Response to 'Ventriloquising the Voice: Writing in the University'

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Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn. They will need literacy to feed their imagination so they can create the world of the future (Moore, 1999). This paper explores writing strategies for English as a foreign language learners, recent trend of standards-based education, and relationship between 'voice' and writing frameworks.

INTRODUCTION: WRITING STRATEGY FOR EFL LEARNERS

In contrast to the traditional cognitive view of writing strategies, this paper explores English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' writing strategy use within the growing body of research on writing and second language acquisition. Moreover, recent standards-based education reform and assessment which align with writing goals and curricula are discussed. In the main part, this paper features voice and writing instruction.

Writing is the ability to compose text effectively for various purposes and audiences (Shanahan, 2004). Also, it is a tool for communication and learning that allows students to document, collect, and widely circulate detailed information (Graham, 2005). Writing provides opportunity to express oneself and persuade others. However, writing is not just a method of communication and expression. Several researchers have found that, much like reading, improving one's writing skills improves one's capacity to learn (McGee & Richgels, 1990; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991). In addition, many of the skills that are involved in writing as below:

- Decoding
- Morphology
- Fluency
- Vocabulary

In addition, elements in academic writing instruction for EFL learners which differs from that for native speakers of English are as below:

- The mental lexicon—the vocabulary in people's minds—and different ways to think about it
- Vocabulary and grammatical development

- Understanding structured academic writing rules

Examples of strategies and skills that can be taught across content areas include the steps of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, and editing) and skills relevant to editing and revision. According to National Institute for Literacy (NIFL, 2007), to use direct, explicit, and systematic instruction in writing:

1. Explain the writing skill or strategy and model how to apply it in writing in a manner that is similar to what students will be asked to do.
2. Guide students in using the skills and strategies in their writing assignments and provide corrective feedback.
3. Provide time and opportunities for independent practice with the writing skills and strategies.
4. Repeat these instructional steps until students are able to use them independently in their writing.

Guidelines of academic writing are more than certain shapes and forms, but are necessary for EFL learners who are not familiar with the activity and, of course, English language itself.

IMPLEMENTING COHERENT, STANDARDS-BASED CURRICULA AND ASSESSMENT

Recently, standards-based education is regarded as the most important for both schools and school districts. In response, schools and school districts set clear, high, and measurable expectations for student achievement. It is not only the U.S.'s trend, but also it surges at many countries including the U.K. and Japan.

Now, curricula at schools and instruction are coherent and aligned with state standards, including (NIFL, op. cit):

- The amount of time spent on mathematics and language arts instruction, and the extent to which they are protected from interruption and integrated with other subjects.
- The proportion of teachers in a school who regularly use the same curriculum packages, and which ones they used.
- The extent to which teachers reported alignment and consistency in curriculum and instruction, planning and materials.
- Teacher, principal, and district use of state standards to guide curriculum and instruction.
- The use of a standards-based report card.
- The extent to which the district had addressed the needs of EFL learners.

The standards-based education reform is conducted to improve student achievement and instruction by using assessment data. Although writing instructional strategies may be useful to teachers as they teach within their content area, it is important to address how the writing will be assessed.

Assessment tools such as rubrics are available, and teachers can share them with their students to help them understand expectations for performance and how the

assessment will be graded. In addition, students can use the rubrics to evaluate their own and their peers' writing. In that sense, the rubric becomes an assessment tool for teachers while also promoting self-evaluation, student autonomy, and student collaboration (Morretta & Ambrosini, 2000). Rubrics are important in assessing writing because they do not simply attribute a grade or score to the writing assignment but detail a clearer understanding of strength, weakness and progress. Examples of student work are another helpful source of information on the types of performances considered standard or above standard. These insights provide students information needed to improve their writing (Shanahan, op. cit).

It seems fair and effective, however, assessments using rubrics present several challenges. Most assessments assume that students have understood the reading that they are asked to apply in the assessment. These assessments do not help teachers understand students' writing skills and strategies. Personal characteristics of a student, such as confidence and self-esteem, which are based on language fluency and so on, influence performance on assessments. Finally, student performance is difficult to score reliably. Teacher preparation programs and/or professional development sessions to be able to score consistently are urgently needed.

Although a 'one-size-fits-all' writing instruction does not address the diverse needs that are encountered by most teachers in their classrooms, Klingner & Vaughn (2004) address the needs of diverse learners, teachers can integrate models and provide instruction in academic English as suggestions and strategies into their instruction. In this case, academic writing frameworks work effectively.

VOICE, SELF AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

In this section, I would like to discuss the relationship between voice and writing instruction focusing on language limitation. The question is, whether writing framework ruins/ventriloquises students' voice or not.

First, here is Amanda Fulford's definition of voice.

> In what follows, I want to explore voice somewhat differently, as a notion of that incorporates aspects of personal expressiveness, writing style, as authenticity, but also as a more complex term that is concerned with the person an individual is; with her having language; the relationships she has with her community; her responsibility to her language and her society, that is, her responsibility to say what she means (Fulford, 2009).

In addition, Fulford describes her sharp perspective on the relationship between voice and writing frameworks.

> What is needed in the pedagogy of academic writing is not an approach that merely leads to unthinking observance, but the facilitation of student voice that recognises the importance of crafting, and of artistry (Ibid.).

From a different viewpoint, the writing frameworks/guidelines do not directly lead to 'unthinking observance'. Shen (1989) has pointed out in his autobiographical work that he had encountered with lessons on how to write academic essays in English:

> Rule number one in English composition is: Be yourself. (More than one composition instructor has told me, 'Just write what you think.') The values behind this rule, it seems to me, are based on the principle of protecting and promoting individuality (and private property) in this country [i.e., the United States]. This instruction was probably crystal clear to students raised on these values, but, as a guideline of composition, it was not very clear or useful to me when I first heard it (Shen, 1989, p. 460).

Here, he states he needed some frameworks/guidelines to write what he thought. Matsuda (2001) agrees with Shen's opinion:

> Being 'myself' did not seem to me to mean representing the 'self' that I construct when I talk to my English-speaking friends or the one I construct when I am with my teachers. Did it mean my Japanese self—how I generally see myself when I am in Japan? But I was also aware that, when I was in Japan, I constructed and represent my 'self' in various ways because of the socially sanctioned values and codes of behavior that were partly embedded in the Japanese language through features such as honorifics and various address terms. Furthermore, I felt that my Japanese self, if such a thing existed, would be beyond my teachers' comprehension because they were not familiar with the context in which it was constructed (Matsuda, 2001, pp. 38-39).

Without knowing rules, and values behind them, the flower, or 'voice' will be wilted, or even will not emerge from the seeded soil (as Nussbaum describes). For EFL learners, frameworks/guidelines are not the restriction, but free their 'self'. Moreover, expression of voice and re-finding of self may be restricted or confounded by language especially given EFL learners and their lack of language abilities.

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