

## EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROCESS APPROACH IN IMPROVING WRITING: A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to provide both teachers and learners of English as a foreign language with a theoretical background about the effectiveness of the Process Approach in improving writing. It deals with the emergence and nature of the approach. It also emphasizes the positive effects of recursiveness and that the different elements which make up writing: pre-writing, composing, drafting, revising and editing – are important composing stages.

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### Introduction

**The** writing skill causes great difficulty to our students at all levels. This difficulty could be minimized if we become aware about the nature and effectiveness of the process approach and the activities involved in it. The introduction of the Process Approach has been motivated by the dissatisfaction of the Product Approach or the controlled composition. It was therefore felt that the adoption of the process approach provides our learners and teachers with a better understanding on the writing skill.

### ملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى إفادة أساتذة وطلبة اللغة الإنجليزية بنظرية ناجعة يمكن تطبيقها في التعبير الكتابي. وتتمثل هذه الطريقة في تطبيق العملية الكتابية، مروراً بالمراحل المختلفة، بداية من رصد الأفكار، ووضع الخطة، ثم كتابة المسودة ومراجعتها وافية، إلى أن يحصل الطالب الكاتب على مقال سليم من الأخطاء في النهاية.

### 1- The Product versus Process Approach

Traditionally, writing was viewed as a linear sequence of events. The student writer begins by planning and reflecting on his/her subject matter then starts to write. Once the writing is finished, s/he improves his/her writing by checking for errors to reach greater clarity and readability. Research in recent years has stressed the need for English as a

Second Language writing instruction to move from the traditional approach, that of the product, to a Process Approach that would teach students not only how to edit, but also to develop strategies to generate ideas, compose multiple drafts, deal with feedback and revise all their written work at all levels. ( See Chenowith 1987; Raimes 1985. 1987 )

"A current concern in writing theory and practice is with the new "pedagogical orthodoxy" of process writing where the main interest is in what writers do when they write. This approach sees writing as an exploratory generative collaborative process rather than a linear route to a predetermined product. " Peacock (1986:34-35 ) . The new philosophy has to do with exploring the different phases through which the student / writer goes through to reach his/her main objective, that of the product. When we say generative collaborative process, we understand that the ideas are generated, put in a first draft, organized, arranged in a whole corrected revised / reviewed ( \* ) and finally written in its final form in a final draft. Here comes the idea of recursiveness which means that writing is not a linear route towards a well determined product. "The process of composition is not a linear one, moving from planning to composing to revising and to editing. It would be more accurate to characterize writing as a recursive activity in which the writer moves backwards and forwards between drafting and revising with stages of re-planning and between " .Hedge (1988:20 ) .

Raimes (1985:229) described the idea of recursiveness in the writing process by stating that: "Contrary to what many text books advise, writers do not follow a neat sequence of planning, organizing, writing and then revising. For while a writer's product – the finished essay, story, or novel – is presented in lines, the process that produces it is not linear at all. Instead, it is recursive, a cyclical process during which writers move back and forth on a continuum discovering analysing and synthesizing ideas "

What Raimes means by "recursive" is that when producing and preparing the text, writers move backwards and forwards at several times of the composition when they feel the usefulness of doing it. Tribble (1996:39) adds that "The writer may then need to revise the plan radically in order to cope with changes that have developed in the argument, or may want to revise the style of earlier sections before going to write later parts of the text as they come to appreciate how best to their intended audience

## **2-Characteristics of the Process Approach**

Departing from the idea that the Process Approach was built up around the idea of the complexities of the writing process, rather than on the idea that texts are first planned, Hairston(1988), one of the passionate proponents of this type of teaching ,describes the Process Approach as follows , claiming a paradigm shift in writing theory and instruction:

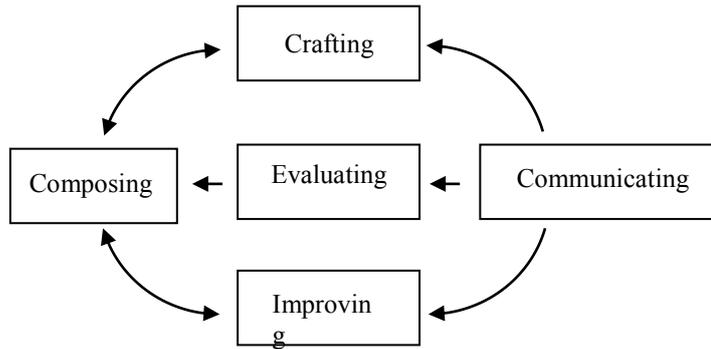
- It focuses on the writing process; instructors intervene in students' writing during the process.
- It teaches strategies for invention and discovery; instructors help students generate content and discover purpose.

- It is rhetorically based; audience, purpose and occasion figure prominently in the assignment of writing tasks.
- Instructors evaluate the written product by how well it fulfils the writer's intention and meets the audience's needs.
- It views writing as a recursive rather than a linear process; pre-writing as an activity that involves the intuitive and non-rational as well as the rational faculties.
- It emphasises that writing is a way of learning and developing as well as a communication skill.
- It includes a variety of writing modes, expressive as well as expository.
- It is informed by other disciplines, especially Cognitive Psychology and Linguistics.
- It views writing as a disciplined creative activity that can be analysed and described; its practitioners believe that writing can be taught.
- It is based on linguistic research and research into the composing process.
- It stresses the principle that writing teachers should be people who write

It is important to note that Hairston's (1988) description of the writing process does not show how it should be adopted in the classroom. In other words, she does not attempt to describe how the above cited points should be translated into the classroom. Additionally, the discussed framework is dealt with only in terms of first language teaching. For application to the second language classroom, we think, some adjustments may have to be made. Furthermore, Hairston (1988:86) sees the writing class as being integral in the whole process of education. It helps to train and develop the thinking process, for example. In fact, Hairston was attempting to define a whole new attitude to the teaching of writing of which emphasis on process was only an important element. When we assess what the 'process approach' has to offer us, we should look at all the ideas which are or have been associated with it."

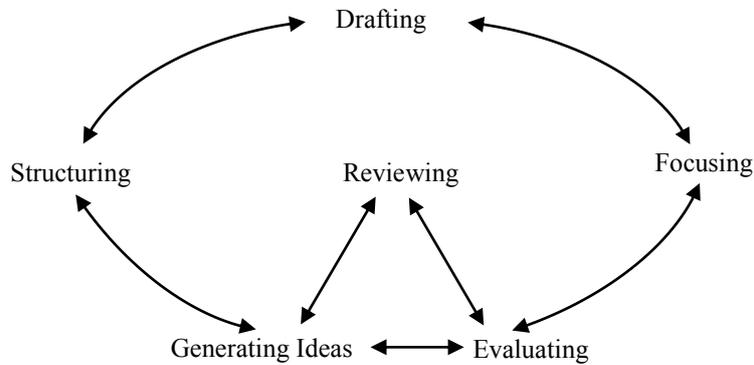
### **3-Models of Process Writing**

Hedge (1988) refers to the writing processes using terms such as "Composing", an equivalent for generating and structuring in White and Arndt's (1991) model. It is the stage where the students "get their ideas together, make rough plans or formulate mental outlines, and develop a sense of direction as they begin to draft their writing" Hedge (1988:15), then she talks about "communicating" –the stage where the students "think about who they are writing for" Hedge (Ibid : 9). "Crafting" is the activity in which the students pass to the real production of texts. "Improving and evaluating" are put by Hedge (1988) to cover the activities/ stages of constant reviewing, revising and editing. It is the stage where the teacher intervenes for a better clarity and quality of writing; it is the typical act of responding which leads to redrafting and editing.



**Figure : 1 Adapted Version of the Model of Writing According the Hedge's Terminology . (1988)**

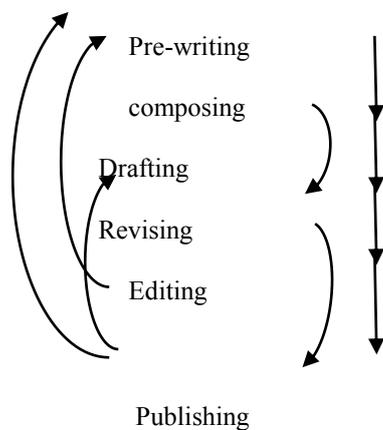
The model presented by White and Arndt (1991) is almost similar to the design used by Hedge and differs only in terminology as shown in Figure 2 below.



**Figure :2 A Model of Writing ( White and Arndt 1991)**

As given by White and Arndt (1991), the processes involved in the act of writing are : Generating, focusing, structuring, drafting, evaluating and reviewing

Writing is viewed as a process in which the student interacts with what s/he has written, planning, physically writing and revising what has been written , then editing and publishing. This is presented figure 3 which shows the whole process not as fixed sequence but as a dynamic and unpredictable process.

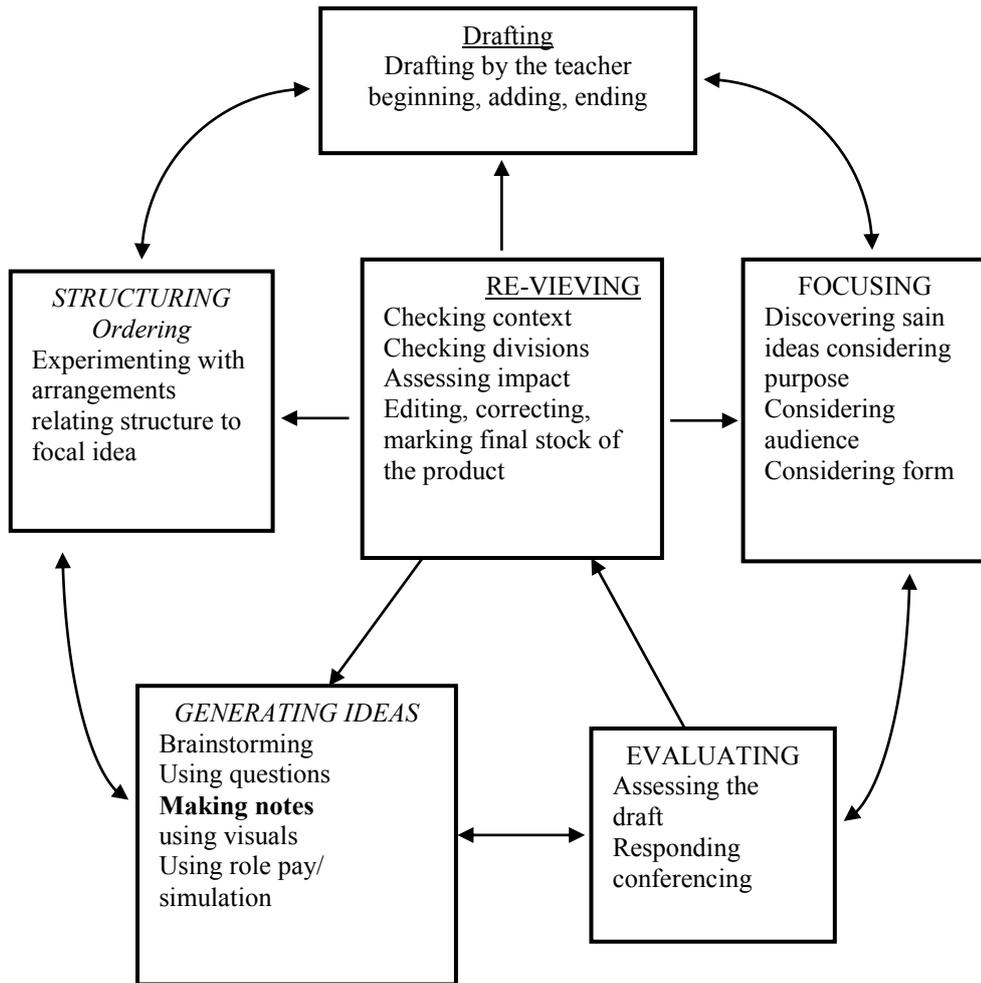


**Figure 3: The Process Approach According to Tribble 1996 :39**

#### **4- Process Writing Activities / Techniques**

Any resource book adapting a Process Approach is based on the same principles and presents activities that go around the models presented earlier in the foreign or second language writing classroom. Such activities may vary but the rationale behind them remains the same.

According to White and Arndt (1991), the major activities that can be included in a process of writing can be summarized in figure 4.



**Figure: 4 Activities of Process Writing Course (Adapted from White and Arndt's Model of Writing) (1991).**

White and Arndt(1991 )give a rather long daunting list of the typical activities adopted in a process oriented classroom which might go on in a process writing course.

- Discussion (class, small group, pair).
- Brain storming / making notes / asking questions.
- Fast writing/ selecting ideas/ establishing a view point
- Rough draft
- Preliminary self-evaluation
- Arranging information/structuring the text.
- First draft

Group/ peer evaluation and responding.  
Conference  
Second draft  
Self-evaluation /editing/ proof reading  
Finished draft  
Final responding to draft

**A Typical Sequence of Activities in a Process Writing Course (White and Arndt 1991:7)**

There are many useful instructive techniques that can be used as a framework for teachers to approach/capture the recursive not linear nature of writing.. Activities to generate ideas (for example , brainstorming) help writers tap their long term memory and answer the question: “ what can I say on the topic? Focusing (for example, fast writing) deals with : What is my overall purpose in writing this?” . Structuring is organized and reorganized text to answer the question: “How can I present these ideas in a way that is acceptable to my reader? ” Activities include experimenting with different types of text, having read examples. Drafting is the transition from writer – based thought into reader-based text (See Furneaux 1998).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we can say that writing is less effective in our classes, and our teachers and learners need to examine and develop writing strategies that help them improve the quality of writing .These strategies lie in the exploration of writing as a process . Most importantly, our students need to know the recursive and developmental nature of writing by constantly going through the different stages and by revising their productions .The teachers should not evaluate students on their first products but give them the opportunity to write and write and write again until they produce concise and relatively correct compositions .

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