

Encouraging Fluency and Self-Expression in the ESL Writing Classroom

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Challenges in ESL writing classes:

- ❖ Ss not aware of need for pre-writing and drafting stages
- ❖ Unfamiliarity with different genres of English
- ❖ Covert nature of written discourse: what to leave in, what to omit? (Nunan, 1991)
- ❖ Lack of clear purpose of audience-artificial nature of writing assignments; syntax-focused classroom
- ❖ Focus of teacher feedback may lead to student lack of motivation, reluctance to complete assignments or write in or outside of the classroom
- ❖ Lack of provision for practice of writing skill in classroom

Strategies

Vocalizing thoughts

- Good for 'stuck' writers
- Helps process ideas
- Assists student in making meaningful, effective changes in revision process

Collaborative/Cooperative learning

- Focus on 'messages' and targeted communication functions. Objectives embodied in process of cooperative writing and the communication tasks (e.g., brainstorming, speed-writing, story sequences, jigsaws)
- Provides structure for student interaction
- Encourages 'positive interdependence'

Free writing

- Learners write for a period of time in class on a topic of interest to them (quick writes, dialogue journals)
- Some may be discarded; others kept in a portfolio or notebook- themes may emerge, act as springboards for more extensive writing that is discussed, revised, edited, and published.
- Non-stressful, safe environment, 3 times a week minimum recommended
- Challenges: Distracted student/The Talker/The Translator/The Copier

Process writing

- 'an approach to the teaching of writing which stresses the creativity of the individual writer, and which pays attention to the development of good writing practices rather than the imitation of models'. (Tribble, 1996, p160)
- Encourages ESL writers to communicate their own written messages while simultaneously developing their literacy skills
- Communication of the message is paramount; developing, but inaccurate, attempts at handwriting, spelling, and grammar are accepted
- Within the process of regular writing opportunities students will gain control of these sub-skills.
- Further developed with peer review/feedback and group work
- 'generating ideas, focusing, structuring, drafting, evaluating and re-viewing'. (White and Arndt, 1991)
- different forms of brainstorming, selecting and ordering ideas, planning, drafting, redrafting and revising and editing
- 'not linear at all' but 'recursive' (Raimes, 1985, p229. quoted in Tribble, 1996, p59), writers can loop backwards or forwards to whichever of the activities involved in text composition they may find useful'.
- provides the student writer and the teacher with a practical and manageable framework within which to work through the writing process
- allows for great flexibility, depending on each individual task and the personality and preferences of each individual writer
- The more a writing activity can engage the learner as a person, the more it will capture his/her imagination and spark his/her motivation
- Students have traditionally had 'no intellectual or emotional investment in what they are writing about.
- They are saying something that nobody cares about in order to practise something else'. (Raimes, 19~5 a)
- Provision of interesting and stimulating topics to write about, the development of activities which engage the students' interest in these topics and help them to express and develop their ideas on them and in the attempt to develop tasks where students have a more genuine purpose to write and a stronger sense of the audience for whom they are writing

Peer Evaluation

- Feedback often has negative connotation-“correction”
- Receiving feedback from peers=less pressure
- Chance to read and critically examine others' work, compare own writing
- Escape from teacher's eye
- Needs to be introduced to students, clear instructions given

Challenges:

- ❖ Not taken seriously by students
- ❖ Ss don't want to hurt others' feelings

Benefits:

- students become aware that writing skills can in fact be acquired and improved, that writing is a thinking process that requires brainstorming, generating ideas, and then organizing those ideas into coherent thoughts that can be put down on paper-not just inspiration
- Transparency-students are aware of techniques and criteria by which writing can be objectively marked
- raises the students' awareness of the importance of developing and, subsequently, using critical thinking skills
- encourages the students to voice their opinions- their opinions meaningful and valid
- raises the students' awareness of the importance of giving constructive feedback-writer can choose whether to accept (unlike teacher feedback)
- Peers a valuable part of writing process

Dialogue Journals

- written conversations in which a learner and teacher (or other writing partner) communicate regularly (daily, weekly, or on a schedule that fits the educational setting) over a semester, school year, or course
- . Learners write as much as they choose on a wide range of topics and in a variety of genres and styles, teacher writes back regularly, responding to questions and comments, introducing new topics, or asking questions
- Teacher primarily a participant in an ongoing, written conversation with the learner rather than an evaluator who corrects or comments on the quality of the learner's writing
- Topics for or types of writing may be specified to enhance the curriculum, and some correction may be given by the teacher, but the primary goal of the writing is communication.

Challenges:

- 'Correctness' of writing
- Time to respond to learners' writing
- Writing that is overly personal

Benefits:

- Extends time teachers have with individual learners
- Gives learner access to knowledge of a member of the new language and culture
- Gives teacher detailed knowledge about the learner's strengths and needs
- Learner has regular opportunities to reflect on new experiences and emerging knowledge and to think through with another individual ideas, problems, and important choices
- Allows learners to use reading and writing in purposeful ways and provides a natural, comfortable bridge to other kinds of writing

- open new channels of communication, provide natural contexts for language and literacy development
- Learners write to express themselves, to make sense of their own and others' experiences, and to develop their abilities (Auerbach, 1999; Isserlis, 1996)
- Important component of a critical inquiry approach (Van Duzer & Florez, 1999)- learners and teachers think critically together about texts and events that affect them and respond in writing

Principle of Nonjudgmental Awareness

- “Gallwey’s *Inner Game of Tennis*
- learning “proceeds most effectively and effortlessly when learners allow themselves to move naturally through the learning process, aware of relevant aspects of performance without making excessive critical judgments about that performance” (Kasper 58)
- involves a process-oriented approach; places greater responsibility on students as they go through the writing process- process of discovery in which” ideas are generated and not just transcribed” (Susser 35), and the chief goal is attainment of fluency and clarity of expression
- usually results in students experiencing a lessening of anxiety and a marked increase in self-confidence
- Feedback given in the forms of both instructor and peer feedbackTeacher as coach and guide -gradually asks student to assume more responsibility for growth as writers, provides scaffolding and schema activation, creates climate where student successes acknowledged and specific strategies for dealing with weaknesses provided
- Task-oriented questions in teacher feedback rather than traditional error markingRevision presented as a way to generate new ideas and improve fluency rather than as an error correction exercise

Metacognitive Approach

- Metacognitive theory- deals with cognitive self-knowledge (what individuals know about their own thinking (Kellogg, 1994)).
- “knowledge which focuses on or regulates any part of cognitive activity, and he identified two general dimensions of metacognition: knowledge and experience” (Flavell)
- consists of what we have learned, through experience, three distinct and highly interactive knowledge variables: personal variables, task variables, and strategy variables. (Flavell, 1993)
- Possessing a strong metacognitive knowledge base critical to successful learning
- In mc terms, a good learner is "one who has ample metacognitive knowledge about the self as learner, about the nature of the cognitive task at hand, and about appropriate strategies for achieving cognitive goals" (Devine, 1993, p. 109).
- metacognitive topics -acknowledge the affective or emotional component to learning to write.

Benefits:

- clarification, opportunity for verbal expression
- time for thinking and understanding

- awareness of progress through comparison of work, and increased awareness of the instructor
- harmony of student-centered methods and goals
- "encouraging" and "enabling" of participants and growth of self-awareness and autonomy of learners

The Writing Autobiography

- Pre- and post-course writing
- Students describe and evaluate both positive and negative aspects of their English language writing experience
- Reflects self-knowledge
- Pre-course writing autobiography provides instructors with a meta-cognitive "baseline" for each student
- Post-course: helps students to monitor their own development as writers and assists students in developing sound criteria for assessing their own writing performance (Sandman, 1993).

The Cognitive Style Questionnaire

- directs students' attention to the goals they set and the strategies they use when writing
- clarifies task and strategy knowledge by asking students to define good writing, to describe what they do when they have trouble writing, and finally to rank, in order of importance both to their writing teachers and to themselves, criteria such as clarity, fluency, grammar, originality, content, organization, and exploration. (Devine, 1993)

Written Protocols

Reliability and usefulness of written protocols generated by students with limited English proficiency?

In Quantifying Language, Phil Scholfield (1995) reports that such protocols are being used increasingly with foreign students, who "show a greater ability than might have been expected to introspect usefully about their conscious learning strategies and communication processing activities for the language they are learning, as well as what they say in it" (p. 65).

Samples of Metacognitive Approach materials

Writing Autobiography

(adapted from Sandman, 1993, p. 19)

Note: The pre-course writing autobiography consisted of responses to questions 1 through 3. The post-course writing autobiography consisted of responses to questions 1 through 4.

1. Think of a particular time in your life when writing in English was a positive (good) experience. Describe that time in as much detail as you can. What was the task, the assignment, the circumstance? What are some of the factors that make writing a positive experience for you?
2. Describe one negative (bad) writing experience you have had. Think of a time when writing was difficult, frustrating, unsatisfying. Again, please be as specific as you can. What are some of the conditions that make writing difficult for you?
3. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer? What experiences have led you to believe that you have these strengths and weaknesses?
4. What have you learned this semester about your ability as a writer? How, specifically, do you think your writing has improved? What areas of your writing do you think still need work? (-17-)

Cognitive Style Questionnaire

(adapted from Devine et al., 1993, p. 224)

1. Define good writing.
2. What do you do when you have trouble writing?
3. Rank the following in order of importance--in the first column rank their importance to you, personally; in the other column, rank their importance to the teachers who grade your papers. Use # 1 for most important through #7 for least important.

Importance to:	You	Teachers
1. Clarity		
2. Originality		
3. Grammar		
4. Organization		
5. Exploration		

- 6. Fluency
 - 7. Content
- (-18-)

Example of Process Writing Activity (Dave's ESL Café)

This is a fun process writing exercise. Process Writing, as we all know, is where ESL students learn that writing is process of creations and edits and no one (Not even me) sits down and writes wonderfully the first time thru. Here's how its done. You need some old slides and a slide projector. You announce to the class that you picked up your film yesterday and were given the WRONG film by mistake. You need the class to play detective and help you find out about this person.

Step 1: Show three slides. Ask the students to write (double spaced) what this person does for a living.

Step 2: Now the students must slide their papers to their partner on the right. Now the students must read what the other person wrote, and continue the story from there (after they get the next three slides).

Step 3: Show three slides. Ask the students to pick up where the original author left off and write what kind of person the photographer is.

Step 4: Ask the students to circle the adjectives. SURPRISE! Every time I've done this exercise, there are very few adjectives written. Have the students add adjectives. They can write over others writing. After they finish writing, solicit adjectives from them (if you do it before they finish writing, you might influence the others).

Step 5: switch papers, show three slides and ask for another attribute (e.g.,: Profession, Political Beliefs, etc.). Ask the students to circle another part of speech, such as the adverbs. Again, have them edit their papers, adding adverbs. Then solicit responses.