

Investigation and Analysis of College English Writing

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Abstract: English writing is a basic skill and competence either for high school students or for college students. Many approaches are studied and applied to english writing. This thesis investigates and analyzes main English writing approaches in current china. It also ponits out that these approaches are appied to different students and teaching environment.It can be said that the development of writing teaching method reflects the thinking process of the essence of language learning. Product approach, process approach, genre approach, content approach and task approach are introduced in this paper. Various teaching methods are different in their focal points because of different point of view of writing ability. It can be said that the development of writing teaching method reflects the thinking process of the essence of language learning.

Keywords: English writing, product approach, process approach, genre approach, content approach, task approach

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

College English writing is a fascinating and rapidly growing field which is involved of interest in foreign language acquisition research and pedagogy. During this period, English writing has evolved from its origin as subdiscipline of applied linguistics and develops its own distinct field of inquiry that crosses a wide range of disciplinary boundaries. English writing is no longer simply one of the “five skills ” covered in language class training programs but rather an important and dynamic area of specialization for researchers and learners. In tests, writing always appears as a good method to evaluate learners’ writing competence. Therefore, most tests use writing to evaluate proficiency of the testees.

In domestic, there are many tests to grade learners, such as CET4 and CET6, PETS, TOIEC and GAT (Graduate Admission Test). As a good way to select candidates, English writing is always the indispensable test item to separate testees and an effective method to select good learners. On the other side, Writing plays an important role in business which may provide a future job opportunity for college students. Xia Jimei (2003) once made a investigation of personnel managers and chief managers of joint venture and foreign- oriented enterprises. She finds that the most daily use of English is oral communication which amounts to 56.5%,

writing amounts to 34.7% and translation amounts to 21.7%. Liu Haiping (2008) says that above 80% companies of finances, insurances and real estates required employees of their writing ability.

But current teaching situation of English writing is not in correspondence with its importance. Firstly, importance has not been attached to writing course for a long time and it is even ignored sometimes. What's more, learners pay little attention to writing. According to Cai Jigang's (2012) investigation of 6,625 freshmen who come from 36 universities of 21 provinces, their consideration on writing (40.2%) lags far behind speaking (86.2%), listening (70.2%) and reading (41.2%). Secondly, the non-English-major learners almost have no writing training and their writing abilities cannot satisfy their future job requirement. In 2009, Dalian international recruitment Conference attracted 2,000 companies (such as DELL, Hewlett-Packard and Huawei), and 20,000 applicants. More than 5,000 jobs were vacant, but 60% applicants failed since their reading and writing abilities for English technical documents is deficient (Cai., 2012). Their productive ability lags behind their reading and listening comprehension ability. Thirdly, the learners are not interested in English writing and are even afraid of writing. When they get a topic, their minds immediately go blank and many of them become very anxious. There seems nothing to express in students' composition. What they will do in writing is just to translate the Chinese ideas into English in Chinglish style or recite some composition examples before tests, setting the theme, structure or creativity aside.

Currently there are many teaching approaches of writing, such as product approach, process approach, genre approach and length approach. Every approach has its advantage and applicant condition, which will be discussed in Chapter two. We need a convenient method, which can both save the lecture time and improve non-English major learners' English writing proficiency. To solve this problem, this thesis is an attempt to find a new method to improve non-English-majors' writing capacity and efficiency.

2. REVIEW OF POPULAR APPROACHES OF WRITING TEACHING

There are many teaching approaches in the field of college English writing. Each has its advantages and range of application. In the following, the author will make a brief account of teaching approaches of writing: product approach, genre approach, process approach and length approach. These approaches provide helpful reference to CT.

2.1 Product Approach

As a main teaching approach in China, product approach derives from the controlled composition and current-traditional rhetoric in the west, which may be traced back to the 19th century. This approach was welcomed by universities before 1980s and is still popular in high schools.

Generally speaking, behaviorist theory is considered to be theoretical basis of this approach. It requires teacher to give necessary and effective stimulus, such as good syntax and thinking content, and learners follow the teacher's stimulus by writing clearly and freely.

The procedure of product approach can be illustrated by following sketch map:

familiarization → guided writing → single practice → teacher feedback → learner revision.

Firstly, the teacher selects and presents a model text, and analyzes it from the aspects of lexicon, discourse and structural pattern. The aim of this step is to make learners get familiar with rhetorical features and linguistic features. Then teacher trains the learners to imitate a related composition which contains the specific rhetorical and linguistic features, and instructs learners to do paragraph writing and structure development. Next, learners are entitled to write freely according to the teacher's guidance. Last, teacher comments and corrects composition and gives learners feedback. During the whole course of the approach, the interaction between teacher and learner is a one-way: learners are passive receivers and teacher is in the position of center.

Product approach focuses on ultimate writing, and aims to make learners understand and imitate good examples, which certainly results in fixed and similar composition between learners. They may lose interests in writing gradually. This approach is based on a sequence of systematic practice. Teacher's guidance should be overt and timely, and practice should be systematic. Imitation is an effective method to CT. Learners create "products" though comprehension and imitation inputting information. The ultimate aim of CT is to improve English, so it must be helpful for learners to pass kinds of examination.

2.2 Genre Approach

The genre approach was formed in 1980s and introduced into China afterwards (Qin 1997, 2000; Han, Qin 2000, Wang 1998). Ever since then, it became popular in college English writing field. In the process of genre study learners can be familiar with different kinds of model texts and master one genre of writing quickly, especially in ESP and EAP. Sometimes it may be considered as an expansion of product approach in some sense (Badger and White, 2000). According to Cope and Kalantzis, genre approach can be taken apart into three processes: modeling, joint negotiation of text and independent construction of text.

In the process of modeling, teachers introduce a model text to make learners get familiar with a certain genre. Learners should practice and master social function, generic structure and linguistic features and make a joint negotiation of text. At last, learners create a target text of this genre independently.

Genre approach concentrates on analyzing and imitating writing examples, and its aim is to make learners familiar with and master one kind of genre in limited period. Genre approach fits for research writing, vocational writing and technical writing, so it can provide CT with practical and ready-made imputing material for learners to imitate.

2.3 Process Approach

Process approach was introduced in China in the late 1970s and immediately heated by Chinese educators in 1980s and the early of the 1990s (e.g. Han YuShu, 1992, Jia Aiwu, 1998; Lisen, 2000). Afterwards, it began to act as a crucial approach in the field of EFL writing instruction.

Process approach maintains that writing process is important and indispensable in the course of composition practice, and both teachers and learners should concentrate on process. Process approach attaches importance to students' comprehension of the communication and communicative competence, whose purpose is to enable learners to exchange thinking, to make personal choices about what to read and how to write, to be responsible to their own tasks, and to cultivate a cooperative attitude with others in the writing process (Wu Fei 2005).

Social constructionism and interactive theory are considered as the theoretical basis of process approach, which maintain that the writing process of groups instead of individual activities are communicative activities. The learning process is to share every learner's existing experience and discuss between group members so that a collective meditation is formed.

The procedure of process approach can be illustrated by following sketch map

prewriting → drafting → responding → revising → post writing

In the step of prewriting, learners are assigned to prepare some topic related activities. They understand relevant information beforehand, make team discussion, and brainstorm teacher's instruction and peer's suggestion. Then learners are asked to put down the draft regardless of linguistic mistakes and mechanic errors. Next new responding including feedback of teacher and peer is available for learners to make a revision. Lastly, learners streamline their composition which diction, layout and thinking are considered.

Process approach emphasizes that it is crucial to develop learner's potential learning ability and cognitive ability. There are many activities and interaction between teacher and learners in assessment before and during writing. Process approach needs great executive ability for teachers and the time is available so that teacher can cultivate learner's exploratory ability. Process approach provides CT referent steps, and team discussion, brainstorm, teacher's instruction and peer's suggestion are also applied in CT.

2.4 Length Approach

Length approach is a task-based, experimental, and write-to-learn method which special need is paid to learners' affective. Wang Chunming put forward length approach in 2000 and applied it to teaching English major freshmen. He explained: if learners were given time to write as long as they could, they would promote their self-confidence of English writing. This approach is a write-to-learn method which entitles learners to write whatever come to their mind, the longer the better, without considering rules of formal composition. The aim of length approach

is to promote learners' self-confidence of English study and sense of achievement, broaden their mind, release the initiative and improve their ability of language application. The major theoretical basis of length approach is Swain's comprehensible output hypothesis(1985).

The procedure of Length approach can be illustrated by the following sketch map
task design → composing after class → model text analysis → error tolerance scoring

Firstly, teacher designs an appropriate assignment which will inspire the learner to write as long as they can. The purpose of design is to make learners express their thought willingly so that learners' language competences such as vocabulary, rhetorical pattern are improved. Then learners are required to complete a composition at a certain period, without word limitation, but the longer the better. The aim is to improve writing quality through quantity. Next, teacher selects some good works from learners, presents to the whole learners and analyzes these works to learners. The good linguistic forms and expressions are set for the whole learners to follow. Last, teacher's feedback is usually positive, and comments such as "Excellent", "Very good" are popular. Proper word choices, good sentences and bright thinking are praised especially.

Length approach can open up learner's affective channels so as to facilitate language study, help learners override themselves, broaden their vision in discussion and bring their learning potential of foreign language into full play. Length approach requires that learner's affective factor is high and fits for English majors who have higher English competence.

3. CONCLUSION

Various teaching methods are different in their focal points because of different point of view of writing ability. It can be said that the development of writing teaching method reflects the thinking process of the essence of language learning.

Specifically, the teaching method or the product approach reflects the concept that language learning is the process of stimulating-reaction-consolidation. This is a linear process of teaching. In teaching procedures, students imitate model and write single release. Then the teachers correct compositions and students mend the errors. The teachers pay close attention to the writing results. Thus the students' writing level is improved through the feedback correction.

On the contrary, the process of teaching method reflects that the language learning is a complex cognitive and communicative activity. Therefore when teaching, the writing process of multiple draft change is particularly emphasized. It also stresses the interaction between teachers and students in the review stage. This kind of teaching process is not linear. Multiple draft writing, peer assessment and teacher assessment and modification make the process tortuous and circulatory.

Genre based teaching approach emphasizes that language has its communicative purpose. In order to achieve the communicative purpose, schema structure needs to be followed which is the inherent of the genre. The structure is conventional and restricted (Qin Xiubai, 2000). The

key to the teaching approach is to analyze and imitate genre characteristics so that the writing is consistent with a certain genre of writing paradigm as far as possible.

Content teaching method reflects that language is a tool for communication. The concept of teaching goal is twofold. One is to master the professional knowledge and the other is to improve their language skills.

The task teaching method emphasizes social interaction of language learning and lets students participate in the activities of language use that takes meaning as the center. According to Willis (1996), the task teaching method is divided into the pre-task stage (pre-task), task cycle stage and language focus stage. It includes many teaching steps, such as benefit by mutual discussion, collecting material, writing the report and feedback analysis. Task-based teaching method in the teaching of writing should create the interaction environment between students and teachers, students and students, and students and society.

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