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ЛИНГВОДИДАКТИЧЕСКИЕ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ
ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ ГОТОВНОСТИ
К МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОМУ ДИАЛОГУ

SECTION 5
LINGUODIDACTIC TECHNOLOGIES IN FORMING
READINESS FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

INTERACTIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING WRITING

ИНТЕРАКТИВНЫЙ ПОДХОД К ОБУЧЕНИЮ ПИСЬМУ

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The article considers the approach to writing, that emphasizes discourse and cognitive aspects of writing. An interactive model, that links the writer, the reader and the text itself – three essentials of communicative process – is suggested.

Key words: interactive process model; discourse and cognitive aspects; questionnaire cum checklist; recursive process; interactive feedback.

В статье рассматривается проблема обучения письму с учетом дискурсивных и когнитивных аспектов. Предлагается модель, объединяющая три основных элемента коммуникативного процесса: пишущего текст, читающего текст и сам текст.

Ключевые слова: интерактивный подход; дискурсивный и когнитивные аспекты; список вопросов, включая оценочный лист; рекурсивный процесс; интерактивная обратная связь.

Despite significant developments in ELT/ESP/EST practices in second-language contexts writing at the tertiary level remains confined to teaching certain technical aspects rather than emphasizing its specific communicative goals and purposes. Teachers seldom follow methods and approaches that make students aware of the way writers make decisions as they write.

The approach considered in this article emphasizes discourse or cognitive aspects of writing that help students understand (1) how to generate ideas,

and (2) how to develop them in a written structure adapted to the needs of the reader and the goals of the writer.

Viewing writing as a process, an interactive process model is developed which links the writer, the reader, and the text—the essentials of the communicative triangle—and provides a sense of discovery in learning how to write, by integrating skills and tasks that contribute to self-learning, self-correcting, and self-editing. The model includes three stages: pre-writing, writing and post-writing.

Pre-writing

As most writers spend a lot of time *planning* before they write, students are asked 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.), since the choice of the content, organization, 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 mainly *a way of writing* rather than writing on this or that subject, students are also made aware of three kinds of competences that must be demonstrated in their composition: (1) subject competence, (2) organizational competence, and (3) linguistic competence. They must show that they can communicate their message (professional or subject knowledge) objectively, logically, and unambiguously, employing appropriate linguistic and organizational 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 relating to the content, structure, emphasis, and procedure helps 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 correct sequencing of ideas.

Writing

Since the purpose of writing is to convey concrete information, students are encouraged to make decisions regarding the specific content to be included in their text. The audience analysis that they have done at 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 the content is given linguistic expression (through definition, description, explanation, classification, generalization, comparison, contrast, and hypothesis, etc.), (2) how thought connectors are used, (3) how a formal discourse is organized, 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, the middle part, and the end, keeping logic, clarity, brevity, and correctness in mind.

To enable students to understand both form and format, a special technique is devised consisting of a set of questions related to various aspects of writing that is called a Questionnaire-cum-Check list (QCC). It makes the process approach essentially learner-centered and interactive. With the tasks set by the QCC students are motivated to rethink and revise their work with confidence. The QCC is an essential tool for the writing process to help students become their own editors, developing a sense of an effective discourse. The items of the questionnaire constitute a group of related questions that foster an awareness of a writing mechanism as well as provide a basis for peer interaction and correction. Specific questions require students to (1) identify the main ideas, (2) use appropriate headings and subheadings, (3) outline, (4) use nonverbal information (graphs and charts), (5) organize bibliographical information, and (6) identify grammatical errors. These activities become part of the feedback, practice, and evaluation process.

If a student is able to recognize that a sentence or paragraph in a draft needs changing or improvement, s/he should be able to identify the problem and suggest an acceptable revision; s/he should be able to focus on larger text structures (inter-sentence cohesion, coherence of argument, consistency in formality and technicality of the language, rhetorical conventions, style and layout, etc.). S/he should point out where misunderstanding may arise or what can be done to convey the exact meaning in a text.

Items in the QCC help internalize the process of writing and editing. In this process students can become analytical, critical, and creative, they are given an opportunity to respond to their peers' reports.

The interactive input obtained by exchanging the QCC and draft essay among the students makes them aware of writing style. To encourage a good critical evaluation, the peer critic must judge the written piece as a whole, giving a holistic rating. Critical reading of the draft with attention to specific aspects of discourse organization, language, and style becomes a motivating experience. Students become aware of their own performance as they organize their comments about the writing of others. Because the peers know the subject matter well (or at least as well as the writer-students in the audience know it) they are able to evaluate their fellow writer's handling of the factual content and logical development. Moreover, the QCC stimulates them to ac-

tion (which is particularly important as students are often not as motivated in learning to write as a teacher would wish them to be).

Post-writing

The interactive process approach is essentially recursive in that reviewing, evaluating, revising, and editing sends students back to the previous stages of writing in response to peer observations. The author-students critically reexamine their first draft along with the QCC and consider peer comments while writing the final draft. In some cases student-writers may have to reconsider their prewriting decisions regarding the scope, purpose, audience, and framework, and revise the draft accordingly. All students have the freedom to accept or reject a suggestion or comment on its merits or relevance; they reformulate ideas and structure, correct grammatical, lexical, syntactical, and organizational lapses, incorporate new ideas, or make changes wherever necessary in order to improve the overall writing. They reassure themselves that the final draft is better written and achieves its objective for the intended audience.

Classroom procedure

The interactive process is based on the communicative principle of writing, focusing on interactive feedback. The process of reading → analyzing → writing → feedback → re-writing within the broad framework of the three-stage planning, writing, and rewriting process enriches students' subject and language experience in addition to making them understand the essentials of English rhetoric. The QCC helps them to curb their tendency to be formless and disorganized in structuring an essay and to appreciate constructive criticism and suggestions that ultimately lead to self-correction and rewriting.

After completing the draft essay on the assigned topic within three-four weeks, each student submits it to the teacher for marking. (The marks awarded at each stage are not revealed to the students, nor are any comments made by the teacher regarding the draft.) After all the papers have been evaluated, the teacher distributes the drafts to the students along with the QCC. No one in a group will get his or her own paper. Within 10 days, each student hands in both the draft essay and the feedback sheet along with additional observations, if any, for the teacher's evaluation and recording of marks. At the third stage of the process, the writer of the first draft gets his/her own paper back along with a fellow student's feedback, and then writes another draft. After about two-three weeks, each student submits the final draft along with the first draft and the QCC for the teacher's evaluation and record.

Even if in a 17-week term (with two hours per week for teaching written communication) there is time to write only one full-length essay with a reasonable amount of planning and interactive feedback, students can develop

certain cognitive and analytical abilities that should help them in their future academic writing assignments.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the interactive procedure to develop academic/EST writing skills in the second language context is to some extent innovative in that it does not consist of routines familiar to the students. After each term, the teacher can reflect on and analyze the apparent effects of his/her own teaching and apply the results of these reflections to future planning. In other words teachers can effectively integrate classroom teaching with doing research. The students can learn by examining their work and that of their peers.

Learning to achieve stylistic excellence and structural cohesion in writing is a long process. It is to the English language teacher's credit to make students aware of this through appropriate technique. The interactive process approach can prepare students to acquire ability to write for any audience and any purpose. The most important thing is to give them plenty of practice and opportunities for interaction.

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