

J's English Classroom News

ENG 204

TEACHERS HAVE A MANDATE TO:

- Incorporate the use of multimedia forms of technology in the classroom for instruction and assessment.
- Create stimuli for writing in diverse genres.
- Teach writing conventions in an authentic context rather than abstract.



- Encourage students to take responsibility for certain aspects of their writing.



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REFLECTION ON NCTE (2004): BELIEFS ABOUT THE TEACHING OF WRITING

The beauty of studying a literary text as a class is that it provides opportunities to share thoughts and ideas with others. Writer's write with a purpose and an audience in mind but that audience does not process information in the very same way. Hence the reason why teachers are encouraged to foster a sense of unity, respect and openness amongst their classroom community of English language learners. Students need to feel comfortable sharing their reading and writing experiences with others. In this way, students develop a critical perspective on issues and this results in divergent rather than one-track thinking. Indeed an uninhibited flow of ideas is what a teacher wants from a class who are on a path to growing and increasing fortitude in their writing abilities.

In adopting Vygotsky (1978) socio-cultural approach to learning which advocates the need for social interaction between learners and more knowledgeable others (MKO's), teachers need to encourage students to read aloud and to engage in discourse. After discourse (debates, grand conversations, reflections etc) and shared reading comes shared writing. The teacher can model the specific aspect of writing to the whole class using several examples, thereafter students engage in guided practice in small groups. It is only when students feel comfortable enough to work on their own that they should be granted permission to work independently on a piece of writing in a specific genre in the class or for homework.

It must be emphasized that the NCTE (2004) recommends that writing be incorporated in activities after students have engaged in shared or independent reading and in this way students can make an authentic rather than abstract connection about writing' conventions, style, purpose and so forth. For e.g. students should not attempt exercises focusing on correcting grammar outside the context of a piece of literature which has morphological and syntactical errors.

More importantly, students should not be pressured to "write for the teacher" or to follow a template. Yes, students need to write for specific purposes and within context but we as teachers do not want to stifle the students' individual perspectives on issues. Students need their inner voices to be heard and to be guided appropriately.

Furthermore, writing is a dynamic rather than a static process. Therefore, even if a student's thoughts are organized after reading the literary text and is assumed to be mentally prepared to develop those thoughts into ideas for writing, this may not be so. During this time, even more thoughts can occur which can shed light on, dispel or cloud previous thoughts. To assist students with the aforesaid teachers need to teach students writing to learn strategies which can help to stimulate, capture, organize, and edit their thoughts or ideas.

Therefore it is quintessential that students be provided sufficient time to write both in the classroom and at home.

When students write at home and in the classroom, teachers should help students to connect their writ-

ing to their lives, habits, and preferences outside of the school for e.g. blogging, texting, journal and diary entries, e-mailing and instant messaging. By providing students an opportunity to express their beliefs, values and attitudes, the students will be more motivated to take responsibility for certain aspects of their writing for e.g. reflections

Nevertheless, sharing is a big part of growing as a writer and therefore students should be provided with opportunities to use the technology that they are familiar with to collaborate with each other. For e.g. The teacher may set up a classroom blog for students to post comments on short stories, poems, character sketches. She explains the rules which apply to its use and is obligated to monitor it and post comments as well. Additionally, teachers can help students to gravitate towards the writing process for e.g. editing, revising and proofreading by sharing their work using Google apps. Students will appreciate that the writing process can become less tedious because of the instantaneous feedback which can be received from their teacher and peers.

Multimedia can also be used in a whole classroom activity for e.g. videoconferencing with students in an English classroom in some distant land who have studied the same piece of literature. Students would then reflect on this experience as well as insights gained into the literary piece for e.g. thematic content-the thought of this excites me.

In sum, the possibilities to make writing purposeful and worthwhile for students are endless but without the much needed motivation and dedication from students and teachers themselves, students' growth in writing abilities and teachers' growth in pedagogical skills to teach writing in a relevant and engaging way are seemingly an uphill climb.