the things that mattered were grades, ranks, prizes and pats on the back for a teacher’s pet. An example of hardly-meaningful school activities, characteristic of school life, was a sentence I memorized for a third-grade primary school science exam: Some plants reproduce through ‘cutting’; for example, Razeghi (Arabian Jasmine) and Kharzahreh (Oleander). In the plant-rich area where we lived, I knew how to do cutting on orange trees, but we did not have either Oleanders or Arabian Jasmines and I did not know what they were. I found out what an Oleander looked like only ten years later, but until now, 25 years after I wrote Arabian Jasmine as the example of the plants that are reproduced through cutting, I still do not know what it looks like and even if it is a bush-size plant or a big tree.

Later, as an undergraduate student majoring in ‘Teaching English as a Foreign Language,’ after a few years of undergraduate grappling with the usual English learning stuff traditionally put into the frames of the skills and components like reading, writing, speaking, listening, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, I just started to feel an unease that was the launch of an avalanche of questions. For example, in the case of writing, I thought: Why should I care about the mechanics of writing to the extent that I forget what I want to write about? (In a third-year writing course, I remember I was given the task of writing a piece with a word limit of 100. I wrote something but I found it to be about 140 words; rewrote it to meet the word limit but ended up with less than 80 words; and wrote it again to finally hit the 100, forgetting all about what was written about.)

Therefore, I started to become a ‘critical pedagogy’ fan as early as the third year of my undergraduate studies and the peak of all that was a thorny graduate thesis on critical pedagogy in English language education. As a graduate student, I started different teaching activities thinking to be fighting for bringing critical pedagogical perspectives into English teaching in Iran. I also started various types of writing and cooperating with academic communities as a member of the editorial board, journal review board member, manuscript referee, and conference committee member. However, later I started to question critical pedagogy itself.
Considering my felt pains and concerns in English language teaching, I have come to realize that too many things are always taken for granted in this field. Presupposed and taken-for-granted assumptions seem to have come to capture the entire world of academia and beyond. Therefore, one might observe that the most fundamental beliefs in any social practice, including my own language education life, tend to be the most hidden and the most steadfast of opinions that escape many eyes that otherwise happen to be very meticulous in techniques and technicalities such as the ones dealing with aspects of English teaching and research. Therefore, what follows in the rest of this dissertation is, in fact, an academic and, at the same time personal, pursuit of my concerns with language, learning and life.

**Revisiting Writing Theory**

The literature on teaching second language writing that started to flourish in the 1980s illustrates a separation between the research and practice of teaching writing (Leki, Cumming and Silva 2008). The work of language teaching researchers and practitioners is generally characterized by the lack of a coherent, comprehensive and practically illuminating theory of second language writing instruction within existing frameworks (Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Hyland 2016; Mak and Coniam 2008; Silva 1993; Zamel 1987). Theoretical work focusing on the teaching of writing comprises the three trends known as *product*, *process*, and *post-process* perspectives. Product approaches have focused on writing for learning linguistic elements and the mechanics of sentence formation (Connor 1987; Silva 1990). Process approaches shifted the focus to cognitive complexity and stage-based views of experimenting with challenges of text composition (Graham and Sandmel 2011; Lam 2015). The lesser-known post-process perspectives considered the socio-political nature of writing as a literacy practice (Atkinson 2003; Kent 1999).

Apart from the now disclosed simplistic nature of product-orientation and the naïve and extremely cognitive asocial orientation of process approaches, post-process perspectives also stayed far from a source of practical wisdom in writing pedagogy. Despite the promises, the problems with the latter may be attributed to the exaggerated distance from the formal and cognitive concerns of product and process perspectives, on the one hand, and an over-emphasis on social activism at the expense of meaningful consideration of personal dimensions of life-like writing, on the other. Moreover, post-process discourse may be perceived as “overly concerned with outward critique rather than inward reflection” and also “too academic and forbidding to be approached as feasible classroom practices” (Mirhosseini 2009, 42). It is within this troubled theoretical landscape that designing writing courses has been described to be as dangerous as treading a minefield (Raimes 2002).

The theory of second language writing instruction seems to be viewed as a less important concern in the actual settings of writing instruction, since *contextual* considerations such as the logistics of writing courses, evaluation processes and learner involvement influence the act of second language writing more than a neatly structured theory of teaching writing (Boughey 2000; Brindley and Schneider 2002). The extensive theory-building attempts of writing-researchers, dating back to the 1970s, seem not to have found their way into the classroom life of writing courses, and language teachers appear to continue to cling to traditional perceptions and practices (McArthur, Graham and Fitsjerald 2008). The continued teacher-centered and product-oriented writing pedagogy views the attainment of grammatical and lexical accuracy and complexity as
perhaps the most noticeable mission of second language writing teachers (Mazgutova and Kormos 2015; Ortega 2015).

It is within the confines of such writing approaches that frameworks like Hyland’s (2003) four-stage model of teaching writing take shape (comprising the four steps of familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing and free writing). In practising this model, a teacher is expected to introduce a particular grammatical structure and a number of vocabulary items and to direct students to utilize fixed patterns in composing sentences. The next stage is replicating those familiar texts as composition models and, finally, students are to use these models in writing their course assignments. The impersonal character of such frameworks is so obvious that, in the case of Hyland’s model (to take one example), the developer of the model himself concedes that this kind of teaching writing is far from writers’ real-life experiences, since it presumes the produced texts to be linguistic products and objects, the fabrication of which shapes the focus of the instructional process.

Likewise, second language (academic) writing instruction in higher education encourages students to replicate existing published sources and, therefore, to distrust their own knowledge and their perceived inability to create texts appropriate to the so-called standards of academia (Leki et al. 2008). Students tend to consider writing as products to-be-judged and, therefore, their minds are occupied with the expected features of a product—including the awkward concern of the required word-length of texts—to the extent that they automatically stop creating anything original (Mak and Coniam 2008). This is what stimulates retrospective reflections on university experiences of second language writing like the one in Mirhosseini’s piece above.

Solving conundrums like how many words to use, how many pages to write, what mechanics to follow and how to get the best score, takes more than one more academic theory of teaching second language writing. What we need is not continued theorisation that suggests more models, frameworks, stages, steps and tips for mixing vocabulary into longer linguistic stretches called sentences and sentences into yet longer ones called paragraphs and texts. Rather, we need to shift the focus from the long-debated issues of the how of teaching and learning writing, and to consider who writes (that is, the self of the writer), about what (that is, the world of the writer) and why (that is, the reason and purpose of writing).

**Writing the Self-Other Wor(l)d**

A view of writing as a creative process of word-world exploration and reflection involves as much focus on writer as on writing—if not more. Writing is not separable from the writer’s life, identity and self (Ai 2015; Cardell and Douglas 2018; Clark and Ivanic 1997). The act of language learning, including learning to write, is shaped by personal experiences in social interactions (Doecke 2004; Doecke, Locke and Petrosky 2004). The power of words in this social craft (Graves 2005) and different aspects of its teaching have been of considerable interest in literacy studies (Cameron 1998; Fasheh 2007; Goodman 1996; Petrosky and Mihalakis 2016). An appreciation of the individual-social nature of writing enables it to be viewed as the creation of a dialogic language in which utterances are always addressed toward both the self and others (Bakhtin 1986; Nishino and Atkinson 2015).

Written texts constantly grow and develop in a web of social interactions after they are born. In addition, rich texts possess the potential to be creatively transformed through time, far distant from the mind of their authors and from the time of their birth (Bakhtin 1981). In other words, rather than a so-called neutral and static skill of producing rigid compositions, the act of
writing is a dialogic and evolving endeavor in embedding writers’ meanings in texts that carry the wisdom of their authors (Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Clark and Holquist 1984). Texts are mutually constructed and collaboratively composed by the writer and the potential reader. The complex employment of values, understandings and experiences by both writers and readers are required to perceive how dialogic language functions and how texts are constructed and construed in an individual-social context (Hirvela 2007; Goodman 1996; Nishino and Atkinson 2015).

The view of writing as crafting one’s socially-shaped personal experiences into a unique meaningful artifact implies that writing, like any other form of artistic expression, is a fuzzy and unpredictable operation (Graves 2005). This conception of writing, rather than endorsing a strict process-oriented conception that can suggest a series of sequential steps from the beginning of writing toward a determined product, depicts it as a recursive act that needs time to flourish (Graves 2003). In his Fresh Look at Writing, Graves (1994) discusses choice awareness, that is, choosing writing topics based on learner-writers’ world knowledge as crucial to true writing that can happen only by reading the writer’s world. Thus, a focus on personal knowledge and narratives may inspire writers to take ownership of their writing and become engaged in their act of writing (Canagarajah 2015). Therefore, the writing teacher’s most important characteristic turns to be the ability to awaken students’ past and present interests and knowledge within a socio-cultural milieu and to demonstrate self-other conceptions (Cardell and Douglas 2018; Petrosky and Mihalakis 2016).

Writers’ sentences, paragraphs and even linguistic structures may be seen as culture-bound and constantly redefined through social relations (Beach and Friedrich 2008). In line with Bakhtin’s view of writing as engagement in a cultural activity, it may be understood as more than the transcription of speech and the representation of oral language on paper (Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Leggo 2004). Based on such a standpoint, and defying the fragmentation of writing from the writer’s individual and collective identity (Ai 2015; Cox et al. 2010; Majchrzak 2018), Clark and Ivanic (1997) portray an image of writing as narrating one’s life events and a way of telling about the writer. They introduce the autobiographical self, the discoursal self, and the authorial self as the interwoven selves of a writer’s identity. They refer to the presence of writers’ personal past experiences; the discourse characteristics of a text that is indicative of values, beliefs and social power relations; and the way writers reveal themselves as authors.

When writing, the word-world of the self-other becomes a mirror of who the writer is. It is then, according to Cameron (1998), that writers can claim the true right to write. Gaining this right implies that the desire to write emerges from learner-writers’ personal lives as dialogues with the self and others because they value their knowledge and experience. Learner-writers write as part of their learning journeys on the path of discovering their own voice in their texts (Cardell and Douglas 2018; Doecke 2004; Doecke et al. 2004; Martin et al. 2018). Therefore, there is hardly any need to compete with others in scoring higher, since everybody is understood to have their own way of writing (Canagarajah 2015). The creating spirit in writing thus emerges as soon as the writer decides to write without the worry of the mechanics. The more personally-powerful writing becomes, the more universally it can communicate as it becomes embedded in the writer’s life.

(Non-)Writing in Academia

At a conspicuous distance from the conception of writing discussed above, the teaching of academic writing seems to be predominantly captured by world-less definitions of writing and strictly product-based and examination-oriented instructional practices (Bilton and
Sivasubramaniam 2009; Bruce and Hamp-Lyons 2015). Language learners may feel the pressure to merely obtain passing grades by meeting the expectations, whatever they are. The self, the other, and the world tend to be lost in the process of learning academic second language writing as product-oriented writing in the university courses espouse a depersonalised view of language learning (Leggo 2007). Nonetheless, observing the fact that second language writers from different parts of the globe are unique, one may need to be wary of ignoring their cultural differences associated with personal learning styles, and their perceptions toward knowledge, language, text and identity (Ai 2015; Hyland 2003; Majchrzak 2018).

One major caution in this regard concerns high stakes writing exams in which the formal correctness of sentences tends to be centrally stressed (Polio and Shea 2014). With the arrival of computerised scoring systems, intended to eradicate human raters’ errors, the emphasis on the mechanics of writing gets even stronger (Elliot and Williamson 2013). Thus, to improve their writing, students have to read the available textbooks providing plenty of strategies to strengthen and sharpen their skills in a short period of time. The dominant role of these books seems to be motivating students to acquire the obligatory tricks to pass exams (Nation 2009). Learners of second language academic writing, in the shadow of tests and exams, move from one sentence to the next with difficulty and frequently get trapped in their word choice before they make sure that their topic sentence and its supporting sentences are correct and acceptable according to the rules. By applying the strategies and techniques prescribed in course-books, second language academic writer-learners are pushed to exhibit their passive approval of the books (Macovski 1997; Manchon 2011). They lose their creativity in their struggle for technical writing mastery.

One-semester writing courses can hardly provide enough space for gaining the feel of writing the (academic) world (Ortega 2003; Storch 2009). A further related dilemma is that time limitation of writing courses can frighten academic writer-learners of a second language since writing requires a safe environment to think, choose and write (Elbow 1995; Graves 2005). A view of writing that endeavors to understand the essence of writing as an expression of the self may be a way out of these limitations. Gee (2009) believes that there has been a turning point in the study of language, knowledge and learning, representing them as social and cultural performances, activities and collaborative accomplishments, not primarily as mental skills or abilities (Nishino and Atkinson 2015). Accordingly, successful (academic) writers can be expected to be able to convey their own thoughts and experiences in their written discourse. If students are nurtured to read and respond to their own worlds, they may gain more awareness of their own personalities, values and positions and can be expected to act upon them in the act of authoring their own lives into their texts (Canagarajah 2015; Clark and Holquist 1984).

**Academic or Writer?**

The complications of writing the personal world in a second language are exacerbated by the burden of bringing together the dichotomous roles of an academic and a writer. This is depicted in the distinction that Elbow (1995) observes between the position of a writer in contrast with that of an academic. On the one hand, writers are to express themselves on the topics of their writing. On the other hand, academics tend to forget themselves in reading academic texts and writing about them in as impersonal a manner as possible. Although academic writer-learners need to gain consciousness of their positions as writers to create dialogic texts and to achieve the goal of entering the second language academic world, teachers tend to focus on disciplinary norms at the
expense of personally engaged and expressive writing (Barton 2007; Ferris and Hedgcock 2014; Hyland 2016; Zamel 1987).

As a hallmark of this kind of teaching, the dominant product-oriented approach to academic writing instruction is directed towards purposefully writing like the book (Ferris and Hedgcock 2014; Hyland 2003, 2016). This may imply a conscious self-distancing from the expression of original personal ideas and the inner voice (Swales and Feak 2011, 2013). The consequence can be the loss of the potentially resourceful language of writers’ real lives and the (re)production of colorless texts (Potgieter and Smit 2008). “The depersonalized, bookish language – especially when it naively shows off its bookishness – is a sign of a half-educated writer” (Bazerman 2005, 337). Learners’ potential for gaining awareness and taking transformative action in academia may vanish if students’ tasks are limited to the confines of static and lifeless writing models in course-books, without questioning the contents, embedded meanings or learning processes (Cameron 1998). Therefore, to avoid this pitfall, academic second language writing teachers’ have a responsibility to encourage self-other awareness, showing ways to nurture the rebirth of the learners’ own dialogic and insightful language (Bakhtin 1986; Bazerman 2002; Clark and Holquist 1984).

One more dimension of the challenge of academic disciplinary writing is the concern of publication (Hyland 2015). By publishing their writing, academics strive to invite public acceptance and recognition (Bardi 2015; Hyland 2009). An exaggerated view of this might suggest an absolute binary opposition: the necessity of writing oneself as the essence of true writing on the one hand, and the pressure to follow the harsh norms and politics of peer review and publication, on the other. Although this binary is not quite so fixed or unresolvable, academic writing pedagogy needs to strive for an awareness of this dichotomy in teaching and learning to write in a second language with the aim of reaching a balance between the apparent contradiction of a largely impersonal role of academics and the importantly personal essence of writing one’s own world. In academia, one may at least opt for writing the academic world of oneself rather than falling hostage to the fabrication of big name publications.

Conclusion

Beyond the tight tunnel view of the mechanics of instrumental literacy, writing can be part of a broader journey of gaining consciousness of one’s own lived experiences (Anderson and Irvine 1993; Peterson and Wetzel 2015). With the integration of the word and the world, teaching and learning writing can be realized as composing the wor(l)d of the learner-writer. Such a view of writing from the perspective of wonders, transcends issues of form, structure, text and genre. In the kind of literacy which prioritises world over word (Freire 1991), the act of writing, like that of reading, comprises a vibrant cultural activity in which meaning-making becomes a form of social action and part of learner-writers’ life-world (Berthoff 1981; Cooper and Holtzman 1989; Nishino and Atkinson 2015). A writer engaged in writing as a way of learning, learns and discovers new insights and composes his or her own world (Hariston 1992; Shor 1999).

Moreover, transcending the personal world, writing in a new language as a further window to wider worldviews can contribute to competing ideologies and interests in the social world. Writing turns out to be closely connected to society and social issues (Nishino and Atkinson 2015). Therefore, as an act and not simply an object, it should be understood in its social context (Clark and Ivanic 1997). The sort of writing which the learners learn, supports particular values, power relations and ideologies. From this standpoint, writing “is, ultimately, always maintaining or
promoting certain interests” (Clark and Ivanic 1997, 118). What learners need as they learn to write, then, is to gain an awareness of these delicate and complex individual-social, self-other related and word-world reflective attributes of writing.

Our argument has moved from reflecting on writing in general, to personal writing and to academic writing. The strange character of writing in one’s mother tongue becomes even stranger when trying to write in a foreign language, and the experience is then compounded by the privileging of academic writing in academic settings, when students are required to depersonalise their writing in order to pass tests. Academics as writers can open up the possibility for students to write in the ways shown by the excerpts at the beginning of this article and discussed throughout. This would be to shift away from a preoccupation with the surface features of written expression, and the fetish that is made of the conventions of so-called academic writing. Moreover, it would be to welcome writing that has a hybrid character, comprising a combination of lives and languages as well as a combination of genres or styles (narrative and analysis).

A closing note on world writing is that looking at writing from such a perspective does not imply ignoring issues of form and technicalities. Technical ability and issues of structure, genre and text, although they should not be seen as ultimate targets in themselves, are obviously vital to the act of writing. The argument, however, is that learners should acquire these abilities by engaging in authentic activities (Peterson and Wetzel 2015; Smith 1983) and put them at the service of the act of meaningful writing. The issue at stake is avoiding the dissection of writing into pieces (Barton 2007) and a mere concern with nuts and bolts to correctly conjoin them into strings of sentences. Learning to write words is a worthwhile engagement if it is not bereft of the writer-learners’ world (Chambers et al. 2012; Leggo 2007). Let us teach and learn writing (in any language) in the process of writing something that is worth writing about because the time and thought spent on learning to write is itself life rather than preparation for life that stands at a distance.

References


