

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE PROCESS APPROACH TO COMPOSITION

1. Origins and focus of the process approach

The process approach had its origins in the late 1960s/early 1970s, when second language researchers looked to first language composition research in the hope of finding a theoretical foundation for the teaching of ESL composition. Arapoff (1968, 1969) Lawrence (1973, 1975) and Zamel (1976, 1982) were amongst the first ESL teachers and researchers to emphasise the importance of composing processes in the teaching of written composition, drawing on first language research which revealed writing to be a complex recursive process. The description of writing built up from both L1 and L2 research provided the basis for an approach to the teaching of ESL composition which became known as the process approach. While certain teaching methods are associated with the process approach, as, for example, encouraging students to work from rough drafts to polished drafts, conferencing and freewriting, the approach has been described as a perspective based on the perception of writing as a process rather than as a prescribed set of methods (Liebman-Kleine 1986). Young (1978), and later, Hairston (1982) and Spack (1984) equated the process approach with a new **paradigm**ⁱ for the teaching of written composition, to emphasise that the new orientation was fundamentally different from that preceding it (i.e. current traditional rhetoric or the so-called product approach).

2. Relevance of the process approach to L1 and L2 writers

While the process approach was formulated and is still described as a teaching approach to second language composition, its scope in both teaching and research has not been limited to L2 composing. This apparent versatility of the process approach is possibly due to a general perception of its practitioners that composing is not viewed as a fundamentally different procedure for first and second language students (see Silva 1990:15-16). This is perhaps because the focus of the process approach is on the written interaction rather than the

learning of linguistic forms (see Zamel 1985, 1987). While most process practitioners would agree that using typical process methods would help to develop fluency (if not accuracy) in a second language, Cumming's (1989) comprehensive study suggests that there is no direct relationship between second language proficiency and composing expertise. Over fifty video protocol analyses carried out over the last twenty years bear out Cumming's conclusions, and suggest that there is no such thing as a typical second language composing profile, or, for that matter, a typical second language writer. A continuum is apparent, rather, ranging from less proficient to more proficient composing behaviour, with first and second language composers represented at both ends. It is, however, clear that, below a certain level of proficiency in a second language, composing is not viable, and that composing in a second language, while not following a pattern significantly different from that of first language composing (yet see Raimes 1985), does impose certain constraints. For example, redrafting does not offer significant gains to writers who lack the linguistic skills needed to revise their texts, or who cannot interpret the cultural nuances which indicate what an acceptable text constitutes.

3. Research into composing processes

First- and, subsequently, second-language research into composing processes lent itself to case studies, usually involving small numbers of writers engaged in a specific writing task or tasks. Such research often involved the use of think-aloud protocols to reconstruct the composing processes in which their writers engaged (Emig 1977, Flower & Hayes 1980, Perl 1980, Sommers 1980, Raimes 1985). In some cases video protocols were used to provide a more comprehensive picture of individual student's composing procedures (Jones 1982, Matsushashi 1982, Pianko 1979). While the case studies used were usually limited to one or a few writing tasks, teacher observations in classrooms (Shaughnessy 1977) and ethnographic research carried out in actual communities (Heath 1983) involved long-term studies and provided detailed information on literacy in general and composing in particular.

4. The view of writing built up from process research

The following view of writing was built up from L1 and L2 process research, that is research into the written interactions in which writers engage as they compose. Writing was viewed as a **process** which is not linear and logical, but “messy, recursive, convoluted, and uneven” (Hairston 1982:85). While the process was thought to be infinitely flexible, process researchers acknowledged that **expressing ideas** was important in the early stages, and that revision and editing should be left until the later stages. Writing was also viewed as a form of discourse, involving a process of **interaction and negotiation** (Taylor in Chick ms) with the projected reader. This process required frequent **redrafting** as writers continually reworked their messages in anticipation of the imagined reader’s responses; it involved “producing a **text that evolves over time**” (Zamel 1985:79). In order to anticipate the prospective reader’s responses to what they had written, writers were thought to switch rapidly to different **reader roles** during the composing process (Widdowson 1984:64) so as to dialogue by proxy with the imagined reader. Writing was seen as a form of thinking, as “the act of writing itself is capable of **generating ideas**” (Spack 1984:650-651). Composing was seen as involving not only formal expository writing but less formal modes, particularly, **expressive writing**, which writers used both as a discovery process and as a means of clarifying what they meant (Candlin 1981:184).

5. The process approach to teaching composition

Insights into the ways in which composing takes place have meant that the processes involved in composing can be taught, **demystifying** composing and making it more accessible to students (Bloom 1992:3), whether they be first or second language writers. The teacher can **model** the processes involved in composing by demonstrating these directly to students (Pfungstag 1984) or by providing students with a schema of composing processes (Hedge 1988, Walshe 1980, White 1989). The process-oriented teacher adopts a **collaborative** rather than authoritarian role, intervening to show learner writers how to assume the necessary reader roles adopted by writers during the process (Spack 1984, Zamel 1985). Process practitioners assist students to

revise by responding to writing as **work in progress** rather than assessing it as a finished product only (Sommers 1982, Zamel 1985). Methods such as **conferencing** (Graves 1978, Zamel 1985) and **journal writing** (Martin 1981) emphasise the **interactive** nature of writing as a process in which meaning is negotiated with an imagined reader: the focus is on the communication mode, that is fluency (Widdowson in Chick ms). The realisation that expressive writing can be a means of discovery is put to practical application in techniques such as **freewriting** (Elbow 1989, Raimes 1987).

6. Criticisms of the process approach

The main criticism of the process approach is that it omits to set composing in its wider social context and does not deal satisfactorily with the issue of academic requirements. This issue is addressed in some detail in Chapter Six, where it is shown how the interpersonal context of the process approach does not take cognizance of the wider social influences which might shape composing. The process approach has also been criticised for representing composing as a universal process (Faigley 1986:534, Kostelnick 1989:278, Krapels 1990:53, Lynn 1987:908, Young 1978:40): process practitioners themselves have cautioned that writing is too complex and too idiosyncratic for researchers to be able to identify one common writing procedure (Raimes 1985, Spack 1984). It is hoped that the modelling process involved in this study has gone some way towards distinguishing between the commonalities and variables involved in composing.

ⁱ It must be remembered that all of the abovementioned writers were using the term paradigm in the sense of **disciplinary matrix** (Kuhn 1962:182) rather than **comprehensive world view** (1962:175), the sense in which it tends to be used in the field of Education (notably by curriculum theorists such as Grundy 1986 and Schubert 1987). To suggest that there is a disciplinary matrix for the field of written composition is clearly unwise, as the field of written composition is characterised by diversity (see North 1987:iii) rather than by a shared set of values and beliefs about composition and how it should best be taught. Moreover, it is difficult to see why the process approach, while popular, should be given a position of prominence in a field which was then, and still is dominated by form-based approaches (for example, current-traditional rhetoric in the 1980s and social constructionism in the 1990s, as well as the postmodern approaches based on the perception of discourse as text). Yet Young (1978), Hairston (1982) and Spack's (1984) claim that the advent of the process approach involved a **paradigm shift** was in fact justified, as the focus shifted (at least momentarily) towards a consideration of writing as interaction between participants, that is the **communicative** function of writing was being emphasised for the first time.