# Teaching writing-for-publishing practices to language teacher trainees: A classroom experience

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**Abstract**
Reading and writing practices play an essential role in language teacher 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.

## Introduction

Reading and writing practices play an essential role in language teacher education programs. On the one hand, they can constitute an essential learning tool to acquire disciplinary knowledge (Carlino et al., 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 itself (Edwards-Groves, 2013). One common way of doing the latter is through publishing. 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 rarely get the opportunity to communicate to a real audience since most of their written works are addressed to their professors. 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

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*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 Fernandez". 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 sociocultural stance on teaching and learning that conceive 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 though 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 in an autonomous way specific writing practices and become full members of their disciplinary communities of practice do (Colombo, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

However, in most tertiary education institution 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 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 was conceived from an approach that sees writing as a social and situated activity (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bazerman & Prior, 2004) the focus of the class was not on writing

as a product but as a process and as a social activity. In other words, in addition to discuss and analyze students drafts, teaching actions and class activities were developed so as students could focus on how these texts were used in the academic world.

These ways of doing with writing are often not so tangible (Aitchison, 2009), so some class activities were designed to make the writing process more visible and thus manageable. At the beginning of the terms and with the aim of providing a 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) was offered. The concepts and controversies presented in this mini lecture (e.g., Cassany, 2006; Castelló, et al., 2010) were revisited all along the semester during class discussions and offered students some tools to critically evaluate and challenge their own ideas on writing. For example, while discussing the cognitive stance, some students were able to defy the idea that writing is just putting thoughts into words and started 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 were not aimed at teaching the cognitive models themselves, but to offer students some conceptual and theoretical tools to think about writing.

In addition to discuss 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 field shares his early experience with academic writing (Matsuda, 2003). Students tend to show surprised 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 believe 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 start seeing it as something that can be learnt.

These dialogues on how the authors handled their writing processes also allowed 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 shared 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 wrote down in the blackboard all the different strategies mentioned in class as to come up with a common list. This list would be the departing point for their homework: 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 were aimed at prompting students to share and revise their own writing habits. Thus, students´ attention was drawn to what people did, not their texts. Paying attention to what other people did, including famous writers and the class professor, allowed students to acknowledge the specific actions they performed 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, had 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 lead 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 analyzing what they tended to do when writing, we worked in class with the four writing profiles proposed by Crème and Lea (2008): the diver writing, 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, the whole class discussed each profile. Students shared their techniques, activities, routines and attitudes related to writing. This activity was useful to jointly arrive to the conclusion that there are several ways of managing the writing process and that each of them have 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 with the writing objectives at hand. In addition, since everybody in class revised his or her own writing process, it became obvious that composing activities and strategies are intrinsically related and there are no clear cut boundaries between planning, textualizing and revising.

In sum, class work with different conceptualizations of writing as well as different ways of managing the writing process showed 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 it 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 sociocultural 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 class work was based on and for the texts produced by the students. Thus, instead of exercising for future writing tasks, students actually faced 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 had 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 turned in their advances and drafts were revised in whole-class and peer review activities. The first in-class revision was made using a computer and a projector so the professor could model and make explicit a specific way of commenting the drafts (Wells, 1990). First, the professor explained the overall goal of the revising activity: helping authors keep on advancing with their writing. Therefore, those who revised drafts were supposed to comment them and not to correct them. Then, the professor started to write comments in the draft, stating out loud the criteria behind the comments. This is: she made explicit why she was commenting what she was commenting, why she wrote the comment in the way she wrote it. This talk about text (Wells, 1990) had the intention of prompting participatory appropriation (Rogoff, 2008) since students later will comment their partner´s draft. Gradually, students started to offer suggestions on what and how to comment in the draft, making explicit the reasons why. The whole-class revision, then, opened a space where, with the help of someone with more expertise, students started to participate in a peripheral but legitimate way (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the following classes, the professor gradually started to make less and less comments, asking students to do them. Thus, students appropriated 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 were key so students could enact and appropriate this type of practice. In addition, during the revision activities several issues related to offering written feedback were discussed such as if making 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 way of doing this, the professor shared comments that her research team partners had made in early drafts of published articles, showing how experts carry on this practice in a real environment. In addition, it was discussed how reviewers should make efforts to achieve a balance between praising and criticizing so authors could find comments useful to improve their texts (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Finally, as reviewers were supposed to comment, not correct the texts, they would first mention something positive about the draft and every time they identified some issues, they were supposed to offer a possible solution. All in all, the whole-class revision activities allowed students to achieve a participatory appropriation of the revision practices and, at the same time, learn and reflect on different ways of giving feedback.

In addition to teach how to carry on peer review activities, working with drafts in class also highlighted how important it is to work with provisional texts. As a matter of fact, bringing their drafts to class reinforced the idea that no text is created at once. Furthermore, revision activities allowed for students to share strategies to review their own texts and how to treat the feedback received during class and from peers. This opened the door to dialogues were students shared feelings and reflections on how they managed their own revising process and what they could change.

Additionally, working repeatedly with drafts led to whole-class discussions centered on topics such as APA style, grammatical and spelling issues. These linguistic contents were treated with a focus on the relationship between the form and the rhetorical effect that every author wanted to achieve. Therefore, students did not only collect strategies to manage more efficiently their writing processes but also revision tips to improve their partners´ and their own writing.

To conclude, the previously mentioned activities afforded 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 had the chance to get to know and use new (to them) ways of managing their process. These dialogues kept on going during the whole class activities and the peer review activities where students exchanged ideas about how to review their texts. Finally, working with drafts in class not only allowed to deal

with some grammatical and style issues but opened up a space were students actually enacted 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* was designed from a sociocultural 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 opened the door for students to participate and, by participating, practice and gradually acquire self-regulated strategies to manage their writing process. This implied 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 were designed so students could experience in addition to conceptualize and reflect on the different ways in which texts can be composed. To make this possible, a great amount of class time was devoted to give visibility and discuss different ideas about writing and how to manage the writing process. As a result, students collected an array of tools that they could use to keep on improving the way they regulated their own writing. Therefore, this course, far for being only centered on the texts, gave a space to work with the writers. Additionally, whole-class and peer review activities opened a space where students exercised a very common scholarly practice: giving and receiving comments. Instead of "doing exercises" for later being able to write as scholars, students "exercised" scholarly literacy practices with others (professor and peers) so gradually they could become better academic writers. They learned 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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