

PROMOTING LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH JOURNAL WRITING

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Abstract

This article is answering to what extent journal writing can be applied to booster students' literacy skills. This article is based on the classroom action research which was held in September until December, 2016, in the first semester students of English Education Department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Sebelas Maret University. The development of literacy skills is a necessity for preparing students in improving and widening their content knowledge and concepts which give support to other domains of life. Through these literacy skills, students are expected to have ability in creating knowledge through writing in terms of personal growth, synthesis, and reflection of new information. One technique in teaching writing that can be applied to promote literacy skills for new advanced learning is journal writing. The result of this research shows that there is an improvement on the students' attitude toward literacy skills. They are motivated to write in academic setting.

Keywords: literacy skills, journal writing, classroom action research

1. INTRODUCTION

When students move from high schools into university, they also move their academic thought into higher level. They have to prepare themselves to be adult learners. In adult learning, the position of teacher is not the only source of knowledge; it means that students are free to get knowledge from many sources. They can use many media of knowledge as they like. As adult people, university students like to be given the opportunity to use their existing foundation of knowledge and experiences gained throughout their life and apply it to their new learning experiences. Some strategies that can be done in this principle are finding out the students' interests and past experiences (personal, work and study related), assisting them to draw on those experiences when problem-solving, reflecting and applying clinical reasoning processes, and facilitating reflective learning opportunities. Adult students become ready to learn when the goal of learning meet their needs and cope real-life tasks or problems. This principle leads teachers to provide meaningful learning. Meaningful learning involves students in evaluating their own learning – this can develop their skills of critical reflection by making use of diaries, reflection journals and problem solving sessions. In meaningful learning, students gain knowledge freely from any media of information. Students need to be able to work effectively with information, using it at all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating). For doing so, students need to develop their literacy skills. Literacy skills help students gain knowledge through reading as well as using media and technology. These skills also help students create knowledge through writing as well as developing media and technology. Besides literacy in reading and writing traditionally, university students need to have literacy in decoding and producing information through the use of such media of communication. Students have to consume excessive information to gain new skills in handling it. It is very helpful when the information came through official publications like books, newspapers, magazines, and television shows, students encountered data that had been prepared by professionals. Unfortunately, much information in such networks is worked out by non academic people in unreliable manner of

writing. Some of those works are reliable, but many are not. In this situation, students have to use their information literacy skills in picking which knowledge is reliable enough to set up into primary or secondary sources of knowledge. They have to check and cross-check the information and identify the bias and errors. In searching out the information, all aspects have to be located such as: communication situation, with area sender, subject, purpose, medium, receiver, and context. After students finished receiving the information, they must produce the information in their manner. Few years before, when they produced information, it was largely for a single reader—the teacher. It was therefore not an authentic communication situation, and students felt that writing was a purely academic activity. As the technology of information comes forward, the students need to share the idea with others; not only to the teacher and writing is one of the main ways students communicate. It has real-world applications and consequences. Students need to understand that what they write can do great or harm in the real world, and that how they write determines how powerful their words are. Students need to take on the role of professional writers, learning to be effective and ethical producers of information.

Providing meaningful learning becomes a must for English Education Department of Teacher and Training Education Faculty, Sebelas Maret University. In this department, students are assisted to gain knowledge in meaningful atmosphere in which they make use their literacy skills. The use of literacy skills in academic life of campus has to be habit for all students due to the fact that habit in using literacy skills forms a mechanism for learning about topics they enjoy and acquiring content knowledge and concepts that support progress in other domains. It is critical for supporting a range of positive outcomes, including success in school and other environments. Simply, literacy skills are useful in preparing students for widening their knowledge or getting new knowledge from other fields. The habit for using literacy skills, somehow, needs to be acknowledged as earlier as possible. When students sit on the higher level of college, they are used to read, write, and listen in their routine academic life. For new students who sit on the first semester, they need effort to form a habit in using full literacy skills in their new academic atmosphere. When they move from high school to college, some students feel shocked because the use of literacy skills independently and excessively is not formed in schools. They have to wait the knowledge from teacher, as the one source of information, so they have little idea in using other sources of information, such internet, journal, and other printed materials. In college, students cannot depend their academic competence only on the lecturer. They have abundant sources needed to be explored, not only waiting from the lecturer. They have to study and work independently using literacy skills. The more they use their literacy skills, the more they have higher academic competence, either hard skills and soft skill, and finally forming good life skills.

The academic-culture-shocking students are easily found in writing class of the first semester. They have to write in every meeting; starting from sentence building until simple paragraph writing. When the students are unusual to produce information through written language, they face difficulties. It is not easy for them to state main idea, even to decide topic for writing. It is the lecturer job to provide class with unthreatening atmosphere, so that the students will be motivated to write. The lecturer needs to assist or guide students with outlining, diction choice, and other language features required in certain text type. Simple, the fresh students in writing class cannot stay alone without any support.

In Writing 1 class (Sentence Building class), the students' score was not good enough. About 65% students in class had under 70 (the standard score to state whether students' score is good) or C score. From years of observation, it can be seen that the reason of unsatisfying students score is academic-culture-shocking. The students were not used to functioning literacy skills independently and excessively. They waited only the instruction from the lecturer.

To promote the use of literacy skills independently and excessively, especially in writing, for the first semester students, the researcher as the lecturer implemented journal writing. Journal writing

in its variety of forms is used in various ways by adult learners; adult educators should consider the benefits in terms of enhancing learning and professional development. It was first time used in medical science early 1965. Hiemstra (2002) states that journaling in its various forms is a means for recording personal thoughts, daily experiences, and evolving insights. Journaling technique becomes a potential way to promote critical self-reflection where dilemmas, contradictions, and evolving worldviews are questioned or challenged. Journal also plays an important role in the learning of languages. There are also some benefits in journal writing; (1) it provides effective and meaningful way for students to practice and improve the quality of their writing; (2) it encourages students to think about the past activities and evaluate them and also to use high order thinking skills in forming grounded questions; and (3) it helps students in practicing personal recount text writing.

Conceptually, journal writing can be an alternative technique to booster students' literacy skills as part of developing meaningful learning in Writing 1 class. The question is that in what extent journal writing can be applied to booster students' literacy skills. This research describes the setting in which journal writing technique is best applied in promoting literacy skills for writing class.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

To obtain the goal of this research, the researcher worked on a classroom action research. This research is primarily focused on the process when a proposed solution is applied to solve problems in classroom. The quality improvement of teaching and learning process is the outcome of this research. There is no exact time for researcher to finish the action in this research, as long as the criteria for the improvement are not gained yet. For the teacher, classroom action research is kind of long life research in the period of her teaching and learning process. When a teacher needs to improve the quality or solve the problem in class, and she does the actions, it can be said that she has a classroom action research. The object of this research was the first semester students of English Department in Teacher Training Faculty, Sebelas Maret University, for the academic year 2016/2017. The class was Writing 1 A1 with 14 students inside. Through the steps in action research, the researcher observed the class of Writing 1 for years, designed lesson plan with journal writing as the main activity, implemented the plan in the action, and evaluated the process of implementation. To analyze the data, the researcher used interactive model analysis as proposed by Milles and Huberman.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In obtaining the goal, that is to describe the setting in which journal writing technique was best applied in promoting literacy skills for writing class, there were two cycles run out. In the first cycle, the researcher planned some activities in teaching writing by implementing journal writing, implemented the activities, and evaluated as well as reflected the result of implementation. The activities for writing journal started in the second meeting. It was weekly-based journal writing. In the first meeting, students were lectured to have comprehension on basic writing, especially descriptive text, and the way they wrote their journal. They had to prepare a book containing 20-25 blank or lined pages for writing journal. Within three meetings, students wrote three different journals in the same topic, that was describing person. In the first assignment, the topic was describing a person in the family. In the second, students described a person they had met outside. The last was describing a person they want to become their soul mate in the future. In writing the journal, students were allowed to put their personal touch in description, for example: what they feel on the person, happiness, sadness, guilty feeling, what about the skin, what about the hair, and so on. When the students only had a few data on the person they tried to describe, the students had to make interview with the person. The lecturer gave some code markers for correcting the

journal. These code markers were very useful when the lecturer gave correction to her students' works, and the students recognized what kind of mistakes they had to revise. Here the examples: T – tense, V – verb, SV – subject verb agreement, Prep – preposition, P – punctuation, WO – word order, and WW – wrong word. In the implementation step, students had to collect their works two days before the Writing 1 class schedule. It would give time for lecturer to correct students' works. In the day of meeting, the lecturer gave back the works to the students. They had to analyze the code markers for correction and tried to revise the mistakes. After they revised their works, they had to bring back the revision to the lecturer for some corrections and comments. In the end of the meeting, the lecturer asked few students to present their works in front of the class. The meeting was ended with some analytical questions for students to be answered at home; such as what do you feel about the person? Do you want to keep silent when she/he gets some mistakes only because you adore him/her? These questions led students to have more personalized feeling to the character of person, imagination whether the case will happen in their future. Hopefully they would write with such intimate touch. In evaluating students' result in writing for first cycle, researcher found that some students still faced difficulties in grammar usage, for example: the use of present tense contrasting with present continuous tense, subject-verb agreement, verb, and word order. It was also found that some texts were not coherence. In organizing text, some students were not able to bring unity idea into paragraphs they developed. The students were less in giving supporting detail when they described people. This would lead to ambiguity when the readers had to visualize the description because there was not enough information. Because the works were hand written, there was difficulty in correcting punctuation marks. It was hard to identify whether students put comma or dot. Based on these result, the researcher decided to have next cycle with some revisions on the lesson plan. In the second cycle, the activity was still on weekly-based journal writing. The differences were laid on the kind of text that had to be composed and technique of correction the works. In the meetings of second cycle, the students were assigned to write recount text with different topics. In the first topic, students required to write their daily life in which they had to tell the activities they did from the dawn until they got to bed including for describing the people, places, and so on in their story. In the second topic, students were asked to write the funniest story of their life. They were allowed to draw picture of things in their composition. The picture is helpful to visualize the description of place or people. The last topic was telling story about what they will do after graduating from the English Department. The students needed to build up their imagination, hope, and dream as the data of the text. The rule for writing had no difference from the previous cycle. The students were required to write at home and collected the works two days before the meeting. The lecturer would bring the works back to the students without any markers for revisions. In the class, the lecturer gave the works randomly to students and they had to correct their friend works. The technique used was peer-correction. The students gave 20 minutes for doing correction and gave the works back to the owners. The situation became crowded when each student wanted to clarify the mistake to the corrector. When they could not find the answer of clarification, they came to the lecturer for correction. One disadvantage of peer correction is that when the peers do not have enough competence, they cannot do correction correctly. The advantage is that through peer correction, the students can learn more on the grammar used because they were motivated for not to be blamed in giving incorrect correction. They also can develop their ability in analyzing other works. They will have multiple perspectives in pointing the same topic. To evaluate students' writings, the researcher adopted scoring rubric from Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey (1981: 91), which consists of five general aspects namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Based on the data taken in the second cycle, it can be analyzed that there were some improvements in writing. (1) In term of content, students provided the text with fun and easy to do because they had the evidence and experiences. They spent more pages to write recount

than descriptive writing. (2) In organization, the idea of students' writing flowed smoothly. They had coherence and unity in their text. They moved their idea easily from one paragraph to another paragraph. Since recount text is chronologically order developed, students will easily trace back their memories in writing experience. They had ordered to move from paragraphs using time indicators. There was a clear outline or structure for writing their experiences into recount text. (3) In vocabulary and language use, students put synonyms to state similar meaning of words and vice versa. They were suggested for not using same words more than three times, so they had to find the synonyms or antonyms to state some meanings. (4) In mechanics, the compositions were developed better. The students tried to write text in readable hand-writing.

From the research findings, it can be interpreted that settings in which journal writing technique was best applied in promoting literacy skills for writing class are as follows. (1) Giving journal writing as home assignment with topics that are closed to the students' life will promote continuity for students to practice writing in a habit-forming literacy skills and give opportunity for students to develop their idea without time constraints. (2) Encouraging students to have creativity can be done in some ways, for example letting students to include sketches and illustration alongside their writing. The illustration or picture will help students to visualize their description and to check whether they did descriptive words correctly or not based on the illustration. (3) Giving various topics to write is based on the order of difficulty, starting from description until analytical constraints. It is also a way to form habit of thinking; thinking from the simplest until the most difficult. (4) Encouraging imagination of present or future life provides students to think anti main-stream; let them have their own view on thing being discussed. Whether they correct or not, is not a matter. The most important is that they can describe what in their head into writing. In expressing imagination, encourage the students to make reasonable content. (5) Giving feedback using consistent format. It is a must for teachers to give feedback toward students' works. Provide code markers for correcting the works and give a brief explanation on how to correct the works using code markers. The students will know what kinds of mistakes they did through code markers, and hopefully they can revise their mistakes based on lecturer feedback and comment. (6) Rewarding on strengths and areas for improvement can start with positive comment to the students' works as rewarding of their effort in writing. After that, give comment on an area for improvement. Still keep in mind that lecturer needs to be honest while evoking an enthusiastic and encouraging tone at the same time. (7) In facilitating the students to have multiple perspectives on the same topic, put in the students mind that a topic can be pointed into different views. Every view has its argument in which the argument needs to be elaborated with sample, evidence, and so on. It will make students get deep comprehension on the writing topic. (8) In describing, encourage students to use many adjectives to describe common nouns. It is part of sensory details that include the senses of hearing, tasting, sight, sound and touch.

4. CONCLUSION

The result of this research shows that journal writing can be used to promote literacy skills of first semester students in Writing 1 class. It is useful when meaningful learning becomes requirement in teaching and learning process because it helps to form habit for using literacy skills in academic life. For first semester students in Writing 1 class of Teacher Training Faculty of Sebelas Maret University, journal writing is best applied to promote literacy skills in some settings, such as: (1) giving journal writing as home assignment with topics that are closed to the students' life; (2) encouraging students to have creativity; (3) giving various topics to write; (4) encouraging imagination of present or future life; (5) giving feedback using consistent format; (6) rewarding on strengths and areas for improvement; (7) having students to have students in multiple perspectives on the same topic; and (8) in describing, by encouraging students to use many adjectives to describe common nouns.

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