FORMING STUDENTS' WRITTEN SPEECH

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Abstract: The article depicts the methods of teaching writing by using different activities, examples and modern pedagogic techniques

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Writing is clearly a complex process, and competent writing is frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired. Few people write spontaneously, and few feel comfortable with a formal writing task intended for the eyes of someone else. When the 'someone else' is a teacher, whose eye may be critical, and who indeed may assign a formal assessment to the written product, most people feel uncomfortable. It makes sense then, that the atmosphere of the writing classroom should be warm and supportive, and nonthreatening. It helps if teachers show willingness to write too. and to offer their attempts for class discussion along with those of the students; it helps if students can work together, assisting each other, pointing out strength and weaknesses without taking or giving offence. Many of our tasks suggest working with a partner or in groups, and we see this work as very important; not only does it make the task livelier and more enjoyable, but it makes sure that students see that writing really is cooperative, a relationship between writer and reader. Usually the writer has to1 imagine a reader, but co-operative writing provides each writer with a reader and makes the writing task more realistic and more interactive. . . . Writing is commonly seen as a three-stage process: pre-writing, writing and rewriting. Although this is very much an oversimplification, it is a helpful one. In the past teachers concentrated on the end of the second stage, i.e. after the writing had been done. They did not see how they could intervene at the pre-writing and writing stages, as rewriting was seen on y as 'correcting the mistakes'. We now understand the importance of all three stages as part of the writing process, and try to help students master the process by participating in it with them, rather than contenting ourselves with criticising the product, i.e. the composition, without knowing much about how it was arrived at. (Hamp-Lyonsand Heasley[1] 1987: 2-3)

[1] Hamp-Lyons Z. and B.Heaseey. 1987. Study writing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.p64

The objective of the teaching of writing in a foreign language is to get learners to acquire the abilities and skills they need to produce a range of different kinds of written texts-similar to those an educated person would be expected to be able to produce in their own language.

Writing is widely used within foreign language courses as a convenient means for engaging with aspects of language other than the writing itself. For example: learners note down new vocabulary; copy out grammar rules; write out answers to reading or listening comprehension questions; do written tests. In these examples, writing is simply used either as a means of getting the students to attend to and practice a particular language point, or - even more frequently - as a convenient method of testing it: providing information as to how well something has been learned in a form which the teacher can then check at his or her leisure. Other activities take as their main objective the writing itself. At the 'micro' level, they practice specific written forms at the level of word or sentence (handwriting or typing, spelling, punctuation); at the 'macro' level the emphasis is on content and organization: tasks, invite learners to express themselves using their own words, state a purpose for writing, and often specify an audience. Examples of such activities would be narrating a story, writing a letter.

The purpose of writing, in principle, is the expression of ideas, the conveying of a message to the reader; so the ideas themselves should arguably be seen as the most important aspect of the writing. On the other hand, the writer needs also to pay some attention to formal aspects: neat handwriting, correct spelling and punctuation, as well as acceptable grammar and careful selection of vocabulary'. This is because much higher standards of language are normally demanded in writing than in speech: constructions that are more careful, more precise and varied vocabulary, more correctness of expression in general. In addition, the slow and reflective nature of the process of writing in itself enables the writer to devote time and attention to formal aspects during the process of production - something it is difficult to demand in the course of the real-time flow of speech.

One of our problems in teaching writing is to maintain a fair balance between content and form when defining our requirements and assessing. What this 'fair balance' is depends, of course to some extent on your own teaching situation and opinion.

Look at a textbook you know, or a book that explicitly sets out to teach writing, and identify two or three activities that do, in your opinion, really teach writing as an 'end' not just as a 'means', as defined in the first part of this unit. Do these activities maintain a balance between content and form that seems to you appropriate for your own teaching situation? If there is a bias, which way does it tend?

Writing tasks

1. Book report

Can be a fairly routine, rather boring, exercise; usually done in order to check that students have read a book, rather than for the sake of the writing. Some preliminary guidance is sometimes needed on content and organization.

2. Book review

It needs some preliminary guidance; but the writing is more purposeful, audience-oriented and interesting to do. There is some point in rewriting and polishing the reviews for publishing within the class (on a class noticeboard, for example).

3. Instruction sheet

Students usually find this interesting to do and you may wish to give some advice on the layout of instructions.

4. Narrative

A fairly interesting task that can be adapted for most levels. It does depend on preparation of suitable pictures, perhaps cut from magazines.

5. Personal story

On the whole students are motivated to write (and read) about personal experiences; also, each can write at his or her own level of proficiency. Preparation: perhaps a brief sample of a personal story contributed by the teacher or a volunteer student.

6. Describe a view

This can be interesting but should be kept fairly short; in can be done at various levels of proficiency. If no window with a view is available, students can be asked to recall and describe a view they are familiar with.

7. Describe someone

Fairly easy to do, and straightforward to present; can be interesting both to write and read.

8. Describe people

It can also be interesting, because the stimulus to the imagination - but of course demands more preparation.

9. Answer a letter

Usually a highly motivating task, fairly advanced, with a clear audience and purpose. As it stands, you need to prepare the original letter; an alternative is to ask all

the students to write letters of complaint, and later answer each other's letters. Some pre-teaching of conventional letter-formalities and layout in the target language is necessary.

10. Job application

Again, some conventions about letters like this will need to be taught, and perhaps some details about the exact job being applied for.

11. Propose change

Advanced writing, involving the organized and convincing presentation of an argument. You may or may riot feel it necessary to read a similar piece of writing with the students in advance, to supply a model.

12. News report

This is clear 'model-imitation' writing, which is perhaps useful, but not very interesting to do. It may be more interesting if it is a report of a genuine local event. In preparation, you may need to draw learners' attention to the typical features of this genre of written discourse.

13. Ideal school

A task which is interesting and relevant for schoolchildren. Little preparation is the kinds of topics they may wish to include.

14. Describe process

A more sophisticated task, requiring precise and orderly representation of facts: suitable particularly for learners in science or technology.

15. Film music

A stimulating, fun task for imaginative students1, but it may take time to select and prepare a suitable piece of music.

The process of composition

When we are teaching advanced composition, it is sometimes difficult to decide what kind of teacher intervention can be most productive. One thing that can help is to study how people write: how a writer thinks, feels and acts at the various stages of composing a text.

The writing process **Stage 1: Writing**

Choose one of the two problems described in Box, and compose a written answer in the form of a short text of about 200-300 words. Do this on paper, not ода word processor, crossing out rather than erasing parts you wish to delete, so that all versions of the draft are preserved, though you may start a new version on a fresh piece of paper

as often as you like. As you compose your answer, try to be aware of how you are thinking and what you are doing. You may keep a piece of paper at your elbow to note down things that you notice about your own thinking and action, as they come up; or describe your thoughts into a cassette recorder as you write; or simply keep notes in your head, and write down what you remember as soon as you finish the composition process. **Stage 2: Reflection**

If you are in a group, compare your results with those of other participants. What were the similarities and differences in your writing process? If you are alone, reflect and note down your conclusions.

In either case, you might find the questions shown in Box help to focus your thinking.

Stage 3: Conclusion

Try to draw some practical teaching conclusions from the results of your introspection and discussion. Compare these with the suggestions in the following section.

Different writers may produce equally good results through widely different processes. This means that there is probably no one 'right' system of writing that we should recommend; rather, we should suggest and make available various possible strategies, encouraging individuals to experiment and search for one that is personally effective.

2. Writing is a messy business. Most people progress-through a number of untidy drafts before reaching a final version. Nor do they always follow what might seem a rational order of priority: it is true that on the whole good writers think about content first arid, form later; but this order is not consistently observed. Actual content may be altered at quite late stages in the drafting, and changes to sentence or paragraph organization, relatively early. So while it may be useful to advise learners not to worry too much about spelling and grammar at the beginning, and to get down their ideas first, it may not be wise to try to impose this as a rigid rule. More helpful, perhaps, is to encourage learners to work through a number of revisions; to accept messy : drafts as a positive, even essential, stage in writing; to treat early drafts as transition stages to be criticized but not formally assessed.

3. Writing is potentially satisfying. If you are writing on a topic about which you feel you have something worthwhile or interesting to say, the process of writing can be absorbing and enjoyable; and if it is worked through to a final product, most people feel pride in their work and want it to be read. It is therefore worth investing thought in the selection of topics and tasks that motivate learners to write; and

extremely important to provide an appreciative reader audience, whether teacher or co-learners.

Used literature:

1. Hamp-Lyons Z. and B.Heaseey. 1987. Study writing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.