

New York State Association for Bilingual Education Journal v10 p13-24, Summer 1995

# The Process Oriented Approach to Teaching Writing to Second Language Learners

Nicole Montague

*Abstract:* The process oriented approach to teaching writing in the classroom is an idea that began three decades ago as the result of extensive research on literacy acquisition for majority language learners. Since that initial research, process oriented instruction has been used in many classrooms across the country with different types of learners, implemented by different types of interpretations and teaching styles (Reyes, 1991a). The appropriateness of such instruction for learners from minority cultures and speakers of minority languages has been questioned by some researchers (Delpit, 1986; Reyes, 1991a, 1991b; Valdés, 1988, 1992). This review examines the foundation of the process oriented approach and current theories of literacy acquisition. The efficacy of implementing this teaching approach with second language learners is examined through a review of the pertinent literature and an examination of recent case studies.

## Introduction

When I participated in the "Rio Grande Writing Project" (RGWP) three summers ago, I emerged revitalized as a writer who teaches children to write. Creative writing had long been a love and a lifesaver for me throughout my childhood. The RGWP gave this type of writing back to me in a validated, structured way to teach my students. On an individual level, I had been using logic to integrate personal writing into the curriculum. At that time, I taught third, fourth and fifth graders at a bilingual magnet school in New Mexico.

As part of our daily writing activities, my children kept daily journals that included personal reflection, a record of daily news events, rough drafts of poetry and narrative pieces, artwork lists, wishes and dreams. Inside each journal cover they kept their sticker collection and copied famous quotations. Occasionally favorite family photos, magazine and newspaper clippings were accompanied by a piece of writing. My class simply kept their lives in their journals, not knowledgeable about the two basic forms of journals-for-the-classroom, "dialogue journals" and "diaries" (Hamayan, 1989). I collected them periodically and entered my own remarks, modeling appropriate spellings and grammatical structures in English or in Spanish. We had

worked out a system for privacy which I always respected. If a writer folded down a page onto itself, that entry was private and not to be read by anyone. I discussed this with parents during our open house at the beginning of the year, setting a tone for respect of each writer's privacy.

The journals my children kept became so important to them that they invariably ended up making entries about family life that were quite private. Each journal became a place for the children to sort out a confusing

world. When one child used her journal for examining a personal problem in writing, her mother purchased a "home journal" which made the mother feel more comfortable with her budding young writer's reflections. The journals my children kept became their trusted space, treasured and protected by each child in the room. We began the year with two or three journals listed on the supply list and usually ended up with four to six full journals per child. These journals recorded artwork, literacy development and social growth over the period of one year in a particular child's life.

After graduating from the local teaching program at the University of New Mexico, I embarked on the use of journals with all of the children in my classroom. This population included second language learners and children from minority cultures. My classes were comprised of one Iranian child, many Mexican-American students, children from two other Spanish speaking countries, African-American students, and some Anglo children from extremely poor families. Our classes also included children from wealthy families of dominant and diverse ethnic backgrounds. I worked with students at different stages in their acquisition of literacy, from those who scored above grade level in reading to those who were "non-literate". To work with these children, I implemented the use of journals in my own unstructured, awkward way while incorporating the required curriculum of science, social studies, mathematics, music, literature, English and other areas into the writing of our daily classroom life. I didn't know about the controversy of "process versus product" (Murray, 1972). I wasn't aware of the "process movement" that seemed to be sweeping educational circles. I just knew that writing had worked for me and that my children deserved access to the same world. The Rio Grande Writing Project, the local version of the National Writing Project, changed all that.

The National Writing Project is a university-school collaborative program directed toward improving the teaching of writing in our public school classrooms. The project identifies teachers of writing and invites them to participate in an intensive, five-week workshop during which they prepare to become "teacher-consultants". Then they return to the schools to teach effective methods of writing instruction to other teachers. The "teachers-teaching-teachers" idea is the heart of the program (Gray, 1986).

Participation in the RGWP taught me that not only am I a writer, but that all of my children are writers too. This came as a surprise to many of my students and some of their parents. In addition to serving as a place for dialogue with me and as a diary for the children, their journals became a place where most first drafts began. These pieces were later polished with the help of peer groups and conferences with an adult, until the author was ready to publish them. Daily journal keeping and writer's groups led to eventual publication for all of my students' work in the school-wide magazine. In addition, some of their work was published in the city paper and some in state-wide publications. Many of these children continued writing into the summer on a personal basis. While all of the students ended the school year with between one to six journals full, I would like to think that many of them continue to enjoy writing to the present day. However, in light of further readings I have completed on the subject, I am beginning to question my approach.

Delpit (1986) raises a good question when considering instruction for the learner from a minority culture. She quotes a colleague addressing the process teaching approach for the African-American student:

This is just another one of those racist ploys to keep our kids out. White kids learn how to write a decent sentence. Even if they don't teach them in school, their parents make sure they get what they need. But what about our kids? They don't get it at home and they spend all their time in school learning to be *fluent*. I'm sick of this liberal nonsense. (p. 382)

While examining my teaching practices, I asked myself many questions that held great implications. How were my children whose home language was one other than English, second language learners, affected by

the process oriented approach to teaching writing? How were my students who were African Americans affected? Delpit is one researcher who provides an examination of the effect of using the process oriented approach with African-American students. It is beyond the scope of this paper to accurately address the issues surrounding use of this approach to teaching writing with this particular population. After having read some of her work, I recommend it for anyone who is not familiar with this important issue. As teachers of African -American children it is our duty to educate ourselves about the best instructional practices for these learners.

While it remains true that my children improved their attitude toward writing and experienced the thrill of seeing their pieces and names published, were they short-changed in the long run? Should my class have incorporated more language drills and practice of writing skills divorced from context? Were my students misled if they learned that correct spelling and punctuation, correct usage and structures of verbs, sentences and paragraphs, were only small parts of the entire writing process, secondary to text creation?

This paper examines the process oriented approach to teaching writing and the theoretical assumption underlying this approach; the theory of literacy acquisition. It also provides a review of pertinent literature on the research concerning use of the process oriented approach when teaching the second language learner. After suggesting possible approaches for teachers to consider in light of the research presently available, this paper offers a discussion of the need for further research.

### **Process Oriented Approach**

The process oriented approach refers to a teaching approach that focuses on the process a writer engages in when constructing meaning. This teaching approach concludes with editing as a final stage in text creation, rather than an initial one as in a product oriented approach. The process oriented approach may include identified stages of the writing process such as: pre-writing, writing and re-writing. Once the rough draft has been created, it is polished into subsequent drafts with the assistance of peer and teacher conferencing. Final editing and publication can follow if the author chooses to publish their writing (Murray, 1972).

### **Literacy Acquisition**

Verbal language, drawings, play and verbal interaction are part of the process of literacy development (Dyson, 1992). These are essential and not only precede writing development but continue to contribute to it in significant ways throughout development. Children invent, interact, react, and extend writing activities throughout the process of literacy acquisition.

Graphic symbolism develops over time, after gestures and object constancy have become concrete, and speech has become controlled and deliberate (Dyson, 1992). Vygotsky (1978) defines drawing as a kind of graphic speech. Children gain a sense of writing the same way they do of speech by experimentation and exploration. Initially, written language is a prop that facilitates human activity. Writing begins to carry the same functional load earlier carried by speech, gesture and drawing. Therefore, drawing, talking and writing support each other (Vygotsky, 1978).

These principles remain constant whether the child is acquiring literacy in their first or second language. For very young children, rhyming words and word patterns add to children's consciousness of words. Writing development is preceded by speech development. Symbol weaving becomes an intertwining of talk and drawing. In studying literacy development Edelsky found that bilingual writers make language choices depending on ability, emotion and expressional need. Oral language activities with access to many symbolic

tools facilitates writing development for these writers Use of the arts promotes the crossing of social, cultural and language barriers (Edelsky, 1982).

## **Second Language Literacy Acquisition**

Betancourt and Phinney (1987) cite research on second language composition that shows how functional bilingual writers follow the same composing process as monolingual writers do when involved in process oriented instructional programs. Hudelson (1984, 1989) and Hamayan (1989) concur with whole language teaching strategies for the second language learner approaching literacy acquisition. This is attributed to the essential need for learning language in context, associated with meaning which is important and relevant to the language learner. Cummins (1984) theorizes that when acquiring oral language skills, development follows very similar stages for first and subsequent languages. Involvement in the meaningful and communicative use of language is central for development of oral and written language skills for second language learners (Johnson, 1989). Valdés (1992) notes that in order to examine the acquisition of literacy in a child's second language (L2), researchers sometimes compare what we know about primary language (L1) literacy acquisition and search for similarities. Johnson (1989) relates research in L2 written acquisition to research in oral L2 acquisition by stating that "research in one area can inform the other area" (p. 44). Edelsky (1982) and Valdés (1992) express caution regarding such an assumption.

Verbal and written language acquisition differ in significant ways. Edelsky cautions educators to be careful in applying simple functional models of oral language development in research on written language growth. Unlike oral language, written language involves the use of a deliberately controlled symbolic system to mediate activity. A written word can have symbolic representational meaning but can also have imaginary meaning or be used as a prop (Edelsky, 1982). Oral language includes many para-linguistic cues for both the sender and receiver of the message that written language does not include. These are issues that are important when instructing the bilingual learner.

## **Defining Bilingualism**

Valdés (1992) provides an overview of the nature of bilingualism. She indicates that before prescribing a specific approach to the teaching of writing for the second language learner, we must first examine and define the needs of the target population. For example, she differentiates between elective and circumstantial bilingualism and incipient and functional circumstantial bilinguals, providing reasons why each must be considered individually. Once the needs of these students have been identified, then we are better equipped to identify the instructional techniques best suited for their learning styles.

Elective bilinguals are those individuals who choose to learn a language through study or seeking out a contextual situation, such as living in or visiting a foreign country, or both. Circumstantial bilinguals are those individuals who have had little choice but to learn another language in order to survive due to their life circumstances. Haugen (1972) observes that circumstantial bilinguals are not in a situation where their first language meets all of their communicative needs. For the majority of cases, Valdés states that "bilingual American minorities are, by definition, circumstantial bilinguals" (p. 94). She expresses caution in identifying the educational needs of these bilingual children ". . . because of the complexity of circumstantial bilingualism, one cannot easily classify bilingual individuals using one or two variables such as 'first language learned' or 'language spoken at home' " (p.95). The specific experience of each individual with each language can impact the loss or retention of both languages. The competition for language use depending on the domain, in addition to other factors such as emotional association with speaking one of the languages or development of domain-specific vocabulary are factors to consider when addressing the

instruction of bilingual students.

In addition to these factors, differences can develop between two individuals in the same generation. The acquisition of the target language and the retention of the native language depend on opportunities for use by the child. Valdés notes that even in diglossic communities, places where both languages are used and accepted, invariably the native or immigrant language tends to become used for intimacy and informal situations. The majority language, however, develops concurrently with world experience, building vocabulary and competence along with domain association. An example of this is the development of English for academic purposes while using the minority language for community and family activities. Competence in the majority language soon outdistances that in the native language (Valdés, 1992).

Identifying the language learning stage in which a child is operating affects the ways in which we propose to teach him to write. Valdés further distinguishes between two types of circumstantial bilingualism: incipient and functional (1992). Incipient bilinguals are in the stage of acquiring their second language, a functional bilingual prefers using L1 yet is able to function in L2 in almost all contexts and domains. Valdés observes that most American minorities with a native language other than English, "acquire their ethnic or immigrant language first and then acquire English, this country's majority or societal language" (1992, p. 99). This period of acquisition is referred to as incipient bilingualism. If the second language learner in our classroom is an incipient bilingual, an individual still in the act of acquiring her second language, then writing instruction needs to encourage literacy development in the home language. If the child is a functional bilingual, writing instruction can involve increased use of the second language.

### **Process versus Product for the Second Language Learner**

Reyes cautions against over-enthusiastic use of the process oriented approach with second language learners (1992). In expressing concern, Reyes examines four assumptions that she views as inherent in this approach to teaching writing. She cites examples of how each assumption interferes with second language acquisition in the classroom.

The first error that school authorities make is in confusing the concept of English acquisition with that of education, according to Reyes's first assumption. Assuredly, this measure becomes an attitude made by majority language (English) speakers which creates conflict. Though subtle, this assumption can be transmitted easily to children and their families by the school staff.

The second assumption Reyes challenges is that linguistic minorities learn better if immersed into English as quickly as possible (1992). In addition to the research named in this paper, she cites extensive research conducted on language acquisition supporting initial instruction in the native language:

These studies indicate that bilingual students attain higher achievement levels when allowed to begin literacy instruction in their primary language before transferring to English literacy. . . students who learn academic concepts and literacy skills in their native language can more readily and quickly transfer those skills to a second language because knowledge is grounded in the language and schema they comprehend (p. 434).

The third assumption Reyes examines is that of approaching the education of children from very different experiential backgrounds with a "one size fits all" approach. She claims that teachers who implement the process oriented approach to teaching writing without modifications, have "lost sight of the fact that mere implementation of [these] programs does not necessarily translate into authentic, natural, or holistic experiences for non-mainstream students" (p. 435).

The fourth assumption challenged by Reyes is that error correction in process oriented instruction hampers learning. She observes that in attempting to follow the principles of process instruction, teachers generally refrain from overt error correction out of a fear of discouraging fluency and voice. She states that unless teachers draw student attention to errors found in writing, error correction is ignored by second language learners. The assumptions Reyes highlights regarding the process approach to teaching writing are crucial for use in examining our teaching practices.

## **Second Language Development in the Classroom**

Effective bilingual programs have some characteristics in common. These include subject matter instruction in the native language, first language development in literacy, and comprehensible input in the second language (Krashen & Biber, 1988). Researchers on bilingual education agree that instruction which effectively promotes L1 is, in effect, promoting L2 development by establishing an underlying conceptual framework for L2 acquisition. This is true as long as there is sufficient incentive to learn and use the second language in a purposeful context for the learner (Cummins, 1981). Research suggests that children who are placed in programs where L1 literacy is developed, eventually perform better academically in L2 (Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey, and Pasta, 1991a, 1991b).

Reyes, Laliberty, and Orbansky (1993) conducted a case study which gives an example of process instruction with modifications that proved to be successful for both mainstream and linguistically different students. All students received holistic language instruction in their strongest language by having academic instruction, teacher and peer interaction, and literacy available in their home languages. The teachers created a classroom atmosphere that valued all languages and actively reinforced bilingualism. Children from both language groups began to explore the other language group and its speakers in social interaction, writing topics and translation of created texts. These interactions occurred increasingly in the classroom and beyond the school campus. According to the authors, these experiences provided the children with "authentic opportunities to experience every day, living-and-breathing, cultural, and linguistic diversity instead of relying solely on vicarious experiences from multicultural books" (Reyes et al., 1993, p. 667). The authors reported that though the children did not become functional bilinguals in the short span of the school year, their behavior provides compelling evidence that the groundwork was being laid for both emerging biliteracy and cross-cultural sensitivity. They noted that these experiences have the "potential to equip individuals with the necessary skills to live in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural society" (p. 668).

Significant factors affecting bilingual writers include the language of instruction, the complexity of language proficiency of the student and any disability in language learning. Rueda (1987) addressed two theories to explain the complexity of language and cognitive development. The first of these is the "Metaset Hypothesis" developed by DeAvila and Duncan (1981). This is the notion that "conceptual disequilibrium" leads to the integration of schemes within the bilingual child's repertoire, therefore forming the basis for cognitive development.

The second of these theories is that of the "Threshold Hypothesis" as it relates to linguistic proficiency. This theory was proposed by Cummins (1979) as an interactive framework. It suggests that there are minimal levels of linguistic competence in a child's home language which must be attained before a child is expected to address the learning of a second language in order to avoid deficits in cognitive growth. While this review is too limited to discuss these theories in full depth, they are noted to reinforce the notion that bilingual children are continually in a state of acquiring new information and adjusting their existing

frameworks to accommodate new knowledge. This is an important perspective when we consider the ability of the bilingual to explore literacy development through access to curriculum that includes the process oriented approach to teaching writing.

### **Instructional Techniques for the Bilingual Classroom**

Initial writing attempts include the verbalizations the child makes, as well as initial rehearsals in art and writing toward symbolic representation of their ideas. Assigning significant efforts as "scribbling" is insulting to serious learners (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984). Requesting young children to write before drawing pulls the child toward conventionality. When the request follows drawing, creative expression is enhanced. Perhaps these results reflect the importance of not underestimating young writers. Many of these young writers continue to move from writing to art and back and forth much the same way adult writers move between self-talk and revision.

The authors show that when children revise they make changes in mechanics and form, in contrast to adults who revise for changes in discourse and voice. Moving between art and writing is an excellent technique used by all ages of successful writers and is called a "keep going strategy". During the course of the school experience of most writers, strategies such as these will be unlearned and have to be relearned in future writing experiences (Harste et al., 1984). Both speech and art indicate a child's strategy building in writing. These need to be encouraged in young learners, rather than seen as "scribbles" Harste et al. (1984.) stress that control of form should not be confused with the onset or attainment of literacy.

During the early grades in school, exploration with literature is essential. Many teachers at the primary level, however, do not allow uninterrupted time for children to interact with print (Harste et al., 1984). Some teachers believe that uninterrupted time is not useful or that the children are not "ready" for such access to literature. These classrooms are considered "unfortunate" by the authors for children to be in. In support of this, Clay (1975) notes that "before the end of the first year in school the child who is making good progress develops a power to read which outreaches his capacity to write" (p. 3). The connection between reading and writing acquisition provides many clues for the learner to use in generalizing about each.

According to many researchers, there is no strict linear progression in written language development for every child (Edelsky, 1982; Graves, 1983; Harste et al., 1984). Children in their early years need many opportunities to use the arts and oral interaction in an effort to master written language. Each domain separately and together becomes part of a child's repertoire for making meaning out of symbols. Children, not writing and reading, should be the center of the writing curriculum (Edelsky, 1982). Making literacy the central aspect of a curriculum can keep black and white "squiggles" from becoming dynamic, colorful, intellectual and social tools.

Edelsky suggests that teachers should help children connect print with the liveliness of their natural use of other symbolic forms. Drawing helps reveal "inner" pictures that underlay children's attempts to make sense of their text. Edelsky calls for allowing children the artistic and social space they need to be able to infuse meaning into their own writing through drawing, social talk, and dramatic play. In examining reading development, Clay (1975) points out that fluency in oral language may actually permit the young reader to depend almost entirely on meaning, thereby overlooking the need for discriminating details of letters and words. When applying this knowledge to young writers, Clay notes that while the child is discovering letter forms and creating early messages the task seems to have its own attraction if the child's efforts are appreciated.

In order to accomplish an appreciation for writing, teachers can talk to children about their efforts to help them reflect upon their processes. Early childhood educators should be cautious about writing process curricula developed for older children. For the very young, reflective talk and playful talk during drawing may be more valuable than formal conferencing (Edelsky, 1986). Educators must remember that, according to the research available at this time, establishing a strong base in the home language of a child will actually facilitate development in the second language. To quote Edelsky (1982): "Data have been presented to support the perspective that what a young writer knows about writing in the first language forms the basis of new hypotheses rather than interferes with writing in another language" (p.227).

Johnson (1989) argues that English as a second language (ESL) students flourish in their acquisition of L2 when language is used as a social activity with a focus on communication rather than teacher approval. Both Edelsky (1986) and Urzua (1987) argue that second language writing should involve linguistic, social and cognitive processes. Johnson notes that, "just as children use a variety of cognitive, social and linguistic strategies in learning to speak English as an additional language, developing L2 writers also use various cognitive, social and linguistic strategies to participate in the L2 literacy communities" of the classroom (p. 40). Research in second language acquisition indicates that linguistic development in L2 occurs as learners attempt to make sense of what they comprehend and can produce in oral and written discourse.

In the interest of modifications appropriate for the second language learner involved in the process oriented approach, Hamayan (1989) provides a well organized resource guide for teachers. One of her suggestions is to use "language experience stories", connecting a group activity to literacy through creating student written accounts of the experience. Another idea is to make cloze passages out of a storybook read in class, or have students re-write the ending or create a new version of the book.

Hamayan also suggests using dialogue journals with second language learners, since this can facilitate written interaction in both the first and second language in a non-threatening context. For students who are preliterate, Hamayan suggests encouraging them to interact with the teacher in written dialogue at a level appropriate to their learning. An example of this would be for the teacher to ask "What is your favorite animal?" and allow children to draw or write their answer. She also recommends use of two types of diaries with second language learners: content area and personal. Content area diaries incorporate meta-cognitive development as students write about how they solved a math problem, what they did in a science experiment, etc. Personal diaries are a place for students to write about anything in their lives. Hamayan also endorses creative writing activities such as teacher modeling, peer response and immediate conferences with the teacher for second language learners.

In approaching the task of writing in one's weaker language, students need to feel two kinds of power in the process (Elbow, 1981). The first is power over oneself in the writing process and the second is control over the use of language as a communicative tool in addition to contact and power over readers. Johnson views power in the second language context as "a student's ability to obtain personal objectives through literacy events and written text" (1989, p. 42). She recommends that teachers vary student's social roles in writing tasks in many ways. These teaching strategies include arranging for students to control the topics about which they write and occasionally take the role of teacher. It is also useful for students in English as a second language (ESL) classes to build on their social agendas to link social and academic writing goals.

## **Discussion**

In addition to the detailed distinctions made by Valdés that determine the type of bilingual characteristics students have, there is another important consideration. Prestige of both the home language and target

language can also have a great impact on the rate of language learning that occurs in an individual. The experience, for example, of a majority language child who studies a foreign language in school and then visits a country where that language is spoken, is very different than the experience of a minority language speaker. The minority speaker often learns that her home language is not the prestige language of the country she lives in and her efforts at second language learning are met with ridicule and associated with shame on a regular basis in the larger context of school and society.

Escamilla (1994) studied the sociolinguistic environment of one bilingual school and concurs with the idea that careful consideration of language prestige is important. She asserts that in order for bilingual programs to be places where children become truly bilingual, "each language must have the same status outside the classroom" (p. 21). Additional factors affect second language acquisition in children. These include not only the status of the language in the community outside the school, but the status of the speakers of each language from the child's view (Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992; Snow, 1992).

We must remember that we all have different experiences of the world and none of us should be tempted to make assumptions about one another based on our own experiential level. As educators of children from minority cultures who sometimes speak minority languages, it becomes our obligation to value the experience of all of our children in addition to teaching them to value themselves. This can be done through the medium of personal writing, journal keeping, writing groups and publication, all conducted on a regular basis. Similar to adults, children thrive on the success this can provide.

Valdés reports that current available research which examines language acquisition in bilingual individuals has been largely conducted on bilingual groups that were poorly chosen and poorly defined. This points to the need for additional research in literacy acquisition for bilinguals. Considerations of the ways in which culture and home language use affects learning for our students, is critical. Educators of all children must become informed about the children we teach and the communities we serve. All children in our classrooms deserve the opportunity to develop and learn in the ways that utilize their strengths, validate their experience and encourage them to become the best person and writer that they have the potential of becoming.

In response to the objections made by Reyes regarding the writing process approach, her point is well made that all children are not equal and therefore modifications must be made in instruction for individual students. Therefore, modified instruction for every learner with each subject we teach is the ideal. Teachers must educate themselves on the ways in which children learn, including the ways in which second language learners acquire literacy. With such knowledge, we should be capable of gearing our instruction above the pitfalls of the first three of the assumptions Reyes observed. The fourth assumption, that error correction in the process approach is perceived to hamper learning, deserves special attention here.

If we, as educators and writers, observe the ways in which we write, error correction is not absent from our process but usually is included at some point subsequent to initial meaning construction. In writing this paper, for example, I sat down and constructed an initial draft, then reviewed for errors, then asked colleagues to read it and provide input, then I returned to do final editing. If this is true for us as adults writing in our strongest language, what are the possible differences in the process as it occurs for the child writing in his weakest language? Would this difference change if the writing process is approached in his first language? Depending on the individual, the first language may not necessarily be the strongest language due to reasons outlined in this paper. These are factors to be considered when planning writing instruction for minority language speakers.

Research conducted on oral language acquisition indicates that when error correction is provided

prematurely in the language learning process, subsequent risk-taking is halted by the child. During the initial stages of language learning, the focus is on communication. In oral language acquisition, error correction is provided later, once communication has been mastered. Is the same true for written language acquisition or is this another assumption to be cautious of? Making this jump from oral to written language is tempting. However, in view of the caution listed by Valdés, it would not be prudent to make such a generalization. Instead, this illustrates the need for future research which examines the effect of the timing of error correction in the writing process on the literacy acquisition of L2 learners .

In view of the information I had available to me regarding literacy instruction when I began teaching in 1985, the writing curriculum I devised was a shot in the dark. Incorporating the information provided here, I can see that in some ways the children in my classroom were misled. The process each individual went through in making meaning out of literacy was valued in our class. However, when standardized tests were administered, including the state test of basic writing skills, process was not measured. Anonymous testers examined the final product my children produced. Their writing skills were assigned a numerical value based on their test performance. I cannot help but feel that I did not adequately prepare them to succeed on those tests.

Nonetheless, I can see how my version of the process oriented approach benefited all of my students in some way. Young egos were reinforced for risk-taking with literacy in native and home languages. Also the self-esteem of each writer was raised as they were valued for individual writing talent. Finally, the act of writing became an approachable task by all children in my classroom.

The journals my children kept lumped all of the language experiences discussed in this paper into one place. Their journals were dialogue journals and diaries all in one. They were also places for meta-cognition and language experience stories as well as artwork, creative writing and cultural and community connections through photographs. Different entries were written in the first and second language, as dictated by the child. This was true for all learners, native English speakers approaching the use of Spanish as well as vice versa. Though perhaps awkward, I believe that the process oriented approach we used in our classroom helped all children to perform better on standardized test measures than they would have been able to had my instruction focused on final writing products in isolation.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

In light of this review of the literature available when examining literacy acquisition for the second language learner through the process oriented approach, certain questions arise. Further research into these areas would be helpful as we consider writing approach strategies and their effect on the minority language learner in our classrooms. Some of the questions that this review brings up include the following:

What is the availability of classrooms employing the writing process approach to minority and second language learners? What is the degree of appropriateness of such instruction for all learners? What are some of the individualization strategies usually practiced by teachers in these classrooms? Where do very young second language learners fit into our present educational system? Is it more beneficial for them to be pulled from the classroom where the writing process approach is being taught in order to focus on skill drills with other English as a second language (ESL) students? When does the writing process approach begin to be effective with the second language learner and how much additional time is needed for skill building? Should skill building occur in isolation or in the context of the real language of the classroom?

Valdés (1992) notes that, although the research on bilingualism is, as a whole, extensive enough to be

usually published only in book-length form, research on language development in bilinguals is limited. In addition, research that examines literacy acquisition is even more limited. When it is conducted, it usually either focuses on oral language development and assumes a transfer of skills to written language development or underestimates the complexity of some of the factors affecting bilingualism. She states a need for research which stems from a complete understanding of both writing and bilingualism (1992).

If examined closely, Valdés' concerns regarding teacher interaction with the second language learner could have serious impact on the current school organizational structure. She questions:

*How should mainstream teachers deal with*

*[bilingual] students? Should they view them as regular mainstream writers? Should they be viewed as basic writers? Should the same assumptions about sound pedagogical approaches made for mainstream writers inform the teaching of writing to bilinguals students? How will functional bilinguals be affected by current popular practices, such as writing across the curriculum, writing to learn and the like? Will they be penalized for the non-native quality of their writing? And will they be penalized unfairly? (p. 108)*

## References

Betancourt, F., & Phinney, M. (1987). *Sources of writing block in bilingual writers* (Report No. 143). ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 281 361.

Clay, M. (1975). *What did I write?* Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books.

Cummins, J. (1979). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Education Research*, 49, 222-251.

Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In California State Department of Education (Ed.), *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (pp 3-49). Los Angeles, CA: California State University.

Cummins, J. (1984). *Bilingualism and special education: Issues in assessment and pedagogy*. San Diego: College Hill Press.

DeAvila, E. A., & Duncan, S. E. (1981). Bilingualism and the metaset. In R. Duran (Ed.), *Latino language and communicative behavior* (pp. 337-354). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Delpit, L. D. (1986). Skills and other dilemmas of a progressive black educator. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(4), 379-385.

Dyson, A. H. (1992). *From prop to mediator: The changing role of written language in children's symbolic repertoires*. University of California: National Center for the Study of Writing.

Edelsky, C. (1982). Writing in a bilingual program: The relation of L1 and L2 texts. *TESOL Quarterly*, 16(2), 211-228.

Edelsky, C. (1986). *Writing in a bilingual program: Había una vez*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Elbow, P. (1981). *Writing with power*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Escamilla, K. (1994). Theory to practice: A look a maintenance bilingual education class rooms. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 11, 1-23.
- Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gray, J. R. (1986). *Practical ideas for teaching writing as a process*. Sacramento, CA: California State Department of Education.
- Hamayan, E. V. (1989). Teaching writing to potentially English proficient students using whole language approaches. *Program Information Guide Series* (No.11). Washington: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Harste, J. C., Woodward, V. A., & Burke, C. L. (1984). *Language stories & literacy lessons*. Ports mouth, NH: Heinemann
- Haugen, E. (1972). The stigmata of bilingualism. In A. S. Dil (Ed.), *The ecology of language* (pp. 307-324). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hudelson, S. (1984). Kan yu ret an rayt en ingles: Children become literate in English as a second language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 18, 221-238.
- Hudelson, S. (1989). *Write on: Children writing in ESL*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Johnson, D. M. (1989). Enriching task contexts for second language writing: Power through interpersonal roles. In D. M. Johnson & D. H. Roen, (Eds.). *Richness in writing: Empowering ESL students* (pp. 39-54). New York: Longman.
- Krashen, S. D. & Biber, D. (1988). *On course: Bilingual education's success in California*. Sacramento, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Murray, D. (1972). Teach writing as a process not product. In Graves, R. (Ed.) *Rhetoric and Composition; A sourcebook for teachers and writers* ( pp. 89-92). Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.
- Pease-Alvarez, L. & Hakuta, K (1992). Enriching our views of bilingualism and bilingual education. *Educational Researcher*, 21 (2), 4-6.
- Ramírez, D. J., Yuen, S. D., Ramey, D. R., & Pasta, D. J. (1991a). *Final report: Longitudinal study of structured English immersion -strategy, early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs for language-minority children*, Vol. I. San Mateo, CA: Aguirre International.
- Ramírez, D. J., Yuen, S. D., Ramey, D. R., & Pasta, D. J. (1991b). *Final report: Longitudinal study of structured English immersion strategy, early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs for language-minority children*, Vol. II. San Mateo, CA: Aguirre International.
- Reyes, M. D. L. L. (1991a). A process approach to literacy using dialogue journals and literature logs with second language learners. *Research in the Teaching of English* 25,(3), 291-313.

- Reyes, M. D. L. L. (1991b). Bilingual student writers: A question of fair evaluation. *English Journal*, 12, 16-23.
- Reyes, M. D. L. L. (1992). Challenging venerable assumptions. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62, (4), 427-446.
- Reyes, M. D. L. L., Laliberty, E. A. & Orbansky, J. M. (1993). Emerging biliteracy and cross-cultural sensitivity in a language arts classroom. *Language Arts*, 70, 659-668.
- Rueda, R. (1987). Social and communicative aspects of language proficiency in low-achieving language minority students. In H. Trueba (Ed.) *Success or Failure?*(pp. 185-197). Santa Barbara, CA.: Newbury House.
- Snow, C. E. (1992). Perspectives on second-language development: Implications for bilingual education. *Educational Researcher*, 21 (2), 16-19.
- Urzua, C. (1987). "You stopped too soon": Second language children composing and revising. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(2), 279-298.
- Valdés, G. (1988). *Identifying priorities in the study of the writing of Hispanic students: Final report*. Berkeley: Center for the Study of Writing, University of California.
- Valdés, G. (1992). Bilingual Minorities and Language Issues in Writing. *Written Communication*, 9(1),85-136.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[Return to Table of Contents. Vol 10.](#)

---

*The HTML version of this document was prepared by NCBE and posted to the web with the permission of the author/publisher.*

[go to HOME PAGE](#)

[www.ncela.gwu.edu](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu)