

Teaching Writing as a Process in English Classes

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show the benefits of writing as an effective teaching approach to language and learning skills. Writing is a powerful activity which enhances students' language skills, develops their metacognitive skills, their confidence, independence and interpersonal skills, which are very important for their future and their live in general. Students consider writing more often a burden rather than an activity which helps them. A case study approach was taken. It is a qualitative approach where observation and interviews were the instruments used to collect the data. The questions that guide my study are how writing benefits students in developing students' language skills and group work skills. The other question is to what extent teaching of writing as a process in multilingual groups leads to developing inter and intra personal communication skills. The study concludes that the teaching of writing as a process is effective and in a multinational learning setting it is essential that the teacher must play the role of a guide as well as facilitator.

Keywords: Learning, process, writing, product

1. Introduction

Writing is a powerful deliberating activity which allows a person to express what thoughts, emotions, attitudes he has. It is a medium which, if properly developed, can be a very effective way of improving oneself. Students in university "make use" of writing to aid them for different purposes and more than often such activity becomes a burden for them. As students often have difficulties to reach their goals in their writing assignments, the writing assignments do not play their intended roles in reaching students' goals but overcharge them with futile anxiety and stress. This leads to each and every assignment seeming more difficult. One of the reasons of these difficulties is that students perceive writing only as the final goal or the final product thus adding extra weight to the entire activity. This situation is not created by the students alone but it is rather a cycle starting from teachers, who more than often tackle writing as the final product. They seem to be more interested in the final product of the students' work, rather than in the process of doing this. In order to write on a given topic people read and study literature, gather information from different sources so that the written material will be in line with the same unit of thought that they are learning. It is a never ending cycle of learning and studying about an expected product with the aim of achieving the desirable one. Students' writing becomes no more of a respect for a set of dogmatic rules coming out of the "teachers' favourite guidelines" on how a student should act with a specific topic, what s/he should write and what not to write. If/when the teacher understands this set context then he will see that such guided practice is not only void of any learning but also harmful as it hinders the progress of the student.

Writing is more of a compositional activity which needs to be seen as a process. It is a demanding, highly intellectual activity and should be treated as such during the teaching activities of educators by means of which they can have a meaningful and worthy result from their students.

Writing activities are considered as a difficult language skills. It takes time and careful guidance by teachers to make students good writers. Often students due to the overload of their tasks, the time constraints and sometimes to the limitations placed upon them by requirements are prone to mistakes in writing, loss of focus from the topic, grammar, spelling errors etc. And with all other subjects that they have to take writing seems and becomes sometimes a great obstacle for them. It is not a pleasurable activity in the least. Given the above-mentioned I have introduced a case-study activity in a group of 25 students in the Faculty of Economics writing an article using a topic of their choice within the economic area. On a pragmatic level students have many benefits from process writing.

First, as Murray I mentioned "There are rewards and excitement, however, for when we discover what we have said we discover who we are. In finding your voice you discover your identity.. "There is a pleasurable part of writing in understanding what you know and understanding that by looking at what you have written and how you have written it.

Second, the writing process creates a bond between teacher and student which improves students writing," as Robert C. Wess² puts it :- ..This bonding between teacher and student fosters a climate of trust in which teacher and student feel free to express themselves..." because the link between teacher-student "fosters a climate of trust in which teacher and students feel free to express themselves.. it and it also enables creativity and

1 (Donald M. Murray "The Explorers of Inner Space", The English Journal, Vol. 58, No. 6 (Sep., 1969), pp. 908-911:)

2 Wess, Robert C. "SHOULD WRITING TEACHERS WRITE?" Freshman English News, vol. 11, no. 2/3, 1983, pp. 15-17., www.jstor.org/stable/43518802;

frees students from the “usual guidelines “ as Lauri1 mentions in “Teaching Student Writers to Be Warriors,;” “Unfortunately, [students] are learning that success means mastering the system rather than their own impulses; that they should seek money, not meaning; and that as long as they shut up and figure out what the teacher wants, they’ll get their stamp of approval”) students should think and have their own voice in matters including their writing.

Thirdly, as part of a set of skills needed for students after they graduate knowing what and how to write will help them later in life in order to get their ideas across. It will aid them in their everyday work, life or circumstances for writing can allow you to discover what you really feel about the world around you, and once you discover this, maybe you can work for change

2. Research question

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of process writing as a means of improving students’ writing skills, their logical thinking and the way they express themselves. It is an approach which will open their eyes to the benefits and satisfying side of writing thus enabling them to produce a more qualitative piece of writing. The questions raised in this study are how they use process writing and how this helps them in improving their writing works and way of thinking in general.

3. Methodology

A case study approach has been used. The instruments used to gather data in this study were observations and interviews. The students were asked the following questions :

Questionnaire 1

- 1- Did you brainstorm at the beginning of your writing or did you start writing only having the topic in mind?
- 2-When you write do you have an audience in mind? If yes, who?
- 3- Do you make notes, outline or daydream while writing?
- 4-Do you rethink/reconsider what you have written? If so, how often?
- 5- What takes more time while you are writing?
- 6-What is the most difficult part of writing?
- 7- How much is your writing affected but what the teacher requires from you?

4. A case study

The case study for this article was the writing of an article with a topic of their choice in the area of economics. This study was carried out because there has been cases of essays with grammar mistakes, semantic errors, irrelevant and repeated ideas and not a logical development of the argument.

5. Participants

The participants in this study were 34 first year students enrolled in English for specific purposes, at the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana. The students’ language proficiency ranged from intermediate to upper-intermediate. They were majoring in Informatics Economics at the Faculty of Economics. All of them were native Albanian speakers; most of them had taken international language exams such as IELTS or TOEFL, as a requirement for admission to this field of study.

6. Design and purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was both on an individual level as well as on an academic level. This study case aimed at increasing the student’s awareness of their own potential by means of writing. They would have to discover their inventiveness, vocabulary and logical thinking they needed for a proper writing work. Also they would have to learn and come into terms with the grammar rules, semantics logic. It would raise their interest in writing for they would see how well they can fare and how well their writing can transmit their ideas, can argue a topic, and can oppose a statement. Other aims at this project were improving students reading, listening, vocabulary skills as well as developing their researching, assessing and group working skills.

This study follows the typical stages of the writing process proposed by Tomkins (2004). During the writing process a stage may be skipped but can be returned to later. There are five stages of the writing process as follows:

- Prewriting: Students planned what they intended to write about. They outlined and jotted down their thoughts, their arguments because they might need them afterwards and sometimes go back and forth to get the proper idea out. . Planning is a very important step of the writing process; it allows the students (writers) to organize their writing before they begin. A good planning at the beginning of the writing process will facilitate a great deal of what comes after. It will help student not to wonder off or get stuck in one part of their writing.

1 Mattenson, Lauri M. “Teaching Student Writers to Be Warriors.” Chronicle Review 6 August 2004: B10–B11;

- **Drafting:** In this stage, students have to arrange the ideas and arguments they came up with in the planning stage on paper. During this stage, spelling rules for the written text are ignored. The students have to focus on the content of their material (Marchisan v Alber,2001). Drafting along with prewriting are crucial stages in the students composition. In these stages the students came up with novelty of ideas. Students read, search, assess notions and compose the bulk in a raw form of what will come later in their writing. In the drafting stage they organise their ideas, notions, they choose a topic and now all they need is to think of the means in which they are going to put these notions in writing. They have to come up with the words, phrases, paragraphs to express ideas and at the same time they have to think of the logical order which fits best these ideas. Student must also think about the conclusion of their writing and how it is all linked with the main notion they thought of transmitting
- **Revising:** During this stage the students review each-other. They assess, edit the written drafts. In this stage they may modify, erase or even come up with new ideas according to the suggestions of their friends in class. This is a crucial part of the writing process which serves as a filter of peers that refines the written work according to the feedback with regard to the content. (Kapka v Oberman, 2001).
- **Editing:** In this stage there is a shift in the focus of the students with regard to their drafts. If they concentrated on content until now, in this stage they will pay attention to the form and refine their grammar, sharpen their punctuation, spelling. During this phase they zoom in on the aesthetical parts of their work. In this part the teacher might be included in the process by suggesting grammatically-correct words, refreshing punctuation rules etc.
- **Publishing:** This is the last stage of the writing process. In this stage, the students share the text they have written with the readers they determined in the prewriting stage. (Lehr,1995) states that sharing what has been written is a good way for students both to recognize writing as an effective communication tool and motivate them to write.

7. Findings and discussion

The study case and the way in which this entire process was organised was very appreciated by the students and ultimately achieved its goals. During all the stages the students were very motivated to write, they cooperated with one another and were focused on what they were aiming. This was a very good situation created by the study which enabled the students' participation and self-motivation due to, also, to the role of the teacher who in this process was more their equal rather than their "superior" (which is usually the case for teaching in Albania). The teacher was just a guide and a facilitator of the process and its presence on many cases was almost absent. Mostly he oriented the students to use English in their discussions and their comments, he clarified in broad terms what the process was and what they were going to present. After the process and the final written work of the students and the final presentation of their work an interview was conducted to understand the students' reaction to such manner of writing and how they felt about such process in general.

With regard to the first question most of the students explained that they brainstormed before any written work to have a clear idea in mind and then to develop it. Leonora said "when I start writing a lot of arguments come to mind. I just need to organize them". Another student stated that he saw some documentaries and video and then he brainstormed. As far as the audience many students stated that their audience was their class and their teacher whereas others had a larger audience such as everyday readers (they wrote as if this was a newspaper article). Others stated that they had no audience in mind when they wrote, others wrote for unspecified people and even including themselves in the audience or the only audience. Most students jot down notes before and during their written work writing their thoughts or ideas but a considerable part of them stated that they also daydream and just thought about the ideas they wanted to write about. A few did both. With regard to what they had written most of them reread and reconsidered. Elisa stated "It depends on the topic but almost every time I reconsider what I have written sometimes even 5 or 6 times during writing". Whereas Sara explained "... I read each sentence twice or more before I write the other one ...". Different answers were given to question 5 where many spent more time in the form with organization of ideas and paragraphs whereas others with the thinking process, coming up with new ideas or choosing the best of words. They had different answers for Q5 such as: "Linking my ideas takes more time while I write and also trying to find the best words for the context" . "The body of the essay. How I organize information firstly in my mind then in paper" "Most of the time is spent with the selection of words so that my article will affect more the audience" or "Thinking on how I am going to write and organize", "Organisation of my ideas and adjustments of paragraphs". "More time takes the opening paragraphs . After that everything becomes easy" "I spent most of the time on how to express my thoughts". Whereas for Q6 most had problems with choosing a topic and the right words to put into the right paragraph. Inva stated "...choosing the words how to express myself in my opinion is the most difficult part of writing."

8. Conclusion

This study and literature review has shown that process writing has positive effects on students writing in general and their writing skills and how they approach writing. Given sufficient time students will improve their language, how they express themselves and will be more conscious about their own potentials and how much they can gain by writing properly. Such abilities will be helpful to them in school, life and elsewhere. During this “writing exercise” they understood the mechanics of writing well, became more observant of the logic of writing, took into consideration different audiences for the works, learnt how to focus with a specific aim (other than the final product), became critics of others and their own work and took responsibilities of what they wrote as well as felt the satisfaction of a well-written as by exploring new horizons they didn’t know they had.

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