Professional development for the second language writing teacher
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Abstract

This article outlines strategies for professional development for second language writing teachers. It examines the current pedagogic strategies available to writing teachers, based on analysis of texts, analysis of the writing process and analysis of the writer. The principal features of product and process approaches to writing are described. Then a framework for professional development is described, and a range of activities which writing teachers individually or in groups can use are presented. Three flexible ideas for the writing classroom – discussion activities, peer reviewing and portfolios – are described briefly as emerging opportunities for changing times in the writing classroom.

1. Introduction

There was a time when the role of writing in the FL classroom was practising grammatical structures and vocabulary. The purpose of writing activities then was practice in manipulating language forms in order to demonstrate to construct grammatically correct sentences. Now writing is viewed as a social practice, where the emphasis is on communicating messages which are meaningful in terms of the context of writing (purpose and identity of the writer) and of the context of reading (expectations and identity of the reader). As our understanding of writing has become more comprehensive and more complex, the challenge for teachers of second language writing has also increased. Their pedagogy has to focus on many more aspects of writing than sentence-level grammatical accuracy. Appropriate teaching strategies for these aspects however, are not always readily available or easy to fit into existing syllabuses and language learning contexts.

In this article I examine the issues facing second language writing teachers. First, I outline some major developments in our understanding of the writing process over recent decades. Then, current pedagogical options and the implications they have for teachers and curriculum designers are examined. Approaches to professional development for second language writing teachers are considered, with a focus particularly on teacher learning through exploration of and reflection on their own practice as teachers of writing. Finally, I outline some suggestions for teachers to

improve their practice in the writing classroom, and enhance the performance of their student writers.

2. Second language writing

2.1 Understanding texts

The idea that different texts have different features have been with us for a long time: a poem is different from a shopping list; a novel is different from a business letter. In the past writers developed skills in these writing genres through apprenticeships of observation and participation. In contexts where the texts are used, novice writers understand the communicative or expressive purpose of texts, and assimilate the patterns of language and ideas embedded in them. They start by imitating models and progress to adapting the genre to their own particular needs. More recently, some text types or genres have become the focus of pedagogic analysis and purpose; they are analysed to expose their structure, and these features of structure used to provide guides to students in the classroom, and assessors in the context of writing tests. The texts particularly focussed on here are letters, and expository texts based on graphs, tables and maps and other data formats. In the field of academic writing a lot of research has been carried out on the research article (RA) genre (Canagarajah 2002). The conventions of the RA are used to guide the teaching of academic writing skills, in university English contexts in many countries, and in specialist programmes which prepare students for study in English-medium universities. The understanding of text features is thus both part of the essential knowledge of the writing teacher, and part of his or her teaching strategy in programmes and classrooms.

2.2 Understanding the writing process

Writing is more than constructing accurate sentences. A number of models have been developed to illustrate both the range of factors involved in the writing process, and the stages involved in getting to a final text. The Hayes (1996) model understands the

writing process as a prolonged dialogue of discovery between the purposes and motivations of the writer on the one hand and the social and physical context of writing on the other. The dialogue is shaped by ongoing evaluations which align the message and the language features and thus shape the final text. Hedge (1988; 2000) outlines such a model in a more linear fashion for pedagogic purposes. As a plan, it looks like a series of stages for the writer and the writing teachers, but in implementation should be understood as dialogic and recursive.

Composing	-	generating the ideas
Communicating	-	organising the ideas
Crafting	-	putting ideas into text
Improving	-	editing the text

These stages can be related to different purposes and contexts of writing. The key variation in different writing situations is the extent to which there is revision at the different stages. For example, in examination conditions, writers may revise very little, and often only at the *composing* (planning) and *improving* (proof-reading) stages. When writing a coursework assignment, or a journal article for publication, a writer may revise extensively, and at all stages, such that the final text is very different from the first draft. A major feature of the writing process is feedback from readers. This is often the teacher, but in best practice contexts, it should involve the writer himself or herself as critical reader, and can include student peers (See Section 4 below). The provision and use of feedback in the writing process has social and political aspects, and these have to be managed carefully in order for the process to be a truly learning experience (Hall 2011; Ferris & Hedgcock 1998; Sengupta 1998).

2.3   Understanding the writer

More recently, the research focus in second language writing has focussed on the writer. The focus is on style and identity and is articulated in terms of culture and voice. The culture perspectives derives from the argument that different cultures or L1 literacies tend to have different macro-structures, and thus the way individual writers

shape their texts reflects this nationally-based cultural style (Connor 2001). An example of this is Weigle's observation on Chinese writing style:

> In Chinese, writers tend to provide a series of examples without stating the main point of the example or tying them together through a generalisation, in contrast to the English preference for transparent, explicit connections in prose.
>
> (Weigle 2002:21)

The second identity perspective is that of individual voice: writers have a particular experience of the world and this shapes both the content of their writing and the particular language forms they choose to express this message. Creative writing has always valued this expressive aspect of the task. Expository, professional and academic writing however, have become more specified, even formulaic, with consequences for writers who because of their identity, their context of writing or some aspect of personal flair, find the specifics of the genre inappropriate or constraining. Canagarajah (2002) documents the particular experience of second language writers writing in English: they are aware that as their texts comply with specified norms, they lose something essential from their message.

These three areas of enquiry – the text, the writing process, and the writer - have all been the focus of critical comment, with writers from different perspectives critiquing the construct validity and pedagogical relevance of established approaches: Benesch (2001) and Canagarajah (2002) for example note how a text-based pedagogy can marginalise multilingual writers; Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) find the emphasis on identity and personal voice can disadvantage writers who might benefit more from a more text-based, modelling approach. Watson Todd (2001) notes that EAP focuses on the analysis of texts rather than issues of pedagogy, and because of this, much of the literature in the EAP field is of limited use to teachers. The next section examines broad trends in second language writing pedagogy, focussing on the curriculum design options and activity types for the classroom.

3. Second language writing pedagogy: product and process approaches

A review pedagogic options for the teaching of writing suggest there are two major approaches to the teaching to second language writing: product and process approaches (Tribble 1996; White 1998). *Product* approaches are characterised by a teacher of classroom focus on the final text; *process* approaches by a focus on the planning, drafting and revising activities involved in completing a text. Table 1 illustrates the key features of these approaches.

Product	Process
Location of writing	
Composition as homework	Composition as classwork
Role of teacher	
Teacher gives title - students do the rest	Teacher discusses planning of content, structuring, etc
Role of student peers	
All work individual	Collaborative work encouraged / required
Revising processes	
No drafting or rewriting	Drafting and rewriting essential
Audience/assessor	
Teacher is audience and assessor	Different audiences, including self and peers
Assessment criteria	
Emphasis on grammatical and spelling errors	Focus of content organisation, discourse development, genre and register as well as sentence level accuracy
Use of assessment	
Mark or grade – focus on what has been achieved	Detailed feedback given – focus on eloping skills further

Table 1: Product and Process approaches to teaching second language writing

Product approaches place emphasis on the text, which is completed without teacher involvement and is then marked. The marking is often a final stage: while the student

may correct or follow up issues identified, usually it is a cue to move on the next task. This writing practice prepares students for writing in examination conditions where the first draft is the final one, and the challenge is to get it right first time. Getting it right often means correct grammar and appropriate word choice, with an additional focus on structure of argument or narrative. Students may be advised to set out a plan before writing, and to proof-read at the end, but these revision processes tend to be marginal, due to time pressure, and because the focus of the task is the actual writing.

Process approaches emphasise the writing process. As implicit in the Hedge framework, there is attention initially to the content, then the shaping of that content into a coherent message and text. At this stage a focus on language takes over, though of course shaping the message continues till the final draft. A key feature of this approach to writing in the involvement of the tutor and possibly peers: interaction and discussion about the ideas and the textual features are a key element of the development of writing skills. A major issue in many contexts, especially where there are large classes, is the time it takes to implement this approach. The classroom process can be time-consuming, and thus create problems for teachers who have a rigid syllabus and scheme of work to follow. Providing feedback on drafts can be time-consuming for the teacher, especially if they feel they have to mark the final version as well. The ideas in Section 4 may provide the basis for addressing these issues in different contexts.

The product and process approaches to teaching writing are best understood as two ends of a continuum – in actual classroom contexts, there is likely to be a blend of the two approaches shaped by local conditions, teacher biography and curriculum history. Table 1 above can serve as a framework for teachers to i) identify their own writing teaching practices, and ii) map out lines of development for improving their curriculum. The next section examines in detail what is involved in these dimensions of second language writing curriculum development.

4. Professional development for teachers

Whereas initial teacher training focuses on understanding and implementing new techniques for the classroom, post-experience training, also labelled continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers, has to take into account the teachers' existing practice in its curriculum context. The purpose of professional development is to promote change in classroom practices. The goal of CPD is change that teachers are comfortable with and can integrate gradually and smoothly with existing practices (Kiely 2009). In this section two approaches to CPD for the writing teacher are set out: i) analysis of current practices and the factors which shape them, and ii) identification of opportunities for innovation, so that gradual change in teaching writing is facilitated. The goal is to develop practice which best meets the learning needs and aspirations of students, and at the same time, aligns with the teacher's approach to teaching, develops their knowledge and skills, takes into account the particular requirements of the context, and manages an ecological fit with issues deriving from the history of the curriculum, and expectations of managers, students and examiners. Finally I set out three sets of activities for the writing classroom – discussion activities, peer reviewing, and portfolios – which teachers can adapt to develop their own writing pedagogy.

Richards and Farrell (2005) outline six contexts of learning which are relevant to the writing curriculum. Table 2 summarises these contexts with their particular relevance to enhancing the writing teachers' skills and practices.

Contexts of learning	Relevance for writing teacher's professional development
1. Subject learning	Opportunities for learning here can focus on English language skills or aspects of writing such as those outlined in Section 2 above. The focus of training can be general or specific, that is, it can work on the advanced English language skills, particularly in relation to writing, or it can focus on aspects of our understanding of the nature of texts and the writing process. This latter type of training might includes input sessions on genres, text structure, coherence or process writing.
2. Research-based knowledge about teaching	The focus here is on the current state of our knowledge of second language writing, with a particular focus on opportunities for policy development, that is the development of an innovative pedagogic or assessment strategy. One area where the research is particularly relevant to the teacher is in studies of feedback, which

	and learning	show the complexity of innovating and developing student awareness of what use of feedback means. It is likely that this type of training will follow a generic introduction to the field as outlined above.
3.	Specialised knowledge and skills	The specialisation here typically derives from two sources: first, specialist curricula such as English for Academic Purposes, or English for Science and Technology, where the focus is on genres and related teaching and assessment issues. Second, a specialisation may relate to contexts of learning, for example, where specific writing skills are required, or where the students have a particular background.
4.	Collaborative teaching	Collaborative teaching supports learning through observation, discussion, and opportunities to try out new skills in a safe setting. This is especially valuable where new teaching and assessment strategies in the writing curriculum are being introduced, and can be considered a better quality learning opportunity than providing teachers with guidelines to implement on their own in their own classroom. Such practice in professional development is informed by recent research into the nature of teaching: teachers do not so much implement pre-set plans in their lessons as operate in responsive mode, basing decisions on what is happening in the classroom as the planned activities unfold.
5.	Expanded teacher role	An expanded teacher role is often a significant opportunity for teacher learning, especially if adequately resourced, and based on a teacher's interests and skills. Such roles include leading projects to develop policies and materials for teaching and assessing writing. This is especially valuable if it is for an external agency, such as a publisher of examination board. The social recognition of such activity has in itself a distinct learning value. The documentation produced has the advantages of precise fit for context, and may also be accompanied by workshops where a community of good practice can be developed.
6.	Self-evaluation and Reflection	This approach to learning involves the individual teacher learning from his or her own practice. We envisage this as a late stage of learning, following some or all of the preceding stages. It can be implemented in two stages: first, a process of informal evaluation and reflection through which a deeper understanding of the preceding stages of teacher learning is achieved through the experience of implementing innovative teaching and assessment strategies. Second, a more formal set of activities may emerge as teachers become aware of the implications of the innovative pedagogy. Here teachers elaborate evaluation and research designs in order to construct understandings of second language writing pedagogy which provide for further policy development, both in that specific curricular writing context and more widely.

Table 2: Contexts of CPD for the writing teacher (after Richards and Farrell 2005)

Table 2 outlines a scheme for professional development of second language writing teachers. The progression implicit in this scheme is from *input* to *action*, with appropriate attention at each stage to the capacity of the individual teacher and the characteristics of the particular curriculum context. *Input* (the first three activities in Table 2) involves teachers learning new information, whether in lectures, briefings, or workshops, or through reading or video-viewing, so that their understanding of writing processes is enhanced. *Action* (the second three activities in Table 2 above) involves observation, actual teaching, and reflection in a supported environment, so that skills development can emerge from enhanced knowledge. This is thus a mediated approach, helping teachers understand the nature of the new practices, understand the implications for them and their students, and develop ownership of the innovative practices so that they can transform their classrooms and the writing skills of their students (see Mann (2005); Kiely & Davis (2010); and Kiely, Davis and Wheeler (2010) for further discussion of such approach to the learning or practising teachers). Running parallel to these *input* and *action* activities are two strands of analysis carried out by each teacher or ideally group of teachers: examination of current practice, and identification of specific practices which are appropriate for change.

A focus on current practice is likely to address three components of the writing curriculum:

- o The teacher's own thinking
- o The materials and activities used
- o The prevailing assessment criteria

The focus on the teacher's own thinking reflects the central role the teacher plays in curriculum construction (Farrell 2007; Burns 2009; Breen, Hurd, Milton, Oliver, and Thwaite, 2001). Teachers' planning and action in the classroom and in assessment of texts derives from beliefs and assumptions which have to be understood from training and work experiences. These have usually been changed and adapted in order for writing classroom to be successful. Central to these beliefs is the teacher's view of

himself or herself as a writing teacher: areas of expertise, sources of confidence, and of course, perceived deficits in these areas. The materials and activities used can be seen as the realisation of beliefs and assumptions: ideas about teaching are reflected in the materials and activities used, particularly where there is an element of teacher choice. Materials also provided a means of discussing beliefs and assumptions: the questions in Table 3 below for example, can be addressed in the context of looking at frequently-used or typical materials for the writing class. The prevailing assessment criteria constitute another source of materials and activities. For many teachers, professional responsibility aligns with preparing students for high-stakes tests. In such contexts, classroom activities and the teacher's work more generally, will be shaped by the writing assessment criteria which prevail, the ways these are interpreted and weighted, and the task-types used in tests. A focus on criteria here, rather than the more global perspective on task type is particularly valuable: it anchors the discussion in the detail of the work of the writing teacher. This provides an opportunity to develop small-scale innovations which both extend teachers knowledge and skills and at the same time are seen by students as preparation for the tests.

Table 3 sets out reflection and discussion questions to facilitate engagement with the issues in each of these areas.

Curriculum components	Reflection and discussion questions
The teacher's own thinking	Which writing activities are easy and which are difficult? Which take a lot of time? Where is my expertise in writing? Which activities do I prefer? And why? To what extent am I influenced by student expectations? To what extent am I influenced by my own learning experiences? To what extent am I influenced by accumulated teaching experiences?
The materials and activities used	To what extent do I use existing materials? What do I consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of these? In what ways do I augment or adapt these? What proportion of the writing class is given to student writing?

	What proportion to planning and discussing macro-structure issues? What proportion to errors and areas for improvement? Which 'areas for improvement' do I focus on: sentence level; paragraph structure; overall text organisation?
The prevailing assessment criteria	What assessment formats am I preparing students for? What are the criteria in these assessments? How are these criteria interpreted and weighted? In what ways do I enhance students' understanding of these criteria? Is my assessment practice aligned to these interpretations?

Table 3: Towards an analysis of teachers' writing pedagogy

Following an examination of their existing practices, teachers need to focus on identifying innovations appropriate for their classroom. In many writing classrooms the process of innovation will involve a shift from a *product* approach to writing to a *process* one (see Table 1 above). Each aspect of the writing pedagogy which is on the left column offers an opportunity for change. For example, if a teacher (or preferably a group of teachers) decide that their practice is characterised by a product approach to *Role of teacher*, they can work out way to gradually change this. If their role in the student writing process is as setter of the task, and then as assessor, they might consider how they can be involved in the composing, communicating and crafting stages. This might mean a section of a lesson where the teacher leads a discussion on planning and arranging ideas to form an argument, or on paragraphing. Then, once students became familiar with this whole class composing and communicating discussion, they might do this in groups, with some groups presenting outlines or plans at the end of the session.

The innovation process here is based on four principles:

a. The change is managed so that there is clear relative advantage in the novel practice and this is the basis for consensual participation. This may mean explicit linking of the innovation to shared goals such as effective test preparation.

b. The change, though initiated by the teachers is not owned only by the teacher: it is designed so that students have a role to play, and invest time and effort in the success of that role.

c. The new practice should not require significantly greater resource than the existing practice. Increased effort or time commitment on the part of the teacher and students will not be easy to sustain, and will soon dampen enthusiasm and perceptions of benefit.

d. The innovation is an opportunity for teacher learning. This means that the innovation will be fine-tuned and developed to fit emerging needs and preferences as it is implemented.

In order to illustrate how these principles can be translated into practices in the writing classroom, three ideas for writing innovations are set out in the next section.

5. Three writing innovations

In this section I outline three innovations in the second language writing curriculum which have the potential to both improve teaching and learning, and enhance the writing teacher's pedagogical skills. These innovations are progressive in a general sense: where the current practice is distinctly product-oriented, it may work best if they are introduced in the order set out here. Thus, there is a gradual shift from writing in isolation to classroom discussion of writing issues, to peer discussion and reviewing, and finally to portfolios where there is potential to bring together a process writing approach and assessment practice which includes self-assessment and reflection as well as peer and teacher assessment.

5.1 Discussion activities

Discussion activities are likely to play some role in existing practice: it may be a teacher-led classroom discussion about the features of model texts or recurrent grammatical errors. It can however be harnessed to facilitate more process features. Examples include:

o Discussion of composing processes, where relevant ideas are generated;
o Discussion of communication strategies, which relate to intended audiences and the connections in argument that will work for them;

- Discussion of a 'draft', including initially, the teacher's assessment of where it is successful and where unsuccessful, and later, pair or group discussion of how it could be improved.

Once such discussion about writing and texts becomes routine in the writing classroom, a more focussed approach to peer reviewing can be engaged.

5.2   Peer reviewing

Peer reviewing is valuable as an interactional stimulus to learning (Hu 2005). While interaction with and feedback from a teacher may present a particularly strong stimulus, class size and time factors often limit opportunities for this. Peer interaction can be introduced using the following stages:

- Select a short text, such as a draft of a student not in the class (for example, an anonymised draft from a pervious year);
- Set a focussed task such as a language focus relating to grammatical choices such as verb phrase constructions or article choices initially, and later content analysis such as relationship between points in the argument;
- Conclude the session with a series of short presentations (3-5 minutes) on the text analysis from the peer review. Although the peer discussing can be in L1 or in L2, the report should be in English;
- Once students' skills in carrying out such reviews are in place, a focus on peer reviewing can be initiated. This should be initially with short texts – perhaps introductory paragraphs written after a class discussion on planning the task so that comprehension issues are minimised.
- The pattern of review and report (see above) can continue, with the writer reporting on what she/he has learnt about the text. This discussion is a potential training ground for the written reflection which is at the heart of the development of second language writing skills through portfolios.

5.3   Portfolios

Portfolios have become an important tool in process writing pedagogy, both in terms of classroom activity (Hedge 2000; Tribble 1996) and assessment of writing (Weigle 2002). Portfolios have validity in two ways: they represent real-world writing, in that complex projects involving research, audience sensitivity and multi-media features (inclusion of photos, graphics, and eye-catching devices) (Banfi 2003). Second completing the portfolio involves a range of assessment processes – tutor feedback, peer feedback, self-assessment, and decision-making throughout the process about which feedback points to act on, and how to re-shape the text to incorporate them (Cotterall & Cohen 2003). Teachers embarking on a portfolio dimension to their second language writing course might envisage it as a series of different text types or genres, possibly determined by the text types and formats which are typical of the tests students will take, and reflective texts in which students articulate what they have learnt and how they are integrating these lessons into subsequent pieces of writing. The following are possible stages for introducing portfolios:

- o Stage 1

  The teacher should specify the contents of the portfolio (typically a collection of text types, number of drafts, and reflective pieces), the schedule of compilation, and the type of loose leaf binder, or e-portfolio platform which holds the material. Initially the portfolio is a learning device, with a range of formative assessments and reflective writing.

- o Stage 2

  At this stage the focus is on student ownership of the portfolio: achieving this involves handing over responsibility for managing the portfolio to individual students, thus saving the teacher time. Each student sets out personal learning goals, incorporating test performance, and language issues. Peer review and teacher assessment become part of the reflective cycle. Increasingly much of the portfolio compilation happens outside the class, with classroom discussion focussing on sharing strategies and exploring enduring problems.

- ○ Stage 3

  Where assessment by coursework is part of the programme, the portfolio can be adapted to contribute to summative assessment. This process has to fit with wider programme and institutional policy, and clear assessment criteria (including self and peer assessment) are elaborated.

7. Conclusion

In this article I have mapped out some routes to professional learning for the second language writing teacher. This learning is grounded in both development over recent decades in our understanding of texts, writing processes and writer identity on the one hand, and in the actual classroom context of teachers on the other. Teacher learning is understood as involving two elements: input, where the teacher's understanding is enhanced (this may be through training sessions or individual reading), and action, where based on an analysis of classroom practice, the teacher (or teachers) innovate to gradually establish activities more supportive of student learning. Such activities will also lead to teachers' pedagogic knowledge and skills which relate directly to second language writing. The frameworks for the analysis of current practice, and identification of possible innovations for the writing curriculum are not complete: they need further adaptation to context, then implementation, and ongoing evaluation of effectiveness, and research into the ways the activities contribute to both teacher and student learning about second language writing.

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