

WRITING TO DEVELOP READING SKILLS

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Resumen

Un estructurado proceso de la enseñanza de la escritura en el idioma inglés, puede perfectamente integrar las cuatro habilidades y mejorar la comprensión de textos. Cuando se prepara a los estudiantes para una prueba nacional que mide la habilidad de lectura, se tiene la tendencia de enfocarse en la lectura solamente. Sin embargo, quiero demostrar como la escritura de párrafos puede ayudar grandemente a los estudiantes.

Palabras claves

Escritura, lectura, lluvia de ideas, proceso de escritura.

Abstract

When preparing students for a national reading test, leaving out other linguistic skills and focusing only in reading can hinder the language acquisition process. However, a teacher can find a helping hand in subsequently teaching writing to develop reading comprehension skills. I will illustrate how a structured scaffolding writing process can combine the four language skills, leading students to acquire more vocabulary and linguistic features that will make them comprehend a text easily.

Keywords

Brainstorm, first draft, freewriting, reading, writing, writing process.

One common complaint about teaching English as a second language for a national reading examination is that students should be trained mostly in reading, thus why some teachers limit the time to study the other three skills in the classroom and focus their majority of time on teaching reading. However, there are some important aspects in the principles of teaching reading that are well-matched to writing. This is a descriptive essay to highlight the positive aspects of teaching English through writing.

According to a publication by I.S.P Nation (2009) “ teachers need to give equal time to teach under these four strands: meaning – focused input, meaning-focused output, language- focused learning and fluency development”. Here we can say that writing is the common thread: Why? Because the more extensive readings, the more vocabulary and structures the learners will have to comprehend. Meaning- focused will be settled through speaking and writing

tasks, within the same tasks they will be working on their own learning and pairing with their classmates, making the whole process a collaborative process.

The acquisition of language is linked to intensive reading because of the different types of tasks the students need to accomplish, such as filling in the blanks with vocabulary that requires knowledge of certain grammatical patterns.

Recycling is crucial when learning a second language. Students need to develop fluency by using all the grammar structures and vocabulary they have previously learned. They have to read and write the text according to their level of proficiency. The activation of their previous knowledge has an important role before each task as a pre-activity. Giving the students these stepping stones will make them succeed.

Most of the lessons link reading to writing tasks, where the student can show their





listening and reading comprehension by producing texts to express their understanding.

Phonological awareness can be reinforced when the teacher and students read aloud, and through the constant use of vocabulary in oral activities, or in exercises where they match sounds with pictures- a basic way of reading for young students.

There are some principles for teaching reading that are connected to writing components. For instance, It is essential to develop skimming and scanning strategies but Gable (2009) says that readers should know 95% of the words in a text to read it successfully . Thus, a 5% chance to understand the meaning of words by context, as you can see learning vocabulary can be significant.

Also, grammar acquaintance will make the task easier if the learner is used to text structures. Knowing that a paragraph is made of one main idea with supporting details, will guide them to a better understanding of a passage when identifying a contrasting paragraph- that includes understanding linking words. If they learn to write essays, letters, diaries, etc., they will become familiar with the structure of the paragraphs in each text type.

When students write, they have to convey spelling and use vocabulary in context. They are forced to master those subskills and prepare them to recognize them when reading. Also, when morphology is applied in writing it will make them guess the meaning through the use of prefixes and suffixes. For example, when they find the word baker or cooker in a text about

occupations, they will be able to predict the meaning of the unknown word.

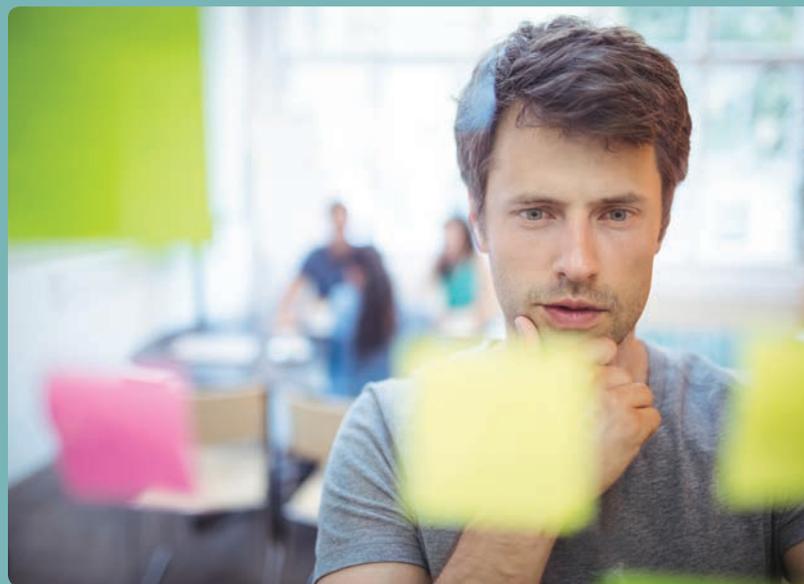
Campbell (2007) says: “Oral language is the place where the writing/reading connection begins.” The author encourages teachers to give students the opportunity to share their texts orally. By doing so, they can enhance the four skills at the same time. Therefore, writing exercises in the classroom can make this possible. For example, in 2006 I encouraged some students to create a technological project for a science fair, they had to write a story, illustrate the paragraphs by drawing different pictures, and then, they had to record the narration of the story, at the end using moviemaker they had to produce an audiobook.

Freewriting is another technique that helps students acquire fluency and feel more confident when writing. For Elbow (1998) “Freewriting improves your writing”. He really encourages this practice, teachers can motivate students to write words or sentences for a certain period of time to activate vocabulary that is in our long – term memory. It leads students to understand revising and editing skills. Once they finish, they can check grammar, spelling, content and use the information to write a second draft. In addition, freewriting may be a nice activity to be used as a warm-up activity to show progress in writing and reading.

For a written task, a more structured process needs to be followed. Johnson (2016) states that “the written product is a result of the process. Understanding the process involved is the most important element.” In addition, pupils need to

know the process of writing and this has to be taught in the class. Hatcher & Lane (2005) adds “all these steps are important. If you learn and follow them, your writing will improve”.

As soon as students have delimited their topics, the first step to beginning the writing process is to read. That is the way they will gather information. They can search online, read books or magazines. They can watch videos, as well, find good sources of information that will make them develop critical thinking competencies. A simple way to collect information might be a survey about leisure activities, where they can formulate a set of questions to gather information.



That information can be organized following different strategies, such as: brainstorming and listing, semantic webs, and freewriting. These strategies will help them organize their ideas and create an outline. An outline allows a writer to organize the paragraphs and what points will be addressed in each paragraph.

Each paragraph has a main idea and a set of supporting details to reinforce it, and once finished it becomes the first draft. This part can be taught through the hamburger model, a writing organizer. There are several websites where teachers can find information to prepare a lesson to guide the students to follow. They will move from simple paragraphs to more sophisticated ones.

To polish that first draft, students need to continue the process to revise content, create cohesion and style by using linking words. Then, grammar and spelling might need some revision. Peer assessment has an important role because students can help each other during the revising and editing stage.

Finally, other skills could be integrated when sharing the final draft to the rest of the class. The learners can do it online,

using a blog, creating a video, a short story, or an audiobook for the whole class. They love to use TIC's in the classroom. For those high schools that belong to TecnoAprender (Programa Nacional de Tecnologías Móviles), this is a way to combine English and technology in one project.

Once the writing tasks have been carried out in class, the teachers can assign a similar one as homework. That task had to correspond to a linguistic objective or assessment strategy. It also can be assessed as a class assignment using the indicators created from the syllabus because they respond to observable behaviors and the students will feel confident to accomplish a similar task in a test- restricted part.

METHODOLOGY

First of all, the teacher told the students to read about the positive effects of technology on society. Then, she guided the students through the whole process of writing since brainstorming to the final draft. Then, students were asked to do it by themselves but using a similar topic.

1. The teacher asks the students to read about the negative effects of Science and Technology on Society. They have to provide three sources.
2. The students use the information gathered to brainstorm about the negative effects.
3. The students brainstorm to create an outline.
4. Students write an introduction paragraph that outlines the main idea of the essay. This introductory paragraph must give the reader an idea what is expected to read in the text.
5. The students write a topic sentence and three supporting details for each paragraph.

6. Once they have the body, students write a conclusion; they can include their opinion.
7. They revise the ideas.
8. They add linking words.
9. They check grammar and punctuation marks.
10. Peer assessment.
11. They propose a way to share the text to the rest of the class- using technology.

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

1. The students watch the movie Wall-E and then read an article by Paul Miller (<https://www.theverge.com/2012/5/2/2994277/paul-miller-diary-offline-day-of-life-without-internet>) about his first day being offline. They reflect on those two sources to write a diary entry to link it to the effects of science and technology on our society. This activity allows the teacher to introduce a new text type to write about something they read or heard. The information found in the article can be adapted to the level of the students.
2. The teacher presents some information about advantages and disadvantages of e-books and print books. First, they have to think about two adjectives to describe a book and an e-book. Second, the students read the information presented in a piece of paper to decide whether it is an advantage or disadvantage. The teacher reinforces verbs and adjectives by writing them on the board. Then, using the information presented, the students have to provide facts why e-books or printed books are recommended regarding cost, health issues, size, care, availability, access, comfort, and so on. Next, the students



mingle to ask questions, answer questions such as: What kind of books do you prepare? What is the environmental impact of hard-copy books?, What are some of the health issues linked to e-books?, etc. After that, they will feel confident to write an e-mail to a friend about the advantages and disadvantages of either hard-copy books or e-books.

CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning, students were not able to produce a complete utterance neither written or spoken. Through the process of writing, they were acquiring vocabulary and grammatical patterns by incorporating an “early bird activity” warm-up where the students play games at the beginning of the lesson to strengthen grammar patterns. Then, they need to know, understand and learn when to use linking words to make the lecture more comprehensive. Another important aspect was to internalize the concept of main idea and supporting details in a paragraph structure. Now they know that it is crucial to understand a text and understand the meaning of a word by context, if it is necessary. Also, it has influenced the way they prepare for an impromptu speech because they can use the brainstorming technique to take notes, organize their ideas and search

for new vocabulary. It is a process and the teachers have a significant part when preparing a lesson. They have to visualize the final product they want the students to accomplish in order to provide them stepping stones to achieve it. It means to prepare a series of activities the students have to carry out to move from knowledge, understanding and finally production. Otherwise, they will feel unprepared and frustrated. This process will increase their self-confidence and motivation. Two important ingredients in the classroom to be succeed. In regards to reading, the students acquired lots of grammar patterns, vocabulary, expressions. Besides, they were able to relate the use of linking words with the purpose of the text, making a connection and identifying the structure of the paragraphs to search for the main idea, thus improving their reading comprehension.

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Como citar este artículo

Arias Zúñiga, I. (2018). Writing to Develop Reading Skills. *Revista Conexiones: una experiencia mas allá del aula*, 4-11. Obtenido de https://www.mep.go.cr/sites/default/files/3revistaconexiones2018_a1.pdf