

A Project-based Focused Freewriting Approach to Teach Writing

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Abstract: Student-center approach has prevailed in educational sector in the new era, as more and more educators emphasize the importance of students' voice and their engagement in classroom in facilitating learning achievement. One of the most popular approaches that advocate the student-center theory is the project-based approach, which has been applied in various disciplines including language teaching. Although various researches have analyzed PBL in foreign language classes, fewer are concentrated on writing course, as writing is normally deemed as a personal task and confined to personal expression, whereas project-based approach incorporates more people to collaborate in learning. According to Geoff Scott (2005), "learners will need to be immersed in learning situations that engage them in action, that are authentic, reflective and collaborative". Therefore it can be fruitful to teach English writing in a project context. Free writing is a prevailing approach in teaching writing, as indicated and proved in many studies. This article will review literature on project-based approach and free-writing approach to synthesize a new approach which can assist teachers in teaching writing.

Keywords: Education Research; Course Analysis; Writing To Explore

Introduction

More people to collaborate in learning. According to Geoff Scott (2005), "learners will need to be immersed in learning situations that engage them in action, that are authentic, reflective and collaborative". Therefore it can be fruitful to teach English writing in a project context. Free writing is a prevailing approach in teaching writing as indicated and proved in many studies. This article will review literature on project-based approach and free-writing approach to synthesize a new approach which can assist teachers in teaching writing.

1. Project-based Approach

As pointed out by Joseph S. Krajcik and Phyllis C. Blumenfeld (2006), project-based learning is based on "the constructivist finding that students gain a deeper understanding of material when they actively construct their understanding by working with and using ideas" (p.317). According to some studies, PBL is characterized by its communicative nature as students will have more information exchange activities orally or in written compared with other teaching approaches.

The advantages and disadvantages of PBL have been explored in different papers. Ibrahim FAROUCK (2016) proved by a model study that PBL can enhance students' willingness to communicate: However, some may criticize it on its limit contents as teacher plays a role as instructor instead of conveying knowledge in a traditional way. Murtaza, T. & Mahmood, M. (2018) suggested that PBL can "enrich teaching to support active learning" (P.2); whereas it confronts teachers with challenges in preparing and also implementation stages (P.2). In a qualitative and quantitative study on PBL on college students by Feng Yufang (2010), the result revealed that PBL can help to improve students' overall language competence, especially in reading and writing. Other literatures consider PBL as contributive in cultivating students' skills such as collaboration, communication, problem solving and also developing students' confidence in learning language.

Researchers also investigate PBL application in various languages teaching context, especially in EFL situation. Some educator compared PBL with other approaches; others applied research to explore PBL implementation in different school levels, from kindergarten to higher education. There are also studies focusing on teachers' role in PBL teaching, or PBL in teaching EAP and ESP. However, most studies take great effort on comprehensive language learning, fewer have concentrated in PBL implementation in writing.

2. Free-Writing Approach

Free-writing is defined by LEWIS R.M. (1985) as "A writing process which generates a smooth flow of words and thoughts without concern for polished phrases or mechanics; the writer expresses his ideas freely on whatever comes to mind" (p.8) In this definition, free writing provides opportunity for writer to express his viewpoints freely without considering the language or any other forms of an article. LEWIS R.M. also brought forward the concept of "Focused Freewriting" in this article.

Studies on pros and cons of free writing have been employed by many educators in order to find effective strategy for teaching writing. JU A HWANG (2010) applied as considered (2007) it as useful not only in writing but also study to explore benefits of free writing in students' writing fluency by comparing unguided and guided free writing. The study indicated that free writing help

students to compose writing from simple personal experience description to more abstract ideas and insights. Additionally, the study also proved the positive impact of free writing on writing fluency. Another study by L. Y. Li (2007) explored the concept of focused freewriting in learning academic writing, the author considered free writing has its limitation as it “lack of focus or control”(p.42). However, focused freewriting can benefit students in engaging students in continuous writing practices and ease the mental burden of author when he/she is trying to seek for words.

Some studies explored the benefit of free writing in other educational context. L. Y. Li so in other courses; Masrouf, M. R. and Hoseini, M. (2013) evaluated the usage of free writing in pre-reading course; Seohyun Penn and Hyun-Woo Lim (2016)^[3]examined the effect of free writing on Korean’ overall English competence. Farzaneh Nouri and Amir Marzban (2018) undertook the evaluation from a particular perspective as free writing’s effect on using correct punctuation marks in writing.

Summarizing, studies have been adopted in different countries to investigate the benefits and implementation of free writing in various classroom context.

3. Towards a synthesis: Project-based Focused Freewriting Approach

To overcome the shortages of both project-based approach and free writing approach, a Project-based Focused Freewriting Approach is synthesized for effective teaching in writing class. Focused freewriting is sort of free writing that focuses on one topic. The new synthesized approach can utilize advantages of free writing while overcome its limitation as “lack of focus and control” by utilizing the focused topics.^[4]

The PB focused freewriting is preferably implemented in higher education level, as PBL learning requires student collaborative learning ability and even coordination skill. Teaching goal of PB focused freewriting is set up to develop student’s writing skill gradually through group and peers work by free writing on controlled topics. During the whole project process, student will not only practice their writing skill, but also develop other abilities, such as logical thinking, insight and critical thinking, learning autonomy, collaboration awareness and skill, communication and even presentation skill. In short, writing is the main target in PB focused freewriting; however, students can achieve more than writing skill during the project.

In a PBL context, teachers are requested with ability in handling student-center teaching strategies to motivate and instruct students (Tamim, S. R. , & Grant, M. M. 2013) Therefore, PB Focused freewriting should cover a rational lesson plan and^[5]thoughtful preparation. The whole project can be executed within one semester. The implementation procedure may contain following stages.

3.1 First, project instruction and explanation

Teacher explains all necessary information, teaching goal, requirements and assessment rubrics before project execution. Concept and characteristics of free writing will be explained to students in this stage.

3.2 Second, forming learning groups

Learning groups should include no less than 3 but not more than 8 persons in each group.

3.3 Third, Topics Collection

One of the essences of free writing is students’ interest in writing. To facilitate students’ engagement in the learning projects, questionnaire survey can be applied to collect popular topics among students.

3.4 Fourth, Project start-up meeting

The start-up meeting is to determine one main by each group topic through which each group tries to solve one problem of writing and enhance each members’ writing skill progressively. The problems are not limited to language use, grammar or thought in composing writing. The second to be confirmed in the meeting are the sub-topics within the domain of main topic.^[6]

3.5 Fifth, weekly free writing on sub-topics

Weekly group discussion and sharing Group members will write on one sub-topic each week. This session will last for at least 10 weeks.

Group discussion and sharing need to be arranged every week to share everyone’ work in last week. Discussion and sharing can be in a vast range, including but not limit to content, language use, grammar, text structure.

3.6 Sixth, Personal free writing on main focused topic

Final free writing on the main topic will begin after 10 weeks intensive free writing session. Student could have enhanced their insight and language skill through the previous 10 weeks writing and discussion.

4. Conclusion

Project-based focused freewriting can take advantages of PBL and free writing approaches in teaching writing while avoid shortcomings of both approaches. Through an intensive writing practice and collaborative work, students will not only improve their writing skill, but also gain benefit in other aspects, especially in communication, cooperation and critical thinking^[7].

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