# APPROACHES TO EFL WRITING INSTRUCTION AND IMPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITIES

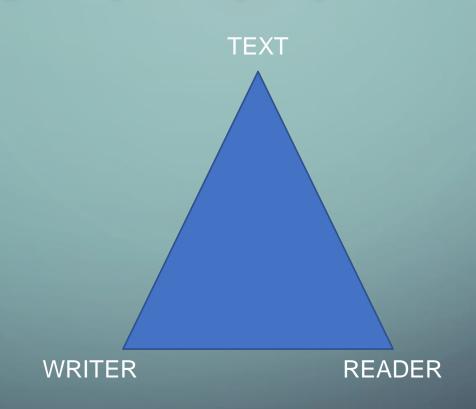
Δρ. ΜΑΡΙΑ ΜΑΛΙΤΣΑ

Σ.Ε.Ε. ΠΕΟ6  $1^{OY}$  ΠΕ.Κ.Ε.Σ.

#### WRITING IS IMPORTANT!

- Writing is an essential component of literacy.
- It is one of the most important skills students need to develop.
- Writing is not only a job-skill but an important life skill to learn.
- It can help students succeed in their academics, career, and in many other aspects of their lives: It enables them to express their ideas, feelings, etc. and communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.
- Writing should be given more attention in the EFL classroom, as it is often neglected.

# The triangle of components involved in the writing process Which is given primacy in your teaching context?



#### MAIN APPROACHES TO WRITING

#### 1) Text-oriented approaches

These approaches focus on the products of writing by examining texts, either through their formal surface elements, the vocabulary and grammar, or their discourse structure. We can distinguish three strands: Texts as Autonomous Objects, Texts as Discourse and Genre Approaches

#### • 2) Writer-oriented approaches

• These approaches, divided into Expressivist, Cognitivist and Situated strands, focus on the writer and describe writing in terms of the processes used to create texts.

#### 3) Reader-oriented approaches

These approaches emphasize the role that readers play in writing, adding an interactional dimension by examining how writers engage with an audience in creating texts.

#### > 1) TEXT-ORIENTED APPROACHES

- A] The first strand: texts as autonomous objects
- The idea that texts are autonomous objects has been inherited from structuralism. Texts can function independently of a context. Meaning lies in the words, not in the minds of text users, and writers are rather passive in following the rules of grammar.
- Implications for the teaching practice?
- From this perspective learners' compositions are seen as a demonstration of their knowledge of forms and their awareness of the system rules to create texts. Good writing is accurate and conveys the writer's meaning explicitly.
- However, focusing exclusively on formal features of texts as a measure of writing competence ignores how texts are the writer's response to a particular communicative setting.

## MPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITIES

- Consider the sample activity for the teaching of writing below:
- Look at this sentence:
- "The children are playing happily in the playground".
- Can you produce a new sentence, replacing the words in italics with those below?
- birds; singing; loudly; garden
- [The birds are singing loudly in the garden]
- It might be an extreme example of a mechanical exercise, based on "controlled habit-formation" (behaviourist psychology), but one could find similar exercises in the pre-writing stage of a writing lesson in some textbooks. It is completely decontextualized and fully controlled one and only one answer is expected. The teacher will provide positive or negative reinforcement (correcting the grammar).
- Can you think of how it could be made more challenging?
- Other exercises of a similar type might focus on vocabulary, but not in a meaningful way.
- Then, learners are presented with a model text, which they have to imitate, while the writing is usually done at home. The teacher evaluates the product/gives feedback.
- [Sample writing lesson]

#### 16) TEXT-ORIENTED APPROACHES

- B) The second major strand looks beyond surface structures to see texts as discourse.
- © 'Discourse' relates both to:
- (a) the fact that the textual features extend beyond the level of the sentence and microstructure to the way sentences combine to form a text and macrostructure, and
- (b) the focus on function, that is, the use to which language is put, rather than form alone.
- Discourse-oriented approaches show greater concern for the reader than the text-as autonomous-object approaches.
- Implications for the teaching practice?
- Teaching students the structural forms of the language is not enough. It is necessary to draw learners' attention to the significance of smooth information structure for the development of writing efficiency, especially if the learners' native language does not display the same information structure properties.
- Focusing on thematic and information structure issues in the target language would enhance the acceptability and naturalness of the text created.

#### TEXTS AS DISCOURSE - IMPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITIES

- She approaches that consider texts as discourse, have tried to discover how writers organize language to produce coherent, purposeful texts and we should teach learners to do that, too.
- For example, we use the structure of what is **known (given) and new** to the reader (Prague School) or
- the **theme-rheme** structure (Halliday). Theme is what the writer is talking about and rheme is what the writer is saying about it: the part of the message the writer considers important.
- Theme and rheme help organize clauses into information units that push the communication forward through a text and make it easy for readers to follow.
- This is because we expect old information to come first as a context for new but breaking this pattern can be confusing. In the example that follows, the writer establishes a pattern in which the rheme of the first sentence becomes the themes of the next three, clearly signposting the progression. The theme of the final sentence, however, breaks the sequence, surprising the reader and disturbing processability.

#### THE THEME-RHEME PATTERN — AN EXAMPLE

- \* "Non-verbal communication is traditionally divided into paralanguage, proxemics, body language and haptics. Paralanguage refers to the non-verbal vocal signs that accompany speech. Proxemics concerns physical distance and orientation. Body language describes expression, posture and gesture. The study of touch is called haptics".
- As can be seen from the above example, the theme-rheme progression is vital for the effectiveness of the written message.
- Implications for the teaching practice?
- We need to familiarize learners with the legitimate word order possibilities in the English language, illustrating the functional differences. Since Greek students learning English have a morphologically rich mother tongue and more flexibility as regards word order, we need to show them that these legitimate orders are much more restricted in the target language, where the absence of rich morphology makes word order a primary indicator of structural relations.

#### THE PROBLEM-SOLUTION PATTERN

Another issue concerns the way units of texts are organized to help the reader see how the purpose of the message is unfolding. Some typical patterns include *problem-solution*, hypothetical-real, and general-particular.

#### Implications for the teaching practice?

- We need to familiarize learners with the above patterns. For example, we all have a strong expectation of how a story will proceed: we anticipate a problem-solution pattern, where following a context introducing the participants and situation (e.g. Cinderella is bullied by her sisters), we anticipate a problem will arise for the participants to solve (she can't go to the dance), then we look for a response to the problem (the fairy godmother's help) and finally an evaluation whether the response worked (she goes to the party and marries the prince).
- This problem-solution pattern is found in other genres, too, e.g. argumentative texts. The 'problem-solution' pattern involves arranging statements in the 'situation'-'problem'-'response'-'evaluation of response' order.
- As can be seen from the above example, part of what makes writing coherent lies in the readers' background knowledge and interpretive abilities rather than the text, i.e., in their cognitive schemata.
- Regarding the general-particular structure, e.g., topic sentences and supporting statements, among others (a transition from the more general to the particular), we have to teach that to the learners (e.g. how to structure a paragraph).
- It would, therefore, be useful to help students realize that smooth text flow may be a more 'global' and less 'local' issue. 🤇

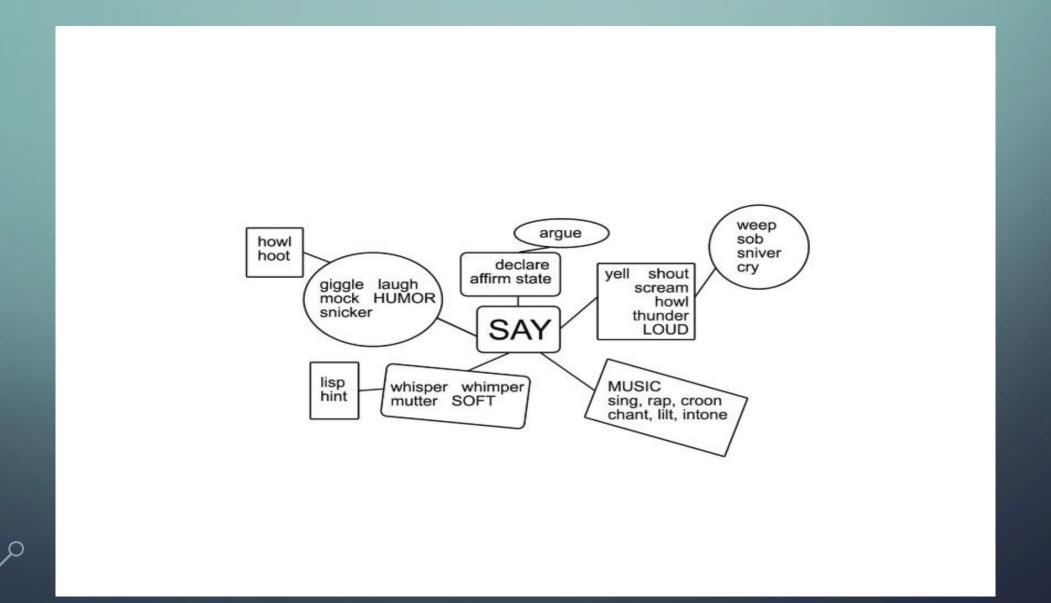
#### COHESION

- Cohesion categories: lexical cohesion, reference, substitution and ellipsis. Also, conjunction.
- Lexical cohesion: "continuity may be established in a text by the choice of words.

#### Implications for the teaching practice?

- We need to familiarize learners with how word repetition is used to create connectivity in texts (but also to reflect the author's stance towards the topic). This may take the form of "word repetition", as in the case of 'king' in a children's story or of a derivative like 'kingdom', for example.
- It could also take the form of "the choice of a word that is related in some way to a previous one, e.g. synonyms, collocations, antonyms, etc.
- We can brainstorm topic-related vocabulary and create a lexical pool at the planning stage of writing, which may be particularly useful in establishing lexical cohesion ties in a text. Also, a thesaurus-like vocabulary work, as in 'look –stare-glare-glimpse-watch ...', would give the writer flexibility in creating links while also avoiding repetition of a specific lexical item.
- With regard to collocations specifically, one would expect to find 'sea' in a text where a 'ship' is referred to, while "sleep" would most probably collocate with "bed".
- As regards reference, personal pronouns, like 'he', 'she', 'it', 'they' and so on, or demonstratives, like 'this', 'that', 'these', 'those', as in 'All this points to the fact that ...', for example, are used.

#### A SPIDERGRAM CAN BE USED FOR THESAURUS LIKE VOCABULARY WORK



#### COHESION AND COHERENCE

- The teaching of cohesion has generally focused on conjunctive relations and conjunctions are treated as the main way of holding the parts of a text together. Students are presented with lists of conjunctions, which are believed to guarantee writing quality and success in language certificate exams.
- However, the effects of local cohesion, within or between sentences, on writing quality differ from those of global cohesion, between paragraphs or larger chunks of text, and text cohesion.
- Is text connectedness a matter of specific language markers or of content or both? In other words, is it a matter of cohesion or of coherence?
- Coherence may not be a property of the text but may be reader-driven instead, like 'higher-level' processes in general. Part of what makes writing coherent lies in the readers' background knowledge and interpretive abilities rather than in the text.
- While it is relatively easy to explore the surface forms of cohesion, the nature of coherence is much more difficult to discern.
- Implications for the teaching practice?
- Connectedness should be seen from a number of viewpoints. Although conjunctions may be essential to the uninhibited flow of a text, they should not be overpractised or seen as the primary means of holding a text together.
- $^{\prime \bullet}$  It is, therefore, necessary to consider other cohesive relations, too, which tend to be neglected in the teaching of writing.
- For example, we could work on cohesion and coherence with different groups of learners in relation to the same text.
- Intertextuality -A key concept in securing coherence. Intertextuality refers to the extent our texts echo other texts.

#### 1) TEXT-ORIENTED APPROACHES

- C) The third stand: Genre approaches to writing
- Genre: a meaningful grouping of texts marked by common features of some kind. Emphasis is placed on function rather than form and on contextualization the social aspect.
- The genre approach has often been criticized as being quite prescriptive, limiting the writer's freedom, and also as acculturating the writer in the conventions of another culture.
- Implications for the teaching practice?
- In the classroom, we should promote student exploration of a variety of genres written in and for a variety of audiences and contexts. In this way we will help them develop the sociolinguistic competence needed to deal with diverse situations.
- We should make them aware of the social purpose in using language, which also has consequences for linguistic choices made (for any given instance of language use, a genre is selected, e.g., a report, a narrative, etc. and particular language choices are made).
- The role of context is most important.

# THE R.A.F.T. MODEL (READING/ WRITING STRATEGY)

- The letters in the acronym R.A.F.T. stand for:
- R: Role What role will the students be taking on? What perspective will they be writing from?
- A: Audience Who will they be writing to?
- F: Format What is the product? How will the understanding be displayed?
- T: Topic What are they writing about? What is the subject or focus?
- This model could be used for differentiated instruction.

#### A SAMPLE R.A.F.T. CHART

In a R.A.F.T. assignment, the students are given a chart with multiple options under each letter of the acronym, and they must choose one of each to create a unique piece of writing. Here is a sample R.A.F.T. chart:

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Headmaster	Parents	Speech	The new library
Tourist Operator	Tourists	Brochure	The city
Mayor	Sports unions	Announcement	The new sports facilities

- Using the example above, a student may choose to write a speech (Format) as Mayor (Role) to a group of citizens/teachers, etc. (Audience) about the new library (Topic.)
- Students using this strategy have to explore the content from multiple perspectives and think critically and creatively to express their understanding in multiple ways. This strategy also allows for differentiation due to the wealth of possibilities that can be chosen in each R.A.F.T., i.e. the topic in the above chart could be the same but the 'Role' and 'Audience' and 'Format' different, and students could be given choice, so that the assignment they complete meets their needs.

#### GENRE APPROACHES - IMPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITIES

- In a writing lesson we can include the following five stages:
- 'Building the context', 'modelling and deconstructing the text', 'joint construction of the text', 'independent construction of the text' and, finally, 'comparing related texts'.
- For example, for context building, we could show learners a video and continue with the proper student 'scaffolding' (using questions, direct instruction, vocabulary building exercises, role-plays, jigsaw, etc.)
- In the second step, namely genre modelling and deconstructing, learners could be presented with models of the text type taught and work on them (in pairs or groups) to discover their internal structure. Syntax and lexicon are elaborated upon if this is required by learners' proficiency, always in connection to the specific genre context, not in isolation.
- At the following stage, students are expected to use the knowledge gained so far and collaborate to produce texts of the same genre, while, next, they work independently to produce their own text.
- Finally, they explore the intertextuality potential of the text type practised, comparing their own text with other texts of the same type.

#### 2) WRITER-ORIENTED APPROACHES

- The second broad approach takes the writer, rather than the text, as the point of departure.
- We can distinguish three positions which together have contributed to the hugely influential process writing movement:
- A) Writing as personal expression the expressivist view. The first position focuses on the personal creativity of the individual writer and has helped to move writing teaching away from a restricted attention to form.
- However, it ignores communication in real-world contexts where writing matters. But despite its limitations, the Expressivist approach is still influential in many US first-language classrooms.
- A key feature of such an approach would thus be writing without constraint, as in guickwriting.

#### IMPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITIES - QUICKWRITING

- Quickwriting has three features: Concentrating on content, not worrying about form, and writing without stopping (e.g., for five minutes).
- It can be integrated into writing classes, e.g., at the beginning of the writing activity. It is a good way to help students develop ideas, and come up with words to express ideas, by separating the creating stage of writing from the editing stage.
- The 'stream-of-consciousness'-like element in quickwriting also called 'freewriting', 'speedwriting', 'flashwriting' is meant to liberate writers and to shift attention from form to content; quickwriting is an 'invention strategy'.
- For better results, quickwriting should be demonstrated to students.
- P Have you ever used quickwrites in your writing lessons? If so, what have you observed?
- The following is another example activity reflecting the expressivist view:
- "Read the story and then respond to it with a poem. Try not to retell the story in poem form alone"

#### <sup>o</sup> 2) WRITER-ORIENTED APPROACHES

- B) Writing as a cognitive process the cognitivist view.
- This position focuses on the cognitive processes of writing and views writing as a non-linear process, during which writers discover and reformulate their ideas while they attempt to compose a text.
- It has had a lasting effect on writing instruction in the form of 'process writing'.
- Process writing has its roots in cognitive psychology. It attempts to simulate what happens in the human mind in the act of composing.
- This model **also caters for individual differences** in writing strategies. With weak students we can use a composing model that is a reduced version of that used by more proficient students and provide scaffolding while instructing them in using effective strategies.

### THE COGNITIVIST VIEW — PROCESS WRITING IMPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITIES

- The writing process does not have to be linear. The writer may plan before writing, plan further after writing, draft, revise, edit at any point in the process, which means that one component may feed into another.
- ullet The written output may be modified on the basis of feedback received at any stage in the writing process.
- It is important to allow learners time to go over what they have written again and again, making changes/rearranging content, polishing ideas etc.
- These are very important steps, as the focus is on the process and not on the end product, that is on the HOW of writing, the stages the writer goes through in constructing meaning, and not on the WHAT of writing, as a finished piece of work.
- Therefore, Pre-planning is not enough. 'Post-planning' is important, too, since we think about what we will write, start putting down our ideas, think again, draft on, think again about what we have written, discarding some of our initial thoughts and adopting some new ones, and so on.
- This is, then, a non-linear, recursive process and this idea also needs to be reflected in writing pedagogy:

  "Writers cannot plan for what they do not yet know they are going to write".

## PROCESS WRITING —IMPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITIES of THE STAGES OF A LESSON

- A process-oriented lesson may involve some discussion and brainstorming, some quick-writing, idea selection or note-taking, producing a rough draft, evaluating it, structuring the text, producing the first draft and peer evaluation, conferencing, producing a second draft, self-evaluation, editing, producing a final draft and the final response to the draft (White & Arndt, 1991, p. 7).
- The first draft could be produced in groups/pairs and then the groups exchange drafts and evaluate/provide feedback for each other's work. The final draft, in which the feedback is taken into consideration, is produced individually.
- However, this should by no means be viewed as restrictive. Several steps could be seen as optional, or be collapsed, and their order could be reversed.
- To sum up, a writing lesson could be implemented in a series of stages, corresponding to the stages the writer goes through while trying to complete a writing task: 'planning', 'drafting' and 'revising' one's draft and, finally, 'editing' it.
- Although the names of the various stages of the process could differ, they all involve some kind of planning, drafting and revising, with all the going back and forth of recursiveness.

#### HOW DOES A MODEL TEXT FIT IN?

- Crucial to a process-oriented approach is that students should not be constrained by a model text supplied at the beginning of the composing activity (model texts could be supplied at the end).
- Instead, they could engage in a meaning-making process in a specific genre, drawing on the relevant schemata which were formed through earlier exposure to the genre, for instance and/or on the teacher's guidance, provided in the form of questions, extracts, distractors to be ruled out and so on.
- In this way, they will build up a text which they can subsequently compare with some text-type samples on the topic. Students will thus have the feeling that they themselves contribute something to the process rather than imitating or copying alone.
- Subsequent revision might focus on form matters mostly, mechanics and the final editing. In this way, students will be dealing with one thing at a time.
- As a final step, students could be presented with some sample texts (more than one model texts) and be invited to spot similarities and differences (e.g. What is there in these texts that has not been included in yours? Would you make any changes in your text or in the ones given? Why? How would this help improve the text? ...).
- Thus, the planning stage might also involve some writing, while the final stage might also involve reading.

#### DEALING WITH ERRORS

- Since the writer, rather than the written work produced, becomes the focus of instruction, implies that errors are no longer seen as a threat.
- In fact, they are 'encouraged' in a way, since controlling the process and checking for errors often discourages production, which is to be avoided.
- For example, when students are inventing ideas through quickwriting, no attention is paid to errors at the initial stage and content is given priority. The fact that multiple drafts are required means that the written product is not final and errors are dealt with in the final version.
- While some indirect teaching concerning particular structural and grammatical problems may be
  necessary, emphasis should be upon the expressive and creative process of writing. In this way,
   the students' purpose would be communicating genuine thoughts and experiences.
- This marks a striking change from the tight control of the writing process and the treatment of errors as a taboo in the approach to texts qua texts outlined earlier.

#### PROVIDING FEEDBACK

- We should make students aware of writing as an ongoing process of modification, which requires interaction between the writer, the reader and the text. This interaction is provided by:
- A) The teacher-facilitator, through systematic feedback, which usually does not concern overt error correction but indirect guidance, not focusing primarily on form.
- B) The peers, who are expected to respond to the written text and express reader expectations which will be included in a subsequent revision of the text.
- The teacher provides oral feedback in the form of conferencing. But the teacher is not the only person to provide feedback. There is also 'peer feedback' and 'self-driven feedback' (e.g., with the use of a code). Student autonomy is encouraged.
- Feedback is not provided only at the end of the writing process, on a finished product, alone. Pre-text, real-time feedback is very useful.
- Form-focussed feedback, targeting grammar errors or the mechanics of writing, i.e., spelling, punctuation and the like, is deft for a later stage. Instead, attention is paid primarily to issues of semantics and idea content and organization.
- The feedback expected is usually not of a 'yes/no' nature alone; constructive comments are expected, requiring readers to pinpoint the exact source of the deviance observed and providing tangible help for the writer in the reviewing process.

#### MODIFYING A WRITING LESSON (GROUPS)

> Work in groups and after looking at the writing lesson "Description of a place", make suggestions about how you could modify it in a more process-like direction.

#### COMMENTS ON THE WRITING TASK

- First of all, the activity needs to be better contextualized by providing a realistic purpose and an audience (who is going to read it? Why should they write it? Is it for a competition, for the school magazine to persuade students to choose it for their next excursion?). We could make it much more realistic if we told them that the best description would be published in the class/school blog.
- It is important to a process-oriented approach that students are not constrained by a model text at the beginning. Model texts are largely product-driven, since they are used in order for learners to have a 'correct' text of a specific genre to imitate. Such tasks are not 'authentic', as students do not engage in a real-life, problem-solving activity.
- Instead, pairs or groups of students might be given different prompts and required to build a statement around these prompts. Group A might be given '....', group B '... '(With lower-level students we could use a slip of paper with some language support like 'there is/there are ...'). The resulting statements can then be pooled and an attempt could be made for students to put the information in some logical order and produce a coherent text. Students' output, produced in groups, could subsequently be swapped among groups and commented upon in terms of peer reader expectations, these comments eventually leading to a revision of the first draft, adding, removing or elaborating on various points.

#### 2) WRITER-ORIENTED APPROACHES

- C) Writing as a situated act: the third position focuses on the writer's immediate context.
- Writing is a social act that occurs within particular situations.
- This model incorporates the writer's prior experiences and the impact of the immediate, local context on writing.
- Social inequalities of power, educational and home backgrounds, and so on can result in what has been called writing apprehension (Faigley, Daly and Witte, 1981) where individuals experience high degrees of anxiety when asked to write.

#### FINAL REMARKS: A SYNTHESIS OF APPROACHES

- Process writing approaches should be used along with writing-as-text approaches.
- The need to contextualise the activity and make the right assumptions regarding audience expectations, can be incorporated within the process of writing itself.
- Moreover, issues of form, though usually left for the later stages of the writing process, are also important for the production of an effective piece of writing.
- Therefore, the best option is an eclectic approach to the teaching of writing, synthesizing the strength of the process and genre approaches for implementation in the classroom:
- Elements such as planning, drafting, conferencing, editing, and peer review are components of the process approach. Considering and understanding the purpose, audience, and contexts, on the other hand, are components of the genre approach.

#### > 3) READER-ORIENTED APPROACHES TO WRITING

- They reflect the social role of writing
- The second on writer-reader communities and
- The third on the power relations involved in the social dimensions of writing.
- Pivotal in this approach is the writer's anticipation of reader needs and expectations (the notion of audience).
- Implications for the teaching practice?
- 'Audience' can be a difficult concept for writers. The writer might fail to meet the needs and expectations of their audience, if they make the 'wrong' assumptions on the basis of their own cultural patterns.
- Therefore, we need to help students develop a clear sense of audience, while also sensitizing them to cultural differences. Also, we should make writing tasks as authentic as possible.
- •We also need to integrate 'intertextuality' in the writing lesson.
- Texts display how authors understand an audience because they exploit readers' abilities to recognise intertextuality between texts. Intertextuality is a relationship between a given text and one or more earlier texts which have influenced it. Because texts are not produced in a social vacuum, intertextuality is a feature of all texts, but it varies in terms of how directly visible the influences of the earlier texts are.

#### WRITER-READER COMMUNITIES-WRITING AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

- In this sense, writing is a means of constructing as well as sustaining the identity of a discourse community, bound together by "routine practices and conventions" (Hyland, 2016).
- In the social construction approach, the focus is not on the writer-reader pair but on the writer as a member of a discourse community interacting with other members of the community. In other words, the social context within which writing is considered is substantially broadened, for it is now a whole community rather than a reader or group of readers that is addressed.
- The constraining effects of the group on the individual are therefore most prominent in this orientation. There are not clearcut definitions regarding 'discourse community', which is also referred to as 'community of practice' or 'interpretive community'.
- In academic writing, conformity to the standards of the community is absolutely necessary and it clearly points to the 'like-mindedness' or 'membership' lying at the heart of the notion.
- To go on belonging to or being a member of an interpretive community and thus have one's writing read one needs to have good knowledge of the code of the community and this is strongly linked to knowledge of other texts, namely intertextuality.

#### WRITING AS POWER AND IDEOLOGY

- The social dimension of written communication is by no means ideologically neutral and is, instead, marked by power relations.
- The way discourse mediates power relations is systematically explored by Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1992; 2013; Forchtner & Wodak, 2018; Wodak, 2009; Van Dijk, 2008).
- In other words, Critical Discourse analysts take up the issue of authority inherent in social constructionism and genre-related approaches and expose it in full.
- This is an important step from conformity to questioning.

#### WRITING IN THE DIGITAL AGE - USING DIGITAL TOOLS

- Digital tools are a part of our life now and several of them can be used with students in different writing stages.
- They offer great possibilities for collaboration, peer feedback, editing and publishing. They can also increase student motivation to write.
- Some digital tools can help struggling students compose 'multimodal compositions' (e.g. Haiku Deck, Buncee, and Adobe Spark ).
- Publishing students' writing in blogs and wikis can increase motivation to write, as students know there is a purpose behind their writing and a "real" audience who will be reading their work.
- Some digital tools are great for students to share their writing and then receive feedback. Digital tools are great for both teacher and peer feedback.

# Thank you