# THE PROCESS APPROACH AND UAE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS'ATTITUDES TOWARDS WRITING

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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## ABSTRACT

Many students have negative attitudes towards writing and they feel frustrated because they do not know what to do to improve it. One of the main reasons behind this attitude is the adoption of the product approach that looks at writing basically as grammar practice and teaches and assesses compositions as final products regardless of the process that students have gone through to come up with them. Moreover, the feedback provided by the instructor does not seem to help students to pinpoint their weaknesses and deal with them. The "process approach" or "process writing" brought about an interesting change to composition classes as to how to go about writing, what to focus on and what sort of feedback might be more helpful to learners. Indeed, the process approach, as its very name suggests, focuses on the process that takes students all the way to come up with a final piece of writing, does not concentrate only on teaching or assessing the grammar knowledge of the learner, and encourages students to express their own ideas through a recursive movement through the different writing stages that allow brainstorming, freewriting, drafting, revising, peer-editing, etc. Moreover, the sort of feedback that the teachers provide aims to help students with expressing what they really want to say.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether using some process-approach associated activities in UAE high school writing classes can contribute to a change in students' attitudes towards writing. If yes, what sort of change can it bring about? If no, what might be the reasons? To answer these questions, a six-week writing course

adopting some process-writing techniques was offered to a class of 25 grade 9 students, the experimental group. Before and after this course, a survey was administered to this group, and to another group that did not take the course, a control group, in order to gather some comparative data. Informal interviews were constantly conducted and descriptive journal notes were also continually taken all along the course as extra supportive qualitative tools of research. Results of this research, first, emphasize that many students initially had rather negative attitudes towards writing and, second, point out that adopting process-writing activities may change the majority of students' attitudes towards writing in general and towards some writing features in specific.

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# DEDICATION

I owe it all to Raoudha, my wife; thanks to you, I could persist. Thank you for everything.

# Chapter 1

## Overview of the Study

The traditional way of teaching composition in many parts of the world seems to have caused many students' attitudes towards writing to be rather negative and many students to feel frustrated. Based on my own experience, I believe this issue is yet more complicated in the United Arab Emirates, as the writing problem in this part of the world is threefold. Firstly, students have little in their textbooks showing them how to write an essay or even a paragraph. Secondly, it seems that most teachers do not give students helpful feedback to improve their writing. Some teachers do not even return papers to students to read their comments; they just give grades. Thirdly, and probably most surprisingly, students are often not even encouraged to express themselves in writing. Students are often expected to only memorize ready-made paragraphs and to write them verbatim on their exam papers. The closer the students' paragraphs are to the workbook version, the better grades they get. Workbook essays are written by the teacher on the blackboard and copied by the students in their workbooks. Therefore, the students' exclusive concern in writing is to memorize the paragraph and to write it correctly without grammar or spelling mistakes.

This is not the students' concern only; it is also the major concern of many teachers and even administrators. One day at the beginning of the 2005/2006 school year, for example, while I was teaching composition, the school principal came into my class. He looked at the spider gram on the blackboard. It was the product of a brainstorming activity that I had just finished with students. He could not figure out what it was so he asked me about the lesson, and I said it was a writing one. Then he asked me about the students' writing level, so I told him they were really weak and that they needed much effort to improve. He became rather angry at hearing that, and immediately turned to the students and addressed them in a rather blaming tone, "You can't memorize ten or fifteen lines in English?" The principal's view that he expressed through this remark seems to be a typical view shared by many administrators working in the UAE, perhaps because they themselves were taught to write through this method. For them, writing seems to be inextricably linked to memorization.

Alreyes (1996) attributes the UAE students' writing difficulties to three major reasons. Firstly, he points out that there's a socio-economic reason that might be encouraging students to overlook the writing skill. Indeed, in the following statement, he asserts that developing the writing skill is not conceived of as crucially important to the future careers of students:

> Most of the graduates in the UAE apply to work in government offices—work which not only does not require writing skills in English, but which does not require any English at all. In addition if they opt to work in the private sector, such as in a financial institution, or in private, commercial institutions, they will be able to rely on secretaries to draft letters or memos. Therefore, there actually appears to be little need for concern about developing writing skills. (p. 14)

Secondly, the writing problems might be due to cognitive reasons. According to Alreyes, "in the UAE**,** ESL consumers do not consider the writing skills an important component of language proficiency" (p. 14). Here, in this respect, a lot of students might wrongly think that language is all about speaking and that the basic skills really more worth developing are, after all, speaking and listening. According to Alreyes (1996), the communicative approach predominantly adopted in UAE schools "seeks to enhance oral rather than written proficiency" (p. 11).

Finally, and probably most importantly, the writing problem might also be due, according to Alreyes (1996), to the fact that "students in the UAE experience a specific form of the Product Approach [in which] classroom activities lack any method for teaching writing or even discussing the importance of writing in the acquisition of English as a second language" (p. 10). The appearance of such a specific form of the product approach might be accounted for by the unsurprising change that, according to Caudery (1999), teaching approaches undergo while spreading through different parts of the world and that can even lead to some serious negative changes.

In fact, Caudery (1999) points out that, "as ideas spread from one teacher to another, it is the strongest and most distinctive elements of the original approach that tend to survive" (p. 2). The danger of this procedure of "simplification," as Caudery calls it, is that it might be followed by a process of "distortion" (p. 2), and this might be what has happened in the UAE. Indeed, we cannot strictly say that the methods

adopted in teaching writing in UAE schools are an accurate implementation of the initial versions of the product approach. Nevertheless, the general features of the approach usually applied in teaching writing in the UAE are those of the product approach, which will be discussed in more depth in chapter 2. Therefore, applying these features might be one of the factors that has so far led to the flaws of teaching writing.

"This deficiency in the teaching of second language writing has," in the terms of Alreyes (1996), "led to a parent and student outcry in the UAE—a protest so earnest that the National Ministry of Education has been lately compelled to investigate the situation and provide a sound solution to it" (p. 13). Nevertheless, the investigation that the UAE Ministry of Education conducted roughly sixteen years ago and the report that it published in 1990 under the title "Report on the Educational Problems in the UAE" do not seem to have brought about any attention-grabbing changes as students continue to suffer from huge difficulties in writing, which has dragged down their attitudes towards this activity and made it look like a mountain seemingly impossible to approach, let alone to climb to the top of.

A lot has been written on the process approach and its contribution to the change of students' attitudes towards writing. However, most of it has been done in writing classes for native speakers, which has raised a debate on whether this approach is directly applicable in ESL/EFL classes. Furthermore, even process approach studies reported on in an ESL/EFL context have been mainly conducted at the university level. This study, therefore, is significant in two ways: First, it will be conducted in an EFL context, and second at the high school level.

In this research study, I conducted action research in which I introduced and applied some features of the process approach in my writing classes to see whether students' attitudes towards writing would change or not. To see if there was a change of attitudes and of what type, , I administered two surveys to two groups of students, an experimental group which took the course, and a control group which remained faithful to the traditional approach. All along the course, I kept a journal and informally interviewed students individually and collectively.

Overall, there were three sources of data, one quantitative and two qualitative. The quantitative was a survey given to 49 students, and the qualitative included my own journal and group interviews. The specific questions that I addressed through the

research were the following:

1. What are the students’ actual attitudes towards writing?
2. Could introducing some process writing activities into this type of situation improve students' attitudes towards writing?
3. If it could, how far could it go in changing these negative attitudes into rather positive ones?
4. If not, what might cause its failure?

# Chapter 2

# Review of the Literature

## The Traditional Approach to Teaching Writing

How should we teach writing? Hyland (2002) argues that there is no black-or-white answer to this question and I share his opinion. Nevertheless, knowing the learners' attitudes towards the way they are being taught writing might help us weigh the value of the teaching approach adopted. In UAE schools, for example, teachers predominantly adopt product-based approaches. These approaches, in general, conceive of writing as "mainly concerned," in the terms of Badger and White (2000), "with knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development as mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher" (p. 154). The words "structure, language, imitation, and form" used in this definition suggest, first, that writing is basically an imitation activity and not a creative one and, second, that it targets the form rather than the content. In implementing this view of teaching writing, some teachers in the UAE have even taken it a step further by trying to provide students with ready-made models of writing and asking them to just memorize them. On the exam paper, the more students stick to the teacher's model, the better grades they are likely to receive. Be it memorization or imitation, both the teachers' and the students' biggest concern in writing is linguistic knowledge and grammatical correctness. Tyson (1999) observes that the main aim of many students while writing is to produce "grammatically correct sentences" (p. 1).

According to Badger and Goodith (2000) and Hyland (2003), teachers adopting the product approach take their students through a four-stage process: first familiarization, second controlled writing, third guided writing, and finally free writing. During the familiarization phase students are exposed to samples of the form of writing that they are going to work on, in order to learn about their main features. At this stage, students might be introduced to some samples of, for instance, descriptive essays to see what their main characteristics are. When describing, say, a park, students are supposed to be introduced to a text including such adjectives as "big," "green," "nice," and "fresh," such nouns as "grass," "trees," "air," and "barbecues," and such structure words as "and," "in addition," and "besides." Once

students are made familiar with these "features of the targeted text," (Badger& Goodith 2000, p. 153) they pass on to the controlled writing phase in which they may produce some simple sentences making use of the words and the features that they have just been familiarized with. The third stage might consist of writing a guided descriptive essay, i.e., an essay based on some questions, disordered statements, or a list of topic-related words. Finally, students are asked to write a free composition about a topic proposed by the teacher and to submit it for grading. This way of approaching writing, often described as the traditional way, has been in the last couple of decades the centre of a heated debate that has tackled some of its focal points and cornerstones such as looking at writing only as a final product, evaluating it as such, teaching composition with an exaggerated emphasis on grammaticality at the expense of ideas and content, and giving students a kind of feedback that may not help them improve their writing. Although these critical points seem to deal with different features of the product approach, they are indeed to a large extent inter-related.

## The Product and Nothing But the Product

One of the most prominent features of the product approach is looking at writing exclusively as a final product, i.e., regardless of the process that students have gone through to come up with that product. Hinkel (2002) points out that when such an approach is used, "the teaching and evaluation of papers and assignments focus almost exclusively on the product of writing" (p. 47). Put in other words, teachers using the product approach teach students to write one perfect draft and to get it right from the beginning, and they therefore evaluate one final draft. This exclusive focus made Badger and White (2000) notice that one of the weaknesses of the product approach is that "process skills, such as planning a text, are given a relatively small role" (p. 157). As a matter of fact, the main concern of composition teachers has traditionally been the final product and not such processes as, for example, planning, drafting, and editing that might be involved in writing.

This situation made Gebhard (1996) wonder whether it is really "enough to give an assignment, to let the students write and then to evaluate the product," and to reply immediately that, "it is not" (p. 225). Yan (2005) points out, "The product approach has received much criticism because it ignores the actual processes used by students, or any writers to produce a piece of writing," although, he argues, not many

people can write a “perfect product on the first draft” (p. 19). Raimes (1998) reminds us that Ernest Hemmingway, in spite of being one of the most famous writers ever, had to write the end of his novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, 39 times before he could have it the way he wanted it to be(Raimes, 1998).

In addition, some critics argue that taking into consideration only the final product for evaluation, that is adopting what is often described as a single-shot approach, might just be misleading. In fact, it is hard to infer the student's writing abilities from a single writing sample. Murray (1980, cited in Chastain, 1988) clarifies this point by drawing a humorous analogy between trying to form an opinion about a process from a product, and trying to form an opinion about a pig from a sausage; both are by definition, and in the same way, illogical. Put in other words, teachers, by looking exclusively at the product, cannot appreciate the students’ meaning making process which can be crucial to possessing effective writing skills.

Furthermore, assessing the final product is usually associated in the traditional way of teaching writing with writing within a limited pre-set amount of time. Indeed, students in the UAE for example usually take writing tests as a part of comprehensive tests including the following sub-parts: writing a paragraph and a letter, structure questions, a vocabulary exercise, and a mechanics exercise. These are done altogether in one and a half hours, and then papers are taken for grading. Such a way of assessment may not be authentic, as “writing done under timed conditions on an unfamiliar topic” in Weigle’s (2002) terms, “does not accurately reflect the conditions under which most writing is done in non-testing situations or writing as it is taught and practiced in the classroom” (p. 197).

## The Traditional Focus on Grammar

As for the focus on grammar instruction the product approach, Leki (1991) points out that the aim of second language writing exercises is traditionally to “catch grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors” (p. 170). It seems to be clear then that the focus is not exactly on writing well but probably on writing correctly. Another critic, Hirose (2001), has even gone so far as to say that often “English writing instruction …appears to be a service activity used to reinforce the teaching of grammatical structures or vocabulary” (p. 35), which might show that improving the writing skill has not even been targeted by traditional composition teachers and that it has been

used only as a means to an end. Hinkel (2002) adds that, during the 1950s and 1960's composition assessment even for native speakers was also based on lexical, rhetorical, stylistic, and syntactic considerations rather than on the ideas or the contents included in the essay. She points out,

> The quality of the student assignments was evaluated according to the analysis of literature and writing style, which included such considerations as the presence of thesis and rhetorical support, coherence, cohesion, and uses of vocabulary and syntax. (p. 47)

Of course, writing well includes writing cohesively and coherently, but what about the content? Did the student really express his/her own ideas? What if the paragraph is cohesive, coherent, and syntactically correct, but is not exactly to the point or does not express the student's real thoughts and feelings?

This special focus on grammar and syntax makes students afraid of breaking the grammatical rules and of making errors, and makes them write, in the terms of Leki (1991), "very cautiously and conservatively" (p. 171). They write only thinking of what their teacher wants them to write, because they are afraid of having many mistakes to correct. Some instructors even give their students ready-made safe expressions to use so that they are spared the effort of correcting a slew of errors. Besides, students tend to say not what they want to say but what they know how to say. Leki (1991) explains, "If what they have to say does not fit with what they already know how to say, they simply write something easier, something they know they can control" (p. 171). The result of this, according to Leki (1991), is often compositions that are "crippled, filled with clichés, and very boring" (p. 171), both for the student and for the teacher.

Heffernan, Lincoln, and Atwill (2000) define the grammar of a language as "the set of rules by which its sentences are made" (p. xxxvi), and they recognize the importance of grammar knowledge in forming meaningful sentences. However, they notice that "good writing is more than the act of obeying grammatical rules" (p. xxxvi) because, according to them, writing well is not only writing without making mistakes. This idea is in a way echoed in Biber, Conrad, and Leech's (2002) view of language learning in relation to grammar. Indeed, they state that "for someone learning about the English language for the purposes of communication, it is the real use of language that is important. It is not enough to study just the grammatical forms,

structures and classes" (p. 2).

Chastain (1988) further supports this view by arguing that there is no strong connection between teaching grammar and writing well. That means, generally speaking, students who learn grammar rules may not necessarily become able to write good essays. From my own experience as a secondary school student, I was top of the class in grammar and that often helped me make coherent sentences and reduced the number of my errors. However, I was never very good at composition because I was never taught to write more than individual grammatically correct sentences. Tyson (1999) observes that in Korea where the product approach is the norm, in spite of the strong focus on grammar, "very few Korean university students—even English majors—graduate with the ability to write a coherent paragraph, let alone a longer essay, a business letter, or a research paper" (p. 1). On the other hand, even a very good second language writer is more than likely to make mistakes when writing, as "second language learners are," according to Dodigovic (2005), "doomed to making errors" (p. 1), and these errors, according to her, simply show that the learner is a second language learner. Dodigovic's assumption partly explains why a lot of students feel frustrated being unable to do anything about the slew of mistakes they make whenever they write; they are second language learners and it is natural for them to commit errors. Furthermore, it makes the exaggerated focus on grammar rather absurd as students will continue to make errors even if we keep teaching them grammar all the time.

## The Traditional Approach to Feedback

The feedback that the teacher provides on written papers might be of paramount importance both as an evaluation of the students' essays and as a learning tool. When comprehensive and meaningful, the feedback can play an interesting role in helping students learn how to write. Nevertheless, some researchers think that the final product approach is likely to make the teacher's feedback useless and unhelpful to students simply because, as their product is looked at as final, their grades are also considered as final, and so there's no urgent need for revisiting an essay to review or to refine it. This situation, unsurprisingly, leads learners to grow more and more concerned about their scores rather than about improving their writing level. This concern is mainly due to the frustration that students feel towards writing well as, "no

one," in Chastain's (1988) terms, "has led them through the process of generating ideas, organizing them into a coherent sequence, and putting them on paper" (p. 251). Indeed, in a typical composition class, the teacher suggests a topic; the students write thinking primarily about the safest way to express their ideas, i.e. writing without making mistakes; the teacher again corrects essays making sure not to let any mistake go without being highlighted or corrected; and finally, the teacher returns papers to students (Tyson, 1999).

At least two major reasons might be at the root of giving this type of feedback. The first is the traditional view of what makes a successful piece of writing which gives priority to the form even at the cost of content and organization. Indeed, "traditionally, L2 writing achievement has been defined," in the terms of Goring Kepner (1991), "as mastery of the discrete surface skills required for production of an accurately-written document" (p. 305). Building on this definition, second language composition teachers often direct their feedback towards helping students to achieve this aim, that is, coming up with an accurate composition. Second, a lot of teachers might be afraid that if they leave any mistake unattended, it might be more likely to become fossilized. This phobia of fossilization pushes many to try to catch all mistakes no matter how serious they are. Some teachers even "feel morally obligated to correct all mistakes in L2 student written work" (Goring Kepner, 1991, p. 305).

The students' reaction to this type of teacher feedback seems to differ from one student to another. Some students do not give it any importance. They know before hand that they can do nothing about it. They think that it doesn't help them to write better, nor does it help them to improve their scores. That is why, as Tyson (1999) points out, they sometimes content themselves with having a short look at it and just forget about it. Worse still, for some other students, the teacher's feedback might even be destructive. Dodigovic (2005) reports on a Japanese student who kept crying for a long time because she got feedback from her teacher that she judged as offensive, that is, that "some of her sentences could not be understood by the lecturer" (p. 1). Dodigovic (2005) also mentions another case of an Asian student who looked at his teacher's feedback as a personal reaction to his work. This student gained confidence in his English after passing a proficiency test. He got the idea that his English was irreproachable and so any negative remarks or comments from his teachers were offensive to him. Angry and frustrated, this student ended up dropping

out of several universities.

In my own experience, I still remember how our French composition teachers used to return papers to us with their comments written in red. Sometimes, these comments were even longer than our written works. The majority of the students, when we were handed our papers, would just hold them tightly to our chests, not to show strong emotions but to hide them from others because we felt very ashamed to show that we had made such an array of errors and because, when other students saw the teacher's written feedback, they could pretty much guess the grade, which was a top secret. We would then secretly peer at our papers, and the majority of us would just stop at this stage. We did not really make any use of our teacher's remarks.

For such reasons, "error correction in L2 writing," in the terms of Ferris (1999), "is a source of great concern to writing instructors and of controversy to researchers and composition theorists" (p. 1). Indeed, a lot of real-life teachers lie between two extremes. On the one hand, they are aware that "students' errors are troublesome" and that "students themselves are concerned about accuracy" (p. 1). Nevertheless, on the other hand, they know that "responding effectively to students' grammatical and lexical problems, is a challenging endeavor fraught with uncertainty about its long term effectiveness" (p. 1). This situation might put composition teachers into a real dilemma about whether they should correct all grammatical and spelling errors or whether they should just ignore all or some of them.

Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) wondered whether error correction can bring about any positive results and they came to the conclusion that, in order for it to work, dealing with errors has to consider the following three decisive issues:

> (1) Is grammar feedback and instruction carried out selectively, systematically, and accurately? (2) Are individual student differences (including language proficiency, learning styles, motivation and attitude, first language, etc.) adequately considered and accounted for? And (3) are studies which assess the effectiveness of error correction designed and executed appropriately? (p. 202)

On the whole, product approaches have some positive points, such as the facts that "they recognize the need for learners to be given linguistic knowledge about texts, and they understand that imitation is one way in which people learn" (Badger & White, 2000, p. 157). Nevertheless, they also have some important weaknesses.

Indeed, although the final product is important, concentrating exclusively on it in both teaching and testing at the expense of the content and the path that has led to it might not be reasonable and it might not be helpful to students. Besides, putting that much focus on grammar might also have negative effects on the students' writing and might not lead them to writing correctly and accurately. Furthermore, the kind of feedback provided by teachers using the product approach might not be helpful to students and might not guide them into writing well. On the contrary, it might even be "discouraging and demoralizing" (Tessema, 2005, p. 24) or even "devastating," as Dodigovic (2005, p. 1) has shown. These weaknesses in the product approach have created rather negative attitudes towards writing and have developed a feeling of frustration among a lot of students, which has made them very reluctant to write and made "learning to write in a foreign language" in the terms of Tessema (2005), "an uphill struggle for most students" (p. 22). And the natural result of this is that many students "experience a lack of motivation" (p. 22).

Fortunately, this approach is not the only alternative for teaching writing, as another approach has been developed to try to deal with these deficiencies in an attempt to help students out of "controlled composition and the focus on product in writing classes" (Gunn & Raven, 2005, p. 265). Students can be encouraged to write what they actually want to say and express themselves with less concern, at least during the early stages of writing, about correctness and accuracy. This approach has come to be called the "process approach" or "process writing" (Tyson, 2003, p. 116). this second part of the literature review aims to introduce and evaluate the process approach, and above all to address the following central questions: Can it change the students' negative attitudes towards writing? If it can, how far can it go in changing these negative attitudes into rather positive ones? And if not, what might cause its failure?

## The Process Approach

It is noteworthy that there is no single definition of process writing (Badger & White, 2000; Caudery, 1995), which probably gives it some flexibility of implementation and adoption in L2 writing classes. Caudery (1995) conducted an online survey to see if, after around fifteen years of use in classes in different parts of the world, the process approach had undergone any changes in terms of meanings and

definitions. Surprisingly enough, he came up with the following striking conclusion: The “process approach” often means different and even contradictory things to different teachers. He confirms this when he says at the end of his article, “The process approach by no means is a unitary concept now, if indeed it ever was. Though the definitions given often had elements in common, there were also strong differences in emphasis and even some contradictory ideas" (p. 9).

The reason behind this change in meaning, according to Caudery (1995), might be that when any teaching approach gets adopted in many different parts of the world, it gets interpreted in different ways. It is often simplified, as it keeps only its basic elements and loses a lot of its secondary components. This loss of some elements may lead either to its distortion when it deviates too much from its original concept to take on a totally different meaning, or to its evolution when the change enriches its original meaning and adds to its concepts.

Caudery’s survey revealed that some of the respondents focused in their definitions of the process approach on the process of writing, disregarding any importance of the final product, while some other respondents confirmed that both the process and the final product are very important. The latter argued that the process is a path or a means that leads to an end which is the final product. Therefore, they argued that the final product has to be targeted by the teachers using the process approach. The survey also revealed that some respondents looked at the process approach in terms of its reasons for use. They basically focused on its "learning outcomes or educational philosophy" (p. 9), whereas some other respondents concentrated only on the various activities that they perform in their writing classes while adopting this approach. The survey finally showed that some of the respondents focused on the practical difficulties of using the process approach in detail, whereas some others made it clear that they had already solved that problem by a process of simplification whereby they skipped some of the elements of the process approach.

These big differences in views and emphases regarding the process approach have not prevented some researchers from attempting to define it on the basis of its shared core features. One of the most simple and straightforward definitions I have so far come across is the one that Seow (2002) offers. He concisely points out that process writing is “no more than a writing process approach to teaching writing” (p. 315). That is, it is an approach that takes students through a certain process to teach

them writing.

Badger and White (2000) look at the process approach from a little different perspective, as they suggest that it consists of the writing activities that take students from the first stages, in which they generate ideas and collect data related to the topic of the composition, to end up with the stage in which they publish their finished essays. Yan (2005) suggests that the following four stages are what make up process writing: first, prewriting; second, composing or drafting; third, revising; and fourth, editing (p. 19). Brock (1994) also defines the process approach through stages, but he seems to go into more detail as he classifies the process writing phases as follows: "Students first explore a topic, write drafts, receive feedback from classmates and the teacher, working throughout to make the meaning clearer" (p. 74).

Tyson (1999), on the other hand, defines it in terms of its main characteristic; he says "it is the use of multiple drafts which is perhaps the main identifying characteristic of the process approach" (p. 6). This definition looks as though it oversimplifies the process approach, but indeed it does not, as writing more than one draft is probably the most prominent feature of process writing. Connor (1987) gives a more detailed description of the process approach in an attempt to define it comprehensively through its distinctive features. She points out,

> The process-centered paradigm…focuses on writing processes; teaches strategies for invention and discovery; considers audience, purpose and context of writing; emphasizes recursiveness in the writing process; and distinguishes between aims and modes of discourse (e.g., expressive, expository, persuasive; and description, narration, evaluation, classification). (p. 677)

This definition indeed does not go through the different stages of process writing as some of the above definitions do, but it mentions some of its specificities, focal points, and emphases.

On the whole, as Caudery's (1995) study suggests, ESL teachers' ideas about what the process approach is are sometimes very different. Indeed, some teachers base their definition on the stages of writing like, for example, brainstorming, freewriting, and drafting. According to them, these are the main distinctive features of the process approach in comparison with, for instance, the product approach. Some others base their definition on the reasons or the purposes for using the process approach in their

writing classes, and some others just describe the process approach through its main characteristics, i.e., process-centered, recursive, etc.

## History of Process Writing

It is worth noting at the beginning that there is no exact date as to when the process approach was invented or started functioning, and what we can find in the literature is either speculations about who was the first to start this relatively new approach, such as Donald Murray being one of the forefathers of the process approach (Caudery, 1995), or vague expressions of time such as "during the 1980s" (Reid, 2001, p. 29), " has been around for a couple of decades" (Tyson, 1999, p. 6), or "twenty years ago or so" (Caudery, 1995, p. 1). However, Zemelman and Daniels (1993) seem to have a different view of when people became aware of process writing, as they think that it is not really a new approach at all, but started many centuries ago.

Caudery (1995) confirms that a lot of articles on process writing appeared in the late 1970s when researchers realized that writing was, by nature, recursive and cyclical rather than linear and straightforward. Those articles raised composition teachers' awareness that helping students with the process which might lead them to write well was probably more effective than commenting critically which often demoralized student writers. That is, "instead of concentrating on the writing that students produced and making critical comments on it," in Caudery's (1995) terms, "they could aim to help students write better by aiding them in the actual process of writing" (p. 1).

Among the researchers who wrote about this issue in the late 1970s was Donald Murray (Caudery, 1995). What he wrote were really reflections about his own way of writing, about how he came to find out what he wanted to say through writing. Those articles, according to Caudery (1995), led to the appearance of process writing. "Thus," he points out "a 'process approach' to teaching writing was born" (p. 1). As for ESL classrooms, the advent of the process approach was simultaneous with the realization that different learners had different needs in terms of language skills. Writing therefore came to be recognized as a skill to be taught in an appropriate way rather than in the traditional ways of teaching that "proved [not only] inadequate, but also incoherent and theoretically baseless" (Caudery, 1995, p. 2). Caudery points out

that, "in this context, the process approach arrived on the scene at a very opportune moment" (p. 2).

A bit differently from Caudery's view, Reid (2001) maintains that the process approach as adopted in second language writing classes has its roots in the "expressive approach" which prevailed in native English speaker writing classes in the 1980s. In this expressive trend, Reid (2001) explains, writing was taught as a "process of self-discovery" (p. 29), a process whereby writers discover their own real thoughts, feelings, and opinions. However, only ten years later, according to Reid (2001), did the process approach find its way into L2 composition classrooms. That is, for her, "the process movement" (p. 29) was introduced into second language pedagogy only in the 1990s.

Zemelman and Daniels (1993) have a completely different view as to when process writing appeared. They point out that a lot of the modern process approach-oriented activities have been used through different ages. Their evidence goes even as far back in history as the first century A.D. when the Roman rhetorician Marcus Fabius Quintillian advised that correctness not be the teachers' main concern at the expense of “boldness and exuberance” (p. 340). In addition, Zemelman and Daniels (1993) show that a lot of 19$^{th}$ century composition teachers and educators defended teaching writing using methods that now look modern. They state the example of Barrett Wendell who used to be a rhetoric instructor at Harvard University in the late 19$^{th}$ century. Wendell, according to Zemelman, and Daniels, showed "eagerness to care for his students, to see the world through their eyes, to appreciate their strengths, to exult in their tiniest steps of exploration" (p. 340), which clearly shows his concern with things other than accuracy. By providing this historical background, Zemelman and Daniels want to prove that the process approach is not a fashion that is in for a short time and that will fade away soon. Instead, they argue that it is deeply rooted in history, and that it is the offspring of a lot of thought put into teaching writing throughout many centuries.

On the whole, different teachers have different conceptions as to what the process approach is, and they have different conceptions as to when it exactly appeared and developed. They accordingly have different conceptions as to what stages are included in process writing.

Stages and Techniques of Process Writing

It is important to notice at the beginning that in spite of the differences regarding the stages of the process writing, a lot of researchers agree that these stages are not sequential and do not take place in an orderly regular way (Seow, 2002; Tyson, 2003) but rather non-linear, recursive, and complex (Barnett, 1989; Yan, 2005). That is, there are no straight lines or orderly steps to follow while writing. Instead, writers have to move forward and backward till they find out what it is they want to express. Writers are just like travelers who are not sure about their way, so they cannot just go straight. They have to look back, move backwards, and change their direction sometimes. The writers' and the travelers' pace in this case might be slow; nevertheless, it is safer and more likely to lead to the right destination in the end. To clarify the nature of writing, different researchers have used different similes and analogies. Strauch (2005), for example, gives us the following imaginary scenario to clarify his point of view of writing being a messy and disorderly activity:

> Imagine a circular building with six rooms…. You go in through the entrance into a room called "selecting a topic." You go in and out of the rooms to your left and exit the building through the room marked "writing the final draft." However, notice that once you go into a room to your left, you can always come back through the center of the building to a room on your right. This is because writing does not always go smoothly forward. Sometimes writers need to go back as well as forward. (p. 17)

Singleton (2005) draws a unique analogy between writing and life itself. Indeed, according to him, just like life, the writing process is disorganized and "doesn't happen step by step" (p. 4). He clarifies his view with the following drawing (Figure 1) which shows a child proud of his processes of writing although they look horribly messy:

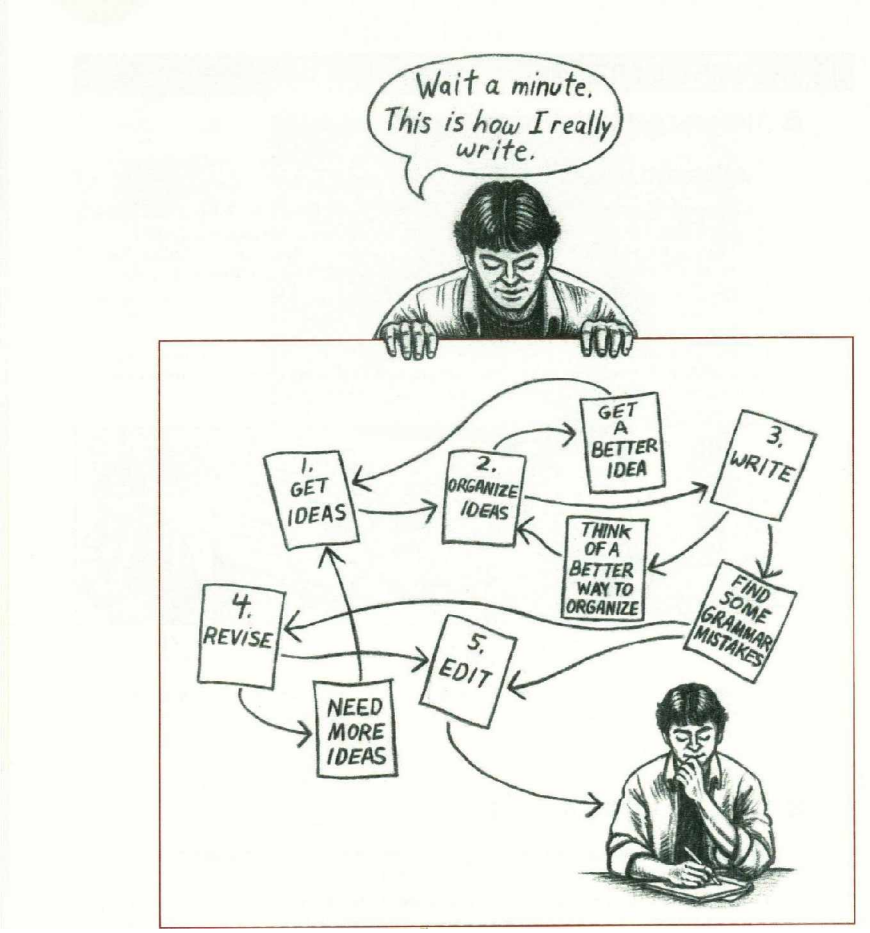



Figure 1. Singleton's (2005) Representation of a Child's Writing Process

Contrary to Singleton (2005) and Strauch (2005) who seem to rely more on metaphors and analogies to explain the stages of process writing, Tyson (2003, p. 117) is more straightforward in describing the possible stages of the process approach. In fact, he mentions them in the following list without claiming that they should necessarily be ordered this way or in any other way:

Discussion (class, small group, pair)

Brainstorming/making notes/asking questions

Fastwriting/selecting ideas/establishing a viewpoint

Rough draft

Preliminary self-evaluation

Arranging information/structuring the text

First draft

Group/peer evaluation and responding

Conference

Second draft

Self-evaluation/editing/proof-reading

Finished draft

Final responding to draft

Seow (2002) points out that, generally speaking, the writing process is made up of four intermingled and intertwined stages. They are planning, drafting, editing, and revising. However, later in his article he elaborates on these stages to include in each one of them other sub-stages or sub-components that pertain to it like brainstorming, clustering, freewriting, etc. Although Yan (2005) differs a little bit from Seow (2002) regarding the terminology he uses, he doesn't change the essence of the process approach stages. In fact, he also indicates four stages: "(1) prewriting, (2) composing/drafting, (3) revising, and (4) editing" (p. 19).

For Seow (2002), the pre-writing phase includes “any activity in the classroom that encourages students to write” (p. 316). Indeed, rather than suggesting a topic, giving students a blank page, and asking them to write, these prewriting activities aim to help learners get started with lowered inhibitions. The idea of introducing prewriting activities before actually indulging students in writing stems from some researchers' belief that one of the major reasons for writing problems is the inadequate and inappropriate preparation for the writing. Chastain (1988) expresses this concept in the following words: "Some of the problems students have in communicative writing, at least those over which the teacher has some control, stem from inadequate preparation for the writing assignment" (p. 253). This phase helps students collect some ideas and learn about some more details to use in the composition. "Prewriting activities," in Barnett's (1989) terms, "help students start their papers: they involve students with a composition topic, let them realize what might be included in their papers, help them work out rhetorical problems, or review or provide useful vocabulary" (p. 36).

In line with Seow’s (2002) and Barnett's (1989) views, Lindemann (2001) points out that “pre-writing refers to those activities that precede composing a draft” (p. 109). Although, Lindemann, here, does not directly mention how the prewriting activities relate to the act of writing, as Seow (2002) does, the activities that are,

according to her, involved in the pre-writing phase show a strong link with writing. Indeed, these activities “may involve reading, thinking, talking with others, as well as writing” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 108). Such activities, when preceding writing, may pave the students’ way to have a clearer view of the topic and therefore to get started more easily. That's why, according to Lindemann, some teachers prefer to call these activities, “invention” (p. 109) rather than prewriting. However, a lot of teachers try to avoid the term invention, and use “prewriting” instead, simply because they see it as a “Latinate term” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 109).

Historically speaking, during the 1960s, prewriting used to refer to three different kinds of writing: “journals, meditation, and analogy” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 109). These kinds of exploratory writing were, according to Lindemann, introduced and made popular by D. Gordon Rohman and Albert O. Wlecke. This meaning has been replaced by another meaning. In fact, prewriting nowadays refers to “a variety of strategies [that] writers use to generate and organize their material” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 109). Through this definition, Lindemann elucidates her own view of the function of prewriting activities. Indeed, according to her, they help learners to organize the ideas that they already have and to create new ideas about the topic.

## Prewriting Activities

### Brainstorming

One of the activities that is often included in the prewriting stage is brainstorming, which Lindemann (2001) defines as “an unstructured probing of a topic” (p. 112). For her, brainstorming is about anything that springs to mind during the first contact with a particular topic. For example, if students are to deal with an argumentative topic about the advantages and disadvantages of computers, they are likely, and entitled, to remember anything that relates positively or negatively to the computer. They might, for example, mention that a computer helps us know lots of things and solves many problems and they might as well remember that it might hurt the eyes and probably weaken the eyesight.

As a classroom activity, Gebhard (1996) defines brainstorming as the activity in which, "based on a topic of interest, students call out as many associations as possible while the teacher (or students) jot them down" (p. 227). This idea is further developed in Campbell's (1998) definition, as he considers that it is "a technique for

generating a pool of ideas in order to eventually select the most appropriate ideas for use in writing" (p. 81), which means that brainstorming is not or should not be an end in itself but a means functioning within a larger process. Raimes (1998) further confirms this idea when she notes that thanks to brainstorming we can have a set of ideas in front of us and, therefore, we can choose what to get rid of and what to keep for using in the following stages. Continuing with the topic about the advantages and disadvantages of computers, some students might suggest, in the brainstorming stage, details that are somehow irrelevant to the topic and the teacher might even write them on the board for the sake of encouraging the students' flow of ideas at the very beginning However, at the next stage these ideas might just be skipped and taken out of the topic outline.

In brainstorming, Seow (2002) points out that students have to be spontaneous as there is no such a thing as right or wrong answers at this stage. Students, therefore, have to be encouraged to have their say without judging their answers, since brainstorming, in the terms of Lindemann (2001), “allow[s] writers to venture whatever comes to mind about a subject, no matter how obvious or strange the ideas might be” (p. 112). However, Lindemann still recommends that students at a certain stage should be guided either directly or indirectly. Indeed, students often need to be encouraged to generate meaningful details that relate in some way or another to the topic discussed. Besides, the teacher may ask follow up questions by asking students about what they mean by some particular word or expression.

The purpose of brainstorming is neither to reach accurate information nor to make an exhaustive list that encompasses all the details needed for the drafting stage. The main purpose of this activity is to think about the topic in a free, open way exempt from the right and wrong restrictions and from the testwise orientations of the teacher's feedback to students' responses that often increase the students' inhibition. Brainstorming is simply to discover what a topic is related to or connected with in the students’ minds, no matter how strange this relation or connection might seem at first. That’s why Lindemann (2001) points out that students need to be honest at this stage in order to be able to look at the subject with frankness and openness and to try to “explore [it] thoroughly and discover what makes it interesting or important" (p. 112).

Furthermore, being a prewriting activity, brainstorming can be very effective in terms of peer-learning about the topic. Raimes (1998) concludes that being

"essentially a group activity, brainstorming allows us to share ideas, learn from others, and produce new ideas of our own" (p. 32). Raimes here hints at the interactive nature of brainstorming, and therefore adds a new functional scope to its roles. In other words, she states that while students brainstorm a topic collectively, first they benefit from one another's ideas, and second they generate new thoughts. Moreover, brainstorming puts the students in the mode of the topic and gets them to dig deeper into their own culture to discover their prior knowledge about the suggested topic.

The role of writing teachers in brainstorming a topic has to be twofold. First, they have to encourage students "to spew out ideas about the topic" (Seow, 2002, p. 316). That means encourage them to express whichever idea that knocks on the door of their minds. And second, teachers have to guide students into "generating useful details" (Lindemann, 2001, p. 112), In other words, try to direct their attention to specific ideas or expressions. These two functions might seem contradictory because the teacher's concentration on the "useful details" might hamper the flow of ideas and increase inhibition. However, digging deeper into these two functions might lead us to the conclusion that they are rather complementary, as the teacher encourages spontaneity of thinking and accepts all details on probably with a smile. At the same time, however, the teacher might ask about the meaning of a particular word or about the way it relates to the topic. The teacher can even ask students to be a bit more specific in order to "explore the subject thoroughly and discover what makes it interesting or important" (Lindemann, 2001, p. 112).

### Clustering

Clustering is yet another technique which aims to help learners "generate ideas for writing and begin to organize those ideas" (Campbell, 1998, p. 82). In this activity, students think of words that are related to a topic. In fact, "learners," in the terms of Campbell (1998), "are encouraged to think of as many ideas as possible that are relevant to a writing assignment, and thereafter to draw lines circling (or clustering) the ideas that seem to most closely relate to each other" (p. 82). In line with Campbell's view, Gebhard (1996) defines clustering in a classroom context as follows: "Using a key word placed in the centre of a page (or board), a student (or teacher) jots down all the free associations students give related to the word, clustering similar words" (p. 227). The key word that Gebhard mentions here has to

do with the central idea of the topic that the writer chooses to write about.

Seow (2002) points out that this activity is a "simple yet [a] powerful strategy" (p. 316). Indeed, it helps students to organize their ideas by means of associations. Lindemann (2001) even defines it in these terms, as she states that it is a process that helps students to "explore the organizational possibilities in their material" (p. 114). That is thanks to clustering students can have an overview of their subject and visualize the various possibilities of how to organize their writing. The main purpose of clustering is to bring order to disordered details. Put in other words, clustering is a first step forward in the direction of organizing a composition before it is actually written. For example, in responding to a topic asking students to write about their ideal house, students at the clustering stage might consider organizing their ideas on the basis of the components that make an ideal house to them. They might therefore consider grouping together some of their favorite furniture items. They might also gather together some of their desired architectural specifications. Finally, they can put in one category some of the options pertaining to the garden, the number and characteristics of the rooms, the swimming pool, and so on and so forth (see the diagram in Raimes, 1998, p. 35).

### Freewriting

Freewriting is another prewriting technique usually associated with the process approach. According to Lindemann (2001), this technique was "advocated by Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie" and it "offers students a risk-free way of getting words onto a page without having to worry about correctness" (p. 114). So the first characteristic of this technique is its openness to mistakes and errors. This feature was also echoed in Cohen and Miller's (2003) definition of freewriting. Indeed, according to them, it is "an unstructured writing task in which students can freely express their thoughts and share them with a partner, without worrying about grammar or spelling" (Introduction, p. v). The aim of this technique, according to Raimes (1998), is "to let ideas emerge freely and to let one idea suggest another on the page" (p. 32). Likewise, Lindemann (2001) points out that the "primary purpose [of freewriting] is to get something on paper" (p. 114). Therefore, while performing this activity, students are encouraged to write within the frame of a limited period of time without ever stopping to worry about how a word should be written, how a sentence should be constructed,

or how a paragraph should be organized (Raimes, 1998).

The only reason for which students can stop is, according to Gebhard (1998), "to read and consider what they wrote and write nonstop again" (p. 227). Indeed, Composition teachers often just ask students to freewrite for five minutes, ten minutes, or any other limited amount of time, about a specified or an unspecified topic. Seow (2002) notices that the time limit makes students' minds function in a faster way. Moreover, having to write continuously in a limited period of time lowers the students' inhibition and prompts them to get started quickly and without trying to get it right from the first time. Lindemann (2001) eloquently expresses this idea when she states that "freewriting encourages students to overcome their fears of the blank page and their stifling preoccupation with correctness" (p. 114). Campbell (1998) refers to freewriting as "a technique to encourage fluency" (p. 84) rather than accuracy, that is, a stage of writing wherein students can write whatever springs to mind about a topic.

Expectedly enough, a lot of students might find themselves in a situation where they do not find anything to say. In this case, students might write anything just to prevent stopping writing and to fill some time as they think of what to write next. Raimes (1998), even suggests that students write things along the lines of '"I'm stuck and I can't think of what to write next' or 'I wish I could think of something more interesting to say'" (p. 32). Or, they might just keep writing the same words, according to Raimes, until they get more ideas to write about.

This activity might be helpful in two ways. The first way is that, while practicing freewriting, students no longer put all their concentration on form and on the way the teacher wants them to write. On the contrary, they are busy thinking exclusively about what to write in order not to come to a closed road and get obliged to stop writing. So the focus in writing shifts to content. The second way freewriting might be helpful is that students learn that they do not have to bother about getting it right from the first time because, actually, it is nearly impossible to write perfectly from the first attempt even for professional writers, let alone fresh ESL learners. This principle might lower their inhibition and encourage them to get started quickly without too much concern about how to write.

Discussing

Discussing a topic before writing about it is one of the much applied pre-writing activities in ESL composition classrooms. Shi (1998) points out that "speaking activities like pre-writing discussions are popular in ESL writing classes" (p. 319). Indeed, it seems even commonsensical for writing teachers to enact a conversation about a topic before students get engaged in writing about it. It often becomes a necessity imposed by the classroom environment when some students start wondering about the potential components or elements of a topic by either asking their teacher or one another about, for example, what is meant by one of the key words of the topic. Process approach proponents and teachers who adopt process writing in their composition classes often include discussing even in their own definitions of this approach or put it at the beginning of their writing activities' list. Indeed, Tyson (2003) puts it at the top of his list encompassing possible writing assignment steps.

Nevertheless, how effective this activity is, in terms of improving the students' quality of writing, has been under discussion on the grounds that it has not been clearly evident that exchanging opinions about some issue would definitely lead students to write about it in a better style or way. According to Shi (1998), the problem is that while there is some research suggesting that discussing, as a prewriting activity, can help students write better, "none of these studies have tried to establish clearly how teacher-student interactions actually assist students' writing" (p. 319).

Researchers who think that conversation has a certain effect on writing fall, according to Shi (1998), into three groups. A first group has conducted empirical studies based on one type of talking that Shi calls "teacher-fronted talk" (p. 320). These studies, expectedly enough, came to the conclusion that, "when writing classes are teacher-centered, the majority of talk focuses on coaching and guidance" (p. 320). The weakness of such studies is, according to Shi, that they did not give enough attention to "students' reactions" (p. 320) to their instructors' oral instructions. A second group of studies has found out that the interactions between teachers and their students during writing conferences were helpful to students specifically in reviewing their essays. Indeed, Shi notes that, according to some studies, L2 writers who discussed meaning with their teachers made corrective modifications in their

following drafts. And a third group of studies has concentrated on peer-review groups and was different in terms of conclusions about the ways discussions between students might change writing. In fact, some studies have suggested that "students may need to be trained" (Shi, 1998, p. 321) in order to be able to give more useful feedback to one another, whereas others indicated, according to Shi, that "the student acting as the reader or the reviewer, mainly controlled the interactions while the writer was encouraged to articulate the intended meanings of the text" (p. 321). Nevertheless, most of the studies that tackled this issue overlooked discussing as a prewriting activity and how it influences writing.

Shi (1998) conducted a study of a group of adult ESL students in order to know the difference between the quality of writing done after teacher-led or peer-led discussions on the one hand, and the quality of writing done in conditions that lacked any sort of discussion. She asked the two following questions:

1. Is students' writing more effective after peer talk, teacher-led discussion, or no discussion?
2. How do verbal behaviors of participants in teacher-led and peer discussions, as indicated by the use of verbs, affect students' writing? (Shi, 1998, p. 324).

After conducting the study, Shi came to the conclusion that although prewriting discussions might not have instantaneous results on the students' grades, it "affected students' writing in terms of length of essays and use of vocabulary" (p. 339). Indeed, Shi concluded that students who went through prewriting discussions launched and guided by their teacher tended to write shorter drafts, students who attended peer talks before actually starting to write their compositions made more use of "verbs indicating mental processes" (p. 339), and students who wrote without going through prewriting discussions produced longer compositions and made more use of verbs signifying "status and possession" (p. 339).

### Multiple Drafting

Tyson (1999, p. 6) concisely summarizes the idea of multiple drafts, in relation to process writing, in the following words:

> It is the use of the multiple drafts which is perhaps the main identifying characteristic of the process approach. Rather than requiring students to try to

express their ideas perfectly on the first attempt (or the first “draft”), the process approach allows students to receive feedback from both instructor and other students and to revise and rewrite at least once or twice before submitting a “final draft” for a grade.

Multiple drafting is, therefore, a distinctive feature of the process approach because it shifts the focus of writing from attempting to write grammatically correct essays and trying to get it right from the first attempt to trying to "learn something about how to go about the very difficult task of producing a real piece of writing in a foreign language" (Tyson, 1999, p. 6).

The drafting stage starts with the first draft in which "writers take material previously gathered and organized and structure it into a linear piece of writing" (Shih, 1986, p. 629). Indeed, students start writing when they feel that it is the moment to put on paper the ideas that they have previously discussed, messily jotted down, and finally planned. Barnett (1989) is a bit different from Shih as to when to start writing the first draft, as he asserts, "Once the composition topic and/or organization has been introduced, the students begin writing their first draft" (p. 36). That is, for Barnett, students might start their writing journey without going through prewriting activities. On the contrary, they might just begin writing their first draft as soon as they are introduced to the topic.

When writing the first draft of an essay, six skills are needed, according to Shih (1986, pp. 629-630):

1. Applying processes that help students to write productively and to carry on writing; and having the ability to change the intended plan in case the writers find new thoughts.
2. Trying to check the writing development without falling into an anticipated process of editing which might delay or hamper the flow of writing.
3. "Having lexical/semantic knowledge and fluency-conveying intended meaning in words."
4. Having the abilities to properly join sentences together and to express the different types of relationships between ideas.
5. "Knowing discourse frames, conventions, and techniques" such as problem, purpose, and thesis statement.

6. Having a good knowledge of mechanics such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

At this stage, students should not bother too much about accuracy. Indeed, Seow (2002) points out that "at the drafting stage, the writers are focused on the fluency of writing and are not preoccupied with grammatical accuracy or the neatness of the draft" (p. 317). The preoccupation with fluency and self-expression rather than correctness and accuracy might, according to a lot of research, lead students to know what is going on while writing and to learn about the processes used by writers while trying to express themselves. Knowing these processes, students become more likely to improve in writing and above all to have their attitudes towards writing change.

Tyson (1999) points out that in Korea, composition teachers have basically adopted the traditional approach and that clearly affected the students' level of writing badly and drove them to boredom and frustration. As a matter of fact, many Korean university EFL students, according to Tyson, are unable to write a sound English paragraph, "let alone a longer essay, a business letter, or a research paper" (p. 1). This situation not only affects the students' attitudes towards writing but also makes the idea of teaching composition unattractive to teachers. Applying process-oriented activities such as writing in more than one draft, according to Tyson (1999), helps students "learn how to go about the very difficult task of producing a real piece of writing in a foreign language" (p. 6). Instead of asking students to express their ideas well in a single final draft, the process approach provides learners with a good chance to "receive feedback from both the instructor and other students and to revise and rewrite at least once or twice before submitting a 'final draft' for a grade" (p. 6). This way of teaching writing helps students to find out what they actually want to express and, according to Tyson, to dig deeper into their own ideas and make use of the feedback of their peers to clarify their own ideas that have probably been vaguely expressed in earlier drafts.

Tyson (1999) points out that applying the multiple-drafting feature of the process approach positively affects the final product in terms of content as well as in terms of such domains as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. In fact, although the major focus in the process approach is on the process, the final product is also given much attention and is likely to be well written, that is, even better than an essay written traditionally with an exclusive emphasis on the final product through a single

draft. After applying this approach in a Korean university for one term, Tyson's students showed deep interest in correcting their errors and an appreciation of their essays being improved from one draft to another through peer and teacher reviewing and editing. One of the students expressed her new attitudes in the following words:

> To find faults in my writing is one of the most interesting things in this class as well as the most useful. I appreciated the opportunity of correcting my errors. Through it I felt my writing improving and gaining better structure and grammar. I learned writing is a course completed through correcting. And in writing again I could express my opinion more exactly. (p. 6)

Types of Feedback in the Process Approach

Giving efficient feedback is, according to Hyland (1998), "a central concern for any teacher of writing and an important area for both L1 and L2 writing research" (p. 255). However, this concern is realized differently in teachers' behavior in composition classrooms depending on the approach that they choose to adopt. One of the most prominent features of the process approach is the kind of feedback that its users try to provide for their students. Indeed, contrary to feedback in the product approach that focuses exclusively on the grammaticality and correctness of the writing, that is, on form, process approach feedback focuses more, especially at early stages, on content and organization. Besides, the process approach allows for feedback from more than one stream as it targets more than the traditional audience, i.e., the teacher. In fact, it also allows for feedback from classmates as another sort of audience allowed to read, review, and even give feedback.

Gunn and Raven (2005) ask, "Is teacher feedback useful?" (p. 265). Researchers have different views as to how effective and helpful teachers' feedback is. Indeed, some researchers believe that the teacher's feedback and the possibility of reviewing compositions are fundamental to the students' writing skill development, as they argue that new writers really need to be guided by their teacher's remarks and comments on the contents and the ideas they include in their written works (Matsumura, Patthey-Chavez, Valdes, & Garnier, 2002). Some others, however, are not sure about the nature of the effect of the teacher's feedback on the development of students' writing. Paulus (1999), for example, points out that even though instructors' and students' feedback, along with reviews, are regular elements of the process-writing composition classroom, the influence that the feedback and revision processes

has on the development of student writing is up to now uncertain.

One of the ways of weighing the value of the teacher's feedback is to investigate how students value it and use it in improving their writing from one draft to another. Gunn and Raven (2005) have recently examined this issue in the context of the American University of Sharjah (AUS) by distributing a 13-question survey to more than 450 AUS students. They concluded that "it is very clear that feedback was valued by students" (p. 268). Another recent study was conducted by Weaver (2006) in the faculties of Business and Art & Design in Nottingham Trend University in the United Kingdom. 44 students were surveyed and interviewed. After data analysis, Weaver (2006) came to the conclusion that "students wholeheartedly recognize the value of feedback in improving their learning" although their responses indicated that "feedback is not as effective as it could be" (p. 390). As a matter of fact, Weaver emphasizes that survey findings showed that, first, students needed some guidance as to how to make the best use of feedback, and second, composition teachers needed to avoid comments that were "too general or vague" and feedback that "lacked guidance, focused on the negative, or were unrelated to assessment criteria" (p. 379).

Ashwell (2000) points out that proponents of the process approach in second language writing have made a variety of propositions about the optimal way instructors can respond to their students' writing. One of these proposals, according to Ashwell, is that "teachers should attend to content in preliminary drafts before switching to focus on form in later drafts" (p. 227). This view may be, along with the multiple drafting, a distinctive feature of the process approach as it plays a major role in lowering the students' inhibition and encouraging them to get started with the assumption that they do not have to care much about accuracy issues at early stages and that they have to be concerned exclusively with expressing their own ideas. Ferris and Hedgcock (1998), although they consider it is necessary to respond to grammatical mistakes, still agree that such action should be taken in later drafts.

The point in delaying feedback on grammatical errors may be not to fall into the trap of horrifying students from the very beginning with the red pen scratching roughly nearly every sentence and every word of their compositions. As a matter of fact, doing that would be interpreted by students just as special emphasis on the part of the teacher on form and grammatical accuracy rather than on content and organization. This emphasis, in turn, might increase inhibition and make it a hard task

to break the ice and get started in writing. On the contrary, commenting on content and ideas at earlier stages of writing is likely to help students dig deeper into their own thoughts and discover what they might really want to say.

Nevertheless, the instructor's feedback is not the only kind of feedback that students get. Indeed, they might also get useful feedback from their peers. That is why Paulus (1999) asserts that "peer review is now commonplace as one part of the feedback and revision process of ESL writing classes" (p. 267). Peer feedback and its usefulness to students have often been under study and research. Paulus (1999), for example, examined the issue of whether students "use the peer feedback in their revisions" (p. 268). He conducted a study with 11 students registered in a pre-freshman writing course and came to the conclusion that composition teachers can safely incorporate peer feedback into the writing classroom with confidence that this feedback can be both useful and helpful to a lot of students in their revisions. This result was confirmed by Tsui and Ng (2000). They conducted a study based on surveys and interviews with 27 secondary school students studying in Hong Kong, and they also came to conclude that other students played "important roles…in providing feedback to their peers' writing" (p. 167), and that even teacher feedback could not take the place of the students' comments. Tsui and Ng (2000) point out that "peer comments take students away from individualized learning to collaborative learning in which the teacher is not the only source of knowledge" (p. 168). That is, students might learn from one another as much as they might learn from their teacher who has now become one of the multiple sources of knowledge for the students.

## Conclusion

Overall, the literature reviewed shows that some of the features of the product approach, especially the version adopted in the UAE, might be at the root of a lot of writing problems that many students in this part of the world suffer from. These problems might be responsible for students' negative attitudes towards writing. Moreover, some of the features of the process approach look as though they might help in overcoming these difficulties and in improving these attitudes

# Chapter 3
# Methodology

## Design of the Study

The central question in this research study is whether adopting some process-approach associated activities can change students' attitudes towards writing. However, before addressing it, this study had to investigate what the students' initial attitudes towards writing were in order to see if the adoption of process writing would bring about any sort of change in attitudes.

For the sake of triangulation, three sources of data were used. First, a pre-course survey investigating the students' initial attitudes towards writing was administered to two groups of students, an experimental group and a control group altogether made up of 49 pupils. A post-course survey was administered to the same participants. These two surveys were designed to gather twofold comparative data, between students of the two groups before and after the writing course on the one hand, and between the experimental group students' attitudes before and after having the course. Second, ongoing informal interviews were conducted with either a whole class, or with small groups of students, depending on the aim of the interview. Third, and finally, a writing journal was kept to notice students' behavior and development throughout the writing course.

## The Participants

For the sake of having more comparative authentic data, I decided to involve two classes in my study, an experimental group made up of 24 students, and a control group made up of 25 students. All the participants were boys as the school I am currently working in is a single-sex educational institution, and due to my job duties, it was not possible for me to visit female schools during my working hours to have girls as other possible participants. The age range of these boys was between 15 and 17, and all of them started studying English roughly from grade one in primary school.

## The Setting

The whole research was conducted in "Shafe'y School for Basic Education" in Dubai. It is a single-sex school of Around 500 male students from various Arabic countries such as Yemen, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, however, the majority of them are from the United Arab Emirates. All students, then, speak Arabic although not the standard Arabic. At home, most of them speak the dialect of their countries, but at school, the local dialect is the dominant language. The majority of students have started studying English either from kindergarten level or from the primary school, grade one. Therefore, grade 9 students should have studied English for at least 9 years.

The official English book used in Shafe'y School is the one designed by the Ministry of Education, *English for the Emirates.* It is made up of two parts, the Pupil's Book which contains lessons developing the four different skills, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking; and the Workbook which is made up of various exercises and activities usually consolidating or elaborating on Pupil's Book lessons.

## The Instruments

### Surveys

A twenty-item survey was used as the main quantitative tool of collecting data. It was designed over two stages. For my pilot study completed in the first term, the survey was made up of 10 items and then I learned with the help of my committee members that the survey did not cover all the areas of research, so I designed another survey made up of twenty statements which was more comprehensive and more inclusive (see Appendix A). For fear students would misunderstand any of the statements, I translated the whole contents of the survey into Arabic with the assistance of a graduate student in translation, Gihane Sadek (see Appendix B). In addition, I tried to make it clear to all students that the aim of the survey was to give feedback to the Ministry of Education on how students would see this method of teaching writing in order to urge them to respond honestly to it. I also made it clear that no matter how they responded to the survey it would in no way affect their grades.

This survey was given to both my students and the control group at the beginning and end of a six-week writing course. In my course, the students were

introduced to some process-approach associated activities. The control group was taught by another teacher in the traditional way. At the beginning of the course, the survey aimed at measuring both groups' initial attitudes towards writing, and at the end of the course, the survey was meant to notice the change, if there would be any, of the experimental group's attitudes especially in comparison with the control group's attitudes.

Interviews and Journals

Interviews were conducted every writing session in two different ways. At the end of each period, I would either ask a group of at least four students to stay in class after their classmates had left for another class. I asked them, for example, about a specific thing that I noticed during the session. Or I would sometimes just keep the whole class, with the permission of my colleague, for an extra five or ten minutes to have their general impression about a particular activity that we had carried out during that session. For instance, in the session that followed the administration of the surveys, I asked a specific group of students to remain in class to clarify some of their responses, whereas when students practiced brainstorming, clustering, drafting, etc, I would usually try to get some feedback from the whole class.

In interviews, I spoke both in English and in Arabic. I would start by asking my question in English. If I felt that students did not understand, I would paraphrase it in different simple ways. The following questions, which I asked at the end of a session in which students brainstormed on the first topic, clarify this point: How do you find brainstorming? Did you do this activity before? Do you find it useful? Do you think it will help you in writing? How do you think it will help you? If a particular question was not clear, students would usually ask for more clarification or translation. However, most of the time students responded in Arabic and I didn't object to it. On the contrary, I sometimes encouraged them to express themselves in Arabic.

The journal notes went in tandem with interviews. In fact, they were taken in two ways. The first was while giving the lesson and the second was just after it. As for the first, I would write my comments either in a copybook or on sheets of papers that were available on my desk. Indeed, afraid of forgetting about any important remark, comments, or a specific behavior, I would immediately take notes.

Afterwards, I would look into those notes and organize them in a folder entitled, “My Thesis Data.” In this journal, I sometimes wrote even what students said confidentially to one another without intending to let me know what they said. The second kind of journal that I also kept was my own reflections after the end of each session. I would write about anything that worked during the session and anything that did not work. My main question when writing this journal was, “ How did students react to today’s activities?”

## The Course

As was pointed out earlier, the aim of the course was to introduce some activities usually associated with the process approach during a six week writing course that met two periods a week to see how these activities would affect students’ attitudes. Before actually starting the course, I administered the survey to two classes, the class that I was giving the writing course to, and another class taught by a colleague who uses the traditional approach in his writing classes.

The writing course was started with a PowerPoint presentation that tried to introduce in a brief and simple way some aspects of the process approach, such as prewriting activities, multiple drafting, and peer-review. Students, at this stage kept asking the following question: “Are we going to finish all these activities in one period?” Their question clearly stems from their habit of writing under timed conditions. More specifically, writing an essay, as they conceived of it, should not go beyond a part of a period. I explained then that we were going to work on two topics throughout the six weeks and that they would see all those concepts in practice.

During the next writing session, I asked students to suggest some topics that they would like to write about. They suggested a few topics, and I suggested some others and wrote all of them on the blackboard. At the end, they chose two topics by a majority vote. The first was writing a letter to a pen friend to introduce oneself, and the second was writing a composition about the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones. The following section will clarify the way I dealt with topic one, as an example of the way I used the process approach throughout the writing course.

Topic One: “Write a letter to your pen-friend, Rex, from Australia, introduce yourself to him, and invite him to your country”

From my personal experience teaching in UAE schools, I got the idea that students love to write about themselves, and would especially enjoy writing a letter to a pen friend. During the first week of dealing with this topic, students worked on the following two main stages: (1) discussing, brainstorming, and clustering as the prewriting stages, and (2) writing the first draft as the second stage. The first two activities were conducted collectively. All students participated, as they were convinced that there was no right or wrong answers in these stages. Students were given handouts containing spider grams to fill in with any words that they thought were related to the topic (see Appendix H).

When clustering, students got into five groups of four or five. I asked them to try to discuss their opinions in English, and I walked from one group to another to help in case of difficulties. I also asked everybody to participate and to understand what was going on in his group since the following period would be drafting, and that meant everyone would work alone and rely on himself. Actually, I divided the groups with strong and weak students evenly distributed among them in order for the weak students to benefit from the strong ones. During the following period, every student used his own notes to write his own letter to a pen pal.

The following week, students had their first experience of reading one another’s compositions. In order to direct their attention to what to concentrate on while reading, I gave them a simple checklist to tick what was missing in the letter (see Appendix I). During that session, in small groups, students exchanged papers and completed the checklists. After that they stapled the two sheets together and passed them on to double check another already peer-reviewed letter, to read and see whether the checklist contained any inaccurate or wrong information.

Relying on the peer-review checklist remarks, students wrote their second draft trying to add the information missing from their first draft. At this stage, students worked individually to achieve two consecutive goals. The first was to see what was checked as missing and to make sure that it was really missing, and the second was to see how to incorporate the missing information within the whole letter in a rather smooth and logical way as I recommended them to do. Furthermore, I permitted them to bring new ideas into their second draft. That is to say, I explained to them that they

did not necessarily have to completely stick to the contents of the first draft. This permission was meant to encourage them to think about the topics they were working on even outside class.

At the end of that session, I collected the papers and corrected them. I gave comments especially on their contents and ideas and on the possible ways of expressing them in a clearer or better way. In addition, I highlighted some of their grammatical and spelling mistakes which made the meaning vague or wrong. I also made some of these mistakes a subject for the following session's warming up, without mentioning whose mistakes they were. During the following session, students were asked to take my remarks into consideration while writing their final drafts. Finally, the first, second, and third drafts were stapled together and submitted to me for grading. While grading them, I tried to bear in mind the process that was deployed by the student to come up with that final draft.

The last session of the first topic was devoted to reading the final drafts in groups in order for each group to select one of the compositions to be published in the wall magazine which was designed and named by students, *Shafe'y Magazine*. In fact, at the beginning of the course, it was planned that the selected topics would be published in a school magazine called *Shafe'y School*; however, for various reasons, the school administration could not publish it. Instead, a wall magazine was designed by the school's English Club. One paper from each group was chosen by students and put in a file attached to the blackboard. Each writing session, students took turns in small groups to read the published works. Furthermore, students from other groups and other levels also had the opportunity to read them when they had class in the English room.

Overall, what I applied in the writing course were some of the features that I thought were associated with process-writing. However, the process approach could definitely be approached differently depending on students' needs and wishes.

# Chapter 4

# Findings

Three sources of data were used in order to investigate whether or not applying process-approach associated activities in a writing classroom would change high school students' attitudes towards writing. The first of these sources included two surveys that I carried out at the beginning and end of the study with two groups of students, an experimental group and a control group. The second source of data included informal interviews that I conducted with groups of students at the end of each writing session. The third source of data was my own journal that I kept throughout the course. Data from these sources have been gathered, categorized, and analyzed in this chapter.

## Impacts of the Traditional Approach

A lot of research suggests that the product approach is at the root of many of the difficulties that students suffer from in writing and that these difficulties deeply affect students' attitudes and make writing in a second language, according to Tessema (2005), "an uphill struggle for most students" (p. 22). This causes many students to "experience a lack of motivation" (p. 22) vis-à-vis this skill.
Did the product approach have this same impact on the participants in my research study?

There were ten items on the survey designed to investigate the students' opinions about writing (see Table 1). The first striking result that was revealed

Table 1. Impacts of the Traditional Approach (N=49)

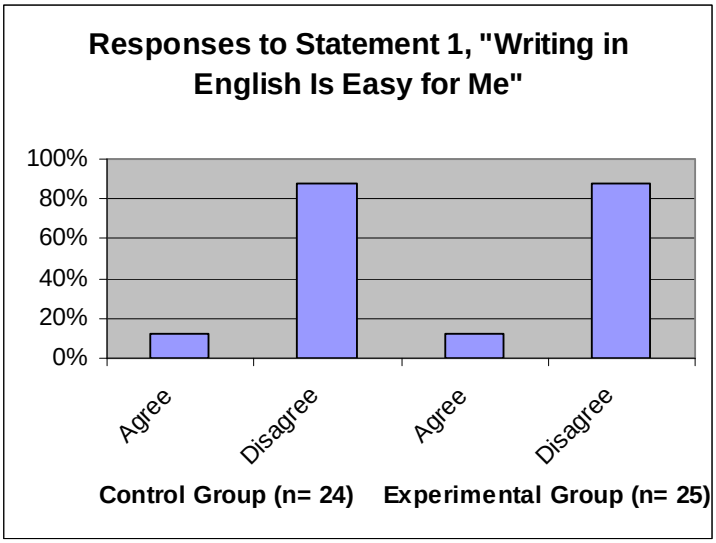
| | Control Group (n= 24) | | Experimental Group (n= 25) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Statements | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree |
| 1. Writing in English is easy for me. | 3 (13%) | 21 (88%) | 3 (13%) | 22 (88%) |
| 4. My main concern when I write is not to make grammar mistakes. | 22 (91%) | 2 (8%) | 23 (92%) | 2 (8%) |
| 9. I like writing in English. | 8 (33%) | 16 (67%) | 8 (32%) | 17 (68%) |
| 11. Getting a good grade is my main concern when I write. | 22 (92%) | 2 (8%) | 25 (100%) | 0 (0%) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. The best way to learn to write well in English is to memorize compositions from my textbook. | 22 (91%) | 2 (8%) | 21 (84%) | 4 (16%) |
| 13. I learn better when my teacher corrects all my grammatical and spelling mistakes. | 23 (96%) | 1 (4%) | 24 (96%) | 1 (4%) |
| 14. I don't need to express my own ideas in a composition. | 20 (83%) | 4 (16%) | 20 (80%) | 5 (20%) |
| 16. I don't care if I make grammar and spelling mistakes in my compositions. | 2 (8%) | 22 (92%) | 2 (8%) | 22 (88%) |
| 18. Grammatical correctness is more important than expressing my own ideas. | 21 (88%) | 3 (13%) | 21 (84%) | 4 (16%) |
| 19. I like the way I have been taught writing so far. | 16 (67%) | 8 (33%) | 18 (72%) | 7 (28%) |

Note: One student of the Experimental Group did not respond to question 16.

by the pre-course survey was that 88% of the control group and 88% of the experimental group responded that they did not find writing in English an easy task when responding to statement 1, "Writing in English is not easy for me" (see Figure 1 below). Interviews with three groups of four students provided two important explanations for that. First, more than half of the students interviewed said they did not actually know how to go about writing. One of the students even summarized their actual classroom writing activities in three major steps: "We try to write, some of us read what they write, then the teacher writes the essay on the blackboard and then we copy it in our workbooks." Second, more than half of the students explained their response to statement 1 by saying that they believed writing well is mainly based on memorization and that they were not keen on learning by rote. The overwhelming majority of both groups thought at the beginning of the course that memorizing compositions was the best way to learn to write well. "What I memorize on the very morning of the exam day I forget during the test time," said one of the students to explain his memorization difficulties. Another student complained, "The difficulty lies not only in memorizing the general content of the composition but also the way its words are spelled and its sentences are organized."

Figure 2. Students' Response to Statement 1, “Writing in English Is Easy for Me"




In response to my question, "How can memorization be the best way to learn to write well?" one student gave me a concise explanation: "To write well is to get a full mark, and the best way to get such a mark is to memorize." Another student had another response but not very different from this one. He stated that when he memorizes an essay he “gets on the safe side.” That is he can be sure of having a good grade, whereas when he does not memorize, he is likely not to be able to write anything about the topic. In my journal, I jotted down the following observation that one of the students made to the class after writing his first draft: "Oh my god, I have written too much, how am I going to memorize all this?"

To dig deeper into this issue, I included statements in the survey scrutinizing the students' concerns while writing and I came up with further explanations for the reason that students find writing in English a very hard task. The first of these concerns, as revealed by responses to statement 4, was grammar and spelling. Indeed, more than 90% of both groups agreed that their main concern when they write is not to make grammar mistakes. The response to statement 16, "I don't care if I make grammar and spelling mistakes in my compositions," even further confirmed the validity of this major concern. In response to the statement, 92% of the control group and 88% of the experimental group disagreed.

Furthermore, I noticed through some informal interviews that I conducted with some strong students and some weak ones that the stronger students cared more about

grammar and spelling than the weaker ones. They accounted for such an interest by giving at least two reasons. First, and expectedly enough, they believed that grammar mistakes can be decisive in determining their grade, so this made it a field of competition that can create the difference between good and bad students. For example, they mentioned that if two students write on the same content, what will make one's grade better/worse than the other's grade is the existence, or otherwise, of grammatical and spelling mistakes. For this reason good students tend to be very much concerned about their grammar and spelling. Second, as one student explained to me, "It's humiliating to have my paper full of mistakes. What will I tell my father when I give him the exam paper to sign?"

Another striking result showing the students' deep concern about grammar and spelling was disclosed by the students' responses to the open-ended question at the end of the survey, "What do you think are your main problems in writing in English?" 38 out of the 49 students responded to this question. Of these 38 respondents, 35 reported having spelling or grammar as their major concern when they write. The word “spelling” (students often wrote it “spilling”), either in English or in Arabic, was repeated 39 times. These results are perhaps very indicative of the huge focus that the traditional approach puts on form, namely on grammar and spelling.

The problem with this concern is that it seems to have dominated some other reasonable concerns when writing. For instance, in response to statement 18, 84% of the experimental group and 88% of the control group acknowledged that grammatical correctness was for them more important than expressing their own ideas. When I asked two groups of four students for an explanation to this response, nearly all of them attributed it to the fact that expressing their own ideas "might lead nowhere," as one of the students said, and that this was not necessarily conducive to getting good grades, whereas writing correctly is likely to lead any student to have a full mark.

This concern about grammatical correctness is made even more impressive by the students' response to statement 14, “I don’t need to express my own ideas in a composition.” Indeed, 80% of the experimental group and 84% of the control group felt that there is no need for them at all to express their own ideas in their essays. Although this response was a bit surprising to me, it was not very unexpected. On the one hand, students seemed to be obsessed by the idea of pleasing their teacher to have a good mark, and the safest pathway that could, according to them, lead to that end

was to write what they think the teacher wants them to write rather than to express their own ideas. In my journal, I noted that a lot of students asked me, while drafting, to read what they wrote roughly after writing each one or two lines. I felt that they were scared of going off of the right track. On the other hand, the students' major concentration was on how to write correctly in terms of spelling and grammar rather than on expressing their own ideas. Again I noted in my own journal that during the first writing classes, the students' most frequently asked questions were "How do we spell the word…?", "Can you please write the word…on the blackboard?" or "Is it grammatically correct to say…?" Such questions brought to my attention the fact that none of the students ever tried to discuss or share any idea about content with me.

Even in terms of learning, a majority, as big as 96% of both groups, believed that they learn better when their teacher corrects all their grammatical and spelling mistakes (see statement 13). When I interviewed two small groups of students from each group about why they thought they learn better by having all their grammatical and spelling mistakes corrected, one of them replied, "I learn the right way of spelling and ordering words." Some other students nodded their heads and said "yes" to express agreement with him. This testimony might give us insight into, first, the kind of feedback that students are receiving in writing and, second, the intertwined relationship between writing as a skill in its own right and other aspects of language learning like spelling and grammar. Indeed, I noticed that some students felt that the main purpose of writing is to learn grammar and spelling.

Grades were another major concern that was revealed by the survey and confirmed by all the qualitative data. 100% of the experimental group and 92% of the control group agreed that getting a good grade is their main concern when they write. I observed that a lot of students laughed while responding to this question. Some of them explained their reaction by the fact that it normally goes without saying that grades should be their main concern. One student even made the following offending comment: "It's a stupid statement!" He explained that it is so evident that it should not have been put into the survey. This reaction is somewhat predictable for more than one reason. Firstly, the pressure that parents exert on their children makes students worried about their marks. Secondly, the traditional approach adopted in UAE schools gives students a chance to write only one draft and to submit it for grading. Besides, the grades that students get will be considered as final grades. Therefore, if the grade

is low they will not have a chance to write again to improve it. For these reasons, perhaps most students felt that it was unnecessary to include a statement checking attitudes about grades.

The two students who responded differently to this statement explained their response also in different ways. The first student interviewed said that he did not care about grades whether in writing or in any other subject. He stated that his major concern rather was to learn regardless of whether he got low or high grades. To check the credibility of his response, I referred to his school record and found out that he was a dedicated $A^+$ student.

Unexpectedly enough, the second student asserted that his main concern was to be able to write well. He even said to me, "There's no point in getting a good grade if I am not able to write well." This student was average, yet, it seems that he could understand the contrast underlying this statement and responded accordingly. Put in other words, it seems that he thought along the lines of "what other concern can I have apart from grades," and he came up with writing well as being a nobler and probably a more reasonable concern. He made the following short remark at the end of our short conference: "Thinking of how to write well is more significant than thinking about grades." Nevertheless, these two students made up only 8% of the total number of the responding students, which clearly shows that the overwhelming majority had grades as their major concern.

As a result of the above mentioned problems and concerns, roughly one-third of the students in each group said that they liked writing in English, whereas about two-thirds of them admitted that they did not like it when responding to statement 9. This was an expected result because students normally find writing difficult, and they are usually asked to do it under all sorts of pressures and concerns. In answer to the question "Why don't you like writing?" 10 out of 12 students interviewed stated that they find it very difficult. One student said simply, "I don't know how to write." Another student said, "It's boring. I prefer discussing issues to writing about them."

To my great surprise, in spite of these problems and difficulties more than two-thirds of the respondents expressed their contentment with the way they were taught writing at the beginning of the course when responding to statement 19, “I like the way I have been taught writing so far.” However, this mystery was to some extent demystified by interviewing 12 students about their apparently mismatching

responses. All the students interviewed admitted that they did not know any other way of teaching writing to compare it with the way they were actually being taught. Moreover, I wrote the following notes in my journal on the very first day of the course:

> Today, I asked students to describe the way they have been taught writing so far. They tried to describe it to me collectively; i.e., a lot of students contributed to the description…. "Do you know any other ways of teaching writing?" I asked and a unanimous no was the answer. (March12, 2006).

Overall, it seems that the traditional approach had a very deep impact on the students' writing attitudes. This impact made the great majority of the students almost totally concerned about grammar, spelling, and grades when writing regardless of whether or not what they are writing expresses their own ideas and thoughts. They came to develop a point of view that classroom writing has to be at the service of grammar and spelling, which they thought were more important than expressing their own ideas. These attitudes made the overwhelming majority think that writing is not easy and, therefore, most of the respondents disliked writing in English.

### Pre-course Attitudes towards Process Writing Activities

To investigate the students' attitudes towards some process-approach associated activities including multiple drafting, pre-writing activities, Teacher's and peer feedback, and publication before the course, I included 10 statements in the survey (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Initial Attitudes towards Process-Approach Associated Activities

| | Control Group (n= 24) | | Experimental Group (n= 25) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Statements | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree |
| 2. There's no need to write more than one draft of a composition. | 19 (79%) | 5 (20%) | 21 (84%) | 4 (16%) |
| 3. It is useful to collect ideas about the topic and to organize them before actually starting to write | 21 (88%) | 3 (13%) | 22 (88%) | 3 (12%) |
| 5. I like to read my classmates' essays. | 4 (17%) | 20 (83%) | 4 (16%) | 21 (84%) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. I like to have my essays read by my classmates. | 3 (12%) | 21 (88%) | 3 (12%) | 22 (88%) |
| 7. I read my essays again after they are graded by my teacher | 3 (12%) | 21 (88%) | 2 (8%) | 23 (92%) |
| 8. I use my teacher's comments on my compositions to improve my writing. | 18 (75%) | 6 (25%) | 19 (76%) | 6 (24%) |
| 10. I like to see my essays published in the School Magazine. | 15 (63%) | 9 (38%) | 16 (64%) | 9 (36%) |
| 15. I like to read my teacher's comments on my compositions. | 18 (75%) | 6 (25%) | 19 (76%) | 6 (24%) |
| 17. I like to choose my own topics when I write. | 23 (96%) | 1 (4%) | 24 (96%) | 1 (4%) |
| 20. I can write about any topic the teacher suggests (not only about workbook topics). | 5 (21%) | 19 (79%) | 5 (20%) | 20 (80%) |

Attitudes towards Multiple Drafting

One of the main features of the process approach is multiple drafting. Indeed, Tyson (1999) points out that this is perhaps the main defining feature of process writing. Nevertheless, in response to statement 2 on the pre-course survey, around 80% of each group agreed that there is no need to write more than one draft of an essay. This result may seem surprising; however, by looking at previous findings, we might say that it was a predictable response. It is, indeed, in harmony with the fact that an overwhelming majority of the students thought that the best way to learn to write well was by rote learning of essays. In addition, this attitude, which conceives of writing as a mechanical activity, might be in clear contradiction with the idea behind process writing which seeks to enable writers to express themselves.

Twelve students were divided into three groups and interviewed consecutively about their responses to this and other statements on the survey. Three students said that their response was due to the fact that writing was usually included in a test comprising other long activities, which means, according to them, that there was not enough time to write more than one draft. Therefore, the time factor here entered into play to prevent them from even thinking of writing more than one draft. The rest of the students interviewed emphasized that they express all of their ideas in the first

draft so that there was no real need for, in the terms of one of them, “writing the same thing twice”

One of the notes in my daily journal during the course confirms this view. It briefly describes how students, at the beginning of the course, got fed up with having to write a second draft. One student even refused to write at the beginning, complaining, “it’s boring, sir!” That attitude was, according to my own interpretation, due to the fact that students had not been used to writing in that way. In fact, they were used to writing once, getting a mark, and that was the end of the process.

Attitudes towards the Different Types of Feedback

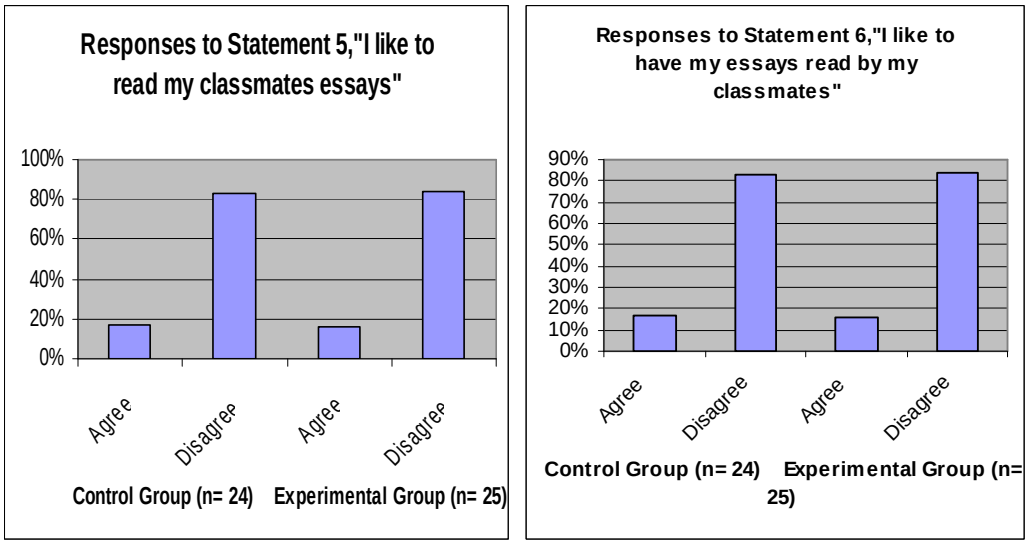
It appears that due to this attitude towards multiple drafting, in response to statement 7, 92% of the experimental group and 88% of the control group admitted that they did not even read their essays after being graded, let alone modify or improve them. It looks like grades for them were the end of the writing continuum and, for the majority of the responding students, all the activities that might follow were generally not considered useful. Nevertheless, about three-fourths of these respondents agreed that they used their teacher’s feedback to improve their writing (see statement 8). Furthermore, nearly the same percentage of both groups agreed that they liked to read their teacher’s comments on their compositions (see statement 15).

This response, perhaps, has two interpretations. Firstly, some students may have been truly eager to see what their teacher wrote on their papers, they definitely read their instructor’s comments, which mainly pertained to grammar and spelling, and probably tried to take some of them into consideration when writing another composition. However, this response might as well have been partly prompted by many other students’ misleading feeling that it was the response that I personally expected, in spite of my assertions over and over again that they were free to respond in the way they would like. In other words, many students may have still insisted on showing me through that specific response that they cared about their teacher’s feedback and that they even used it actively in their future writings. I could come to this latter conclusion by one student’s, unintentional remark: “Teachers usually like students who read their comments and don’t make the same mistakes when they write in the future.”

Attitudes towards Peer Review

One of the subsequent activities that proved to be pretty much unwanted by most students was peer reading. As a matter of fact, in response to statements 5 and 6, the survey revealed that a clear majority did not like reading their peers' compositions and did not like to have their compositions read by them (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Attitudes towards Peer Reading




When I interviewed some students informally about this specific point, the majority of them pointed out that there was no point in reading their classmates' compositions. One of the students interviewed even said smilingly, "I know what everyone would write. Instead of reading any of my friends' essays, I can just read the original essay in my workbook." Actually, I noticed that memorization-based writings made reading any other students' compositions look useless. Moreover, the fact that students did not practice this activity before might have made them unable to appreciate its usefulness; on the contrary, it made them look at it as "a waste of time."

Attitudes towards Prewriting Activities

The students' attitudes towards prewriting activities were examined through survey statement 3, "It is useful to collect ideas about the topic and to organize them before actually starting to write," along with some follow-up questions and journal

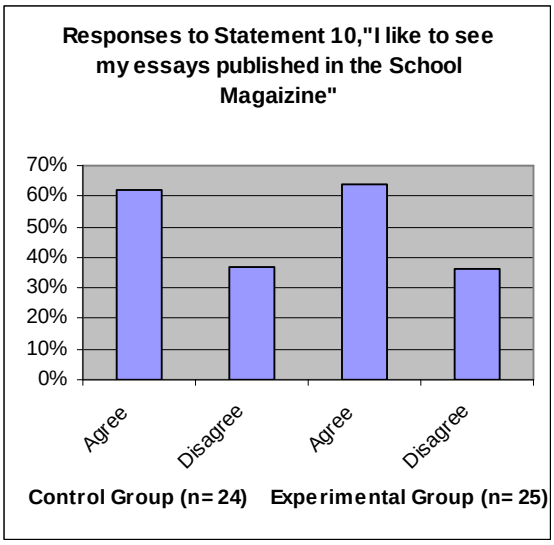
notes. One of the discrepancies that this statement revealed was an apparent contradiction between survey results and interview results. As for survey results, they uncovered a clear appreciation of the activities that precede writing since a majority of nearly 90% of both groups confirmed the usefulness of prewriting activities.

Nevertheless, when three groups of students were asked about what types of activities they usually do before writing they stated that they scarcely did any, and when they did it was only discussion about the topic. For example, one student said, "I like discussing any topic before writing about it because it puts me on the right track and I don't get afraid of writing an off-topic essay." "At least we know the main points we will be dealing with," was a remark that another student made about prewriting discussions. In answer to the question, "What other activities do you think may also be useful before writing?" most of the students just expressed that they needed more guidance and more help from their teacher. Moreover, when asked whether such words as brainstorming, outlining, or clustering made any sense to them, they all answered negatively. I noted in my journal at the time, "Students could not actually suggest specific activities, maybe because they didn't practice any."

### Students' Attitudes towards Publishing

Statement 10, "I like to see my work published in the School Magazine," was meant to examine the students' initial attitudes towards publishing their works in a school magazine, whether a wall magazine or a regularly published school magazine. Students from both groups were divided on this question with a small majority of them for publishing (see Figure 4). More accurately speaking, slightly over 60% of both groups were in favor of publishing their work, against just under 40% who were against it. I then chose a group of students whose response was for publishing and another group who disagreed with the idea of publishing to interview in order to see what lay behind their responses.

Figure 4. Attitudes towards Publishing




The respondents who were for publishing actually praised it. They stated that it is a very interesting experience to see what you write published anywhere. However, those were generally the above average students in English and they wanted to raise their self-esteem by boasting that their essays were chosen for publishing over others.

On the other hand, those who disagreed with the idea of publishing their works expressed their fear and inhibition of having their essays potentially read by everybody. One of the students interviewed had this to say: “They will laugh at what I write…. I don’t write well, and I don’t want anyone to laugh at what I write.” This feeling made some sense to me, as some students might take advantage of any error made by the students whose essays were published, or even some personal information from the composition, to make fun of them. Besides, this response seems to go hand in hand with the majority of the students’ disagreement with the idea of reading other students’ work or having their essays read by other students, although their dislike for peer-reading was more unanimous.

Overall, both the survey and the interviews, along with data from my journal, revealed that students from both the experimental and the control groups seemed to have rather negative attitudes towards writing. The question now is, “Can introducing some process-approach associated activities change some of these attitudes?”

## Post-Course Attitudes

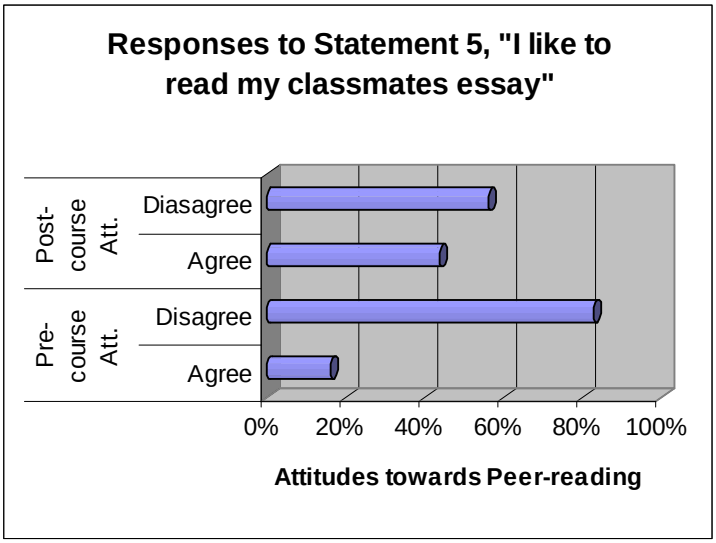
After the six week course, I surveyed and interviewed both groups again to see what happened, and I found some important differences between the two groups. As a matter of fact, although both group showed different types of changes, ranging from minor changes to major ones, the experimental group showed more comprehensive change of attitudes.

## The Control Group

### Major Changes in Attitudes

Although the control group was not introduced to any process-oriented activities, it turned that two of their attitudes underwent some serious changes compared to their initial attitudes. The first of these attention-grabbing changes was the students' attitudes towards peer-reading (see complete responses to the post-course survey in Appendix E). Indeed, although a majority still maintained that they liked neither to read their classmates' compositions nor to have their essays read by them, the rate of those who changed their minds more than doubled. In fact, before the course, a minority of 17% agreed that they like to read their classmates essay, while after the course period, this proportion rose to 44%. Figure 4 illustrates this change further.

Figure 5: Control Group's Change of Attitudes towards Peer-reading (n=25)

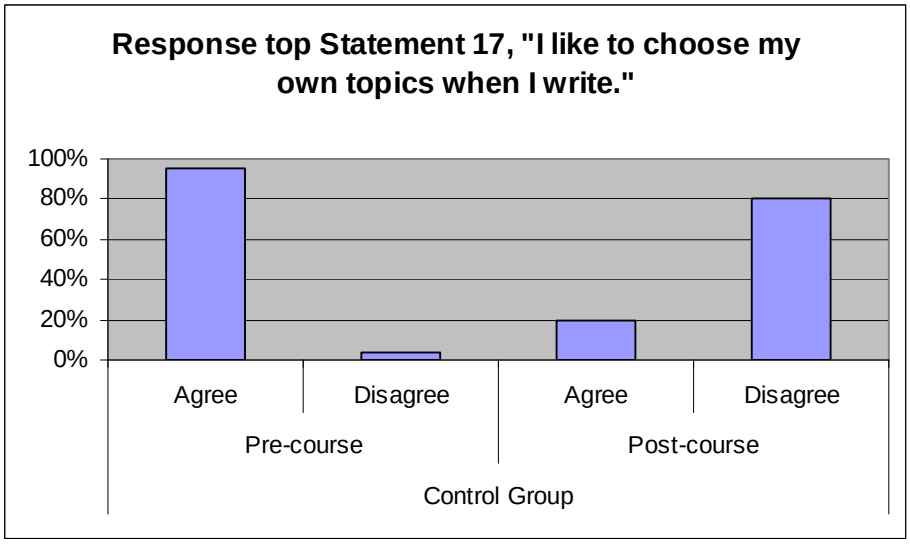



This change was pretty much unexpected, as students of the control group did not have the writing course that I offered to the experimental group, nor did they seem to have any new factor in their writing classes that might have led to such a change. I tried to dispel this ambiguity by asking four of the respondents why they had changed their minds. One of them simply replied, "I Just like that." However, the other three students gave me the following answer that I could appreciate. They said that their friends in the experimental group told them about the fun they found in reading one another's essays. That was why now they felt that they could enjoy that activity.

The second arresting major change pertained to the choice of the topic. Indeed, surprisingly enough, in response to statement 17, "I like to choose my own topic when I write," a clear majority of 96% at the beginning of the course dropped dramatically to 20% at the end. I really had no explanation for this unexpected change before I talked to all the students and to their teacher. After responding to the survey for the first time, students discussed with their teacher some of the issues that they discussed with me while responding. Their teacher, as I learned later, was against the idea of the students' choosing their own topics. "They are not mature enough to choose interesting topics to talk about," and "The topics of the workbook are very worthwhile," were among what he had to say about this issue after informing me that he had discussed it with his students. That discussion seemed to have influenced the students' position to a great extent. A lot of students just reiterated what the teacher

said, namely, in one student's words "The topics of the workbook are interesting."

Figure 6. Control Groups' Change of Attitudes towards Choosing Topics (n. 25)




Moderate to Minor Changes in Attitudes

The rest of the control group's attitudes investigated seemed to undergo either a moderate normal change or a minor uninteresting one. Overall, the most significant of this type of change pertains to the overall attitude towards the accessibility of writing. Actually, the percentage of those who agreed that writing was easy (Table 1, Statement 1) was still a minority; nevertheless, the percentage rose from 13% to 36%, which was pretty much unexpected. To understand the reasons behind this change of attitude among the control group students, I conducted an informal interview. Three out of the six students who had changed their minds said that writing for them was sometimes easy and sometimes difficult. At the moment of the second survey, the topic they were writing about in class was the computer, which was a very motivating topic to almost all the students. The other three did not seem to have clear reasons for that change.

Overall, the responding students nearly kept the same attitudes towards multiple drafting, prewriting activities, and expressing their opinions while writing. Moreover, the results of the survey showed nearly the same degree of deep concern about grades, grammar, and spelling. In fact, the post-course survey did not betray

any significant improvement in the students' attitudes towards writing, as nearly the same number of students disagreed with the statement 9, "I like writing in English." Indeed, at the beginning of the course, 16 out of 24 respondents disagreed with it and at the end of the course 15 out 25 did, which is only a minor change; nevertheless, it shows, at least, that their attitude did not change for the better in this regard.

## The Experimental Group

### Major Changes in Overall Attitudes

Adopting some process-approach associated activities in the writing classes of the experimental group for a period of six weeks seems to have brought about dramatic changes in the students' attitudes towards many of the aspects and features of writing.

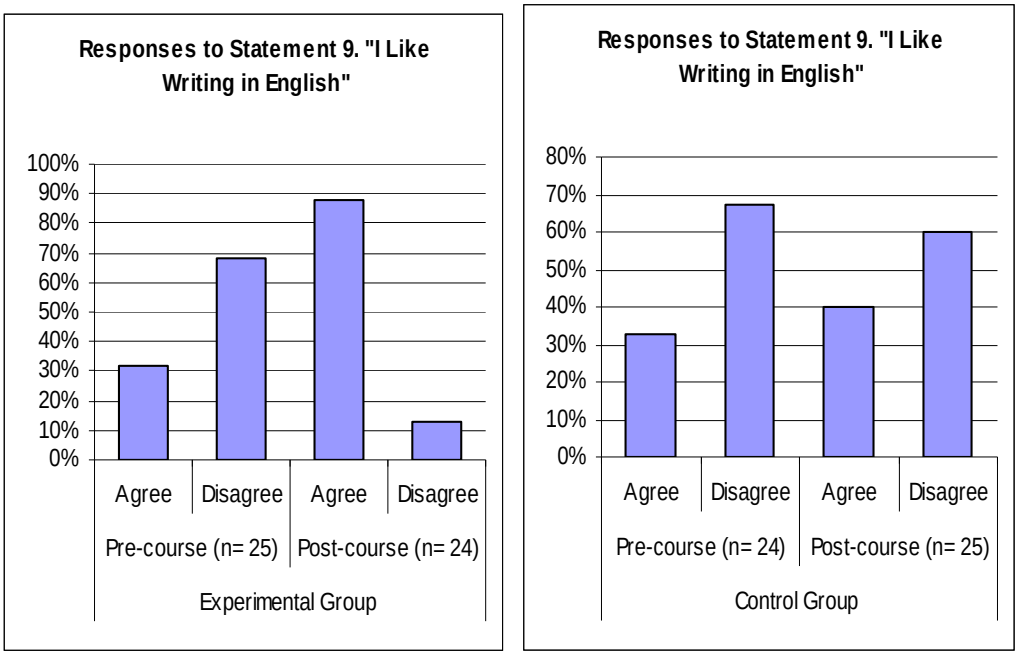
Starting with the overall attitude towards writing which was investigated by statement 1, "Writing in English is easy for me," most students had a totally different attitude. Indeed, at the beginning of the course, a majority of 88% disagreed that writing in English was easy. After taking the course, and to my big surprise, a majority of 88% agreed that writing was easy. This result was, for me, worth digging deeper into. After the survey, I asked those who had changed their responses in an informal interview to tell me why they now thought that writing was easy for them, and I got some interesting responses along the lines of "I know how to write now," "Now, I am no longer afraid of making mistakes," and "If my first draft was bad, no problem, I can make it better later." I also noted in my journal that students seemed to become less inhibited and more motivated to write, especially after knowing that they could write without having to worry about committing errors.

This change brought about another very significant change. At the beginning of the course, 68% of this group responded negatively to statement 9, "I like writing in English." In the post-course survey this percentage dropped to 12%. If we compare this result to that of the control group, we might appreciate more the change that took place. In fact, for the control group, the percentage of those who disagreed with the above statement dropped only by 7% to reach 60%at the end of the course. Figure 7 below clarifies this difference in change of attitudes. On the other hand, for the experimental group this percentage dropped by 56%. That is to say, 88% of the

experimental group students seemed to like writing in English by the end of the course. This result is perhaps because students were no longer writing under pressures of fear of making many mistakes or getting good marks.

Many students in the experimental group stated by the end of the course that they enjoyed the stages of writing, that is, prewriting activities, drafting, and most specifically, peer-reading. You could see that, for example, on the day of the peer-review when students come to the staff room before the session to ask for specific students' papers to read and check. "I want to read X's and Y's papers today," some students would say, for instance.

Figures 7. Overall Change or Attitudes in both Groups




Major Changes towards Writing Concerns

The experimental group, by the end of the course, pretty much seemed to have changed their idea of good grades being their main concern when they write. In response to Statement 11, "Getting a good grade is my main concern when I write," 100% of the experimental group and 92% of the control group agreed in the pre-course surveys. At the end of the course, the degree of concern for grades by the control group even went up, reaching a total of 96%. However, for the experimental

group, the percentage of those who said that getting good grades was their main concern fell drastically to 33%. Based on my journal notes, this dramatic change seems to be the result of the students' understanding that their prime concern should not be good grades exclusively but also writing well and expressing themselves. One of the students said, "If I am taught writing this way, why should I worry so much about grades? If I don't get a good grade, I can improve my essay and get a better one."

Being more concerned about expressing themselves and writing better was echoed in the experimental group students' responses in the post-course survey to statement 18, "Grammatical correctness is more important than expressing my own ideas," and Statement 14, "I don't need to express my own ideas in a composition." In fact, the majority of students of the experimental group that agreed with both of these statements at the beginning of the course turned out to be a minority by the end of the course. More specifically, 84% agreed with statement 18 and 80% agreed with statement 14 the second in response to the pre-course survey. However, by the end of the course, the first percentage fell to 30% and the second fell dramatically to 8%. This change in attitudes again makes more sense when we compare it to the change that happened in the control group. Indeed, in this group, the same majority of around 84% agreed with statement 14 both at the beginning and at the end of the course, and the majority of respondents who agreed with Statement 18 even gained more adherents as their percentage rose from 88% to 96%.

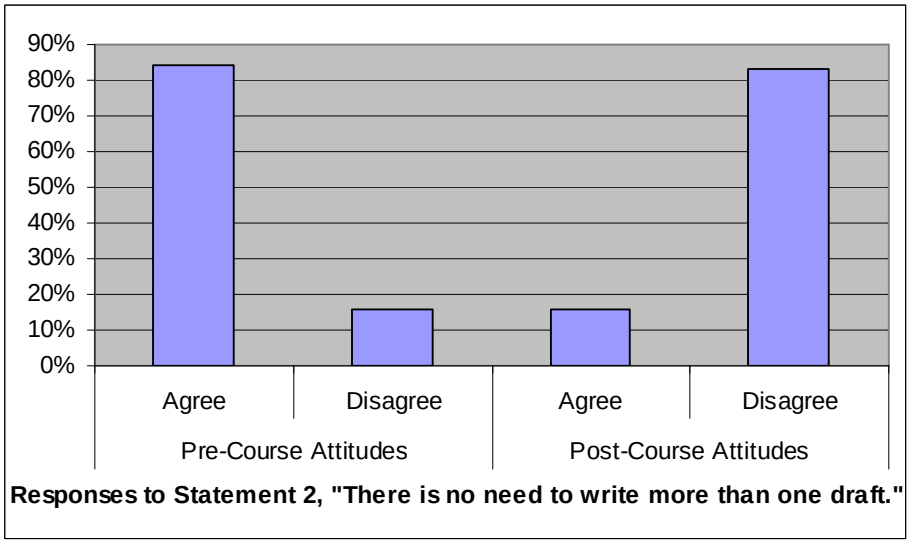
While writing their compositions, I noted in my journal that some students' questions were gradually changing from asking about how to spell a word, to asking about how to express an idea or which idea comes before another. Such a change in questions might show that some students started to become seriously concerned about content issues rather than formal ones. Moreover, students seemed to be no longer trapped by memorization as they once were. In fact, after the course, the majority of 84% of the experimental group who agreed that memorization was the best way to learn to write turned out to be a minority of only 12%. Consequently, the majority of respondents now felt able to write about any topic the teacher suggested. Before the course, surprisingly enough, only 20% agreed that they could write about topics other than those included in their workbooks. In the post-course survey, this percentage changed to be a clear majority of 83%. When I interviewed students about what they

had benefited most from in the course, the majority stated that they learned how to write without memorization and without having to refer to the workbook. The following are excerpts from what some students had to say at the end of the course: “Now, we may write without having to memorize,” “For the first time, I can write a whole page by myself,” and “We never learned how to write before.”

Major Changes of Attitudes towards Multiple-drafting

One of the significant major changes in attitudes had to do with multiple-drafting. Indeed, 21 students out of 25 agreed at the end of the course that there is a need to write more than one draft of a composition. Only four had agreed at the beginning of the course. That is to say, a majority of 84% now believed that it was necessary to write more than one draft and that one is hardly able to make oneself clear in just one draft. Figure 7 highlights this considerable change of attitude.

Figure 7. Experimental Group’s Attitudes towards Multiple-drafting (n = 24).




When I asked some students about their opinions about this specific characteristic of process writing, they stated that multiple drafting gave them more chance to express their own ideas and encouraged them to write with more confidence. They said they always had the possibility to improve their compositions. As a result, they were no longer afraid of making mistakes.

Moderate to Minor Changes of Attitudes

In spite of the above dramatic changes, some other attitudes were hardly changed. Indeed, an overwhelming majority still maintained that they learned better when their teacher corrected their grammatical and spelling mistakes. This position might be due to more than one reason. Firstly, such an impression was taken after many years of grammatical feedback. It might have become an axiom for most students. One very good student even said, “All our teachers told us that we could learn better if we corrected the grammatical mistakes that they highlighted in our compositions.”

Another moderate change pertained to their attitude towards publishing. In fact, before the course 64% of the experimental group students agreed that they liked to see their works published in the club’s wall magazine. After actually seeing some selected essays published, the proportion rose to more than 87%. I call this change moderate because both before and after the course, a majority was for publishing. Nevertheless, two students who were for publishing initially later changed their minds. One of them said, “It is not a big deal.” However, while selecting the works to be published, I noticed that many students were very enthusiastic to know whose essays would be chosen for the magazine.

To conclude, the process approach activities introduced during the course seemed to have brought about some important changes in attitudes. Indeed, most of these high school students now had more positive attitudes that might be used to improve their level of writing.

# Chapter 5
# Conclusions and Implications

## Summary of Findings

It is noteworthy that the results of this research to a large extent confirm much of the literature written about both traditional and process approaches. As a matter of fact, being familiar only with the traditional approach to writing, the majority of the 49 students who responded to the survey before the course were mostly concerned about grammar and spelling while writing. This concern was pointed out by Leki (1991) who argues that the traditional approach focuses on grammar, spelling, and punctuation more than any other issue in writing. It was also highlighted by Hirose (2001) who draws attention to the fact that teaching writing was even "a service activity" (p. 35) that was supposed to consolidate other different areas of language learning such as grammar or vocabulary.

As a consequence of this concern, many students started to write thinking of grammar rather than concentrating on expressing themselves. More than 80% of the respondents admitted in the pre-course surveys that they did not believe that they even needed to express their own ideas while writing. What seems to have replaced self expression is on the one hand this exaggerated concern about grammar and spelling, and on the other hand concern about grades. These concerns have such deep effects on students that with them in mind they could hardly think of anything else. Also being so deeply concerned about these areas, many students seemed to be very reluctant to write. Indeed, for the majority of them writing was not seen as an easy task. On the contrary, it was rather considered "an uphill struggle for most students" (Tessema, 2005, p. 22).

The main purpose of this study was to see whether adopting some process-approach associated activities in a high school writing course could really change these attitudes. Results of the survey submitted before and after the writing course showed that it could to a large extent change these attitudes for the better as the majority of the students who found writing difficult at the beginning of the course found it a bit easier at the end, and many of those who said they did not like it at the beginning came to appreciate it at the end. Results of the interviews conducted

informally with groups of students mostly confirmed the results of the survey. In fact, the majority of the students of the experimental group admitted at the end of the course that they had not studied writing before and that what they had done was just memorization of paragraphs. A more significant result was that more than 80% of the experimental group at the end of the course thought that they could write about any topic the teacher suggested, whereas before the course only 20% thought so. In comparison, only 20% of the control group before the course and 12% after it said they could write about any suggested topic. This result was very meaningful to me because it made me feel that the process approach more or less freed students from the trap of memorization and opened their minds to a whole new world of productivity and creativity.

Another purpose of this study was to check whether we could apply the process approach in high schools in an EFL/ESL context. Results of the survey were generally indicative of the possibility of its implementation. More interestingly, the results brought about within a period of just six weeks suggest that if these process-approach associated activities were applied all throughout a school year, they might bring about even more obvious and long-lasting changes. My journal notes showed, for example, that the majority of students became engaged in writing at my request and showed low or no inhibition when starting to write. When applying the traditional approach only a minority would get started and all the rest would just keep thinking about what to write till the end of the allocated time.

These results reveal then that the process approach might be an effective alternative to the traditional approach in terms of developing a more positive and a safer atmosphere of writing. Indeed, having more than one chance to “get it right” within a multiple-drafting approach, writing without being entirely concerned about grammar, spelling, and ultimately grades, and getting meaningful feedback from both students and the teacher did away with a lot of writing difficulties and made students’ attitudes towards writing more positive. However, a few students complained that it was boring to write nearly the same thing twice. One student even stated that the way they had been traditionally taught was simpler and easier because all he had to do had been to just write and go.

## Limitations of This Study and Directions for Further Research

The first and probably more obvious limitation of this study was the time factor. While surveys, interviews, and journal notes showed that a definite change in attitudes was taking place, six weeks might not be enough to enable students to have long-lasting changes in attitudes. This issue gets still worse when some students miss some of the writing classes. Had these process-associated activities been used all throughout a school year, they would probably have had a greater influence on the students' attitudes towards writing.

Another limitation was probably the discrepancy between the curriculum and what it was designed for and the tenets of the process approach. As a matter of fact, the group of students that I taught for six weeks were supposed to finish an essay plus at least one grammar, spelling, or reading comprehension exercise within a period as short as 45 minutes. During the course of study, however, they accomplished only two essays, which seemed strange to students. For example, one student commented, "How are we going to finish the program this way?"

A final limitation was probably the application of these activities in a basically traditional atmosphere, that is, with other teachers in the same school all applying the traditional approach. That had some positive results as it made students in a way more enthusiastic about learning a new way of approaching writing; nevertheless, it made it harder for me as a teacher to take on the entire burden of preparing handouts and checklists alone along with keeping up with the curriculum requirements. Put in other words, I put in at least twice as much time as I would have if I were using the traditional approach, and this might be one of the reasons that makes some teachers resist using process writing in their classes.

## Implications of the Study

Generally speaking, the study has clearly shown that after a six-week adoption of process-approach associated activities students took a different view of writing. In fact, they developed better attitudes and started practicing this skill under more motivating conditions. This result could provide all of the stakeholders, i.e., curriculum designers, school principals, supervisors, and finally teachers, with insights into how to take actual steps forward towards adopting the process approach as a possible alternative to the traditional approaches used in UAE high schools,

which seem to be developing rather negative attitudes in students toward writing.

Implications for Curriculum Designers

As their very name indicates, curriculum designers are held responsible for all the procedures that finally end up in textbooks published and used in schools. The series, *English for the Emirates,* seems to be predominantly adopting traditional approaches to writing. A quick skim through of the workbook of grade 9 in mainstream education reveals two important conclusions. Firstly, writing does not have a separate status, but it is most of the time incorporated within other grammatical or vocabulary activities (see the example in Appendix F), and therefore less time than necessary is allocated for writing. Indeed, an average writing activity should not take more than half of a 45-minute period. Secondly, throughout the school year, which is roughly 40 weeks, more than 30 topics are suggested for students to write about.

These two features might betray the traditional tendency of the curriculum designers. This propensity is probably outdated, especially with regard to the rather negative attitudes that it has caused students to have since its adoption in writing classes. According to the results of this study, the writing section of the curriculum should probably be approached differently. As a matter of fact, students seem to be in no need to work on a huge number of topics relying on the "copy and memorize strategies" that they are actually using. Based on the results of this research, I suggest curriculum designers take the following steps:

1. Conduct needs' analysis research in order to decide the students' favorite topics as this will probably increase their motivation to learn to write well.
2. Reduce the number of topics suggested to a rate of one topic each three or four weeks, with two writing classes a week, to give enough time for helpful prewriting activities, meaningful feedback, and multiple drafting. This suggestion is, to a large extent, practical with the total of six English classes that students actually take per week.
3. Separate grammatical exercises from writing activities so that students get the idea that these two activities may be complementary but that they are as well independent of each other.

I have to note at the end of these implications that curriculum designers may be in need of an agreement and probably encouragement on the part of the Ministry of Education before they can take such actions. Nevertheless, convincing this official establishment of the necessity and usefulness of change might result in agreement and therefore support.

## Implications for School Principals

The second considerably influential elements after curriculum designers are school principals, being ostensibly in charge of the actual implementation of curricular activities within their school boundaries. Indeed, especially due to the recent official tendency to give more school leadership to headmasters, a more interesting change of role may be expected from them. Indeed, this role was already displayed by my own school principal when he sampled the possibility of permitting teachers to introduce change by allowing me to apply process approach activities instead of the official traditional approach. This permission gave me insight into how headmasters can play a more active role in introducing change to their schools by just granting teachers more freedom of action within the limits of their classrooms. This freedom might enable instructors to take more active and creative positions concerning the methods and the approaches they may wish to adopt in class. Headmasters can even go so far as to encourage teachers' initiatives for change, as long as these are based on accurate research studies.

## Implications for Supervisors

Supervisors play a significant technical and informative role in the teachers' career, being basically experienced former teachers. They are first mediators between the Ministry of Education and instructors. In other words, they are actually in charge of informing teachers through private or public conferences about any new changes or modifications introduced to the syllabus. Second, they sometimes take the initiative of organizing annual meetings and conferences to update teachers on new theories. These two roles can be very effective in terms of raising teachers' awareness that there are other possible ways of approaching writing in classes. At least, I believe that they can explain the theory and practice of this approach and leave it to teachers whether to adopt it in their writing classes or to set it aside.

Supervisors can also hold workshops and collective lesson observations that might enable teachers to see the steps and stages of the process approach and the possible ways of using it under different conditions. Moreover, they can encourage using process writing when they themselves observe writing lessons. Indeed, supervisors' points of view may be of paramount importance to teachers, especially when based on sound evidence. This study clearly showed that the adoption of the process approach can bring about positive change in attitudes towards writing. This might suggest that supervisors should use their deep influence on teachers to both introduce them to this approach and encourage them to use at least some aspects of it in their writing classes.

## Implications for Teachers

It is to a large extent true that teachers are required to only implement what they have in their curriculum. Nevertheless, conducting this study in my school along with performing my career duties may show that teachers can take a more active role towards their own classroom activities. In fact, one of the principles of reflective teaching is to reflect on the approach that a teacher adopts in class. Conducting classroom research might just be one interesting way of doing that. If an activity or a whole approach proves to be ineffective or to lead to negative results, I believe that teachers are entitled to take an action to change or to modify it without being liable for blame. Results of this research study show that at least some features of the process approach should be encouraged in writing classes in order to make students more wiling to write.

More accurately speaking, I believe that teachers can play a very important role in the following areas:

1. Providing evidence on the failure of the traditional approaches in meeting the students' writing needs by conducting research studies.
2. Convincing their school administrations of the necessity of changing their traditional ways of teaching writing even if that was not prompted by the Ministry of Education or other superior institutions.
3. Overcoming the potential difficulties that can be encountered due to the inadequacy of the context to the adoption of process-approach activities. Such inadequacies might pertain to the size of classes, the number of the

working hours, and the unavailability of the necessary tools to help implement some of the process-writing features.

To conclude, I dare say that teachers cannot actually be banned from applying some process-approach activities in their own writing classes. In fact, I think neither their school principals nor their supervisors should ever blame them for giving their students more guided prewriting activities, more chances to write better, more helpful feedback, and opportunities to see their works published. Hence, teachers, even though not officially directed to use the process writing in their classes, may start by adopting a partial use of some process-associated activities. This, I believe, may pave the way to a more comprehensive adoption of the process approach.

## Final Thought

Any change, even if towards the better, needs much time and much effort. Although results of this research suggest that the way writing is approached in this part of the world needs to be changed, still much effort needs to be deployed in order to have all stakeholders persuaded of the necessity of change as a first step, and to have them work toward it as a second. Efforts of curriculum designers, school principals, supervisors, and teachers need to be combined to achieve such a change.

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Appendix A. Writing Attitudes Survey (The English Copy of the Survey)

Grades 9/5 and 9/4: Mainstream Governmental Education

Number of Respondents: 49 students

Context: Shafe'y School for Basic Education

Please respond to the statements below honestly. Check ( √ ) the best answer after reading each sentence. Your answers will help me teach English writing better. Thanks.

AS= Agree Strongly; A= Agree; D= Disagree; DS= Disagree Strongly

| Statement | **AS** | **A** | **D** | **DS** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Writing in English is easy for me. | | | | |
| 2. There's no need to write more than one draft of a composition. | | | | |
| 3. It is useful to collect ideas about the topic and to organize them before actually starting to write | | | | |
| 4. My main concern when I write is not to make grammar mistakes. | | | | |
| 5. I like to read my classmates' essays. | | | | |
| 6. I like to have my essays read by my classmates. | | | | |
| 7. I read my essays again after they are graded by my teacher. | | | | |
| 8. I use my teacher's comments on my compositions to improve my writing. | | | | |
| 9. I like writing in English. | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. I like to see my essays published in the School Magazine. | | | | |
| 11. Getting a good grade is my main concern when I write. | | | | |
| 12. The best way to learn to write well in English is to memorize compositions from my textbook. | | | | |
| 13. I learn better when my teacher corrects all my grammatical and spelling mistakes. | | | | |
| 14. I don't need to express my own ideas in a composition. | | | | |
| 15. I like to read my teacher's comments on my compositions. | | | | |
| 16. I don't care if I make grammar and spelling mistakes in my compositions. | | | | |
| 17. I like to choose my own topics when I write. | | | | |
| 18. Grammatical correctness is more important than expressing my own ideas. | | | | |
| 19. I like the way I have been taught writing so far. | | | | |
| 20. I can write about any topic the teacher suggests (not only about workbook topics). | | | | |

What do you think are your main problems in writing in English?

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Appendix B. The Arabic Copy of the survey

استبيان

الرجاء تعبئة هذا الاستبيان بكل نزاهة. إختر الإجابة التي تراها مناسبة بعد قراءة الجمل التالية بتمعن. أجوبتك ستساعدني على تدريس التعبير بصفة أفضل.

| | أوافق تماما | أوافق | لا أوافق | لا أوافق مطلقاً |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. أكتب باللغة الانجليزية بسهولة. | | | | |
| 2. لاداعي لكتابة اكثر من مسودة عند كتابة الانشاء. | | | | |
| 3. من المفيد تجميع الافكار وتنظيمها قبل البدء فعليا في الكتابة. | | | | |
| 4. همي الأول عندما اكتب هو ان لااقوم باخطاء نحوية. | | | | |
| 5. احب ان اقرأ تعابير زملائي. | | | | |
| 6. أحب ان أرى زملائي يقرؤون تعبيري. | | | | |
| 7. اقرأ تعابيري بعد أن يقومها المدرس. | | | | |
| 8. أستغل ملاحظات المدرس لتحسين مستوى مقالاتي. | | | | |
| 9. أحب الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية. | | | | |
| 10. أحب ان ارى مقالاتي تنشر بمجلة المدرسة. | | | | |
| 11. همي ألأول حين أكتب هو الحصول على درجة ممتازة. | | | | |
| 12. أحسن طريقة أتعلم بها الكتابة هي حفظ المقالات من الكتاب المدرسي. | | | | |
| 13. أتعلم بصفة أفضل لما يصوب المدرس جميع أخطائي النحوية والإملائية. | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. لاأحتاج إلى التعبير عن أفكارياألخاصة عندما أكتب. | | | | |
| 15. أحب أن أقرأ تعاليق المدرس على مقالاتي. | | | | |
| 16. لا أهتم كثيرا حينما أرتكب أخطاء نحوية وإملائية. | | | | |
| 17. أحب أن أختار بنفسي ألمواضيع التي أكتب عنها | | | | |
| 18. سلامة اللغة أهم عندي من التعبير عن أفكاري الخاصة. | | | | |
| 19. أحب الطريقة التي أتعلم بها الكتابة الى حد الان. | | | | |
| 20. أستطيع الكتابة في اي موضوع يقترحه المدرس (وليس فقط المواضيع المدرجة في الكتاب) . | | | | |

ما هي برأيك أهم مشكلات التعبير باللغة الأنجليزية؟.....

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Appendix C. Results of the Pre-course Attitudes Survey

(The Control Group)

Grade: 9/4 Mainstream Governmental Education

Number of Respondents: 24 Students

Gender: Boys

Age Group: 15- 17

Context: Shafe'y School for Basic Education

AS= Agree Strongly; A= Agree; D= Disagree; DS= Disagree Strongly

| **Statement** | **AS** | **A** | **D** | **DS** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Writing in English is easy for me. | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) | 9 (38%) | 12 (50%) |
| 2. There's no need to write more than one draft of a composition. | 16 (67%) | 3 (13%) | 4 (17%) | 1 (4%) |
| 3. It is useful to collect ideas about the topic and to organize them before actually starting to write | 18 (75%) | 3 (13%) | 2 (8%) | 1 (4%) |
| 4. My main concern when I write is not to make grammar mistakes. | 16 (67%) | 6 (25%) | 1 (4%) | 1 (4%) |
| 5. I like to read my classmates' essays. | 1 (4%) | 3 (13%) | 3 (13%) | 17 (71%) |
| 6. I like to have my essays read by my classmates. | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) | 5 (21%) | 16 (67%) |
| 7. I read my essays again after they are graded by my teacher | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) | 5 (21%) | 16 (67%) |
| 8. I use my teacher's comments on my compositions to improve my writing. | 14 (58%) | 4 (17%) | 5 (21%) | 1 (4%) |
| 9. I like writing in English. | 8 (33%) | 1 (4%) | 6 (25%) | 10 (42%) |
| 10. I like to see my essays published in the School Magazine. | 8 (33%) | 7 (29%) | 5 (21%) | 4 (17%) |
| 11. Getting a good grade is my main concern when I write. | 22 (92%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (8%) |
| 12. The best way to learn to write well in English is to memorize compositions from my textbook. | 15 (63%) | 7 (29%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (8%) |
| 13. I learn better when my teacher corrects all my grammatical and spelling mistakes. | 20 (83%) | 4 (17%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) |
| 14. I don't need to express my own ideas in a composition. | 16 (67%) | 4 (17%) | 2 (8%) | 2 (8%) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. I like to read my teacher's comments on my compositions. | 14 (58%) | 4 (16%) | 2 (8%) | 4 (16%) |
| 16. I don't care if I make grammar and spelling mistakes in my compositions. | 1 (4%) | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) | 20 (83%) |
| 17. I like to choose my own topics when I write. | 14 (58%) | 9 (38%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) |
| 18. Grammatical correctness is more important than expressing my own ideas. | 18 (75%) | 3 (13%) | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) |
| 19. I like the way I have been taught writing so far. | 14 (58%) | 2 (8%) | 4 (17%) | 4 (17%) |
| 20. I can write about any topic the teacher suggests (not only about workbook topics). | 3 (13%) | 2 (8%) | 2 (8%) | 17 (71%) |

What do you think are your main problems in writing in English?

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Appendix D. Results of the Pre-course Attitudes Survey

(The Experimental Group)

Grade: 9/5 Mainstream Governmental Education

Number of Respondents: 25 students

Gender: Boys

Age Group: 15- 17

Context: Shafe'y School for Basic Education

AS= Agree Strongly; A= Agree; D= Disagree; DS= Disagree Strongly

| **Statement** | **AS** | **A** | **D** | **Ds** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Writing in English is easy for me. | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) | 13 (52%) | 9 (36%) |
| 2. There's no need to write more than one draft of a composition. | 19 (76%) | 2 (8%) | 4 (16%) | 0 (0%) |
| 3. It is useful to collect ideas about the topic and to organize them before actually starting to write. | 19 (76%) | 3 (12%) | 2 (8%) | 1 (4%) |
| 4. My main concern when I write is not to make grammar mistakes. | 17 (68%) | 6 (24%) | 1 (4%) | 1 (4%) |
| 5. I like to read my classmates' essays. | 1 (4%) | 3 (12%) | 4 (16%) | 17 (68%) |
| 6. I like to have my essays read by my classmates. | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) | 4 (16%) | 18 (72%) |
| 7. I read my essays again after they are graded by my teacher | 1 (4%) | 1 (4%) | 4 (16%) | 19 (76%) |
| 8. I use my teacher's comments on my compositions to improve my writing. | 13 (52%) | 6 (24%) | 5 (20%) | 1 (4%) |
| 9. I like writing in English. | 7 (28%) | 1 (4%) | 8 (32%) | 9 (36%) |
| 10. I like to see my essays published in the School Magazine. | 11 (44%) | 5 (20%) | 4 (16%) | 5 (20%) |
| 11. Getting a good grade is my main concern when I write. | 24 (96%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| 12. The best way to learn to write well in English is to memorize compositions from my textbook. | 15 (60%) | 6 (24%) | 1 (4%) | 3 (12%) |
| 13. I learn better when my teacher corrects all my grammatical and spelling mistakes. | 20 (80%) | 4 (16%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. I don't need to express my own ideas in a composition. | 16 (64%) | 4 (16%) | 2 (8%) | 3 (12%) |
| 15. I like to read my teacher's comments on my compositions. | 15 (60%) | 4 (16%) | 3 (12%) | 3 (12%) |
| 16. I don't care if I make grammar and spelling mistakes in my compositions. | 1 (4%) | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) | 20 (80%) |
| 17. I like to choose my own topics when I write. | 15 (60%) | 9 (36%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) |
| 18. Grammatical correctness is more important than expressing my own ideas. | 18 (72%) | 3 (12%) | 1 (4%) | 3 (12% |
| 19. I like the way I have been taught writing so far. | 15 (60%) | 3 (12%) | 3 (12%) | 4 (16%) |
| 20. I can write about any topic the teacher suggests (not only about workbook topics). | 4 (16%) | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) | 18 (72%) |

Notice: One student did not respond to question number 16

What do you think are your main problems in writing in English?

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Appendix E. Survey Results of the Post-Course Attitudes Survey

(The Control Group)

Grade: 9/4 Mainstream Governmental Education

Number of Respondents: 25 respondents

Gender: Boys

Age Group: 15- 17

Context: Shafe'y School for Basic Education

AS= Agree Strongly; A= Agree; D= Disagree; DS= Disagree Strongly

| **Statement** | **AS** | **A** | **D** | **DS** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Writing in English is easy for me. | 2 (8%) | 7 (28%) | 12 (48%) | 4 (16%) |
| 2. There's no need to write more than one draft of a composition. | 18 (72%) | 2 (8%) | 1 (4%) | 4 (16%) |
| 3. It is useful to collect ideas about the topic and to organize them before actually starting to write. | 16 (64%) | 7 (28%) | 2 (8%) | 0 (0%) |
| 4. My main concern when I write is not to make grammar mistakes. | 18 (72%) | 6 (24%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) |
| 5. I like to read my classmates' essays. | 4 (16%) | 7 (28%) | 7 (28%) | 7 (28%) |
| 6. I like to have my essays read by my classmates. | 4 (16%) | 2 (8%) | 6 (24%) | 13 (52%) |
| 7. I read my essays again after they are graded by my teacher | 3 (12%) | 4 (16%) | 3 (12%) | 15 (60%) |
| 8. I use my teacher's comments on my compositions to improve my writing. | 15 (60%) | 6 (24%) | 3 (12%) | 1 (4%) |
| 9. I like writing in English. | 8 (32%) | 3 (12%) | 8 (32%) | 7 (28%) |
| 10. I like to see my essays published in the School Magazine. | 8 (32%) | 2 (8%) | 7 (28%) | 9 (36%) |
| 11. Getting a good grade is my main concern when I write. | 20 (80%) | 4 (16%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) |
| 12. The best way to learn to write well in English is to memorize compositions from my textbook. | 21 (84%) | 2 (8%) | 1 (4%) | 1 (4%) |
| 13. I learn better when my teacher corrects all my grammatical and spelling mistakes. | 17 (68%) | 6 (24%) | 2 (8%) | 0 (0%) |
| 14. I don't need to express my own ideas in a composition. | 17 (68%) | 4 (16%) | 2 (8%) | 2 (8%) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. I like to read my teacher's comments on my compositions. | 12 (48%) | 7 (28%) | 3 (12%) | 3 (12%) |
| 16. I don't care if I make grammar and spelling mistakes in my compositions. | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 8 (32%) | 16 (64%) |
| 17. I like to choose my own topics when I write. | 4 (16%) | 1 (4%) | 4 (16%) | 16 (64%) |
| 18. Grammatical correctness is more important than expressing my own ideas. | 23 (92%) | 1 (4%) | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) |
| 19. I like the way I have been taught writing so far. | 6 (24%) | 7 (28%) | 3 (12%) | 9 (36%) |
| 20. I can write about any topic the teacher suggests (not only about workbook topics). | 3 (12%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (8%) | 20 (80%) |

What do you think are your main problems in writing in English?

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Appendix F. Survey Results of the Post-Course Attitudes Survey

(The Experimental Group)

**Grade: 9/5 Mainstream Governmental Education**

**Number of Respondents: 24**

**Gender: Boys**

**Age Group: 15- 17**

**Context: Shafe'y School for Basic Education**

**AS= Agree Strongly; A= Agree; D= Disagree; DS= Disagree Strongly**

| **Statement** | **AS** | **A** | **DS** | **D** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Writing in English is easy for me. | 7 (28%) | 14 (58%) | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) |
| 2. There's no need to write more than one draft of a composition. | 1 (4%) | 3 (13%) | 8 (33%) | 12 (50%) |
| 3. It is useful to collect ideas about the topic and to organize them before actually starting to write. | 17 (71%) | 4 (17%) | 2 (8%) | 1 (4%) |
| 4. My main concern when I write is not to make grammar mistakes. | 5 (21%) | 4 (17%) | 12 (50%) | 3 (13%) |
| 5. I like to read my classmates' essays. | 8 (33%) | 10 (42%) | 2 (8%) | 4 (17%) |
| 6. I like to have my essays read by my classmates. | 13 (54%) | 7 (29%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (16%) |
| 7. I read my essays again after they are graded by my teacher | 8 (33%) | 10 (42%) | 3 (13%) | 2 (8%) |
| 8. I use my teacher's comments on my compositions to improve my writing. | 19 (79%) | 5 (21%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| 9. I like writing in English. | 10 (42%) | 11 (46%) | 2 (8%) | 1 (4%) |
| 10. I like to see my essays published in the School Magazine. | 12 (50%) | 9 (38%) | 1 (4%) | 2 (8%) |
| 11. Getting a good grade is my main concern when I write. | 4 (17%) | 4 (17%) | 11 (46%) | 5 (21%) |
| 12. The best way to learn to write well in English is to memorize compositions from my textbook. | 3 (13%) | 0 (0%) | 7 (29%) | 14 (58%) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. I learn better when my teacher corrects all my grammatical and spelling mistakes. | 13 (54%) | 10 (42%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (4%) |
| 14. I don't need to express my own ideas in a composition. | 0 (0%) | 2 (8%) | 9 (38%) | 13 (54%) |
| 15. I like to read my teacher's comments on my compositions. | 11 (46%) | 10 (42%) | 2 (8%) | 1 (4%) |
| 16. I don't care if I make grammar and spelling mistakes in my compositions. | 4 (17%) | 10 (42%) | 5 (21%) | 5 (21%) |
| 17. I like to choose my own topics when I write. | 11 (46%) | 10 (42%) | 2 (8%) | 1 (4%) |
| 18. Grammatical correctness is more important than expressing my own ideas. | 3 (13%) | 4 (17%) | 13 (54%) | 4 (17%) |
| 19. I like the way I have been taught writing so far. | 2 (8%) | 3 (13%) | 7 (29%) | 12 (50%) |
| 20. I can write about any topic the teacher suggests (not only about workbook topics). | 11 (46%) | 9 (38%) | 2 (8%) | 2 (8%) |

Notice: 1 student did not respond to question number 7

What do you think are your main problems in writing in English? .....

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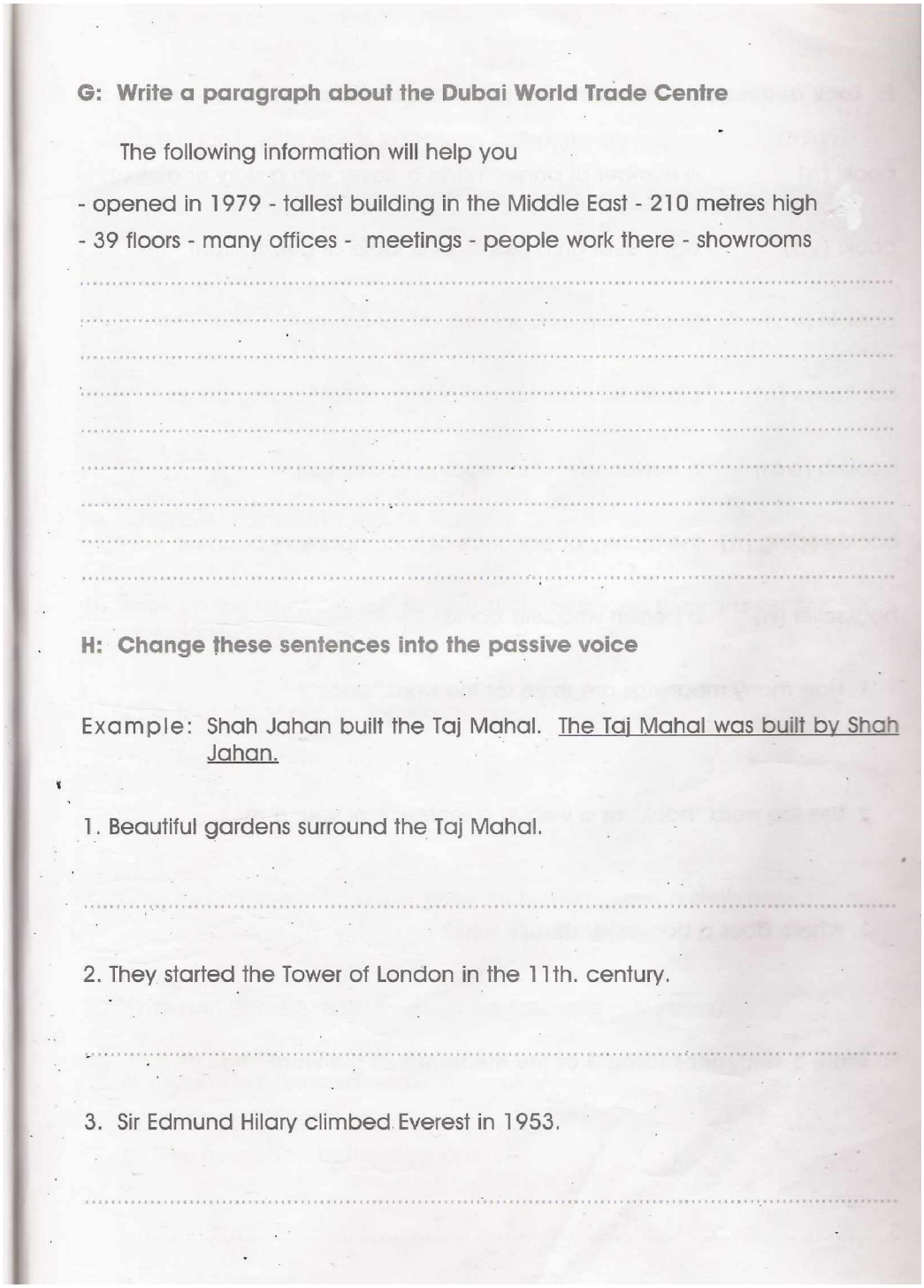
Appendix G. Mixing of Grammatical and Writing Activities



**G: Write a paragraph about the Dubai World Trade Centre**

The following information will help you

- opened in 1979 - tallest building in the Middle East - 210 metres high
- 39 floors - many offices - meetings - people work there - showrooms

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**H: Change these sentences into the passive voice**

Example: Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal was built by Shah Jahan.

1. Beautiful gardens surround the Taj Mahal.

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2. They started the Tower of London in the 11th. century.

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3. Sir Edmund Hilary climbed Everest in 1953.

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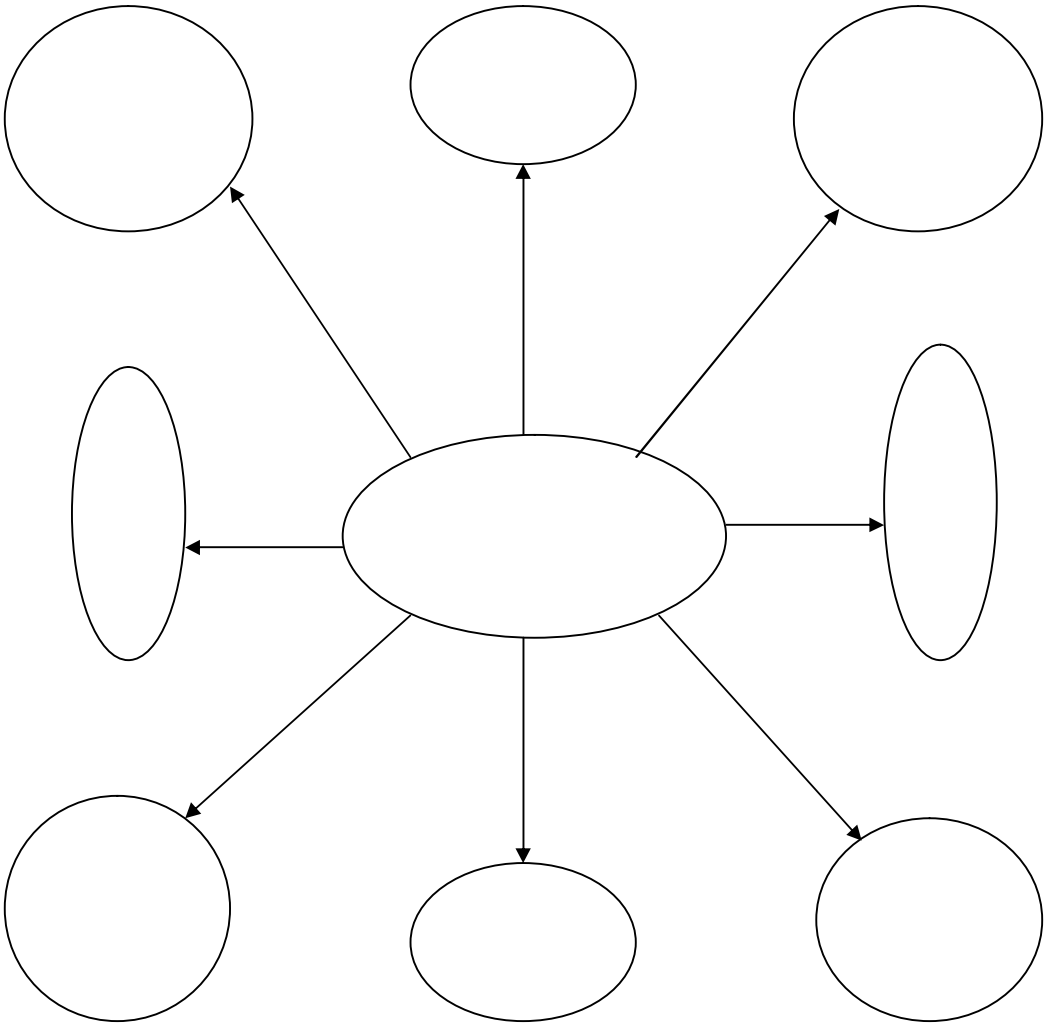
*English for the Emirates*, Workbook 9, Unit 2 Lesson 2 (p. 21)

Appendix H. A Brainstorming Worksheet

Read the topic carefully; write the main word in the central circle and the words that relate to it in the surrounding circles.



Appendix I. A Simple Peer-Review Checklist

# Peer Review

**Dear friend……..……**

**I was very happy when I read your letter. Now, I know a lot about you.**

**However, you have probably forgotten to tell me about your**

- **Address……**
- **Name……**
- **Age……**
- **Grade……..**
- **School…….**
- **Favorite subject……**
- **Favorite teacher……**
- **Father's job……**
- **Mother's job……..**
- **Brothers and sisters……**
- **City…….**
- **Country……**
- **Hobbies……**

**In your next letter, please tell me about them.**

**Yours,**

**Rex**

# VITA

Hichem Aouina is a high school teacher who graduated from the Ecole Normale Superieure of Sousse in 1993. He has a teaching experience of three years in Tunisian schools and ten years in UAE schools. He presented two lectures in Dubai Annual Conferences of English Teachers; one entitled, Online Teaching, and another, The Teachers' Feedback. Heals, participated in the AUS 2006 TESOL Symposium.