

Finding a Voice: Writing Narrative in the Early Stages of a Doctoral Thesis

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Abstract

This study applies Ivanic's (2004) extension of Lea and Street's (1998) model of approaches to the teaching of writing, to a body of student texts produced over a six-month period. Its purpose is to assess the impact of different kinds of feedback on iterative samples of academic writing. However, rather than analysing the texts of a number of different student writers, it examines different texts produced by the same writer. Using extracts from one early-career research student's writing, supervisor notes and email messages, it argues that actual writers may continue to need and demand engagement in a variety of pedagogic practices on their way to developing their own voice. The possibility of inconsistent development with occasional lapses is accepted, with progress through Ivanic's model being seen not in a developmental Piagetian way, but through a Vygotskian process of socialisation. In this sense, the position adopted is social constructionist. In particular, writers' production of narrative around their research topic in the form of creative writing – one of Ivanic's additions to the discourses in the Lea and Street model – may provide useful stimulus material (e.g. Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 41); and the application of Hatton and Smith's (1995) framework of levels of reflection to the outcome may provide an indication of the timeliness of Ivanic's other teaching approaches.

Introduction

In their search for a voice, newly registered research students frequently recycle previous writing in an effort to meet formal requirements such as the submission of a sample chapter for upgrade in the first year. However, even at this stage of their writing career they may display little evidence of their ability to employ an argument or critical approach to the literature or their methodology. The writer's voice may lack conviction and be stylistically influenced by other texts. The conventional prescription for this state of affairs, often demanded by the same student writers, may be the teaching of genre or prescriptive skills, such as punctuation and paragraph organisation, rather than the exploration of an academic literacies approach, which draws on the traditions of language use as social discourse.

A number of possible tensions are therefore evident in the needs and expectations of these academic writers and their readers, who at an early stage often comprise supervisors and writing tutors, and who act as surrogates for a wider audience. Students' experiences in the acquisition of a recognisably academic style are well documented, e.g. Street (2010). They may successfully find an idea to express, but lose it as they struggle with the contortions of the rules and regulations of academic prose. Reading some of my own academic writing from twenty years ago, I notice the liberal use of deixis, unconsciously reproduced, and feel regret for the occasional idea that surfaced, but was never developed. And as academic discourse is organic, the apprenticeship is a long one. Supervisors too experience tensions in their role as mentors and readers. As readers, they may feel an irresistible urge to sweep away unconventional features, having everything tidy so they can get straight to the ideas. Unfortunately, they

may be so busy spring cleaning that they forget about the message at the heart of the writing. As mentors, they may want to focus on writers' ideas but misinterpret them because of what they see as surrounding distractions. A common strategy, then, is for supervisors to demand that the writing is proof read before they comment on it. Another option is to go with the flow, to resist the urge to standardise and to focus on developing the student's ideas through further writing. This is the approach that I tried to adopt with one student, whose outcome I will report here.

Literature Review

Lea and Street's (1998) model of approaches to teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing, places academic literacies hierarchically in relation to skills and genre approaches. There are obvious parallels in the hierarchy with Aristotle's conceptualisation of forms of knowledge and Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. What they have in common are fundamental concerns with firstly the external object (Aristotle's *episteme*, Bloom's knowledge, and Lea and Street's skills), secondly the individual (Aristotle's *techne*, Bloom's application, and Lea and Street's genre), and finally society (Aristotle's *phronesis*, Bloom's evaluation, and Lea and Street's academic literacies). There are similar equivalences in any application of Lea and Street's model with the likely language focus (form, function and discourse). Further parallels could be drawn with Richards' (2002) theories of teaching: science research, theory-philosophy, and art-craft (see Table 1). The equivalences help to explain why, as Lillis (2003) points out, 'little explicit attention has been paid to exploring how an academic literacies stance might inform the theory and practice of student writing pedagogy' (Lillis 2003: 195). It is not simply that academic literacies is a mesh through which to view discourse rather than a method; it requires the writer 'to handle the social meanings and identities that [different settings] [evoke]' (Lea and Street 2006) and be capable of reproducing them.

Table 1: Academic literacies as social discourse

Aristotle: forms of knowledge	Bloom's taxonomy (1956)	Lea and Street (1998): approaches to teaching EAP writing	Jack C Richards (2002): theories of teaching	Language focus
<i>phronesis</i>	evaluation	academic literacies	art-craft	discourse
<i>techne</i>	application	genre	theory-philosophy	function
<i>episteme</i>	knowledge	skills	science research	form

The academic literacies approach is therefore concerned with the interplay of self and society, and how each influences the other in a virtuous circle. It does not deal with accuracy at sentence level and below, or with the rhetorical structures of particular subject disciplines. An academic literacies approach demands that writers have the ability to distance themselves from their writings in order to appraise their social and textual relationships. Writers should be able to reflect on and critique their work in relation to their field, with the aim of achieving sophisticated levels of self- or critical reflection. In Hatton and Smith's framework, developed from the writing journals of trainee teachers, critical reflection is more than merely analytical or integrative: it 'demonstrates an awareness that actions and events are not only located within and explicable by multiple perspectives, but are located in and influenced by multiple historical and socio-political contexts' or, in other words, are 'reflexive' (1995 cited in Moon 2004: 97). The active nature of reflexivity (as opposed to reflectivity) enables the practitioner to see multiple viewpoints, which she can

inhabit in a shifting alternative contrast that produces a unique emotional conclusion that is the sum of their relationships. It 'entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others' (Anderson 2010: 382).

This practice demands the development of a sense of self – where the writer stands in relation to their academic subject. Without a sense of who the writer is, or where they want to be in relation to the academic subject they are writing about, there can be no critique, no opinion. It is a paradox that a writer needs to begin with a predetermined stance in order to evaluate sources and data. Perhaps this is why the focus in EAP is currently shifting from critical reading to voice. It also explains why a general adoption of an academic literacies approach in teaching writing is still some way off. Indeed, so much has been acknowledged (Lillis 2003: 195). Perhaps it also explains the attraction of the graded approach to the teaching of writing implied by Ivanic's (2004) expansion of Lea and Street's (1998) model.

Ivanic (2004) inserts an additional three discourse types to Lea and Street's (1998) model of approaches to the teaching of EAP writing: (1) 'creative' and (2) 'process' between 'skills' and 'genres' discourses, and (3) 'social practices' between 'genre' and 'socio-political' discourses (Ivanic 2004: 225). In Ivanic's model, the discourse type follows a cline from explicitly objective and mechanical teaching of 'rules' (even if those rules are socially derived) to one in which the writer shows awareness of the effect of various manifestations of power on discourses. Intermediate discourse types on the cline are (1) creative self-expression, drawing on the writer's interior resources; (2) process, which typically involves peers in drafting and redrafting texts; (3) genre, the practice of socially-defined discourse constraints at a very general level; and (4) social practices, the writing purposes of a culture, e.g. the culture of physicists and all the ways physicists disseminate information and engage in communication (see Hyland 2000).

In her labelling of the various approaches to the teaching of writing, Ivanic distinguishes between explicit and implicit, defining the teaching of creative self-expression and purposeful communication as 'implicit', which may seem self-evident. Although there is no body of knowledge that could be referred to as conveniently as the discourses identified for explicit teaching, it is the lack of a neat system or model that can be applied to these discourses that marks them as different; this requires a more indirect teaching approach and, consequently, for the ideas to come from the writer. In the implicit teaching of writing, it has to be the writer's self-expression and the writer's purpose that is articulated and practised rather than conventional rules of sentence structure, the rhetoric of a discourse community, or the linguistic expression of political power.

This too, however, implies a graded, incremental approach that may not be appropriate with students already working on a higher degree. After all, an exclusive pedagogic focus on error correction, supposing there are errors to be corrected, is not going to respond to the writing at a rhetorical level. Instead, it may be necessary to offer all the approaches in Ivanic's list and more; Ivanic notes her list is not exhaustive: 'There may also be other discourses which are relevant to literacy pedagogy' (Ivanic 2004: 240) in an iterative process with the same students over a period of time. By that, I mean for example, that writing tutors might need to invite a critical approach and discuss rhetorical moves at the same time as explicitly teaching particular knowledge such as academic conventions. They hope for writerly insight in any of these areas.

Study

In the following section, I discuss the application of a range of approaches to the teaching of writing with the same student, K, who had recently completed an MA in Applied Linguistics at another university, and applied to register for a PhD at my institution. I agreed to be her principal supervisor. There was one second supervisor, and later two. Although for me K's proposal, to research the notion of linguistic multicompetence (Cook 1991), lacked coherence and the surface features of her writing made it difficult to understand (see extract in Example 1 below), I was not unduly concerned, having taught academic writing for many years in a previous post, and reasoning that the quality of surface features was not

necessarily a reflection of academic ability or a predictor of academic success. There would be many options available to us, I imagined, from working together to develop her ideas further, to recommending she took advantage of the free one-to-one study support available within the department, taking private tuition, and, as a last resort, having her thesis professionally proofread.

During the first six months of K's registration, she produced a range of texts, from her initial research proposal to PowerPoint slides and draft papers, and as her supervisor I took the opportunity to use a number of approaches in commenting on and eliciting written texts from her along the whole range of Ivanič's six approaches. Although the teaching approach followed a broadly cumulative scheme, beginning with skills and ending with critical literacy, the reality was much more complicated, with each approach being re-visited from time to time. In the following pages, I will illustrate some of the complexity, offering representative examples of texts and comments.

It is difficult to imagine the study of language itself at research level taking place in a vacuum and not referring to social practices or socio-political theory. In particular, as an aspect of second language acquisition, a writer's focus on multicompetence might be expected to be situated in a socio-cultural framework. It would be mandatory if the exemplars were to be from a specific sub-cultural set, as is implied from the reference to code switching in the extract below.

Example 1: Extract from Introduction to initial Research Proposal

The Multicompetence is defines as the 'compound state of a mind with two grammars' (Cook, 1991). Neurolinguists discovered that language acquisition takes various methods of acquisition because it has a different metalinguistic awareness and 'language acquisition takes place in more than one cognitive process' (Cook, 1991). For a multicompetent learner the acquisition process is complicated because more components play their parts in acquisition process which witness a large scale facilitation or interference. The awareness, use and knowledge of other languages make their cognitive process more vibrant and dynamic than monolingual (Cook, 1993) and they apply some rules of their previous languages to reconstruct the new language. During code switching their previous language systems are constantly available (Cook 1991a). These various sets of grammar are depending on one another and form one complex grammar (Cook, 1992).

My response to the initial research proposal was to suppose that some sort of explicit skills teaching, in the form of error correction of the script, was necessary in order to better understand the writer's intentions. The second supervisor emailed a reminder:

You are not supposed to be a proof-reader, but most of us can't help correcting the English as we go along - that can get pretty time-consuming, so try to resist if you can! It is the student's responsibility to organise a proof-reader. (email from 2nd supervisor 1.11.10)

Despite some surface error correction of the script, face to face meetings focused on ideas – the problems of defining, identifying and measuring multicompetence and considering the implications for the individual language learner and a whole society of language learners. In response to a request to write some personal background to the topic, K produced a revised research proposal, which to me seemed much more coherent. In the extract below, an outline of the positive implications of the notion of multicompetence is given from a personal level and is unexpectedly interrupted by a quotation from the literature.

Example 2. Extract from revised research proposal (10.12.10)

[...] these difficulties automatically minimised as suddenly I started to realised that I am a multicompetence learner. This was a tremendous feeling which has boosted my confidence [...] Some where Punjabi helped me in learning intonation [...] Urdu blessed me in grammar structure [...] Sindhi helped me to understand polite and impolite language style [...] Multicompetence

helped me to re-evaluate and re-portray my self-image as an English language learner. (**'If we are interested in L2 users and L2 acquisition rather than closeness to native speakers we need to start from the mind of the L2 user in all its richness and complexity'** Cook, 2005). My rich language experience, although late, has developed my confidence to learn English swiftly with little efforts and apply all the linguistic components which were present in my mind as a multicompetence learner. (Emphasis added).

In response to the interruption, it seemed to me that it would be appropriate to adopt explicit genre teaching in order to suggest a more conventional location for the quotation. My handwritten notes on the script read:

The quotation seems to interrupt the flow of ideas here. [...] I think this autobiographical self-reflection is helpful in introducing the notion of multicompetence and in conveying your personal interest in exploring its implications. However, before stating your hypothesis, it would be conventional to identify a gap, ie some kind of problem or deficiency, at this point. The problem might be to do with the definitions of multicompetence so far adopted, or its application, or the boundaries of the concept. How can it be measured or distinguished from similar notions such as multilingualism?

At the same time, I was interested in one of the revised research questions:

What are the internal and external factors involve in the English language learning in the multicompetence society like Pakistan? (Extract from revised research proposal 10.12.10)

Together with the rest of the revised proposal, it suggested that key notions for the writer were multicompetence, code switching and culture, whose relations would be worth investigating further. My notes on a meeting three days later read:

K will write a paper on multicompetence at national level and submit by 23 December. (SW notes on meeting with K 13.12.10)

I understood 'multicompetence at national level' to mean how a wholly multi-competent society created a particular culture as a result of its special aptitude. The result was a piece of writing whose conclusion merely located code-switching at a local rather than a national level yet, for the first time, apparently offered some parameters for an empirical project.

Example 3. Pakistan a multilingual society: Conclusion 23.12.10

It is important for linguistics in multilingual societies to know when, why and with whom a language should be chosen. Sometimes code-switching is spontaneous among the multilinguals but some itmes carefully planned, but at times thereofre, it is importat to research that when and why the speaker use it as a strategic tool and under what circumstancis he is spontaneou because such ability is important links among their linguistic repertoire and the various interlocutors in such a diverse society.

As the above suggests, the revision did not address the nature of multicompetence at national level as promised and returned to the level of the individual language user; the general notion of multicompetence is absent, replaced by the more concrete and therefore measurable phenomenon of code-switching. On the script, I wrote

- How could you investigate spontaneity vs planning? ...
- I think your conclusion could discuss the implications of the situation for Pakistani society. As I recall, you were going to write on Pakistan as a multicompetent society, which perhaps is slightly different in focus? (SW handwritten notes on script)

It seemed at this stage that the way we were collaborating was a process approach, revising and refining successive drafts to clarify the nature and purpose of the research project. The writing now seemed more coherent than earlier drafts, and I thought that the possibility of clarifying the linguistic phenomenon of interest at the individual level was worth exploring further. In a subsequent email message, I wrote:

I wonder if it would be worth reflecting on your own experience and situation as a multilingual in Pakistan as a way of refining your research topic? I thought the autobiographical section at the start of the proposal you submitted last month read very well [...] (email SW to K 15.1.11)

In other words, I thought that identifying a salient episode in the writer's own experience would provide the necessary stimulus for a research enquiry. My intention was to (1) identify the locus of conflict and (2) recognise the potential for its transfer or application. The common elements between narrative and thesis or, as here, autobiography and research are the familiar ones of stasis, complication and resolution, familiar from Propp (1968) and the Situation – Problem – Solution – Evaluation (SPSE) structure (Hoey 1994). The association of the uniquely personal and the objective process of conducting a research project is neither new nor confined to verbal disciplines in the arts and social sciences; Mason *et al.* (1982) even advocate narrative as an approach to the study of mathematics. The association of personal narrative and research enquiry is made explicit by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who write that 'Narrative enquiry characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 41).

In this case, the result was a mixture of promising detail and superficial evaluation. It is as though the writer wraps up all the conflicting and emotive experience, labels it as non-functional, and dismisses it. But while the writer seemed anxious to gloss over the details and move the story on to a safer place, I thought that the interactions of the two groups of students – the English medium and the Sindhi speakers, the hijackers and the back-benchers – described in the account of high school language learning was most salient and provided images that offered rich possibilities for further investigation.

Example 5. Reflection of my use of languages as a teenager 9.3.11

I passed my matriculation in good grades and I got admission in a Christian Missionary college with full confidence. But all my confidence and dreams were shattered because in the college everybody was fluent in English except me. ...

The girls and boys from English medium schools, who were in the minority, hijacked the classroom activities and discussions because they were fluent in English, while majority of the students, who were from Sindhi medium schools, like me, were silent spectators and back benchers. My class was visibly divided into the Sindhi and English medium students. I was a pendulum, as I belonged to both, 'Sindhi and convent girl', and enjoyed the privileges of both groups, though I felt strong affiliation with rural students because I didn't like the snobbish and superficial attitude of English medium students. ...

Ironically, in the first semester and in the rest of the semesters, 'the back-benchers', who were good in writing as well as literature comprehension, snatched all positions. ...

Although we, 'the rural student', outclassed the English 'medium students' but there was one conspicuous evident which always went against my group. We were good to discuss the English writers, use the flowery language, explain the philosophical statements, enjoy the poetical and musical verses but we were not able to communicate on the minor issues, how to use the English in daily matters. We were poor in outside classroom talk in English. The reason was obvious; Shakespeare, Milton, Dostoyevsky, Voltaire or Goethe had never taught us the communicative language. This problem persisted for a long time, as hardly find chances interact in English, until I was appointed the teacher in English.

This prompted me to wonder whether code-switching data could be collected and analysed from modern representatives of the hijackers and the back-benchers. It soon emerged, however, that the account had been closed and would need to be reopened, perhaps in a less personal, more sensitive way. Despite his earlier enthusiasm for the use of narrative as a catalyst in academic research, Mason (2002) spells out

the risks: over-simplification, facile discrimination, and early foreclosure, and sees it as therapeutic in the short-term but enervating in terms of taking any further action to improve the situation:

Writing narratives can be very useful as an aid to making sense, to digesting experience, but in the process the energy for more sensitised noticing in the future may be dissipated. Narratives, by their very nature, are likely to support pigeon-holing, because they smooth out disturbances and provide or imply explanation and justification. The extent to which a collection of accounts leaves open possibilities, does not theorise and account-for, is the extent to which there is potential for influencing and informing the future. Succumbing to the impulse to weave a narrative which explains, links, and organises, may make you feel better, but may lessen the energy available to make changes. (Mason 2002: 62)

In K's observation, 'The reason was obvious' – seems to arrive at a point that requires no further explanation, similar to Mason's (2002) claims above. The puzzle is solved: there is no longer a puzzle. What is missing in the writing is any evidence of reflexivity, a particular form of reflection (see Hatton and Smith's 1995 framework of levels of reflection, Fig. 1).

- critical reflection – demonstrates an awareness that actions and events are not only located within and explicable by multiple perspectives, but are located in and influenced by multiple historical and socio-political contexts' [= 'reflexive'].
 - dialogic reflection – analytical or integrative
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- descriptive reflection – the possibility of alternative viewpoints is accepted but most reflection is from one perspective.
 - descriptive writing – no discussion beyond description.

Figure. 1: Hatton and Smith's (1995) framework of levels of reflection (in Moon 2004: 97, my break)

K's writing is primarily descriptive. In her account of the two student groups, the hijackers and the back-benchers, K seems to accept the possibility of alternative viewpoints, but neither is explored. From a linguistic perspective, what is missing are illustrations of the talk of the two groups. What made their talk different? Repeated requests failed to elicit any linguistic examples from K. Dialogic and critical reflection are absent and there is no reflexivity in the account.

Reflexivity [...] entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others. (Anderson 2010: 382)

Anderson's (2010) characterisation of reflexivity suggests that K's writing offers insights, for example, while she refers to her own group's language as 'flowery'; but she makes no further contrast with the language used by other groups, or the same groups at earlier or later stages of their careers. She does not comment on whether, from her present perspective, she sees her earlier language use as flowery. Instead, the denouement of the story is her becoming a teacher. That is what puts the episode in perspective.

Soon afterwards, five drafts were produced for a poster presentation in another city, involving revisions of title, sections, references and terms of reference. Because its purpose was a public display at a training course, the work illustrates a blend of functional teaching approaches and purposeful communication. Specifically, work on the poster title touches on critical literacy. Despite my suggestion a month earlier that a working title for her project might be 'The discourse of young women English language learners in a multilingual society', the title of the first draft of the poster read 'The analytic exploration of discourse of young ladies of English language learners and their identities and subjectivities in the multilingual society' (2.3.11). In my notes from a meeting two days later, I write, 'Why was the draft title changed from "The discourse of young women"?' (4.3.11). I learned in a later face-to-face meeting that the researcher continued to resist my suggestion because of the local associations attached to the words *women* and

ladies in her English language community. Whilst the title was eventually changed, K kept *ladies* in one of the poster sections.

Discussion

K's autobiographical narrative and more conventional academic writing seem to conform to, rather than resist, the *status quo*. It is, or aspires to be, middle class and distant (Bourdieu 1984); socially-produced in its *plaisir* (Barthes 1973 / 1975); in its description of the classroom hijackers, grotesquely realistic more than carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1968); and self-controlled rather than attempting to resist hegemonic force (Foucault 1978). It is generally monologic and heteroglossic (Fiske 1989) with little sign of independent authorial voice or ability to '[make] visible / [challenge] / [play] with official and unofficial discourse' (Lillis 2003: 193). At this level of academic study, the writing needs more consistently to show dialogic if not critical reflection; instead, what it offers is description and descriptive reflection.

The three commonalities of object, individual and society outlined at the start of the paper suggest K writes at the level of the individual; there is no critique placing her ideas in relation to the field. The focus in all her texts remains at the level of object and self, in this case secondary sources and personal experience; they do not make the social connection inviting an academic literacies approach. A range of alternatives to the teaching of writing seems to continue to be appropriate. My purpose in teaching is to simultaneously support and challenge, and to facilitate the production of the next level of discourse in Ivanic's model. Further justification is given for this approach in Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development.

- 4 De-automatisation of performance leads to recursion through the zone of proximal development.
- 3 Performance is developed, automatized and fossilised.
- 2 Performance is assisted by self.
- 1 Performance is assisted by more capable others.

(Tharp and Gallimore 1988: 35)

There seemed to be ample evidence of K's fossilisation of performance in her regurgitation of the literature, and the suggestion that she should write an autobiographical account of her adolescent experience of language learning to reflect on the phenomenon she wished to investigate was intended as a challenge to 'de-automatise' her reliance on secondary sources.

Conclusion

I can attest to the 'tensions and contradictions' predicted by Ivanic (2004: 241) for a writing teacher aiming to combine all six teaching approaches in her model. Not wishing to invade the personal, yet wanting K to tap the reserves of energy required for undertaking a three-year research project, my purpose was to encourage the development of her ideas through writing. The alternative, suspected by K's supervisors, was that K wanted the energy to come from them. The characteristics of K's writing, with its absence of dialogue and critique, tend to confirm the reasonableness of Hatton and Smith's (1995) framework of levels of reflection. In fact, the creative writing exercise yielded a revised research proposal centred around the code-switching of young Sindhi women instead of the more abstract 'multicompetence' of K's original proposal, although K never seemed to draw further on her own experience for ideas. Nevertheless, the situation described in the autobiographical account informed the methodology for data gathering on code-switching participant identity and discourse situation. It suggested location, settings and participants. As a follow-up project, it would be interesting to survey a number of Social Science researchers' (auto)biographical accounts of the genesis of their investigations, using them to diagnose levels of reflection, and explore similar parallels in the methodology and discursive nature of their projects.

What I did not know when K began her research career was that she had failed to meet the entrance conditions for admission to the doctoral programme. She had been unable to provide the evidence requested by the department of 'passing [her] MA in Applied Linguistics with a Grade B/60%' because of a poor record at her previous university. In fact, her application to the doctoral school there had been refused. In the meantime, however, K was mistakenly sent an unconditional offer that was never rescinded. Would it have made any difference to the work we did had I known? As my first experience of doctoral supervision, it was to prove time-consuming, challenging and depressing. At the same time, although I was not her writing tutor, I wanted to explore different forms of writing with K in an effort to take things forward. In this respect, even with the benefit of hindsight, I believe I would have taken the same approach in trying to develop ideas for her research project through writing. In two years, K visited a study skills tutor on two occasions. Despite being introduced to a writing tutor, she resisted all attempts to set up a tutorial. Instead, she recycled her own writing as thoroughly as any baroque composer.

This study suggests that trying to achieve critical literacy by working through discourse models of writing and the associated teaching approaches in any systematic order will not succeed. It may be necessary to revisit other discourses and approaches from time to time. Whilst critical literacy may more easily be realised after mastering other forms, together they form a repertory all of whose elements the writer calls upon when needed. Meanwhile, the level of reflection apparent in a text may provide an indication of the nature of discourses so far acquired, e.g. reflexive writing implying that the writer can also produce dialogic, reflective and descriptive writing. As Moon (2004) has pointed out, descriptive writing is absolutely necessary as a basis for reflexivity: writers cannot hold multiple perspectives without first describing a single perspective. In this respect, autobiographical writing offers both the advantages outlined by Crème (2000) and the potential for transformative learning described in McDrury and Alterio's (2002) theory of learning. It offers a perspective very familiar to the writer and invites reinterpretation. Similarly, discourse has both form and function; and evaluation entails both the application of an analytical system and the knowledge to apply it. A likely order of text type acquisition, as acknowledged by Lea and Street (1998), does not mean that writers have to be entirely competent in one order before trying another – e.g. in technical aspects before creative writing – or that writing teachers have to completely exhaust the genre approach before inviting critical language awareness from their students. More important than any particular approach, it seems, is to set up a dialogue with the writer, giving them an incentive to produce texts that can form the basis for discussion and help them work out their ideas.

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