

Using SWAG in Teaching Writing to Motivate Students to Write

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Motivating students to write is as hard as asking them to read as both of the skills are kinds of boring activities for them. Many students also enjoy speaking more rather than writing because in writing they have to be more accurate and mostly people will not tolerate mistakes in written language. Therefore, a teacher needs to design various kinds of techniques to make the students comfortable and enthusiastic in writing. Pictures and pictures technique in cooperative learning was used in this study, with the steps called SWAG, standing for **S**crumbling the series of pictures, **W**riting the paragraph, **A**sking the reasons, and **G**iving feedback. This study was conducted in the 7th grade in the topic of descriptive, narrative and recount texts. Data were collected from class observations, students' interview, and students' tasks on writing. The study ended with the result that applying SWAG motivates students to write.

Keywords : Teaching Writing, cooperative learning, motivation

INTRODUCTION

Assigning students to write even in their native language is not an easy thing to do. Many of them think that writing is the most difficult skill to master after speaking. Students think that they can not write or even do not want to write. This is probably because they lack of confidence, they think it is a boring activity, or they probably do not come up with ideas. Moreover, not only having problems in organizing ideas, they also have problems in translating those ideas into a text that is readable. Many students also think that writing is a language skill that is 'scary' for them as Leki (1991) claims that many language teachers are too demanding about grammatical correctness. Teachers of English often expect for grammatical perfection of their students and cannot tolerate errors. Native speakers who are not language teachers can even tolerate errors as long as they can understand the message or the content.

Of the problems, language teachers actually have to know the difference between **writing-for-learning** and **writing-for writing** (Harmer, 2010). When writing is used as a practice tool to help students to practice the language that they have learned, it is called writing-for-learning. On the other hand, writing-for writing is when we direct the students to be a skillful writer and develop their writing skill by starting from planning, drafting, reviewing, and editing. Students' work also includes not only how to use the language appropriately, but also how to construct text, as well as the layout, style, and effectiveness. For the beginner students, it is better for teachers to apply writing-for learning first.

The most important thing is to motivate students, and increase their confidence and enthusiasm in writing. Whatever the reason, we need to help such students build the writing habit so that they recognise writing as being a normal part of classroom practice

and they come to writing tasks with as much as enthusiasm as they do other activities (Harmer, 2009). Moreover, when students are not focused on grammatical error but when they are instead writing freely, writing or trying to write what they think they want to say, they develop confidence and a sense of power over the language that none of the other skills is likely to produce until the students are very well advanced in their language studies (Leki, 1991).

There are many activities we can apply to make the class enjoyable and interesting, and one of them is by giving the students pictures. Pictures, as Harmer (2009) explains, can provide stimulation for writing-habit activities. Pictures can be taken from magazines, books, newspaper, photographs, or even drawn by ourselves. Those can be in the form of flashcards, cue cards, photographs, or illustrations which are colourful or even black and white.

Pictures can also be put in various kinds of writing games, such as story reconstruction activities where students have to build up a story from a set of pictures. We can put the students into a groupworking as writing in groups can be highly motivating for students. This is called a cooperative writing where students are divided into groups and each student has a different task in writing to accomplish group writing task. Cooperative writing includes in the cooperative learning method, and one of the techniques is called *picture and picture*. Cooperative Learning or CL is similar to group working but it focuses on each individual's participation.

There have been some experts who developed CL with various kinds of techniques. The most popular ones are developed by Spencer Kagan. Up to now, Kagan creates more and more techniques by sharing them through online and offline seminars, as well as printed books. Kagan in Kessler (1992) proposes the definition of cooperative learning this way:

“CL is a group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others.”

In line with Kagan, Smith (1996) in Barkley (2005) defines CL as the form of small group working to make learners cooperate so that they can maximize each learning process and lean from each other. Cooperative learning doesn't merely the same as group working, as Jacobs (1997) states that CL is more than just putting students in groups and giving them something to do, but it is a tool which teachers use to encourage mutual helpfulness in groups and the active participation of all members.

What makes cooperative learning different from group working can be defined from its key elements which include *positive interdependence*, *team formation*, *accountability*, *social skills*, and *structuring and structures* (Olsen & Kagan, 1992). Positive interdependence occurs when the gains for one individual are associated with gains for others; that is, when one student achieves, other benefits, too. The second element is team formation in which students can choose their own group by selecting teammates. When students can't do the selection, the teacher can help and it is probably more effective as the teacher knows better about the students' ability. There are four types of formal team formation including heterogeneous, random, interest, and homogeneous/heterogeneous language ability.

The third element is accountability which means that students may be made individually accountable assigning each student that he or she may not go on to the next activity until all teams members finish the task. Therefore, the fourth element is needed, that is social skills which include ways students interact each other to achieve activity or task objectives. Moreover, to build interactions among students, it needs structures to organize student interactions. For example, one student talks while others listen, then the next student talks, etc.

Picture and picture in cooperative learning is one of the structures in cooperative learning which also applied by forming the students into a group of four or five, depending on the amount of pictures we provide for the students. The media is a set of pictures in which the students have to construct a story from the pictures. The kinds of pictures and the length of the story must be appropriate for the students' level of ability.

RESEARCH METHOD

The writer conducted this qualitative research in one of the secondary schools in Bogor, helped by one of her students in the university. The writer's student is a student teacher studying in the English Department, and when the research was conducted, she was doing her teaching practice in this school as one of the requirements to accomplish her graduate study. The participants were the students of the seventh grade in one class consisting of around 32 students with various level of ability and interest in English.

At that time, the curriculum used was the 2006 curriculum which is a genre-based, and the students learned more about text types. The skills focused were reading and writing, so the students were given different kinds of text like narrative, descriptive, recount, etc. The main aim of this curriculum was how to make students understand and get the meaning of a text, as well as be able to write a text. The activities done were more on reading and writing a text, and those were really boring for the students.

Therefore, the writer tried to apply more interesting techniques from cooperative learning method. *Picture and picture* techniques were given in four meetings but the writer's student and her created their own steps of activities, called *SWAG*. *SWAG* stands for **S**crumbling the pictures, **W**riting the paragraph, **A**sking for the reasons, and **G**iving feedback. The pictures used were taken from course books, and some sources from websites. The texts learned were narrative, descriptive, and recount, which were included in the English subject of the 7th grade. The activity was given after the teacher explained about a kind of text including the function as well as the content. After the students get clear understanding about the text, then they were given *picture and picture* technique.

First, the teacher prepared some sets of pictures consisting of four or five pictures for each set. Students were divided into a group of four or five, depending on the amount of the students. Each group was given a differet set of pictures which had been scrambled. Each member of the group got different picture but all pictures could form a story. Then each member should write a paragraph based on the picture they got, and discussed each picture to make them unscrambled and form a text or a story. The time given was around 30-45 minutes to discuss and after that the teacher asked each group to submit their task.

After that the teacher checked the students' work and asked their reasons why they organized the paragraphs like that, and how they combined those paragraphs into a text. At the end, the teacher gave feedback but only focused on their ideas and organization of the paragraphs because in this case, we just needed to find out whether the students' motivation in writing was increasing or there was not any significant change.

The data was mainly taken from the class observations in which the writer observed the process of how the students cooperated each other in the group, how they came up with ideas into a paragraph, how they organized the paragraphs, and how enthusiastic they were in writing. Moreover, the students' product of writing was also checked to find out the grammatical error although it wouldn't be given as a feedback to the students. However, that was the start for the next aim in teaching writing, to make them practice how to write-for-writing in which they increase their skill in writing. In addition, the students' interview was also done to support the data. The students were asked some questions related to their interest in the implementation of SWAG in *picture and picture technique*, and how motivated they were in writing.

Since it is a qualitative research, the writer took the three analysis strategies suggested by Suparman (2009). First, the writing notes were reviewed which included the observational field notes, interview transcriptions, and notes about videotapes. Next, she reduced the data and classify text or visual images into categories. Finally, those categories were described so that they could result in findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

SWAG and Writing Motivation

From the notes of class observation, as well as the videotape description, it was found that the students showed their quite high motivation in writing a paragraph although some students looked unmotivated. The writer found there were around 7 students who had difficulties to put their ideas into a paragraph. From the interview, it was found that these students thought that the task was too difficult for them since they had problems with their English as well and they were not interested in learning English so they also had difficulties in increasing their motivation. Gardner (1985) supported by defining motivation as an effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes towards learning a language. So when a student feels that the learning is not important, then the motivation won't increase.

However, from the interview, around 80% of students answered that they loved *picture and picture technique* with SWAG steps. It was a kind of challenging for them because they had to unscramble the pictures, guess what the pictures were about, write their own paragraph, and combine the ideas with other members in the group. Pictures for students were also considered interesting as many people are visual learners. They love to see visual images in which can help them understand the language. Visual images could be a guide for them to determine what vocabulary could be used in the paragraph.

In addition, by putting the students in groups, it could be seen that the students could cooperate quite well. Some quite learners showed their enthusiasm more than when they

were given individual tasks. Although each member had their own responsibility, but since they had to accomplish the group task, so they did a high effort to help other members. It is supported by Harmer (2009) that individual students also found themselves saying and writing things they might not have come up with on their own, and the group's research was broader than an individual's normally was.

Talking about feedback, around 92% students were delighted to get feedback from the teacher although the rest still felt that feedback could make them humiliated. The feedback only included the ideas and the organization, not yet about the grammatical error or any others. However, it seemed 'scary' because the teacher gave feedback in the class. It is supported by Harmer (2009) that giving feedback on writing tasks demand special care. Teachers should respon positively and encouragingly to the content of what the student have written. When a teacher does not give any feedback, it seems that he/she doesn't care about the students' work.

The Weaknesses

Implementing SWAG in *picture and picture* technique had some problems to be solved. The problems included finding some appropriate pictures, dealing with some reluctant learners, taking individual assessment, and organizing the time. Talking about appropriate pictures, the writer found that in one session, students could not come up with ideas because the pictures showed unclear sequence. Students got more understanding when they were given pictures from a course book because it has been created very carefully based on the level of the students.

Next, during the research the writer found that some students were reluctant to write because their ability in English was also low. They couldn't find appropriate vocabulary that represented the pictures, as well as constructing words into sentences. According to the interview, some students didn't like reading and many of them didn't read English textbooks. The lack of vocabulary led the students to writing difficulty.

Assessments of all skills were done during the process of SWAG, however it was a little bit hard to assess all students in one session especially for their speaking ability since there were too many students in one class. So, the teacher only took the writing assessment from the paragraphs. Each student was asked to write their name on each paragraph of the text although the paragraph was probably helped by other member. However, the main aim of this activity was to increase students' motivation to write, so the important thing was they were encouraged to write first.

The last was about the time organization. Since the students had various kinds of level of ability in English, each of them had different length of time to finish the paragraph. The fast learners could finish faster than the slower ones, so they had to wait longer. At the beginning, the class began very crowded because the fast learners just waited for the slower ones finish the task, and they just had a chat with others. It was supported by Harmer (2009) that writing takes longer than conversation as there is usually time for discussion with individual students or students working in pairs or groups to complete the a writing task.

To solve the problem, the teacher tried to encourage the fast learners to help the slower ones because they have to cooperate each other as it was stated in the elements of cooperative learning method by Olsen & Kagan (Kessler, 1992) which includes *Positive Interdependence* and *Accountability*. By encouraging the students to help each other, the students could finish the task faster although some groups still couldn't follow the teacher's instruction until the end of this research. However, the writer believed that by giving them more interesting activities to increase their motivation to write, it will build the writing habit in the future.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Of the research done, it can be concluded that using *SWAG* in *picture and picture* technique of cooperative learning can be used as an activity to be applied in language class. Moreover, students are encouraged to write and build their writing habit as long as the teacher gives them interesting and enjoyable activities and media as well. Therefore, the teacher's roles are very important in motivating students to write. As stated by Harmer (2009) that although the teacher needs to deploy some or all of the usual roles when students are asked to write, the ones that are especially important are they can become **a motivator, a resource, and a feedback provider**.

Motivator means that the teacher has to motivate and encourage students to make as much effort as possible for maximum benefit. A teacher as a resource also has to be ready to supply more information and language when necessary and give students advice and suggestions. As a feedback provider, a teacher also has to be alert on the students' works to be corrected. However, before correcting, a teacher should know what to focus on, whether the students are only asked for their ideas to write or they are 'shaped' to be a skillful writer.

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