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Learning to Be a Writing Instructor in the Age of Generative AI: The Role of Research-Practice Partnerships

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Abstract
The rise of generative AI (GenAI) is reshaping writing instruction, presenting both opportunities and challenges for language educators. While some teachers initially resisted AI integration, many now recognize its potential to support brainstorming, modelling, and feedback. This shift necessitates new pedagogical strategies that balance AI-assisted writing with traditional skill development. Research-practice partnerships (RPPs) offer a collaborative approach to teacher learning, enabling educators to explore GenAI's role in writing instruction through reflective inquiry and structured experimentation. Our perspective in this article is developed via an examination of the experiences of two English language teachers who engaged in an RPP to integrate GenAI into their writing lessons. The project's findings reveal that RPP participation facilitated professional growth, deepened pedagogical understanding, and fostered meaningful engagement with writing among students. The article highlights the evolving nature of writing instruction, emphasizing a shift from product-based to process-oriented teaching. While concerns persist regarding AI's impact on originality and critical thinking, structured integration within an RPP framework empowers teachers to navigate these complexities proactively. As GenAI continues to transform literacy practices, RPPs serve as a scalable model for professional learning, equipping educators with the skills and insights needed to harness AI's potential responsibly and innovatively in the writing classroom.

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Introduction

GenAI is being credited with several changes that teachers and students are experiencing in different educational sectors. In language education, writing

instruction is one of those areas that are seen as being most significantly impacted due to the ease with which users of the technology can generate written texts. According to some research, this initially led certain teachers to feel hesitant about adopting GenAI tools in their teaching of writing, even though many of them now seem to share their students' views with respect to how best to integrate the technology in the writing classroom. In fact, Barrett and Pack's (2023) study reveals a shared perspective among students and teachers: using GenAI for brainstorming, modelling answers, or offloading tasks already mastered is generally acceptable. However, employing the technology to complete writing assignments, whether disclosed or not, is deemed unacceptable. Both groups consider AI use more appropriate during early writing stages, such as brainstorming and outlining, than in later stages (Barrett & Pack, 2023). This suggests that the technology is more favourably viewed when it supports idea generation and organization rather than serving as an automatic writing tool (Barrett & Pack, 2023; Marzuki et al., 2023).

Despite any misgivings they might have about the use of the technology in writing instruction, language teachers are increasingly aware that GenAI is impacting writing in unprecedented ways (Bozkurt et al., 2024). Hence, keeping abreast with developments in the technology by experimenting with it in the classroom seems sound. This implies learning how to use it in a productive manner for the purpose of enhancing their own teaching, and enabling students to reap the benefits posed by the technology. Our perspective in this article is that an RPP is a valuable source of professional learning that can enable teachers to harness GenAI for the sake of improving writing instruction. We first consider the relationship between GenAI and writing instruction by considering some of the benefits and challenges associated with these tools. Then we examine how teachers' participation in an RPP can act as a form of professional growth with respect to learning to use GenAI in writing instruction. Through an analysis of the experiences of two English language teachers who recently partnered with us, we highlight the affordances of this professional learning model and explore how it fostered both teacher growth and more meaningful engagement with writing for their students.

GenAI and Writing Instruction

Current research reports mixed views with respect to the integration of GenAI into writing instruction, these views being somewhat influenced by an awareness of the benefits of the technology and the challenges associated with its use in the production of writing. Some research indicates that while students seem to agree that AI should be incorporated into the teaching and learning of writing (Liang et al., 2024; Putra, 2023; Utami et al., 2023), there are conflicting views among teachers on the integration of the technology into the EFL/ESL writing classroom (Praphan & Praphan, 2023;

Putra, 2023). A study of 343 communication instructors found a shared belief that AI-assisted writing will become common in the workplace and will necessitate major changes in teaching methods (Cardon et al., 2023). The main challenges identified included reduced critical thinking and authenticity in writing, while the primary benefits noted were increased efficiency and improved idea generation in writing (Cardon et al., 2023). Teachers seem to recognize the benefits of GenAI but voice concerns about its potential misuse, emphasizing the need for a balanced integration of traditional and technological methods, with a focus on responsible use of the technology in writing (Maphoto et al., 2024).

The emphasis on misuse and responsibility has led to research on teachers' ability to detect AI-generated writing in second language education. One study shows that teachers typically rely on a deficit-based assessment model, viewing errors as markers of L2 writing quality, while associating high technical and grammatical accuracy and advanced language use with AI-generated text (Alexander et al., 2023). Seemingly indicative of the concern that some teachers have with the latter issue, the ability to detect AI-generated text has also been recommended for inclusion as a valuable topic in pre-service teacher education (De Wilde, 2024). However, a more sensible approach is to acknowledge that writing with computational assistance calls for a reimagining of how writing and creativity are understood, especially since banning the use of AI systems in writing education is likely to be counterproductive (de Vicente-Yagüe-Jara et al., 2023).

Despite still harbouring important concerns over the technology's impact on academic integrity and its potential adverse effects on students' writing and thinking skills, many teachers are also appreciative of the benefits of GenAI use in writing instruction, such as reduced instructor workload (Khlaif et al., 2024). Even when teachers have a neutral attitude toward the use of AI in teaching writing, they seem to be interested in its potential to streamline the grading of writing assignments (Nicolas, 2024). In fact, one study found that most teachers viewed an AI grading tool positively for scoring essays and providing feedback, despite remaining uncertain about its reliability and refraining from seeing it as a complete replacement for teacher grading (Alsalem, 2024). This last point seems to be corroborated by another study which found that students who received teacher-only feedback or a blend of teacher- and technology-generated feedback performed better than those who received only automated feedback on their writing (Mohammadi et al., 2023). Overall, research on the validity of automated feedback is inconclusive, with students tending to prefer instructor feedback despite most studies highlighting the positive impact of automated writing evaluation feedback (Liu, 2024).

The benefits of harnessing GenAI in the teaching and learning of writing are underscored by an increasing number of studies. For example, research on ChatGPT has highlighted the tool's affordances and potential applications in L2 writing pedagogy, along with its automated workflow that could enhance efficiency in the writing process (Yan, 2023). The reason for which many students view GenAI positively is due to its potential to provide personalized learning support when serving as a writing tool (Khlaif et al., 2024). In fact, AI sample sentences facilitate contextualization for generating comprehensive content, while AI writing feedback supports personalization by enabling iterative revisions to enhance writing quality, with the combination of the two improving cohesion and consistency in writing (Hwang et al., 2023). A tool like ChatGPT can streamline the writing process by providing instant feedback, generating ideas, and improving organization (Tseng & Lin, 2024). Acting as a substitute for peer reviewers, it offers objective critiques to refine drafts (Tseng & Lin, 2024). This human-technology partnership fosters critical thinking and helps students develop their unique writing voice, making them active participants in a technology-enhanced learning experience (Tseng & Lin, 2024; Xerri, 2025).

Overall, it seems that when students use AI-powered tools to support writing, it creates a learning loop that bridges online learning with offline practice (Hsiao & Chang, 2023). Playful experimentation with GenAI can inspire young people to enjoy digital writing while critically exploring the platform dynamics that influence literate activities (Stornaiuolo et al., 2024). One study even suggests that using GenAI platforms for story creation tasks significantly improves narrative intelligence scores and writing self-efficacy compared to traditional platforms (Pellas, 2023). Wang et al. (2024) found that in using ChatGPT for a writing assignment students engaged in multiple rounds of prompting, recognized AI's strengths – including topic relevance, template creation, and sentence quality – identified weaknesses – such as generic language, robotic tone, lack of emotion, personal voice, and critical thinking – and aimed to improve AI-generated writing by incorporating personal stories, connections, emotions, and eliminating repetitive language. These benefits are not only relevant for classroom writing tasks but transfer to the writing activities students engage in outside the classroom. Hence, those language teachers who see their influence as transcending the confines of the classroom are likely to avoid being reluctant to integrate the technology into their teaching (Zhai, 2024). Doing so does not only lead them to learn about how best to exploit the technology, but it also makes them reflect on how to redefine writing instruction in the time of GenAI. From our perspective, one means of achieving such professional learning is via an RPP.

Effective Research-Practice Partnerships

An RPP consists of a collaboration between academics or professional researchers and classroom practitioners. While enabling both parties to engage in classroom research, it also serves as a means of professional growth for practitioners by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to become research-oriented professionals (Xerri, 2022). By participating in an RPP, educators enhance their capabilities, address the needs of their local communities, and cultivate their identity as researchers (Ralston & Waggoner, 2024).

Despite its advantages, for an RPP to operate successfully a number of conditions need to be in place. For example, consistent participation strengthens commitment to the RPP process, with horizontal collaboration between stakeholders working well, and researchers having to take on multiple roles, including acting as change agents and facilitators (Korhonen et al., 2024). Success in an RPP requires an open, flexible approach, a readiness for change at all levels, and mutual respect and sensitivity among participants (Korhonen et al., 2024). In their analysis of a long-standing RPP, Melton et al. (2022) underscore the significance of pre-existing factors, like a culture that respects both researcher and practitioner expertise, a shared history, and strong partner chemistry. Non-professional interactions, productive disagreements, clearly defined yet flexible roles, and shared power are also key elements that enhance collaboration (Melton et al., 2022). While transforming educational practice is one of the main objectives behind the RPP process, there are other equally important values that can inspire individuals to join or remain involved in a partnership (Popa et al., 2023). These include prioritizing practice needs by emphasizing relationships and innovation over research tasks and plans, fostering awareness of factors external to the RPP, and seeking justice both in research and within the partnership itself (Popa et al., 2023). In order for an RPP not to reproduce existing inequities, there needs to be a commitment from partners to openly share their research and action theories, routinely critique areas that are not working, and consistently address power and privilege in discussions as part of the RPP routine (Denner et al., 2019).

The question of power and equity in an RPP is a crucial one given that researchers might lose sight of what practitioners are meant to gain from their participation. Despite everyone's best efforts, research produced through an RPP may still fail to fully address the needs of practice partners (Arce-Trigatti et al., 2023). Hence, carefully assessing whether potential research questions are highly relevant and actionable for both researchers and practitioners can help ensure that the needs of both groups are met, allowing partnerships to drive meaningful educational improvement (Thompson et al., 2017). This idea is illustrated by a study that describes how the act of collaborating on research with practitioners enabled researchers to observe and

understand differences in how a popular spelling programme in the USA was implemented, while also allowing them to develop and address research questions that were meaningful to teachers (Tortorelli & Bruner, 2022). Similarly, while underlining the significance of mutual trust, rigorous research, and support for practice goals, Alonzo et al. (2022) demonstrate how building sustainable collaborations between researchers and practitioners was crucial for enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes. The idea of a sustainable relationship that equitably addresses the needs of both sets of partners is at the heart of Penuel et al.'s (2015) conceptualization of an RPP as a collaborative effort across multiple boundaries. Researchers and practitioners must acknowledge and navigate various boundaries in collaboration, and while some boundary crossing occurs spontaneously to address emerging issues, it is possible to establish practices that offer ongoing opportunities for boundary crossing while effectively supporting the partnership's primary goals (Penuel et al., 2015).

Research-Practice Partnership Investigating GenAI in Writing Instruction

Our RPP project on the integration of GenAI into English language writing instruction utilized Collaborative Action Research (CAR) as its framework. CAR emphasizes collaboration between practitioners and professional researchers to attain shared goals (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). The collaborative aspect provides new perspectives on ingrained practices, often leading to a refinement of the practitioners' teaching approaches (Bruce et al., 2011). Following a four-stage model similar to Bruce et al.'s (2011) design—problem identification, goal setting and planning, implementation, and evaluation—the four-week project comprised four cycles of 90-minute writing lessons. Two teachers led the lessons at different private language schools in Malta. The country is renowned for attracting language travel students, with 78,567 foreign clients attending English language courses in 2023 (National Statistics Office, 2024). Students hailed from various countries and were following a General English course, with Teacher 1 (henceforth T1) teaching an A2-level group and Teacher 2 (henceforth T2) a B2-level group.

Working with the researchers (i.e., the authors of this article), the teachers focused on a key concern: the impact of GenAI tools on their teaching practices and professional identities. This led to the research question: How does the use of GenAI tools in the teaching of writing affect teachers' professional identity? The team developed four lessons incorporating ChatGPT to support process writing, with each week focusing on different stages, such as brainstorming, planning, drafting, and editing (Stanley, n.d.). This approach allowed teachers to reflect on their reactions to GenAI interventions; it also enabled them to help students clarify their thoughts and identify their strengths and limitations as writers (White & Arndt, 1991). In the first week, the

teachers delivered the initial lessons and reflected on their experiences through narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen et al., 2025). This involved semi-structured interviews with the researchers and reflective journal writing (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024). Sharing these reflections with each other and the researchers enabled collaborative discussions, which informed the next cycle's lesson planning. For instance, after completing the first cycle the team decided to embed key AI skills in the writing lesson, including prompt engineering and critical AI literacy. The project offered a safe space for the two teachers to take risks while remaining persistent when faced with unexpected challenges (Bruce et al., 2011). From week to week, the lessons were adjusted to address emerging issues and capitalize on successes.

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis, involving thorough review and categorization of interview transcripts and journal entries to identify patterns and themes. In the section below, we discuss one of the most significant themes that emerged from the data yielded by the RPP project.

Redefining Writing Lessons in the Time of GenAI

The 21st century is marked by constant change and uncertainty, a notion that Bauman (2000) defines as "liquid modernity." Consequently, teachers have to seek ways to adapt and redefine longstanding teaching practices. RPP projects provide an opportunity for them to improve their pedagogy based on the specific needs of their teaching context (Ralston & Waggoner, 2024). During our project, the two teachers realized that the nature of writing as a skill is undergoing transformation. As the focus shifted from the final product to the process, writing became more fluid, influenced by the ongoing technological advancements (Bauman, 2000). Through their reflections, the teachers redefined their understanding of what constitutes a writing lesson, viewing its fluidity as an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and deepen their understanding (Hugoson, 2019). T2 even noted that GenAI merely represents the latest stage in an evolution which is centuries long, hinting that while writing will continue to exist, it will take new forms:

> Writing once referred to physically carving symbols into stone or engraving images onto surfaces. Over time, the definition expanded to putting fingers to keyboards. I see engagement with AI as an extension of this evolution. My role as a teacher is to help my students master this new form of writing, just as educators in the past helped their students transition from pen and paper. (T2)

The role of the teacher is evolving from a marker to a reader who prioritizes students' engagement with their writing, rather than focusing solely on form (Stanley, n.d.). T1

admitted that with the incorporation of GenAI, in her lessons she could emphasize writer-reader interaction instead of accuracy, as ChatGPT became her "digital colleague" (Bender, 2024, p. 170). This aligns with one of the main objectives of process writing. White and Arndt (1991) argue that concentrating on language errors does little to improve writing fluency and accuracy, and that seeing how students deal with the writing process is more likely to lead to improvements. T1 decided to achieve this by highlighting such key aspects as audience, tone, and purpose:

> In a world that is increasingly providing assistance, looking at all the components that make up writing seems to be more useful in the long term than staying fixated on errors. GenAI pulled students away from the anxiety of knowing the right words and using the 'correct' sentence constructions. My role dramatically shifted away from looking at grammatical and lexical achievements, to focusing on content, audience, organization, register and coherence. Or rather: everything but grammatical and lexical errors. (T1)

The concept of multimodal writing existed long before the rise of GenAI. Howell's (2018) experiment in two high school classrooms demonstrated how digital tools can be blended with more traditional forms of writing to provide scaffolding, which eventually leads to improved pieces of writing. Nonetheless, GenAI brought new challenges and at times both practitioners felt uncertain because, as T1 claimed, it seemed they were "not teaching students how to write, but teaching them about writing." This concern is currently common among English teachers. For instance, Wang (2024) highlights how students struggle to improve their writing using GenAI while maintaining their unique voice, which can also lead to a loss of learning experiences. T1 reflected, "What is writing if a large language model can produce it already? If you're using GenAI, is it generated or written?". This highlights the need for critical thinking to be an integral part of writing instruction, since it will help students not only develop their cognitive skills but also acquire a distinct writing voice (Xerri, 2025).

Despite having several benefits, such as an increase in student engagement, GenAI presented significant challenges in the development of students' writing skills (Praphan & Praphan, 2023). T1 felt that using ChatGPT as a writing tool emphasized the generation aspect over the act of writing. Similarly, in Week 3 T2 admitted that she was "beginning to question the future of writing instruction" and wondered whether there would still be a need to teach formal emails and blog posts. Bender (2024) compares students' interaction with GenAI to a casino-like "push a button then wait to see what it produces" (p. 167). The integration of GenAI has indeed required significant adjustments in teaching approaches to writing; however, the skill will still

be vital in workplaces (Cardon et al., 2023). As a result, the teaching of writing has been shifting more towards real-life practicalities, and as T2 aptly put it, teachers need to be ready to "give students autonomy and prepare them for the real world." This does not mean that learning how to use GenAI will replace language learning, but rather that students will learn the language *with* the new technology (Bender, 2024).

Prohibiting the use of GenAI, or perceiving it as a 'villain', can be counterproductive (de Vicente-Yagüe-Jara et al., 2023). However, T1 stressed the fact that incorporating GenAI made certain tasks more time-consuming and lessons took longer than traditional writing lessons. After the first lesson, she admitted that she "did not allocate as much time as students actually needed," which contrasts with Yan's (2023) claim that AI tools make writing more efficient. Although time constraints persisted, T1 reflected on her own expectations in relation to the project and adjusted them in the weeks that followed (Khlaif et al., 2024). T2 also acknowledged similar challenges, but she highlighted the importance of fostering an open dialogue with students about their GenAI use:

> It's been such a taboo topic in education for so long: 'Oh, I'm going to use AI secretly, but I need to make sure that my teacher doesn't know about it.' Flipping that on its head and telling students, 'Listen, it's a tool and it's good to use. It just depends on how you actually use it', is novel for them. It's like giving them permission to do something that they thought they were not allowed to do, but obviously giving the guidance to use it in the right way, in ethical ways. (T2)

Initially, both practitioners questioned the necessity of teaching writing skills in a period of such rapid technological advancements. This aligns with a study conducted in four Hong Kong universities by Moorhouse and Kohnke (2024), in which teachers expressed concerns that GenAI tools will substantially impact instruction and assessment. In our project, the integration of GenAI gave writing a new purpose. According to T2, students engaged more deeply with the process and better understood the relevance of the lessons. This reinforces the idea that GenAI tools offer opportunities for a deeper exploration of writing as a language skill by facilitating feedback, generating ideas, and organizing thoughts (Tseng & Lin, 2024). T1 even mentioned that using ChatGPT added value to writing, as both her students and herself explored different aspects of writing in greater depth:

> Suddenly it becomes more of a larger writing project and not like a quick piece of writing that you do so that you've done some writing. When you start using ChatGPT, writing's given more weight. In the last four weeks, I

> feel like writing has been given a lot more importance because we're trying out this new tool and we're looking at the different processes. (T1)

RPP encourages educational innovation and a constant drive for adaptation (Penuel et al., 2015). In this study, GenAI led the practitioners to explore certain writing stages, such as pre-writing, in more creative ways: "not just talk to your partner about what you think on the topic and now write" (T1). This underscores the importance of providing targeted learning opportunities to teachers and supporting the adoption of GenAI tools by providing several incentives, including funding and recognition programmes (Khlaif et al., 2024). Ongoing teacher support and structured professional development will not only motivate teachers to be more creative and innovative in their teaching but also give them increased confidence in their professional abilities, resulting in more agency (Zhai, 2024).

The two teachers acknowledged that, rather than merely perceiving it as a writing assistant for students, GenAI made writing lessons more meaningful. Consequently, this facilitated a more comprehensive learning environment which ultimately elevated the quality of student writing (Marzuki et al., 2023). The RPP project helped the two teachers acquire the skills and attitudes they needed to position themselves as classroom researchers who were eager to find answers to the questions that puzzled them (Xerri, 2022). Through their involvement in research on writing instruction as part of the RPP, both of them became aware that we are all learners when it comes to technology. Hence, understanding teachers' needs, addressing their concerns, and helping them develop their GenAI competence should be a "strategic priority" (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2024, p. 8).

Concluding Thoughts

From our perspective, the above discussion highlights the pivotal role of an RPP in enabling language teachers to deal with the complexities of writing instruction in the era of GenAI. As demonstrated by our project, participating in an RPP provided the teachers with a structured yet flexible space to critically examine and refine their pedagogical approaches to writing. Through CAR, they not only explored the affordances and limitations of GenAI tools but also reconceptualized their roles as writing instructors. Rather than merely integrating AI into their teaching, they developed a subtler understanding of writing as a dynamic, evolving process that extends beyond linguistic accuracy to encompass critical thinking, creativity, and audience awareness.

This professional learning experience also highlighted how teachers can harness GenAI to foster more meaningful writing engagements among students while

maintaining their own agency in shaping instruction. By actively interrogating the impact of AI-generated text on writing development, the two teachers in our study moved beyond reactionary fears and towards informed, ethical, and pedagogically sound applications of AI in writing education. Crucially, the RPP framework enabled them to shift from passive adaptation to proactive innovation, positioning them as contributors to the evolving discourse on AI-enhanced writing instruction.

As GenAI continues to redefine literacy practices, teacher learning cannot be left to isolated, individual efforts. RPPs offer a scalable, collaborative model that not only supports teachers in developing AI literacy but also fosters a culture of inquiry-driven teaching. Rather than resisting technological change, educators who engage in an RPP—as well as in other equally valid forms of professional learning—can play an active role in shaping the future of writing instruction. By embedding structured reflection, iterative experimentation, and shared expertise into professional learning, RPPs emerge as a powerful mechanism for sustaining teacher growth and ensuring that writing instruction remains relevant, engaging, and pedagogically sound in the age of AI.

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