

Journal Keeping in an ESL Classroom: an Innovative Approach in Language Learning

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Abstract

The teacher is saddled with enormous responsibilities in the ESL classroom. These responsibilities go beyond the teaching of prescribed texts and grammar of English but also in creating a robust and enabling environment to promote writing fluency and instilling confidence in the students. The innovative teacher does these by assisting students to acquire communicative, analytical, logical skills through the medium of journaling in the classroom. Journals enable students focus on the expression of their thoughts and ideas (Isaacs and Brodine, 1994: ix). Journal keeping is a pedagogical process of establishing a routine writing workout, and connecting reading with writing on the one hand, and enabling the English teacher to deal with the growing demands on the English teacher on the other hand. Research has shown that methodology, training and concept alone will not make a teacher competent enough to train students at college level to meet their requirements but a reflective practice could serve the ever growing needs of the English language learner and teacher by integrating both theory and practice (Lakshimi 2009:). This paper is designed as an investigative study on the potential of journal keeping development tool for equipping students with the necessary skills for their day-to-day expedition in the classroom.

Keywords: Journal Keeping, ESL Classroom, Reading and writing Connection

1. Introduction

The teacher is saddled with enormous responsibilities in the ESL classroom. These responsibilities go beyond the teaching of prescribed texts and grammar of English but also in creating a robust and enabling environment to promote writing fluency and instilling confidence in the students. The innovative teacher does these by assisting students to acquire communicative, analytical, logical skills through the medium of journaling in the classroom. Journals enable student focus on the expression of their thoughts and ideas (Isaacs and Brodine, 1994: ix). Journal keeping is a pedagogical process of establishing a routine writing workout, and connecting reading with writing on the one hand, and enabling the English teacher to deal with the growing demands on the English teacher on the other hand. Research has shown that methodology, training and concept alone will not make a teacher competent enough to train students at college level to meet their requirements but a reflective practice could serve the ever growing needs of the English language learner and teacher by integrating both theory and practice (Lakshimi 2009:). This paper is designed as an investigative study on the potential of journal keeping development tool for equipping students with the necessary skills for their day-to-day expedition in the classroom. Journal writing as a viable device in ESL classroom teaching and learning has existed for centuries but several a teachers has utilized this instrument in enabling students to transmit their thoughts and feelings to paper. It develops language skills of students. Its language has the rhythm of every day speech as opposed to those of academic. Its cognitive characteristics are observational, questioning, speculative, self aware, digressory, synthetic and revisionary (Burton & Carroll 2000:4). The entries in a journal tends to be long, frequent, self initiated and well documented and so it enables students to find their voices and to promote writing fluency. It is a resource for students to connect their reading with writing in an ESL classroom. It instills confidence in the

students as a departure from the perceived difficulty associated with writing which involves following a set of rules for grammar, spelling and punctuation. Journals offer students opportunity to explore and express their thoughts and ideas inhibited by the constraining rules of language. It requires the cooperation of the teacher and students in order to make it a daily and rewarding exercise. Journals take the act of writing out of the language 'box' and spread it throughout the day, connecting writing with reading as part of everyday lesson. Journal is a great learning tool. It is a way to get students to write down what they think, see, or hear and to promote both learning and thinking about a subject. It is a recommended way for teachers to help the student learn to self direct their own learning. It involves diversities of subjects so students can write often about the things that they are interested in, and as a result they learn more effectively. As the ESL classroom becomes student centred they will write about things of personal interest, what they know and what they imagine. Journals therefore foster connections between what they know, and what they are learning. Teachers and researchers interests in journals in education increased in the past decades. It gained increased popularity when the dialogue journal came into use in the 1980s. The teacher of English, in addition to being an expert in the language, is also expected to develop skills relevant to his area, which includes not just teaching but making instant decisions, facing classroom challenges, and maintaining rapport with the students by understanding their behaviours, attitudes, etc. We live in a time of rapid change where change itself is changing and becoming faster. In this fast changing global scenario, no other processes except for reflective practice, could serve the ever growing needs of English language learners and teachers by integrating both theory and practice (Bartlett, 1990). Elbow sum up the importance of reading and writing thus: *'only when people write do they discover what they know. This is because writing is an instrument of thought'* (Quoted by Thomson). Journals can take the form of personal dairies in which students' tract their growth towards specific goals. They are primarily for recording daily events, thoughts, and reflections. These may include self-analysis, discussion of personal beliefs or goals, and evaluation of real-life situations. It could be responses to literature in which students write about books they are reading or have read. In this type of journal, free form writing is acceptable, and less attention is paid to writing conventions such as spelling and grammar. Dialogue journals contains written discourse exchanges between students and their teacher in an ESL classroom while the team journal takes a collaborative format where students working as a group records the progress made in their project. Dialectical journals have the same format as double-column notes. They aid in analysis and encourage meta-cognitive processes. These journals are flexible and can be used in any discipline, including English, science, social studies, and math. Creative journals are designed to be a creative outlet for the imagination. These journals are primarily used in English classes, but can also be used in other disciplines. This journal gives the student a chance to write creatively, primarily poetry, fiction, and narratives. Students might create a fictitious journal for an imagined character or historical figure, and write fictional newspaper articles as well. Journal is a vehicle for the tentative forays of fledging writers. As students are engaged in the process of writing, journal becomes the voyage of discovery. Journal as an ESL classroom resource brings about: improvement of analytical ability, improvement of memory, ability to connect course concepts to life experiences and improvement of communication skills and linguistic development. It is ideal for practice and experimentation essential to natural writing development.

2. Previous Studies

Plethora of works has been done regarding the effectiveness and usefulness of journal as a learning resource in ESL/EFL classroom. Campbell 2004 discussed on the use of live journal for authentic communication in EFL classes. The author's approach centres on the use of web log for language learning. Much emphasis was laid on learning the authentic native communication. Dodson 2001 in journal writing pathfinder provides information about how to access resources in journal writing. The author presented resources which focused on different journal types and benefits, the logistics to implement journal writing, and the role of the teacher in this process as both observer and participant. Lakshmi2009 writing on Journal Writing: a Means of Professional Development in ESL Classroom. Baird 2010 discussed on the Making College Writing Fun for ESL and EFL Learners Using Kamishibai. The author noted that Kamishibai-a

paper drama-is a creative way for students engaging in writing. As a prewriting tool, it helps students to think aloud and gain confidence in writing. Pierson 2004 discussing on the Perspective of Journal Writing for ESL/EFL Classroom discussed the dialogue journal based on its definition, goals and procedures, benefits and limitations. He found out that once learners understood the overall writing process, they were eager to begin writing. The present study slightly differs from the review of journals in ESL classroom. The studies were concerned with the analysis of journals and benefits students. This paper discussed the benefits of journal to students in ESL classroom as a resource in connecting reading and writing. It further discusses the role of the teacher in Journal keeping in ESL classroom. We advocate for fluency before accuracy in the ESL classroom.

3. Reading and Writing Connection

Reading and writing are sufficiently overlapping activities that they support a symbiosis in which the impact of the two together becomes greater than the sum of their separate impact (Robert Tierney).

Reading and writing should occur naturally to construct meaning in everyday situations. (Miller, 1982; Wilson, 1981). Reading-writing activities are essential to the child's learning to read and write. Reading and writing are interdependent processes that are essential to each other and mutually beneficial (Holt & Vacca, 1984). As writing improves through daily communicative use, reading is enhanced (Goodman & Goodman, 1983). Reading in the past decades has attracted much attention and studies while other areas seem to receive little or no attention. The reading and writing process remains a marriage of convenience in the learning process. While reading is inevitable to success in the school, writing enhances students reading mastery in several ways (Tiedl et al 1989). According to Isaacs and Brodine (1994:6), children first try to communicate in writing before they begin by using the few sight words they know. They seek continually to learn by reading whatever word they can find in the environment which in turn expands their vocabularies. Beginning writers often when they read learn new words and at next opportunity attempt to replicate these words. Such writers often use an initial letter sound to represent a word and progress to the key consonants especially mimicking the process of reading phonetically as a result learning to read and write becomes a reciprocal process. (Isaacs and Brodine op cit.) Also, students who share their writing with others are motivated to improve both their reading and writing skills. They want to be able to read the writing of their peers, and they desire to have their writing read with comprehension. A routine of sharing journal entries sets in motion a reading-writing process. Buddy and Dialogue journals make this contention consistent. Here, students exchange entries, also a student and a teacher write to each other respectively. When students have the understanding other people will be reading their writing, they will have a better sense of the writer and write better with the sense of the reader. As students analyze others writing with the thought of using the result of such analysis in their own writing, their comprehension and sophistication deepens. The reading and writing connection is based on communication that is to say if reading and writing are to be communicative then the reader needs to read with the sense of the writer and the writer needs to write with the sense of the reader. Students communication abilities develop once opportunities to read and write are created by the innovative teacher in ESL classroom. Reading constructs meaning through relationships between parts of the text and the reader's prior knowledge, while writing adds meaning to the text by the reader relating his/her prior knowledge and experiences to the text. Reading and writing enables the reader to make predictions, and constructs meaning in order to understand the text but while writing the student develops a new text with the aid of his prior knowledge and imagination. As Nelson 1988 puts it, all literate persons are readers and writers, constructing meaning from the text in which they read and meaning from the text in which they write. The teacher can help Students to bridge the gap between reading and writing, once the reading process has been established. We advocate introduction of the free writing form of journaling which encourages fluency before accuracy.

4. The Role of the Innovative Teacher

The teacher is the main actor or role model in the classroom who runs, administers and manages the students. The teacher is the director and manager of the learning process and curriculum developer. S/he is the key individual who influences the tone and direction of the classroom. The teacher's expectations, encouragement, evaluations, attentiveness and attitude greatly affect student's perception of their academic abilities. The teacher provides the opportunities for students' to apply new context to their own experience (Branford, 1994). The teacher serves as a mediator to assist the learner in a cooperative process of inquiry and self improvement in order to refine skills and knowledge (Brown, Palincar & Arbustner 1994, Routman, 2000; Ruddel, & Unrau, 1994; Yopp and Singer, 1994). Teachers understanding of the reading and writing process need to be strong in order to teach effectively to influence positive literacy acquisition. Teachers must have ability to view situations and events from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives and possess positive attitudes towards culturally diverse students. The teacher needs to provide a variety of teaching strategies that will influence students learning. They need to adapt and modify their pedagogy to make effective instructional decisions that draw students on their various abilities, cultural learning styles and backgrounds. Teachers need to use effective instructional strategies such as: Read Aloud/write; Aloud, Shared Reading/Writing; Cooperative Reading/ Writing and Independent Reading/ Writing to aid in the process of becoming a fluent reader/writer (Applebee, 2000; Banks, 2002, Banks, 1997, Davidman, 1994, Ladson-billing, 1995, Paris Lipson, & Wixson, 1994, and Routman 2002). Journal activity requires considerable time commitment by the teacher to read and respond meaningfully to each learner's entry. In order to reduce the work load, the teacher may decide days and number of times the students write on a weekly basis. Also, some adult students may be reluctant to participate in journal writing then the teacher should decide what needed to done for the students to participate. As earlier stated journaling success in ESL class require the understanding and cooperation of the students and their teacher. The teacher may put them through process writing as it is expected that the process may result in a deepened trust between the learners and the teacher as well as a willingness to share their experiences with others. The teacher needs to assist students to distinguish between narrative and information text, and to provide them with opportunities to closely examine techniques used by authors (Lawrence, McNeal and Yildiz, 2009:483).

Conclusion

This article has discussed on the use of journal in ESL classroom. It gave a broad definition of journal, previous studies, and its relevance as a model for bridging the reading and writing gap. The reading and writing connection has been identified as resource for success and literacy development. The paper further identified the role of the innovative teacher who is the director and manager of the students and activities in the ESL classroom. The innovative teacher assists students to acquire communicative, analytical, logical skills through the medium of journaling in the classroom. We noted that the success in the journaling process depends on the cooperation of the students and teacher in ESL classroom. Also, it is the role of the teacher to choose text or topic which the students would write in their journals. We finally advice the teacher who is concerned in the success of students in language learning to determine the journal forms for every lesson based on the learners' needs.

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