Approaches to Teaching Second Language Writing

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Abstract

This paper provides a general overview of two major approaches to teaching and researching ESL/EFL writing: the product-oriented and process-oriented approaches. The former focuses on the text, the final output of the writing process, and on the superficial elements of language: grammar and mechanics. In contrast, the latter approach, which is based on cognitive psychology theories, concentrates on the process itself, that is, how a writer can explore and generate ideas, so that content and discourse in a piece of writing are the major concerns. Included in this paper are discussions about salient components related to each approach, followed by additional comments and the final recommendations in which the integration of both orientations is suggested.

Introduction

"One of the most controversial aspects of writing pedagogy has been the tension between process and product approaches to the teaching of writing" (Nunan, 1999, p. 272).

Beginning as a subfield of second language studies during the 1960's, ESL/EFL writing has become increasingly interesting to ESL/EFL teachers and researchers. In Asian countries including Thailand, as well as European and other western countries, English

writing and its instruction have been among the main concerns of both teachers and non-native students as the need for English in written communication has grown significantly over the past decade. Demand in the language use has been arising from students furthering their education in English-speaking countries, students joining international schools or universities in their own countries, and graduates working for organisations that require them to use English in writing.

There are a number of approaches to teaching ESL/EFL writing that have been known to many teachers and researchers of English writing. Among those approaches are two major ones that have been applied in classrooms and extensively researched: the product and process approaches. Product-oriented approaches focus on the final product, the coherent, error free text. These approaches focus on grammatical correctness on the sentence level. On the other hand, process-oriented approaches, as the title indicates, see writing as a cognitive process (e.g. Emig, 1971; Flower and Hayes, 1981; Labov, 1970) focusing on the steps involving prewriting, drafting and redrafting a piece of work. Studies on these two major approaches to teaching and researching second/foreign language writing play a vital role in the understanding of how students' writing competency can be improved and assessed.

1. Product-oriented Approach

Proponents of product-oriented approaches to writing regard writing as textual products or autonomous objects. Texts can function acontextually and ideas in texts are believed to be transferable mainly through language. Meanings are encoded by the writer and can be decoded by a skilled reader. No ambiguities should exist in interpretations because all writers and readers strictly conform to homogeneous practices (Hyland, 2002a).

1.1 Writing as Sentence-level Structure

In this approach, a reader's role is primarily that of a teacher, an examiner, an editor, or a proofreader. The reader's main interest is not in the quality of ideas or expressions, but in the correct use of formal

linguistic features (Kroll, 1997). The criteria of good writing often include presentations of facts and vivid exposition. From this perspective of writing, learners are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of form in their texts, which are created through their awareness of the system of rules. Writing instruction is then focused on training in grammatical accuracy. Writing is viewed as an instrument for teaching grammar and a general knowledge of language. Foreign or second language writing "mainly involves linguistic knowledge and the vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns, and cohesive devices that comprise the essential building blocks of texts" (Hyland, 2003). The main teaching method used by this approach was controlled composition, the philosophy of which "grew directly out of the audio-lingual method: students are taught incrementally, error is prevented, and fluency is expected to arise out of practice with structures" (Reid, 1993, p. 24). This type of composition needed no particular context and focused on sentence-level structure. Exercises mainly consisted of copying, combining, substitution exercises that were designed to facilitate the learning of sentence structures by providing students with "no freedom to make mistakes" (Pincas, 1982, p. 91).

Hyland (2003) indicates that a four-stage process that shows a focus on language structure as a basis for the teaching of writing includes:

1. ***Familiarization:*** Learners are taught certain grammar and vocabulary, usually through a text.
2. ***Controlled writing:*** Learners manipulate fixed patterns, often from substitution tables.
3. ***Guided writing:*** Learners imitate model texts.
4. ***Free writing:*** Learners use the patterns they have developed to write an essay, letter, and so forth.

In addition, in this perspective correction is the major type of response the teacher provides for a piece of writing. Teachers normally view student writers' texts as final products to mark or grade; therefore, students understand that "the major function of writing is to produce texts for teachers to evaluate, not to communicate meaningfully with another person" (Nunan, 1991, p. 88). Indirect assessments such as multiple choice or error identification tasks are also claimed to be reliable

measures of writing skill. This approach disregards the fact that communication, not absolute accuracy, is the purpose of writing.

Hyland (2002a, 2003) maintains that syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy are not the main features contributing to writing development, nor are they the most effective measures of good writing. Many students who can produce grammatically and structurally accurate sentences are unable to craft appropriate written texts. Furthermore, fewer errors in student writing, although considered as evidence of progress, may indicate that the writer avoids taking risks and will not be able to reach beyond a current level of competence. Specifically, an exclusive emphasis on formal features of texts as a measure of writing ability is inadequate to enable the writer to effectively respond to particular communicative setting. Written tasks then cannot be autonomous because they take part in a particular situation and display that situation in their pages.

1.2 Writing as Discourse-level Structure

In the product-oriented approach, texts can also be regarded as discourse. Also labelled "current-traditional rhetoric" or "a functional approach", this approach sees functions as the means for achieving the end, or purpose, of writing. Certain communicative functions are performed by particular language forms, and "students can be taught the functions most relevant to their needs" (Hyland, 2003, p. 6).

One of the main aims of this approach is to enable students to create different types of paragraphs effectively through the production of sentences, supporting sentences, and transitions. Writing students practice free writing through reordering sentences in scrambled paragraphs, selecting appropriate sentences to complete paragraphs, and writing paragraphs from provided information. Students may also read and analyse a model and then create a piece of writing of their own applying the structural knowledge gained. At a more advanced level, students are asked to list and group facts relevant to a provided topic, devise topic and supporting sentences from these facts, formulate an outline, and craft their compositions based on the outline. Certain structural entities, e.g. Introduction-Body-Conclusion, are the major components of texts, and students are taught to write with particular organisational patterns or modes (normally narration, description, and exposition), "with exposition

typically seen as the most appropriate for use by university-level second language writers" (Silva, 1997, p. 14).

In this perspective, learning to write mainly involves sharpening skills in identifying, internalising, and executing prescribed patterns. Students mainly perform rearranging, completing, or writing tasks using the provided or self-generated content. However, unfamiliar patterns of expression used by the students often confuse the reader. Academic writing is the main focus of this approach, and teachers are viewed as the judges of student writing.

1.3 Linguistic Approaches to Written Language in a Discourse

Linguistic analyses play a crucial role in examining written language used in a discourse. Studies involving writing as discourse-level structure have sought to discover how writers use patterns of language options to construct coherent, purposeful texts. A major early contribution came from Prague School, whose focus was on functional sentence perspective, the ways in which clauses are structured to represent the writers' assumptions about what is known (given) or new to the reader. Halliday (1994) and other Systemic linguists expanded this concept of theme-rheme structure.

1.3.1 Theme and Rheme

In this type of text structure, described as the 'point of departure' (Halliday, 1994, p. 38), *theme,* or what the writer is talking about, and *rheme,* what he or she is saying about it, work harmoniously to form series of coherent ideas in a text (T. Bloor & M. Bloor, 1995). Clauses are organized by the writer in the way that thematic choices are related to ideas presented in the theme or rheme of an earlier clause. Writers put the theme first and this orients the reader to what is about to be communicated. The rheme, the rest of the clause, tells the reader something about the theme (McCarthy, 1991). In this way, the reader can use old information as a context to facilitate his or her understanding of the new information. A brief, simplified analysis of *theme* and *rheme* is shown in the following instances:

(1) The teenager went into the pub. She was astonished by the very small number
(a) (b) (a) (c)
of patrons in there.

(2) The teenager talked to her friends. They tried to persuade her to join their
(a) (b) (b) (c)
party.

In both (1) and (2), the first sentence is divided into two parts: theme (a) and rheme (b), either of which can be the context of old information for the second sentence. In instance (1), the thematic information in the second sentence (she) earlier occurs as the theme of the previous sentence (the teenager). In instance (2), the theme of the second sentence (they) is the rheme of the previous sentence (her friends).

The notion of theme and rheme reveals a close relationship between grammatical structure and discourse function. Students can be taught this notion so that they will be able to write more coherently. Then, with the principles involving discourse analysis, language can be taught through the presentations of variations in clause structure in relation to discourse functions (McCarthy, 1991, p. 59). Students gradually assimilate the structure of clauses in a foreign language as they learn its grammar. The study of different structural options for the creation of texts will, therefore, be of much use for language learners.

1.3.2 Clause Relations

Another group of researchers, particularly Hoey (1983), have studied the rhetorical functions of particular discourse units and tried to identify the functions of different parts of a text and how they fit into the entire text. Their main focus is on the relationships between clauses within written texts, without considering the purpose for which they were written (Tribble, 1996). Knowledge of how texts are structured internally is required. The text is organised with a set of typical textual patterns signalled by specific lexical markers (cohesive ties) or with the usual stages of development of different text types. In this Clause Relation perspective, patterns are labelled *problem-solution, hypothetical-real,* and *general-particular.* The researchers demonstrate that, even without explicit signposting, readers can easily draw the semantic

connections between clauses, sentences or groups of sentences through recognisable text patterns (Hyland, 2002a). For instance, in a general-particular text, the reader would expect to find the introductory part of the text more general and the following supporting parts more specific, so that the pattern is complete.

1.3.3 Systemic Functional Linguistics

Current theories of discourse analysis revolve around the notion that forms express functions and vary according to context. Emerging from this is the theory of language called *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (SFL), developed by Michael Halliday (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Its theoretical framework explains "the interrelationships between culture, society, and language use" (Coffin, 2001). His central concept related to this framework is *register*, which indicates the relationship between text and context. Halliday stresses the need to look into the context in which a text is produced while the text is analysed and/or interpreted. The major question he poses is "which kinds of situational factor determined which kinds of selection in the linguistic system?" (Halliday, 1978, p. 32). In addition, the concept suggests that there are major variables that determine how text meanings are interpreted (Martin 1997). It is "a useful abstraction linking variations of language to variations of social context," and "there are three aspects in any situation that have linguistic consequences: field, tenor, and mode" (Eggins, 1994, p. 52). *Field* refers to the type of social action, or what text is about. It is "what is happening to the nature of the social action that is taking place." *Tenor* refers to the role relationships, or who is involved in a particular situation. It is concerned with "the nature of the participants, their status and roles." Finally, *mode* is the symbolic organisation of the discourse, or what the language is doing. It involves "what it is that the participants are expecting language to do for them in that situation" (Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

Registers provide sets of texts with similar meanings, and some of them have predictable features that help us identify a close relationship between situational contexts and the texts they give rise to. Some types of documents such as legal contracts conform to more restricted conventions of lexis and grammar, while others like business letters

contain a wider range of meanings and forms. Register analysis of linguistic texts has helped us to uncover how language is manoeuvred to construct meaning, and therefore has received popular application in discourse analysis and language teaching pedagogy.

1.3.4 Genre

Emerging from this perspective is genre analysis, which focuses on socially recognised ways of using language. This concept has been developed into three broad approaches. *A Systemic Functional view* sees genre as "the system of staged, goal-oriented social processes through which social subjects in a given culture live their lives" (Martin, 1997, p. 13). In *An 'ESP' perspective,* which was developed by a group focusing on constructing English for Specific Purposes written texts, sees genres as a set of structured communicative events connected by broad communicative purposes shared by the members of specific discourse communities (Swales, 1990). Finally, the *'New Rhetoric' group* views genres as typical rhetorical actions that are accomplished by the forms of discourse and as responses to recurring situations or contexts (Coffin, 2001; Freadman & Medway, 1994).

Genre, or context of culture, can be understood as "the general framework that gives purpose to interactions of particular types, adaptable to the many specific contexts of situation that they get used in" (Eggins, 1994, p. 32). Texts, therefore, derive their meanings not only "from the meaning contained within the discourse," but also "from the meanings of genre, or the meanings about the conventionalised social occasions from which texts arise" (Leckie-Tarry, 1993, p. 33). "Texts belonging to the same genre can vary in their structure," while "the one aspect in which they cannot vary without consequence to their genre allocation is the obligatory elements and dispositions of the GSP [genre specific potential]" (Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

Genres are useful in our daily life because they provide us with resources that help us respond to various situations recurring situations appropriately. Such situations range from shopping lists to job applications, and they are elucidated by genre analysts for the teaching of writing. Genre has typical patterns of rhetoric and organization, and it determines the style of the language to be used (Harmer, 2001). Therefore, genre-based teaching can enhance learners' awareness and understanding of the

conventions of writing so that they could craft well-formed texts that are appropriate to readers. To achieve this goal, writing students should learn to use appropriate linguistic features both within and beyond the sentence, and teachers should provide students with an explicit grammar (Hyland, 2002b). Genre-based grammar focuses on how an entire text is structured and organised in relation to its purpose, audience, and message. It also emphasises the structure and organisation of all parts of the text, including paragraphs and sentences, so that an effective text can be produced for written communication (Knapp & Watkins, 1994). Martin (1989) proposes 'factual genres', which include *procedure* (how something is done), *description* (what something is like), *report* (what a class of things is like), and *explanation* (reason why a judgement is made). These genres are identified by the structure and repeated patterns of transitivity, reference, conjunction, etc., so that students writing expositions, for example, may be taught to use a *Thesis-Argument-Conclusion* structure (Rothery, 1989).

An example of school genre (exposition)

Thesis: A good teacher needs to be understanding to all children.

Argument: He or she must be fair and reasonable. The teacher must work at a sensible pace. The teacher also needs to speak with a clear voice so the children can understand.

Conclusion: That's what I think a good teacher should be like.

(Rothery, 1989)

However, genre pedagogy has such a text-intensive focus that students might see genres as a set of rules or 'a recipe theory of genre' (Freadman, 1994, p. 46). Consequently, genres can be taught as moulds into which meanings are poured, rather than as ways of making meanings (Hyland, 2002a, p. 22). The explicit teaching of genres may restrict students' creativity through conformity and prescriptivism, and the dominance of genres could restrain students from shaping their own experiences (Dixon, 1987; Sawyer & Watson, 1987). Genre pedagogy

is based on the belief that explicit awareness of language, rather than experiment and exploration, plays a vital role in learning. Thus, students are usually excluded from social interaction when crafting texts. Obviously, a static, decontextualised pedagogy poses dangers as far as students seeking to develop their writing skills are concerned. Writing, therefore, should be situated in the audiences and contexts for which it is produced.

1.3.5 Limitations of the Product-oriented Approach

The product-oriented approach views the writing process as a linear one. In this orientation, writing is conceptualised as a sequential completion of separate tasks (Reid, 1982). This approach focuses on a composition which is made up of a series of parts-words, sentences, and paragraphs. Students are asked to complete a set of predetermined tasks or exercises, mainly putting or rearranging words into grammatical sentences. This is simply a grammar exercise in a controlled context, rather than an act of composing. This approach emphasises the students' ability to memorise and apply grammar rules. When required to craft a paragraph or a composition, the students simply follow a fixed organisational pattern or mode. They are asked to complete tasks that emphasise syntactic accuracy. Language proficiency is the major element that determines the writing competency, while the acts of discovering ideas and creating meaning do not receive attention.

Writing teachers who observe this view simply spot and correct grammatical and mechanical errors without providing appropriate response to student writing. Their major function is to reinforce a set of grammar rules, and their feedback, which is focused on grammatical errors, fails to help students explore and generate ideas in writing. Overlooked is reader-based discourse with target audience and purpose for writing.

1.3.6 Conclusion

The product approach to teaching ESL/EFL writing is inadequate considering students' writing skill development. Teachers should be aware of the drawbacks and limitations of this approach so that they would find a better alternative to teaching writing and familiarise themselves with the teaching method. Also, they should reconsider their role in the language classroom, being a facilitator rather than a judge or examiner.

As a consequence, they should not be excessively obsessed with students' grammatical and syntactic errors while responding to student writing. They should realise that the content and organisation of a text are of superior significance and learn how to teach and provide feedback in a way to help students create more meaningful and better organised paragraphs or essays. Writing teachers should also understand that writing does not merely involve producing a text for evaluation or grading. Rather, writing involves a process through which students need to brainstorm, generate ideas, negotiate meaning, organise details, and revise their drafts. Obviously, more communication and interaction between teachers and students during the writing process is essential. To achieve this goal, ESL/EFL teachers should be given the opportunity to receive training regarding process writing skills, and textbooks used in writing classes should meet the needs and objectives of process writing.

2. Process-oriented Approach

Another approach to teaching writing, known as the process approach, primarily focuses on the writer, rather than the text. This notion of writing regards writing as a process of discovering meaning and developing organisation (Matsuda, 2003). It involves what good writers should do when approaching writing tasks. Pedagogical methods have been formulated to help learners acquire effective writing skills.

2.1 Writing as Creative Expression

The Expressivist view of writing sees writing as a creative activity. In other words, writing is considered as an act of personal expression and discovery in which the process plays a role as important as that of the product. This view refutes the notion that writing is the demonstration of correct grammar and usage; therefore, it focuses on how writers develop their writing skill with the help of the teacher as a facilitator who provides writing students with encouragement and cooperation. According to this perspective, "writing is learned, not taught, so writing instruction is nondirective and personal" (Hyland, 2003). Free imagination, the major feature of good writing, is encouraged among apprentice

writers. However, with such notions, the definitions of good writing as proposed by this school are vague and are based on an asocial view of the writer. There are no thorough considerations about the cultural differences in the value of 'self-expression', the social consequences of writing, the distinctions in the writing processes of mature and novice writers, and the variations in personal inhibition (Hyland, 2002a). This view of writing, despite its limitations, has contributed to the growth of research studies involving a cognitive view of writing.

2.2 Writing as a Cognitive Process

Writing as a cognitive process is the perspective that focuses on the cognitive aspects of writing, and research in this view is principally based on the theories of cognitive psychology. This approach views writing as a non-linear, recursive process (Emig, 1983; Zamel, 1983). Advocates relied on "a research-based, audience-focused, context-based approach to the process of writing" (Reid, 1993). Nunan (1999) suggests the most vivid and pragmatic introductions to process writing by White and Arndt (1991), who "view writing as a complex, cognitive process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a considerable period of time." They suggest six recursive procedures involved in the production of a text (See Figure 1).

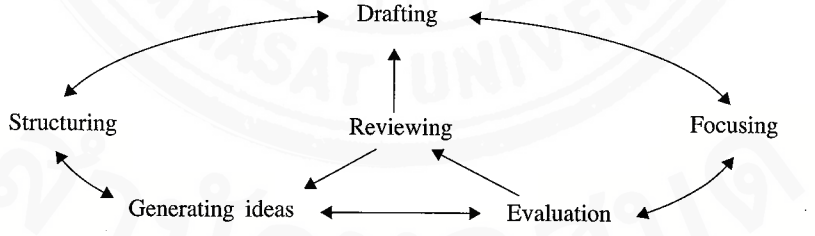

Figure 1 Procedures involved in producing a written text

From *Process Writing* (p. 4), by R. White and V. Arndt, 1991, Harlow, United Kingdom: Longman.

Flower and Hayes (1981) also state that composing involves a wide range of mental activities and seeks to explain individual differences in writing strategies. Immature writers and expert writers are supposed to employ different approaches to composing tasks. Apprentice writers use a reduced version of the composing model used by experts and can develop their writing proficiency or competence through instruction in expert strategies. The model of writing processes that involves the planning-writing-reviewing framework established by Flower and Hayes is "the most widely accepted by L2 writing teachers" (Hyland, 2003). As shown in Figure 2: planning, drafting, revising, and editing in the writing process are recursive and non-linear. Writers "discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (Zamel, 1983, p. 165). Teachers developed a new attitude towards giving response to student writing and discovered a new way of providing feedback. Further, teachers no longer act as examiners or editors, but rather as consultants, facilitators, or assistants. Students are provided with extensive help so that, during an act of composing, they can produce coherent, meaningful, and creative texts.

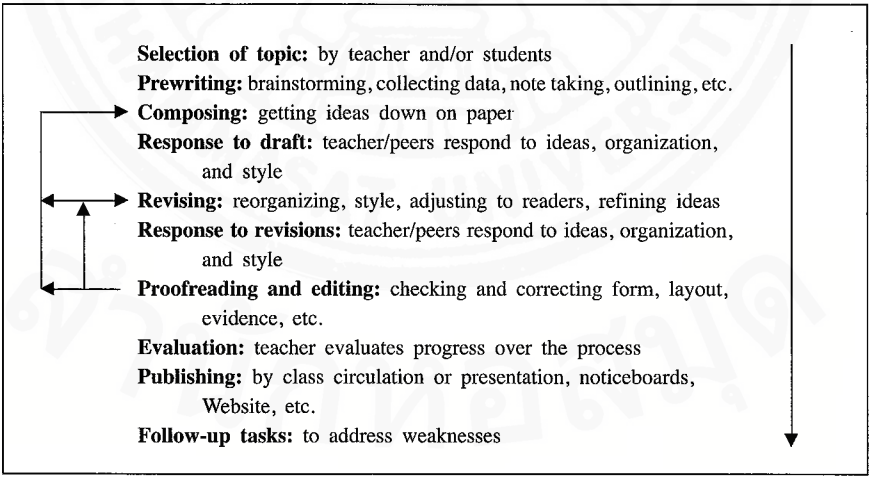

Figure 2 A process model of writing instruction

From *Second Language Writing* (p. 11), by K. Hyland, 2003, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Among other cognitive models, the most significant is Bereiter and Scardamalia's (Furneaux, 1998), which focuses on the developmental view of writing. The researchers suggest two important models: Less skilled writers are involved in a knowledge-telling model, whereas more skilled writers operate at the level associated with a knowledge-transforming model. The former model indicates that novice writers plan and revise less often than expert writers, and they mainly generate content from their internal resources (Hyland, 2002a), thus primarily producing a simple narrative. The latter suggests how skilled students can analyse problems and set goals when approaching a writing task. According to this model, expert students can "reflect on the complexities of the task and resolve problems of content, form, audience, style, organisation, and so on within a content space and a rhetorical space, so that there is continuous interaction between developing knowledge and text" (Hyland, 2002a). Nevertheless, these models are unable to clearly explain why student writers make certain choices and how or when they make a cognitive transition from one stage to another (Hyland, 2002a, 2003).

In the process approach, invention techniques are incorporated in the teaching of writing to help students "discover and engage a topic" (Myers, 1997, p. 1). These techniques, sometimes called "prewriting techniques" are conducive to the improvement of students' writing skills. Such techniques as freewriting, listing, wh-questions, clusters, and looping can help students formulate and organise initial thoughts so that writers can choose the ideas that interest them or that are worth developing (Leki, 2000, p. 20). After this stage is achieved, writing students can move on to the planning and composing process. It is during this stage that response to or feedback on student writing can be provided as an intervention, either from teachers or peers. Writing students can then revise their preliminary work to refine their ideas, adjusting content and organisation to the needs of their readers. Further feedback can be given to the resulting draft upon the completion of this phase. Subsequently, during the final stage, students proofread and edit their works, focusing their attention on grammatical and mechanical errors, layout, evidence, and so on.

A large number of process-based models used in second language writing and researching rely heavily on *think-aloud protocols*. These

models allow writers to conduct self-reports while crafting a writing task; in other words, writers "spoke their thoughts as they composed or planned their writing" (Reid, 1993, p. 8). The researchers tape-recorded the writers' composing-aloud thoughts and analysed them to discover what was going on in the mind of the writers (Brookes & Grundy, 1991). In a lot of research studies, the writing process of both experienced and inexperienced adult writers has been examined and it was found that "there are many kinds of writing processes and that composing is not necessarily linear" (Reid, 1993, p. 8). However, think-aloud protocols are criticised as inadequate to provide a clear picture of the complicated cognitive activities involved. Hayes and Flower (1983) point out that conscious reporting of unconscious processes would be extremely difficult. "Many cognitive processes are routine and internalised operations which are often completed without any conscious recognition and therefore not available to verbal description" (Hyland 2002a).

2.3 Providing Feedback to Student Writing

The emergence of the process-oriented approach calls for a totally different feedback system. It "emphasises a process of writing and rewriting where the text is not seen as self-contained but points forward to other texts the student will write" (Hyland, 2003, p. 177). Although providing feedback to student writing can be a tedious chore for teachers and feedback itself can be a bore or a threat on the students' part, appropriate response to students' texts can contribute significantly to the improvement of students' writing skills. Ferris (2003b) reports the findings of student survey research that are supported by various empirical evidence and longitudinal text analyses: "Students say that they value teacher feedback, that they pay attention to it, and that it helps them to improve their writing" (p. 30). The major types of feedback for student writing to be discussed here include *teacher written feedback, teacher-student conferencing, and peer feedback.*

2.3.1 Teacher Written Feedback

Because writing is considered as a complex developmental task and a recursive process, the process approach focuses more on how a text is crafted through the discovery of meaning than on the production of error-free sentences or paragraphs. In this approach, written feedback is

given to both content and form during all phases of writing, i.e. from the initial stage during which ideas are generated to the final stage where the entire discourse is revised. With this method, texts were improved considerably both in grammar and in content (Fathman & Whalley, 1990). Written comments on student writing may take various forms; however, those "that take the form of a paraphrase of the ideas expressed, praise, questions, or suggestions are more productive than an end comment like 'Only fair,' 'Good,' or 'Needs more work'."(Raimes, 1983, p. 143). In addition, like L1 students, ESL writing students should be given praise and told what to do to improve their work. Specific suggestions, step-by-step directions, and questions for alternative options should be provided so that students know how to revise their papers more effectively (Raimes, 1983). F. Hyland and K. Hyland (2001) stress the importance of praise as a mitigation strategy to soften criticisms and suggestions given to student papers. Hedging devices, question forms, and personal attribution are also effective feedback techniques to motivate student writers.

Hyland (2003) suggests the most common techniques of teacher written feedback: *commentary, rubrics, minimal marking, taped commentary, and electronic feedback. Commentary,* consisting of handwritten marginal or end comments on the student paper itself, can be perceived as response to student writing rather than its evaluation. While comments in the form of comprehensive end notes can summarise main points regarding the overall quality and general observations of the paper, those in the essay margins are "immediate and proximate" (p. 180) and therefore can help students understand the problematic areas precisely. However, commentary written in students' first language might as well be useful for non-achievers who would find explanations in English too complicated and too difficult to understand.

Rubrics, an alternative form of commentary, involves using cover sheets on which criteria for writing assessment are set out alongside with writing students' performances in relation to those criteria. While they may be inadequate in terms of the range of issues that can be addressed, they exhibit clear marking schemes and serve as a useful instrument for explicit grade assignments.

Minimal marking, a type of "in-text, form-based feedback," (Hyland, 2003, p. 181) involves teachers' indicating the location and type of error

on the student paper using a set of correction codes to help students identify their own mistakes and find out how to correct them. Although this feedback technique appears less intimidating than direct correction, it is usually difficult to categorise some errors, thereby making correction ambiguous and confusing for both teachers and students. Additionally, with respect to reducing long-term errors, describing the type of error has been found to be inferior to direct correction and simple underlining of errors, which can help students produce accurate revisions and are considered by students to be the fastest and easiest ways of error correction (Chandler, 2003).

Taped commentary, which can be used as an alternative to marginal comments, requires teachers to tape-record their remarks and write numbers of reference on different parts of the student paper so that students can listen to teachers' corresponding comments (Hyland, 1990). Although this type of feedback is time-saving and helps students who need listening practice and prefer aural learning styles, teachers who speak the same mother tongue as their students might feel uncomfortable with this method and may even waste more time preparing scripts before starting the voice recording.

Lastly, *electronic feedback,* which involves providing feedback through e-mail or through other computer-based or online functions, provides alternative means of written feedback with various types of tools available. These computer-based tools "offer teachers greater flexibility in their responding practices, but ultimately convenience is likely to be the deciding factor in which are used" (Hyland, 2003, p. 183). While they would be confined to a particular means of feedback when evaluating paper-based compositions, writing teachers can select or combine electronic functions as they provide written feedback through the use of computers.

In addition, teachers can find it less tiring to use online functions for giving feedback to student writing. With a number of software programs available, teachers can spend less time grading essays. On the students' part, they would find feedback from their teachers less intimidating and, on the contrary, more encouraging with electronic responses that they are more familiar with.

Nevertheless, teachers who are unfamiliar with or unskillful in utilising computers as instructional media would find this method

threatening and unreliable particularly when having to handle a large number of writing papers.

In the process approach, where students are required to produce multiple drafts, appropriate comments should be provided during the various stages of writing. Teacher response to a first draft will be to provide helpful comments on its progress and suggestions as to how it can be improved in subsequent drafts. For a final draft, comments regarding "what we liked, how we felt about the text, and what they might do next time if the students are going to write something different" should be provided (Harmer, 2001, p. 111). When asked to produce multiple drafts, "students claim to prefer comments on ideas and organisation in earlier drafts and on grammar in later drafts" (Hyland, 2003, p. 179). Ferris (2003a) suggests that feedback be delivered at intermediate stages of the writing process because students can improve their writing in subsequent revisions based on the teachers' feedback. Final draft feedback should consist of praise and summative suggestions for students to consider for their future assignments (Ferris, 2003a; Hyland, 2003).

2.3.2 Teacher-student Conferencing

Teacher-student conferencing involves discussing a paper with the student, in person. It can supplement one-way teacher written feedback by providing opportunities for students to clarify and negotiate the meaning of texts through dialogues with their teachers "to clear up matters that cannot be handled by written feedback alone" (Cohen, 1990). Even though this technique can be "extremely time-consuming" and impractical in some teaching situations, it is the only way to discover what was on the student's mind as he or she was writing (Raimes, 1983). A well-structured conference "calls for careful and detailed response by the teacher in order to help the student test and apply suggestions and comments before the final drafts and the graded evaluation" (Reid, 1993, p. 220). However, successful conferences require students who actively participate in the interaction, ask questions, clarify teachers' responses, and negotiate meaning (Hyland, 2003; Reid, 1993). This method can not only help students to improve their writing in subsequent drafts but also contribute to the development of writing skills to be applied in later assignments (Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997).

Yet this type of feedback has drawbacks that concern both teachers and students. On the part of teachers, oral conferences "consume considerable amounts of time and require good interaction skills" (Hyland, 2003, p. 193). On the students' part, problems involve a lack of experience and interactive skills, inadequate aural comprehension skill, and cultural inhibitions about asking or arguing with teachers who are normally perceived as authority figures (Ferris, 2003a; Hyland, 2003; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997). Other shortcomings involve teachers' monopolising conferences, low-achieving students' simply responding with "Yeah" or "Um-hmm" to avoid being more involved in the conferences, and teachers' simply helping students figure out their handwriting in written feedback (Cohen, 1990).

2.3.3 Peer Response

Developed from L1 process-oriented classes, peer response has become an alternative form of feedback provided for ESL student writing. This method of feedback involves students' receiving feedback from their peers regarding form or content in their writing. Peers, arranged as a group of readers, interact with writing students as an audience, or real-world readers, to gain more understanding their texts and share attitudes with writers concerning the topics and facts presented (Reid, 1993). Peer review, as suggested by various proponents of this feedback technique, has a number of benefits (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998):

1. Writing students can play active roles in their learning process.
2. Writing students can receive feedback from various sources and from authentic audience.
3. Writing students can understand readers' needs from their peers' comments and questions.
4. Reading students responding to peers' writing can develop critical skills necessary for the revision of their own writing.
5. Reading students providing response can perceive peers' strengths and weaknesses in writing, then gaining more confidence as student writers. (pp. 170-171)

Hyland (2003) maintains that peer response contributes to writing and learning as social processes that call for authentic social interaction. In addition, students who provide peer response can enhance their own critical and analytical skills useful for the revision of their own writing (Leki, 1990).

However, according to Ferris and Hedgcock (1998), based on various teachers' and researchers' concerns, peer response also has several drawbacks and limitations with regard to both writing students and those giving response:

1. Students feel uncomfortable with peer feedback due to their misunderstanding of the purposes of the technique.
2. Students from certain cultures, especially "collectivist" ones, can be unsatisfied with peer feedback activities because they are more interested in group development than individual success.
3. Students, as L2 learners and apprentice writers, are incapable of providing helpful feedback for their peers. (pp. 170-171)

Furthermore, because students are rhetorically inexperienced, they may only be able to provide feedback concerning sentence level issues, and not those addressing content and organisation (Hyland, 2003). Being untrained, they may also provide vague and unhelpful comments, or even critical and satirical ones (Leki, 1990).

Despite certain shortcomings, feedback plays a crucial role in developing writing skills in the process approach. Teachers should be able to select the feedback techniques that are most appropriate for their students and their learning situations. That is, feedback should be provided in order that students can improve content and organisation, as well as form, in their writing, particularly through multiple-draft revisions. This will, in turn, lead to students' long-term improvement as students gain self-confidence in writing and become experienced critics of their own works. With the teacher's role being active as a reader, not an authority, throughout the writing process, this student-centered, process-oriented approach manages to accommodate individual differences among students while enabling each novice writer to become actively involved in the process of creating a meaningful, purposeful, as well as grammatically acceptable, text.

2.4 Conclusion

The process approach focuses on how a text, or a product, is produced, with its major concern on content and organisation (discourse). It seeks to improve students' writing proficiency through changes in teacher's and the student's roles and attitudes. While the teacher should act as a supporter, writing students should act as independent writers. In this approach, collaboration between students and with teachers is necessary to develop writers' skills over several drafts (Furneaux, 1998). Providing response or feedback is one of the most crucial components of this approach. Language accuracy can also be enhanced in this approach, particularly during the revision and editing stages, when the students can consult dictionaries or a corpus of linguistic texts to improve grammatical patterns, collocations, and word choice.

However, researchers still lack a complete understanding of how learners approach a writing task or how they learn to write. This is because "process models are hampered by small-scale, often contradictory studies and the difficulties of getting inside writers' heads to report unconscious processing" (Hyland, 2003, p. 13). In addition, psychological factors may not be the only principal factors to be considered as far as the writing skill is concerned, either theoretically or pedagogically. An overemphasis on the cognitive processes may obscure the social and cultural aspects of writing, which should be incorporated into this orientation.

3. Recommendations

To enhance our EFL writing curriculum, both of the approaches should be merged and go hand in hand, although the product approach has still dominated our writing classroom. According to Arndt (1987), writing can be interpreted in several ways: it can be the product of composition (text) or the act of composing itself. Because these two approaches actually represent two different perspectives for looking at writing, neither can safely be said to be more effective as a means to strengthen students' writing competency. Rather, they should be carefully combined so that both the "finished product" and the "psychological and cognitive processes" can be developed.

As the two approaches cannot be divorced from each other, both paradigms can acquire new meanings and have a new role to play. The process approach can be regarded as "formative feedback" aimed at refining student's written work. The main purpose of this type of feedback would be to provide an opportunity for continuous interaction between the teacher and writing students. During the process, the teacher can adjust his or her instruction methods and/or materials to facilitate better learning. As a mentor, the teacher can establish a better relationship with his or her student while enhancing the students' progress and learning process.

Conversely, the product approach should be viewed as a way to provide "summative feedback" to students. Rather than overemphasise grammatical and mechanical accuracy in final products, the teacher should determine how much the students have achieved after a particular unit of instruction and should ensure that they have mastered the intended learning outcomes. In this way, the teacher would be able to assess the effectiveness of his or her instruction and revise his or her teaching strategies in subsequent lessons.

Both types of feedback are inseparable and complementary to each other. Obviously, these two major approaches, when adopted into the writing classroom as a collaborative effort, can become a unified pedagogical EFL writing approach, incorporating the advantages of both orientations into a new paradigm.

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