

Aspects of Teaching Writing

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the aspects of teaching writing. This study reveals a structured approach to teaching writing in English. Irrespective of the teacher's choice of appropriate approach and suitable methods, techniques and activities, there are some more components playing significant role in terms of conducting writing lessons. Apart from many other aspects that influence effectiveness of teaching (and learning) writing, two major factors that play the key roles here are the ones of the teacher and the student.

Keywords: Aspects; Teaching of Writing

Introduction

Many English teachers get frustrated when they have to teach writing skill. They are often confused about how to teach writing skills effectively and efficiently. However hard they have tried, at the end of the semester, when they see the students' test result, they will usually frown. They are disappointed. Their students fail to fulfill their expectation. Finally, if not blaming their students of being lazy to study, they will blame themselves of not being able to teach writing skills.

Are you one of those English teachers? If yes, then you must arrive here with the expectation to find proven teaching writing strategies which will be very helpful to your duty as a teacher. Well, you may find teaching writing techniques that I've written here and here useful. Hopefully! But, keep it in mind that always depending on techniques made by others to help you cope with the teaching and learning problems you find in your classroom is not wise. Why? Because each class is unique. There are no exactly two similar classes in the word. As a result, techniques proven effective in one class may be found less effective in your class. Therefore, you need to create your own teaching techniques to cope with problems you find. If the technique you create does not show expected result, revise it until you get what you want.

In relation to teaching writing skills, there are some important aspects you need to consider before creating your own teaching techniques. If you could consider those aspect and adjust the teaching techniques/strategies you are going to create, then the result must be satisfying. In contrast, if you fail to adjust them to your techniques, then there must be weaknesses in the techniques. The aspects are as follow:

- (1) Students' Level of education.

It is very crucial aspect which will affect the effectiveness of your techniques. You should pay great attention to whether your students are in elementary schools, in secondary school (junior and senior high schools), or in university. If the technique is not appropriately adjusted to students' level of education, then the product could be too easy or too difficult for the students.

(2) Students' level of English mastery

Let's say that your students have not understood well about basic English grammar and they don't have sufficient repertoire of English vocabularies. But you assign them to write about their holiday experience. Of course, your students will not be able to do just like what you expect. With this kind of students you should assign them to complete sentences with appropriate words.

(3) Types of assigned writing

By this aspect, I mean you should pay attention to kinds of text your students will have to produce: narrative, descriptive, expository, persuasive, argumentative, procedural, essay, resume, creative, or summary writing. You need to consider this because different kinds of text needs different teaching techniques. It is not effective, or even meaningless, of course, to use picture of series of event in your teaching when you actually want your students to write description about one prominent figure.

Well, that is the list of aspect you should know and consider while creating your own teaching writing techniques. I believe, over time, the English teaching and learning activities in your classroom will improve once you are able to create your own teaching techniques/strategies.

1. Students' needs

Regarding the teenage level of secondary school students, it is generally known that for this life stage self-esteem and peer approval are as crucial as vital. Teenage students undergoing their quest for identity will most likely question everything they do, English lesson activities not excluding. Therefore, it is of major importance that the teacher attends to the students' needs in order to help them succeed in their learning of writing.

1.1 Personal involvement

Students must get personally involved, argues Harmer (2001:39) and adds: "Teenagers, if they are engaged, have a great capacity to learn, a great potential for creativity, and a passionate commitment to things which interest them." He calls upon teachers to "provoke student engagement" by using relevant and involving activities in their lessons.

Writing tasks should be realistic and relevant. The best way of teaching writing according to Raimes (1983:83) is to have a clear purpose and a specific audience. Such practical writing may include messages, notes, forms, invitations, various kinds of letters, instructions (e.g. recipes



and giving directions), lists, daily notes, apology, complaint, writings expressing congratulations or sympathy, etc. However, other types such as creative writing should not be neglected though.

White and Arndt (1991:5) add that students should be involved also in evaluating and revising their writing, taking responsibility for their written products from the early stage.

1.2 Language competence

Byrne (1988:54) holds that one of the primary needs of students is that they need to be taught how to write in L2 and need to acquire ability to organise sentences into a coherent whole. For this reason they need to learn how to use linking devices, and recognize specific structure of a genre and its purpose. He (Byrne) continues that students need a great variety of activities (1988:27-29) and Harmer (1991:54) similarly advises that they are provided with controlled exposure and a great deal of practice of new language.

1.3 Guidance and freedom

Students need the teacher's support and guidance, though at the same time teachers should provoke their intellectual activity by contrasting ideas and concepts that they have to resolve for themselves, states Harmer (2001:39). Concurrently, likewise in Byrne's observation (1988:49), students feel a great need to use language freely without the teacher intervening; they seek opportunities for free expressing and responding to situations "with their own thoughts and experience," see Puchta and Schratz (as cited in Harmer, 2001:39).

1.4 Fun and challenge

What is commonly known is that adolescents (children at all levels actually) love fun. If possible, teachers can include in their writing classes tasks of such character. Byrne (1988: 43-46, 64-69) introduces a few fun activities such as quizzes, questionnaires, puzzles, mystery stories, and other. More fun can be brought into the class in the form of a comic story, jokes, amusing and ridiculous situations, and so on. Such tasks are motivating for the students and rewarding at the same time.

However, it is not less important that "communication activities should match the growing ability of the learners to express themselves through the written form," points out Byrne (1988:60). The teacher should therefore be aware of the fact that the more advanced the students are in written communication, the more challenging activities need to be presented.

2. Teacher's tasks

The teacher plays a significant role in the language development of students as it is the teacher who is in control of the teaching. Having students' needs in mind, it is desirable that following aspects of teaching writing are considered and employed in the lessons as well.

2.1 Good planning

When planning a writing lesson, the teacher should take into account suitable activities that would equip students with ideas and thus with more confidence for the writing assignment,

suggests Raimes (1983: 12-13). According to her planning a writing lesson involves considering the following aspects:

1. Having a purpose – students feel greater involvement if the subject of their writing is meaningful or real. For example, the teacher does not only inform about the topic but motivates students to be involved in it as an FBI agent who needs to write a report for his headquarters. And it is also important that the writing will be read by a concrete reader the writer has in mind already when starting composing.

2. Thinking of the reader – students should compose their piece of writing with a specific audience in mind. It can be a classmate, a pen pal, imaginary audience or the teacher, if they accept the role of a reader rather than a judge.

3. Using various patterns of interaction – it is beneficial to involve students actively in participating in pair/group/class work or discussions. Students with help of the teacher brainstorm their ideas, discuss them, keep notes, contribute, report, and summarize main ideas, this all in various interaction patterns. Such attitude makes students active and co-responsible in the process, in contrast to the teacher assigning, explaining, directing, correcting and evaluating the work.

4. Allowing enough time – this factor is an essential part of the whole process as it can either backup the whole process or thwart it. In order to feel confident and well equipped for the assignment, students need sufficient amount of time for exploring, drafting, rewriting, revising, etc. “The longer students grapple with the subject, the more their command of the necessary vocabulary and idioms develops,” argues

Raimes (1983:14) and adds that the more students read, the more they learn, the more they discuss, the more ideas they develop. The more diligent the planning stage of the teacher is, the riper the products of the students can be. However, there are a few more aspects, not less vital to be involved in the running of the writing lesson and which are described below.

2.2 Integrating all skills

Raimes (1983:13) argues that one of the most troublesome problems writers face are “not about difficulty of finding right words and using correct grammar, but about difficulty of finding and expressing ideas in new language”. In order to help communicate ideas, she advises the teacher to exercise a selected topic in whole-class activities that would give space and time for students to prepare for the writing task, and continues that writing lesson does not necessarily mean a silent classroom, supporting her idea by accommodating all four language skills in planning a writing lesson. Arranging real-life communicative situations, in which students have to use all four language skills, helps them to explore the topic and start their writing, mentions Raimes (1983:69-79) and introduces a list of pre-writing techniques, e.g. brainstorming, guided discussion, interview, skit, dictation, note-taking, story-telling, etc. In addition, according to Byrne’s view (1988), the key factor that influences the amount of opportunities for integrating

skills is how students work on activities. He claims that pair/group work, in contrary to individual work, increases skills engagement as students are invited to communicate in a more natural way.

2.3 Supporting role

It is argued by Harmer (2001) and Byrne (1988) that the role of the teacher is quite a crucial and delicate factor in the process of learning writing. Generally, there are several roles the teacher can take on when teaching. Depending on circumstances and goals of particular activities, the teacher, as further described by Harmer (2001:57-67), can act as a controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, observer, or language model, teaching aid, and performer.

More importantly, when helping students to become more successful in their writing, the teacher has many tasks to perform during the whole writing process. The following points are a collection of stimuli for teachers by Harmer (2004:41-42), Byrne (1988:29, 49), and White and Arndt (1991:5):

1. Motivate students when they feel lost for words.
2. Provoke them with having ideas.
3. Engage students in creative process; excite them how the text is coming into being.
4. Demonstrate real examples of target genres.
5. Get the right balance of writing activities to ensure students' progress.
6. Provide a great variety of writing activity types and variety of interaction.
7. Be prepared to support students when they need help and reassurance.
8. Be sympathetic; expect not proficiency level from students but many problems.
9. Respond supportively; make suggestions for improvement during the whole process.
10. Evaluate progress not by grading only but by indicating what was written well and where the mistakes are.

Knowledge from the Study

Statistics show that reading helps develop your writing skills, but writing helps develop your cognitive growth, organizational abilities, and the power to influence others through persuasion. In short, writing powers the brain.

Studies show that children who practice creative writing more often are generally better in other subjects too like math, science, and languages. Challenging themselves to come up with creative solve, builds the students need to life. There are many writing:



thoughts and problem confidence and discipline succeed in all areas of benefits to creative

1. Imagination And Creativity

Creative writing encourages kids to exercise their creative minds and practice using their imaginations. It improves their ability to come up with alternatives. This broadens their thought processes, which can lead to success in many areas, including problem solving and analysis.

2. Self-Expression

Children often have difficulty understanding and expressing how they feel. Through writing, children have a safe place to explore, and this can be a highly beneficial tool for expressing their feelings.

3. Self-Confidence

Writing gives children more opportunity to assert themselves and their opinions and develop their “voice.” These developments can really strengthen their self-confidence.

4. Communication And Persuasion Skills

A well-written piece involves a lot of thought, planning, organization, and use of language to get a point across. What great practice for kids at laying out their thoughts and trying to clearly convince someone of their point of view.

Conclusion

The basic types of written communication followed by writing approaches, methods and techniques were introduced and further inspected. Since there exist many approaches to teaching writing and a wide range of methods, it is the responsibility and privilege of the teacher to decide on the best-suitable choice that would meet the needs of their writing class. It has been highlighted that the best way does not necessarily mean to stick to one approach only, but teachers are highly recommended to combine approaches and methods freely at their convenience. As, for instance, Tribble (1996:61) holds, genre and process approach are not incompatible and “effective writing pedagogy will call upon both approaches,” in this way, writing lesson can foster both, expressing ideas in “individually authentic voices”, yet creating texts that are “socially appropriate.”

What also has been discussed is that writing is a social interaction of people who write to communicate so as to pass information and opinions. When learning writing, students



develop skills of spelling, using punctuation, forming sentences, coherence and cohesion, and using appropriate layout and level of formality, concurrently learning to balance four aspects of their language ability: fluency, accuracy, complexity and appropriacy. (Lindsay & Knight, 2006:52) Apparently, this interrelation of many aspects of the writing process, together with the fact that writing evokes thinking, makes it a very valuable part of personal development as such.

Besides, writing programme should be carefully planned in order to develop writing skills, continually providing a wide range of tasks and activities, as varied as possible, avoiding monotonous approach based on limited range of task types, holds Byrne (1988:48). In his view it is impossible to develop writing skills through practising solely targeted genre, either for examination purposes or for future career reasons. He stresses that writing can only be developed by continuous, balanced training through a variety of activities, and based on a variety of approaches and methods.

Eventually, “you learn to write through writing,” points out Harmer (1989:169) and follows that there is no other way of improving in writing unless learning from own hands-on writing experience. In the following chapters, the research on most frequent written genres in occupation will be presented, followed by practical methodology tips for them.

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