

# K–12 ESL Writing Instruction: Learning to Write or Writing to Learn Language?

Subrata Bhowmik

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*Writing is an important literacy skill for K–12 students' academic success. For English as a Second Language (ESL) children, developing writing skills involves both learning English and learning to write. This makes ESL writing instruction challenging as teachers have to strike a balance between teaching writing as a literacy skill and as a tool for students' English language development. Recent research has identified that in-service teachers in K–12 settings lack requisite training in L2 writing, resulting in various challenges in the ESL writing classroom. One such challenge for them is to determine whether the focus of writing instruction should be to teach students how to write (learn-to-write) or to utilize writing as a tool to help students develop the English language (write-to-learn language). Eliciting the theoretical orientations of both learn-to-write (LW) and write-to-learn language (WLL), this article suggests that the LW and WLL approaches are not mutually exclusive for teaching ESL writing. Based on a review of recent research, the paper discusses a systemic functional linguistics (SFL)–informed genre-based writing pedagogy as well as teaching and learning activities that integrate both LW and WLL principles into ESL writing instruction in the elementary classroom.*

*L'écriture est une compétence de littératie importante pour le succès scolaire des apprenants de la maternelle jusqu'à la douzième année (K-12). Pour les enfants apprenant l'anglais en tant que langue seconde (ALS), le développement des compétences en écriture implique simultanément l'apprentissage de l'anglais et l'apprentissage de l'écriture. L'enseignement de l'écriture en ALS devient alors un défi étant donné que les enseignants doivent maintenir un équilibre entre l'enseignement de l'écriture en tant que compétence de littératie et en tant qu'outil pour le développement de l'anglais chez les apprenants. Les études récentes indiquent que les enseignants en service dans les milieux K-12 manquent la formation requise en écriture en langue seconde, menant ainsi à un nombre de défis dans la classe d'écriture d'ALS. Un de ces défis consiste à déterminer si l'enseignement de l'écriture devrait se concentrer sur le fait d'enseigner aux apprenants comment écrire (« apprendre à écrire ») ou bien sur l'utilisation de l'écriture comme outil pour les aider à développer leur anglais (« écrire pour apprendre la langue »). En se basant sur les orientations théoriques des approches « apprendre à écrire » et « écrire pour apprendre la langue », cet article suggère que les deux approches ne sont pas mutuellement exclusives pour l'enseignement de l'écriture en ALS. Sur la base d'une revue de la littérature récente, le présent article explore une pédagogie de l'écriture basée sur les genres et informée par la linguistique systémique fonctionnelle. De plus, nous présenterons des activités d'apprentissage et*

*d'enseignement de l'écriture en ALS qui intègrent les approches « apprendre à écrire » et « écrire pour apprendre la langue » en classe primaire.*

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Writing is a literacy skill that children must develop for their academic success (e.g., Huie & Yahya, 2003; Reynolds et al., 2013; Schulz, 2009), as there is a correlation between early writing literacy development and children's future academic success (Roessingh & Elgie, 2009). For ESL children, this has important implications since their English language and writing literacy development occurs simultaneously, making writing in English especially challenging. Despite its critical importance, scholars (e.g., Larsen, 2013, 2016) have noted that writing does not always receive due attention in literacy education.

Teaching ESL writing in K–12 settings is not an easy undertaking, for teachers encounter a variety of challenges (Gilliland, 2015; Kibler et al., 2016; Larsen, 2013, 2016; Lee, 2011; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013; Yi, 2013). Gilliland (2015), for example, found that her teacher participants did not have a clear understanding of what teaching language and writing entailed, especially to students who were also English language learners (ELLs). Their teaching of ESL writing was based on the view that writing was procedural and that it could be learned inductively, through exposures, highlighting an emphasis on forms and structures. Similar findings were reported by Lee (2011), who noted that when teaching English writing in K–12 contexts, her teacher participants considered themselves as *language*, not *writing* teachers, and by Yi (2013), who found that her teacher participants used writing as a means of *assessment* rather than *to learn how to write*. Both pre-service teacher participants in Yi's study also reported that they did not have training in writing in order to construct a writing teacher identity. They were more comfortable aligning themselves with an English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher identity, thereby implicating a *language* rather than *writing* orientation in their teaching practices. Studies by Kibler et al. (2016) and Larsen (2013, 2016) found that most teachers felt unprepared for teaching ESL writing in both elementary and secondary contexts, underlining an urgent need for a review of the current teacher preparation programs so that pre- and in-service teachers can be appropriately trained in ESL writing instruction. In separate studies, Ortmeier-Hooper (2013) and Kibler (2011) found that there was a misalignment between teacher and ELL student expectations about writing, largely because teachers were not explicit about what they expected of student writing. These findings point to a lack of clarity in teachers' approach to teaching in the ESL writing classroom.

While the research reviewed above underlines a lack of teacher preparedness for teaching ESL writing, another palpable theme also emerges, pointing toward a tension among teachers regarding whether to focus on *language* or *writing* when teaching writing to ESL students. This tension parallels recent scholarly conversations in the "disciplinary dialogues" section of the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, in which Polio (2019) points out that not enough attention is paid to the *language* aspects in L2 writing instruction, as teachers focus on various *writing* issues, including "mastering English rhetorical style" or "writing from sources" (p. 2), relegating language to an afterthought. Polio cites empirical evidence (Polio et al., 2018; Yoon & Polio, 2017) showing that although students' writing skills improved because of instruction, their language skills, as indicated by various accuracy measures, did not improve much. Polio attributes this to a writing-focused pedagogy that overlooks students' L2 development. Although the evidence that Polio cites relates to a postsecondary context, a lack of clarity on the part of K–12 teachers regarding whether to focus on language or writing in the ESL writing classroom is evident from the extant

research on this issue. Consequently, addressing LW and WLL orientations to ESL writing pedagogy in K–12 settings is important.

In light of the above, this article first introduces the theories that underpin the LW and WLL approaches to L2 writing pedagogy. Drawing on recent scholarship, the article then presents the pedagogical possibility of an SFL-informed genre-based approach to ESL writing instruction at the elementary level that integrates both LW and WLL orientations into teaching practices. As a way to demonstrate the efficacy of this pedagogical possibility, the article discusses several teaching activities that include both LW and WLL principles, making the case that LW and WLL orientations to ESL writing instruction are not mutually exclusive.

## **Learning to Write and Writing to Learn Language**

The LW and WLL approaches provide insights into how L2 writing is conceptualized and what contributes to learning to write. Because these two approaches adopt differing views on what writing is and what should be done to develop writing skills, they emphasize different strategies to achieve specific pedagogical goals. Write-to-learn-content (WLC) is a related theoretical orientation that is often discussed alongside LW and WLL (Manchón, 2011a). However, since the core argument of the current article revolves around LW and WLL approaches, an extensive discussion of WLC is not relevant here.

Hyland (2011) has identified three main theoretical orientations to LW—process, product and reader-writer reciprocity—each of which has a unique focus. A process approach to writing considers the writing processes—namely, planning, reformulating, and revising—to be the most important steps to accomplish writing. The writer is viewed as engaging in these steps by going back and forth as they write. For this reason, writing is considered to be a recursive rather than linear process (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Much of the writing process in this sense takes place in the writer’s head. Through stimulated recalls, researchers (e.g., Manchón et al., 2009; Sasaki, 2004) have investigated what the L2 writing process looks like. In a process approach, writing instruction entails helping students understand the importance of various steps in writing so that they can control and manipulate their thoughts when composing. Although process theory has been influential in composition studies, it has drawn criticism for its exclusive individual-centredness (Atkinson, 2003a, 2003b). Citing empirical evidence, L2 scholars have called for the inclusion of various social and cultural factors in theorizing the L2 writing processes (e.g., Bhowmik, 2016, 2017; Lei, 2008).

In a product approach, the focus is on the product of writing—the text. Writing is viewed as audience and context independent, and emphasis is placed on the production of error-free texts. Teaching writing entails helping students learn about various grammatical and textual features, as learners’ writing development is measured by the accuracy of the texts they produce. Research in this area has focused on various measures of linguistic accuracy, such as the number of errors and error-free units (e.g., Polio & Shea, 2014). According to this theory, “learning to write...means little more than learning to demonstrate grammatical accuracy and clear exposition with little awareness of a reader beyond the teacher” (Hyland, 2011, p. 22). The third theoretical orientation within LW that focuses on reader–writer reciprocity maintains that both the writer and reader share certain common assumptions. When writing, the writer anticipates what the reader expects from the text. Writing instruction entails teaching students how to analyze the context and recognize the context-specific conventions that the reader shares with the writer. This writing theory assumes that the writer and reader belong to a common discourse community. The discourse community, in turn, shapes and is shaped by the writer and reader, which explains why different disciplines value different writing and argument styles (Hyland, 2011).

Unlike an LW approach, in which the focus is primarily on writing, in a WLL approach the focus shifts to L2 development. In this regard, Cumming (1990) and Swain and Lapkin (1995) have argued that the problem-solving dimension of an act of writing both contributes to L2 learning and consolidates L2 learners' current linguistic knowledge. In her review of WLL, Manchón (2011b) has identified two main strands of research in WLL: *descriptive* and *interventionist*. The descriptive strand explains L2 writing as part of evidence of L2 learners' engagement with different psycholinguistic activities that help develop the L2. For example, learners' *attention* during the L2 writing process is of great interest to scholars, since attention is an important constituent in the noticing and output hypotheses of L2 learning (Schmidt, 2001; Swain, 1985, 1995). Empirical research on this topic suggests that the deeper linguistic processes and the meaning-making activities that characterize the act of writing contribute to the psycholinguistic processes such as noticing and metalinguistic reflections in L2 learning (Manchón, 2014; Manchón & Roca de Larios, 2007). In addition, it has been argued that writing fosters various other L2 learning processes, including hypothesis formulations about different linguistic structures and testing those hypotheses, forming explicit and implicit linguistic knowledge and reflections on L2 learners' languaging activities (Manchón, 2011b).

The interventionist strand of WLL research focuses on how various interventions during the individual and collaborative writing process contribute to L2 learning. Examples include feedback studies in L2 writing (Manchón, 2011b, pp. 68–69). These studies help explain how different types of intervention contribute to L2 learning and how teachers can utilize these insights in classroom teaching. Research has shown that feedback triggers noticing processes, which in turn contributes to L2 learning. Empirical evidence has confirmed that the depth of processing determines the level of L2 learning. That is, the more the depth of processing, the higher the L2 learning gains. For example, Bitchener (2008) found that feedback coupled with oral or written metalinguistic explanations resulted in enhanced L2 writing skills when compared to feedback without metalinguistic explanations. The implication of Bitchener's findings is that feedback with metalinguistic explanations engaged L2 learners in more in-depth cognitive processes, which resulted in better L2 learning. Similar findings were also reported by Bitchener and Knoch (2008) and Sheen (2010). Elsewhere, empirical evidence has shown that collaborative writing helps consolidate and expand learners' L2 knowledge by drawing their attention to various linguistic forms and structures (e.g., Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009).

## **K-12 ESL Writing Instruction and L2 Writing Teacher Education**

The discussion on LW and WLL above provides the main theoretical orientations and insights into the nexus between writing and L2 learning. It sheds light on writing as a literacy skill as well as on writing as a tool for developing learners' L2, taking advantage of what Manchón (2011b) describes as "the language learning potential (LPP) of writing" (p. 62). Based on the discussion above, it can be argued that an effective writing pedagogy can prepare ESL children for their future academic success by helping them develop both writing literacy skills and the English language.

Unfortunately, however, the combination of teachers' lack of preparedness for teaching writing (Kibler et al., 2016; Larsen, 2013, 2016) on the one hand, and the lack of clarity about whether to focus on writing or language aspects when teaching writing in the ESL classroom (Gilliland, 2015; Lee, 2011; Yi, 2013) on the other, makes it difficult to achieve the dual goal of improving children's writing literacy skills and English language development. This is concerning, especially in the context of elementary classrooms since elementary education is responsible for providing foundational literacy and language skills for children's future academic career. One way to overcome this challenge is to turn our attention to improving teacher education programs and orientating teachers to pedagogical approaches that incorporate both LW and WLL principles. Orientating ESL teachers to LW and WLL approaches will provide them with the theoretical underpinnings of their teaching practices and help them realize that LW and WLL approaches

to teaching ESL writing are not mutually exclusive (Ortega, 2009). This will also prepare them to be confident practitioners of ESL writing pedagogy, capable of addressing contextual exigencies of student needs, curriculum objectives, and so on.

Therefore, in what follows I discuss the pedagogical possibility of an SFL-informed genre-based approach to teaching ESL writing in elementary contexts. This pedagogical possibility has been conceptualized based on a systematic review of ESL writing instruction that analyzed 49 peer-reviewed sources published between 2010 and 2019 (Bhowmik & Kim, 2021). To further amplify in-service teachers' understanding about this pedagogical possibility, I discuss several empirically based teaching activities, also drawn from the systematic review referenced above, which elementary teachers may consider using in their classrooms.

## **A Pedagogical Possibility for Teaching ESL Writing in the Elementary Classroom**

As I outline an SFL-informed and genre-based ESL writing pedagogy at the elementary level below, I have organized the discussion as follows: first, I introduce SFL and genre-based writing pedagogy; this is followed by a discussion on writing instruction and classroom activities as a way to show how this pedagogical possibility can be implemented in an actual classroom.

### *An SFL-Informed and Genre-Based Pedagogy*

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a theory of language that promotes the meaning-making potential of language as a semiotic resource (Brisk, 2021; Gebhard, 2019; Halliday, 1985). Instead of viewing language as bounded by a set of rules, SFL recognizes that the function of language depends on the context of use and its meaning-making potential, and that depending on the context, language users have numerous options to choose from to construct appropriate language structures. The *context of situation* and *context of culture* are two important concepts in SFL that help determine the linguistic choices one makes (Halliday, 1985, 1993). The context of situation entails the consideration that must be given to the language used in a particular context for a particular purpose and is defined by three metafunctions of texts: (a) field (the topic and content); (b) tenor (the relationship between the speaker/writer and audience); and (c) mode (the type of text, e.g., written or oral). Thus, the context of situation of a PowerPoint presentation on global warming given to a group of elementary students will be different from that given in a professional conference or a written report on the same topic submitted to the government.

The context of culture relates to the shared understandings and assumptions held by people in a particular community about communication (Halliday, 1985, 1993). The term *genre*<sup>1</sup> is often used to refer to the texts that share common discourse and organizational patterns, social purpose, and linguistic choices (e.g., Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2008). In this sense, the genres students encounter in the community are markedly different from those they encounter in school (Schleppegrell, 2004). In light of this, one of the goals of teaching writing in school should be to introduce students to various school-based genres through explicit instruction such as discussing the organizational and linguistic structures of different genres (Brisk, 2012). An important step in such a pedagogical approach is to help students develop the metalanguage of writing. According to Brisk (2021), “metalanguage is the language that helps talk about language” (p. 4). In other words, the objective of helping student writers develop the metalanguage is to help them to be

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<sup>1</sup> It may be pertinent to mention that the notions of genre as conceptualized by SFL scholars and in rhetorical studies are used interchangeably in this paper.

able to verbalize the linguistic and organizational choices they make in writing. For example, Brisk (2021) exemplifies how students can be taught to develop metalanguage in order to pack information in their sentences by using noun phrases (instead of single-word nouns). Using the examples from Brisk (2021) in Table 1, the teacher can help students analyze the sentences and develop the metalanguage of the constructions “long black pointy claws” from “claws” and “polar bears” from “bears” by packing additional information (i.e., adding an adjective to the noun groups) (Brisk, 2021, p. 77).

Table 1

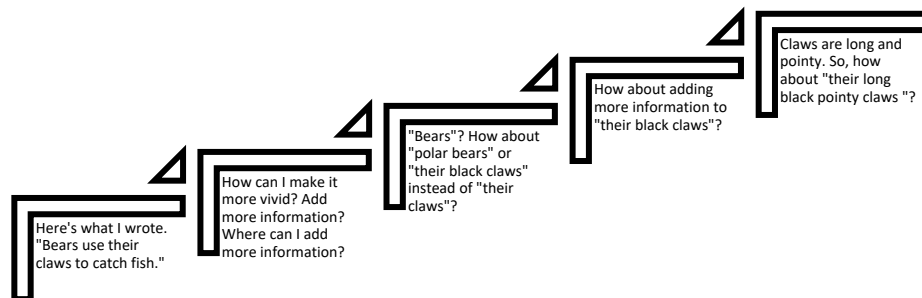
Packing Information by Using Metalanguage

Target language structure	Example
Use of noun phrases to pack information	<p>Bears use their claws to catch fish.</p> <p><u>Polar bears</u> use their <u>black claws</u> to catch fish.</p> <p>Polar bears use their <u>long black pointy claws</u> to catch fish.</p>

This example step-up process of students’ development of metalanguage in order to pack information is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Step-Up Process of Developing Metalanguage



One of the most common ways to implement SFL-informed and genre-based writing instruction is through the Teaching/Learning Cycle (TLC). Originally developed by Rothery (1996), over the years TLC has gone through various adaptations (e.g., the expanded model by Gebhard, 2019, and the Teaching-to-Learn Cycle by Martin & Rose, 2005). However, the most common components of TLC include deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction. Deconstruction involves “building the field” (Spycher, 2017, p. 12) by orientating students to the content knowledge through discussion, readings,

analyses, and watching videos, among others. In the deconstruction phase, teachers also introduce the focal genre by making mentor texts available to students. In the joint construction phase, the teacher and students co-construct the same genre introduced in the deconstruction phase. While co-constructing texts in the target genre, the teacher brings to students' attention the purpose, text structures, and language features of the focal genre in order to bridge the gap between students' current knowledge in language use and that required in an academic context. Finally, in the independent construction phase, students work on their own to write in the target genre (Derewianka, 1990). The teacher offers less support and scaffolding but ensures that students have opportunities to write in the target genre (de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Spycher, 2017). As is evident in the discussion above, an SFL-informed and genre-based pedagogy embeds both language structures and composition of texts (in writing) by integrating both WLL and LW aspects into writing instruction. For instance, through a phased approach, development of metalanguage, familiarity with the notions of genres, and writing as a dialogic activity, students get to orientate themselves to the process, product, and reader-writer reciprocity aspects of LW. These methods are equally effective in promoting students' engagement in languaging and noticing activities deemed important in WLL.

### *Writing Instruction and Classroom Activities*

To adopt an SFL-informed and genre-based pedagogy, teachers need to first orientate students to content knowledge and target genre by "building the field" (Spycher, 2017, p. 12) and deconstructing mentor texts. This can be done in a variety of ways; for example, Spycher (2017) lists ideas such as "field trip," "collaborative summarizing," "paired reading tasks," "teacher read-alouds," "structured video and podcast discussions," "text analysis," "identifying purpose and audience," "analyzing text structure and organization," "collaborative text reconstruction," "sentence unpacking and repacking," "discussing nominalizations," and "examining verb types" (pp. 12–16). The goal of these activities is to help students become familiar with both the content knowledge and language that they will need to write in the target genre. To illustrate, teachers can "deconstruct" the mentor text while pointing out intentional lexical and grammatical usage to achieve specific communicative goals (e.g., those in a science report, a job letter, a product review, and so on) (e.g., de Oliveira & Lan, 2014). It is important at this stage to raise student awareness about the audience, context, and purpose of writing. The class will then move to the joint construction stage, with the teacher and students co-constructing texts in the target genre. In this phase, teachers' role is to clearly "set the purpose" of text construction. For example, they can explain how the social purpose of texts varies when one persuades, informs, explains, or entertains (Spycher, 2017, p. 17). Another important consideration for teachers at this stage is to help students deploy their metalanguage in writing (e.g., Figure 1). Teachers must be open to student ideas and scaffold them by asking questions related to the appropriateness of the content and language features of the text they are producing. Finally, students will participate in the independent construction of a piece of writing to demonstrate their writing proficiency. It is important for teachers to ensure that students are intentional about their writing in the target genre. That is, they should be purposeful about the content and language features they include in their texts. Teachers can facilitate this phase by providing students with a list of "success criteria" of a specific genre (Spycher, 2017, p. 19). Several studies in recent times (e.g., Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2010; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Gebhard et al., 2011) have reported successful implementation of TLC in the elementary classroom.

An SFL-informed and genre-based pedagogy calls for student involvement in every step of the teaching process. The teacher acts mostly as a facilitator. With a view to providing elementary teachers with specific classroom techniques, below I discuss a few activities that are grounded on the principles of

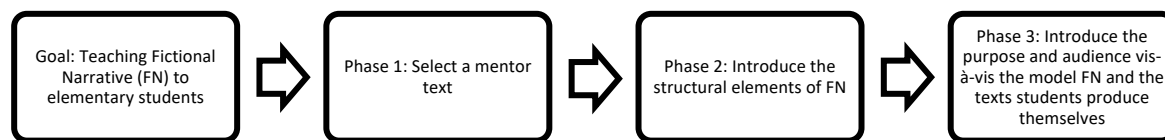
an SFL-informed and genre-based pedagogy. The ideas for these activities have been drawn from recent empirical studies (e.g., Accurso et al., 2016; Brisk, 2012; Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2010; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Gebhard et al., 2011; Harman, 2013; Shin, 2016). Also included in the discussion are the ways in which these activities address both LW and WLL aspects of ESL writing instruction.

## 1. Using a phased approach to writing instruction

Brisk and Zisselsberger (2010) provide details about a three-phase approach to ESL writing instruction for elementary students. A phased approach to teaching writing is unique in that it orientates students to the writing task on hand gradually, instead of overwhelming them with the entirety of the task at once. It is therefore a particularly useful approach to teaching writing to elementary ESL students, who are likely to be underprepared with regard to both writing literacy and English language. Teachers can use three phases to teach writing, as follows. In phase one, they can select a genre of writing—for example, fictional narrative (FN)—and give an actual fictional account and describe its settings, characters, problem, and solution, without giving too many details about the structural elements of the narrative. In phase two, the teacher will introduce the structural elements of the FN by drawing on the details of the characters, settings, problem, and solution. The teacher can use model texts to help students recall and retell the structural elements introduced earlier. At this time, the teacher can ask students to work on their own FNs. In phase three, the teacher can introduce the notions of purpose and audience in writing, first by explaining the purpose of the model text used in phase two and the lessons intended for the kindergarteners, and then by asking students to consider what the purpose and audience of their own FNs are. The process of this three-phase lesson is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The Process of Teaching Fictional Narratives (e.g., Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2010)



An important aspect of this phased approach to writing instruction is that it integrates both LW and WLL orientations into student writing. For example, it orientates students explicitly to various rhetorical notions—that is, LW—such as the context of writing (e.g., setting, characters, problem, and solution), purpose, and audience. At the same time, it elaborates on what language forms need to be used to achieve those specific rhetorical goals, thus orientating students to WLL aspects of writing. Brisk and Zisselsberger’s (2010) findings indicate that implementing this phased approach to writing instruction helped improve elementary student writing. The teacher participants of the study “felt that the students’ writing improved because students had been ‘let in on the secret’ of how, in the context of American culture, text is created” (p. 118).

## 2. Helping students develop the metalanguage of writing

A focus on helping students develop the metalanguage of writing (e.g., Figure 1) works well when teaching writing to elementary ESL students. The metalanguage is to be informed by a genre approach to writing instruction. By implementing this teaching technique, teachers can help students develop the metalanguage of writing in a specific genre through scaffolding and co-constructing texts with students and identifying the purpose and audience of the text (LW) as well as the language forms and structures to be used to achieve



the writing goals (WLL). For instance, teachers can help students develop the metalanguage of genre features and language forms when introducing a particular genre (e.g., letters, science reports). For early elementary students, teachers can choose to use graphic organizers and other visuals as mediational artifacts (e.g., Figure 1; Table 1) to help students organize and anchor their thoughts and develop the metalanguage about the target genre more easily. Helping students develop the metalanguage of writing has the benefit of preventing students from reproducing texts by rote learning. Instead, ESL students become more agentive to use their creativity in both text production (LW) and English language learning (WLL). For instance, Shin (2016) found that the use of metalanguage and scaffolding by the teacher helped a first-grade ESL student produce a topic-centred, coherent science report. Perhaps more importantly, the student was able to use the metalanguage in eliciting the meaning in their report.

### 3. Using the genre framework to teach content-area writing

Teachers can use the genre framework, which is informed by SFL principles, to teach content-area writing to ESL students. In particular, for content-area writing such as science reports that may require precision and explicitness of language use and organization of text, teachers can use a genre-based approach to teaching writing. Teachers should first select the target genre and appropriate model texts, which they can deconstruct with the class to underline the importance of the target genre features (LW), precise vocabulary use (WLL), syntactic structures (WLL), and organization of the text (LW). Using this approach allows for an integration of both LW and WLL aspects of writing into the pedagogy and is ideal for triggering student noticing for the forms and structures of subject-specific language use. De Oliveira and Lan (2014) found that this teaching technique helped improve the explicitness and precision of procedural recount in science writing by a fourth-grade ESL student, although the authors did not report on whether an improvement in writing helped the student learn the content more efficiently.

### 4. Using genre to teach language functions and grammar in writing

Leveraging the SFL notions of field, tenor, and mode (Halliday, 1985, 1993), teachers can teach language functions and grammar in the elementary writing classroom. For example, the teacher can focus on a specific genre and its purpose so that the functions of the intentional language and grammar use in the genre are explicit to the students. The teacher can juxtapose texts of different genres to demonstrate how texts use language and grammar differently to achieve specific written communicative goals. From there on, the teacher may ask students to practice writing (LW) in a genre using appropriate language forms and structures (WLL). An important point to note here is that instead of teaching discrete-point grammar to ESL students as a set of rules, the teacher will focus on teaching grammar in context, through writing, as a means of encoding meaning in language use. Brisk's (2012) findings show that rather than teaching fixed rules about grammatical person in English to Grade 3–5 ESL students, the teacher can effectively teach writing by focusing on how “genre (purpose), mode (spoken or written), and tenor (audience and voice) affect language use” (p. 466).

### 5. Teaching writing as a dialogic activity

Teaching writing as a dialogic activity calls for helping students understand the text that they produce as a mosaic of intertexts (Harman, 2013). This can be done through scaffolding when students write. For instance, teachers can encourage students to use their agency to identify and utilize the meaning-making

resources that language offers. This will help achieve the LW goals. Teaching writing as a dialogic activity is ideal for teaching literary narratives at the elementary or upper elementary level, whereby teachers can underline the specific language forms that need to be used in a particular context and the various language forms that are at their disposal (WLL). Drawing on SFL principles, teachers can work with students to show how knowledge is created through academic and literary texts. Harman's (2013) findings show how two fifth-grade Spanish/English bilingual students viewed writing as a dialogic activity between literary texts and various scaffolding activities in the classroom. The findings further underscore that students' improved writing performance is a testimony to their active agency as writers and the utilization of "language as a pliable resource" (p. 137).

A great way to teach writing as a dialogic activity is to encourage students to use blogging as a way to express themselves and connect with others. Teachers can integrate blogging as part of creating opportunities for elementary ESL writing. This enables students to situate their writing in social and cultural contexts. For instance, encouraging students to respond to peers' blog posts will enhance students' understanding about how to position themselves as writers in relation to readers and will raise their awareness about their audiences, promoting LW aspects of writing (i.e., rhetorical skills such as tone and voice). Situating writing in its social and cultural contexts will also help engage students in critical literacy so that they will gain insights into how texts are produced in relation to various power dimensions that operate in any given context (e.g., Giroux, 2020). Encouraging students to express different kinds of emotion such as praise, apology, worry, and excitement as well as agreements, disagreements, and opinions in their blog posts will make them focus on WLL aspects of writing, as they will learn to use specific language forms and syntactic structures for the intended expressions. Additionally, students can be asked to offer feedback on their peers' blog posts, a task in which both LW and WLL aspects can be integrated. Findings of Gebhard et al. (2011) show that the participant used blogging to apologize, praise and joke, provide feedback, as well as thank and accept feedback. She used blogging as a means of constructing and displaying social networks and power dynamics related to peer relationships.

## 6. Using SFL to analyze and assess student writing, track progress, and give feedback

Elementary teachers can use an SFL-informed framework to analyze students' writing and track their progress. For example, the concepts field, tenor, and mode (e.g., Halliday, 1985, 1993) can be used to analyze the extent to which students have used appropriate content and ideas to achieve the communicative goals of the written piece, shown audience awareness and fulfilled the audience expectations of the written piece, and used appropriate vocabulary of the target genre. These analytical procedures will enable teachers to provide targeted feedback on both students' LW and WLL aspects of writing. To illustrate, while raising students' audience awareness by making them cognizant about the context of writing falls under LW, using appropriate vocabulary and language structures to achieve specific communicative goals falls under WLL. Accurso et al.'s (2016) findings suggest that this approach to writing instruction was effective in helping an elementary teacher recognize and value the knowledge and linguistic resources students brought to the classroom, strategically select grade-appropriate model texts so students could try out new language both in groups and individually, and highlight the social functions of linguistic choices that students could make for elementary science writing.

Teacher feedback in an SFL-informed and genre-based pedagogy involves raising student awareness about how functional and meaningful texts are produced. Thus, when giving feedback, teachers must probe student knowledge on these important goals of writing and gauge both the descriptive and interventionist aspects of WLL. Depending on student needs, teachers can provide interactive feedback as a whole class or in small groups during deconstruction or joint construction stages. Personal feedback at the independent construction stage would work best if interventions are deemed necessary. Assessment

rubrics need to be prepared while keeping in mind the specific written communicative goals or LW aspects of the assignments. This can be done by using the mentor text as a model. Assessment rubrics can be co-developed with the class during the deconstruction stage discussed above, the process of which has the benefit of students internalizing the objectives of the writing assignment. When assessing student writing, rather than making various grammatical errors as a focus, through feedback teachers should articulate how the errors may have interfered with achieving the communicative goals of their texts.

## Conclusion

Strong literacy education is a prerequisite for children's future academic success. In particular, effective writing education is essential for ESL children, considering the challenges they encounter both as language and literacy learners later on in their academic career. One important criterion to provide quality writing instruction is to consider building strong teacher education programs that would prepare ESL teachers with the latest theories and practices in the field. The pedagogical possibility discussed in this article provides insights into what can be incorporated into teacher training programs to strengthen ESL writing education. For in-service teachers, the article provides ideas and tools for teaching ESL writing in the elementary classroom. ESL writing instruction in K–12 contexts has been found to be mostly overlooked in teacher preparation programs, resulting in teachers feeling unprepared to teach writing (Kibler et al., 2016; Larsen, 2013, 2016; Yi, 2013). When in the classroom, ESL teachers must be able to make informed decisions regarding when and how to address language and writing, or a combination of both these aspects. Both pre- and in-service teachers can use the ideas discussed in this article for their classroom practices. The discussion and examples above illustrate that LW and WLL approaches are not mutually exclusive and that K–12 teachers have many pedagogical options to choose from as they step into the ESL writing classroom.

## *The Author*

Subrata Bhowmik is associate professor of teaching in Language and Literacy at the Werklund School of Education of the University of Calgary. His academic interests include L2 writing and sociocultural approaches to L2 education.

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