

PROCESS-BASED LEARNING AND REFLECTION JOURNAL TO PROMOTE LEARNERS' AUTONOMY IN STYLISTIC WRITING CLASS

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Abstract

The main concern in education for the past decade has been on establishing autonomous learners. Giving more responsibility to learners in conducting the course of their learning is possible by applying appropriate approach and structured monitoring. In process-based learning, learners are motivated to experience a full cycle of writing process from planning to revision. What is more important is that learners are also encouraged to measure their development by keeping track of those processes in the form of reflection journal. While, the process-based learning enables learners to sharpen their cognitive awareness by exercising self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, and feedback-evaluation, the reflection journal enables them to evaluate and reflect their overall experience, including the difficulties they encounter during the processes. For this purpose, the reflection journal is designed as a tool which makes learners understand their initial and final strengths and weaknesses, their internal and external challenges and supports, and their past and future commitments autonomously with limited involvement from the teacher. In Stylistic Writing class, process-based learning and reflection journal are essential to establish learners' autonomy in a way that they raise learners' awareness of their own ability and needs as well as being sensitive to the issues in their environment. The combination of both helps learners identify pressing problems in their close environment and present solutions to those problems which leads to the creation of autonomous learners.

Keywords: process-based learning, reflection journal, learners' autonomy, stylistic writing

1. Introduction

Creating a learning environment which promotes autonomous learning is an intricate process since autonomy closely relates with context. Exploring the context of the learners alongside the context of the course is essential in determining the suitable learning method to create autonomous learning. Nevertheless, misguided understanding on autonomous learning might lead to false achievement of learners' autonomy.

The fact that autonomous learning has been the main concerns in modern education for the past decades without sufficient consideration of teachers' voice has set a pessimistic tone to many researches on this matter. Borg, in [1], took this concern into his workshop design on learners' autonomy. Theoretical definitions on autonomous learning are accessible for teachers since Holec proposed his in 1981. In [2], he states that learner autonomy is "the ability to

take charge of one's learning ... to have and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning". This widely accepted definition is challenged in the execution of this particular discussion for some defined decisions proposed by Holec, such as determining the lesson objectives and selecting methods and techniques to use, could cause real damages to learners' development.

More current researches on learners' autonomy make clear that context is a crucial part in establishing autonomous learning. Murphy, in [3], compares different results of distance learning applied in two different learning contexts. In [4], Dion explores the tools which enhance learners' autonomy in developing second language writing ability. Another research, done by Mahdavinia & Ahmadi in [5], focuses the attention in the use of learners' portfolio as the tool to promote self-directed learning.

This research is dedicated to promote learners' autonomy by intertwining process-based learning and reflection journal. This paper, therefore, presents a discussion on the context of Stylistic Writing class. A discussion on the roles of process-based learning and reflection journal in promoting learner' autonomy immediately follows.

2. Stylistic Writing and Autonomous Learning

Stylistic Writing class is a writing course for semester 3 students of English Department, Faculty of Letters, *Universitas Sanata Dharma*. The course helps learners develop ideas through various kinds of text types. Stylistic Writing is a one-credit course, in one week learners are entitled to have one contact hour, one hour of independent learning, and one hour of research. With one contact hour per week, time becomes a real constraint since the course is required to cover seven topics in fourteen weeks. The course covers the topics of the style of writing, recount writing, report writing, descriptive writing, procedural writing, explanation writing, expository writing, and discussion writing.

In addition, the learners' context in the pilot research [6] shows that 37 students joined the course. The composition of learners consists of 34 students of semester 3, 2 students of semester 5, and 1 student of semester 7. The statistics of the learners' achievement on the previous course is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Writing 2 Score Distribution [6]

Semester	Grade			
	A	B	C	D
3	16.22%	35.14%	37.84%	2.7%
5	-	2.7%	-	2.7%
7	2.7%	-	-	-
Total	18.92%	37.84%	37.84%	5.4%

From this distribution, it can be seen that their writing competence is generally sufficient even though it is varied. As many as 94.6% of the learners achievement is above the minimum requirement. The majority of the learners in Stylistic Writing is able to comprehend the concepts of paragraph development given in Writing 2. Therefore, the learners in Stylistic Writing should have little or no problem in developing their ideas into a well-developed, united, and coherent paragraphs.

From the context, it is impossible to conduct a traditional teaching-learning method in

order to achieve the course objectives. Thus, the urgency to go beyond the class hour is high. On a positive note, Stylistic Writing offers great opportunity in promoting autonomous learning.

Nevertheless, Holec's theory on learner autonomy in [2] is considered to be non-comprehensive in the context of Stylistic Writing. Therefore, a more comprehensive theory which takes teachers' belief into account is needed. In [7], Sinclair formulated 13 characteristics of learning autonomy as elaborated in Table 1.

Table 2. Sinclair's Learning Autonomy in [7]

1	Autonomy is a construct of capacity
2	Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning
3	The capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility is not necessarily innate
4	Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal
5	There are degrees of autonomy
6	The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable
7	Autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent
8	Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process – i.e. conscious reflection and decision making
9	Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies
10	Autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom
11	Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension
12	The promotion of autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension
13	Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures

Sinclair's definitions of learning autonomy become the main consideration in applying process-based learning and reflection journal to promote learners' autonomy.

3. Process-based Approach in Promoting Autonomous Learning

Learners' i-knowledge plays a great part in the construction of autonomous learning.

In [7], Sinclair states that “complete autonomy is an idealistic goal” and that “there are degrees of autonomy”. The cognitive requirement is crucial for autonomous task execution. Adding new skills or knowledge works only when comprehension is established. Thus, in the beginning of the course, teacher’s role is essential to assist the establishment of learners’ comprehension. As the course progresses, teacher’s role decreases and learners’ autonomy takes over. This illustrates that “autonomy is a construct capacity” [7]. The execution of the process-based learning in Stylistic Writing, therefore, takes place after the completion of the first topic where learners are introduced to the concepts of various styles of texts.

With great consideration of the context, a learning experience which enables students to be exposed with new and relevant experience is constructed. In Stylistic Writing, the exposure to these experiences is given in the form of process-based learning. Learners must have the opportunity to choose, develop, express, and edit their ideas during the whole process. With 14 meetings and 7 topics in hand, it is logical to cover 1 topic in two meetings. Hence, the first meeting in every topic, except *the style of writing*, focuses on the skill of choosing and developing ideas, whereas the second meeting focuses on the skill of editing.

The process-based learning is conducted by adopting the principle of POWER: *Plan, Organize, Write, Edit, and Revise*. In *Plan*, the learner must have a clear topic in mind. The topic of the learner’s choice must be able to support the purpose of the text type. In *Organize*, the topic is developed into an outline. In *Write*, a complete compositional draft is written. In *Edit*, an activity of analyzing the flow of ideas and the language features in the draft takes place. Finally, in *Revise*, the learner has to improve the draft based on the result of the editing.

Since “learning autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension” [7], learners are entitled to have both individual and group experiences. In this respect, the class is distributed into groups of four based on the learners’ preference to promote effective and efficient discussions. This grouping is not a fixed grouping for the whole semester. The composition of the group members is possible to change after the completion of each topic. With this grouping, learners have the opportunity to develop their knowledge and their values from the group interaction at the same time.

Furthermore, autonomy is not limited within the classroom. Autonomy can happen during the class hour and outside the class hour [7]. Utilizing the one-hour independent learning and one-hour research, the course set the *Write* and *Revise* stages to be done outside the class hour. The *Plan, Organize, and Edit* stages are strategically put in the class hour due to the importance of teacher’s monitoring of the learners’ progress.

The process-based learning in Stylistic Writing class is outlined in 6 stages of learning. The first stage is the context and concept familiarization. This stage takes around 15 minutes of the class hour. Providing the learners with a course book explaining the types of text with examples and practice analysis, they are expected to come ready with questions. The first 15 minutes of the class hour is used to discuss the raising questions for finding solutions.

The second stage is the beginning of the POWER principle. In *Plan*, the learners decide the topic which they want to develop and anticipate questions regarding the topic. This stage is an intricate stage in the first few topics due to the lack of significance of the chosen topics towards the learners’ context. The degree of significance and contribution of the topics are imperative since the products of writing are targeted for public consumption. This stage is done in groups. By doing it in groups, the learners are able to give and get constructive feedback from the peer. Teacher’s monitoring and interference are still significant in the first few meetings. The interference takes the form of analytical questions to trigger the learners’ logic in relating the choice of topic with their environment. After the first two topics, the *Plan* stage becomes easier for the learners. There is no fixed time allocation for this stage due to the various abilities of the learners. The completion of this stage is followed by the next stage, *Organize* stage.

When the learners organize their ideas, they develop the ideas into a more comprehensive outline. The outcome of this stage is a composition outline. This stage is also done in groups and lasts until the end of the classroom time. The learners are required to make individual outlines. Yet, the members of the group have active roles in giving constructive inputs and

recommendation throughout the process.

The fourth stage, *Write*, is a stage where the learners express their ideas and develop their outlines into composition drafts. This stage is done outside the classroom time. Further research on the topic can also be done alongside the writing process. The product of this stage is required to be brought on the next classroom time to ensure the continuation of the process.

The fifth stage, *Edit*, takes place on the second meeting of the same course topic. Executed in groups, the discussion on individual first draft happens. Each draft is analyzed from the perspectives of language features and idea development. The peer editing process takes place. During this peer editing process, various kinds of discussions are done to improve the quality of the writing product. The peer editing process often consumes the whole classroom time. During this process, teacher's interference, in the form of analytical questions, is needed whenever the learners find difficulties in analyzing parts of the writing products.

The last stage in the process-based learning applied in this course is the *Revision* stage. Revision is done outside the classroom time. The learners continue the writing process by making revision based on the constructive feedback they get on the previous stage. During the revision process, the teacher needs to give the opportunity for the learners who want to have further discussion on their personal writing tasks. Autonomy is not as simple as creating a situation which requires learners to be independent [7], it is also a matter of making sure that the learners have the capability to be independent.

The application of this process-based learning caters the learners' requirements to be able to conduct autonomous learning. The consideration of their initial knowledge and the addition of new concepts are taken into accounts in the process. It allows the learners to develop their stylistic writing ability by using the steps as scaffoldings to attain learning autonomy.

4. Reflection Journal as an Integral Tool in Autonomous Learning

The experience during the process-based learning needs to be internalized in order for the autonomous learning to happen. The learners must make meanings out of their experience. This is where the reflection process enters the scheme.

Reflection is an integral part of autonomous

learning. Taking one of Sinclair's definitions of autonomous learning in [7], reflection is a big part of the development of learners' autonomy since it promotes conscious awareness during the learning process. Starting from the beginning of the lesson, the students must acquire complete understanding on every action they are about to do. Therefore, a reflection journal is designed to cater this purpose. Through this journal, the students are able to capture and comprehend the fundamental values from the overall writing processes through their experience which make meanings of their autonomy. From the start, they are aware that the reflection process would be simultaneous with their experiencing process.

Reflection journal is crucial in supporting the establishment of learning autonomy. In this reflection journal, the learners note down their journey during the learning process. The reflection journal is designed to help the learners understand about themselves and about their progress in the course. The journal allows the learners to write as much or as little as they need concerning their success, difficulties, thoughts, and feeling about the whole process.

The reflection journal designed in [8] consists of 8 chapters. The first 7 chapters are topical-based due to the 7 discussion topics covered in the course. Chapter 8 is designed as a section which accommodates the overall experience in the whole semester.

The sections in chapter 1 to 7 are identical. Each chapter consists of 4 sections. Section 1 is the *Reflection Page*. The reflection page is divided into four reflection focuses: backward-looking, inward-looking, outward-looking, and forward-looking. The backward-looking reflection page focuses on the initial knowledge and emotion the learners have concerning the topic. The inward-looking reflection focuses on the individual feeling, behavior, and attitude towards the process. The outward-looking reflection focuses on how others see the individual's progress and product. Last, the forward-looking reflection focuses on the learner's problem solution or future resolution. By having this overall reflection, the learners are expected to get a full understanding on their ability and progress in

order to make proper adjustment to become truly autonomous learners.

The second section in every chapter is the *Journey Page*. The learners record their whole activities in achieving the objectives of the course. The journey page records detail activities done for the completion of every process in the stages of process-based learning.

The third section is the *Observation Page*. This section allows the learners to note down their group members' performance. This is meant to give motivation for self-improvements or for other-improvement. The learners are encouraged to focus on giving constructive criticism as the follow up of this activity. When the learners identify a problem in their group, they are encouraged to provide a solution to the problem as well. The autonomy plays in many different aspects because the learners take control of their own progress as well as others. Autonomous learning is fostered through the development of social awareness which allows the "capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility" [7].

The last section is designed to allow the learners to express their thoughts and feelings about the learning processes through other means than words. The *Doodles* section captures more things because some learners might find difficulties in utilizing words to reflect their experience.

The combination of these sections in chapter 1 to chapter 7 supports learning autonomy. The combination trains the learners to take responsibility for their own learning by providing visible documentation of their progress. The learners have the access to the information about the things that work and those that do not work for them.

The last chapter in the Reflection Journal is designed for the learners to freely express their feelings and emotion. The chapter functions as the last remarks of their journey in Stylistic Writing class. An example of their reflection in this chapter is as follow

I enjoy writing text as I enjoy writing many types of them in Writing 3. Apart from others, I think my texts were mostly about one topic, sharks. The reason I wrote about sharks was because I like sharks. I like sharks since I was in Junior High School. I like watching sharks in National Geographic and Animal Planet because they show a lot of episodes about

sharks. In particular, I like to watch "Shark Month", a month dedicated for playing episodes about sharks.

From Writing 3, I can create many types of texts about sharks. My wish is that the people who read them can understand and know about the role of sharks in the ocean, as well as to clear the misperception about sharks and shark fins.

The reflection above illustrates the learner's ability to reflect his experience as a conscious learning process. It shows the willingness to take responsibility in certain choices along the process of learning. Thus, learning autonomy is achieved.

5. Concluding Remark

The integration of process-based learning with reflection journal is effective in establishing learning autonomy. A consideration of the learners and learning context plays an important role in creating autonomous learning. Even though the execution stumbled upon some limitations, the overall experience is positive.

Three positive results are gained from this research. First, the learners show an increase in motivation and responsibility as portrayed in their reflection journal. Second, the learners show an increase in time management and a development in logical thinking. Third, the documentation of the learners' activity makes it easy to monitor their progress in cognition and values.

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