



Student Writing as Knotting

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Why? To improve students' (feeling of) learning and to narrow the gap between academia and students' diverse backgrounds.

Harmen keek naar zijn beeldscherm, met een blik van bevestiging. [...] ' [...] Jouw acties [geven weer] wie jij bent als persoon, en de mensen om je heen zijn de getuige[n] van die acties, geef dus aandacht aan de mensen die het dichtst bij jou staan.' [txt A]

Disciplined Yet Empowering Writing?

? Can teaching writing skills not just discipline students towards standardized academic literacy, but also empower them to connect academic training with their diverse worlds (their loves and lives)?

→ I **designed** an assignment in academic/creative writing that offers students the possibility to explore textual literariness, in order to make them aware of the possibilities for such a combination.

Students Stories

Theory, Materials and Methodology

1. Theoretical Viewpoints

- ❖ Writing in higher education is a co-creative activity between academic disciplinary standards and students' diverse lives and backgrounds.
- ❖ The literariness of (even academic) writing offers critical potential through *différance* (Derrida).
- ❖ Textual *différance* can help to realize the educational principle of emancipation (Rancière), but also reconnect knowing and loving (Murdoch) and knotting together what got separated by r/national epistemologies (Haraway), especially in nationally standardized and supposedly identity-defining languages such as Dutch in the Netherlands.

2. Collecting Stories

I tested the designed assignment in two bachelor's courses on academic or creative writing:

1. *start of the course*: Students write a **letter** about what they learn to a person they love (like their mother).
2. *end of the course*: Students write a **story** about themselves as a character writing that letter.

3. Literary Analysis

Do these stories offer **textual** (literary, narratological) **components** that can be understood as co-constructive of connective identities among these students?

→ **colour coding**

note: Textual components that were included to meet the requirements of the assignment were filtered out (*Bildung* as a journey, chronotopes, polyphony, focalization,...). Discussed here are new components, or new combinations of such components.

Het is kiezen of kabelen en je moet blijven werken, want je bent wat je doet. Dat hadden haar beste vriendin en diens moeder haar bijgebracht op een rommelige boerderij in het Oosten. [...] Op dat aanraden was [ze] blijven doen, en doen, en academische hoogstandaard, en de stamkroeg en je moet vaker in de sportschool komen – anders is het een ondankbare sport. [txt B]

Knowing & Loving

Testing the Design: Preliminary Results (n=4)

Self as Seen by Others

Students construct obvious characters: a student, a writer. The characters are always seen by others, which makes them experience stress and reflect on their immense freedom of choice. Thus, characters are given meaning from the outside, from their visible activity/passivity (*doing = being*).

Own Voice = Starting to Speak

Students show an awareness of a voice of their own. They hint at a **responsibility** that might come with it, but manifest it most often as a *preliminary silence*, or a *starting-to-speak*.

Connecting with Loved Others

Students write about *postponing*, *caring for* or *restoring* contact with ones they love, often **through technology**.

The one exception is an elaborative metaphor of the student-writer as a race pilot. She makes her rounds, experiences stress, sees a conflict between freedom of choice and the importance of strategies, instructed to her by the racing team. In the end she is aware that 'the media' judge her only by the final results of the race. [txt C]

Summary

These students appear to have textual elements ready (beyond the instructions for the assignment) to imagine stories that enable them to knot together their training in writing and worlds they feel connected to. Though liminality is apparent in their writing (postponing speech, starting-to-speak, reconnecting), they also hint at an awareness of their own agency and even responsibility in writing.

Een hooivagen kijkt neer op een zielig hoopje mens. [...] Hij ziet wat voor treurig leven ik leid in mijn kleine kamertje, waar hij waarschijnlijk wel gelukkig is met wat hij heeft: een web op een goede plek. [...] Nu ga ik een staarwedstrijd aan met het [acht]ogige beest terwijl ik verder verdwaald raak in mijn gedachten. [txt D]

Ik voel eigenlijk een grote afstand tot de wereld. De wereld, die eigenlijk zo fucking interessant is, verveelt me. De vrijheid die ik heb als jonge student in Nederland is immens. [...] Deze gedachte gaf me toen ik net aan mijn studie begon een orkaan aan energie. Nieuwe mensen, nieuwe stad, nieuw leven. Nu vind ik die vrijheid beangstigend. [txt D]

Mijn moeder appt en vraagt of het beter met me gaat. [...] Zou ze hebben gezien dat ik online ben? Mijn ademhaling gaat omhoog, mijn hoofd wordt zwaar, mijn handen beginnen te trillen. Mijn telefoon gaat. [end of story] [txt D]

Ze bracht te weinig bezoeken aan de andere kant van de Ijs[se]l, [...]. Ergens tussen sorry, zwijgen en vluchten zette ze dingen op papier die altijd gingen 'over' en nooit in gesprek 'met'. [...] Als je terug wil gaan, dan moet je gaan. [...] Dat schreef ze ook, maar godzijdank was ze [er] gewend aan dat haar woorden op papier veilig waren. Dat ze [zich] aan de belofte die ze daar maakte niet hoefde te houden. [...] Zes weken later zou ze zichzelf toch aan die papieren belofte houden en eens naar de andere oever afreizen. [txt B]

Next Steps

- **adjustment**: include more space for multilingualism, informal language,... (and n7)
- **discussion** in the light of existing education research on writing in higher education
- **question**: Is 'love' strong enough to do right to the diversity of backgrounds? Can it compete with the powerful requirements of academic writing and culture?