Current Issues in Academic Writing in English

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Agenda

- Theoretical Approaches and Teaching 2\textsuperscript{nd} language writing
- 2\textsuperscript{nd} language writing: Influences and Challenges
- An Overview of 2\textsuperscript{nd} language writing approaches
- Traditional L2 Rhetoric
- Expressivism and Cognitivism
- Socioliterate, collaborative, and critical literacy approaches
- Conclusions
Theory in Teaching L2 Writing

Teachers must consequently “consider a variety of approaches, their underlying assumptions, and the practices that each philosophy generates” (Raimes, 1991, p. 412)

Theory in Teaching L2 Writing

• L2 writing teacher practices are influenced by:
  • personal beliefs based on their own writing experiences
  • knowledge of theory and teaching methods
  • Practical constraints in their teaching context (class time, access to materials, curriculum, etc.)

• Knowledge of L2 writing approaches → informed L2 teaching
Factors Influencing 2nd Language Writing

- L1 writing strategies transfer to L2 writing tasks
- L2 global proficiency and vocabulary development
- Affective and cognitive factors (motivation, executive planning, etc)
- L2 writers focus more on local writing issues like grammar, word choice, and mechanics
- No focus on global writing issues like audience, purpose, genre, coherence, and cohesion

Challenges L2 Writers Face

- Lack of knowledge about appropriate content and word choices
- Misuse of linguistic structures and cohesion devices
- Lack of knowledge of cultural, disciplinary, and rhetorical practices
  - e.g. western practices for developing an argument, textual borrowing, and reader expectations
Question: What challenges do your 2nd language writers face?

An Overview of Theoretical Approaches

Product – oriented approaches (before 1970s)
- Focus literary analysis and school-based rhetorical modes (expository, narrative, and argumentative writing)

- Focus on individual writing development and expressive writing (journals, personal essays)

Post – process approaches (after 1980s)
- Focus on writing as social process involving the writer, the reader, the text, and the context
Product - Oriented: Traditional L2 Rhetoric

- Beliefs about teaching and learning writing
  - Analyzing literature and copying models improves writing skills
  - Writing is a tool for language learning and assessment
- Contributions
  - Prepares students for academic writing in the Humanities
- Critiques
  - No contribution to overall writing proficiency and fluency
  - No preparation for disciplinary and non-academic writing
  - No consideration of social and communicative practice of writing

Traditional L2 Rhetoric Activities

- Introducing school-based rhetorical modes through models
- Teaching prescribed formulas for writing
- Writing 5 paragraph essays with introduction, body, and conclusion
- Combining sentence drills (Audiolingualism)
Process-Oriented: Expressivism

- Beliefs about teaching and learning writing
  - Expressive writing improves critical thinking and writing skills
  - allows for self-discovery of one’s writing identity (voice)
- Contributions
  - Freewriting improves global writing fluency and increases student motivation
- Critiques
  - No preparation for disciplinary and non-academic writing
  - Minimal focus on language for L2 writers
  - Voice is a cultural construct; may not be useful for L2 writers

Question:
How useful is a traditional 2nd language rhetoric approach for your classroom?
Expressivist Activities

• Free writing on topics of interest to the student
• Guiding students through individual and group writing conferences
• Assigning freewriting, journaling, personal essays

Process-Oriented: Cognitivism

• Beliefs about teaching and learning writing
  • Writing skills are learned by engaging in the process of writing
  • Writing helps students with critical thinking and problem-solving
• Contributions
  • Teaching composing processes improves student use of successful writing strategies
• Critiques
  • No focus on academic and non-academic genres and reader expectations
  • Minimal focus on language for 2nd language writers
Process-Oriented Activities

- Focus on the stages of the writing process (Flower and Hayes, 1980)
- Guiding students through pre-writing, planning, drafting, pausing, reading, revising, editing, publishing stages

Question: How useful are expressivist or cognitivist approaches for your classroom?
Socioliterate Approaches

- Beliefs about teaching and learning writing
  - Literacies are multiple and writing practices are unique to discourse communities
- Three main approaches:
  - Genre studies
  - Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
  - Writing across the curriculum (WAC)
- Critiques
  - Return to formulaic models for writing
  - No critical analysis of power and inequality in academic communities
  - Minimal focus on language for 2nd language writers

Genre Studies

- Common in English for academic/specific purposes (EAP/ESP), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS)
- Beliefs about teaching and learning writing
  - Instruction should focus on genres 2nd language writers need in their academic disciplines
- Contributions
  - Building genre knowledge has been shown to improve disciplinary writing skills
**Rhetorical Issues: Ethos, Pathos and Logos:**

- How does each genre help to establish the information’s credibility? Is it effective?
- How does each genre help to evoke an emotional response from the audience? Which emotions? Why?
- What types of evidence are used to support the claims of the information in the genres? Is it appropriate? Why or why not?

**Structure:**

- How is the information shaped by the genre(s)? (Consider the limitations/freedoms of space, time, layout, audience, and so on.)
- How are the genres organized to convey its message?
- How does the structure facilitate the purpose of the information in the genre(s)?

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**Genre-based Activities**

- Raising awareness of the communicative purposes, reader expectations, moves and linguistic features of a disciplinary genre
- Using models to write their own samples of the genre

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**Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)**

- Common in in K-12 and in disciplinary courses at universities
- Beliefs about teaching and learning writing
  - Writing instruction should be learned in discipline-specific courses and content areas
- Contributions
  - Teaching writing within the content area increases student motivation and genre knowledge.
CLIL and WAC Activities

- Analyzing discipline-specific writing conventions of genres while learning content
- Assigning writing that integrates content learning and disciplinary writing practices

Question:
How useful is a socioliterate approach for your classroom?
Post – Process: Collaborative Pedagogies

• Beliefs about teaching and learning writing
  • Collaborative learning, social mediation and scaffolding (sociocultural theory, Vygotsky, 1986) improves writing skills
  • Writing is communication with readers and text (‘intertextuality’)

• Contributions
  • Scaffolding and collaborative activities have been shown to encourage interlanguage development in 2nd language writing
  • Can be used with other writing approaches

• Critiques
  • Preparing 2nd language writers to work together can be challenging
  • Students may be at different levels or contribute differently

Collaborative Writing Activities

• Small group discussions of models and writing conventions
• Collaborative writing tasks and peer feedback
• Workshops and student-teacher writing conferences
Post – Process: Critical Literacy

• Beliefs about teaching and learning writing
  • Writing in discourse communities enacts social, political and cultural power structures.
  • 2nd language writers should analyze sociohistorical context of writing and challenge educational practices.

• Contributions
  • Critical literacy practices may be empowering for 2nd language writers and may improve their advocacy skills.

• Critiques
  • Impractical for novice members in a discourse community
  • Minimal focus on language skills for 2nd language writers

Critical Literacy Activities

• Critical needs analysis and rights analysis (Benesch, 2001)
• Critical analysis of texts and critical writing about academic genres
• Exploring issues of race, class, gender and sexuality in discourse communities
• Exploring textual borrowing practices as a cultural construct
Question:
How useful are collaborative and critical approaches for your classroom?

References

Teacher Resources

- **Writing Skills** (American English, US Department of State)
  - A good general source for teaching ESL writing
- **Read – Write – Think** (International Literacy Association)
  - A good source for traditional rhetoric and collaborative writing resources
- **Second Language Writing Listserv** (Conference on College Composition and Communication)
  - A good source for process orientations to teaching writing
- **Teaching Resources** (Writing Across the Curriculum)
  - A good source for Writing across the curriculum teaching resources
- **Online Writing Lab** (Purdue University)
  - A good source for WAC, genre studies and socioliterate approaches
- **Classroom Resources** (Teaching Tolerance)
  - A good source for critical literacy resources