

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion.

Two lessons on two separate topics were conducted in a form four class. Each lesson used different teaching methods but the same approach, that is, “Process Writing Approach” in the teaching of ‘free/continuous essays’. The students were also given different topics in each lesson and the topics were:

1) Lesson 1 – “ A lot of our life is spent doing useless things. Is this true?”

In this lesson, even though ‘Process Writing Approach’ was used no instructions on the topic were given to the students. The teacher only talked about the steps involved in writing and stressed that they should follow the steps. All these were explained on the blackboard without showing them ‘how’ to do it.

2) Lesson 2 – “Uniforms are not necessary”.

This lesson was carried out using the ‘Process Writing’ approach. The teacher taught the students the steps involved in writing, starting from the brainstorming process, writing the outline, writing the first draft, revising, editing and writing the final draft. The teacher spent time in class to go through each step. The brainstorming process was done orally in class and ideas were written on the blackboard. Next, the teacher taught them how to write the outline and a sample was done on the blackboard for them to see. The students were given time (about 30 minutes) to write their outline and to hand in

the work to be seen by the teacher. In the next lesson, based on the outline and the feedback written by the teacher, students began to write their first draft. During this time, the teacher monitored the students in class and gave help to those needed help. The teacher also explained how they could use the outline to start writing their essays. Before that, they were told to organize the points into several paragraphs. They were given until the end of the second period to finish their work. By the end of that time, all the work was collected even if they did not manage to complete the whole essay. The reason for this was so that in the next lesson, the students would not be able to give excuses such as 'forgot to bring the work', 'lost the work' and so on as some of the students were known for giving these excuses.

The students' work were looked at and the errors were corrected especially those related to structural errors. In terms of content, comments were written where it was felt necessary such as 'good points/ideas', 'could have been elaborated further', 'give more examples' and so on. For structural errors, teacher used symbols such as 'sp.' for spelling, SVA for subject verb agreement, 'ss' for sentence structure or 'p' for punctuation. Other symbols used were underlining, ~, ^, //, =. For the piece of writing with numerous errors, the feedback given was 'please see me'. It was hoped that all these comments would help the students to revise and edit their final drafts and those who could not understand the comments would make an effort to seek clarification. In the next lesson, the students were given back their first drafts. They were told to take some time to read through the comments and to think of ways to correct their work. They should also exchange books with their friends to check each other's work. Those who did not finish the first drafts must finish that first and get the

draft checked by the teacher before they could proceed with the final draft. This was to ensure that everyone finished the next step in 'process writing' before he/she can move on to the next stage. Once they were happy and satisfied with their drafts, then they could start writing the final drafts. Some students only managed to finish their first drafts during that lesson while a few managed to finish the final drafts already. This time, those who did not finish the work were allowed to take the work home in order to complete it. They were given a dateline to hand in the work.

On the whole, it was found that 'Process Writing' helped students to write in the writing class. It also helped the teacher to get most of the students interested to do the work and to finish the work. It was felt that by doing 'Process Writing' in class, the students felt that they were not left entirely on their own to do the work but everyone went through each step together. Besides, the time spent going through each step and the time spent by the students in class made it easier for the teacher to see and monitor their work. This gave a chance to the teacher to help the weak students. The comments and errors corrected in the first drafts helped students to improve their final drafts. The end – products (final drafts) definitely showed improvement from the previous two lessons. The number of students who did the work also increased from the number in the previous lessons. In the last two lessons, only about half of the class handed in their final work and it was obvious that they did not bother to follow the steps explained in class. They felt that they did not have to follow the steps discussed, as no one would check their work. What counts to them were the final products that they handed in and the grades they received. The 'Process Writing' approach worked the best when students were given the chance to see what was involved in each step and given ample

time to do it. This method gave the students the opportunity to be a part of all the steps involved and exposes them to the process involved in writing.

Limitations of the Research/Study.

In carrying out this study, there were some limitations that should be taken into considerations that might have affected the results. These limitations should be overcome in future research. Among the limitations were only two topics were conducted. Also, the lessons conducted were not continuous – i.e. no continuity from one period (lesson) to the next. The choice of topic should be seriously considered for future research. AppleBee, in his article, “Problems in Process Approaches: Toward a Reconceptualization of Process Instruction”, pointed out that the processes vary depending on the nature of the task given, instructional context, personal history and knowledge of writer about the topic. The class environment was not conducive to learning because the students were in the science laboratory as theirs was a floating class. (There was no choice as all the form four science classes were floating classes). As a result, the seating arrangement was not very favourable.

Other limitations were:

- 1) The time the lessons were conducted also could have affected the results and affected the students’ concentration.

On every Monday, the two periods for English were right after assembly and assembly would normally stretched to the next period. Therefore, lesson time was

shortened and also on top of that, 10 students from the class are prefects. This means that, they would also come to class later than the others.

On Tuesdays, the lesson was the one period before recess but during the form three recess. Lessons could only be conducted for the first 15 minutes because the prefects would start to leave the class early to do their duties. Also, at this time, they would be in the form three classroom, so by the end of the form three recess, the form three students would come back to get their books to go to the science laboratory.

On Wednesdays, the last two periods of the day were for English. The surrounding would be very noisy as the laboratory is located on the ground floor and the afternoon session students would already be around.

- 2) Not all the five periods allocated for English per week could be used to teach 'writing' only. Teacher also needs to use one period per week for 'Class Readers Program' as well as to teach other skills or topics. Therefore, there would be a break in the flow of the lesson.
- 3) The teacher needs to take some time to go over students' work as there are 42 students in the class. Hence, the teacher could not manage to check or mark the work and be able to return them on the very next day. (Time constraint and the class size factors).
- 4) There were other interruptions such as classes being cancelled to make way for other activities to be carried out such as 'assembly' or 'science week' as many

things would be going on in the school which involved the students as well as the teachers.

- 5) Mixed abilities of students in the class. Some of the students are very good in English and some are very weak especially those from the Chinese Education background. The weak students cannot even write proper sentences and lack the vocabulary needed. As a result, the students had to progress at different levels, thus, making the good students bored when more time is spent on certain skills or more time spent at a certain stage of the process.
- 6) It is difficult for the teacher to be the 'facilitator' to a big group of students (42 students) as often not enough time is given to individual student who needed help in class.
- 7) Some students get restless very easily in class while waiting for the others to finish the work. Thus, these students would be making noise and distract the others in the class.

Implications and Suggestions.

Besides looking at the limitations, this study has brought to light some implications to the teaching of writing and to the English Language teachers. Among the implications and suggestions that could prove beneficial are:

- 1) The schools and policy makers should be made aware of the importance of 'writing skills' among students especially in the upper secondary as the SPM English Language 1119/1322 Paper emphasizes on the 'writing skills'. AppleBee in his article in the book written by Kroll,B, Second Language Writing,1993, also pointed out the existence of issues such as the conflict which centers around issues such as curriculum coverage, teaching of requisite skills and the importance of students' own thoughts and opinion in the educational process.
- 2) The Head of the English Language Department in the schools should incorporate the teaching of writing in the yearly plan or in the activities planned for the year. (Maybe in the scheme of work).
- 3) The students should be exposed to the techniques involved in 'Process Writing' because there might be students who would find this approach suitable for them.
- 4) Language teachers should be given proper training on the 'teaching of writing' before they teach so that they will be able to practise this in class with the students and not just explain it. It is important that they teach the 'how' and not just the 'why'.
- 5) Language teachers should also be trained to act as 'facilitators' in class and not only to be the 'judge' on students' writing. They should shift from the idea of looking for students' errors to giving positive comments on the content and ideas presented. According to AppleBee in his article on "Problems in Process Approaches", it is important that 'teachers first and primary response to students' writing would shift from evaluator of its quality or success to that of interested reader, seeking to understand and clarify what the writer has to say'. In other words, we need to shift

towards the strategies and procedures that students need to learn in order to carry out more sophisticated writing tasks.

- 6) The school administrators should also be made known that students are permitted to write drafts in their exercise books or on paper before they produce the final drafts. In fact, in a study done by AppleBee and colleagues on a 'National study of Writing in Secondary School in America, the results showed that students questioned on whether they could use pencil to write the drafts or whether they could write on a piece of paper.
- 7) Language teachers should not set any expectations on the topics given to students to write on. They should be more open – minded when reading students' work.
- 8) English Language Syllabus/Curriculum in the lower levels (primary and secondary) should place more emphasis on the 'writing skills' in order to prepare students later on in the upper secondary. This is because up to Form Three, students are only exposed to or required to write 'guided compositions' of about 100 words. Suddenly, when they come to Forms four and five, they are required to write a 'free/continuous essay' of between 350 – 500 words. Therefore, this is a big 'culture shock' especially for the weak students who could barely write correct simple sentences.
- 9) More teachers should be trained to mark 'free/continuous essays' as this training would expose them to what should be given emphasis on and what to look for in this kind of essays. At the moment, only those involved in marking the SPM papers are given proper training and this is supposed to be 'confidential'. Many teachers then are still in the dark as to how they should teach or how to mark this kind of

essays. This is important in order to overcome the issue of such essays being too 'subjective' to be judged. Once they know this, it will be easier for them to guide the students.

- 10) Students should be made known of the importance of writing skills in English or in any other languages especially for their future.
- 11) Language classes should not have big number of students in order for the skills to be taught and learned effectively. P.Bizzell in her article on 'Composing Process', (pg. 67) recommended that the class size be not larger than 20 students.
- 12) Language classes should not have mixed ability students so that they can progress at the same pace or at least there will be no big gap among them.
- 13) Teachers should use different approaches or a variety of approaches so that students can choose or adopt which one suits them the best as there is no one method that suits everyone.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, it can be said that the approach taken for the teaching of writing should depend on the set of students and their level of proficiency. In addition, the affective factors of the students should also be looked into as they are vital to the success of learning the language. The affective factors are such as motivation, liking for the language, interest and determination. Besides all these, we should also integrate the basic senses that are sight, smell, sound, touch and taste in stimulating the learning of the language in order to make it more exciting. The teacher should also try to be more resourceful in providing ideas, examples and experience to the learners. As discussed

earlier on the current Malaysian English Language Syllabus, writing is not solely the dominant skill to be emphasized in class. So, if 'process writing' is only practised once or twice throughout a semester/term, there will not be enough opportunities for students to master it. On the other hand, if a teacher emphasizes too much on this, other areas may be neglected as English is allocated only five periods per week. Besides, the number of students in a class should be small enough for it to really work and for the teacher to be able to give his/her attention to the students. If more time is spent on writing skill, the test designed should also provide opportunities for students to put this practice to use. We also have to take into considerations other factors such as the training provided for the teachers as well as the role of policy makers in order to come to an agreement to the practice of this approach.