A process-oriented approach to writing pedagogy: how to promote expressivism and social interaction through collaboration and skills integration

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Abstract

Writing should be treated as a skill in its own right taking into account a triangle of components involved in the writing process, namely the text, the writer and the reader which have resulted into three main approaches to writing instruction the so-called text-based, writer-based and reader-based approaches (Calfoglou, 2004; Hyland 2009). These approaches have raised an extended discussion on notions like contextualization, guidance, control and teacher intervention so far providing a unifying framework to deal with writing pedagogy. In the light of the above, the aim of this article is to practise and reflect on the theory and application of criteria for the effective teaching of writing by preparing and teaching an original writing lesson based on specific writing criteria.

Key-words: contextualization, cognitivism, expressivism, skills integration, social interaction, motivation, collaborative writing, intervention

Introduction

Writing proves to be a cognitive act going through a number of not strictly sequential stages. To this end, teachers should continuously strive to provide the writing instruction which best meets the real needs and abilities of the individual Ls[1] by laying the primary emphasis on the social, cognitive, expressive and creative process of writing through contextualization, skills integration and teacher's minimum intervention, thus enhancing Ls' motivation, and involvement and generating a commitment to writing.

The following writing lesson aims to promote Ls' self-activity, personal involvement, decisions and choices with respect to each other's suggestions. There is a minimum of interference and intervention on the part of the teacher with emphasis

[1] Ls = Learners

on peer- and self-evaluation (O' Brien, 2004). The evaluation points are the key questions that contribute to the successful *textuality* (coherence and cohesion- Calfoglou, 2004; Carrell, 1982) and help Ls to think of and decide about the appropriate content, structure and vocabulary required for the audience to be addressed. In this way, Ls manage to produce an informative article to meet the readers' expectations and demands to a great extent.

Description of the original writing lesson

The topic of the *original* writing lesson is "All about my town". Writing is the main focus of the lesson aiming to help Ls develop their writing skills; it follows the *process-oriented* approach to writing (Calfoglou, 2004; O' Brien, 2004) and consists of four main stages subdivided into ten distinct steps[2] which promote skills integration and peer interaction (Silva & Brice, 2004).

In the pre-writing stage, the teacher sets the context to *stimulate* Ls to write for a purpose in a realistic way (Hyland, 2009) by asking Ls to write an article for a writing competition of a British travel magazine (*contextualization*). Then, Ls are asked to *brainstorm* in groups to accomplish a task which encourages free expression (*expressivism*) and activates individual thinking, prior knowledge and experience (*cognitivism*) thematically related to the topic of the article (Hyland, 2009). Ls are also asked to write after joining a whole class discussion to exchange ideas and information with their classmates and the teacher by which 'the context cues cognition' (*writing as a situated act* -Hyland, 2009). In the planning stage, Ls are asked to consider the *mechanics* and *conventions* of the text (O' Brien, 2004) by answering relevant prompt card questions[3] while conferencing with their fellow writers. They also organize the information gathered in the pre-writing stage on a relevant planning sheet[4] consisting of three main parts in order to prepare themselves for the actual drafting stage. In the drafting stage, the *first draft* involves Ls' working in their groups to actively focus on the *content* and *coherence* bearing in mind *readers'* expectations and demands (*writing as social interaction* - Hyland, 2009). What follows is a *peer-evaluation* editing task between the groups taking into account the evaluation points provided to continue with the *final draft* in which they focus

[2] See the original lesson plan for more details.
[3] See the worksheets.
[4] See the worksheets.

mostly on language matters and thus *cohesion*. In the post-writing stage, there is a *self-editing* task for each group towards reflecting critically on their own written products. Finally, each group of Ls shares their article with the whole class to compare and vote the best article.

Reflection on writing tasks' efficiency based on criteria

As it becomes obvious from the previous section, the original writing lesson is developed through *process-oriented* stages and activities which combine the *text-*, *writer-* and *reader-based* approaches to writing.

More specifically, the pre-writing tasks such as *brainstorming* (a brainstorming sheet[5] with topic 'clouds' to be filled), *group-work*, *class discussion* and the use of *visual stimuli* (pictures of their town) motivate Ls to think and write for a purpose (Lo & Hyland, 2007), make them realize the whole activity as a *process of generating ideas* and enhance *collaborative writing* (Hyland, 2009). The planning tasks which ask Ls to answer four relevant questions (one for each group on a prompt card) in order to think about the purpose, the audience and the format of their text activate Ls' *critical thinking* and encourage their *interaction* with the text and the readers in order to produce an attractive, realistic and informative article, to conform to writing conventions and thus satisfy *readers*' expectations (O' Brien, 2004). Then the planning sheet[6] also helps Ls organize the information gathered from the pre-writing stage and activates their cognitive and critical thinking making them act as *autonomous* and *independent* writers. The drafting tasks include a *first rough draft*, by which Ls have to decide in their groups how to select, structure and present ideas and information about their town focusing on *content* and *coherence* (Carrell, 1982) thus enhancing their *self-expression* further. To revise and encourage peer feedback (Frankenberg-Garcia, 1999; O' Brien, 2004), there is a *peer-evaluation* editing task in which groups exchange and evaluate their peer groups' draft based on specific evaluation points[7]. Then each group produces the *final draft* focusing mostly on *cohesion*, spelling, punctuation, grammar and vocabulary (O' Brien, 2004) after taking into account peer evaluation remarks. Finally, the post-writing tasks such as the final *self-editing* checklist and all the groups' sharing their final written products with

[5] See the worksheets.
[6] See the worksheets.
[7] See the peer-evaluation editing checklist.

each other help Ls develop their critical thinking, self-evaluation, reflective and collaborative skills further.

THE ORIGINAL WRITING LESSON PLAN

'All about my town'

Class profile:
5th or 6th Class of the State Primary School
Level: A1-A2
Time: ~ 45-50 min

Aim: To engage Ls in a contextualized writing activity based on process-oriented tasks to produce an informative written text (article).

Specific aims: 1. To develop Ls' writing skills
2. To encourage Ls' personal expression
3. To help Ls become independent writers
4. To stimulate Ls' thinking
5. To achieve skills integration
6. To enhance Ls' collaborative writing
7. To promote interactive writing

Procedure	Objectives	Time
A) Pre-writing stage: **Step 1:** The teacher sets the context of the writing activity by informing the Ls that they are going to join a writing competition for a British travel magazine. To join this competition they have to write an article in English about their town entitled 'All about my town' to attract tourists. The best article is going to be published in the British travel magazine.	- To set the context - To write for a purpose - To motivate Ls to write	~10 min
Step 2: Ls are divided into four groups to brainstorm and make a list of information about their	- To stimulate Ls to think & write - To initiate Ls' brainstorming	

town by filling in the topic 'clouds' of the relevant brainstorming sheet. To this end, each group of Ls is also provided with prompt photos of their town to motivate them further & activate their thinking.	- To generate ideas - To encourage group writing	
Step 3: Ls join a whole class discussion to exchange ideas and information by filling in all the topic clouds with the missing information.	- To trigger a whole class discussion - To integrate writing with speaking & listening	
B) Planning stage: **Step 4:** Ls are asked to consider the purpose, the audience and format of their text. To this end, each group of Ls is provided with a prompt card with a different relevant question to think about and then discuss as a whole class.	- To activate Ls' personal thinking - To enhance interaction with the reader - To encourage collaborative/group writing	~15 min
Step 5: Each group decides what information they will choose to write in their article and develop an initial plan for drafting their informative text. To this end, Ls are given a planning sheet to organize the information they have generated during pre-writing into three parts: Introduction, Main body, Conclusion.	- To help Ls organize their information - To activate Ls' cognitive & critical thinking - To make Ls independent/autonomous writers	

C) Drafting stage: **Step 6:** Ls are asked to structure and sort out the above information about their town in their groups to produce a first rough draft.	- To produce a rough draft - To focus on content & coherence	
Step 7: Ls exchange their first draft with another group to evaluate their peers' draft and make suggestions based on specific evaluation points.	- To encourage Ls' self-expression - To encourage peer feedback - To revise the first draft - To integrate writing with reading	~15 min
Step 8: Each group of Ls writes their final draft focusing on cohesion, spelling, punctuation grammar and vocabulary by conferencing with peers and the teacher.	- To produce a final draft - To focus on language & cohesion	
D) Post-writing stage: **Step 9:** Ls are asked to fill in a final self-editing checklist in their groups.	- To reflect upon their writing - To encourage self-evaluation/feedback	
Step 10: Each group of Ls read their written products to the whole class. They can also make comparisons and comments to vote the best article.	- To share their article with the class - To integrate writing with speaking & listening	~10 min

WRITING WORKSHEETS

BRAINSTORMING SHEET

LOCATION & WEATHER

SIGHTS & ATTRACTIONS

ACCOMMODATION & ENTERTAINMENT

PEOPLE & HABITS

4 PROMPT QUESTION CARDS

1st Group: 'What is my purpose for writing this text?'

2nd Group: 'Who are my readers?'

3rd Group: 'What kind of text is to be written?'

4th Group: 'What do my readers not know?'

PLANNING SHEET

‘ALL ABOUT MY TOWN’
INTRODUCTION
MAIN BODY
CONCLUSION

EVALUATION EDITING CHECKLISTS SHEET

PEER-EVALUATION EDITING CHECKLIST	YES	NO
Did I write an introduction, a body and a conclusion?		
Did I write a topic sentence for each paragraph?		
Did I use correct punctuation?		
Did I avoid repeating the same words over and over again?		
Did I use the right vocabulary to describe my topic?		
Did I punctuate the end of each sentence correctly?		
Did I spell all words correctly?		
Did I capitalize the first word of every sentence?		
Did I use the correct word order?		
Did I use the correct verb forms and tenses?		

FINAL SELF-EVALUATION EDITING CHECKLIST (put a tick √ or a cross X)	
We read our article to the partners of my group to see where to STOP - for periods . - question marks ? - exclamation marks !	
We used capital letters at the beginning of each sentence.	
We have an interesting beginning sentence.	
We tried to say things in different and surprising ways to keep the reader interested.	
We used the correct word order.	
We used the correct grammar.	
We put the information in an order that makes sense.	
We avoided repeating the same words over and over again	
We included an introduction, a body and a conclusion	
We spelled all words correctly.	
We tried to give our readers the information they need.	
Our handwriting is good.	

Conclusion

What is essential in writing instruction is to encourage Ls to feel safe taking risks in order to develop a community of writers who support each other and share with each other (*writing as social construction* - Hyland, 2009). There are no controlled and guided activities as Ls are completely free to express their ideas, knowledge and experience about their town. The writing product is going to be an article that could have alternative outcomes and thus does not restrict Ls during the thinking process. The teacher is simply a facilitator and monitor (Calfoglou, 2004; Frankenberg-Garcia, 1999).

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