Chapter 7
How Blending Process and Product Approaches to Teaching Writing Helps EFL Learners: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT
Writing is a deciding factor for academic success among tertiary-level students. Developing the writing skill of learners at the foundation level plays a significant role in their academic career. In teaching writing, a debatable issue has been whether to use a process or product approach. While some researchers contend that a process approach helps develop writing among ESL/EFL learners, others argue that the product is more important than the process. However, process without product would be aimless and a product without a process would be hollow. This chapter deals with the writing module taught across the three levels of the Foundation Program at Oman’s Dhofar University. It focuses on how writing course content, learning outcomes, writing portfolios, and assessment procedures are addressed and how the process and product approaches are blended to achieve learning outcomes. Teacher and student perceptions on how this approach helps are analyzed and discussed.

INTRODUCTION
English has now attained the status of a global language and is being taught and learned feverishly across the world. No nation can now ignore this once alien language. When prescribed as the medium of instruction at college and university level, particularly in Asia and the Middle East countries, students face a real challenge when required to submit their term papers or assignments in it. While all the four skills are of equal importance for an EFL learner, writing assumes
special importance for students during their college or university studies. Indeed this becomes the most dreaded aspect of learning. And rightly so, since writing is by far the most difficult and complex of all the language skills. It must be honed over several years in order to be effective and during this period an EFL learner must tread the painful path of mastering all the lexical, grammatical and stylistic aspects of the language.

Most language courses focus on preparing students to manage in social situations where writing takes a back seat. The spoken skill takes precedence over the other three. Traditionally favored Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasized the use of social expressions and helped learners to cope with new environments and new cultural settings. While learners were able to speak fluently, they could not produce a coherent piece of writing. In order to fill the gap, more emphasis is now being laid on teaching writing. Some researchers favor the process part of writing while others emphasize its product. This can be problematic of course. Although those trained in the process approach might communicate when setting down essential information, they might lack the ability to produce a coherent piece of writing. The opposite approach, however, might sacrifice the thought process involved.

This chapter shows that the present researchers have found that an amalgamation of both the process and product approaches goes a long way in helping learners to make their writings meaningful and purposeful and in conformance with all aspects of the writing skill.

**WRITING SKILLS IN ESL/EFL**

Writing is by far the most complex and difficult of the four language skills. It has long been neglected in the history of teaching English as a Second and or a Foreign Language. According to Raimes, cited in Nunan (1999):

*Until the mid-1970s, writing was seen as a subservient skill, whose function was to support the development of oral language. Pedagogy was therefore dominated by form-focused techniques that were in line with the audio-lingual ideology of drill and practice (p. 271).*

Neglecting writing instruction made the skill a very complex and difficult one for instructors to teach and learners to learn. According to Walters (1983:17) “writing is the last and perhaps most difficult skill students learn - if they ever do.” This holds true for the early encounter of students with a foreign language in countries where the community is unilingual. In Omani schools, students routinely try to avoid the task of writing a paragraph on their own. Widdowson (1983:35) finds writing “....an irksome activity and an ordeal to be avoided whenever possible”. Even when students attempt to produce a piece of writing, it often lacks the essential elements of composition. To fashion well developed writing, students must know the nuances of integrating ideas with appropriate lexis and structure. Nunan (1996) says, “producing a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing there is to do in language”. Being able to do this in school situations is not common among foreign language learners, because they do not encounter the target language in their social situations. In fact, “in comparison to speaking, listening and reading, writing outside of school is rare”. (Weigle, 2002:4). Hence, it would be wrong to assume that students automatically learn to write and master the skill through instruction in grammar and other skills. Technological advancements and