
Students' Attitudes Towards Writing and the Development of Academic Writing Skills

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Introduction

The emphasis on the learner, which emerged with the advent of the learner-centered approach, manifested itself in the field of L2 academic writing as an emphasis on the learner's attitudes towards and perceptions of different aspects of writing, or as Johns (1997) put it, their "personal theories" of literacy. Since these theories influence students' writing behavior, it is essential for writing instructors and tutors to understand how they are formed and how they develop.

These observations motivated a research study at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary, with the aim to investigate non-native graduate students' attitudes towards writing in English. CEU, a graduate school for social sciences and humanities, is one of the many English-medium universities (i.e., a non-English speaking country where English in a school is the medium of education) that have been established in Central and Eastern Europe in the last decade. What is unique about it is that its student body comes from more than forty different countries, mostly from the ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Of particular importance for this study is the fact that in the educational traditions of these countries there is, in general, no tradition of explicit teaching of writing in the native language; consequently, the writing instruction at CEU is for many students their first experience attending a writing course or having a writing tutorial. It is, therefore, of interest to gain insights into these students' personal theories of writing and their attitudes towards their experiences of writing in English.

In this article, rather than presenting individual profiles of the students who participated in the study, I discuss, based on the obtained data¹, more general issues related to attitudes towards writing, which may be of interest to those working with ESL students, especially students coming from educational settings where writing is not traditionally taught. I will discuss the implications of the findings for writing pedagogy, and present the practice of the Writing Center at Central European University, one of the few writing centers in Eastern Europe, in dealing with students' attitudes towards

writing. In the next section, I first situate the study within the context of research into attitudes, and, in particular, attitudes towards writing, both of which informed this inquiry.

Research into Attitudes

In second language acquisition studies, there is a long tradition of research into attitudes, which have been studied, together with motivation, within the area of individual learner differences, as affective factors in L2 learning. This line of research has provided empirically tested models of the causal relationship between attitudes, motivation, and achievement, and has shown that attitudes have an indirect effect on achievement, but are also formed as a non-linguistic outcome of learning (Gardner and MacIntyre 1993). A more recent emphasis within this area of SLA studies has been on learner beliefs, or metacognitive knowledge, and their impact on learner strategy use and achievement (see, for example, Horwitz's BALLI [Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory] 1999).

Outside of the SLA field, attitudes have been studied extensively within social and cognitive psychology. For the purposes of this discussion, I will briefly overview Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (for an overview, see Dornyei 1998), which explains the relationships between attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. According to the theory (presented in Kennedy and Kennedy 1996), attitudes, as an affective response, are determined by beliefs, which are basically cognitive. An attitude towards a certain behavior is determined by the belief about the outcome of such behavior and the evaluation of that outcome. However, in order for an individual to act according to his or her attitudes, two other conditions need to be satisfied: first, that the individual believes others will be supportive of such behavior (this is referred to as subjective norm), and, second, that the individual perceives herself/himself as having control over the behavior (termed perceived behavioral control). This theory provides an explanation of something that writing teachers often find puzzling: why positive attitudes to a certain writing technique do not automatically lead to its use.

Finally, it is important to point out that in the literature one can find studies in which attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, personal theories, and other terms are used to mean very similar if not the same concepts. In an article about teacher beliefs, Pajares (1992) tries to "clean up a messy construct" and establish clear boundaries between the different terms used in this field. Pajares outlines Rokeach's theory (1968, cited in Pajares 1992) which explains the difference between attitudes and beliefs in the following way: attitudes, beliefs, and values are all elements of the belief system. Attitudes

are determined by beliefs, which, being higher mental representations, are formed early based on experience. Attitudes are more affective and evaluative, and also less stable and more subject to change. An important part of Rokeach's theory explains the complexity of the structure of the belief system: beliefs behind an attitude are related to other beliefs behind other attitudes. Understanding this has relevance for writing instruction, as attitudes towards, for example, learning writing may be based on beliefs about language learning in general. For the purpose of this overview, it is also important to mention research findings from Guskey's study on attitude change (1986, cited in Pajares 1992), which showed that belief and attitude change "follows, rather than precedes, change in behavior" (Pajares 321).

In sum, these different fields have shown that attitudes determine behavior in a complex way but also emerge as an outcome (non-linguistic) of language learning. They are grounded in underlying beliefs but also formed or changed in light of new experience. That is why attitudes may influence the learning process in a significant way.

Research into Attitudes towards Writing in L2

L2 writing research, which developed rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, has mostly focused on exploring the writing process or writing strategies², in other words, on providing an account of what writers do when writing. Few studies, however, deal with these issues from the students' point of view, that is, with students' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards various aspects of writing. Recently, many scholars have pointed to the importance of the students' point of view; for example, Johns (1997) stresses that "personal theories" of writing, held by both teachers and students, "influence how academic literacies are taught and learnt" (3), while Hyland goes a step further, stating that a "major task of EAP teaching is therefore to address the perceptions and practices of writing that students may bring with them . . ." (145). Yet, studies addressing the issue of students' perceptions and attitudes towards L2 writing are scarce.

The few studies focusing on individual L2 students and their attitudes, beliefs, and writing experiences (such as Johns 1991; Leki 1995; Leki and Carson 1994; Leki and Carson 1997; Prior 1998; Victori 1999) uncover a complex inter-relationship between attitudes and beliefs, writing experiences, and academic writing development. These studies raise a number of questions about the teaching of L2 academic writing and call for writing course designers, writing instructors, and tutors to take the students' perspective into account in a more informed way.

The Study

The aim of the study was to explore non-native speakers' attitudes towards aspects of writing in English, as well as their perceptions of their writing processes. Attitudes are understood here as individual affective responses to various aspects of writing.

The participants were eight M.A. students at CEU, all in their early to middle twenties, seven females and one male. They were of different national and linguistic backgrounds (6 from Eastern Europe, 2 from Central Asia). All were advanced speakers of English, but their experience in writing in English varied. Five participants had had considerable experience in writing in English prior to coming to CEU, while the remaining three started writing in English only after coming to CEU. All students attended at least one academic writing course (at CEU); some had also attended writing courses in their countries. At the time of the study, the participants were at the beginning stages of writing up their M.A. theses, prior to which they had written a number of assignments in English, including research papers, position papers, critiques, and reports, and attended a number of tutorials in the Writing Center.

The study used structured interviews as the main instrument of data collection. Interviewees were given a set of 90 prompts, in the form of written statements expressing an attitude or an assertion about a writing strategy, and were asked to respond orally, elaborating on their agreement/disagreement where they felt relevant. The interviewer asked additional questions about issues that seemed particularly important for the interviewee. The interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. They were tape-recorded and transcribed.

The interviews offer an abundance of data about attitudes of these particular students to writing in English. Instead of creating individual writer profiles, however, I present more general issues related to attitudes towards writing that have relevant implications for writing pedagogy. In other words, my focus here is on showing how attitudes form and change in relation to the writing course, tutorials, and writing experiences. While most of the data refer to writing courses, much of what will be presented is applicable to writing tutorials as well; therefore, I use the term "writing instruction" to cover both courses and tutorials. This is especially appropriate since "writing classes" in the U.S. are often a function of writing centers in Europe.

The following aspects of attitudes in relation to writing will be discussed: the formative nature of writing instruction, attitudes in the process of change, clash between attitudes and behavior, the individual nature of attitudes, and

the issue of self-expression. An attempt has been made here to organize the discussion under these five topics for the sake of greater clarity; however, some overlap inevitably occurs, as the issues are inter-related.

The Formative Nature of Writing Instruction

For most students, the writing course and tutorials at CEU is their first encounter with writing instruction in any language, since, as already noted, writing is traditionally not taught in L1 in Eastern Europe. For example, in the academic writing courses run by the Writing Center at CEU in 2000, 89% of the students had never attended a writing course.

This situation raises an immediate question about the effect of writing instruction on the students' writing processes at a stage when they have already formed writing habits. Leki and Carson (1994) suggest that the ESL writing course (thus, tutorials) may be formative in terms of familiarizing the students with types of writing or writing practices they were not familiar with before. The interviews in this study provide ample evidence in support of this hypothesis, especially in the responses of the students who had attended a writing course previously. When asked about the writing strategies they use and their attitudes towards them, the interviewed students often referred to the writing courses they had attended, the writing instructors, or the writing assignments they were required to do. This points to a clear link between the formation of attitudes and the experiences related to writing instruction. Excerpts from the interviews with two students, both of whom had had writing instruction prior to coming to CEU, will be presented here.

Adopting New Strategies

When asked about her opinion on the usefulness of outlines, respondent D refers to the writing class where outlining was introduced as a task:

This outline was a very debatable issue in our class at the university, and the American teacher told us to write outlines, and if there wasn't an outline she would put zero, and students were against it.

She goes on to express her opinion, which reflects her recent experience in using outlines:

But I think writing an outline is important to organize your thoughts and to put it on paper, now I think it's more important.

This is an example of initial resistance to a newly introduced writing strategy, caused either by the instructor's strict approach or, at a deeper level, by the incompatibility of the strategy with the educational and cultural context (i.e., if a culture regards writing as an act of creation for which inspiration is needed, then planning writing through outlining will not be easily accepted). At CEU, in this student's department, the students were required to submit outlines of their papers and theses. The student was, therefore, required to use the new strategy in the course of both her previous and present studies. This was at first accompanied by a negative attitude, which, as can be inferred from the interview excerpt, later changed. The change in attitude to outlining followed the repeated required practice, as the student gradually adopted a new strategy for her assignments in content courses. Yet, this case shows that adopting a strategy and developing a positive attitude to it can be a long process, requiring many positive experiences, among which those outside of the writing course may play an especially important role.

Adapting Strategies

Respondent S also refers to a strategy she learned in the writing class:

I keep a journal . . . it started as a task when I had this American teacher because she said that it is important to develop a habit of writing and that academic writing is not necessarily a good way to develop the habit . . . and when you write a diary you feel more at ease.

Later in the interview, when asked whether spending more time writing would improve her writing abilities, she responds using almost the same words but now talking about her own beliefs:

I believe that writing is a habit and the more you write the better you become.

When asked about what would make her a better writer, her response shows that she has adapted the strategy to her own ends, and now finds it not only useful but also enjoyable:

For me it's really important to keep this private journal, because it gives you a lot of opportunity to experiment with the language and then you feel you are not controlled by anyone and you just write for pleasure.

Critical Customers

While the above examples illustrate the process whereby a strategy introduced by the writing instructor or tutor was adopted, either with initial resistance or immediate enthusiasm, we should not assume that any writing strategy would and should be adopted in the end. Even though writing instruction may be formative, it is important to bear in mind that university students have already developed writing strategies through their previous schooling, regardless of whether they were explicitly taught writing or not. Some of these self-taught strategies may be less effective, but their existence should not be disregarded. Teaching/learning writing is a two-way process with a great deal of negotiation built in; students do not take everything for granted even if they have a generally positive attitude towards the writing class or tutor. Such critical attitude can only be welcome, since ultimately writing has to do with making choices, and one of the aims of teaching writing and tutoring is for students to discover new options to select from. As respondent S states when asked whether writing techniques can be learned in a writing course:

I don't necessarily buy everything I read or learn in a writing course but just arguing about techniques can give you ideas and some of these techniques are really helpful.

As the examples above show, writing instruction may be formative in terms of the attitudes towards writing and writing behaviors, especially if it introduces new writing practices to students who did not have much prior exposure to writing instruction. It can, however, be *re*-formative as well, if what is introduced aims (intentionally or not) to change previous practices in a significant way. In such cases, student resistance may naturally follow, especially if what is presented challenges the underlying beliefs about writing. However, without finding out about the kinds of practices and attitudes the students bring with them, writing instructors and tutors are ill-equipped to deal with students' responses to what is taught.

Attitudes in the Process of Change

The interview transcripts, especially with those students who had had no writing instruction before coming to CEU, show that new attitudes are being formed, or previous attitudes are being challenged, as the students are being exposed to new experiences. The excerpts below show a certain instability of attitudes, as old attitudes are questioned and new ones emerge. To emphasise the different nuances

in attitude change, the responses by two interviewees will be broken into parts, although they make a continuous train of thought.

When asked about her opinion on outlines, respondent R starts with expressing a negative attitude:

I know that I don't like to write outlines. I never did this for my essay, nor for my term papers.

This is followed by a description of a recent positive experience, when the student was required to write an outline, which induced a process of reflection and opened up a space for attitude change:

But here [at CEU] we were demanded to make an outline of our research and actually it was useful, I can understand it now, at least it helped me to formulate some questions because it was the first time when I found out that there might be some advantages of these things, especially right now when I have to write a text.

However, one positive experience is not sufficient for the student to change her attitude:

... but at the same time I doubt whether I am going to do this.

In a similar way, respondent S starts by expressing some reservations when asked about collaborative writing:

I've tried it [writing in pairs] but it doesn't necessarily work.

A description of a recent positive experience follows:

For example, I wrote this article for a magazine with M [another student], and it worked all right although we are very different. He has this very social orientation which I don't but the balance was good. We alternated paragraphs so we had to figure out how to put it together, it was puzzle pieces, it was obvious that it was written by two people but at the same time it has this dialogic quality.

The respondent finishes with stating a positive attitude, in clear contrast to the opening sentence:

So I like writing in pairs.

In both examples, one positive experience was very important in terms of initiating a process of reflection on their own writing. However, one experience, even if positive, is not necessarily enough unless it is a striking episode. This seems to confirm Gusky's findings (Gusky, in Pajares 1992) that change in belief actually follows rather than precedes change in behavior.

Clash between Attitudes and Behavior

The interviews also show that there is often a mismatch between students' attitudes and writing behavior. Based on the interviews, two types of such conflict can be identified: first, when a strategy is evaluated positively but not used, and, second, when a strategy is used but evaluated negatively. The first type of situation can be explained by Ajzen's theory of planned behavior. Ajzen shows a positive attitude does not automatically translate into behavior because of students' perceived lack of control over the situation due to pressing deadlines and other external factors. The factors may also be internal, that is, if a student perceives her language proficiency inadequate for the use of a particular strategy. The following excerpt illustrates how lack of time prevents the student from using a strategy she considers useful:

Prompt: I leave my text aside for a couple of days so that I can see it in a new perspective.

I could find this useful if I have the couple of days. I learnt [sic] this during the creative writing course, because the teacher just told us not to read what we have written till the next day, and it's certainly helpful to forget what you've written.

This type of conflict can be seen as positive if the students make conscious choices among the writing strategies at their disposal, and select a strategy most suited to the demands of the situation. Having a repertoire of writing strategies and being able to judge which strategy would yield best results in a given situation is an important aspect of proficient writing. If, however, a student consistently avoids a strategy for fear of not being able to control the situation it involves, then this leads to risk avoidance and thus missed learning opportunities.

The second type of conflict between attitudes and writing behavior refers to situations when students find themselves in a position to use strate-

gies which they do not consider effective, such as in the following examples:

I should not start writing without having a mental or written plan but in fact I do, but when I do, I fail.

No, it's usually not true that I focus on one thing [when revising], I focus on all the things which I think is not very good. (Respondent L)

It can be argued that in such situations an attitude change, based on newly acquired knowledge, is forcing a change in writing behavior. It is possible that in this case attitudes serve as a guiding principle in "ideal" circumstances (i.e., sufficient amount of time to engage in all the stages of the process), but that the student has not yet managed to transfer the newly acquired strategies into the real world, and that she resorts to old practices under pressure.³

Choosing the writing process that matches one's linguistic abilities and cognitive style and at the same time is feasible given the external pressures can be a frustrating experience. Writing instructors and tutors, therefore, need to be aware of the possible cognitive and affective changes accompanying their students' writing experiences.

The Individual Nature of Attitudes

Even when faced with the same experiences students respond to them in different ways. What for one student is a positive and motivating experience, for another will lead to negative attitudes and avoidance of a certain type of situation or behavior in the future. The reasons might lie in underlying beliefs which do not allow for a change in attitudes. For example, the negative attitude towards peer evaluation that this student expresses might have been caused by a belief in teacher authority and superiority as the only or most valuable source of knowledge rather than by a negative experience of peer evaluation:

It should be an expert. I can speak to my supervisor who is better than me. I need to a person who is better, who knows more.
(Respondent I)

Whether a particular experience will be seen as motivating or demotivating is related to other factors in addition to the underlying beliefs, such as personality, cultural and educational background, level of proficiency, and so forth. An important aspect of this issue is the way students

respond to perceived difficulty. For some, difficulty is a motivating challenge; for others an obstacle, as the following excerpts from the interviews illustrate:

Responding to Difficulty with a Positive Attitude

it's [writing in English] a new experience, when you try to formulate your ideas using some unusual, different . . . a variety of different devices, sometimes you may understand better what exactly you are going to say, so it's really very exciting, even if rather difficult. (Respondent R)

it [linking ideas] might be very difficult at times, especially if the text is long, I find this difficult but at the same time it's fun to do, if you think of solving a puzzle or arranging these mosaics.
(Respondent S)

to play a little bit with the words . . . I like to try to express things with a minimal amount of words because I very much like this quality of the economy of speech but this is difficult for me to achieve. (Respondent S)

Responding to Difficulty with a Negative Attitude

I don't like writing in English. I like writing in general but it's difficult to write in English. (Respondent L)

I don't like writing at all, in general, I don't like writing in Russian. I just have to. These two are different, the system of thought and the system of speech. It's very difficult to translate from thought to speech, since in every translation you lose something when you verbalize something. (Respondent I)

These differences in the way students respond to difficulty can be explained by self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1993, overviewed in Dornyei 1998), which asserts that the way individuals judge their abilities to perform certain actions will determine whether they will engage in them and to what extent. The theory postulates that individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy approach difficult tasks with confidence, whereas those with a low sense of self-efficacy see difficulty as threat and, consequently,

try to avoid it. This can be seen in the choice of words in the responses above: the first group see difficult tasks as amusing (*fun, exciting, play a little bit with the words*), whereas for the second group difficulty is associated with something negative (*I just have to, you lose something*). One of the important implications for the writing class, and especially for tutorials, is that, since the sense of self-efficacy is based on, among other factors, other people's opinions and evaluations, *early* positive feedback can play a crucial role in increasing students' sense of self-efficacy as writers, thus helping them to approach difficult tasks with more confidence.

Talking about Attitudes

All the interviewed students seemed interested in talking about their attitudes, experiences, and preferred strategies. They differed in the way they were able to articulate their attitudes, which can be ascribed to a difference in awareness of these issues rather than to a difference in language knowledge, as students are all advanced speakers of English. The difference is noticeable between the students who attended previous writing courses and had more experience in writing in English and those who had their first course at CEU and have written their first papers in English after coming to CEU. The former appear to be not only more aware of their own attitudes and strategies they use, but also more articulate when talking about them, having the appropriate vocabulary to discuss their own writing, such as *internal logic, economy of speech, shared responsibility, and reader friendly texts*.

However, all students found ways to express their opinions, and, as the following excerpt shows, lacking appropriate terminology, they found alternative, if sometimes unusual, ways to convey the intended message:

my style . . . is rather Russian, I mean rather awake and the reader has to be a co-creator of the text and some activity, some efforts should be made.

in Russian it is a question of style but in English it is also a question of . . . it's difficult to define what else except style, it's a possibility, opportunity, or my limitations to find once again a proper form.

The same student commented on the questions themselves although that was not part of the interview:

I think it's a very good questionnaire, because it's difficult just to think about your way of writing, . . . it makes me really think about things I haven't thought before.

This last comment points to the usefulness of questionnaires and interviews as a pedagogical tool but also to provide the students with the space and tools for reflection and self-expression about writing. Some suggestions for encouraging this process will be discussed in the next two sections.

Implications for Writing Pedagogy

This small-scale research study has confirmed that in the area of L2 writing, attitudes are as important in writing as in language learning in general. Several observations about attitude change are particularly relevant to the teaching of writing: most importantly, that attitudes do change in light of new experience, especially strikingly positive or negative episodes. As the interviews suggest, attitude change tends to follow a change in behavior, that is, positive writing experiences are essential for positive attitude formation or change. Writing instruction then should aim to provide ample opportunities for students to gain such experiences. In that sense, writing instruction can be formative if it involves students in different writing behaviors. However, two reservations should be kept in mind: first, that individual differences in the ways attitudes are developed should be accepted, and, secondly, that even with attitude change, students will tend to resort to familiar strategies if they do not feel they are in control.

Writing instruction can be re-formative as well, in which case negative attitudes may be developed and various forms of student resistance should not come as a surprise. Student resistance is an important issue deserving more space than can be given here, but it can be pointed out that one of the steps in dealing with student resistance is to place it within the context of students' prior writing or educational experience. This again stresses the role of attitudes and experiences students bring with them, the understanding of which may help identify the causes of student discomfort leading to resistance. In this regard, because of the context, methodologies employed and opportunities for feedback, writing tutorials have an advantage over the writing class.

In addition to providing opportunities for formative and re-formative writing experiences, writing instruction also needs to create a space for attitudes and experience to be reflected upon, expressed, and exchanged. Various awareness-raising activities related to writing promote an aware-

ness of one's own practices and those of others, while at the same time provide the instructor with relevant information on students' perceptions of writing. In the next section, I offer some examples from the practice of the Language Teaching Center (LTC), the writing center at CEU, in addressing attitudes towards writing.

Addressing Attitudes Towards Writing: the LTC Practice

The LTC is an educational unit within CEU whose aim is to provide writing support to students during their study at CEU. The services offered include taught courses in academic writing, workshops, and individual tutorials available throughout the year. The Center employs seven EAP instructors, who are responsible for course and materials design, teaching the courses and workshops, and giving individual consultations. This type of writing support, through both writing courses and one-to-one tutorials, seems to be rare, as writing centers typically offer either writing courses or writing tutorials only⁴. As many writing centers are considering expanding their services by offering courses in addition to tutorials, I will focus on that aspect of the LTC work, hoping that the following presentation may help such writing centers in developing ideas about how such courses can be integrated with existing forms of writing support. In spite of the focus on the taught course, much of the discussion presented here is applicable to one-to-one writing tutorials as well.

The aim of the academic writing course designed and delivered by the LTC is to help the student "develop as a writer within the English speaking academic community by raising awareness of, practising, and reflecting upon the conventions of written texts" (Study pack 2000, 5). The course consists of fifteen 100-minute sessions, most of which are held during the three weeks of the pre-session. It is divided into three blocks, each focusing on one genre: the critique, the argumentative essay, and the research paper. Each session deals with a specific topic related to academic writing, and to the genre studied in the block in particular, focusing on writing skills development. During the course, students are required to write three assignments: a critique, an argumentative essay, and a research paper.

While working on these assignments, the students are required to attend a minimum of one tutorial per paper during the course. These introductory tutorials are an integral part of the course, whose aim is to introduce the students to the drafting process and to familiarize them with tutorial practice. This transition stage from classroom teaching to one-to-one tutorials is very important, as many CEU students are not used to this format of instruction. Two factors facilitate this process: first, the students

have their first tutorials with their writing instructor, who they already know but are now meeting in a different role, and, second, these first tutorials focus on low-stakes papers, that is, papers which are not graded, but rather serve diagnostic and developmental purposes. All this is aimed at conveying the message that writing tutorials are not to be seen as primarily remedial, but rather as a space for exploring and discussing one's writing with a critical reader in order to further develop as a writer.

In sum, the writing support offered by the LTC starts with a writing course, within which the students are provided with an initial experience of tutorials, and after which the students come for tutorials when and as frequently as they wish while working on departmental papers. The approach to writing instruction can be described in broad terms by the phrase from the aim of the course, that is, "raising awareness of, practicing, and reflecting upon the conventions of written texts." Such an approach inevitably leads to emphasising the recognition and expression of attitudes towards writing. Throughout the course, the students' personal theories of writing are addressed in different ways and at different stages. In general, two types of activities are used to encourage the expression of students' views on writing; I refer to them as reflection-in-writing and reflection-on-writing.

Reflection-in-writing consists of short lead-in writing activities, whose purpose is for the students to focus on a writing issue and express their opinion of it in written form, that is, to "think in writing." These activities are usually prompted by simple questions, such as: *What is academic writing? What are the differences between writing in English and in your native language? Write an outline of your writing process or present it as a drawing or diagram.* This form of reflection-in-writing allows students to express their views, or express views commonly held and often taken for granted in the cultures from which they come. The writing stage is followed by an exchange of opinions in small groups, which may lead to an animated discussion, with different opinions expressed, or many related questions raised. It may also happen, however, that students do not have much to say, if they feel they are dealing with an issue they simply have not thought much about before, or have not had much experience to draw upon. That is why the same issues are revisited at different points in the course. It often happens that an issue students initially see as black-or-white, the same as in their languages, or simply not worth discussing, is later seen as more complex, with more nuances. An example from the classroom nicely illustrates this point: one of the participants at a writing seminar for teachers I conducted in Russia was puzzled when in the first session the group was asked to think of their latest writing experience and

write down the stages of the writing process they went through. The participant's paper was left blank; she said there was nothing to write because, as she said, "I just put the pen on paper and start writing." At the end of the course, while reflecting on what was learned in the course, the same participant referred back to her own earlier remark, commenting that the course had made her realize that she starts writing even before she takes a pen in her hand. This growing awareness of writing issues is often accompanied by a greater interest and willingness to talk about them; all this suggests that students are in the process of developing their personal theories of writing in addition to their writing skills.

In contrast to reflection-in-writing, reflection-on-writing usually follows a writing activity, with the aim to engage the students in evaluating the potential of a writing technique to enhance their writing skills, or to be used as a self-study activity outside of the writing class. This stage is especially important when students are introduced to a new technique. For example, many students in our courses are not familiar with techniques like peer evaluation or collaborative writing, and while some students are open to such new experiences, others may see them as involving risk or even threatening. These are important issues to discuss in the class. Discussion is usually prompted by asking general questions about whether the students found the activity useful, enjoyable, what aspects made them uncomfortable, whether they would use it in the future, and how they would adapt it. In asking such questions, an important message is conveyed: that personal differences are respected and that writing strategies are, ultimately, a matter of personal choice. These short discussion points give the students a chance to reflect upon and share their experiences in the writing class, and also give the instructor an opportunity to understand the students' affective responses.

There are many other possible activities for exploring attitudes and generating discussion around them (Johns, 1997, offers many interesting ideas). In this study, using a set of written prompts has proved to be an excellent starting point for discussion. Questionnaires can be used both in the writing class, for students to interview each other about various writing issues, and in a tutorial, as a set of topics to discuss. Another possibility is to ask students to keep a writing journal during the whole process of writing an assignment for another course, as a kind of loop input writing activity where writing is both the subject matter and the medium. Finally, opportunities for discussing attitudes towards writing sometimes arise spontaneously in the classroom. Issues such as the writing block or cultural differences in writing often emerge in relation to other issues. Such student-initiated

discussions are especially valuable as they show that students see the writing class as a place for exploring not only texts and processes but also affective issues they are confronted with.

Conclusion

As this small-scale study has shown, development of attitudes towards writing is an integral part of the process of writing development. Attitudes are formed as a result of writing experiences but also have an impact on future writing behavior. Addressing this side of writing development is, therefore, an essential aspect of writing pedagogy. Whether through a writing course, tutorials, or a combination of the two, a sound writing pedagogy needs to take into account students' initial personal theories of writing. Such pedagogy should create a space for addressing their change and development, as students become better writers.

Notes

¹ The data presented in this article were collected for a larger study (Czarl and Petric 2001) on validation of a writing strategies questionnaire. Here I present only the data related to students' attitudes towards writing.

² According to McDonough (1999), the use of terminology in this field is somewhat confusing, as *writing process* is mostly used in first language writing research and by those researchers informed by that tradition, while the field of SLA commonly uses the term *writing strategies* to denote the same research area.

³ Another possible explanation should not be disregarded though: that the student is being influenced by the interviewer's question and is trying to please her by saying what she thinks she is expected to say.

⁴ This observation is based on personal communication with a number of writing instructors at the first conference of European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing (EATAW) in Groningen, the Netherlands, in 2001.

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