

3. The modern approach

In 1970's, directed against Chomsky's "linguistic competence", Hymes put forward the theory of "communicative competence". Based on this theory, the "communicative approach" gradually came in fashion. This approach concentrates on getting learners to do things with language, to express concepts and to carry out communicative acts of various kinds. The content of a language course is now defined not in terms of forms, words and sentence patterns, but in terms of the concepts, or notions, which such forms are used to express, and the communicative functions which they are used to perform.

Reflected in the teaching of intermediate-level writing skills to EFL students, the modern approach involves a combination of the communicative approach and the process approach to writing. It is based on three assumptions:

- A. People write to communicate with readers.
- B. People write to accomplish specific purposes.
- C. Writing is a complex process.

Thus, writing is seen as a communicative act. Students are asked to think of their audience, the reader, and their purpose for writing. Meaning is stressed, rather than form. And writing is seen as a process, which can be divided into three stages: prewriting, composing, and revision. Students are trained to use the methods that good writers use in writing.

The communicative approach has its own problems in the following two aspects. First, it turns out that learners don't vary readily in their knowledge of the language system from their communicative activities. Second, when using language individually either to convey one intended meaning, or to interpret the meanings of other people, we adopt strategies of differential access and analysis in the interests of effective communication. So inevitably, there are some problems with trying to apply the approach of teaching intermediate-level writing skills to EFL students to practice. The two major problems are as follows. First, the overwhelming majority of findings in the research into the process of writing deal with students who write at an advanced level. Next to nothing is recorded about the application of these findings to basic and intermediate writing programs in EFL countries. Second, the research into the grammatical improvement of students who use the process method of learning to write shows no improvement at all.

4. A balanced approach to the teaching of intermediate-level writing skills to EFL students

Because both of the approaches are deficient in themselves (although it has been generally accepted that there are lots of merits in the communicative teaching approach), we practitioners should take both into consideration in the teaching of intermediate-level writing skills to EFL students. As Ann Raimes points out that "all approaches to writing overlap, and the teacher should not be so devoted to one approach that she excludes all others." (1) A teacher should be eclectic, drawing from all methods available. A balanced approach to the teaching of intermediate writing skills should take into account all of the factors which are involved in good writing. The diagram below shows what writers have to deal with as they produce a piece of writing.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Students need to think about the interests, knowledge, and abilities of the people they are writing for and the purpose for which they are writing. They need to learn the value of writing several drafts and developing their ideas. Raimes points out that "a student who is given the time for the process to work, along with the appropriate feedback from readers such as the teacher or other students, will discover new ideas, new sentences, and new words as he plans, writes a first draft, and revises what he has written for a second draft." (2)

But students also need to learn the styles and formats for a variety of writing purposes, and the grammatical and lexical forms relevant to those purposes as well. In addition, they need to be trained to act as an audience for other writers and to comment on the logicality, factuality, and appropriacy of what a writer puts down on paper as well as the form in which he does it.

For the balanced approach discussed above, I would like to suggest that classroom procedures for such an approach make use of the following principles and techniques.

- A. Even though language learning is divided into four skill areas, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking, the skills should not be treated in total isolation of each other. Thus, although writing is the focus of attention in the writing classroom, it should always be supported by other skills.
- B. The students should do as much of the work as possible, not the teacher. The teacher's role is to advise on

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**Teachers of English to Speakers of
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