

## **DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS**

The introduction of external independent testing (EID) in 2006 as examinations for admission to universities in Ukraine brought about the change in the attitude towards the development of secondary students' writing skills. Traditionally, EID in English consists of three parts: reading, language use and writing. So, in secondary schooling there has been a shift from considering writing mainly as a means of learning to developing writing as a skill.

The following common attitudes to teaching writing with some implications may help secondary school teachers to reconceptualise the development of writing as a skill:

➤ It is a common view that writing can be done almost exclusively outside the class. *However* some stages of a writing lesson that can be done usefully in class – thinking of ideas, discussing and organising ideas, group writing, working on editing skills, etc.

➤ Learners always need lots of varied practice of grammar and vocabulary and the fact that they are under less time pressure when they write means that writing is a useful mode for a focus on accuracy. *However* to use this mode exclusively for language practice ignores the fact that writing is a skill in its own right, and one that (arguably) needs to be developed through practice.

➤ It is probably right to think of ways that writing activities can be made fun and not to be intimidating to learners. *On the other hand* simply doing writing for self-expression ignores the fact that many learners (e.g. those who need English for academic purposes) need to master text types where high premium is placed on accuracy.

➤ The point of view that writing should be done individually, or else weaker writers will simply rely on the stronger ones is reasonable, *but* overlooks

the fact that the weaker learners may be getting support from the stronger ones, and hence learning from them [1, p.63-64].

There are several ways to approach writing in the classroom:

*A product approach* – a traditional approach, in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, which is usually presented and analysed at an early stage.

*A process approach* – tends to focus more on the varied classroom activities which promote the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, re-writing [2].

The choice of the approach depends on:

- the teacher
- the students
- the genre of texts.

The two approaches can coexist or be united in the following ways:

➤ Process writing, i.e. re-drafting, collaboration, can be integrated with the practice of studying written models in the classroom.

➤ We can take from the process approach the collaborative work, the discussion which is so important in generating and organising ideas.

➤ Once students have written their first drafts, model texts can be introduced as texts for comparison.

➤ We can incorporate the exchanging of drafts, so that the students become the readers of each other's work. This is an important part of the writing experience as it is by responding as readers, both during the collaborative stage of writing in groups, as well as when reading another group's work, that students develop an awareness of the fact that a writer is producing something to be read by someone else.

Here are some types of writing activities commonly used in the classroom:

➤ multiple-choice gap fill (the learners choose the best answer to complete the sentences);

➤ reproducing a model (learners study a model text and then write their own text based on it. For example, they read a letter of complaint and answer

questions about the layout of the letter and the content of each paragraph. Afterwards they write their own letter of complaint);

- interactive writing (learners interact in writing. For example, they write, and respond to, text messages to each other);
- composition (learners write a composition. For example, they discuss the achievements of a famous person;
- dialogue writing + items (learners write dialogue that includes pre-selected items. For example, they must include six words that are given by the teacher).

None of the activities is “better” or “worse” than any of the other, but the ones, which provide sufficient preparation for the skill of writing are:

- characterised by the communicative purpose (a writing task is communicative if it requires writers to communicate meanings in order to affect the thoughts or behaviours of their reader(s). The production of sentences or texts in order to practise specific grammatical or textual features is unlikely to be communicative);
- integrated (a text is “integrated” if it forms a complete “message” in a recognisable text type, even if it is a part of a series of messages (as in the case of text-messaging);
- real-life-like (a task can be “real-life-like” even if it’s not something that the learners themselves expect to do in real life, e.g. writing a poem);
- intended for a reader (tasks often work best when it is clear who will read the piece of writing – either another member of the class or a fictitious recipient [1, p.64].

## **REFERENCES**

1. Thornbury S., Watkins P. The CELTA Course. Trainer's Manual. – Cambridge University Press, 2007. – 186 p.
2. Steele V. Product and process writing: A comparison. [Electronic resource]. – URL: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/product-process-writing-a-comparison>