

L2 Writing Pedagogy in EFL Contexts: An Exploration of Salient Practices in Teaching and Learning

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Manchón and Haan (2008) in their introduction to the special issue of *Journal of Second Language Writing* note that research findings and theoretical discussions relating to EFL contexts are underrepresented in mainstream L2 writing literature. Drawing on the same line of argument in this paper I examine some salient teaching and learning practices of L2 writing in EFL contexts. Review of literature shows that teaching and learning practices of L2 writing vary based on various context-specific issues. I argue that in order for L2 writing researchers to construct inclusive L2 writing theories it is imperative that they look into context-specific teaching and learning practices, especially those in EFL contexts. Various implications and recommendations are also discussed.

Key words: L2 writing, EFL/ESL context, contrastive rhetoric, process approach to writing.

INTRODUCTION

Manchón and Haan (2008) were spot on to note that while second language writing has grown as an independent field in the past couple of decades, its over-reliance on ESL-oriented research for theoretical discussions has made the field somewhat incomplete with regard to

representativeness and the generation of, in Ortega's (2004) terms, "robust knowledge," necessary for diverse contexts. This pattern is far from ideal. On the one hand, it is heartening to experience the growing body of research findings and theoretical discussions on L2 writing mostly relating to ESL contexts; on the other, it is somewhat disconcerting to see the apparent incompatibility between the research findings/theoretical discussions and the L2 writing pedagogy that takes place in EFL contexts. Since English language pedagogy in EFL contexts covers a large English learning population, any theoretical discussions without appropriate representation of these contexts do not account for the formation of "robust knowledge" in the field.

It is important for any academic field to strive for achieving a comprehensive knowledge base in order for it to be able to provide its followers with a solid understanding of various theoretical and applied practices. Although relatively new, the field of L2 writing is not an exception to this end. The fact that L2 writing has traditionally drawn a lot of research from L1 composition "in bits and pieces" (Johns, 1990), and that historically composition studies as a field has thrived in North America may account for an over-reliance of the theoretical discussions and pedagogical practices of L2 writing on ESL contexts. In this paper it is my goal to demonstrate that diverse pedagogical practices of L2 writing exist in EFL contexts, and since mainstream L2 writing theories and pedagogical practices are predominantly based on ESL contexts they cannot address L2 writing teaching and learning needs in those situations.

Let me begin by providing an outline of the methodology and organization of the paper. In order to formulate a basis for my core argument, that EFL and ESL teaching and learning environments consist of disparate contextual variables that are very important yet often go unnoticed in the research and theoretical discussions of mainstream L2 writing literature (e.g., Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005; Hyland, 2003; Kroll, 1990; Leki, 1992), I first juxtapose two research articles published in *Journal of Second Language Writing*. Juxtaposition of these articles on similar topics with data of one of them

drawn from EFL, and of another from ESL context allows me to closely look at various micro-level contextual variables (e.g., class sizes, various institutional and cultural constraints, interactions between teachers and students, etc.) that affect L2 writing pedagogy. The justification of analyzing these two articles upfront lies in the fact that through analysis of them it was possible to single out the unique characteristics of EFL and ESL contexts without having to get distracted by a myriad of issues from multiple sources at a time. While this initial analysis provides a preliminary ground to establish the primary thesis of my paper, the next section surveys literature for a more comprehensive examination of diverse contextual variables that dominate L2 writing pedagogy in EFL contexts. In order to keep the review of literature current and manageable in this section I look at publications relating to L2 writing in EFL contexts in the past ten years. A close look at the recent scholarship in L2 writing indicates that context of writing has gained much currency in the field. In fact, there has been a recent shift of focus from cognitive to a relatively new sociocultural paradigm of writing studies within which L2 writing researchers call for an exploration of L2 writing and its relationship with contexts. As a result, discussions on L2 writing, especially those with reference to context, almost automatically allude to issues such as culture and contrastive rhetoric (henceforth CR). Keeping up with the prevailing trend I look at these issues in a separate section to further underscore the importance of a consideration of the context-specific variables encompassing both EFL and ESL contexts to develop more comprehensive theories of L2 writing. Finally, I discuss various implications and recommendations.

Since the definition of context is often contested (e.g., Atkinson, 1999, 2004) and the acronyms EFL and ESL are central to my paper before moving into the discussions relating to the core issues I intend to adopt working definitions of EFL and ESL. Borrowing from Nayar's (1997) article that articulates multifaceted interpretation of the terms ESL and EFL as well as definitions proposed by other researchers (Broughton et al., 1978; Judd, 1987; Moag, 1982; Richards, Platt, & Weber 1985), I will define EFL as

follows: The usage of English in a context in which it is taught as a subject in educational institutions. ESL, on the other hand, is defined as: The usage of English in a context in which English is the primary language for the vast majority of people.

AN EXAMINATION OF L2 WRITING PEDAGOGY IN EFL AND ESL CONTEXTS

L2 writing pedagogical practices in EFL and ESL contexts are different in many ways. The bulk of these differences are due to the context-specific factors that demand certain kind of teaching and learning approaches effective for the specific context. In order to establish this premise below I examine L2 writing pedagogy in EFL and ESL contexts drawn from two research articles (i.e., Bitchener, 2008; Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006). While selecting these studies I considered a number of things: First, they are tentatively on similar topics (i.e., feedback practices in L2 writing), and they provide me with a comparative picture of various contextual factors prevalent in EFL and ESL scenarios. Furthermore, both studies are fairly recent and were published around the same point in time establishing their relevance to the contemporary L2 writing pedagogical practices. While examining them my purpose here is not to go into detailed discussions about them but to filter the salient context-specific factors that affect L2 writing pedagogy in EFL and ESL situations.

Scenario 1

Miao, Badger, and Zhen's (2006) study to investigate the effects of peer and teacher feedback took place in China, one of the largest English learning contexts in the world. The authors report that although great importance is given to writing most teachers consider writing instruction to be a "thankless" and "tedious" job (pp. 179-180), mainly because the class sizes

are very large. At university level on an average 40 is considered to be a regular class size while the authors also experienced classes of 100 students. More information about class dynamics in China includes the following: It is fairly commonplace that students are taught to prepare for the examinations. Although teachers are believed to be teaching a process approach to composing, in practice, they are more concerned about students' written products and most student writings are completed in a single draft.

With the general classroom practices in mind what we see in feedback practices yields more critical information. Although the writing instructions are conducted in English (p. 180), when it comes to feedback peers are allowed to use their L1 (i.e., Chinese) to talk to each other during peer feedback sessions (p. 184). The hierarchical relationship between teachers and students is "problematic" in the feedback process since students are always expected to abide by what the teachers say and they are not supposed to challenge the teachers and their opinions (p. 180). It is also mentioned that in Chinese society the Confucian cultures ascribe a lot of respect to teachers which students at all levels usually follow. While it is found that students welcome peer feedback Chinese students are often reluctant to critique their peers' work. In the same way they are also less likely to welcome non-native speakers of English to judge their writing (p. 182). Furthermore, even though students acknowledge that peer feedback is helpful their attitudes vary a great deal across groups. In short, we can see that all these personal and cultural traits have significant bearing on actual L2 writing pedagogy. More specifically, all the context-specific variables greatly affect the pedagogical practices.

Scenario 2

Bitchener's (2008) study to find evidence in support of corrective feedback took place in New Zealand, an ESL situation, according to my working definition discussed earlier. The author investigated the role of corrective feedback on the written texts of 4 groups of low intermediate ESL students

from different countries. A total of 75 participants from 4 classes took part in the research. Although not explicitly stated we can assume each of these 4 classes had roughly 19 students. Demographically these students were diverse – they came from at least 11 different East Asian, Middle Eastern, European, and South American countries. It is only natural that these learners brought distinct cultural and personal traits to their respective classes.

Quite inevitably all feedback was given in English, considering English was the only common language amongst these diverse groups of people. No matter what the participants' proficiency level in English was they had to internalize all feedback given in English in order for them to successfully translate it into their writing during the revision process. We can assume that along the way of the entire feedback process the students might have misinterpreted and/or misunderstood some of the information they actually received, resulting in considerable qualitative disparity of the feedback given and its actual materialization. In a nutshell, it is clear that like scenario 1 in this example (of ESL context) too there are complex contextual variables that greatly affect the feedback practices.

From the accounts above what I wanted to show are the disparate contextual factors that interplay in EFL and ESL situations. It is important to note that some of the variables are distinctly different from each other and are exclusive to the specific context. Drawn from the two articles the characteristics of the two contexts discussed here may not be representative of a whole range of scenarios, but at the same time they are not entirely atypical. Rather, distinctly different characteristics of EFL and ESL situations drawn from these two articles help us situate L2 writing pedagogy and examine the unique differences between them more closely.

More specifically, first, let us take the case of L2 writing in the context of China. In spite of the hard work on their part, teachers seem to be quite frustrated while providing feedback, presumably due to sheer class sizes. If writing comments for 40 students per class is daunting, it is even more challenging to make the process effective, helpful, and enjoyable for students. Then there is the issue of culture—although widely disputed (e.g., Cheng,

2000), research shows that Chinese students are reticent and shy in classrooms (see Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Tsui, 1996, p. 157). In such a circumstance it is hard to make peer feedback work. It is important to note that none of these factors usually figures at all in L2 writing pedagogy in an ESL context, as we can see from scenario 2 above. ESL classes in this specific context (and elsewhere) are typically of manageable size; classes of 19 students are certainly not too bad when compared with classes of 40. Therefore feedback may work just fine in such situations. Moreover, since students in these contexts come from different socio-cultural backgrounds they are likely to come out of their comfort zones and participate in class activities more actively. That is, since the classes are heterogeneous demographically (in this case students came from at least 11 different countries) students should have the urge to assimilate with the general norms and practices that are functional in class. To explain the point more specifically, even if there is a quiet Chinese student in a class like this (e.g., scenario 2) one can expect that he would be actively participating in the feedback process by following the rest of his peers. What this means is that the context itself compels the class dynamics to function in certain ways. Therefore, we can say that L2 writing pedagogy is greatly affected by the class dynamics which is a part of the many contextual variables operational in any given situation. It is only natural that research studies relating to L2 writing that take place in these contexts would be greatly impacted by various contextual factors discussed here.

L2 WRITING IN DIVERSE EFL CONTEXTS

The analysis above sheds light on how contexts affect research, subsequent discussions and the formation of theories in L2 writing. As observed at the beginning of this paper, although EFL contexts constitute a huge bulk of L2 writing population, research findings from these contexts are under-represented (Manchón & Haan, 2008). As the field grows it is imperative to

include more research from diverse EFL contexts in mainstream L2 writing literature. The comparative analysis of L2 writing pedagogy in EFL and ESL contexts above underscores the importance of such a move. In the section that follows I examine the pedagogical diversity of L2 writing in various EFL contexts.

Research shows that L2 writing pedagogy in EFL contexts, especially that in Asia, is confronted by a number of issues that include institutional constraints, various logistical problems such as large class sizes, unique teaching and learning approaches and ideologies. Each of these factors plays critical roles in effective L2 writing instruction. Lee (2004, 2008a, 2008b) in a series of studies looked into the L2 writing issues in Hong Kong. Although most of Lee's work was on L2 writing at secondary schools, investigating her work yields interesting information. Lee (2008b) notes that the error feedback practices in Hong Kong are influenced by certain central education authorities, such as Education Bureau (EDB) (pp. 71-72). In fact, most of the times teachers have to satisfy the instructional guidelines prescribed by these authorities largely ignoring context-specific requirements and student needs. Lee (2004) mentions that instructions for the teaching of L2 writing are centrally governed by the authority called Curriculum Development Council (CDC), which means school authorities have no autonomy to make decisions about the local needs. Also, there is a perennial gap between what is recommended about feedback in the literature and teachers' actual classroom practices (Lee, 2008b). Although process approach to feedback is preached it is hardly practiced and too much of emphasis on examinations takes the focus off the process-based writing instructions. In fact, examination pressure is such that often "writing is tested rather than taught" (Lee, 2004, p. 288). Furthermore, lack of cooperation from school administration is another reason why teachers often revert to traditional exam-based writing instructions instead of process-based ones (Lee, 2008b, p. 73). Lee (2008b) also reports that in an exam-dominated educational culture it is not quite clear who Hong Kong teachers are accountable to, for there are often multiple stakeholders (e.g., the school itself, students' parents, the EDB, the HKEAA

[Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority]) who have conflicting “demands and expectations.” Each of these factors influences the classroom practices of L2 writing in Hong Kong, directly or indirectly. Going a step further, Lee (2008b) reports that context plays a pivotal role in feedback practices of L2 writing pedagogy.

Lee (2008a) in a separate study, also based in Hong Kong, makes further observations on the impacts of context-specific constraints on L2 writing pedagogy. In general Hong Kong students use single-draft essays for their writing assignments and the classes are teacher-dominated (p. 149). As there are little self/peer evaluation and teacher-student conferencing students develop heavy reliance on teachers and they themselves become mere passive agents who are unlikely to take any learning initiatives on their own. Lee (2008a) notes “...teacher-dominated feedback practices breed passive and dependent learners” (p. 157). Also, at times writing classes tend to turn into mere grammar/language instruction classes, especially with students who lack English language proficiency (p. 149). Teachers’ heavy workloads in such teaching contexts may be the reason behind inefficient feedback delivery. It can be argued that teachers’ heavy workloads account for having little or no time for peer/self evaluation and teacher-student conferencing following each writing assignment. Sengupta’s (1998) study relating to Hong Kong EFL students’ revision process yields support to the contextual factors described by Lee. For example, Sengupta (1998) notes that EFL writing in Hong Kong is “teacher-dominated,” “accuracy-,” and “product-centered” (p. 114). Additionally, she observes that Hong Kong students are constantly made aware of the fact that accuracy is more valuable than critical thinking in the process of text production. Students are generally busy preparing for examinations as most compositions are done in class as part of tests (p. 114).

Large classes are a common problem in most developing countries that have a lot of population. Educational administrators in these countries cannot afford to have smaller classes primarily because of lack of funding and logistics. Implementation of the mainstream L2 writing pedagogical practices becomes almost an impossible task with such large classes. Situations get

more exacerbated when writing instructors are caught-up between various governmental directives and fulfilling L2 writing pedagogical obligations. You (2004) investigated English writing instruction at a Chinese university. The findings reported fall somewhat in line with those of Lee (2004, 2008a, 2008b). Some of the salient characteristics include: The class had more the 50 students. Like in Hong Kong, in China too high stake examinations such as College English Test Band 4 (CETB-4) receive much attention from both teachers and students. Teachers are quite concerned about how they can make their students do well on these examinations. Because of large class sizes teachers make general comments about students' writing assignments instead of reading each student's essay and giving individual feedback. You (2004) notes that the main foci of writing pedagogy lie on error-free production of the writing assignments and memorization of model essays so students can do well on the examinations (p. 101). Thus, L2 writing is taught following "current-traditional approach," (see Matsuda, 2003; Silva, 1990, p. 13) in which *form* is the most important criterion rather than *thoughts* (emphasis mine).

Turning our attention away from Asia the state of L2 writing in Europe provides us with more information about the local exigencies that shape EFL pedagogy and EFL writing, in particular. Tarnopolsky (2000) reports on the state of L2 writing in Ukraine, an eastern European country that witnessed massive socio-political change in the last few years. The author observes that the socio-political change in the country (caused primarily by the disintegration of former USSR) greatly influenced the EFL pedagogy there (pp. 210-211). Like many other countries around the world Ukraine also experienced a major boom in English language teaching/learning in recent times. The EFL writing needs of the Ukrainians evolved over time as the country settled in from socio-political turmoil and expanded its businesses and professional cooperation with other countries across the world. With time L2 writing received more impetus, with ESP (English for Specific Purposes), rather than academic writing gaining more importance. The bulk of the usage of L2 writing evolved around business correspondence for various business

transactions. Tarnopolsky (2000) observes that when EFL writing courses were designed in ways that combined process and genre approach to writing they did not turn out to be successful. In fact, many students had dropped out even before the courses ended. On the other hand, upon reviewing the reasons for large drop outs, some modifications were made to the courses by adding a “writing for fun” module, enabling students to be involved in interesting activities as they were doing their writing tasks. Once these changes were made the writing courses turned out to be more successful than before. This phenomenon underscores the importance of local exigencies, such as preferences for a certain kind of teaching approach, to be taken into consideration in order for EFL writing to be successful.

Positive attitudes toward particular teaching approaches impact the teaching and learning outcomes positively. On the other hand, it becomes quite challenging to achieve the desired course objectives when teachers and learners show negative attitudes toward teaching approaches and methodologies. Clachar (2000) shows how conflicting attitudes and ideologies of Turkish teachers affect EFL writing in Turkey. She reports that when process and rhetorical approaches to writing were followed in the writing programs curricula Turkish teachers showed diverging attitudes. This was due to the fact that Turkish teachers held both opposing and accommodating views about these approaches to writing permeated by their cultural beliefs and personal ideologies about various teaching practices. Clachar (2000) notes that “... there is no such thing as culturally neutral language pedagogy”; that is, teaching materials and approaches developed in Euro-American contexts would invariably carry certain cultural biases that are prevalent in the Western societies. Therefore, it is natural that people having differing ideologies could react either positively or negatively to these teaching materials and instructional approaches.

Reichelt (2005) in her research on EFL writing in Poland found some salient contextual factors that affect L2 writing teaching and learning. For instance, various socio-political realities including increased demand of English for business correspondence, employment, research, and higher

education acted as factors for learning of English in Poland. However, in spite of these major boosts English language pedagogy has had to put up with several obstacles. By pointing at the history of English language learning and teaching in Poland, Reichelt (2005) notes that the Polish education system does not have much tradition of teaching L1 (Polish) writing except at the primary level. As a result, there is little scope for EFL learners in Poland to draw on from their L1 writing experience to apply to EFL writing (p. 219). Furthermore, writing instructions receive less emphasis in EFL pedagogy. There are several reasons accounting for this trend: English teachers receive little training in teaching writing, as more emphasis is given on speaking, reading, and listening. Additionally, English language teachers ignore instruction of writing as an avoidance tactic—to reduce heavy workloads of grading writing assignments (p. 220). As far as actual writing is concerned, Reichelt (2005) notes that both teachers and students concede that there are significant rhetorical differences between English and Polish. While in Polish length is more important than content and organization, in English the opposite is true. Therefore, unaware of the value of coherent organization of ideas and logical development of arguments Polish EFL students concentrate on writing longer texts. Also, because of the Polish examination system the kind of writing assignments students undertake as part of their course requirements have little or no relevance to everyday usage outside the university (p. 223). In a nutshell then, lack of proper writing instructions at various levels of EFL pedagogy, lack of writing tradition in L1, various rhetorical differences between English and Polish, pressure of examinations, English teachers' heavy workloads constitute some of the indispensable context-specific realities of EFL writing in Poland. Reichelt (2005) rightly notes that all these factors need to be taken into consideration in order for us to create a comprehensive theory of L2 writing. Reichelt (1999) maintains that such a theory would help develop a more “complete” and “accurate” body of knowledge about various aspects of writing in a second language.

Although it is not an exhaustive account, the discussions above have been an attempt to survey various L2 writing teaching and learning practices in

EFL contexts. While context remains an important factor in L2 writing pedagogy a related issue that is central to much research in the field is “culture.” Much of the work relating to culture and L2 writing is devoted to understanding the implication of different context- and/or culture-specific variables for gaining better insights into the process of second language writing. In recent times there has been a significant body of literature on L2 writing (e.g., Atkinson, 2004; Connor, 2002, 2004; Walker, 2006) that calls for a better conceptualization of culture relative to various contexts. An examination of some of these issues may be relevant at this point.

CONTEXT, CULTURE, AND L2 WRITING

There has been tremendous impetus in the study of cultural influence on L2 writing ever since the publication of Kaplan’s (1966) landmark article on CR. Loosely speaking CR-oriented L2 writing theories recognize the fact that since composition resembles writer’s “modes of thinking” (Casanave, 2004) or various thought processes and that writer’s thought processes are greatly influenced by his immediate culture, it is possible that culture has influence on L2 writing. It is also argued that differences of various discourse-level features between a learner’s first and second languages cause difficulties in L2 writing (Casanave, 2004) and that most of these difficulties can be explained through an analysis of cultural thought orientation. In sum, what we see in CR studies is that culture plays an important role in L2 writing (e.g., Atkinson, 2004). Since “context” is central to the conceptualization of culture (e.g., Atkinson, 1999, 2004) any attempt of the study of culture without a thorough examination of corresponding contexts would prove ineffective. It is therefore imperative to provide due consideration to various contextual variables in the study of L2 writing.

The core of the CR-oriented approach to L2 writing is an acknowledgement of various context-specific advantages and constraints that affect L2 writers. That is, it is believed that L2 writers have to operate within the contextual

milieus that affect their composition act in many ways. Xing, Wang, and Spencer (2008), for example, maintain that “Learning to compose in a foreign language is not an isolated classroom activity, but a social and cultural experience.” (p. 73). The English composition rules, it is argued, may be in contradiction with the composition rules in Chinese or Korean and vice versa. That is, L2 writers in English have to successfully assume the values and norms of the mainstream English society. This entails that the process of learning to write includes not only learning various discourse features in the target language but also learning how they help “create” and “define” a new identity and “balance” it with the old one (Xing, Wang & Spencer, 2008, p. 73). One underlying implication then is that consideration of learners’ local contexts (e.g., EFL and ESL) should be an important component of L2 writing research and theories.

While general concept of context is an important constituent of “big culture,” it is an equally important part of “small culture” (Atkinson, 2004). Atkinson maintains that the overarching notion of culture relates to the conceptualization of culture in its broadest sense (such as “national culture,” “English culture” etc.), but an array of complex and overlapping “small cultures” of different levels interact both with each other and the big cultures (also see Walker, 2006, p. 96). To use Atkinson’s example, while both student culture and classroom culture have their own unique characteristics they operate within a bigger national culture of any given country. This means that any consideration of culture must not only look at the big culture but also the overlapping small cultures that are important constituents of culture as a whole. Atkinson’s conceptualization of big and small culture binary underscores the importance of relatively “small” forms of contexts such as the context of classroom, home, academia, and so on. This concurs that if the applicability of culture in L2 writing pedagogy is to be recognized one must also assign due importance to nuanced contextual variables including learners’ personal, classroom, and academic issues.

In fact, CR-oriented L2 writing theories call for a whole new approach to L2 writing pedagogy with greater recognition of the composition “process”

rather than viewing composition solely as “product” (e.g., Atkinson, 2004; Connor, 2002, 2004). In a recent attempt to update CR Connor (2002) discusses why it is important to consider “the processes that produce the products” (Atkinson, 2004). Atkinson himself argues that “the postmodernist-influenced notion of *identity*” (italics original, p. 282) has much to do with the renewed emphasis on the process approach to the conceptualization of culture. In such an approach individuals are considered to be subject to various sociocultural influences—it is believed that different cultural and social forces have great impacts on individuals. Connor (2004) echoes almost an identical view on the issue:

...the field has moved to emphasize the social situation of writing. Today, writing is increasingly regarded as being socially situated; each situation may entail special consideration to audience, purposes, level of perfection, and correspondingly may require varying amounts of revision, collaboration, and attention to detail (p. 293).

What is clear from this is an increased recognition of the importance of context in L2 writing. A common thread running through the discussions presented above is that as the field of L2 writing moves forward with an attempt to conceptualize new theories, specialists in the field attach more value to a more context-based, nuanced approach to L2 writing research and theorization. This concurs with the main argument of this paper that it is imperative to think beyond ESL contexts and take account of L2 writing pedagogy in EFL situations in order for a more comprehensive and inclusive portrayal of L2 writing research and theories.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

From the discussions above we can conclude at least two things: 1) EFL contexts in which L2 writing takes place are very diverse. While some of the contextual variables converge with each other some bear unique characteristics,

specific to various cultural and socio-political circumstances. 2) There is a renewed call for studying L2 writing in relation to contexts and culture. Many theorists in the field have called for setting future research agenda by focusing more on the “processes” of writing rather than solely on the “products” (Atkinson, 2004; Connor, 2004), or combining the two approaches (e.g., Atkinson, 2004).

As emerged in the discussions various contextual factors have significant bearing on teaching and learning practices of L2 writing. That is, these context-specific characteristics of EFL writing determine teaching and learning experiences in many ways. Going back to the original argument of the paper, the first step toward creating “robust knowledge” in the field of L2 writing would be to recognize all these contextual factors in an attempt to formulate an overarching L2 writing theory applicable to diverse contexts across the world. This would be a big positive step to take the field forward given that L2 writing textbook authors (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 2) while describing L2 writing teaching and learning practices still use ESL and EFL contexts interchangeably, without considering the differing contextual factors that play significant roles in determining L2 writing teaching and learning outcomes.

That is not to say, however, that discussions relating to EFL writing are entirely absent in the literature. Nor is it true that these context-specific (i.e., EFL) variables escaped the attention of L2 writing specialists. In fact, Manchón and Haan (2008) contend that in the past few years empirical research in FL writing has steadily grown (p. 1). There have been discussions about how L2 writing pedagogy in EFL contexts are different from ESL contexts and how both teachers and students find it difficult to transform theoretical discussions of L2 writing that are based on ESL situations into actual classroom practices. As an offshoot of this reality second language writing scholars attempted to describe L2 writing in various settings across the world (Reichelt, 2005). Nevertheless, what is still absent in the field is an integration of the research findings from EFL contexts into the mainstream L2 writing theories and references to EFL-specific issues in the subsequent

discussions. After all, theories are what influence the actual teaching and learning practices most; as Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) note "...without the knowledge provided by theoretical principles, we lose sight of a crucial tool for responsible instructional planning and classroom decision making." (p. 3) The same line of argument in turn suggests that a disparity between the theoretical discussions and actual teaching practices could be counter-productive since it might provide forgettable experiences to those who are part of it. Therefore, more integration of EFL-context-specific factors into the theoretical discussions of L2 writing pedagogy should be the second most important thing on the agenda. Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) rightly observe that although the field of L2 writing boasts "an impressive body of research," it still lacks a single, comprehensive theory of L2 writing. Cumming and Riazi (2000, cited in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005) capture the situation more precisely saying that the field of L2 writing lacks "a coherent understanding of 'how people actually learn to write in a second language'" (p. 3). These accounts firmly substantiate the need for carefully drawn theories of L2 writing that would account for L2 writing teaching and learning in different contexts across the world.

Separately, there have been renewed efforts to come up with more effective approaches to CR-oriented research agenda in the field of L2 writing (e.g., Atkinson, 2004; Connor, 2002, 2004). Both Atkinson (2004) and Connor (2002, 2004) for example, call for coming away from the traditional text-based study of L2 writing. Instead, they argue for a more "process"-oriented approach to CR research in which context and culture of writing would receive more priority. It is believed that individuals in the modern world are affected tremendously by their surroundings—their joys and sorrows, successes and failures, and numerous other life experiences. As a result, unless writing is viewed in relation to all these contextual variables that are part of any social activity researchers would miss out on important insights into the formation of plausible theories.

As noted, although L2 writing research findings in EFL situations have increased in recent times, concerted efforts are necessary for these findings to

be brought into the limelight. A measure that could be taken in this line would be to encourage and facilitate more regional publications, conference presentations, and empirical research on various aspects of L2 writing. The valuable discussions derived from such projects could be part of the mainstream disciplinary discourses in the field of L2 writing. As such discourses would evolve they would contribute important theoretical insights drawn from different contexts to the field of L2 writing.

Lest we fail to fully capture the importance of contextual factors that affect the teaching and learning practices of L2 writing in EFL situations below I summarize some of the implications derived from the discussions so far:

If the prevalent mismatch between theoretical discussions about L2 writing and actual teaching/learning practices continues it might fail to address the teaching and learning needs of both teachers and students. In fact, if L2 writing instructions are atheoretical, devoid of “a coherent understanding” (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005) of actual teaching/learning practices, the field of L2 writing would be unable to meet the pedagogical challenges, crucial for the consistent growth of any field of inquiry. Furthermore, such failures may eventually be responsible for unresponsive teaching/learning experiences for both teachers and students.

Unless this mismatch is removed by having more conversations within the field of L2 writing it might act as an injustice to all involved in L2 writing pedagogy. To clarify, if a given college curriculum requires that its teachers follow the process approach to writing in a context that does not allow such teaching practices owing to various contextual factors (e.g., large class size, examination-based writing instructions) it would cause a great deal of frustration on the part of the teachers. In the similar way, if the teachers persist with the process approach to writing while students themselves are busy preparing for examinations that they must pass, it would cause a similar kind and extent of frustration on the part of the students too. What this implies is that in L2 writing pedagogy there is a need for increased sensitivity toward various contextual exigencies.

Another problematic aspect of this situation is that unless there is

conformity between the theoretical discussions and actual teaching/learning practices no objective measure of teaching and learning is possible. This is because unless teachers are aware of the “to-do lists” determined by comprehensive L2 writing theories one cannot account either for the success or failure of overall classroom practices. Most importantly, students cannot be expected to receive a fair evaluation of their progress or failure in writing assignments by instructors who themselves are not aware of the most suitable teaching-learning practices one must have at one’s disposal for specific contexts.

Also, not less importantly, an integration of various context-specific research findings, incorporating both EFL and ESL contexts, is absolutely essential to take the field of L2 writing forward. Manchón and Haan (2008) argue that “...[the] growth in research output has not applied equally to investigations into second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) writing.” Therefore, it is important for scholars in L2 writing to acknowledge this fact and undertake concerted efforts to help the field of L2 writing grow to its entirety. We must acknowledge though that it is hard to find an “ideal” EFL (and ESL) situation that would reflect all possible contextual variables that affect L2 writing. One possible future direction of research to this end could be to identify a collection of specific contextual factors that are relevant to L2 writing (e.g., existence of national examination system, large class size, teacher workload, etc.), and make sure we do research in contexts that reflect the full spectrum of each of these factors.

CONCLUSION

Above I discussed various contextual factors that affect teaching and learning practices of L2 writing in different EFL contexts. Before concluding, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations of the current paper. First, in the process of exploration of salient contextual factors relating to EFL contexts the paper relied solely on published literature. Furthermore, the

review of literature is neither conclusive nor exhaustive. One may notice that the literature reviewed does not cover some important EFL contexts in Asia such as India, Malaysia, Japan, Korea; countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America and many countries in Europe. This is mainly due to the limited scope of the current project, and partly due to the difficulty in accessing local publications that provide information about L2 writing in these contexts. As mentioned earlier in order to keep the review of literature current and manageable I investigated publications in the last ten years that related to L2 writing pedagogy in EFL contexts. My attempt here has not been to come up with a comprehensive L2 writing pedagogical theory but rather raise an important issue in the field. It is hoped that the conversations that started here will continue in the future and provide helpful insights into L2 writing pedagogy. Each of the studies reviewed in this paper had its own goals and objectives. Since the purpose of this project was to investigate various contextual variables in EFL contexts, in the process of literature review I looked for the information that was most relevant to my paper. Therefore, it must be noted that the discussions in this paper provide only snapshots on different EFL contexts and more comprehensive studies would be required if one is interested to investigate context-specific L2 writing pedagogy surveyed in this paper more thoroughly. Finally, I must acknowledge that there is an uneven representation of EFL contexts surveyed. For instance, more literature on Asia than that of Europe or Africa and more literature on Hong Kong than that of any other countries is presented in this paper. This was done not due to a preference for a particular geographical territory but solely due to the convenience factor—first, unavailability of the corresponding literature in the last ten years, and second, difficulty in accessing the local publications relating to L2 writing.

In spite of these limitations it can be said that the current paper underscores the significance of various contextual factors that affect teaching and learning practices of L2 writing in EFL contexts. It is imperative that L2 writing scholars undertake more elaborate research to address the issue. Because, in Reichelt's (2005) words, the results of such research "...provide

an important source of information in the development of an accurate and inclusive theory of L2 writing” (p. 226).

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