Concretely speaking then, by the end of the fifth year, Italian students who attend a Liceo Linguistico should be able to analyze and summarize a written text and to write a composition, which are required from the six-hour State Exam that concludes the five-year course.

The exam, called Seconda Prova, arrives from the Ministry of Public Education on the morning of the exam and the students can pick the language in which they want to write. The exam come into two parts, Production and Comprehension. If students decide upon Production, they have to write a long composition and they can choose between three titles in Italian, again provided by the Ministry. Usually, the text required is an argumentative text, or a mixed-type one, in which both description and opinion are required. Therefore students have to be familiar not only with different discourse modes (summary, comment, composition) but also with text types (argumentative, descriptive, narrative).

In the Comprehension section, students can further choose between two texts, a 20th century literary excerpt, or a current-events text, generally from The Economist. They have to read the text they have chosen and answer questions on that text. These can be referential or inferential; they can ask for a brief synthesis of a part of the passage; they can ask about textual organization or about the tone and attitude of the writer/journalist; they can be about vocabulary or stylistic choices; or they can inquire about the atmosphere of the passage. Next, students have to summarize the passage they have chosen, and finally write a short composition on a title (sometimes there is more than one) provided by the Ministry and generally geared toward the topic of the passage they have chosen to analyze. The exam is difficult as it asks not only for fluent writing, but also engaged context, critical thinking, and critiquing. (State Exams can be found at the following web site: http://www.eduscola.it/esami.html under Seconda prova)

2. The problem

As the objectives of “Progetto Brocca” and the structure of the State Exam show, Italian students should arrive at the exam capable to process and to produce reasonably engaged texts in at least two of the three foreign languages they have studied, i.e. English, French, or Spanish –
German is generally excused, as it is offered only froz the third year. What happens in that students
tend to take the exam in French rather than in English, or in Spanish where it is offered.

Teaching EFL students to write in English is not an easy task. In addition to knowing
English well, teachers should be good, confident writers themselves, and their methodology should
be informed by theory and research, and kept updated. Both theory and research are vital for
acquiring teaching awareness. Research in the teaching of L2 writing unanimously says:

"a familiarity with formally articulated theories and principles enables teachers to discover
and build on their own theories. This knowledge also helps teachers become aware of the
strengths and weaknesses of their own teaching. . . Formal theories, coupled with the
findings of empirical research, can thus play a vital role in our thinking about teaching and
the conduct of our classes. (Ferris and Hedgecock 2, 1998)"

Such awareness, besides helping pedagogy, can be extremely useful also when making decisions for
planning. Yet few teachers seem to be aware of this necessity. Although there still is not a well-
defined theory of L2 writing, the field is "far from atheoretical" (Ferris and Hedgecock 3, 1998). In
the American academy, where teaching English as an L2 is an issue, there is a vast, on-going
research and discussions on writing, both in English as a first and as a second language.

Unfortunately, such research does not always make it abroad and teachers are not always aware of
it.

The Italian Ministry of Public Education seems to believe that English high school teachers,
especially in language schools, do not need special training to teach writing. The underlying
assumption seems to be that because teachers of English have a degree, they automatically know
how to teach writing in English and do not need to be trained. The same can be said for Langstage
assistants: because they are native speakers, they automatically should know how to teach writing.
Although they do have a teaching degree, to my knowledge most have not been trained to teach
writing.

Teaching writing to EFL students is not easy because it does not provide immediate visible
and tangible results. Students seem to make the same mistakes again and again and never to
progress. What teachers end up doing, because they think it is the best procedure and because they
feel a need to teach and get some results in the short time available, is to assign one writing activity after another, and consider each of them the final product. It is a cycle: teachers correct and comment on the papers, return them to the students, who read the comments, look at the mistakes and the grade, then the teacher assigns the next writing task. Sometimes students ask questions, generally concerned with language; more often, however, they do not. This procedure is a good example of completely wasted efforts and energies, both on the part of the students and the teacher.

Grammar is important. There is clearly nothing wrong with dealing with grammar. In an EFL composition, problems of that nature are the first to be noticed, and they have to be dealt with, always. However, it is obvious that if, when reading a composition, teachers focus on grammar to start with, and insist on starting from grammar, they will rarely be able to move to other aspects of writing, such as coherence and cohesion, which Italian students’ compositions often lack. Cohesion and coherence are standards essential in any written text, and in fact they may be more important than mechanical aspects. Therefore they should be part of the writing syllabus. Although it cannot be said that lack of cohesion and coherence are not addressed, I suspect that the way they are is not adequate. The point is that if teachers insist on starting from the mechanics of the language, they risk stopping there, as they will always find mistakes and will never ever see any developmental progress in students’ writing. Actually, there will hardly be any development at all.

Generally, however, teachers stop at the language level, whereas writing is much more than that. And, although there might be awareness that writing is a process, the text-type single-draft-based approach, which emphasizes the product rather than the process, is the approach more widely used. Writing does not seem to be perceived as a communicative act. As Mina Shaughnessy, Maxine Hairston, Mike Rose and many others insist, “we cannot teach students to write by looking only at what they have written. . . . We have to do the hard thing, examine the intangible process, rather than the easy thing, evaluate the tangible product”, be the students L1 or L2 (Hairston 84, 1982).
The result of the fact that teachers are not theoretically updated of the approaches they use, and above all of the little time institutionally appointed for writing, is that students are poor writers in English. It will probably continue to be this way until the day teachers realize that the traditional approach they have always used may not necessarily be the best, and that reading some theory and research could lead to different teaching behaviors which could lead to different results. The institution which prepares the State exam must also understand that if we expect students to do well on the exam it is time to train teachers to teach writing. As Maxine Hairston points out in her discussion on L1 writing, a view "which denies that writing requires intellectual activity and ignores the importance of writing as a basic method of learning, takes away any incentive for the writing teacher to grow professionally" (Hairston 79, 1982).

Thus, the problem in my situation is a rather complex one. Students are not really taught how to write, with too much emphasis on the language and on the product, but they are expected to be able to write; and even when they are "taught" to write their texts present a number of problems. The attitude seems to be that because they know how to write in Italian, students do not really need proper tutoring in writing in English. Teachers seem only slightly aware of the fact that transferring abilities is not as natural, as immediate, and as productive as it may seem. Exactly because there is a foreign language involved, a different teaching approach may be necessary if not essential.

1.2 Narrowing the problem

Italian students’ compositions in English, besides the obvious grammar, vocabulary, and syntax problems, tend to be incoherent, which is a much worse problem that faulty mechanics. The pattern of organization of the composition and how the information is presented, is often messy and does not answer what the title requires. However universal the concept of coherence may be, when students write in English, they often do not produce coherent, cohesive, texts, ones which develop argumentation logically in a sequence of units of thought which the reader expects and is able to follow. As for the first types of problems, clearly, anybody writing in a foreign language makes mistakes, especially if the language has not yet been mastered at advanced levels. Problems
of coherence and cohesion, on the other hand, can be more subtle, more difficult to handle, and definitely more dangerous in terms of actually learning or being able to write. These are aspects of writing that go beyond the mere sphere of language to enter the sphere of logic. And because teachers seem to be interested mainly in mechanical problems, and stop at what is in fact the first draft, problems with coherence are rarely addressed and when they are, they are not handled adequately. For example, though it can definitely be useful, reordering paragraphs in scrambled order is not enough to teach students to be relevant and coherent. As for cohesion, although eventually students will need a list of links, simply providing them with such a list, or gapped paragraphs to be filled, is not the right answer to the problem.

The notion of coherence is strictly connected with the notions of logic and relevance. If such aspects are disregarded, the effectiveness of a discourse will suffer, and the writer will risk being misunderstood, or worse, will seriously obstruct communication. In other words, writing, unless we mean getting ink on the page, does not happen. It may be objected that part of the difficulty that Italian students have is due to the fact that the foreign language constitutes a tangible barrier. It is always harder to write in a foreign language than in the native language, but this is only part of the problem. There are also other explanations. In 1966, Kaplan claimed that when the paper of a foreign student is out of focus, it means that the student has been using "a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader" (Kaplan, 1966). In other words, Kaplan says that both rhetoric and sequence of thought reflect those of the student's culture. In his article, Kaplan says also that "each language and each culture has a paragraph order, unique to itself, and that part of the learning of a particular language is the mastering of its logical system" (Kaplan, 1966). Therefore, the fact that Italian students' sequence of units of thought often suffers in coherency, according to English standards, may be because it follows a different logic, accepted in Italian, but not in English.

1.3 Some considerations on writing: The importance of writing and of critical thinking
It cannot be denied that writing is the basis of much education. Being able to write is important, although students generally do not seem to believe it. Writing is required in everyday life, practically to everyone, in school and outside school, "it occurs any time one's mind is engaged in choosing words to be put on paper" (Mayber et al. 78.). Anybody may at one point of his/her life need to write for different purposes, either "for professional or civic writing assignments" (Shaughnessy 280. 1977). According to the National Center for Education Statistics:

Effective writing skills are important in all stages of life from early education to future employment. In the business world, as well as in school, students must convey complex ideas and information in a clear, succinct manner. Inadequate writing skills, therefore, could inhibit achievement across the curriculum and in future careers, while proficient writing skills help students convey ideas, deliver instructions, analyze information, and motivate others (quoted in Nagin 3, 2006)

Therefore, schools as a place for learning and where citizens are formed need to provide situations in which students are helped to "develop their skills in both the writing and reading diverse types of texts for a variety of academic and public communities" (Neulieb 6). Kaplan, together with many others, says that "composing is more likely to be learned than acquired" (Kaplan 1987, 17). And indeed, the belief that being able to write can be a gift one is born with, as Carl says, is a superstition. Although there might be people to whom writing comes easy, writing is a skill that has to be learned. It is therefore the responsibility of school and teachers to assist students in the unlinear process of growing as writers.

Because writing is a complex skill, "the instruction that a school must provide if its students are to reach the high standards of learning expected of them," must be aware of this complexity (Nagin 9, 2006). Specifically, teachers must be aware that writing "does not take shape all at once in fluent sentences and organized paragraphs" (Nagin 9, 2006). The fact that writing does not take place at once implies that teachers cannot be happy with one draft. Writers themselves do not get it right the first time they write. They "shuffle through phases of planning, reflection, drafting, and revision," and "rarely in a linear fashion" (Nagin 10). It is for this reason that they recommend re-reading and revising, and writing and rewriting.
Writing is important also because it can be an excellent tool for learning as it is the result of complex mental operations which give the writer the opportunity of putting together in a coherent and articulated whole ideas, information, notions, thoughts, opinions, responses, contents that would otherwise remain scattered and unsted. It effects learning as it activates cognitive processes, being "a means of clarifying problems and of acquiring into potential solutions" (Cage 24). It is a cognitive activity which enables the writer to discover and generate new meanings to communicate to the reader (Frederiksen & Dominic 2-4).

Clearly, "[writing to learn depends upon an active rather than passive approach to learning. It requires that we conceive of both learning and writing as meaning-making processes." (Mayher et al., 78). Therefore for writing to be learning, and not an end in itself, the ideas and contents students work with have to be meaningful, intriguing, realistic, possibly thought provoking (Cage 16). For this reason writing should be "the ongoing reflection of students' developing understanding of ideas," their development as thinkers as they struggle to discover meaning while composing (Cage 5).

Educators widely believe that "writing is the most visible expression not only of what their students know but also of how well they have learned it"(Nagin 11, 2006). This belief has to be intended in the Aristotelian sense, according to which the ability to write well mirrors the ability to reason well (Cage 11). Taught as a form of "inquiry, problem solving, and discovery," practice in writing can help to:

- develop higher-order thinking skills: analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and interpreting. The very difficulty of writing is its virtue: it requires that students move beyond rote learning and simply reproducing information, fact, data, and formulae. Students must also learn how to question their own assumptions and reflect critically on an opposing viewpoint. (Nagin 23-25, 2003, emphasis mine)

Writing, as well as the rest of education, should be intended not only as a skill to be mastered for utilitarian purposes but also for its potentiality to teach independent thought and the ability to
reason. It is "thinking-made-tangible, thinking that can be examined because it is on the page"

(Cage 19). Hjelms' puts:

"teachers must do more with writing than simply teach its forms and model its processes. They need to help students develop the basic inquiry strategies common to most disciplines and incorporate them in their writing activity. Such strategies lie at the core of the critical thinking that students must do in academia, in a profession, and as adult citizens in the real world beyond school." (Qtd. in Nagin 54-55)

Writing has indeed to do with the important responsibility of having clear and structured ideas.

(Cage 24, 28). For this reason it is essential that teachers be aware of this and be able to create the conditions which will push and encourage students to think. Clearly, it is very difficult to see students' improvement in critical thinking as they "improve as thinkers in small, undetectable increments of change," but they do improve and their improvement is directly commensurable to the challenges they are asked to face (Cage 23).

If writing can enhance learning and help the cognitive development of L1 students, there are no reasons why it should not do the same for L2 students, even though they are already engaged with learning a new language. Actually, from the language point of view:

"writing to learn, to discover connections, to describe processes, to express emerging understanding, to raise questions and to find answers provides the best single means of making the acquisition of vocabulary an active and lasting process. The vocabulary itself isn't the explicit end of learning; rather, it is the means though the learning is achieved and expressed" (Mayher 79).

Because the "vocabulary itself isn't the explicit end of learning," but "the means though the learning is achieved and expressed" it becomes a natural by-product from which EFL learners simply and unquestionably benefit greatly. "[A] rich vocabulary is the result of productive language use, which includes active and responsive reading and listening as well as writing and talking, and is only partially susceptible to direct instruction" (Mayher 79). For this reason writing that involves only controlled exercises or following a model do not improve writing and does not encourage learning.

Research has proved that learning a foreign language helps students to develop cognitively and that those who study one or more foreign languages generally do better in other subjects than
University Press, and it is the result of about eight years of "experimentation and practical use" at the Universities of Edinburgh and Quebec. As the title suggests, it is a very controlled course, which focuses closely on grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. As for actual composing, it provides topics, guidelines, and quotations to be studied and turned into a composition. Interestingly, it suggests the students "get several opinions on the final result" and recommends not to "be afraid to re-write it later in order to improve it in the light of constructive criticism" (165).

Writing, Upper-intermediate, Oxford Supplementary Skill; by Rob Nolasc (Oxford University Press, 1987), provides task-based writing practice and recipes to write narratives, personal/business letters, descriptions, discursive texts, and reports. The Introduction to the Teacher confidently says, "The book can function as supplementary material or as a full-blown course in writing skills" (vi).

Study Writing, A Course in Written English for Academic and Professional Purposes, (Cambridge University Press, 1987) is divided into three parts: Part I is on functional writing, i.e., definitions, classifications, descriptions, comparison/contrast; Part II focuses on text structure; Part III is the Teacher’s guide. The Introduction to Part II says:

Various ways of organizing information into classifications, descriptions of processes etc. were tried out in Part I. While all these information structures are important, they usually appear within larger texts rather than forming the basis for a complete text. Most texts have a complex structure that includes definitions, classifications, comparisons, etc., but as elements within the text, which has a large overall purpose, usually to instruct, or to inform. The way a complete text is organized will depend on the overall goal, the writer’s prediction of the ability and knowledge of the reader, and the specific topic being written about. (98, emphasis in the original)

After this not-very-clear introduction the unit plunges into very controlled tasks up to the section.

Text Structure. Once again, however, what follows proves unsatisfying as it does not really discuss the structure of a piece of writing in English.

While informational texts in English use different combinations of the types of writing you have studied in Units 1-9, the structure of the text as a whole remains much more
the same. If this was not true it would be extremely difficult to read and write texts, since nothing would ever become predictable. (100)

This is all it says about structure. Then the unit offers texts which have the situation-problem-solution-evaluation structure, which according to the unit "can be found in even quite a short text" (102). After completing a few flow diagrams and having extracted the "S-P-S-E" structure, students should be aware of the fact that in texts:

1. The elements are not necessarily the same length as each other
2. Sometimes an element is omitted or only implied
3. The elements may appear in a different order.
   It is important to remember that texts are like people: each one is a little different from every other one, but they all have certain characteristics in common. Your job as a writer is to learn to control all the common characteristics so that you can create texts which are individual and acceptable. (107)

These explanations, and those offered to the teacher in Part III, sound rather banal and superficial, and not useful for teaching writing in most EFL situations.

Progressive Writing Skills (Nelson House, 1989) is considered a good textboo. The approach is again very controlled and based on model texts. W.H. Fowler, the author, says in the section Approach of the Introduction:

In my opinion, students cannot write successfully in a foreign language without models, and these models must be accessible to them in the sense that they can be imitated. I have therefore provided models for all the writing tasks in the book that exemplify technique. . . . These models lend themselves to analysis in terms of organization as well as usage.

Students often fail to appreciate that the organization of ideas in a discussion composition, for example, is more important than the idea itself and as important as the control of language. Throughout the book, therefore, models and exercises are used to draw students' attention to such things as the importance of paragraphing and the use of connectors and modifiers (Fowler).

Both organization and language are presented as being more important than content, and despite the title Progressive, writing is not approached as a recursive process but as a linear progression. The "models for analysis" it offers contain multiple choice exercises. This means that the first aspect of writing students are confronted with is language, when they should be helped to "control and express their ideas" before worrying "about getting the commas right" (Mayher et al., '71).
Writing 3 (upper intermediate) & 4 (advanced), from the Cambridge Skills for Fluency series (1994), promise to place writing in a central position, “presenting it as an activity which contributes to language learning in general” and to treat it as a process “with an emphasis on note-making, drafting, re-writing and collaboration between students” (Back Cover). The Introduction to the Student of Writing 3 further explains that the book has two aims, that is, to help students to develop their writing abilities and their knowledge of English. But then the units present activities that students have already encountered at basic level – how to write informal letters, inviting; a receipt, to describe a person – which are not productive in terms of learning how to compose the type of essay required in Liceo Linguistico or in more advanced types of writing situations. Unit 7 What Makes a Good Piece of Writing asks the student some important questions about the text it presents:

- What is the purpose of the text?
- Does it achieve that purpose?
- Is it clear and easy to understand?
- Are headings used appropriately?
- Do some sentences or paragraphs need to be broken down or combined?
- Does anything need to be added to or taken away from the text?
- Does the text need to be organized in some way?

But then, rather than expanding on these, the unit concludes with exercises focusing on “common mistakes in English,” or “odds of the pen” (28-29).

Unit 5 in Writing 4 promises to focus on “the process of writing” and how you (the student) personally experience it” (14). To do this, it asks the student to list the steps they go through when they have to write something “that needs careful thought.” For the listing, the unit provides students with 8 cards, to be applied to an important letter, a story, a job application, and an essay:


The students have to create a diagram with the cards, and then place it on the wall, and that is all about the process of writing. Units 10: Gathering & organizing ideas; 11: Drafting, sharing ideas & revising; and 12: Getting feedback, reviewing & producing a final version sound quite promising,
"writing is merely the habit of talking with the pen instead of with the tongue" (Harvard Report 1882, qtd. in Gere 36)

"... any writing needs time after its birth so it can change and grow and eventually reach its potential" (Joanne Pilgrim, qtd. in Elbow 5)

2.1 The product and the process approach in L1 writing: review of research

Until about the 1960s, the methodology used to teach writing in L1 was the so-called product approach. It was not based on a clear theory of learning or teaching. In fact, the assumption was that writing could not really be taught because it was "a mysterious creative activity that cannot be categorized or analyzed" (Hirston 1982, 78). This approach focused on the composed product—paragraphs, sentences, grammar, words, spelling, and punctuation—and on teaching grammar and literature. It did not take into consideration the steps which are involved in, and the recursive nature of, the composing process. As a result, teachers viewed students' written products "as static representations of their knowledge and learning" (Ferris & Hedgecock 1998, 3).

In this "dark period of our disciplinary history," as Lad Tobin has defined it, teachers who were generally not professional writing teachers, spent no or insignificant time on the actual process of writing (Tobin 1994, 2). They expected their students to be able to take care of themselves, and believed that the composing process was linear, proceeding "from prewriting to writing to rewriting" (Hirston 1982, 78). Consequently, in class teachers dealt with a piece of literature, assigned a composition on it, and then evaluated the product that the students handed in. Their comments on students' papers "focused on grammar errors and syntax: 'awkwardness' with vague references to content deficiencies such as 'average work' and 'support your ideas'" (Reid 1993, 1).

In her overview of composing processes, Bizzell explains that classical rhetoric did view reading and writing as a process made of invention, arrangement, style, memory.
delivery. During the centuries, however, invention and arrangement were redefined as pertaining to logic, whereas memory and delivery were considered unnecessary (Bizzell 1986, 50). The result was that rhetoric ended up by dealing only with one of the stages of the classical composing process, namely, style.

The tasks of the English department were to analyze the style of canonical literary works, for the purpose of interpreting these works’ enduring human values; and to analyze the style of students’ essays, for the purpose of correcting their errors and encouraging the writers towards the beauties discovered in the canonical works. From the students’ viewpoint, the English department was devoted to the study of style certainly encouraged the fantasy that there are no composing processes. Only finished products were treated in class, whether the accomplished works of literary masters or the mediocre ones of the students themselves. (Bizzell 1986, 50)

Considering that being able to write well is not an inborn gift, concludes Bizzell, students did not improve their composing because it was not taught to them.

The writing process movement began in the late 1960s as a criticism and as an alternative to this “product-driven, rule-based, correctness-obsessed” teaching approach (Tobin 1994, 4). It developed as:

- a rejection of a particular kind of product—the superficial packaged, formulaic essays that most of us grew up with—writing and teaching, and a particular kind of process—write, proof-read, hand in, and then move on to next week’s assignment. (Tobin 1994, 4)

There were writing teachers who started to do research on their students’ composing process, to publish their studies, and to meet at conferences. By the 1970s, it became clear that the traditional approach to teach writing, did not really work. It “failed to distinguish between knowledge about language and experience with how language is used,” and the emphasis on language errors “overshadowed the deep rhetorical, social and cognitive possibilities of writing for communication and critical thinking” (Nagin 2006, 20).

In 1972 Donald Murray observed that teachers taught writing as a product because they were trained by studying a product, i.e., literature. What student pass to teachers is however not literature, and their “conscientious, doggedly responsible, repetitive autopsying doesn’t give birth to live writing. The product doesn’t improve …” (Murray 1972, 11).
Therefore, he concluded, teachers should be aware of the fact that they are teaching "a process of discovery through language," which is:

"the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language. It's the process of using language to learn about our world, to evaluate what we learn about our world, to communicate what we learn about our world. (Muray 1972,12)"

In 1977 Mina Shaughnessy, in her famous *Errors and Expectations*, clearly stated that brushing aside students' work with scribbled injunctions, does not help students to "learn to write because "the keys to their development as writers often lie in the very features of their writing" (Shaughnessy 1977, 5).

By the 1980s researchers were focusing on composing as a process. According to Linda Flower and John R. Hayes the paradigm shift in teaching writing started when teachers began asking the question "What happens when people write?" (Flower and Hayes 1981), that is when writing began to be conceived "in terms of what the writer does... instead of in terms of what the final product looks like" (Applebee 1986, 96). The simple acknowledgement that there are composing processes, Bizzell writes, was "something of a gain for modern composition studies" (Bizzell 1986, 49).

In *Writing with Power: Teaching for Mastering the Writing Process*, Peter Elbow states that he can best help improve writing skills by talking not only about the words that should end up on paper "but also about the processes that should occur on the way to that final draft" (Elbow 1981, 7). Interestingly, he also says that writing requires two very different skills, "so different that they usually conflict with each other: creating and criticizing," that is "the ability to create words and ideas... but also the ability to criticize them in order to decide which ones to use" (Elbow 1981, 7). These skills, which are not separate in the composing process and which hint at the recursive nature of writing, are lead by what Perl calls *felt sense*, which is the natural "process of using what is sensed directly about a topic" (Perl 1980, 149).

In writing, meaning cannot be discovered the way we discover an object on an archaeological dig. In writing, meaning is crafted and constructed. It involves us in a process of coming-into-being. Once we have worked at shaping, through language.
As researchers focused on process, it became evident that writing not only reflects thought, it can serve as a facilitator of thought and may in fact even help the writer in the process of writing to shape and refine ideas which are not yet fully formed” (Taylor 1981, 6). The process of going back and forth between creating and criticizing, which Murray calls “process of exploration,” helps discovery of meaning. For this reason writing should be seen as a means of thinking and of expressing meaning.

Just like Murray ten years before, Hairstone wrote that:

writing is an act of discovery for both skilled and unskilled writers: most writers have only a partial notion of what they want to say when they begin to write, and their ideas develop in the process of writing. They develop their topics intuitively, not methodically. (Hairstone 1982, 85)

“Another truth” wrote Hairstone:

is that usually the writing process is not linear, moving smoothly in one direction from start to finish. It is messy, recursive, convoluted, and uneven. Writers write, plan, revise, anticipate, and review throughout the writing process, moving back and forth among the different operations involved in writing without any apparent plan. (Hairstone 1982, 85)

One pedagogical implication, explains Nold “is that even the conception of the writing process as prewriting, writing and rewriting oversimplifies. Planning occurs regularly in the middle of draft writing, not only before transcribing” (Nold 1981, 77). Also Flower and Hayes believed that writing is made of a set of thinking processes which writers orchestrate not in tidy and ordered stages. They see writing as a hierarchical system, which “admits many embedded sub-processes” (Flower and Hayes 1981, 376). Some researchers, says Bizzell, “influenced by Flower and Hayes “have argued that poor writing results from neglecting the recursive quality of the composing process...” (Bizzell 1986, 57).

Once it was clear that instruction in grammar does not necessarily transfer to the uses of language, that “extended writing that has the purpose of communicating a message to an
audience” can actually improve writing and develop thinking skills, and that there is not just one type of composing process, research started to focus on how a writer’s mind works when composing (Nagin 2006, 22). It emerged that writers move through a series of recursive phases to transform “inchoate and vaguely defined thinking to more organized, coherent, and polished presentation of ideas and subject matter” (Nagin 2006, 22). It also emerged that these phases do not take place in a fixed linear order, but in a messy fashion, which is however only apparent, or momentary. Above all, it became clear that writers generally “don't know their subject well until they’ve written a draft” (Nagin 2006, 22-25).

As a consequence of considering writing “a creative discovery procedure characterized by the dynamic interplay of content and language,” the importance of revision became more and more evident (Taylor, 1981, 6). Flowe and Hayes explain:

we do not need to define “revision” as a unique stage in composition, but as a thinking process that can occur at any time a writer chooses to evaluate or revise his texts or his plans. As an important part of writing, it constantly leads to new planning or a revision of what one wanted to say. (Flowe and Hayes 1981, 376).

Murray, Enig, Perl, Sommers, Nold, Elbow, just to name a few, have made it clear that revision does not only entail fixing the language, i.e. editing, and that rewriting should then not be seen as punishment. “The extent to which revision can play a role in writing,” says Taylor, is rarely made explicit to students. It is therefore no small wonder that much of what students submit more closely resembles rough drafts than finished essays. Revision, however, is that crucial point in the process when discovery and organization come together, when writers refine and recast what they have written and shape it into a more coherent written statement.” (Taylor 1981, 7, emphasis mine)

Thus, research in L1 considered “writing a discovery procedure which relies heavily on the power of revision to clarify and refine that discovery” (Taylor 1981, 8).

The revision process explains Sommers, is not “a separate stage at the end of the process,” but a sequence of changes which “occur continually throughout the writing of a work.” It is “part of the process of discovering meaning altogether” for the simple reason that writing is recursive (Sommers 1980, 221-2-8, emphasis in the original). Perl adds that those
who are aware that "writing can be a recursive process have an easier time with writing, looking, and discovering" (Perl 1980, 151). Therefore, what textbook advice should take place at the end of the draft, "actually occurs throughout the writing of the draft" (Nold 1981, 77).

Revision is not editing, and not "a one-time process that occurs at the end of a writing session" (Nold 1981, 74).

Thus, with time some teachers became more and more convinced that "students needed a better understanding of the whole process of working on a piece of writing, to give adequate time to the task and to make the time spent more productive" (Bizzoli 1986, 52).

Some started to think that "composing processes, rather than grammar drills, could become the actual content of the writing course," and that "students should forget their anxieties about correctness, stop trying to sound like someone else, and work to discover and refine their own personal, authentic writing styles" (Bizzoli 1986, 52-3).

Clearly, the new conception of writing did not produce immediate changes. Teachers did start to concentrate on the process, and also on the writer and his/her relationship with the reader rather than on the product of writing or on literary discussion. They also became committed to the idea that teaching writing was possible. And in 1982 Hairstone lamented that the great majority of writing teachers in the USA were not professional ones. In 1986 Gere said that composition teachers at all levels "had no direct instruction in composition pedagogy" and what they knew about composing was the result of "informal curriculum", which is "a combination of self-sponsored reading, orientation meetings, and conversations with other instructors" and textbooks (Gere 1986, 35). Although probably not all writing teachers were professional writers either, and it took some time before the process approaches widespread in 1986 Applebee reported that many teachers were not widely used—changes did come about, thanks to research, case studies, conferences, meetings, discussions, publications and the birth of professional journals. Besides the commitment to the idea that writing can be taught, it became clear that writing teachers should participate in the discussion, read professional journals...
their own research, possibly publish it. In other words, teachers should be prepared for this profession.

Since the 1960s, research on the composing process has come a long way. Researchers and specialists agree on the fact that composing is a complex, demanding, and recursive process. They have identified the phases that take place when composing, and discovered that they are hierarchical and do not take place in a linear way. Researchers agree also that “learning to write requires writing,” and therefore “[s]tudents cannot be expected to match such complex processes if they only practice them two or three times in a school term, or without a teachers’ guidance” (Bizzell, 1986, 66).

These were the 1980s and early 1990s. The writing process movement is now at a crossroad, and new research trends have appeared, explains Lad Tobin in the Introduction to Taking Stock. The Writing Process Movement in the ‘90s (Tobin 1994). In the last few years the approach has begun to be attacked by social constructivists, cultural critics, and back-to-basics supporters. However, the basic tenets of the writing process movement continue to be followed especially by those “who have worked within a system that insisted upon a five-paragraph theme per week in which the writer could never use I, ... never stop thinking about grammar, usage, and the correct answer” (Tobin 1994, 7). In 1992 “The Writing Process: Prospect and Retrospect” conference reassessed the movement. It did not reject it, nor did it yield to the requests of traditional opponents. It restated its strong aspects, while opening to new perspectives, brought about by theory and research, namely, the impact of gender, race, class, and culture, the effect of computer technologies, and teachers’ reading process (Tobin 1994, 9–10).

2.2 Implications of L1 composition research for L2 composition

The new field of L1 composition studies was divided into two schools, the Expressive and the Cognitive Schools. Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, some of most famous exponents of
the former, influenced by British educators (1), “focused on sincerity, integrity, spontaneity, and originality in composition classrooms; students were encouraged to ‘discover’ themselves through language” (Reid 4, 1993). Writing was seen as a process of meaning making but also of self-discovery. Richard Young, Linda Flower and John Hayes, famous exponents of the latter, investigated both the writing and the teaching processes, and they are the group who, according to Ann M. Johns, mostly influenced ESL teaching writing and research (Johns 1996, 26). Concerned with writers’ mental processes, they believed in a research-based, audience-focused, context-based approach to the process of writing, in which writers construct reality through language... and studied how writers approach tasks by problem solving in areas such as audience, purpose, and the situation for writing. (Reid 5, 1993)

It was this “more balanced combination of process and product” which constructivist theories brought about the eventually reached L2 professionals (Reid 1993, 7).

L2 composition was historically excluded from applied linguistics (Blanton 2002, 151).

"Like a foster child," Linda Lonon Blanton explains:

ESL composition ... has been hard to "place." Not present at the birth of ESL, in fact, not a natural-born child of linguistics, it has been shunted between foster homes in English departments, ELIs, skill centers, and extension programs (taught alongside belly dancing and wine tasting)." (Blanton 2002, 152)

And it was because it was disconnected from ESL that L2 composition associated with L1 composition theory and research, which eventually influenced by the findings in L1 writing research, articles and forum gave life to an engaged discussion among EFL/ESL professionals. Process case studies started to be performed, with the purpose of identifying and studying the behavior of ESL writers during the composing process, and of finding also "the extent to which what we do as teachers affects their writing" (Janell 1987, 699). As a consequence, ESL teaching procedures also slowly started to change.

For years, however, what had happened in L1 happened also in L2. Writing was considered — and in some cases still is — one of the means for learning language, nothing more
Indeed, along with the above attitudes to writing, there were ESL professionals who were aware of L1 findings. For example, in 1978 Barbara Kroll pointed out that L2 composition teachers tended to concentrate on “what appeared most teachable—resulting in an emphasis on mechanical skills and on algorithms of form,” when the skills necessary for writing are in fact creative processes that must be acquired (Kroll 1978, 181). She observes that to the best of her knowledge there was yet “no real call for process approach in any currently used textbooks on L2 writing.” (Kroll 1978, 179). Also Vivian Zamel and Barry Taylor were among the first ESL specialists to point to the importance of teaching writing as a process. In the early 1980s, they both were familiar with the L1 research in composition by Murray, Erroig, Perl, Sommers, Faigley and Witte, Rosse, Flower and Hayes. In 1981 Taylor declared that “writing is a discovery procedure which relies heavily on the power of revision to clarify and refine that discovery” (Taylor 1981, 8). Although ESL students have “their own particular language problems which require attention,” teachers should recognize that writing is only partially a linguistic process (Taylor 1981, 10). Therefore, writing teachers had to place pedagogical emphasis on content, revision, extensive practice, the importance of feedback and of reading (Taylor 1981, 10).

Zamel was aware of the fact that “writing is a process of discovering and making meaning,” and because it “may be recursive, non-linear, and convoluted,” writers can change it dramatically when they revise it, thus approximating “what may only have existed on an intuitive level” (Zamel 1983, 166). She lamented, however, that the pedagogy of teaching writing in L2 “insists on teaching writing systematically and prescriptively” and “teachers respond to student writing by finding and correcting errors rather than reacting to the ideas expressed by the text” (Zamel, 1992, 167-181, emphasis mine). She plainly says that teaching approaches that consider writing:

as the sequential completion of separate tasks, beginning with a thesis sentence and outlines and requiring topic sentences before one has even begun to explore ideas, may be as inappropriate for ESL students as they are for native speakers of English. ESL students should be allowed the opportunity to explore their ideas with reference to a
topic, hopefully a topic that truly engages them, and to make decisions about the most effective way to communicate these ideas. (Zamel, 1983, 181)

But, because second language writing research continues to emphasize the linearity of writing in English, and is interested in:

promoting language learning, ESL writing continues to be taught as if form preceded content, as if composing were a matter of adopting preconceived rhetorical frameworks, as if correct language usage took priority over the purposes for which language is used. (Zamel, 1983, 167).

Also Kaplan lamented the fact that in ESL field there was:

a long-standing pedagogical problem in the teaching of writing—that of trying to work backward from output, from the ‘finished’ composition—instead of recognizing writing (composing) as a process in which a given text is not at all finished output, but merely a waystage (Kaplan, 17, 1987).

Both at the university and school levels, there was “a general lack of awareness and application of research and theory” (Zamel, 1987, 699). ESL writing teachers considered themselves “primarily as language teachers,” says Zamel. “In fact, they are so distracted by language related problems that they often correct these without realizing that there is a much larger, meaning-related problem that they have failed to address” (Zamel, 1987, 704).

As a result of the work of these pioneer professionals, the paradigm shift in L2 composition eventually started, however imperceptibly. Bernard Susser (1994) says that by the mid 1980s process writing theories had been gradually introduced in ESL and EFL. Teachers and researchers, influenced by L1 composition research, slowly become more interested in what L2 writers do as they write, focused on pre-writing strategies, recommended the use of journals, advocated the teaching of invention techniques, and stressed the importance of feedback (Susser, 1994).

Although by the end of the 1980s the process approach to composing had reached the field of ESL writing, and research was beginning to grow rapidly, not all teachers espoused the new tendency on the field:
Despite the rapid growth in research and classroom applications in this area, and despite the enthusiastic acceptance of a shift in our discipline to a view of language as communication and to an understanding of the process of learning, teachers did not all strike along this new path. The radical changes that were called for in instructional approach seemed to provoke a swift reaction, a return to the safety of the well-worn trail where texts and teachers have priority. (Raines, 1991, 410)

Some teachers considered the process approach as inadequate for academic requirements and process pedagogists were not accepted by all EFL/ESL practitioners; in fact it caused great discussion, and much of the opposition was the result of “misunderstandings of what process writing was” (Sasser, 1994, 38). Daniel Horowitz, for instance, attacks them as not adequate to teach ESL students to write, whereas Joanne Liebman-Kleine, in her answer to Horowitz, says that those who attack the process approach to writing fail to understand that it is not one approach but many approaches:

There will never be a process approach because writing — the process of writing — is such a complicated and rich process, involving many facets of being: cognition, emotion, sense of self, sense of others, situation, background, experience, development. . . Process is not a dogma, but a concept that enables people to see writing in a new way and thereby ask questions that were not asked as long as people saw writing simply as finished product. (Liebman-Kleine, 1986, 785, emphasis in the original)

What the writing teacher has to help students to develop is an ability to handle different writing situations, and this is what the process approach should do. Sasser too says that “process is a component of many different theories of writing” (Sasser, 1994, 34).

Textbooks also lagged behind, as they still largely used the traditional paradigm. This means that despite the findings of research on process they had not had much impact in the ESL world at large, yet. According to Zamel, the reason for this delay should be looked in the “constraints of the educational system. . . at odds with the implications of process research” or in the fact that process approach to writing implies a less controlling role for teachers (Zamel, 1987, 701).

Although, as Ann M. Johns points out in 1990, the radical maturation from the audio-lingual and product approaches, had not yet produced satisfactory theories of ESL composition (Johns, 1990, 24), as the 1990s progressed ESL writing teachers were definitely dealing with,
happens in their class-room. Leki even emphasizes the necessity of a critical attitude towards what teachers do, because teachers and students live not just in the world of the class, but also in the world:

I believe now that teachers are in a position to aim not just at the welfare of individual students but, in their role as cultural workers and through their students (Pennycook 1996), at issues of social justice more generally. We can choose to make use of our knowledge and promote students’ developing literacy either narrowly for personal advancement or more broadly to combat social injustice in our shared world (Leki 2002, 60).

For this reason, says Leki (also), L2 writing teachers have “social obligations to work toward improving the world we live in” (Leki 2002, 61). And for the same reason Silva’s pedagogy “takes into consideration the strategic, rhetorical, and textual dimensions of writing” but also “the contexts (institutional, societal, and ideological) in which instruction takes place” (Silva 2002, 78).

What is important to note is that although research in L2 composition has branched out in diverse directions, just like research in L1 composition, the process approach to writing has not been retagged. In fact, also in the case of L2 it is recommended even for “the preparation of a rigorously defined academic product” which may easily be an exit essay exam without drafting and time restrictions (Reid 1993, 38).

2.3 Italian EFL teachers writing pedagogy

In the article Ann Johns wrote in 2003 after attending the Second Joint Biennial Conference of the European Association for the teaching of Academic Writing she noted that “elements of writing process are relatively new in Europe” (Johns 2003, 315). Therefore, considering the fact that in the United States the idea of second language writing as a field with its own disciplinary infrastructure and a shared sense of identity did not come into prominence until the 1990s, it is no wonder that in Europe the field of EFL writing has not really developed yet (Matsuda, 2002, 163-164). The approach to writing as a process seems to have interested the field of ESL more than that of EFL, that is English taught abroad by non-native teachers. Both native ESL and EFL teachers are language teachers, and in the United
States have only recently started to have the opportunity of being trained as writing teachers due to new graduate programs in teaching writing offered by various universities. Unless a native language teacher who has decided to teach outside English-speaking countries obtains proper professional writing training at home, he or she will hardly become aware of the development of the field. Leki explains that both groups of native ESL and EFL teachers "may not be as aware of non-traditional approaches to teaching writing" (Leki 1992, 6-7). Furthermore, the notes, it is these teachers who "would be less likely to abandon more traditional views of teaching writing and more likely to resist the de-emphasis on grammar characteristic of process methodologies" (Leki 1992, 6-7). Most ESL and EFL writing teachers, says Johns:

are self-taught, products of departments of linguistics, foreign languages, education, or TESL/TEFL, where the emphases have been, and in some cases still are, on sentence-level grammar, literature, or methodologies for teaching second language speaking and listening. (Johns 2002, 104)

If this is true for native ESL and EFL teachers, it is even true for non-native EFL teachers who teach English in their country, and who obtained their EFL degree in their country.

Writing in English in my situation is, whether my colleagues and myself admit it or not, the neglected skill. We do not dedicate enough time to it, and the time we dedicate to it is not quality time. The main reason lying at the bottom of the problem is that we have not been prepared to do it, and although some of us are animated by good intentions, the way we go around teaching writing is dated, to say the least.

When we teach composition, we tend to use the pedagogy we were taught with when we were at university, probably "not an optimum path" says Barbara Kroll (Kroll 2002, 34).

Our university teachers of writing were native speakers, both English and American, who happened to be in Italy looking for a job and found one at a university. These native speakers did have a degree, but they did not have, to my knowledge unfortunately they still do not have, training as writing teachers, conversant in the latest theoretical research. They were native speakers, and that was good enough to be hired and to be assigned to teach writing.
very careful not to write long compositions as the longer they were the greater the risk of making mistakes became, which were proof that we still did not know how to 'compose' because, I realize now, "writing was seen as grammar in practice" (Kroll 2002, 27). Like Kroll, I now also wonder whether our teachers ever noticed "how multiplying similar" the compositions we handed in were (Kroll 2002, 31).

Probably, the objective of my university was to make us learn as much language as possible. The question is legitimate, however, whether one learns more language when using formalise and aiming at accuracy, or when one is engaged with assignments that treat writing as a skill that is mastered over time, and for this reason allows mistakes to start with and expects some thinking, because writing is in fact a communicative act.

Although the high school EFL teachers of my area agree that it is important to teach students how to write in English, and that it is not a skill one is born with, the time dedicated to this skill is simply not enough. Clearly, this is not our fault but that of the institution, more specifically of Progetto Brocca, which allocates only three hours of English a week. Two periods go to the non-native EFL teacher who has to teach the literature syllabus and then test orally each student twice a term in order to prepare them for the oral part of the exit examination. The remaining period goes to the language assistant, who is however primarily hired to teach conversation, not writing, and who tries to do both.

Not knowing any better, we teach writing in exactly the same way as we were taught, including the red and blue pencils, and the language assistant does the same. In class, we read an introductory reading, generally the newspaper or magazine article of a past exam, we point out peculiar grammar structures if necessary, focus on vocabulary, and ask students to do the exercise on comprehension. There is a minimum discussion on the topic. Next, we assign the summary and then the composition that the exam requires, and which is based on the article. On the board, we show the class how to structure a composition, and we make it very clear that there has to be an introduction, at least three paragraphs in which students discuss the pros and
the cons of the issue at stake, and a conclusion. And we all expect the first and only draft to be a good product, or else. Then, we move on the next assignment (Totin 1994, 4).

Obviously, ours is a product-based approach, which tells students to start composing by writing an introduction (Flower and Hayes, 51). Because we are only remotely aware of:

the strategic, rhetorical, and textual dimensions of writing—that is, composing processes, relations between the reader and the writer, and the formal and functional features of texts, as well as the contexts (institutional, social, political, and ideological) in which instruction takes place (Silva 2002, 78).

we do not ask for planning or drafting, we do not ask for revision, teacher response is mainly on language. Revision is equated to editing, and drafting is considered a waste of time, a form of punishment, a useless activity because students would not know what else to say in a better way, definitely not motivating for them. But the greatest majority of the compositions that our students hand in resemble more "rough draft than finished essays" (Taylor 1921, 7).

None of the teachers of my area are familiar with, and only vaguely aware of, the ongoing research and discussion on writing in English, both as an L1 and an L2, and though they think that knowing about it could help their methodology, they all say that they do not have time for that. None knows about, or has heard of, the process approach as an alternative to the approach we use. The methodology of those who use a textbook, is heavily "textbook bound" (Silva 2002, 69). But what the textbooks available propose is the model/product approach, which focuses on grammar, text types, organization, provide lists of linkers and phrases related to the different text types. Some teachers think that the textbooks available offer the application of new methods, which the survey on textbooks in chapter one shows is not the case.

Clearly, according to the teachers of my area, the main problems of Italian students' compositions are language problems. Though we all consider content important, it is not clear whether with content we mean idea, or simply the avoidance of using irrelevant information, which seems more a problem of coherence. In any case, we never complain about the poor content of our students' compositions, only about their grammar. Accuracy, that is, 'the ability
writing and that we could benefit from new research so as to acquire also the perspective of a writing teacher when we deal with our students' compositions. Some of us though show suspicion towards theory and research, thus excluding the validity of what we could learn from professionals in the field such as Barbara Koll, Dana Ferris, John Hodgecock, Paul Kei Matsuda, Ilona Leki, Mike Rose, Peter Elbow, Tony Silva, Joy Reid. The bottom line is that we are probably not aware of the fact that as teachers in our institution and publishing houses to provide us with workshops on writing, not just on language, and that we are not granted the time to develop a new approach to teaching composition. Therefore, we stop at wishful thinking.

Ilona Leki clearly says that:

what goes on in the writing class or in any educational setting needs to be continuously informed by each of following:
- the research literature in L1 and L2—in order to find out what others are doing and thinking;
- our students—in order to respect their sense of what they hope for from a class; and
- our own felt sense of what is effective and appropriate for each of our classes—informed by constant reflection on, even fretting about, what we do so that we don't become complacent and so that we remember that thinking critically is not just for students. (Leki 2002, 61).

We are still very far from "the realization of the dangers of complacency and of the failure to critique" our assumptions, and even farther from "the hope of better developing and employing a consistently critical attitude toward the work" we do (Leki 2002, 59). One from understanding "that teachers are in a position to aim not just at the welfare of individual students, but in their role as cultural workers and through their students, at issues of social justice more generally," that is to say, improving the world we live in (Leki 2002, 66-1).

Our institution does not offer training courses in composition pedagogy, nor do the university departments of foreign languages. The assumption at the bottom seems to be that there is "no seriously scholarly work to be done in the field of composition studies . . ." (Bizzell 1986, 52). The situation is similar to what Gere lamented in 1986 in the United States, that is teachers learnt through an informal curriculum, which is based on textbooks, which means that teachers rely on their resources and that textbooks prepare writing teachers (Gere 1986, 40).
The writing experience that our language high school students have is not adequate for the writing demands of the exit exam, and above all, it undeniable focuses on aspects of writing that are not what the students need. In other words, our students do not get the writing practice they need to really learn to write, and to cope both with the final exam and eventually university requirements (Grade 44). Whether we are aware of it or not, our students are not adequately prepared for the exam. It seems to me that in order to learn, to compose the type of writing practice they require calls for a multi-craft, process approach. It is the only way to help students develop the strategies that allow them to "learn to pursue the development of their ideas without being side-tracked by lexical and syntactic difficulties" and prepare them to handle the six-hour time span exam.

It is true that the Liceo Linguistico exit exam is constrained by time, and that students therefore do not have any to "waste". Our long term aim should be:

- to help students learn how to produce a good, workmanlike job with a written essay wherever they need to. And this means what it means in any trade or craft, it means knowing rules of thumb and tricks of the trade to accomplish basic tasks without having to think them out from scratch every time (Scholes 1998, 96)

Which means that students need to practice enough so as to get to the exit exam knowing exactly what they have to do, having already developed their individual writing strategies, which cannot possibly happen when the emphasis is mainly on the product and its language.

2.4 The case for and against grammar: L1 writing

Also the issue of grammar in L1 composition has influenced L2 writing. The language issue is a controversial one, which has fueled, and fuels, lively debate in both research fields. In the former, the point of the controversy seems to be whether grammar instruction can be useful in L1 writing classes. In the latter, the disagreement verges more on grammar correction, whether it may produce improvement in the quality of writing of L2 students. In both fields there are professionals who passionately argue for and those who, with the same passion, argue against grammar. And again, what L1 writing professional say about grammar in L1 composition may be useful for L2 composition.
teaching grammar in the context of writing will not automatically mean that once taught, the concepts will be learned and applied forever after. On the contrary, grammatical concepts must often be taught and retaught, to individuals as well as to groups or classes, and students may long afterward continue to need guidance in actually applying what they have, in some sense or to some degree, already learned. (Weaver 1998, 24)

Both Constance Weaver (1998) and Lois Matz Rozen (1998) attack the traditional teaching of grammar based on “the behaviorist ideas that practice makes perfect and that skills practiced in isolation will be learned and then applied as relevant” (Weaver 1998, 24). Rozen, aware of the value placed on “correctness as an indication of writing ability”, and of the fact that “surface errors do distract the reader”, advocates finding “balance and proportion in the writing program” (Rozen 1998, 141). That is, focusing on content without losing sight of the importance of grammatical structures (Rozen 1998, 141).

Interestingly, what the professionals who question the value of teaching grammar are in fact doing, says Hartwell, is “shaking the whole elaborate edifice of traditional composition instruction” (Hartwell 1985, 351). He says that:

Those who defend the teaching of grammar tend to have a model of composition instruction that is rigidly skill-centered and rigidly sequential: the formal teaching of grammar, as the first step in that sequence, is the cornerstone or linchpin.” (Hartwell 1985, 351).

The elaborate edifice had already been shaken by Mina Shaughnessy in 1977, when she wrote that teachers are obsessed with errors because in their minds “good writing” means “correct writing” (Shaughnessy 1977, 8). But, says Rozen, “the time-intensive practice of the teacher’s ‘error hunt’ does not produce more mechanically perfect papers” (Rozen 1998, 139), and chimes in Mike Rose, correctness does not necessarily imply writing in order to communicate and to learn to discover (Rose 1987, 104).

“A reader’s sense of order and development in a piece of discursive writing,” says Shaughnessy, “depends upon the writer’s ability to stay with each thought in the line of his discussion long enough to mark it as important” (Shaughnessy 1977, 250). If, in the midst of
the "struggle of articulation" students have to take care also of grammar, they lose track of where they are going (Shaughnessy 1977, 232). Not only do they lose track, Harris points out. focusing on error "can often block the attempts of beginning writers to form their thoughts in prose" (Harris 1955, 394). And exactly because writing is a complex process, students "who worry about mechanics while they are composing are not concentrating fully on what they have to say because it is difficult to do two things well at the same time, especially if neither task is yet completely under the writer's control" (Rosen 1998, 141). Indeed, as Harris points out, "what is involved in detecting errors seems to be not only an awareness of rules but a shift in attentiveness: One needs to learn how to read for mistakes as well as meaning" (Harris 1955, 396-397). The long and the short of it is that, "while we can't teach for correctness alone, we also can't not teach for it either" (Harris 1998, 396-397, emphasis in the original). Because correctness is important, Rosen suggests "a process-oriented approach to correctness," the key aspect of which is revision, "but at the appropriate time in the writing process" (Rosen 1998, 144).

2.5 The case for and against grammar: L2 writing

"You can't learn without goofing" (Heidi and Burt)

Far from saying that composing in L1 is the same as composing in L2—L2 students have to learn English language, besides learning to write in English—just like L1 students, L2 students often fail to apply their knowledge of grammar to their compositions in English (Leki 2002, Silva 2002). Exactly because there is a whole language to be learned, traditionally composition "researchers and teachers interested in determining appropriate pedagogies for these students focused, not on their writing processes, but on their language learning processes" (Leki 1992, 76, emphasis mine). Because language was traditionally considered "as a complex of small, easily digestible bits of grammar, which students could master one at a time," and grammar as fundamental in order to learn to write, learning to compose in English "consisted of practicing bits
of language in sentence patterns, striving for grammatical perfection” (Leki 1992, 5). Composing, says Kroll, “was seen as grammar in practice” (Kroll 2002, 27). Therefore, it is not surprising that for a long time L2 writing classes emphasized “linguistic competence as a prerequisite to learning to write” (Leki, 1992, 76). Nor is it surprising that teachers were obsessed with grammar errors, hunted for them, and were convinced that they had to be exterminated. And, perhaps, it is not surprising that it still happens.

In EFL and ESL fields grammar is fundamental, it is fundamental to teach it, and never to lose sight of it. Actually, Silva has discovered that ESL students feel that “their only sense of security comes from what they have learned about grammar” (Silva, qtd. in Leki 1992, 80). We cannot afford not to address some bad errors in our students’ compositions right away, like for example regularized strong verbs. For one thing, as K. Astor Smith says, students might have problems trusting a teacher who would let, though only momentarily, errors like those go.

For another, as Ferris and Hedgecock say, students may never “take seriously the need to improve their editing skills” (Ferris and Hedgecock 1998, 2009). However, as I said above, composing is a different matter, and if we insist on dealing with our students’ compositions focusing mainly or only on grammar, we will always find imperfections, mistakes, errors.

Above all, we will not have the time, the energy, the patience to move to other, perhaps more important, aspects of writing, such as coherence, which as I said above is a major problem, at least for my students. Obviously, correctness is essential. It has to do with communicative prowess and makes writing easy to read, and we would do our students a disservice not to focus on the mechanics of the language. Coherence is essential, too. It refers to the knowledge underlying the sentences of a text, because it is “the ways in which the components of the Textual World . . . are mutually accessible and relevant,” the components being the concepts the text contains and the meaningful links between them. (de Beaugrande and Dressler 4, emphasis in the original). It is only when we read for content that “semantic structures
constitute the field of attention,” not when we read for language proficiency (Williams 1981, 407).

What finally research has revealed is that “while language proficiency may have an additive effect on the quality of a text, language proficiency in and of itself appears to be an independent factor in the students’ ability to write well in L2” (Leki 1992, 77). Therefore, in the same way as “being a native speaker does not guarantee an ability to write,” non-native speakers do not necessarily need “more work with language but rather with writing” in order to learn to compose in English (Leki 1992, 78). It is the students who lack writing proficiency that focus on language rather than on content as they compose.

Vivian Cook says that L2 learners, even at advanced levels, have ‘cognitive deficits’ caused by difficulties with processing information in an L2 (Cook 1996, 75). It does not mean that they cannot learn to write. It means that L2 students need more targeted writing. Actually, according to Raimes, they need “more of everything.”

more time; more opportunity to talk, listen, read, and write in order to marshal the vocabulary they need to make their own background knowledge accessible to them in their L2; more instruction and practice in generating, organizing, and revising ideas; more attention to the rhetorical options available to them; and more emphasis on editing linguistic form and style. (Raimes 1985, 250)

This means also that, though they do need grammar, L2 students do not need only that, at least they do not need only that which is in their composition classes. Clearly, says Leki, “if students must use part of their cognitive capacity to focus on language because they are not familiar with that language, other functions, perhaps higher functions of organization, cannot be engaged at full capacity” (Leki 1992, 79). If they concentrate on correctness, the rest will suffer.

Just like L1 in the past, L2 writing teachers return papers so full of marks and comments that students simply do not know what is worth attending to (Rosen 1998, 140). It is for this reason that in 1996 John Truscott published an article in which he simply declares grammar correction in L2 compositions, the norm in the field, not always a good idea if our concern is to improve our students’ overall writing quality. He reiterated his conviction in his response
to Dana Ferris in 1999, when he observed that "the real problem is the almost complete domination of the orthodox view" (Truscott, 1999, 112), and in 2004 in his answer to Chandler, when he once again concluded that "the state of the evidence, especially regarding grammar errors, points to a clear conclusion: Correction is a bad idea" (Truscott 2004, 342).

Unlike native speakers, EFL learners knew and understand the system of English language only remotely consciously, and teaching them how it works is simply necessary. The lack of grammatical ability may limit their writing performance, and an understanding of grammar may be important as EFL students often make language mistakes simply because they do not know about that particular grammar structure (Kollin x). However, for the purpose of my discussion, I find intriguing Truscott's objection to Dana Ferris and Jean Chandler that students believe in and demand correction because influenced by the teachers themselves. "To some extent, the argument from students' belief is circular" he explains, as "by using correction, teachers encourage students to believe in it; because students believe in it, teachers must continue using it" (Truscott, 1999, 112).

"Real-life teachers": says Ferris, "have always known that students' errors are troublesome" (Ferris 1999, 1). But, the exaggerate focus on grammar correction:

leads students to shorten and simplify their writing to avoid being corrected, thereby reducing the opportunities to practice writing and to experiment with new forms. In fact, the suggestion that teachers should make students more aware of the importance of avoiding mistakes, if carried out, is likely to exacerbate the problem" (Truscott, 1999, 117).

If too extensive, it may also damage "students' motivation and self-confidence as writers" (Ficza Hylard and Ken Hylard 2001, 186). Like Hartwell for L1 composing, Truscott's questioning the value of correction in L2 compositions is an attempt to shake "the whole elaborate edifice of traditional composition instruction" (Hartwell 1985, 351), because "good writing" does not mean "correct writing" (Shaughnessy 1977, 8). Because "the time-intensive practice of the teacher's 'error hunt' does not produce more mechanically perfect papers" (Rosen 1998, 139), and correctness does not necessarily imply writing in order to communicat and to
learn to discover (Rose 1987, 104). It is true that students ask for correction, because they already know that they have to avoid mistakes. It is also true, however, that despite all the time and energies that teachers devote to pin down each error and correct it, such corrections do not always transfer. As Truscott observes, in order to benefit from corrections, these same students should also devote time and energy on the corrected papers, but not only would this devotion "detract from other aspects of their learning," at least my students simply do not do it.

L2 students eventually reach a level of proficiency in language, but to reach proficiency in writing is a different matter, and insisting on grammar not only may produce "negligible... or even harmful effect on improvement in writing," we will never ever see any developmental progress in students' writing (Braddock et al. 1963, qtd. in Hartwell 1985, 105). Actually, there will tardy be any development at all, as it happens with L1 students. According to Shaughnessy L1 students lose track of where they are going if in the midst of the "struggle of articulation;" they have to take care also of grammar (Shaughnessy 1977, 232). Not only do they lose track, Harris adds in, their thoughts in prose are blocked (Harris 1995, 394). If this happens to native speakers there is no reason not to expect it with non-native speakers.

Also Cummings, sharing Truscott's worry, seriously wonders about the usefulness of error-correction:

I suspect this may be useful in certain ways, such as helping students to analyze and talk about their writing in a second language, but we know so little about these things at present, or how to do them purposefully, that I fear that error corrections may in many instances hinder rather than help the development of second language writing. Given the pervasive tendency of instructors to attempt to correct second language writing, this is a topic on which we need much more research. This research needs to recognize the complexity of issues involved. (Cummings 2002, 132)

"That errors are developmentally inevitable" says Kroll, "is a primary lesson that research on learning new offers teachers in training, and this insight leads to a far different response to deviations from standard English" (Kroll 2002, 27).
In her 2004 article to assess the state of the art in error correction research in L2 writing, Dana Ferri calls once again (Ferri 1999, Ferri and Roberts 2001) for further and more accurate research and so does Tautscott (1990, 1997, 2004), Chandle (2003, 2004), Goldstein, (2004), Lee (2004), Yates and Kenkel (2004). The research available is still not adequate says Ferri as it "predicts (but does not conclusively prove) positive effects for written error correction" (Ferri 2004, 56, emphasis in the original). Although, she recommends providing students with feedback, as "its absence may be harmful" (Ferri 2004, 55), she also states that "teachers' error correction is only one piece (albeit a large and time-consuming piece) of an overall approach to the "treatment of error" in L2 students' writing" (Ferri 2004, 57), and that "error correction can be harmful to students when it diverts teachers' and students' attention from other crucial aspects of the writing process" (Ferri 1998, 202). Tim Aswell asks for a more precise definition of "the purpose or purposes to which grammar correction (or more widely, form feedback) might be put" (Aswell 2000, 228). The grammatical component must be present when teaching L2 writing for the simple reason, as again Aswell points out, that "the formal accuracy of the written product matters" (Aswell 2000, 229). But let's not stop there. Probably Rosen's "process-oriented approach to correctness," the key aspect of which is revision but "at the appropriate time in the writing process," is the best suggestion, because errors are "a normal part of writing growth" (Rosen 1998, 142-151). According to Murdock: To merely vandalise every mis-step in a paper, covering the text with monotonous corrections and scoldings, as though one mistake were the same as another, represents the kind of carelessness, indifferent teacher response that causes students to give up, or to protect themselves from criticism by regressing to a simpler, more childish writing style. (Murdock 1996, 44)

It has to occur, says Ferri, "at a point in the composing process when the writer may be most aware of its importance and therefore likely to attend to it" (Ferri 1998, 203). Writing for EFL students must be as much of a developmental process as it is for the native speaker. Some mistakes simply require better proofreading, "while others require growth of the kind that may take years, and still others may be based on a missing concept that the student is ready to learn" (Murdock 1996, 44).
Bartholomae says that “Errors in writing may be caused by interference from the act of writing itself, from the difficulty of moving a pen across the page quickly enough to keep up with the words on the writer’s mind.” (Bartholomae 1980, 259). “Writing instructors need to help their students develop and improve their editing skills” (Ferris and Hedgcock 1998, 198). For this reason, Ferris and Hedgcock’s suggestion of contextualizing and prioritizing errors and of committing “to a strategy for building students’ awareness and knowledge of their most serious and frequent grammar problems” sound a worthy and more productive alternative (Ferris and Hedgcock 203, 1998, Ferris 1999, 7).

A model that looks only at the grammar dimension cannot help students see language as a means of communication (Gere 1986, 31). Leki’s realization could be as “profoundly liberating” for us as it was for her: is that “Learning language and learning to write take time and effort” and students will “not learn once and for all” in our classes, because Richard Haswell says, the writing of students develops over time (Leki 2002, 56; Haswell 1991). Although they may seem to make the same mistakes again and again, in Haswell’s words, that some students do not progress is “a tale.” Although at times it seems that no developmental change takes place in students’ writing, their learning continues to develop. The problem is not the student’s, but the teacher’s, who may lack the sensitivity and the preparation to see, despite the apparent regression in some skills, where the student is actually growing (Haswell 1991).

Lorena, this is very informative and interesting. You’ve built a good case for the need for better L2 writing instruction!