3 Theories of Writing and Development

Introduction

Before we address existing models of writing development – both process-related models and product-related models – we need to think about the relationship between learning and development; and also between writing and meaning-making. These are two large areas that need clarification, as well as a stating of our own position, so that subsequent chapters can be built on a relatively firm foundation. Part of the problem with writing development theory is that it has not addressed these two key issues. It has operated as though the development of writing can be studied in a vacuum.

Current theories of learning and development

Two books by Illeris (2007, 2009) provide a helpful guide to the current state of learning theory. What is interesting is that they have less to say about development. This is surprising, given that cognitive development has been a central preoccupation of learning theory for much of the twentieth century; and that other kinds of development (physical, emotional, ‘maturational’, experiential, social) must have a bearing on writing development. Indeed, if we look at the index of the first of these titles, How We Learn: Learning and Non-learning in School and Beyond, ‘development’ is given scant attention. Illeris notes in defining learning that: ‘The term “development” is understood as an umbrella term for learning and maturation, and I thus regard the “classical” conflict in psychology concerning whether learning comes before development or vice versa (see Vygotsky 1986 [1934], pp260ff.) to be mistaken. Learning is part of development’ (p. 3).

‘Development’, then, for Illeris is at such a general level of signification as to be hardly worth addressing in the book. This is an interesting position, as it assumes that learning and development are more or less synonymous; and/or that it is not worth considering development as a category that is useful in thinking about progress in learning. Later,
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however, he maps the position of various theorists in the learning field, and has as one of the axes of a learning triangle the work of developmental psychologists like Piaget (at the ‘content’ end of the spectrum) and Freud (at the ‘incentive’ end, though Freud is acknowledged as only addressing learning indirectly). So development does have a kind of significance: in mapping the field of learning, it provides one side of a (triangular) field, the other two of which are represented by activity theory and socialization theory.

In the later, edited book, Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists ... in their Own Words, there is no mention of development in the index, though the term occurs in many of the chapters. The assumption must be that development is of such pervasive significance in learning theory as to be of no significance.

Avoiding the polemical pitfalls of the classical conflict mentioned above – briefly, whether development precedes learning (Piaget) or learning precedes development (Vygotsky) – our own view is that it is worth distinguishing between learning and development. We attempt to define the terms of engagement here so that they can be clearly used in the rest of the book, informing our discussion of writing development models.

Learning we take to be a transformational process and act resulting from engagement with or within a community. It is an act that moves us forward in some way. Traditionally, that ‘moving forward’ has been conceived as a cognitive step or steps; and it is also seen as progression in knowledge, so that epistemological dimensions are taken into account. But the traditional cognitive/epistemological axis of learning does not seem to us to account fully for the act of learning. First, learning is transformational in that it marks a change from a previous state of being/knowledge/awareness. That is to say, the learner is different at the end of the learning process than he/she was at the beginning. He/she may have acquired a new (small) segment of knowledge – for example, he/she may have learnt that in some countries, you drive on the right-hand side of the road, and in others, on the left. At the other end of the spectrum, he/she may have undergone a major learning experience which will have changed the paradigms or values for learning completely – for example, learning that the world is a spherical orb in a galaxy of other planets rather than flat territory at the centre of one’s personal ‘universe’ is a major transformational act.

Second, learning is an effect of community (Rogoff 1992). That is to say, the very fact of being part of a community leads to learning about the values, mores, knowledge and other aspects of that community, whether it is a family, school, special interest society, or a wider socio-political group. We can build on Rogoff’s Vygotskian conception to say that learning is an effect of communities: we all belong to a number of communities,
real-world and electronic, of varying degrees of networked intensity, which interact with each other through our own activities. Not only do we learn by being part of a community, then; we also learn by navigating between different communities and gaining from the tensions and complementarities at the interfaces of those communities.

We are not so interested in learning outcomes; to reduce learning to a set of identifiable targets and commodities seems to us to diminish its power. Rather, we see learning as a process that can transform us personally (emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, physically, and so on) but also help us to contribute to social and political dimensions of learning (adding to a socially agreed body of knowledge, using learning to change the world). Learning is thus seen as a verb in its original sense (the present participle of the verb ‘to learn’) but subsequently as a gerund (the noun ‘learning’): remembering its origin as a verb reminds us that it is a process, an action. There is no doubt, then, that learning takes place both outside as well as inside school. Throughout the present book on writing development, we see the development of writers taking place in communities of practice: these can be formal schooling communities, or they can be out-of-school communities like writing groups, families, online communities or special interest societies.

Development need not be a transformational act nor result from engagement with a community or communities. So the first points to make about it stem from its differences from learning. Development can take place over a period of time. It is a result of a combination of any of the strands of separate development that we have characterized earlier: emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual, cognitive, moral, experiential, social or ‘maturational’. It results not so much from an act of learning, which could happen in an instant of time, as from a succession of acts of learning that add up to a stage in development. Furthermore, development need not be social or community based. It could be (and usually is conceived of as being) individual.

Later in this chapter, once we have also considered the relationship between writing and meaning-making and communicating in general, we will come back to the question of writing development (and of developing writers). For now, we need to explore in more depth the notion of development per se. In addition to the points that distinguish it from learning, we could also say that development usually has positive associations. That is true of learning too, though learning could be negative (we can imagine social situations in which learning about poverty through experiencing it could have negative consequences in later life). But development suggests positive individual maturation. Furthermore, to say that someone has developed suggests that they have integrated various aspects of learning along with normally occurring physical and social growth. Development
assumes change in time. One of our key assumptions in the present book is that writing development is a complex, multi-dimensional (or, to change the metaphor, multi-stranded) phenomenon that has yet to be given full attention by the academic community, let alone by practitioners who teach writing. The temporal dimension is one that is important to any fuller account of how young and older people learn to write.

**Writing and meaning-making**

Writing is both a means of making sense – ‘how can I tell what I think till I see what I say?’ (Forster 1927/1976:99) – as well as a means of communicating with others. As we will explore later in the chapter on writing and multimodality, writing has particular affordances as a means of representation and as a ‘language’ or mode of communication. We will leave the discussion of its affordances in systemic terms until later. Here we look particularly at writing as meaning-making.

Writing has often been seen (for example, by Vygotsky) as a secondary symbolic system, based on speech. It is understandable how such a conception could form: speech comes first in the child; writing comes second, and seems in many ways to be used to represent speech; writing has dialogic properties that seem to be borrowed from speech; writing systems, at least in the alphabetic written languages, seem to be based on a broad (though often inexact) correspondence with speech-sounds. And yet it could not be said that the writing system in Modern Standard Written Chinese or its larger set of classic Chinese characters could be based on speech, as that system is ideographic rather than grapho-phonemic. Furthermore, it is the case that written systems have operated alongside spoken systems of communication – as far as we know – throughout time. It is more accurate to say that writing systems operate alongside spoken systems, often with close correspondence but sometimes not.

Learning to write in English, then, is a different matter from learning to write in Chinese. Not only do the two languages (English/English and Mandarin, or any other Chinese dialect/Modern Standard Written Chinese) have different written systems; the underpinning logic of those systems is different. The English alphabet, shared with other European languages, is predicated on a linear logic which suggests that strings of letters in particular sequences made into words, and then strings of words in particular sequences, constitute meaning. In Chinese and other ideographic written systems, the relationship between elements of the ‘character’ or concept are spatial rather than sequential. Within a square space, the elements are put together to compose a concept. Many of these abstract concepts carry the residual visual identity of the originally drawn
characters; as spatial written systems, they are inevitably more visual than aural. And yet the changing of meanings in time results in the fact that the Chinese characters carry metaphorical nuances of their concrete origins.

If written systems operate alongside spoken systems, the implications is that they develop their own ways of making and representing meaning. These ways of meaning-making can be termed affordances. The affordances of writing in English is that they stand at an abstracted level away from felt or perceived experience: one can stand in an uninscribed landscape and speak to another person – perhaps a fellow walker or climber – and the voice leaves no trace on the landscape. But to write something in that landscape, whether it is inscribed on the ground with a stick in the dust, or carved into a tree; or whether it is less connected to the landscape, like a note left for future passers-by in a prominent place, or a recorded reflection or observation of particular features of the landscape or experience in a notebook – a notebook that will probably be carried out of the immediate landscape as the walker continues his/her journey – means that writing is to some degree or another abstracted from experience. Such abstraction (‘pulled away from’) is powerful because it allows non-figurative communication. New ideas can be imported; combinations of thought and experience can be made; new configurations explored; and all this can be preserved for future reference. (The same could be said for speech, especially now that it can be easily recorded and preserved. But speech is less considered, more narrow in its verbal range, more part of its immediate environment on the whole.)

Thus writing makes a particular kind of meaning: one that is, in general, transportable; readable; drawing on a wider vocabulary than speech; and preservable. In terms of meaning, it creates – again, on the whole – more orderly, managed, univocal messages than are usual in speech.

**Why writing?**

But the deliberations above do not fully answer the question of why we write at all. They address questions of the relationship of writing as a semiotic system. They do not answer a more fundamental question: why do we write? Why it is seen to be important? And why does education prize it so highly?

To start to answer the fundamental question – why write? – and its attendant questions, we need to go back to the bedrock of writing: verbal language. Verbal languages, which we define as languages that are made up of words, characters or other signs that can be represented in speech or writing, have as their driving force the need for social interaction between people. By ‘verbal’ we mean ‘to do with words’, not merely
‘oral’ languages; we distinguish verbal language, therefore, from visual, physical, musical, mathematical and other ‘languages’. But we include the variety of world languages (English, Spanish, Mandarin, Swahili, etc.) under our generic term ‘verbal language’.

Verbal languages have at least five characteristics that distinguish them from other languages. They are inherently symbolic; they are or can be relatively inexpensive in terms of production; they are relatively free in terms of copyright; they are flexible and develop; and they are carriers (and indeed creators) of a wide range of meaning, from the particular to the abstract, from the concrete to the conceptual. Let us explore each of these characteristics in turn.

The symbolic nature of language is evident in speech as well as in writing. Unlike most forms of visual, physical or musical representation (but like mathematical equations), verbal language is already one step removed from the sensory world of experience. Because words are either seen visually or heard aurally, there is a sensory dimension. But what we are reading or hearing is a symbolic representation of experience and/or abstraction, not the thing itself. Indeed, words operate in a realm of experience that is not primarily sensory. They map experience, in the way that an actual map charts a terrain rather than walks you through it. Each word (or element in other languages, like characters) is a small abstraction from the world of everyday felt experience. The way they are joined to each other – in utterances, sentences – makes for links between these abstractions that can be narrative and/or hierarchical and/or argumentational and/or classificatory in nature. But the words themselves do not all constitute ‘concepts’ as was proposed by Vygotsky; they constitute, instead, the raw material of concepts in the form of abstractions. Concepts are more like fully-fledged amalgams of abstraction, perhaps based on a series or collection of particularities, that have coherence and generalizibility. Abstractions come in all shapes and sizes, and their borders are less defined.

We need to qualify one statement in the previous paragraph: that verbal languages are a representation of experience, not the thing itself. There are many exceptions to this rule, for example in literature where the actual verbal construction is the experience (as in a poem); or in speech act theory where some utterances enact and stand in for experience (as in a declaration at a wedding – ‘I do’ – or a signature to an agreement, which have locutionary, perlocutionary and illocutionary force and import). But even in these examples of language-as-action, the verbal construct only appears to be standing freely from its context. In the case of a poem or experience, other modes of communication and significance are implied or suggested; in the case of a wedding or other legal ceremony, the words signify actions of agreement. So words rarely stand on their own, even in ritualistic and highly formal situations where they appear to do so.
The second characteristic of verbal languages is that they are economical. Speech, at least, is relatively free. It takes air, vocal chords, intention; but these resources are available for other purposes too and seem not to draw heavily on human resources. Writing is different in that it requires mediation other than air: it is inscribed in the sand, on paper, via electronic means. It is much more a part of the physical world than speech in the sense that it is tangible, visual and needs to be transported. When Yeats said of his poetry that ‘he made it out of a mouthful of air’ he was talking about the oral rather than the written version. Writing requires resources, even if these are a simple as a paper and pencil. When we compare written language to the other modes – the visual, physical, aural, etc. – we can see that each draws on a different set of resources. What is flexible about written language is that it can operate with scant resources as well as more expensive, high production resources such as computers, mobile phones and printing presses. What needs to be stressed is the flexibility of written language in terms of its representation and re-representation in various media. Because the individual units – words, characters and their constituent elements – are small and weightless, they are eminently transportable.

The issue of copyright is an unlikely feature to discuss in a book on the nature and development of writing. Nevertheless, the movement that has brought about a commodification and valuation of intellectual property finds itself in a relatively freer zone in the written world than it does in worlds of music and the visual. To suggest that words are more generally free of copyright than other modes is not to ignore the issue of copyright in the verbal domain; it is simply to say that combinations of words are less easily bound, less marketable and thus less subject to copyright law than other modes. It is hard, for instance, to patent an idea without it being framed in a particular sequence of words in the language. But an image or a musical work is more readily identifiable, and thus more of a commodity that can be protected. It is also the case that the music and visual industries fight harder to retain copyright than what we would loosely called the ‘verbal industries’ – except in the case of books, works, particularly achieved sequences of words and other verbal documents.

The flexibility and evolution of human verbal languages is another dimension that requires consideration. Because words, even though they are abstractions, are sometimes close to everyday experience in that they not only describe the world but operate as an invisible fabric of connection in the social world, they reflect changes in the physical world and in the social world. These changes are more readily and immediately observable in oral versions of languages, but they soon become reflected in written versions too. The interesting phenomenon here is that if written languages are more fixed in their spelling systems (in alphabetic languages) or in
characters and scripts, they are likely not to be able to keep up with shifts in pronunciation and dialect in spoken languages. The advantage of standard written versions of a language – standard written English, modern standard written Chinese, classical Arabic, for example – is that they are relatively stable as systems of communication and can this be interpreted by a wide range of people. But they need to be leant because the spoken dialects, accents and languages change more quickly and the gap between the spoken and written version of the language can widen. The flexibility of written language is connected to its evolution. English, for example, has throughout its history absorbed and incorporated words from other languages, creating a colourful, hybrid, extensive range of meanings, allowing nuance between shades of meaning.

Lastly, in terms of characteristics of verbal languages, they ‘are carriers (and indeed creators) of a wide range of meaning, from the particular to the abstract, from the concrete to the conceptual’. The axes suggested here denote something special about verbal languages: they can operate, indeed define and create, across a wide spectrum of possibility. An example is the way in which we use words as search terms in an electronic search engine: it would be hard to conceive of visual or aural or physical coding that could perform the same function. Words can be combined vertically and hierarchically, in terms of categories and concepts; and/or they can be strung in (horizontal) sequences to create logical, descriptive and narrative sets of meaning. It is also possible to create a field of enquiry and its terms of references in verbal languages: a new book on multimodality or on chaos theory will most likely be represented in words, even though part of its conceptions may have been in the visual mode or its initiating impulse may have been rhythmical. Because words can operate in multi-layered, logical and quasi-logical sequences, they are particularly suited to describing complexity and making it explicit.

How does or could the teaching of writing reflect the above?

We could expect issues like those discussed above to be part of study in an advanced level language course in a high school, college or in the early years of university study; but how do such characteristics manifest themselves in the curriculum and pedagogies for writing that take place earlier in schooling, when most of the development in writing is most apparent? These characteristics may, at first sight, seem to be highly abstracted from actual written experience; but our aim in this section is to show that they are, in fact, highly practical and full of possibilities in the writing curriculum and in its pedagogies.
The answer to the question ‘how does the teaching of writing reflect the above?’ is short. In most cases, it does not. There is little awareness in writing curricula about why we write and what its affordances are. For example, questions of the symbolic nature of the written word; of its economy; of intellectual property issues; of its evolution; and of its range, complexity and nuance are rarely addressed. And yet there are practical ways in which such issues can be incorporated into teaching, thus infusing it with more meaning and contributing to greater motivational possibilities for students.

Exploration of the metaphorical power of verbal language could be incorporated much more integrally into lessons. This is not so much a matter of identifying metaphors and similes in poems, as recognizing that metaphor pervades verbal language. Studies such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) indicate that metaphor works structurally through ideologies and assumptions that are represented in the language, as well as at the more micro-level of one thing standing for another. Media coverage, for example, will often be couched in terms of conflict and battle, winning and losing, because these dualities sell newspapers and make for engaging television and radio. But the conventions of seeing arguments solely in terms of battle can be countered by different metaphors that see it in terms of building or dance, or of a journey. To discuss such underpinning metaphors in the course of classroom interaction, as and when they emerge, can be highly illuminating. Simple phrases like ‘I can see your point’ or ‘How far have we come in this discussion?’ reveal underlying metaphors of landscape and journeying, in these cases, that are worthy of further exploration. Even in the business of writing itself, metaphors of, say, building and cooking can be brought in to enlighten understanding of the way in writing works. For example, we can say of an emerging argument that it needs to establish its foundations and then build on that stage by stage. Or, of a piece that needs further revision, that the ingredients of the piece need further cooking with the addition of some critical spice to enliven the work.

To pursue the practical implications further: issues of economy can be brought in by first considering with a class, at whatever age or stage in their development as writers, what the available resources are to communicate something to someone. Are we writing to someone close to whom we can pass a handwritten note; or is the piece longer that we wish to create, and does it need transportation across the world via electronic means? What are the means of reception? What is it going to cost us to make this kind of communication, and are there better ways of effecting such communication? Are we operating with our own material or with others’ material that needs some acknowledgement, if not copyright clearance? Do we want to copyright our own productions so
that others cannot appropriate them unfairly? How has verbal language changed, even with our own experienced generations, so that we need to think about our audience and whether they will understand what we are ‘saying’?

These matters are not purely contextual or abstracted from the actual business of writing: they are intimately connected to the act of writing and can add meaning and import, thus increasing motivation. Writing is thus seen as a means to an end (communication with others) rather than a rather sterile, school-based exercise for its own sake.

Why do education systems prize writing so highly?

Although one of our arguments throughout the book is that school writing needs to connect with out-of-school writing in order to embrace ‘the universe of discourse’ (Moffett 1968/1983), we need in the current chapter to consider school writing (Sheeran and Barnes 1991) again, and in particular the place and function that writing has in schooling. Sheeran and Barnes suggested that schools fostered specific genres of writing that were not present in the world outside school, and therefore were of limited relevance in becoming a writer. An example of such a ‘school genre’ would be the *descriptive* piece, deriving from a nineteenth-century rhetorical category, in which the powers of describing with ‘powerful’ verbs and plenty of adjectives or adverbs would be the norm. Such cameo pieces, almost like writing exercises or the Greek *progymnasmata*, are arbitrary. As schooling has begin to reconnect itself to the outside world (we hesitate to call the spaces outside schools and the school day the ‘real world’, as schools themselves are part of that reality) attempts are being made to make writing more real, for real audiences, and in preparation for the ‘real world’.

And yet, despite a movement to reconnect with the wider world, schools remain places with their own cultures. Institutionally, they have their parameters and their discourses. Writing plays a central role in schooling, and we need to know why as the status and development of writing has much to do with the nature of schooling itself. First, as in any institution, writing is used within school to regulate activity. Rules, conventions, instructions, statements of mission and aim and teacher directions are often couched in writing. They appear in notices, in handbooks and in letters to parents and students. Inevitably, these written missives carry the weight of authority and control; their attempt is to create a community, but it is a community that is run by adults for the benefit of young people. Part of the intent is to control and manage these young people so that they can learn. It is no coincidence that academic
disciplines are connected to self-discipline and the maintenance of order in schools.

Second, writing is important in schools because it marks the kind of discourse that is highly valued. The transition from home to school (at increasingly early ages across the world in pre-school and kindergarten, but formally somewhere between the ages of 4 and 6) marks a transition from a primarily oral world of discourse to one in which writing takes pre-eminence. Writing is consciously taught in the early years of schooling – that is partly what elementary and primary schools see as their function – but writing also provides the medium and mode through which much of education takes place. Classrooms are places for writing, and for reading it. They move children from a ‘natural’ context in which communication is a means to an end as well as a pleasurable end in itself, to an environment in which communication has purpose, is boxed and packaged, and is systematized. We do not want to take a romantic position in which we see the period before school as Eden-like, and schooling itself as equivalent to the Fall, but something of that detachment of the purposes of writing from the systems of writing takes place as soon as the child enters the school on his or her first day. This is an institution that values writing highly, but which separates it from its contexts in the wider world in order to help children learn it as a system.

Third, writing is used by schools to assess progress. It is the principal mode and medium used in the examination system. Because of that, it carries with it associations of diagnosis, appraisal, control and grading – the concomitants of assessment. Much writing undertaken by children in schools is written for the teacher to assess – it is handed in as homework or as classwork/homework. Whether it is in draft form or is a finished piece, it receives a response from the teacher. That response can range from anything from a simple tick to show that the piece has been read and is generally approved (a sort of nod of acknowledgement), to a fully-fledged critical commentary, usually in the form of annotations. These signs of response and comments are sometimes accompanied by a grade. It is one thing to recognize the importance of writing to assessment, and the way the two are implicated with each other in schooling (we return to the issue more practically in Chapter 11); but it is also the case that assessment itself is interested in the kinds of knowledge that writing can represent. That is to say, writing makes possible and subsequently handles abstractions and concepts, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter. These form the basis of much assessment of understanding in the education system. Although that understanding can be expressed also in mathematical symbols (even more abstractly than in words) and in maps and diagrams, the expression of understanding or explanation and exposition is often in words.
For these and other reasons, then, writing is highly prized within schooling. It seems, in many ways, to be the sine qua non of schooling: school is where you go to write. The same is true of higher education. In a two year seminar series on the changing nature of the dissertation/thesis in the digital and multimodal age (see Andrews et al. 2011) in the arts, humanities and social sciences, the conclusion was that despite the turn to the visual – not only in arts-based theses but in the humanities and social sciences too – universities and colleges seem reluctant to abandon a dependence on words for the final assessment of a contribution to knowledge. Even where the regulations permitted the submitting of artworks, exhibitions, made objects or ‘portfolios’ of such non-verbal productions, most of them still required a ‘commentary’ – often of 40,000 words or so for a doctoral dissertation – in writing.

Writing development

What are the implications of the discussions above for the notion of writing development? And before we move into the chapters that review existing process- and product-related writing models, what other considerations need to take place?

Let us start with the point implied at the end of the previous section: that writing development continues beyond schooling into the college and university years. We can extrapolate from that and suggest that writing development continues (or could continue) throughout life. It is as much a concern for adult learners of whatever stage in writing development – from someone struggling to learn to write in an adult education class, or learning to write in a new language if they have immigrated from a part of the world and/or from a culture in which writing in the new language (or writing at all) was not addressed at one end of the spectrum; to an advanced writer in specific fields (like the writer of medical journal articles, or a human resources specialist designing job descriptions) at the other end of the spectrum. Writing development continues, and what is more, writing itself continues to develop and become more a part of everyday activities in the workplace, requiring the need for people to upskill themselves.

At the other end of the age continuum, writing starts before schooling. A number of studies have looked at pre-school writing (e.g. Kress 1997, Andrews 1988) and concluded that the writing/drawing/play nexus is a rich one in which writing is first seen as a means of communication, and then is gradually separated out as a system in its own right (a process that is accelerated at school). So writing development is a phenomenon that starts as soon as a child makes a mark with a crayon or any tool on a surface.
An implication of the lifelong process of learning to write is that tightly staged assessment/progress systems in the limited years of schooling – although they are the principal focus of this book and the stages at which writing development is likely to accelerate most quickly – do not fully account for writing development over the lifecourse. It is important to for us, as writers of this book and for teachers, to look outside schooling to the wider contexts and environments for writing.

Conclusion: developing writers

Finally, in this chapter devoted to theories of learning and the place of writing, we switch the term ‘writing development’ to ‘developing writers’ – the title of the book. As well as to the business of helping to develop writers – the job of teachers of writing, addressed again more practically in Chapter 11 – we wish to draw attention to the human dimension of learning to write: the fact that writers are people who develop their skills and capabilities in writing over the lifecourse.

It is interesting that writing development foregrounds the product, writing, rather than the act of writing or the person who is writing. As with many of the product-oriented models we will discuss in Chapter 5, such an approach is predicated on the development of written products, or the assumed changes that take place between one written product and another. But writers who develop are people who develop: they develop not only maturationally and cognitively, but also socially, experientially and globally by being exposed to different worlds, different people, different communities. Their range of discourses thus develops.

This somewhat different approach to the development of writing, by focusing on the writers, moves the ground of our common practice and interest to the role writing plays in people’s lives. We think that no longer it is adequate to concentrate only on writing systems, and particularly on sub-sections of those systems that have been prioritized as central to the business of learning to write, like sentence grammar (see Locke 2010 for a move beyond conventional approaches to and debates about ‘grammar’). Entire teaching approaches have been predicated on the teaching of a system; or on the systematization of the practice of writing that is already emergent. Our own approach is more integrated with other aspects of experience, in that it sees writing as one means of expression, one mode that is related to other modes; and furthermore, as a means of expression that is powerful in the contemporary world. This approach also wishes to lower the barriers between the school world and the world outside school. Such a widening of the aperture sees writing as a transparent window to
experience and knowledge, rather than a self-referential system. At the same time, we do not underestimate that learning to write in one or more languages is a challenge that requires gaining the command of a symbolic system. We set high store by accuracy and elegance in the use of those systems; but we recognize that developing as a writer means being open to influences that may change one as a person – and therefore as a writer.