REVIEWS
COMPTES RENDUS

Think, Write, Share: Process Writing for Adult ESL and Basic Education Students

Joyce Scane, Anne Marie Guy, Lauren Wenstrom
Toronto, Ont: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1991,
86 pp.

Unlike most of the newer composition texts, which only profess to teach writing as a process, *Think, Write, Share: Process Writing for Adult ESL and Basic Education Students* remains true to its objective of helping teachers introduce process writing methods into their adult English as a second language (ESL) and adult basic education (ABE) classes.

This teacher-reference text evolved from several research projects involving ESL and ABE students. The ESL students were presumably drawn from high beginner to high intermediate levels. The ABE students were also from a number of levels, "threshold up to and including community college students working at approximately a senior secondary school level" (p. ix).

Going through the text, ESL teachers seasoned in the process methodology see a kindred soul. The authors have joined the ranks of those attesting to the validity and benefits of process writing.

One of the impressive features of the text is the rationale and documentation pertaining to student-centred and co-operative learning, the basis for the successful implementation of writing as a process.

For the novice teacher, or experienced but hesitant professional, the book provides a number of "tips" and examples as motivation to try this approach in teaching/learning writing. The novice, in particular, should be pleased with Chapter 7, "Process Writing Activities that Work."

Ana's case study, which launches Chapter 1, "Before You Start," is an unusual and intriguing way to illustrate the writing process, at the same time grabbing the reader's attention. The eleven summary steps that Ana went through are both informative, elucidating and inspiring. Seeing the product of Ana's writing process, "Bulls, Bears of Chickens," even a skeptic notices the potential rewards of using a process methodology. Other examples of student-generated text are equally

compelling and useful.

Another source of strength is found in Chapter 5, "Linking Skills: Computers in Process Writing," which encourages teachers to make links which enhance many skills simultaneously. The list of benefits associated with teaching/learning writing with computers is straight-forward and impressive. Teachers will also find a helpful list of steps to follow in preparing the class to write on the computer. As for which word processing program to use, the seven-point list of features to look for when choosing a program will help guide the teacher to make an informed first choice. We particularly like the encourage-ment and rationale given to those teachers of adult ESL students without access to computer labs—a common occurrence—but with access to a few computers. The authors' message stresses the positive—exploit and maximize what you have and be flexible.

Chapter 6, "Problem Solving," depicts the book at its best. Firstly, by dealing with problems in implementing the process approach in a pragmatic, realistic and believable way, and by providing solutions, the authors do not pretend the change to the process approach is an easy one but show its worth. Because the work reflects the contribution of a team of twenty-five teachers with a high level of experience in the dynamics of a process writing classroom, blood and sweat appear on every page. Secondly, making this chapter even more delightful is its "friendly" organization: a brief introductory paragraph, accurate use of headers as well as of a hierarchy of headers, enumerated problems, lists and a conclusion all make it easy for the reader to scan this chapter and locate information. Would that the rest of the book were so user-friendly!

The text would have been more reader-friendly had the authors demonstrated some consistency. For example, the helpful technique of chapter previewing, as used in Chapter 7, could have been adopted throughout the text. This consistent manner of organization would have helped the authors to present their material better, thereby enhancing the readers' ability to follow the authors' intention. Instead, readers cannot help but suspect that the three authors did not collaborate as well as they might have to integrate their respective parts. (We note that Chapter 3, which also attempts to use the previewing technique, does so haphazardly and inaccurately.)

The book would have benefited also from a clear definition of terms early in the text and their consistent use throughout. For example, the term "conferencing" is used in different ways: at times, it refers to the "who" (either student/student or student/teacher); at other times, it refers to the "what" (conferencing/revision or proofreading/con-ferencing). As well, its use in the Chapter (3) heading, "The First Draft and Conferencing," is misleading. In this instance, it refers to

peer conferencing on content only. In certain cases, definitions are missing altogether. For example, in Chapter 2, "Prewriting Activities," readers are expected to construe the meaning of the term "prewriting" from the examples and the rationale. This chapter, by elaborating upon the technique of brainstorming to the exclusion of others, may have attached a disproportionate importance to this strategy.

At times, the authors appear to neglect the needs of teachers new to the process writing approach. For example, after having presented principles of process writing (advocating initial focus on rhetorical issues over linguistic/grammatical ones, free choice of topic when possible), the authors baffle the readers with their emphasis on the need to pre-teach writing (i.e., rhetorical issues) and grammar (linguistic issues). How this is to be done is not explained. If linguistic problems are attended to after meaning has been shaped—one of their recommended practices in the text—how can grammar be pre-taught? Clarification is needed.

In summary, one would hope that a revised edition would contain more reader-friendly features such as less running text, more headers (and in hierarchy), less digression towards rationale, more information on practices and procedures, more consistency in organization (at two levels, content and formatting of text) and, lastly, less repetition and duplication. (Chapter 7, Parts C and D have the same heading, "Using Process Writing to Teach Grammar and Composition Skills.)

Despite these limitations, *Think, Write, Share* is interesting and useful, and its existence is a manifestation of the change in the methodology of teaching/learning writing—a change that many classroom practitioners can relate to, and find comforting, as more of them join ranks.

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Sue Ling
Dennie Rothschild

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THE REVIEWERS

Sue Ling and Dennie Rothschild teach ESL at Vancouver Community College. They are also teacher trainers in the TESL Certificate Program at V.C.C. Of special interest to them is teaching writing in ESL, and they have published articles in the *TESL Canada Journal* on the subject. Their earlier book on teaching writing as a process has been revised as *Interactive Composing: Techniques in Process Writing for ESL Students* (in press).

From Near and Far: Short Fiction for E.S.L.

John Sivell
Virgil, Ontario: Full Blast Productions, 1991. 116 pp.
ISBN: 1-895451-00-0

From Near and Far: Short Fiction for E.S.L. is a collection of readings and activities for adolescent and adult learners of English as a Second Language written by John Sivell, Department of Applied Language Studies, Brock University.

There are four units in the book: The Tangled Webs We Weave, Life's Mysteries, People Are Funny, and Decisions, Decisions! The theme of each unit is universal. For example, the theme of "People Are Funny," is the unpredictability of human behaviour—even when we think we know how a person will think and act, that person may do something quite unexpected. In the story, "The Bag of Cherries," Jana, a somewhat "absent-minded" English teacher, is astonished when a strange man sitting on the same park bench reaches into her bag of cherries and eats several without asking permission. Jana finds this behaviour not only unexpected but also insulting. Readers can identify with Jana's situation and her reaction. Sivell has chosen themes that are seldom found in ESL reading textbooks but which are realistic, meaningful and interesting for ESL, as well as first language, readers.

Each unit consists of an opening jigsaw reading activity, four thematically related stories, and questions and assignments based on the individual stories and on the unit as a whole. The jigsaw activities provide each unit with an "advance organizer" to draw the learners' attention to the unit's themes, questions and problems. Sivell's jigsaws encourage students to think about their own cultural knowledge and personal experience and to connect these to the stories. Skilled readers make such connections. In the jigsaw for "The Tangled Webs We Weave," Myriam, a part-time employee at a record shop, wants to do something to earn her boss' trust. Four people—her friend, her boyfriend, her sister, and her boss—offer solutions to Myriam's problem. In the jigsaw discussions, students share their own reactions and observations regarding the problem in an attempt to reach a consensus on appropriate or inappropriate solutions. Students will, one hopes, carry these reflections and learnings to similar situations in real life.

Each unit has four thematically related stories that entertain as well as educate. These thought-provoking stories encourage readers to reflect on the significance of cultural knowledge and the ways such

knowledge influences each reader's interpretation of the stories. The recurrence of some themes—for example, the shock of contact with unfamiliar customs and values—reveals the similarities of all people while highlighting certain distinct cultural differences. The stories are set in a variety of places around the world, such as the Mosel valley, Asahi Mountain, New Mexico, Burma, Spain, Kunda, and Cuzco. Only two stories are set in Canada: one in Niagara Falls, the second in Halifax.

There is great variety, too, in the types of stories included in the collection. "What a Surprise!" is written in the style of a traditional folk tale; it begins, "Long ago in the area that we now call New Mexico there was a tribe with a wise and generous chief." "The Spring" is a fairy tale about an old couple who sell firewood. Thanks to a fairy who lives in their garden, the gentle, thoughtful old woman becomes as youthful as the day she was married. Unfortunately, her moody and solitary husband does not fare as well! "Neighbours" is a murder mystery, "X-ray Vision" a science-fiction story, "A Man of Action" a character study, and "The Faithful Bride" a love story. The stories in the collection are imaginative, interesting and all involve an element of surprise. ESL readers will enjoy reading the stories while developing effective reading strategies.

Answering the questions included at the end of each story and each unit requires more than mechanical searching and copying from the text. It involves using reading, thinking and affective skills and processes. There is a mixture of convergent questions (ones with a single correct answer) and divergent ones (open ended, with many appropriate answers). For example, two of the comprehension questions from the story "The Teacher" are, "Describe the main features of Maria's first year of experience as a teacher" and "Is it a good idea for Maria to run the risk of crossing the river to deliver the report card?"

Some questions require students to seek out new relationships, assumptions, implications, to combine information in new ways, or to evaluate information. In the "People Are Funny" unit, students are asked the following questions:
1. Which of the characters in these stories would you like to have as a friend? Why?
2. Which character changes the most?
3. Which character's behaviour is the most unexpected?
4. Do any of the strange actions in these stories cause real problems?

Some questions require students to connect present learning with past learning. For example, one question asks, "When moving to study, work or live away from home, have you met with experiences

similar to those described at the beginning of the story?" To foster comprehension, students are required to answer questions in their own words, "Paraphrase as a Dialogue" or "Paraphrase in a Normal Paragraph." Exercises such as "Extra Episode" stimulate creative expression by asking students to expand the story by developing an extra episode within the story. Teachers recognize that the use of instructional variety helps to maintain students' attention and increase achievement. Sivell has successfully managed to provide much variety in the stories as well as the questions and activities in this reading text.

To help teachers successfully use this reader, Sivell has included a section in the introduction, "Teachers' Notes: Teaching Reading." This book, according to Sivell, has been constructed with recognition of the four aspects of the reading process: (1) Linguistic Knowledge: Vocabulary, (2) Linguistic Knowledge: Grammar, (3) Discourse Knowledge, and (4) Non-Linguistic Cultural Knowledge. Sivell's rationale for developing the book as he has will help teachers "actively adapt" *From Far and Near* "in the manner that is best for their own learners."

According to the "Teachers' Notes" this book was originally composed, field-tested and revised at Brock University, St. Catherines. I am encouraged to see a book written by a TESL professor who is actively involved with classroom teachers in the Intensive English Language Program at a Canadian university. I am confident this book can be used successfully, too, in the program where I teach, English for Academic Purposes, at the University of Regina. I look forward to "adapting" this teaching resource with my own students.

Mary Calder

THE REVIEWER

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The Second Language Curriculum

Robert Keith Johnson (ed.)
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
ISBN 0-521-36961-4 (paperback)

We often hear that a certain book should be required reading. In the case of this book, bureaucrats who determine language policy and funding criteria, administrators juggling dollars with one hand and programs with the other, syllabus designers, and language instructors would all benefit from a thorough read. Unfortunately, it is the very fragmentation of language instruction policy and implementation, against which the authors in this book argue, that ensures that the audience most in need of these ideas may never see them.

The guiding principle of this volume is the notion of the coherent language curriculum; in Johnson's terms, "one in which decision outcomes from the various stages of development are mutually consistent and complementary, and learning outcomes reflect curricular aims" (xiii). Recurrent in the volume is the analogy to an ecosystem: each stage of curriculum development has a significant effect on the others; a problem at any one point in the system will be felt throughout. As with the environment, there has been a tendency in ESL to ignore the balance of relationships; often decisions are made as isolated acts, without consideration of the broader consequences.

Johnson has assembled an impressive set of contributions which are organized into sections on curriculum planning, ends/means specification, program implementation, classroom implementation and evaluation. In the introductory chapter Johnson outlines the development of a coherent curriculum; he stresses the importance of making explicit the rationale for decisions made at each stage.

In Chapter 2, Theodore Rodgers points out that, traditionally, the syllabus has been viewed as central to teaching and learning, yet clearly many other elements have a significant impact. He argues that the socio-political context of any education program must be determined and a set of strategies developed to work within that context. Rodgers suggests a framework exercise for generating discussion amongst all the major players on aspects of curriculum design.

In *Des-impl-evalu-ign: an evaluator's checklist*, Peter Hargreaves

stresses the importance of ongoing evaluation at all stages of curriculum development and implementation. Included in the paper is a useful checklist that could be applied to a wide variety of programs to ensure that critical aspects of evaluation are not overlooked.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6, by Richard Berwick, Geoffrey Brindley and John Swales respectively, comprise the section on ends/means specification. Both Berwick and Brindley discuss needs assessment and the interpretation of findings to guide curricular changes. In his description of several approaches to needs assessment Berwick shows how learner needs are filtered through the perceptions of those conducting the analyses. He advises that planners have an "action plan" which outlines their response to the findings in a needs assessment. Brindley distinguishes between objective and subjective learner needs, the former having to do with linguistic matters, the latter with cognitive and affective needs. He stresses the importance of ongoing consultation and negotiation with the learners as well as accommodation and compromise. Swales discusses the reality of less-than-ideal language education situations using the concept of opportunity cost, i.e., "what you cannot "afford" not to do, what you can "afford" to do, what you can "afford" not to do, and what you cannot "afford" to do" (89).

Program Implementation, the third section of the book, consists of two papers on teacher education and two on materials design. Martha Pennington advocates experiential learning activities for both preservice and inservice teacher education programs; in addition, she suggests four stages of multicultural training which she considers essential for shaping and broadening teachers' attitudes. In a discussion of the establishment of a faculty for language programs, Pennington echoes the theme of the book that all related factors program objectives, student needs, complementarity of other faculty members, etc.) must be considered.

Breen, Candlin, Dam and Gabrielsen describe the evolution, warts and all, of an ongoing English teacher inservice program in Denmark that began in 1978. The roles of the participants, the nature of workshops conducted and the strengths and weaknesses of each stage of the training program are candidly discussed. The authors offer valuable observations on inservice that are applicable not only to second language trainers but to facilitators of inservice programs of any kind.

Both Chapters 9, by Graham Low, and 10, by Andrew Littlejohn and Scott Windeatt, advocate the critical assessment of language materials. Low evaluates various structural designs and details the problems associated with each. Littlejohn and Windeatt offer some basic guidelines for judging the suitability of the content of language learning materials; in addition, they suggest that students be encouraged to critically evaluate the materials they are required to use.

In the first unit in the section on classroom implementation, the mismatch of learner and teacher expectations is explored in David Nunan's chapter on hidden agendas. Despite the current, seemingly omnipresent rhetoric of learner-centred curricula, Nunan suggests that, in fact, learners are generally left out of the picture. He urges the inclusion of the learner through a negotiated curriculum.

In Chapter 12, Breen, like Nunan, advises the involvement of learners in the evaluation of classroom learning tasks, as both a means of identifying progress and as a significant language learning activity. The teacher's role as facilitator is stressed.

In Chapter 13, David Stern argues that classroom-centred research often focusses on superficial behaviours with little or no consideration of the basic theoretical assumptions and policies that underlie those behaviours. Any viable schema for analysis of language teaching requires—in addition to classroom observations—that operational definitions of language, society, learning and teaching be made explicit and that content, objectives, treatment or procedures, and evaluation be entailed in the analysis. Failure to consider these aspects of language pedagogy will result in virtually uninterpretable data.

In the first paper in the section on evaluation, James Dean Brown outlines the evaluation model in place at the English Language Institute at the University of Hawaii. Brown contends that evaluation is at the heart of the language curriculum; types of needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials and teaching should all be subjected to systematic assessment in terms of relative effectiveness, efficiency and learner and teacher attitudes.

Both Lyle Bachman in Chapter 15 and Thom Hudson in Chapter 16 make a case for the abandonment of norm-referenced tests in favour of criterion-referenced assessment of language proficiency. Bachman identifies the need for empirical research which would both specify "a domain of communicative language ability that is consistent with

current frameworks" and define "levels or scales of proficiency abstractly, in terms of relative degrees of ability, and independently of contextual features of language use" (p. 257). Hudson points out that assessment of language mastery must begin with a) decisions as to what constitutes evidence of learning b) evaluation approaches that are consistent with program objectives c) dependable measures and d) appropriate (albeit somewhat arbitrary) score standards.

Finally, Warwick Elley offers a practical "how to" guide in chapter 17 that takes into account real world problems in the evaluation of a language program. Although Elley directs his attention to school systems, much of his advice can be applied to virtually any language program.

The Second Language Curriculum achieves its aim in demonstrating most convincingly the necessity of viewing language learning and teaching from a larger perspective—seeing both the wood AND the trees, to borrow from H.H. Stern's chapter title. Some of the selections seem to assume a willingness that may not exist on the part of major players—funders, policy makers, materials designers, adminis-trators, instructors and students alike—to participate in the develop-ment of a coherent, internally consistent curriculum. However, in many parts of Canada we have been working within the alternative, isolationist model for years with less than desirable results. This book deserves a wide audience; it is both thought-provoking and full of good sense.

Tracey Derwing

THE REVIEWER

Tracey Derwing is an assistant professor at the University of Alberta in the department of Adult, Career and Technology Education. Her interests include native speaker-nonnative speaker discourse, and L2 literacy.