

# Key Features of the Process Approach and Their Pedagogical Implications: Challenges for the Indonesian Context

Utami Widiati

**Abstract:** Paradigm shifts have occurred in the teaching of writing in the ESL context. The process approach, the paradigm of the “reinvented rhetoric”, as Freedman and Pringle (in Emig, 1982: 2022) call it, emphasises the view of writing as a process of developing organisation as well as meaning. This article examines the challenges of the process approach for the Indonesian context. It begins with the description of the key features of the approach. The article also highlights what pedagogical implications the features have for writing instruction in EFL/ESL writing classrooms.

**Keywords:** the process approach, EFL/ESL writing classrooms, pedagogical implications, the Indonesian context.

Writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols (White & Arndt, 1991: 3); there is much more to writing than a mere learning and applying of linguistic or rhetorical rules. Writing itself, by its nature, is a process (Emig, 1982). Describing writing this way, writers and linguistic researchers are attempting to describe the incredibly complex system of transforming thought into written communication (D’Aoust, 1997: 1). The act of transforming thought into print involves a non-linear sequence of creative acts or stages (Gray, 1997: xii); it is recursive (Emig, 1982).

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*Utami Widiati is a lecturer of the State University of Malang.*

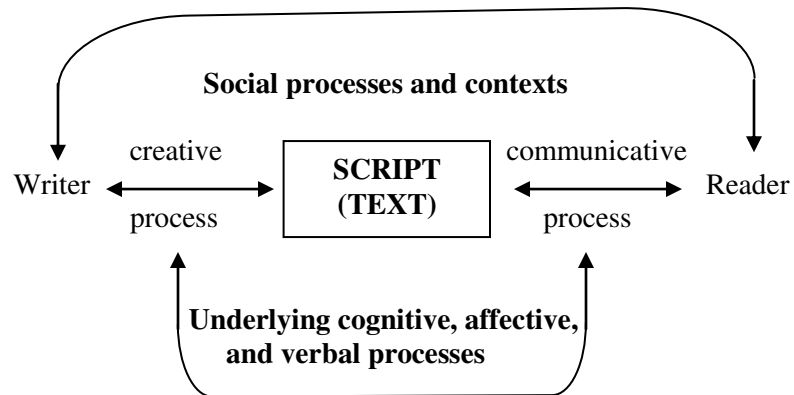
The above description has had a significant impact on writing teachers whose demand for a product has been replaced by a concern for the series of stages which make up the writing process. The stage-process model has been used as a teaching tool to facilitate student writing. The significance of understanding the writing process for both the teacher and the students is that the former may have to restructure the classroom and constantly reevaluate his or her role as a writing teacher (D'Aoust, 1997: 4), whereas the latter is helped to see how initial weaknesses in writing can actually become successes through feedback and revision in the processes of writing. The study of the writing process has thus produced notable changes in the teaching of writing (Walshe, 1981: 6).

Understanding the writing process implies finding out what actually goes on when people write, which is "notoriously difficult" (White & Arndt, 1991: 3). In Emig's (1982: 2023) words, "there is no monolithic process of writing"; there are processes of writing that differ because of differing aims, intents, modes, and audiences. She further suggests that although there are shared features in the way we write, there are also individual, even idiosyncratic, features. Nevertheless, it has been conclusively proven that the process of writing involves several stages.

D'Aoust (1997) states that as the teacher facilitates the students' writing process, it becomes apparent that the writing stages overlap and sometimes compete for the students' attention. The students' own recursive inner processes dictate the sequence of the writing process. Writing teachers are thus faced with the challenging tasks of developing students' awareness that as they write, they might dart back and forth from one stage to another (White & Arndt, 1991). Therefore, instructional approaches that assign sequential planning, drafting, and revising stages miss the point of the cognitive model of writing (Lipson et al., 2000).

The nature of the writing process taken into account by the process-oriented approach brings about pedagogical implications for writing instruction. The phases involved in the writing process capture the complexity of writing and the difficulty of teaching it (Lipson et al., 2000: 211). Consequently, writing instruction is complex, demanding teachers who are astute observers of students' writing and who are capable of making instructional decisions responsive to writing issues that students are grappling with as they write (Dyson & Freedman, 1991 in Lipson et al., 2000). The process approach, which is illustrated in Figure 1, seems to meet these needs (Coe, 1988).

Coe (1988) explains that the process approach includes explicitly helping students develop the cognitive, affective, and verbal abilities that underlie effective writing and speaking. It is not enough to just show students what ‘good’ writing is, demand that they do it, and grade them down if they fail. In addition, the process approach means treating writing and speaking as creative and communicative processes. It means guiding students through the writing process, not just grading their written products. It means helping them learn how to communicate effectively in various situations.



**Figure 1 The Process Approach (Coe, 1988: 292)**

When translated into classroom practice, the process approach calls for the emergence of these features in a writing classroom: provision of adequate time, the importance of ownership, the value of constructive feedback, and the collaborative environment. These key features will be discussed in the following sections.

## **KEY FEATURES OF THE PROCESS APPROACH**

### **Provision of Adequate Time**

The process approach means that *students spend more time writing* (Coe, 1988: 298). One of the most valuable perspectives to come out of the process approach is that rewriting and revision are integral to writing (Myers, 1997); they are fundamental to the improvement of student writing skills. Rather than being expected to turn in a finished product right away, students need to be taught that rewriting and revision are

important as they are asked for multiple drafts of a work (Caudery, 1995). Traditional curricula and pedagogies, which usually worked only with the 'best' students, are not adequate to meet these students' needs (Coe, 1988: 290-291). The process approach, which puts more emphasis on writing as a communicative ability, according to Coe, meets these needs and will work with all types of students, not only with "the most educationally advantaged students who are predisposed to learn – if need be, despite the teacher" (p. 291).

Practising the process approach regularly will help students realise that not even the professionals can get their writing right straight off. "Everyone needs to revise and everyone *can* revise – and that means *everyone can learn to write*, at least competently", Graves emphasised (reported in Walshe, 1981: 16). Students are expected to eventually realise that writing generally requires many drafts and revisions to get ideas into a form that satisfies the writer. Within the construct of the process approach, revision is seen as a way of shaping and forming and discovering meaning, thus aimed at conveying the writer's ideas as effectively as possible (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997). What follows is that there need to be longer, more sustained writing periods (White & Arndt, 1991). The writing instruction should include lengthy and continuous opportunities to write and rewrite (Lipson et al., 2000: 221).

The writing process takes time – lots of time (Calkins, 1981: 51). It requires a pace which is qualitatively different (Graves in Calkins, 1981: 52). The pace can be very slow, particularly if the writing represents significant learning (Emig, 1982: 2023). Furthermore, as a craft, writing is "a process of shaping material toward an end" (Graves, 1983: 6); there is a long, painstaking, patient process demanded to learn how to shape material. There must be time for careful listening to the evolving piece, time for responsiveness, time for sustainment (Graves in Calkins, 1981: 52). And that time has to come from somewhere else in the curriculum.

When students receive more time for writing, they learn to wait more effectively; "they know there will be time to find their problems, to hound out their difficulties" (Calkins, 1981: 52). The waiting is the best aid to redrafting (Murray and Graves, 1981: 107); this gives distance to the text and greatly aids the act of revision (Murray & Graves, 1981: 109). "In revision, we are constantly adjusting distance, the distance between writer and experience, writer and meaning, writer and the writing, writer and reader, language and subject, text and reader" (Murray & Graves, 1981: 114).

### **Importance of Ownership**

Teachers' tendency to give too much prescription or correction or even advice will be very likely to take control of the writing away from students. This can be confusing, not enlightening. Process pedagogies encourage teachers to receive (or appreciate) students' writings. As they grow in their ability to do so, teachers become sensitive to what professionals call 'the writer's voice' (Graves in Walshe, 1981: 11). Voice contributes most to the development of the writer (Graves, 1983: 229); it pushes the writer into confronting new problems through interesting topics, gives energy to persist in their solution, then carries the writer on to a new set of issues. Voice would be absent or break down when students lose control of their writing. Thus, instead of treating students as inferior learners, we, teachers, are actually in the business of helping them value what they know, leaving control, power, and authority with them.

Moreover, Graves suggests that nothing influences a student's attitude to writing more than the choice of topic. A teacher employing the process approach should not impose a single topic, but will rather allow a degree of choice within a broad frame. Unlike in older views of writing, topic selection and idea generation in this new methodology are now the domain of students (Lipson et al., 2000: 211). If students have chosen a topic and if the teacher shows genuine interest in it, then there is no limit to the effort the students will make. The teacher should never imply a greater knowledge of the selected topic than the students possess. Students who are given this power soon eventually become confident in choosing topics, quite responsible about it, giving the matter deep consideration. So, central to the process approach are choice-of-topic-by-the-student and control-of-writing-by-the-student.

Ownership is central to authentic writing and authorship (Lipson et al., 2000: 211). The different pace of writing leads to a different sense of ownership (Calkins, 1981: 54). When students choose their own topics and revise their papers based on their own decisions, they care about their writing. The writing belongs to them. Ownership is worth the time it takes. The process approach offers the students the responsibilities of enticing topics, deciding how many drafts a piece needs, finding the problems in a draft, and making editing corrections, thus implying the changes of the teacher's roles. The classroom activities now focus on students' responsibility; students would work and help each other, rather than work alone (Reid, 2001). When students have ownership of their

piece, they supply the motivation, the energy. Teachers, as Calkins further suggests, can observe, question, and extend.

### **Value of Constructive Feedback**

As a recursive model, the process approach focuses on how to revise in response to feedback from the reader, whether the reader is the instructor, an ESL peer, or the author him- or herself. This emphasis implies the need to provide feedback and constructively respond to the feedback in ESL writing classes adopting the approach. Feedback is seen as essential to the multiple-draft process, as it is 'what pushes the writer through the various drafts and on to the eventual end-product' (Keh, 1990 in Muncie, 2000: 47). Good feedback is that which facilitates the process of revision.

Provision of feedback is closely related to one of the two pillars of process writing pedagogy suggested by Susser (1994), that is, intervention. Coe (1988: 292) suggests that the teaching process now involves intervening in the various processes surrounding and underlying the writing. Intervention is meant to help writers during, not after, the writing process. Intervening is useful when it is done during the writing process, that is, between drafts; it is not useful when done at the end. Thus, as the writing process itself is recursive rather than linear, intervening is to occur throughout the process (Zamel, 1983). This view is consonant with Vygotsky's recognition that there would be a difference between students' ability to write as individuals and their ability to write with intervention from their teacher and classmates. According to the principles of Vygotsky's theory, by positive results from interventions, students have cognitive resources ready to be brought into the composing process.

There is room for intervention around substantive issues throughout the process. Working from a cognitive perspective, Flower and Hayes (1981: 55 in Susser, 1994) suggest that seeing writing as a complex problem-solving process enables teachers to intervene at points in the writing process, which could do writers the most good as they are actually engaged in the act of writing. Teachers thus could help writers to write, not just learn to repair the damage.

Implied in the above views is the importance of 'dialogues' between readers and the writer in order for the feedback to become valuable as in the process-oriented approach, various types of feedback are possible. 'Dialogues' are necessary to complement written feedback

since by nature it has a number of limitations. 'Dialogues' can be facilitated by establishing 'writing conference' (Graves, 1983), or 'writing workshop', or 'peer-response session'. A growing appreciation of peer response in addition to the teacher response as a source of feedback is obviously reflected in the writing instruction.

### **Collaborative Environment**

Writing has been viewed as a socially constructed act as well as a cognitive one. The social dimension of writing is often reflected in pedagogical practices, viewing ways of making knowledge – including writing – from a collaborative or social perspective, which has resulted in writing teachers turning their classrooms into communities of learners. When translated into the classroom context, the process approach calls for the provision of a positive, encouraging, and collaborative workshop environment, an environment which, according to Shafer (2000: 32), should be the goal of every informed, twenty-first century teacher. Such an approach aims to raise students' awareness of the recursive nature of the composing process, while allowing teacher and peer collaboration and intervention during the writing process as together student writers and peers negotiate meaning (Reid, 1994). In other words, the writing classroom is arranged in the manner of a workshop, where students can work in groups and confer with their peers and are encouraged to share their writing with each other and revise it together.

To reinforce the emphasis on the dynamic and interactive aspects of writing as a process, a supportive, interactive environment should be created on a collaborative philosophy (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997). This enables us, teachers, to encourage partnerships and groups to form (Graves in Walshe, 1981: 15). Although individuals ultimately own their own work, throughout the stages of the writing process they have worked with the whole class, in pairs, and in small groups (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997): brainstorming ideas, focusing their topics, considering ways to express themselves, revising their papers, getting ready for publication, and, finally, sharing their final pieces with the entire class. Thus, the process approach calls for collaboration and support at every phase; students need the social rules of collaboration (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997).

### **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: INDONESIAN CONTEXT**

It is important to note that although process approaches to the development of writing skills are not new, there is still far from

widespread use of such approaches in Asia (Curtis, 2001). This might be partly due to teachers' lack of exposure to the approaches during their initial teacher training. Besides, as indicated by Jacobs and Ratmanida (1996: 103-104), whenever a teaching methodology is exported from one part of the world to another, educators, parents, students, and other stakeholders should receive it cautiously with regard to its appropriateness to their particular situation. "Cultures, students' needs, and educational resources are just a few of the ways in which countries differ" (Jacobs & Ratmanida, 1996: 104). Importing approaches as advocated by Western theoreticians to our Eastern context is usually easier said than done (Dardjowidjojo, 2001).

Coe (1988: 290) indicates that an understanding of our own local social and educational realities can be a basis for (re)defining our instructional goals and effective teaching practices. In part, this is because teachers know their students, usually better than the 'experts' do. Teachers can figure out how best to apply a certain methodology with particular groups of students. Coe (1988) further suggests that, being actively engaged in the process of working out this problem, teachers internalise the new principles and transform their own conceptions of what they are doing. "From this transformation flows basic change – bona fide new approaches, rather than the insertion of a few new pedagogical gimmicks into an essentially unchanged conception" (Coe, 1988: 290).

It should be noted here that in the Indonesian context, the proportion of learning situation is much greater than that of acquisition. It is mostly in the classroom that we expect our students to get the necessary input as much as possible since the target language is not used outside of the classroom, the typical characteristics of EFL classes in Indonesia. Concerning the process approach, in line with Myers's statement (1997: 3), the problem here is not a matter of disowning the insights of the approach, but of incorporating those insights into our instruction while still addressing the needs of our own students. A closer look at our context suggests a number of possible challenges in implementing the process approach. The following sections describe the challenges in light of the key features described previously.

### **Provision of Adequate Time**

One perspective to come out of the process approach is that rewriting and revision are integral to writing; they are fundamental to the improvement of student writing skills. Students are expected to realise



that writing generally requires many drafts and revisions to get ideas into a form that satisfies the writer. This implies the need for longer, more sustained, writing periods; the writing instruction should include lengthy and continuous opportunities to write and rewrite.

The indecent working conditions, partly in the form of limited teaching time, seems to be a problem in implementing the process approach. In addition, the real challenges lie most likely in building up teachers' own individual commitment to monitoring students' work over time and in convincing students that revising is indeed an important aspect in the writing process. The former implies the need for providing adequate instructional support while students are writing in order for them to be successful, not simply assigning and evaluating writing (Willis, 1997); teachers need to help students do what adept writers do. This means that we have the tasks of being 'a text-oriented instructor' as well as 'a student-oriented nurturer', as Wilcox (1997) calls it. Furthermore, in an EFL environment like ours, where the learning situation makes carrying out writing tasks harder, it is obviously painful for students who have struggled to produce a piece of writing, who have written what they could, to go back to it and revise it. Students' previous writing experience might also foster the attitude of 'the one-shot draft', a view that writing is completed once they have written a first draft. Many students seem to be resistant towards revising and editing their work. Therefore, as Tully (1996: 30 in Stemper, 2002: 20) suggests, as teachers, we have the challenge of "getting students to want to revise". We must show them how they can change a piece of writing to make it more powerful and effective (Willis, 1997). We must help them realise the amount of planning, drafting, and revising that goes into any author's work; they should not imagine a piece of writing as a swiftly created masterpiece. Giving opportunities for students to revise their own work eventually results in the development of student ownership in their writing.

### **Importance of Ownership**

Acknowledging the importance of ownership implies shifting our focus of attention from teaching to learning, making the students the centre of writing activities. The classroom activities now focus on students' responsibility (Reid, 2001); the process approach thus offers the students the responsibilities of generating ideas, focusing and structuring them, deciding how many drafts a piece needs, finding the problems in a draft, and making editing corrections. This also means the changes of the

teacher's roles. In the process approach, the teacher facilitates the students' writing. Such changes likely come into conflict with our cultural beliefs and values.

One of Hofstede's (1980, 1986 in Jacobs & Ratmanida, 1996) four dimensions of cross-cultural difference, that is, power distance, seems appropriate to examine the possible conflicts. Power distance is defined as the extent of inequality of power and influence between people at different points in societal hierarchies. In high power distance cultures like ours, as Jacobs and Ratmanida (1996: 106) hypothesise, students taking the responsibility for their own learning might not fit well because teachers are seen as the prime, infallible source of knowledge. Many students might, therefore, prefer to learn directly from the teacher all the time. This appears to be confirmed by the dominant tendency in formal education from primary to tertiary education. In much of Southeast Asia and other Asian countries, attitudes to knowledge tend to be more 'conserving' than 'extending' (Ballard & Clanchy, 1984: 13), which has implications not just for learning approaches and strategies but also for teaching. The dominant tendency is more toward the reproductive approach to learning, instead of the speculative one, suggesting that knowledge is handed down from generation to generation without change. As the teacher is the repository of knowledge, knowledge in the teaching process is passed down from teachers to students.

To promote ownership, central to the process approach are choice-of-topic-by-the-student and control-of-writing-by-the-student. As a result of largely of the specific curriculum being followed, students write particular assignments, very often about something beyond their purely personal, individual lives, there being little in the way of free choice of essay topics. Therefore, students who have experienced writing courses using a more teacher-fronted approach might obviously find this feature hard. They might be more familiar with the provision of a common set of expectations of what is to be written and how. In addition, as Stemper (2002) indicates, the evaluation procedures in such an approach might have promoted the students' misconceptions regarding who is supposed to have control over their work. When teachers themselves evaluate the final products, with red ink all over the students' papers, they complete the editing process for their students (Willis, 1997). This reduces student ownership in their writing. As a result, too often, students assume that "it is their task to write and the teacher's to evaluate" (White & Arndt, 1991: 116).

Writing instructors implementing the process approach thus need to work on the above dilemmas related to either our educational system or our cultural background. We have to try to persuade our students that it is ultimately not the teacher, but they themselves who must decide whether their text fulfils its intended goal. Most importantly, in spite of the many roles the teacher plays in the process approach, many students possibly still find it hard to accept this. They know that the fact remains the same. At the end of the semester we, EFL teachers, play the role of ultimate evaluator. Grading is based solely on teacher assessment. This brings an authoritarian dimension to the teacher's role (Muncie, 2000) so that in a writing classroom, students are likely to favour feedback from the teacher more than that from a peer. This problem is closely related to provision of feedback in the process-oriented writing classroom as discussed below.

### **Value of Constructive Feedback**

The process approach sees feedback as essential to the multiple-draft process; good feedback is, therefore, that which facilitates the process of revision. In the process-oriented approach, various types of feedback are possible, from the teacher as well as from peers. A growing appreciation of peer response in addition to the teacher response as a source of feedback is obviously reflected in the writing instruction adopting the process approach.

While there seems to be no problem for students to receive feedback from the teacher in a writing class, in the Indonesian context, many of them do not like participating in peer response activities. They tend to look upon teacher response more favourably. The students doubt the value of peer response because they might think that their peers are approximately of the same, or perhaps lower, English proficiency and that they are similarly still in the process of learning English. It appears here that it is not an easy matter for students to differentiate the problem of lack of language proficiency in English from the ability to express ideas. They mistrust their classmates' responses based on their reason that English is not their native language, even though research has found that there might be a writing expertise, which is independent of L2 proficiency, affecting L2 writing (Bosher, 1998; Cumming, 1989). In other words, the challenge here is to convince the students that lack of English proficiency does not necessarily prevent someone from offering fruitful ideas.

The second problem relates to culturally-related roles of students and teachers. Based on personal experience, the practice of students responding to the writings of other students might be considered culturally unusual. Students generally view the teacher as the possessor of all knowledge and the one who is responsible for responding to their work. Such an attitude is likely to result in students' difficulty in accepting their peers' responses. Similar cultural characteristics in classroom techniques are found in Asian countries. Thus, for students who might have come to the writing classroom looking for expertise from their teacher, but found that they are expected to revise their writing in the light of feedback from their classmates, they would often appear confused. There should be an attempt to change such an attitude and to develop students' awareness that peer response is a worthwhile activity.

The other possible challenge appears to be stimulating students to take an active role in such group activities as peer response sessions. They are surely more used to the class, the physical set up of which is mostly in the form of a teacher standing in front and the [forty to fifty] students sitting in rows, the typical classroom situation in the Indonesian context as described by Dardjowidjojo (2001). Students are thus more familiar with a teacher-fronted mode, where they can often just sit passively listening to the teacher (Jacobs & Ratmanida, 1996). Even so, the lesson will still continue because the teacher is conscientiously performing the task. On the other hand, with group activities, according to Jacobs and Ratmanida (1996: 111), "if students do not participate, the lesson cannot continue". Creating a classroom atmosphere where students are encouraged to collaborate is another challenging task for writing instructors adopting the process approach.

### **Collaborative Environment**

As in other disciplines, "small-group discussion has become a staple of composition pedagogy" (Howard, 2001: 54). The recursive nature of the composing process allows teacher and peer collaboration and intervention during the writing process as together student writers and peers negotiate meaning. In other words, the writing classroom is arranged in the manner of a workshop, where students can work in groups and confer with their peers and are encouraged to share their writing with each other and revise it together. The problems then lie in the process of building up mutual trust among the students, that is, creating an

atmosphere of trust, mutual respect, and a commitment to learn from each other.

From the teacher's perspective, our cultural philosophy of planting the seeds among the elders (i.e., teachers) that they must be looked upon as the ultimate good (Dardjowidjojo, 2001) seems to pose a barrier to collaborative pedagogy. From childhood, an Indonesian child is brought up in a social environment where "the yardstick for judging whether a child is good or bad is the degree of obedience shown to h(is/er) parents" (Dardjowidjojo, 2001: 314). Parents set up the norms to which the children are expected to adhere. We do not encourage our children to express their views, especially those that are different from those of their elders. Such parental guidance is extended to the classroom, where "a teacher is a figure whom we must trust and whose behaviour we must follow" (Dardjowidjojo, 2001: 315). The implication of this is two-pronged: a teacher is to provide and a student to accept the classroom materials. Changing the role to a facilitator is a great cultural shift. "A class cannot possibly be interactive, if the teacher is not willing to relinquish some of h(is/er) authority" (Dardjowidjojo, 2001: 319). Furthermore, as our own teacher-training programs did not equip us with more collaborative writing pedagogy, it would take us great effort to create a positive classroom atmosphere to establish good teacher-student as well as student-student relationships.

From the students' side, moving into a classroom atmosphere where more interaction is emphasised than transmission is not an easy job. From childhood, our various forms of philosophy, at home as well as at school, clearly expect children/students to conform to the societal value system which discourages differences of opinions. They are brought up in an environment of total obedience to those at a higher level in the hierarchy. While in the family circle this tradition may be of high cultural value, it does not help people develop questioning minds and critical thinking (Dardjowidjojo, 2001: 314). Therefore, students are more used to a tranquil class where they sit faithfully at their desks and move only when they are told to do so. This classroom tranquility, as Dardjowidjojo (2001: 317) observes, is to be found not only at the lower levels of education, but at the doctorate level as well. It would thus take courage for students to take part in a more interactive classroom, to participate in interactive discussions with the teacher and peers about writing, let alone to do so in a foreign language classroom like ours. They need to feel that the classroom is a trustworthy and safe community in order to reveal their

weaknesses in their writing to the teacher or to peers (Tully, 1996 in Stemper, 2002: 29).

As we provide more writing time to engage students, they are expected to learn that rewriting and revision are fundamental to the improvement of their writing skills. If students are to care about revising a particular piece, they must want to make it better, to go back and look at it again, contemplate it, be involved with it (Zemelman and Daniels, 1988 in Stemper, 2002: 29). They have to own it and think of it, not just as the teacher's piece and the teacher's responsibility, but theirs. "For students to learn how to revise their writing, they must receive feedback on their work" (Willis, 1997: 2). As the feedback can be from the teacher and peers, they must learn to respect and trust their peers. All this can be fostered in a more collaborative classroom environment, reflected not only in the instructional activities but also in the physical layout of the writing class.

### **CONCLUSION**

The above characteristics of the writing-as-a-process approach suggest that the approach understands the importance of the skills involved in writing. The approach recognises that what learners bring to the writing classroom contributes to the development of the writing ability. In other words, improvement in writing skills is expected to take place in a conscious as well as subconscious way. In the process approach, it is not enough for writing teachers just to show students models of excellent writing, tell them to write, and mark their errors. If we, writing teachers, understand the composing process, if we understand the relationship between the writing process and the written product, we can do a lot more to help students learn. Therefore, we need to display the key features of the process approach to our students: they would spend more time generating material and strategies, they should control their own writing, they would do several drafts utilising advice from both the teacher and their peers, and they would learn more and retain more in a collaborative environment. Furthermore, as the approach originates from the Western context, implementing it in our Eastern context is not without problems. An understanding of our own local social and educational realities can be a basis for (re)defining our instructional goals and effective teaching practices.

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