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SOME IDEAS ABOUT TEACHING WRITING AS A PROCESS

The purpose of this paper is to provide some specific ways foreign language teachers can weave humanistic strategies into their already existing curricular materials for teaching writing.

Since teachers are given books to "cover", the most realistic approach to including humanistic concepts is not total abandonment of what teachers are expected to teach, but supplementing these materials where appropriate. The activities are intended to enhance the foreign language program by bringing out the best in students – the positive side. The activities attempt to trigger what students feel, think and know and blend it with what they are learning in the target language. They add variety to the class and hold appeal for all age levels.

A good deal of writing in the English language class is undertaken as an aid to learning, for example, to practising new structures and vocabulary or to helping students remember new items of functional language. In this context, the role of writing is slightly different from its role in other subjects; it enables students not only to see how they are progressing with their use of the target language but also to get feedback from the teacher as regards their level of language mastery. In addition, it allows teachers to monitor and diagnose problems. It is undeniable that teachers and teaching have a very important role in the process of learning a language. Nevertheless, good writing is more than developing the ability to choose words in order to express ideas, thoughts and feelings or make clear and correct sentences and connect them in order to produce paragraphs. Good writing is clear, vigorous, well organised, tightly focused and adapted to the audience. Writing as such is an active process, accomplished in steps and it should be approached as a task-oriented problem – solving process. I am interested in tasks that help students convey meaning in writing and produce whole pieces of communication, and in tasks that develop the ability to present information, ideas, or arguments to a particular reader or group of readers.

Classroom writing tasks should reflect the ultimate goal of enabling students to write whole texts which form connected, contextualized, and appropriate pieces of communication. A list of the"skills" that writers need could include:

- getting the grammar right
- having a range of vocabulary
- punctuating meaningfully
- using the conventions of layout correctly, e.g. in letters
- spelling accurately
- using a range of sentence structures
- linking ideas and information across sentences to develop a topic
- developing and organizing the content clearly and convincingly.

It is also possible to build up a checklist of the forms (letters, essays, reports) and the functions (narrative, description, comparison, and contrast) of written texts and to show students how the features of organization of these different written products differ from one

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other. Teachers and students can focus on one or on a number of the general skills, ideally within the context of a whole text.

Students need opportunities to practice various forms and functions in writing and within these to develop the different skills involved in producing written texts. Good writers appear to go through certain processes that lead to successful pieces of written work. They start off with an overall plan in their heads. They think about what they want to say and whom they are writing for. They then draft out sections of writing and as they work on them they are constantly reviewing, revising, and editing their work. In other words, good writers are people who have a sense of purpose, a sense of audience, and a sense of direction in their writing. Unskilled writers tend to be much less confident in their approach.

Classroom writing tasks need to be set up in ways that reflect the writing process in good writers. Students should be encouraged to go through a process of planning, organizing, composing, and revising.

The process of writing involves composing. It also involves communication. Most of the writing we do in real life is written with a reader in mind-a friend, a relative, a colleague, an institution, or a particular teacher. Knowing who the reader is provides the writer with a context without which it is difficult to know exactly what or how to write. In other words, the selection of appropriate content and style depends on a sense of audience. One of the teacher's tasks is to create contexts and provide audiences for writing. Sometimes it is possible to write for real audiences, for example, letter requesting information from an organization. Sometimes the teacher can create audiences by setting up "roles" in the classroom for tasks in which students write to each other.

Helping students with planning and drafting is only half of the teacher's task. The other half concerns response to writing, a response which is important for a number of reasons:

a) writing requires a lot of conscious effort from students, so they understandably expect feedback and can become discouraged if it is not forthcoming
b) learners monitor their writing to a much greater extent than they monitor their speech writing is a more conscious process. It is probably true, then, that writing is a truer indication of how a student is progressing in the language and it can therefore give the teacher an opportunity for assessment and diagnosis of problem areas
c) writing is much easier to revise than speech because it i permanent and therefore available. It is therefore possible for teachers to exploit writing for learning in several effective ways.

Responding positively to the strenghts in a student's writing is important in building up confidence in the writing process.

Unfortunately, in most cases, writing is mainly relegated to a homework activity. It is perhaps not surprising that writing often tends to be an out-of-class activity: many teachers feel that class time, often scarce, is best devoted to aural/oral work and homework to writing, which can than be done at the student's own pace. However, many students would benefit from classroom practice in writing for which the teacher can prepare tasks with carefully worked out stages of planning, drafting, and revision. If poorer writers feel some measure of success in the supportive learning environment of the classroom, they will begin to develop the confidence they need to write more at home and so start on the upward spiral of motivation and improvement. Students need time in the classroom for writing. The teacher's task is to select or design activities that support students through the process of producing a piece of writing.

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Communication, both oral and written, is based on the mastery of language skills and not on knowledge about language. That is why the teacher should continuously aim at developing the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are classified, according to the medium in which they are produced, into oral and written skills[1]. Expressing oneself in a foreign language and understanding the language are, however, perceived as two distinct abilities, though closely related to each other.

Writing, while natural talent helps, is primarily a learned art, with students being taught all the formal and technical aspects and relying primarily on their own creativity to create. Teaching writing skills can be difficult for any teacher, since the approach will be different for almost every student. Some will learn quickly, while others will need some encouragement and more attention to ensure they understand what they are being taught. There is a general learning arc that most students will go through, regardless of their age.

NOTE

[1] Fârnoagă, G., *English Language Achievement Testing* , Universitatea din Bucureşti, Bucureşti, 1985, p.46

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RÉSUMÉ

SUGGESTIONS SUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE L'EXPRESSION ECRITE

La civilisation de l'image a mis en arrière plan les formes de communication de la pensée traditionnelles, en reléguant la plus importante parmi elles, voire l'écriture, à un rôle subalterne. La préoccupation vis-à-vis d'un déclin irréversible de la capacité d'écrire et la conscience que « savoir dire » en formes divergées, savoir utiliser la langue italienne en formes originales et diverses qui constituent des éléments fondamentaux et indispensables de n'importe quel parcours formatif, ont induit chez les enseignants de lettres le besoin de projeter un laboratoire d'écriture, structuré pour des seuils de compétence, qui puissent, en quelque sorte, remédier aux carences linguistiques et préparer les jeunes étudiants à affronter la réalité complexe d'un monde soutenu par les lois de la communication.

Mots clés *: procès de communication, langage, écriture, vocabulaire.*

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