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b) Kertas kerja Seminar

Zamimi Awang. (1994). *Micro Accounting System for Medical Care Service Programme*, Paper presented at the Malaysian Ministry of Health Micro Accounting System Course (October), Kuala Lumpur, mimeo.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INSTRUCTOR BEING A WRITING MODEL AND SETTING UP THE WRITING ENVIRONMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

In learning to speak, to read and to write, the student observes the instructor as a genuine user of the language. The student is invited to participate because he/she has a need for and the interest in learning to write which is a skill in the learning of a language. The writer believes that when student is not learning, it is because the demonstrations are not given or are inadequate and are not seen as meaningful to the learner. This idea is significant at the tertiary level where many students are turned off. Based on research and classroom experience, being a model in the classroom environment will enhance the learning process.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The teaching of writing has always placed emphasis on the final written product. The product focuses on the aspects of usage and correct form. Many language instructors believe writers should know what they are going to write; that teaching grammar, then sentence, then paragraph and finally the essay is an effective method of writing instruction. But grammatically perfect sentences have little power if they do not clearly and forcefully express intelligent ideas.

This paper looks into the importance of the instructor/teacher being a writing model and the ability to set up a writing environment. There are several reasons for focusing on the instructor/teacher to be the model for students and the environment for writing. Firstly, I believe that as teachers we should not ask our students to go through any process we have not experienced ourselves. Our students must have writing models if they are to become writers, and we instructors/teachers need to be those models. The same goes with reading. Almost every teacher I know reads with and to the students-during read-aloud time, sustained silent reading and guided reading. Not so with writing.

Most of us do not write with our students or share our own writing. In fact many of us do not like to write or are afraid to write. We have been conditioned by our own traditional schooling to view writing as an assignment by and for the teacher. Though we meticulously lead students through the steps of the writing process, we have never been through the process ourselves. Yet, when we take art or athletics lessons from a teacher, he/she will demonstrate. We cannot be instructors/teachers of writing until we demonstrate the craft ourselves. We must become genuine users and risk takers before we can expect the same of our students. Writing is tough work, even for those who do it regularly.

Secondly, research has shown that undue apprehension can be the student's worst enemy. Consider the situation of Diederich's remedial students ".....they hate and fear writing more than anything else they have had to do in school" (Diederich 1974:21) This fear of writing is related to poor writing performance and may impede the development of writing skills.

Thirdly, when students recognize pressures upon them to perform and doubt their ability to do so, the anxiety which results can increase the likelihood of failure. Based on the reasons listed above, then it is felt necessary to focus on the model and environment of writing, especially among students who are second language learners.

2.0 THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A WRITING MODEL

There are many ways to begin to become a writing model. One way is to share a copy of a letter or note written for a real purpose. Another way is to try a shared writing exercise after a common class experience such as a field trip. Or two classes can be combined, with one teacher writing in front of the students and the other teacher providing support. I believe it is okay to tell the students we have never written in front of a class before and are feeling very anxious. Students will respect and learn the process if they know the teacher is sincere and cares about them.

Another method that teachers can adopt if the fear of writing before the class is too great to actually do it, is by inviting a writer into the classroom. The individual need not be a famous writer. He/She could be a parent, a colleague-anyone who makes writing a real part of life. Students must know adults who write and who are willing to demonstrate their thinking-writing-revising-editing processes for them.

In class we have always stressed the importance of writing. I have shared drafts of my own writing in front of the class on the overhead projector. It took me ten years to get up the courage to do that. My favourite is journal writing. First, I listed some topics that I could write about: needing a haircut, baking cakes, gardening, driving to Sarikei, being nervous about my presentation.

I didn't know I was actually going to write in public until I did it. As I began composing on the overhead projector, the room became silent. I felt apprehensive because I had no idea what I was going to write or how it would come out. This is what I wrote:

Last night some of my friends came to my room, and we were sharing pictures from our lives. As it got later and later, I started to get really nervous because I needed some quiet time to organize my thoughts for the next day's presentation.

I had trouble sleeping. I kept waking and looking at the clock and wondering when it would be six a.m. I had butterflies in my stomach all morning- through breakfast and through the other students' presentation. But once I started talking, my nervousness disappeared, and I began to relax.

My handwriting was as illegible as usual, I had several cross outs, my content was sparse, but at least it was a genuine attempt, and the students appreciated that. My own feelings of vulnerability have helped me be empathetic to students who share their writing and have sensitized me to the need to set up a classroom writing climate that is supportive and encouraging. We all need to feel that our writing and best efforts are valued if we are going to take the risk of sharing writing and accepting responses.

When UiTM suggested that all the lecturers send in their writings, I had an idea of having a support group to focus on writing as most of us honestly say that we did not write ourselves. We can write a draft of a fond memory in the university, our experiences and these topics are considered having a real purpose. Maybe we take about six weeks of the support group meetings to write our drafts, meet in small response groups to give feedback, write final copies and share the finished pieces. Probably after going through this support group, we may feel vulnerable and may even be surprised at our own sensitivity to suggestions or comments. This will make us realize how careful we have to be with students. All this time we may have no idea we would feel so defensive about our writing. From this experience it would make it easier to demonstrate ourselves as writers to our students.

3.0 SETTING UP THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FOR WRITING

The climate of the classroom, both emotional and physical, contributes to students' willingness and eagerness to write. We need to examine and be able to articulate our own beliefs about writing before we can foster an environment that meaningfully engages students in the writing process. For me, Routman (1991) has said it best:

A Framework of beliefs about writing

1. Writers need regular chunks of time.
2. Writers need their own topics.
3. Writers need response.
4. Writers learn mechanics in context.
5. Students need to know adults who write.
6. Writers need to read.
7. Writers need to feel safe to take a risk.
8. Writers need a genuine purpose for writing.

3.1 Making the writing process real

In many writing classes, writing is not natural. Instead, writing is a mechanistic process. Many of us have bought into "process writing" without the necessary personal conviction to make it significant for students. I remember starting by posting on the wall the steps of the writing process. I took the students through the steps as if following a recipe. On Monday we did prewriting. On Tuesday we did the first draft. Wednesday we revised. Thursday we edited. Friday we published. This does not happen to anyone of us who writes.

When I write, I became aware that writers do not go through an exact process. I never get up and say today I will do prewriting. To those who write, they are always thinking, including outlining, brainstorming, jotting notes, and is mostly a mental process. From my experience, I never go neatly through steps. I go back and forth, I write a draft, revise think, rewrite, begin a new draft and I do not follow any steps. Thus we need to allow students the same time to find what works for them. This is not to say we should not give students due dates, but we can build in flexibility as much as possible.

3.2 Valuing Revision

Revision is the heart of the writing process and is fundamental to all good writing. Students need to understand the importance of revision and this can be done when revision is demonstrated as a genuine part of good writing. On the other hand, when it is presented as "step three" in the writing process, students rarely take it seriously. Murray (1990) calls revision "central to the act of discovery". Revision means, literally looking again at a piece of writing.

Revision requires careful attention and thinking and refers to any changes the writer makes in an attempt to improve clarity, organization, wording and understanding. As a teacher, going into the classroom, she should bring drafts of her writing and share it with the students and let them make suggestions. Let the students know that revision will be challenging and this will help them prepare for the work ahead. Teachers can bring letters to parents, handouts to explain the curriculum, a note to a favourite person or any written text on a special occasion.

When a student who has come from a school in which correctness and form in writing have been emphasized above meaning, the student's writing may be correct but it is usually dull and lifeless. Overemphasis on correctness produces unimaginative writing. I believe we need to give students lots of opportunities for experimentation and practice without grading. Only a small percentage of writing should be evaluated, the rest should be for students to try out alternative forms, styles and genres.

3.3 Using authentic materials for demonstration

Often the best way for students to write well in a particular genre is to immerse themselves in the literature of that genre. For example, students need to examine and appreciate models of quality fiction before they can be expected to write fiction themselves.

When reading aloud, I often stop and note the way the author has created a mood, setting or character description in a work of fiction. One may use a paragraph or a page and share it on the overhead projector, highlighting key words and phrases the author has used. This may help the student to become a better writer through becoming an insightful reader.

The writing that goes on in classrooms must be relevant to students if they are to become engaged in and value the process. Practicing through exercises, skill sheets and isolated activities does not produce good writers and in fact, is not real writing. The focus must be on writing for real purposes.

We will need to demonstrate the particular form or genre by immersing students in many reading – writing examples. For example, before expecting students to write directions, book blurbs, a newspaper article, or a report, we must first expose them to many pieces of quality writing in that genre so that they become familiar with the format, style, and language conventions.

Specific examples of letter writing, story writing and journal writing are powerful tools for getting started successfully with authentic writing. In this way the teacher is providing support and nurturing writing, encouraging it, sustaining it and giving it time, space and freedom to grow. Students must understand and value why they are writing so they see a need for clarity, organization and even completion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

To conclude, the instructor must provide writing opportunities that allow for:

1. Unstructured or independent writing.
2. Involving students in planning.
3. Organizing for visitors or guest writers in the classroom
4. Independent work time for the students.
5. Utilizing library services.

Perhaps most important, we must be writing models ourselves and give our students writing models through literature. Until we demonstrate and value writing ourselves, many students will fail to take writing seriously or to see writing as a tool for thinking and learning.

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