

Creating A Bridge Between Academic Research and Artistic Creativity

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of mastering the academic writing skill . In order to achieve our goal, two main ideas will be developed ;the first will discuss new concepts of the theory of learning with a specific focus on the relationship between transformational/telling knowledge, constructivist theory and the difference between successful /average learner . The second section will expose the three-stages of writing as a process approach in terms of pre writing, writing and post writing tasks. This will hopefully help students of fine arts promote an analytical spirit and achieve personal and academic writing for the fulfillment of their memoirs.

Keywords: transformational/telling knowledge; constructivism; academic writing ;process approach; arts.

Many studies in Australia, Canada, England and the USA affirm that students have not received serious instruction or practice in cognitively demanding writing tasks(Applebee1981,R.Carter,1990, Christie1989,Martin 1989) reported (Bereiter and Scardamalia, cited in Grabe & Kaplan ,1996: 125) .In Algeria too some Magister students in different universities have conducted field research on writing and reached similar results highlighting students' weakness regarding cohesion, grammar, vocabulary, structuring . Obviously the less skilled writers are knowledge telling as they are considered as 'the novice-expert writing research,' as (Bereiter and Scardamalia,1996:125) sustained .What makes writing skill so poor in different places of the world? It is not possible to account for one explanation as many interwoven factors are identified .In these lines (Bereiter and Scardamalia, cited in Grabe & Kaplan ,1996: 125) advanced some hypotheses:

- Student have not been trained to early and frequent writing
- Student are inhibited by the huge information availability via internet
- Students do not rely on different sources and reading research
- Students suffer from psychological cognitive development, critical thinking and abstraction.
- Student do not master the rules of written language.

All these remarks necessitate a reconsidering of syllabus designing and approaches to teaching writing from early stages in order to equip learners with cognitive strategies and leading them become skilled writers and transformational knowledge learners. The issue becomes more crucial when learners have to corroborate two different fields, namely academic writing and artistic creativity as for the case of students of the High School of Fine Arts of Algiers who have to write a memoir according to academic norms in relation to their artistic project. Henceforth, the question of how to overcome this mental passivity and writing reluctance is raised. As a possible answer, some pedagogues insist on privileging writing process approach over product one. The former requires notions such as, audience, planning, structuring ,drafting and arguing to surmount the writing reticence (Swales& Feak, 1994, , Zamel,1985,Widowson,1978) and the latter seeks for a perfectly finished text shaped on other's model, as explained by (White, R. and Arndt, 1991,and Hyland,2003) among others. Besides this, the learner-

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centered learning of the process approach needs to promote awareness of the importance of knowledge transforming over knowledge telling to make students behave as active vs. passive learners as Bereiter and Scardamalia, (1987) claimed.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of teaching academic writing and artistic production as a process and discourse and not as a finished product. In order to achieve our goal, two main ideas will be developed; the first will discuss new concepts of the theory of learning which aim at changing the learners' attitudes and behaviours as a whole, while the second, for space limitation, will expose the three stages of the process approach applied to the writing task more specifically as put by (Nunan, 1998).

Some Preliminaries

Interestingly is the parallel we can draw between academic writing and academic artistic project. If we acknowledge that both do not come from vacuum or void it is, then, possible to admit that any type of creation is a result of construction and transformational knowledge that necessitates different processes to reach a final acceptable form. In academic writing, learners have to undertake reading research in its extensive and intensive aspect, take notes of what is directly/indirectly related to the question to be answered, interact with teachers and peers about what is/is not appropriate, and finally structure thoughts and write them coherently and cohesively. However, this is conditioned by many attempts and drafts before reaching a fairly satisfactory written text. Similarly, students of fine arts when undertaking an artistic task-based project have to undergo through the same stages. Obviously, one has to correct the pervasive and misleading belief that relates artistic activity to inspiration only. On the opposite, it is worth recalling a current saying that privileges efforts over gifted talent claiming that any creativity is the outcome of 2% inspiration and of 98% transpiration. Drawing on this assumption, artistic creation in education context needs research compilation too in order to construct one's knowledge on the issue and sharpen critical thinking. By this way, learners could select the best concepts or tools to be used according to their suitability/unsuitability in terms of material, color, shape and esthetics before starting the artistic performance. Moreover, knowing that no masterpiece could be achieved from the first start, both writer and artist are aware of the challenge, effort, involvement and time investment needed for fulfilling their work and beating their path to success.

In this context the theory of learning brings up to discussion some new concepts that are worthy tackling as they shed light on how to be autonomous, creative and efficient learner. Thus, a specific focus is first made on the relationship between transformational/telling knowledge, then on the impact of the constructivist theory and finally the difference between successful/average learner in order to create awareness in the learners' mind on the similarity between writing and artistic production which could be considered at the same time as an argument and a problem-solving.

The relationship Between Transformational/Telling Knowledge

When students arrive at the university they are obviously equipped with limited knowledge of writing skills considered in most cases as telling-knowledge. The latter is defined as description and regurgitation-based learning (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996:119). Indeed, the student's knowledge, deprived from any critical or innovative thinking displays information depending on memory and facts only. As an illustration, we refer to the case of one of our students who is asked to present an assignment on a given sculptor's artworks. She has inserted in likely twenty pictures of the artist's sculptures and written barely three pages to introduce and analyze them. This is another way of being seduced by the numerous artistic pictures available in internet store -standing for an equivalent of personal memory-

which are passively pasted as telling knowledge without pinpointing the mere critical analytical thinking. On the opposite, transformational knowledge approach which is based on analytical approach, e.g. how to transform information drawn from different sources into creative and critical thinking, seems to best meet the norms of academic learning (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996:193). Arguably, the first difficulty for the students is to change their mental attitude and learning practices. Thus, they are expected to shift from being passive learners to active ones by freeing themselves from the habits of telling-knowledge and adopting the transformational knowledge attitude.

Here again I want to come back to artistic studies when some students are unable to transform the theoretical information read into practical one. In other words, they meet difficulties in building a bridge between conceptualization and practice. For example we mention the case of a student who wants to propose a luxury interior design for a wagon of a local train for her artistic project. Her dissertation has been divided into two main parts: theoretical and practical. The former represents a compilation of a diachronic survey of different trains luxury design in Europe while the latter is devoted to an artistic project of an Algerian train. Accordingly one expects her to establish the link between the luxurious design between the European and Algerian train. Nonetheless, she does not know how to use concretely the information of her review of literature for her artistic project. It seems difficult for her to point out what she could adapt/adopt or reject consciously. Her inability to bridge theory to practice has led to produce a memoir with unrelated parts unveiling lack of coherence and cohesion. Seemingly, the absence of transformational knowledge strategy makes her appear as 'the novice-expert writing research,' as (Bereiter and Scardamalia, in Grabe and Kaplan, 1996:125) sustained. To remedy the absence of transformational knowledge skill, I would refer to an interesting exercise I have discovered during a workshop monitored by a Nobel Prize of Cartoon. It is first based on writing one's story which is then, handed to a mate class who has at his/her turn to transform it into a drawing. The move from a text to a picture aims at highlighting that understanding and transforming what others say/write is made possible thanks to the cognitive ability each one possesses -even if not always activated in due time- and which is being constructed, among others along life as the constructivist theory shows.

Constructivist Theory

The constructivist theory views learning as the construction of knowledge and meaning all long life basically through interaction in its different mediations as (Piaget, 1973, Vigotsky, 1978, De Vries, 2002) claimed, while (Duffy and Cunningham, 1966 and Jonassen, 2003,) insist upon nurturing self awareness of the knowledge construction process. Besides this, Pritchard and Woolard (2010:8) consider that " we select and transform information from past and current knowledge and experience into new personal knowledge and understanding." To be able to properly invest the prior knowledge with the present one, it is necessary to defeat some negative psychological factors such as low self esteem, and inferiority complex that are enacted in soliloquy by phrases such as '**My poor production / Their good production**' , **I can't/They can** either at writing or artistic level. This complex of inferiority is particularly prominent at the beginning of any task. In most cases, learners find difficulty how to start their work because they have no idea about the topic. This prompt reaction has to be evacuated first, by urging learners to activate through brainstorming their passive stored knowledge partly, and attempt to widen it through reading and taking notes for research purposes, partly. Above all, what seems be difficult and easy at the same time is how to read, understand, and filter the information to construct one's proper opinion. Indeed, many learners ignore that the deeds of others could be taken as a model or as a means of inspiration to generate one's own creation and not as an end in itself. This, for us, depends on two main attitudes characterized by demystification and distance. A demystifying attitude insemminates in the learner's mind that whatever great is a given creative production, it is never perfect. Therefore, the over

idealization of such a work that could hinder personal creativity will be defeated and personal competition encouraged. On the other side, distance towards other's creation enhances critical thinking and enables to construct self confidence in order to produce better or at least closely similar personal artistic work/or a written piece. But for this goal to be reached distinction between average /successful student needs to be drawn.

The Average Student vs .Successful Student.

To answer the question who an average /successful student is,it is important to clarify that the former relies on reiterating the information given by teacher in class ,while the latter ,besides what s/ he receives in class, seeks how to deepen his/her knowledge by making personal effort through extensive/intensive reading and library research(Veit and al,2004:40). The benefits of reading research are multisided. First it exposes the active student to a myriad of information which tackles any topic from different angles. Second , this may reveal views that can match or contradict one's beliefs and convictions. The similar thoughts reinforce self confidence while the variety of opposing ones could but construct a more tolerant view and wider knowledge on the one hand, and enhance critical and creative thinking , on the other hand. Third, reading and library research play a positive role in empowering the intellectual identity. As an illustration, we do approve the metaphor "*reading works my head*», said by the young girl Dalila,the main character of Mokkadem 's fiction,(1998),who is a very literate and strongly communicative person thanks to the great number of readings she regularly swells (Nedjai Mebtouche,2011:96). For us, reading does really help change behaviour and promote intellectual identity and agency. In the same way, the success of student hangs upon to what extent the perception of reading as a good transformational tool for developing original ,autonomous and creative writing is /is not internalized . Arguably, both transformational and constructivist theories urge the student to invest the already acquired knowledge in class/ life as a means to discover other researches, in order to develop new vision of how to apprehend the question to be discussed in writing or designed in the artistic project. Only at that moment could the learner sharpen his/her intelligence through active learning process that blends the in and out class input that will be transformed into a new output drawing on the principle of Chomsky's transformational rules applied to linguistic performance. The principle of transformational rules could perfectly suit any level of human knowledge when considered in its human and creative dimension . Thus, the learner will adopt self regulated learning which involves the use of cognitive, metacognitive and motivational strategies to create effective learning. Self regulated learners have the control over the use of several cognitive strategies such as predicting, visualizing and summarizing. They also know how to use metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring ,and evaluating solutions (Hyland,2003a:10). Consequently, the learner could become active learner in contrast of the passive one who sets no challenge to win, but accepts to pass to upper grade with less interest and effort. Being more implicated in reading , researching and evaluating entails also developing cognitive skills of argumentation .A fact that will lead us to speak about writing as an argument and a problem -solving.

Writing as Argument and Problem -Solving.

Reference to the importance of transformational knowledge and active learning are meant to draw attention to the importance of making personal effort through research and reading, before starting any writing. It goes without saying that academic writers are expected to write to a reader –the teacher-who already has a sound knowledge on the question asked. So, students have to show through their writing to what extent they have accessed other sources and are able to understand, criticize other's

ideas and , therefore, produce their proper new ideas resulting from the combination of one 's experience confronted with others. Not only have students to generate original ideas in their writing but they are supposed to evidence their statements and ideas by supporting arguments as well. As an illustration we refer to the definition of academic writing proposed by a lecturer's answer to an interviewer who said that writing is *an argument* (Stott,2001:37). The conception of perceiving writing as an argument stresses the idea that students have not to provide general assertive statement -a fact that reveals a rather poor analytical level-but they are expected to justify their point of view by scientific resourced and objective evidence to reach the scientific requirements of academic writing. Moreover, looking for appropriate arguments means to be able to making choice and solving problem.It is fair to recall that the overwhelming availability of information with a mere click on the computer mouse needs a sharp critical thinking to choose the right word, rhetoric and argument. It is worth reminding the commonly known saying in court.'What you say may or will be used against you.' In the same way ,the strength or weakness of any argument lays in to what extent it is/is not closely relevant to support a given idea. For this reason an attitude of prudence is highly recommended when selecting sources of information. Besides this, a great attention has to be conferred to the appropriate way of answering the raised question. For example some students tend to fill up sheets and sheets but they are amazed to be badly scored . At this point , it is crucial for them to realize that what is important in writing is not the quantification of information- whatever its relevance per se is- ,but to what extent the appropriateness and relationship of the selected content will satisfactorily answer the question under study. Indeed, it is possible to admit that the writing activity is an endlessly problem-solving issue bound to choosing, transforming and subsequently arguing what best meets the targeted answer. A fact that justifies the difficulty of writing when taken as a whole .For this reason ,the process approach advocates to split it into three stages that will be developed in the following. But for space limitation we will focus on writing activity only and not on the artistic production.

Three-Stages of the Writing Process

Considering writing as a process is first of all meant to bear in mind from the beginning to the end that it is a dynamic task.'*It reflects that writing which always, but to varying extents and in various ways requires preparation, drafting and revising, purpose and audience'* (Brown and Hood,1989:3-4). (Grabe &Kaplan,1996) The process of writing is mainly divided into three stages such as pre writing, writing and post writing tasks which include other sub stages to be detailed in the development of this paper as enhanced by(Nunan,1998).

Pre Writing Stage

The pre -writing task includes conferencing, brainstorming , generating ideas /collecting data and structuring according to (Nunan,1998).

Conferencing and brainstorming. First, conferencing aloud about the question is necessary to understand properly the question and the different related ideas.Conferencing could be done alone or with others. Often teachers repeat that understanding the question raised is half answering it. This step is immediately followed by brainstorming. Seemingly, conferencing and brainstorming are the two tasks where a relatively great freedom of thoughts expression is recommended in order to generate as much as possible ideas regardless their order, the language used, spelling , grammar and mistakes. It is only by this means that the student can fight the inhibiting writing anxiety. The writer can momentarily forget

the linguistic constraints to free the path for greater inspiration of ideas and focus on generating ideas by multiplying the wh questions such as how, where, when, for what and what.

In this stream (White and Arndt,1992) suggest to use for example either a spider diagram, or map mind, besides to highlighters and drawings. The benefits of the spider diagram or the map mind are considered better than linear notes for many reasons. To start with, the map mind provides different branches around the central circled ideas that could be endlessly ornamented by branches going into different directions. This reflects the upspring of ideas. Second spider diagram or map mind is less space consuming and seems more inspiring too. (Widdowson, 1995:58). However, though this stage of collecting data is positively stimulating for helping overcome the void of the screen page, it remains rather problematic. Often the data collected drawn from different sources are in topsy-turvy order, and sometimes redundant. Thus, there is an urgent need to structure them according to the target set by the writer in order to successfully answer the question.

Structuring. Students often ignore that the process of generating ideas during the brainstorming or taking notes through reading tasks represents a raw material that requires structuring according to the main ideas and supporting ones. There are many possibilities of organizing ideas either from general to specific or vice versa, or from chronological/spatial order. What is important to underline is that the good structuring of ideas must give birth to a coherent and cohesive text underlying respectively logic and unity. It is, therefore, necessary to write an outline before starting writing the essay to be more or less urged to stick to the direction set by the topic, the audience and the writer's purpose.

In addition to that let's recall the importance of respecting the attributes of each part of the essay. Any piece of writing has to fulfill form and content specifically defined for each genre in terms of introduction, development and conclusion. Shortly stated the introduction reiterates the question and the direction to take, while the development should be at the same time in form of separate and related paragraphs in which each of them is structured around one central idea that could be developed through supporting evidence and facts and not personal assertive statements. With these lines Stott, A. and Snarth, R. (2001: 45) suggest *'to select, organize your idea and evidence into sequential argument which uses a new paragraph for each main idea'*. The conclusion besides the restatement of the main ideas tackled is expected to inform the reader on how successfully the writer answers the question by bringing out strong arguments which are objectively, cohesively and explicitly displayed. Having prepared the data and the outline, the student will be confronted with the laborious self-producing step of writing.

Writing- stage and Drafting

It is never enough to insist that writing is an ever ending draft that could be improved, changed, reworked many times before reaching an acceptable level. I do not hesitate to tell my students that teachers, famous researchers and writers used to go through many trials and drafts before writing any research paper or thesis. This may at least demystify the power of these writers in spite of their long experience, high academic qualification and worldwide fame. It can also create more confidence when knowing that writing performance is, for everyone, a difficult task but not an impossible one. Hopefully, students will adopt a more flexible attitude towards their writing by admitting that it is not a finished and perfect product from the first start. In this sense, the process approach is also called an approach of revision implying that many drafts are necessary before reaching a fairly good written piece. This may also help them develop self-criticism, when reaching the editing task level.

Post Writing Stage

After having reached what could be considered as an acceptable version of the written text, two other conscious tasks of critically and objectively evaluating one's product in terms of editing and proof reading are to be followed.

Editing Task

Even if self satisfaction is a stimulating factor in intellectual achievement, this by no means should lessen the self criticism attitude. This is why, the idea of choice underpinned by the idea of editing the work remains of a great concern. It is the moment for the writer to read many times his /her work with sharp critical thinking and distance to find out what wrong /right is, how to improve the global structuring and the cohesion of the text. Changing the order of paragraphs, or sentences inside the paragraphs, adding/omitting some cohesive conjuncts to achieve cohesion and coherence is unavoidable. Halliday and Hassan, maintain that cohesion means coherence of a text with itself, while coherence is the coherence of the text with its context of situation (Halliday and Hassan, 1976:2). Consciousness rising of the benefits of cohesion and coherence signifies that writing is a discourse. Being a discourse implies that writing has a communicative function. A fact that means that at this stage the writer moves from a *writer-based writing* to a *reader-based writing* (White, and al,1991:99). What is important to underline at this moment is to put oneself in the reader's skin and to wonder whether s/he is straightfully going to understand the ideas developed, enjoy the reading, and discover something original. The writer's preoccupation of what effect s/he can produce on the reader means that s/he takes into account the other's expectations, namely the precise answer to the question, the reader's pleasure, the explicit transmission of the targeted information and the power of argumentation. However, the internalization of these explicit and implicit rules that govern the writing process at editing phase is not the last requirement. Another necessary task has to be adopted: proof reading.

Proof Reading

During exams superseding, I have often observed students keeping on writing their answer till the last minutes of the allotted time and giving back their exam sheets either without reading them at all or, when it may happen, they read them without the slightest critical glance, ignoring, therefore all about the shortcomings of any performance. In this sense, Chomsky underlines that the occurrence of errors is, in most cases, due to the fatigue and the stress which may lead to lack of concentration (Chomsky, 1957:12). Consequently, the demanding multisided activity of writing which might inevitably be punctuated by errors, that would negatively influence the evaluation of their performance has to be explained to learners many times before they realize the impact of proof reading in improving their written text. To be able to overcome these traps, it is necessary to go step by step through the proof reading activity in order to enhance one's writing by correcting or at least reducing the occurrence of errors. To guaranty the success of this task, the writer has to be aware of the sublevels of proofreading that could be considered separately. In other words, the student can focus for example, first, on grammatical errors, then lexical ones, and later on punctuation. At this stage too, the notion of choice is reiterated since at any moment the writer is obliged to choose the most appropriate lexicon, grammatical structure, punctuation and reference.

It is also possible to ask someone else to make the proof reading because sometimes some mistakes are not noticeable by oneself for lack of distance. Another suggestion which is worth mentioning is to come back to the text to proof reading it after pause (s) because when released from the fatigue of writing the concentration is renewed to spot out the mistakes. This requires a good time management to prepare the essay before the deadline of handing. Only after all these stages, one can print the written

piece by observing the requirements of printing according to the instructions related to the form, font , margin and line space.

Conclusion

The intense technological development, namely internet, has led to a kind of mental passivity that encourages plagiarism temptation at the detriment of creative writing .It is now within the grasp of everybody to have a rapid access to information and to the latest discovery in different research disciplines via websites . In order to fight this mental passivity, I attempted in this paper to highlight the triangulation between reading research, transformational knowledge, and process approach that give birth to self accomplishment at writing or artistic creation level . This triangulation shows undeniable benefits for many reasons. It is widely admitted that it helps raise awareness that writing/artistic production though difficult could be organized into related separate stages respectively as pre writing ,writing and post writing or sketching , designing and polishing .It also highlights the dynamic aspect of any creativity by considering it as an ever ending renewable draft in opposition to perceiving it as a finished production. Both can be considered as a result of transformational and constructive knowledge. Moreover, we do believe that it helps construct more self confidence through self assessment in terms of problem-solving, choice and argument each stage requires. Thus, the process approach can consolidate the mastery of each stage than the product one which targets the result as a perfect finished product. Each of the two approaches reveals different attitudes towards the learning of writing skill. Shortly stated , the former implies new challenges and perceptions of learning which are learner- centered as opposed to the latter requirements which are teacher-centered. Besides this, the learner centered-learning needs to promote awareness of the importance of knowledge transforming over knowledge telling to make students behave as active vs. passive learners as Bereiter and Scardamalia,(1987)claimed.However, the process approach may show some drawbacks such as a somewhat perception of fragmentation which may decrease the writer's involvement since it is not always possible to draw a sharp line between the interwoven substages above mentioned.

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