

Translanguaging Life Writing: *Autobiography-Driven Writing Instruction*

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Abstract

Deficiency-oriented attitudes are still common occurrences despite growing emphasis on linguistic and cultural diversity. Promoting inclusivity in learning, Herrera (2016) proposed “biography-driven instruction” emphasizing the power of students’ assets. Though her work was intended for young learners’ biliteracy, I argue that the tenets can be used as a framework for more equitable adult ESL instruction to build on learners’ “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) and “cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2016). In this article, I theorize an “*autobiography-driven instruction*” approach where L2 writing instruction can foster inclusivity through life writing by acknowledging diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds as assets, drawing from rich lived experiences, and tapping into multi-competencies. Drawing from the work in translanguaging and life writing, this article problematizes the deficiency-based assumptions, argues for life writing practices, and provides a practical look into the theorized *autobiography-driven instruction*. I detail how this approach can help students take a more active role in their learning and inevitably leads to amplifying diverse voices and inclusivity in ESL by learners (1) choosing the content they write about, (2) practicing a variety of the life writing genres, and (3) sharing their personal stories to create empathy and build rapport.

Keywords: translanguaging, life writing, asset-based adult ESL instruction, CLD.

“Cada cabeza es un mundo”
“Each mind is a world” -- Héctor Lavoe

“Bir dil bir insan, iki dil iki insan”
One language, one person; two languages, two persons. (A Turkish proverb).

Stories of Assumed Deficiency

I would like to start my article with a story from Menard-Warwick’s 2008 study in an ESL classroom primarily serving Latina immigrant women in the US, demonstrating how some teachers of adult English Language Learners (ELL) might have certain assumptions about their students, which then influence how they position their students and hence their pedagogies in problematic ways. During a unit on employment, the teacher in the study gave out handouts to her students about some work skills and asked them to pick which skills they already had, including cleaning house, cooking, or cutting hair. A former businesswoman in the class, Fabiana, then added to her handout “buy and sell chemical products” as it was important for her to list skills from her pre-immigration businesswoman identity to challenge the assumption that she was *only* an ELL. Her somewhat limited control of the English language (having made a grammatical mistake in a previous exchange in the class, thus being positioned first and foremost as an ELL rather than someone with skills and knowledge) prevented her from fully explaining herself to the teacher, yet she resisted the assigned position of “homemaker” by her teacher through the act of writing.

In another study where Kayı-Aydar investigated positioning acts through teacher narratives, she noticed that the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher was showing some negative assumptions about his students where he noted that he had noticed a lot of plagiarism in his students’ writing at the beginning of the semester. He stated that his students were “unaware of the processes involved in citation and, due to cultural differences, didn’t think it was necessary” (Kayı-Aydar, 2019, p. 138). After administering surveys, though, he shifted his assumption of them, collectively, to “intentional plagiarizers,” stating that they knew about proper citation techniques and the need to cite external sources but chose not to do so. Then, his solution was to have them write drafts under his supervision, giving them time to do the tasks in class so that they would not “procrastinate and feel forced to extreme measures like cheating.” In doing so, he positioned himself as a “responsible and concerned teacher” who took agency to solve problems and students as lacking the ethics to cite external sources (Kayı-Aydar, 2019, pp. 138-140).

Unfortunately, these examples are not unfamiliar experiences especially for adult ESL learners in an English-speaking country trying to learn a language while also trying to build a new life in their new environments. Such negative and deficit-oriented language attitudes of seeing students as only one thing— “learners,” and hence assigning them role-based responsibilities, rights, and duties— hinder what could actually be rich grounds of teaching and learning in culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) classrooms. Fabiana resisted the expectations and assigned positions through her act of writing by taking agency, but the “plagiarizing students” did not get to have a chance to explain themselves and their individual stories and reasons (or even be able to ask for help from their teacher) when confronted by such a problematic pedagogical intervention that did not go into the details of why something was happening but rather offered band aid, temporary solutions that did not take into account the complexity of their learning.

In an effort to address such negative (and often unconscious) assumptions that affect pedagogical choices teachers make, Socorro Herrera (2016) emphasized what she called “teaching from the asset perspective” where what students bring to the classroom—their

biographies/ life histories—is seen as more meaningful than any (standardized/ linguistic) test scores in supporting their learning and success. In doing so, she urged ESL teachers to embrace a pedagogy of celebration of linguistic and cultural diversity through biography-driven instruction.

Moving From Biography-Driven Instruction to Autobiography-Driven Instruction

Considering the importance of increasing diversity in college classrooms across US institutions, instructors need to be aware of and prepared for working responsibly and ethically with CLD student bodies. We have already begun to see growing emphasis on critical approaches to cultural and linguistic diversity. With Ladson-Billings developing the grounded theory of culturally relevant pedagogy which “help[s] students to be academically successful, culturally competent, and sociopolitically critical” (1995, pp. 477-478), and concepts such as the cultural wealth model that Yosso (2016) forwarded that works on similar ground in that it recognizes “the strengths and the rich cultural capital” linguistically and culturally diverse students bring to the classroom as a response to seeing minority communities at a disadvantage, there has been more emphasis on critical approaches to cultural and linguistic diversity. Building on this previous work, Gay presented the concept culturally responsive teaching that emphasizes “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010, p.14). Paris (2012) furthered that work and developed a vision for culturally sustaining pedagogy which takes into account students’ diverse identities and cultures and the various ways these evolve. What all these pedagogical approaches have in common in their goals is that they work to promote asset-based, additive alternatives to teaching and learning and positioning diverse languages, cultures, and identities of students as resources to build on rather than hindrances to their success.

All the affordances of these pedagogical approaches align with what can be achieved by biography-driven instruction that Herrera (2016) put forth, reminding teacher-scholars of the power of students’ assets in the classroom. With the focus on “integrating student knowledge with the school curriculum” in biliteracy education of young learners, she argued, biography-driven instruction allows students to have opportunities to learn in the “third space” to create culturally responsive teaching (2016, pp. 9-10). Though this approach has been put forth for younger learners and for biliteracy education, in this article, I build on the useful foundation it provides for CLD students and offer an interdisciplinary framework for teaching adult English learners writing through meaningful content with the integration of life writing practices in composition studies in promotion of a more inclusive learning environment for CLD students.

Defined as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively,” this approach is based on “the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference for students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (Gay, 2010, p. 14). Taking into account the importance of students’ lived experiences and their assets, in what follows, I bridge the work of biography-driven instruction in biliteracy education of young learners and life writing in composition studies to argue for the promotion of the assets of CLD learners, i.e., their depths of knowledge in areas such as culture (Moll et al., 1992; Yosso, 2016) – while providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate their diverse range of identities, positions, and lived experiences to their advantage and take an active role in their own learning. In order to do so, I propose that a life writing pedagogy in adult ESL classrooms as an interdisciplinary approach can provide teachers of adult CLD learners a creative and innovative way to teach second

language writing and help their students engage in L2 writing in meaningful and relatable ways, situated out of their frames of reference because even though biography-driven instruction exists and is used with young learners, we see little evidence of similar methods in adult ESL classrooms. Additionally, life writing as a subdiscipline of composition studies has not made its way to the teaching and learning of languages as a field explicitly. Therefore, what follows can act as a segue to imagine a means to integrate strategies from life writing scholarship into the field of applied linguistics, specifically in second language writing classrooms with adult learners.

In biography-driven instruction, it is usually the teacher who gathers the biographical information from their students, through CLD student biography cards (that include questions regarding students' country of origin, time spent in the US, first and additional languages known, learning style, and prior academic experiences, to name a few), surveys or home visits where caregivers of the students can provide information about their academic, linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of their lives through various open-ended questions, such as "What would you like me to know about the student?," with the help of translators and interpreters especially if teachers do not know the other languages of their students. However, I argue, if we can apply the tenets of this method in adult education that originated in young learners' biliteracy education, it would be the learners themselves bringing in the content they want included in their learning, thus allowing them to use their agency and reclaim their power as individuals with rich life histories who can meet their sociocultural, linguistic, cognitive, and academic needs in collaboration with their instructors. To this end, I propose an approach I call "*autobiography-driven instruction*" in adult ESL classrooms and argue that getting personal through life writing in second language pedagogy could be a practice of inclusivity. Understanding our students as individuals with unique histories and needs includes focusing not only on their educational and academic backgrounds but their life stories as well as individual and cultural wealth: what their family histories are like, how they reached the point they are now at, what challenges they faced along the way, what their aspirations are moving forward, how their culture is impacting how they are learning or being as individuals, and what they have to offer to their new learning community.

A Practical Look at *Autobiography-Driven Instruction*: Translanguaging, Content Selection, Life Writing Genres, and Sharing

The first tenet of this inclusive *autobiography-driven instruction* is the acknowledgement of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as assets and resources that they can use to their advantage in their learning of English. Given the fact that language learning is identity work (Kubota & Lin 2009; Nero, 2005; Nieto, 2004; Norton, 1995; 2010; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Park, 2013; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000), acknowledging CLD students as legitimate users of English language empowers them and eschews concepts like monolingualism and standard English ideology. With a translanguaging approach to language (Horner et al., 2011), a more inclusive and diverse learning environment is created to benefit not only ELLs but all students. Through this approach that promotes translanguaging as an integrated linguistic strategy, when we ask students to share their stories, in any language they can use as they are adding English to their linguistic repertoires, we would also be responding to their culturally diverse ways of learning, and facilitating the formation of useful and supportive pedagogical spaces in and beyond the classroom, by allowing them to tap into their "multicompetencies" (Cook, 2002) as translanguaging individuals. To this end, as they translanguaging their ways into writing (about) their life stories, they also have a chance to practice the language they are learning.

Drawing from Fu (2009), "Writing Between Languages," who emphasized the writing backgrounds of ELLs (in grades 4-12) and how they can be an important resource rather than

a hindrance to writing in English, teachers can follow the four stages outlined in her work for writing development that do not eliminate students' linguistic background but rather build on it. The stages she outlined begin with writing in first language (L1) alone, then slowly moving to code-switching or mixing languages, then to the interlanguage stage (i.e., writing in English but in the grammatical sentence structure of students' L1), and finally transitioning to writing fully in English. Following these stages of second language (L2) writing, Fu argued that students "build content knowledge through learning and writing in the first language" (2009, p. 28), and that "their stories help [us] understand them, not just as writers, but as individuals" (p. 40). What is important to highlight here is that by focusing on the act of writing rather than how they write and in what language, teachers position their students as individuals with rich and diverse lived experiences first, rather than learners only. By allowing learners to follow these stages that align with translanguaging, i.e., the dynamic processes these multilingual speakers navigate the complexities of the demanding and challenging task of meaningful language use, especially in written mode, *autobiography* driven instruction starts with the valuable pedagogies translanguaging offers in operating across diverse linguistic systems that encourage creativity and innovation in constructing and conveying meaning while also fostering critical thinking with students constantly reflecting on their linguistic, cognitive, academic, and sociocultural needs and realities. One way to do that would be an activity where a writing prompt, following the reading of a personal essay on immigration or a children's book depending on their English proficiency level, asks students to share a memory where they felt like the character in the story. In this situation, students are free to use any translingual act they are comfortable using, with the teacher writing alongside them and then sharing how the process went. Modeling what is being asked of students this way would be encouraging students to voice their own processes and help build trust and rapport with each other as well as the teacher. Students could write about their first day in the US, the first time they took the bus to go the grocery store, or seeing something for the first time in their lives and comparing it to something familiar back home. This way, teachers not only show that they encourage translanguaging in writing, but also welcome diversity by allowing students to explore language and content in their own ways.

After changing the deficit-based assumptions and negative attitudes towards CLD students' linguistic resources through adopting the translanguaging strategies and the linguistic aspect of their individual and cultural wealth, we look to various ways of integrating life (hi)story content to second language writing assignments or activities in transitioning from biography-driven to *autobiography*-driven instruction. One way to do that, as mentioned, is to encourage students to bring in the content they want to engage *with* and write *about*. Similar work has been done in a high school course called "Action Research and Social Change," designed and led by the students, detailing the Latinx youth involvement in promoting culturally sustaining pedagogies, when students chose the content they wanted to study, drawing from multiple languages to maximize meaning-making and affirming their "hybrid identities" as they tapped into their "cultural frames of reference to create engaging, quality learning experiences" (Irizzary, 2017, p. 87). The students in this study had stated that their traditional curriculum and what was referenced in standardized tests were "rarely applicable to their lives" (Irizzary, 2017, p. 89). Therefore, building on the asset-based approaches to education, in this course where students took an active role in choosing content to be covered, they were able to take agency in their learning and claim their powerful positions in the ESL classroom. In that sense, I argue that if high school students were able to engage in such critical decision-making processes in their own learning, it could also be done at higher levels such as with adult learners or college students, as well, since such spaces could allow for more flexibility in individualized and personalized curriculum. This begins with the acknowledgement of the multiple and varied positions of language learners in the classrooms; that they are persons with diverse literacy and

lived experiences and their backgrounds, interests, and aspirations could be highly informative for the pedagogical choices their teachers can make.

Going back to the example shared at the beginning, what was missing in the instructional model in the classroom with Fabiana when she was only positioned as a language learner and a homemaker was an understanding that adult ESL learners could do more than what a single instructor could imagine and prepare for, and adult learners could contribute to their own learning in collaboration with their instructor to make classroom material and content better fit their needs as diverse individuals. Then, what that instructor could have done in addition to the handout they worked on together would be to have a short writing task asking students to tell a story about their previous work life, e.g., a time when they felt frustrated with a co-worker, or when they accomplished something they had not anticipated, or some embarrassing moment when there was a misunderstanding. There could also be regularly scheduled times within a unit where students are asked to bring in a writing prompt or a reading material they would like included in the lesson plan and the following writing assignments can be created out of that in collaboration with everyone in the classroom and not just the instructor. That way, adult learners of English in such welcoming classrooms will likely feel included and that their experiences and (life) stories matter in this new space where they learn not only a new language but where they also get to teach others about their own lived experiences and realities.

If such a big undertaking is not possible in a given teaching context, another way to give students the opportunity to bring in the content they want to write on could be through dialogue journal writing, as discussed in Peyton and Staton's (1991) work "Writing Our Lives," which suggested that dialogue journals between the student and the teacher gave them all an interactive, authentic, and sincere way to communicate, without concerns for making mistakes as the journals would be additional to their classwork and hence not graded. Through dialogue journals, "students simply communicate at the level at which they are able and challenged" (Peyton & Staton, 1991, p. 2). Student entries in these journals could be about their own backgrounds, thoughts, and experiences, or about social, political, or academic topics studied in school or anything that relates closely to the realities of their lives. Students are the ones who initiate, direct, extend, or abandon the topics of their entries, and teachers simply engage with them through writing back and forth throughout the semester as regularly as they can. Peyton and Staton's work was based on improving (bi)literacy of their adult students, mainly focusing on basic writing skills, however, their approach could also be used for more than improving the basics such as spelling, and build on students' ideas, content development skills or awareness on registers and different rhetorical strategies in writing in an additional language. While the purpose in original dialogue journals was to have additional writing practice, their use in *autobiography-driven* instructional model would be to help students gain more confidence in their second language writing and focus on the content of what they can share from their lived experiences. That way, they could feel like they are contributing to their own learning as experts on topics covered rather than just learners. Additionally, originally, dialogue journals did not involve any exchange among peers, however, if and when students are willing to do so, they could also engage in written dialogue among themselves, as well, and continue their interaction among themselves for as long as they desire. For instance, if it is among their interests, a student could start an entry about the political debates going on during an election year, and either the teacher or another student with similar interest could take up that journal and continue the conversation by talking about similarities and differences between the political system in their home countries, what political candidates are promising or failing to do, or their predictions on the election results. Being able to talk about certain topics they may have not been able to do in their previous lives perhaps, students could feel empowered to share their opinions in these safer spaces that encourage such inclusivity.

Moreover, by use of questionnaires, informal interviews, or smaller brainstorming or writing activities asking about and building on students' educational and employment histories, for instance, teachers can further address the four dimensions of effective L2 instruction provided with biography-driven model, i.e., cognitive, linguistic, sociocultural, and academic, and facilitate students' L2 identity construction through writing as well as support their diverse, individual, and reflexive positioning in *autobiography*-driven instruction, as well. In that sense, biography and *autobiography*-driven instruction stand on similar grounds but what is added or improved through *autobiography*-driven is that while in the former a lot of the responsibility is in the shoulders of the instructors doing the research and preparation to meet their young students' needs, in the latter the responsibility is shared in collaboration with the adult students who could contribute to their own learning experiences. Through brainstorming, making connections to their life histories, teachers would be doing the work of "igniting, discovering, extending, and affirming" (Herrera, 2016, p. 143) their students' rich backgrounds, helping them transfer their skills and knowledge to new learning and living situations, and making sense for content building, together with their students rather than on their own.

Furthermore, to support students in establishing their sense of authorship, either in their L1 or L2 or both, using the types of writing students do *beyond* the academic contexts, such as in online platforms, teachers can encourage "compelling means of self-expression, self-discovery" (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005 in Yi, 2007, p. 28) through various topics in direct relationship to their lives. Using these interactive and reflective journal entries or biography cards as springboards, teachers would also be building rapport with students early on, which could be easily achieved through "conferencing," i.e., meeting them one-on-one and spending individualized/personalized time with each student and their life and writing as Ortmeier-Hooper suggested for literacy improvement (2008). Doing so, teachers can learn a lot about their students individually and therefore move from a sense of seeing them with a singular position of English language learner, or assigning them a collective identity, to one of multiplicity where students are more than learners and individuals who speak multiple dialects perhaps, or those who have visited many countries, worked various jobs, learned various literacies, experienced different cultures, and have values that might be unfamiliar or unexpected from those of their own. In that sense, spending one-on-one time with each student, even for ten minutes a week, could give teachers ample opportunities to get to know their students at a different level and help their writing improve in individualized ways by getting a sense of what kinds of writings they do beyond the academic work and how they could build upon them.

As mentioned, some of the brainstorming or small-scale, low-stakes life writing practices that are student-initiated and developed could be done without concern for grades and correction and just as a way of practicing writing and connecting what Fink calls "course files" and "life files" to build a significant learning experience (2003). By integrating life files and course files, then, what goes on in their lives outside the classroom (e.g., life files that could include what challenges they face at work, or how long they have to travel for an international grocery store, or whether they have lost a relative recently) and what is needed to succeed in the classroom (e.g., course files that could include linguistic knowledge such as how to form sentences using present perfect, vocabulary related to shopping, how to develop a body paragraph or write a blog post).

In meaningful and intentional ways, students can engage in writing practices that support and promote the realities of their lives more fully rather than being limited by the artificial boundaries drawn between the two spaces to create "significant learning categories" in six areas, namely foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn (Fink, 2003). Fink argued that each of these interconnected significant

learning categories has a distinct value for learners as they do not separate what is learned academically (foundational knowledge, for instance) with what is valuable beyond that (such as through human dimensions that emphasize learning about oneself and others, as well as caring that helps learners develop new feelings, interests, and values). To this end, by getting personal through life writing practices integrated in the second language writing pedagogies, the link between life academically and life outside of it becomes stronger because the connection is already there, as students do not and cannot leave their worries, struggles, or excitements outside when they walk into the classroom. Therefore, even asking a simple question at the beginning of the class as a form of warm-up writing prompt such as, “How are you feeling today and why?” could yield various fruitful conversations that ultimately help students feel heard and their lives outside the classroom valued. In addition, in staying clear of concerns for grammatical mistakes, these simple writing exercises can provide students a form of “pedagogical safe house” in their linguistic journey that are “free of surveillance” (Canagarajah, 2004, p. 121) and with high degrees of trust [and a] shared understanding” (Pratt, 1991, p. 40). A pedagogical safe house, then, in this case, is a learning space where students could engage in interactions where there is no scrutiny regarding their language use but that allows free flowing interaction among students.

One example is to let students translanguage among themselves, maybe through code-switching and passing notes during class or having their peer discussions in a mix of languages or multiple modes and using various media. A pedagogical safe space is any kind of environment that allows for “constructing a culture of underlife behavior” where students can develop multiple, mobile, and shifting ways of interacting and communicating their own desires, values, and needs in ways that serve them (Canagarajah, 2004, p. 121). Some underlife behavior could look like sharing a secret code in their dialects or first language during activities to complete a task more easily, gathering with others who share the same culture during recess to talk about common events they could organize or go to, or responding to prompts using symbols or emojis instead of words in English in a way to draw from their other literacies or to build community in a space of unfamiliarity. Culturally and linguistically diverse students in these pedagogical safe houses can, in short, build language awareness and multiliteracies, become multivocal as they are invited to use their linguistic repertoires to their advantage, evoke their hybrid identities as multiracial/lingual individuals, represent the diverse styles and codes that are available to them, cross discourses and community boundaries as they cross linguistic boundaries through translanguaging, shuttle between writing genres (such as texts, e-mails, social media style articles, reports, or job application forms and bend the rules to fit their purposes) and discourses of diverse communities to be socially functional, and participate as legitimate members of second language classroom communities (Canagarajah, 2004). In that sense, I argue that through these pedagogical safe houses, with code switching in writing, for instance, or by taking agency in deciding on content to write about, (life) writing practices could be a form of safe house in second language writing classrooms where students negotiate their shifting identities through various writing practices with content they choose to bring from their lives beyond the academic spaces. As they build confidence in their legitimate membership in the target communities, they start to participate and “invest” more in their learning and take more agency, as Norton (1995) argued, because participation is more than just about having the linguistic competence to use the language but it also involves the social, cultural, and historical aspects of a communicative situation in which an individual may choose not to interact with others if they are not invested in the topic of conversation, for instance, or if there are differing social power dynamics involved. Therefore, acknowledging and encouraging the formation of pedagogical safe houses, especially in rich “contact zones” (Pratt, 1991) such as multilingual classrooms with CLD students, is highly critical and important for effective learning and teaching.

With the comfort of being able to use their linguistic backgrounds and bringing their life histories and stories into the L2 writing classroom, the next aspect in *autobiography-driven* L2 instruction would be choosing among the various life writing genres to deliver and convey life stories in. At this point, however, it is important to explain what we exactly mean by life writing. With life writing, we do not just refer to personal essays and memoirs, as typically thought of in composition scholarship, but instead we should consider a wide range of genres of nonfiction, such as (multi-)literacy narratives as they can be means of empowerment (Pavlenko, 2002) and systemic examination of one's life (Johnson & Golombek, 2011); travel writing or migrant literacies that “involve stories of loss, displacement, and migration” (Pahl & Rowel 2010, as cited in Karam et al., 2021, p. 512); or artifactual literacies that “also carry the hope of ‘connecting communities, affording new forms of talk, engendering critical literacy, and providing spaces for authoring new selves’” (Bartlett & Vasuvedan, 2010, as cited in Karam et al., 2021, p. 512). Additionally, “artifacts [also] carry narratives of not only past lives and identities, but also the ‘potential for transformation, which then can move people across diasporas into new spaces’” (Pahl & Roswell, 2011, as cited in Karam et al., 2021, p. 517). Then, asking students to bring in an artefact that is important to them and not only describe that artefact in detail but also share a memory with it to emphasize its importance could be a life writing exercise. Similarly, having students write a literacy narrative could also invite them to think more broadly about the literacies they have (beyond just about writing and reading in traditional sense), such as their musical literacies, bilingualism, knowing how to operate a vehicle, conduct a lab experiment, or run a company. This invitation to write about what they know, in any language they know or can write in, would help them feel valued and encourage them to engage in more meaningful content creation that is not just for a grade. Such (personal) narratives can also be presented as counternarratives to resist the deficiency-based assumptions members of target L2 communities can have of L2 learners.

Other examples of life writing genres to integrate in adult ESL writing instruction besides various narratives could be blogging about their favorite recipes, Instagramming (or other writing practices involving social media), letter writing (which could include open letters to society about an issue they see in their communities, letters to loved/lost ones, or even to entities such as anxiety or loss to have a therapeutic experience in a time of distress), writings about family histories detailing one's heritage, sequential life writing, testimonies, apologies, anecdotes, confessions, diary entries, as well as narrative poems as “literary experience is also a language experience” (Arthur, cited in McConochie, 1985, pp. 125-126) or cross-cultural autobiographies that are rich accounts of transforming literacies and transnational lives. (See Smith & Watson, 2010 for more genres of life narratives.) These are just a few of the life writing genres students could be encouraged to take up and attempt to compose in, and this is by no means an exhaustive list. Teachers could give a list of these genres at the beginning of the semester and ask students to choose among them throughout depending on which one could better serve their needs at the time. That way, students could also practice different forms of writing and learn how to analyze a writing genre, the intended audience for their writing, as well as their purpose, and how to deliver the most effective version based on what they believe is needed as writers.

These life writing genres could take many forms, such as “personal, formal, informal, humorous, descriptive, reflective, nature, critical, lyric, narrative, review, periodical, romantic, scholarly, and genteel” (Stuckey-French, 2018, p. 6). Since life writing is any piece of writing that does the work of “discovery” and personal inquiry (Epstein, 1997, cited in Neal, 2018, p. 61), it serves as a mirror into one's life, identity, and culture; it is *their* version of a life story, an event, or a lived experience. Telling their life stories, then, these often-underrepresented adult ESL students “can position themselves at the center of scholarly discourse rather than

always at the edges” (Viray, cited in Gray-Rosendale, 2018, p. xvii). “When we draw our personal stories into public spaces such as the classroom—” as Morrison (2018) wrote, “as much as we wish to share, and no more—we build spaces for empathy, connection, and a new model of scholarship that makes space for the acknowledgment and nurturing of the subjective aspects of the work that have been driving us all along, in one way or another” (p. 176). To this end, to make adult CLD learners’ voices heard, life writing where there is a clear connection between writing practices in and outside the classroom could provide the needed support for amplifying the notions of diversity and inclusivity and also help create rhetorically savvy individuals who think of the genre of their writing as well as their audiences and the social aspects that go into creating meaningful and purposeful texts.

Lastly, in having an *autobiography*-driven approach to teaching L2 writing, besides allowing for multiple ways of expression by having students tap into all their linguistic resources through translanguaging, by letting students use their agency to choose what topics they want to explore, and by providing them with a wide range of options from life writing genres to compose their stories in, the last but not least step to have in this inclusive teaching practice through *autobiography*-driven instruction would be to create a space in the classroom for students to read and share their work with each other. A practice like “group reading Tuesdays” or “Friday share-day” would help facilitate community and rapport building in the classroom and be a practice of fostering empathy with one another and within oneself. In a classroom where students do life writing and share their work, Schell wrote (2018), we help create a space for “literary expression, healing, stress release, and places for comfort and solidarity as well as the development of a public voice” (p. 23). Students engage in a meaning-making process by witnessing the life stories of one another when they share their writing, take turns, and listen to understand not only one another but also themselves. Kameen wrote “[Students] need to have something that [they] genuinely want to say, and [they] need to be able to enter the conversation with the prospect of actually being heard” (Neal, 2018, p. 62) in a writing classroom. In addition, through sharing our own writing, we can understand how students position themselves and make their values, beliefs, and experiences known. Therefore, by asking a generative question, such as “Would you like to tell me a story?” as it is “potentially one of the most meaningful invitations to human interaction” according to McCorkle, Arrington, and Harker (2018, p. 77), teachers can invite CLD students, and themselves, to get to know unfamiliar languages and life stories and build empathy toward differences, thereby creating an inclusive learning environment where everyone is heard and appreciated for who they are with rich and diverse lived experiences beyond the single positions assigned as “language learners.”

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to emphasize that since the meaning and purpose of life writing could change from one student to another, as their linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds are not monolithic, one cannot and should not expect their learning process to be the same, either. To this end, with autobiographical writing “which foreground[s] issues of identity, subjectivity, memory, agency, history, and representation” (Fuchs & Howes, 2008, p. 1), ESL teachers can help CLD students to use life writing to be more “expressive and critical” (Fuchs & Howes 2008, p. 15) as they navigate the demands of a new life and an additional language and the challenges these bring. To this end, this article has built off of what has already been put forth in biography-driven biliteracy education in young learners, translanguaging, and culturally sustaining pedagogies, and argued for an *autobiography*-driven approach to teaching writing in adult ESL classrooms to help bridge the gap between the diverse experiences of the participants of L2 contexts, both the teachers and the CLD students, in hopes of providing a framework for inclusivity through integrating life writing practices where students can draw

from their funds of knowledge and individual and cultural wealth. With such an approach, students can, not only recognize others' values, beliefs, and experiences, but they can also center their own knowledge and experiences in learning to navigate translingual/transnational writing in L2 contexts and cultures and claim more positions of power to make their otherwise invisible assets visible.

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