

USING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN DESCRIPTIVE TEXT WRITING ON THE ELEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS OF SMAN 3 SUNGAI AMBAWANG

Deonisius Kalpari

English Education Study Proram Teacher Training and Education Faculty
Tanjungpura University Pontianak
Email :deonisiuskalpari@gmail.com

Abstract

This research was carried out to solve students' problem, in what way collaborative learning improves students' descriptive text to the eleventh grade students of SMAN 3 Sungai Ambawang in academic year 2014-2015. Classroom Action Research is used in conducting this research. The tools of data collection used are written test, observation checklist, and field note. Using collaborative learning technique is useful to students since it gives the students a chance to learn how to be active in writing process and to guide the students to produce the descriptive text. In doing so, they had the privilege to give some opinions and ask questions to their group, the writer, or the teacher. Later on, the writing product was discussed with other groups. The writer intention is to collaborate students to broaden their ideas and open their mind to see others' perspective. The students' competence was improved step by step until they fulfilled all indicators of success. This confirmed the teacher that students' descriptive text writing skills have been improved.

Key words: *Collaborative Learning, Descriptive Text, and Writing*

According to Nunan (2003: 92-94), there are four principles that every teacher should consider while planning a course, whether it is a writing course, or a course in which writing plays a part. The first one is understanding students' reason for writing. The greatest dissatisfaction with writing instruction comes when the teachers' goal do not match the students' work. The second one is providing many opportunities for students to write. Providing students with many different types of writing as well help them for them in writing task later on. The third is making feedback helpful and meaningful. Feedback gives important values for the students to look the problems faced by the students and

how to solve it. And the last is clarifying for the teacher, and for the students, how their writing was evaluated. Teacher should tell the students about their scoring criteria of their writing. It can be useful to make them know the purpose of their activity or writing tasks. Furthermore, there are also some techniques or method that teacher possibly uses in teaching writing. Such as wordmapping, quickwriting, and brainstorming.

Writers cannot start stories or deliver news without using descriptive writing. It is used to describe the characters and setting. In short, descriptive writing is the most important type of writing, and it is the reason

behind me proposing a research about it. A good descriptive text allows the readers to see, hear, or even feel the subject matter clearly as Alan Meyers (2005: 60) says: "Through careful word choice, strong details, and clear organization, a writer creates a mental picture for readers. Instead of just telling them that a place is pretty, unusual, or horrible, the writer expresses to them the places so that they can see its beauty, uniqueness, or ugliness for themselves. Oshima and Hogue (1997: 50) explain that descriptive writing appeals to the senses, so it tells how something looks, feels, smells, tastes, and sounds. A good description is like a "word picture" that the reader can imagine the object, place, or person in his or her mind. In conclusion, a writer of a good descriptive text is like an artist who paints a picture that can be "seen" clearly in the mind of the reader.

Based on interview with the English teacher of SMAN 3 Sungai Ambawang, the students had problems in organizing descriptive texts. They usually worried about arranging or making descriptive text because writing is a complex task. It even can be more complex than speaking. As we know, students may be able to speak English fluently but at the same time it does not mean they are able to express their English well in a written form. It is complex because writing has aspects such as content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics of the writing. If it is broken even just once, the writing may become confusing or not attractive to the readers. So the students' problems are here. They were confused with the use of "verb + s" in present tense. For examples, goes, eats, and flies. They were also confused in using adjectives: describing, numbering, and classifying. For examples, two strong legs, sharp white fangs. Then using linking verbs to give information about a subject, as in, "My

mum is really cool" and "It has very thick fur"; using thinking verbs (believe, think, etc.) and feeling verbs to express personal feeling about a subject. For examples, the police believe the suspect is armed, I think it is a clever animal. And the last in using adverbs to give additional information to the adjective used. For examples, it is extremely high, it runs definitely fast.

The writer is interested in using a technique in teaching writing, especially in writing descriptive text. Because when students were involved in the kind of process writing, there are stages possible to do before write. In this case, this is the teacher's duty to use a teamwork-based to make them write easier. For this purpose, the writer selected a collaborative teaching technique in classroom action research in writing a descriptive text. The writer selected SMAN 3 Sungai Ambawang. It emphasizes on writing is important for senior high school students, especially for a preparation, as they will study in a university, where majority of the tasks are about writing. Lecturers also usually assign students to do a group assignment, so it is important for them to work collaboratively.

RESEARCH METHOD

Since the purpose of a research is to investigate the finding of a problem, there must be rules or regulation followed by the researcher such as subject of the study, method used etc. The research form used in this study is Classroom Action Research. Action research is a flexible spiral process which allows action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge) to be achieved at the same time.

Action research undertakes a study because it explores whether or not something can be done in a better way or not. Most classroom teachers involved in a research activity are doing

action research. The study might be made for the purposes of trying to improve local classroom practices. Action research provides an opportunity for educators to reflect on their own practice (Creswell 2005:550).

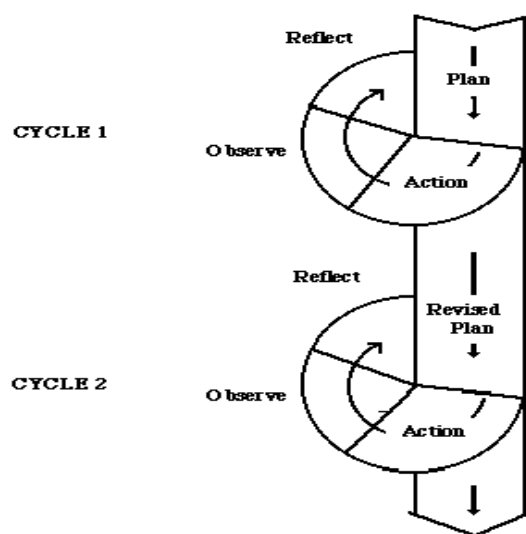
Action research has an important role for the teacher, researcher and school-teams to study local school issues. Moreover, it applies scientific methods to real life problems and represents a great improvement over teachers' subjective judgments based upon story and their limited personal experiences. In fact, the scope of action research provides a means for teachers or educators in the school to improve their practices of taking action and to do so by participating in action.

By doing an action research, teachers develop their skills in giving the material to students. They have a challenge to solve the problem they have found in class. They have inner motivation to do this research because they are aware of this advantage: their class situation needs a special treatment and direct action. Therefore, this situation creates a good environment among teachers to do the best thing for the

students. On the other hand, this reality proves that a teacher is able to be a good researcher and good teacher at the same time.

Carr and Kemmis (1986: 162) view action research as a form of self reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out. Based on the definitions above, in short, action research is a form of reflective inquiry, which enables practitioners to better realize such qualities in their practice.

As the action research seeks to create knowledge, propose and implement change, and improve practice and performance, there are four steps in the research process. According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), the cycle of Action Research includes the following stages: initial reflection to identify an issue or problem, planning and action (to solve the problem), implementation of the action, observation of the action, and reflection.



Scheme 1

Action Research Protocol after Kemmis (cited in Hopkins, 1985)

Planning

The writer thinks about what might cause the problems and then tries to find the solution by talking to the teacher to get the idea. The writer create a lesson plan with SK and KD of writing descriptive text. The writer with the teacher also make lesson plans, finds some literatures such as books and sources from webs that support the materials that would be taught, and instruments for data collecting.

Acting

The writer teaches the teacher how to conduct collaborative writing in teaching descriptive text. The teacher will teach descriptive text to the students using collaborative learning when he is ready. During the acting stage, the instructions, which is stated in the lesson plans are followed using technique choosen.

Observing

The teacher is helped by the writer to gather evidence, which will be analyzed. During the observing stage, the classroom activities, which is stated in the lesson plans are being observed.

Reflecting

At the end of this period of reflection, ideas will usually arise for further cycle. During the reflecting stage, the observed classroom activities are being reflected to find the solutions.

RESEARCH RESULT

The researcher applied classroom action research in conducting this research. This research method was intended to solve the writing activity problems found in the class. The eleventh grade students of SMAN 3 Sungai Ambawang were not good in generating and organizing ideas and using simple present tense, in writing descriptive text. The researcher used descriptive text as the material of the

research. The purpose of using collaborative learning in this research was to improve students' skills in writing descriptive text. Hopefully, students adjust their use of written language to communicate effectively with a kind of genre and for different purposes. As mentioned here, the data indicate an increase of students' achievement in writing a descriptive text.

Duringthe implementation, the researcher as the collaborator recorded the process using field note and worksheet. Firstly, the teacher taught the material and implemented collaborative learning technique. The second, students did the writing task. And then the researcher computed the students' score and classified the mean score into the qualification. Those were the steps done to obtain the research findings.

Test used here was achievement test. Heaton (1988: 163) states that achievement test are intended to measure achievement on a large scale. Interpretation of the test score were presented into every cycle for knowing students' progress. The writer calculated the data by using the formula below.

$$m = \frac{\sum fx}{N}$$

Note:

m = the mean score of the entire participants (students)

$\sum fx$ = the sum of the individual students' score

N = the sample size (the number of participants)

Heaton (1988: 175-176)

Cycle 1

Planning

For this action plan, the writer divided the meeting into two stages. Stage 1: for building knowledge of the field. Firstly, the writer read the explanation aloud and then in turns the students followed him. Actually, the

main goals of those activities were just to encourage students to be active to take part in learning. The function of the teacher here just as the guide. At the end of the meeting, the writer asked students to write a descriptive text.

Acting

Furthermore, the writer did his act. The act was conducted in two meetings. The first meeting was Building knowledge of the field. It was held on February 19th 2015. Here, the students are asked to be more active in discussion. The purpose of it just encouraged students to be braver in showing their ideas. The students were divided into groups. An example of descriptive text was given into each group. The topic was about 'My Mother'. Every student in the group had a duty to analyze the generic structures of the descriptive text example given. Then they submitted the result of their analysis in a group conclusion. In doing so, they had the privilege to give opinion and ask their group, the writer, or the teacher. Later on, the conclusion was discussed with other groups. The writer intention was to collaborate students' ideas and open the students' mind to see many other perspectives.

The second meeting was held on February 21st 2015. The writer asked the students to write a descriptive text. The topic is about 'My Mother', the topic was similar to the previous example text. In this case, the students were supposed to describe their mother, in a written form. The writer just gave some words related to their topic to make sure that they were helped enough. Here are some common adjectives for describing people. Personality: happy, satisfied, relaxed, exciting, nervous, angry, serious, sad, depressed, an outgoing. Physical characteristics: big, large, tall, small, tiny, short, thin, heavy, strong, weak, light-, dark-skinned. (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005:27)

Based on the result of the test of students' writing, then the writer analyzed what steps should be done in order to make sure that the teaching writing especially for descriptive text will success. Their weaknesses in their writing could be possible solved if the writer got such data.

This stage was intended to know the students' weaknesses before having some treatments and to get score during the action research.

Table 1
The Result of Cycle 1

| No. | Students' Code | Score |
|-------------|----------------|-------|
| 1 | X 1 | 72 |
| 2 | X 2 | 64 |
| 3 | X 3 | 61 |
| 4 | X 4 | 66 |
| 5 | X 5 | 65 |
| 6 | X 6 | 67 |
| 7 | X 7 | 67 |
| 8 | X 8 | 61 |
| 9 | X 9 | 68 |
| 10 | X 10 | 65 |
| 11 | X 11 | 71 |
| 12 | X 12 | 73 |
| 13 | X 13 | 65 |
| 14 | X 14 | 69 |
| Total Score | | 867 |
| Mean score | | 61,93 |

The students' average were 61, 93. It could be said that they were really under qualification. It may be caused by the students' lacking of knowledge and practice.

Observing

Based on the writer's observation, the writer found that the activities were success although there were some problems faced during conducting the action plan.

Reflecting

Not any single plan could be run in line with the fact. Otherwise, the writer got some important points during conducting this first cycle.

Asking the students to write a descriptive text about a person, place or thing that they have ever heard, watched or read was really helpful in order to be the first step for the next meeting.

Some problems faced during the first cycle were the student still silenced when they were asked to work with a more distant friend. Later on, the writer continued his step for the second cycle.

Table 2
Problems in the first cycle and the solutions.

| No. | Problems | Solutions |
|-----|--|---|
| 1. | The students could not catch the ideas of the text. | The teacher has to emphasize the material on a more familiar topic. |
| 2. | The students did not want to work with a distant friend. | The teacher has to interview the students about their friendship in the class. |
| 3. | The students did not understand about the generic structure of descriptive text. | The teacher has to re-explain the generic structure of descriptive text by giving the characteristic of each generic structure. |
| 4. | The students got noisy while the teaching learning process was holding. | The teacher makes the students get more interested and should attract the students |

interest by
choosing an
interesting
topic.

Cycle 2

Planning

The writer divided the groups based on the students' own choice. The information was achieved by using interview. There were a lot of input and information achieved from the interview. The writer emphasized on a more familiar topic. The theme was 'My Best Friend'. According to some of them, they were avoiding describing their mother. The writer re-explained the generic structure of descriptive text. It emphasized on the characteristics of the generic structure. The review of generic structure, were similar with the previous one.

Acting

The act was conducted in two meetings. The first meeting was building knowledge about using simple present tense, adjectives, adverbs, linking verbs, thinking verbs and feeling verbs. It was held on February 26th 2015. Here, the students are asked to be more active in discussion. The members of the groups were considered based on the result of the interview about their friendship. But the writer added one higher achieving student in each group, based on the result of the cycle 1. An example of descriptive text was given into each group. Every student in the group had a duty to analyze the simple present tense, adjectives, adverbs, linking verbs, thinking verbs and feeling verbs used in the descriptive text example given. Then they submitted the result of their analysis in a group conclusion. In doing so, they had the privilege to give opinion and ask their group, the writer, or the teacher. Later on, the conclusion was discussed with other groups. The second meeting was held on February 28th 2015.

In cycle one the writer found that students were not openly describing their mother. So in this cycle, each student was randomly given one name of their classmate in a piece of paper, and then they were assigned to write a descriptive text about the person. Nobody knows who they were writing about. The purpose was to make students write more openly. Since the description was about their classmate, they already knew what to write because they meet each other everyday.

Table 3
The Result of Cycle 2

| No. | Students' Code | Score |
|-------------|----------------|-------|
| 1 | X 1 | 79 |
| 2 | X 2 | 68 |
| 3 | X 3 | 66 |
| 4 | X 4 | 71 |
| 5 | X 5 | 71 |
| 6 | X 6 | 73 |
| 7 | X 7 | 73 |
| 8 | X 8 | 65 |
| 9 | X 9 | 80 |
| 10 | X 10 | 66 |
| 11 | X 11 | 71 |
| 12 | X 12 | 75 |
| 13 | X 13 | 70 |
| 14 | X 14 | 70 |
| Total Score | | 998 |
| Mean score | | 71,29 |

The students' average score in this cycle is 71, 29. According to Harris (1969: 134) it is categorized as good. There is a significant improvement of 9, 36 points compared to cycle 1.

Observing

During the collaboration, the writer found that students more enthusiastic when they were asked to break up into groups based on their own choices.

Reflecting

The writer concluded that this action is right to be conducted for the small class which members of the groups are under 20 students. Besides that, the writer found that if the teacher let the students enjoy their own writing class so they would be more enthusiastic in writing. The result of the entire process in cycle 2 was unsatisfactory but it had been improved. The improvements are as follows:

The students could give their opinions about the text because they work freely with their close friends.

The students were more enthusiastic in learning activity because the theme was about Best Friend.

However, the researcher found some problems happened in the second cycle. Then, the researcher discussed with the teacher about the solution for the problems, the researcher made the reflection as below:

Table 4
The problems in the Second Cycle and the Solutions

| No. | Problems | Solutions |
|-----|---|---|
| 1. | The students still could not use the simple present tense in sentences. | The teacher has to explain more about the simple present tense by giving more examples of sentence in simple present tense and how to use it. |
| 2. | The students still could not use adjectives, adverbs, linking verbs, thinking verbs and | The teacher has to explain more about adjectives, adverbs, linking verbs, thinking verbs and feeling verbs and how to use it. |

| | | |
|----|--|--|
| | feeling verbs well. | |
| 3. | Some students kept talking to their friends while the teacher asked about their difficulties in the first cycle. | The teacher should get students attention, by telling them if they have some questions about the material, they could ask the teacher. |
| 4. | Some students were not enthusiastic to study. | The teacher should control the students, and make them interested in studying activity by walking around the class. |
| 5. | Some students still confused to choose appropriate words to make the sentences | The teacher should guide the students to make the sentences and give the words they need or ask them to use dictionary. |

Cycle 3

Planning

In this section, the writer just focused on the product of students writing. It was held on March 5th 2015. During this session, the writer asked students to work in group. The purpose of the activities was to be more creative.

Acting

The writer asked the students to work in groups. Each group consisted of three to four students. The groups were from the previous cycle. Then the teacher showed an example of descriptive text about best friend. The text contains everything they had learned from the previous meetings.

Then the teacher asked the students to write down characteristics of their best friend. The characteristics of the best friend in the example text had been underlined, so the students just needed to change the characteristics into their own best friend's. The students then combined their ideas in their group and supported each other.

Observing

They were more focused in their task. They were better when they were asked to break up into groups based on their own choices. It was like seeing different students from the first meeting. Based on the writer's observation, the writer found that the activities were more successful than the previous ones, although some problems could not be avoided during conducting the action plan. It could be caused by the solutions used by reflecting the first and second cycle.

Reflecting

Based on the result of students' individual score, they concluded that the third cycle had been successful. The content of their ideas were quite clear. The students did not have serious problem in developing ideas. It meant that the cycle could be stopped.

Table 5
The Result of Cycle 3

| No. | Students' Code | Score |
|-------------|----------------|-------|
| 1 | X 1 | 90 |
| 2 | X 2 | 74 |
| 3 | X 3 | 74 |
| 4 | X 4 | 76 |
| 5 | X 5 | 76 |
| 6 | X 6 | 74 |
| 7 | X 7 | 74 |
| 8 | X 8 | 79 |
| 9 | X 9 | 85 |
| 10 | X 10 | 76 |
| 11 | X 11 | 79 |
| 12 | X 12 | 85 |
| 13 | X 13 | 79 |
| 14 | X 14 | 85 |
| Total Score | | 1106 |
| Mean score | | 79 |

The average score in this cycle is 79. It is raised up to 17, 07 if it is compared with the result of cycle 1. It can be concluded that the students' achievement were improved and there is any significant improvement between cycles.

DISCUSSION

The problems of students in writing descriptive text were as follows:

- (1) The students were struggling to generate and organize ideas from the topic given by the teacher.
- (2) The students were struggling to collaborate in groups given by the teacher.
- (3) The students were confused in mentioning the generic structure of descriptive text and using it in writing descriptive text.
- (4) The last, students were confused in mentioning and using the characteristics of descriptive text like Simple Present Tense, adjectives,

adverbs, linking verbs, thinking verbs, and feeling verbs.

The report here is reporting the whole discussion. After having calculated the result of cycles, it can be concluded that students' competence in writing a descriptive text are better since the method was applied. The average of cycle 1 was 61,93. Meanwhile the average of students' achievement in cycle 3 was 79. Based on the data shown the writer can conclude that there is any significant improvement. After having doing some treatments for few meetings, finally most of them understood how to write a descriptive text. The writer presents the overall of the whole result to gain the students' improvement for their writing competency.

Table 6
Overall Test Score

| No. | Students' Code | Score of cycle 1 | Score of cycle 2 | Score of cycle 3 |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1 | X 1 | 72 | 79 | 90 |
| 2 | X 2 | 64 | 68 | 74 |
| 3 | X 3 | 61 | 66 | 74 |
| 4 | X 4 | 66 | 71 | 76 |
| 5 | X 5 | 65 | 71 | 76 |
| 6 | X 6 | 67 | 73 | 74 |
| 7 | X 7 | 67 | 73 | 74 |
| 8 | X 8 | 61 | 65 | 79 |
| 9 | X 9 | 68 | 80 | 85 |
| 10 | X 10 | 65 | 66 | 76 |
| 11 | X 11 | 71 | 71 | 79 |
| 12 | X 12 | 73 | 75 | 85 |
| 13 | X 13 | 65 | 70 | 79 |
| 14 | X 14 | 69 | 70 | 85 |
| Total Score | | 867 | 998 | 1106 |
| Mean Score | | 61,93 | 71,29 | 79 |

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the research finding of the research, the researcher concludes the research as follow:

(1) Students' descriptive text writing skills especially in generating ideas, organizing the generic structure, using adjectives, verbs, nouns, present tense, and mechanics are improved by using collaborative learning technique; this was proved by the result of mean score and the result of the observation.

(2) This classroom action research was conducted in three main cycles with four main stages; planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The students' competence was improved step by step in each cycle until they fulfilled all indicators of success. This confirmed the teacher that the students' descriptive text writing skills have improved.

(3) Using collaborative learning technique is useful to students since it gives the students chance to learn how to be active in writing process and to guide the students to produce the descriptive text.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusion above, the writer would like to offer some suggestions:

(1) For teaching writing descriptive text, the students should be approached by combining media preceded by giving an example of the text which also can be combined with pictures or any others media and then encourage them to be active and brave enough to apply their knowledge and understanding for their writing through work in collaboration with other students, and here is the teachers' duty to let them enjoy the writing process by letting them to find out the best way or approaches while they were writing.

(2) A good English teacher should implemented his process approaches in writing can easily be done for students

and think about the time being spent. However, teacher also should give opportunities and encouragement for students to share their ideas with his group. In addition, giving a model of written text for students will improve their understanding about the form and how to write a descriptive text. Finally, to get a good generalization of the result of the study, those activities should be conducted in other schools.

(3) It is important to the teacher to be more creative in doing teaching and learning. Consequently, the students will enjoy the process of learning and the frame of it will be more attractive and enjoyable

(4) The researcher recommends the teacher to apply collaborative learning technique in the classroom when teaching descriptive text writing.

REFERENCES

- Bailey, S. (2004). *Academic Writing: A Practical Guide for Students*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Best, J. W., & Khan, J. V. (1995). *Research in Education*. New Delhi: PrenticeHall Inc.
- Brown, D.H. (2004). *Language Assessment*. New York: Pearson Education Inc.
- Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research Second Edition*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Gillies, R.M., & Ashman, A. F. (2005). *Co-operative Learning*. London and New York: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Harris, D.P. (1969). *Teaching Language as a Second Language*. New York: Mc.Graw Hill Book Company.
- Heaton, J. B. (1994). *Writing Language Test*. London: Longman.

- Kane, T.S. (2000). *The Oxford Essential Guide for Writing*. New York: Berkley Books.
- Mayer, P. (2011). *CRESL Level for Writing Guide*.
- Meyers, A. (2005). *Gateways to Academic Writing: Effective Sentences, Paragraphs and Essays*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Muijs, Daniel. (2004). *Doing Quantitative Research in Education*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Nunan, D. (1993). *Research Method in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (1997). *Introduction to Academic Writing*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Partridge, E. (2005). *You Have a Point There: A Guide to Punctuation and its Allies*. London: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Zemach, D. E., & Rumisek, L. A. (2005). *Academic Writing from Paragraph to Essay*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.