SOLUTIONS TO THE BARRIERS IN TEACHING WRITING : A THREE FACETED MODEL

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INTRODUCTION

"Written language makes a radical difference to the complexity of organization that humans can manage, since it changes the relation between memory and classification, and allows many forms of referencing, cataloguing, indexing, recording and transmitting information" (Stubbs 1987: 20-1). Due to variety of practical reasons and through mastery of writing that the individual comes to be fully effective in intellectual organization, not only in the management of everyday affairs but also in the expression of ideas and arguments. "The mere fact that something is written conveys its own message, for example of permanence and authority. Certain people write and certain things get written" (Stubbs 1987:21). It is for such reasons that writing comes to be associated with status and power. By writing you can have control not only of information but on people. When someone learns how to write, they are not just developing a new skill, they are also getting involved in an activity in which questions of social role, power, and the appropriate use of language cannot be avoided. Writing skills in English for ESL leaners assumes the status of being a characteristic blend of the most significant and immensely difficult task to master. However, inspite of such popular notions about the importance of writing in professional and personal development, it still remains an uncharted area of debate 'Though writing is a powerful instrument of thinking, gains control over your thoughts and aids personal growth, it is mostly a neglected skill of the four. (Greenberg & Rath 1985, p.12).

To understand the nature of writing and focus on how it can be taught in the classroom, we must first analyze the problems associated with teaching of writing. A knowledge of the problems associated with writing and probable solutions to these will better prepare the teacher to implement teaching activities in classrooms. The present study attempts to collate various problems to writing associated with the pedagogy, teachers, & students and also suggests solutions to overcome these three dimensional barriers to developing writing skills.

SOLUTIONS TO THE BARRIERS ASSOCIATED WITH MODELS/APPROACHES:

The primary barrier associated with writing is that of models/ approaches. Each era brought with it a new approach because the previous model did not yield the desired result. The problem associated with Audio-lingual approach was it laid much emphasis on the form resulting in lack of meaning and no learner's identity (Pack & Henrichsen, 1980). This debacle paved way for the Process Approach which brought the entire attention onto 'the learners' internal world', consequently the role of the teacher was reduced to being an observer at the periphery. This focus on learner's internal world could not have lent itself to academic writing (Horowitz, 1986). Therefore it gave rise to Content Approach wherein readers' expectations and the demands of academics were at the centre. However as this approach was closely knitted to the curriculum of the content courses, the autonomy of ESL writing classroom was sacrificed (Raimes,1991). Lastly, EAP-English for Academic Purpose largely focused on the audience but the problem lied in the fact that with the reader becoming all powerful, the writer can never know the generalized nature of the readers' identity. Thus the poignant question remains that how far the study and analysis of these models can help students' understanding of what makes a good writing piece? The model is product oriented rather than process, it being the product of other people. The choice of models becomes another difficulty because the use of authentic models proves intricate for elementary level and the specially designed models render itself artificial and repetitive. Ultimately models focus on structural manipulation in which communicative purpose is ignored (Corder 1967; Krashen, 1978; Paulston and Dykstra, 1973).

The solutions to the afore mentioned barriers within models/approaches are detailed herein.

Any model must be introduced to the learner after the process has already begun. Thus, model is used as a resource, a tool for comparison than imitation. When an exposure to the model is deliberately delayed, an alien product (model) is truly involving them in the original process. Learners must be allowed to discover their own writing problems within the process. Once they make this discovery, models can be helpful, demonstrating solutions which can be utilized.

Learners must be exposed to a wide variety of style, format & genres. Introduction of literature in target language aids in producing affective response. Hence the alien product becomes original process and the response can be translated into genuine composition.

Also with the use of authentic materials namely brochures, official forms, memos, notices, timetables students' writing can be stimulated which is non-imitative.

SOLUTIONS TO THE BARRIERS RELATED TO TEACHERS:

This section elaborates on solutions to the barriers related to teachers. There is an extensive list of problems that a good teacher faces in the writing classroom. Selection of topics based on four approaches and Choice of teaching personal or academic writing. Research studies show that EFL students in western world need 'Writing in English' as a part of academic assignment only, while ESL learners use it throughout the course of their professional lives. (Shih &Leki 1990)

Another obstacle is to define what entails 'Real Writing'. Students' writing in exams is considered 'unreal' and the 'real' is writing for learning (Searle 1969). Students' produce written English during examinations which can be considered the final product but may not display the process or the growth of the learner. The process and product are not to be viewed as separate entities but as a combination. However the present scene of assessment ignores this fundamental criterion.

Then there is the problem of deciding on the Nature of Academic Discourse Community. This community would be either open & beneficial or powerful & controlling hence the teacher is torn apart between purposes of teaching writing and demands of Academic Discourse Community (Auerbach, 1986, 1990; Peirce, 1989). The stance chosen could be political which could work for or against the student.

The next hindrance is the lack of contrastive rhetoric in the classroom which can be utilized as the cultural link in written products. Focus on one rhetoric and ignoring the benefits of alternative rhetoric is one of the reasons that hamper the comparison chances of the given rhetoric with similar relatable rhetoric within students' experience.

Lastly responding to students' writing is limited often random. Feedback is arbitrary and often contradictory. (Zamel 1985) The response is considered as the end of interaction which results in zero movement ahead in learning continuum. (Cohen, 1987 Cavalcanti, 1990 Radecki & Swales 1988)

Minor barriers include lack of infrastructure, class size, focus on syllabus completion, and lack of teacher training.

The product and process have to be viewed in combination and not separate entities. Students need to perceive writing as a tool of learning which can be useful throughout their professional and personal lives not just to pass examination. They should be taught to use the process to their advantage as language learners and how to produce an acceptable product upon demand. One of the assumptions is also made that tasks/assignments by ESL teachers are often 'unreal'.

"The rules of discourse in the 'community' insist students to learn 'to talk like engineers' surrendering their own language and the mode of thought to the requirements of the target community." (Johns, 1990). A survey by Johns, 1981 suggests "which is more important for success in your classes- a general knowledge of English or knowledge of English specific to the discipline" General English was ranked above ESP, one of the reasons being the ESP concept is not fully comprehensible by most teachers. The focus on ADC issues of whether academic writing is 'good writing' often masks a lack of genuine understanding' and 'Is there a stable construct?' (Elbow, 1991) argues 'there is no such thing 'ADC' to teach. Hence the nature, requirements, existence of Academic writing is questioned.

"Non-native readers could accommodate to more kinds of rhetoric patterns than could native speaker readers."(Land & Whitley, 1989) The need is "to recognize value & foster the alternative rhetoric" that ESL student brings to our language. We mistake students' L1 knowledge as a hindrance however it becomes an important resource in decision-making in writing L2. Teachers can use alternative rhetoric as consciousness raising device, wherein they can discuss what they have observed about texts in different cultures and have students discover whether research findings holds true in their experience of their L1 text.

Hedgcock (2005) summarized that different factors can influence experts' feedback such as proficiency level of the students, their educational prospect and needs of the writing task itself, and the teacher himself/herself thereby the conclusion regarding the effect of feedback in second language writing maybe a "long way off".

Ramaprasad (1983) claimed that feedback is the difference between knowledge of the actual level and reference level of a factor which is used to change the differences in some ways. It is suggested that feedback is information about the students' performance value and excellence which is given to him or her. Other studies also have introduced feedback as an experience which generates self-managed learning. Guenette (2007) asserted that there has been an argument about the importance of teachers' feedback in research studies regarding second language writing. However different points of view may exist on giving the remedial feedback to writing learners in order to improve their writing accurateness.

If teachers see their response as the end of the interaction then students will simply 'make a mental note' of the response. If responses include specific directions on what to do next 'an assignment' (Lees, 1979) there is a

chance of application of principles. However, little research examines activities that occur after the act of responding.

SOLUTIONS TO THE BARRIERS RELATED TO STUDENTS:

The complexity in writing skills is found at three levels- Language, Process & Culture. Students complain about difficulty in Word Order, Sentence Construction, and Sequence of tenses in complex sentence which they are unable to master. More options in clause construction, use of phrasal verbs and confusion in idiomatic usage, lack of vocabulary in English and its wide connotation in their native language are some the problems faced by students.

The process approach entails three important levels- Planning, Writing, & Revising. In the process of writing Planning is hampered because studentstake more time in comprehension of writing task and proverbs of L1 occur more easily. At the writing stage, an attempt is towards direct translation from L1 rather than creating L2, which renders the process time-consuming. Revising is hindered due to lack of understanding of connotative differences and the nature of unfamiliar audience. More focus always mostly given on spelling & grammar which leaves lesser time for organization. Lastly culture-specific barriers are selection of appropriate presentation style, using references, level of formality to be used, arrangement of narrative, English is more deductive and straight-forward, while native languages are more vague and inductive and stylistic differences between Spoken and Written English (Al Fadda, 2011)

In order to overcome barriers with reference to language, students must be made aware about the major differences in linguistic structure between English and students' first language. The issue of Spoken & Written English must be addressed through providing the students with the list of common expressions in both the spoken and written forms. Discussions about word connotation must be encouraged. A provision of list of common connecting words & exercises to enhance precision in word choice has to be made. Focus must be more on use of appropriate expression than grammar.

In Process approach the first stage of 'Planning' is crucial so more time to be spent on planning & organization. Use of flow-charts for planning in helping students decide on the structure of writing must be encouraged. The problem in 'Reviewing' is linguistic once so focus must be on organization and then on grammar & spellings.

Students' exposure to the L2 culture, history, customs, habits & literature must be increased. Repeated attempts at L2 listening and reading have to be made through the use of Audio-visual materials in the classroom which may include TV, talk shows, magazine articles, books to name a few to expose them 'to thought & logic of English.'

In order to achieve these goals to enhance writing competence in terms of pedagogy, teachers' training and development plays a significant game-changer. Teachers' ability to adapt or reject approaches/models or pedagogy on the basis of their students' capacity of understanding will go a long way in building writing skills. Within the classroom at a fundamental level teachers must speak clearly, loudly and repeat often. Individual attentions raise interest, lively atmosphere to be maintained in classroom. Students must be allowed to generate options with regard to writing strategies, while teachers must specify how to approach a particular topic for which ideas have to be emphasized. Also topics and related material have to be assigned in advance so that students can focus on writing process itself and they should be encouraged to write papers.

CONCLUSION

Through this paper an attempt has been made to collate the barriers associated to writing and find feasible solutions to the same. The researcher has analyzed the existing literature in the domain of writing and has categorized the barriers into three main dimensions. Solutions have been excerpted from various research papers , which can further be expanded for better understanding of the complex nature of writing and its implication in the classrooms.

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