

TEACHING WRITING SKILL THROUGH COLLABORATIVE WRITING TECHNIQUE: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

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Abstract: Based on the school based curriculum states that the teaching of writing skill is aimed at enabling students to master the functional and monologue texts in the form of genres. However, previous studies revealed that Indonesian students still have problems in learning it because writing itself involves aspects of grammatical form, choice of words, generating and organizing the ideas into coherent and logically ordered. Those have become a hard challenge for many students in Indonesia. To overcome this, collaborative writing technique is one of writing techniques to help students learn and develop their writing. This article discusses it from both theoretical perspective and pedagogical procedures for teaching writing of collaborative writing technique.

Keywords: Teaching, Writing Skill, Collaborative Writing Technique.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a tool of communication in a written form such as email, business letters, newspapers, diary, and so on. This skill is essential part to convey our thoughts, ideas and organize them into sentences or paragraphs. As Harmer (1998) points out that the writing skill has finally recognized as an important skill for language learning. He emphasizes on the importance of writing skill to be taught to English foreign language students such as learning encouragement, language development, learning approach, and most importantly, writing skill as compulsory subject. Therefore, writing

become one of necessary skills for preparing students to communicate and acquire knowledge in the era of information technology.

In Indonesia, the purpose of the teaching of writing is to enable EFL students to master functional and monologue texts in the form of genres such as descriptive, narrative, recount, procedure, and report (Depdiknas, 2006). The various genres of writing texts have social function, the purpose of texts, and meaning of text types, However, a study conducted by Widiati (2003) revealed that the teaching of writing in Indonesian context has not been able to respond to the students' needs for different literacy ability. Many students feel difficult to develop the ideas and pour down the ideas into paragraph and even more complicated in grammar and diction. It is very hard and complex to teach writing, many teachers ignore it due to it needs a deep knowledge and enough time to practice. Compared to other three skill, is regarded as the most difficult language skill to achieve by the students and to teach by the teachers (Alwasilah, 2004).

To improve a student's writing ability, much attention has to be needed by a teacher as approaches to teaching writing through providing guide and feedback (Leki& Carson, 1994). The teacher must help and encourage his/her students to master writing. It needs varied activities to implement at the classroom so that the students can develop their ideas into better. Collaborative writing technique is a good way to teach writing because it facilitates the students to work in pair or group in creating the text. According to Alwasilah (2004) collaborative writing is the ways in which students work in a community of readers and writers and negotiate meaning and symbols used in the text. Students are required to jointly discuss a topic, plan an outline, and contribute elements of the text (paragraphs, sentences, phrases, words) in a collaborative writing. By working in groups, students enjoy more opportunity to see how their peers think and create new ideas. Moreover, discussion in group can provide less anxiety- producing context in which learners are likely to feel free to try out new ideas. Harmer (2002) adds that generation of

ideas is more lively with two or more students involved than it is when the writers work on their own. In addition, Lyons and Hasley (1987) state that collaborative writing provides a co-operative relationship between writer and reader and makes the writing task more realistic and interactive. Through this technique can give a positive impact on students' performance and motivation in reconstructing the text.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Writing Technique: Theoretical Perspective

Collaborative writing technique has been becoming a current issue in writing and pedagogical studies in the twenty first century. Much attention start focusing on collaborative writing in early 1970's when the expert of writing, Kenneth Bruffee, stated his argument that by doing in groups to write essays and fiction, students produced better performance in composition than they worked alone. He reasoned that EFL/ESL students could learn more with their partners to achieve a goal than they only communicate with their teacher (Spring, 1997,p. 2). It is also inspired by psychologist, Vygotsky, (1896-1934 cited by Kellough and Kellough, 1999,p. 302) studying the importance of a learner's social interactions in learning situations. Vygotsky explained that learning could be effective when students worked together to finish a task because they created interactive learning environment each other and they definitely were monitored and guided by their teacher. Due to a pedagogical shift from teacher centered lessons to student centered lessons, the teaching of writing has also changed the design of lesson plan to make collaborative writing interactive in EFL/ESL classroom activities (Ellis, 2001; Li et al., 2012).

Murray (1992) states that collaborative writing is basically a social activities through which writers looked for specific items to be shared their understanding of essays. To reach such an understanding, participants function according to several social and interactional rules as follows: First, the participants discuss the goals

which they are going to write. They place the goals in rank order from high to low, and then they share a higher order goal. From the sharing, they set a common goal for the group. Meanwhile, specification of the goal is negotiated during the process. Secondly, the participants must have different knowledge and there must be a gap information between them. Because of this information gap, they (group members) have to negotiate content, style, and even the goal of writing. Thirdly, the participants interact as a group. They exchange thought, feeling, ideas between them, and result in reciprocal effect on each other. Fourthly, the participants distanced themselves from the text. To see their collaborative text, they produce many written drafts during one session and they move away from the text in time and space. Setting the text aside for a time will make them have a new perspective to find their mistakes in the text. In addition, Chin (1996) asserts that collaborative writing is an area where group ware may provide significant benefit. It allows students to simultaneously work on different portions of the same document and/or to review and critique the written work of others.

It is clear that collaboration refers to a group discussion in writing, in this way, personal combination determines optimal results among them-group or pairs. Accordingly, Frakas (1991 cited by Spring, 1997) offers four possible definitions useful in engaging group discussion through the core activities, they are:

1. Pair or group students jointly construct the finished text of a paper;
2. Pair or group students participating to writing aspects in a paper;
3. One or more students revising a paper through editing and reviewing,
4. Each partner working actively with another or other partners and drafting a paper based on their own thoughts or ideas.

In collaborative writing, students work together in pairs or triads in composing a formal paper. Each student participate and cooperate at the steps of the writing process such as brainstorming ideas, gathering and organizing ideas, drafting, revising, and editing a paper. Working together actually help students to learn and run the

writing process effectively. Finally students' work in composing a text will better and better and can be easily read by readers (Barkely F. Elizabeth et., al. 2005). Collaborative writing process can refer to about how groups or pairs provide feedback to each other, what they search for help from each other, and how they discuss and negotiate strategies in pointing writing concerns (e.g., how to mark a missing citation) (Kessler, Grek, et.al, 2012). The purpose of the collaborative writing does not only produce final product but also construct meaning in collaboration to achieve higher quality of product. The revising and editing processes are mutual relationship to the learning process. The most practical way teachers provide feedback to students' errors and monitor them in working in group (Shin WanTeow, 2014).

The point of collaborative writing is the process of producing a written language in a pair or group where all members cooperated and contributed to the writing process to produce a better text and also create social interaction between student-student and student-teacher to achieve a goal. It refers to a project where a composition is created by the pair together rather than individually. It may be in a pair or group of students working together on a piece of writing who can respond to each other's ideas (both in terms language and content), making suggestions for changes and so contributing to the success of the finished product. This technique gives extra opportunity to write more by exchanging other ideas, giving suggestions and contributing the success of the final product. The chance to write in group or in pairs will motivate students and make students joyful to learn how to write well. So, it is really helpful and useful to be implemented by teachers developing students' thoughts and arguments. Finally, students feel self-confident to learn autonomously by expressing their ideas freely and encourage them to compose an essay in which they may initially be afraid to make errors. Furthermore, this technique can also be set to increase the students' motivation in writing.

The Pedagogical Procedures of Teaching Writing through Collaborative Writing Technique

Before actualizing writing teaching practice through collaborative writing technique, the article firstly tries to describe about teaching writing. Teaching writing involves micro and macro aspects to be understood by teachers and taught to students. In micro aspect, teachers need to explain and practice to students about specific written forms at the level of word or sentence (handwriting or typing, spelling, punctuation). While, macro aspect teachers pay much more on content and organization. In this case, teachers command students to express themselves by using their own words, convey the aims of composing, and specify a targeted audience. More clear explanation is provided by Brown (2004, p. 220); he states that micro-skills refer to specific terms or patterns of writing work, while macro-skills are pointed to responsive and extensive writing. The micro and macro skills are described as follows:

1) Micro-skills

- a) Producing graphemes and orthographic English forms;
- b) Producing composing works at an efficient rate of speed to match the goal;
- c) Producing an acceptable core of words and use appropriate word order patterns;
- d) Using acceptable structural forms (e.g. tense, agreement, pluralization), sentence patterns and rules;
- e) Expressing a certain meaning in diverse grammatical patterns; and
- f) Using cohesive devices in written language.

2) Macro-skills

- a) Using the clear and accurate forms and rules of written discourse;
- b) Accomplishing appropriately the communicative functions of various texts according to the form and purpose;

- c) Conveying links and connections to organize every items such as topic sentence, supporting sentences, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification;
- d) Differing between literal and implied meanings when composing;
- e) Delivering appropriately culturally specific sources in the context of the written text; and
- f) Developing and using writing strategies, such as accurately assessing the reader's interpretation, starting pre-writing devices with emphasizing fluency on the first draft, using paraphrases and similar words, requiring peer and teacher feedback, and implementing feedback for revising and editing.

In teaching writing, teachers also have to orient on several kinds of writing knowledge namely knowledge of the content, knowledge of writing steps to connect the ideas, knowledge of writing rules, and procedural knowledge needed to employ the three other kinds of knowledge in writing a written product (Hillocks in O'Malley, 1996). Those are as principal components to teaching writing to students. The theory is also supported by Tribble (1996) that in order to understand a specific task in writing, writers (students) requires the range of knowledge which can be summarized as follows:

- a) Content knowledge
It is the knowledge of the concepts involved in the subject area.
- b) Context knowledge
It is the knowledge of the context in which the text will be read.
- c) Language system knowledge
It is the knowledge of those aspects of the language system necessary for the completion of the task.
- d) Writing process knowledge
- e) It is the knowledge of the most appropriate way of preparing for a specific writing task.

In order to be able to produce a good written text, teachers should require procedures to teach writing in order to be achieved the objectives of teaching writing itself. Therefore, this article suggests collaboration in writing an essay. As stated by Reid, M John (2000) writing requires collaboration in order to be easier, better, and more successful when doing a writing process in talking, drafting, revising, reading and editing. Furthermore, the exchange of ideas provides open-ended, real-life context to reach the objectives of writing (Blanton, 1992; Savova and Donato, 1991 in Reid, M John, 2000). Reid adds that in small groups, students can

- a. Collaboratively gather information, generate, and support opinions, and respond to ideas.
- b. Problem-solve, evaluate, and make decisions.
- c. Role-play or participate in simulation activities in the process of discovery.
- d. Collaborate in reader response activities: annotating, analyzing, evaluating articles, and student essay.

Thus, to engage collaboration among students, it is recommended from this concept to appoint students to work in pair. They consist of a helper and a writer and they play their role based on the task. Specific tasks need to be done by the helper and the writer when they write collaboratively. The one who is at a higher writing ability plays the role as a helper, and the one who is at a lower writing level plays the role as a writer. It indicates the helper is smarter and more knowledgeable than his/her partner as writer because he/she is able to assist a writer to guide and develop a text to be better. Each of them has the responsibility to contribute to the successful writing product. Pair activities create interaction each other and allow students to explore the ideas what they have. The pedagogical procedures are described as follows:

Step 1 Idea Generation

This stage is getting the students' ideas through encouraging and brainstorming them so that they are able to generate ideas for the topic. Harmer (2002) argues that generation of ideas is lively with two

or more students involved than it is when the writers work on their own. At the beginning step, the teacher raises students' prior knowledge about what they know from the discussed topic. A teacher asks a helper to have some questions to stimulate the writer's ideas. The questions can be in the form of yes/no questions or WH questions. In this context, each pair is hoped to understand important components of the various texts such as generic structure, grammatical forms, and vocabulary and so on. For example, if the teacher teaches a descriptive text, he or she surely explains and gives an understanding of structure of the text, kind of tenses and appropriate words. This text has identification and description. The generic structure of identification refers to the writer identifies things or phenomena happened in the descriptive texts and the description means the writer tries to describe parts, qualities, and characteristics. The types of the questions can be employed yes-no questions and WH-questions as follows:

- a. Do you know this topic?
- b. Is it interesting for you?
- c. What the thing do you like?
- d. What does it look like?
- e. Where does it live? etc.

Then, the writer takes the questions and makes lists to answer each one. The teacher then assigns the helper to review the writer's key words, to develop the ideas into paragraph, and to organize the ideas in order and negotiate it together. Then, the pair reviews and decides whether the organization should be changed or not. It indicates negotiating role each of them. If the ideas may not match from the topic, they can code them by underlining or highlighting with a red marker. Then, pairs choose to draw lines linking or around related ideas, so that a "semantic map" is constructed.

Step 2 Drafting

When ideas are gathered from the previous stage, the next effort is to try to write-drafting may be carried out quickly. Basically, the first attempt to write ideas down called rough drafts. In this stage,

the teacher reminds writers and helpers do not have to worry much about the linguistics forms, diction, spelling or punctuation. It emphasizes on letting ideas to flow. This step aims to give the writer opportunities to start writing a rough draft based on the information what they have from the helper. Both writer and helper are asked to arrange their ideas into paragraph and they are allowed by the teacher to use a dictionary. In this way, a writer begins writing rough drafts based on the discovered ideas and then rough drafts are reviewed by the helper. The writer focuses on the arrangement of words and phrase into sentences and further organized into paragraph. The other side, the helper gives comments and feedback from the drafts and they discuss ideas to each other. For drafting students should have a main idea in their thoughts that they would like to communicate to the audience as readers in order to give a clear direction to their writing. During the activity, the teacher monitor around the class to provide assistance, guidance, and comments if they need.

Step 3 Reading

In this step, the writer reads the draft. When the writer reads the draft aloud to the helper, the helper provides notes and gives some corrections if the draft that sound incorrectly and inappropriately for words or phrases and the helper may also comment on the clarity and relevance of the ideas and their coherence in the kind of written comment. Then, the writer reorganizes what has been written in the first rough draft and to refine ideas based on the feedback from the helper.

Step 4 Revising

Revision is a part of writing process where the helper reviews and then he/she amends their work so that it looks fresh. Then the writer writes down some changes that are corrected by the helper. However, the helper should consider several aspects of revision. It can be a revising guide for the helper by to check the writer thoughts in writing drafts by using yes/no questions adapted from Harcourt (2012) as follows:

Ideas

- _____ a. Is the topic important and relevant?
- _____ b. Has the writer developed a specific focus or thesis statement?
- _____ c. Does each paragraph support the thesis?
- _____ d. Has the writer included enough details to make the ideas clear?

Organization

- _____ e. Does the writing follow a clear pattern of organization?
- _____ f. Has the writer developed effective beginning, middle, and ending parts?
- _____ g. Does the sentences need to reorder any parts?

Voice

- _____ i. Does the writer's voice fit the purpose of the writing?
- _____ j. Does the writer sound interested in and knowledgeable about the topic?

Word Choice

- _____ l. Has the writer used an appropriate level of formality?
- _____ m. Does the writer use specific nouns and vivid verbs?
- _____ n. Does the writer avoid repetition and redundancy?

Sentence Fluency

- _____ o. Are the sentences complete and clearly written?
- _____ p. Do the sentences flow smoothly?
- _____ q. Has the writer varied the sentences beginning and lengths?

Those checklists are important for the helper to review and offer suggestions so that the drafts of essay sound better and better. A revising process tend to focus on ideas, organization, and voice and also style (word choice, sentence fluency) that flowing on the pairs' thoughts Harcourt (2012).

Step 4 Editing

In this step, the helper and the writer look at the whole essay to edit together and consider what improvement might be made. This

process is the last step to check error of words, phrases, or sentences and punctuation. Obviously the writer and the helper correct directly the draft more than once, check the five editing criteria:

- a. Meaning
- b. Order (organization of the separate ideas in the text, organization within a phrase or sentence, and organization of order of sentences)
- c. Spelling
- d. Punctuation
- e. Style (word choice and sentence structure)

While editing, the writer and helper determine the following questions as a guide adapted from Harcourt (2012):

Punctuation

- ___ Do the sentences end with the proper punctuation?
- ___ Do we use commas correctly in compound sentences?
- ___ Do we use commas correctly in a series and after long introductory phrases or clauses?
- ___ Do we use apostrophes correctly?

Mechanics (Capitalization and Spelling)

- ___ Do we start the sentences with capital letters?
- ___ Do we capitalize proper nouns?
- ___ Have we checked for spelling errors (including those the spell-checker may have missed)?

Grammar

- ___ Do the subjects and verbs agree in our sentences?
- ___ Do our sentences use correct and inconsistent verb tenses?
- ___ Do our pronouns agree with their antecedents?
- ___ Have we avoided any other usage errors?

Presentation

- ___ Does the title effectively lead into the writing?
- ___ Are the sources of information properly presented and documented?
- ___ Does our writing meet the requirements for final presentation?

The order of questions indicates the most important things in writing. With the question in mind, the helper marks area the writer has missed, the helper can also suggest other changes.

In this step, the role of the teacher reminds the pair to use the checklists so that they may add new ideas; delete irrelevant sentences and information and rearrange ideas to improve the organization. The process of editing is the final stage to correct inappropriate words, wrong sentences or error punctuation and so on to produce the better writing version.

Step 5 Best Copy

The writer then copies out a neat or best version of the corrected draft. The helper provides help when necessary, depending on the skill of the writer. In this case, the teacher instructs the writer role to write the last version of the writing product. The best copy is a joint product of the pair and is then hand in to the teacher.

Step 6 The Teacher Evaluation

Teacher evaluation is the final step. In this step, students will have an opportunity to receive comments and instructive feedback directly from the teacher.

The teacher instructs each pair to submit their best product, then the teacher provide them feedback to correct their writing explicitly. The teacher's comments focus on meaning/idea, order, style, spelling, and punctuation, which are the five editing criteria stated in Step 4. In evaluating, the teacher also holds on a conference by assigning the pair to exchange their composition to be proofread by other pairs. After that, the pair discusses the corrections, feedback or comments from other pairs, if they still have problems with the corrections, feedback or comments from other pairs. If the pairs still have problems in their work, the teacher can explain and solve them together at the end of conference. Next the teacher asks the student (writer) to revise the composition based on the correction, feedback provided and comments from their friends or their teacher. Finally, the final composition from any teacher's and pairs' feedback are revised and submitted to the teacher.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Teaching writing requires many techniques that encourage the students to use it as written communication. Collaborative writing technique can be applied in pair or group discussion to engage students' writing. This technique is able to solve the students' problems in writing texts. Although some teachers may not be aware, collaborative writing has lots of benefits (Kessler et al., 2012; Leki, 1993; Storch, 2005). Thus, teaching writing through collaborative writing is a suitable technique to improve the students' writing ability. It can be used as a reference for the teacher in improving the students' writing ability because every step of writing process can be followed easier and more flexible by the students. Finally the products of students' composition have the good quality.

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