

Teaching Writing-for-Publishing Practices to Language Teacher Trainees: A Classroom Experience

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Resumen

Las prácticas de lectura y escritura juegan un papel esencial en la formación de profesores de lenguas extranjeras. Por un lado, pueden constituir una herramienta fundamental para la adquisición de conocimiento disciplinar (Carlino, Iglesia, & Laxalt, 2013). Por el otro, los profesores de lengua extranjera precisan ser lectores y escritores efectivos en sus comunidades profesionales para poder contribuir tanto con el avance de sus propias carreras como del campo profesional (Edwards-Groves, 2013), ya que esto por lo general se realiza mediante las publicaciones. Sin embargo, las prácticas letradas que rodean el proceso de escritura de trabajos para su publicación raramente son enseñadas. De hecho, durante su formación, son raras las ocasiones en las que los futuros profesores de lengua extranjera cuentan con la oportunidad de escribir para una audiencia real, ya que la mayoría de las veces lo hacen para sus profesores y con el fin de ser evaluados. En este trabajo, compartimos una experiencia de aula con futuros profesores de inglés. En este espacio curricular, se espera que los estudiantes adquieran algunas de las prácticas letradas del escribir para publicar, incluyendo

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aquellas pertenecientes al proceso de referato, el cual se encuentra presente en la mayoría de las publicaciones académicas.

Palabras clave: escritura académica, revisión entre pares, profesores inglés, publicar.

Abstract

Reading and writing practices play an essential role in language teachers' education programs. On the one hand, they can constitute an essential learning tool to acquire disciplinary knowledge (Carlino, Iglesia, & Laxalt, 2013). On the other hand, language teachers need to become effective readers and writers in their professional communities in order to contribute to the advancement of their own careers as well as to the development of the profession (Edwards-Groves, 2013). One common way of doing this is through publishing. Nevertheless, the literacy practices that surround the making of a publishable paper are infrequently taught to future language teachers. As a matter of fact, while pursuing their degree students rarely count with an opportunity to communicate to a real audience since most of their written works are only read by their professors. In this work, we share a classroom experience with future English teachers. In this course, students are expected to acquire some of the writing-for-publishing literacy practices, including those implied in the peer-review process commonly found in academic publication venues.

Keywords: *academic writing, peer review, English teachers, publishing.*

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Introduction

Publishing is essential not only for the advancement of language teachers but also for the advancement of the profession itself (Edwards-Groves, 2013). Therefore, reading and writing practices should be conceptualized not only as a tool to learn disciplinary contents (Carlino *et al.*, 2013) but also as content to be taught. Thus, language teachers need to become effective readers and writers in academic and professional settings.

Nevertheless, the literacy practices that surround the making of a publishable paper are infrequently taught to future language teachers in our country. As a matter of fact, while pursuing their degrees, teacher trainees usually read and write in order to learn disciplinary contents and to be evaluated by their professors. They rarely get the opportunity to communicate to a real audience. In this work, we share a classroom

experience where future English teachers were expected to acquire writing-for-publishing literacy practices while producing a piece of publishable material.

The setting

Lectura y escritura de textos académicos en lengua extranjera is a course that students take during the last year of the *Profesorado de Inglés* at the *Instituto de Enseñanza Superior en Lenguas Vivas "Juan Ramón Fernández"*. This elective course is offered each term and it meets once a week for 2.40 hours. The general objective of the class is to provide students with an opportunity of acquiring and reflecting on academic writing practices in a second language, while pursuing a writing project addressed to a real audience. The syllabus was conceived departing from certain ideas about literacy practices and their acquisition.

In this course, academic literacy is conceptualized as the accumulative result of participating in a variety of social relations and discourse activities (Casanave, 2002). Thus, writing practices are not learnt once and for ever or in an individual manner, and we need to teach the specific uses of reading and writing at tertiary level institutions (Carlino, 2013; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Turner, 2001). These literacy practices are acquired through the interaction with disciplinary texts and other people (Casanave, 2002; Prior, 1998). This goes in line with a socio-cultural stance on teaching and learning that conceives cognition as situated, and learning as an activity related to processes of participation in social life (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990, 2008). It is assumed that people learn by getting involved in certain types of activities, and while they transform themselves they also transform their communities.

Nevertheless, for students to learn literacy practices, they do not only need to be in contact with texts and other people, but they also need some specific kind of interaction. According to Rogoff (1990, 2008), a guided participation is necessary: a mutual implication between individuals –by observing or enacting practices– while performing a culturally meaningful activity. This process leads to a participatory appropriation through which individuals change thanks to their engagement in an activity (Rogoff, 1990, 2008). This is, the context has to facilitate a shared process where novice writers achieve a participatory appropriation in order to acquire effective writing strategies. This happens when a novice interacts and talks with others who offer scaffolding during writing tasks. These types of tasks are necessary so students can later auto-regulate their writing process (Castelló, 2008; Castelló, Bañales, & Vega, 2010). In other words, students gradually start to become more and more independent until they can enact

specific writing practices in an autonomous way and become full members of their disciplinary communities of practice (Colombo, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

However, in most tertiary education institutions all the aforementioned learning remains as the sole responsibility of the student. Since many professors conceptualize reading and writing as general skills that students should bring with them, they rarely teach the specific uses of reading and writing in the discipline. The classroom experience we present here goes against this trend, since it is based on the assumption that opportunities can be created so as to scaffold students while they learn how to enact some literacy practices while actually doing them (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990, 2008). Consequently, in this course students are expected to learn how to write an abstract, a conference paper or a research article by actually doing it.

At the beginning of the course, students negotiate with the professor the writing project they will work on during the term. It can be an individual or group project (with a maximum of three participants per group) and the final product should be aimed at a real publication venue. Most of the class time is devoted to work on students drafts, which allows professor and students not only to talk about the written products but also about how these are used in specific contexts (i.e., the venues chosen by each student) and how students manage their own writing process.

The writing process in the classroom

Since the course has been conceived from an approach that sees writing as a social and situated activity (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bazerman & Prior, 2004) the focus of the class is not on writing as a product but as a process and as a social activity. In other words, in addition to discussing and analyzing students' drafts, teaching actions and class activities have been developed so that students can focus on how these texts are used in the academic world.

These ways of doing with writing are often not so tangible (Aitchison, 2009), so some class activities have been designed to make the writing process more visible and, thus, manageable. At the beginning of the terms and with the aim of providing common ground for later class-discussions, a mini lecture on different stances on writing (i.e., as a product, as a process or as a social practice) is offered. The concepts and controversies presented in this mini lecture (e.g., Cassany, 2006; Castelló, *et al.*, 2010) are revisited all along the semester during class discussions and offer students some tools to critically evaluate and challenge their own ideas on writing. For

example, while discussing the cognitive stance, some students are able to defy the idea that writing is just putting thoughts into words and start to acknowledge writing as a very complex process that requires the orchestration of different planning, textualizing and revising activities (Flower & Hayes, 1981). It is worth mentioning that class discussions are not aimed at teaching the cognitive models themselves, but to offer students some conceptual and theoretical tools to think about writing.

In addition to discussing theories and research, and to illustrate how the writing process does not happen in a linear fashion but is recursive and somewhat chaotic, students read and discuss some materials such as a fragment of *Bird by bird: Some instructions on writing and life* (Lamott, 1994), where the author tells the reader about her writing habits. They also read a book chapter in which an acclaimed author in the Second Language acquisition field shares his early experience with academic writing (Matsuda, 2003). Students tend to show surprise after reading these materials and to declare that they never thought that writing was a difficult endeavor for famous and prolific writers. As a matter of fact, this is understandable: they always get in contact with the finished written product and never learn about all the things authors did to laboriously create those pages. This is the basis for a common misconception: the idea that good writers produce their texts at once and without effort. Reading Lamott's fragment and/or Matsuda's chapter allows students to start conceptualizing writing as an inherently difficult task for everybody and to abandon the romantic notion of authorship associated with the belief that writing is a gift possessed by few (Gere, 1987). On the contrary, reading about famous authors' experiences and writing habits helps students to demystify this activity as something innate and to start seeing it as something that can be learnt.

These discussions on how the authors handled their writing processes also allow the class to characterize different strategies that could be used at the time of elaborating and registering ideas as part of planning. At the same time, students share other strategies of their own such as taking handwritten notes, using certain apps in their cell phones to take notes, emailing themselves, recording voice notes, etc. The professor writes down on the blackboard all the different strategies mentioned in class so as to come up with a common list. This list would be the departing point for their homework: to write a paragraph explaining how they felt after choosing from the list and trying at least one strategy that they never used before.

These activities are aimed at prompting students to share and revise their own writing habits. Thus, students' attention is drawn to what people do, not to their texts. Paying attention to what other people do, including famous writers and the class professor, allows students to acknowledge the specific actions they perform at the time of planning their texts. It is worth mentioning that these activities, instead of instructing students on one specific way of managing their writing process, have the purpose of showing that there is not a specific way of being a good writer, but that a good writer is a person who knows and can choose from an array of strategies to face the task at hand. Therefore, learning other strategies and reflecting on the ones we tend to use is a good way of becoming a more effective writer.

In addition, the different writing strategies were related to the three activities that we carry out when writing: planning, textualizing and revising. It became clear that these are intertwined, and they are not easy to separate since writing is recursive. At the same time, learning that not everybody carries these activities in the same way allowed to reach the conclusion that writing is also personal. Finally, looking at their own way of managing their writing process leads students to recognize that we tend to utilize a minimum number of strategies and that these also depend on the type of task at hand.

To further have students analyze what they tended to do when writing, we worked in class with the four writing profiles proposed by Creme and Lea (2008): the diver writer, the patchwork writer, the grand plan writer and the architect writer. These profiles are composed by a series of techniques, activities, routines and attitudes related to writing that people tend to use recursively in different situations. Therefore, relating to one of these profiles can help students to identify some pros and cons in the way they manage their writing process and decide what to keep and what to modify to become more efficient writers.

After students read the description of each profile (Creme & Lea, 2008) to answer the question "What kind of writer are you?" in written form, the class as a whole discusses each profile. Students share their techniques, activities, routines and attitudes related to writing. This activity is useful to jointly arrive at the conclusion that there are several ways of managing the writing process and that each of them has strengths and weaknesses. Acknowledging these different ways of doing can allow writers to modify what they do if the way they are managing the writing process is not being functional to the writing objectives at hand. In addition, since everybody in class revises his or her own writing process, it becomes obvious that

composing activities and strategies are intrinsically related and that there are no clear-cut boundaries between planning, textualizing and revising.

In sum, classwork with different conceptualizations of writing, as well as with different ways of managing the writing process, shows students that every writer faces difficulties. Composing is naturally a difficult process even for experienced writers, and taking this idea with them is valuable to novice writers so they can stop experiencing this as a personal failure. Hence, students can start having a «vigilant but tolerant» (Castelló, 2007, p. 55) attitude with their own writing and their own academic identity (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). In other words, knowing that facing obstacles while composing is something common to most people helps students to lower their anxiety and improve their self-image as writers. Additionally, “discovering” what others (published authors, professor, classmates) actually do when producing a piece of writing can raise self-awareness and make evident other ways of doing (techniques, activities, routines and attitudes). Learning how others manage their writing process can be enriching since students can start building their own toolbox to use whenever their usual writing habits become inefficient.

Revision activities in the classroom

As was mentioned before, it is not enough for students to identify the different activities implied in the writing process to be able to manage it better, but they have to get involved in concrete experiences that allow them to apply different strategies and techniques. This idea goes in line with the aforementioned socio-cultural stance on learning: people learn by legitimately participating in meaningful activities. Therefore, to give place to a participatory appropriation (Rogoff, 2008) in this course, all the classwork is based on and for the texts produced by the students. Thus, instead of exercising for future writing tasks, students actually face a real and concrete writing task (Carlino, 2013): writing for publishing here and now. Through a series of guided exercises and negotiations with the professor, by the third class each student has chosen a topic and a publication venue. It is worth mentioning that this is possible thanks to the small class size, with a maximum of 15 students per term.

Each class, students turn in their advances, and drafts are revised in whole-class and peer review activities. The first in-class revision is made using a computer and a projector so the professor can model and make explicit a specific way of commenting on the drafts (Wells, 1990). First, the professor explains the overall goal of the revising activity: helping authors keep on advancing with their writing. Therefore, those who revise drafts are supposed to comment on them and not to correct them. Then, the

professor starts to write comments on the draft, stating out loud the criteria behind the comments. This is, she makes explicit why she is commenting what she is commenting, why she writes the comment in the way she does it. This talk about text (Wells, 1990) has the intention of prompting participatory appropriation (Rogoff, 2008) since students will later comment on their partner's draft. Gradually, students start to offer suggestions on what and how to comment in the draft, making explicit the reasons why. The whole-class revision, then, opens a space where, with the help of someone with more expertise, students start to participate in a peripheral but legitimate way (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the following classes, the professor gradually starts to make fewer comments, asking students to do so instead. Thus, students appropriate this practice not only by talking about it and reflecting on it, but also by actually doing it: they learn to offer feedback while offering feedback.

These revision activities are key for students to enact and appropriate this type of practice. In addition, during the revision activities several issues related to offering written feedback are discussed, such as whether to make several comments throughout the text and/or one general comment at the beginning or end of the document, the way comments should be written, etc. To illustrate certain ways of doing this, the professor shares comments that her research team partners made in early drafts of published articles, showing how experts carry out this practice in a real environment. In addition, it is discussed how reviewers should make efforts to achieve a balance between praising and criticizing, so authors can find comments useful to improve their texts (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Finally, as reviewers are supposed to comment on, not correct the texts, they first mention something positive about the draft and every time they identify some issues, they are supposed to offer a possible solution. All in all, whole-class revision activities allow students to achieve a participatory appropriation of the revision practices and, at the same time, to learn and reflect on different ways of giving feedback.

In addition to teaching how to carry on peer review activities, working with drafts in class also highlights how important it is to work with provisional texts. As a matter of fact, bringing their drafts to class reinforces the idea that no text is created at once. Furthermore, revision activities allow students to share strategies to review their own texts and to know how to treat the feedback received during class and from peers. This opens the door to exchanges in which students share feelings and reflections on how they manage their own revising process and what they could change.

Additionally, working repeatedly with drafts leads to whole-class discussions centered on topics such as APA (American Psychological Association) style, grammatical and spelling issues. These linguistic contents are treated with a focus on the relationship between the form and the rhetorical effect that every author wants to achieve. Therefore, students do not only collect strategies to manage their writing processes more efficiently but also revision tips to improve their partners' and their own writing.

To conclude, the previously mentioned activities afford some visibility and awareness on how laborious and complex writing is, not only for those who are not experts, but also for most of the people. Even more, thanks to dialogues and exchanges with other writers in class, students have the chance to get to know and use new (to them) ways of managing their processes. These dialogues keep on going during the whole class activities and the peer review activities in which students exchange ideas about how to review their texts. Finally, working with drafts in class not only allows to deal with some grammatical and style issues but opens up a space where students actually enact the peer review process by receiving and offering comments on their writings.

Closing remarks

As shown in previous sections, the course *Lectura y escritura de textos académicos en lengua extranjera* has been designed from a socio-cultural perspective related to the idea that learning to write implies much more than just knowing a linguistic system, since in order to acquire specific disciplinary writing practices students have to start participating in disciplinary communities. Therefore, instead of teaching writing strategies or explicit linguistic contents divorced from the context of use, the course opens the door for students to participate and, by participating, to practice and gradually acquire self-regulated strategies to manage their writing process. This implies not only working with the texts but also with the writers by making the classroom a safe space where students observe and actually enact specific writing practices with others (peers and professor).

The activities presented here have been designed so students can experience, in addition to conceptualizing and reflecting on the different ways in which texts can be composed. To make this possible, a great amount of class time is devoted to giving visibility and discussing different ideas about writing and how to manage the writing process. As a result, students collect an array of tools that they can use to keep on improving the way they regulate their own writing. Therefore, this course, far from being only centered on the texts, gives a space to work with the writers.

Additionally, whole-class and peer review activities open a space where students exercise a very common scholarly practice: giving and receiving comments. Instead of “doing exercises” for later being able to write as scholars, students “exercise” scholarly literacy practices with others (professor and peers), so they can gradually become better academic writers. They learn to write for publishing by actually facing real writing projects, while being scaffolded by their professor and peers.

As previously mentioned, teachers who publish can contribute not only to the advancement of their own careers but also to the development of the profession. Therefore, we need to teach future language teachers the different uses that writing practices have in their professional communities so they can participate in their disciplinary conversations. The responsibility of learning writing-for-publishing practices should not be attributed to students. On the contrary, we believe that teacher training institutions should provide more spaces where students can learn how to contribute to the language teaching field.

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