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'Localizing' Second Language Writing Pedagogy in a Skills-Integrated Language Program in Brazil

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Introduction

When teachers think about teaching English as a second language (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL), usually the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing automatically come to mind. In fact, these four skills are always present in integrated-skills coursebooks, but not necessarily with equal emphasis. The focus on writing can range 'from a mere "backup" for grammar teaching to a major syllabus strand in its own right, where mastering the ability to write effectively is seen as a key objective for learners' (Harmer 2004: 31).

Just as the emphasis on writing can vary significantly both in international coursebooks and in the EFL curriculum of different language teaching organizations, there is also variation in the approach to teaching writing, the main distinctions continuing to be between the product, process, and genre approaches (Paran 2012). According to Paran, the main approach in many EFL classrooms is still product oriented, and the university context is almost exclusively where genre and process approaches are generally being implemented.

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Most of the studies involving the teaching and learning of L2 writing have been conducted with college-level ESL students, with a smaller set of studies involving college EFL writing, many coming out of Hong Kong and Japan (Matsuda 2006). A few studies have also focused on secondary students in Asia and they have addressed the implementation of process pedagogy in product-oriented writing classrooms, as reviewed by Lee (2010). In all of them, the second language writing classes were conducted in students' regular secondary schools.

Despite this range of research, the number of studies that have focused on writing in private language institutes is virtually nonexistent, which means that second language writing (SLW) scholars are likely to be unaware of how their research and their proposed approaches reach this international teaching audience. This chapter describes how a private ELT institute in Brasilia, Brazil, has adopted and adapted process-genre writing pedagogy in its skills-integrated curriculum. It is hoped that teachers and administrators working in similar contexts can gain insights on how to adapt the process-genre approach to suit their institutions and that SLW researchers can better understand how their work is negotiated in international contexts.

Context

Casa Thomas Jefferson (CTJ) is a not-for-profit Brazil-US binational center in Brasilia, with over 17,000 students and 260 teachers. CTJ offers English classes to students from the age of three to adults, and from the complete beginner to the advanced level. CTJ aims to expand the very limited experience of learning English, mostly part-time, that students receive in their regular primary and secondary schools, which can be characterized as having few contact hours and a methodology that focuses primarily on reading and grammar. Thus, it is common for some families to enroll their children in ELT institutes with more communicative and skills-integrated classes. Besides listening, speaking, and reading, from the beginning there is also a focus on writing in the four-hour-a-week courses at CTJ, with activities that encompass both writing for learning and writing for writing (Harmer 2004). However, it is at the intermediate and advanced levels that a greater focus on process writing takes place, when students produce three pieces of writing per semester, through at least two drafts.

The following section describes how, over time, the process and then the process-genre approaches were introduced at CTJ and how these trends have

been used in the institution to negotiate a pedagogy that is locally appropriate but can inform other similar EFL contexts.

The Process Approach

In the late 1960s, there was a shift in first-language (L1) composition teaching from a focus on product to a focus on process, a consequence of various studies demonstrating that the ways writers produce texts did not necessarily match the models that had been traditionally promulgated. It took some time for these insights from L1 pedagogy to be imported into L2 teaching (Kroll 1991). Dissatisfaction with both the 'controlled composition' and the 'current-traditional' approaches motivated the introduction of the process approach in ESL composition teaching. It was felt that expression of thought was neglected in both of these approaches, which were prescriptive and considered composition to be a linear process (Zamel 1983). Boscolo (2008) suggests using the term 'process approaches', in the plural, since there have been many variations. In its original and 'strong' version, the process approach has the following characteristics: (a) teacher-led classes are minimized and group work is emphasized; (b) students should be allowed to choose topics to write about and to produce several drafts of their writing; (c) the teacher is not a judge, but rather, a facilitator who provides feedback to students in individual conferences; (d) the social dimension of writing is emphasized, as students work in groups and read each other's writings (see Murtiningsih and Hapsari , this volume, for more on learner collaboration).

Although the process approach to teaching writing emerged in ELT in the early 1980s, it was only in the mid-1990s that it caught the attention of CTJ teachers, coordinators, and supervisors. The result was a radical pendulum shift whereby the focus changed from the product and the rhetorical form to the writer and his/her process of creating meaning. Students wrote primarily about themselves and had to produce at least three drafts per piece of writing. The teacher was required to give feedback only on content and organization of ideas on the first draft and to focus on form on the second draft. Quantity was exchanged for quality: students wrote fewer texts, but now in multiple drafts. However, it was very difficult to convince and train teachers to use this approach because it was completely alien to their experiences of learning or teaching writing, both in L1 and in L2. A strong version of the process approach was never fully adopted, but rather, we tried to adapt its core principles to our context, especially regarding the recur-

sive nature of writing and the stages of the writing process that have to be observed in the classroom.

In 1999, a survey was conducted with 59 CTJ advanced course teachers to ascertain the extent to which they followed the pedagogical principles underlying a process-oriented methodology (Villas Boas 1999). The survey found that only 15% of the teachers considered the teaching of writing through a process approach at the advanced level to be effective and consistent. The main problems faced at that time, according to the survey, were the lack of well-defined grading criteria for writing, the inconsistent focus on the generating ideas and planning stages of the writing process, and the almost nonexistent adoption of peer revision as a stage of the drafting process. Teachers' main reason for not adhering to the underlying principles and stages of process writing was lack of time, which related to the difficulty of adopting process writing methodology in a skills-integrated institutional environment, where the focus of the course is not solely on writing and teachers have between five and ten different groups containing up to 18 students each. Also, as the teachers were not specialized in second language writing, they were not necessarily aligned with process writing theory.

The survey results led to the implementation of a standardized writing curriculum, with writing goals for each level in the institution, from the basic to the advanced courses, and the development of rubrics to assess students' writing, which considered both the students' progress and the final product. Because the coursebooks used at the time had a minimal and inconsistent focus on writing, worksheets were developed to help teachers with the planning and revising stages. For the adult advanced levels, peer review sheets for each writing assignment were also developed.

The 'Post-process' Framework and the Genre Approach

The beginning of the millennium saw the teaching of writing reach a more balanced theoretical perspective by way of: the recognition of academic writing as a social act of communication; a combination of process and product; an emphasis on the classroom community and the participation of the student in the construction of his or her writing and that of others; and a focus on the interrelationship between reader and writer (Reid 2001). Atkinson (2003) emphasizes that this sociocultural turn in what he calls the post-process era does not preclude using a process approach to writing. Prewriting,

drafting, feedback, and revising are still regarded as effective classroom activities. Rather than being a paradigm shift, the post-process approach is an expansion and broadening of the domain of L2 writing. Genre-based pedagogy came to expand the notion of L2 writing. It goes beyond the planning-writing-reviewing framework by focusing on the production of different types of texts and the linguistic resources writers need to communicate effectively, rather than merely on writing strategies or processes (Hyland 2007). Hyland argues that genre pedagogies pull together language, content, and context and present students with systematic explanations of how texts exercise their communicative functions.

Influenced over time by all these theoretical trends, CTJ has more recently come to adopt and adapt a process-genre approach to teaching writing whereby:

(1) A process approach is still advocated, but without losing sight of the final product.
(2) Texts of different genres should be used for analysis and as models, with the purpose of linking reading and writing, as well as listening and speaking to support the writing assignment, and of raising students' awareness of the linguistic features that characterize different genres.
(3) Students should be taught rhetorical patterns and conventions explicitly; we cannot assume that they will pick them up incidentally. Students do not learn to write just by writing.
(4) Teachers should plan their instruction so as to encompass all the stages of the writing process: generating ideas, planning, drafting, revising, assessing, and giving feedback. They should also recognize that writers do not go about these stages linearly, but rather recursively.

Applying the Framework

An analysis of the three different coursebooks adopted for the Teens, Intermediate, and Advanced courses at CTJ showed that, despite the fact that the books provide models of texts in the genres students are expected to write, they do not contain genre analysis activities. Only the intermediate-level coursebook provides activities for generating ideas and planning, and none of the coursebooks addresses self and peer correction or provides rubrics to assess specific writing tasks. As a result, course supervisors at CTJ have developed materials to supplement coursebook lessons with the elements of the process-genre approach that are highlighted above (see Tante,

this volume, for another account of teachers supplementing textbooks for primary school learners). The texts used in the reading comprehension section of the book are often used as a springboard for the customized writing lesson, following a process-genre approach (Yang 2010). It is a localized version of the approach that relates to a number of contextual factors, such as the limited class time teachers have to dedicate to writing in a skills-integrated course that places a greater emphasis on speaking due to student interest.

The Teens coursebook is the one that requires the greatest amount of supplementation, as its writing assignments only contain a model and then a writing task, with no scaffolding in between. Thus, worksheets have been developed with these elements:

– Analysis of the model: genre, textual features, use of discourse markers, grammar features, specific vocabulary;
– Support for generating ideas and planning: a variety of tasks for planning, such as brainstorming, freewriting, discussing, and mind-mapping;
– Assessment rubrics: performance descriptors focused on the specific writing task.

Below is an example of how these principles are applied in a writing task for Teens aged 12–14 at the A2–B1 levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Figure 17.1 shows the writing task in the book, which presents a letter to a city official about a problem in the neighborhood. Students are asked to read the letter and then write their own version. There is no genre analysis or prewriting activity.

In order to supplement the coursebook assignment with the pedagogical steps underlying a process-genre approach, the worksheet shown in Fig. 17.2 was developed.

The worksheet allows the students to analyze the letter, focusing on its linguistic and rhetorical structure. They then have the opportunity to brainstorm problems that they could write about, building on previous listening and speaking activities on the topic of 'problems in my community', already presented in the coursebook, as well as on their reading of the text that served as a model. This scaffolding supports them to choose and write about a topic they are interested in.

Next, students write their own letters, drawing on the model. In the subsequent stage, students receive feedback from a peer and the teacher. Peer feedback for this age and proficiency level is usually done by way of a check-

Read a letter to a city official. Then write your own letter about something that changed in your neighborhood and why the official should help.

Ms. Sandy Millen
202 Main Street
Glendale, California 50550

Dear Ms. Millen,

I am writing to tell you about a problem in my neighborhood. There used to be an open field on 2nd Avenue. The kids in the neighborhood used to play soccer there, but now they cannot play there anymore because the city put a fence around the field.

This is a problem because there aren't other places nearby to play soccer and the kids need to play outside. The other soccer fields are in the suburbs, too far away for the kids who live in the city, and there aren't buses to the soccer fields in the suburbs.

Please remove the fence around the park on 2nd Street. Also, please add buses that go to the soccer fields in the suburbs. It would be great if city and suburb kids could play together.

Sincerely,

Tisha Adams

Fig. 17.1 The coursebook writing assignment

list (Fig. 17.3) in which students identify whether the rhetorical and linguistic features learned for the assignment are present in the writing.

The teacher complements the feedback provided by the peer and addresses other problems of language use by using correction symbols. Students rewrite their assignments and receive a mark based on task-specific rubrics (Fig. 17.4).

Despite the adaptations mentioned above, we have encountered a number of contextual challenges related to the teaching of SLW at CTJ. These are now discussed together with solutions that have been adopted.

Challenges in Adopting a Process-Genre Approach

Academic articles on the teaching of the four skills do not necessarily touch on local day-to-day tensions and dilemmas that may underlie the adoption of a certain teaching approach. This section aims to bridge this gap

A. <u>Analyzing the model</u>: Read the letter to a city official **(p. 84)** and answer the questions.

1. Who wrote the letter?
2. Who is going to read the letter?
3. When was the letter written?
4. What is the problem raised in the letter?
5. Where was the open field?
6. What can we infer about where Tisha lives?
7. Why can't the kids play soccer in the suburbs?

B. Most letters have five to six parts. Each part gives different information. Read Tisha's letter again and complete the information below with the words from the box.

| date | signature | address | greeting | message | closing |

1. The _____ shows the place where the person lives.
2. The _____ shows the day, month and year that Tisha wrote the letter.
3. The _____ gives the name of the person Tisha wrote to.
4. The _____ is what Tisha wants to tell that person.
5. The _____ ends the message.

6. The _____ gives Tisha's name (in her handwriting).

B. <u>Prewriting</u>: Make a list of problems you find in your neighborhood or school. Then compare the list with your partner. Choose the problem you find the most serious or the one you feel the most confident to write about.

C. <u>Writing</u>: You are going to write a letter to your local government or to your school board about a problem in your neighborhood or in your school. Organize your letter according to the instructions below.

Recipient's address

Date

Greeting

Message:

Paragraph 1: Specify the problem. Talk about how it used to be in the past and how it is now.

Paragraph 2: Explain how this problem affects your neighborhood or your school.

Paragraph 3: Suggest possible solutions to the problem.

Closing

Signature

Fig. 17.2 Customized writing worksheet

Read your peer's letter to a city official or school principal. Check (√) if all the letter components below are present:

(   ) There is a heading with the recipient's name and address.

(   ) The address is followed by the date.

(   ) There is an appropriate greeting.

(   ) The first paragraph states the problem clearly and with sufficient details.

(   ) The second paragraph explains why the problem affects the community.

(   ) The third paragraph gives a suggestion.

(   ) There is an appropriate closing.

(   ) Grammar and vocabulary are accurate.

Write one or two suggestions for your peer to make the letter even better.

_____

_____

_____

Fig. 17.3 Peer revision sheet

by discussing some of the main dilemmas we have experienced and by presenting solutions we have developed. Readers are invited to compare these dilemmas and solutions to those they may experience in their own teaching contexts.

Tensions Between Writing Approaches at CTJ and Other Schooling

Students attending CTJ are seldom familiar with process writing. A study in the four major K-12 schools attended by our students (Villas Boas 2014) showed that CTJ's approach to teaching writing is in tension with the product and examination-oriented approach adopted in those schools. On the other hand, the same study also showed that a focus on process writing helped students develop as writers in their L1. They transferred the skills and strategies learned at CTJ, such as generating ideas, planning, and revising,

Content and Organization			
	Yes	Partially	No
The first paragraph specifies the problem	3	2-1	0
The second paragraph explains how the problem affects the neighborhood or school.	3	2-1	0
The third paragraph suggests possible solutions.	3	2-1	0
Uses appropriate letter format.	3	2-1	0

Grammar				
	Yes	Mostly	Partially	No
Uses verb tenses correctly.	4	3-2	1	0
Uses correct subject-verb agreement.	4	3-2	1	0
Uses appropriate sentence construction.	4	3-2	1	0

Discourse and vocabulary				
	Yes	Mostly	Partially	No
Uses connectors to link ideas.	4	3-2	1	0
Uses correct word form.	4	3-2	1	0
Uses appropriate vocabulary for a formal letter.	4	3-2	1	0

Mechanics			
	Yes	Partially	No
Uses correct spelling and capitalization.	3	2-1	0
Uses correct punctuation.	3	2-1	0

Fig. 17.4 Scoring rubrics

to their regular school writing experiences. In fact, 94% of the participants found that one of the greatest strengths of the writing program at CTJ was having the opportunity to rewrite their compositions.

This lack of familiarity with process writing has led us to scaffold the writing process more explicitly for our students and also raise their awareness of how strategies for planning, drafting, and revising their writing can help them in their academic and professional lives. For every writing task, students experiment with different types of planning strategies, such as mind-mapping, freewriting, debating, and outlining. Figure 17.5 shows an example of a combination of a speaking/mind-mapping activity that was used as a supplementary worksheet to generate and organize ideas for writing.

After revising their writing, students are also invited to compare the first and second drafts and reflect upon their improvement. In the advanced course, students have a course portfolio (see Lam, this volume) in which they keep their writing assignments throughout the four-semester course and are invited to reflect upon their progress as writers. They also receive extra credit for having rewritten all of their assignments.

C. Christopher Columbus discovered America and became a fundamental man in history. Sometimes we know people who have done important things, too, but they don't become famous for that. Think about someone in your family or a friend's family who has done or achieved something you consider great or significant and write about it. Use the space below to brainstorm some ideas:

   Examples:
   My grandmother got an award for Best Storyteller.
   My sister created a group that rescues stray cats and dogs in our neighborhood.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

D. Share your ideas with a partner. Begin your conversation like this:

   Student A*: I think I'll talk about my grandmother.*
   Student B: *Really? What did she do?*
   Student A: *She got an award for best storyteller.*
   Student B: *When was that?*

E. At home, talk to your family and do some research. Use a mind map to organize ideas before writing.

D. Write an essay about your important person. Organize ideas in paragraphs as in the model **(p. 68).** Adapt the language in order to use the vocabulary and structures in unit 7. Use the box below to help you.

Vocabulary	*Language focus*
- Verbs (became, discovered, died, introduced, won, invented, took place, traveled, etc.) - People - Places - Dates	Past tense with IN, AGO, DURING, FOR and FROM.

Fig. 17.5 Generating ideas and planning

Teachers' Lack of Familiarity and Training in Process Writing

During their own education, the teachers did not experience process writing pedagogy, except for those who were themselves students at CTJ. They are

also unfamiliar with this approach because their pre and in-service teacher education would not typically include practice in teaching process writing. Even though they may have attended writing classes in their Language Arts courses, very few teachers would have experienced process writing or learned about it in theoretical terms (Villas Boas 2014).

To bridge this gap, CTJ offers a five-semester, 320-hour teacher development course (TDC) that contains a 32-hour writing component. In this writing course, a process-genre approach is adopted, so that student-teachers experience the approach themselves and are more equipped to use it with their students. In the course, teachers analyze the rhetorical structure and linguistic features of different genres (e.g. formal and informal letters, e-mails, reports, narrative accounts, blog posts, etc.) and produce texts in these genres. They practice different strategies to generate and plan ideas, such as researching and discussing the topic with peers, outlining, freewriting, and working with different types of graphic organizers, and go through the feedback and revising stages, experiencing both self and peer assessment.

Novice teachers at CTJ also go through a one-semester, two-hour-a-week induction course, with workshops on different areas. Teaching writing is one of the topics covered in the course. In addition, in our local TEFL seminar, held every year in July and lasting from two to three days, and in the mini-courses offered during our in-service training, we frequently address issues related to teaching writing. The main topics addressed in recent years have been giving effective feedback, conducting peer revision, designing effective assessment rubrics, and using technology to teach and give feedback on writing. ELT institutes wishing to adopt a process-genre approach would benefit from offering similar opportunities for teachers to learn about and experience this approach so that they can use it more effectively in their classes.

Tensions in Teacher and Student Perceptions of Drafting

CTJ instructors typically teach six groups of up to 18 students each, and as for many teachers worldwide, their time and energy are limited. In a process writing approach, each student produces at least two drafts each. In the past, students received a grade only after they had handed in their second or third drafts, and the rubrics used contained a progress element in which the teacher assessed both the final product and students' performance throughout the drafting process. This amount of feedback placed considerable demands on teachers. Because they knew that their grades would be 'open' until the very end of the process, students also tended to delay handing in

their work. Some students wrote their first drafts in a casual manner, since they would later have a chance to revise them. To address this issue, students now receive a preliminary mark for their first drafts and a deadline to submit a second draft. If they do not meet the deadline, their preliminary mark becomes permanent.

Another initiative that has contributed to facilitating the drafting process both for the students and for the teachers is the use of the Google Classroom application. Teachers can post assignments, communicate with students, and provide feedback on students' writing, eliminating paper work and/or time-consuming e-mailing, downloading, and printing. Teachers and students also use a voice application that allows them to provide oral feedback on the compositions.

Provision of Consistent and Effective Feedback to Students

Despite the great strides made in teaching writing in the past 20 years and the efforts to implement process-genre writing pedagogy in a large institutional program, we are still faced with two major challenges related to providing feedback to students. It remains difficult to guarantee that teachers will provide consistent and comprehensive feedback on content and organization of ideas, in addition to feedback on form (see Pham and Iwashita, this volume, for further discussion of feedback options). We have a mixture of more and less experienced professionals that can result in an unfortunate inconsistency in the way feedback is provided. The Advanced Course portfolio mentioned earlier is a step towards dealing with this problem, as students collect their work throughout the course and teachers can see the kind of feedback provided by their students' previous teachers. Another initiative is to have more experienced teachers mentor the less experienced, helping them to provide effective feedback.

The second major challenge is a wider adoption of peer revision. Teachers and course supervisors are still reluctant to adopt peer revision, despite the fact that its advantages have been documented, and strategies to handle peer revision effectively have been proposed:

(1) Model the activity by revising pieces of writing with the whole class.
(2) Begin by having students give feedback on anonymous writing, as they do not feel comfortable 'criticizing' their peer's writing. After a while, they see that feedback is not necessarily criticism.

(3) Begin with short checklists and expand the tasks gradually, until they can be more open-ended.

(4) Vary the focus and the format of the peer review activity.

(5) Use peer review sheets instead of having students write on their peer's paper.

(6) Be patient. Teaching students how to give and receive feedback takes time. They will be very reluctant in the beginning, as peer revision is not part of their educational experience. If the teacher is persistent, students eventually incorporate it as a natural step in a writing lesson.

More recently, a team of advanced course teachers has been piloting a Google Classroom Project and has started incorporating peer revision more consistently into their writing lessons, experimenting with Google applications for oral feedback as well. It is hoped that this new project will inspire other teachers to incorporate peer revision. Formative assessment has also been a major focus of the institution in the past two years, and courses and in-service sessions have been offered to familiarize teachers with formative assessment tools, such as classroom quizzes, electronic polls to check learning, rubrics, and checklists. Self and peer revision are integral elements of formative assessment, so it is hoped that teachers will adopt them more in their teaching.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, two major elements have been highlighted that can help other English language institutes implement a process-genre approach to writing. The first one relates to how coursebooks can be adapted and expanded in order to build a consistent process-genre writing curriculum, taking advantage of the different genres already present. The second element involves the role of continuing teacher development that has an experiential focus as a key factor in familiarizing teachers with the process-genre approach.

It is hoped that teachers and administrators around the world who have also struggled with the adoption of the combination of process and genre approaches in second language writing instruction in their contexts have gained insights on how to localize the approach to meet the needs of their organization, their teachers, and their students.

Questions for Reflection

(1) Think about how you learned to compose texts in your native language. Was it by way of a product, process, genre, or process-genre approach? Did the methodology used follow the steps mentioned in this chapter? How about when you learned to compose texts in EFL/ESL (if you are a non-native-English-speaking teacher) or another second/foreign language (if you are a native-English-speaking teacher)?

2) How much emphasis was given to second language writing in your teacher education course and/or pre and in-service training? How much did it contribute to developing your expertise in dealing with writing in your second/foreign language classroom?

(3) Analyze the coursebooks used in your program to verify whether they contain all the stages in the writing process discussed in this chapter and focus on the production of different genres. If not, how could you adapt and supplement the activities?

4) How do the challenges described in the Brazilian context compare with those you face or might face in your context? Are there other challenges that were not mentioned here?

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