Developing Friendly-Instruction Writing Activities to Engage Students’ Creative Writing

Uzlifatul Masruroh Isnawati
Universitas Islam Lamongan, Faculty of Economics
LAMONGAN, East Java, Indonesia
uzlifatulmasruroh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Engaging the students to write is a challenging activity for both the teacher and the students. It is widely known that learning to write in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning. The students’ low reading habit as it goes with the students’ low motivation to write contributing their low productivity in writing. In fact, the majority of classroom instructions for the teaching of writing somehow still, dominated by the writing rules, certain topics for writing are the routine activities occurred in the classroom instruction. Therefore, this does not provide much space and opportunity for the students to explore their writing. This paper elaborates a way to develop friendly-instructional lesson planning to engage students’ creative writing. The writer involves the writing instruction with the students’ personal activities. This is intended to touch the students’ affective side as well as their personal interest. To mention some, the followings are the activities covered in Lesson Planning, the rainbow game, If I were......(paragraph), I like...and dislike (paragraph). Indeed, the teacher knows better what their students’ need and deal with in their writing, therefore, the teacher’s major concern in scaffolding the students writing creatively.

KEYWORDS: friendly instruction, lesson planning, creative writing

It has already widely experienced by teachers that writing is the most challenging skill to master for foreign or second language learners (Hyland, 2003: xiii). Even, in the context of first language, students still find it difficult to produce a piece of writing in their native language. These phenomena make both the teachers and the students ‘frustrated’ in with writing instruction. In fact, not many students are confident in writing. It is quite different from speaking, in speaking the students would
easily express their thought without considering the mistakes they might produce. In writing, the students would consider about a set of rules including about the grammar, the words choice, as well as the content they produce. Those factors are considered as their ‘barrier’ in writing.

If we make some comparisons with the teaching of speaking, there should be no problem regarding the teaching of writing. If the students are able to speak, at the same time the students are also able to write as well. In discourse context, this is a matter of producing spoken text and the written text. The different is only that, the students considered if they are not able to produce a piece of writing. Therefore, the teachers as the facilitator in the classroom should provide the classroom with activities, which stimulate the students to write. The activities in writing instruction should motivate the students to write without feeling hesitant. This is what I consider as friendly-based instruction. The ideas of friendly-based instruction, which later elaborated in lesson plan practically, are expected to help the students in writing.

WHY FRIENDLY-INSTRUCTION?

Once I assign my students to write a recount text of her own. Her name is Diana. She wrote a very good essay and a poem. She surprised me with her writings. Then, I asked them ‘how do you produce such good writing?’ In addition, she said, ‘I love writing about myself and I always make connections between my writing with my own experience”. From her story, then I realized that many writers are successful and they are mostly writing about their own experience. Of course, in this context, I do not discuss about the academic writing. I focus on how stimulate the students to love and make the students familiar with writing as the main concern.

The idea of friendly-based instructions is based on the idea that the students’ affection in writing should be first developed. When the passion of writing is already
‘within’ the students, it would be easier for the students to write since they have their own motivation. Therefore, the writing activities should be made as friendly as possible. This is intended not to make them frustrated. In friendly-based instruction lesson planning, the students are not ‘weighted’ with the length, the required theme, or other requirements in writing giving the students space and freedom to write are the core of the activities in this lesson planning. So, the teaching of the writing is not always started by assigning the students writing a good topic sentence. They will learn that later... Since, for the beginner writer it is not easy to make a good start in writing. Therefore, let the friendly-instruction takes the role instead, the ‘formal’ rule does.

**Teacher as Facilitator in Writing Instruction**

Referring to one of the book Cambourne’s Theory of Literacy Learning written by Brian Cambourne, (1995) develops a theory of learning that he has since applied to literacy. He began his research because he was continually surprised knowing the students who did not seem able to learn simple reading, writing. Therefore, regardless of the level of difficulty faced by the students in learning simple reading and writing, he believes that another factor might influence this are due to the students’ motivation and affection towards the subject being taught.

In teacher’s mind, motivated students are usually those who participate actively in class, express interest in the subject matter, and study a great deal. Teachers can easily recognize characteristics such as these. They also have more opportunity to influence these characteristics than students’ reasons for studying the second language. Or they attitudes toward the language and its speakers. If we can make our classrooms places where students enjoy coming because the content is interesting and relevant to their age level of ability, where the learning goals are
challenging yet manageable and clear, and where the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, we can make a positive contribution to students’ motivation to learn.

Graham and Schmidt (1991) state several areas where educational research has reported increased levels of motivation for students in relation to pedagogical practices. Including among these are:

a. Motivating students into the lesson. At the opening on stages of lessons (and within transitions), it has been observed that remarks teachers make about forthcoming activities can lead to higher levels of interest on the part of the students.

b. Varying the activities, tasks, and materials. Students are reassured by the existence of classroom routines, which they can depend on. However, lessons, which always consist of the same routines, patterns, and formats, have been shown to lead to a decrease in attention and an increase in boredom. Varying the activities, tasks and materials can help to avoid this and increase students’ interest levels.

c. Using co-operative rather than competitive goals. Co-operative learning activities are those in which students must work together in order to complete a task or solve the problem. These techniques have been found to increase the self-confidence of the students, including weaker ones because every participant in co-operative tasks has an important role to play. Knowing that their teammates are counting on them can increase students’ motivation.

Clearly, teachers have important role in motivating the students through competitive interaction, while in others, co-operative activities will be more successful.

Further, in a slight different perspective, Lightbown and Spada (2001) assert that the most important factor in second language acquisition success is motivation.
Everyone agrees that learners who want to learn tend to do better than those who do not. However, we must guard against too strong an interpretation of this. Sometimes, even in the highly motivated learners encounter great difficulties in improving their mastery of the language. We know, for example, that learners who begin learning as a second language as adults rarely achieve the fluency and accuracy that children do in first language acquisition. This failure to achieve native-like ability cannot be taken as evidence that adult second language learners, there are always those who are more successful than others. This is sometimes due to differences in language learning aptitude and in how the instruction interacts with individual learner’s styles and preferences for learning.

Obviously, teachers have no influence over a learner’s intrinsic motivation for learning a second language. Learners come into our classrooms from different background and life experiences, all of which has contributed to their attitudes toward and motivation to learn the target language. The principal’s way that teachers can influence learner’s motivation is by making the classroom a supportive environment in which students are stimulated, engaged in activities which are appropriate to their age, interests, and cultural backgrounds, and most importantly, where students can experience success. This in turn can contribute to positive motivation, leading to still greater success.

**The Teacher’s Role and Aspirations for Students**

Kumaradivelu (2003) has suggested that teachers can adopt three different major roles in the lives of their students:

a. Teachers as passive technicians. This means that the teacher is no more than the mechanism for delivering the teaching package. Teachers in this role accept
uncritically the authority of others, who prescribe through the syllabus, textbook, and examination what is to be taught and how.

b. Teachers as reflective practitioners. Such teachers tend to have critical outlook on the materials and methods they are required to use, and may well adapt and transform them. They are also self-critical in that they constantly reflect on their actions, both as they do them and after they have done them. This implies a teacher who is more deeply, and personally engaged pedagogically in the profession.

c. Teachers as transformative intellectuals. In this role, teachers move beyond purely subject-focused reflection. They see themselves as agents of social change, with the power to influence the direction of their students’ live, not merely as purveyors (in his case) a language. This gives them the opportunity, not only to teach the language, but to help learners appropriate it for their own purposes.

Referring to the previous statements, the teacher might have different goals for their students. They can be explained as the followings:

a. They may simply want their students to become proficient language users (this corresponds with the teacher as passive technician role)

b. They may want their students to become critical thinkers about the process of teaching/learning they are engaged in (this corresponds with the teacher as reflective practitioner role)

c. They may want their students to become human citizens of the world. In addition to being proficient users of the language, and reflecting on their learning. (this corresponds with the teacher as transformative intellectual role)

d. They may want their students to become human citizens of the world, in addition to being proficient users of the language, and reflecting on their learning (this corresponds with the teacher as transformative intellectual role).
Among those three different goals, a question comes up: Which role would be selected by the teachers, as a passive technician role, as reflective practitioner role, or as transformative intellectual role? Meanwhile, Maley (2014) reflects that working with the cultural dimensions as suggested above would favor the development of teachers as transformative intellectuals and of students as humane citizens of the world. Further, this would be everyone’s benefit. Indeed, the students became the part who takes the benefits if the teachers take important part if the teachers might observe, analyze the students’ need in writing instruction. Then, provide the lesson planning instruction, which meet their students’ need.

**More Motivations: Grading, Rewards**

Some people advocate elimination of rewards because they erode intrinsic motivation, yet cooperative learning structures include praising and celebrations. How can this be reconciled? Not all rewards and not all ways of giving rewards erode intrinsic motivation. It is commonly known that praise and celebrations have numerous positive benefits they hold for our students and our class. Not only do the students feel more competent when they receive positive feedback, we harness powerful social forces when students praise each other and celebrate successes. Think about the last time you were complimented. How did you feel about yourself? How did you feel about the person who gave you the compliment? We boost students’ self-esteem and liking for others by including praise and celebrations in our team learning structures. We create a more positive learning environment; students feel more secure, are more likely to participate, and more willing to take risks. We develop in students the habit of mind of looking for good in others. We transform classroom norms. Instead of being ridiculed as a know-it-all or worse students are appreciated for their knowledge and skills.
Furthermore, recent brain research corroborates the argument for inclusion of frequent praise and celebrations in the classroom. James Mc Gaugh in Kagan (2012) elaborates the principle of retrograde memory enhancement. What he and his co-workers have established is that emotion is a signal to the brain, “this is worth remembering!” thus when we teach in ways that generate emotion in our students, our lessons are better remembered. If they praise each other after solving a problem, the solution is better cemented into memory. We deal with the issue of rewards and motivation in depth. Related to the writing instruction in the classroom, the role of reward would be very urgent as the teacher also gives rewards to other subject. The reward and compliment given to the students are symbolized as the appreciation of what they produce in writing’. Although, the reward is stated verbally, such ‘that is good’, ‘good idea, I like it’, or also in a written form as a feedback for the students. They both are worthed. It happened, when we were at school, right? How I remembered the teacher wrote on my writing’s feedback though I realized that my writing was not that good. but, this really means a lot for the students.

Sample of the Activities Used in Lesson Plan

As this paper is intended to provide the friendly-based instruction in writing instruction, the followings are given some examples of those instruction compiled taken from many sources. The lesson planning covers with the objective, level, source, and also the procedure of the activities.

1) The Rainbow Game

Aims : describe various objects; express an opinion
Level : 20-25 minutes
Source : worksheet, coloured-pen
Procedure :
a. Ask the students to colour that they like and write those four colours as the headings of four of the five columns on their worksheets. The fifth column is left blank.

b. Dictate a list of 20 familiar nouns. Have students write each word in one or more columns, according to what they decide is the most appropriate color.

c. As one student read his list aloud, classmates guess which color was intended

d. Have students label the fifth (blank) column with a favorite color and then write four to six vocabulary items for that color

e. Students take turns reading their color lists as their clasmates guess which colour they intended  

(adapted from White: 1995)

2) If I were ..........(paragraph)

Aims : sharpen the students’ imagination towards their future plan.

Level : 20-25 minutes

Source : -

Procedure :

a. Brainstorming the students about what they plan for the short term and their plan in the future time.

b. Write down their ‘dream’ and plan on the paper.

c. Assign the students to read their writing in turn.

d. Have students label the most favourable plan they write.

e. To evaluate, give the students the additional question , ‘ why they like this plan better than other plan’.

f. Students take turns reading their writing followed by discussion with the class.. (additional activities, reading aloud and speaking)

g. Displaying the students’ writing on the classroom’s wall.
3) The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars

Aims : compare and contrast in simple sentence

Source : chalkboard & chalk (for teacher) pencil & paper (for students)

Procedure :

a. Draw the simple structures on the chalkboard: a sun, a moon, and several stars
b. Ask: “which two are alike and why? What makes the third difference?”
c. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers and that it is interesting to hear
   the variety of ideas that students have.
d. Write model sentence on the chalkboard: The...........is/are like
   the...........because............ The

e. Give students 5 minutes to write their opinion

f. Share aloud

4) I like............and I dislike ............ (paragraph)

Aims : expressing the students’ preference in written text.

Level : 20-25 minutes

Source : worksheet

Procedure :

a. The students are given a paper labeled with “ I like............”
b. The students continue the I like............into a complete sentences.
c. After completing the I like ............then the students continued with I dislike.......sentence.
d. The students are assigned to write as many as possible, until the teacher is able to
   select the most interesting, the most unique sentences they write.
e. Selecting and grouping the I like............into one paragraph selecting and grouping
   the I like paragraph into one paragraph.
f. Now, the students are already accomplish two paragraphs.

g. The teacher evaluates the students’ paragraph directly in the classroom.

h. Display the like and dislike paragraph on the students’ wall classroom.

5) It’s All in the Name

Aims : practicing the students in writing based on their alphabetical names.

Class time : 20-30 minutes

Resource : worksheet.

Procedure :

a. Ask all the students to come to the board and write their name

b. Make sentence based on the first letter of their full name.

c. To control the unity and content of the sentences, make sure that the sentences are interrelated each other.

d. The teacher might lead the students to focus on the specific character or objective of writing the whole name sentences.

e. From the sentences created, it might become the story of each individual/student.

Those activities are only some examples of lesson planning I develop for teaching writing at the beginner level. There are more activities which I develop myself, some I adapt from the various sources including the journals and the textbooks, but mostly with some adaptations. Therefore, adaptations are needed due to the students’ need since basically the sources of the texts are in different activities, procedures, level and context as well as cultural setting.

CONCLUSION

There is always a way to promote the students’ writing creatively. As a teacher who takes role as facilitator and motivator, motivating and facilitating the students to write are merely their responsibility. Therefore, creating what I so called as friendly-
lesson planning instruction would give the students benefit in learning to write. Different students need different approach and treatment, the teacher knows better what sort of lesson planning would fit best to their students. Adapting, compiling, and developing lesson planning creatively from various sources are worthed as an effort to facilitate the students’ writing instruction.

REFERENCES

Cambourne, B. 1995. Toward an educationally relevant theory of literacy learning: twenty years of inquiry: The Reading Teacher, 49 (182-190)


Maley, A. 2014. Local Culture: Taxidermy or Living Organism. Proceeding Asia Creative Writing. UNESA. State University of Surabaya Press.