

CHAPTER NINE

WRITERS' JOURNEYS: WAYS OF BEING, KNOWING AND DOING

ROBYN HENDERSON

Abstract

Traditionally, reading and writing have been recognised as characteristics of a literate person. However, literacy educators generally acknowledge that becoming literate is a complex and dynamic process that incorporates much more than learning basic skills. Literacy is understood as a situated social and cultural practice that incorporates coding, semantic, pragmatic and critical competences (e.g., Freebody, 2004; 1982; Luke & Freebody, 1999). As Freire and Macedo (1987) highlighted, reading the word cannot happen without a reading of the world. Additionally, our literacies (using the plural term) and our ways of being, knowing and doing are interconnected with our discourse communities, our identities and our sense of agency (Moje & Lewis, 2007). In this chapter, I analyse selected examples of the students' writing and their reflections about their writing from Chapter 6, to investigate the students' ways of being, knowing and doing as they negotiate their journeys as writers. I conclude the chapter with a consideration of implications for teacher education.

Introduction

The starting point for this chapter was a reading of the selection of writing presented in Chapter 8. The writing is identified as focusing on *Relationships – Darkness, light, and shades between*. Interestingly, the dark-light-shade metaphor of the chapter's title reminded me of Alfred Noyes' poem *The highwayman*, where the tragic story of the highwayman and his sweetheart Bess, the innkeeper's daughter, is told through the

striking imagery of darkness and ghostly light, with shades of red. *The highwayman* is a story of love, and Bess makes the ultimate sacrifice, shooting herself with a musket, in an attempt to save the highwayman from sure death. Overall, the poem is about relationships and weaves together a story about love, betrayal, criminal activity and the law.

Chapter 8 also focuses on relationships. The writing of Claire D'Arcy, Lorrae Charles, Jaclyn Fitzgerald, Kathleen Parkes and Natalie Romanet introduces an array of relationship issues, including love, loss of loved ones, relationship breakdown, and fear and hatred. The texts deal with the lives of real life and fictional characters, but they also prompt emotional reactions from readers. Through Chapter 8, the authors reflect on their writing and the learning that accompanied their journeys as writers. These pieces of writing provide insights into the work of novice writers and their ways of being a writer, and knowing about and doing writing.

My reading of the texts produced by the five authors prompted me to reflect on my prior knowledge and experiences of the process of writing and the journey of the writer. My background in literacy education meant that I came to the reading of the stories (using the term *stories* in a broad sense) and the writers' reflections with particular understandings about literacy and what it means to be a literate person. At the same time, my research background meant that I read the texts with an interest in their linguistic design and what that was telling me about the social and cultural contexts within which the texts were constructed.

As I began to think about how I would respond, I decided that I would explore the writing and the authors' reflections in terms of the themes of being, knowing and doing – being a writer, knowing how to be a writer, and doing writing. It seemed that the authors of Chapter 8 had been involved in learning how to 'be' writers as part of their university course work. It was likely, therefore, that their reflections might share some of their experiences and learnings about 'doing' writing.

As a result, I begin this chapter by discussing my view of literacy and the social world and the application of these ideas to the texts of Chapter 8. I then conduct a brief analysis of the writing. In considering the writing and the writers' reflections and on their writing, it is important to keep in mind that the writing in Chapter 8 represents the products of the writers' personal experiences in their lives outside the university as well as the learning that occurred in the course they were studying. I conclude with a discussion of writing through the authors' ideas of being, knowing and doing.

From literacy and the social world to thinking about the production of literary texts

I understand reading and writing, and literacy more broadly, as situated social and cultural practices and recognise that the authors' writing and my reading of their work are part of the network of the social and cultural practices that occur around texts. Such a view acknowledges that a range of resources is needed in order to be a literate person. As highlighted in Luke and Freebody's four resources model (e.g., Freebody, 2004; Luke & Freebody, 1999), a literate person needs coding, semantic, pragmatic and critical competences. This model highlights the complexity of learning to read and write and emphasises that each of the competences is necessary but not sufficient for such learning to occur. Indeed, the competences are "variously mixed and orchestrated in proficient ... writing" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 7). The appropriate use of these resources indicates an understanding of the particular situation, the context, in which literacy is used.

Understandings about context are not new. The work of Heath (1982, 1983), Gee (2004), Barton and others (e.g., Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000), for example, noted the importance of context and offered empirical evidence about the relationship between context and text. As Stephens (2000) explained, such views of literacy are generally discussed under the label of the "new literacy studies," which highlight "the description of literacy practices of everyday life" and challenge "approaches which emphasise decontextualised basic skills" (p. 10). Rather than seeing literacy as an "autonomous" skill, using the language of Street (1997), this view of literacy takes seriously the effect of context.

Indeed, reading and writing are practices of our social world. They do not occur in isolation, but have inextricable links to context. This is evident in the way that we always read and write for particular audiences and for particular social and cultural purposes. According to Freire and Macedo (1987), being literate involves both reading the world and reading the word. In the foreword to Macedo's (1994) book, Freire explained that "there cannot be reading of text without reading the world, without reading the context" (p. xi). Moje and Lewis (2007) explained that learning always "involves and requires participation in something" (p. 16). They argue that learning is a "moment of participation" that occurs in what they term "discourse communities," groups of people who share "ways of knowing, thinking, believing, acting, and communicating" (p. 16; see also Gee, 1996).

People are members of many discourse communities (Moje & Lewis, 2007). Gee (1996) highlighted the way that different literacies are connected to “different ways of being in the world” (p. viii). Yet, becoming a member of a ‘new’ discourse community is not necessarily easy. Linkon’s (2011) work, for example, emphasised the importance of developing “strategic knowledge” (p. 2), in order to bring relevant “habits of mind, assumptions, attitudes, and critical practices” (p. 3) to literary tasks. Although Linkon’s focus was on the reading of literary texts, her message about making strategic knowledge visible has application to developing writers.

For the novice writers in Chapter 8, their course work experiences apprenticed them into a writers’ discourse community and we would expect that their learning created opportunities to “make and remake selves, identities and relationships” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 18). These provide the foci of the section that follows. A brief analysis of the writers’ texts considers their ways of being, doing and knowing and how that links to identity and agency and their place/s as markers of teacher transformation as the writers’ engaged in writing the word and the world.

The place of context and the analysis of the writing in Chapter 8

In previous research, I have used Fairclough’s (2001) context-interaction-text model to analyse text as data (e.g., Henderson, 2008, 2009). This model is founded in an amalgamation of theoretical traditions. In particular, linguistic, discourse and social theories, with critical and poststructuralist origins, contribute to an understanding of the social world (Henderson, 2005). Based on the work of Halliday (e.g., Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985), ongoing work in the field of systemic functional linguistics (e.g., Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000; Derewianka, 2011) provides a theoretical frame for understanding the relationship between context and text, showing how an examination of text can provide clues to the context within which it was produced.

Pragmatically, such work has provided guidance for linguistic analyses of text, by considering “how people use authentic language in various contexts in real life to achieve their purposes” (context of culture) and how “language choices change from situation to situation” (context of situation) (see also Butt et al., 2000, pp. 3-4; Derewianka, 2011, p. 3). The context of culture represents the way we do things in our culture, while the context of situation addresses “the things going on in the world outside the

text that make the text what it is” (Butt et al., 2000, p. 4). Knowledge of the context in which a text is produced is important.

However, the writing in Chapter 8 sparked my thinking about how writers have to create context for their readers. The fictional and, in some cases, autobiographical pieces of writing were created within a particular sociocultural context, where this type of writing usually serves the purpose of entertainment or provocation. As noted by Linkon (2011), we have to “appreciate ... text as a construction” (p. 11) of an author,

an individual with a perspective based on a specific cultural context, social position, and life history, who has imagined a world and a situation, invented characters, crafted a voice, and made hundreds of decisions and probably a number of revisions in constructing the text. (p. 11).

Additionally, the texts in Chapter 8 were informed by their production within a university course that is embedded in a broader sociocultural context. There were several clues to this context as some of the authors made explicit reference to Janice, their teacher. In terms of the context of the situation, the writers were obviously cognisant of the relationship that they needed to develop with an audience of readers. While Janice was a known and visible reader, their writing is now being presented to a wider, unknown audience.

As a result of my thinking about this, I analysed the writing in Chapter 8 while pondering some particular questions: What do the texts tell me about the authors’ efforts at being a writer, knowing how to be a writer, and doing writing? How do the authors create context within their writing? To begin the analysis, I looked for ways of being, doing and knowing that were evident in the authors’ reflections on their writing and how they incorporated the notions they discussed in their writing. The next five sections discuss each of the writers’ ‘stories’ (or collection of writing, as the case may be) in terms of being, doing and knowing.

Story 1: Natalie Romanet’s *Surf Break*

Natalie Romanet’s story *Surf Break*, for example, begins with narrator Liz in a dark place. In walking out of the house in the early hours of the morning to escape her parents’ fighting, Liz meets Trav, a surfer who had also experienced dark times. However, his return to surfing had brought a peace of mind where “thoughts and anger just melted away.” Liz’s story does not dwell on the many years they spent together – the light – but it shifts to a shade in between, where Liz recalls her “wild days of surfing”

with Trav and reflects on the way their youngest grandchild continues the family's surfing tradition.

When Romanet reflects on her writing, she discusses the concern she had about writing the story and using an appropriate style for an audience of teenagers and young adults. In *being* a writer, she decides to write using the first person and what she describes as a "very relaxed style." She identifies some of the linguistic choices she made, including her decision to rewrite the beginnings of sentences to avoid the repetition that had occurred. Through these reflections, Romanet positions herself as a novice, and at times struggling, writer who works hard at the craft of writing. She indicates that *knowing* how to write is important.

Despite Romanet's assertion that she is "still ... struggling" with aspects of writing, it seems that her *doing* has worked. Her use of direct speech at the beginning draws readers in to her first person story. Her understatement about the happy years Liz and Trav spent together – summed up in the short sentence, "I never dreamed we would grow old together" – and her fleeting memories of events and people who are "all gone now" provide a short, succinct conclusion to her story.

Story 2: Jaclyn Fitzgerald's *The Silent Ranks*

Jaclyn Fitzgerald's contributions to Chapter 8 demonstrate her use of writing as a survival strategy. With her husband on deployment in Afghanistan, she offers a portfolio of writing that she describes as "candid, honest and very real account of the stories of an Army wife and her children." It seems that *being* a writer offered Fitzgerald opportunities, perhaps even a form of therapy, to validate, share and celebrate the family's experiences. Her *knowing* of the heartache that results from the absence of a loved one provides the stimulus for writing that moves between shades of light and dark.

Fitzgerald's partly autobiographical work is full of contrasts, one of her techniques of *doing* writing. Her initial story uses images of crimson blood to contrast with the white compound and white stairs. The harshness and terror of battle is followed by the 'softness' of the next story where Fitzgerald describes meeting her husband and collecting "that moment in time like a butterfly in a child's net." As she tells other stories, the red-white comparison continues with red wine and the whiteness of confusion. These visual images are supported by the juxtaposition of noise and silence, the symbolism of the ticking clock, and the personification of time, helping Fitzgerald to construct her fear of the unthinkable consequences of her husband's deployment.

Through these writing techniques, Fitzgerald allows readers to understand her feelings as she tries to deal with the “uncompromising silence” of her husband’s absence. As her stories shift between shades of light and dark, Fitzgerald creates a dream-like space for remembering her husband, a strategy that enables her to survive the uncertainties about what might happen.

Story 3: Lorrae Charles’ *A Housewife’s Discontent* and *Brad’s Scones*

Lorrae Charles begins her writing with the dark poem of an abusive husband, written from his wife’s perspective. The poem is followed by a story about the housewife’s decision to act and to remove the husband from her life. The details of Brad’s murder are left to the reader’s imagination and, as Charles says, imply “horror without direct statement.”

In her reflections, Charles is clear about her *doing* as a writer. She says that she chose first person to “emphasise the action” and she “tried to leave space for the reader to imagine.” She discusses foreshadowing as a technique, her attempt to add a twist to the story, and the effect of leaving gaps. Throughout her reflections, she indicates the importance of what is not said, as the gaps help to “create space for audience interpretation”. *Knowing* about these techniques seems to permeate the description Charles provides of *being* a writer.

In the poem *A Housewife’s Discontent*, Charles identifies her choice of themes as “monotony, loneliness and power in a domestic setting.” Her focus, however, is the powerlessness that Lizzie the housewife experiences. Like some of the other authors featured in Chapter 6, Charles develops shades of dark and light through a range of literary techniques. For example, Lizzie’s life is “passing by, like driving through fog” and “love’s tricked away and the fire’s gone out.” Charles’ use of similes and images emphasises the drudgery Lizzie experiences and highlights the monotony of life “like an old re-run.”

However, the poem finishes with Lizzie asking “What would happen tomorrow if I just stay in bed?” This forewarning that Lizzie might try to break the monotony and torment of her life leads the reader to the story of *Brad’s Scones*. It is here that Charles demonstrates the effects of not telling the reader every detail of the events that occur. Her use of foreshadowing is evident in Lizzie’s watching of a soap opera, where “an unhappy wife murdered her husband,” Lizzie’s gaze shifting to “the jam-covered knife,” and her statement that “down at the tank was Brad, unsuspecting.” The story finishes with dark humour when Lizzie tells her mother-in-law that she tries to “put a bit of Brad in [her] cooking.”

Story 4: Claire D’Arcy’s *A Gift for Cindy*

Claire D’Arcy presents a play in a style that she describes as “minimalist.” Her *doing* of writing is “based on personal experience,” although she does not describe the experiences that brought her to the story set in a charity shop. D’Arcy’s choice of names for the characters seems to establish stereotypes, which are continued throughout the play. The names of Sandra and Susan who work in the charity shop are shortened to Sandy and Susie. Their banter about the “vintage clothes shop” being a “just a fancy word for out of date and second hand” is broken by the arrival of two upper class women, Veronica Kensington and Margot Ridley-Smith, who are described by Susie as “put[ting] on airs and graces.” Both pairs of women enjoy gossip, although D’Arcy highlights the different purposes that gossip plays: “For Susie and Sandy it is entertainment; something to fill the working day,” but for Veronica and Margot it is a way of embellishing lives and “bragging about their own and their children’s successes.”

In *being* a writer, D’Arcy explains that she “was not enticed” by the prospect of writing and that she did not think that she had “the creative scope” to move beyond her initial attempts. Yet D’Arcy highlights her intention to develop a sense of irony in her play. She emphasises her message about gossip, highlighting the irony that Sandy and Susie criticize the gossip of women who enter their shop, but are not aware of their own predilection for gossip. Her writing focuses on the dark undertones of a supposedly light situation. It seems that D’Arcy’s reflections on her experience of writing are transferable to her future as a teacher. In *knowing* about writing, she lays bare her perceived (in)ability to write. At the same time, she extends her reflections to understand and problematise the teaching of writing in schools.

Story 5: Kathleen Parkes’ *Broken and Dancing*

Like some of the other authors, Kathleen Parkes offers a portfolio of two pieces of writing: a poem, *Broken*, and a story, *Dancing*. Parkes’ poem focuses on her feelings of torment when a close relative was diagnosed with a potentially terminal illness. Her state of *knowing* and feeling sorrow was translated into the repetition of the poem:

I feel
I feel sick

I am twisted ...
I feel like ...
I feel as though
I feel like ...
I feel that ...

Parkes explains that she did not want to obscure the “rawness” of the experience and her choice of metaphoric language and imagery (re)creates the pain – “stabbed with a dagger,” “pierced with the lightning of a thousand storms,” and “cheeks eroded by the thousands of tears.” She reflects on the therapeutic benefits of *being* a writer and acknowledges the challenges and the benefits of the editing process.

In *Dancing*, Parkes moves away from the darkness of her poem, to do some “reminiscing on the better times,” before the diagnosis that had brought the “darkness of sickness.” She expresses a preference for descriptive language to indicate this time and to create “the intricate details of the evening” when the characters are “suddenly enthralled and delighted by the love and beauty that surrounds them.” In *doing* her writing, Parkes feels that she has created a “fragile moment, captured in memories or words, delicate and fading, like a photograph captured in time.” Responding to this through her reading, the editor as teacher and researcher concludes that “love, and the loss of love, are pivotal” to writing and “writers’ understandings of themselves, their relationships and their place in the world.”

Conclusion

Although the analysis of the writing in Chapter 8 was brief, it demonstrated the way that each of the students took on the role of writer. Many of their stories built on meaningful personal experiences of the past or the present, and the opportunity to write allowed them to write their worlds into textual form. The context of the university classroom offered an environment in which writing was encouraged and indeed expected. As some of the writers explained, their teacher Janice offered ideas and support, while providing a context within which they could take risks and try out ideas for writing.

In this context, the students could ‘be’ writers. It became apparent from their reflections that the context allowed them to try new ways of doing writing. They experimented with the resources of Luke and Freebody’s model (e.g., Freebody, 2004; 1982; Luke & Freebody, 1999), focusing

particularly on semantic and pragmatic decisions to enhance the texts they were creating. It was also apparent that considerations around code-breaking along with a focus on figurative language meant that the novice writers were learning to know about the craft of writing.

Their doing of writing clearly had two main effects. On the one hand, the writers wanted to enhance their writing skills and to produce readable and meaningful texts. It seemed that they had taken on the identities of writers and were doing the work that writers do. On the other hand, they could see that learning to be, know and do writing can have greater long-term effects. To this end, there was some reflection on the implications for their futures as teachers and opportunities to share their learning with others. Their journeys as writers, towards being, knowing and doing writing, have the potential to transform and enthuse future writers.

This transformational potential is an example of Fairclough's (2001) context-interaction-text model in action. The model argues for a dialectical relationship between social structures and events or actions, in this case writing. Social structures are often theorised as constraining what can be done. However, a dialectical relationship means that events and actions are not only constrained, but they can enable change in the broader social context. This means that we can consider how the production of writing and the learning that has resulted from the writing that was produced and published in Chapter 8 can impact on broader social structures.

There would seem to be potential for learnings for teacher education. In the current educational context, where the push for standardised testing and increased accountability seems to be resulting in a narrowing of curriculum and associated "teaching to the test" (see Mills, 2008, p. 212), it is important to make room for teachers and teacher educators to advocate the merits of opportunities for writing for creative purposes, for purposes other than those that meet the academic requirements of the political agenda.

Luke (2002) argued that educational researchers often engage in critique but avoid getting their "hands dirty with the sticky matter of what educationally is to be done" (p. 54). Similarly, I argue that teachers often complain about educational change that is imposed, but they do not always offer new ways forward or advocate for rethinking how educational practice might be 'done.' The writing of Chapter 8, however, exemplifies opportunities for future teachers to become writers, to be able to talk from their experiences as writers, and to advocate for a renewed emphasis on a range of writing forms.

Without realising it, the authors of Chapter 8 have demonstrated the effect of Fairclough's (2001) model – of the potential to influence and

change practices through experiencing writing as a writer. Indeed, Claire D'Arcy, Lorrae Charles, Jaclyn Fitzgerald, Kathleen Parkes and Natalie Romanet have already shown that they are willing to get their hands dirty with what might be done and, as a result, there is much to learn from their efforts. Just as Alfred Noyes' poem *The highwayman* has been memorable for me, the writing of Chapter 8 has established the importance of students, or more specifically pre-service teachers, experiencing a writer's journey of being, doing and knowing and advocating for these experiences to inform practice.

References

- Barton, D., Hamilton, M., & Ivanic, R. (2000). Introduction: Exploring situated literacies. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (pp. 1-6). London: Routledge.
- Butt, D., Fahey, R., Feez, S., Spinks, S., & Yallop, C. (2000). *Using functional grammar: An explorer's guide* (2nd ed.). Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.
- Derewianka, B. (2011). *A new grammar companion for teachers*. Marrickville Metro, NSW: e-lit, Primary English Teaching Association.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). London: Longman.
- Freebody, P. (2004). Foreword: Hindsight and foresight: Putting the four roles model of reading to work in the daily business of teaching. In A. Healy & E. Honan (Eds.), *Text next: New resources for literacy learning* (pp. 3-17). Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. P. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. Westport: Bergin & Garvin.
- Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (2nd ed.). London: Falmer Press.
- Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional school*. New York: Routledge.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *A short introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1985). *Language, context and text: Aspects of language in a social semiotic perspective*. Geelong, Vic.: Deakin University Press.

- Heath, S. B. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. *Language in Society*, 11, 49-76.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henderson, R. (2005). A Faircloughian approach to CDA: Principled eclecticism or a method searching for a theory? *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 46(2), 9-24.
- Henderson, R. (2008). A boy behaving badly: Investigating teachers' assumptions about gender, behaviour, mobility and literacy learning. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 31(1), 74-87.
- Henderson, R. (2009). Itinerant farm workers' children in Australia: Learning from the experiences of one family. In P. A. Danaher, M. Kenny & J. Remy Leder (Eds.), *Traveller, nomadic and migrant education* (pp. 46-58). New York: Routledge.
- Linkon, S. L. (2011). *Literary learning: Teaching the English major*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Luke, A. (2002). Curriculum, ethics, metanarrative: Teaching and learning beyond the nation. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 22(1), 49-55.
- Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1999). A map of possible practices: Further notes on the four resources model. *Practically Primary*, 4(2), 5-8.
- Macedo, D. P. (1994). *Literacies of power: What Americans are not allowed to know*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Mills, K. A. (2008). Will large-scale assessments raise literacy standards in Australian schools? *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 31(3), 211-225.
- Moje, E. B., & Lewis, C. (2007). Examining opportunities to learn literacy: The role of critical sociocultural literacy research. In C. Lewis, P. Enciso & E. B. Moje (Eds.), *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy: Identity, agency, and power* (pp. 15-48). New York: Routledge.
- Stephens, K. (2000). A critical discussion of the 'new literacy studies'. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48(1), 10-23.
- Street, B. V. (1997). The implications of the "New Literacy Studies" for literacy education. *English in Education*, 31(3), 45-59.