

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### Introduction

I embarked on this study with the hope of finding an effective technique that will help me get nearer to the goal of enabling my low proficiency level ESL students write compositions with minimum hesitancy and errors.

The situation in IBMM (Institut Bahasa Melayu Malaysia), a teacher-training college where I am currently teaching English Proficiency to student teachers majoring in Malay studies, warranted such a study. Students in my writing class at IBMM have very limited knowledge of and experience with the target language. To these students, writing in English was nothing more than an exercise in translation, from their native language into English, often with disastrous results.

Because of their low language proficiency, the ‘process approach’ to writing which was originally promoted with L1 students in mind, failed to help my L2 students in their composition writing. What my students needed was a repertory of useful expressions, sentence structures, and other writing elements in the EL. What they needed was a technique that would enable them to learn the principles of good writing inductively through skillfully prepared exercises. What they needed was a writing aid in the form of models used in a “reading → analyzing → writing” approach to writing.

This led me to the purpose of this study, that is, to investigate the extent to which the models approach could help my L2 students improve in their writing performance, and subsequently, meet their writing needs.

This concluding chapter will begin with a brief summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the pedagogical implications. Limitations to the study are also identified and finally recommendations for future research are presented.

### Summary of Findings

The data collected clearly show that the use of models has facilitated the overall writing performance of the four low proficiency ESL students.

On juxtaposing the essays with the models, it was clear that a transfer of the positive features of the models to the students' own writing had indeed taken place. All four students registered an increase in marks between the Initial Writing Score and the Final Writing Score, particularly in three of five writing components, namely Content Development, Text Organization and Language Use. This is a clear indication that the models have helped to improve the writing performance of the four low proficiency ESL students in the study. This finding agrees with Gorrell's (1987) claim that many teachers using imitation of models in their classrooms have found it to be effective in teaching form and sense of language.

It is clear that the students in this study have gained considerably from their interaction with the models given to them. All four writers produced longer essays in their Final Writing tasks as compared to their Initial Writing tasks. This finding concurs with Gary's (1983:185) observation that "students applying the now-familiar structures write longer, extended sequences". The modeling technique seemed to have provided students with the motivation for continued writing, and according to Paulston (1972:38), motivation is a major consideration in language learning.

Better text organization was apparent in the Final Writing scripts as compared to the Initial Writing scripts, with the clear presence of the topic sentence, the supporting sentences that elaborate on the topic sentence and the concluding statements. The writer introduced and developed each idea in logical sequence with relevant illustrations and examples. In addition, transition expressions were effectively used in the Final Writing samples to help blend the sentences together cohesively. The absence of all these features in the Initial Writing texts clearly showed that the subjects had "learned" from their models.

According to Taylor (1976:309), the ability to write clear, concise, logical, and convincing paragraphs or essays involves more than just the ability to write grammatical sentences. It requires knowledge of the rhetorical rules of the language such as knowledge of topic sentences, supporting sentences which elaborate on the topic sentence, and concluding statements. It requires the skill of weaving these sentences together into a unified whole, which incidentally involves more than just being reasonably proficient in the language. According to Gorrell (1987:54), writing from models offers a way for unskilled writers to learn form and structure, shape their sentences, develop their paragraphs and perform other tasks on composition skills. The models in this study had served to do just that. Findings showed that it had taken the writers "beyond the sentence level and provided exposure to the structural patterns and conventions of the target language" (Watson, 1982:6). Williams' (1979:37) observation that fewer flaws in organization are found among imitators of models concurs with the findings of this study.

Content development registered an increase in marks between the Initial and Final Writing samples for all four students, indicating the positive influence of the models on the development of content. The writers were able to extend their points substantially and through relevant examples and illustrations. These findings lend support to Gorrell's (1987:55) claim that attention to form is part of the process of generating and expressing ideas, of informing and aiding writing at all stages. Rather than impair creativity, attention to form encourages creativity in thought generation and in extension to new forms.

In addition, the writers' successful attempts in transferring language patterns learned from the models to their own writing, resulted in an improvement in the Language Use component (see Table 3, p. 36). Paulston and Cramer & Cramer (1972) established that patterned writing which gives students plenty of practice in writing correct forms is more desirable than allowing them to continue practicing the incorrect forms, thus protecting them from a hit-and-miss activity forming multiple errors. They further maintained that by attending to form, writers benefit by receiving direct, concrete exposure to writing models with discernible language patterns and constructions. Master (1997:20) contended that models do not only provide exposure to conventions of the language, but also to lexical items and structural patterns, as well as demonstrate many modes of rhetorical organization, communicative purpose and anticipated audience.

The introduction of models did not seem to have any discernible impact on the Vocabulary component, which continued to remain adequate throughout both the initial and final writing scripts. Students were found to be trying out, in both their essays, new vocabulary items, which were gleaned directly from other related texts which the students

read prior to their writing. As the writers' performance in the Vocabulary section in both the initial and final essays was equally commendable, this was credited to the readings undertaken at the pre-writing stage rather than to the influence of the models.

Errors of punctuation were only intermittent in both the initial and final writing texts, and not serious or frequent enough to interfere with the writer's attempts to communicate. However, Gorrell (1987) contended that the use of models would have been able to address, and subsequently arrest, the problem of punctuation if it so arises. According to him, students learn the conventions of punctuation, such as the use of semicolons in compound sentences, not by the usual method of correcting errors but by composing sentences from models that utilize those structures.

A problem that arose from the study is that the resultant student products, although having fewer errors, tended to be "artificial". All four Final Writing texts, written after the writers' exposure to the models, were almost carbon copies of each other, particularly in text organization and language use, so carefully prescribed by the models. This was the result of the tendency to treat the models as a source of patterns to be reproduced or manipulated. Creativity thus suffered at the expense of language accuracy. Although three of the four students welcomed the tight control by the models as being helpful in providing support and reassurance in their writing, the fourth student voiced his discontent at having to follow the models so rigidly as he felt it repressed his personal style.

### Pedagogical Implications

The most obvious pedagogical implication of this study is that writing instructors who are interested in teaching writing, which is formally correct and appropriate, ought to use models in teaching prose forms. Findings from this study concur with Watson's (1982:6) claim that models provide powerful input and contribute significantly to students' own participation in the writing process by providing, both resource and support, stimulus and guidance, experience and reassurance.

The positive findings imply that the use of models and the analysis of them can aid students in developing their writing processes. Teachers should encourage students to explore models and compare them to their own products at various stages in their writing. Presenting the model is most useful when integrated into the sequence of activities within the writing lesson. Students should be encouraged to explore and analyze the models by actively working together. Thus when models are used within the writing process in this way, students can easily perceive their purpose and utility. The student writers thus control the total process, including recourse to the model, because their own writing has become the central concern of the lesson.

From the study, it is also found that students, especially those of low language proficiency, tend to imitate a model too rigidly, resulting in writing that was artificial and stilted, and lacking in personal style. Thus, it is suggested that teachers provide the models *after* the student has made an initial attempt to write, not before. Teachers should be reminded that models be treated as a resource rather than the ideal. "The model becomes not what he should do but only an example of what he could do" (Raimes, 1983:127). A model should be used as a basis of comparison to what a writer has already

generated. Courses should be developed in which models are used as problem-specific resources, that is, within the students' writing process, rather than outside it or initiating it. Students must be permitted to discover their own writing problems, then models can be very helpful, demonstrating solutions that others have found and that students can utilize for themselves.

The study also provides evidence that the reading experience is as critical a factor in developing writing ability as writing instruction itself. Hence, teachers should direct more attention towards improving the composing and comprehending processes. Teachers should engage students in a large amount of varied reading and writing in order to help them develop a sense of control over these processes and find a personal significance for becoming literate. Focusing on activities where reading and writing take place simultaneously will help students realize that one process supports the other and that development in reading and writing can only occur if they actively participate in reading and writing experiences which have significant and personal meaning for them.

### Limitations

The study is limited by the small sample size – a total of four students. Hence, the conclusions drawn from this study could only be viewed as tentative. Further research on a larger group of ESL learners at similar proficiency levels has to be carried out before conclusions can be generalized.

Also, only three models were used in the study. The findings therefore do not support the effects of using more than three models. Furthermore, investigation is

confined to only one type of expository text – the cause and effect text type. Hence, findings from this study should not be generalized to other genres.

The restricted time frame within which this study was carried out posed another form of limitation. One may wonder if similar findings could have been obtained if the time-lapse between the Initial and Final Writing tasks is sustained over a longer time frame.

The models used in this study were not real models from real texts written for real communicative purposes for real readers. Rather, they were contrived textbook paragraphs, written solely for the purpose of demonstrating form. The students thus impose the skeleton of this contrived form onto new content, as if they were "making gingerbread men all the same shape from a variety of ingredients besides gingerbread" (Raimes, 1987:38). Because they have been instructed to follow the model, they did not deviate far from it. They merely bowed to convention, followed the models, and wrote simply - and safely. As a result, the language, structures and rhetorical strategies, to which the students were exposed in the classroom, were largely controlled by the author of the models. Such tight control was perhaps helpful to the low proficiency students in that it provides maximum support and reassurance, as was indicated by the responses to the interview. However, the problem that arose was that the writing that resulted became artificial and stilted, and lacking in personal style. Also, the sheltered environment offered false reassurance to the students. Authentic models in the form of brochures, official forms, menus, notices, time-tables should be used to introduce students to the living language in as wide a variety of styles, formats, and genres as possible.



### Suggestions for Future Research

The study has been limited to an investigation of just four low proficiency ESL student-teachers majoring in Malay studies. A larger sample size made up of subjects from other disciplines and proficiency levels might render more conclusive results and give greater validity to the findings.

As this study only focuses on one type of genre – the cause and effect expository text – researchers can also investigate the use of models to teach composition writing of other genres such as descriptive, imaginative or argumentative. The models used should include a variety of those syntactic features, which are characteristic of mature prose and should represent a variety of writing: narrative, descriptive, analytical, critical, instructional, and reflective.

Since this study is limited to the investigation of the effects of models through the analysis of the written product, further research should consider other strategies, for example, those involving teacher variable and student variable, to determine how teaching of writing through the use of models can aid writing.