Improving Productive Vocabulary Knowledge Through Writing

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Abstract

To improve and activate the vocabulary of EFL learners, an alternative to common advice in trying to use them in speech can be invited. Mclaughlin, B. et al. (2000) previously argued for the role of reading comprehension in improving the vocabulary knowledge of nonnative speakers. The same can be shown through writing. As two quite different methodologies in writing pedagogy are process and product writing, it is interesting to find which holds more promise for the vocabulary improvement. Product writing pedagogy encompasses accuracy-based and error-corrective tradition and students acting one-off (Gabrielatos, 2004), while process writing enacts students learning how to write by writing involving brainstorming and production of multiple drafts based on teacher's feedback (Paribakht, 2003). For the purpose of this study, sixty four from a hundred interested students at the intermediate level of English proficiency, set by a TOEFL score, pursued and consummated the weekly classes of writing instruction. A class is selected to be instructed in process writing by the flip of a coin and the other taught product writing then. After a semester period of teaching process and product writing to respective homogeneous groups and applying a pretest-posttest design, the researchers used a T-test to compare mean difference of group scores from pretest and posttest which is a productive vocabulary test. The results of study demonstrate that process group improved their vocabulary significantly better over product group. Controlling that all subjects be of the same age range, language proficiency level and of both sexes in balanced divisions, while every other

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factor is held constant to make a fair estimate of the role of writing method on vocabulary.

Key words: productive vocabulary knowledge, process writing, product writing, t-test.

1. Background

1.1 Introduction

As a magnificent building is erected by laying the bricks over the previous one, words are the units of written text that gain paramount importance in constructing any written passage. There is extensive research indicating that a rich vocabulary is a critical element in vitalizing writing and reading skills. Recent research has identified vocabulary knowledge as the single most important factor in reading comprehension. There is, likewise, no shortage of studies documenting a strong link between reading and writing. "Reading and writing are two analogous and complementary processes in that both involve generating ideas, organizing ideas into a logical order, drafting them a number of times to achieve cohesion, and revising ideas as appropriate" (Laflamme, 1997, p. 373).

If the writing process is inextricably linked to the reading process, and the reading process is heavily dependent upon vocabulary, it naturally follows that the writing process is likewise dependent. This is the perspective of how teachers can use vocabulary development specifically to improve writing skills. Most investigations regarding writing skill come to observe that major focus is on syntactic features of writing rather than vocabulary. Hence, this part is lacking the attention it rightfully deserved. This research is going to highlight this. Language skills should demonstrate a collaborating effect, to develop timely & cost-effective ways for teaching language. This research opens new path to vocabulary improvement and enhancement through writing. Writing in English language is undertaken as an aid to learning, for example, to consolidate the learning of new structures or vocabulary or to help students remember new items of the language.

1.2 Vocabulary

As a well-established fact, a key component as well as a great challenge for second language proficiency is vocabulary (Coxhead, 2000; Waring, 1997). The efficacy of teacher error/grammar correction in second language writing classes has been the subject of much controversy. Chin (2000) again asserts that grammar instruction is most naturally integrated during the revising, editing, and proofreading phases of the writing process. But few noteworthy researches are about the role of writing methodologies in improving productive vocabulary. A modern shift in approaches is also evident in emphasizing the vocabulary knowledge. The communicative language teaching techniques and comprehension-based teaching methodologies of the last two decades also attach more importance to vocabulary acquisition than did, for instance, the grammar translation and audio-lingual approaches which dominated pre-1970 language teaching. It requires our increasing awareness, as Stoller and Grabe (1993) state, "Vocabulary is a language area that needs continued growth and development for native and nonnative speakers alike," (p. 38). The authors point out that a curriculum with a comprehensive vocabulary component should include opportunities for explicit learning as well as implicit learning. They also point out that students themselves also need to develop independent learning strategies that will allow them to "expand their vocabularies both in and out of the classroom," (p. 39).

An important subcategorization of vocabulary is the distinction between Active and passive vocabularies. This closely interrelate with the notion of cognitive mapping of the brain. If the vocabulary item that one learns reaches the level of cognition, it is activated, unless it remains inactive or passive. To make words active, they should occur in normal communication situations, not in contrived language-focused activities (Nation, 2000). Controlled active (elicited) vocabulary grows at a slower rate than passive vocabulary, and the gap between the two widens as passive vocabulary knowledge increases. The two develop differently (Laufer, 1998). This dichotomy however, is not considered appropriate by some scholars, since vocabulary items can not be truly passive! A better

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term for the dichotomy is receptive versus productive vocabulary as used in Waring (1997), and Meara and Fitzpatrick (2000). There are some of the even more modern classifications like that of John Read. It is not used in this study, although interesting in its own rate and can be focused on other studies. Read (2000), in his book of Assessing Vocabulary, classifies vocabulary meticulously. One dichotomy from testing perspective is represented as discrete point versus embedded. In the former, vocabulary is assessed in isolation while in the latter; it is measured in conjunction with other language skills.

1.3 Writing

The direction of the relation between the variables of this study becomes clearer when one notices the current interfaces made salient with the efforts to provide more facility for learning the huge lexicon through more practical ways. As Macaro (2003) promises the warding off of the common misconception suggesting that communicative approach to language teaching favors oral communication over written communication (p.220). The reason to hope and suspect the role of writing rises when speaking enjoys little practicality in societies with English as a foreign language. Writing, in the least, can be a complement that may provide opportune moments of intervention and salience of vocabulary, as Paribakht (2003) also affirms. She advocated the superiority of process writing in this regard and deemed it reasonable to assume that process-based writing, involving efforts in content generation like brainstorming and production of multiple drafts based on teacher's feedback, would enhance students' vocabulary acquisition more than a product-based approach. Raimes (1983) defines process writing as focused on how the writer writes, where ideas come from, how developed, and what various stages of composing involve. The initial idea is extended and refined. It's learning to write by writing.

Teaching writing through process approach is in just the 3rd decade of its development. The author highlights that when it appeared in mid 70s; it was not focused on 'what' but on 'how' the

writer writes. The center is on where ideas come from, how developed, and what various stages of composing involve. This initial idea is only then extended and refined. Recursiveness and topic exploration through writing is the monumental characteristics of process writing (cited in Taghaviour, 1997). From a contemporary but not as impartial viewpoint, Hosseini (2003) places emphasis on the writer responsibility, being greater in process writing, while the text is product and secondary derivative concern (p.16)

Product Writing, on the other hand, is what Gabrielatos (2004) portrays as the one-shot accuracy-based and error-corrective tradition, hugely de-emphasized in academic literature because of weak basis in a plausible theory (P.C). The slim literature on product-based literature may be due to the under-representation looming upon that because of the contrast with process-oriented in a ubiquitous dichotomy. As Aghili (1997) spotlights, this dichotomy divides grammatical form from communicative content in closer zooming as an indicant of Product and Process Writing, respectively traditional and message-oriented (p.13). Yet, there is no unanimous agreement on the choice between the two among the scholars. Ansari (1997) observes that students expectation and orientation in Iran is set more towards Product-based approach (p.55). This should be taken into account as a factor pertaining learner-centeredness that attracts practitioners today. While the notion of recursiveness is interesting, the difficulties of implementing process writing should be regarded. In the same vein, Hadley (2003) observes that the writing process of students is not outlined and does not always come smoothly in 'stages' of writing in composition manuals, at least in the chronological sense (p.319).

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Figure 1: process writing recursive stages in contrast to one-shot Product writing.



ONE Shot → Selecting a topic & Begin Writing an essay.

There is plenty of literature review on How's and Why's of process approaches, while this is not true about its counterpart 'product writing'. The reason why there's little literature on 'product' approaches can be traced regarding its earlier views that did not take the writing skill as a venture and lightly that it's one of those traditional, intuitive, a-theoretical approaches, like grammar-translation.

To reserve our limited time and resources for effective means in educational system, integrative opportunities for teaching English is necessary to make the most out of instruction, here set into a relatively traditional framework of two groups that reciprocate differing writing treatments while closely watched for vocabulary improvement.

2. Method

2.1 Subjects

The subjects were 64 Iranian University students, selected from a pool of above hundred students in Tehran through an unseen TOEFL (1995) test. The potential moderator variables such as age and sex were controlled. The subjects were both male (47%) and female (53%) and their age range is from 24 to 29.

2.2 Design

The design of the study is a repeated measure of two groups through a pretest and a posttest before and following the writing treatment:

G1 X1 - T1 (product) - X1

G2 X1 - T2 (process) - X2

There is one independent variable with two levels, as well as one dependent variables in the study. Process and Product as two modes of Writing compose the two levels of independent variable while Vocabulary is the dependent variable.

2.3 Instrumentation and Procedure

The instruments of this study are initially a TOEFL to check for homogeneity and then a Lex30 test of productive vocabulary (developed by Meara and Fitzpatrick, 2000) as the pretest and posttest. After researching over the choice of a proper test for measuring Productive Vocabulary through recommendable tests, none had the qualifications of this test. Authors claim even the nearest alternative (Laufer and Nation 1995. 1999) is not as well-established and easy-to-use. The procedure of this study composes of several steps explained in detail as following: First, the standardized TOEFL (1995) was administered to the interested university students made aware of the nature of course that encompasses writing. In administering the TOEFL, only the structure, vocabulary and the reading parts of the test were administered due to the issue of practicality with 100 minutes time allocation for students to answer. Second, all the subjects, outlier scorers excluded, were given the Lex30. In administering LEX 30, 30 stimulus words presented orally one at a time and testees given 30 seconds to respond to each, after which the administrator calls the next number. Testees write series of response words, three (or four if they can) for each stimulus word, using free word association, thinking of synonyms, antonyms, and related words. The total time for this test is roughly about 15 minutes. To avoid fluctuation in pronunciation and time allocations that proved less than accurate in a pilot session, a pre-recorded set of test is used by the researchers.

Third, the distinct treatment in writing section is assigned, while other parts of the classes, in quality and quantity, remained constant and similar in two groups. The only thing differed was the method of teaching Writing. The general techniques are used in both classes to reduce the chance of uncalled-for mechanical or affective deprivation to control the treatment to special process-oriented or product-oriented techniques. The researchers recommended both group members to buy a three-hole loose-leaf notebook, keeping it accessible for others to use as a reference and encouraged them to doodle on a sheet to refuel creativity. The teacher did the writing instruction in a mini-lesson, keeping the tone of each session as one of discovery rather than convention. The tools for making general comments meanwhile was ideally overhead projectors, and when not accessible, whiteboards. For techniques used in product group, we turned to Gabrielatos (2002, personal communication) as a source of insight while Lippert (2004) was a paramount insightful commenter for process group. For the specific techniques and instructions used in Process and Product Writing classes are presented in the Appendix B and C.

Fourth, the Posttest is administered, identical to Pretest form, after eight sessions elapsed from the onset of the period of teaching writing in predetermined ways. Having done all this, the result is ready for analysis and interpretation.

An issue at stake is students' exposure to the target words between the writings of drafts outside the class. It could well be asked that what if students learn these words through other activities? How could it be claimed that the target words were learned through the assignment only. A proper justification and a possible response to this potential critique is that getting involved in learning these words outside the class and the assignment is a part of the whole process in that process-writing set the wheels in motion and makes certain words salient to the students. Noticing is a first step in acquisition. Because certain words are brought to the students' attention, they may then make a special effort to learn

these words, by looking them up in the dictionary or through other means.

2.4 Analysis

The analysis in this study uses statistical analyses including descriptive statistics. Split-half and Cronbach's alpha reliability measures were applied to measure the internal consistency of the test. The reliability measures were applied as the essential steps of standardization process and its .8 index indicates that it is high and acceptable. Descriptive statistics such as means are used throughout the study in order to check the underlying assumptions of the statistical procedures applied in the study. The matched T-test is used to compare means of two groups that had the same measure repeated.

2.5 Scoring

The scoring of the test should begin when each testee's responses (approximately 90 per subject) were typed into a machine-readable text file. Each of the responses was lemmatized so that inflectional suffixes (plural forms, past tenses, comparatives, etc.) and frequent regular derivational affixes (-able, -ly, etc.) were counted as examples of base-forms of these words. Words falling outside these levels were not lemmatized and were treated as separate words. Once the stimulus words have been disregarded, we are left with a short text generated by each testee, which typically consists of about 90 different words. Each testee's text is then processed using a program similar to Nation's Vocal Profile (Heatley and Nation, 1998). The program reports the frequency level of each word in the list, and produces a report profile for that testee. The table that appears in Appendix 1 illustrates a typical results profile from which any response passing the filter of levels adds one point up to a maximum of 90. Words were lemmatized according to the criteria for level 2 and 3 affixes, as well as level 1 and 2. Words with affixes included in the lists below were treated as instances of their base lemmas, and scored accordingly. Words with affixes that do not appear in the lists were not lemmatized, and were treated as separate words.

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3. Results

As the first step results, normality of distribution is the prerequisite for the use of particular statistical procedure, indicated in the following table of K-S Test.

Table 3.1: K-S Check for Homogeneity

One-Sample	Ko	Imogo	orov-S	Smirnov	Test
-		_			

		PRETEST	POSTTEST
N		64	64
Normal Parameters a,b	Mean	45.7344	51.6875
Most Extreme Differences	Std. Deviation	8.5898	11.3611
	Absolute	.101	.115
	Positive	.097	.108
	Negative	101	115
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.810	.918
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.528	.369

a. Test distribution is Normal.

does not constitute a very neat curve. This gives a go-ahead with the main test described in the following table.

Table3.2: Paired T-Test comparing process & product groups

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair	PREPROD	36.3125	32	8.89522	1.57247
1	POSPROD	37.5625	32	8.57580	1.51600
Pair	PREPROC	46.9688	32	8.56280	1.51370
2	POSTPROC	54.9063	32	10.90830	1.92833

In the above table, the Paired (Matched) T-test Comparison of the means at the very first step indicates a far greater mean difference (x-bar) between the two groups in posttest than in pretest. It is demonstrated that the process writing group outperformed the latter product writing group. Also the treatment effect was more remarkable in the posttest of the process writing group than that of

b. Calculated from data.

product writing group. In sum, the table clearly displays the very little ascending rate of mean score in group 1 (product-based writing), a mere turning up relative to group 2, which received Process-based treatment in writing skill. The significance level index is more clearly demonstrated in following table in detail.

Table3.3: Paired T-Test comparing correlation of groups

Paired Differences 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Std. Error Upper Mean Std. Deviation Mean Lower Pair 1 PREPROD - POSP -1.2500 3.72437 -2.5928 .0928 -1.899 .65838 31 .067 Pair 2 PREPROC - POST -7.9375 6.32424 1.11798 10.2176 -5.6574 -7.100 31 .000

Paired Samples Test

Table 3, 3 comparing the groups, shows the significance of two-tailed hypothesis. The last column pinpoints the significance of difference for process group while product group could not meet the value below the criteria set for sig. level (0.05). The moderator variables such as age and sex are virtually held equal in both groups, so that they can not be confounding variables. The comparison and contrast of the sig. level and the mean in pretest and posttest of the two experimental groups shows that process-based writing under controlled conditions can yield more productive vocabulary in the long run.

4. Discussion

First the researchers announces that the results of data are not generalizable to other similar instances. Two underlying assumptions of generalizability, random selection and random assignment, were not possible to observe under circumstances. Yet, within its limits, the study is done meticulously, making the most out of the time.

The researchers tried to plan far ahead to deal with the problem of finding subjects for the study. Therefore, the subjects were gleaned from all classes that the researchers taught as the teacher for a year. Finding subject willing to seat a test contentedly and personal purpose is a difficult especially if they are expected to undergo a semester-long treatment. By foreseeing these sorts of problems, professors guided the supervising and tutoring the researcher's work.

A plane of this work attests to works of Liebman-Kleine (1986) who had a spirited defense of the process writing. The critical view of Horowitz (1986) who is suspicious of the effectiveness of engorging the issue casts doubts on its role. They are critics and advocates of writing method per se. Totten (2003) go back three decades ago when Hairstone's seminal article blows the 'Winds of Change'. A new paradigm with twelve principles for teaching writing comes into vogue by that work. The original ideas backing these principles hugely divide it from earlier practices. Writing becomes rhetorically-based and audience as well as purpose and occasion figure prominently and become recursive. Holistic stages overlap nonlinearly to account for non-rational as well as rational activities. Writing then becomes a way of learning as well as a communication skill, expressive, as well as expository, based on psychology as well as linguistics research, creative as well as a teachable activity. The author then complains about the very slow shifting of paradigm and explains that back in his days when he was unaware of process writing, how he taught in high-order academic places with little success and how this changed in a flashlight at the hey-day of process writing when he was in charge and power to ease the shift after discovery. Massi (2001) evaluates the trends in writing in a progression encompassing the preoccupation with 'the composition' and 'the essay' at the expense of other types of writing and preference of usage over use are defects of what the author calls traditional paradigm. The social orientation through writer-textinteraction and importance of purpose and audience in the production of discourse plus reinforcement of functional dimension of communication are considered the advantages of Process Writing. On the other hand, product is losing place because rooted in Behaviorist Theory, the learner is not allowed to 'create' in target language at all. Language use is manipulation of fixed patterns, learned by imitation; and originality do not occur until they learn and master (Harwood, 2002)

But the point about this study is nearest to the view taken by Muncie (2002) as a result of his observation and study to the effective role of process writing in vocabulary development. It is one of the rare impetuses to this methodology that our study also advocated. The study is not aimed at just doing this. It can provide insight for both approaches to writing. Through dealing with both groups, Writing is found as a negotiative and exploratory act requiring great understanding, judgment and interest and this skill could not be learned anywhere around near-perfect at once. a yearlong experience with writing instruction both ways can be relied upon as one of the sources of evidence as to the effectiveness of techniques that students use unconsciously for expanding their working vocabulary. The significant posttest scores from betweengroup comparison bear witness to the more positive impact of process writing on vocabulary, while product maintained a little impact.

Writing is a relatively under-represented skill in the classroom activities such as vocabulary learning. This stems from two myths. First, a well-established and widely recognized model of writing does not exist. Second, the priority had been given to 'communication' in Speaking, in actual implementation of Communicative Language Teaching method. New efforts on developing a writing teaching methodology recompensed this absence in part. Writing skill has some unique features that other skills do not possess. The defining and significant characteristic of writing skill is what Ghavidel (1994) describes as the process through which one can capture elusive ideas that crosses the mind in some special moments and enables the writers to transmit their opinions, knowledge and ideas to others, across time and location (p.5). However, it should not be left unsaid that teaching writing thoughtfully and effectively is not particularly an easy task.

5. Conclusion

Analyses of students treated by two major methodologies for

teaching writing demonstrate that their vocabulary becomes more productive after a period of time, as the Process Writing group score higher than Product Writing. The two groups are similar in the number of participants in groups and the groups were internally homogenous and externally equivalent. Although limitations to carry out this study should be acknowledged, the groups benefited from equivalent stress-free and positive learning environment, and the students showed satisfaction. It is clear that the treatment for two groups significantly differed in systematic ways. The sex and age of the participants were also held constant to remove the possibility of a distorted picture as result of a confounded design. The best instruction is that which gives the greatest return for the least investment of time. Silva (2004) foresees a bright future for second language writing based on the market forces of supply and demand. As the supply of ESL writers increases in colleges and universities, so, too, will the demand for ESL writing specialists to serve them. This, in turn, will increase the supply of Ph.D.s in second language writing.

6. Implications

- Teachers should move toward a more emotional studentcentered and modern methodology for teaching writing that exploits modern technology and utilizes post-modern insights.
- Textbook writers & material developers should also feel the need to adopt the modern designs and prepare books and learning-teaching materials that observes the vocabulary activation by process writing instruction.
- Test-developers do not need to stick to fixed tests for measuring dynamic skills. By venturing out for the less conventional and structured options, with established reliability and validity, they provide an alternative to burdensome and demanding tests that holds little interest for students. One such test is Lex30. It is both easy to administer and score. They should also carry the burden of building credibility for such tests among parents and policy-makers than students

7. Suggestions for further research

Interestingly, the question-generating potential of this research exceeds the answer-providing characteristics. The following thought-provoking research questions are relevant to be pursued in the line of this research:

Could there be a more effective result if we integrate both methods of writing in a comprehensive way? As Horowitz (1986) laments the sometimes exaggerated dichotomy between process and product, as creating tension among researchers of the field, advancing methodological and theoretical tools and developing a comprehensive theory of second language writing can shed a glow on future path. What if the groups of sole product, sole process, and comprehensive process and product methodologies compared?

Which personality types fit better with the two writing methods?

Does recent advanced technology-enhanced methodology offer a more all-encompassing and choice –empowering design? What is the role of other possible writing genres with the same test? How the results would differ if a more traditional test is used with the same design. These, along with a series of other puzzling queries seek further research in the wide arena of writing methodology.

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Appendix A

Scoring procedure: Filtering of scores by lexical levels

Level 0

words (high frequency structure words, proper names and numbers) score zero points

Level 1

words (the most frequent content words in English) score zero points Level 2

Inflectional suffixes score zero points:

- * Plural
- * 3rd person singular present tense
- * past tense
- * past participle
- * -ing
- * comparative
- * superlative
- * possessive

Level 3

Most frequent and regular derivational affixes score zero points:

- * -able not when added to nouns
- * -er
- * -ish

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- * -less
- * -ly
- * -ness
- * -th cardinal ordinal only
- * -y adjectives from nouns
- * non-
- * un-

Appendix B

Some techniques and instructions used in Process Writing classes The teacher-researchers instructed students with such sentences:

No focus on results for now, Just keep the pen moving, do not try to plan far ahead. Do not edit: no stoppage to cross things out. Do not worry about Grammar or Spelling. Editing trifles creativity, save it for later. Keep your writings in a book consistently until you fill it up. She recommends writing in groups now and then. This works because of positive effect of better scheduling and counting on one another that reinforces writers to show up motivated. Another benefit is being able to inspire each other. Using friend's ideas and finally, after writing for 20 minutes, you can stop and go around the table and read some or all of the compositions aloud.

Scaffolding is another technique used as a flexible support for the learners throughout writing of their essays. Cotterall & Cohen (2003) highlight that they promote learner autonomy by focusing on authentic tasks and supporting writers as they approach and approximate the target performance. The techniques such as Brainstorming, Blackboard composition, Freewriting, Projection into dialogue, Rewriting, Outlining, Random association, and Cross-fertilizing are useful. Raimes (1983) defines Brainstorming as an activity to produce words, phrases, and ideas as rapidly as possible just as occurring, without concerning for appropriateness, order, and accuracy. It is done in class or group or individually on a piece of paper. In this phase, students produce relevant vocabulary, make comments, ask questions, and make associations as freely as possible (p.10).

A Sample Process Writing Session, (First session) Setting for the first session:

Participants sit in a computer center, ready to be immersed in the writing process.

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Objectives:

Introducing the new technological resources such as Word processor, Search engines, Editing software that all aid writing to Participants. They should reflect on their writing experience and apply what they've learned to their classrooms.

Introduction: 9:30-9:35

Focus on the writing process and how technology can support and

enhance it.

Prewriting: 9:35-10

open the Word processor and Go to http://www.google.com/ and by clicking on "search" after entering "favorite home" as the keyword, open the first result. While viewing the fist page, write down a few of the themes and ideas you see in the page to share with the whole group.

Drafting: 10-10:20

Using Microsoft Word, write on topic of "My Favorite Home"

Save on disk

Share writing with a partner.

Listeners provide feedback

Comment on" What you liked, what could be added, what could be changed"

Revising: 10:20-10:40

Based on conversation revise your piece and save under a different name.

Share your revised writing with your partner.

Listeners provide feedback on changes

Editing & Publishing: 10:40-11

With the same partner create a newsletter using Microsoft Publisher. Present to whole group and discuss how working with a partner impacted your writing.

Appendix C

Some techniques and instructions used in Product writing classes

The teacher emphasized correct spelling, appropriate use of grammar and lexicon, and a good range of vocabulary as the elements of good writing product. The topic for the writing session is selected with student negotiation and roughly half an hour time is allotted to students to produce a final draft to be read after time finished in class or to be handed as an assignment in the following next session.

A Sample Product Writing Session, (First session)

Students are in the classroom and the teacher presents them to a topic list on board and asks to students to write about one of them in silence. They should finish it in 50 minutes, including the fair copy, if their handwriting is not readable at foul copy. The students are sitting like an exam session, thinking and jotting down sentences on and off. Some are observed randomly and if they have any question, they can silently ask teachers and teacher comments on their work. The finished foul or fair copy will be presented as read aloud to silent and thoughtful class and they can do further revisions at home and hand the final fair copy next session to teacher. The teacher keeps them in archive for helping a part of their evaluation at term end.