

A SOCIOCOGNITIVE-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING WRITING

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Abstract. This article reports some of the compelling concerns in using various approaches to teaching writing. On this note, this paper provides an alternative teaching framework for the teaching of ESL writing to address these concerns. This sociocognitive-transformative framework incorporates the cognitive, social, cultural, and transformative components of learning. Specifically, the discussion covers three sections that shed light on the theoretical underpinning, the design, and procedure on how the proposed approach can be realized in ESL writing classrooms. It is also hoped that through this approach, the teaching and learning of writing would lead to producing 21st century learners capable of surviving this highly globalized and knowledge-based society.

Keywords: 21st century literacy, ESL writing, sociocognitive approach, transformative learning, ESL pedagogy

Second language (L2) writing pedagogy has been constantly experiencing paradigm shifts. From the heydays of the product approach, the trend shifted to the post-process pedagogy (Trimbur, 1994). Currently, there are four approaches to teaching writing: product approach, process approach, genre approach, and process genre approach. While the product approach focuses on what a final piece of writing will look like and measures the product using vocabulary use, grammar, mechanics, content, and organization as criteria (Brown, 1994), the process approach takes into consideration the recursive nature of writing process through constant revision and feedback from others. It also guides teachers to concentrate first on the content of preliminary drafts before they focus on forms (Ashwell, 2000). However, critics of process approach argued that (1) it views process as the same for all writers regardless of what is being written and who is doing the writing (Inghilleri, 1989); and (2) it lacks emphasis on the social context and purpose of the piece of writing (Badger & White, 2000). Hyland

(2003) further emphasized that process approach (3) treats writing as a decontextualized skill and that learners are not able to notice how different texts are distinct in relation to their purpose, audience, and message; (4) does not provide learners explicit teaching in the structure of different genres; and (5) lacks engagement with the socio-political realities of learners' everyday lives.

As a reaction to these limitations, a genre approach was introduced. This approach emphasizes that writing and learning to write is a social activity and that learning to write is needs-oriented, requires explicit outcomes and expectations, and involves learning to use the language (Hyland, 2007, p. 152–153). It allows the learners to explicitly understand the text structure and the reason for writing a genre the way it is written. It also uses texts that learners need in a specific context and allows the learners to perceive the differences in the structure and form and consequently apply what they learn to their own writing. The only major concern about using this approach is it undervalues the processes

needed to produce a text and sees learners as largely passive (Badger & White, 2000).

After considering the weaknesses and strengths of all the three earlier approaches, the process genre approach came into place (Tribble, 1996) and then expanded and operationalized by Badger & White (2000). It is a synthesis of product, process, and genre approach. It allows learners to study the relationship between purpose and form for a particular genre as they use recursive writing processes. It also develops learners' awareness of different genres and of the composing processes. More importantly, this approach is not limited to cognitive view but sees writing from a social perspective. This makes the act of writing public, interactive, and situated (Matsuda, 2003). From this context, it can be posited that the process genre approach takes its roots from the post-process pedagogy in L2 writing.

Unfortunately, despite considerable efforts to transform L2 writing pedagogy practices, there is still this dearth of integrating sociocultural, pragmatic, and transformative aspects into the teaching of writing. More importantly, the available approaches failed to provide learners the opportunities to explore and practice 21st century skills considering that many learners are confident and are already globally prepared to maximize the opportunities that are available for them in the 21st century. By 21st century literacy, we mean the skills that contemporary learners must possess to survive today's highly globalized economy (PPRC, 2010).

Given this context, it is necessary that learners be taught of writing skills which are aligned to the demands of 21st century learning. Hence, this paper advocates for a sociocognitive-transformative approach (Barrot, 2013; Barrot, 2014) to teaching writing.

THE APPROACH

The sociocognitive-transformative approach to teaching writing takes a functional-interactive view of language in which writing is treated as an activity to express meaning and to build and realize interpersonal relations and social transactions between interlocutors. It is an offshoot of sociocognitive-transformative approach in ESL pedagogy (Barrot, 2013). The approach does not only aim to produce communicatively competent learners but also to produce 21st century multiliterate lifelong learners who are able to participate in and contribute to this knowledge-based and global society for social transformation.

Sociocognitive approach views language learning from an interactionist perspective which gives prime importance to interaction in language learning. This approach further claims that language learning occurs when learner's internal mechanism interacts with linguistic environment and social environment (Ellis, 1994, p. 243). It also stands in the principle that language is not acquired for the sake of acquiring it but to perform social actions (Atkinson, 2002). Transformative learning, on the other hand, relates to actual behavior that learners should possess to contribute to community as a whole and participate in social activities. It is a theory that promotes change and questioning of the truthfulness of one's deeply held assumptions (Mezirow, 1978, p. xi) through personal and critical reflection about these assumptions, validation of transformative insights, and finally, integration of transformed insights in one's life.

To actualize the approach into specific classroom practices, it is fused with process genre approach and reading-into-writing approach. Scholars claim that learners can greatly benefit from linking reading and writing especially in the context of process genre pedagogy. First, reading-into-writing helps learners acquire the necessary discourse

rules for writing (Tsai, 2006). Second, it allows learners to practice and improve their ability to think critically and analytically which is necessary for effective writing (Goscik, 2007). Third, it provides learners something to write about (Goscik, 2007). Finally, it allows learners to recognize the conventions (i.e., vocabulary, grammatical structures, and rhetorical features) of a particular genre, and use that understanding in their own writing (Mayo, 2000).

THE DESIGN

Objectives

Since the learning goal is quite general, it requires to be translated into more specific short-term learning objectives (i.e., lesson level) which help monitor whether each lesson is on the right direction to achieving the goal. Each set of learning objectives needs to incorporate the (1) practice and development of reading and writing skills and knowledge, (2) practice of reflective learning, (3) participation in social activities and social transformation, (3) and development of various forms of 21st century skills. These skills include digital-age literacies, inventive thinking, effective communication, and high productivity (NCREL, 2003). Digital-age literacy refers to a broader form of literacies that will help them gain understanding of scientific, cultural, and technological information in various forms. It includes *basic literacy* (i.e., numeracy and language proficiency to perform job and social functions), *scientific literacy* (i.e., knowledge of scientific concepts and processes for decision-making, civic and cultural participation, and economic productivity), *economic literacy* (i.e., ability to identify and analyze issues, changes, and situations pertaining to economy), *technological literacy* (i.e., knowledge on and ability to efficiently use technology for a specific purpose), *visual literacy* (i.e., ability to interpret, use, appreciate, and create images and videos),

information literacy (i.e., ability to process information in various media), *multicultural literacy* (i.e., ability to understand and appreciate customs, beliefs, and values of one's own culture and of others), and *global awareness* (i.e., recognition and understanding of interrelationships among international organizations, nation-states, public and private economic entities, sociocultural groups, and individuals across the globe). Unlike digital-age literacy, inventive thinking is the learners' ability to process and apply higher thinking skills and information technology on complex and sustained contexts. It is composed of life skills, such as adaptability, managing complexity, self-direction, curiosity, creativity, risk-taking, and higher-order thinking and sound reasoning. Effective communication, on the other hand, refers to teaming and collaboration, interpersonal skills, personal responsibility, social and civic responsibility, and interactive communication. Finally, there is high productivity which is the learners' ability to be productive as part of workforce. This includes prioritizing, planning, and managing for results, effective use of real-world tools, and ability to produce relevant and high-quality products. It should be noted, however, that it is not necessary that all 21st century literacies be integrated into one lesson. This is because each lesson is guided by a specific 21st century theme which may not be able to accommodate other forms of digital-age literacies. What is important is that the four general categories of 21st century skills are represented in the learning objectives.

As can be seen in the sample set of objectives, the first four objectives relate to 21st century skills while objectives 5, 6, and 7 relate to the target task, reading skills, and language focus, respectively. Finally, objectives 8 and 9 were aimed to develop the writing skill while objective 10 was set to allow learners to reflect on their own learning.

<i>Theme:</i>	Environmental literacy
<i>Task:</i>	Make an online advocacy website on any environmental issue
<i>Reading:</i>	Distinguishing facts from opinions
<i>Grammar Focus:</i>	Cohesive devices for argumentation
<i>Writing:</i>	Argumentative essay
<i>Objectives:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. gain understanding of environmental issues from various forms of sources;2. apply higher thinking skills in analyzing complex environmental issues;3. practice collaboration, interpersonal skills, personal responsibility, social and civic responsibility, and interactive communication;4. practice prioritizing, planning, and managing for results, effective use of real-world tools, and ability to produce relevant, high-quality products;5. make an online advocacy website on any current environmental issue;6. distinguish facts from opinions;7. use appropriate transitional devices for argumentation;8. select, gather, evaluate, and utilize effectively the print and nonprint sources for the essay using appropriate technologies;9. write a well-drafted argumentative essay about an important environmental issue; and10. reflect on your learning.

Syllabus

In a sociocognitive-transformative writing course, a layered syllabus (i.e., a mixture of various forms of syllabus) is adopted. It specifically combines topical, task-based, and skill-based syllabuses. As a topical syllabus, it is necessary that themes are framed within 21st century learning to produce multiliterate lifelong learners. These core themes include civic literacy, global awareness, financial literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy (PPRC, 2010). While *civic literacy* refers to learners' ability to be stayed informed on "governmental processes, being able to participate in civic life, and recognizing the local and global implications of civic decisions" (p. 2), *global awareness* focuses on allowing learners to understand global issues and participate in diverse learning communities. *Financial literacy*, on the one hand, relates to making informed and sound economic and financial decisions. There is also *health literacy* which refers to learners' ability to access and use available information for health-related decisions. Finally, there is *environmental literacy* which

relates to learners' ability to "understand and discuss both man-made and natural environmental issues and propose or debate alternative solutions to these problems" (p. 4).

After sequencing the themes, tasks are then specified. These tasks are essentially community-based projects that would allow learners to be an active member of their respective communities. In performing and accomplishing the tasks, it is essential that learners utilize various forms of ICT (e.g., computer, Internet, software). The genres or text types should also be spelt out from which the target reading and writing skills are aligned. These reading and writing skills should be complementary in nature by ensuring that they are essential to the chosen genre or text type. The same is true for the selected essential forms. They should be aligned with the target genre/text type and should be necessary to complete tasks and execute the target skills.

Types of learning and teaching activities

To realize the learning goal in a sociocognitive-transformative pedagogy,

learners need to be engaged in authentic and project-based tasks with focus on social/community participation. Through these types of tasks, learners will have the power and control, through their active participation, to contribute to social as well as self-transformation. Using this type of learning activities would also make instructional materials go beyond decontextualized, sentence-level grammar presentation resulting in learners' exposure to the ways speakers and writers choose linguistic items that shape situations (Schneider, 2005). More importantly, using project-based tasks will foster cooperation between and among learners, teachers, administrators, and the community in general. It is also important to note that when providing learners tasks and activities, these tasks should be within their sphere of social realities. For example, a teacher cannot give the task 'preparing an advocacy brochure' to grade 1 pupils.

As regards learning materials, using authentic texts from print, broadcast, and online media which represent the culture of learners is highly encouraged. These materials would make learners acquire language competence, perform social actions, participate in communities, and contribute to social and self-transformation. It is important that the topics exploited in these authentic materials be aligned to 21st century themes and learners' personal and social experiences for them to find meaning and relevance to the teaching-learning process. Teacher-made texts are also acceptable so long as they reflect the target themes.

Role of learners

From a sociocognitive-transformative standpoint, learners are viewed neither as a vessel for knowledge nor as an individual acquirer of language but an active participant in the teaching-learning process and social interactions. With this, learners are treated as real people performing things naturally

(Atkinson, 2002). Moreover, learners are seen as "dialectically connected to social contexts in a synergistic, two-way relation" (Meskill & Rangelova, 2000, p.1). This suggests that in any social environments, language learners are entrenched in such social contexts to become "competent participants in culturally, socially, and politically shaped communicative contexts" (Zuengler & Miller, 2004, p. 40).

Role of teachers

The teachers have a threefold role in a sociocognitive-transformative classroom: a facilitator, a conscious-raiser, and a socializer/co-learner. As a facilitator, teachers relinquish their authority to allow learners' expressive capacity to flourish. Hence, they only serve as a guide in all classroom procedures and activities by offering comments and encouragement. Not only that they facilitate classroom activities, teachers using sociocognitive-transformative approach need to be facilitators of change as well by offering learners opportunities to reflect and understand their strength, limitations, misconceptions, and roles in the community. They need to awaken the social consciousness of learners on what is happening around them through reading and writing. Finally, teachers take the role of a socializer and a co-learner who participate in a critical dialogue with learners.

PROCEDURE

Since sociocognitive-transformative to teaching writing is an approach more than a method, the specific procedure may somewhat vary depending on the context of teaching, learners, teachers, and academic program. Thus, the following procedure is more of suggestive rather than prescriptive.

Similar to all writing lessons, the activity should start from the specified learning objectives. This is followed by a diagnostic task which has a three-pronged purpose of engaging the learners, activating their

background knowledge, and diagnosing their weaknesses and strengths all at the same time. Given the nature of the lesson, it dictates that the diagnostic task involves reading and writing preferably in groups.

After completing all the diagnostic tasks, learners are enjoined to answer the self-assessment rubric which is aligned to the set learning objectives. This self-assessment at the start of the lesson aims to provide learners some insights about their baseline skills, knowledge, preferences, and interests. Consequently, it will provide teachers some directions on where to focus on and on how to deliver the input and administer tasks. Another tool which can be made part of self-assessment is the misconception analysis which allows learners to discuss in small groups their misconceptions, naive theories, non-scientific beliefs, conceptual misunderstandings, and preconceived notions (Fisher & Frey, 2007). With all these activities, self-assessment would allow learners to develop their metacognitive knowledge which will guide them to monitor and regulate their own learning.

It is from the results of self-assessment that the teacher proceeds to providing input or key concepts underlying the target reading skill. By input, it means verbal and nonverbal information that are exploited to generate meaningful communication for both comprehension and acquisition purposes. They can be presented via listening, viewing, and reading. They can either be presented inductively or deductively, explicitly or implicitly, or in a form of tasks. Whatever the form and mode may be, it is necessary that these inputs are adjusted to the learners' level, needs, and preferences and that they are chosen depending on the intention of instruction. Input presentation can be followed by a comprehension check which has the purpose of identifying whether the learners have fully understood the key concepts. Questions to be included in this section should

tap the higher order thinking skills of the learners. This means that recall-type questions should be avoided as much as possible. In case learners posted lower scores in the comprehension check, the teacher needs to revisit the part in which learners obtained lower scores. This strategy is a realization of the concept of differentiation and spiral progression.

Subsequent to comprehension check phase is the application stage. At this stage, learners are asked to practice the target reading skill at an increasing difficulty and sophistication. Using the example used in the "Objectives" section of this paper, at first, learners may be asked to identify whether one statement is a fact, an opinion, or a combination of the two. The text to be used in this activity can be an argumentative article from a reputable newspaper. If you will notice, the selected text is aligned to the target text type (i.e., argumentative essay). Afterwards, learners may be asked to extract sentences that are purely facts, purely opinions, and a combination of facts and opinions. As a follow-up activity, learners may be asked to assess whether the given facts and opinions are accurate/valid using reliable sources. Allowing them to validate their answers will compel them to practice inventive thinking and information literacy.

Between reading section and writing section is the language component of the lesson. At this junction, learners are provided inductively or deductively some input on how a certain essential form is used in a particular genre. If it is done deductively, learners may be presented first with target language forms using authentic texts. If it is done inductively, learners may be presented several samples of authentic texts using the target language forms. Thereafter, they may be asked to generalize from those texts. After input presentation, learners may be asked to practice the target language forms through cloze test with options, cloze test without options, and

writing in the suggested order. This is one way to grade the language activities from simple to complex. Importantly, the texts to be used during input presentation and application should be aligned to the target genre and theme.

By the time learners reached the writing lesson, they would have been significantly exposed to the target genre, its rhetorical features, lexicon, and grammatical features, which would facilitate the writing of their respective papers.

As mentioned earlier, the approach is fused with process genre approach. Unlike traditional approaches, a process genre approach follows six stages: preparation, modeling and reinforcing, planning, joint constructing, independent constructing, and revising (Badger & White, 2000). During preparation stage, teachers define a situation that will require a written text and placing it within a specific genre. Teachers also help in activating the schemata and allow learners to anticipate the structural features of this genre. There are two ways on how preparation can be done from a sociocognitive-transformative perspective. First, the teachers may ask learners to view a video clip (e.g., documentary) that deals with the target theme and aligns to the target genre. Learners are then asked to process the clip in terms of content and presentation. Questions about the previously discussed reading skill can also be asked to learners. In this way, the target reading and language skills in the lesson are reinforced. For example, using the same example above, after viewing, learners may be asked about facts and opinion presented in the clip. And since the genre is argumentation, they may also be asked on the logical fallacies they have encountered and whether they agree or disagree with the points advocated in the clip. The last part of the processing of the clip would serve as a springboard in discussing the context of writing. This is by asking learners about the general and specific purpose of the

clip, its significance, target audience, and author's persona. After viewing, the class can have a mini-debate on any proposition raised in the clip. In this way, they will integrate other macroskills.

In the modeling and reinforcing stage, teachers introduce a model of the genre and let learners consider the social purpose of the text, its audience, and language used. Teachers also discuss how the text is structured and how its organization develops to accomplish its purpose. Eventually, learners may do some comparisons with other texts to reinforce what they have learned about a particular genre. Also at this stage, conceptual inputs are provided to learners. This includes the nature of the essay, its components and structural features; hence, it is at this point that a sample outline is provided to learners.

Following the modeling and reinforcing stage is the planning stage. This stage can be divided into two parts: brainstorming and searching for references. During brainstorming, learners may discuss, read associated materials, and relate the topic to their experience in order to increase their interest in the topic. Also at this stage, learners narrow down the topic that they have chosen during the preparation stage using appropriate strategies (e.g., clustering, free writing, and listing). They will then be asked to transform the specific topic into a question that when answered will result in a thesis statement of their paper. In searching for references, learners are required to gather a reasonable number of references to address the drafted thesis statement. These references should be taken from valid and reliable print and nonprint sources.

After the learners have gathered enough references, they will be asked to perform group construction with a classmate and/or a teacher. But before learners begin the actual writing of the text, they need to collaborate first in the preparation of their outline based on the drafted thesis statement. After

completing the outline, the teacher and learners work together to begin the writing of a text. Teachers also use the writing processes of brainstorming, drafting, and revising. Learners contribute information and ideas, and the teacher writes the generated text on the blackboard or computer. Eventually, the final draft provides a model for learners to refer to when they work on their individual compositions.

By the time independent construction has been reached, learners have already examined model texts and have jointly constructed a text in the genre. Learners undertake the task of composing their own texts on a related topic. Class time can be set aside for learners to compose independently so that the teacher is available to help, clarify, or consult about the process. Writing task can be continued as homework.

The final stage involves revision. During this stage, learners perform revisions and editing of their drafts. It is divided into two parts: the first revision which is the output after peer feedback and the second revision which is the output after teacher feedback. During peer feedback, learners may check, discuss, and evaluate their work with fellow learners, as the teacher again guides and facilitates. After the second draft (i.e., output of first revision) has been completed, it is then submitted to teacher for feedback. Both the peer and the teacher use the same guide questions which are anchored on the rubric used for final assessment. After the third draft (i.e., output of second revision) has been completed, the teacher may require learners to publish the learners' work in any social networking site (e.g., Facebook or blogspot), which will stimulate their sense of authorship and achievement as well as motivate them to become more responsible writers.

Finally, after completing all the reading, language, and writing tasks, learners will be asked to complete the target project in groups. They are highly encouraged to use the

available ICT in accomplishing a community-based project. Similar to the essay they have produced, learners need to disseminate their output to their intended audience.

As previously pointed out, every task should have a corresponding assessment. This makes assessment an integral component of the approach. Various forms of assessment (self-, peer, and teacher-based assessment) both in traditional and alternative methods will be used to assess learners' progress and performances in all the tasks and activities. This multicomponential assessment phase will provide a wide range of information and feedback on whether the intended goal and objectives were achieved as indicated by their actual performances. Through the use of rubric for performance-based tasks and other forms of objective assessment by the peers and teachers, the achievement of target learning goal and objectives can be determined. As regards self-assessment, learners need to be given an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned by answering the reflective questions which are parallel to the stipulated learning objectives. This reflection will provide additional information on whether the objectives were achieved or whether there is a need to revisit some aspects of the lesson in the succeeding lessons or whether there is a need to adjust the way they are being taught.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents some of the issues in using various approaches to teaching ESL writing in the context of 21st century literacy. With these compelling issues, a sociocognitive-transformative approach that incorporates the cognitive, social, cultural, and transformative components of learning was offered. To better understand this approach from both theoretical and practical perspective, this paper clarifies the theories (i.e., sociocognitive theory and transformative learning) that underpin the approach as well as

its design (i.e., objectives, syllabus, types of learning and teaching activities, role of learners, and role of teachers) and procedure. Through this approach, it is hoped that the goal of producing 21st century multiliterate and communicatively competent lifelong learners can be achieved. But at the end of the day, the success of such an approach greatly depends on the commitment and persistence of both the teachers and learners to break the barrier of complacency and individualistic approach to acquiring and using writing skills.

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