

Writing Instruction in an EFL Context: Learning to Write or Writing to Learn Language?

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Abstract

Writing is an important skill to function effectively in a foreign language. In an EFL context, writing is all the more important as a high percentage of students learn English for academic and professional purposes that require advanced writing skills. In the most recent scholarship of L2 writing, arguments have emerged regarding whether the focus of writing instruction should be to teach students how to write effectively in the target language, or how they should use writing to learn the language. Eliciting the main tenets around both these theoretical orientations, the current paper examines writing instruction in EFL contexts and makes the case that the learn-to-write and write-to-learn language approaches are not mutually exclusive. The paper further posits that learner needs should pivot L2 writing instruction in EFL contexts, and that approaches to L2 writing instruction need to be flexible and adaptable.

Keywords: L2 Writing; Learn-to-Write; Write-to-Learn Language; EFL; L2 Learning

Introduction

Writing is an important skill that second language (L2) learners need to develop in order to participate as effective communicators—be it in an academic or a professional context. This entails that much attention needs to be paid in developing written communication skills. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, the stakes for developing these skills are quite high as many EFL learners aspire to go abroad, mainly in English-speaking countries, to pursue higher education, while others set the goal for themselves to work for multinational organizations as part of their professional career (e.g. Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009). Having advanced written communication skills is paramount in both these situations.

This points to the importance of writing instruction in EFL contexts, and how EFL students prepare themselves for the demands of written communication skills required to be successful in both their academic and professional careers. As is the case in any L2 writing context, EFL students are required to do two things at once when participating in English writing skill development: learn the English language and learn how to write effectively in English (see Manchón, 2014). Keeping these dynamics of L2 writing as a departure point, recent scholarly conversations on this issue have weighed in on the importance of L2 development, on one hand, and the writing skills development in L2, on the other. This has followed that for some L2 scholars, too much attention is paid to the “writing” aspects of L2 writing instruction, neglecting L2, the core in L2 writing (e.g. Polio, 2019). For others, important concerns of L2 writing instruction involve helping students develop problem solving and negotiation skills through building sound arguments by such means as rhetorical organization and rhetorical positioning and self-discovery as writers (Hirvela, 2011).

Faced with these contrasting scholarly positionings, determining pedagogical goals in the EFL writing classroom can be challenging for teachers, especially for those who do not have tertiary degrees or extensive training in and advanced knowledge of either L2 writing or applied linguistics. In particular, contexts where curriculum mandates are not well articulated, it is helpful to unpack the theoretical underpinnings of each of these scholarly strands and empirical evidence in support of them. In light of this, the goal of this paper is to first situate the scholarly conversations around *learn-to-write* (LW) and *write-to-learn language* (WLL) approaches as they relate to L2 writing instruction. Next, I examine the characteristics of L2 writing instruction in EFL contexts, followed by discussions on what this means with respect to writing instruction in these contexts. Finally, I make the argument that LW and WLL approaches are not mutually exclusive, and that student needs should play the determining role for teachers to decide which aspects of these two foci they should use in the EFL writing classroom.

Learn-to-Write and Write-to-Learn Language

In this section I discuss the major theoretical and conceptual orientations of LW and WLL approaches to writing. As part of this discussion, I examine the major theories, and where applicable, refer to relevant empirical evidence.

Learn-to-Write

L2 writing has a clear lineage to first language (L1) composition studies (Manchón, 2011a). This means that much of what we know today about what good writing is, what it means to be a good writer, and how to teach writing effectively has generally emerged from the scholarship of L1 composition studies. Thus, the dominant theories about learning how to write in an L2 parallels the theories of writing espoused in the context of L1 composition and can be summarized as follows (although not necessarily in the order of their inceptions) (see Hyland, 2011).

Process theory, one of the most influential L2 writing theories, views writing as a process and writers must adhere to the steps such as planning, reformulating, and revising in order to complete the writing task (Flower & Hayes, 1981). According to this theory, the writer is at the center of the writing process. The writer works individually to plan and engage in various invention activities to generate ideas for writing. Writing seen from this perspective is recursive, meaning the writer can go back and forth throughout the entire writing process. For example, after the formulation (i.e. drafting) stage, the writer can go back and engage in additional planning to make changes to the text. Process theory therefore puts much emphasis on the writer's cognition or thinking and considers the writer to be siloed from the surroundings. This means that much attention is paid to the writer's thought processes as they accomplish the writing task, and it is believed that writing instruction involves underlining the importance of the writing processes and having students go through each step of these processes so that they can control and manipulate their thinking when writing. In short, process theory assumes that learning to write means following the steps of the writing process while training the writer's thoughts to control and organize ideas effectively to produce texts.

As much as process theory has been influential in L2 writing instruction, it has received its share of criticism. The primary criticism relates to its almost exclusive individual-writer-centeredness and a cognitive orientation. An activity of writing, as perpetuated by process theory, is fundamentally asocial. However, humans being social, and considering that the writer shapes and is shaped by various social factors around them, it is hard to imagine that writing occurs in a vacuum. A corollary of this is that L2 scholars, especially those with an orientation to sociocultural approaches to L2 learning, have called for inclusion of various social and cultural factors in the theorization of L2 writing (e.g. Atkinson, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Bhowmik, 2016, 2017; Lei, 2008).

A second theory that informs us a great deal about LW focuses on the product of writing—the text, instead of the writer. In this perspective, texts are often viewed as objects and learning to write means producing grammatically correct texts. This entails that learners' writing development can be measured through improvement in various aspects of accuracy of the language use. This writing theory also assumes that writing is audience independent and ignores the assumption that a piece of writing is essentially a communicative response in a particular context. A moderate version of the theory focuses on texts, but assumes the text as discourse, meaning all texts are produced in social settings as part of communicative events. This particular view of writing stresses on LW as a socially situated, communicatively oriented act. Teaching writing therefore means to help students see each piece of writing having a social purpose and context (Hyland, 2011, p. 23). An offshoot of this approach to LW is the genre approach, in which a genre is considered to be a socially recognizable way to communicate with each other.

The third and final LW theory is based on reader-writer reciprocity in text construction: when writing, the writer anticipates what the reader expects, and when interpreting the text for meanings, the reader draws on the common knowledge that they share with the writer about text construction, and ultimately, communication. LW in this perspective means to be able to recognize the set of conventions in a given context that a reader shares with the writer. Teaching writing should be focused on analyzing the contexts, helping students recognize the context-specific writing conventions that the reader assumes, and relate these learning experiences to real life writing tasks as much as possible. This particular theory evokes the concept of discourse community as both the writer and reader are part of the community that they shape and are shaped by. In other words, due to reciprocity, the reader and writer form a unique community that they both identify with. This explains why different disciplines value different types of argument and writing styles. For instance, the social sciences stresses on synthesizing research based on multiple sources, whereas in science, describing and reporting on the phenomena are considered to be important (Hyland, 2011, p. 29).

Write-to-Learn Language

In a WLL approach to L2 writing instruction, the focus shifts from writing to L2 development. In short, the consensus among L2 scholars is that writing is a language learning tool and engaging in writing activities helps augment what Manchón (2011b) calls the language learning potential (LLP) of L2 learners (also see Wolff, 2000). Although researchers have explored the writing—L2 learning relationship from a variety of perspectives, Manchón (2011b) has identified two main strands of studies that have informed our collective understanding in this area: the *descriptive* and the *interventionist* approaches to L2 writing research.

A *descriptive* approach focuses on describing L2 writing as part of evidence of learners' engagement in various psycholinguistic processes that are considered to support L2 development (Manchón, 2011b; Manchón & Williams, 2016). For example, individual or collaborative *attention* in the L2 writing process is of great interest to researchers for learners' L2 development, as *attention* is considered to be an important constituent in both Noticing and Output Hypotheses of L2 learning (Schmidt, 2001; Swain, 1985, 1995). Swain and Lapkin (1995) in this regard have noted that the problems learners encounter in L2 production (i.e. L2 writing) trigger cognitive processes (e.g. noticing and metalinguistic reflection) that contribute to L2 learning. From sociocultural perspectives of L2 learning, the ways social interactions through the writing process contribute to L2 development have also drawn researchers' interest. In sociocultural frameworks of L2 learning, social interactions are considered to contribute to L2 development. Consequently, the interactions involved in individual and collaborative writing processes are believed to contribute to L2 learning (Manchón, 2011a, 2011b).

An *interventionist* approach to L2 writing research has focused on the effects of various interventions during the writing process on L2 learning. Much research in L2 writing following this paradigm has focused on feedback practices: how feedback on writing contributes to the improvement of L2 texts, and by implication, L2 development. Within feedback studies, researchers have looked into different types and aspects of feedback practices and their effects on L2 writing. Examples include explicit and implicit feedback, oral and written feedback, focused and unfocused feedback, feedback followed by reflections, and feedback with or without metalinguistic explanations (Manchón, 2011b, pp. 68-69). The main focus of these studies has been to investigate the impact of interventions in the form of feedback on L2 development. Another strand of research with an *interventionist* approach has examined how learners' attention to grammar is mediated by different task modalities such as written output (e.g. writing) and non-output (e.g. reading comprehension) tasks.

Another dimension of WLL that researchers have often focused on is what is known as writing to learn content (WLC) (see Hirvela, 2011; Manchón, 2011a). Writing scholars have maintained that just as L2 learners learn the target language by engaging in production activities of the written output, they also acquire content knowledge in the process (Hirvela, 2011). They argue that writing affords students exposures to the meaning making process in the target language and helps them develop disciplinary knowledge. WLC has in recent times morphed into various approaches to writing instruction such as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) or Content-Based Instruction (CBI), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), mainly in Europe. It may be noted that although both CBLT/CBI and CLIL draw on the WLC approach, they are used in the contexts of L2 pedagogy in general (i.e., as opposed to L2 writing pedagogy only), and focus on other language skills (reading, speaking and listening), in addition to writing. A common thread running through CBLT, CBI and CLIL in L2 instruction is that L2 learners are assumed to acquire the target language effectively when presented with the interdisciplinary information in a meaningful and contextualized form and when the focus is on helping them learn the content-area knowledge (Hirvela, 2011; Manchón, 2011a).

Current Conversations about L2 Writing Instructional Goals

Keeping the LW and WLL approaches to L2 writing discussed above in mind, we now turn to the current scholarly conversations about the instructional goals in the L2 writing classroom, especially those that relate to EFL contexts. In a recent paper, Polio (2019) has made the case that in L2 writing instruction, not enough attention is paid to L2 development. According to Polio, instructors are more concerned about helping students develop various writing skills such as “writing from sources” and “mastering English rhetorical styles” (Polio, 2019, p. 2) than focusing on such language-related issues as collocation, grammatical accuracy, and lexical and syntactic development.

Polio’s (2019) observation is based on a number of recent empirical studies showing that while writing courses contributed to the improvement of students’ writing quality, no significant improvement was evident in terms of accuracy measures. For example, examining a corpus of descriptive essays written over a semester in the context of a US university, Polio and Shea (2014) found that the quality of student essays improved. However, in terms of linguistic development, the researchers did not find any change in student writing on a number of accuracy measures, except for a decrease in preposition errors. Similar findings were reported by Bulté and Housen (2014), who did not find any linguistic improvement in terms of three lexical complexity measures in descriptive essays, although the quality of essays had improved. In a separate study, Yoon and Polio (2017) examined narrative and argumentative essays written over a semester. Their findings showed that even though there was an increase of words written in 30 minutes, there was no improvement in terms of syntactic complexity, lexical complexity, and accuracy measures. In a more recent study, Polio, Lim and Tigchelaar (2018) examined two different classes and found that while teachers provided feedback on student writing, little class time was utilized for language aspects of writing instruction. The researchers noted that the textbook of the course had little focus on language issues. These empirical findings convinced Polio (2019) that not enough attention is paid to various language aspects in L2 writing instruction. It is relevant to note here that all empirical studies discussed here took place in USA, an ESL context.

Teaching Writing in an EFL Context

Prominent L2 writing scholars (e.g. Lee, 2016; Manchón, 2009; Ortega, 2009) have maintained that teaching writing in an EFL context is different from that of an ESL context. These differences have been attributed to, among other things, context-specific exigencies, unique student needs and institutional mandates, and curricular and pedagogical goals (Manchón, 2014; Ortega, 2009). Despite the differences that exist between ESL and EFL contexts, it is necessary to examine L2 writing instruction in light of Polio’s (2019) arguments discussed in the previous section. This is of critical importance for an enhanced clarity on our professional practices as educators and to help teachers in EFL contexts become more reflective of what they do and expect students to do as part of L2 writing pedagogy. Therefore, in what follows, I discuss concerns that characterize teaching writing in EFL contexts. I have organized my discussion around three broad areas: the context of teaching and learning, how EFL students learn, and how EFL teachers teach.

Context of Teaching and Learning

Unlike ESL contexts where students have exposures to English outside the classroom, EFL students get exposures to the English language primarily in the classroom. This, some scholars have argued, makes students somewhat confused about setting the learning priorities for themselves in the writing classroom (O’Brien, 2004): should they focus on learning English or learning how to write in English (see Wolff, 2000)? Seen from this vantage point, it becomes apparent why both LW and WLL perspectives of L2 writing are especially relevant in EFL contexts.

L2 scholars have noted that generally there is a prevalence of a WLL approach to writing in EFL contexts (Polio, 2019). There are a variety of reasons for this, but the most notable ones relate to context-specific and practical issues. For example, research has shown that L2 writing in EFL contexts is perceived to be a vehicle for improving English language skills (O'Brien, 2004; Wolff, 2000). This means that both students and teachers focus specifically on the language aspects of writing such as correction of mechanical errors, sentence structures, expanding vocabulary as well as improving the fluency of writing. Since many students participate in study abroad programs or go "overseas to study in institutions where English is the medium of instruction," improving general English skills is a practical and immediate goal for them (Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009, p. 35). From a teaching point of view, instructors have to follow institutional mandates, which oftentimes have a clear focus on helping students improve English language skills through writing (see Lee, 2005, 2008). Another way to look at this is that since these institutions rarely have structured writing programs, similar to the ones seen in the USA, for example, teaching and learning objectives of writing courses are not well-articulated (see Wolff, 2000). This results in a more generic approach to teaching and learning of L2 writing.

How Students Learn

In addition to the context of teaching and learning, how students learn also characterizes the teaching of writing in EFL contexts. Research suggests that as they engage in the cognitive processes of writing, EFL students of all proficiency levels invest most of their time in reformulation tasks and least time in planning and revising dimensions of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). As students' proficiency level improves, they seem to be able to free up the time from reformulation tasks and focus more on planning and revising. Based on empirical findings along the similar lines, researchers have come up with what they describe as Inhibition Hypothesis, which maintains that EFL writers with low English proficiency level are not able to deploy resources to cognitively demanding writing processes such as conceptual expansions of a given topic (e.g. content elaboration, monitoring, and higher order revisions) when engaged in a writing task as they use up the resources to attend to the language aspects of writing (Manchón, Roca de Larios & Murphy, 2009; Ortega, 2009; Snellings, van Gelderen & De Gloppe, 2004; Stevenson, Schoonen & de Gloppe, 2006). These findings explain why the focus of L2 writing instruction in EFL contexts is primarily on language aspects of writing. One reason why these findings are important is that explicit instruction of L2 writing explicating various aspects of the cognitive processes of writing (i.e. planning, reformulation, and revising) can contribute to raising student awareness about the steps that they must take when engaged in a writing activity.

As noted earlier, students in EFL contexts have a variety of goals, including pursuing advanced degrees, studying abroad, fulfilling program-specific requirements, professional advancement, to mention a few. Due to these diverse learning goals, students' motivation levels vary as well. Researchers (e.g. Lo & Hyland, 2007) have noted that different levels of motivation result in varying degrees of uptake among students. In order to ensure the effectiveness of what is taught in the EFL writing classroom, teachers need to be mindful about these particular dynamics of student behavior.

Since EFL students are typically homogeneous and familiar with the teaching contexts, transitions to writing classes is fairly smooth. Also, as EFL classes are generally staffed by local teachers, L1 culture-specific literacy practices are often used in L2 writing instruction, making it convenient for students to acclimatize to the teaching-learning process (e.g. see O'Brien, 2004; Ortega, 2009). However, the same cannot be said about ESL contexts, where students come from a variety of backgrounds, and generally are not familiar with local teaching-learning practices. Students' disparate cultural and academic backgrounds in such contexts mean that it typically takes longer for students to adapt to the classroom environment (Ortega, 2009).

How Teachers Teach

Due to a prevalence of WLL orientations and institutional mandates, many EFL writing teachers focus on specific language aspects (e.g. correction of errors) in their writing lessons. Lee (2005), for example, found that EFL writing teachers' feedback in Hong Kong almost exclusively focused on students' mechanical errors, so much so that it was almost counter-productive, as many students felt demotivated seeing the red marks on the paper. Teachers in this particular context reported that providing exhaustive feedback on student errors was part of the institutional mandate that they had to follow (Lee, 2005). As is evident in this example, tension is palpable around the error correction practices that teachers used in this context. This points to the fact that writing teachers in EFL contexts need to have a plan in place to mitigate potential negative impacts of what they do in the classroom on student motivation.

Providing feedback on writing is common in EFL contexts; however, as noted above, feedback in EFL contexts generally revolves around the language aspects of writing, more specifically, grammar. While teacher feedback is widespread, research has shown that peer feedback is also used as a useful pedagogical practice. In fact, researchers have found that peer feedback is used and has been proven to be effective in an authoritative social context like China as well (e.g. Miao, Badger & Zhen, 2006). This serves to indicate that sound pedagogical practices coupled with teachers' careful monitoring contribute to effective EFL writing pedagogy.

Finally, an important dimension of EFL writing pedagogy is that teachers may perceive writing in EFL contexts to be "less purposeful" and "needs driven" compared to how writing is viewed in ESL contexts (Ortega, 2009, p. 232; Wolff, 2000). However, it needs to be remembered that writing being an essential part of literacy development, having students develop strong writing skills is a prerequisite to helping them reach their future academic and professional goals. In this process, teachers play an important role.

What Does This Mean for Writing Instruction in EFL Contexts?

The discussion above elicits important concerns of EFL writing instruction. It is evident that writing is an important tool for the development of L2. Writing is a literacy practice; in addition, writing is important to learn the content (Hirvela, 2011), especially in an L2. Consequently, while designing the curricula and teaching in the classroom, attention must be paid to a variety of issues.

Since WLL appears to be more prevalent in EFL contexts (e.g. Polio, 2019), a cautious approach needs to be adopted that would allow for an incorporation of the important writing skills into the curriculum. As noted in the preceding section, a "less purposeful" approach to writing instruction is not conducive to student learning. Keeping the WLL approach in mind, teachers in EFL contexts need to set clear pedagogical goals and design the curricula that would ensure tangible writing skill development for students. These skills can be determined on the basis of groups of students in question and their immediate and future needs. For example, if the students are bound for college or university studies, writing for academic purposes or WAC-oriented assignments may be considered. Similarly, if the students are embarking on a professional career, specific skills required in the profession may be appropriate. In other words, an integration of the LW approach with careful planning and preparation can help students in EFL contexts develop the skills they need to be successful in both their academic and professional careers.

Based on empirical findings, L2 scholars have suggested two important criteria that can be considered in developing EFL writing curricula: problem solving skills and motivation. First, engaging students in tasks that promote problem solving skills and are challenging in nature are conducive to L2 development (Manchón, 2014). Engaging students in problem solving skills and challenging tasks through writing

helps contribute to the refinement of the cognitive processes, which in turn, promotes noticing and consolidates learners' L2-related knowledge, and ultimately, L2 development (Shintani, 2019; Wolff, 2000). Manchón (2014) in this regard has suggested that this type of writing tasks helps students' "consolidation or extension of knowledge" (p. 105) in the L2. Second, sustained motivation is another factor that L2 scholars have suggested to be important for student engagement in the writing task. However, in EFL contexts tensions may arise between sustaining student motivation and fulfilling the curricular objectives (Lee, 2005; Ortega, 2009). Lo and Hyland's (2007) findings in this regard are relevant here. They found that although through curricular innovations they were able to enhance student engagement and motivation there were certain negative consequences in language accuracy and an over-reliance on "L1 textual solutions" (Ortega, 2009, p. 245). This suggests that EFL writing teachers need to be aware that their curricular decisions (e.g. what to focus on in class activities, the lesson plans and assessment to be used, how to mark student texts) may have potentially negative consequences. Therefore, each of their decisions must be made with students' learning interests in mind.

Another facet of EFL writing instruction that L2 scholars have identified relates to the tension between the implicitness and explicitness with regard to both students' metaknowledge and the teaching of L2 writing (Ortega, 2009). Ortega argues that while teachers expect students' knowledge about various linguistic and rhetorical choices they (students) make during writing to be demonstrated explicitly, they (teachers) need to be mindful that this knowledge may not always be "verbalizable" (p. 246). In fact, being situated in a close proximity of L1 environments, students' writing choices in EFL contexts are expected to be fluid, since they shuttle between L1 and L2—specific rhetorical knowledge when writing in English (Canagarajah, 2006). Also important to recognize are the affective factors (e.g. especially various psycho-emotional factors) that may influence student writing and the choices students make because of them. Ortega (2009) points out that the explicitness and implicitness of EFL writing instruction itself are also important issues to consider, as research suggests that in certain EFL contexts explicit instruction seems to work (Rinnert & Kobayashi, 2009), while in other contexts a more implicit approach to L2 writing instruction is appropriate (e.g. Manchón, Roca de Larios & Murphy, 2009). These findings suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to EFL writing instruction; instructors should be prepared to adopt a context-appropriate approach that works best for them. Ortega (2009) further adds that teachers must guard against explicit instruction that may turn into a formulaic approach to teaching writing, which may have many undesirable outcomes (e.g. Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Yoshida, 2007).

L2 writing research (e.g. Caplan & Farling, 2017; De Oliveira & Lan, 2014) in recent times has shown that an emphasis on meaning making through writing by adopting a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) orientation underlining how language functions in real life contexts can be an effective strategy for teaching writing. It addresses both the language aspects of writing and train students in how to utilize language for effective written communication, thereby helping them develop strong writing skills. An SFL approach to writing instruction is based on the premise that context is important in determining what language one uses and how one uses it. Consequently, the functional aspects of language—i.e. how language functions to enact communication, come to the fore. Once the context is dissected, the teacher together with students determines the language they will need to achieve the communicative goals. The result of such a context-specific, goal-driven, functional language use in writing becomes palpable to students when they see both how language functions (e.g. grammar use, use of vocabulary) and how to use language to achieve specific written communicative goals. Empirical research, albeit mostly in ESL contexts, using this approach to writing instruction has yielded positive results (e.g. De Oliveira & Lan, 2014). Consequently, this approach can be a viable option for teaching writing in EFL contexts and striking a balance between language and writing-focused instruction.

This brings us to the important issue of teacher education and teacher preparation programs in EFL contexts. A number of studies have identified gaps in teacher preparedness for teaching writing and

underlined the need for robust teacher training programs in various aspects of EFL writing pedagogy (Hudson, Nguyen & Hudson, 2009; Lee, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2016). Hudson, Nguyen and Hudson (2009) in their study found that pre-service teachers in Vietnam felt that they did not have many opportunities to be mentored on teaching writing. Lee's (2010, 2011) research in Hong Kong also suggests that in-service teachers were under-prepared to teach writing. These findings indicate that in order for effective writing instruction to occur, attention needs to be paid to develop effective teacher preparation programs encompassing a variety of topics. For example, to adopt an SFL-oriented teaching approach, teachers need to be first trained in the underlying theoretical framework by elaborating on the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics. They then need to be trained in the implementation process of this approach through the Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC) (see Caplan, 2019; Caplan & Farling, 2017). Lee (2016) argues that considering the high stakes associated with feedback and assessment practices, teachers also need to be trained in how they can adopt effective writing assessment, on one hand, and provide helpful feedback on student texts, on the other. This is important because teachers need to strike a delicate balance between the two, owing to the large class sizes and exam-oriented cultures that are typical in EFL contexts (Lee, 2008, 2011). Also, as Cumming (2009) has noted, considering the increasingly important role that technology plays in our everyday life, EFL teachers need to expand their orientations to writing and literacy practices in general so that various technologies (e.g. wikis, blog posts, using Google Docs for collaborative writing projects) can be integrated into writing instruction. This has the potential to enhance both student motivation and realize the utility of writing practices, as students are likely to find a direct relevance of these activities to how they write in real-life and professional contexts.

Learning to Write and Writing to Learn Language Are Not Mutually Exclusive

The discussion above suggests that despite concerns among L2 writing scholars (e.g. Polio, 2019) that not enough attention is paid to language aspects of L2 writing, various language aspects in fact play out quite conspicuously in the teaching of writing in EFL contexts. Although the scholars cited above generally speak about L2 writing instruction in ESL contexts, it is helpful to critically examine the status quo of EFL writing instruction in this light as well. This allows for reflective teaching practices in the EFL classroom, given the high stakes associated with writing instruction.

As has been discussed above and acknowledged by a number of L2 writing scholars (Manchón, 2009; Ortega, 2009), the context of teaching plays a significant role in determining how certain instructional approaches are adopted. Consequently, what is taught in EFL writing classes must be considered in light of the unique exigencies of the teaching context. This begs the question as to why there seems to be an overemphasis on *language* in writing instruction in EFL contexts, and on *writing* in writing instruction in ESL contexts. What characterizes each of these contexts that might necessitate the disparate foci in the teaching of writing? To what extent are these foci a necessity and to what extent are they a choice for instructors? The answer to these questions may lie in how teachers' perceptions are mediated by student needs and curriculum in ESL and EFL contexts.

Composition studies as a field has a long tradition in ESL contexts, particularly in the USA, where most first-year college/university students are expected to take writing courses, ostensibly to prepare themselves for the demands of academic writing in the coming years (Silva, 2016; Wolff, 2000). A similar emphasis on students' writing literacy development is also apparent in primary and secondary education systems in the USA (see de Oliveira & Smith, 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising that inherent in the writing curricula in ESL contexts is an expectation that students must develop strong writing skills. Such expectations are spilled over to L2 writing courses as well, with a focus on students' development of robust writing skills, at times by circumventing the needs of L2 development that these students may need along the way.

The context of writing instruction in an EFL context is vastly different. For example, barring a few exceptions, it can be said that the culture of composition studies similar to the one described above is not to be found in EFL settings (e.g. Wolff, 2000). As someone who was educated and subsequently taught in an EFL setting, the author of this paper knows first-hand that writing courses are usually offered and taught by instructors who generally have an orientation to English literature or applied linguistics, with little or no formal training in composition studies. Additionally, since students' exposures to the English language outside the classroom are rare or non-existent, writing is perceived to be a vehicle for their English language development. Instructors' approach to writing instruction in EFL settings is therefore mediated by their academic and professional backgrounds, on one hand, and practical concerns regarding what their students will immediately need out of the writing courses, on the other. In sum, it is not surprising that there is an overt emphasis on language aspects when teaching writing in EFL contexts.

Despite this status quo, however, it can be argued that the LW and WLL approaches to L2 writing instruction do not have to be mutually exclusive in EFL settings. This is because both these approaches can be adopted, and an integration of both writing-focused and language-focused writing instruction is possible if the needs of students warrant so (see Caplan, 2019; Paltridge, 2019). Indeed, student needs should dictate the approaches to writing instruction. Although it may be true that students in EFL contexts view writing as a vehicle for English language development, some of these students may aspire to study abroad for advanced degrees and are motivated to develop solid academic writing skills. In fact, unless they have a strong academic writing background they will be at a disadvantage when starting their degree programs abroad. Instructors in such contexts may want to teach students with a balanced approach, focusing on both the development of language and writing skills. As noted earlier and reported in several empirical studies (Caplan & Farling, 2017; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014), an SFL-based approach to writing instruction can be a perfect solution for EFL writing teachers, as they can focus on writing instruction by situating the writing task within its context. More recently, L2 scholars have suggested writing activities involving story continuation, reformulation, and dictogloss tasks help advance EFL learners' writing skills while addressing their English language learning needs (Polio, 2019; Shintani, 2019). Shintani (2019) notes that these tasks help establish links between language input and output and promote "noticing and noticing-the-gap" in students' English language development (p. 2). Ultimately, what this means is that there are ways teachers can address both writing and language in the L2 writing classroom. It is the needs of students that should pivot what writing teachers should do in the classroom and what instructional approach they should adopt, without showing any bias for either LW or WLL. Neither should they feel constrained by the fact that one of these approaches is more prevalent in their context of teaching.

L2 writing research to date has made it amply clear that both language and writing are essential for L2 students to develop into effective writers. Taking this view as a departure point, it is important to ensure that students have adequate support to develop their skills in the L2, whether it is through writing-specific support, language-specific support or through a combination of both. The key is for instructors to be prepared and have the expertise and understanding to provide the help that their students need.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper has been to examine the recent contention in L2 writing literature that too much emphasis is given to the writing aspects in L2 writing instruction, relegating the importance of language-specific issues in the teaching of L2 writing. Surveying relevant theoretical frameworks related to LW and WLL, and where applicable, discussing the empirical evidence supporting them, the current paper has focused on suggesting that the LW and WLL approaches are not mutually exclusive and that both approaches can be implemented in an EFL context simultaneously, if required. The key issue that should drive the pedagogical decisions for teachers is student needs—both immediate and future. A related and

important consideration that falls within the purview of teacher education is to ensure that teachers have the requisite training, resources and professional development opportunities to successfully implement effective teaching practices in the classroom.

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Ethics Statement

I, hereby, state that I have conducted the research and prepared the manuscript following the protocol of research and publications ethics. I am solely responsible if any deviation or mistake (in content and language) is identified in the manuscript.

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