

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WHOLE BRAIN WRITING GAME IN TEACHING WRITING

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Abstract: This study was a case study, involving 24 students at the third semester of English Education Department who were taking a course of writing II in Slamet Riyadi Surakarta. The goals of the study are to find out how Whole Brain Writing Game (WBWG) stimulates the students to generate and to develop ideas writing process, to identify the constraints experienced by the students when writing and how they coped with those problems. Over six months of conducting the research; field notes, transcribed interviews, and responses from questionnaire served as the data. The results showed that the Whole Brain Writing Game (WBWG) stimulated the students to generate and to develop ideas writing process by conducting two parts: Complexors and Puzzles. Complexors gave the students hundreds of repetitions in basic writing skills. Puzzles guided the students through a set of writing patterns. When students were playing with Complexors, they worked in teams to orally create as many Complexor tasks as possible in a minute. Complexors are speed games designed to build oral fluency. Writing a topic sentence was enormously simplified because students could speak 20 topic sentences in a row. When students were playing with Puzzles they worked individually or in teams, completing prewriting and writing tasks. Using a set of writing rules, students completed ever more elaborate, and challenging, essay patterns.

Keywords: *Whole Brain Writing Game, Teaching Writing, Case Study*

Writing is one of important skill to learn. Byrne (1997: 1) states that writing is the act of forming symbols, letters or combinations of letters, which relate to the sound when we speak, making marks on a flat surface of some kind, arranged according to certain conventions to form words and words arranged to form sentences. Furthermore, Richard (1997: 100) states that good writing skills are essential to academic success and a requirement for many occupations and professions. According to Harmer (1998: 73), there are four reasons for teaching writing to students of English as a foreign language: 1) reinforcement, some students acquire languages in a purely oral way, but most of them benefit greatly from seeing the language written down; 2) language development, the actual process of writing helps learners to learn as they go along; 3) learning style, writing is appropriate for learners who take little longer time at picking up language just by looking and listening; 4) writing as a skill, teaching writing is a basic language skill just as important as speaking, listening and reading.

Writing can be said as the most difficult skill compared to listening, speaking and reading. According to Byrne (1997: 4), writing is a difficult activity for most people, both in the mother tongue and in a foreign language. In writing activity, students need not only the correct application of linguistic aspects but also the ability of organizing ideas or thoughts well. Students in writing class are expected to produce written text by demonstrating command of standard written English such as using appropriate structure, accurate grammar, spelling, and punctuation, appropriate use of vocabulary and good organization of ideas manifested in coherent paragraphs (Hinkel, 2004: 19).

Writing difficulties were also experienced by the students of Slamet Riyadi University. Fortunately, the lecturer had considered this phenomenon and decided to implement The Whole Brain Teaching Game in teaching writing. According to Biffle (2010: 4) Whole Brain Writing Game (WBWG) is a highly visual system for teaching students to write. The game is modular. WBWG components, color coded diagrams, can be combined in any order to design a writing curriculum for beginning to advanced writers. Biffle (2010: 4) divides The Whole Brain Writing Game into two parts: Complexors and Puzzles. Complexors are speed games designed to build oral fluency. The other part, Puzzles, guide the students through a set of writing patterns.

Research Method

The participants were 24 students the third semester students (class 02) of English Education Program of UNISRI Surakarta who were taking writing II course. The Research began in August 2013 and finished in January 2014. The data of the study were in the form of qualitative data. It were collected using non-test instruments in three different techniques, those were: (1) observation, (2) interview, and (3) questionnaire. The data collected are validated by using triangulation. The data analysis in qualitative research involves three things namely the data reduction, the data presentation or display and the conclusion drawing or verification (Sutopo, 2002: 90).

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study include two main ideas: 1) the implementation process of Whole Brain Writing Game (WBWG) in order to stimulate the students in generating and in developing ideas; 2) the identification of the constraints experienced by the students when writing and how they coped with those problems.

The Complexor Game

Complexors are words and grammatical devices that add complexity to language. In complexor, the students get choices to increase the challenge of their task by using an “adder” to support their sentence. The term adders mean simply sentences that add information to the sentence they follow. There are 16 complexors used in Whole Brain Writing Game, namely: And, But, Or, Since, Because, Though, Adjectives and Noun, Similes, Fact, Paraphrase, College Talk Verbs, Descriptive sentences, Comma List, Comma Opener, Comma Splitter, Double Comma Phrase. The complexor conducted as a simple game in class. The researcher found the following procedures used by the lecturer in implementing those complexors:

1. The lecturer wanted the students to work in pair. Then, she gave each student one of the Complexor pages.
2. The lecturer explained the rule of the game. First, one of the students orally filled in the blank using the word ‘and’ and then it would be his/her teammate’s turn. The teacher encouraged the students to give some help when their friend were having a problem. The students used the nouns in order at the bottom of the complexor page to fill in the blanks.
3. The lecturer walked around the room and listened to her students orally creating sentences. When students were making complete sentences and correctly using the first complexor then they could continue to the next complexor.
4. In this step, the students played against the clock. In one minute, the students created sentences from the list of complexors words at the bottom of the complexor pages. They kept taking turns but they had to work as quickly as possible.
5. The lecturer asked the pairs of students to switch, it is expected that a different student goes first for the next minute’s test. Lecturer gave second minute for the students and tell them to cheer when they broke their team’s record. Then the lecturer asked the students to start making sentences with the next two nouns.

Using Puzzles in Class

Puzzles are diagrams that guide students from pre-writing skills to full featured, five paragraph, college essays. Puzzles in The Whole Brain Writing Game are patterns that help students practice composition skills. There are 1-22 steps of Puzzle, but in this study the researcher only found 1-20 implemented by the lecturer.

Puzzles 1 to 6 develop prewriting abilities and can be completed orally, like the Complexors. In Puzzle 1, named as “One, Two, Three, Four”, students practiced the fundamental writing skill of dividing a topic into several parts. In Puzzle 2, “Writing Sketches”, students solved the puzzle by selecting a topic and then dividing it into two subjects, Part 1 and Part 2. Additional difficulty was added when they attempt the two point puzzle, dividing a topic into three parts. In puzzle 3, “Subject Verb Agreement”, students had hundreds opportunities of hearing the correct subject or verb pattern. Student made a sentence with a starter and a finisher. Students read a starter and then read a finisher. They heard a hundred repetition and found the correct link between subject and verb.

In puzzle 4, “Fragments and Sentences”, students deliberately wrote fragments. They made mistakes on purpose, so that they clarify for themselves the difference between incomplete and complete sentences. In puzzle 5, “Brainstorming”, students began with a topic and then broke it into two parts; each part was then divided into two smaller units. This puzzle prepares students to establish the structure of a short essay. In puzzle 6, “Topic Sentence”, students started by constructing a short topic sentence. The next step was to construct a longer topic sentence by adding the word “and.”

Puzzles 7 to 20 involve writing. Students worked in pairs to strengthen their ability to break a topic into smaller parts. In puzzle 7, “Topic Sentence Paragraphs”, some of the easiest topic sentences to write are ones that contain “and.” “And” divides the topic sentence into two parts; each part can then be expanded in the next sentences. In Puzzle 8, “Beginner Essay”, a three paragraph mini-essay was the first writing assignment. Adders are required in this puzzle. The problem of constructing transitions was avoided by asking students to copy sentences from the first paragraph into the next two paragraphs. Students were assigned to write their first complexor in the second sentence of the second paragraph.

In puzzle 9, students wrote two Complexors while in puzzle 10, “Four Paragraph Essay”, students added a conclusion to their mini-essay. In puzzle 11, “Paraphrase Complexor Essay”, writing paraphrases was introduced in this short assignment. In puzzle 12, students were writing a tightly organized four paragraph essay. The topic sentence includes “and”. Paraphrase Complexors are used as transitions; two additional Complexors are introduced in the body of the essay. In puzzle 13, students were given some freedom. They could choose

where in the essay to place a new Complexor. In puzzle 14, students no longer wrote topic sentences with “and”. This requires them to generalize about a subject which they will break into two parts in the second and third sentences of the first paragraph. Puzzle 15 contains students’ additional creative freedom. They wrote “several” sentences in each body paragraph as opposed to the previous pattern which requires three. The topic sentence is paraphrased as the conclusion. Puzzle 16, “Topic Paragraph Flip Flop”, begins “wide” and then “narrows down to a point” in the topic sentence. In Puzzle 17, students wrote a total of eight Complexors (three Paraphrase and five additional Complexors).

Puzzle 18 -20 contains essay pattern, while puzzle 21-22 contains letter format. In puzzle 18, “Narrative Essay”, lecturer introduced “freebies,” words, “first ... then ... finally” that simplify the internal organization of an essay. In puzzle 19, “Expository Essay”, students were explaining the “story” of the steps involved in a process. Puzzle 20, “Argumentative Essay”, are among the most difficult for students to write.

The Constraints Experienced by Students and How They Coped with Those Problems

When students learn how to write from their previous teacher, they were asked to do too much in short period of time. As a result, it was difficult for them to generate the ideas that they want to write. They lacked of technical skill from writing. It is different with Whole Brain Writing Game. In WBWG, it is believed that students will be more successful creating essays, if they have had hundreds of repetitions in each of writing’s micro skills to engage in oral writing as what the lecturer’s conducted in Complexors.

In the first meeting, the students did not understand how to use complexor correctly. They made a lot of errors when they race against the clock. The lecturer stopped them and gave example. Then, the students were asked to make their own sentences by writing it first. It was still rather difficult for the students who lacked competency to race against clock during complexor step. Then the lecturer paired weaker writers with stronger writers. The lecturer also encouraged stronger writers to help their partner. Everytime weaker students had problems, stronger writers would always be there to give some help. The students began to understand the important part of complexor, especially when they were doing Puzzle 8. When a significant number of students were having problems with the complexors they were using, they got additional oral practice with the appropriate complexor games.

In puzzles steps, technical problems could be solved by giving assignment completion and proofreading. The rules, arranged from simpler to more complex, are accompanied by proofreading tasks. A peer reviewing system was conducted by placing a star beside errors that had been correctly marked by their classmates. When teachers received these starred papers, the amount of time spent evaluating a composition was significantly decreased and students could learn the lesson from their friends’ mistakes.

The students experienced psychological problems, so that they thought that writing was difficult to do. They thought that theoretical pattern, like prepositional phrase or adverbial phrase, was difficult. After the lecturer introduced comma opener, a phrase that opens a sentence and that ends with a coma, it was no longer a problem. It is easier for students to understand prepositional phrases like “in the summer” and adverbial phrases like “happily walking” if they are not called prepositional and adverbial phrases.

The researcher found fatigue and dizziness as physical problems. As a result, the students were not motivated to finish their writing. To avoid this physical problems distracted students’ focus, the lecturer conducted breaking personal record. According to Biffle (2010: 10), there is no learning activity more motivating than setting and breaking personal records. In the complexor game, personal records are determined by how much work can be completed in a time period. In puzzles, students get the option of choosing what Puzzle they want to work on, and how it should be evaluated. Students are judged by their personal best effort, whether or not they meet standards they set for themselves. Students receive recognition when they have met the goal they set for themselves.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusions

From the findings above, the researcher can drawn the conclusion as follows.

1. The Whole Brain Writing Game is divided into two parts: Complexors and Puzzles. Complexors can be completed orally and provide students with hundreds of repetitions in using words and phrases that added complexity to their compositions. Puzzles are writing patterns that begin with simple tasks, creating three sentence paragraphs and culminate with five paragraph college level essays.
2. The most common problems in this research are technical, physical, and psychological problems. Working in pairs, a weaker with a stronger writer, and and proofreading task used as solution for technical problem. Setting and breaking records is an important component to solve physical problems in the Whole Brain Writing Game. They also can cope with their pscycological problems by using helpful strategies for them.

Suggestions

1. Teachers or lecturers have to consider that the students need process in writing. WBWG follows that process starting from hundred times practice of repetition how to make topic sentence until finishing by completing complete essay. The researcher hopes that WBWG can be an alternative method that the teachers and lecturers can use to teach writing.
2. The researcher hoped that the findings of this study would inspire other researchers to conduct research with similar method or other issues in writing.

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