

Writers as performers: Developing reflexive and creative writing identities

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ABSTRACT: Writing is a complex and learned activity in that it requires us to shape our thoughts into words and texts that are appropriate for the purpose, audience and medium of a variety of communicative forms. Writers must constantly make decisions about how to represent their subject matter and themselves through language. In this way, writing can be conceptualised as a performance whereby writers shape and represent their identities as they mediate social structures and personal considerations. In this paper I use theories of reflexivity and discourse to analyse interviews and writing samples of culturally and linguistically diverse Australian primary students for evidence of particular kinds of writing identities. Findings indicate a clear influence of particular teaching strategies and contexts on the writing identities of students. I argue that making students aware of their writing choices, the influences on, and the potential impact of those choices on themselves, their text and their audience, is a new imperative in the teaching of writing.

KEYWORDS: Writing identities, writer as performer, reflexive writers, creative writers, writing pedagogy, diverse writers.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a social performance: young people write to communicate, to get things done, to negotiate relationships with others, to portray themselves in particular ways, and to influence thinking about social issues (Lillis & McKinney, 2013). However, unlike many other activities which become easier with practice, writing remains highly demanding even for experienced writers (Cremin & Myhill, 2012). Writing is a complex and learned activity in that it requires us to shape our thoughts into words and texts that are appropriate for the purpose, audience and medium of communication. The writer must constantly make decisions about how to represent their subject matter and themselves through language. In this sense it is a creative performance.

Decision-making in writing is not just a matter of individuals deciding what and how to write. These decisions are mediated through personal motivations, interests, skills and priorities, along with expectations and “normal” ways of doing things in the classroom particularly for writing tasks. Sometimes these structural conditions or expectations become the measures of “good” writing or writers. Turvey (2007) argues that over-attention to forms and features (expected structures) of writing can be to the detriment of the development of a writing identity that highlights choice, ideas and relationship building with an audience. Students whose writing decisions are heavily mediated by the contextual structures expected by the education system, the school and the teacher, can often regurgitate genres and produce formulaic paragraphs and texts (Ryan & Barton, 2014). Such students are less likely to have a vested interest in written texts and styles, to develop a love of and interest in writing outside school,

and to flex their writing identities in new and innovative ways. It can stifle their creativity as a writer. They also may be unable to make effective writing decisions when there is no formula provided. In effect, they become *school writers*.

In this paper I argue that making students aware of their writing choices, and the potential impact of those choices on themselves, their text and their audience, is a new imperative in the teaching of writing. First I discuss writing as a social and creative performance, and then I use theories of reflexivity to frame my analytical approach to self-conscious writing identity. Thirdly, I use writing samples and interview data from students in culturally and linguistically diverse upper primary classes in Australia, to illustrate how different kinds of writing identities are enacted. Finally I discuss the implications of these findings for the development of writing identities and the teaching of writing.

WRITERS AS PERFORMERS

Recent research in writing foregrounds the writer as an active designer of text, shaping meanings and expressing aspects of self within the social context (Dyson, 2009; Myhill, Jones, Watson, & Lines, 2013; Ryan & Barton, 2014). The ability to make effective choices that consider both the intentions of the individual and the conditions in which the writing is produced, is paramount in this conceptualisation of the writer (Ryan & Kettle, 2012). Effective choices are contingent upon access to a repertoire of textual and creative knowledges and skills.

Textual knowledge in writing is constituted by four main knowledge domains: 1) metalinguistic knowledge (grammar, cohesion, structures and lexical forms); 2) knowledge about the communicative purposes of texts and how they can be designed to achieve these purposes; 3) knowledge about the roles and relationships between the writer and the audience and how meaning is negotiable and contested; and 4) knowledge about the affordances and dynamics of the medium (Ivanič, 2004; Macken-Horarik & Morgan, 2011). The skill of the writer is evidenced in the ways that they negotiate and use these knowledges for the texts that they produce in different social contexts.

The social performance of writing

The view of writing for this study is based on Halliday's (1978) foundational ideas about language as a social semiotic, which sees texts as products of the social conditions, with language considered a socially meaningful sign system. The basis of Halliday's work is the foregrounding of choice, that is, texts are produced by people in particular ways according to the social context, the audience, the subject matter and the mode and medium of communication. Halliday's work forms the basis of much recent research in writing, which argues that the way we use language is fundamentally expressive of who we are and how we make sense of our world (Cremin & Myhill, 2012). The power of language is not only in its representation of the topic or subject of the text, but also in its interpersonal positioning of the writer or speaker themselves (Martin, 2007). Since the explosion of Web 2.0 technologies, young people regularly take up opportunities to write themselves into social discourses of interaction and validation, engaging in a public performance of

belonging (Highfield, Harrington, & Bruns, 2013) that permeates everyday life. These new forms of public identity-building mean that the choices young people make in writing matter. It also means that ideas of audience are claiming a new importance in the teaching and learning of writing.

Building a relationship with the reader is part of the identity work that the writer does. Ivanič (1998) explained this clearly through her model of the writer as performer (after Goffman, 1969), which moves away from a purely cognitive view of writer's "voice" through the process of writing, to a more social view of the relationship between the writer and reader – making visible the "discoursal self". This approach foregrounds the ways in which the writer might "perform" a role to suit the task or manipulate the reader through the use of language, and also how they represent their own creativity, values or commitment to the subject matter (Ryan & Barton, 2014). Grainger, Gooch and Lambirth (2002, 2005) suggested that young writers today may know more about morphological and technical features of writing. However, they question whether students have a desire to write or indeed whether they are offered opportunities to play with words and generate new possibilities for voice in writing, indicating a lack of creativity in the practice of writing in school.

Importantly, Canagarajah (2006) emphasises a similar approach for multilingual writers, that is, treating context, rather than language, as the main variable as writers switch their languages, discourses, and identities in response to contextual change. He strongly argues that multilingual writers are not passively conditioned by their language and culture, but rather, they can choose how to perform as writer for different texts and contexts. The opportunity to creatively "code mesh" by blending, merging and hybridising language and dialect for the purposes of constructing ethnic identities in writing, must be considered in writing assessment (Jordan, 2012). Hyland (2003) and Athanases, Bennett and Michelsen Wahleithner (2013) argue that a focus on writers as individuals who build an identity in writing in different ways for different purposes, is of utmost importance for linguistically diverse writers otherwise they will be relegated to a formulaic approach to writing.

Elbow (2000) explicated a theory of writer's voice which aligns with Ivanič's (1998) discoursal self and links writing with identity and creative expression. Elbow identifies five ways that voice can be present in writing: first, the audible voice to describe the sound of a text, that is, the rhythm, tone or accent of the text as a spoken piece, which is not valued so much in expository or academic texts; second, the dramatic voice to identify the persona, or character, taken up by the author; and third, a recognisable voice, or style of writing, that is distinctive of an author – each of these relate to Ivanič's (1998) discoursal self or how the writer wants to present themselves, regardless of their stance (Ryan & Barton, 2014); fourth, an authoritative voice able to speak the truth, or convey the truth – highly valued in academic or formal writing (Carbone & Orellana, 2010); and a resonant voice, or presence, which reveals the relationship between what the writer commits to paper and his or her unconscious, that is, how they show what they don't know as much as what they do about this style of writing or the subject matter (Carbone & Orellana, 2010). The ways in which writers take up, reject or hybridise these voices say much about the writing identities that they bring into play through different texts in different contexts. It also enables them to enact a powerfully creative process, often required in effective writing tasks.

The creative performance of writing

The idea that the writer chooses to “perform” a role to suit the task or manipulate readers, and also to represent their own creativity, values or commitment to the subject matter, suggests a level of self-awareness. When students follow recipes for writing they are less likely to engage in a creative process of reflexivity and testing of new ideas. The notion that creativity is an integral part of the writing process has been acknowledged in the literature (Greene, 1991; Jewitt, 2008; Wright, 2010), yet it is not always enacted in time-poor and test-focused classrooms. Novel ideas and uncustomary ways of viewing things can often be facilitated through multiple modes. Indeed, Jewitt (2008) found that “the use of performance and visual arts opened up the voices of the students identified as reluctant writers” (p. 255). The pre-writing phase is integral in building students’ investment and interest in writing so they critically and creatively engage with the reader and the subject matter, and also demonstrate textual mastery appropriate for the task at hand. It is through processes such as these that the concept of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; 1996) can be attained.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) developed the idea of “flow” or what he calls the “optimal experience” (p. 110) to describe the way people feel when things are going well during an activity that stretches their capacity and involves elements of novelty and discovery. Flow is characterised by an effortless yet highly focused state of consciousness. According to Jackson, Thomas, Marsh and Smethurst (2001) flow is characterised by high levels of concentration, deep understanding and absolute absorption in an activity, and is necessary for creative and high-quality outcomes. Further, Willms and Friesen (2012) state that students rarely have the opportunity to attain a “flow state” in the classroom as they often feel unchallenged or find school work irrelevant. In relation to the teaching of writing, this would indicate that extended periods of time and a deep understanding of and commitment to the subject matter and textual design are needed to allow the flow of creativity to occur.

THEORETICAL FRAMING: REFLEXIVITY AND WRITING PERFORMANCE

Archer’s (2007) theory of reflexivity provides a theoretical underpinning for engagement in writing and the agency of writers. She highlights the importance of both the concerns of the individual and the social structures or “expected” ways of acting in a particular context. Reflexivity involves deliberating about possible courses of action, deciding what might be feasible at this time in this writing situation and then choosing a way forward. The effects of these choices constitute a form of learning, as this new knowledge is woven into the next course of action. *Effective* writers in any context are active decision-makers who mediate their own concerns and considerations (interests, emotions, beliefs, creativity, priorities, knowledge and capabilities) and their particular circumstances (for example, school curriculum and assessment requirements, teacher and text type expectations etc.) to write in certain ways. Archer suggests that we have “internal conversations” in which we reflect upon and weigh up (multiple) possible options, taking internal and external considerations into account. The causal powers of these external or objective structures are exercised

as enablements and constraints, and even the anticipation of particular enablements or constraints can serve as a deterrent or an encouragement (Archer, 2007).

Although students' writing decisions are conditioned by social expectations, these structures are not considered by Archer to be "forces", but rather are "reasons for acting in particular ways" (Archer, 1995 p. 209). The reception of such influences by active agents is essential to understanding and explaining eventual outcomes, which are mediated by their reflexivity (Archer, 2010). The cyclical process of reflexivity, according to Archer's research, involves internal conversations whereby one discerns the situation and the possible choices, reflects and deliberates on the influences, and decides on a course of action, triggering the next cycle. In contextually congruent or static conditions (such as highly structured and formulaic writing conditions in some classrooms), students have less need to reflexively weigh up their options. However in contextually incongruent or unpredictable conditions that have less formal structure and/or privacy and/or more potential for misinterpretation (such as out-of-school writing on social media sites, instant messaging, blogs or email), Archer argues that reflexive processes, which go beyond reflective thought to include action and *re*-action, are more important than ever in weighing up good decisions. If students only ever write in contextually congruent conditions, with no opportunities to deliberate about the influences on and effects of their writing decision-making, they will lack the skills to write effectively and appropriately in other contexts. Making oneself the object of study through reflexivity is a powerful way to interrogate the decisions one makes and the ensuing effects or implications.

This theoretical approach draws upon the work of Ivanič (1998) on identity and performance in writing and Halliday's (1978) systems of choice in text production, to theorise how decisions are made in writing. Reflexivity theory enables exploration of the enablements and constraints in writing. Whilst writers have agency to weigh up the personal and the structural considerations to make decisions that represent self in different ways at different times, they are also enabled or constrained in these choices by the contextual conditions. If writing contexts are too constrained in terms of time, engagement in subject matter, creativity, and flexibility of genre and style, this has clear implications for writing outcomes.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The student participants were drawn from two linguistically and culturally diverse primary schools, Mountain Gully School (MGS) and Willow Edge School (WES) in an Australian metropolitan area (pseudonyms used throughout). At MGS, 8.6% of students were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage, 33% spoke languages other than English at home, and there was also a high proportion of students with special learning needs. At WES, 32% of students had language backgrounds other than English, making it also a linguistically diverse school. The local community is quite multicultural with families from around 45 different countries attending the school, including Indigenous students and families from countries in South America, North America, Asia, Europe and the Pacific Islands.

This research specifically aimed to:

1. Identify the types of writing that 10-13 year old students undertake in and out of school;
2. Use students' writing samples as prompts for them to discuss their decision-making in writing;
3. Identify what students see as writing, and how they perceive of themselves as writers.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Reflexivity theory (Archer, 2007, 2013) is operationalised in this study through the study of discourse; that is, how social practices and decisions influence and are influenced by semiotic systems of texts (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). The word text is used in the broad sense to mean any communicative event such as talk, written text, gesture, visual image and so on. The analytical method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) enabled me to explore writing identities and reflexivity on three intertwined levels: the macro level of socio-historical ideologies, objective structures and influences on students, teachers and teaching; the meso level of the contextual specificities of the textual occurrences, the decisions that are made at these moments, and how these influence the texts produced; and the micro level of the language choices that are used to represent self, others, knowledge and ideas. I use Fairclough's (1992, 2003) linguistic point of reference, that of Hallidayan (1978) systemic functional linguistics, which is concerned with the social character of text and the relationship between discourse and discursive practice. Hallidayan linguistics is particularly useful in exploring reflexivity as it foregrounds choice and decision-making in the design of texts.

Years Five, Six and Seven teachers at each school (MGS n= 4; WES n=3) were asked to complete a questionnaire about their writing pedagogies and practices. Students from each of their classes also completed a questionnaire about their writing practices and attitudes towards writing (MGS n= 40; WES n=42). The writing co-ordinator/Head of Curriculum at each school was interviewed about whole-school approaches to writing, and 12 students from each school identified from the questionnaire (to represent a range of backgrounds and writing practices) agreed to be interviewed and to provide writing samples (n=24). For the purposes of this paper, interviews and writing samples from six students are used to illustrate three different kinds of writing identities evident across the data. However, I also briefly outline contextual data from each school so the findings can be situated within these structures of influence.

Discourse analysis of students' interviews utilised linguistic evaluation and appraisal (Martin, 2004) to determine students' self-appraisal as writers and of their motivations, decision-making and writing identities. Students' writing samples were analysed for identification of student voice (Carbone & Orellana, 2010; Elbow, 2000; Ivanič, 1998) and for their positioning as a writer. The samples were examined for the linguistic strategies used by students to achieve the purpose of the text for the audience. Specifically, assumptions that were made, grammatical mood, styles, modality and evaluation were examined to determine aspects of the "discoursal self" and how the writer represented their identity and developed a relationship with the reader in different texts.

WRITING IDENTITIES: DATA AND ANALYSIS

First, I provide some of the contextual data about teaching practices and/or priorities at each school so that the findings can be situated within these objective structures (Archer, 2007) of influence.

MGS Contextual data

MGS has integrated a number of strategies to improve writing but overall the approach is to teach the skills required to write in particular genres through systematic and explicit teaching. As such the school has developed a *Genre Grid* that highlights what text-types each year level is to learn across their academic year. Teachers are expected to use literacy indicators, annotated student writing samples, writing checklists and writing rubrics to map student progress. Additionally, an essential part of this targeted approach is the discourse that occurs around the teaching of writing between staff members and administration. Some of the teachers are trained markers for the national tests and they have provided professional development for other staff on the teaching of writing. In this way, the writing practices at MGS are highly influenced by objective conditions (Archer, 2007) of government policy, including the national testing program and the genres that are prioritised in such tests (to date persuasive and short story narrative).

While the school's approach ultimately produced an overall improvement in national test results (over the last three years), it didn't improve the writing (or the test scores) of more highly accomplished writers. It left little chance for the students to capture and reflect on their learning of specific genres or to participate in creative writing endeavours, all of which is indicative of a mechanical approach to genre (Hilton, 2006).

WES contextual data

The teaching of writing at WES has been greatly influenced by objective conditions (Archer, 2007) of high-stakes national testing in Australia and highly visible curriculum audit practices across state education in Queensland. This school was found to be below average in writing results across the range of year levels tested in national tests two years prior to the current project being undertaken. As a result, the school implemented strategies focused on improving writing. They implemented a writing program "Seven Steps to Writing Success Program" (McVeity, 2012) developed by a children's book author. The program is represented explicitly as a way to improve national test scores. The program is represented as well structured and scaffolded, which may well appeal to teachers of the (often mechanical) genre approach in Australia (Hilton, 2006). It has a focus on planning and structure, particularly how to make an impact by targeting structural and syntactical elements of writing such as the introduction, conclusion and sentence construction.

The school has also introduced an extended pre-writing phase to develop vocabulary and oral language use and has taught students to write reflectively about their writing. For example, students are asked to share the choices they make while writing, the impact they think those choices have, who they write for, what motivates them to write, what they find hard or easy, and the types of writing they like best. This social

aspect of reflection is a powerful way to self-assess desires, knowledges and skills in writing (Ryan, 2014). WES is an interesting context for this study in that it is clearly influenced by prescriptive and on-demand writing agendas, yet their writing strategies also include some of the more protracted and complex processes of writing and the acknowledgement that good writers need more than just skills and processes. These strategies include reflective sharing by students and informal action research by teachers into pedagogy that works as opposed to what is expected.

Writing identities

The student data indicate three distinct types of writing identities: The school writers, the constrained writers and the reflexive writers. The school writers comprise the largest group in the corpus of student data (16 out of 24) with 10 attending MGE and 6 attending WES. This is followed by the constrained writers (5 out of 24), three of whom attend WES and two from MGE, with the reflexive writers as the smallest group (3 out of 24) – with each student attending WES.

The school writers

The school writers are those who comply with objective school structures and write because it is required at school. They show little evidence of engagement with writing tasks, innovative techniques, or of reflexive or creative decision-making in writing.

David, who attended MGE and speaks Vietnamese as his first language at home, indicated that his approach to writing aligned with what the teachers asked him to do.

We have to do what the teachers says but otherwise I wouldn't do it...it's something that I have to do not like, because we get in trouble if we don't do it, so I have to do it.

David repeats “*have to do*” a number of times, and uses causal statements related to being in trouble to indicate the consequences of not conforming to the teacher directed writing in this classroom. He is not reflexive about why he might want to be able to write or whether there are types of writing that might be more pleasurable. He is clearly taking an evaluative position on writing as an unpalatable yet non-negotiable school activity.

While David did not particularly like writing he had the technical language to be able to talk about it by using phrases such as: *high modality*, *in the third person* and also text types such as: *narrative*, *information reports*, *persuasive texts*. Interestingly, David said that he would not talk to anyone about his writing, as when they write in class *its mostly quiet time and we're not allowed to talk*. David was immersed in the “school” discourses of writing whereby you write for the teacher and according to the teacher’s conditions of production, particularly as an ESL student who is still learning the nuances of the English language. David is not invested in the writing and has not developed a recognisable or dramatic voice (Elbow, 2000) to connect with the reader (given that it is generally the teacher) despite being one of the high-achievers in the class in other areas.

An analysis of David’s sample of writing (Figure 1)—a persuasive text on why mobile phones should not be allowed at school—shows that there is a distinct

structure in the text with paragraphs starting with the words: *I strongly believe*; *firstly*; *secondly*; *finally* and *in conclusion*. While David has clearly “followed the rules” and provided three clear areas of argument (brainstormed in the planning stage in class), his writing is unconvincing as there is limited dramatic or resonant voice employed (Carbone & Orellana, 2010) showing little evidence of investment in these arguments.

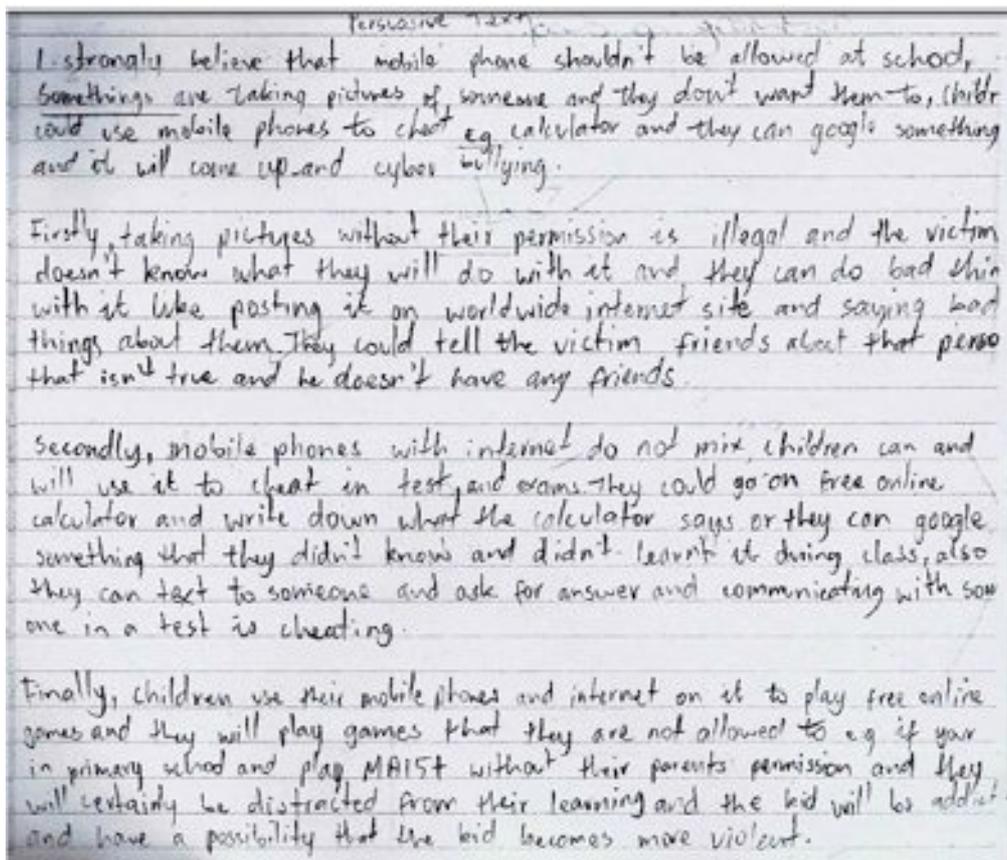


Figure 1. David's persuasive writing

David doesn't utilise a variety of moods to appeal to the reader and create dramatic impact – he maintains a declarative mood throughout, with a series of conjunctions “and” and “or” used throughout to indicate additive semantic relations. Unfortunately these additives give the sense of afterthoughts being added as they come to mind, rather than a cohesive building up of an argument with causal, contrastive or elaborative semantic relations (Fairclough, 2003).

Tahlia, who attended MGE and is an English speaker born in Australia, similarly demonstrates the influence of objective structures (teacher and text-type expectations), as she tries to explain the difference between persuasive texts and biographies:

Well you're trying to persuade people to, like, read the autograph thing (she's referring to a letter to the editor) and that, and then in, like, a biography you're not really persuading anybody, you're just doing what you've been told, just doin' that.

She understands a persuasive text in terms of persuading an audience to read it, which is one legitimate textual purpose. However, she doesn't move beyond this idea to engage in a more subjective concern for the subject matter and one's stance in the

argument. Her persuasive text (Figure 2) about caging animals, with a position that this constitutes animal cruelty, shows definite paragraph structure organised around key points. However, she is clearly following the formula and appropriate phrasing provided by her teacher during a brainstorm session pre-writing: *...needs to be noted... On the surface of this matter....* Despite her use of these features, she struggles with morphosyntactic elements of the text. Her sentence structure is poor, with mostly additive clauses and her style is more akin to oral language. Tahlia's lack of subject matter knowledge means that it becomes a circuitous argument (paragraph 3) that stops and starts and glosses over the issue of animal cruelty. For example, she adds conditional points, such as differentiating particular animals (birds, circus or injured animals) that could be kept in cages without dispute.

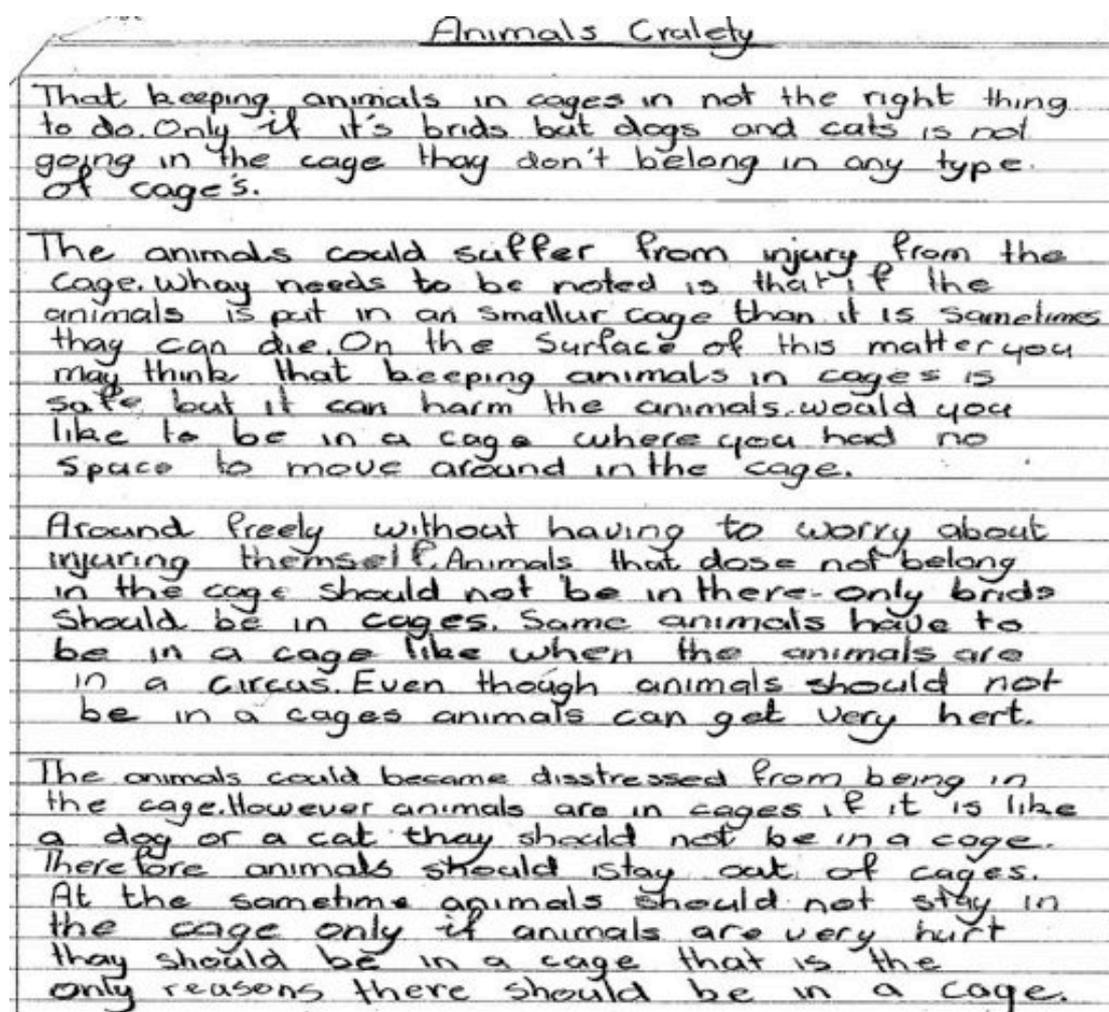


Figure 2. Tahlia's persuasive writing

Like David, Tahlia doesn't appear to have a sense of audience and lacks an authoritative or recognisable voice (Elbow, 2000). Tahlia explained in her interview that she found school tasks difficult, and that she was not engaged by such tasks. She was using linguistic and structural moves that had been provided by her teacher for this task. However, she shows limited knowledge of the subject matter. Her identity as a writer is clearly influenced by the school and testing environments, which make visible the techniques that students employ in high-pressure writing situations and which therefore need to be practised (Comber, 2012).

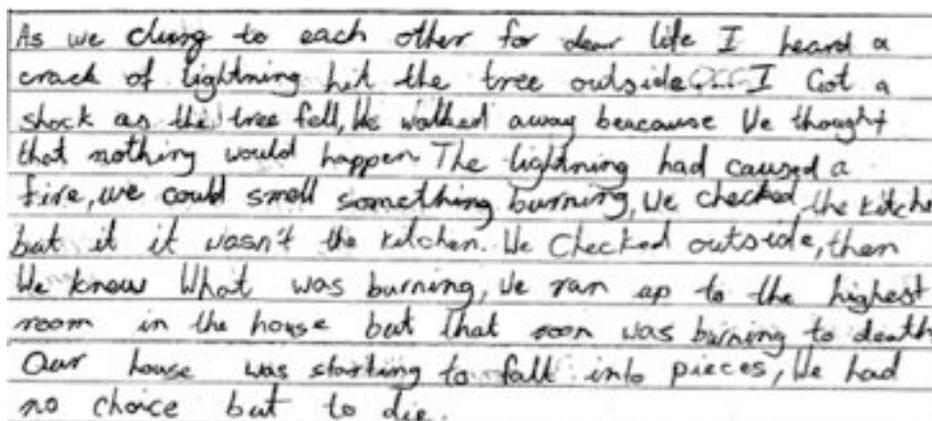
Dale, who attended WES and is an ESL student from Vietnam, indicated that his writing was influenced by teacher expectations of length, rather than other expectations of linguistic or rhetorical appropriateness, command of subject matter or creativity in writing.

If you want to get better marks you can make it longer and, well, yeah you can just make it normal if you don't really...

His use of *normal* and the comparative *longer* makes an evaluative statement about the difference between what he thinks is an appropriate length and what his teacher expects. When asked to reflect on what he would change or improve, Dale demonstrated again his focus on producing writing that would meet the teacher's standards of presentation.

There are, like, gaps in the middle because I rubbed out stuff and if I just rub this out I have to write it all again and just... because of that gap.

Dale does show some knowledge of narrative techniques to draw in the reader. However, it soon becomes apparent that he is following a recipe for "The exciting narrative". He begins his narrative with an exciting event...



As we cling to each other for dear life I heard a crack of lightning hit the tree outside. I got a shock as the tree fell, we walked away because we thought that nothing would happen. The lightning had caused a fire, we could smell something burning, we checked the kitchen but it wasn't the kitchen. We checked outside, then we knew what was burning, we ran up to the highest room in the house but that soon was burning to death. Our house was starting to fall into pieces, we had no choice but to die.

Figure 3. Dale's introduction

His use of hyperbole *no choice but to die* and onomatopoeia *crack of lightning* are indicative of a dramatic and audible voice, yet these characteristics without a sense of how to pull the audience along for the ride with a resonant (narrative) voice or recognisable voice (Elbow, 2000) through characterisation, plot development and cohesive style, mean that Dale's writing becomes a series of "exciting" yet easily resolved events that make no temporal sense.

He goes on describe how they *tried and tried for half an hour, and finally (sic) it opened*, then a convenient piece of paper fell down to tell them what to do... *I read and read until I knew what to do...we are going to make the strongest vacuum (sic) in the world. We planned for about 1 hour, and then we started building. We finished after 3-4 hours.* Then in the final two sentences a new character is introduced... *My friend Tom sacrificed (sic) himself to save me. In the end he turned out to be the bravest man in the world and everybody would remember him. The End.* Dale is applying his skills to create impact – he uses repetition *tried and tried, read and read*, and emotive verbs *sacrificed* and a series of complications; yet there is no sense that

he is invested in this story. He doesn't invite a commitment from the audience to the characters, as they are not ascribed personality and their motivations are not described nor evaluated. The assumption that Dale is making about narrative in this text is that quantity of, rather than quality of, complications and resolutions within the plot are to be prioritised.



Passage

We found a secret door, we jumped in and thought we were safe. A minute later all the walls were turning red, we were boiling and couldn't resist the heat, we thought to just stay calm and call 000. An hour later we found a tiny hatch, we were dehydrated and had no energy, there was no way we could open the hatch.

We tried and tried for half an hour, and finally it opened. There was nothing in it but balloons, we searched the room for hours and hours and hours. There was nothing that could help us, I jumped up and down as I said Noooooooooooooooo!!! and on my final stomp a piece of paper fell on my head that tells us how to work the thing in the hatch.

Figure 4. Dale's series of events

The constrained writers

The constrained writers are those who show evidence of writing identities that are not defined by school writing, yet are highly influenced by it. They mediate subjective (personal) concerns and interests with objective structures and expectations. However, ultimately structures have the greater influence. In this way, these students show elements of creativity and dramatic and recognisable voice, yet their writing seems unable to fulfil its potential, as they are constrained by formulaic and mechanical demands of test writing.

Alice, who attended WES (Australian born with parents who speak Greek as L1 and English as L2 at home) created impact in her short story "Death by Barnacle" with her use of interesting and emotive vocabulary, variety of moods (declarative, interrogative) and degrees of modality moving from definite statements to hesitation and doubt – all effective elements in a short narrative.

After a tense and exciting beginning that foregrounds Alice's subjective engagement through an audible and dramatic voice, she goes on to describe a *mysterious and disturbing figure lurking behind a rock* in her second paragraph. So far so good. However, she concludes with a final paragraph that has the main character thinking about his loving wife and three children, determined to survive, climbing onto a barnacled rock and dying. Alice's switch of tenor from *I* to *the man*, her tantalising threads that are not revisited, and her quick and unsatisfying ending, suggest a broken connection with the reader and the subject matter. Her investment in the story is constrained by the need to finish, albeit dramatically. Instead, she, like Dale, projects a sense of "writing by numbers", which draws quite effectively on certain skills and

processes of creating a narrative. However, she fails to build a writing identity (Ivanič, 1998) that is not steeped in school discourses. She doesn't develop a resonant voice (Elbow, 2000) that acknowledges her subjective interests and motivations (inherent in the social practices of writing) or build on her recognisable style or stance with which the reader can connect.

As the ferocious, angry waves smashed against the strong rocks, my boat The Tiki was smashed against the rock and splintered into what looked as though a million tiny pieces. As my boat crumbled into the sea I leaped out with terror from my boat in to the icy, blue sea. The water slapped my skin the first moment I hit the water I was PETRIFIED....

I'm going to die! Will I be smashed against the rocks or be eaten by shark? The possibilities are endless.

My freezing hands tread the very unforgiving sea, my blood-shot eyes caught site of a very mysterious and disturbing figure it was about five meters long lurking behind small rock and slowly but surly creeping to wards me. I can almost imagine its three rows of razor sharp teeth slicing threw my body like a huge blender.

But I couldn't leave my loving wife and three children behind, how would they cope without me? I WILL SURVIVE I hope... I swam for dear life as fast as my terrified body could take me I scrambled frantically onto the biggest barnacled rock the barnacles ripped my body they shredded my skin. I felt I couldn't go on but I just kept on fighting for life. When I reached the top of the rock my whole body was bleeding. The man only lived for a few more painful minutes... he bled to death!

Figure 5. Alice's short story

Examples of persuasive texts in these data also show strong elements of formulaic planning, structure and paragraphing, and use of dramatic voice to create an impact – all products of the objective influences of test writing and commercial writing programs adopted by the schools. Notable across most samples, however, is the lack of authoritative voice (Elbow, 2000) which comes from a deep knowledge of and interest in the subject and case for which you are arguing (subjective concerns), and thus enables a convincing style. It is clear that these students have not researched the topics that they are writing about.

Sari, who attended WES (English speaker born in Australia, some Papua New Guinean pidgin spoken at home), uses imperative, declarative and interrogative mood as she maintains a dramatic and audible voice in her persuasive text: *Dump TV and get out and play. Don't you see that TV is ruining children's lives? What a bore.* Yet like Alice, she seems constrained by textual structure and linguistic comparison (listing points) rather than demonstrating engagement in the subject matter and her position in the argument.

She is able to draw on some subject matter knowledge, yet she wouldn't convince a TV buff that such a variety of shows is boring. Sari has a rhythmic and dramatic style that could be quite powerful if she felt confident to draw on an authoritative voice when needed. Time invested in background research and/or a choice of topics that she is passionate about and a real audience would see her identity as a writer grow and transform through the mediation of subjective concerns and objective structures within which she writes.

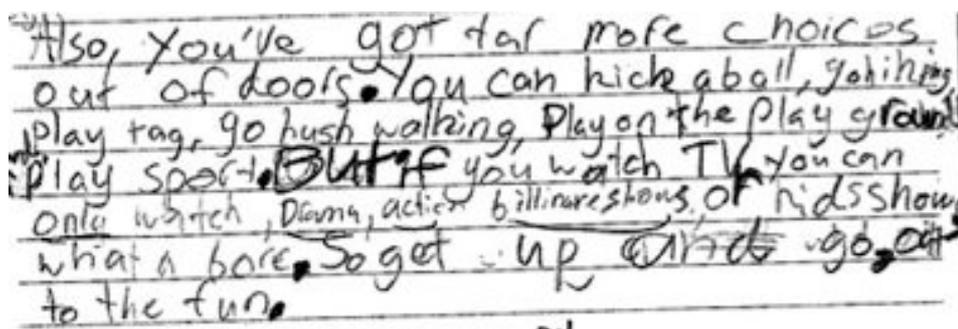


Figure 6. Sari's fourth paragraph

The reflexive writers

The reflexive writers are those who show evidence of a well-developed sense of self as a writer. They can articulate their reflexive writing strategies, including the effects that these might have on their audience, and they produce texts that are creative, show recognisable and resonant voice and are not written from genre recipes.

Ged, who attended WES (born in the USA and moves between there and Australia), chose to write a fictional narrative based on visiting his grandfather (who has dementia), including a flashback element remembering stories from his grandfather's childhood. The narrative is engaging and realistic, exploring the relationship between the two characters, strategies for dealing with difficult emotions, and his knowledge about dementia and its effects. Ged demonstrates an authoritative and resonant voice suggesting an investment in the story. He uses humour, creative wordplay and figurative language to foreground his audible and dramatic voice and posit a recognisable style. Ged's discursal self (Ivanič, 1998), as demonstrated here, is one of a writer who has mediated subjective and objective concerns on his own terms. He has shaped an identity as a writer with something to share and make comment about, rather than someone who is going through the motions of a school task.

Ryan closed his eyes, hoping, more than anything, that he would once again hear his grandfather's strange but comforting voice, strange because what he said bore only a tenuous connection with reality and comforting because, before his dementia, Ryan's grandfather had always been there for him...

Netsook's walking was almost as unsteady as his mind. He would stumble every five steps or so... and would talk to inanimate objects, which included complimenting an upright fan on its hairdo...

Before he left, Ryan looked deep into his grandfather's eyes, trying to see if there was any recognition, or any trace of the former self he had grown up around. But he saw only a blank, white slate without colour or meaning, an opaque window hiding what, if anything, was left of his soul... "Could you pass me the salted papershredder please?" Netsook said to his neighbour...

Ged indicated in his interview that he was drawing on his family background for this story, using his own memories and those of his parents to paint a vivid picture of his Inuit grandfather. His connectedness to the subject matter and the narrative style to entertain and make social comment is obvious as he draws the reader in, and maintains interest using narrative techniques of flashback, characterisation and interesting vocabulary.

Another example from WES, this time a persuasive text by Hani, an EAL student from India, uses a variety of moods (imperative, declarative, interrogative), strong evaluative statements and a clear authoritative voice about her chosen subject matter of Nelson Mandela. She easily hybridises the text types of biography and persuasive speech, temporally elaborating on Mandela's life and achievements, while emphasising the impact of his life on others to build her argument. Her Global Citizen speech is engaging, well informed and convincing, suggesting an interest and belief in her argument about the worthiness of Mandela as a hero. Her audible and dramatic voice is used well for the speech genre.

Committee members look no further. If you want the best, you've got the best! I strongly believe that Nelson Mandela should be your number one choice for Hero of the Year. Why you may ask? This noble man has dedicated his life to achieving equality for black people in South Africa.

Hani uses evaluative descriptors and nouns, *worthy cause*, *incredible hardship*, and emotive verbs to highlight the actions of her subject Mandela, *fighting injustice*, *protecting the rights*, *outraged by social injustice*, *dedicated his life*. And her strong modality and resonant voice invites the reader to invest in the assumptions about Mandela's worthiness and his inspiration to others. Both Ged and Hani show writing styles that represent a discursive self that moves beyond school discourses. Even though Hani is writing a school task, her command of the genre and subject matter, and her voice evident throughout the text, mean that she linguistically positions herself as a writer, not just as a finisher of tasks.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Writing is a performance of self that is influenced by subjective concerns (personal skills, desires, motivations, experiences) and objective conditions (expectations, norms, correctness) (Archer, 2007). The writer consciously or subconsciously mediates these conditions to make decisions in writing. Such decisions include the amount of time and effort they are prepared to expend; their choice of and/or engagement with the subject matter and language; the strategies they will use to plan, organise, execute, monitor and access information or help; the ways in which they want to represent self and subject; and the extent to which they innovate, hybridise and design in new and creative ways. The data reported here show that students are significantly enabled or constrained (Archer, 2007) by the objective conditions that influence the teaching of writing at these schools.

Not all students develop writing identities in the same ways, even within the same schools and classrooms. Identities are shaped and performed in very personal ways as students (and teachers) consciously or subconsciously mediate their own concerns with the expectations inherent in school writing. These individual reflexive processes (Archer, 2013) include discernment of key concerns, deliberation about possible choices, social influences and priorities, and dedication of a suitable or desirable course of action. Despite the overwhelming constraints of accountability, visibility and comparison in the teaching and learning of writing, largely resulting from

standardised tests, students and teachers have agency and can choose to mediate subjective and objective conditions in differently at different times in enabling ways.

These findings show three distinct types of identities being enacted by students in this study: the school writers, the constrained writers, and the reflexive writers. The school writers followed instructions or formulas to produce writing that had recognisable structures and predictable language features. School writers can, and do, improve their writing in (targeted) technical terms. In this study they do not, however, show improvement in creative use of language, textual features or voice. The constrained writers similarly follow structural formulas. However, they also inject elements of a recognisable voice (Elbow, 2000), which indicates potential writing flair that is not quite realised. With more time and enablement however, this creative potential could develop. The reflexive writers demonstrate a command of writing in that they call on appropriate structures like their peers. However, they tend to hybridise and inject interesting and/or unusual textual and linguistic techniques to project a discursive self (Ivanic, 1998) with resonant, authoritative, dramatic and recognisable voice (Elbow, 2000). Although students, as agents in their own learning, perform these different identity formations, I argue, using Archer's (2007) theory of reflexivity, that teaching and learning conditions can enable or constrain particular performances of self.

While the school writers and constrained writers were evident in both schools, the reflexive writers in this study were only identified at WES. What was significant about the conditions for teaching and learning writing at this school was the inclusion of reflective opportunities for students and teachers in the writing program. Students at WES were encouraged to reflect upon their writing choices, albeit sometimes in unsophisticated ways, such as identifying errors. Some students at WES, however, were encouraged to reflect on audience and style, including the implications of their language choices. The teachers at WES were involved in partnered professional development as they taught writing together, discussed their strategies and students' outcomes, and implemented new ideas based on what seemed to work. In effect, they were engaging in social forms of reflective practice (Yancey, 2014), which can prompt deeper engagement with practice and learning opportunities.

The development of reflexive writing identities requires sustained effort. However, students need a reason, other than standardised testing, to invest in writing. To enable writing that is technically and rhetorically appropriate, yet also allows the writer to perform for the audience, there must be a balance of sustained preparatory strategies and opportunities for reflexivity that is made social. All students, and particularly linguistically diverse students, need explicit instruction in the forms and structures of different text-types. However, they also need time to engage critically and creatively with their subject matter and to develop their voice as writers for real audiences. Under highly structured conditions, without enabling attention to creative flow and identity building through engagement with the task, the types of writing that students produce will be formulaic. Writing under these conditions shows evidence of specific skill development, yet lacks the fluidity and linguistic complexity of confident writers to develop an authentic relationship with the reader (Ryan & Barton, 2014).

I argue that providing opportunities for, and teaching students how to, reflexively engage in writing at a deep level and in social ways, can enable the shaping of more sophisticated writing identities. Making students aware of their opportunities for

decision-making, and the personal concerns and expectations that they can legitimately weigh up to make such decisions, can create conditions for developing reflexive and creative writing identities. Sharing these reflexive processes can be a powerful learning experience that enables transformed action. The first step in this goal is for teachers to engage reflexively in their teaching of writing. They too can deliberate about the choices they have, even in highly accountable conditions, and the impact of their decisions (to enable or constrain) on the writers in their class – as evidenced in this study.

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