

TEACHING

English Language

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1. INTRODUCTION:

There has been a reasonable gradual shift in the approach of teaching writing in the classroom from product approach – comprising grammar-translation, controlled-to-free, paragraph pattern, grammar syntax organization approaches (mostly prevalent till early 1970's) to communicative approach (mid 1970's), process (late 1970's - Early 1980's), English for Academic Purposes (Mid 1980's) and Genre Approach (1990's). However, there are array of opinions, arguments and concerns over the fact that which style works best with the students in developing their ability to express their ideas with freedom and at the same time with correct composition and coherence. All these approaches focuses at different aspect of English writing and requires relevant changes in the role of teachers and students, their involvement in the class room, nature of exercises and in the feedback method. However, they provide an English Language Trainer a flexibility to implement one or a combination of more than one approach (James, 1993) considering the time, purpose, need, cultural milieu and academic level of students and their proficiency in the English Language.

This piece of writing will not delve into different approaches of teaching writing in the class room but is intended to explore the process approach of teaching writing, its implications on the teaching methodology and class room management and possible ways through which teachers might respond to assure that both the need of learners/students and the objective of the course is met.

2. PHILOSOPHY OF THE PROCESS APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH WRITING:

The underline philosophy of the process approach is to provide students/learners the ability to learn the processes that leads to the acceptable finished text or product together with a degree of freedom of expression based on their own fluency of language. The quote “process cannot be inferred from the product, any more than wheat can be inferred from bread” (Murray, 1982:18) aptly describes the importance of this approach while teaching English writing in the classroom. Before discussing the process approach further, a brief account of the research that guided the attention of teachers on the process of writing would be relevant here. The main influence on the development of process approach was the work of two cognitive psychologists Flower and Hayes, who proposed a writing model based on their research on L1 writers (Flower and Hayes, 1981) that became the basic tool for the further research on the process of writing and is widely used since then by researchers. However, the writing model of Flower and Hayes was found incompatible considering the writers as skilled and unskilled (Raimes, 1985) and thus led to the development of another L1 writing model that emphasizes on the two types of writing styles - knowledge-telling (writing style of 12 year old) and knowledge-transforming (synthesis and interpretation of knowledge) and hence follow different writing processes (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1985). The other significant research that influenced the development of process approach was the work of Grabe and Kaplan (1996) who suggested other dimensions to research such as education, cognitive side of writing, discourse analysis and the rhetorical study (led to genre approach).

The process approach is more to develop a cyclical and recursive style of writing which involves continuously and simultaneously the pre-writing (planning), writing and re-writing processes (Smith, 1982: 104). The proponents of teaching writing with greater

emphasis on the 'writing as the process' Escholz (1980), White (1988) and Jordon (1997) indicate towards the drawbacks of 'product approach' such as model-based learning that fosters the sense of imitation in students with little scope for students to actually learn the processes involved in obtaining the acceptable final product as the main reasons behind the emergence of this approach (Escholz, 1980:24).

The process approach provides ample opportunities to students to make their own choices related to the direction of their writing by series of classroom discussions, tasks, drafting and re-drafting their writings and with the formative feedback provided by teachers. The approach also enables students to make improvements in their own composition (Jordan, 1997: 168) unlike in the product approach which leaves the task of correcting and improvement to the teachers. As this approach puts more emphasis on the purpose, the audience and the writer's process it involves significant brainstorming to put together the thoughts and ideas, drafting and re-drafting and an increased focus on both the content and the language simultaneously encouraging students to devote time to writing and provide peer feedback.

The two critical component of the process approach to writing are awareness and intervention (Susser, 1994). However, before discussing the importance of these two components in the process pedagogy it is exceedingly important to understand the difference between the 'writing process' and 'process writing' which are often confused by stakeholders (students, teachers, school and institutions and authorities). In the words of Susser, 'writing process' is nothing but the writing or composing, however 'process writing' is the process-based teaching techniques (Susser, 1994: 32-34). Now let us discuss the two important components out of which the Awareness means that the students should be made aware that writing is a process, each type of writing requires different processes and these processes are not merely giving words to the ideas but they comprise the judgment of format or genre, a

thorough consideration of audience and use of appropriate vocabulary. Intervention, on the other hand, is considered as the integral part of process approach which emphasizes the role of teachers as facilitators who help students at different stages of the writing process through classroom exercises and activities (Susser, 1994:35). These two components are complimentary to each other and help in achievement of the objective of teaching process.

3. SALIENT FEATURES OF PROCESS APPROACH:

In order to devise a strategy of teaching writing in the classroom a thorough understanding of the focus points of process strategy is a pre-requisite. Hence, the salient features of the process approach are listed below (Hairston, 1982) with an aim to provide a kind of 'to-do-list' for teachers - who plan to use this approach of teaching - to help them ensure that they cover these areas during the planning of their classroom methodology. These features are taken from the process writing framework provided by Hairston (1982).

- The process approach dramatically changes the role of teachers from an 'Instructor' - who correct the writers text, imposes on them their own writing style, instruct student to follow guidelines and model form of writing; to a 'Facilitator' who guides the writing process with intervention at various stages providing students direction leaving onus of correcting and improvement of text on them.
- The process approach emphasizes on learning of the ways to explore ideas and content in a particular context.
- The main basis of the approach is the various linguistic and specific researches done on composing process of writing. It also takes ideas from other fields for example cognitive psychology.

- The assignments used in the class extensively cover the purpose of writing, audience and the occasions.
- Assessment judges the compatibility of produced text keeping in mind the writers' intentions and readers needs.
- It takes in to accounts the more realistic recursive/cyclic nature of writing process instead of looking at it as a linear process and uses a variety of writing models and processes that are expressive and expository in nature.
- It considers writing as a creative activity that can be described, analyzed and taught effectively in the classroom using right methodology. Also, iterates that the teachers, who are writers, can be more effective in teaching writing to students.
- It views writing as a learning, developing and communication skill.

4. PROCESS APPROACH AND THE ROLE OF TEACHERS:

The pre-dominant use of teaching writing in the classroom focusing on the product approach over so many years has resulted in teachers being predisposed to using class exercises such as sentence completion, syntax correction and making logical connections while teaching writing. However, during the process teachers are heavily involved in the correction and improvement of student's composition themselves and in a sense impose their writing style on students. On the contrary, in the process approach the role of teachers become more like a facilitator where they encourage students to do improvement or correction of the composition on their own by providing them formative feedback. The role of teachers starts with the very fact that they have to bring writing as a classroom activity instead of leaving it on students as homework. The process approach is built around the

cyclic model of writing proposed by White and Arndt (1991), hence, it will be useful to describe the role of teachers for each component of writing process postulated by cyclic model such as Generating Ideas, Focusing, Structuring, Drafting, Evaluating and Re-viewing.

4.1 Generating Ideas - It is the most important component as it sets the tone for the writing process. Teachers are supposed to initiate the thinking process of writers and help them through motivating them and providing guidance, direction, clues, situations, images, and food for thought throughout the activity.

4.2 Focusing - The setting up of central theme to start writing about is the very critical and perhaps the foundation of writing process. As students brainstorm and gather ideas they struggle to collaborate these ideas to derive a central theme for further action. The intervention of teachers is greatly required in helping student focus on the purpose of writing i.e. theme. Certain activities described in the cyclic model (White and Arndt, 1991:44) such as fast writing and loop writing can be used to enhance the results during this stage.

4.3 Structuring – It is an on-going process not a one-stage process and basically deals with the channelization of ideas in a way that make sense and appeal to the reader and most importantly can convey the subject matter in a logical way. For example deciding on the introduction, conclusion and presentation of information. The role of teacher in this stage is to provide necessary guidance and support in defining a clear structure for writing, however, only direction should be given letting student learn it by doing it. The main activities that are suggested for this process are experimenting with arrangement, identification of organizing principal and its effect on text by studying text (White and Arndt, 1991:78).

4.4 Drafting - This is the stage at which student produces his/her first draft and the role of teachers here is to make student aware of different styles of opening and closing a text, a piece of writing or a paragraph and encouraging them to make their writing appealing and interesting to read. Teachers may also do one outline of the task just to show the students an expert way of doing that. The different activities suggested here are exercises aimed at individual and group compositions with extensive intervention from teachers (White and Arndt, 1991:78).

4.5 Evaluating – Often at this stage, teachers’ dictating approach defeats the very motive of the process approach as they start correcting the text produced by students discouraging the idea of self-evaluation. Teachers have to ensure that students themselves are the only evaluators of their work. This is the basic development which in broader perspective will help students life-long. Also, teachers have to be very careful the way they give feedback to students, considering their cultural backgrounds – Collective and Individualistic Cultures (Hofstede, 1980) - as they tend to take teachers’ suggestions as instructions and may follow them religiously. Peer feedback can be exercised here and more precisely use of peer feedback from L1 to L2 writers and vice versa would be fruitful in encouraging students to self-evaluate their work through analysis (White and Arndt, 1991:78).

4.6 Re-viewing – This is more like a habit which should be inculcated in the students to have a final re-view of their writing which helps in spotting gaps in the final product such as any correction required or induction of new ideas or further re-arrangement of ideas to make it more coherent. The role of teacher here is to make students aware of the importance and essence of re-viewing. The basic activities suggested at this stage are checking coherence and logical progressing of the text, its division and assessment of its impact on readers (White and Arndt, 1991:136).

5. IMPLICATION OF PROCESS APPROACH ON THE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:

Teachers taking a shift from the product approach to the process approach must be aware of the practical implications it will have on the management of classroom while teaching. In the words of Wason “it would be wrong to suppose that there is one best way to understand how people write” (Wason, 1981a:340). This precisely indicate that teachers cannot really find a suitable way of teaching that caters to the need of group of learners who have different needs and hence required to pay attention on one-to-one basis, which in a sense is more demanding. Given the characteristics of the process approach it demands a whole new approach to teaching writing. The implications of process approach are mentioned below under various subheads -

5.1 Implications on course content: The course content continues to focus on the basic teaching about the language, however, there is some change required in the content and delivery considering L1 and L2 writers. For L2 writers, more emphasis should be on the vocabulary and they should also be made to read and brainstorm extensively during the course as it is imperative to perform writing task whereas for L1 writers the emphasis should be more on grammar and sentence construction. On the whole, the basic idea of the course structure should be to provide enough opportunities for learners to write with personal involvement.

5.2 Implications on Class room Assignments: Students often perceive the classroom exercises as compulsion and mere a way of getting good grades that makes them be less involved personally. In such situations ability of teachers to convince writers the wider perspective of assignment, which is not the evaluation for grades but the improvement and to build a foundation for future writing tasks is the key. This would also help writers to be more

committed and involved in the effective writing which would further make them to think about their private conception of their writing task (Galbraith, 1981). The best idea that could be utilized here is the provision of autonomy to students in choosing their own topics which would result in students having greater idea of audience and purpose, however, teachers may choose to set direction in terms of type of writing and methods of choosing a topic. Further, It would help teachers in determining the 'skilled' and 'unskilled' writers and in choosing ways to deal with their individual needs. For instance, skilled writers consider purpose and audience while writing and write 'reader-based prose' from the beginning whereas unskilled writers do not consider purpose and audience while writing and need assignments challenging them to think about these elements in order to produce good product. Also, unskilled writers initially write 'writer-based prose' but after the guidance and as they develop, shift to 'reader-based prose' mode later on (Flower, 1979).

The list of processes such as discussion, brainstorming, taking notes, fastwriting, rough draft, preliminary self evaluation, structuring text, first draft, peer evaluation, conference, second draft, self-evaluation/editing, finished draft, final response to draft (White and Arndt, 1991:7) involved in the production of a decent piece of writing provides ample scope to decide on the activities to be chosen during the classroom teaching. Some techniques that can be used in the pedagogy are brainstorming, cubing (in which students ask themselves a flurry of question about any topic), wet-ink writing (student write for ten minutes and then pick up the idea from the text and then write about that idea again and so on), role playing and the idea of 'writing-centres' (Ronesi, 1995) among others.

5.3 Implication on feedback mechanism: The process approach requires more participation from the students as it considers writing as an activity and encourages peer feedback and thereby the process requires relative changes in the classroom setting. The

success of process pedagogy depends heavily on feedback mechanism as it provides necessary guidance to students that comprise mainly teacher-student feedback and peer feedback. Teachers have to balance their feedback keeping in view that neither they dictate the writing process by providing feedback in the form of guidelines - as students then religiously follow that and stop thinking, nor they should provide less feedback so as to make it useless (Zamel, 1985). However, unfortunately, researchers found in most cases the feedback given to student are in the form of guidelines. Hence, it is appropriate to mention and advise the idea of process-feedback as proposed by White and Arndt (1991) which advocates provision of feedback in the form of suggestions and not instructions, should provide hints only not the complete solution (to encourage self-evaluation) and should be given on both the good things and on improvement areas. Also teachers should act as readers not as language experts or possibly just like fellow students and not instructors while responding to the text. Keeping the peer feedback in the view, teachers need to group the native English speaking students and students with English as a second language together to have more comprehensive and valuable peer feedback. The underline idea here is to make L2 writers learn from the L1 writer's development on the cultural aspects that would help them in contextual writings.

5.4 Implications related to teacher-student involvement and evaluation: The process approach encourages students towards creative writing and to take up writing as a problem solving activity (Flower and Hayes, 1980a). But this could lead to a kind of problem for teachers related to the selection of right kind of problems to be worked on in the class room with an aim to improve student's linguistic capabilities as well as provide them freedom to experiment with vocabulary. This situation underlines the importance of involvement of both student and teacher in the process of learning during the course. As the process of teaching involved a lot of activities such as drafting and re-drafting for a number of times, it

is important to keep in mind that students may lose motivation which can only be overcome through creating ways to involve students in the process constantly.

The other area of concern in the process approach which has far reaching implications on classroom management is Evaluation. Evaluation on the face of it looks difficult to handle in the process approach as it produces a lot of text during the course. Further, the approach to evaluation also poses a degree of challenge in this pedagogy. In the words of Hairston, the written text should be evaluated by teachers based on parameters of fulfillment of writer's intentions and the audience need which results in the difficulty for evaluators as to how can they know the writer's intentions? The other difficulty is the determining as what is to be evaluated, the process or the product and this results in a challenging situation for teachers as to who should be rated high the one who make a lot of changes to the text during the re-drafting or the one who makes less changes during the writing process and produced quality text. It would be worth mentioning here the two contradictory arguments on this issue. Beach (1976) in his writings advocated 'extensive revisers' as better writers than the 'non revisers'; on the contrary Dieterich (1976:302) opines that there seems no logic in proclaiming that revising contains 'inherent worth'.

5.5 Implications related to L1 and L2 writers: It makes logical sense that adoption of process approach has different implications for L1 and L2 learners considering their level of proficiency and individual needs. Hence, necessary changes to the classroom approaches should be made to make it more suitable to L1 and L2 writers. We know that there are marked similarities in L1 and L2 writers for example in composition process, however, same approach of teaching would not work and hence require careful planning and execution of teaching (Fulcher, 1997: 16-18). Various researches done in this area (Zamel (1983), Arndt (1987), Cumming (1989), Hall (1990)) comparing L1 and L2 writers have revealed that

transporting teaching techniques from L1 to L2 is extremely forbidden and teachers should avoid forcing one writing technique on all students neglecting the differences among them.

6. CONCLUSION

The process approach has been acknowledged as a suitable approach for teaching writing in the classroom as far as the needs and development of students are concerned, however, the way teachers respond to the pedagogy is crucial. The features, useful activities and its implications of the process approach discussed in the paper only serve as a limited guide to teachers and majority of onus and judgment lies in the hands of teachers and their effectiveness determines the end result. Teachers need to pay attention to the evaluation process and should exercise a balance while evaluating both processes and finished product as often they may find themselves in a difficult situation of judging product more than the process or may neglect product completely while focusing mainly on processes. Similarly, teachers' intervention in guiding students at different stages of the process is very critical to make approach work efficiently.

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