

The Reasons for Failure in Writing Essays: Teaching Writing as a Project-Based Enterprise

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Abstract : Studies show that developing writing skills throughout years of formal foreign language instruction does not necessarily result in rewarding accomplishments among learners, nor an affirmative attitude they build towards written assignments. What causes this apparently wide-spread bias to writing might be a diminished relevance students attach to it, as opposed to the other productive skill — speaking, insufficient resources available for them to succeed, or the ways writing is approached by instructors, that is inapt teaching techniques that discourage rather than inflame learners' engagement. The assumption underlying this presentation is that psychological and psycholinguistic factors constitute a key dimension of every writing process, and hence should be seriously considered in both material design and lesson planning. The author intends to demonstrate research in which writing tasks were conceived of as attitudinal rather than technical operations, and consequently turned into meaningful and socially-oriented incidents that students could relate to and have an active hand in. The instrument employed to achieve this purpose and to make writing even more interactive was the format of a project, a carefully devised series of tasks, which involved students as human beings, not only language learners. The projects rested upon the premise that the presence of peers and the teacher in class could be taken advantage of in a supportive rather than evaluative mode. In fact, the research showed that collaborative work and constant meaning negotiation reinforced not only bonds between learners, but also the language form and structure of the output. Accordingly, the role of the teacher shifted from the assessor to problem barometer, always ready to accept the slightest improvements in students' language performance. This way, written verbal communication, which usually aims to merely manifest accuracy and coherent content for assessment, became part of the enterprise meant to emphasise its social aspect — the writer in real-life setting. The samples of projects show the spectrum of possibilities teachers have when exploring the domain of writing within school curriculum. The ideas are easy to modify and adjust to all proficiency levels and ages. Initially, however, they were meant to suit teenage and young adult learners of English as a foreign language in both European and Asian contexts.

Keywords : projects, psycholinguistic/ psychological dimension of writing, writing as a social enterprise, writing skills, written assignments

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