CREATIVELY NAVIGATING L2 WRITING CONTROVERSIES

Queen Mary University of London

Language Centre CPD Conference

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1. OVERVIEW

1. Introduction
2. What is the post-IELTS writing challenge?
3. What is writing?
4. The field of L2 writing: Casanave's controversies (2004)
5. Moving beyond basic, IELTS writing
6. How can the teacher help?
7. How can we engage students with writing in the EAP classroom?

2. THE CHALLENGE: FROM IELTS TO ACADEMIC WRITING

Student view of IELTS writing after first MA writing task:

'IELTS writing is just assessing your vocabulary, assessing how to write and how to use the colloquial items, but in academic writing it's different from IELTS writing. In academic writing you need to use some idea, you need to support them, you need to find loads of examples, you need to read books before starting writing…In IELTS, just they are given topics and you are starting to write about these topics.'
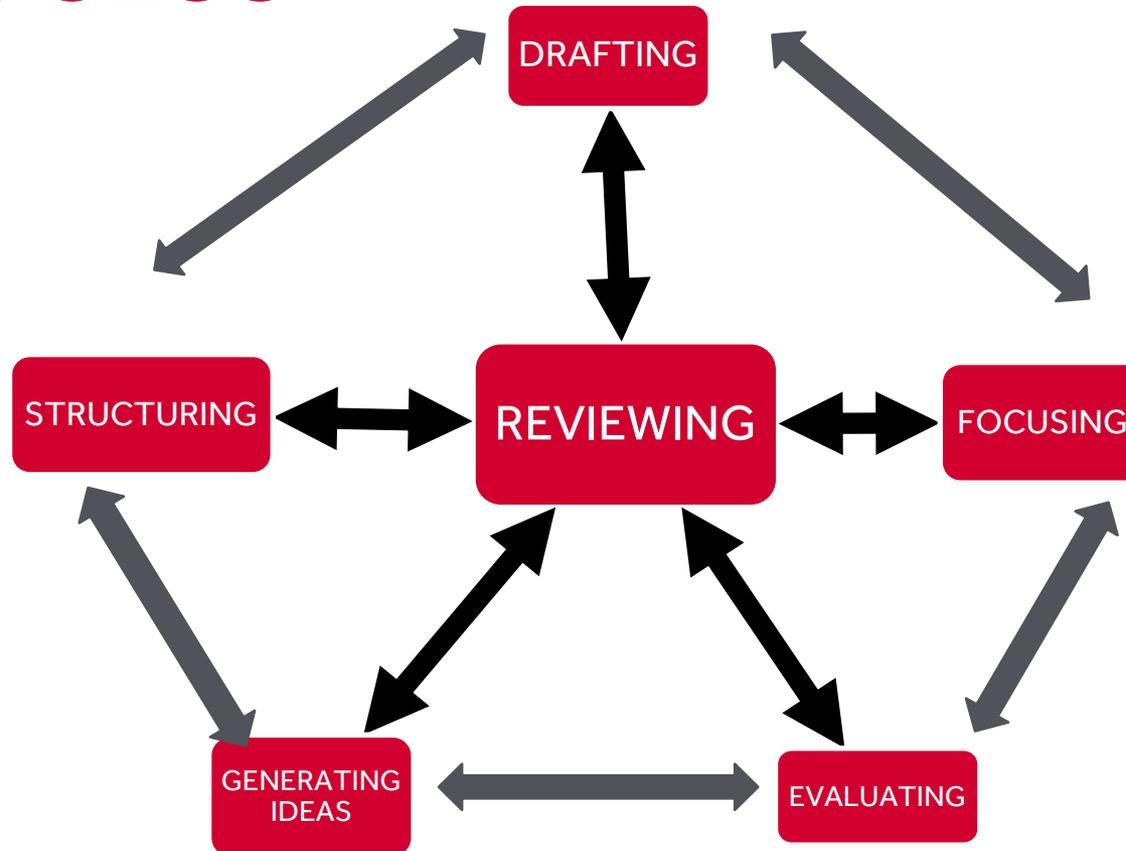
'Timur' – Turkey

3. WHAT IS WRITING?

WRITING IS A PROCESS

CYCLICAL MODEL OF THE WRITING PROCESS

White and Arndt (1991)

WRITING IS A PRODUCT

'The concept of 'washback' or 'backwash' has been defined in a number of ways in language testing and applied linguistics. Simply put, it refers to the positive or negative influence that tests have on teaching and learning (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Hughes, 2003).'

extract from MA assignment

WRITING IS A SOCIAL/CULTURAL ACTIVITY

4. THE FIELD OF L2 WRITING: CASANAVE'S CONTROVERSIES

Theory

Practice

PATHS TO WRITING IMPROVEMENT

Basic questions:

- What is good writing?

- How do we find out?

- How do we help our students produce it?

'A MERRY-GO-ROUND OF APPROACHES'
SILVA 1990, P.18 – IN CASANAVE 2004

L2 WRITING CONTROVERSIES: 4.1 CONTRASTIVE RHETORIC

Kaplan's doodles (1966) – linguistic relativity: cultural patterns

L1 interference in L2 ; negative-transfer

Classroom perspectives/knowledge for Ts & Ss include:

- Rhetorical patterns
- Coherence-creating mechanisms in the L2
- Range/appearance of text types
- Target audience characteristics/expectations

4.2 IMPROVING WRITING: FLUENCY-ACCURACY

- Producing a lot of writing, without hesitation/blocks

    vs

- Error-free writing (at word/sentence level)
- 'two competing goals' (Casanave 2004: 75)

'Writing teachers are genetically endowed with a paper-marking reflex that makes it difficult for them to read their students' papers without (red) pen in hand'

Casanave 2004,p.69

14

- Classroom perspectives include:
  - Getting the balance right for your students
  - Giving them the resources to improve in both
  - Helping them ask the right questions about their text

PROCESS-PRODUCT

- Composing   vs

- The finished text

- Classroom perspectives include:

  - Bringing writing into the classroom

  - Discussing the *how*

  - the *what* (genre)

  - AND : the *who*

    - 'the social turn' (Casanave 2004, p. 75)

4.3 ASSESSMENT

- Of what?
- How?

- Validity
- Reliability
- Authenticity

- Classroom perspectives include:
  - Clarity re assessment tasks and their purpose
  - Criteria
  - Consistency in assessment

FEEDBACK ON:

- Appropriate content: what; where to access; how to present

- Appropriate language:
  - global (style/register choices)
  - local (word/grammar choices)

4.4 INTERACTION IN L2 STUDENTS' WRITING

- Writing as social interaction:
  - With an audience
  - With other writers/their texts
- Classroom perspectives include:
  - Identifying/writing for an audience:
    - real/imagined?
    - known/unknown?
  - Helping students with 'textual borrowings' (Pennycook, 1996)

4.5 POLITICS & IDEOLOGY

- Pragmatic/'accommodationist' EAP (eg Horowitz 1986; Santos 1992)

- Critical EAP (eg Benesch 1993, Canagarajah 2002; Pennycook 1994)

- Classroom perspectives include:
  - Develop critical thinking skills, including:
  - Help students ask questions about the writing they are asked to do – for you/in their discipline

TODAY'S 'POLITICAL' ISSUE?

- EAP (e.g. Nesi & Gardner, 2012)

  - vs

- Academic Literacies (e.g. Lillis, 2003)

- Raised by Wingate & Tribble (2012)

- Classroom perspectives include:

  - All of the above –and to come!!

5. MOVING STUDENTS BEYOND BASIC, IELTS WRITING

WRITING IS:

- **process**

- **product**

- **social/cultural activity**

WRITERS HAVE TO CONSIDER:

- **Audience**

- **Purpose**

- **Genre**

- **Appropriacy**

6. THE TEACHER CAN HELP BY…

- bringing writing into the classroom, not leaving it mainly as a homework activity

- helping students to generate/organise idea

- assisting with goal setting (developing a central theme/focus)

- providing support and advice during drafting

- encouraging peer support

- encouraging reviewing (especially self-evaluation) , focussing on purpose, genre, audience

- and re-drafting in the light of the review

27

- helping students to build up knowledge of text features, though reading and analysing appropriate texts

- Texts include skilled and unskilled writing; from expert authors/peers

- providing whole text writing tasks

- doing the writing tasks the students are working on, so they see one skilled process and expert drafts on the tasks they are working on.

IMPORTANT IN ACADEMIC WRITING, NOT EMPHASISED IN IELTS WRITING

1. Genre-specific writing – eg building an argument
2. Writing with sources – reading into writing
3. Developing a voice
4. Critical writing
5. Spending time on drafting/writing one text
6. Writing for a specific audience
7. Others?

- "…the challenge facing the EAP course designer and teacher is to equip students with the tools to deconstruct and make sense of texts and related discourses … equipping students with the tools of discourse analysis, tools that they can meaningfully apply in present or future within their chosen discipline" (Bruce 2011, p7)

30

QUESTIONS?
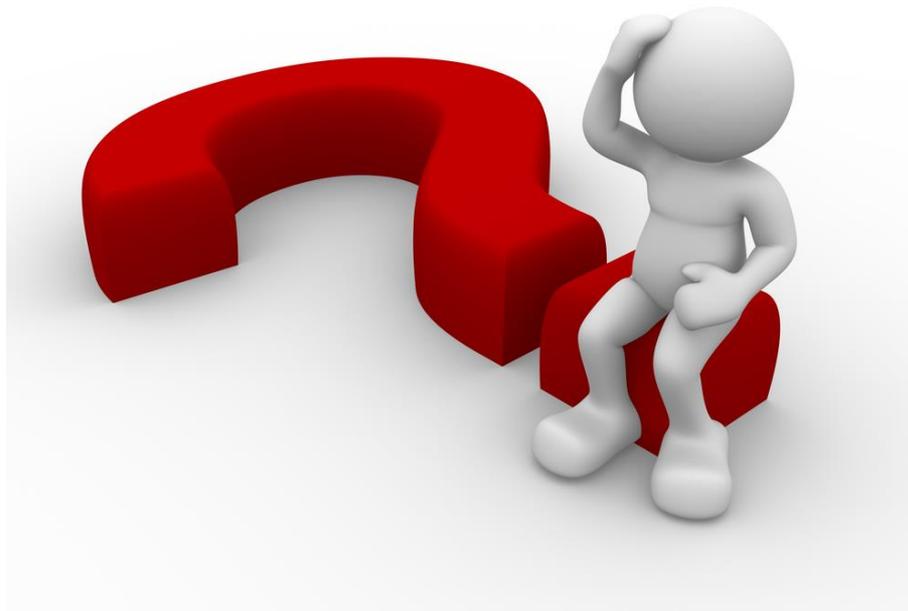
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