Chapter 5

A Reflective Overview of a Process Approach to Writing in Generation 1.5 ESL Classrooms: Instructors’ and Students’ Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Today, process writing is an integral part of writing classes. Writing teachers provide students with plenty of opportunities to draft and revise their essays. This chapter aims to explore a process approach to writing in ESL classrooms by providing a brief literature review and insights regarding the implementation of process writing at two levels of pre-college ESL classes in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at a four year-college. This chapter is unusual as the student body discussed in it is made up predominantly of generation 1.5 students, a unique sub-group among ESL populations in the U.S. The authors share various documents that facilitate the revision process for students. They also draw on open-ended survey results regarding students’ perceptions of the method described. Overall, the chapter represents an important contribution to the field, as the authors provide a reflective look at the application of process writing in their classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

For composition instructors who work with Generation 1.5 learners of English in academic settings, such as colleges and universities, the ability of their students to develop proficiency in academic English reading and writing is a paramount concern. For at least the past several decades, there has been recognition that instructors play an important role in helping learners focus on the process of writing, as opposed to emphasizing solely the final product of the writing process.
A Reflective Overview of a Process Approach to Writing

(Lee & Schallert, 2008). This so-called process approach to writing undergirds the approach to writing instruction in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program described in this reflective overview. We begin with a background review of the concept of writing as process and then move to discuss different forms of feedback before presenting our reflective process in the context of the EAP program.

Writing as Process

A review of writing as process logically begins with a definition of the process approach, which Silva and Matsuda (2001) explain as involving the development of students’ voices as writers. They go on to identify the extensive use of revision and a focus on the learners’ writing itself as key aspects of writing instruction. Hyland (2003) asserts that “process approaches have served to instil greater respect for individual writers and for the writing process itself” (p. 17). In short, this approach to writing, as it has been understood since the 1980s (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981), focuses on writing as a recursive (i.e. non-linear) process through which learners develop their own voices and abilities as writers.

Wen (2013) suggests that the process of writing is enhanced by “engaging students’ minds with minimal marking and by ensuring their positive feelings with demonstrated improvement” (p. 427). By focusing on the process of writing, rather than on its product, students are encouraged to explore meaning in their work. They and instructors focus on how writing progresses rather than what is produced. Wen adds that in serving as guides and facilitators of the process, instructors need to encourage students. However, teachers also have an important role to play in pointing out areas in need of improvement in learners’ writing because “approval alone is incomplete” (p. 429).

The history and influence of the process approach has been extensively examined, if not always well understood. Matsuda (2003) explains the origins of the focus on the writing process by exploring “the ‘social turn’ in composition studies...already underway by the late 1980s” (p. 66). He cautions that the sway of the process approach in many academic circles over the past few decades does not mean that traditional pedagogical approaches have been supplanted (p. 69). Still, he goes on to assert that “the late 20th-century process movement achieved a level of success that was unprecedented in comparison to previous reform efforts” (p. 70). In turning to the present (and future) problematizing of process writing, he notes that a significant “post-process” discussion is underway. However, he notes that an important concept is that post-process is really more an extension of the process approach rather than a negation of it (p. 73).

Shafer (2012) adds to our fuller understanding of process writing and the post-process environment emerging today when he asserts that “process can be and often is filled with the same heuristic, organic search for meaning that is espoused in a post-process writing class” (p. 295). By exploring a number of cases in a “post-process writing center,” Shafer offers us a way to think about process that is less teacher-driven and, in that sense, further differentiated from traditional prescriptive approaches to writing instruction.

Roughly a decade before Shafer (2012), Casanave (2003) problematized the use of “post-process” by mentioning how the notion of the process approach may have been unevenly applied in non-Western contexts, such as in Japan. Further, she encouraged researchers and practitioners to work towards a place “where people, their goals and institutional policies, and their relationships matter as much as do grammar and syntax, drafting and revising” (p. 98). Such considerations of structural concerns draw our attention to the issue of corrective feedback, particularly as we seek to understand how learners may or may not benefit from instructor-provided feedback in light of the process writing framework.
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