

Rethinking Writing Pedagogy for Equity: Organising Students' Experience in the Classroom

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Research Overview

Writing is central to participation in contemporary society, yet literacy gaps persist for disadvantaged students across OECD systems (OECD, 2018, 2023, 2024), including Australia, where national testing continues to show gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged students (Ng et al., 2024). This calls for closer attention to writing pedagogy in disadvantaged contexts. This paper reports findings from a naturalistic study of writing instruction in a middle years classroom in a low-SES Queensland school, with implications for equitable writing pedagogy internationally.

Purpose of Study

This study examined how writing instruction was organised to facilitate students' lived experience during a secondary school writing unit. This focus addresses a persistent limitation in research on writing instruction, which privileges discrete skills, performance indicators, and measurable outcomes (Ng et al., 2024). Even when affect, imagination, identity, and perspective-taking are acknowledged, they are often treated as by-products of instruction rather than as dimensions actively shaped through pedagogy (Barton et al., 2024; Camacho, Alves, & Boscolo, 2021; Vossoughi et al., 2022). As a result, how teaching organises the lived experience of writing remains underexplored, especially in disadvantaged contexts.

The study conceptualises pedagogy as the organisation of lived experience through Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1994). *Perezhivanie* refers to the unity of emotional, cognitive, and relational experience through which learners live through and make sense of situations (Ng & Renshaw, 2019). Rather than separating emotion from cognition, it highlights how meaning emerges through the dynamic relation between learners and their pedagogically organised environments (Blunden, 2016; Roth & Jornet, 2016; Veresov & Fleer, 2016). While *perezhivanie* has often been used to analyse learners' experiences (e.g. Ng, 2021; Ng & Renshaw, 2019), it has been less frequently used to analyse pedagogy itself. The study therefore asked: How did classroom teaching practices facilitate the lived experience (*perezhivanie*) of students in a low-SES secondary school writing unit?

Research Methods

The study adopted a naturalistic qualitative case study design. The case was a Year 8 English classroom in an Australian secondary school serving a low socio-economic community. Over a ten-week unit, students studied a literary text set in an Islamic cultural context and completed a narrative "gap story" from the perspective of a secondary character. The unit foregrounded cultural difference, ethical positioning, and first-person narration, making it a productive site for examining how pedagogy organises lived experience in writing.

Data collection comprised fifteen full-lesson observations (1,050 minutes), semi-structured interviews with the teacher and ten students, and instructional materials and student texts. Classroom observation was the primary data source because the analysis focused on pedagogy as enacted over time. This “being there” stance aligns with microgenetic approaches to capturing meaning as it emerges in learning settings (Saxe & Esmonde, 2005). Detailed fieldnotes documented pedagogical actions, interactional patterns, affective tone, and transitions between activities. Analysis followed a recursive abductive process (Tavory & Timmermans, 2022), through which repeated reading and memoing identified a recurring pattern of pedagogical movement. A coding scheme was inductively developed around two didactic movements, *moving in* and *moving out*, and applied across four lesson domains: writing practice, cultural understanding, character experience, and story plotting.

Results and Discussion

The analysis showed that teaching in this classroom was systematically organised through patterned movement into and out of lived experience. Across the four pedagogical domains, teaching consistently oriented students into affective, embodied, and imaginative engagement, then guided them out through reflection, articulation, interpretation, and regulation. These movements formed an oscillating pedagogical rhythm within and across lessons, rather than a linear progression from experience to abstraction.

This pattern is conceptualised as a *moving in–moving out pedagogy of perezhivanie*. Moving in involved sensory immersion, first-person positioning, embodied cultural activity, and invitations to inhabit a character’s world. Moving out involved dialogue, explanation, reflective sharing, narrative constraint, and revision. One illustrative lesson centred on *Wudu*, an Islamic ritual practice referenced in the class novel. Students were first moved into experience through direct sensory engagement with water, then moved out through discussion of its cultural and religious significance, before moving back into experience through a first-person writing task and finally out again through reflective sharing.

For an international audience, the significance of these findings lies in their implications for equitable literacy pedagogy. In many systems, disadvantaged students are expected to improve writing through narrow instructional models focused on skill acquisition and assessment. This study shows that pedagogy matters not only because it teaches writing skills, but because it shapes whether writing becomes meaningful, imaginable, and livable for students. Its contribution is both theoretical and practical; it offers a pedagogical lens for understanding how writing instruction can support richer engagement, especially for students whose educational experiences are often narrowed by deficit assumptions and performance pressures. In this way, the study speaks to broader international concerns about literacy, equity, and pedagogies that expand rather than constrain students’ participation in writing.

Keywords: writing; pedagogy; equity; Vygotsky; disadvantaged students

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