

Teaching L2 Writing: An Overview

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Overview

- Why teach writing?
- Difficulties for NNESTs in an EFL setting
- Guiding principles in L2 writing
- Sample three-draft assignment

Why teach writing?*

- It helps students to explore content areas outside the classroom.
- It allows students to practice English skills without classroom pressure.
- It is an opportunity to communicate with NSs.
- It is a key to academic and professional success.

*adapted from a presentation given by Dr. Sara Weigle of Georgia State University in February, 2010.

Difficulties for NNESTs*

- Teacher proficiency
- Lack of training/experience in teaching writing
- Institutional buy-in
- Time required to read/respond to writing
- Importance compared to other skills

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Guiding principles in L2 writing*

- Focus on language
- Focus on text functions
- Focus on creativity
- Focus on process
- Focus on content
- Focus on genre
- Towards a synthesis of the above

*Adapted from *Second Language Writing* by Ken Hyland (2009)

Focus on Language

- Writing is a product
- Emphasis on grammatical correctness
- Guided compositions
- Slot-and-filler activities
- No communicative setting or purpose

Focus on text functions

- Prescribed formulas for text creation
 - Narrative
 - Cause and effect
 - Comparison and contrast
- Form-focused
- Treats texts as objects independent of writer, and reader

Focus on creativity

- Encourages spontaneous text creation
- Writing is personal and creative
- Writing is learned, not taught
- Writing is a way to discover meaning
- No intrinsic purpose or audience

Focus on process

- Writing is a recursive series of steps
 - Planning, drafting, writing, rewriting, publishing
- Approximates the process used by effective writers
- Teacher is a strategy-building guide
- Assumes there is one process
- Little emphasis on purpose or audience

Focus on content

- Emphasis on meaning and originality
- Addresses interesting/important social/personal/political issues
- Teacher guides development of schemata
- Learners explore theme in depth before writing
- Incorporates group work and collaboration
- Lacks emphasis on purpose

Focus on genre

- Writing is seen as a means to an end
- Writing is communicating
 - Emails, jokes, recipes, articles, memos, novels
- Audience takes center stage
- Purpose is decided first, followed by form, process and content
- Teacher scaffolds the contextualizing-modeling-negotiating-constructing process
- Can de-emphasize the personal nature of writing

A synthesis of principles

- All writing teachers use a combination of these principles
- You decide for your own classroom
- Usually an emphasis on process and/or genre
 - Process focuses primarily on the writer
 - Genre focuses primarily on the audience
- Form and content are also important

A Sample Writing Assignment (1 of 2)

- Learners identify a purpose for creating a text (genre)
- Learners identify structure of typical texts in a genre (text function)
- Learners explore a topic through outside reading, class discussion, freewriting and group work tasks (content)

A Sample Writing Assignment (2 of 2)

- Learners are encouraged to explore voice and originality (creativity)
- Learners plan, draft, write, review, rewrite, publish their work (process)
- Learners edit their work for grammatical mistakes/errors (language)

Thank You!

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