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Writing Instruction That Makes a Difference to English Learners

Abstract: This paper presents the actions of two high school English language arts teachers as they engage in writing instruction with adolescent English learners. Using a naturalistic, qualitative methodology we investigate the actions two high school English language arts teachers engage in to meet the needs of their students. Findings suggest that embracing the students' resources, building on linguistic knowledge, taking time to choose the right books and activities, being explicit about writer's workshop and accepting its frenetic pace because it meets the students' needs, and using the act of writing as a thinking activity, were the actions that made a difference to promote student success.

Effective instructional actions take place when teachers consider student needs, personal and professional experiences, local and national curricular mandates, professional development experiences, pedagogical stance, and when they see students for who they are (Araujo, 2013; Patterson et al., 2010). Sometimes these instructional decisions are made while teachers are in the act of teaching. At other times teachers make these decisions as they plan their instruction. Whenever teachers make these decisions, the appropriateness of the actions taken to meet student needs is what makes the difference.

Some English language arts teachers notice that the instructional decisions and actions they make are not working for their students. Students are disengaged during class and often fail to complete assignments. Consequently, these teachers are tired of maintaining the status quo and working within the existing professional and school constraints, which they feel do not meet the real academic and social aspirations of their students. They say they are keenly aware that they do not know what they should do or what actions they should take to provide good instruction. However, they often do not know what they should do or what actions they should take to provide effective instruction – especially for English learners. But there are a few teachers who accept the challenge to make changes in an attempt to address this need.

To that end, the purpose of this paper was to explore the actions, reactions, and transactions of two English language arts (ELA) teachers as they engaged with students in powerful writing. The question guiding this inquiry is:

- What actions do an eleventh grade mainstream teacher and a ninth grade ESL teacher make during English language arts instruction to support English learners as they become powerful writers?

Related Theory and Research

We situate our work within the socio-cultural (Vygotsky, 1978) framework because of its focus on culture and its use as a mediation tool for learning – it suggests that learning is an interactive social endeavor and therefore, there is a wealth of cultural and linguistic resources which teachers can use during classroom instruction to address literacy learning. In writing instruction research, the socio-cultural theory promotes the idea of co-participation and the importance of supporting cognitive performance, through the use of cultural tools and procedural facilitators (Englert & Mariage & Dunsmore, 2010, p. 211).

ESL and its Offerings for English Learners in US Schools

Today the dominant approach to teaching in secondary ESL in the United States is still sheltered instruction (Peregoy & Boyle, 2012). The purpose of sheltered instruction is to provide grade-appropriate, cognitive demanding core curriculum using sociocultural features including collaboration, grouping, informal assessments, social/affective adjustment, and native language use (Gonzales & Watson, 1986). While many school districts have a form of sheltered instruction in place, it varies widely depending on the teacher's preparation, students' diversity, and professional development engagement. At its inception, sheltered instruction was a good fit, but as students' diversity has increased it has become more challenging to design curriculum that meets the complex needs of students (e.g., cultural, linguistic, language maintenance, and social adjustment). Further, at the high school level students are expected to have command of the English language because of prior school experience. However, this is often not the case. Thus, some high schools maintain classes strictly for English learners, especially newcomers. However, many English learners find themselves in mainstream classrooms where they are expected to function similarly to the native English speakers.

The Teaching and Learning of Writing

Research on writing instruction for students in general and English learners in particular is still in its infancy (Ball, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007). Some literacy experts have authored works (e.g., Applebee & Langer, 2013; Fu, 2009) detailing methods that work for adolescent ESL writers, other have focused on writing development and instruction (Edelsky, 1986; Moll, 1989). Further research has focused on the benefits of native language transfer (Krashen, 1987) and bilingual education and bilingualism (Baker, 2008), but it is still unclear about specific decisions and actions teachers must make to address the writing practices of adolescent English learners at all levels of language proficiencies (emergent/beginning/intermediate/advanced).

In the United States adolescent English learners are often instructed from a skill development and product perspective (Ball, 2006; Delpit, 1987; McCarthey & Mkhize, 2013). That is to say, many secondary ESL teachers still focus on grammar, syntax, spelling, and punctuation because they see that as a pressing concern – in other words they primarily situate their instruction

on the product and the form and function of language. In mainstream class-rooms, writing is increasingly taught using writer's workshop (Atwell, 1987; Gallagher, 2006), an approach that balances product and process. One possible reason for this difference in instruction is that until recently ESL preparation courses were not offered widely. When preparation courses were offered, the objectives focused on the history of bilingualism, second language acquisition, multicultural education from an elementary students' perspective. Of note is that in most writers' workshops there is equal importance given to the development of the writer's voice, ideas, and language conventions. Additionally, in the workshop approach the teacher is more able to support the individual needs of all students.

More recently the Common Core Writing Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015) in the United States, too, have made a difference for the teaching of writing. The standards ask educators to teach argumentative writing, informational writing, narrative writing, vary the level of formal/informal writing, use the writing process, incorporate technology, write research pieces, and create an environment where writing is pervasive. Although these standards have not been adopted where this study takes place we agree that these skills can benefit adolescent writers.

Literacy research tells us (e.g., culturally responsive instruction, writing workshop, native language instruction, and literacy instruction for English learners) that effective teaching and powerful writing happens when students and teachers collaborate, when the instruction focuses on inquiry and invention, and when the quality of learning is transformational for students and teachers. Holdaway (1978) stated, „the theory or practice of literacy that fails to take into account the deep and powerful implications of language in the whole person fails at the most fundamental level". In short, we should use writing as a tool to develop student's identity, answer their personal questions, and improve their well-being.

Moreover, research on writing instruction (Kwok et al., 2016) informs us that teachers can create opportunities for students to write in ways through which they can carry their personal lives into their academic discourse community (p. 268). These openings can help students make sense and connections between their individual goals, academic needs, and global expectations.

Research History and Methods

The teachers in this study participated in a professional development approach called „Culturally Mediated Writing Instruction" (CMWI) funded by the National Writing Project (NWP) (Patterson et al., 2010; Wickstrom et al., 2011). For a semester the teachers were immersed in „research-based ideas and guidance" to support the writing needs of English learners in their ELA classrooms. Using inquiry (Dewey, 1910; Short & Burke & Hartse, 1996; Wilhelm, 2007) and a writer's workshop (Atwell, 1987; Gallagher, 2006) approach, the teachers studied funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and the use of social action issues (e.g., immigration, poverty, family) as meaningful writing themes. Documentation of the instructional decisions and practices made by these teachers was created during the spring of 2010. The purpose was to determine what decisions and actions these teachers took to make learning meaningful for their students. Prior inductive analysis (Araujo, 2013) on two instructional units for these same two teachers informed the analysis of this inquiry. For Carmen (pseudonym) the units were, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) and *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008). For Janet (pseudonym), the units were *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) and *The Odyssey* (Homer, trans. 1996). The analysis yielded the following (Araujo, 2013):

- Decisions that **attend to the shifts in culture** of the classroom make a difference for students.
- Decisions that **focus solely on delivering the explicit curriculum make little difference** to student learning.
- When **teachers take into account the available resources (student, personal, textual, and contextual), they are able to expand the learning zone** (see Figure 1) and create a deep integrated curricular experience for students. The shaded area represents the „resources in action" or affordances teachers tap into with effective decisions making. Teachers are aware of possible resources and use them when appropriate to meet the needs of students.
- As teachers **grow in expertise about the available resources, they are able to more closely meet the needs** of the students.

Fig. 1. Decision-Making Conceptual Mediation Heuristic
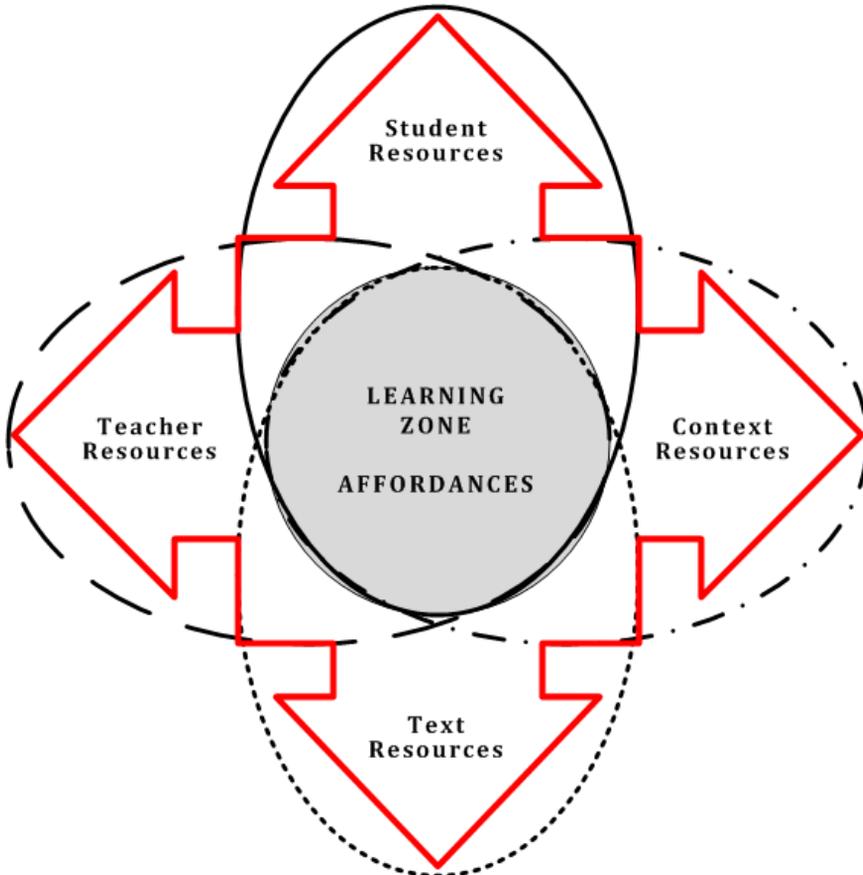
Source: (Araujo, 2013)

In this chapter, we focus on the actions the teachers made throughout the observations with particular attention to those that promote powerful writing. Because decisions and actions happen often and are moment-by-moment the data lends itself to multiple approaches of analysis.

Setting

The study took place in two adolescent classrooms, at two different high schools in the southwest region of the United States. These particular class-rooms were chosen because of our insider knowledge with the teacher partic-ipants and their school settings. These established relationships allowed for high accessibility, patterned ways of interacting with the staff and the teach-ers, and an established rapport with administrators.

Participants

The participants in this study were two high school ELA teachers. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2001). The teachers met the following criteria: 1) participation in the local NWP summer institute, 2) knowledge of CMWI principles and practices, 3) teachers of English language arts to native and English language learners, and 4) membership in the local NWP project site. Using these criteria, it was likely that these two English language art teachers would be making decisions based on student resources and information obtained from the CMWI professional development. Both participants collected demographic data for students, and took part during the triangulation phase.

Carmen was a secondary ELA teacher (11th grade) whose focus is literature. English learners were mainstreamed in her classroom. She had taught at the middle and secondary grades using a writing workshop approach. This was Carmen's second year as a high school teacher. During this study she taught American Literature which focuses on works from 1900 to the present. In previous years as a middle school teacher she was more willing to take risks and experiment. In high school though she was intent on portraying a more traditional teacher, which was against to her nature. This was her first year teaching this course so she was experimenting with how to mediate the curriculum. While the district provided teachers with a timeline to follow, she said that she had decided to stray frequently away from it in order to meet the needs of her students who she felt were capable readers and writers.

Janet was a secondary ELA teacher (9th grade), with a passion for working with beginning to intermediate English language learners. Her professional developmental activity focused on learning more about effective practices with English learners. Janet had been working with ESL students for 11 years. She described herself as a compassionate person who saw students as extended family members. At the time of this study, she was the only ESL teacher in the school. The purpose of the courses she taught was to transition first year English learners to mainstream classrooms in two years.

Data Collection

The four types of data collected to document the study were: (1) pre entry interview, (2) teacher survey, (3) periodic classroom observations, and (4) semi-structured teacher conversations before and after the observation. One of the researchers observed the teachers during the spring semester across a period of four months.

Analysis

Initial data analysis took place throughout the data collection phase. Data were organized by participant, day of observation, interview, student assignment, or teacher directed assignment with particular attention to decisions that addressed powerful writing. Then, the researchers read through the observations and interviews multiple times to get an understanding of the data. For this analysis the researchers focused on 1) the actions the teachers made that made a difference for powerful writing. To achieve triangulation (Merriam, 1988) the researchers convened a team of five literacy experts (3 full-time university faculty and 2 doctoral students) who were familiar with the teachers and the professional development to collectively analyze the data. The codes and themes were discussed, modifications were suggested, and a consensus about codes and themes was reached. The actions written about in this manuscript emerged from rereading the data, conversations with the teachers and triangulation team. Table 1 provides the codes and patterns found during the analysis for the mainstream and ESL classes.

Table 1. Mainstream/ESL Codes and Patterns

CMWI Instructional Patterns	Mainstream Classroom	ESL Classroom
Empathy and Caring	Increase in use	Organizing framework
Meaningful Connections	Increase in use	Decreasing in use
Inquiry Stance	Increase in use	Organizing framework
Authentic Tasks	Increase in use	Part of instructional routine
Just Enough Support	Increase in use	Part of instructional routine
Resources in Use (Affordances)	**Mainstream Classroom**	**ESL Classroom**
Context	Often in use	Often in use
Teacher	Increase in use	Increase in use
Student	Increase in use	Routinely put in use
Text	Increase in use	Increase in use
Literacy Actions	**Mainstream Classroom**	**ESL Classroom**
Social and Cultural Capital	Increase in importance	Central to decision making
Linguistic Knowledge	Routinely took into account	Decrease in importance
Thinking Activities	Routinely took into account	Central to decision making
Academic Content Knowledge	Decrease in importance	Increase in importance

Source: author's work

In the mainstream classroom, the data suggest that empathy and caring, meaningful connections, and taking an inquiry stance were the CMWI instructional patterns that did increase during the study. Carmen used the context as a resource often (i.e., the classroom, the home, or the school). Initially, Carmen made decisions based on academic content; however, as the semester progressed she took into account the social and cultural capital of students. In the ESL classroom, the data suggest that empathy and caring, and inquiry stance were the overarching organizing CMWI frameworks during the study. As the semester went along Janet made instructional decisions to improve students' thinking strategies and build academic content to prepare them for mainstream classes. In sum, the patterns suggest that Carmen was adapting perspective to meet the needs of students, while Janet was findings ways to create curriculum to meet the principles and practices that she believed in.

Findings

Carmen at Work in the Mainstream Classroom

CMWI instructional patterns. At the onset, Carmen focused the decisions she made based on covering the necessary academic content mandated by the local school district. By the end of the semester, the instructional patterns suggested she was more concerned with student making meaningful connections to the students' personal activities. In class, students spent most of the time inquiring, reading, and writing about the topic of the day. Carmen was attentive to student needs, frequently engaging with students individually and collectively during conferring time. Using a mix of formative assessments Carmen motivated students to become self-reliant and take initiative for their own learning. She mediated learning using small and whole group conversations, interactive writing activities with a focus on using technology, and on the spot conversation to her students sort out their questions about what to do next. She was adamant that her calculated risk taking was rewarded by the students' commitment to do „great work." Powerful writing assignments included writing satires about world events, developing character scripts and recording movie shorts, crafting newspaper response columns pretending to be book characters, creating comic strips about life events, and researching and delivering findings about a social action inquiry project of their choice.

Utilizing the resources to improve learning. At first, writing in Carmen's classroom was limited to answering short-essay questions on quizzes and occasional book reports. When students wrote in class, there was minimal

collaboration happening, and students simply turned in assignments and waited for grades. At the beginning of the data collection it was evident that students were not connecting to the texts, assignments, or the instructional conversations Carmen was attempting to have with them. During the first debriefing session Carmen said that her immediate job was to get them engaged in the work, „I need to get them to read the book first, before they can do anything else". Instead of seeing students' lack of engagement as a reason to give up, Carmen saw it as a professional challenge. Weeks went by as she thought about what to do. One day, she said:

> I've decided to select a book that they will select and enjoy. (Carmen)

Using knowledge of her students' resources, she purposefully decided to take this action because she wanted to prove to students that there are books that can be fun and at the same time academically appropriate. As she became more familiar with students through their writing, the actions she took integrated more of the students' resources. She said, „I no longer just thought about the curriculum", rather, her decisions and actions deliberately took into account how she could use the student's resources to create writing activities that were meaningful to their lives. From, that point forward *this* became the focus – using students' expertise and knowhow as they engage in learning.

The students noticed this shift in Carmen's thinking and doing; in response, „they too increased their level of contribution and writing quality" (Carmen). A class that at first was fragmented shifted to one where transactional learning took place. That is to say, their writing became a function of their circumstances, their motives, the subject they were writing about, and the relationship between them and their prospective readers (Rosenblatt, 2004, pp. 1380). In an effort to learn what worked, Carmen asked students to write about their experiences as part of an end of the year essay. She felt she missed learning opportunities this year so she wanted to capitalize on the students' thinking early next year.

> I am not really a good writer, but have enjoyed some of the writing assignments you have given us. The fairy-tale assignment was my favorite. I like how you let us write in slang, that was fun. The only book I liked this year was *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008). I don't know why, but maybe it was because the kids were kind of like us, the kids have a little rebel inside all of them. (Jeff, pseudonym)

> I saw you try to persuade your students into doing their work, and turning it in on time, like we are supposed to, but what can you do, we are teenagers!... I like the fact that you tried to come to terms after the break, you tried to build relationships with us, which a lot of teachers don't do. I didn't experience this kind of relationship with you in ninth grade. (John, pseudonym)

Overall, the other responses suggested that they appreciated the effort Carmen made at the end of the semester to allow them to write about topics that were of interest to them, but most were still concerned about the constant testing.

Deciding to build student vocabulary and linguistic knowledge. Concept and vocabulary development was central to Carmen's teaching. However, the diversity of students' linguistic abilities had to be a central focus. As she introduced new vocabulary words like „transmogrify", „invariable" and „shrewd", she used multimodal tools such as wikis, Google docs and other online tools for example You-Tube videos and magazine articles to put these words in context. When I asked why this action was important, she often mentioned that „many students were thinking of taking college writing entrance exams". It was a priority for the school district too. To get the students ready for achievement exams like the SAT and ACT, she focused on powerful language they might use to when writing about an author's purpose, imagery, figurative language, and use of proper diction. Using multimodal tools that might appeal to today's adolescents was a further attempt to engage students in learning.

Once Carmen knew students' linguistic knowledge, she used it as a way to engage in powerful writing. For instance, one time she asked students to write their favorite fairy tale in slang as a way for students to think deeply about the story, connect to theme, and then use their home language to make the story unique. This activity was particularly engaging for the few English learners because they could use slang.

Purposive explicit vocabulary development was an action that made a difference for students at the end of the semester as they took practice entrance exams. Many students mentioned how these activities helped them as they took the exams.

To support the students' ability to pass the state of Texas yearly criterion-based assessment Carmen introduced thinking strategies. However, she said she only made explicit references to the state assessment two weeks prior to the test. She said this decision and action was purposeful because she thought that the students did not need much preparation and that students could do other activities that were more meaningful.

Janet at Work in the ESL Classroom

CMWI instructional patterns. At the onset, Janet stressed that she made decisions based on encouraging students to embrace their heritages and use literature they encounter in school to mediate the world outside of school. Powerful writing tasks in Janet's class were chosen to allow students to expe-

rience choice, a wide variety of genres from poetry to narrative writing to argumentative writing. She mediated learning using technology like videos, computer programs, and electronic translators. Students wrote poetry about who they were, narratives about their experiences learning English, and reflective narrative about books they read.

Inviting students to take an inquiry stance through writing workshop.

I get so sad that their [my students'] sense of discovery is lost in high school... that we are not letting our kids wonder in high school. (Janet, pseudonym)

Janet planned assignments so students could explore their own topics including family, immigration, heroes, Greek Mythology, and learning English through writing. She said that in her experience some students as they wrote were simply regurgitating what teachers said, not what they had learned about the topic. In class, she wanted to create environments where students were free to question and wonder about what they were writing about. This approach was noticeable especially when learning became difficult for students. For example, to introduce Greek Mythology she asked students to research and write about the characteristics of heroes. At the beginning of the unit she had students read aloud what they had found a hero to be. They used words like „strong", „helpful", „trusting" and „does the right thing". As students reported their findings, Janet made a poster with the vocabulary and hung it on one of the class walls. As the reading progressed, the class spoke about others' words that describe heroes according to Greek Mythology. At the end of the unit, Janet made an argument to the class that their ideas of heroes had changed because of what they had noticed what characters do in the book. They used words like „afraid," „fearful," „weak," and „runs away from trouble".

Janet used writing workshop as the tool to promote inquiry. Janet's action set the learning contexts and conditions to make sure there was daily writing time and opportunities to confer with students. This was apparent from the first day of the observation and appeared to be the organizing framework for instruction. A typical day in Janet's class included the following:

8:30 Read self-selected book
8:40 Listen to announcements
8:45 Journal writing
8:50 Daily mini-lesson of the day (Reading/Writing)
9:20 Reading and Writing Workshop
      Conferring
10:00 Debriefing (status of the class)

While parts of the period seemed structured, the writing workshop time was messy. That is to say, that there „appeared" to be no order or structure as students wrote. Students weaved themselves around the writing process seamlessly; this was seen through movement from computer stations to desks, conversations between students, conferring sessions with Janet, and individual trips to the library. In response to the question whether writing was a messy process Janet responded:

> Yeah! That's a very accurate statement. But it's really interesting; it takes a lot of effort to get the kids to be messy. They really think that they have to put it down perfectly the first time. (Janet, pseudonym)

During this time, students were in charge of their writing. Each owned their powerful writing. Nevertheless, when students needed advice or were stuck they were able to write their name on the board to confer with Janet about their writing progress. At times, Janet would say to one student:

> Jay, I've not seen your writing in a few days, sign your name on the board soon so that I can get your status.

This action created positive, trusting relationship that Janet reported improved student writing.

Deciding to support academic content knowledge. Janet took action to find ways and provide writing support where possible. She said that „one way to do that was to find connections to their backgrounds or prior knowledge". Most times, the actions and decisions she made were appropriate. At times the students struggled to connect to the themes of the story because of the writing language and prose and lack of personal connections.

> I don't think they have any prior knowledge [of Greek Mythology] so, I don't think they have something to hang on to [so it has been very difficult to accomplish anything with this book]. (Janet)

Janet was also concerned about providing appropriate writing support because of the various levels of language proficiency in the class. That is to say, in Janet's class there was a mix of emergent, beginning and intermediate writers of English. These writers too came from different language backgrounds (e.g., Hindi, Vietnamese, Korean, and Spanish) so it made it difficult to choose one approach that worked for all students.

She said she thought about improving the students' writing skills and allowing them to explore on their own. To address concerns, Janet noticed and planned writing mini-lessons that addressed frequent questions that came up during the conferring time with students or what she noticed as she read student papers.

Janet was also aware that in order for students to create powerful writing they needed guidance citing work within their papers.

> See, you put that in quotation marks, but that is not what the book says! It has to be word for word. Write it word for word, don't edit. You put in parenthesis what you want to say. Therefore it tells the reader what YOU want to say. That's a little trick you can use. Don't put what you infer, write it directly from the story. We are truly playing a game here, when you change it, even if it's minor, it can tip the scale. Don't add anything that is not in the text. (Janet, pseudonym)

Carmen and Janet use Writing as a Thinking Activity

At the beginning of the study Carmen assigned writing tasks that focused on short answers to pop quizzes and end of the book exams which explicitly asked surface-level knowledge (memory) questions about facts and dates. Still she knew this was a recall activity.

> I think in general a lot of them don't want to read the things we tell them. I think they go to the net and find out what the book is about to take the test. [Because of this] they know the teacher will make the test harder. They still don't care and won't read the book, they're okay having 70s and 60s as long as they are not epically failing. (Carmen, pseudonym)

As the semester progressed Carmen shifted the purpose for writing from just an assessment tool that tests memory recall to a tool that aided students to think in convergent, divergent and evaluative ways (Ciardiello, 1998). In other words, she asked students to use writing to take on roles of characters in the books they were reading, hypothesize what could happen next/what they would do in the characters shoes, justify the actions of characters, and finally use writing to take a stand and defend a topic. The conferring process, also, shifted throughout the semester. Sometimes, students were directed to consult with other students, other times, they were asked to speak to the teacher and outsiders about their work. While much of the work was done in class it was okay for students to continue at home or afterschool. The writing artifacts they turned in for grading, too, changed depending on the writing tasks. Carmen's students wrote short narratives about their lives, fiction stories, poems in the role of characters they were reading, movie scripts about social issues they were researching, and mystery quickwrites. See Table 2 for a selected list of writing tasks.

Table 2. Mainstream Writing Activities

Writing Task	Level of Questions /Inquiry	Grouping Structure	Genre	Artifact
Formal Assessments	Memory	Individual	Informational	Quizzes
Comic Strip	Convergent	Individual	Personal	Read aloud/ Story board
Fiction	Divergent	Individual	Narrative	Essay
Social Research Project	Evaluative	Partners	Informational	PowerPoint/Essay

Source: author's work

> This is what good readers and writers do, they don't just read or write, they think about what they are reading and writing about. (Janet, 2010)

The above excerpt illustrates Janet's approach to literacy learning and teaching. Students in Janet's class were also expected to go beyond decoding the text – memorization. With their writing they were expected to explore local and global issues. For example, in one writing assignment students thought, spoke and wrote about the difficulty recent immigrants like them have adjusting to a new language and culture; particularly, the similarities and differences between characters they were reading and their personal stories.

To provide thinking options and strategies as students wrote about connections between Esperanza from *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984), Janet took action and provided a variety of tools.

> Ok, this is just a thinking tool, we get to use different tools, ok, somebody might use a plier to get a nail out others might use a hammer. (Janet)

For students, these tools seemed particularly useful during the criterion-based assessment. Janet reported that all the students had successfully met the passing criteria and all said that the thinking strategies were helpful. See Table 3 for a selected list of writing tasks.

Table 3. ESL Writing Activities

Writing Task	Level of Questions/ Inquiry	Grouping Structure	Genre	Artifact
Formal Assessments	Memory	Individual	Informational	State test practice
My Family	Convergent	Individual	Poetry	Read aloud
What Makes English Hard	Divergent	Individual	Personal Narrative	Essay
The Odyssey Chapters Research Project	Evaluative	Individual/ informal grouping	Informational	Research paper/ whole class

Source: author's work

Janet used visual thinking tools like flip charts, journal writing, and graphic organizers to brainstorm writing topics. She said that the purpose of these thinking tools was to use them as scaffolds to connect knowledge to new learning. The products that students submitted in Janet's class were always the same. The process was different depending on student comfort level with the content. She often times used different sources (i.e., books, multimedia, internet, copies) to vary content delivery. In sum, Carmen and Janet used writing to promote reflection, differentiate learning processes and products, and allow for choice and authenticity.

Implications

There are a few implications we can discuss that are applicable to writing teachers working with English learners in mainstream or ESL classrooms. Powerful writing happens when teacher actions consciously address the needs of the students. As noted in Carmen's and Janet's classroom, teaching decisions based on specific instructional patterns and resources make a difference.

Ball (2006) and others (Wickstrom et al., 2011) remind us that if we are to engage culturally and linguistically diverse students in meaningful instruction, writing topics ought to take into account and respect student voices and ideas. Janet's actions, in particular, remind us that teachers should create spaces where students have voice and choice, their ideas are respected, and they can ask for help anytime. As we have progressed through this analysis we have become more aware of the positive influences these deliberate actions in respect to inquiry (Dewey, 1910; Burke & Hartse & Short, 1995; Wilhelm, 2007) and writing workshop (Atwell, 1987) make to student writing quality.

Power writing happens when teachers seek for literature that takes into account students' perspectives and backgrounds. Today, publishers in the United States and throughout the world are making it more possible for teachers to find appropriate literature. For example, the International Board on Books for Young People (www.ibby.org) mission is to promote international understanding through the use of children's books. Other sites include Worlds of Words (www.wowlit.org) where teachers can find book titles and reviews for all audiences.

Powerful writing happens when teachers use writing workshop as an instructional framework. Although writing workshop (Atwell, 1987) in adolescent classrooms has a long history, this is not the case in English learners settings. In the United States, the National Writing Project (1971) through its invitational summer institute took action and made it possible for many in-service teachers to experience this approach first hand and then take and make their own in Kindergarten through high school classrooms.

We, too, certainly understand the concerns and the importance about how to provide skills development and explicit vocabulary opportunities for students of all language proficiencies. In our experience, we have seen teachers who just focus on skill development and others who just focus on the process of writing. Carmen and Janet teach us though that it is possible to development language skills through mini-lessons and during conferring time. They also remind us that as teachers we need to capitalize on students' multiple resources. The purpose of writing (literacy in general) is not to just improve language skills or go through its process; rather it is to develop the whole person using meaningful activities (Freire, 1970; Holdaway, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978).

Powerful writing instruction happens in a school setting where both teachers and administrators are willing to create a culture of writing. Where teachers use writing as an instructional framework and routinely ask students to use writing to express themselves and develop their ideas through writing. The Common Core ELA Standard 10 asks school districts to write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Conclusion

The actions Carmen and Janet took provide some evidence that educators make a difference to students in an environment where writing is frequent, supported by tasks that are engaging to students, and ask them to think in multiple ways and for different purposes. These two cases add to the body of literature which supports using writing as means to build expertise, challenge thinking, and go beyond using it as an assessment tool.

The actions Carmen and Janet made provide some interesting questions for further research. What, if any, writing differences exist in a classroom where the focus is skill development compared to a class where the focus is powerful writing? What, if any, are the differences of a writer's workshop approach in a mainstream classroom compared to an ESL classroom? And finally, how does a writer's workshop approach provide support for English language learners of all language proficiencies? We call on literacy researchers to pursue these complex inquiries to help teachers make a difference for their students.

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Warsztaty pisania – ich znaczenie dla uczących się języka angielskiego

ABSTRAKT: Korzystając z naturalistycznej, jakościowej metodologii w artykule zaprezentowane zostaną działania dwóch nauczycieli języka angielskiego w szkole średniej, angażujących się w zaspokajanie potrzeb młodzieży w zakresie nauczania języka. Wnioski sugerują, że najbardziej efektywnymi metodami nauki i osiągania sukcesu przez uczniów są: znajomość źródeł, opieranie się na wiedzy językowej, poświęcenie czasu na wybór odpowiednich książek i aktywności, wyraźne formułowanie zasad rządzących warsztatem pisarskim, a także traktowanie pisania jako czynności nierozerwalnie połączonej z myśleniem.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: pisanie, rozwój zawodowy, edukacja nauczycieli, młodzież, nauka języka angielskiego