

Moving from the Known to the Unknown in Academic Writing

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By

Verbra Frances Pfeiffer

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Dedicated:

To my beautiful daughter Jessica Pfeiffer

An evolutionary journey with expressive writing,
moving from the known to the unknown in academic writing.

—Verbra Frances Pfeiffer

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind
about nothing, to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts.
(John Keats, 1817)

1.1 Point of Departure

Writing in its own right is a difficult and complex activity and for this generation of students consumed in a world of electronic gadgetry, visual culture and information overload, reading and writing have declined as educational practices. It is my observation that our university students read and write mainly in order to meet exam requirements and standards. As a result, students no longer view reading and writing as an educating act, nor do they understand the sense of personal gratification it promotes. In light of this, for students, learning to write often begins with the mastery of producing legible letters and basic spelling (Abbott, Berninger and Fayol, 2010) and once these skills are attained, young writers attempt to master basic grammar and sentence structure (Pfeiffer and Sivasubramaniam, 2016, p. 95).

According to Kohonen et al. (2001: 145) “schools are seen as production plants, curricula as production plans, students as raw materials, teachers as production managers or producers of ‘educational commodities’” and so on. With this mindset, students find reading and writing in school demotivating. Having this attitude could explain to students' their incapacity to write fluently at a tertiary level.

It appears that when students read and write just because they need to pass exams and graduate, it is unlikely that they will appreciate the value of what they read and write. Hence, it is likely that such a situation will influence them to view literacy as a mechanical acquisition of reading and writing skills. Accordingly, their view of literacy fails to transcend its literal meaning for want of a meaning that will emphasise its transformative educational and constructive social nature. In effect, our students become

casualties of "a cultural ignorance and categorical stupidity crucial to the silencing of all potentially critical voices" (Giroux in Freire and Macedo, 1987: 13).

As a result, we should not presuppose that our students have acquired functional competencies in reading and writing, but rather notice a lack of capacity in our students to understand how their world is affected by their reading and writing and in turn, how their reading and writing affect their world. My observation and belief is that our students are illiterate even if they can read and write. There is a further assumption that this kind of illiteracy has far-reaching implications in that it not only threatens the economic status of a society but also constitutes an injustice by preventing the "illiterates" from making decisions for themselves or from participating in the process of educational and social change.

My view is that the poverty of writing and the culture of ignorance it creates need to be addressed in higher learning institutions (McCormick, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1995). I wish to propose a concept of literacy that encourages democratic and liberatory change and that as a result, this concept of literacy enhances the possibility to educate our students about the dialectical relationships between them and the world on the one hand and language and change on the other (Freire and Macedo, 1987). In light of this, language pedagogies and practices that target and signify students' experiences and responses assume immediacy and primacy. I argue that such pedagogies will be able to teach our students to assert their rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, I surmise that it will not only teach our students to read, understand and transform their own experiences but will also teach them to reconstruct their relationship with their society. In addition, I believe that certain language pedagogies will guide our students to be better equipped to process knowledge that is beyond their experience and to view their reading and writing as acts of empowerment (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

The issues discussed so far reflect my faith in the potential that reading and writing have for nurturing critical consciousness, especially when delivered through pedagogies of response.

Many universities homogenise their teachers to teach in a particular way and pressurise their students to learn in a particular way. These universities that homogenise their teachers and students into specific ways of functioning feel they will provide for better control and power relations.

Very often universities use set course books that impart themselves to fact-based and transference-based models of teaching and learning. As a result, there is little or no scope for both the teacher and the students to reclaim their language. The outcome in such instances is that neither the teacher nor the student can reformulate their language. Thus, the teaching and learning of language fails to evolve critical and creative consciousness in the classroom.

In order to promote learning through personal "response" and experience, I looked to literary text(s) of an evolutionary nature that can facilitate the deployment of literature pedagogy. I found that the beneficial and challenging content of literary texts that relate to daily living can serve to demolish the course book drills and the culture of ignorance it creates. I, therefore, intend to lay the foundations for using literature of daily living, one that relates to students' joys, fears, sorrows, abstractions, hopes and intuitions, to help them become better writers.

1.2 Aims and Scope of this Study

My research aims to investigate the use of literary text of an evolutionary nature and journal writing in a Communications classroom. This study aspires to generate an understanding of the strong relationship between the teaching of language and the teaching of literature relating to the daily living of students whose mother tongue is English and those whose mother tongue is not English, thereby illustrating how the recognition of the varied ways in which language and literature of this nature are related and integrated and could offer benefits to the classroom (Brumfit and Carter, 1986).

By addressing linguistic, methodological and pedagogical issues and the corresponding values that accrue from them, my research will appraise the use of literary texts of an evolutionary nature in the classroom as a means of promoting student-centred pedagogies and practices in writing. The rationale for this investigation is to use a literary text of an evolutionary nature, which transcends a fundamental approach to expressive writing. The use of such literature based on daily living, where emotions like hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, abstractions and intuitions are expressed, has been viewed as the most suitable form of literature to address expressive writing. In essence, with this kind of literature, the students read the literature texts and react to it in writing, which means that they would need to write something that is a reaction to what they had read and is, in a sense, an act of aesthetic reading. Hence, in this kind of reading, one explores the work and oneself. Rosenblatt (2005: 25) argues that in aesthetic reading, the

reader's attention is centred directly on what he/she is living through during his/her relationship with that text.

Bearing that in mind, this study notes that there is no need for the students to acquire knowledge of critical concepts, literary conventions and meta-language, which is often used while talking or reading about literature of this nature.

In upholding a subject view of literature as formulated by Widdowson (1975), the rationale suggests that:

1. The emphasis be placed on expressive language-based approaches to literary texts as they provide a "way into" the text.
2. The teacher acts as an enabler in helping students to develop a sense of involvement with the text and in helping them to explore and express their perceptions that accrue from their emotional and experiential involvement with the text of their daily living.

Linked to Widdowson's rationale for the subjective view on literature, I argue that the students will not fall short of the chance to discover the rules of language and language use through sustained and initiated appreciations of the discursal value of connected language (Carter and Long, 1991; Widdowson, 1975).

By the same token, I was curious to find out if the use of literary texts of an evolutionary nature:

1. can motivate students to become better writers,
2. can promote learning through "response" rather than learning by rote, and
3. can develop language awareness and a sense of literacy.

Ergo, I argue that by integrating personal "response" to literary texts of an evolutionary nature, we can lead writers to believe that grammatical accuracy is not that important since writing as an acceptance of the belief that error is developmental and evolutionary, rather than deficient and nonstandard. I suggest that literature of this nature can be gainfully deployed in the educational practice of reading and writing. It will be further argued that the scope provided by literature, based on daily living, can provide provisional interpretations through writing, which can bring about constructive educational and social change. The envisaged scheme of investigation will use a qualitative research methodology. Based on this

choice, my book, which is predicated on this study, will describe the dynamics and outcomes of a second language (L2) phenomenon influenced using literary texts of an evolutionary nature. I hope that such a description will provide an understanding of that phenomenon from the perspective of participants, that is, the students and ourselves.

The phenomenon to be investigated necessitates me to propose the following research questions:

1. How do students participating in this case study understand expressive writing?
2. How does the (socio) cognitive process influence the participating student's ability to write?
3. Which type of writing exercises will help the participating students to improve their writing?

I hope that these questions will augment my understanding of a student-centred pedagogy and the practices that can accrue using literary texts and journal writing. The research questions that I have proposed, require a research design that allow triangulation through multiple source data collection. In this respect, my data collection procedures have shaped the core of the classroom story that my research proposes to construct in order to answer the questions it has raised.

With this in mind, my research has created a self-directed, transformational and experiential learning complement cognition through reflection, thus allowing the teacher to become a facilitator for student engagement (Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007 as cited in Rodrigues-Garcia, 2014). Therefore, it should be noted that the procedures used in this study were not devised just for the sake of collecting data; rather, they are an indivisible part of a curriculum design and classroom methodology signifying the overall educational ideology of the researchers. In this book, I plan to use multiple writing exercises and provisional interpretations of evolving literary texts to promote an appreciation of writing. I hope that such interactions will serve to de-emphasise the exam-centred university atmosphere and encourage students to view their reading and writing as acts of social involvement.

1.3 Context of the Study

The context of this study was a literary-based language programme which I initiated. The programme is longitudinal in that it spreads over two semesters

and has three stages requiring 320 hours of classroom work during this time. The students who participated in my study were members of an engineering communication class, a course that all first-year students have to attend. In selecting students, I was familiar with what they were studying, and I was able to construct topics for the writing sessions that legitimately reflected classroom work.

This study attempted to determine the centrality of a literature-based approach to L2 learners, whether that approach can address the L2 "angst" at a university in the Western Cape, South Africa and whether it could have general implications for other universities. The L2 angst referred to here manifests itself in symptoms such as rote learning, little or no inclination to read or write, exam-oriented learning habits, poor motivation to attend and participate in communications class and increasing failure rate. These symptoms are educational and sociocultural problems, and this study hopes to find solutions to them by bringing about a change in the students' attitudes and approaches to writing. As this study was situated in a South African context, it is necessary to discuss the context with reference to some aspects of culture and its implications for the classroom. The following discussion aims to do that.

First and foremost, I wish to caution that the ensuing description of the context is not meant to be "an objective window on reality" (Edge and Richards, 1998: 340). I prefer that my study be viewed as a dynamic and discursive meaning structure that I constructed as "the teacher of a continuity and community of shared understanding with learners" (Candlin and Mercer, 2001: 7). In this regard, the emotional and affective involvement that I had with the students will form the basis of my understanding of the context as a sociocultural classroom phenomenon. Working with, relating to and getting to know my students daily can create an interactive approach that enhances teaching, I aimed to develop the rapport and the trust necessary for this study.

Based on the above-mentioned issues, I propose to interpret the context of this study against the backdrop of many of my students coming from very "wobbly" family structures, where they are faced with the sad reality of broken homes, estranged parents, single parents and parents not being there for them. It will be helpful to view these as interrelated ways by which my students behave and react to classroom attendance and in performing tasks in class.

Barret, Bower and Donovan (2007: 46) assure that “it will take more study and a better understanding of the factors influencing instructional style to facilitate the evolution to a truly learner-centred environment”. For this purpose, another motivation to undertake this study had been stimulated due to the outside factors influencing my instructional style.

1.4 Definitions

The following terms used in my study are defined for both ease of reference and better understanding

English as a second language (ESL): A program designed to offer acquisition and development of English language communicative skills in reading, writing, pronunciation and grammar to students native to languages other than English (Cohen, 2008).

First Language (L1): A first language (also native language, mother tongue, arterial language, or **L1**) is the language(s) a person has learnt from birth or within the critical period, or that a person speaks the best and so is often the basis for sociolinguistic identity (Wikipedia).

Second Language (L2): More informally, a second language or **L2** can be said to be any language learnt in addition to one's mother tongues, especially in the context of second language acquisition (that is, learning a new foreign language) (Wikipedia).

Noticeable students: Worthy or deserving of notice or attention (dictionary). This definition is very fitting with reference to my students because that is exactly the way I saw them: as worth noticing. I hope that my data will help justify this metaphorical categorisation.

Distinguished students: Known by many people because of some quality or achievement (Merriam-Webster). This metaphorical categorisation compliments these students because I found that they possessed some qualities worth seeing, which I hope will be further distinguished in my investigation.

Literature of daily living (evolutionary): Entails literature that affects emotions, motives, features of personality and forms of cognition. It is the interactions between "human nature" and the forms of cultural imagination, including literature and its oral antecedents.

1.5 Significance of my Study

This study was conducted to raise awareness of meaningful literacy, proposing that this pedagogy can be a way to promote a humanistic language classroom. I used this case study as an exercise in eclectic humanism, so that it can be seen in a humanistic way. It presents an introduction to meaningful literacy by using fourteen participants performing various writing tasks, journal entries and interviews. The students' writing tasks and journal entries were quite personal and allowed them the scope to express themselves freely from a personal perspective.

Although this study cannot be considered a full-term experience of meaningful literacy, it has exposed participants to the practice of meaningful literacy (Alosaimi, 2014). This study was intended to raise awareness in language teachers and provide an opportunity for them to consider meaningful literacy as an approach for creating a contextualised learning experience for promoting L2 writing. By highlighting English Second Language (ESL) learners'/teachers' reflections on the value of meaningful literacy, my study can add further knowledge to effective ways for humanising language learning and use it in an ESL context (Alosaimi, 2014). Furthermore, I propose a methodology, which I believe can be easily executed in any L2 writing classroom or can be integrated as a part of teacher education programs.

My study is significant considering its benefits for the participants. This is the first time that such a study of this scale and substance has been implemented at a university in South Africa. This study was executed to serve as a consciousness-raising exercise in which language teachers have the chance to experience and think about the advantages of meaningful literacy instruction and how to apply it in their future teaching contexts. Another point of significance about this study is that the participants could attain greater understanding of the value of meaningful literacy practices by sharing their perceptions about its role in developing L2 writing.

Moreover, since the consciousness-raising exercise included different writing genres—personal response, course-based exams and literary texts of an evolutionary nature—this study can be pivotal to enhancing the participants' genre awareness. In addition, by exploring the participants' pedagogical recommendations based on their experiences in the current meaningful literacy exercise, this research aimed to provide a detailed justification for implementing a meaningful literacy approach from an English language teacher perspective.

Finally, in conjunction with what Alosaimi (2104) raises in her study, since I too homed in on the consciousness-raising exercise that meaningful literacy utilised in my students' personal experiences, feelings and beliefs as the context for language use, this study intends to deepen the understanding of the real purpose for language learning and writing. My study also aimed to lean on the importance of integrating learners' personal lives into L2 writing, to allow new perspectives about L2 learning and writing wherein language learning and writing can be viewed as personally meaningful activities. I also intended to understand the expansion of literature that focuses on journal and autobiography writing as the mainstay of expressive writing, as it allows a medium for students to write about themselves.

1.6 Attitude and Beliefs Underlying my Stance

The educational and social nature of this study demands a discussion of my stance and the implications for the choice of epistemology employed in my investigation. I hope that the ensuing discussion will provide the synergy for my investigation and the underpinnings it needs to justify the how and why of the methods employed and their outcomes.

Briefly, my discussion attempts to define the governing dynamic of this study in terms of the epistemology I have chosen to implement. The epistemology of this study is meant to dispute the scientific/rationalistic/technological approach to our world and the one-sided view of human beings that arise from it as a result. There appears to be confusion about what science projects as a rationalistic representation of life and the real, personally meaningful lived life of the human being (Sivasubramaniam, 2004). I suggest that the quantitatively measured, value-free knowledge of science is fundamentally different from the personalised and panoramic knowledge that human beings live by in their daily lives. In light of this, the conceptualisation of language teaching and language learning attempted by the rationalistic-scientific epistemology in quantitative approaches fails to account for the lived experiences of the teacher and the students (Kohonen et al., 2001).

Researchers have argued that the research data in education is usually obtained from human beings and that the compulsion to quantify them as seen in a rationalistic epistemology reduce human beings to test scores, mean scores and experimental objects (Bailey in Byrnes, 1998: 81-82). Such a stance is not consistent with the educational values that underlie this study. Hence, I argue that this study discards an objectivist epistemology in favour of a subjectivist/constructivist epistemology. This means that I do not

expect knowledge to come as a product of impersonal procedures designed to support a scientific inquiry at a neutral site, but rather to regard knowledge and its meaning as outcomes of experience in a given social context and at a given time and place (Bleich in Cooper, 1985: 269-272).

In articulating a subjectivist/constructivist epistemology, this study signals an urgency to question research postures that directly focus and supply energy that is fitting to human nature and society into exact rational categories. Thus, this study aims to recognise the need to contextualise its questions and interpret knowledge as an outcome of that contextualisation (Chopra, 2000; Polanyi, 1958; Toulmin, 1990).

In order to find a suitable way of describing the uniqueness of an individual's perception both from the participant's' point of view and the researcher's, this study will assign immediacy and primacy to the dynamics of response. Having incorporated a subjectivist/constructivist epistemology, this study will examine and emphasise the implications of such an epistemology for my research. I hope that the following discussion can serve to totalise my stance in addition to providing a basis for both making value judgments and justifying them.

However, preceding that, I need to reinforce my research questions and direct the proposed discussion with reference to each of them. I believe this will add impetus to the proposed discussion:

1. How do students participating in this case study understand expressive writing?
2. How does the (socio) cognitive process influence the participating students' ability to write?
3. Which type of writing exercises will help the participating students to improve their writing?

1. How do students participating in this case study understand expressive writing?

Everybody learns to speak at least one language fluently, but many are unable to write with confidence. One must learn that writing normally requires some form of instruction which is not a skill that is readily picked up by exposure; it is like reading, although its social role is very different.

The command of writing gives access to certain cognitive, conceptual, social and political arenas (Tribble, 1996) whereby the person who commands both the forms of writing and of speech is therefore constructed in a

fundamentally different way from the person who commands the forms of speech alone. "“Learning to write is not just a question of developing a set of mechanical ‘orthographic’ skills, it also involves learning a new set of cognitive and social relations”, as stated by Tribble (1996). Abbott et al. (2012) argue that research on writing alone is typically grounded in the cognitive processes of writing such as planning, translating and reviewing/revising, rather than on the levels of language involved in translating ideas into a written product.

The personal nature of writing differs among individuals because for some people writing comes easily whereas for others it is a continual struggle. Commenting on the research done on writing, Smith (1982) claims that writing has drawn alongside reading as a matter of educational concern and has perhaps overtaken it as a target of educational and psychological research.

Writing can contribute to every aspect of our lives. It can be an extension and reflection of all our efforts to develop and express ourselves in a world around us, to make sense of that world and to impose order upon it. Not many people write very much, yet writing is something that everyone ought to be able to do and enjoy as naturally as singing, dancing or playing. Writing is full of inhibitions for most of us. Instead of asking why so few people learn to write well and enjoy writing, we might ask why so many come not to enjoy it and therefore lose the desire to engage in it (Smith, 1982).

Students must realise that writing, like reading, can serve as an extension and reflection of all our efforts towards self-development and empowerment. The aim is to get students to enjoy writing. Students must realise that literature educates human emotions whereby we channel our emotional energies and provide an emotional release; that an engagement with literature exercises our senses more actively than we can otherwise achieve. The educational value of any engagement with language studies is mainly derived from a stance that views language to be “an essential element of a human being’s thought processes, perceptions and self-expressions; and as such it is considered to be at the core of translingual and transcultural competence” (MLA, 2007: 235 as cited in Rodrigues-Garcia, 2014). Hence, the needed curricular reform should place “language study in cultural, historical, geographic, and cross-cultural frames within the context of humanistic learning” (MLA, 2007: 238 as cited in Rodrigues-Garcia, 2014).

The philosophical and educational foundations of expressive writing and its development as a pedagogical tool are examined in this study through the technique of expressive thinking. The use of autobiographical writing, journal entries and personal response, could assist with expressive thinking.

2. How does the (socio) cognitive process influence the participating students' ability to write.

According to Hayes (2012), there is a distinction between the writer, the writer's task environment and the writer's long-term memory. The attempt to identify separate interacting writing subprocesses and the importance of the text produced so far are all still regarded as useful ideas. In this study, I wish to address how to combine motivation with cognitive processes and to show how motivation is important in writing and through that, how it influences students' willingness to engage in writing. Observations suggest that whether people write, how long they write and how much they attend to the quality of what they write will depend on their motivations.

Many researchers argue that learning English as a second language is decontextualised even if it is used in a communicative setting or is based on the authentic use of language (Hanauer, 2012; Kramsch, 2006, 2009; Widdowson, 1978). Alosaimi (2014) believes that this perception is based on the idea that by focusing on the cognitive, structural, linguistic and communicative aspects of language learning, ESL pedagogy has lost the vision of "the flesh and blood individuals who are doing the learning" (Kramsch, 2006: 98). This means that emphasising language learning as an intellectual act has marginalised learners' sense of individuality to the extent that learners' experiences, emotions and personal expressions are avoided in the language classroom (Alosaimi, 2014). As a result, this study also wishes to address the difficulty that language learners go through in expressing themselves meaningfully in the second language or even have a sense of authorship and ownership.

It should be noted that any learning, particularly humanistic learning in an educational context, is first and foremost language-based learning (Halliday, 1993, 1999a). This means that the centrality of language can be conveyed only if all educational practice acknowledges that "the development of desired mental skills is entirely dependent on the mastery of the linguistic pattern in which these skills are realized" and "that 'knowledge' itself is constructed in varying patterns of discourse" (Christie, 1989: 153).

Essentially, this research not only draws considerably less attention and obtains its foci from developments in reading but also treats writing primarily to display evolving knowledge of language forms. As Bernhardt (1991: 235) states: “second language learners ... essentially have to ‘read to learn’ and ‘write to demonstrate learning’”.

3. Which type of writing exercises will help the participating students to improve their writing.

Classroom-based studies must investigate how students learn how to write in a second language. It is therefore equally important to learn how students learn a second language through writing (Haklau, 1999: 329).

Students must realise that writing is an activity designed to create a text for some kind of audience and that within this broad definition, it is useful to identify certain specialised writing activities (Hayes, 2012). What we most commonly think of as writing is the activity of producing text to be read by other people, for example, writing articles or school essays. This is formal writing where the author meets the standards for spelling, grammar and other rules of good communication. Besides formal writing, there is also journal or autobiographical writing where the writer is the sole audience and here the formal rules may be relaxed.

Language learning should be perceived as a human activity for facilitating personal expression and reflection. Hence, Lapidus, Kaveh and Hirano (2013) and Park (2013a, 2013b) explored autobiographical writing as a method for constructing L2 identity. In this study, I used autobiographical writing, journal writing and literary text of an evolutionary nature which I thought may contribute to expressive writing. In a setting where writing was the focus, the engagement with texts of an evolutionary nature did not involve textual modelling at a level of specificity that might subsequently enhance writing.

I approached this study in a more general treatment of the structure of texts that might work well for university students, in which I assumed that the students had gained appreciable language knowledge and had been exposed to various literacy events that gave them a feel for the texts I used. I aimed to develop students’ writing by creating situationally appropriate texts that recognise their current meaning-making capacities and simultaneously push them to continue to develop their meaning-making resources and by extension, their writing abilities over an extended curricular progression.

1.7 Organisation of the Chapters of the Study

This book consists of five chapters.

Chapter One serves as an introduction. It discusses a set of educational and social concerns that act as an awareness-building exercise and a point of departure for this study. It discusses the aims, scope, rationale, context, definitions and significance of this study and my stance underlying its epistemology.

Chapter Two presents a literature review that focuses on insights and issues in L2 writing. It examines various models of reading and writing and assigns centrality to expressive models of writing in this study. It also discusses crucial theoretical constructs that relate to the deployment of literacy in L2 classrooms. It attempts critical engagement with methods and materials that articulate the use of literary text of an evolutionary nature as a resource for language teaching and their implications for classroom research. It also discusses the importance of a constructivist approach to knowledge in this study regarding some theories of education.

Chapter Three presents a rationale for the presentation and analysis of data and attempts a description and analysis of the data gathered in relation to the research questions raised by this study.

Chapter Four presents a discussion of findings. It interprets the findings as relates the research questions along with the underlying epistemology of this study.

Chapter Five presents the conclusions of this study with reference to the research questions and the findings. It discusses the limitations of this study, revisits some of the ideas presented in the literature review, revisits the significance of this study and lists the implications of the findings for future research.

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CHAPTER TWO

ALL ABOUT WRITING

“Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership
of that freed self was another.”
—Toni Morrison (1987)

As educators we should consider the following questions as posed by Spandel and Stiggins (1997: 3): (i) What are we teaching, when we teach writing? (ii) Is it form and function? (iii) Is it the thinking behind the writing? (iv) Should it be some of each? (v) Should we consider each of these questions, then we must make room in the curriculum not only for informational and technical writing, research writing, journalist reporting, business writing, persuasion writing and literary analysis but for creative and reflective writing as well.

When it comes to academic writing, it is all about what happens during the actual writing and the strategies the writer adopts before engaging in the writing process (prewriting, planning, editing, revising, writing). Tierney’s (2002: 385) understanding of the “how” of writing, is that “our texts are built more in relation to fiction and storytelling, rather than in response to the norms of science and logical empiricism”. With this in mind, it is believed that this effort in writing is not merely experimental but “personal, political and intellectual, reflecting the qualitative effort toward more engaging, more useful texts that ‘change minds and hearts’ as well as the norms of academic writing” (Foley: 2002: 383).

2.1. Defining Expressive Writing

The philosophical and educational foundations of expressive writing and its development as a pedagogical tool are examined in this book through the technique of expressive thinking.

Students have to understand that expressive writing is not so-called "creative writing" in which the writer essentially "plays" without purpose or structure (Foulk and Hoover, 1996). Expressive writing is the act of thinking

on paper something one probably does every day in the course of one's research, composition and planning processes; it also deals with observations, analyses and insights designed for a writer's personal use (Foulk and Hoover, 1996).

Expressive writing has also been defined as a manner of making connections between the "known" and the "new" on paper and writing for the purpose of displaying knowledge or supporting self-expression (Graham and Harris, 1989; Russell, Baker and Edwards, 1999, Pfeiffer and Sivasubramaniam, 2016). Even though the above definition was aimed at students with learning disabilities, I have adopted this definition and found that its definition of expressive writing also applies to students without learning disabilities, meaning that the definition may be useful even to students who are struggling writers at tertiary level. In addition, Foulk and Hoover (1996: 3) defined expressive writing as a form of writing in which the writer is her/his own audience. They also argue that writing needs to be evaluated by no one other than the writer. With expressive writing, one can commit thought (related to emotions) to what can be seen on paper. Expressive writing is a form of writing that enhances the learning process (Foulk and Hoover, 1996). Psychologists have used the expressive writing paradigm by asking participants to write generally about their thoughts and emotions regarding traumatic life experiences. Expressive writing has also been used as writing prompts such as writing about life goals, one's best possible self, or an imagined traumatic event (Henry et al., 2010). What is seen here is that expressive writing was not used to improve the participants' writing but rather to engage their emotions. The point being that when using expressive writing, your emotions are involved. These emotions can be joy, sadness, hope and healing. Thus, I decided to use this expressive writing technique with my first-year engineering students to improve their academic writing. This meant that the students first had to do some personal response writing with the use of expressive writing, to improve their academic writing. The use of expressive writing helped the L2 students develop confidence in writing in English, which I will examine further in my discussion chapter.

Furthermore, Spigelman (1996: 120) argues that an expressive essay is a form of writing that is easier to recognise than to classify. She discovered that the term *expressive* has been applied to a variety of textual forms over the centuries, including poetry, plays and novels as well as to instructional methods, like freewriting or writing in journals, which in fact do not represent a specific discourse category. Researchers argue that expressive writing pedagogy resulted from the good faith efforts of many writing teachers to encourage students to find and express their individual "voices".