AN OVERVIEW OF WRITING TEACHING APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, five major writing teaching approaches are described. The first is the controlled-composition approach. In this approach, writing is taught to improve students' non-writing skills, that is, speaking, listening, reading, and other language aspects such as vocabulary and grammar. The second is the current-traditional rhetoric approach. In this approach, the aim is to improve students' writing by focusing on language components that are important to becoming a writer, including vocabulary, sentence structures, paragraph structures, and essay development. The third approach is the process approach, which views writing as an individual process. In that sense, the intervention of writing teachers in the teaching of writing should be minimal, if not absent altogether, unless student writers want their teachers' help in writing. The fourth approach is the genre approach. In this approach, writing is seen as a social phenomenon in which certain models of writing must be well-mastered by student writers so that they can later produce them within their society. The last is a contextual approach which combines both process and genre approaches. In this approach, the teaching and learning of writing are based on the writing teachers' analysis of their students' potentials, interests, and needs in writing. It is suggested that the contextual approach be applied in our schools because it is more relevant along our students' journey to becoming great writers.

KEYWORDS: Writing, teaching, approach

INTRODUCTION

Unlike speaking and listening skills, which can be subconsciously acquired, reading and writing skills are two language skills that one must formally learn to master or at least to be able to read and write in a language. In the formal process of learning them, formal teaching is therefore necessary because formal learning is supposed to happen in a formal teaching. The question is how reading and writing skills have been taught in our schools in the last few decades. This essay aims to address the question by providing an overview of some major issues regarding the formal teaching of writing, in the contexts of both first language(s), L-1, and second and/or foreign language(s), L-2. (1981), Kress (1986/1994), Horowitz (1986), Moore (1987), Raimes (1983/1985), Silva (1990), Tans (1994/1999), and Tans et al. (2020).

In that line of thought, this conceptual study on the teaching and learning of writing in L-1 and/or L-2 contexts suggests that there have been five major approaches that have been the bases for the teaching and learning of writing in the last few decades, namely, controlled-composition approach, current traditional rhetoric approach, process approach, genre approach, and contextual approach (Tans, 1999/1994) and Mbeo (2023).

Those approaches will be described in great detail below. Before describing those approaches, however, it is important to understand what is meant by the term "approach" used in this article. In this essay, I view it as Anthony (1963) and Richards and Rodgers (1982/1986) view it, that is, "a theory of language teaching and learning reflecting a certain model or a teaching pattern based on educational research" (in Tans, 1999: 63). Within a teaching approach, there are several methods or language teaching procedures that, in turn, require certain techniques to be used when implementing them in writing classes (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Defining those terms and relationships, Anthony says:

The arrangement is hierarchical. The organizational key is that techniques carry out a method which is consistent with an approach. An approach is a set of correlative

assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning. An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught. Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no parts of which contradict, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural. Within one approach, there can be many methods... A technique is implementational – that which actually takes place in a classroom. It is a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective. Techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well (1963: 63-67).

CONTROLLED-COMPOSITION APPROACH.

This approach, according to Raimes (1985), is also called guided composition or grammar-syntax approach. Its focus, as its name suggests, is mainly to control students' mastery of grammar. That is, they are able to use English words and sentences correctly, including the avoidance of negative interference from their L-1. So, its aim is to help students improve their oral language by using correct grammar (Fries, 1945) and to assist them in enhancing their reading and listening skills rather than their writing proficiency. In other words, this is not a writing teaching approach as its aim is not to improve students' writing capabilities. Consequently, it is understandable that this approach does not have any objectives for writing for publication. The only individual who reads students' writing is their teachers/lecturers.

It is, however, regarded as a part of writing teaching approach because writing is a skill that also relies on other language skills, that is, speaking, listening and reading to improve. In other words, a good writer is also supposed to be a good reader, speaker and

listener because a good piece of writing is fully supported by a writer's good speaking, listening and reading or vice versa (Tans, 1999).

In addition, it is also called a controlled composition approach because it is believed that having good grammar can help student writers improve their writing despite the fact that improving student writers' writing competence is not its direct aim. In this sense, Silva (1990) says that the aim of this approach can be achieved by doing the following things: "1. encouraging students to practice English structures that have been learnt in order to express their own opinion in a well-organised way; 2) imitating and manipulating certain genres by, for example, substituting, transforming, expanding, and completing paragraphs in which certain words and sentence patterns are carefully constructed; and, 3) applying strictly structured programmes aimed at developing students' perfect use of English" (in Tans, 1999: 66-67).

CURRENT-TRADITIONAL RHETORIC APPROACH.

This approach, which is also known as the holistic approach (Scardemalia et al., 1981) or control-to-free approach (Raimes, 1983), is based on Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric theory (1967). In this theory, rhetoric is viewed as "a way of building up syntactic elements into broader meaningful units of discourse. This approach suggests that controlled composition exercises should be followed by allowing students to do free writing, that is, organising effective sentences into coherent and cohesive paragraphs, and uniting such paragraphs in a comprehensive article/essay" (Tans, 1999: 67).

Unlike the controlled composition approach whose aim is to improve students' non-writing skills in general, oral language in particular, the current traditional rhetoric approach aims at improving students' writing skills. In other words, this approach aims to help

students improve their writing abilities, including their use of vocabulary, sentence construction, paragraph development, and complete written discourse.

That's why, in this approach, writing students are typically urged to write freely by practicing what is known as free writing. This is based on the concept that mastering English vocabulary and grammar, along with the vocabulary and grammar of any language, does not automatically equate to being a good writer. They have to write freely using correct English words and sentences in their essays to improve their writing competence (Tans, 1999: 67).

In such a context, Silva (1990) argues that the focus of this approach is on constructing paragraphs logically by creating topic sentences that contain main ideas, additional sentences that cover additional/supporting ideas, including concluding remarks, paraphrasing, and using connecting words. Illustration, comparison, contrast, and clarification are used to develop paragraphs of an essay. Along this method of paragraph development, in this approach, an essay is developed comprehensively by having an appropriate introduction, thesis development, and concluding paragraphs. This is applied in writing such models as narration, description, exposition, and reasoning.

PROCESS APPROACH

This writing approach started in the 1970s when Graves (1975) introduced it through his research entitled "An Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven Year Old Children" published in Research in the Teaching of English (9/3), pp. 227-241. His later works, like Graves (1983/1986), have significantly helped writing teachers understand the nature of writing as a process.

In this approach, writing is seen as an individual process, that is, a process which can only be done or produced, if an individual wants to do or produce it. In other words, this approach argues that a person, including a student writer, will write and therefore produce a piece of writing after rewriting it, in most cases several times, and then publishing it if they want to. If he/she does not want to do it, there will be no writing activities and, therefore, no written product is produced. This is why proponents of this approach believe that it is necessary for writing teachers to let their student writers write any piece of writing they are interested in, if they want their students not only to write actively and productively, but also to frequently publish their writings (Graves, 1975/1983; Silva, 1990; Tans, 1994/1999; Tans et al., 2023; Mbeo, 2023).

In line with the notion that writing is an individual process, writing instructors may refrain from intervening when their pupils write. These instructors may inspire their students to write by proposing writing topics or models during the prewriting stage, but thereafter, they ought not to interfere with their students' writing or rewriting activities, unless the students solicit aid from their instructors. In other words, if their students do not need their teachers' help during their writing activities, teachers may not help them. In that sense, teachers are supposed to write themselves, that is, to produce their own pieces of writing, in order to show that writing is indeed an activity which is challenging, not only for new writers, but also for mature writers like their writing teachers. This is what they call the true nature of writing as a process.

However, like the genre approach whose final activities are publication of students' writings, writing teachers can help their students with things they can do to publish their writings. This is crucial because writing as a process must end in publication. Before publishing a piece of writing, it is, of course, the job of teachers to revise and/or edit their students' writing so that a piece of writing to be published can meet certain criteria, such as

good content, correct vocabulary/sentences, well-developed paragraphs, properly used mechanics of writing, and excellent organisation.

GENRE APPROACH

Genre approach or model approach is in stark contrast to the process approach discussed above. In genre approach, students do not have total freedom in writing like they do within the paradigm of the process approach because they have to write some models of writing which are taught by their teachers. In other words, in genre approach student writers have to write written models their teachers want them to write (Horowitz, 1986; Moore, 1987; Tans, 2023; Mbeo, 2023). This is because writing is seen not only as an individual process but also a social process. In that sense, there are many kinds of writing genres that exist in our society that our students have to master and produce. This is why they are also supposed to write any genres of writing that they may not be interested in because our society needs those writing genres as well.

To make sure that student writers can write certain genres well, this teaching approach suggests that writing teachers explain the genre they want their students to master first. After explaining it in great detail, the teachers then give an example of it so that their students can write and produce it themselves. So, when writing, teachers want their students to write, for example, short stories. They have to explain first what a short story is, its characteristics, and its elements (its generic structure). After that, they give an example of a published short story and ask them to write a short story of their own based on their understanding of what a short story is.

Unlike the process approach, this model/genre approach suggests that when their students are writing, writing teachers' role is of great importance. They have to be very active in intervening when their student writers write. This is to make sure that everything

their students write is well done, that is, any element of their writing is well written including its vocabulary, sentence structures, paragraph structures, organisation, and mechanics.

Like the process approach, the genre approach also views publication as a post-writing activity that student writers have to do. It is, therefore, common to see that writing classrooms taught within this approach have a lot of publications of their students' writings online or offline, or even in their school magazines or on walls.

Contextual approach (Tans, 1999; Mbeo, 2023) is basically a combination of both process and genre approaches. The basic idea of this approach is that writing tuition should be done based on teachers' analysis of their students' talents, interests, and learning needs. This is to say that when student writers, for example, want to write short stories because they think they are good at or talented in it, they are interested in it, and that they really need it for their future lives as literary writers/short story writers, teachers should allow them to do just that. For other students who do not want to write short stories because they think they have no talent to write them or because they are not interested in writing them, they should be allowed to write other kinds of writing. In other words, student writers who have problems joining a writing class within the process approach perspective, i.e. writing without a teacher's intervention, should be taught using the genre approach perspective, i.e. writing with considerable teacher intervention regarding certain genres or models of writing to be written by the student writer, or vice versa.

Along the process of writing or rewriting, including pre-writing and post-writing activities, when the students have problems in writing, teachers should help their students

overcome their writing problems whether they need such help or not. Such help can then be provided through writing conferences, individually or collectively/classically done, some practices which are also done in writing classrooms within the process approach perspective, particularly for the final stages of writing activities, that is, publishing.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion,

it is necessary to restate here five major writing teaching approaches that have been used so far regarding the teaching and learning of writing in L-1, in L-2, and/or in both contexts, namely, the teaching of writing: 1) for the mastery of non-writing language skills, that is, speaking, listening, and reading as well as other aspects of a language like vocabulary, grammar, and its mechanics; 2. that really focuses on the improvement of student writers' writing competence; 3. as an individual process; 4. as a social phenomenon with certain written models to be mastered; and, 5. that takes into account student writers' writing talents, interest, and needs.

It is strongly recommended that writing teachers adopt what is called a contextual approach because it really takes into account students' potentials, interests, and learning needs as writers. This is also in line with Prabhu (1990) who says that there is no single method in teaching writing that is best for everyone. What is supposed to be the best is that teachers of writing always teach their students by focusing on what it is that they really need on their journey to becoming great writers, that, in turn, can make their life better, wherever and whenever they live, through their published ideas that, in turn, could change their readers' lives for the better from generation to generation.

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