Teaching Writing Strategies

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1.Introduction

Developing learners' writing skills has been of concern for a long time in education. Students studying English in our educational institutions have been found to face problems mainly in writing, making them unable to cope with the institution's literacy expectations. However, these students may be able to develop writing skills significantly with positive instructional attitudes towards the errors they make and awareness on the teachers' part of learner problems. That is why they should improve classroom writing instruction to address the serious problem of students writing difficult.

Teaching strategies has shown a dramatic effect on the quality of students' writing. Strategy instruction involves explicitly and systematically teaching steps necessary to use strategies independently. The following table will explain the above ideas

Teaching-Learning Strategies		
Teacher-Guided	**Student Empowerment**	**Specific Strategies**
Before - Discovering what to say about a particular topic - Considering the variables of purpose, audience, and form - Planning	*Before* - What is my topic? My purpose? - Who is my audience? - What should I say? - What form should I use?	*Before* - Talking, Interviewing, Reading, Researching - Brainstorming, Listing, Clustering, Mapping, Webbing, lowcharting, Outlining - Focused Free Writing

During • Saying what is meant as directly and clearly as possible • Finding an appropriate voice and point of view • Telling the reader about the topic *Revising* • Editing for ideas and organization • Proofreading for conventions other than content	• How should I organize my ideas? *During* • How can I introduce my topic? • How can I develop each part? • How can I conclude my topic? *Revising* • Have I edited and proofread? • Have I practised a variety of editing and proofreading methods? Which work best for me?	• Heuristics (Questions/Prompts/ Reading and xamining Models • Viewing, isualization, Guided Imagery • Journal Writing *During* • Mapping Thoughts • Writing-off a Lead • Fast or Free Writing • Personal Letter • Conferencing • Reflecting and Questioning Self *Revising* • Reading Aloud to Another • Using Revision Checklists • Check and Question Marks • Using a "Pass" Strategy • Self-monitoring • Peer Conferencing

2. Development of Writing Abilities

Writing is a powerful instrument of thinking because it provides students with a way of gaining control over their thoughts. Writing shapes their perceptions of themselves and the world. It aids in their personal growth and in their effecting change on the environment. Students are often unaware of the power of the written word, yet the written word:

... enables the writer, perhaps for the first time, to sense the power of ... language to affect another. Through using, selecting and rejecting, arranging and rearranging language, the student comes to understand how language is used (Greenberg & Rath, 1985, p. 12).

Adolescents' writing abilities develop gradually with incremental and uneven progress. In order to become empowered in writing, students need concentration, instruction, practice, and patience.

The teacher's mandate is to assist adolescents to gain control over the written word. Students should:

- develop an explicit knowledge of phases of the writing process
- write frequently on a variety of topics for a variety of purposes and audiences
- develop an understanding of the structures and conventions of language.

2.1 Writing as Process

Writing is a hard process. It is *"a loop rather than a straight line"*, where the writer writes, then plans or revises, and then writes again (Emig, 1971). Teachers can help students write more effectively by getting them to examine their own creative processes. Although the process of writing is essentially idiosyncratic, writers usually work through a few basic phases. Students can be shown the different stages in the production of a piece of writing and be encouraged to discover what works best for them. Students can be shown the basic phases of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising (editing and proofreading), and presenting. The "writing process is the thinking processes that go on during writing" (Crowhurst, 1988, p. 7). The writing process can be summarized as follows.

Writing Process
Prewriting: • using pre-writing techniques to gather ideas   • choosing a purpose and an audience

> - ordering ideas
>
> *Drafting*
> - putting ideas down on paper
> - exploring new ideas during writing
>
> *Revising*
> - Editing: considering ideas and organization
> - Proofreading: correcting errors including sentence structure, usage, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization
> - Polishing
>
> *Presenting*
> - Sharing writing

2.1.1 Pre-writing

Pre-writing centres on engaging students in the writing process and helps them discover what is important or true for them about any subject at a particular time. Unfortunately, no one has found the perfect system for teaching the writing process. What is certain, however, is that if students are to become capable writers they must develop pre-drafting skills. Experienced writers have their own methods, but inexperienced writers need motivation to write and assistance in uncovering concepts, experiences, and ideas about which to write.

During the pre-writing phase, students need direction--a topic or something to discuss in writing. Topics can come from teachers but students also need to develop the skill of using their own insights and experiences (and those of others) as writing material. Most often, the potential of possible topics is revealed through pre-drafting experiences such as the following:

- talking with and interviewing people who know something about a topic
- brainstorming
- focused free writing (i.e., nonstop writing on an intended subject to crystallize ideas and feelings)
- mapping and webbing (i.e., drawing thought webs or graphic representations of the topic)

- writing "leads" (i.e., creating three or more opening sentences as a way of determining the shape and scope of the topic)
- listing
- using reporters' questions (i.e., Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?)
- making similes and metaphors (i.e., asking "What is it like?")
- finding similarities and differences by comparing and contrasting concepts, pictures, and objects
- reading and examining written models to gather information about the topic or to notice genre, style, or tone
- viewing pictures, paintings, television, films, CD-ROMs, or slides
- using visualization and guided imagery
- listening to CDs, tapes, and records
- debating, role playing, and improvising
- exploring ideas in a journal.

Writers must not only think about what they are going to say, but also about how they are going to say it. During the pre-drafting stage students need to establish, at least tentatively, their **purpose, audience, and form**. Although experienced writers often say that content dictates form (i.e., that their ideas tell them which form to use), inexperienced writers need to realize that audience and purpose can help determine form. Students need to achieve competency in a variety of forms and consider a range of purposes and audiences such as the following.

a-Purposes
- to reflect, clarify, and explore ideas
- to express understanding
- to explain, inform, instruct, or report
- to describe
- to retell and narrate
- to state an opinion, evaluate, or convince
- to experiment.

b-Audiences
- specific person (e.g., self, teacher, friend, older person, younger person, parent)
- specific group (e.g., class, team/club, grade, age group, special interest group)

- general audience (e.g., school, community, adults, peers, students, unspecified).

c-Writing Forms

The ability to shape and organize ideas requires choosing a form that is appropriate to the audience and purpose. Students need experiences with a range of forms. Some examples include:

- personal experience narratives
- autobiographies
- biographies
- fictional narratives (e.g., short stories and novellas)
- diary entries
- journal entries
- learning logs
- poetry (e.g., ballads, acrostics, counted-syllable formats, free verse, song lyrics, other formats)
- parodies
- essays
- research reports
- reviews
- news stories
- editorials and opinions
- advertisements
- correspondence (e.g., friendly letters; invitations; letters of thanks, complaint, application, sympathy, inquiry, protest, congratulation, apology)
- scripts (e.g., skits, plays, radio plays, TV commercials)
- oral histories
- eulogies and last will and testaments
- speeches
- memoranda and messages
- instructions and advice
- rules and regulations
- minutes and forms
- pamphlets

- résumés and cover letters.

Through an appropriate balance of experiences with the previous purposes, audiences, and forms, students can become competent in a range of writing tasks. As teachers plan their writing assignments, they should identify and define the appropriate learning objectives, address the elements of effective communication (subject, purpose, audience, and form), and establish guidelines or criteria to evaluate the outcome of the students' work.

d-Organizing and Developing Ideas

Writers not only need to think about what they are going to say but also about how they are going to say it. Pre-composing plans help students approach the blank page. During the pre-writing phase, students should also give some attention to how they might organize and develop their thoughts (Olson, 1992). Although these plans will be tentative, they are useful for getting started. Students need to organize their ideas in logical sequences. Several ways of developing and organizing ideas are possible depending on purpose and form. Some different ways of development and organization include:

Chronological order
- a chronological or step-by-step arrangement of ideas by time or order of occurrence

Spatial order
- spatial, geometrical, or geographical arrangement of ideas according to their position in space--left to right, top to bottom, or circular

Common logic
- definitive (e.g., is called, is made up of)
- classification and division (e.g., parts and relationships)
- order of importance (e.g., first, second)
- comparison and contrast (e.g., compared to, differs from)
- cause-effect (e.g., consequently, the reason for)
- problem-solution (e.g., problem, alternatives, decisions)
- pros and cons (e.g., strongly support, against)
- inductive and deductive (e.g., specific to general, broad to specific)
- dialectic (e.g., thesis/antithesis/synthesis).

Students could consider constructing a map, a chart, an outline, a visual organizer, or a ladder diagram to organize their main ideas and supporting details.

2.1.2 Drafting

During this phase, writers produce a first draft. Momentum is the important issue as students focus their attention on the development of meaning and the flow of thought in their writing. The mechanics are secondary to the flow of ideas.
At this point, students should try to say what they mean quickly. Additional drafts can be written that further shape, organize, and clarify the work. As students mentally step back from their work, they can develop more objectivity and give more consideration to the reader. They should be encouraged to share drafts to confirm or adjust the direction of their writing.
During drafting, teachers should encourage students to:
- say what they mean as directly as they can
- be themselves; write from their own point of view or assume a new persona or voice from which to write
- write as though they were "telling" the reader about the topic.

Committing their thoughts to paper or computer screen is not an easy task for all students. Strategies such as the following may facilitate the translating of ideas into first and successive drafts.
- *Mapping.* Creating a map of additional ideas and reconceptualizing ways to order them as they write sometimes helps students capture their ideas before they are lost.
- *"Writing-off" leads.* Creating several first lines and then using the key words and direction suggested by one of these leads sometimes gets drafts underway for students.
- *Fast or free writing.* Writing an entire first draft as quickly as possible without rereading or pausing to attend to mechanics sometimes helps students create their first draft.
- *Personal letters.* Writing a first draft as if it were a personal letter to one specific person such as a friend sometimes frees students to create their first draft.
- *Conferencing.* Talking about ideas with a teacher or peer sometimes helps students see how they can start and develop their first draft.
- *Reflecting and questioning.* Pausing to ask themselves what they are saying and if they need to say more or to say it differently sometimes helps students move their drafts forward.

Drafting is rarely completed in one sitting. Students usually need to let the work sit for a bit and then write a series of successive drafts if they wish to produce polished compositions. Discussing drafts with others (including peers and teacher) can help move each of their drafts closer to the final version. The drafting needs of students, however, will vary.

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