

Process Approach of Writing Dr. Sadiya Ibrahim Ali Fine Arts school for boys\ Najaf

Abstract:

Process approach has had a major impact on the ways writing is both understood and taught, transforming narrowly – conceived product models and raising awareness of how complex writing actually is. Few teachers now see writing as an exercise in formal accuracy, and most set pre-writing activities, which require multiple drafts, give extensive feedback, encourage peer review and delay surface correction.

Writing involves a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate and organize during the act of composing (Flower and Hayes, 1981). The purpose for writing could be to inform, persuade and manipulate language and express meaning. The process approach encourages learners to write about experiences and individual differences which give their writing a powerful purpose (Westervelt, 1988).

The aim of this study is to firstly describe the process approach involved in writing and secondly describe how the understanding of such a process supports the teacher and learner in today's classrooms.

ملخص الطريقة الاجرائية في الكتابة

ان الطريقة الاجرائية لها تأثير بارز على القليل من المعلمين الذين يرون ان الكتابة هي ممارسة ذات دقة منهجية تنسقها مجموعة من الفعاليات التي تتطلب مسودات متعددة وتغطي تغذية تراجعية، تشجع مراجعات متناظرة بين الطلبة وتوجب التصحيح السطحي.

ان الكتابة تتضمن عمليات فكرية متميزة يؤلفها وينظمها الكاتب خلال عمليات التأليف. ان هدف الدراسة هو: أولاً: وصف الطريقة الاجرائية المتضمنة في الكتابة، وثانياً: تبيان ان فهم هذه الطريقة يساعد كلاً من المعلم والطالب في صفوف اليوم.

A brief overview on process approach

The 1970's cognitive psychologists proposed a model of the composing process involved in writing with three central elements: planning, translating and reviewing (Ivanic, 2004). Learning to write should include learning the process and the procedures of composing the text. Teachers need to pay attention to the practical processes involved in writing rather than the end product (Ivanic, 2004). The writing processes encompass both the cognitive and practical processes. According to Flower and Hayes (1981, P: 65), the major units of analysis involved in the process approach to writing are elementary mental sub- processes such as the process of generating the ideas. The cognitive process is implicitly learned by the writers but teachers need to explicitly teach the practical processes involved in writing (Ivanic, 2004).

Classroom environment plays a crucial role in how students view learning. The students learn implicitly when a process - oriented approach creates a community setting where peer-led instruction vitally affects the learning process (Reeve, 1997, cited in Westervelt, 1998, P: 73). On-going support is crucial as students share their writing and give feedback to other students about their pieces of writing in a non-threatening way (Westervelt, 1998). Therefore, assessment of student's work becomes a part of the student's commitment to being responsible for their own learning. Since they are graded on a holistic, rubric type of scale, they learn to focus on higher order concerns and can master each of these concerns by setting goals and developing as writers (Atwell, 1987, cited in Westervelt, 1998, P: 115).

Teachers serve as models in this crucial environment where the classroom is bustling with activity as students work independently and with others engaged in brainstorming and other pre-writing activities, complete first drafts, make revisions and edit for conventional errors. Teachers allow students to see how they themselves move through the writing process, as they work on their own writing and teachers encourage students to make their own decisions on what to write about, and to set their own research questions, thus enabling them to be independent writers, and thus explicitly teach the practical processes involved.

Such a dialogue journal between the teacher and students can enact a learner- centered dialogical curriculum (Meath- Lang, 1990). The prerequisite is that teachers must try to treat every student as a unique individual, characterized by autobiographical methods, individual focus and political concern, (Meath- Lang, 1990, P: 16) to re-conceive their identities. It could be viewed as one of the "distinctive ways of 'being and doing' that allow people to enact and/ or recognize a specific and distinctive socially situated identity" (Gee, 2000, p. 2).

In this process, students "enact" their inner voices into written conversations with teachers in "a process of discovery" of self- expressions (Zamel, 1982, p. 206).

In a content- based manner, they negotiate their identities in personally meaningful discussions, publishing of the journal writing can make learners "recognize" and reflect how language constructs and changes their social surroundings and their identities, appreciating the significance and impact of their own voices as writers. The roles of teachers were transformed from evaluators and dispensers of knowledge to facilitators, collaborators and friends (Vanett&Jurich, 1990, P: 116). Consisting with Goffman's (1959, P: 118) dramaturgical view of social interaction where the influences of social actors/ actresses are reciprocal, teachers become learners too.

Elements of the process approach

The most important element of this process is the rhetorical problem since it affects the writer's performance. Flower and Hayes (1981) state that the ability of the writers to describe their topic, audience and their role as students to teacher would enable them to solve the problem. Writers' knowledge and planning influence writing, therefore, in the process approach, the writers notate the knowledge they want to use in the planning, and they set their goal which is the major aspect of the planning process. The act of developing and refining writers' goals is not limited to a pre-writing stage in the composing process, but is intimately bound up with the on-going, moment – to – moment process of composing (Flower and Hayes, 1981, P: 58).

During the translation process, the writers put their ideas in written forms and construct sentences to make their meaning clear. Writers consciously review their work to read over what they have written and this can lead to multiple drafting by the writers.

According to Smith and Elley (1997), this multiple drafting of piece of writing is a key feature in the process writing. Reviewing can also lead to new planning and translation, and even evaluation of text and one's own planning (Smith and Elley, 1997, P: 23). As opposed to the stage model, the sub- processes in process approach have a hierarchal structure that is, each of these acts can occur at any time in the composing process (Flower and Hayes, 1987, P: 85). For the process approach to be successful, the teacher needs to adopt all aspects of the approach (Smith and Elley, 1997) and provide a classroom environment which supports writing process through immersion in the writing medium, demonstrating the point medium (such as print displays, labels, charts, books, dictated stories), giving clear expectations (positive/ negative) to the students and allowing them to take responsibility for their own writing and engaging them with the demonstrations made available in the classroom (Cambourne&Turbill, 1987, P: 21).

In the classroom, writers require clear demonstrations that will show them how to go about making changes to improve their writing. They need to be exposed to and be able to identify effective writing techniques in quality models, they require specific teacher feedback relevant to their own learning, and they need opportunities to explore, share, reflect and talk about their writing with others (Dix, 2003, P: 66).

Students approach writing and revision in different ways and are aware of the decisions that go into them. Multicultural classrooms today present teachers with a range of educational challenges. Diversity is acknowledged and celebrated not only with respect to cultural and social differences that students contribute, but also in the diverse ways that children learn in the classroom (Dix, 2006, P: 43). They create and build different texts in different ways (Dix, 2003, cited in Dix, 2006, P: 63). The three fluent writers in the study describe not only how

they construct and revise their different texts in their own ways, but they also demonstrate metacognitive awareness of revision practices they implemented, justifying reasons for making changes (Dix, 2006, P: 72). The process approach is thus shown to be relevant to learners from all cultures as they seek to express themselves in writing in their own ways.

The process approach of writing supports the learners, and as Richgels (2003, p. 12) points out, can teach children to write as 'real writers'. This is because the learner uses the writing process which the real writers use and gives them the opportunity to question themselves about the ideas, content, style, points which need to be clarified in their writing. Since the process approach offers students the opportunity to choose their own topic they can write for various purposes as well as various audiences.

Teachers should encourage learners to talk to them and each other about their choice of topic "writing floats on a sea of talk" (Ministry of Education, 1992, P: 25). Teachers should always be prepared to accept that learners' topic choice may be better idea than the one they themselves had suggested. The advantage of this is that it is child- centered and child-controlled and it gives the learners' ownership to their writing (Smith and Elley, 1997). This helps children to connect to their learning while writing as they can draw on their own ideas and choose what they want to write (Westervelt, 1998). This ownership empowers them to write with more authority and voice since the writers know that they are free to express their experiences and imagination (Richgels, 2003).

One example of such learning was evident during my work as a teacher aid at Whitiora School in 2004, to help three Iraqi sisters. The children were asked to write about 'a picnic at the beach'. The teacher gave the learners choice to select any beach in New Zealand, investigate it and write about what people do at the beach. The learners were confident and had positive attitude in their writing and spent most of their free time on drafting their topic. The teacher wrote some questions that helped the learners to brainstorm, and she expected them to ask the questions of each other and of themselves. The teacher's role was to be a model in this process. Teachers need to write with the learners, because it has multiple effects on them. Smith and Elley (1997, P: 52), state that a teacher creates a powerful model for writing if the learners see her writing with them. Modeling helps learners see the process which accompanies the writing and allows them to see the difficulty and delights of writing. They see that "writing a quality piece takes time" (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 16).

Also it is important that the teacher demonstrates the changes that need to be made to the writing by talking out loud (Dix, 2003, P: 36). This would give the learners a valuable insight into their own writing because the teacher highlights for them the target skills she/ he wants them to apply to their writing (Richards and Hawes, 2004, P: 77). The writing also supports the learner and the teacher through conferencing. Writing teachers consult with either individuals or small groups to reinforce the writing skills and strategies that students have learned (Richard and Hawes, 2004, P: 5). Many opportunities should be provided for writers to talk in groups, in pairs, and with the teacher. The sharing of ideas with sympathetic learners is most helpful in clarifying one's own thoughts (Ministry of Education, 1992, P: 25). The teacher acts as a couch and an audience and shows the learner- writer how the audience would react to their writing (Smith and Elley, 1997, P:33). The scaffold and feedback provided to students during conferencing help them to improve their writing and make the meaning of their writing clear for their audience (Richards and Hawes, 2004, P: 93). The advantage of feedback is that it is given constantly and not just at the end of drafting (Ward and Dix, 2004, P: 60). It also allows the teacher to monitor what students are writing and students can talk with them as they write (Richgels, 2003, P: 64).

In the process approach of writing, the teacher provides valuable assessments as she/ he examines each student's writing to determine its strength and areas of need. Richards and Hawes (2004, P: 213) say that teachers need to treat mistakes as learning opportunities and to encourage children to reach their potential as writers.

Another component of the process approach that supports the learner is revision. This occurs throughout the composition process where the writers usually revise and make changes to improve the meaning, clarity and accuracy of their own writing, they also reread and reflect on their own writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981, P: 91).

"Revision means making any changes at any point in the writing process. Changes might affect meaning or they might merely fix features such as spelling. A writer may revise plans for a composition before any words appear on paper, may change words or sentences while putting them on paper, or may go back to make changes after a draft is finished" (Dix, 2003, p. 120).

The teacher's explanatory language used to discuss revision practices in the classroom influences writers' understanding. Therefore the teacher needs to make sure that the children have a growing language to discuss the process and content of the written subject (Richgels, 2003, P: 81).

In the process approach of writing, the teacher also publishes the students' work so that children can share their work and feel that their writing is valued (Richgels, 2003, P:66). Classroom that allowed children to negotiate time to reach a published form of work seemed to achieve higher overall standards of writing. New Zealand educators have noted that where publication has not been part of the writing programme, or has been treated in a casual manner, there has been a general lack of interest in writing (Ministry of Education, 1992, P: 65).

Although there are many reasons why whole language should be an effective approach for helping students learn to write, some educators worry that children in whole- language classrooms do not learn all they need to know (Spiegel, 1992, cited in Graham and Harris, 1994, P:50). Because whole language relies on indirect versus direct methods of instruction, critics have questioned whether children adequately acquire the knowledge, skills, and strategies underlying skilled writing (Graham and Harris, 1994, P:68). Of the fourteen studies examining writing, six were quasi- experimental studies comparing whole- language to skill – based instruction, six were qualitative analyses of whole language classes, one was a study of the effects of strategy instruction, using a single – subject design, and one was a descriptive investigation of the writing produced by students in whole – language classrooms.

Most of the investigation focused on the effects of whole language on students' written products, but provided no supportive evidence that student in whole – language classrooms were 'dramatically' better writers than students without a whole – language background (Graham and Harris, 1994, P:16). In contrast, Allen (1998, cited in Graham and Harris, 1994, P:99) provided a more critical analysis of seven kindergarten classrooms using whole language. The results showed that 84% of the students progressed as writers. However 8.5% of the students appeared to make no progress and another 5% regressed. Varble (1990, cited in Graham and Harris, 1994, P:39) collected writing samples from second and sixth – grade students taught by teachers using either a whole language or skills approach. There were no differences between the writing of sixth – grade students. The paper written by second – grade students in the whole – language classes, were of higher quality in holistic rating of content than those written by students in skills – oriented classes. No differences were found for holistic ratings on the mechanics of writing for the two groups of second grades. A variety of methodological problems were evident in each study, clouding interpretation of the available data.

Skeptics are concerned that the instructional methods used by a whole – language teachers are not powerful enough to help children learn to write adequately (Mather, 1992, cited in Graham and Harris, 1994, P:35). Students who have problems in writing may require more extensive, structured, and explicit instruction to learn skills and processes that other children learn more easily (Harris and Graham, 1994, P:92).

The most notable effect in whole language was students' thinking about writing. They held a meaning – based view of writing and writing processes, whereas their counterparts in

conventional classes had a skill – based view of writing. Such difference may well have an important impact on students' future development as writers (Graham and Harris, 1994). Reliable difference between the writing of students in whole – language and more conventional classes, however, were not found, possibly because of the bias in methods used to collect writing samples. Language should have a positive impact on motivation to write and attitudes toward writing because, choice, ownership, authenticity, cooperation, and acceptance are emphasized (Graham and Harris, 1994, P:82).

Participation in whole language, therefore, does not ensure that all children will grow and progress as writers. No single method of instruction is suitable for all children. It is worth making all the same (Graham and Harris, 1994). To be certain, whole – language experiences have their benefits. When children's worlds are filled with books and writing materials they are stimulated to do things that are literate (Morrow, 1990; Neuman&Rosko, 1992, cited in Pressley, 1994, P:115). Consistent experiences with high – quality literature foster growth in understanding the structure of stories which positively affects both comprehension and writing as well as the sophistication of children's language (Morrow, 1992, cited in Pressley, 1994, P:31). Whole language fosters student understanding that writing is for meaning making – that writing is a communicative act, a vehicle through which people share information, influence others, make requests and accomplish goals (Pressley, 1994, P:63).

Conclusion

In conclusion the process approach is a method which emphasizes the process of writing rather than the end product. Learners are given ownership to either own writing by giving them the opportunity to write in topics of their own choice and for specific audience. They have regular conference with their teachers and are given the opportunity to share their work and question themselves, their peers about ideas, content and style and about points which need to be clarified. Redrafting and revision is encouraged in this process as is the publication of the final product. Also in today's multicultural classrooms, students approach writing in different ways and are aware of the decisions that go into them. They demonstrate an ability to revisit texts according to their purposes and in their own different and personal ways (Dix, 2006).

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