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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a summary of well established, conventional thinking on the importance of writing to the language learning process. Writing is a central element of language. Any reading and language arts program must consider the multidimensional nature of writing in instructional practices, assessment procedures, and language development. The understanding of writing fundamentals can be understood through examining the multidimensional nature of the writing process. This paper explores these issues and draws pedagogical implications for reading and language arts teachers while capitalizing on the benefits of writing as an indispensable skill in language arts programs. (Contains 16 references.) (KFT)

The Process and Product of Writing: Implications for Elementary School Teachers

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THE PROCESS AND PRODUCT OF WRITING: IMPLICATIONS FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

by

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Introduction

Writing is one of the most complex processes of all language arts. It takes time and effort to learn and teach writing. Most importantly, writing has many aspects and dimensions in terms of its process and product. Any reading and language arts program must consider the multidimensional nature of writing in instructional practices, assessment procedures, and language development.

Given its intricate relationship to other avenues of language especially reading, writing cannot be separated from other linguistic and meta-cognitive processes. Like reading, writing "is viewed as a tool of thinking and a vehicle for sorting out and clarifying thought" (Harste, 1989, p.29). Furthermore, writing functions are as varied as our needs and thought patterns: through writing we entertain and are entertained, instruct and are instructed, remind and are reminded, inform and are informed ... and persuade and are persuaded (Templeton, 1997; Block, 1997).

Apart from its relation to various aspects of language, writing is deeply rooted in our thought patterns that are reflected in various written modes and functions. This intricate link between reading, writing, and thought patterns has profound implications for reading and language arts programs in that it allows learners to evoke specific styles of thinking as they hypothesize, question, cite evidence, make assumptions, validate hypotheses, evaluate, and harness schemata (Block, 1997; Block & Mangieri, 1994; Norton, 1995; Graves, 1994).

Although writing is no longer seen as a separate subject in many current reading programs (Harste, 1989), research indicates that a major part of the illiteracy dilemma in today's society is attributed to the lack of adequate writing instruction given the way

language arts teachers look at writing as a basic skill necessary for the cognitive, social, and psychological growth of children (Smith, 1981, 1982; Kirby & Liner, 1981; Farris 1997). The theoretical foundations of writing have several implications for reading and language arts instruction, assessment and development. The understanding of the writing fundamentals can be understood through examining the multidimensional nature of the writing process.

This paper explores these issues and draws pedagogical implications for reading and language arts teachers while capitalizing on the benefits of writing as an indispensable skill in language arts programs.

Dimensions of Writing

Writing is one of the most complicated aspects of language. It encompasses an array of intervening elements, and requires the utilization of several language tools ranging form mechanics to organization. However, writing primarily revolves around two main aspects: *content* and *form*. On one hand, the locus of writing involves a given topic to be explored and tailored in an organized fashion; the writer must not only have an idea (to recreate meanings presented) about a given topic, but also must have a good sense on how to present it in an authentic and witty manner. Since the writing develops in many directions and "sometimes inconspicuously, sometimes in dramatic spurs" (Newman (1985, p.17), it requires other language tools and thinking skills to emerge and take a final shape. On the other hand, writing requires other structural aspects such as spelling, mechanics, proper diction, legibility and other form-related aspects. Unless a dynamic balance between content and form is achieved, the written product will lack suffer from a lack of natural appeal to the readers.

Since the perplexing nature of the writing process makes it the most difficult for children to learn and most exigent for teachers to teach (Farris, 1997), it is worthwhile to examine the stages of writing and their implications to language teachers.

The Cycle of Writing: A Multi-Trait Process

It has been assumed that writing is a cyclical rather than a linear process (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994; Farris, 1997). Reviewing previous research about the writing process and its profound impact on instruction, Block (1997) concludes that "writing should not be taught as such a linear process and rigid series of stages, but a recursive or fluid experience that allows children to move in and out of these stages in interactive ways" (p.248). The cycle of writing is multifaceted: it consists of the following stages:

Prewriting: This stage students engage themselves in a brainstorming process that requires collecting thoughts and ideas, activating the schemata about a given topic, and envisioning the expectations of their audience. This may be the most difficult stage because the writer must focus the topic to be manageable. At this stage, students tend to reflect and negotiate meanings through various connections among ideas generated. Many thought processes surface through prewriting. Students tend to classify, compare, contrast, analyze, and evaluate emergent themes; they also think-aloud and map out their ideas. There are many strategies that can be useful at this stage:

1. using cognitive maps and semantic webs
2. using outlines and blueprints
3. discussing the topic over with peers
4. reading extensively about the topic
5. connecting ideas to the real world
6. researching and collecting information

Writing: This stage involves composing the text as students freely put down ideas without much attention to form. The major task of the writer is to convey the content and meanings that emerged from the first stage. Such aspects of form as mechanics, spelling, and the like take a second priority. Having a clearer purpose and persona, the writer tends to account for the expectations of their audience.

Having a distinct purpose and target audience in mind, the writer transforms the thoughts and themes into sentences and paragraphs. The body of the written piece begins to take shape as the writer looks into the issues of coherence, relevance, organization, and other related aspects. There are several strategies that can be useful at this stage:

1. using more detailed outlines and blueprints

2. using paraphrasing techniques
3. using sentence transformation techniques
4. varying word choices and sentence patterns
5. using transitions and connectors
6. reflecting, rehearsing and reading aloud

Rewriting: This stage, the most important of all, involves evaluating and editing to achieve a balance between content and form. In other words, at this stage, the student tries to *dress up* the written product. Since the inner world of the writer is revealed at this stage, s/he must assume the role of a reader; i.e. the writer becomes a critic of his own writing. The writer may question the piece and critically reflect on all aspects of content and form for the sake of improvement and attaining authenticity. The following guidelines may help the revising process:

Introducing the topic

Writer motivates and interests the reader
Writer presents relevant background information
Writer concisely limits the topic
Writer has precise and clear opinion

Controlling content

Writer provides complete sufficient details and explanations
Writer connects ideas coherently and in unified a unified manner
Writer presents convincing and sufficient support
Writer achieves balance in length and scope; depth and breadth
Writer follows appropriate mode of writing development
Writer follows a clear line of reasoning
Writer organizes ideas appropriately

Controlling the form

Writer uses appropriate sentence structure in a grammatical manner
Writer maintains consistent length and variety in sentence patterns
Writer avoids unnecessary shifts in person, number, thought, etc.
Writer uses appropriate diction that is consistent with purpose and audience
Writer controls conventions and mechanics such as punctuation, spelling, etc.

Writer writes legibly and clearly in standard form

Writer makes a creative use of figures of speech, metaphors, analogies, etc.

Publishing: The final stage of the writing process involves sharing the completed product with the intended audience. There are many ways in which authors share their published product such as reading the piece to the whole class, class books, class newspaper, bulletin board, author's chair, and the like.

There are several strategies that can promote students' awareness about the writing process and its relation to learning. Since the writing process is an act of discovery, students can substantiate meanings through:

1. question/answer discussions on the final product
2. peer evaluation and constructive feedback
3. follow-up writing activities for more investigation
4. describing the writing process in terms of the finished product
5. promoting metalinguistic awareness through writing
6. promoting metacognitive and critical thinking skills

It is worth noting that there are many traits of writing that have direct implications to writing and reading instruction and assessment. Some of these characteristics involve the student's role, while others involve their language choices and stylistic requirements. As children start learning to read, they acquire new understandings about reading and writing as communicative events and develop an appreciation of how reading and writing tasks intersect (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1996). In fact, research demonstrates that students who become expert writers ascertain more reciprocity, evoke more questions, recapitulate processes more precisely, and discern language and rhetorical patterns more consistently than less-proficient writers (Block, 1997; Block & Mangieri, 1995; Graves, 1994; Kinneavey, 1991). That is to say, there is a positive correlation between reading proficiency and writing proficiency. This could be attributed to the fact that readers are usually exposed to various aspects of the writing process and vice versa, which allows them to develop these skills simultaneously.

In any event, the tenets of the writing cycle can provide a basis for assessing writing and reading skills. As far as reading is concerned, students must be cognizant of the linguistic and thematic cues in the written text; they must also decipher the organizational

structure and stylistic format of the text as they interact with its meanings. At the same time, they must be able to write in accordance with the basic principles of effective writing. The following table provides some of the criteria guidelines for not only assessing the progress of writing, but also serves as a check list that may guide readers to promote reading/writing fluency as they interact with meanings presented in the text.

This has implications for today's schools and language arts programs. It helps us outline the traits of writing and understand the role of writers.

Table 1: Criteria Checklist for Reading/Writing Proficiency

Topic	Writer	Language	Style
social utility	assumes a role (persona)	sentence fluency	ensures accuracy
intellectually stimulating	has a clear purpose	grammatical correctness	achieves coherence
real life connection	takes a clear stance	sentence patterns	achieves unity
interesting and current	has good sense	figures of speech	ensures organization
	knows intended audience	proper mechanics	avoids plagiarism
	appeals logically	punctuation	credits resources
	appeals emotionally	effective diction	cites evidence
	appeals ethically	legibility	accurate quotes
	avoids propaganda techniques	correct spelling	
	avoids fallacies	adequate transitions	
	shows creativity	consistent voice	
	uses adequate modes	appropriate shifts	

Implications

The understanding of various dimensions of the writing process has useful implications for reading and language arts teachers. There several assumptions that underlie the discussion of writing instruction in terms of the multidimensionality of learning and teaching to write. These are:

1. Writing is both process and product
2. Writing is an act of discovery
3. Writing is an ethical process

4. Writing is deeply-rooted in thought patterns

5. Writing is linked to reading and vice versa

6. Writing is a social-psychological activity

7. Writing evolves through writing, writing, writing, writing ...

As a major part of language use, writing--as a natural act--not only "offers children ways to develop social awareness" (Farris, 1997, p. 214), but also affords them opportunities for meta-linguistic and metacognitive growth and development. When students write, they interact with the societal codes, values, and attitudes inherent in their civic ethic as writers and in the expectations of the reading audience (Stotsky, 1991). In fact, when writing, students set a scale of hierarchy before the final draft is reached, which involves critical thinking skills, social skills, and linguistic competencies. For instance, a student at the prewriting stage, busily engaged with generating ideas on a given socially-relevant topic, tends not to pay special attention to aspects of grammar, punctuation etc., but at a later stage this becomes a high priority. Likewise, a student must carefully examine the purpose for writing, the persona (role) of the writer, and the audience for whom writing is intended.

It seems that Maslow's hierarchy comes into play when one writes. In Maslow's terms, physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem are prerequisites for self-actualization. This theory suggests that we tend to fill basic needs (e.g. food and shelter) before we try to fill higher level needs (e.g. buying a car or a house). Similarly, before students approach the *peak of text-actualization*, they should have accounted for basic linguistic needs (e.g. grammar, mechanics, etc.), sociolinguistic contexts (e.g. style), and psycholinguistic aspects (e.g. thought patterns, reader's expectations, etc.) of writing. In other words, effective writing requires conforming to the syntactic and semantic norms to embrace the realm of psychological expectations of readers; for instance, when considering the audience in writing, one needs to avoid stating the obvious, but address the diverse expectations of the readers in terms sociocultural context of language use.

This notion is also deeply rooted in the ancient Greek educational system in which language education was connected to civic education (Stotsky, 1991). Children in the early stages of their schooling were trained to develop effective writing and oral skills as part of their civic and moral upbringing. Leading educators, philosophers, and language

practitioners such as Aristotle and Plato spoke of the three main dimensions of rhetoric as they apply to writing. First, *logos* or word was seen as one major dimension to appeal to the audience logically, given the thought pattern inherent in the way language is perceived and transmitted. Second, *pathos* involves the emotional aspect of language use; recognizing the potential for some audience who are easily swayed by emotional appeal, pathos can be used effectively to engage the readers. Finally, the *ethos* of the writer are integral parts of the writing process as he/she appeals ethically to the audience; this requires the writer to have good sense, moral character, and good will. Although writing is an exigent psycho-sociolinguistic process, it is an intellectually rewarding activity since its emphasis in language education programs allows students to reach their optimal academic potential.

It has been assumed that language speaks us as much as we speak it, and writing writes us as much as we write it (Daiker & Morenberg, 1990). In particular, writing is not used in vacuum because no one writes for nobody; one writes for a target audience, with a specific purpose, and strategic appeal. Since the audience varies in their expectation, the writer needs to take different approaches and utilize language tools, rhetorical writing devices to successfully appeal to them at the logical, emotional and ethical levels.

Consequently, a typical language arts classroom engages children in daily intellectual and social disquisition about present-day issues using language skills and rhetorical devices. Children in contemporary classrooms need to find ample opportunity to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills through oral and written discourse.

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