DESCRIPTIVE WRITING USING THE PROCESS-GENRE APPROACH

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Abstract

Process-based and genre-based approaches both profess to improve the writing proficiency of students. However, if combined, the strengths of one could supplement the limitations of the other. In this study, the process-oriented approach to writing and the structure-specific features of the genre approach were combined and implemented in a class to help students produce descriptive writing compositions. Using the approach, the plan of action involved six steps: preparation, modelling and reinforcing, planning, joint structuring, independent structuring, and revising. The pretest and posttest scores were considered to see if the students' performance in their descriptive writing compositions improved with the use of the process-genre approach. The data gathered were treated using percentages, mean differences, and t-values. Results show that the mean in the posttest is greater than in the pretest, signifying that there is a marked improvement in the descriptive writing compositions of students. Further, the results using the paired t-test show that there is a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest. This implies that the process-genre approach helped the students perform better in writing descriptive compositions.

Keywords: Descriptive Writing, Process-genre Approach, Travelogue Writing

1. Introduction and research focus

Shifting the focus on writing as a product to that of a process is one of the most significant changes in teaching writing (Kroll, Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002; Hyland, 2003; Jarunthawatchai, 2010). Instead of viewing their writing outputs as one-shot submissions which mark a product-centered view of writing, students whose teachers use the process approach see writing as more relaxed, allowing them more time to refine their concepts as they go through the guided steps of writing. However, although the process approach improves students' writing proficiency, it has limitations (Kim & Kim, 2005). Hence, the genre approach emerged as an alternative view of teaching writing. A genre-based approach as intervention had students performing better in writing than those exposed to the process approach (Hyland, 2007; Nueva, 2016). Genre approach necessitates that students learn explicitly the language used to make meaning in a text (Cope &Kalantzis, 2012). When the process approach is coupled with the genre approach, students are acquainted with the language features that characterize the type of academic writing expected of them. As such, students grasp the importance of the kind of texts that the writers produce and why these are produced (Badger & White, 2000).

From this, the researcher determined to use the process-genre approach in teaching descriptive writing to her students, combining the process-oriented approach to writing and the structure-

specific features of the genre approach. Specifically, this paper sought to find if the process-genre approach was effective in enhancing the students' descriptive compositions in terms of their use of more concrete and realistic descriptions and on how they organize their compositions following the structure of the specified genre, in this case, descriptive writing in the form of a travelogue.

2. Plan of action

The researcher used the process-genre approach in teaching descriptive writing in the form of a travelogue to her students. The steps of the process-genre approach are briefly illustrated below:
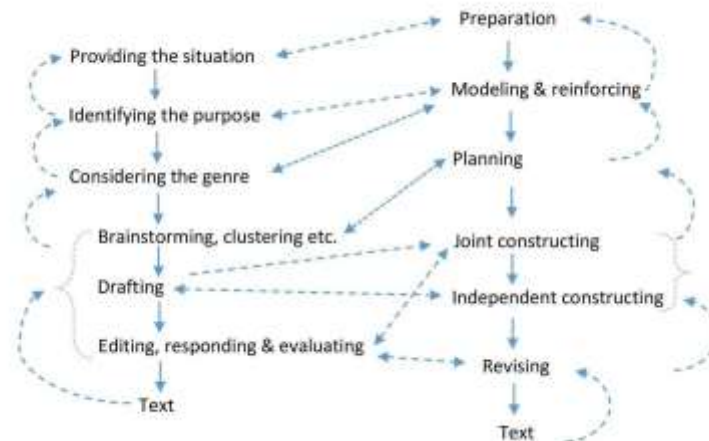

Figure 1: Application of the process-genre approach (Badger & White, 2000)

From the above model, the researcher adapted it using the six general steps suggested by Yan (2005) in implementing the process genre approach for a period of two weeks.

Preparation. The researcher first showed to the students the observation and foci forms they have to accomplish in their senior year where they will be required to teach writing to other students as part of their pre-deployment training. This is to emphasize the importance of their mastery of the writing process. After this mind-setting, the researcher showed a video clip of Greece featuring the country's tourist spots.

Modelling and reinforcing. The researcher showed sample travelogues about Greece and its islands. She then divided the class into three groups for discussion. To reinforce the purpose of descriptive writing, she distributed copies of the sample text, and asked the students to read the text with the following focus questions: 'What is the purpose of the article? Who is the target audience? Has the writer achieved his purpose? Justify.' Meanwhile, to emphasize the structural and language features that made the article descriptive, the teacher asked the students to briefly re-read the sample travelogues and to answer the following focus questions: 'How does the text begin and end? How is the entire text patterned and sequenced? Are the descriptions provided concrete and realistic?' The students reported their group's discussion during the synthesis, citing specific parts of the text that reinforced their answer. After the synthesis, the researcher distributed another sample travelogue that was not arranged coherently. She asked the students to re-organize their travelogue to improve its structure and content. Groups reorganized and restated the faulty travelogue in order to improve its content

and structure. To reinforce what the class had learned about descriptive writing, other well-crafted travelogues were presented as bases of comparison.

Planning. Students were asked to propose what tourist attraction will be featured by the class, of which Baguio City won. The students were asked to complete a web diagram about Baguio City, the summer capital of the Philippines. Items in the web diagram were classified into five categories: climate, food and souvenirs, people and their culture, tourist spots, and transportation. These were decided to be the elements that students will write about in their travelogue. Permission was also sought from the university president to conduct a field trip to Baguio City.

Joint structuring. The students made mini travelogues about Baguio City using the description and items presented in the planning stage. With the teacher first and eventually a partner, students were assigned to a particular item which they will describe. After this, they gave their output to another pair who commented on their articles. The teacher collected the outputs and returned this the following meeting. The revised texts were projected for the class to jointly view.

Independent structuring. The researcher gave guide questions for the travelogue and took her students to a field trip in Baguio City. After the trip, the students were given two days to write the draft of their individual articles, and were assigned schedules for teacher consultation regarding their outputs. They were likewise assigned to their "Baguio buddies", two other classmates to whom they could show their papers for comments and peer checking.

Revising. From the teacher's interaction with the students during the consultation hours and the suggestions of their Baguio buddies, the students revised their articles. They were given one week to polish their final output for submission.

3. Methodology

This is an action research implemented to 15 English majors enrolled in a Creative Writing class at the Urdaneta City University. The pretest and posttest scores were considered to see if the students' performance in their descriptive writing compositions improved with the use of the process genre approach. Results of the Composition Task No. 5 (The Descriptive Composition) were used as scores in the pretest. The scores of the students' travelogues were considered as posttest results. Rubrics were used in grading the outputs.

4. Statistical treatment

The data gathered were treated using percentages, mean differences, and t-values. Both the pretest and posttest scores were presented using frequency counts and percentages. The mean difference of the pretest and posttest was also computed. The significance of the mean difference was tested using the t-test for correlated sample at 0.05 level of significance.

5. Description of action and results

Students' scores in the descriptive composition task which was considered as the pretest and the travelogues which served as the posttest were tallied. Table 1 shows the frequency counts ad percentages of scores obtained by students in their pretest and posttest.

Table 1: Scores of students in descriptive writing compositions (N = 15)

Scores	Descriptive Equivalent	Pretest		Posttest	
		f	%	f	%
41-50	Excellent	2	13.3	4	26.7
31-40	Very Good	5	33.3	10	66.7
21-30	Good	7	46.7	1	7
11-20	Fair	1	7		
10 below	Poor				

In the pretest, only two students (13.3%) got *excellent* marks in their descriptive writing task while 5 (33.3%) got *very good* scores. Most of the students (7 or 46.7%) obtained *good* scores, and one student (7%) obtained a *fair* rating. Meanwhile, the posttest results showed higher scores obtained by students with four (26.7%) having *excellent* scores, ten (66.7%) were *very good*, and one (7%) with a *good* score. From the table, it could be observed that more students got higher scores in the posttest than in the pretest, attesting that combining the process and genre approaches helps students write better descriptive compositions.

To support this, Table 2 presents the comparison of the means in the pretest and the posttest.

Table 2: Comparative mean performance in the pretest and posttest

Statistical Tool	Pretest	Posttest
Highest possible score	50	50
Highest score obtained	47	50
Lowest score obtained	17	30
Mean	31.93	37.4

The highest score obtained in the pretest is 47 rated as *excellent* and the lowest score is 17 rated as *poor*. In the posttest, the perfect score of 50 considered excellent was obtained. The lowest score is 30 rated as good. Using the descriptive equivalent of scores in Table 1, the means of both the pretest and posttest are classified as very good. However, the mean in the posttest (37.4) is greater than in the pretest (31.93), signifying that there is a marked improvement in the descriptive writing compositions of students.

Meanwhile, the significance of the mean difference between the pretest and the posttest is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Significant difference in the pretest and posttest performance of students in descriptive writing

Statistical Tool	Pretest		Posttest
Mean	31.93		37.4
Mean difference		-5.47	
Computed t-value		-2.23*	

df = 14
Critical t-value = ±2.145
*significant at 0.05

A mean difference of -5.47 is evident between the pretest and the posttest scores of students. To further test the significance of the difference between the means at 0.05 level with 14 degrees of freedom, the paired t-test was used. Since the computed value (-2.23) of t is greater than the tabular value (± 2.15), the results are significant. There is a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest administered to the students. Furthermore, since the posttest scores

reveal a higher mean, it indicates that the students have performed better in the posttest than in the pretest. This implies that the process genre approach helped the students perform better in writing descriptive compositions.

6. Evaluation of action

The results obtained in the posttest point to the process genre approach as helpful to the students in writing descriptive compositions, particularly in crafting travelogues. The outputs of students don't only show general descriptions, but also concrete and realistic descriptions. Details about the places and local customs were also more specific to lend authenticity and "local color" to the write-ups. The travelogues were better structured, opening with general description of Baguio City, and narrowing it to more specific places.

A side benefit to the process genre approach was the more minimal occurrence of grammatical errors in the final outputs. Although the researcher was more concerned with the quality of descriptions, she found that, with the input of other students in 'writing buddy system', grammatical errors were minimized. Students who were more adept in the English language helped their buddies in correcting grammatical errors. Indeed, the recursive steps of the process genre approach afforded students to draft, revise and recompose their write-ups before the final submission.

7. Insights

From the conduct of the study, the researcher realized how vital it is that the written product should not be the sole focus of the writing class; rather, composition teachers should help their students in the writing process. Furthermore, through presentation of models and joint construction of model texts, features of the target genre should be emphasized to the students before they are allowed to write independently. With this, the process genre should be considered as one of the approaches that may be implemented in the writing class to help students produce better written outputs.

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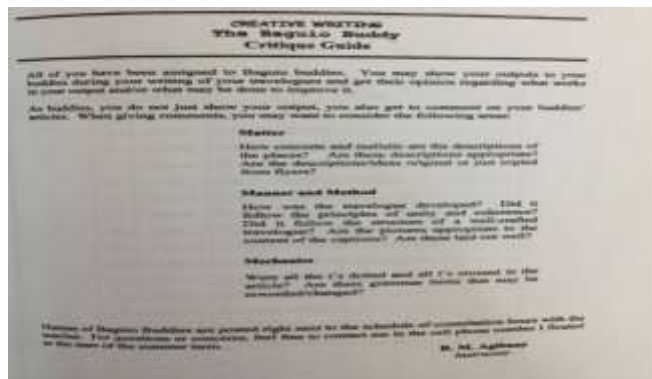
Appendices

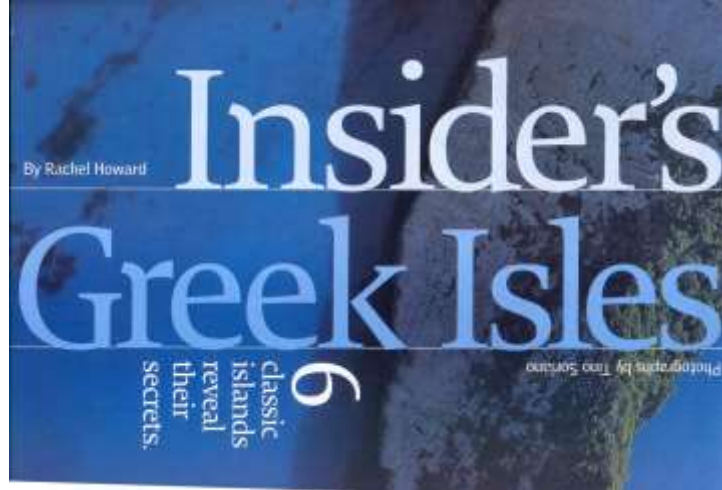## Appendix A: Writing task guide (Pretest)
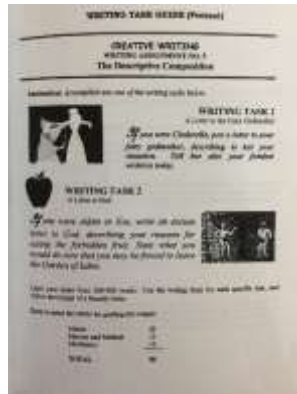
Appendix B: Writing Task Guide (Posttest)
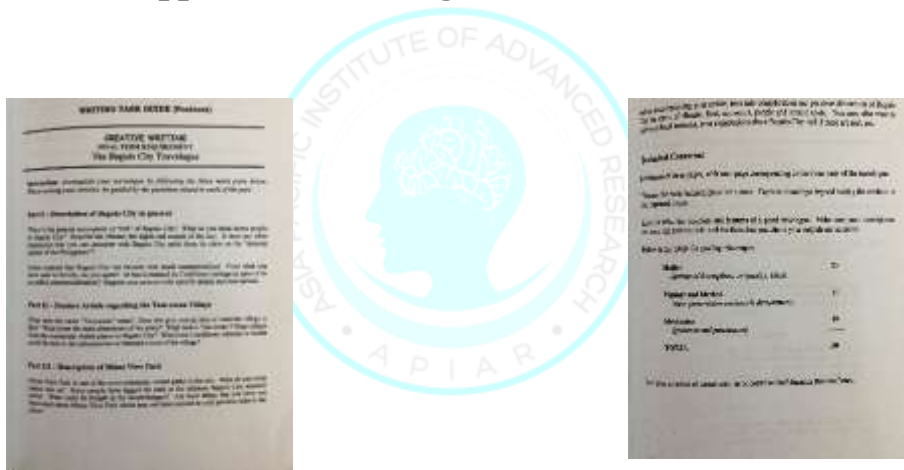
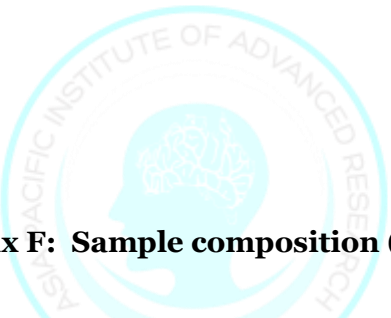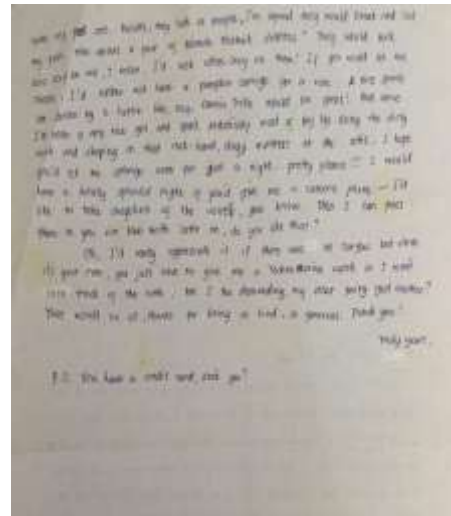## Appendix C: Critique guide for the writing buddy

Appendix D: Sample travelogue

Appendix E: Sample composition (Pretest)

Appendix F: Sample composition (Posttest)