CAMBRIDGE

Developing young writers in ELT

Contents

Introduction

Writing can be described as the productive part of text, or the creation of text. At its core, writing is about communication with someone who is in another place or in another time. Authors communicate with their readers through writing over long periods of time and across vast spaces. Over the past few decades, digital technologies as well as new demands on the labour market have increased the amount of writing in most people's lives. Deborah Brandt (2015) talks about a move away from mass reading, where most people read in their everyday lives, to a situation of mass writing, where most people write as an integral part of their lives, at work, in education and in social life.

Technology has changed the way we look upon writing. We communicate across time as well as across space using smartphones, tablets and computers, writing texts, and using symbols and pictures in a multimodal way. People meet online in chat forums or in online games, where they are physically and geographically in different places and time zones but in the same digital space, often communicating through writing. Social media has rapidly increased as a means of communication and self-promotion.

The starting point for this paper is a current need for education to focus on children's development of critical writing skills for both digital and non-digital contexts, for communication across languages, for global education and work, and perhaps most importantly, for participation in a global and text-based society.

Writing and participation

Today writing is accessible to most people, even very young learners, in their first language (L1) as well as in global English. Writing for participation can be practised at any school age in many different ways. For example, in a study by preschool teacher and researcher Vivian Maria Vasquez (2004), she uses the example of Curtis, four years old, who is standing in the doorway at preschool, watching older students walk across the schoolyard. He asks, "Look, where are they going? To the café? Why are we not going?" (Vasquez, 2004). Curtis' statement then became a starting point for a writing activity in which Vasquez created multiple processes of writing, talking, and reading about matters crucial for the children to engage in. Together they created, for instance, a letter to the school principal arguing for the youngest students' right to go to the café. In age-appropriate ways, they not only became familiar with genre-specific ways of writing text- and subject-specific words, but they also learnt what they could do with writing and what writing could do for them and in their worlds. Through participation in the writing activity, the students' attention was directed to critical thinking and exploration through writing, creating opportunities for them to better understand themselves and the world.

Even if writing for participation is central, writing to create voice, writing for identity, and writing for social or political reasons seem to be neglected in educational policy and practice. In a study of the curricula for primary education in Canada, Connecticut in the USA, New Zealand and Sweden (Peterson, Parr, Lindgren & Kaufman, 2018), there was a lack of focus on writing for participation. Instead, the curricula focused strongly on writing as a skill, as genre, or as a work process. This paper will explore how writing can be perceived of as a cognitive and a social process.

Writing and ELT

Over the past decades, English has become a global language and the language of the internet. This means that in order to participate globally on the internet or elsewhere, literacy in English is important. Many young learners of English across the globe meet English, spoken as well as written, through digital media and popular culture (Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013), which influences their perceptions of using English in speech and writing.

When young learners start learning English at primary school, many of them already know how to write in another language (their L1). Depending on what language they are familiar with, they may have an awareness of differences between scripts: that some are alphabetic, others syllabic or logographic; that concepts correspond with symbols (letters, signs etc.); how words are depicted and how text is organised using, for example, punctuation marks. They also know that the written language can be combined with pictures, colours, symbols and fonts to illustrate meaning, and they know how to use technology to do this. Technology and digital texts have transformed communication from primarily words to a logic of design (cf. Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996), turning multimodal text production into an important means for language learning.

Children also bring meaning-making and identity across languages. In a study of how 11-year-old Swedish children express interpersonal meaning when writing in English, Lindgren and Stevenson (2013) showed that even with limited knowledge of the language, children expressed their feelings and interacted with a reader in much the same ways as they did when they wrote in Swedish as their L1. It was rather gender more so than language that affected how the children communicated with the reader or expressed themselves through writing. Their identities came across strongly regardless of which language they used for writing. The study included two languages (Swedish and English) and two cultures (Sweden and the UK, or the USA), which share similar perceptions of what a letter should include and how one can express oneself through writing. It is important to bear in mind that writing is culture-specific and that, depending on in which context English as a foreign or second language is taught, it may be more or less easy for children to bring knowledge about writing from their L1 into their English writing.

Cummins and Persad (2014) describe how a teaching approach for writing can be designed to account for children's previous knowledge and cultural experiences. In their classroom-based study, children produced dual language texts where the content was close to the children, for example, a healthy eating guide, cultural comparisons, or fairy tales where the children reconstructed classic stories across cultures and across the curriculum. Cummins and Persad describe how the "learning experience must reflect students' realities and identities, and failure to work in this way with students represents a lost opportunity" (p. 25). They found that the outcome of this approach was that students enjoyed and valued learning more, that their communication skills improved, that it helped build classroom community and increased a sense of belonging. In an English language teaching (ELT) context, this approach can be applied to English and another language or other languages that children know. Perhaps some children may even be able to write a story in three languages with the help of teachers, peers, and their families, and bring into their writing their various scripts, familiar content, layout of choice, pictures, and other modes of communicating their meaning.

Writing for thinking and interaction

Regardless of the writing activity, writing is always about writers thinking and about their interactions with readers through their texts and through collaboration. Writers have something to say and someone to say it to and receive a response from. Readers can be known: a teacher, a friend, a parent; or unknown: readers of a blog, a newspaper, etc. Writers have to adjust to writing norms, which are not their own ideas but social constructs that have developed over many years. In order for writers and readers to understand each other easily, norms have formed genres with their own specific language use and structure.

Therefore, writers are never alone while writing. Writers always have to consider the reader, norms for the genre, and whether their message comes across in a clear enough way. Even journal writing that is undertaken in the privacy of a writer's bedroom follows conventions and communicates thoughts to a presumed reader (even if the reader is an imagined reader). During writing, writers have to consider these norms (spelling, grammar, genre, etc.), implicitly or explicitly. Young learners of English, for example, may be occupied with spelling norms, while older learners may focus their attention more towards the reader and what vocabulary and style are most suitable for that reader.

In the following, we will describe and exemplify *thinking* and *interaction* during writing as two fundamental processes in writing, in a foreign language as well as in L1.

Writing as thinking: a cognitive process

The most common model for the cognitive writing process was published by Linda Flower and John Hayes almost 40 years ago (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes, 2012) and it has been refined ever since. The starting point for the model is that knowledge that writers need for writing (e.g. language, genre, content etc.) is stored in their long-term memory. During writing, their working memory helps them retrieve this knowledge and coordinate it with the specific task at hand, with motor activities, reading and so on.

During writing, writers engage in *planning*, *transformation* (or *translation*[1]), *transcription* and *reviewing*.

- *Planning* refers to the thinking that goes on when writers generate ideas, set goals for and organise their text before or during writing. For example, when learners of English are thinking about what to write, they might draw a mind-map or pictures, or during writing they might take a break from the text to re-think and jot down some words or ideas about the content in their L1 or in English.

- *Transformation* is the process when the ideas are transformed into words.

- *Transcription* is when, during the process of writing, the writer's ideas turn into words that come out on paper or the screen. For the English learner, these formulation processes are also constrained by their linguistic resources and what is possible for them to express with the English they know.

[1] Translation in Flower & Hayes' model, which in an ELT context is easily confused with translation between languages.

- *Reviewing* includes writers' evaluation of their texts written so far and revision of the text or of ideas that have been generated. During reviewing, text that has just come out from the mind of the writer is read and the writer evaluates whether they are the right words, they express the writer's intentions, they are correctly spelled, etc.

Importantly, these sub-processes are recursive and they occur throughout writing. Thus, planning would most likely occur at the beginning of a writing session but then come back several times when a writer gets stuck or realises that the text written so far does not really correspond with their ideas, or when a writer is not able to translate their ideas into language.

Figure 2. Writing is a combination of cognition, context and purpose.

In one of our own studies (Lindgren & Sullivan, 2006), for example, we closely analysed young English learners' writing and asked them about it. One of the learners received a task to write to his school principal and persuade him or her to provide more activities for children during breaks. When the student had written the introductory parts of his letter, he came to his specific demands and started to write 'a skateboard ramp', but stopped after 'a' when he realised that he did not know the words in English. He deleted 'a' and wrote 'the', intending to write 'two football fields' instead (i.e. words he knew), but stopped and reconsidered. He concluded that two football fields was too much to ask for and finally settled with 'a football for every class'. This is an example where the writer first had to revise and re-plan because of a linguistic problem: he did not know how to write 'a skateboard ramp' in English. Then he revised again, but this time in relation to the intended reader and cultural conventions about what was reasonable to ask for. To connect back to Flower (1989), this learner's cognitive activities during writing (planning, transformation, transcription and reviewing) were closely connected with the context for the text (e.g. the letter genre, norms, and what is reasonable to ask for) and with the bounded purpose (e.g. the task and how the writer made that meaningful).

Figure 1. The writing process

Thus, writing as a cognitive process refers to the thinking and processing of information that goes on in writers' brains when they write a text. Having said that, it is important to emphasise that cognition is always intertwined with context. Linda Flower (1989) describes how cognition, context and meaning/purpose in writing are three intertwined principles that are embedded in any writing situation. She describes that context cues cognition, that cognition mediates context and that meaning and purpose are bounded and constrained by culture and context.
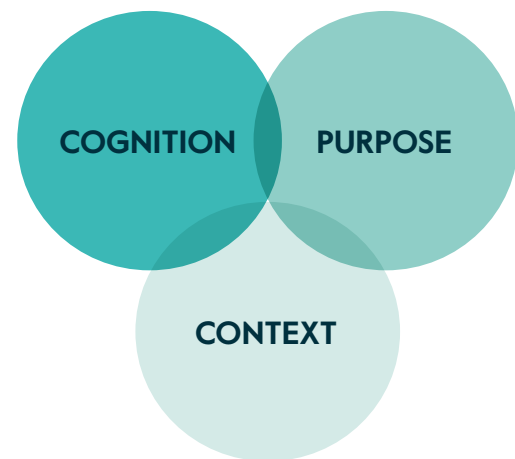
How writers turn their ideas into text depends on their cognitive resources such as attention and working memory, and the mechanics of handwriting or typing[2]. For English language learners, working memory is

particularly relevant. Writing is a very complex and effortful cognitive task. Writers have to juggle ideas, content, language norms (spelling, grammar etc.), genre, the reader, motor skills like holding the pen or navigating the keyboard, etc. simultaneously while writing a text. As working memory is limited, a strong focus on one of these aspects will result in less focus on other things. English learners, for example, may not have automatised spelling and grammar, which means that a large amount of their working memory will be occupied with those aspects, at the expense of, for example, content or adaptation to the reader. Similarly, learners who have not yet automatised the mechanics of writing, like holding the pen, forming the letters or finding their way around the keyboard, are likely to use a substantial amount of their working memory resources for the mechanics. As a consequence, they would not be able to focus as much on form or content.

One way to overcome some of the cognitive constraints of writing, in their L1 as well as in English, is to practise different aspects of writing separately in order for writers to automatise these functions, for example spelling and mechanics. Think of writing as learning an instrument: separate skills, such as scales, need to be practised in order for the player to become independent of the mechanics and allow for full expression of the music and the meaning. In the English writing classroom this can imply, for example, practice of the mechanics of writing a newspaper article so that it is automatised, in order for learners to then shift their attention to being more creative with their articles.

A way to focus more on meaning at the same time as the cognitive load is reduced, is to design a task where you put meaning in focus and ignore form and correctness. For example, use a creative writing approach:

- open the window and ask students to write what they can hear, smell, see etc.

- students write about and draw their experiences from an exhibition

- students write some advice to someone who has lost their dog

- students say and write their opinion about a current issue in school

- students interview each other and spark the writing session with oral communication

Inspire them to create meaning using text, photos, illustrations, emojis, colour, font, etc. As a second step, you can ask them to adapt their meaning to different readers (e.g. friends, teacher or parent) and using different tools (e.g. text message, formal text etc.).

Another way to reduce cognitive load for learners, put meaning in focus, and spark their ideas, is to vary the start of the writing process. Ask students to read, compare and contrast model texts before they start writing. Are the texts good? What makes them good? How are they formulated? Who is the reader? This approach is common when working with a genre approach to writing. You can also show them how a text is written by modelling it yourself in real-time or with something pre-prepared (Braaksma et al., 2002). You can talk about different ways to plan, formulate and revise a text in this particular genre. Tools are available for keystroke or handwriting logging (see Lindgren & Sullivan, 2019)[3], or screen recorders, that will allow you to pre-record a writing session and replay it to the students at the same time as you talk about the writing process and what may be important to keep in mind while writing a particular text. You can also give them a pre-written text and ask them to analyse it and then revise it; inspire them to talk about their ideas with a peer to provide input into planning; continue peer discussions after a while to spark new planning and revision; and encourage revision of ideas and content as well as of form (spelling, punctuation and grammar) and presentation (visuals, icons etc.).

Importantly, whenever possible, see to the individual needs of your learners and design the different writing sessions according to what they need at that particular moment in order to develop their writing. One learner might need to automatise spelling or vocabulary, while another might need to talk to spark ideas, while a third one could use some more focused revision.

To sum up, knowledge about the cognitive writing process provides some useful pieces of information for ELT writing education. One points towards the importance of dividing writing tasks into smaller pieces to avoid cognitive overload and enhance focus on meaning. Another one highlights the importance of practice in order to automatise different aspects, such as mechanics, spelling, grammar and vocabulary, in order to free up resources to focus on meaning.

Advice

- Divide the writing into different sessions and focus the sessions on particular aspects of writing (e.g. generating ideas, revising content, or revising language).

- Start writing differently and model writing in order to focus on meaning, and on form as the tool to develop meaning.

- Talk about writing and use peers as a resource for sparking ideas, and discuss how to best present these ideas.

- Practise spelling, grammar, and punctuation separately to automatise them.

- Practise motor skills of handwriting and keyboarding separately to automatise them.

Writing as interaction: a social process

Understanding writing as a social process implies that children construct meaning and reasons for learning the written language through contacts with peers and adult writers and readers. These contacts also help children understand the ways in which writing is used in different contexts and with various resources.

Social processes of writing in English language teaching are often associated with the functions of the written text. Such writing may be exemplified by a collectively written list of what to bring on their excursion or how children create instructions for their favourite computer games and let friends use the instructions to play the game. Children develop their writing as they gradually become aware of the relationships between their writing and its social context. They observe, process, abstract, generalise, and contextualise information, as well as coming to understand not only what writing is but also what makes a good text in a specific context. Children become familiar with text characteristics and conventions and gradually they learn to use them correctly.

As an illustration of how students may enact social processes of writing, we will describe an intervention study in which students were stimulated to write by observing peers and texts (Rijlaarsdam et.al., 2008). In the study, students were introduced to a practical case in which they would get two free movie tickets if they collected ten Yummy Yummy candy bars wrappers marked with points. The dilemma was that there were, in the end of the designated time period, no wrappers capsulising points. Therefore, students were asked to write a convincing letter to the Yummy Yummy Bar Company arguing that they wanted to receive the two movie tickets for free because it was not their fault that they could not collect ten wrappers with points. Next, a Yummy Yummy student board group read each text

to decide which letters would receive the movie tickets. In this process, they developed criteria for what an effective text was in this context.

So what may characterise a 'good' or an effective text? In the Yummy Yummy text, the author had the ability to take the view of the reader, to act in response to the tentative reader. Thus, one feature of an effective text was that it was developed in dialogue with the reader, here the Yummy Yummy Bar Company. Another feature of an effective text was that it could be read by anyone, independently of where the reader was or if the reader knew the context the text was shaped in.

What more may the Yummy Yummy case show us? It illustrates how the students not only controlled a narrative-role in which the writers envision themselves in the story, but an author-role in which they as authors wrote for the reader, to whom they wanted to say something. As they wrote a text to the Yummy Yummy board, they also constructed and negotiated meanings through conversations with themselves and with others. As such, they created an environment with potential to make sense of themselves, of others and of the world. Further, the Yummy Yummy case highlights a vital aspect for a 'good' writer – the need to control both a narrative- and an author-role. It illustrates the importance, as writers, to be in situations where their writings are shaped within a communicative context. The experience that texts were read by real readers was an important aspect, as well as listening to the discussion of the talk and the arguments around the criteria. Writing the Yummy Yummy text became a social process in which the author observed, analysed, compared and evaluated other texts and writers – providing participants with practice in authentic, real-world writing processes.

Furthermore, the Yummy Yummy case may be seen as an example where the students were inspired to think about what works in a text and what it means to be a writer. As such, writing as a social process strongly interrelates with attitudes and motivation. Studies have shown that

learners with positive attitudes, motivation, and concrete goals will get their attitudes reinforced with success and, likewise, negative attitudes will be given added strength with failure (cf. Candlin & Mercer, 2001; McGroarty, 1996). As a result, to support learners to become more proficient in their ability to write in English, there is a strong implication to create opportunities for them to develop an overall interest for the target language and understanding of why it is needed. The Yummy Yummy case increased the students' knowledge about genre, argumentation, persuasiveness, and formulation. This is knowledge that they can use to reach a particular purpose, such as a writing assignment, but it is also knowledge that they need to integrate into the community and participate in global society, independently of age.
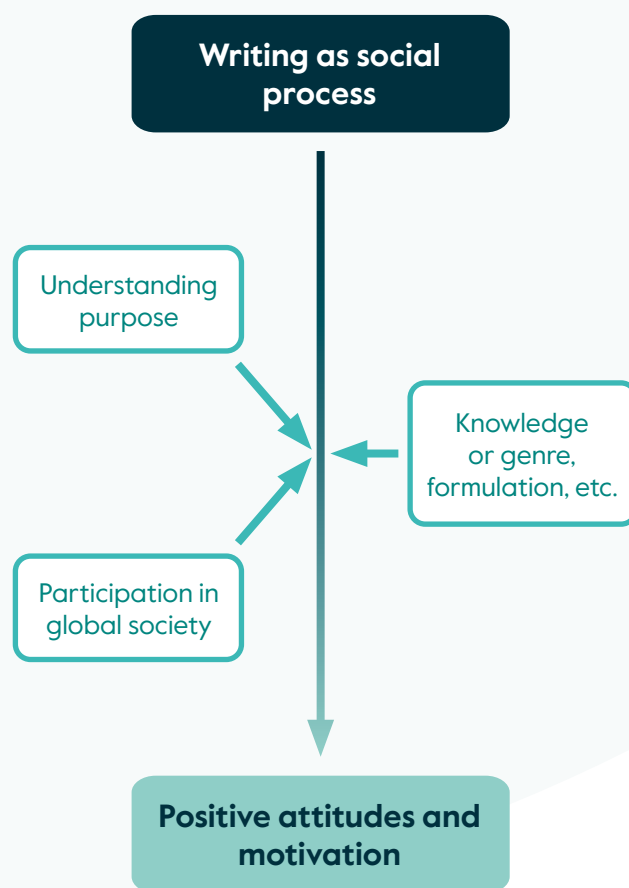

Figure 3. Writing as a social process leading to positive attitudes and motivation.

These motivational constructs, attitudes, and beliefs about language are influenced by the social and cultural aspects. Thus, students from different ethnic groups perceive not only target language and purpose of acquiring foreign language differently, but also the culture of feedback, voice, presenting your own opinion, etc. For example, learners of English continue to exhibit errors in their writing if there is a wide social distance between the writer's L1 culture and the target culture (Coleman, 1996; Holliday, 1997). Similarly, linguistic distance between a young learner's L1 and English may influence their learning. Lindgren and Muñoz (2013) showed that young learners whose L1 was linguistically closer to the target language English (i.e. another Germanic language) performed better in English. It may thus be valuable to create moments with different text designs and genres, as well as time and opportunities to think, read, talk, and write in other languages than the target language. Moments of thinking and talking about cultural and linguistic aspects of different languages are also valuable for students' motivational constructs, attitudes, and beliefs about the target language English.

Viewing writing as a social and cultural act means that learners' full language resources are accounted for. Involving learners' language resources in the writing classroom will offer learning that departs from their earlier knowledge and experiences. A linguistically open classroom provides learners with more comfort, ease, and inclusivity to build on their funds of knowledge (cf Moll et al., 2005). As such, including students' L1 language and culture expands the possibility to develop their identities at the same time as it creates opportunities for all students to be viewed as competent learners.

To sum up, this section has described and discussed writing as socially and culturally situated in time and place involving a multifaceted, recursive, semiotic, and communicative matrix of action. When focusing on writing, it is crucial to address the intrinsic social and cognitive nature of writing. In the words of Paul Prior, "writing does not stand alone as the discrete act of a writer, but emerges as a confluence of many streams of activity: reading, talking, observing, acting, making, thinking and feeling as well as transcribing words on paper" (Prior, 1998:xi).

Advice

☑ Build on authentic, real-life experiences/situations when writing (e.g. as in the Yummy Yummy case).

☑ Use dialogue and discussions as scaffolds for collective writing activities.

☑ Consider writing attitudes and motivation across L1 and the target language (e.g. by thinking and talking about cultural and linguistic aspects of different languages).

☑ Provide time and opportunities to think, read, talk, and write together in languages other than the target language and about cultural and linguistic aspects of different languages.

☑ Acknowledge and accept variety.

Developing writing in the classroom

Writing in English language classrooms is often characterised by practising skills. Missing words and verb forms are filled into gaps in texts and short texts are written about familiar topics, such as family and holidays, with a focus on applying certain words and grammatical forms. These are all useful exercises for the development of writing skills in English. However, there is much more to writing that can also be introduced to young learners who are learning a new language.

The types of classroom writing practices are strongly connected with the views teachers hold of what writing is, i.e. what discourses of writing that materialise as teaching methods, materials and assessment. Roz Ivanič's talks about seven discourses of writing that she created using data from various educational contexts (Ivanič, 2004, 2017): writing as …

1. **skill**
2. **creativity**
3. **thinking**
4. **process**
5. **genre**
6. **social practice**
7. **a socio-political act**

All seven views of what writing can be are necessary in order to build holistic writing instruction that allows for children to develop into independent writers. We need writing skills to write anything. For example, we need to express ourselves creatively, processes to develop awareness of writing, knowledge about genres (including digital genres) to adapt our texts towards purpose and reader, to know how to use writing in our everyday lives, and perhaps most importantly, to know how to use writing to make our voices heard.

How teachers view writing not only directs classroom practices, it also impacts directly on children's views of writing. In a survey of 500 young learners in the UK, Lambirth (2016) found that the students' perceptions of writing were characterised by a skills and compliance discourse and that their perceptions were a reflection of their classroom practices. For example, if instruction is strongly focused on technical aspects of writing (spelling, punctuation, parts of speech etc.), children's perception of what writing is will be that it is all about including the right vocabulary and using punctuation correctly. If writing instruction is strongly focused on creativity, children's perception of writing is that it is all about expressing oneself, not necessarily about how you do that. Thus, becoming aware of what writing can be, and of its functions, forms and purposes, is the first step towards the development of holistic writing instruction in their L1 as well as in English.

Raising teachers' awareness of writing

Some questions that may help teachers to become aware of their own views of writing are:

- What is most important to know about writing?
- What do I assess when marking my students' texts?
- How do I prefer to teach writing?

The following table provides some examples of different types of teaching approaches depending on the answers to these questions:

If you assess accuracy and prefer to teach writing through spelling and grammar exercises, ...	... your focus is on skills.
If you prefer that your students write freely about anything that interests them and you assess only content, ...	... you are likely viewing writing as creativity.
If writing in your classroom is about writing to process information or to reflect, ...	... your view of writing is that writing is for thinking and reflection.
If your focus is on peer-feedback and less on the final texts, ...	... you have a process focus.
If you spend a lot of teaching time on how to write different text types and assess whether they would work in a particular situation, ...	... your focus is on genre.
If you let children write texts for their parents or letters to real pen-friends, ...	... your focus is on social practices in writing.
If you choose writing tasks where children state their opinion or critically respond, ...	... your focus is socio-political.

Most likely, most teachers recognise most of these examples but may not be aware of the many ways in which writing can be perceived. In the following, we describe how you as a teacher may work towards holistic writing instruction.

Designing holistic ELT writing activities

The design of writing activities can be described as a cyclic process in which you identify a problem, evaluate what students currently know, develop an activity, implement the activity, evaluate the results, and then perhaps identify another problem. Throughout the design, keep in mind that writing is about cognitive AND social factors, and that development of writing is supported by reduction of cognitive load as well as by social interaction. Also consider what you want the result to be in terms of learning English, developing writing, and developing as a writer. Let us look at an example that focuses on vocabulary, but the principles can be applied to any area that you want to focus on.
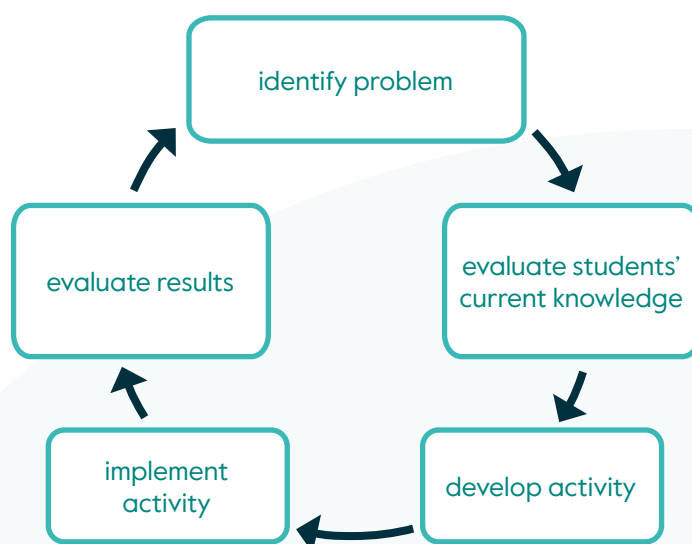

Figure 4. Designing writing activities

Identify a problem and set a goal

You have noticed that it is difficult for your learners to vary their language when they write in English. The problem you identify is that students lack vocabulary and you set a goal that the writing activity should help them actively use ten new words while writing. More specifically, your goal may be that: a) your students know what the words mean; b) your students can use

the words to express their meaning; and c) your students can understand that their readers may interpret words differently. Before you move on to the development of a writing activity, you should decide how much time you need to assign to the activity in order to reach your goal, and what your students already know.

Identify what students already know

In order to evaluate whether your writing activity eventually was successful as a learning method, it is important to know what the students knew before they started the activity. In our example, the goal is that students learn some new words, how to use them to express their meaning and to understand how a reader might understand the words. Thus, you have to assess children's knowledge about these words in a variety of ways before you design your activities. To do this you can provide a vocabulary task, individually or on a class basis, by giving your class some alternative explanations/usages of the words and ask them to decide whether they are correct by raising their hands or showing signs. If you design sentences where a word can be interpreted a little differently, you will get an understanding of whether children perceive of more than one, or any of your suggestions as correct.

Develop activities

This is the main part of your design cycle. This is where your knowledge about writing turns into classroom practice. First you have to decide which ten words you want your students to develop and whether the students in your class need to develop the same, or different, ten words. When doing so, think about what kind of text – what genre – you are working with, and what words students need in order to adapt their text to that specific text type. Consider what reader or audience students should have in mind while writing their texts. Is it a pen-friend, the school principal, or perhaps a blog or newspaper reader? What is the purpose of the text? Are children telling a story, stating their meaning, or arguing something? All these considerations direct what kind of vocabulary and text format students need. It is important to consider these in relation to what is available in your teaching materials and reflect in each case around how it addresses what you aim for.

Also consider how to help students reduce cognitive load during the writing activity. How can you divide up the activity into different steps? In our example, one way is to work with the words before they are put into the context of a whole text, in order to automatise them. Students can say them aloud repeatedly, practise spelling by looking at the relation between the phonemes and the graphemes, and write them repeatedly. Ask them to retrieve the words from memory, with a couple of minutes, hours or days in between.4

While working with the words, also add some creative, social, and collaborative elements to your design. Here, dialogue and discussion are valuable ways to get the students to use words and phrases in order to build security in and knowledge about how to interact around important issues. For example, choose a subject that is relevant for the text type that you are working with and that is relevant for the students and ask yourself:

- What scaffolding do students need to understand and get close to what they want to express?

- How can students be active and supportive in the dialogues?

- How can they practise the words and use them in writing? Can resources like a film or picture be used when co-improvising a model of dialogue with the students? What multiple opportunities may the students get to practise and consolidate the words, phrases, prosody, and pronunciation?

- How can their creativity become an asset? Can multimodality be used collaboratively to create new meanings of the words, or are there alternative ways of presenting them as pictures, colours, videos, etc.?

- How can students use writing as a way to consolidate and reflect on their knowledge? (E.g. perhaps they can create their own picture-based dictionary for the ten words.)

As illustrated by the Yummy Yummy story above, real-life context becomes vital for writing development. The goal of the writing activity is to make students confident users of ten new words, which means that they can use them

to express what they mean and they know how a reader may understand the words. In the following, you will find some questions that can be viewed as guiding tools for thinking around social practices of writing in your classroom.

- What real-life experiences may be relevant for your writing classroom?

- How can students' collective knowledge and experiences be used as a starting point for meaningful and process-oriented writing?

- How can students' various culture- and language-specific knowledge become an asset? What can the ten words mean for different people, and why?

- How can real-life experiences contribute to develop the students' subject specific words, expressions, or how to talk and write to different people, in different contexts and with different purposes?

Try out the activity

In this step, you try out the activity. This process may go on for a part of a lesson or for a longer period, depending on what your goals are for the activity. During this phase, you will be busy supporting your students, but assign some time directly after the lesson for yourself when you can take some notes on how the activity turned out. These notes may be important when you evaluate the activity.

Evaluate what students have learnt

Finally, you evaluate how the activity went and what your students learnt from it. You can assess their uptake individually by asking them to write a text where the topic would steer their vocabulary use towards the ten words you have practised, or design a test where they are asked to translate the words, put them into sentences, and describe what they mean. You could also ask them to form groups where they agree on explanations for the words and where they collaboratively write a short text using the words.

Advice

☑ Create real-life writing situations and experiences.

☑ Strive to create holistic writing activities that involve some aspects of, for example:
- skills (correctness of use of vocabulary)
- creativity (using words freely, making up stories)
- process (writers' cognitive processes and the process of a writing activity)
- thinking (writers' reflection on words and how to use them)
- social practices (words in real-life situations)
- culture (critical discussions of how the words may mean different things to different people).

☑ Consider cognitive aspects of writing such as the importance of reducing cognitive load and automatisation.

☑ Consider the social aspects of writing – support understanding of text types and readers

☑ Promote students' attitudes and identities as writers.

Conclusion

Writing today is a necessity for many people in their education, in the workplace and for social purposes. In order for children to be prepared for a future as global citizens, for making their voices heard and being able to communicate, becoming confident writers in different languages is important. English has become a world language, thus highlighting the importance of effective English language teaching from an early age. In this paper, we have combined different perspectives on writing to exemplify how holistic writing instruction may be implemented in the English language classroom. We took into account cognitive aspects of writing such as the importance of reducing cognitive load and automatisation, but also how the social aspects of writing support understanding of text types and readers, and promote students' attitudes and identities as writers. By using writing as a multilingual, multimodal tool for meaning-making in the English language classroom, students can not only improve their language skills but also their opportunities for the future.

Suggestions for further reading

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