"SCAFFOLDING" STUDENTS' WRITING IN EFL CLASS: IMPLEMENTING PROCESS APPROACH

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Abstract: The writing process approach views a writing learner as a creator of text, and hence, he needs to experience what writers actually do as they write, and so do students in EFL writing classes. The approach offers an answer to the need of helping the students develop their writing skill without their having to master the basic fundamental elements of writing, i.e. grammar, prior to attending the writing courses. This article higlights the potential of the process approach-with which students go through a write-rewrite process-in giving students a scafffold to work in a real, live process of how a real writer engages in the process of writing. However, the most important harvest is the fact that students have become more confident in expressing their ideas in writings.

Key words: writing process, writing skill development, scaffolding

Many of my students taking Writing class experience difficulties as shown by meaningfully vague sentences. I assume such mistakes are the result of their little understanding of the pre-requisite knowledge for writing, i.e. grammar. However, it is not wise to require students to have attended all the grammar classes before they can start their writing class. Moreover, writing does not merely mean applying grammatical rules; it is more students' learning to communicate their ideas in written forms. Indeed, they also experience problems in getting ideas, organizing ideas and developing details, choosing correct words and structuring ideas in correct sentences, as well as maintaining paragraph unity. Hence, regarding the idea that writing plays an important role in shaping

one's mind (Graves, 1994), I have recently implemented the process approach, which I see potential to help students learn not only applying grammatical rules but also communicating their ideas in written form. This paper demonstrates how this approach has worked well with my students in writing classes.

This approach, first initiated by James Britton and Janet Emig in 1970s, views writing learners as creators of texts, and so, they need to experience what writers actually do as they write. In its operational terms, I have interpreted this approach by adopting the principles developed by constructivism theorists, i.e. introducing the technique of "scaffolding" as a means to help students build up their writing skill. Providing the students with a scaffold means giving them help, which gradually decreases, as they are getting "stronger" and finally become independent. By being "scaffolded" or given a "scaffold', my students have been lifted from such a situation in the traditional way of teaching writing as writing without receiving enough feedback to help them develop their ideas in the process of writing. My comments as a facilitator on wrong agreement and improper use of articles, pluralization, and syntactic forms as reflected in vague message of students' sentences as well as on drafts of less good quality, which stem from, among others, lack of paragraph unity, unorganized or less well-organized ideas and insufficient details, are the feedback that students receive in the revising stage of the writing process. Besides, they also receive feedback from their fellow classmates. They use the feedback to revise their writings and so they do this rewrite-revise process before they edit and finally submit their final writings. So, it is the process of working on drafts until publication of writings that counts. This approach has to a certain degree encouraged students to write with confidence and to feel committed to their work; they are not worried about their writings being judged as right or wrong.

WRITING PROCESS APPROACH

This approach began gaining broad writing classroom practice in 1970s (Tompkins, 1994). It shifted the traditional practice, which focused on the finished work, to a new methodology, in which students are given the experience of going through the processes of writing as writers. So, instead of analysis and correction of the final written product (usually) given by the teacher, there comes the *process* of writing in a number of activities, processes or stages: conception, incubation, and production (Britton, 1970 in Tompkins,

1994). Taking the same approach Flower and Hayes (1980 in Beard, 1984) describe similar processes as planning, translating, and reviewing; and Graves (1983) suggests that the processes include prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

To meet the objectives of my Writing class, however, I have directed my class to implement Graves' five-stage process, with a slight modification, regarding the fact that the terms for each stage of the process is more easily understood in EFL classroom context in Indonesia. To illustrate, the term translating as proposed by Flower and Hayes (1980 in Beard, 1984) is potentially understood more as transforming literally from one language to another than putting down ideas into writings.

Another point is that just as what real writers experience, these processes are not ones of a linear mode; rather, recursive: writers jump back and forth from one stage to another as they write (Tompkins, 1994). To illustrate, it happened that some students did not directly publish (Stage 5) after editing (Stage 4) their writing papers because, due to new information related to their topics they came across in newspapers, they decided to revise (Stage 3) them again. So, the numbering of each stage is simply to help students to identify and discuss the activities throughout the process.

The features of the five-stage process as implemented in my classroom context are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Features of the Writing Process (adapted from Tompkins, 1994)

Stage 1: Prewriting
Students choose a topic.
Students gather and organize ideas.
Students define a topic sentence.

Stage 2: Drafting
Students write a rough draft.
Students emphasize content rather than mechanics.

Stage 3: Revising
Students share their writing with teacher or in writing groups.
Students participate constructively in discussions about classmates' writing.
Students make changes in their writings to reflect the reactions and comments of both teacher and classmates.Between the first and final drafts, students make substantive rather than only minor changes.

Stage 4: Editing
Students proofread their own and or classmates' writings.
Students increasingly identify and correct their own mechanical errors.

Stage 5: Publishing
Students publish their writing in appropriate form.
Students share their finished writing with teacher.

WORKING WITH WRITING PROCESS

The following is an illustration of how the five stages overviewed above have worked in my class. Where necessary, samples of students' works are embedded to illustrate relevant points.

Stage 1: Prewriting

Contrary to the traditional view, which believed that writers had already possessed complete thought and plan about what they wanted to write right from the very beginning, the writing process approach sees that writers need to "warm-up" themselves before they indulge their ideas in the stream of writing and prewriting is the means of getting-ready-to-write. It is the stage at which writers see what they know and to which direction they want to bring their ideas. The activities in this stage include:

1. **Choosing a topic**. The writing process approach provides freedom for the students to choose their own topics as Bachman (1990) asserts, that knowl-

edge of the world determines one's communicative language ability and that interest is an important aspect that can drive someone in learning something, to keep them away from being forced to write on topics they know little about or ones which they are not interested in. Thus, by writing on topics of their own interest, which they have knowledge about, they are expected to be able to express their ideas more fluently.

Many of the students can choose their topics very quickly and, once they are ready with their topics, they are confident about writing them down. However, there are students who suffer from the burden of selecting topics; they simply do not know what to write about and so they need to brainstorm a list of topics and identify the one topic they are most interested in and have sufficient knowledge about. They are often surprised to learn that such a brainstorming helps them see many options, which they then develop. Thus, letting the students choose their own topics does not necessarily mean leaving them "unattended".

2. **Gathering and Organizing Ideas.** At this point, I deliberately introduce reading. Through reading they will get familiar with a form of experience and as writers they need a variety of experiences to draw on as they write (Tompkins, 1994). Besides, writing is also encouraged to help them gather and organize ideas. For instance, one student, who is interested in mechanics, wants to write something about Karl Benz, a pioneer in the automotive construction. Narrowing down this topic, she works on a cluster of ideas, from which she learns that she needs a lot more of information about the figure. So, she is advised that she consult encyclopedias and that is how she then manages to write an outline, which initially looks as follows:

Outline for Information about Karl Benz, Owner of Mercedes-Benz Company
Karl Benz
I. As a child
- *He was son of expert in train machines.*
- *He was born in Karlsruhe, Germany in 1844.*
- *His father died when he was two years old.*
- *He inherits his father's talent in machine construction.*

II. He went to school
- *He studied mechanic in his hometown at Karlsruhe.*
- *He left the school before he could finish it to work.*

III. Extraordinary Works
- *He designed a cycle with three-wheels and four-speeds machine.*
- *His success led him to receiving a patent for his car.*
- *His car influenced the pioneer in the US car industry.*
- *He made the first bus in the world.*
- *He joins his factory "Benz" with "Daimler" to produce the Mercedes-Benz cars.*

(*Source - rewritten as original: Reni*)

Syntactically this outline deviates the principle of parallelism; she puts her main ideas in phrases for points *I* and *III* and in a complete sentence for point *II*. In elaborating the main ideas into the sub-points, she also faces problems in the use of articles, phrasal modifiers, tenses, agreement, and choice of words. Later in the revising stage, she receives comments from two friends in her writing group and rewrites the outline, which she submits to me. We discuss it and she finally rewrites the last version of the outline, which shows she has applied the principle of parallelism as well as the correct use of articles, phrasal modifiers, tenses, agreement, and choice of words.

It is also evident that through reading informational books (encyclopedias) she gathers more information, on which she bases her outline, which, in turn, she uses to elaborate the topic she wants to write about. So, in essence, reading and writing are symbiotic, mutually beneficial processes (Tompkins, 1994).

3. **Defining a Topic Sentence**. As a topic is naturally too general—there are too many things to put into a single paragraph (Arnaudet and Barret, 1981) or it can be viewed from different aspects, it needs to be specified, limited, or narrowed down. To make their topics specific, the students apply several techniques. These include—to mention a few—using a pyramid pattern, a list, a web of ideas, an outline, or a schema. A student applying a schema later comes up with three optional topic sentences:

- o *Several factors determine the high cost of maintaining comfort for train passengers.*
- o *There are several factors that determines the high cost of maintaining comfort for train passengers.*
- o *Maintaining comfort for train passengers are determined by several factors.*

(*Source - rewritten as original: Isti*)

It can be identified that there are grammatical mistakes in the topic sentences above, i.e. the student seems confused about which part of the sentences the verbs in the embedded clause of the second and third sentences correspond to or agree with. At this point, however, such grammatical mistakes are not taken into account, as this initial stage of the writing process is mainly intended to build up students' confidence to write.

Stage 2: Drafting

Just as writers do not begin writing with their writings already composed in their minds (Tompkins, 1994), students begin writing their rough, tentative ideas through the activities of writing and refining drafts. During this drafting stage students simply pour out ideas from their minds and so, greater attention is paid to how students can work out with their ideas. By comparison, spelling, punctuation and mechanical mistakes should be of little concern.

Drafts are written on every other line or double-spaced so as to give room for self-revising or comments from the teacher and/ or classmates. They may use circles, arrows and other pointing signs to move, delete, or add (parts of) sentences. Some students, unable to adjust themselves to the new approach, write carefully, because they want to make their rough drafts their final works. To help them negate this idea and emphasize the notion that writing is not to write in an instant thought, they are assigned to label their papers "rough draft". This label keeps reminding them to simply jot down their ideas.

Stage 3: Revising

The revising stage, consisting of two activities—the self-revision and the peer revision, is the stage at which the students make their ideas more refined by, just as the word "revise" suggests "see again", seeing again their writings so

that they can see weaknesses if there is any or to add more bits of information. Some students think that, as soon as they have finished jotting down their ideas, they have completed their tasks. So, they simply stop writing and eagerly submit their papers to me. These students are then convinced that even good writers go through a write-and-rewrite process to make their compositions perfect. Hence, they have to look back at their writings with the help from their classmates and the teacher.

Meanwhile some other students undergo this stage enthusiastically; rereading their rough draft, they then self-revise it by adding, for example, new bits of information, substituting, deleting, or moving words, or putting question marks on unclear parts. To self-revise their writings, the students should be able to see their rough drafts from a fresh perspective and in order to gain this fresh perspective, they are to leave their drafts for a certain period of time. In my class, the students use the juncture between one session and another to take a distance from their rough drafts before they do the self-revision. They make changes and rewrite their initial rough drafts, which they share with their friends in the peer-revision activity.

In the peer-revision activity, students work in writing groups consisting of three or four students with whom they share their self-revised version of their drafts. They respond to each other's work, by giving compliments and comments, orally or in written forms. They are told to look more at the content or what their friends are trying to say. Below is a sample of a self-revised version of a rough draft entitled "My Life":

Figure 2. A Student's Self-Revised Draft

I √born in south Malang in 1980. My family moved to Kalimantan to migrate. That time I went to school until high school for teacher. Then I worked as a teacher. My students √are village students. √There families were farmers who worked in the forest as my father. Then I √gave scholarship from the old man in the village or "Pak Haji". He had money and √I sent to study in Malang. Now I √working hard to receive good marks to become good teacher.

(*Source - rewritten as original: Rahma*)

The students who share this self-revised draft in her group put their comments in questions as presented in Figure 3 below. Grammatical mistakes are not corrected; so, their comments are those of reader-based type.

Figure 3. Fellow Student's Comments on Self-Revised Draft

- *How many brothers and sisters do you have?*
- *When did your family moved to Kalimantan?*
- *Were you happy when you were in Kalimantan?*
- *How many years did you teach?*
- *Where did you teach?*
- *In what school did you teach?*
- *How much was your salary?*
- *How many students did you teach in your class?*
- *What subject did you teach?*

(*Source - rewritten as original: Students in Writing Group*)

In addition to the questions above, I add some comments as presented in Figure 4 to help the student make her writing more interesting and better organized.

Figure 4. Teacher's Comments on Student's Self-Revised Drafts

This is a very interesting story of your life. Write more in paragraph form. Here is a guideline for you to organize your ideas:
- *1st paragraph: What is your name? What was life like for you and your family before you moved to Kalimantan?*
- *2nd paragraph: What was life like in Kalimantan for you and your family? Did you enjoy your job as a teacher?*
- *3rd paragraph: Why did you decide to study in Malang? What were your expectations?*
- *4th paragraph: What do you plan in the future?*

Insert the answers to your friends' questions in the corresponding paragraphs. I am sure you can write a complete good story of your life. Good luck!

The changes that students make during revision can be classified into the kinds of change, i.e. adding, substituting, deleting, or moving, and the level of change, i.e. word, phrase, clause, sentence, or paragraph (Faigley & Witte, 1981 in Tompkins, 1994). To foster their growth in writing, it is advisable that the hierarchy of the changes be shared with the students. It is also an ideal practice for the students to note down and track the types of changes they have made. Some kinds of revisions are more sophisticated than others; however, the students should be encouraged to use the more effective change. When adding a clause is more effective, the students should not necessarily move a sentence, for example.

Stage 4: Editing

It is at this stage that the students attempt to make their writings 'optimally readable' (Smith, 1982), and so, the focus is shifted to looking at mechanics of writing, which includes conventions of written Standard English: capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, etc. The activities in this stage cover:

1. **Proofreading.** Proofreading their writings, the students read word by word to identify and locate mistakes. They initially find this activity burdensome as they are used to leaving the judgment concerning mistakes to the teacher. However, encouragement and guidelines in editing have helped them ease the burden. They use marks, as illustrated in Figure 5, and editing checklist, as illustrated in Figure 6. The checklist is then used by the teacher to focus attention to skills or theoretical aspects of the subject, such as grammar, which is presented in a mini lesson.

Figure 5. Correction Symbol Guide for Proofreading

T : wrong verb tense	Pl : you need the plural noun
WW : wrong word	Sing : you need a singular noun
Agr : verb agreement problem	Inc : incomplete sentences
^ : you need a word	__ : you do not need a word
Sp : spelling	0 : wrong punctuation

Figure 6. Editing Checklist

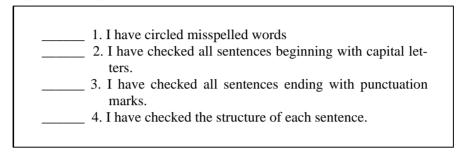|	
_____	1. I have circled misspelled words
_____	2. I have checked all sentences beginning with capital letters.
_____	3. I have checked all sentences ending with punctuation marks.
_____	4. I have checked the structure of each sentence.

Figure 7. Self-edited Sample Writing

My Life

My name is Rahma. I born in a village in South Malang in 1980. I have two sister and one brother. We were very poor. I did not go to school because my father did not have money. He was small farmer.

My family moved to Kalimantan in 1985 because we were poor in Malang. My father has a big land which he plants with rubber. I studied in SPG that is a school for teachers before I became a teacher. I enjoyed being a teacher although my salary is not big. I taught students in elementary school.

One day my father met Pak Haji. He is the rich man in our village. He asked me a scholarship to study in Malang. I was very happy because I could continue my study. I want to become a better teacher.

After graduate from the university of Malang I will go to my hometown. I will teach again. I hope they will become good persons in the future. They have job and a lot of money. (Source - rewritten as original: Rahma)

2. **Correcting Mistakes**. After proofreading their writings, the students correct these mistakes, individually or in groups. Some of these mistakes can be corrected easily while some others need help from the teacher or require the use of a dictionary. When they stumbled a block of difficulty, they came to the teacher and so there came a conference with the teacher. The teacher then helped them for final editing or simply gave marks for them to correct individually. As an illustration, below is the self-edited sample writing of "My Life" with editing marks that I gave. She is then to rewrite it before publishing it.

Stage 5: Publishing

In this final stage, the students publish their writings. Their well-processed results of writing work are handed in to me for sharing. Although they need to be assessed for administrative reason, judgments about their progress are mostly obtained by observing their activities throughout the process. Moreover, my role is not limited to that of an evaluator, rather as the audience. Therefore, I avoid red-inking or else the students will feel that I am not a trusted audience.

CONCLUSIONS

The writing process approach has, in my class to say the least, formed the foundation for writing instruction. The approach has hindered the students from copying the work of others and claiming it as their own. Besides, there are several positive points that can be listed when the writing process approach is implemented. First, the approach empowers the teacher in the sense that, just as the students are to experience the recursive process of writing, the teacher is encouraged to really write him/herself. So, different from the traditional practice, in which the teacher only passed on the theoretical framework of writing, the teacher him/herself is prevented from becoming a hypocrite—one who can only give orders (to write) but never writes him/herself. Second, the stages that the students undergo also help them develop other language skills. To illustrate, the students-to-students or students-to-teacher conference gives room for training in listening and speaking. To go further, when the students have to consult informational books, to a certain degree, they also develop their reading skill. Third, the approach has created an atmosphere in which the students learn to work in collaboration with their friends or to foster a cooperative learning. They help

each other to produce the best writing works, to communicate ideas, to manage emotion, and so on. In short, it reflects a social constructivist point of view about learning. Last but not least is the mini-lesson, which allows the teacher to give the right instruction to solve on-the-spot problems. In fact, I have found that it is more effective to teach both mechanical skills and theoretical framework with this on-the-spot solution during the editing process. In comparison, teaching them merely through lectures is to a certain degree in vain as lectures are easily forgotten.

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