

A CASE FOR USING WIKIS TO TEACH WRITING: AN APPROACH FOR ACADEMIC WRITING.

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one area where language students usually need help, and as such, teachers look for ways in which to support their students in becoming better writers. With the current interest in information and communication technology ICT in the classrooms, teachers are looking for new ways to utilize it in their teaching. Wikis are one method, which could aid teachers in helping their students to become better writers. This study will put forward a case to use Wikis in the writing classroom as they can be used to develop individual and collaborative written work, as well as create a fully integrated environment for learning. This paper then presents a writing approach that is supported by a Wiki.

Keywords: *Writing, Wikis, writing framework, process writing, genre writing, e-learning, student centred learning, ESL writing approach.*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Writing is an integral part of the university experience, as many assessments require learners to prove their understanding of the course content by providing an essay, or project paper. Thus, it is crucial that students are able to express what they have learnt as well as their ideas in a clear and concise way. The university in this study is in Malaysia and in this particular situation; students come to take an intensive English course in order to meet the requirements for their respective degree or masters. Being an intensive course creates the added pressure for learners to improve their skills and become university ready in the matter of a few months.

Writing can be a complex endeavor in your first language, so attempting to convey one's ideas in a second language creates additional problems. This paper proposes an approach to teaching writing by combining writing methodologies, such as genre, process, product, collaborative and then scaffolding this process. With a number of methodologies all

working together, an environment is needed where learners can come to find information, store their work, obtain advice, support and feedback. This study employs a wiki to facilitate the process and support the learners as they learn how to write.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Writing

Writing is one area which many university students have difficulty with (Wall, Nickson, et al. 1988), especially if the language they are writing in is not their first language (Zhang, 2008). Even when students have attained the entry requirement into a university programme, they may not be prepared linguistically for the course (Lillis, 2001; Birrell, 2006; Bretag, 2007). Bretag (2007) suggests that there is a link between language competence and academic standards and one aspect, which needs careful attention is writing, as it is a 'key assessment tool' (Lillis, 2001).

For many years, writing was seen as secondary in importance to spoken proficiency (White, 1988). Nevertheless, in recent years writing methodologies have emerged such as product, process and genre to aid teachers in delivering written instruction. Process, though, has emerged as a more holistic approach to writing instruction, where writers are encouraged to plan, draft, edit and revise their work (Hillocks, 1987; Badger & White, 2000). Some proponents of process claim that a product approach would lock students into a pre-structured procedure, thus not allowing them to develop their own ideas through the writing process (White, 1988). Conversely, Badger and White (2000) claim that a single approach would not be sufficient, as process would not give enough support to the learners who need more instruction. Instead, they suggest a combination of all three approaches.

It is these methodologies that now have to be adapted and utilized (Kessler, Bikowski et al. 2012) as online writing tools, such as Blogs, Google Drive, Wikis and Edmodo become more prevalent in the classroom. These online tools have shown great promise in the writing classroom by encouraging critical thinking before the work is uploaded to the web (Richardson, 2005), providing convenient feedback (Lam and Pennington 1995; Parks, 2000), providing an autonomous environment (Kessler, 2009), reducing classroom time by allowing students to complete work at home (Higdon, 2006), and fostering collaboration (Fitcher, 2005; Chao, 2007; Meishar-Tal and Gorsky, 2010; Yang, 2010).

From pen to computer to online, writing is changing dramatically. Moreover, writers are creating pieces which are being uploaded to wikis, blogs and websites. This is creating "a dynamic teaching and learning relationship between writers and their readers" (Zamel, 1983p.165). In 1995, Lam and Pennington (1995) published a comparative study on writing with a pen versus writing with a computer. They found that the students who used a computer scored significantly higher in all aspects of writing except content, which was nearly significant. Later in 1996, Pennington (1996) laid out four benefits of writing on a computer: 1. writing becomes easier; 2. writing becomes more extensive; 3. writing becomes different; 4. writing becomes more effective. Now, over 20 years later, research is looking into what benefits, if any, are seen from writing online, especially when media accompanies the written text.

Early research on the benefits of using computers for writing made claims that it they reduced the anxiety of making spelling mistakes (Warschauer and Healey, 1998); fostered drafting and editing (Phinney and Kouri, 1993), and they can act as a place to store ideas and thoughts in a ‘non-permanent mode’ (Daiute, 1983). Since then, other research has suggested that, with training and over a duration of time, using computers can help to increase ‘higher-level revisions, which contributed to the improved quality of essay writing’ (Li and Cumming, 2001).

Blogs, Wikis, have in recent years, emerged as a new environment in which to write. Online writing has been seen to increase learner’s motivation to write (Vurdien, 2010); provide versatility to learners so they are able to access and edit their work at any time (McPherson, 2006); provide an authentic audience, and experience writing as a social process (Richardson, 2005). Whereas there are a number of options for writers these days, Wikis have proved to be increasingly popular with teachers who wish to create learning environments for their students to write.

Research on Wikis

Ward Cunningham, the creator of the wiki, expresses below how he understands and conceptualizes them.

"Wiki" is a composition system; it's a discussion medium; it's a repository; it's a mail system; it's a tool for collaboration. We don't know quite what it is, but we do know it's a fun way to communicate asynchronously across the network." (Cunningham, 2013)

The creator of the Wiki himself admits that he is unsure as to what a Wiki actually is. This may explain why some educational practitioners and researchers are yet to come to an agreement on an exact definition (Grant 2006). Nevertheless, there is some consensus that Wikis are a place for collaboration, webpage creation and editing (McMullin, 2005; Chao, 2007; Chen, Chen et al. 2010). With this definition it is possible to break down Wikis into some individual categories, as suggested by Tonkin (2005).

1. **Information display:** PDFs, video, audio and embedded content can be downloaded, or viewed.
2. **Collaborative projects:** A page can be created where students can share information and collaborate on group projects.
3. **Private pages for individual work:** A page can be created where a single student can access it. This page can host essays, tests and grades.

Wikis could be seen as a versatile learning environment (VLE), meaning that they are incredibly intuitive and are able to adapt to the user’s needs. Other online educational systems like Moodle, Google Docs and Edmodo may only offer a fixed learning environment (FLE), where the user is only able to use the functions provided to them. Wikis on the other hand can be fully integrated with other systems, such as Moodle and Google Docs, as well as supporting a number of HTML-based software applications.

One way in which wikis can be used effectively is the writing classroom. A teacher can create three writing environments for learners to improve their written proficiency.

Information Display

Wikis can support and display information in a number of ways, for example: simple text, hyperlinks, audio, video, PPTs, PDFs, and word files. Learners can access this information in real time, which means that the traditional teacher-centred role of information disseminated to learner can be flipped to a student-centred one, where information is not in the sole control of the teacher. Instead past, present and future information is accessible by the student at any time.

Collaborative Writing

A large area of research has focused on wikis as a collaborative tool (Lamb, 2004; Tonkin, 2005; Hughes and Narayan, 2009; Kessler, 2009; Caple and Bogle, 2011; Kessler, Bikowski et al. 2012). The benefits of collaborative writing have been observed by a number of researchers who have noted that wikis help learners to create better texts in terms of: “grammatical accuracy, and complexity” (Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth and Storch, 2009; Dobao, 2012), lexical accuracy (Dobao, 2012) learner’s sharing their individual linguistic skills and encouraging participation (Storch, 2011).

Wikis can support the collaborative writing classroom in a dynamic and engaging way for learners, as they are able to work on projects where audio, video and hyperlinks can enhance their writing. Moreover, projects help students write for an audience (Richards, 2006; Mak and Coniam, 2008), and forces them to think about content, as others will read it. Whereas collaboration has been well researched with regards to wikis, they have other functions (Hughes and Narayan, 2009).

Individual Pages

Aside from displaying information and getting students involved in collaborative writing projects, a single private page can also be created for each learner. This private page can only be accessed by each student and the teacher. A further advantage is that it provides a safe place for students to write away from the watchful eye of their peers. Writing can be a personal experience and some studies have shown that writing anxiety can affect students’ written proficiency (Shang, 2013). Therefore, the private page allows students to write and make mistakes in a safe environment while learning about the writing process. It is here that the teacher can monitor the progress of each student’s writing, and where necessary offer guidance, advice, or support by writing notes directly on to the page.

There is enormous potential for wikis and their use in the writing classroom. However, their varied uses become their disadvantages. When a wiki is first accessed it looks like, and is, a blank screen. For some, this may seem a little intimidating and daunting at first, as there are no introductory functions made available to the teacher. It is for that reason that this paper presents a writing approach that integrates wikis and incorporates a number of writing approaches.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Many writing methodologies have been suggested as a way to teach and improve written skills; they include: product, genre, and process. However, Badger and White (2000) suggest a mixed method, which would include aspects from all writing methodologies in order to aid the writing process. They state that each writing methodology has limitations when used individually. In the case of process writing there is less emphasis on grammatical and lexical items and more on drafting and revising. The reverse can then be said for product, where there is more emphasis on grammatical and lexical items with less attention to drafting and writing. Finally, genre focuses on the social aspect for writing, that is, writing for a purpose, such as a business letter, lists, emails, and messages. Additionally, the learner is usually provided with samples and plans in order to follow.

After all writing methods considered, Badger and White offer a 'process genre approach' (Figure 1) where they suggest combining elements from both methodologies to offer learners more support. Whereas the process approach teaches learners how to develop their work, they lack the benchmark texts, which they are able to base their work on. So, combining genre to process increases the support for the learner.

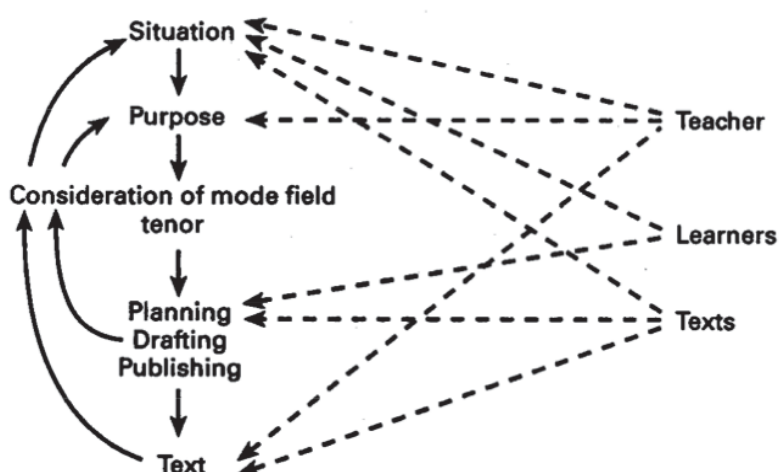


Figure 1: Badger and White (2000) Process Genre Approach

Badger and White (2000) themselves state clearly that each group of learners is different, and therefore, may need different input in terms of instruction if their experience with writing is limited. To build on their work, this paper suggests an approach that also combines methodologies, but scaffolds the learners more in the writing process. The approach is a combination of all methods (genre, product and process) and utilizes a wiki in order to conduct it (Figure 2). With the complexities that learners face with writing, an approach that offers them more support may help them in the process to become better writers.

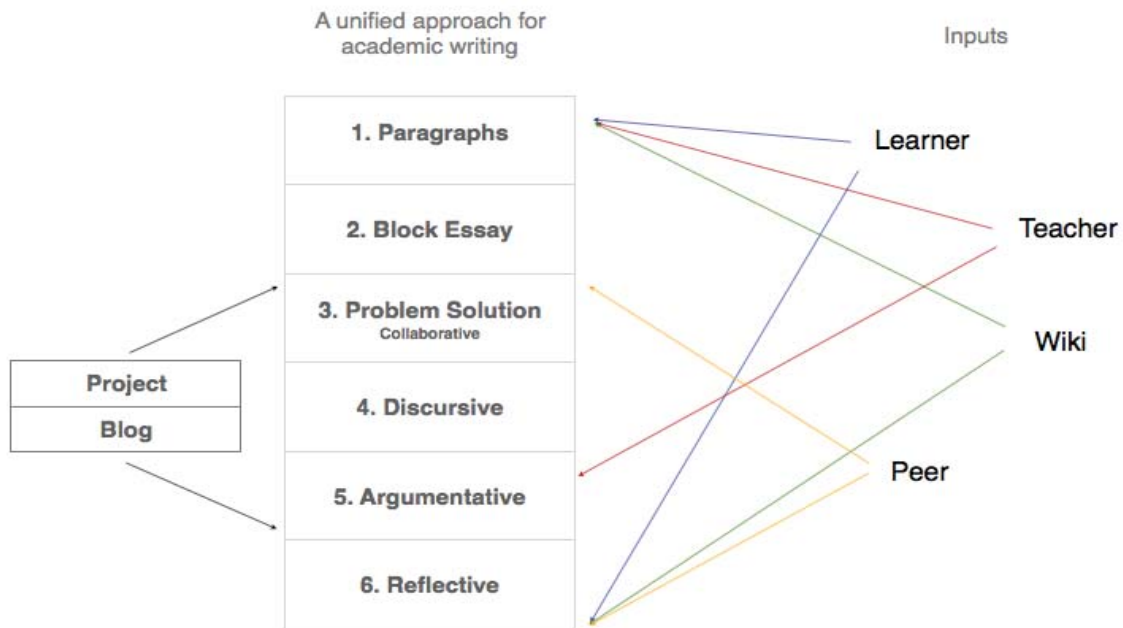


Figure 2: Williams, S. (2013) the Unified Writing Approach for Academic Writing

The following section will explain the steps of the approach in figure 2 in more detail. The approach is structured around an English intensive course with duration of 6 weeks. Each text type corresponds to its respective week and will be explained below in more detail with sample essays. The excerpts are all taken from a wiki and are presented in their finished form.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The approach suggested in this paper will include process and genre, as in the Badger and White (2000) model. Additionally, the process below is designed around a course and not a singular text as in the Badger and White model. The approach scaffolds the learner and guides them from creating simple paragraphs with the support of a teacher to creating more complex essays by themselves.

Table 1: Paragraph Writing

Aims:
To create a comfortable environment for writing.
To write simple paragraphs.
To practice with basic sentence structure.
For the teacher to gauge learners proficiency level.
Procedure:
Learners write simple paragraphs (50 – 100 words).
Learners write about familiar themes (best memory, future plans / dreams).
Teacher edits the paragraph, and focuses on general grammar mistakes and coherence.
Learners write the paragraphs on paper, later transferring them to their individual wiki page.

In the first week of the course, the learners were asked to write simple paragraphs about topics and subjects, which are of importance, or interest to them. The focus is more on helping the learner to feel comfortable with writing. The time is used by the teacher to assess their proficiency level. Also, to assess what skills should be taught, or emphasized over the duration of the course. The teacher will give advice on basic structure and ideas, but will refrain from too much grammatical and lexical correction, as the aim is to create a comfortable environment for writing. The original texts are written on paper, and then subsequently transferred to a wiki page. This begins the scaffolding process by introducing the learners to simple texts, as well as how to use wikis.

Excerpt 1

“The biggest regret I have is spending too much, when I came to Malaysia. The spending level was higher than Korea or China, so I have spent much until now. It could be because I always go to clubs or bars. Each weekend you will see a drunk man go back his room, that is me. Even I know that not a good habit, but I cannot stop myself. Wasting of money always leaves me with enough money to pay for others, that is why I have to lie to my parents. I really regret that and I will change myself soon.”

In excerpt 1 the text is written relatively simply. It lacks a clear structure and focus; it is a common example presented as a first piece of writing. There are some obvious punctuation and capitalization errors as well as a number of grammatical inaccuracies.

Table 2: Block Essay

Aims:
To write a simple block essay.
To introduce students to writing an introduction, main body and conclusion.
To develop more complex sentence structure.
To brainstorm and plan before writing.
To upload and write the essay on an individual wiki page.
To use the wiki to retrieve information on writing skills (via videos and PDFs) and sample essays.
Procedure:
Learners are given access, via the wiki, to essays plans and short lessons on writing skills.
The learner and teacher brainstorm themes and assessment criteria as a class.
Learners are able to view past essays in order to understand what is expected of them. They may also adapt complex sentences, topic sentences, introductory sentences and theses statements.
The teacher monitors the writing process on the wiki page and intervenes when necessary.

The aim of the second stage is to present structure to the learner by building on what they have achieved in the first week. With an idea of how to create a paragraph, this idea is then expanded to a block essay, which contains an introduction, main body and conclusion. The learner is given access, via the Wiki, to an essay plan and samples of which can be adapted and followed. The teacher will start to introduce the learners to planning topics and to thinking about main ideas. Then, the work will be written on a Wiki page, where the teacher will have access to it in order to edit and add comments.

Excerpt 2

“In the 21st Century, people are living so busily. All of people has 24 hours, and 7 days. It never be change in our life until the future. Sometimes, we think about extra day, it means, 8days are become a one week. If 8 days are one week, people would do what they are wants mostly. If i had a extra day, i would go to cinema, and play with my pet.

Firstly, i would prefer go to cinema. Each of week, maybe 1or 2 new blockbuster movie are coming out into the cinema made by Hollywood. We can't see all of movie in a week, because time is limitation, and our weekend are going too fast, like a autobahn, in Germany.

Secondly, i will play with my pet all day. Some of people has a pet at home, but they don't have enough time to play with their pet. Daily work, homework, and personal reason are affect the communication between pet and person.

To sum up, if i had one more extra day, i would go to cinema, and play with my pet all day. However, why we need extra day, and it can't be possible. Actually, we can do all of things in 7 days. We just wants more extra day to do our favorite things more, like go to cinema, and play with pet.”

The aim of this essay was to introduce the notion of a main idea that develops. In the first stages of writing, learners tend to put in a number of ideas into a single text. This makes it harder for the reader to understand and follow. In excerpt 2 the main idea is more clearly stated and developed. Although punctuation and capitalization errors still exist, the learner is slowly developing a sense of where and when to put these.

Table 3: Problem-solution Essay

Aims:
To write an essay collaboratively.
To access the wiki for essay plans and samples.
To upload the essay to a collaborative page.
To write a minimum of 300 words.
To complete the essay with a partner.
To edit the essay (without the teacher's help) and peer-edit another group's essay using a check sheet.
For the learners to self-assess their own work.
Procedure:
Learners are put into small groups.
Learners access the wiki to find an essay guide and samples.
The teacher takes on a facilitative role by monitoring the work via the wiki.
Once the essay is finished, each group accesses the other's essay to proof read.
Once the essay has been edited, each group goes back to their original essay to make the changes.
Each group then self-assess their own work.

As the learner has gained a little more confidence and experience with writing, the third stage asks the students to write collaboratively to produce an essay. They may do this in pairs or groups of three, depending on class size. The students are directed to an essay

plan and sample essays on the wiki, and are then asked to plan and write the essay with their partner. The teacher takes on a more facilitative role in this stage allowing the collaborative process to continue, but stepping in where necessary to offer advice. The final essay is presented on a wiki page where the learners then take the role of checking another essay using a check sheet. They then write feedback and assign grades based on the check sheet and a rubric created collaboratively between teacher and student.

Excerpt 3

“Smoking is a bad habit in the world, even though a lot of people still keep doing it. They know smoking will bring a lot of health problem, but stop smoking is very hard. There are two solution of smoking.

The first solution of smoking is government power. The government can increase the price of cigarette. All of the smoker will spend a lot of money to buy it if they want smoke. Then, the smoker’s family or himself will know smoke cost them too much. Maybe, they will not suppose to smoke.

The second solution of smoking is knowing a lot of disadvantages of smoke by news or TV. The advertisement will be given/give the knowledge to people. Then, they will know the smoking is a bad thing. They don’t know the smoke will bring a big trouble about health. So, when they see the advertisement, they will know, maybe they will change himself.

In conclusion, there are two solutions of smoking. One is the government increases the price and make the cigarette more expensive. Other one is to let smoker know disadvantages of it. I think the first one is the best one because this way is the most useful way to make smoker less than before. No one want to use RM200 to buy one box of cigarette.

The collaborative task allows students to, for the first time, work on an essay with a partner. This process requires students to share their combined understanding of essay writing in order to complete the task. And, whilst doing this, they are learning from each other by sharing each other’s strengths and supporting each other’s weaknesses. Additionally, once the essay is complete, another group then proofreads it, using a check sheet, and make notes on general structure, or grammatical errors. This is now asking the learners to think more critically and their own work, by comparing it to others.

Table 4: Discursive Essay

Aims:
To write an essay individually.
To proof-read and edit the essay after it has been checked by the teacher. (*Edited by the teacher twice)
To write at least 350 – 400 words
To build on sentence structure with cohesive devices.
Procedure:
Provide students with an essay plan and sample essays via the wiki.
Brainstorm possible essay themes in class.
Put the students in small groups in order to create a support network.
Create a deadline for the completion of each draft.
In the first edit, the teacher checks the essay for grammatical, syntax errors and identifies specific problematic areas.
Once the teacher has edited the essay, it is copied and pasted above the original version. The learner is now free to make the changes. Then submit for the second edit.
In the second edit, the teacher checks for the same issues as above, but focuses mainly on cohesion, flow and content.
Once the teacher has edited the essay, it is copied and pasted above the original version. The learner is now free to make the changes. Then submit as a finished piece of writing.

In stage 4, the students have had 3 weeks of writing practice. They are now asked to create an essay on their own. They have practiced writing paragraphs, block essays and a collaborative problem and solution essay. For this essay, the learners will work on drafting their writing by themselves with the teacher editing their work twice. The first edit will concentrate on grammatical and lexical items whereas the second will focus on coherence and flow. Each draft will be saved on a wiki page so they are able to look back at their old work and monitor their own progress.

Excerpt 4

“Nowadays, many people would like to swear whenever they get angry, hot tempered, or even when they are happy. Swearing can also mean saying bad words. Even through swearing can be negative emotional release and release pain, it’s also can give bad emotion and spoil your first image towards other people. In this essay, I would like to discuss argument for and against swearing.

The first argument for swearing is that is can be a negative release. From scientist research, swearing when we were in negative emotion will get release few times faster than if we just kept quiet. If we swear while unhappy, the stress and anger might be released through the bad words. Furthermore, scientist also point out that swearing could help us release pain. Mostly people will say some words when they get pain, but it might be more helpful then to rub medical cream on it. So, sometimes swearing may give us some positive thing.

Although some people argue that swearing is a positive thing, others argue against it. When someone swears, we will feel bad emotion even through the words was not pointing on anyone, vice versa. Sometimes you might feel in a bad mood and resist back, then you both will started quarrel instate of nothing. Moreover, when you swear in public, the outlander could think that you are a rough person. This will affected your first image on other people

eyes. Some critical people may also think that you are bad guy or unmoral. So, swearing at the wrong time or wrong place might be bad for us.

In conclusion, there are a number of people who are for and against swearing. In my opinion, I think that swearing have more against compare to for, although swearing has some positive statement. This is because I think that our first image towards other and prevent quarrel is more important than release of emotion and pain. We can use other ways to release negative emotion like listening music and playing sports. While we are listening music alone or playing sports, we can be emotional released alone without bad to anyone whereas sports with friend can improve relationship between each other.”

The discursive essay asks the learner to write an essay by themselves. They had access to samples, past students’ essays, as well as help from the teacher in the form of editing. Therefore, in this essay we can see signs of improvement in terms of: the placement of punctuation, topic and thesis statements, overall structuring, and the explanation of ideas. There are still a number of grammatical mistakes; nevertheless, the overall proficiency has improved.

Table 5: Argumentative Essay

Aims:
To write an essay individually.
To proof-read and edit the essay after it has been checked by the teacher. (*Edited by the teacher once.)
To write at least 400 – 500 words.
To diversify the range of cohesive devices used.
To improve overall structure and idea development.
Procedure:
Provide students with an essay plan and sample essays via the wiki.
Brainstorm possible essay themes in class.
Put the students in small groups in order to create a support network.
Create a deadline for the completion of each draft.
In the first and only edit, the teacher checks the essay for some grammatical, syntax errors, but will concentrate on coherence and essay flow.
Once the teacher has edited the essay, it is copied and pasted above the original version. The learner is now free to make the changes. They will have to rely on themselves and their past essays to notice common errors that they make.
The teacher can monitor progress of the essay via the student’s page. And, if there is a need for intervention they can intervene.
Once the student has finished the essay, the student can inform the teacher it is ready to be graded.

The fifth stage is much like the fourth. They are able to access essay plans and sample essays on the wiki, as well as past essays written by other students. For this essay, the teacher will only edit it once and focus more on coherence and major grammatical errors, leaving the learner to identify other problems themselves, or ask their peers. Whereas the teacher does not correct the mistake specifically as in stage 4, they will underline it in order to draw the learners’ attention to it. The aim is to gradually bring the student to the stage where they are more capable of proofreading and editing their work by themselves.

Excerpt 5

“What does examination means? Examinations are designed to test what students have learned in the class. In recently years, examination is not important to those students in this world. Opponents claim that examination should be repealed because of pressure and students are not interested in study. However, proponents claim that taking examination will let students know which level they are at and they will focus on the weak subject. In my view, I believe that exams are good for students and shouldn't be repealed.

One point of view in favour of exams being repealed is the pressure of taking them. Because of this, students need to use a lot of time to do revision and exercise before their exam start. It will not make themselves relax, cause they have to study always. On the other hand, examination will let students know what they should focus on after examination. The reason why examination will let them know is they do not need to focus on the strong way and may pay more attention on the subject which not so strong such as Additional Mathematic, Biology, Physic, etc. In brief, examination is a best way to confirm student's grade in class.

Another point of view in favor of is it exams being repealed that it is not interested. By this reason, some students are good at practicing than exam. Sometimes those students who are sitting exam do not get the higher marks, but they get the higher marks when practice in class. Examination not only let students get higher marks, but also force some students who are lazy to study will do revision when exam is coming soon. Besides that, with this way, students will pay attention on study, because they have to prepare for their exam. The argument of exam should be repealed that examination was so good for students because they have no any excused to replace examination by practice.

In conclusion, this essay has discussed about an argument of is it examination should be repealed. Taking examination has a good and bad aspect. The good aspect is that student will focus on their weak subject and force student to study. However, the bad aspect is that students was felt pressure while taking exam and not interested in exam. In my opinion, I personally think examination have to continue, because exam will decide where will we want to go for our future. As long as exam still exist, we just have chance to choose our futures.”

In the final academic style essay, the learners are expected to take on most of the responsibility for proofreading and editing their work. The teacher has only edited this essay once for cohesion, and has underlined areas of concern for the learners to pay attention to. Even though there are grammatical inaccuracies within the text, the learners have demonstrated that they are able to produce a text, which is structured, well punctuated, with ideas that are becoming more developed.

Table 6: Reflective Essay

Aims:
To write a reflective essay individually
To follow essay plans and samples for guidance.
To proof-read and edit the essay without the support of the teacher.
To increase the autonomy of the student by reducing the role and presence of the teacher.
Procedure:
Introduce the students to the essay style.
Provide essay plans and samples via the wiki.
Inform the students that they will complete the essay by themselves and without the support of the teacher.
The teacher can monitor progress of each student's essay via and wiki and intervene if necessary.

The final essay will not be edited by the teacher at all. The teacher will offer advice and guidance, but it is for each learner to take responsibility for planning, writing, proof-reading and editing. The learner is able to access essay plans, as well as sample reflective essays on the wiki to aid the writing on the essay. However, the teacher plays a smaller role in the writing of it. To help the editing process, the students can go over their past essays, and read the notes in order to find common errors which they can then look for on this essay and correct.

Excerpt 6

“As a student in the Upper Intermediate English class, I have learned a number of things over the last 4 weeks. The project which we were all involved in helped me to learn a number of skills which I will be able to take with me and use in my future academic life. The project allowed me to develop my speaking confidence and writing skills. I was always shy when standing in front of many people, but after doing presentations for several times and talking much in front of classmates I feel I am more confident now.

Honestly, speaking was the hardest section for me in this course because I am not an outgoing person anyway. I was scared and shy all the time when I had to stand in front of the class. I knew about what I am going to say, however, I always could not express my opinion clearly because I was nervous. I began to become more confident in speaking by doing presentation for 2 times. I was really nervous at the beginning of the presentation, however, I tried to calm down and started to eye-contact with the teacher and my classmates then I felt more comfortable. Therefore, I could finish them well eventually. Frankly speaking, I somehow feel nervous even now when it comes to speaking, but not as nervous as before. Now, I can express and elaborate my opinion properly.

Actually, writing was the second tough subject for me in this course. I realized that I had problems on overall points such as content, organization, and vocabularies in writing. However, I feel that I am definitely getting better and better by writing different kinds of essays and knowing formats of them. I now clearly know what my weak parts are. In my opinion, if want to improve writing skills, there is only one way ‘write different essays frequently’. To enhance my writing skills, I will practice writing essays more and more times until there is no single mistake in my essay.

Finally, I really enjoyed learning all the subjects during this term. And also, I made a lot of new friends. I'm quite satisfied with my overall outcome. However, I will not stop practicing speaking and writing. For speaking, especially, I will work hard so that I can express my opinions more freely and smoothly in the next term. And for writing, I will read more books, magazines, and newspapers and memorize new vocabularies for using in writing. Again, the course was really beneficial and enjoyable for me. I will keep doing my best in the next term."

The final essay (Excerpt 6) is completed solely by the learner. The teacher will not interfere or intervene to help with coherence or grammatical issues. From this sample essay, the learner has punctuated it well, used cohesive devices, and structured it so the ideas are explained and supported in each paragraph. Now the learner is in complete control, it is up to them to pay special attention to their writing. While the essay above may have grammatical inaccuracies, compared to the first attempt in excerpt 1, the essay is more concise, more structured with main ideas being more supported.

Projects

As the learners finish stage three (the collaborative essay), they are informed that they will begin a group project. This project will run concurrently alongside the individual essay tasks (stage 4 and 5). The main aim of the project is to get the learner actively involved in writing. Moreover, to create a project where the learners are writing for the purpose of enjoyment, they are engaged in the project and the collaborative environment with their peers. The section below explains this process in more detail.

Table 7: Project Guidelines

Aims:
To complete a project / blog.
To work co-operatively / collaboratively.
To carry out online research.
To write for the purpose of enjoyment.
For the learner to write with the support of their peers.
Procedure:
Brief the students on the project aims.
Put the students into small groups.
Direct students to the wiki site, or page which will host the project.
Inform students to keep work progress notes of the work they do.
Monitor progress via the wiki, and intervene when a learner or group is not moving forward.

In this approach to writing, projects play an integral role. When collaboration takes place within the group process, the effects noted include: increased critical thinking (Gokhale, 1995); increased information retention (Johnson and Johnson, 1986), and an increase in students becoming active learners (Hew and Cheung, 2008). Thus, just as teacher feedback is important to the development of writing skill, learners working together on collaborative writing projects may also reveal benefits in terms of “grammatical

accuracy, and complexity” (Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth and Storch, 2009; Dobao, 2012), and lexical accuracy (Dobao, 2012).

Collaborative projects can also take writing, which for many is an individual experience, and make it more engaging. Using projects with an emphasis on writing, but incorporating new media, such as visual, audio and video, may increase the interest and participation of students. The learners were required to interview participants, then upload the video and write an accompanying article to support it. A project like this challenges students to write for an audience, as well as incorporate new media. Projects like this run along the previous stages explained. The aim is to create a project where the learner writes, because of the interest they have, and not because it is an essay which they are expected to complete. Then, putting the students into groups, asks them to naturally work together, check each other’s work and ultimately learn from each other.

Discussion

The approach described above aims to expose students to a number of different writing approaches. Just as Badger and White (2000) postulated that a combination of approaches would greater benefit students, this approach adapts that theory and includes a number of other approaches such as scaffolding, collaboration and projects.

It is possible to see a progression in writing ability from the very first essay (Excerpt 1) to the next essay (Excerpt 4). In the early stages the learners are supported by the teacher and by each other. The teacher follows their progress via the wiki and monitors the students who are in need of help. Eventually, by the last stage, the learners are able to become more conscious writers, as then now have the skills to plan, draft and edit work by themselves.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented an approach that combines a number of writing processes such as genre, process, collaboration and projects. In order for this process to be carried out, a wiki was employed to facilitate and foster it. The wiki is key to this suggested approach as it is versatile and it is able to adapt to any process, which is created for it. Whereas systems like Moodle, Google Drive and Edmodo, offer fixed learning environment (FLE), wikis are versatile, and therefore, adapt to whichever learning scenarios that they are presented with.

The unified writing approach for academic writing (UWAAW), suggested in this paper, requires both student and teacher to adapt to different approaches to writing. Though it may be a little challenging for both parties concerned initially, the process aims to assist students to be able to become more autonomous in their learning. The wiki supports this process by allowing the teacher to have a heavy presence in their learning in the beginning, and then gradually reduce the amount of assistance that is given in order to help the student become more self-reliant. Although increased self-reliance and autonomy is an objective, the wiki allows the teacher to be involved in the students learning, not as a teacher, but as a silent partner, where they monitor progress online and intervene where necessary.

Wikis are the cornerstone of the process suggested in this paper, as they provide the environment in which to facilitate this approach. Furthermore, because writing is a complex process, learners need to be scaffolded and supported as they learn how to do this. Wikis, therefore, support learners as they proof-read, edit and update their work; whilst giving the teacher an avenue to easily edit, store drafts, monitor progress and provide quick feedback during the writing process. Finally, providing an environment where individual writing work, as well as project work can be completed.

Although the system has only been used in a single university environment, it could be easily adapted for any other classroom with a focus on writing. Wikis are a versatile learning environment where teachers can create a space for a collaborative project, an individual essay, display content, or simply proofread and edit work. Moreover, as writing is increasingly found online, the approach suggested in this paper may help prepare and give learners the skills they need in order to become writers in the digital age.

Wikis are vastly underused in classroom settings as their true potential has yet to be seen by many. With a little training and work, teachers and students can together create an environment, which can support and aid the writing process. Wikis bridge the gap between teaching and learning, because they break down the divide between teacher and learner to form one cooperative unit both working towards a single goal, which is increased written proficiency.

Wikis are now able to integrate with Google Docs, which is creating a whole new set of possibilities for learners and teachers. Researchers need to look not only at the collaborative functions within a Wiki, but how process and approaches can be created so teachers can easily follow and adapt them. Finally, when sound pedagogy can be applied to these approaches to using wikis, it will increase their validity, as well as their reliability in the eyes of both teacher and student.

Future Directions of Wikis

Wikis may not be the only digital avenue for teachers and students, as other platforms offer similar services but with slightly different functions. The strength in wikis lies with their versatility, also the notion that any app or function can be built into them. As more educational establishments attempt to integrate technology into their classrooms, Wikis, much like other platforms such as Edmodo and Google Docs, require a new approach. If not, we will continue to try to duplicate tried and tested teaching norms on technology, even though it is capable of so much more.

Building on the writing approach suggested in this paper, it may help researchers to create other approaches which are more suited to a modern take on writing where blogs, websites and Wikis feature more heavily. One reason why this is needed is that writing, much like reading, is now no longer a linear process. With the use of hyperlinks, a reader is taken away from a linear piece of text to other themes on a related topic. Learners need to be taught how they can best create online content, which does not follow the norms of traditional writing. As writing is now almost entirely digitalised, new writing approaches need to be developed which teach the processes of these new practices.

Additionally, with so many educational software tools flooding the market, it is difficult to differentiate between them, and even more difficult to establish which ones are pedagogically sound. Therefore, researchers need to look at these tools and decide in which ways they can be effective for teaching and learning. There is a growing body of research that suggests that wikis are effective in motivating learners to write, creating collaborative environments, as well as encouraging learners to draft and edit their work more.

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