

Chapter six: Suggestions and Recommendations

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Introduction

The results obtained from the two questionnaires have actually emphasized the great importance teachers assign to CL in enhancing students' writing skill. As assumed by many theorists Harmer (2005) Brown (1989), writing skill is regarded as difficult especially in FL classes. Depending on the results gained, we try to introduce some suggestions and recommendations to help teachers be successful and efficient in teaching the writing skill.

1. Educational Context of Teaching Writing

The process of writing actually is a very loose and complex one. Writing takes place anywhere and at anytime. People write letters, reports chats, etc. This could be a mere arbitrary and non-systematic process which has to be distinguished from formal writing that takes place in educational situation. In this instance Hosenfled (1977) states the following suggestions that will help implement cooperative writing activities:

- Balance cooperative work with individual tasks to encourage both cooperation and independence.
- Clarify to your students why you consider peer work valuable and what you expect them to gain from it. You can spell this out in your assignment sheet, or distribute a special handout, if you wish.
- Make it clear that collaborative work requires the commitment of each group member to the whole task.
- Encourage or provide outlines and preplanning, so that all group members agree on purpose, format, and timeline.
- Make sure the groups have deadlines for each important stage of a collaborative project.

- Provide written instructions, guidelines, or checklists to direct their work and help you chart their progress.
- Vary group membership from project to project, to give students an opportunity to work with different peers.
- Encourage students to get to know each other, and vary the members of groups so students don't settle into active and passive roles.
- During in-class group work, listen in or contribute to the conversation (though you shouldn't feel compelled to stifle productive disagreement).
- Consider having students evaluate each other's participation.

2. Pre writing Stage

As most writers spend a good amount of their time planning before they write, we ask students to be clear about the message they want to convey, i.e., the content of their composition. They should be aware of their purpose (what they expect to achieve through their writing) and their audience (their knowledge, background, language abilities, needs, expectations, etc.)

Caroline (2001) maintains that, since the choice of content, organisation, and language depends on these factors. Students are also instructed to consider the constraints (personal, material, system, time, etc.) that they are likely to face while writing and to have a clear understanding of what they expect their readers to do with the writing. While knowledge of “purpose” focuses on the writer, the awareness of “task” focuses on the reader. Since academic (or professional) writing at the tertiary level is largely a way of writing rather than writing on this or that subject, students are also made aware of three kinds of competencies that must be demonstrated in their composition: (1) subject competency, (2) organisational competency, and (3) linguistic competency. They must show that they can communicate their message (professional or subject knowledge) objectively, logically, and unambiguously, employing appropriate linguistic and organisational strategies. They are asked to

collect data through library research, live interviews, and field trips. They must take notes, and critically evaluate the ideas of others to formulate and structure their knowledge about a specific topic. Planning content, structure, emphasis, and procedure help students to monitor the organization and development of their ideas. Preparing an action plan or a framework for writing (explaining, describing, stating, arguing, narrating, etc.), and considering the use of illustrations, nonverbal data, etc., prove effective in the right sequencing of ideas. Caroline (2001) adds, since the purpose of writing is to convey concrete information; we encourage students to make decisions regarding the specific content to be included in their text. The audience analysis that they have done in the pre-writing stage prepares them to decide on what they should or should not include to meet their readers' needs. They set out to give shape to the skeletal structure prepared before writing, considering (1) how content is given linguistic expression (through definition, description, explanation, classification, generalisation, comparison, contrast, and hypothesis, etc.), (2) how thought connectors are used, (3) how a formal discourse is organised, and (4) how subheadings, diagrams, tables, and charts can be used in the final layout of the paper. They construct the text with a distinct beginning, middle, and end, keeping logic, clarity, brevity, and correctness in mind.

Before you begin to write, you....

- Jot down everything you know about this topic.
- Look at other resources.
- Ensure that you understand everything you are supposed.
- Add additional details or supporting ideas.
- Check to see if everything is on topic.

2.1. Organizing Writing

Smith (1996) states that in order to make sure writing makes sense you check that ...

- Your introduction and conclusion make sense.
- Each paragraph stays on topic.
- The connections between sentences and paragraphs are clear.
- Your choice of words suits the audience and the topic.

Before your final draft, you check that.....

- You have written about what was supposed.
- The ideas are connected (to one another).
- Your verb tenses are correct and consistent.
- Your spelling is double checked.
- Your punctuation is effective.

Teachers' control

- Deciding all writing topics
- Dictating improvements without student problem-solving
- Setting learning objectives without student input
- providing instruction only through whole class activity

Time spent on isolated drills on “sub-skills” of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, etc. Writing assignments given briefly, with no context or purpose, completed in one step.

Finished pieces read only by teacher Teachers talks about writing but never writes or shares own work Isolated grammar lessons, given in order determined by textbook, before writing is begun.

2.2. Devaluation of Students' Ideas

- Students viewed as lacking knowledge and language abilities
- Sense of class as competing individuals
- Cooperation among students viewed as cheating, disruptive Writing taught only during “language arts” period. Smith (1996)

2.3. Evaluation as Negative Burden for Students

- Marking all papers heavily for all errors, making teacher a bottleneck
- Editing by teacher, and only after paper completed, rather than student making improvements
- Grading punitively, focused on errors, not growth. Smith (1996)

3. Students' Strategies

- Students will have ample opportunities for choice and ownership in their writing, leading to improved voice.
- Students will have real audiences and publishing opportunities (from the classroom to the public level) to motivate them to write with voice.
- Students will read many examples of writing with evident voice and examine how the author achieved the effect.
- Students will read aloud, interpreting expressively, examples of writing with evident voice.
- Students will practice various revision strategies that impact voice in their writing.
- Students will write a piece and then revise it for different audiences, varying the voice appropriately for each.
- Voice is highly dependent on word choice; see that category for more ideas.

Smith (1996).

4. Professional Development

Cuseo (1992) suggests different ways to help teachers carry writing course through the following:

- Teachers will become familiar with the writing workshop instructional model that supports student choice, multiple drafting, revision, etc.
- Teachers will experiment with life maps, writing territories, and other strategies for helping students find topics that inspire them to write with passion and voice.
- Teachers will try the “I Am What I Am”
- The school will create a literature collection centered around voice that is grade and content-area appropriate. Teachers will be introduced to many of these books, shown how to use them during instruction, and given time to browse the collection. Follow-up sessions will ask teachers to give book talks and share how they have used the collection or resources they have discovered on their own.

Student Strategies:

- Students will give and receive peer response related to clarity in their writing.
- Students will receive feedback from the teacher via written comments as well as individual.

Conferencing over their writing.

- Students will practice various revision strategies that impact clarity in their writing.
- Students will use sentence combining exercises to experiment with various combinations and how they affect clarity in their writing at the sentence level.
- Students will practice expanding and reducing their writing to examine the effect on clarity.

6. Teachers' Objectives

Student ownership and responsibility by:

- helping students choose their own topics and goals for improvement
- using brief teacher-student conferences
- teaching students to review own progress, Class time on writing whole, original pieces through:
 - Real purposes and audiences for writing
 - Instruction and support for all stages of writing
 - prewriting, drafting, revising, editing Writing for real audiences, publishing for the class and wider communities
- Teacher modeling writing:
 - Drafting, revising, sharing
 - As a fellow author and as demonstrator Learning grammar and mechanics in context, at the editing stage, and as items are needed making the classroom a supportive setting:
 - Active exchange of students' ideas
 - Collaborative small-group work
 - Conferences and peer critiquing that give responsibility to authors WAC the curriculum as a tool for learning Constructive and efficient evaluation that involves:
 - Brief oral responses as students work
 - focus on a few errors at a time
 - Thorough grading of just a few of student selected, polished pieces
 - Cumulative view of growth and self-evaluation
 - Encouragement of risk taking and honest expression

Students learn best when they are actively involved in the process. Researchers report that, regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. Students who work in collaborative groups also appear more satisfied with their classes. Roschelle & Teasley (1985)

5.1 Organizing Learning Groups

Roschelle & Teasley (1985) say that teachers will divide into groups and read excerpts from style manuals on the topic of clarity. They will come back together as a group to report their findings and create a list of pointers on achieving clarity.

- Teachers will learn about effective peer response groups and student-teacher writing conferences during in-service instruction. They will model peer response groups with their own writing.
- The University will create a collection of books on revision. Staff will be given time to read books individually or in study groups, or one book will be chosen to be read by the whole staff. Key revision strategies that address clarity will be practiced with teachers and then progress with students reported back.

5.2 Students' Organization

- Students will have opportunities to select their own topics and develop them over multiple drafts to learn how organizational changes can affect a piece of writing. The time and support for making major organizational changes to a piece of writing will be available to students.
- Student will use peer and teacher response to evaluate organization in their writing.
- □ Students will practice various revision strategies that impact organization in their writing, such as graphic organizers, cutting and pasting the text physically, outlines, etc. Smith (1996).

6. Cooperative Writing Projects

Peer editing

Peer teaching

Appropriate critiquing

Error correction

Consensus building

Agreeing/Disagreeing appropriately

Summarizing

Analyzing/Synthesizing

Negotiating

Goal setting

Problem solving

Persuading

Vocabulary building

Verbal and non-verbal communication and behaviorally:

Confidence building

Increased motivation

Lowered affective filter

Self reliance

Increased enjoyment of writing. Cuseo (1992)

7. Further Support

-Write the topic on the board, and do not repeat it orally if a student comes in late.

Instead, point at the board. This also reinforces the topic for visual learners and for students who have poor oral memory.

-Encourage students to use the rapid writing strategy to overcome anxiety for test or assignments.

-Use timed writing for parts of a task –e.g. as many words as possible in three minutes, then as many more as possible in the next three minutes.

-Vary criteria; some students may need to work in point form, or stop and break after three minutes.

- Save completed rapid writing samples to use later to teach writing conventions or organization of ideas.
- Vary the amount of time you give to students.
- Post the topic-related vocabulary in the classroom as an aid for struggling students

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated some suggestions and recommendations which we think may contribute in helping written expression teachers to appropriately use the technique of CL in developing students' writing skill.

Accordingly, teachers need to reconsider the technique of CL and understand how it works in advance. In response to the claim that writing skill is complex and challenging, we suggest to our teachers that the best way to tackle the problem is to involve our learners in the process through using some of CL auxiliaries like (group work, pair work).

Teachers should be aware of the fact that writing may be made more difficult by the lack of providing enough practice of the writing skill. Writing is a process consisting of a number of stages that the student has to go through in order to create his final product. Process Approach to writing is based on the provision of interesting and stimulating topics to write about. The students perform better when they write about topics that are related to their interest.

CONCLUSION

Several approaches, methods and techniques have been developed by educators to understand how the process of writing works in order to supply the appropriate way for teaching the skill, a long tasks requiring cognitive effort, instruction, and Practice in order to generate ideas, plan, and evaluate what is written. This complexity of writing has also appeared in the results obtained in the analysis of the questionnaires which confirmed firmly that both teachers and students know little about CL in teaching the writing skill.

These research procedures have allowed us to draw up some points resulted from the questionnaires. To start with, Students difficulties in writing are absence of teachers' awareness about the major advantages of teaching the writing skill through Cooperative Learning with group works. Therefore, as a research requirement, some suggestions and recommendations have been illustrated aiming at bringing teachers' awareness about the fact of teaching writing through CL and giving reconsideration for group work.