ՀԱՆՐԱԿՐԹԱԿԱՆ ՀԻՄՆԱԿԱՆ ԾՐԱԳՐԵՐ ԻՐԱԿԱՆԱՑՆՈՂ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՍՏԱՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ՝ ՀԵՐԹԱԿԱՆ ԱՏԵՍՏԱՎՈՐՄԱՆ ԵՆԹԱԿԱ ՈՒՍՈՒՑՉԻ ՎԵՐԱՊԱՏՐԱՍՏՄԱՆ ԾՐԱԳԻՐ

Փորձառության հետազոտություն

**Process based approach to writing- for- learning and writing- for- writing**

Lusine Tenkeryan

Ayb

Mentor: Lilit Petrosyan

ԵՐԵՎԱՆ, 2022

[*Speech is the representation of the mind, and writing is the representation of speech.*](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1388546)

[***Aristotle***](https://www.azquotes.com/author/524-Aristotle)

** Introduction**

Over the years of my EFL teaching experience, I have noticed that out of all the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) of teaching the language writing is the most challenging skill to develop among the students. When the learners lack the authentic environment in the process of learning a foreign language, they master the receptive skills (listening and reading) relatively easier than the productive ones (writing and speaking).

  Although the aforementioned segments of the language go under the same group, writing has its peculiarities and difficulties to teach. I believe the reason is that it is challenging to make it appealing to the students, especially young learners. When it comes to the age group of the learners, the need to differentiate the objectives of teaching writing emerges. Harmer (2007) states that “it is helpful to make a distinction between writing-for-learning and writing-for-writing. In the case of the former, writing is used as an aide-memoire or practice tool to help students practice and work with language they have been studying” (p.112). Implementing activities to engage students in writing-for-learning we put an accent on the language itself rather than the text (Harmer, 2007).

Thus, for this research I targeted two different grades: grade 6th for writing-for-learning and grade 10th for writing-for-writing respectively. According to Harmer (2007), writing-for-writing aims to develop the students’ skills as writers. The word “writer” sounds scary to many students, which becomes a reason for grimacing when they hear about writing essays. That’s where the teacher comes to facilitate the process and make the entire “journey” look less rough. That implies helping learners to generate ideas, making mind maps, connect the ideas coherently and ideally produce a nice piece of writing. Furthermore, it is essential to teach students a strategy called argument mapping (Stirling, 2009), in which case chances of becoming a proficient writer get higher.

**The aim of this action research is**

1. To understand the barrier of becoming a proficient writer
2. To study the correlation between the type of activity and lack of students’ engagement in the writing process.
3. To find the reason of not using the target language in the production stage
4. To observe the difficulties among high school students to produce arguments and elaborate on them.

 **The objectives of this action research are**

1. To compare the results of the students’ approach to writing
2. To analyze the information regarding the level of the engagement of the students in the writing process
3. To measure the use of vocabulary/ target language in the writing after applying certain methods
4. To illustrate the connection between speaking and writing in terms of rhetorical skills and raise awareness of their importance

**Literature Review**

I stumbled upon a very insightful article (Sánchez, L. F., & López, M. M. 2019). where the authors conducted several workshops to change the young learners’ approach to writing process. The aim was to implement strategies, such as generating ideas, drafting, revising, and editing, thus improving their written production in English. Their study involved planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Planning was done by small-group brainstorming. As a diagnostic stage student were given a pre-test to be checked on their writing performance. The following main problems were highlighted: lack of confidence, difficulties in content and organization, insufficient vocabulary. They implemented process-based writing approach, which puts a focus on the process of writing, guiding students to produce a text. In the first stage students brainstorm, plan, and organize the ideas. The next stage is writing, which is followed by revising it and getting feedback from the teachers/peers.

The process of the writing is the same for learners as well as professional writers (figure 1).

**Figure 1**. A model of the writing process figure Source (Sánchez, L. F., & López, M. M. (2019)



White and Arndt (1996, p. 43)

Harmer (2004) illustrated writing as a process in the form of a wheel (figure 2).

**Figure 2**. The writing process wheel Source:



Harmer (2004, p. 46)

Here is another writing wheel suggested by Serravallo (2017)



According to the after-test results presented by the researchers it is obvious that there was a significant improvement in the problematic areas diagnosed initially.

Harmer (2004) mentions that the key to success in teaching writing is helping students get engaged in writing process with enthusiasm. He comes with the tips to build the writing habit making learners comfortable with writing, since the hindrances might be different ranging from feeling awkward with spelling, word choice, sentence structure, generating ideas, to mention but a few. Choosing the right activities for the right age group is paramount. They should relate to the activities. By saying “engaging” tasks we should imply not only intellectually, but also emotionally. “When students are ‘switched on’ by engaging tasks there is a good chance that some of their doubts about writing will disappear.” (Harmer 2004, p.) For instance, if they are auditory learners, music might be an appealing way of involving them in the writing process. Among activities suggested by Harmer ‘collaborative writing’ is especially interesting to me. It can be very motivating in terms of generating ideas, sharing knowledge, and feeling less intimidated.

It is Harmer who gave me an idea to differentiate between **writing-for-learning** and **writing-for- writing**. Interestingly, I have chosen 6th graders to experiment with writing-for-learning because this type of writing helps them learn better. Writing as opposed to speaking provide students with time to think, revise what they have learned, and use the language accurately (Harmer, 2004). Thus, the more you do it the better thinker and communicator you become. It is an excellent method or a tool for language reinforcement.

Writing-for-writing is completely different. If students have come to this stage, it is a harbinger that they have a good command of the foreign language and they need to focus on different genres rather than grammar, lexical accuracy and range (Harmer, 2004). Essay writing might be a good illustration of this. Although practicing accuracy is important it is a by-product here. The focus here is on honing the rhetorical skills. This is where Stirling (2009) comes to help with his tips on argument mapping. Just like a map it guides you through speaking and writing and tells you what to say or write and in which order (Stirling, 2009). Since the western education is highly influenced by the ancient Greeks the rhetorical skills are of paramount importance. Stirling claims that speaking and writing skills in the scope of rhetoric are tightly linked. Thus, acquiring the former will facilitate the acquisition of the latter, basically using the same techniques.

**Method**

The method chosen for this study is Action Research. The target groups are 6th grade and 10th grade. I have carried out **process-based approach** to ‘writing for learning’ and ‘writing for writing’ (Harmer, 2004) to address the problems prevailing in the mentioned age groups, considering the level of language proficiency of each group.

**Participants**

I targeted grade 6 with 15 students (4 girls, 11 boys) to implement ‘writing for learning’ approach. It became my target group due to their being relatively homogeneous in terms of the level of English, ability to do teamwork and being open to new activities. Apart from that, it is the age where it is crucial to reinforce the use of the past simple in the production (writing/speaking), since the failure to do so remains a big obstacle to getting fluency, even if they gain a lot of vocabulary along the way. Most of the students had difficulty in terms of generating ideas for writing a story, sequencing the paragraphs, and using the target language appropriately. This made them feel awkward and reluctant to engage in the writing process.

The second target group is grade 10 with 14 students (9 girls,5 boys). As per my observation high school students struggle with giving arguments, which is basically the basis of writing critically and analytically. Most of the students in the target group had a problem with addressing this or that topic, seeing both sides of the issue, developing arguments, elaborating on the points, and structuring thoughts altogether.

**Action stage**

To collect data about the performance of 15 students in grade 6 I had the following criteria in mind: motivation to write, idea generation, the use of the target language, and the volume of writing (see figure 3). Demotivation is mostly triggered by lack of confidence and inability to give it a go. In case of the young learners (grade 6), it is the environment and the engaging way they do it that matters, not to mention their feelings for the topic. There are different ways of writing. Liz Hamp-Lyon and Ben Heasley (2006) state “they require all kinds of different situations in which to feel 'comfortable' when writing” (p.15). Generating ideas is the crucial stage of the writing process. Harmer (2007) claims that “music and pictures are excellent stimuli for both writing and speaking” (p.118).

Using this idea, I have created an activity based on music and drawing to foster students’ skills of generating creative ideas (see Appendix 5). The aim was to stimulate their emotions to relate to the topic they are going to write about. Step 1: Students form a group of four and get a piece of A4 paper each. They divide the paper into four parts. They draw one picture in each quarter of the paper based on the association with the music played in the classroom (see Appendix 2, lesson plan 2, 11.10.2022). This activity helps Students to generate ideas for telling a story and writing a paragraph in the final stage. Step 2: Students get together in their team and create a story using their pictures. They divide the story into four logical parts for each student to have his or her share to present to the entire class. I monitored their teamwork making sure they use the target language, in this case ‘past simple’. Step 3: They work individually and write a short paragraph based on the story they created with the team. Drafting and editing the piece of writing were in the spotlight. Most importantly, the writing piece was assessed by their peers and sent back to the writer to be edited. I implemented the same kind of activity with them on the topic “natural disasters”, where they had to produce the topic-related vocabulary (see Appendix 1, Lesson plan 1,28.09.2022).

The process-based approach to writing for writing with 14 students in grade 10 was carried out in the form of a debate, since its target was to have better argumentative essay writers.” An argument that successfully persuades (opinion-based) or informs (fact-based) demonstrates coherence. Coherence means that the argument is clear and logical.” (Stirling,2009)

The reason I put an accent on practicing debates before starting to write is that they both fall under the same category of generating arguments, supporting them with details and coherence to persuade the opponent, and in case of writing – the reader. There is this interesting observation which reveals that debate arouses great excitement among students, whereas writing essay is not that appealing to many students. Here is what we did prior to writing a ‘for and against essay’ (see Appendix 3, Lesson plan 3) to boost motivation. First, we watched a short video about the topic and get an overall idea.Then the class was divided into three groups (randomly) to brainstorm; group one was to come up with advantages of “a gap year”, group two – disadvantages, group 3- both advantages and disadvantages (see Appendix 6).The regular debate process was on, which resulted in generation of arguments, counterarguments, supporting details. That is what they needed for the final stage: writing an essay. This activity was done twice leading to two pieces of writing (See Appendix 3, Lesson plan 3).

**Data collection method**

In grade 6 data was collected through the teacher’s observation in terms of students’ motivation to write, the ability to generate ideas and use the target language (see figure 3). After the PBA was applied the motivation among students raised by approximately 30%, idea generation by 40% and the use of the target language in the writing by 20%.

In case of grade 10 both the teacher’s observation and the questionnaire (<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=esVcPOuYpE-xaOPV8WIJjWardM9GpSlAoxjHchlrPT1UMlJPMjZPNU8yVDBFRVAzWFVOOE5JUVAyVCQlQCN0PWcu>) gave the approximate figure of the efficacy of the approach to writing for writing, particularly in the area of generating arguments, supporting them with details and coherence. Before the PBA approach I had 6 students out of 14, who were not performing well on the above-mentioned points. In comparison, the number of students was reduced by 4 after going through the applied writing process.

**Figure 3: Pre-action and post-action comparison**

**Conclusions**

The implementation of process-based approach to writing-for-learning and writing-for-writing in grade 6 and grade 10 showed some positive shift in students’ perception of the writing process, particularly overcoming the barrier of starting to write. This in its turn helped students become more conscious about the connection between a natural speech and a writing piece. Furthermore, having the content ready (a narrative and a set of arguments) through engaging activities all students were to do was to zoom in on the target language in the case of 6th graders and the coherence in the matter of grade 10th. Drafting and peer assessment did not appear to be as daunting and compulsory in this amiable environment.

There were limitations due to which I did not get a full picture of the possible outcome. The action intervention results would have been more accurate and reflective of the reality if I had had more time to implement the method consistently over the longer period of time and had done a few summative assessments. Classroom management was another problem holding me back from carrying out this approach in more than 2 classes in middle school to have more reliable results. In addition, the questionnaire content was limited and consisted of closed questions, which did not allow the 10th graders to deeply ponder over the impact the applied approach had on their performance.

Overall, this study showed that putting the focus on the process of writing by breaking it down into engaging stages can change students’ attitude to writing, ignite their motivation, which will set the basis for the development of writing skills

**References**

**Harmer, Jeremy.** (2004). How to Teach Writing. England: Pearson Education.

**Harmer, J.** (2007). How to Teach English. Harlow: Pearson Longman.

**Hamp-Lyons L, Heasley B** (2006) 'Study writing: a course in written English for academic purposes', 2nd edn,: Cambridge University Press.

**Sánchez, L. F., & López, M. M.** (2019) The Effect of the Process-Based Approach on the Writing Skills of Bilingual Elementary Students.

**Stirling, Bruce.** (2009). Speaking and Writing Strategies for TOEFL® iBT. Los Angeles, CA: Nova Press.