Their Stories, Our Stories And My Story:
A Portfolio for Teaching Reading and Writing of Personal Narrative

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Abstract: The vast majority of EFL learners found reading and writing quite challenging learning activities to engage in. This has also been the case in our EFL class. As a result, many of them feel discouraged to read and to write. These barriers also led to poor achievement in these language skills. To deal with such an issue, EFL teachers need to design an enjoyable and meaningful reading and writing activities in their class. This article presents some ideas of how EFL teachers could integrate reading and writing activities regarding personal narrative.

Keywords: Reading, Writing, Story, Teaching Approaches

Introduction

Reading and writing are found to be the two most daunting skill for my students. The reason is probably because of the complexity, especially, in the writing process. Bell and Burnaby (1984, cited in Nunan, 2005, p.36) point out that "writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity requiring the writer to demonstrate control of number of variabes simulataneously". Its' complexety would be found overmhewlming and probabaly has discouraged the students to write. From our personal experience in teaching those subjects, we often hear my students say *"the text is too difficult to understand"*. In regard to writing, many of them also say, *"we want to write, but we just do not how and where to start".* Such students' honest confessions have challenged us to find the best way not only to encourage them to read and write, but also to help them get engaged with those activities voluntarily. We have always been expecting that one day they will love reading and enjoy writing.

Narrative text

One of the reading and writing activities which we personally find interesting is personal stories. In Indonesia language, there are a broad range of novels, legends, short stories and tales written for academic purposes and for pleasure. With regard to benefits of reading and such narrative texts, Pennebaker and Seagal (1999, p.1243) highlight that the formation of a narrative is critical and is an indicator of good mental and physical health. This study suggests that, especially, writing stories, diaries of personal experiences, and the other types of narrative texts would bring improvement to human life, in the form of enjoyment and satisfaction of self-expression and sharing life experiences. We found that many of my students enjoy reading such genre. Some of them have also written their personal stories in the form of diary writing. However, they have not done much with English. Therefore, the unit design will focus on reading and writing of personal stories, which can be fiction or non-fiction.

Texts Selection

There are a number of criteria in selecting the reading passages for the students' reading. As personal narrative texts are categorized literary text whose main purpose is to entertain the readers, therefore the main criteria is to see is its entertaining factor (Department of Education of Florida, 2000, p,3). Responding to such criteria, the text chosen for this teaching purpose is some interesting personal stories taken from website, for instance from *http://www.beyondblue.org.au/connect-with-others/personal-stories/real-life-stories.* The reason of choosing such texts is because the grammar and vocabulary contained in the stories are relevant to the students' language skills level.

Description of the Participants

Before further discussing the design, we will describe the students for whom this unit is especially designed. They are around 30 university students majoring in English language Education. Currently, they are at the second year and based on the university guideline (UNW Mataram, 2008) their current level of English is intermediate above. As previously mentioned, most of the students enjoy reading stories and some have started to write their own stories in Indonesian language. However, they are still struggling with reading and writing such genre in English. Also, at this semester, they are doing extensive reading and literature writing subjects which are obligatory for sophomore students in language education. Therefore, this unit is likely to be relevant to what they are studying.

Learning Outcomes and Indicators

In general, the learning outcomes to achieve within this course unit include: students will be able to utilize the skills of reading for the purpose to obtain information and learn life lessons from others' stories. The students are also expected to be able to utilize writing skills for the purposes of socializing, sharing values, entertaining, expressing feelings and opinions through written stories.

The indicators of achievement for reading skills include the ability of students to: a) summarize the story, b) identify implied lesson in the story, c) predict the theme, the author's life, the purpose, the relation between the author and the audiences, d) identify the key vocabulary and grammar, e) identify the grammar patterns, f) identify the structure of the story, and g) adding their ideas to the story.

However, the indicators of achievement for writing skills include the ability of students to: a) summarize/ paraphrase the story, b) co-create the stories with their peers, c) create their own personal stories, d) use appropriate vocabularies for writing story, e) use appropriative grammar, f) proofread their friends' stories, g) revise and edit their stories, h) add images, sound or videos to personalize their stories, i) publish the synopsis of their stories on the class Facebook page, j) publish their full stories on the class blog.

Teaching Approaches

Reading activities play a crucial part in students' language development. Hedgcok and Ferris (2009, p.210-216) reveal that reading can "improve comprehension skills, develop automaticy, build background knowledge, builds vocabulary and grammar knowledge, improves production skills (speaking and especially writing), and promotes students' confidence and motivation". Furthermore, from reading students can learn how people express their ideas and feeling in well-organized and interesting ways. Tantilo (2013, p.81) argues that to be able to write well, one has to read well because texts provide a good model of writing that a writer can follow or learn from. On the basis of Tantilo's concept, all the activities in this unit are started with reading before moving on to writing. However, other skills like listening and speaking will also be integrated.

Meaning-Focused Input and Language-Focused Learning

Furthermore, combination of meaning-focused input and language-focused learning will be considered in designing the students' writing tasks. Nation (2009, p.93) reveals that in meaning-focused input principle, learners will bring their personal experience and knowledge to their writing. Therefore, the topic of their writing will be based on their interest. Furthermore, Nation points out that concerning language–focused input, learners will learn about parts of writing process (p.94)

Process-Based Writing

Approaches to teaching and learning writing has changed significantly. White (1995, p.3) points out that the current approach to teaching writing empahizes on fluency rather than accuracy, although accuracy still remains an important concern. Therefore, in this unit design, the activities of teaching and learning will prioritize students' fluency in writing, which is well known as process-based writing. Miller (n.d) suggests that writing, under this approach, is a creative act requring time and feedback to be done. By applying this

approach, students will go through some steps in writing before they come to the the final product of their writing. The steps include prewriting, focusing ideas, first draft, revision, editing and publishing (Miller,n.d). Nation (2009, p.114) further suggests seven sub process of writing process: consideration of the goals of the writer, having a model of the readers, gathering ideas, organizing ideas, turning ideas into written text, reviewing what has been written and editing. All these steps are integrated in the three lesson plans of this unit.

Reading and Writing Sequences

The following are suggested procedures in the reading section will include:

1. Dividing students into group of three and tell them the goals of the lesson, as well as the activities to do during the lesson.
2. Distributing the story to each of them. In this case, teacher needs to provide more than one stories depending on the numbers of the group, for instance 5 different stories.
3. Silent reading. This is done on individual basis.
4. Discussing the implied lessons from the story. This activity will enable students to share their ideas.
5. Predicting theme, the author, purpose of the story, relation between author and the readers,
6. Identifying key vocabulary and grammar. This is done individually and then sharing finding activities will follow.
7. Identifying the structure of the story in group
8. Discussing ideas to add in the story in group
9. Retelling the whole class about the story or telling the implied lessons learnt in front of the class, represented by one student in each group

For writing activities, the procedures will include: 1) dividing the students into pairs and explaining lesson goals, objective and the procedures; 2) interviewing each other (questions will be about memorable experiences), which is done as an icebreaker; 3) writing the information gained from their friends; 4) sharing writing to check whether there are other things to add more in the stories; 5) writing the stories on computer; 6) start to write their own story; 7) sharing the story to their friends to get feedback on content (the feedback can be in the form of questions). In this activity one story will be peer reviewed by three or four different students. The preferered comment would be in questions for example, what happened after this? Can you tell more about this part?, etc. The purpose of asking questions is to help the story writers to think of more detail to add in their stories. The following activities would be 8) revising the story; 9) editing the grammar, spelling, and punctuation; 10) writing synopsis of the story, which will be done by other students; 11) posting the synopsis on class Facebook page, and 12) posting the whole story in class blog page.

Another activity for brainstroming, which becomes alternative for interviewing their friends, is by writing anything that comes in their mind when shown some photos or images in the classroom. Teacher can provide many pictures and show them to the students one by one. For each picture, one to two minutes should be allocated for students two see and write something about the images. This would be a challenging and interesting icebreaker.

The activities from number 3 to 9 are called their story activity because the main focus is reading about the other people's stories. However, in the writing activities starting from number 2 to 5 are called our story because students will focus their activities on creating their group stories. Furthermore, activities in number 6 to 12 are called my story.

Feedback on Students' Writing

. The purpose of giving feedback on student writing is "to support students' writing development and nurture their confidence as writers" (Peterson, 2010, p.1). In this unit, there are two sources of feedback that each students will get, from their peers and teacher. As with feedback from teachers, peer review or feedback has potential benefits. If teachers provide opportunities to enggage students in reviewing activity, these will improve their reading and writing skills and allow them to learn how to collaborate effectively (Washington University, 2013).

In this unit, the feedback will be given during the drafting process because it is more

effective to give feedback during the writing process than after the final product (Stanley, 2003; Peterson, 2010). Furthermore, Stanley also higlights that "positive comments can help build student confidence and create good feeling for the next writing class" (ibid). This implies that before giving feedback in spoken or written, students will be encouraged to give positive feedback to their peers' work.

Assessment

Nation (2009, p.75) suggests that it is important to assess students reading. One of the reasons is to ensure they read the texts. In this context students will be assessed by asking them to write a summary which include the implied lesson of a personal story on a webpage. They will also be asked to write a synopsis of one story of their friends. What will be assessed is how they retell the two stories interestingly. In regard to writing, what will be assessed are the writing process and the product, their personal stories. The aspects of the students' story to asses will include: focus/ organization, elaboration/support/style and, grammar, usage and mechanics (Glenco, n.d, p.14)

Reflection

It is expected that by the end of the unit students will be able to read and write a narrative text in the form of personal stories. To go beyond the improvement of reading writing skill, it is expected that students to feel encouraged to read and write their personal stories as well as to publish them on social media such as Facebook and Weblog. Furthermore, by giving the opportunities to review their friends' stories and to co-author a story, they can gain confidence and that would further stimulate them to engage more in developing their literacy skills individually or collaboratively. Hopefully, the experiences they have through this course unit will be an enjoyable and enriching learning language process.

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