

**Revising canons of writing skills
development in the academic setting:
Towards a synergy of teacher
and student creative effort**

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Abstract

It is stipulated that the model of writing typically implemented in the academic context, with its traditional delineation of the respective roles of teacher as expert and student as imitator, demonstrates considerable limitations. Advocated in the article is its replacement through a paradigm of instruction which shifts its emphasis from the presentation of writing forms, genres and conventions of writing, and the evaluation of students' texts with reference to the input models, to the teacher's assistance, mediation and co-authorship in the students' writing process. In this model, the aims of instruction go beyond the solitary pursuit of academic excellence to tap into learner creativity in a dynamic interactive classwork environment which acts as a stimulus to their individual composing and editing endeavours.

Two pedagogic instruments underpin the model: the first is the student-executed Portfolio, comprising records of writing in the form of drafts and re-drafts, and the teacher's interventions in and feedback on them; the second - the teacher-developed Class File, chronicling significant classroom activities and students' written or spoken contributions, made available to the students after the lessons and serving as a link between the texts which have been generated and those which are still in the making.

Keywords

writing – process and product, (Writing) Portfolio, Class File, individual / pair / group work, interactive classwork environment, teacher's involvement, synergy

Synergia aktywności nauczyciela i ucznia jako alternatywa tradycyjnej dychotomii nauczyciel–student w procesie rozwijania umiejętności pisania w kontekście akademickim**Abstract**

Artykuł przedstawia w kontekście akademickim niektóre argumenty uzasadniające zamianę modelu nauczania języka pisanego. Tradycyjnie model ten jest zdominowany przez relację uczeń nauczyciel jako relację ekspert – imitator, i koncentruje się na prezentacji tekstów modelowych i ocenie prac studentów w odniesieniu do tych tekstów. Proponowany w artykule paradygmat obejmuje nie tylko pomoc udzielaną przez prowadzącego w zakresie zagadnień językowych, organizacji tekstu czy procesu pisania, ale również współtworzenie tekstów lub ich elementów przez nauczyciela. W tym rozumieniu cele nauki języka pisanego wykraczają poza poszukiwanie doskonałości w wymiarze jednostkowym w stronę maksymalizację twórczej energii całej zbiorowości studentów do stymulowania indywidualnych procesów pisania.

Dwa główne instrumenty dydaktyczne służą do realizacji tych celów. Pierwszy z nich to Portfolio prac pisanych przez studentów, obejmujące różne etapy procesu pisania i interwencje nauczyciela w tych pracach. Drugi to opracowywany i redagowany przez nauczyciela i wysyłany regularnie do studentów Dziennik Kursu, który obejmuje najważniejsze etapy lekcji i wybrane przykłady tekstów autorstwa studentów i zawiera wskazówki i impulsy do tworzenia tekstów nowych.

Słowa kluczowe

pisanie – proces i produkt, portfolio tekstów pisanych, dziennik kursu, praca indywidualna / w parach / grupowa, interaktywny kontekst klasowy, nauczyciel, synergia

1. Historical context and theoretical framework of the study**1.1. Product and process writing**

There are two perspectives on writing which have influenced the methodology of teaching it.

The first is essentially concerned with the outcomes of writing, i.e. the ready-made texts which can be used as a basis for analysis, evaluation and assessment or, alternatively, for communication and exchange of ideas. The second addresses the reality of creating a text, the certainties and uncertainties of native speaker authors as they try to shape their ideas and the odds with which L2 writers contend as they attempt to communicate their message, drawing on the considerably more modest linguistic resources available to them. The first of these is known as the product approach, the second – the process approach.

1.2. Product and process writing

Writing is portrayed in literature as a non-linear, complex process (Krashen 1984) which brings into relief a dichotomy of the idea's inception and its ultimate expression in the final draft. It is characterised by a considerable degree of recursiveness, with the cycles of researching, planning, outlining, drafting and re-drafting, followed or interrupted by revising and editing (Krashen 1984, Silva 1993). Writing is featured as a cognitive act of summoning ideas and giving expression to them in a form which will be comprehensible to the reader

(Raimes 1983). As it abounds in twists and turns, unexpected detours and intentional or unintentional overlaps (Zamel 1983), writing might be likened to a stimulating but also arduous intellectual journey, frequently not matching but actually surpassing our expectations.

Early research investigated the issue of effective and ineffective writers, without particular differentiation on account of their language background, L1 or L2 (Jacobs 1982, Zamel 1983). Later studies identified areas of dissimilarity between L1 and L2 writing with regard to the composing process, discourse development and the use of language (Silva 1993). They also provided some evidence for the claim that the writer's proficiency, both in respect to the global aspects of writing such as genre, rhetorical structure and paragraphing and the sentence-level aspects of grammar and vocabulary use, impacted in equal measure on the final product (Fathman and Whalley 1990). As a better command of many of the above-mentioned features give the L1 writer an edge over his/her non-native counterpart (Silva 1993), it might be concluded that only L2 writers are in need of specific writing instruction. This hypothesis, however, would not be borne out by those research findings which suggest that although the problems of individual student writers, L1 and L2, may be of different orders of magnitude, they all require some form of assistance (Arndt 1987). This assistance, when delivered in the form of a structured programme of study, incorporating the intrinsic characteristics of the writing process, is labelled process writing (Seow 2002).

1.3. Comparison of product and process writing

Process and product approaches to writing differ in a number of ways. The first of these differences relates to their respective perceptions of the teacher and learner roles in the learning process as determined by the historical contexts in which they came into being. The second difference comes from their handling of the organization, implementation and evaluation of

the writing process. Yet another difference concerns the nature and role of input and the degree of its modification in the writing task. Last but not least come the dissimilar foci adopted by the approaches on the particular constellations of language skills and competencies which are called for in the teaching of writing.

The product writing approach was the approach that predominated the teaching of writing skills for decades, but was not investigated for its methodological validity or teaching efficacy. In the early days of foreign language teaching, associated with the rule of grammar translation, writing featured somewhat inauspiciously as an add-on to the standard teaching sequences. Later, it was integrated with other skills for the purpose of facilitating or reinforcing them, as was the case in the Direct Method. It started assuming some form of autonomy with the so-called Guided Composition, a genre introduced by Fries' oral approach (Fries 1945), although it still retained its function of reinforcing language patterns and habits learned in the mode of oral instruction (Silva 1990). The texts selected as models for students' writing practice employed an input of specially adapted structures while the students' writing practice bore little relation to the concept of composition writing as we understand it today. Instead, it involved various forms of language manipulation and imitation. Among its success claims was a reduction in students' errors. The most conspicuous of its shortcomings was the rigid pattern of discourse which it enforced and the limited scope for the student's self-expression. It was a realisation of these limitations that led to the stipulation by some methodologists (Briere 1966) that controlled composition should be followed by free composition, primarily to extend the amount of writing practice. However, no methodology was developed to bridge the gap between the two approaches, with the result that students were either drilled into writing in the guided composition mode or left to their own devices in free composition practice.

It was only some 25 years later that writing started coming into its own, simultaneously becoming the subject of much more refined research such as that carried out by Emig (1971), whose seminal case study, *The composing processes of twelfth graders*, proved a breakthrough in the investigation of writing processes, with newly devised research instruments such as “composing-aloud” audiotapes of the researcher’s accounts of the subjects’ writing experiences, reports on the process of completing assignments, and materials generated in the process, including notes, outlines and drafts. Based on this research, Zamel (1976) and Raimes (1979) made a case for the adoption of L1 process writing research design for L2 composition studies and the use of L1 teaching techniques for L2 instruction. It is worth adding that these research developments coincided with the emergence of the functional-notional syllabuses and the communicative approach, with its concept of discourse as a unit of language overstepping the sentence paradigm and its introduction of authentic real-life content, as opposed to pedagogically concocted class input, characteristic of the earlier methods.

Understanding of the teacher and learner roles is one of the most essential aspects of any teaching method. In the product and process approaches, they are widely differentiated. In the product approach, as illustrated by Guided Composition, but also by general teaching methodologies such as grammar translation, the Direct Method, the audiolingual method, and the cognitive code, the teacher’s role is that of an input provider, controller and tester/evaluator. In the process approach, and in the parallel communicative or task-based teaching methodologies, the teacher’s role evolves into the more subtle, less “didactic” facilitator, prompter, resource, and feedback provider (details of teacher role typologies to be found in Scrivener 1994, Brown 2001 and Harmer 2007).

The principles of assessment employed in the two approaches change, too. In contrast to product writing, where the teacher evaluates the student’s work and awards a final grade for it, the teacher may, in process writing instruction,

entrust the students themselves with some form of evaluation of their partners' work (peer evaluation), to be carried out with reference to more general or more analytical criteria. Some process writing tasks may also require the students to take part in proofreading and editing on the grounds that their contributions may be as valid as those made by the teacher, especially in relation to the global aspects of content, textual organization and discourse development. Although there is sometimes resistance among students to these procedures and a preference for teacher feedback as being more reliable, especially in learning contexts with antagonistic attitudes, or negative group dynamics, a number of research findings confirm the value of peer feedback in writing instruction provided that students receive training in collaborative activities and peer response (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz 1992, Ferris 2003, Hyland 2003, Nelson and Carson 2006).

The role of input in writing constitutes another demarcation line between the two writing approaches. Product writing uses model texts supplied by the teacher as a springboard for students' writing, whose outcomes are supposed to mirror the salient characteristics of the input. The model text is also used as a yardstick for the assessment of the students' work. In contrast, in process writing, input may not be provided at all for fear of restricting the author's freedom of expression. When input is provided, it will often aim to elicit a response to, an evaluation of, or a critique of the original text. In consequence, the student output, far from mirroring the original, may in fact constitute a deliberate departure from it.

Another point of difference concerns the role of the writing task. While a writing task may simply be delegated for homework or assigned for a test in product writing, a writing task will feature prominently in a process-writing lesson, with activities revolving around researching, brainstorming and pooling ideas, composing and re-drafting, evaluating, revising and editing (Seow 2002). While product writing, with its focus on the written outcomes, leaves the process itself to the learner, process writing will address the learner's need for

support and supervision and may integrate learner activity into the more global tapestry of an interactive class experience.

There is also a difference in the language foci of the two approaches. Product writing, especially at lower levels, frequently restricts itself to sentence-level grammar in tasks which involve simple reduplication of the syntactic patterns provided in the model. Process writing, by contrast, relies to a greater extent on beyond-the-sentence discourse and grammar for its effectiveness. It is not grammatical accuracy and conformity to the original model which are sought after; it is the message itself that is of paramount concern.

In summary, product writing is a largely reproductive skill, involving imitation of model texts, prescribed genres and writing conventions, while process writing is a creative skill which offers the freedom to explore ideas through the medium of the written text.

2. Research questions

Some of the questions arising in this context will include the following:

- Which approach, process or product, is the better option in the writing class for the individual and for a group of individuals?
- Which approach is more appropriate in the academic context, both in terms of curriculum requirements and with regard to the attainment of academic standards?
- Are there any other approaches or important elements of such approaches which should be added to the basic “menu”? In other words, should the practising teacher opt for the purity of a single approach or should he/she combine elements of two or more approaches to create the best possible “teaching mix”?

3. Study group, focus of study and source of data

The questions raised above were tested against a background of a teaching programme devised in 2016 for a research group of first year BA students in their writing course in the academic year 2016/17. Out of a total of 44 students who started the programme, 36 completed both the coursework and the written examination which followed it. Initially, the students presented a mixture of CEFR B2 and C1 levels, but during the year many had made good progress and moved to a strong C1 level. All 36 students completed all assignments and presented portfolios of their work over the two term period. A small section of this programme and the manner of its implementation are presented in the following sections of the article. More extensive details relating to the programme and its theoretical and practical outcomes will be presented in a larger-format investigation following the present study.

4. Summary of the assignment in focus

In focus in this study is a writing assignment selected from the whole course of writing instruction, comprised of twelve assignments. This assignment, labelled *My Writing* was divided into a number of teacher-student activities, conducted over two classes, i.e. on 25.10.2016 (Class 4) and 15.11.2016 (Class 6). Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4 are discussed in some detail below.

No / Topic	Details of assignments and their sections			
2 My Writing	2.1 Sentences about own writing	2.2 Extended paragraph about own writing	2.3 Individual revision / correction of text on basis of feedback	2.4 Extension of discourse written in group

Figure 1

List of assignments featuring in the Writing Portfolio, I BA English Studies: 2016-7, Writing Course
(source: Class File)

5. Details of teacher and student work on Assignment 2: Sections 2.1 and 2.2

5.1. Work on the assignment started with a list of sentence frames referring to students' preferences concerning writing, experiences of success and failure, and ways of moving their writing forward (Figure 2).

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What I like / love about writing is ...</i> - <i>My best / worst piece of writing on an organised course was ...</i> - <i>I wish I had had more / less writing practice when I learned English at school because ... / I feel I had sufficient writing practice because ...</i> - <i>My (occasional/constant) problems with writing were to do with / were related to ...</i> - <i>I find that the best way to improve writing skills in English is ...</i> |
|--|

Figure 2

Writing Assignment 2.1: class (source: Class File)

5.2. The students, working on their own, wrote five sentences about their writing, completing and modifying the sentence frames. Next, working in small groups, they read out their sentences to their peers, comparing their versions for points of similarity and difference. At the end of their discussion, each group was asked to present to the whole class the most important points, arranging them into two basic categories: benefits to be gained from writing and problems posed by it.

5.3. The above points were recorded by the teacher, with some fine-tuning of the students' originals. Figure 3, displayed below, is a list of the students' contributions for the two categories, recorded by the teacher during one session, after final editing of content repetitions and overlaps.

Likes with regard to writing

- *It allows us to put our thoughts into words and organise them.*
- *It creates something that has not existed before.*
- *It gives us a chance to search for new ideas.*
- *It has no limits, it is an expression of your personal freedom.*
- *It gives us the opportunity of inspiring other people.*
- *It helps us organise our daily life through checklists, shopping lists, “must do” lists, diary entries.*
- *It helps clear our minds – gives us a focus for an activity.*
- *It enables us to communicate with people who live a long way from us and with whom we want to stay in contact / with other people who are close by about daily arrangements, engagements, meetings etc.*

Problems which come with writing

- *You have to open up and in this way may make yourself vulnerable, lay yourself open to criticism.*
- *You have to think about what you are writing. It has to be appropriate and also correct linguistically.*
- *Some genres and some writing conventions (teaching requirements: word limits) may stop your creativity or fuller*

- expression of your opinions.*
- *You may have no choice over subject matter or over the type of discourse.*
 - *It may be hard to start it, find inspiration or motivation for it.*
 - *Writing may require a lot of dedication (research) and a considerable amount of time.*
 - *Some types of writing like formal or exam writing may involve some stress.*

Figure 3

Group 2 generated material (source: Class File)

5.4. As a follow-up, the students were asked to contribute ideas about how to develop their writing. Figure 4 provides a selection of the more representative points made.

- *Practice of writing to ensure a sufficient volume of it.*
- *Reading texts for vocabulary, use of structures, and patterns or models of composition writing.*
- *Evaluation / feedback as very useful means of improving one's writing – an outsider's perspective considered invaluable.*
- *Error correction to be conducted in order to make readers more aware of aspects of grammar so that they can be more accurate next time.*
- *Reading a text by the author himself/herself with a view to identify its weaker points.*

Figure 4

Group 1, 2, 3 generated material (source: Class File)

5.5. For homework, the students were requested to put the sentences into a single extended paragraph, entitling it *My writing* (**Writing Assignment 2.2: home – Class File**).

5.6. Preparation for the next class, conducted on 15.11.2016, involved the teacher in the following activities:

- proofreading the students' paragraphs with particular reference to the criteria of textual unity, coherence and cohesion, to establish how successful the students were in transforming the input list into a paragraph of continuous prose;
- providing individual feedback on the texts by singling out strong points and areas which required improvement and setting the students an editing task (**Writing Assignment 2.3 – Class File**);
- selecting short excerpts from the whole body of texts supplied to the teacher, 40 altogether, placing them in the Class File, displaying them in the form of a PowerPoint presentation and photocopies. The mini texts consisted of either single complex sentences (excerpt 4, 12, 13, 14) or short sentence sequences, up to three sentences long (the remaining excerpts), as illustrated in Figure 5.

1 *I wish I had had less writing practice. In almost every lesson, my teacher gave us a topic and we wrote essays. It was kind of boring.*

2 *I don't think I had enough of it in my school years. I practised writing quite a lot and my best piece of writing on an organised course was an argumentative essay about euthanasia.*

3 *There have been several good pieces of writing I have created, but the one I am most proud of is an essay about romantic Polish poetry which I wrote in high school and which has been the most difficult one in my writing career.*

4 *I feel I had sufficient writing practice in school because I never had any problems with English, knew many words and tried to read a lot, so I did OK on all my tests.*

5 *Nonetheless, I strongly regret that during the classes there is almost no time to improve creativity. Forming a whole textual universe, for example in a story, is useless since this form rarely appears on the tests due to the difficulty of matching some criteria.*

6 *When it comes to my best piece of writing on an organised course, I must mention an article about effective ways to learn foreign languages. It was a text I wrote in high school for my English classes. To be honest, it was the best piece I have written so far.*

7 *What I like about writing is the opportunity for self-expression. I think that my best piece of writing on an organised course was an article about voluntary work. I wish I had had more writing practice*

when I learned English at school because I still do not feel comfortable with writing.

8 I feel I had sufficient writing practice because I don't have a problem with writing any kind of text any more. Unfortunately, I can't say that occasional problems do not occur. These problems are to do with lack of ideas to find good arguments for my essays.

Figure 5

Excerpts selected from a total of forty students' texts
(source: students' writing portfolios and Class File)

**6. Details of teacher and student work on Assignment 2:
Section 2.4**

6.1. The students were asked to evaluate the sentences above, not so much for their formal correctness or mistakes, most of which had been weeded out by the teacher prior to the session, but for their effectiveness in conveying the authors' experiences and feelings. Subsequently, the students were grouped to share their ideas with their partners and, as a follow-up, to present their critique of peer texts to the whole class. The students certainly rose to the occasion here, identifying very aptly not only the strong points of the texts, but also suggesting their potential for expansion. This speaking activity led to the next stage of the lesson, **Assignment 2.4**, a collaborative writing assignment.

6.2. For the collaborative writing assignment, **Assignment 2.4**, the students were divided into small groups where they had to decide which of the fourteen text excerpts they would extend. The text extension task involved the addition of extra information which could have been provided by the authors if they had been asked to write an essay instead of a paragraph on the topic. In place of five content points in a single paragraph, they had to imagine changing the information

structure of their text so that each of the content foci given became a hypothetical topic sentence of a separate paragraph. However, they did not need to tackle the whole text, which was not available anyway, but only the excerpt which, in their opinion, had the most potential for generating relevant content.

6.3. The students spent approximately five minutes in discussing and comparing their preferences for the particular excerpts, and finally selecting, as a class, a total of eight of them for extension. Each of the eight texts was chosen by at least one student group; additionally, excerpt 2 was developed independently by three groups, while excerpts 3 and 9 by two groups each. On reaching their consensus on this choice, the students moved on to a negotiation of how they would divide the workload between themselves. Interestingly, all the groups opted for working together all the way through and proceeded to select their secretaries, a procedure completed relatively smoothly except for one slightly non-cohesive group which required some teacher support. The choice of the secretaries turned out to be directly related to the candidates' organizational, social, and linguistic skills, including an interest in writing.

6.4. There were some differences in the way the students worked. The general pattern followed was to make some quick points individually and then to compare them with those of their peers. Following this, the secretaries noted the most interesting ideas, making their final selection in the expanded, freshly worded text. Where there was a measure of like-mindedness, work on the task proceeded without major disruptions. Where there were some clashes of personality or strategy, there was a certain amount of tension and friction but also, on a more positive note, creative ferment which, paradoxically, may have improved the quality of the texts, making them more interesting than they would have been had

there been full consensus in the group right from the beginning.

6.5. Having completed their texts, the students read them out to the class, highlighting the elements added to the original. This afforded an opportunity for comparison of different versions of the same frame. The problem areas identified by the audience were rectified jointly by the secretaries and the teacher to ensure the text's overall coherence and freedom from basic errors. The next stage involved the students preparing a Word version of their texts. These were sent to the teacher for final editing, and subsequent publication in the Class File.

7. Discussion of text extensions written by student groups, edited by class and teacher

Three of the extensions, written on the basis of text 2, are presented in Figure 6.

I don't think I had enough of it in my school years. I practised writing quite a lot and my best piece of writing on an organised course was an argumentative essay about euthanasia.

Text extension A

*I don't think I had enough writing in my school years **and because of that I practised it quite a lot on my own at home.** My best piece of writing on an organised course was an argumentative essay about euthanasia. **I was proud of it. Nevertheless, I had to learn a lot of specific vocabulary which was connected with the topic. I chose the topic myself and the teacher was surprised at that choice. The reason for such a subject was my grandfather's terminable illness. He suffered a great deal and I sometimes wondered if we could have freed him from the pain.** (104 words)*

Text extension B

*Throughout my school years I did not have enough of writing practice **during the classes. That is the reason why I was forced to start working on my writing skills on my own. I created many compositions concerning controversial topics like abortion, violations of human rights, compulsory circumcision, and clergy intervention in state legislation. Consequently, I mastered the argumentative forms. Nevertheless, one cannot create a solid work without proper inspiration. Unfortunately, my best piece of writing was prompted by my mother's death due to incurable illness. It was an essay about euthanasia, very emotional but genuine, which turned out to be a great success.*** (104 words)

Text extension C

*I don't think I had enough of it in my school years. I practised this skill quite a lot **as we were writing essays, paragraphs and creative stories.** My best piece of writing on a course was an argumentative essay about euthanasia. I spent many hours doing research and asking other people for their points of view. I found many interesting stories, but the best one which supported my ideas was a story about a woman from Belgium which was published in the New York Times. My essay was graded very well and I had positive feedback from the teacher, even though I had a controversial point of view on the topic.* (112 words)

Figure 6

Group extensions of extract 2

N.B. The bold type marks show the elements which were added to the original texts
(source: students' writing portfolios and Class File)

In terms of content, the texts provide some details, including general practice of writing (A and B), reasons for the choice of the topic (A, B) preparation for the essay in relation to lexis (A) and content (C). Texts A and B personalize content, introducing a fictitious family member while text C avails itself of a media story.

In terms of discourse development, all three texts adopt an appropriate narrative structure, high-lighting the central event, the writing of the essay, and presenting some events prior to it (Texts A, B, C) and/or following it (Texts B, C). Additionally, the textual functions include listing/addition (*and*), contrast/concession (*but, nevertheless, even though*), result (*consequently*) and surprise/disappointment at a dramatic turn of events (*unfortunately*).

All three text extensions employ both simpler and more complex syntactic units. In addition to simple sentences (three in each text) we can also find examples of compound (Texts A, B) and complex sentences (Text C), as demonstrated in Figure 7.

<p>1 I <u>found</u> many interesting stories, but the best one which supported my ideas was a story about a woman from Belgium which was published in the New York Times. (relative clauses)</p> <p>2 My essay was graded very well and I had positive feedback from the teacher, even though I had a controversial point of view on the topic. (clause of concession)</p>
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Figure 7

Use of syntax in the extensions of extract 2
(source: researcher's notes)

As far as lexis is concerned, all three text extensions include appropriate vocabulary, advanced collocations and fixed expressions, as summarized in Figure 8, with text B displaying the widest lexical range and containing examples of concepts related to controversial social and political phenomena.

- Text extension A – *suffered a great deal, free him from the pain*
- Text extension B – *abortion, violations of human rights, compulsory circumcision, clergy intervention in state legislation; master the argumentative forms; create a solid work; prompted by my mother’s death; incurable illness; very emotional but genuine; turn out to be a great success*
- Text extension C – *doing research, supported my ideas, (had) positive feedback from my teacher*

Figure 8

Use of vocabulary in the extensions of extract 2
(source: researcher’s notes)

7. The teacher’s final edit of the students’ texts

In the case of extensions to extract 2 from Figure 4, the teacher’s final fine-tuning, consisted in four relatively minor changes being made, four to Version A and two to Version C (Figure 9).

Text extension A

- *reason for **such a subject*** was replaced by *reason for **the choice of this topic***
- *I had to learn* was replaced by *I **had had** to learn*
- ***terminable*** was replaced by ***terminal***
- *we **could** have freed him from the pain* was replaced by *we **should not** have freed him from the pain.*

Text extension C

- *I **spent** many hours doing research* was changed into *I **had spent** many hours doing research*
- *was graded **very well**,* was changed into *was graded **A**.*

Figure 9

Teacher’s final editing of text extensions A and C
(source: researcher’s notes)

8. Discussion of the teaching approaches adopted for the research project

8.1. The teacher organised the teaching and learning processes in such a way that evidence of writing development and classroom teaching was available to the learner for the practical learning purposes of storage and learning, and to the researcher himself for reflection and analysis. There were three very important sources of evidence available to the researcher: individual writing assignments, the **students' writing portfolios**, and the electronic **Class File**.

8.2. The assignments were at the heart of the writing approach implemented on the course. They involved a set of class-supervised procedures and corresponding learner writing activities, conducted with a view to developing the learners' writing proficiency. In general terms, they progressed from single sentence messages to shorter to longer texts, covering a range of writing skills and topics, and including preparation for writing, the process of writing itself (composing) and the revision and correction which concluded it. A number of the assignments were marked by the teacher in keeping with the time-honoured tradition of the teacher as the final judge of students' work and for the practical purpose of complying with the academic requirement of grading. The other uses of the assignments were more interesting because they went beyond the confines of traditional academic assessment, involving peer-editing and peer-evaluation, presentation in open class (reading out, displaying on the screen), and discussion or reflection.

8.3. The writing portfolio was one of the most important instruments of both monitoring and developing students' writing development. As an assessment instrument, it ensured that a wider spectrum of learner abilities and competencies was considered for assessment than that measured by a snapshot timed-essay mark and it was in conformity with

the research findings on the value of portfolio assessment contributed by Burnham (1986), Elbow and Belanoff (1986), Belanoff and Dickson (1991), Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000). In compiling the portfolio, the students relied both on ongoing instructions from the teacher issued after each class and on the final checklist provided for each term. The final class of each term was marked by the presentations of the writing portfolios and their peer inspection for completeness and clarity of presentation.

8.4 Another teaching instrument and an important source of information about the approach implemented on the course was the **Class File**. This device, which has been developed by the researcher over a period of many years, served as a means of integrating different aspects of class input and output into a single resource, with multiple examples of student contributions and teacher input and guidance. For the author, it was an important monitor of how teaching related to and affected learning outcomes.

8.5 The preparation of the **Class File** involved the teacher in a constant process of composing and editing, which mirrored, in an important way, learner activity both in the classroom and at home. In the most general terms, the teacher first prepared input for classroom presentation (electronically recorded material, either taken from writing teaching handbooks/L2 coursebooks, or composed by himself), added student contributions, both individual and those made in groups, and subjected them to editing so that they achieved overall coherence. Extracts from the Class File, in the form of lesson units, were made available to the students on a weekly basis, ensuring that there was a regular update on what had been covered in class.

9. Towards a synergy of student and teacher effort in the academic context

9.1. The traditionally implemented methodologies of product and process writing, when practised in isolation, may display certain limitations, which make them problematic as methods of writing instruction.

9.2. The product approach, as implemented in many academic contexts, relies primarily on the study of texts of varying length and representing a range of genres (summary, essay with its subgroups, article, review, thesis) as models for content retrieval and emulation. Important features of writing are practised in class and at home, either in the form of discrete-item exercises, or, as full-fledged textual assignments. The usual mode of working employed is lockstep, which means giving instructions for student individual activity, at home or in class, and checking its results. When conducted by an empathetic instructor, the approach may be reassuring, giving a clear idea of what is expected of the students to satisfy course requirements. In the hands of a strict teacher, it may prove an insurmountable obstacle to the students concerned, especially when the assessment is based on timed essay writing, a mode of writing which fails to do justice to the range of the students' abilities and talents (Burnham 1986, Elbow and Belanoff 1986, Ruth and Murphy 1988).

Indisputably, there are some advantages to this approach, one of which is the coverage of a spectrum of discrete teaching items. Yet another advantage is the relatively straightforward assessment, relying on clearly defined standards of attainment and the teacher's neutrality; since the teacher is not engaged in the student's writing process, the traditional boundaries between him and the students are not blurred. Added to this is the teacher's convenience of not having an ever mounting pile of students' scripts which require attention as, most typically, there will be one script per assignment for the teacher to mark.

9.3. The process approach seems to offer learners much more scope for their writing development, acknowledging the fact that they will probably need more than one attempt at writing to produce a fully satisfactory product, similarly to the most accomplished of authors who make numerous alterations to their texts, smoothing away infelicities of expression, and enriching them with new layers of meaning in a process of intensive drafting and re-drafting. As was mentioned earlier, feedback on a text may be given not only after it has been composed but also during the process of its creation, and not only by the teacher but also by the learners' peers. Also, awareness of writing as a long journey rather than a short trip to one's destination will influence the student writers' aims and strategies, increase their resilience in the face of the countless hurdles they will be confronting and equip them with individual and collaborative strategies for clearing them. Most importantly and reassuringly, the students will know that in the task of writing, they are not left to their own devices but can rely on their instructors and peers to offer them the assistance they need.

For all the advantages mentioned above, process writing is not a remedy for all ills. For the students, the support they are receiving in the writing process may be taken as a matter of course. This in turn may cause excessive dependence on always being guided through the vicissitudes and uncertainties of writing. When confronted with the task of completing a text within a given time, they may "sink rather than swim". Sometimes the students "go round in circles", trying to improve their texts in the successive drafts mechanically, without introducing any qualitative improvements and thus failing to make headway (Hamp-Lyons 2006). In connection with this, one can mention research reports suggesting that process writing should only be used for lower level students or students with more serious deficits in the implementation of writing strategies related to the organization and structuring of content (Diaz 1985, Urzua 1987, Jones 1985, Zamel 1982, 1983, Rorschach 1986). For the teacher

involved in the implementation of the approach, there are some downsides, too, perhaps the greatest of them being the significant time expenditure and eventual tedium of having to “process” multiple student scripts. By the same token, tedium may also become part of the students’ experience as they are churning out multiple drafts in an attempt to make the text “perfect”.

9.4. In view of these limitations, we have to turn to other approaches in language pedagogy if we want to design a programme which will be both productive but also stimulating for a group of learners working together, rather than a group of individuals without any social bonding. An approach which, in the view of the author, needs to be interwoven into the fabric of writing instruction is the interactive approach; however, not in the narrower sense of the communicative approach which was in its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s but in the broader sense of the principles of an interactive pedagogy (Brown 2001).

The interactive approach, as summarized by Brown (2001), energises the classroom learning experience, broadens the range of interaction patterns used in class, lessens the learners’ dependence on the teacher, teaches them to cooperate with each other and, in this way, helps them come out of the isolation of individual writing. Within this methodological framework, the students are afforded an opportunity to write texts which will not only be assessed for their formal features but will also be read and commented on by their fellow students.

The fact of having an addressee for one’s texts other than the institutional assessor makes a fundamental difference to the students’ approach to writing itself. They learn that the texts they create have a communicative purpose and rationale, which is an exchange of ideas with other human beings, be they tutors or peers. When relieved of the threat of constant assessment, the students may be more inclined to experiment and tap into their vein of creativity. One of the features

representative of the interactive approach is peer discussion and evaluation, another is brainstorming and pooling of ideas, both overlapping with important characteristics of process writing. A third characteristic is the creation of texts by groups of students, negotiating their respective roles in the writing process and setting aims for the completion of its individual stages.

9.5. It is impossible to implement the interactive approach without **class dynamics and a sense of community**. A group of people is more than a simple sum of individuals: working collectively, the students are capable of creating content and/or language which may be inaccessible to a single individual, irrespective of his/her ability. A class, therefore, offers extraordinary potential for exploitation; the contributions made by students as a follow-up to their individual or collaborative ventures present a wealth of ideas and linguistic resources which enrich each individual member of the community and the teachers themselves. For the less proficient students taking part in the research project, the obvious benefit was that they could learn from their partners, but also share their own insights, which may have passed unnoticed if they had worked individually. For the stronger students, the opportunities for self-actualisation through more extensive class contributions were combined with the enhanced social role as the driving force of group activity and as individuals who could take responsibility for the performance of their lower-level peers.

And the teacher himself derived countless benefits from the myriad of class contributions and his interface with them. For one thing, working in an interactive framework, the students brought an element of unpredictability to the teacher's cut and dried schemes and lesson plans. Encouraged to draw on their own experience, that of digital-native, globally active members of the world community, they brought insights and know-how which were, at times, both baffling and intriguing to a member of the older generation. And not only did they bring ideas

which called for the teacher's re-examination of his hard-held assumptions, but also in some sense "upgraded" and re-juvenated him.

9.6. Also, the interactive perspective had a major impact on **the role of the teacher and the learner** in the learning process. The teacher's roles within this approach eluded the traditional paradigm of presenting and testing (as present in the product approach) and embraced support and facilitation in the course of text creation. As was pointed out earlier (Section 1.3), the product approach places uncomfortably tight constraints on the would-be writer while the process approach, although much more humanistic and learner-centred, may limit the teacher to a set of one-to-one "relationships", to the provision of ongoing feedback to individual class members, without the added value of catering to a whole group. What the present author would like to posit is that only very close cooperation between the teacher and students and the students themselves at the different points of the pre-, on-going- and post-writing experience will draw on the reserves of learner-teacher creativity, providing a stimulus for students' further writing development. The cooperation described in the study not only took the teacher away from the traditional teacher and learner demarcated territories but established a new scheme of things. By recording students' texts, working with them, editing them and allocating a place for them in the shared, jointly created classroom product, the Class File, and, at the same time, by presenting his own texts or adapting those written by other authors, the teacher symbolically joined fortunes with the students as his partners, becoming himself a member of a writing community. The community prided itself on a shared history, as recorded in the Class File, but also on individual records of achievement, i.e. the students' own work stored in the writing portfolio.

10. Implementation of the “synergic” approach

The implementation of the above model of writing instruction was not always unproblematic. Although the students were generally prepared to work with each other in class on simple speaking and discussion tasks, they initially had more problems focusing on tasks involving composing a joint text or offering peer feedback. The reason for this might possibly have been the fact that tasks which required them to negotiate their respective roles and/or reach consensus, ran into some difficulty due to differences in general language competence and in writing proficiency. Equally problematic, at least initially, were interactive tasks involving multi-layered discourse development. Some students, due to illness, absence from the lesson or sheer absent-mindedness, failed to provide the input for other students to process, thus disrupting, blocking or even sabotaging those students' work. There were also, fortunately relatively isolated, cases of students who were shy or reserved, or simply unenthusiastic about the particular partners they were asked to work with.

Some of these problems may also be put down to the students' identification with learning cultures where they write only for their teachers and are not “distracted” by factors like peer cooperation. However, having learned the new rules of conduct, the overwhelming majority of students made the best of the learning opportunities offered by the “synergic” approach and carried out the tasks diligently, frequently spontaneously or even enthusiastically. The minority of students who did not complete the writing course had stopped attending the whole course of studies. Since their dropping out was a result of a combination of factors related to their level of proficiency and ability, motivation, stamina, diligence and perseverance, it is impossible to conclude that the writing course did not suit them or that they did not suit the course.

11. Conclusions

A combination of the different approaches, activity types, and forms of classroom interaction and modes of working seems to have provided some scope for the students to develop their talents, improve the weaker aspects of their performance and be reassured by both teacher and peer support. The effect of providing the students with interactive activities characterised by dynamics of interaction and certain unpredictability seems to have helped engage the students and spared them the tedium of repetitiveness which might have stifled their writing efforts.

In this way, the “synergic” approach, as a combination of all three approaches discussed above, offered a learning environment in which

(a) the students were able to:

- individually explore aspects of writing which they lacked confidence about within a framework of support and assistance from their teacher;
- build on each other’s strengths to improve their writing proficiency by sharing ideas, completing joint text versions, revising and improving on their partners’ texts, simultaneously honing their general language skills;
- present evidence of their creativity and receive due acknowledgement for it;

(b) the teacher had an opportunity to:

- act as an editor (the writing portfolio), co-author and author (the Class File);
- make use of his expertise and share his creativity with students across a spectrum of their abilities and talents in ways which brought benefits for his own and his students’ development;
- become part of the writing community by engaging in selected aspects of the writing process.

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