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## Writing in EFL teachers' education

### **Abstract**

*The national guidelines for teachers' education in Norway state that EFL students should be able to work with two different dimensions of writing in their future classrooms. Learners are expected to develop their writing skills (learn to write), and they should be able to use writing as a tool in the language learning process (write to learn). The teacher students should also be able to demonstrate good writing skills themselves. The guidelines do not, however, specify the kind of work students should do in order to meet these objectives.*

*Thus, it is up to those who offer EFL courses to interpret the guidelines and decide how students' work with writing will happen. The present article discusses the decisions that are made at thirteen institutions where English is offered as part of the integrated teacher training program for grades five to ten. My data are the requirements related to writing in local syllabuses, and the obligatory writing assignments that students have been given.*

*The investigation shows that writing is a central element in the students' work. However, the required writing functions primarily as a vehicle to ensure proper study progression and to provide a basis for assessment. In this way, it can be said to meet the institutions' and the course instructors' needs more than the students' needs. The article calls for a pedagogy that is geared more towards helping students develop their writing skills and their ability to work with writing in their future classrooms.*

### Introduction

In its description of objectives for the study of English in Norwegian compulsory school, the national curriculum refers to two different dimensions of writing. Learners are, on the one hand, expected to develop the ability to communicate effectively in the new language, by way of different kinds of written texts. On the other hand, learners are expected to use writing as a tool in the language learning process. Along with oral skills, reading, digital skills and

numeracy, writing is described as a “basic skill” which is central in the learners’ work to master the foreign language. This dual perspective on writing is often summed up in the literature as *learning to write* and *writing to learn* (Manchón, 2011a).

The national guidelines for Norwegian teachers’ education state, naturally, that EFL teacher students need to learn how to cater for work with both dimensions of writing in their future classrooms. At the same time, students are expected to develop their own writing skills, so that they can be good language models for their pupils (The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). The guidelines provide no specifications, however, of the work that students are expected to do in order to meet these objectives.

It is, in other words, up to those who offer EFL courses to interpret the curricular documents and decide how students should work with writing. Some decisions will be made in local syllabuses, and some decisions will be made by course instructors as they plan activities and formulate writing tasks. The aim of the present article is to shed some light on the ways in which curricular objectives related to writing have been – and can be – interpreted. My data, local syllabuses and obligatory assignments, stem from EFL courses in the integrated teacher training program for grades five to ten.

Students may develop skills and insight related to writing and the teaching of writing in a number of different ways. It can be argued, however, that obligatory assignments are central in defining the content of a course, and that they provide an important message to the students about the role that writing can play in foreign language education (Reid & Kroll, 1995). I have therefore chosen to limit my investigation to requirements related to writing in local syllabuses and to obligatory writing assignments and exam questions.

My research questions are as follows:

- How do local syllabuses and obligatory writing assignments follow up the objectives related to writing in the national guidelines for EFL teachers’ education and the national curriculum for Norwegian compulsory school?
- How does the required writing correspond to the objectives related to writing in the national curricular documents?

## Theoretical background

The notions of *learning to write* and *writing to learn* are central in many educational contexts. Let us therefore take a closer look at these terms and what they can stand for in foreign language education.

*Learning to write* can range from work with vocabulary and spelling to the composition of long texts (Evensen, 2006). It involves learning about syntax, text structures and typical text formats, and how to build up a text in accordance

with relevant genre conventions. In higher education, increased attention has been paid to the need to help students learn about the specific rhetorical and linguistic conventions of their chosen field of study, *writing in the disciplines* (Bazerman, Little et al., 2005). However, recent research has shown that writing within each discipline varies considerably. Tasks and text types differ from course to course, at the same time as the same tasks and text types can be found in a number of different disciplines. For the student, then, it may first and foremost be a question of learning to master the relevant text types in the course he or she is enrolled in, *writing in the course* (Thaiss, 2001).

*Writing to learn* refers to writing as a tool in order to acquire new knowledge, understandings and skills. It can be used to reflect, to reproduce facts and to reformulate issues, and help develop and organize one's thinking about an issue (Langer and Applebee, 1987). In conjunction with reading, writing can be used to take notes, to select and interpret sources and perspectives, to organize materials and to structure new knowledge. A common view is that *writing to learn* is for the students' private use only, and should not be assessed (Dysthe, Hertzberg and Hoel, 2010).

Writing has a long tradition in foreign language education as a central tool in the students' language learning process. Some L2 scholars therefore differentiate between *writing to learn content* and *writing to learn language* (Manchón, 2011a). It can be argued, however, that the distinction between the three categories *learning to write*, *writing to learn content* and *writing to learn language* is useful primarily in order to make the different aspects of writing visible, and to identify the main objective of a writing task. In the actual writing situation, the different dimensions may be worked with simultaneously, and all types of writing might certainly involve the development of language skills. In fact, it can be argued that all writing in a foreign language represents an "interaction of purposes" (Manchón, 2011a).

What kinds of writing activities, then, can students engage in in order to learn what they are expected to learn? Naturally, such activities can take various forms. When writing is used as a tool for learning, for example, students can make up a wide variety of *writing to learn*-activities for themselves, to suit their own needs and preferences. The whole point is that students experience the tool as a useful one in their own, personal learning process.

On the other end of the scale are the obligatory assignments and exam questions that will be discussed in the present article. They are, one would think, designed with the students' expected learning outcomes in mind, or in order for them to document that they have accomplished what they are expected to accomplish. They are product oriented, as they are to be handed in and evaluated in one way or another (Reid & Kroll, 1995).

Much research has been done on various aspects of L2 writing. However, despite the central role that assignments play and the fact that formulating writing tasks is a central responsibility for teachers of a second or foreign

language, little has been written about this in L2 and EFL literature (Quinn, 2013). Some studies, however, have been done on tasks that aim to help students *write to learn language*. The unequivocal conclusion is that mechanical practice activities, which have been central in many foreign language classrooms, have limited effect (Hyland, 1996). Research based on a cognitive as well as a sociocultural view of learning suggests that “attention” is a central element in the language learning process. In order for learning to take place, the argument goes, learners must become aware of the discrepancy between the rules of the language and their own language competence (Manchón, 2011b). When involved in motivating tasks that encourage meaningful interaction and real communication, chances are that learners will become aware of “gaps” in their own competence and, thus, feel the need to learn more. It is argued that written work can be even more effective than oral activities, since writing leaves a permanent record, and since writing activities provide ample time to reflect and consider other ways of expressing oneself (Williams, 2012).

When it comes to tasks that have to do with *writing in the disciplines*, *learning to write* and *writing to learn content*, some studies have aimed to describe and classify the tasks that students can expect to meet in different academic subjects. Horowitz (1986), for example, presents a taxonomy of tasks in the ESL classroom, encompassing categories such as “summary of / reaction to reading”, “case study” and “research project”. Other studies have investigated the texts that students write and found that the term paper and the short-answer exam are dominant genres (eg Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984). Equally important, however, is these studies’ conclusion that classification of tasks and texts on the basis of formal features makes little sense, since the list of genres is extremely long, and since genres are defined quite differently in different disciplinary contexts (Melzer, 2009).

Recent theory does not define genre with reference to static templates of form and format, but rather as responses to recurring rhetorical situations (Miller, 1994; Swales, 1990). My study therefore investigates Norwegian EFL students’ obligatory writing as responses to the context they are in. The national curriculum for Norwegian compulsory school and the national guidelines for EFL teachers’ education constitute the most central elements here.

## Contextual background: The national curriculum for Norwegian compulsory school

The national guidelines for the EFL courses describe the students’ expected learning outcomes in 52 bullet points. Most of the formulations refer to foreign language teaching and learning in general, and are not geared towards the development of specific skills. Students are, for example, expected to have knowledge about different foreign language learning theories, and they should

know about “different ways of organizing teaching”. They should be able to “cater for a good learning environment with varied, differentiated and meaningful work” and to provide their future pupils with “inspiring and meaningful activities” (The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2010, all translations are mine).

The few bullet points that refer explicitly to writing, point to the need for students to be able to help future pupils *learn to write* as well as *write to learn*. One bullet point states that students should be able to help future pupils “produce oral, written and multimodal texts with accuracy, fluency and coherence”, – *learn to write*. Another bullet point states that students should make the pupils “aware of processes related to reading and writing and how they can utilize these strategically in their own learning”, – *write to learn*. In addition, several learning outcome formulations point to the need for students to make sure that work with the “basic skills” is integrated in all work with English. The curriculum also underlines the importance of integrating work with oral and written language.

When it comes to the students’ own writing skills, the curriculum expects students to be able to write “correct, fluent, coherent and functional texts in different contexts and genres”. It is implied that at least some of these genres are to be academic, as the curriculum requires that students “know about norms for academic text production and proper referencing”. Students are also expected to know about “text structures and linguistic devices”, “different genres and their characteristics”, and they should learn about “reading and writing processes”.

The national guidelines do not provide any specifications of the kind of work that students should engage in. Yet, the objectives indicate that student writing should be geared towards the development of language skills (*writing to learn language*) and the production of texts (*learning to write*). It would also seem natural to link writing activities to the students’ work with the different areas of study in the course, *writing to learn content*. It is worth noticing, however, that no mention is made of the need for students to use writing as a personal tool in their own learning process. Since the national curriculum for Norwegian compulsory school emphasizes this dimension of writing, there appears to be a discrepancy between the two curricular documents here.

## Materials and methods

Norwegian students who want to become teachers of English can choose different educational paths. My focus of attention is the four year integrated program which was launched in 2010 (“Grunnskolelærerutdanning”, “GLU”). It is organized in two streams, one for grades one to seven and one for grades five to ten. I have chosen to investigate the English courses in the higher stream because they are more extensive (60 as opposed to 30 ECTS), and also because

writing will be an even more relevant activity in the future classrooms of these students.

Twenty Norwegian institutions of higher learning offer the integrated program for grades five to ten, but they organize the obligatory and the optional elements in quite different ways. At the time of my investigation, only thirteen of the twenty institutions offered English, which is an elective, during the students' first years. Since my study was conducted two years after the program started, my material stems from these.

The 60 ECTS of English which students must complete in order to be able to teach the subject are offered in modules of 7.5, 15, 20 or 30 ECTS. As Table 1 shows, most institutions use a setup with 15 ECTS modules. The courses are often distributed over two or even three years, which means that all courses had not yet been offered when I finished collecting my materials in the summer of 2012. Although my investigation covers a majority of the courses offered, it is therefore important to remember that many EFL students would experience more – and perhaps other kinds of – work with writing than the present study indicates.

Table 1: EFL (GLU 5-10) courses offered / remaining by summer 2012

Institution	ECTS offered	ECTS remaining
A	40 (2 x 20)	20 (2 x 10)
B	30 (2 x 15)	30 (2 x 15)
C	30 (4 x 7,5)	30 (2 x 15)
D	30 (2 x 15)	30 (1 x 30)
E	60 (2 x 30)	0
F	60 (4 x 15)	0
G	30 (2 x 15)	30 (1 x 30)
H	30 (1 x 30)	30 (1 x 30)
I	45 (3 x 15)	15 (1 x 15)
J	30 (2 x 15)	30 (2 x 15)
K	45 (3 x 15)	15 (1 x 15)
L	45 (3 x 15)	15 (1 x 15)
M	30 (3 x 15)	30 (1 x 15)
Total	505	275

The local syllabuses for all the modules that were offered were available online. Some of the institutions had publicized descriptions of the modules that were scheduled in the year(s) to come, and I was therefore able to investigate these as well. I looked at local syllabuses for a total of 38 courses.

In order to get access to the writing tasks that students were given, I found out which teachers were in charge of the different courses and contacted them via phone and email. They, in turn, sent me the obligatory assignments the way they had been formulated to the students. They also sent me written exam questions, where such were given. I received material from twelve of the

thirteen institutions. Helpful colleagues sent me assignments and exam questions from almost all the different modules that had been offered during the first two years of the program.

I investigated the local syllabuses in terms of the objectives they present for work with writing, and the degree to which they correspond to and can be said to follow up the intentions in the national curricular documents. In addition, I looked for formulations that indicate the kind of written work students are required to do as part of their English studies, and what the purpose of this work seems to be. I also looked at the ways in which students are to be assessed, and the role that writing plays in student assessment. The national guidelines leave decisions about this, too, to local institutions.

I analyzed the writing assignments and exam questions in terms of the three aspects that can be said to constitute any written text, namely content, form and purpose (Ongstad, 2004). Starting with content, I found that the assignments, with very few exceptions, could be categorized as having to do with one of the following areas of study: grammar, phonetics, literature, culture and didactics. As it turned out that the assignments which dealt with the same content also had other characteristics in common, I used these categories as a starting point for further analysis. With reference to Reid & Kroll's (1995) principles for the formulation of effective writing assignments, I investigated

- how the content of the tasks relates to the intentions in the curricular documents
- the texts types that are asked for and how students are helped to write texts with the expected shape and format(s)
- the purpose of the tasks.

As they refer to the main purposes that writing can have in foreign language learning, the notions of *learning to write*, *writing to learn content* and *writing to learn language* are used as points of reference in the discussion of my results.

## The local syllabuses

The local syllabuses rely heavily on the national guidelines, and most of the learning outcome formulations are simply copied directly from one document to the other. Sometimes, bullet points are moved around in order to suit the organization of the course (the national guidelines present English by way of two 30 ECTS modules while most institutions, as we have seen, use 15 ECTS modules). Still, formulations are easily recognizable. Like the national guidelines, then, the local syllabuses present objectives related both to the development of the students' own writing skills and to their ability to teach writing, in rather general terms.

None of the texts mention the role that writing can have as a tool in the students' learning process. Still, from the information that is given about course requirements and procedures for final assessment, we understand that writing is seen as a central part of the students' work. Some courses include an obligatory oral presentation, but compulsory writing assignments are much more common. On average, students have to complete three writing assignments per 15 ECTS module, or a total of twelve writing assignments for the whole 60 ECTS course. The students' final mark is also, most often, set on the basis of written work. Most of the modules have a written school exam, while others use an obligatory essay or a written home exam as part of the basis for the students' overall grade. Only three of the 38 modules that I investigated rely solely on an oral exam for final assessment.

What kinds of content, then, should the students' writing be linked to, and what types of texts are they expected to produce? The local syllabuses are not very specific about this. Most of them state only how many assignments students have to hand in, and further information about the expected content and format of the course requirements is rare. Whenever specifications are given, these usually have to do with the length of the text, such as "two short texts of approximately 400 words" or "one term paper of approximately ten pages". Information is sometimes given that a text is supposed to be the result of group work, but the great majority of assignments are to be done individually. The content of the assignment is mentioned only occasionally, and the reference is most often to the students' teaching practice.

In their description of final assessment, most syllabuses provide information about the weighing of the different components, how many hours a school exam is going to last and how many days students will have to complete their home exam. The area of study that each exam will cover is sometimes mentioned, and "grammar", "phonetics" or "linguistics" are the most common references here. A few of the syllabuses specify the type of text that is expected, for example a literary essay or a reflection text on didactic issues.

None of the syllabuses link the students' writing to the learning outcome formulations, and they also provide little information about criteria for assessment. Most of the formulations that have to do with this refer to oral as well as written work and state in rather general terms that assessment will be based on the students' knowledge, language proficiency and ability to reflect on the content of the course. Quite a few syllabuses refer to semester plans for further information about the assignments, and some also point to class work related to students' obligatory writing.



## Writing assignments and exam questions

When most of the writing assignments and exam questions can be categorized as having to do with either grammar, phonetics, literature, culture or didactics, this reflects the fact that most courses are organized in modules that focus on one of these areas of study. Course names such as “English grammar and phonetics”, “Culture studies” and “English literature for teachers” are common. While the national guidelines require that students have knowledge about these content areas, the organization seems, first and foremost, to reflect the long tradition in Norwegian higher education where English departments taught linguistics, literature and culture as separate disciplines.

Quite a few assignments in the first four categories include a didactic perspective in one or more of the questions, which means that didactic issues are central in a majority of the assignments. Otherwise, the different areas of study are quite evenly distributed among the assignments in my material.

### **Assignments related to grammar and phonetics**

Many of the tasks that have to do with grammar and phonetics ask for short answers only. A typical format is one where students are asked to identify clause constituents, parts of speech or grammar mistakes, in relatively short sentences. Often, students are asked to fill in the correct word and justify their choice, or to briefly explain grammatical terms. When it comes to phonetics, most of the tasks check the students’ mastery of the phonemic alphabet. Students are typically asked to write a transcribed text with regular spelling, and to transcribe words and sentences with proper use of stress marks and weak forms. In addition, students are expected to be able to explain and exemplify phonetic terminology and phenomena such as “phoneme”, “stops” or “intonation”.

Most of the questions related to grammar and phonetics that require a longer answer have to do with classroom application of the students’ knowledge. Here, students are asked to make up a lesson plan or explain a challenge in grammar or pronunciation to a specific age group. The first example below is part of an assignment, while the second one is part of an exam question.

Make a lesson for a 9th grade class where you teach a relevant grammar item for the class. Your lesson plan needs to include a specific plan for how you are going to explain the grammatical item(s) and you need to think through what your students are going to do to acquire what you are teaching them.

In *Basic English Phonetics for Teachers* the authors say that it is important that pronunciation is not taught as a separate subject but that it is integrated in teaching in a natural way. Present briefly two/three ways in which this can be done.

Students are sometimes told how many words they should write, but most of the assignments provide no information about the text type or format that is

expected. As in the short answer questions, the main concern seems to be that students document their knowledge and insight related to grammar and phonetics. I found only one assignment related to linguistic issues that reminded students that they should not only demonstrate good understanding, the text should also be well structured and written in precise and correct English.

### Assignments related to literature

Literature appreciation essays have a long tradition in the study of English in Norway (Drew, 1998), and my material shows that much writing is centered round literature in EFL courses in the new teacher training program, too. The most common approach is to ask students to reflect on central themes in the text, such as “truth and identity” in J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* and racism in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. Most often, students get some clues as to what they ought to include in their answer and how they should organize their text, as this example shows:

Write an essay that examines the role of dialect in either one or both of the novels *The Secret Garden* and *Pigeon English*. Consider the following questions: What is the function of dialect? Why do you think that Frances Hodgson Burnett and Stephen Kelman both pay so much attention to dialect? How does this attention to dialect impact your understanding of the meaning of the novels?

All courses have books for children or young adults on the reading list, and students are often asked to write about one of these books and how it could be adapted for classroom use. Here is a typical question:

Which themes in *Funny in Farsi* would you emphasize in a group of 9<sup>th</sup> graders if you were to use the book in a lesson plan? Give reasons for your choice of themes.

Information about the expected format of the text is most often limited to the number of words that is expected, “Times New Roman 12, 1,5 spaced”. Some assignments, however, indicate that students can get help in the writing process by way of one or more rounds of feedback from peers and/or the course instructor. Quite a few assignments point to information that can be found in course materials or on a web site, on how to build up a text about literature. One module provides assignment formulations that include a long list of tips for students to consider as they write. The following is just an excerpt:

- a) Organise your text with a proper introduction, arranging ideas or topics into paragraphs, and finish off with a conclusion.
- b) Show knowledge. Details and facts impress. Do a bit of research into the author and his/her novel.
- c) Use examples to illustrate your points.
- d) Discuss: find arguments for and against.
- e) Avoid “oral” and / or casual language.

- f) Use the present tense when writing about literature, film, art, etc. Example: In scene four Hamlet says: ...
- g) Write titles properly. Titles of major works should be italicised.

### **Assignments related to cultural questions**

Assignments that have to do with cultural questions vary a great deal. Some ask students to provide brief explanations of terms like New Deal and The American Dream, while others require in-depth discussions of rather complicated issues:

Should Northern Ireland be united with the Republic of Ireland? Outline the relationship between Ireland and England from the twelfth century until today, and discuss the pros and cons of a united Ireland.

Most of the tasks that require a text of some length provide information about how many words students are expected to write and which spacing, font and size they should use. In accordance with one of the requirements in the national guidelines, some of the assignments remind students that their product should be written “as an academic text”. None of the assignment instructions explain what this means, but students are sometimes made aware that useful material can be found on a web site.

Other tasks provide no instructions about the expected format. The following task, for example, provides information only about the fact that the students’ answer related to culture will count 30 per cent in a five hour exam which also covers language and didactics.

In his inaugural address in 1981, Ronald Reagan stated: “Government is not a solution to our problems, government is the problem.” In light of this influential statement, discuss how and why American politics has moved towards the right during the last 30 years. What are some of the consequences of this development?

Quite a few assignments link the students’ culture studies directly to future classroom use, and raise questions such as this: “How would you teach about ethnic minorities in the U.S. to a lower secondary class?” Many tasks ask students to make up a lesson plan on a specific topic, for a specific grade level. The assignments are often rather extensive and ask students to present relevant theory, to provide materials and activities and also to reflect on the choices that they make for the classroom:

Describe how you would teach a class on *either* 9/11 *or* race relations in American culture. Identify the length of the class and the age of your pupils. First provide a short account of the importance of this topic to American culture and emphasize its most significant elements. Then identify the main themes you would wish the pupils to understand in your class; the material you would use to present these themes; and the pedagogical techniques you would employ to teach this material. For each of these three stages, you **MUST** justify the choices you have made.

### **Assignments related to didactics**

Most of the assignments related to didactics have to do with classroom applications of the students' knowledge of grammar, phonetics, literature and culture and, as the previous examples show, students are often asked to make plans for one or more lessons. Another common format is the report from teaching practice. Here, students are often given quite detailed instructions about what the report should contain, the way it is done in this assignment:

The report should contain

- An introduction which contextualises your practice experience
- General and specific aims for the lesson
- A brief lesson plan
- A brief account of what actually happened
- A theoretical discussion of your plan and its execution in relation to the theoretical background that we have discussed in class
- An evaluation /reflection on what you have learned from doing this lesson.

Writing is the topic only in three of the assignments that I investigated. In one of them, students are asked to design a variety of writing activities and to explain how they can help future pupils learn to write in different genres. The two others use an authentic pupil's text as a point of departure and ask students to identify and correct language mistakes, to write feedback to the pupil, to assign a grade and to reflect on issues related to formative and summative assessment.

### **Other assignments**

I found only one module which assigns written work that is geared explicitly towards helping students *learn to write*. In an assignment called "Written proficiency", students are asked to discuss topical issues such as the positive and negative aspects of urbanization and of international tourism. The main focus is on text structuring and how a convincing text needs a clear thesis statement, adequate support and a logical conclusion.

## **Discussion**

### **The local syllabuses**

The learning outcome formulations related to writing in the local syllabuses are, for the most part, identical with the ones in the national guidelines. In this way, the objectives in the guidelines are, seemingly taken care of. However, the local syllabuses do not provide any guarantee that the objectives are followed up in each individual EFL course. They state, first and foremost, how many assignments students are required to write and also that assessment, in most cases, should be based on written work. Other than this, they do not specify the type of

work that students should do in order to develop the learning outcome that is asked for. In other words, the local syllabuses leave much room for interpretation to each individual course instructor.

By emphasizing written work, however, the local syllabuses do point to the important role that writing can have in foreign language education. The fact that students are required to hand in a considerable number of written texts can, clearly, be seen to signal that the development of language skills is a main objective, as it is in any EFL course. When students have to write several texts, this will provide them with valuable language practice, and force them to write to learn language. At the same time, the many writing assignments can be interpreted as help for students to get through the course materials, writing to learn content. As they write a number of different texts, this can also be seen as an opportunity for them to learn to write texts in different genres and formats.

Reid (2001) argues that curricular requirements should be formulated and courses should be designed on the basis of a thorough analysis of student needs. We should not forget, she says, that the teaching of writing in academic courses is a service, where the main objective is to help students “become successful, confident, efficient and effective academic writers” (2001: 144). In our case, we might add “teachers of writing”. On the other hand, it is obvious that student writing must also meet the needs of course instructors and institutions. Schools need to make sure that students have learned what they are supposed to learn, and course instructors need documentation of student achievement in order to be able to assess them.

The local syllabuses do not link the obligatory writing to the students’ expected learning outcomes, nor do they specify the knowledge or the writing skills that students are expected to develop from the different tasks. The institutions’ need to check the students’ competence and study progression is perhaps seen to be just as important as the students’ need to learn. If the institution’s need for documentation is the main concern, this could also explain why the syllabuses do not mention writing as a tool in the students’ own learning processes.

### **The writing assignments**

The writing assignments are linked directly to the content of the course and must be said to help students write to learn content. They guide and support students in their work with a variety of topics that teachers of English, clearly, should know about. In this way, the assignments definitely follow up the intentions in the national guidelines for teachers’ education.

As the writing tasks and exam questions are linked directly to the different areas of study, they also contribute to the organization of the course. They help define grammar, phonetics, literature and culture as separate disciplines, with didactics as an integrated as well as a separate area of study. From the task formulations we see that students are expected to produce a great variety of text

types. Considering the fact that my material stems from twelve different institutions in very different parts of the country, it may come as a surprise that the tasks are, on the whole, quite similar. Thus, Thaiss' (2001) observation that text types vary considerably from course to course can not be said to apply to my material. This may be an indicator that the long tradition in Norwegian higher education of focusing on separate disciplines in English courses influences the formulation of writing tasks just as much as the present curricular guidelines do.

When it comes to writing to learn language and learning to write, this is, of course, addressed by the fact that students are required to produce a number of texts. Since all writing is an "interaction of purposes" student writing will, inevitably, help them develop their language skills and their proficiency as writers of English (Manchón, 2011a). A few assignments require that students get feedback either from the course instructor or a fellow student on one or even two early versions of their text. In addition to being an obvious opportunity for students to write to learn language and work on their language skills, this approach can also help students develop the ability to produce a functional and well-structured text. Students will learn to write, but they will also get insight into the principles of process writing, which may be useful in their future work as teachers of writing.

However, it is worth noticing that few of the tasks draw the students' attention to the ways in which they – as well as their future students – can learn to write. Little emphasis is attached to helping students master the variety of genres and formats that the writing tasks ask for, and hardly any assignments present instructions or expectations when it comes to correctness, precision and appropriacy. Information about criteria for assessment is also, on the whole, lacking.

Reid & Kroll (1995) argue that teachers have paid too little attention to the importance of criteria for good writing, and that students often have had to guess what the teachers want. Since norms have often been communicated in an implicit way, students have gotten the impression that the teacher knows the secrets of good writing, but that he or she does not want to share those secrets. Because of this, Hyland (2007) argues that a "visible pedagogy" needs to be developed in the teaching of writing, where requirements and expected outcomes are made explicit. The assignments in my material support such an argument. Guidelines as to what a good answer should look like might, of course, be given separately, and support in the writing process could well be given in class sessions. Still, the lack of specific information in the task formulations is striking, and it seems obvious that "a visible pedagogy" would have been beneficial for the students' development both as writers and as teachers of writing.

There are other characteristics of the writing tasks that also appear to correspond rather poorly to the objectives in the national guidelines. First of all,

very few of the tasks focus on issues related to writing and classroom work with writing, and hardly any of them encourage students to reflect on the role that writing can play in foreign language education. Secondly, students are asked to produce text types that are valid primarily in the context of their own studies. The assignments ask for a whole range of different texts, from brief, fact-oriented texts to literary analyses and in-depth academic discussions of cultural and political issues. In order to learn about and experience contexts and genres that are more relevant in their future classrooms, students must rely on other parts of the course, such as class work and required reading.

The writing tasks also provide few, if any, opportunities for students to link written work to their own experience and interests, and they give limited room for student creativity. Research indicates that students' motivation and engagement increases when they are allowed to write about topics of interest and relevance to them (Lo & Hyland, 2007). If students are encouraged to be creative and take chances, this will help them develop their own voice as users of the new language (Hyland, 1996). This may apply particularly to younger learners, but college students have also reported that they feel alienated and demotivated when assignments in the academic world restrict their opportunities for self-representation in their texts (Hyland, 2009). Most important is the fact that the students' obligatory writing does not give students much experience with the type of tasks that seem to be crucial in order for them to help future learners enjoy and engage actively in writing activities.

Research also indicates the positive effects of letting learners write for genuine, real-world audiences (Hyland, 1996). A couple of the obligatory assignments ask students to do this. One of these tasks asks students to write a lesson plan that can be shared with a colleague, the other one asks for a presentation of a cultural text at an in-service day for English teachers. All the other texts are clearly meant for the teacher or, to use Reid & Kroll's term (1995), the teacher-as-examiner. On the whole, the main purpose of the tasks seems to be for course instructors to check mastery of course materials, and to function as the basis for assessment. Quite a few aspects of the course are not covered in the final, written exam, but dealt with only in the obligatory work. In this way, even assignments that do not count towards the students' final grade can be said to constitute part of the assessment in a course.

## Conclusion

The learning outcome formulations related to writing in the national guidelines for EFL courses in Norwegian teachers' education are rather vague. Summed up, the curriculum can be said to require that students have good writing skills and the ability to help future pupils with their writing. It is up to the institutions that offer EFL courses to specify the kind of work that students should do in order to reach these objectives.

The local syllabuses signal that writing is an important part of the students' work, but provide few specifications of what and why students are expected to write. The fact that students are required to produce a number of texts can, of course, be interpreted as an opportunity for them to *write to learn language*. Curricular requirements related to the students' ability to write "correct, fluent and coherent" texts also indicate that the students' language proficiency is a main concern.

Writing assignments are central in all the modules that I investigated. This, too, can be seen as an opportunity for students to develop their writing skills, *writing to learn language*. The great majority of obligatory tasks are linked directly to the different areas of study in the course, namely grammar, phonetics, literature, culture and didactics. This is, clearly, an opportunity for them to *write to learn content*. When it comes to *learning to write*, little importance seems to be attached to helping students build up a text according to relevant genre conventions and master different genres and text types. Very few of the assignments provide information about the elements that would constitute a good answer, and issues related to text production are hardly dealt with in the assignment questions. Research into class work and required reading could, of course, change this picture.

Students will, clearly, benefit in many different ways from the obligatory writing that they do as part of their training to become EFL teachers. Still, my material suggests that the needs of the course instructors and the institutions have been prioritized over the needs of the students when work with writing has been designed and tasks have been formulated. The main purpose of the obligatory assignments as well as the exam questions appears to be to ensure proper study progression and to function as the basis for assessment rather than to help students learn to write and write to learn.

My material suggests that little importance is attached to providing students with insight into the different purposes that writing can have in an EFL course, and how they can work with writing in their future EFL classrooms. Perhaps writing is seen as such an obvious element in foreign language education that it needs no further justification or specification? This has been a common understanding in foreign language education. But it is important to remember that much writing in foreign language classrooms has had limited effect, and that work with writing has often lacked both direction and purpose (Reid &



Kroll, 1995). With Hyland (1996), then, there is reason to call for a more “visible pedagogy” and for the development of concrete principles for constructive work with writing. EFL students in Norwegian teachers’ education would, clearly, have benefited from a pedagogy that was geared more towards *their* needs when it comes to work with writing. A pedagogy that focuses explicitly on the purposes and the expected outcomes of different writing activities seems to be a necessary prerequisite in order for the full potential of writing to be exploited, in the students’ own education as well as in their future classrooms.

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