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ABSTRACT

Teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) can use prewriting activities at the earliest stages of instruction to help their students acquire good language skills. Prewriting involves energizing student participation in thinking, talking, group interaction, and skeletal writing activities that become components of a writing task. Concentration on the individual components of a writing task ensures that students actually begin writing early but are not overwhelmed with tasks that they cannot handle. Specific prewriting activities such as group brainstorming, clustering, looping, cubing, pictorializing, dialogue writing, story completion, and short lectures are discussed. Prewriting activities not only help students acquire the target language more effectively, but they build interpersonal, thinking, and planning skills that can be utilized in other fields. (MDM)

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PREWRITING ACTIVITIES: FOCUS ON THE PROCESS OF WRITING

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Writing is a process of communication or sharing of ideas. No one writes without anything to say. Thus, writing compositions requires the fomenting of ideas inside and beyond the classroom, prior to thought organization. Writing had been assigned the last phase of the language-teaching sequence in Listening-Speaking Reading-Writing. It was however, a pedagogical drawback to postpone writing too long when it could have been interwoven into the first three levels such as a short dictocomp to recognize noun-verb chains, drawing main ideas from an effective speaker, preparing short dialogues for a given plot, paraphrasing what has been read and writing slogans in response to a report on the pollution level in a local Smokey Mountain counterpart.

During the TESL heyday, a number of teachers got hooked to controlled writing just like transforming a series of highly structured questions into statements to form a neat composition. That was a big relief from the agony of painting red a student's composition. But the process robbed a student of the excitement in expanding an idea from his own experiences, relating ideas to observed happenings and blocking even the crudest of sentences to build the context of what he wants to communicate to others. Yet, writing an exposition or an essay doesn't just occur. The answer to student insecurities and muffled sighs to writing assignments is prewriting activities.

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What is prewriting?

Prewiring is more than just a gimmick, as cynics claim, but a structured design to energize student participation in thinking, talking, group interaction, and skeletal writing such as building the components of a writing task. The activities, to become participative, must be experiential in nature. The teacher has to be a prewriting facilitator, all the way, in order to eradicate mental blocks to writing. He guides and avoids lectures on "how-tos"; he illustrates interactively with students instead of presenting his own analysis of model expositions and essays.

Some prewriting activities could be oral, written or illustrative which students perform individually, in groups or dyads. These are more process-oriented than product-oriented, although the experienced teacher prefers a blend of the two approaches. In fact, each experiential activity expects bits of behavioral output to be used as input to actual writing. To the English teacher, prewriting is viewed not in isolation but within the total process of prewriting or planning, composing or drafting, and revising or final writing.

Some prewriting activities which can readily be presented in cut-up demonstrations include group brainstorming, clustering, looping, cubing, interviewing visits to places of interest, pictorializing, fantasizing, dialogue writing, story completion and lecturette, among others. Table 1 lays out a teacher's guide to prewriting tryouts that freshman college students respond to enthusiastically. It can be noted that the teacher's role is supportive while students' action is dynamically interactive. Examples in Table 1 provide a sense of direction to both teacher and students but cannot of course capture the prewriting actualization of students. The banking of students' written output of

detailed prewriting activities can certainly enrich and refine the teacher's facilitative techniques.

Words of caution to the teacher: Get off your Perfect English Pedestal (PEP). Create the atmosphere and purpose for writing. Launch student action and step back to your role as learning facilitator.

How experiential can a prewriting activity be?

From the facilitator's perspective, prewriting and composing occupy the initial point in DeVito's experiential vehicle(Figure 1).

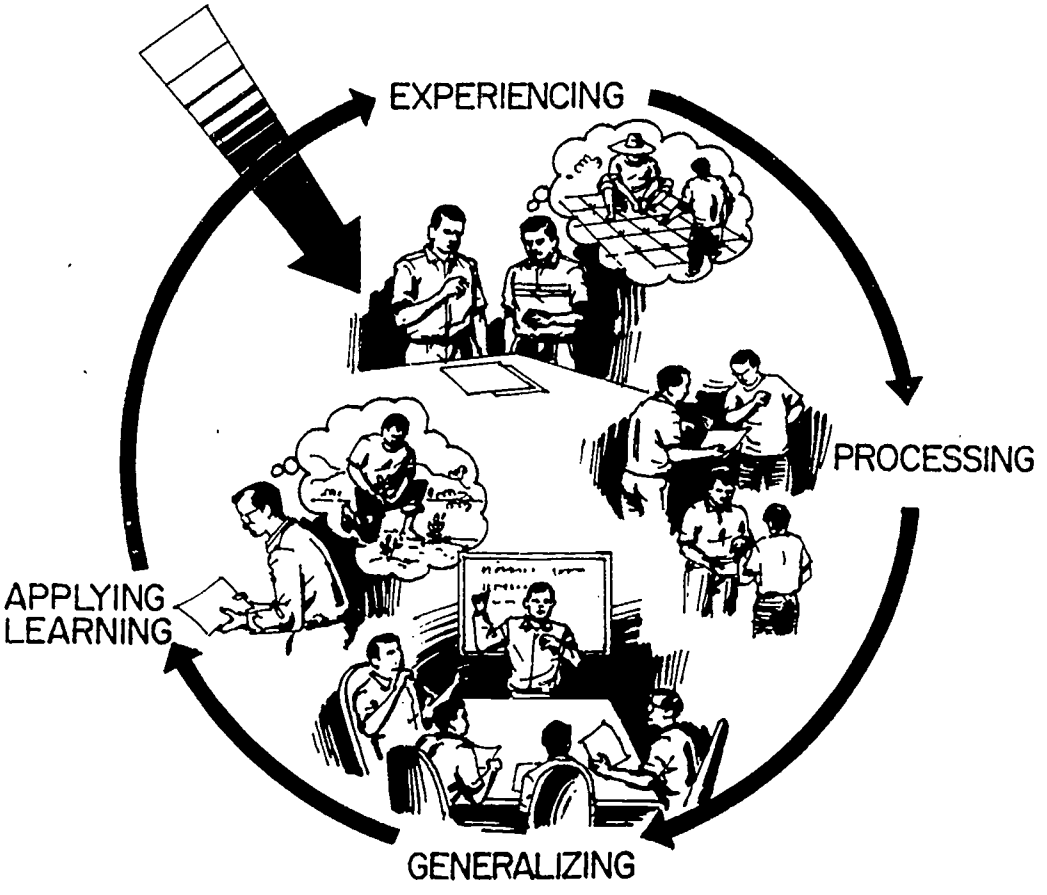

Figure 1. The Experiential Learning Cycle

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The arrow in the experiential cycle indicates the learning goals and teacher preparation. Students' learning experiences may be live or simulated. Student options should be built into the learners' experiencing phase. Processing means the reflection on what could have been done better, modified or deleted based on student output and facile operation of the process. The learning facilitator then formulates generalizations and shares these with other English teachers by way of publishing articles, workshops and informal interactions with colleagues. Generalizations focus on the writing approach that students have been exposed to in terms of mobilized thinking, organizing and writing processes. In other words, he asks himself: What writing skills have my students acquired through both real and contrivbed happenings? The teacher's commitment to participative or experiential learning then automatically applies or spreads to other facilitative challenges that he encounters other than guiding students to write, like training adults for leadership roles and communication interchanges.

Spreading the "good word" by action and continuous practice serves as a more effective and less imposing teaching methodology than one to two hours of lecture, even when reinforced by voluminous handouts. Not before long, this English teacher will find himself attuned to participative research and extension methodologies that should cause a dent in national development. For English teachers – the development of manpower who can organize and expound sound as well as convincing ideas. As an offshoot to experiential learning methodologies, the teacher sheds off his dictatorial tendencies and lecturing fixation. He begins to relate learning processes to maximization of knowledge acquisition, with him as learning facilitator and no longer the traditional teacher.

Lest the learner gets sidelined

What price participative learning experiences to college students in agricultural and technical schools? They would unknowingly, perhaps, carry over participative approaches to interactive negotiations with people - farmers, fisherfolk and other "marginals" in the development process. But what tangible benefits can students derive from participative or experiential learning?

They learn by doing.

They get the opportunity to assess appropriateness and effectiveness of their own learning activities.

They operationalize interpersonal skills in group settings.

They become adept in transforming learning goals into meaningful tasks to accomplish within a time-span.

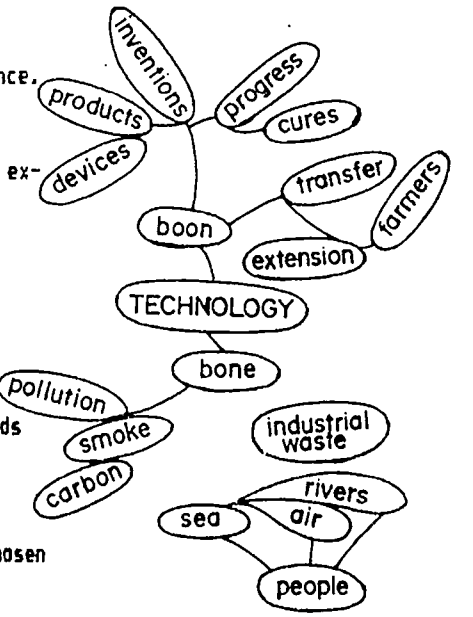
They formulate generalizations based on their experiences and whatever enrichment made accessible to them.

They transfer or apply the thinking, planning, organizing and reviewing behaviors to other learning tasks.

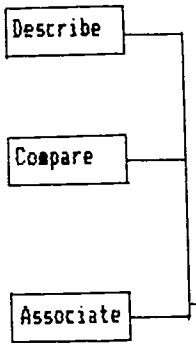
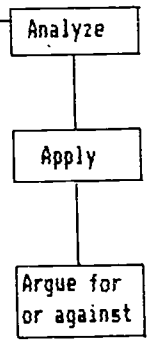
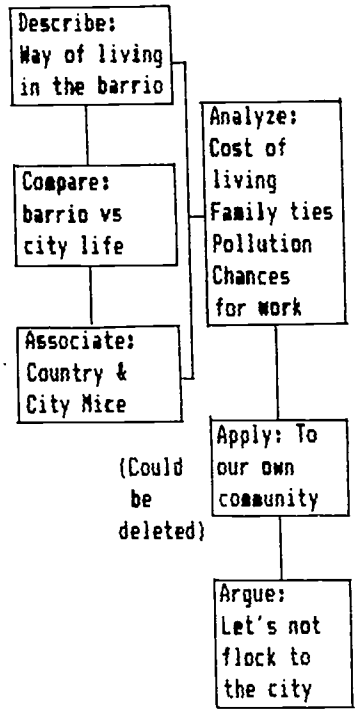
Finally, they expect effective facilitative techniques from other English and nonEnglish teachers to help them learn how to learn.

Would the process approach to writing produce published writers? There can be no such promise but the student who undergoes participative prewriting activities energizes his thinking, organizing, editing and structuring skills as input to an upgraded product of writing and other learning activities as well. He writes not with a blank but ultra-enriched mind.

Table 1. Teacher's Guide to Prewriting Activities

Technique	Teacher's Role	Student Activity	Example
1. Brainstorming (in groups) To generate related ideas to write on. To stimulate creative thinking and add depth to an idea.	Writes questions about an idea under focus. Asks groups to consolidate answers for own use. Allows each group 10 minutes to pool ideas on the chalkboard or Manila paper.	Each student spends five minutes individually to think of answers to questions before brainstorming starts Group leader directs initial thinking to the importance of the given idea and its relevance to current interests. Pooling of answers to questions follows. Group leader closes the session with an afterthought: What would occur if we show or not show concern on the given stimulus - denuded forests.	Idea: Denuded Forests. Pictures or sketches of denuded forests are displayed. Questions: 1. Why are our forests denuded? 2. What program of action can be suggested to stop forest denudation? 3. What could be some expected barriers and consequences of the proposed action plan? Possible Titles: Destroy the Forest, Destroy the Earth. Our Balding Forests - Who's to Blame?
2. Clustering To map out thoughts on a particular topic. To provide an info bank from which to select meaningful clusters	Explains clustering. It is similar to brainstorming except that the focus is on specific words or idea. Circles the stimulus word on the board. Encourages all types of reactions to the stimulus word. Clusters responses with the nucleus word in the center, radiating outwards.	Responds to stimulus word. Discerns the pattern of ideas with teacher guidance. Chooses the meaningful clusters to write on and expand into a composition. Not all clusters on the board are used. For variation: Each group selects a stimulus word and proceeds with the same clustering technique. Gives a title for the chosen clusters.	Stimulus word: Technology 

Technique	Teacher's Role	Student Activity	Example
Topic sentence:	**Science has produced technologies that could benefit or destroy mankind.**		**Title: Technology - Boon or Bane**
3. Looping To pile ideas that pop out in relation to a given topic for later use. To sort out related ideas pertinent to title expansion.	Gives instructions on looping: o Write nonstop about a given topic. o Forget grammar and mechanics but focus on the topic.	Reflects on the given topic for a few minutes before looping thought units. o Writes nonstop in sentences, clauses or phrases without thinking of grammar. o Deletes or modifies loose thought units.	Topic: Man builds and destroys Looping: Buildings and bridges man constructs - he cuts forest trees to build homes and sell as fuel - forests are bald - floods occur to destroy the bridges and buildings that man builds.
	Title: What Man Builds He also Destroys.		
	o Follow the word cluster technique except that instead of words you have phrases, clauses and sentences. o Derive meanings from your thought loops by constructing one or two sentences per bundle of loops.	o After about four or five loops, he sorts out main ideas and sums these up in a sentence or two. o May add new related ideas in the process.	Summing up: Man is both builder and destroyer. He constructs homes, buildings and bridges but forest trees are cut to build these structures which floods, caused by the felling of trees, destroy.
4. Interview To collect ideas for writing at a later date. To use interaction as a means to gather information. To observe living conditions of "marginal people".	o Explains the value of establishing rapport with interviews. o Creates a relaxed atmosphere for writing. o Allows students the time to interview 3-5 respondents without use of a structured questionnaire. o Makes arrangements before hand with prospective interviewees.	In classroom-created groups, the students visit the interview area for a look-see and familiarization with people. Establishes an interview focus like: Livelihood activities Environmental conditions Meeting basic needs Recreational activities Takes mental notes or uses an unobtrusive checklist. Makes an interview guide in the vernacular with clusters in English. Practices asking questions among students first.	Respondents: Three households living near mangrove area, bordering the seashore. Focus: Environmental conditions 1. What made you decide to live in this area? 2. How do you cope with high tides, typhoons and monsoons? 3. What changes have you observed of the river, sea, mangrove and beach? 4. How can you help improve your environment? 5. What in the environment affect your living conditions?
Title: Dwellers in Mangrove Areas How Mangrove Dwellers can Rejuvenate Their Environment? The Harsh Environs of Mangrove Dwellers			

Technique	Teacher's Role	Student Activity	Example
5. Cubing To explore a subject from six points of view: describe it compare it associate it analyze it apply it argue for or against it To generate ideas for organization later.	Gives tips on what students are expected to do when cubing, to generate materials to write on. 	Goes thru the steps of cubing. Chooses a subject matter that takes in suggestions. After cubing, expands and organizes ideas into a composition. May delete or fuse a couple of cubes for brevity and unity. 	Topic: Life in the Rural Area