

## An Insight Into Difficulties Faced By Pakistani Student Writers: Implications for Teaching of Writing

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**Abstract:** *Writing is one of the most difficult and complex human activities. It involves a variety of cognitive activities for example; the development of a design idea, the capture of mental representations of knowledge, and of experience with subjects. The cyclic and nonlinear processes of writing by novice and expert authors have been studied by such diverse disciplines as cognitive psychology, stylistics, rhetoric, text linguistics, critical literary theory, hypertext theory, second language acquisition, and writing pedagogy. In an article named, "Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer" Andrea A. Lunsford(1979) made an effort to establish the notion that students are developmentally incapable of drawing understandings outside of themselves. Lunsford provided references from Vygotsky and Piaget, summarizing that students form concepts from day to day learning but cannot think scientifically about these concepts by separating themselves, defining them, and drawing inferences on them. Lunsford (1979) noted that we learn by doing and includes a quote from Eleanor Duckworth, "thoughts are our way of connecting things up for ourselves. If somebody else tells us about the connections he has made, we can only understand him to the extent that we do the work of making those connections ourselves. Lunsford encourages collaboration in learning, as well as new ways to approach basic writing classes. From such a vast reassurance of approaches and themes, this paper will be concerned with what is immediately relevant to the teaching and learning of writing in Pakistan .In the end I have also made an effort to propose some practical designs for the teaching of writing in real classroom situation.*

**Keywords:** *writing, pakistani students, learning*

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### 1. Introduction

In this article I have tried to interpret the situation of teaching of writing in Pakistan in the light of the article of Lunsford. As a writing student, I find myself wondering about my incompetence as far as making inferences on concepts outside of me. If I haven't fully developed in the area of "de-centering", wouldn't writing be exceptionally hard for my students?

This position invoked me to explore why our students generally fail to satisfy the expectations of examiners. In the prevailing predominant paradigm in Pakistan, knowledge is viewed as static and 'out there' which can be learned through behavioristic model of learning. This model lays extra emphasis on imitation and repetition. With this view of knowledge, it requires a lot of memorization and cramming on the part of students as there is hardly any need, in this paradigm, to reflect and think critically (Sidiqui, 2007, pp.62). Students despite facing the drudgery of a heavy syllabus can not write up to the mark both in L1 and L2. They can memorize a big number of ready made answers to the questions but are unable to produce a single piece of writing critically, why is this so? In this article I have tried to find out the reasons of this malady. Janet Emig (1979 cited in Lunsford, 1979) says,

"writing..... connects the three major tenses of our experience to make meaning. And the two major modes by which these three aspects are united are the processes of analysis and synthesis: analysis, the breaking of entities into their constituent parts; and synthesis, combining or fusing these, often into fresh arrangements or amalgams."

Here I have summarized the discussion of Lunsford who claims that, basic writers have not attained that level of cognitive development which would allow them to form abstractions or conceptions. She further asserts that our students might well perform a given task in a specific situation, but they have great difficulty abstracting from it or replicating it in another situation/context. Lunsford (ibid) conducted a study on basic writing students and summarized her study as, 'typical basic writing students were asked to read ten constructive issues of a comic strip and choose one of the major characteristics and infer the basic values of that character from the information provided in the ten issues, the students found it difficult to articulate anything about the values of characters unlike themselves. Lunsford concluded her study as, "basic writers have problems drawing inferences or forming concepts based on what they have read. They tend either to describe the characters or, more typically, to drop the comic strip character after a few sentences and shift to what they see as their

own values."

Lunsford has summarized Lev Vygostky's THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE(1962), as, there are three basic phases in the ascent to concept formation: a)The initial syntactic stage(in which "word meaning denotes nothing more to the child than a vague syncretic conglomeration of individual objects that have....coalesced into an image." b)The thinking in complex stage( during which "the thought is already coherent and objective....., although it does reflect objective relationships in the same way as conceptual thinking." c)The true-concept of formation stage.

According to Vygostky (1962) "even after the adolescent has learned to produce concepts,..... He does not abandon elementary forms; they continue for a long time to operate, indeed to predominate, in many areas of his thinking.....The transitional character of adolescent thinking becomes especially evident when we observe the actual functioning of the newly acquired concepts. Experiments speedily devised to study the adolescent's operations bring out..... a striking discrepancy between his ability to form concepts and his ability to define them."

Difference between Spontaneous concepts and scientific concepts (Vygotsky.):

Spontaneous Concepts	Scientific Concepts
Formed as a result of ordinary, day to day experience	Formed largely in conjunction with instruction

If we discuss the characteristics of above mentioned students by Lunsford and Vygotsky (1962) the student writers in Pakistan have all of the characteristics of Lunsford's (1979) basic writing students because like Lunsford's Pakistani ESL (L2) writers have shown: a)The ability of Spontaneous concepts. b) They are not able to remove these spontaneous concepts from themselves. c) They are unable to abstract from them. d) They are unable to define their concepts into scientific concepts which are necessary for success full college work. e) They work at what Vygotsky calls the "thinking in complexes" stage and the spontaneous concept stage rather than at the true concept formation stage (Lunsford.). f) While these writers have little difficulty in dealing with familiar everyday problems requiring abstract thought based on concepts, they are not aware of the processes they are using. g) They lack the ability to infer principles from their own experiences. h) They are not forming the "scientific concepts" which are basic to mastery of almost all college material.

Sidiqui(2007,pp.151) claims that at the college level(intermediate and BA) English is being taught by teachers who are MA in English literature. A large majority of them are either unable or resistant to facilitate the process of empowering their students in terms of linguistic enrichment. The result is that our students can memorize critical appreciations of great poetry and prose but when it comes to verbal or written discourse, they find themselves handicapped. Lunsford (1979) further references Jean Piaget's stages of mental development: 1) Sensory-motor stage 2) The pre-operational stage 3) The concrete operational stage 4)The formal operational stage (Bullets added).

"These stages are characterized by the ability to abstract, synthesize, and form coherent logical relationship. At the stage of concrete operations, the child's thought is still closely linked to concrete data; completely representational, hypothetical, or verbal thoughts still eludes him. As the child moves through the stages of cognitive development, he goes through what Piaget, cited in Lunsford (1979) calls the process of "de-centering", a process further defined by Lee Odell (cited in Lunsford ,1979) as getting outside one's own frame of reference, understanding the thoughts, values, feelings of another person;... projecting oneself into unfamiliar circumstances, whether factual or hypothetical;... learning to understand why one reacts as he does to experience." Lunsford (ibid) explains that although children first begin to de-center as early as the pre-operational stage, egocentricity is still strong in the concrete stage, and indeed, we apparently continue the process of "de-centering" throughout our lives.

Lunsford(1979) summarizes Piaget and Vygostky as, cognitive development moves from doing, to doing consciously and then only to formal conceptualization. It might be inferred that mere practice is not sufficient for process of teaching and learning of writing tacit must be converted into reflection. This is common conception that practice makes a man perfect and a writer should continue writing unless he is expert in writing. For this purpose students generally join academies out side the school and college, and the academies help the students pass the examination with an examination-gearred approach. Just like helping books in tuition academies, selected chapters and questions are focused and students are given ready made answers. In the whole process the students are asked to practice certain 'sure shot' questions again and again until they are automatized(Sidiqui,2007).

Conscious doing as cited in Lusford(1979) can be interpreted as that the writer must know that how he is writing, despite what he has written. In Pakistan due to the misinterpretation of this notion of conscious doing our teachers have started focusing imitation without understanding what does this notion of conscious doing is, pedagogical shallowness lies in the fact that after learning English essay writing, letter writing, application writing, dialogue writing and story writing in schools and college our students are still unable to satisfy their teachers. This shows that in Pakistan student writers have not yet acquired the stage of cognitive development, they mere listen monologue of the teacher. According to

Sidiqui(2007,pp.164)"the teaching in most of the intermediate level classes in mainstream colleges resembles monologue. The teacher comes to the classroom, opens the book, and explains the difficult words. Every line is read aloud by the teacher followed by its translation into mother tongue. The whole classroom time is consumed in "teaching" and explaining the books from cover to cover. The students do nothing except listening to the teacher's monologue and later memorize the 'notes' from the 'help-books', popular known as "guides", to pass the examination".

Eleanor Dukworth cited in Lunsford(1979) says in an essay *Piaget in the Classroom*, " thoughts are our way of connecting things up for ourselves. If somebody else tells us about the connections he has made, we can only understand him to extent that we do the work of making those connections ourselves."

This clearly indicates the importance of involving students in the actual act of writing itself. Just providing instructions or providing guideline about how to write an outline or just teaching some steps of organizing content is not sufficient, it demands some more. In Pakistan we still focus on providing oral or verbal instructions to the students without making their own participation sure in the act of writing. Unless the students are involved in the process of writing it seems mere a drill that leads no where and we have also observed its consequences in our country. The students do nothing except listening to the teacher's monologue and later memorize the 'notes' from the 'help-books', popular known as "guides", to pass the examination(Sidiqui,2007pp.164)According to Gilbert Ryle(cited in Lunsford):

*Learning how or improving in ability is not like learning that or acquiring information. Truths can be imparted, procedures can only be inculcated, and while inculcation is gradual process, imparting is relatively sudden it makes sense to ask at what moment someone became apprised of a truth, but not to ask at what moment someone acquired a skill. "Part-trained"s is a significant phase;" part-informed" is not. Training is the art of setting tasks which the pupils have not yet accomplished but are not any longer quite incapable of accomplishing....Misunderstanding is a by-product of knowing how. Only a person who is at least a partial master of the Russian tongue can make the wrong sense of a Russian expression. Mistakes are exercises of competence (pp.59-60)( Italics added).*

Writing is a process of discovery (Zamel, 1982) so unless the writer himself/herself is involved in the whole process this process remains unprofessional. In Pakistan learners are just imparted information. The instructors try the same unprofessional and static grammar translation methods (Sidiqui, 2007) he further asserts "in a number of schools and colleges English is being taught by the teachers whose own specialty is not English. So most of the teachers teach English as they were taught by their teachers, that are by grammar translation method with a lot of translation and drilling to memorization", without understanding whether these methods work or not. The reason is very simple Sidiqui(2007,pp.151) claims that at the college level(intermediate and BA) English is being taught by teachers who are MA in English literature. A large majority of them are either unable or resistant to facilitate the process of empowering their students in terms of linguistic enrichment. In Pakistan students are not involved in the process of writing that is why we are still intrigued in the product oriented approach of teaching of writing. In the prevailing predominant paradigm in Pakistan, knowledge is viewed as static and 'out there' which can be learned through behavioristic model of learning. This model lays extra emphasis on imitation and repetition. With this view of knowledge, it requires a lot of memorization and cramming on the part of students as there is hardly any need, in this paradigm, to reflect and think critically(Sidiqui,2007,pp.62).

Still our textbooks emphasize on studying abstract principles or prospects for writing, but we ignore the facts that writing skills can only be learnt by writing. Chomsky (1965, cited in Lunsford,) asserted that language is essentially and adventitious construct, taught by conditioning'..... or by drill and explicit explanation (pp, 51). Lunsford explains "students learn by doing and then by extrapolating principles from their activities." Here it can be explained that Chomsky (1965) asserts that language can not be learnt by imitation but it involves some cognitive processes which are involved in the whole process of writing but interestingly in Pakistan we have neither followed a behaviorist approach solely nor have tried process approach. The result of this whole situation is that our instructors just start teaching as they have been taught by their teachers (Sidiqui, 2007).

Hairston (1982) in her article claims that Noam Chomsky (1957) in his theory of transformational grammar looked at the rules which language is generated; this theory caused a new focus on the process by which language comes into being". In Pakistan according to Warsi(2004) the Pakistani English Syllabus highly values correct linguistic forms instead of students' development of creative thought. That is why despite studying English in schools and colleges for about 6-8 years, students, especially coming from rural backgrounds, are not able to communicate in English with relative ease and success. The following table indicates that English as a compulsory subject has a very worst results in one of the Educational Boards.

Statement showing subject wise pass percentage of intermediate Part-1 & 11(annual) Examination, 2011 Regular Candidates

Subject	Appeared	Passed	Percentage
Urdu 1 <sup>st</sup> Language	27074	24558	90.71%
English 2 <sup>nd</sup> Language	27000	11127	41.21%
<b>Private Candidates</b>			
Urdu	52791	40729	77.15%
English	53032	9092	17.14%

If we look at the percentage of candidates who passed in English in annual 2011 exam in Lahore Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Total 27000 students appeared for English Exam and only 11127 students passed thus the pass percentage was 41.21 and as private 53032 students appeared in exam and only 9092. Students passed thus pass percentage were 17.14. This situation clearly indicates that English teaching is not meeting the objectives set for learners.

From the above stated results it might be said that results in 1<sup>st</sup> language Urdu and English have a significant difference. This difference exposes the condition of 2<sup>nd</sup> Language in Pakistan. Where according to Abidi(1991) the large number of failure in English was due to the high borrow attitude of the teachers of English who insisted on maintaining the standards of Oxford and Cambridge in Pakistan. Our teachers emphasize upon memorization and rote learning despite involving the experiences of the learners. Even the examination system in Pakistan has become a hurdle in the way of process approach of writing. Sidiqui(2007) says" most of the examinations in the mainstream schools and colleges are memory driven. There are certain set of questions about the text books which are most likely to appear in the examination paper. These questions normally require production of memorized material from the text book. The students without bothering about the text books prepare for the examination with the help of "Get through guides" (help-books specially designed to prepare the examinations) that provide them with a short cut to pass the examination. These help-books contain summaries of the poems and ready-made answers to the comprehension questions of short stories, essays, poems and plays. This entire works fine as the assessment system encourages rote learning." like wise the writing teachers try to impart a set of rules to the learners for writing. They forget the fact that procedures can only be inculcated not imparted (Gilbert, cited in Lunsford, 1979). In Pakistan our writing teachers must realize that we are living in a competitive world in which our educational efforts should not only be related to our national needs, these should also compare well with the standards of education in other countries of the world (Abidi, 1991).

Here I would like to summarize the discussion of Polanyi(cited in Lunsford,) "the well-known fact that the aim of a skillful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them(p.49). According to Donal, Schon(1982.pp.49) 'when we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of every day life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we can not say what is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing in our action."

Polanyi(1976) uses the examples of the person who rides a bicycle, keeps afloat in the water, or plays a musical instrument without at all comprehending the underlying rules. "Rules of art can be useful, Polayani says, but they do not determine the practice of an art; they are maxims, which can serve as a guide to an art only if they can be integrated into the practical knowledge"(pp.45 cited in Lunsford.).

Our present system of education is not designed to promote scholarship. Rather it is impossible to pursue any scholarship in this system. It will be more correct to say that it skills all desire for knowledge. This system only promotes mediocrities (Abidi, 1991.pp.32). Further it is augmented by Sidiqui(2007,pp.168) "if we look at the textbooks of English in Pakistan, in the name of English we see short stories, poems, novel, plays etc. there has recently been a realization that it is important that our students should be exposed to functional English. By functional English we mean that one should be able to carry out various linguistic functions by using language as communication tool. Unfortunately our students who can learn critical appreciation of Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer are unable to communicate, in written or oral form, in an effective manner." Polanyi(cited in Lunsford,1979) further claims that we learn by doing with a recognized master or connoisseur better than by studying or reading about abstract principles.

In Pakistan teachers ask students to read the notes taken during the monologue lecture. In the system I myself have got education we were asked to memorize the instructions about essay writing and reproduce those memorized set of information. A child has no opportunity pass to through an experience that he/she might claim their own. They are only memorizing the content already memorized by the teacher. It might be said a transition of memorized content from

teacher to the taught. Vygostky (1962, pp.104) says "what a child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as the ripening functions.

I remember when I first started teaching writing in the English Language classroom, two issues immediately sprang to my attention; i) the students were extremely demotivated whenever asked to write in English; ii) the end product was fairly disappointing and didn't seem to correlate with my students' abilities as displayed in other aspects of their language ability, such as speaking for example. As my teaching developed over several years, so did my understanding as to why the students displayed such aversion to writing and why the end product of the writing they did do left something to be desired. In Pakistan I have also personally observed a critical situation that writing is something that teachers expects learners to do in class without giving any prior thought to the meaning of the finished product . As a consequence, learners' attitudes towards writing are less than positive. This is compounded by the fact that this skill is often relegated to the status of 'homework' due to pressures of time and syllabus requirements, thus nullifying the possibility of teacher guidance. Furthermore, writing is viewed primarily as a tool for the practice and reinforcement of specific grammatical and lexical patterns; accuracy being all important whereas content and self-expression given little if any priority. Basically students are 'writing to learn' and not 'learning to write'.

I have also inferred from the conversation with my colleagues that writing is a task in which the learner imitates, copies and transforms teacher supplied models, there is no need to focus on the steps involved in creating a piece of work . Here I would like to give a direct response of one of my colleagues:

*"I think..... writing should be taught by imitation, means students should be given the model writing and should be asked to follow the pattern"*

The primary goal of product writing is an error-free coherent text.

*"The paper (written product) should be ideal; there must not be any mistake in the essay."*

Interestingly more than 80 percent of my colleagues believe that a text must be perfect so that the candidate might obtain good grades/marks in the exam 10 percent of my colleagues have view that no text can be perfect, but that a writer will get closer to perfection by following the model text of some great writers and reworking on the successive drafts of a text.

*A writer must write without any mistake of verb grammar and spelling.*

*A student is unable to satisfy unless he/she writes a master piece, because he will get marks only when he writes well.*

*Examiner only loves a perfect essay.....*

*Yes, a student should obtain good marks but he can get good marks by writing an essay that is perfect.*

At this point we must remember that modern composition teaching has emerged primarily from observations of L1 composition students, leading to a strong focus on writing 'process,' which does not address the need of ESL students for help, for example at sentence level. This is based on ESL students' documented preference for error correction (Leki, 1991) and the need for word usage and sentence grammar to become automatic. That is even in countries where English is taught as L2 the focus is on grammar and perfection.

Tim Caudery (1995 cited in Sharon Myers,) reported the responses of second language teachers he surveyed to the question of what the "process approach" meant to them. The responses reflected a lack of consensus among the teachers as to the meaning of the "process approach." The confusion is not surprising, given that most ESL teachers do not come to their profession through courses that teach the history or theory of composition and until recently, much of the literature on teaching composition has been primarily concerned with L1 composition." But in Pakistan this situation is supported by Sidiqui(2007) " in a number of schools and colleges English is being taught by the teachers whose own specialty is not English. So most of the teachers teach English as they were taught by their teachers, that are by grammar translation method with a lot of translation and drilling to memorization".

That is why in Pakistan teaching of writing is an ignored paradigm. And it it further confused by the evaluation made by these inexperienced teachers. In Pakistan the feedback by the teachers the teachers become a source of fear for the students, one of the respondents said,

*Whenever I have shown my work to my teacher he says oh Bad what is this!*

I have personally noticed this thing among a number of my colleagues; they often utter such expressions after looking at the written pieces:

1. *Oh! My God what is this mess?*
2. *What the hell with this writing.*
3. *You can not write boy etc.*

According to Williams (2003 cited in Adam Simpson,) written feedback is an essential part of any language course that involves a writing element. Feedback falls into two categories: feedback on form and feedback on content. Content feedback relates to product writing, and generally consists of the indication of grammatical errors. Feedback on form, however, focuses on the communicative effectiveness of the piece.

This situation is further supplemented by the evaluation system in Pakistan, according to Sidiqi(2007) "most of the examinations in the mainstream schools and colleges are memory driven. There are certain set of questions about the text books which are most likely to appear in the examination paper. These questions normally require production of memorized material from the text book. The students without bothering about the text books prepare for the examination with the help of "Get through guides" (help-books specially designed to prepare the examinations) that provide them with a short cut to pass the examination. These help-books contain summaries of the poems and ready-made answers to the comprehension questions of short stories, essays, poems and plays. All this works fine as the assessment system encourages rote learning." This is a common trend in all over the world that teachers use many different types of marking styles and comments when they mark a paper or an assignment. I have observed this among my own colleagues that the teachers use a variety of these styles and comments which consequently make understanding of the paper/assignment very confusing for the students who have several different teachers and courses. Even within a discipline there is no one set of rules or standards for marking a paper/assignment and we colleagues generally discuss these issues during our staff room discussions. While the type of course can determine the values that a paper is marked on, the comments that a teacher gives have no such boundaries.

I believe the comments that a teacher gives determines the future work of a student. If one item in particular is paid attention to then the student will probably concentrate on that problem for the next paper. If a problem is not noted then the student will miss out on having a chance to fix the problem in later papers. Knowing how teachers use comments and the format that they are used in can provide a student with an invaluable tool. This is a tool that can allow the student to decipher the ideas that the teacher is trying to put across. But unfortunately in our system teachers do not comment the papers/assignments of the students with a view of improvement but just exhibiting their own so-called scholarship. While marking papers /assignments they partially ignore the difficulties faced by the learners.

Hadfield and Hadfield (1990 cited in Adam Simpson) discussed three areas of difficulty for the learner in relation to the productive skills of writing and speaking, namely psychological, linguistic and cognitive difficulties. Here I have discussed these difficulties in relation with Pakistani student writers:

## 2. Psychological Difficulties

Firstly, the writer cannot consult the reader; the audience is not immediately present as is the case with speaking. The psychological difficulty therefore lies in deciding what information the reader needs and the best way to express this as respondents expressed:

- a. *Some time I can not decide what I should write.*
- b. *It is difficult to understand my English teacher he likes some horrible things [laughs].*
- c. *I have no idea ....sometime about the style.....*

This difficulty manifests itself in the prewriting stage, when some learners may be unwilling or unable to produce ideas that will work towards the construction of a piece of writing. Students cannot decenter (Lunsford,1979). They are unable to go beyond themselves. In order to overcome these difficulties, the teacher must employ certain strategies to elicit the necessary input.

## 3. Linguistic Difficulties

Secondly, learners suffer from linguistic difficulty, in that the language used when speaking is not the same as that used in speech. In some cases it is simpler (e.g. shopping lists), in others it is more elaborate and formal (e.g. academic essays). Native speakers not only know an elaborate network of conventions but also know how and when to legitimately 'break the rules'. This problem is evident in learners who are unaware of the discourse patterns inherent in certain types of writing. And, in Pakistan English is taught as 2<sup>nd</sup> Language, so it might be said that students have to face problems related to language. As all of the respondents replied as:

- a. *I have to cram some words so that I may use them while writing.*
- b. *I usually forget spellings this is a horrible situation for me.*
- c. *Yes I have a lot of ideas but normally I feel it difficult to write in good English.*

These responses very clearly illustrate the linguistic difficulties faced by Pakistani student writers. This also supports

Lunsford (1979) that basic writers have problems in converting ideas into an adequate written expression. They can write spontaneously but they have to face difficulty while writing scientifically.

#### 4. Cognitive Difficulties

Finally, Hadfield and Hadfield (1990 cited in Adam Simpson) discuss cognitive difficulty. This relates to the necessity of learners to organise their thoughts on paper. This may be difficult in such circumstances as an essay given as homework, for which the purpose is not immediately apparent, and the piece of writing is not being done for any personal reasons. I have observed that this difficulty is very common among Pakistani students because the textbooks in Pakistan already contain material for the examination purposes and students do not give importance to such assignments because they just cram a few days before exam and get through the exam. Consequently, the writing tasks fail to invoke an audience. The teacher is generally assumed as a sole audience for Pakistani student writers. And, the students know that what the teacher/examiner demands i.e. reproduction or spontaneous reproduction of memorized content.

#### 5. Problems Related to the Process

Here I would share some other problems identified by Dickson (2001, cited in Adam Simpson) according to Dickson (2001, cited in Adam Simpson) writers suffer these problems during writing.

##### 5.1 In-Class Problems

'The reluctant writer' this type of writer stops continually, writes briefly, and is always looking around. He/she never seems to concentrate for more than a few seconds at a time. 'The always-has-to-be-correct writer' for such learners, the use of an eraser or liquid paper indicate a writer with perfectionism as their ideal.

'The keyboard taper' this learner makes frequent use of pocket electronic dictionaries or is constantly flipping the pages of paper dictionaries, thus indicating someone pursuing the most accurate word possible.

'The talker' because a quiet class is usually required for writing, the talker is immediately noticed above the silence of the classroom.

##### 5.2 'Homework Syndrome'

Homework is one of those beaten themes in education that is still attracting the attention of education. There have been fiery arguments, for and against homework but we are still facing this problem, ironically, with much more intensity (Sidiqui, 2007, pp.137) and especially in teaching of writing teachers depend upon homework a lot. Hadfield and Hadfield (1990 cited in Adam Simpson) claimed that, on occasion, writing classes are there merely to show that work is being done and not with a specific purpose or goal. Consequently, writing is associated with chores or even discipline. Writing classes can therefore suffer from what Hadfield and Hadfield label 'homework syndrome', i.e. students are poorly motivated and therefore perform badly. In Pakistan students are asked to memorize the essay or story and the students generally practice this memorization at home. I can relate my own story my English teacher used to emphasize on memorization early in the morning and I along with my other class fellows followed this drill. To support this assumption, I inquired 50 students with regard of this practice and interestingly 45 out of 50 students replied that they memorize their work at home and generally early in the morning. One of the respondents said,

*"I am Haf-ze-Quran and it is easy for me to memorize after or before Fajar prayer."*

The other respondent said,

*"I try to memorize my work (syllabus for class test) at home and especially early in the morning."*

This all result in poor performance when the parents are less vigilant or uneducated. According to Sidiqui(2007,pp.138) "the children are given those items as homework that are either very difficult and cannot be done without help from adults or they are too simple and the purpose of homework is not the strengthening of concepts but to keep the children busy". Some times it happens that students are not provided with adequate instructions. In certain cases there are no clear instructions given by the teachers about the homework. The result is that even when children are willing to do their

homework they do not know how to go about it. Teachers take it for granted that children know how to do this homework (Sidiqui, 2007, pp.138-139). I would like to share an instance of my native town, there a so called English Medium school enrolled a large number of students from the rural area and, offered a very high profile course named Oxford Syllabus. For the teaching of this syllabus the school management had to hire teachers from the local town and induct them as English Medium School teachers. The teachers were untrained and did not know how to teach this high profile course. Consequently, they started to put a lot of stress on homework. Most of the parents of the children were uneducated and unable to help their children. So this problem unintentionally caused tuitions and extra financial burden on parents.

In brief this is a supported fact that most of Pakistani student writers in the words of Lunsford are performing well below the formal-operations or true concept formation stage of cognitive development, and hence they have great difficulty in "de-centring" and performing tasks which require a sound cognitive development. But once we have realized that our student writers have to face difficulties while writing as mentioned above. So what can be done to help them out of this situation? How can classroom teachers make this realization useful or effective for teaching of writing?

## 6. Implications

1. I believe that we must change our attitude towards writing and it should be considered something that is nurtured and developed in the classroom, resulting in the difficulties experienced by learners being comprehended and dealt with. The learners should not be segregated from the difficulties rather these difficulties should be tackled realistically.
2. In Pakistan learners are unwilling or unable to produce ideas that will work towards the construction of a piece of writing. In order to overcome these difficulties, the teacher must employ certain strategies to elicit the necessary input.
3. Teachers should provide encouragement to the students so that they may attend to the task at hand and the teachers should also avoid a perfectionist view of task they should remind their students that perfect work is not expected.
4. Monologue lectures should be avoided in other words classes should be learner centered not the teacher centered.
5. Collaborative learning should be promoted in class room where all of the learners are active participant.
6. In classroom all those devices which promote perfectionism for example, ink-remover etc., should be restricted.
7. Class time should be spent writing, reading what has been written aloud to the group/audience, and talking about the writing (Lunsford, 1979, pp.302).
8. Learner should be motivated to jot down on paper some of the thoughts that they can easily express verbally, since they seem to have a lot to say.
9. The writing instructors should provide feed back that will lead the learner into reflecting on their work, rather than merely copying correction or not studying the assessment at all.
10. Our textbooks must contain such activities that allow students to practice or exercise themselves in these activities continuously.

Here I have made an effort to devise a practical lesson plan for a writing teacher keeping all of the necessary implications in mind.

Writing, unlike speaking, is not an ability we acquire naturally, even in our first language - it has to be nurtured and taught in a class room. In Pakistan unless L2 learners are explicitly taught how to write in L2, their writing skills are likely to get left behind as their speaking progresses honestly speaking in our country none of the language skills is nurtured accurately. But teaching writing is not just about grammar, spelling, or the mechanics of the Roman alphabet. While writing a learners has to be aware of and use the conventions of the genre in the new language and some certain cognitive process because writing has been acknowledged as a socio-cognitive process.

## I. Activity

### *Introduction*

Massi (2001,cited in,Adam,2012) claims that writing is by nature an interactive process because it evolves out of the symbolic interplay between writer, text and reader . Consequently, by making conditions more authentic than the ones in traditional classroom tasks, an awareness of audience, purpose and intentionality is reinforced.

Before writing any piece of writing learners think about a situation and share with a partner. I have put this activity into the category of Prewriting

### *Group brainstorming*

On a given topic (students work cooperatively and write down all the ideas that come to mind in connection with a topic).  
a-The teacher will invite the whole class to work on a topic collectively in small groups and brainstorm. I believe that the class as a whole can generate more ideas than an individual could manage alone (also, their collective schemata are greater than the individual's, Adam, 2012).

b-At this stage the teacher will create a real world and specify the audience and purpose of a text by making the situation 'real'. For this the teacher can ask the students to write for some audience for example; college/school magazine readers, local newspaper readers etc.

c- Now the teacher will give an assignment to a group of learners. The task will be to write a book review and submit it to the college magazine. This is hoped that the learners will respond to this real audience with enthusiasm, and embrace the task as it has a genuine purpose.

## **II. Activity**

### *Team/Collaborative research on focusing ideas for writing*

I believe that introducing students to computer technology has been an effective way to engage them in the research process.

Narrowing down or focusing ideas is a cognitive process, and it involves thinking about which of the many ideas generated are the most important or relevant, and perhaps taking a particular point of view.

As part of the essay-writing process, the teacher will ask the students in group to put the ideas generated in the previous stage onto a 'mind map'. The teacher then will draw a mind-map on the board, using ideas from the different groups. At this stage the teacher can scaffold the students because this gives the learners the tools to better express their own ideas(Catherine,2011).

At this stage the teacher will prepare learners to write an essay, the teacher will give the learners the essay title and pieces of scrap paper. Students will be given 3 minutes to work alone, writing one idea on each piece of paper, before comparing in groups without stopping and without worrying about grammar or punctuation. If they don't know a particular word, they can write it in their L1. This often helps learners to further develop some of the ideas used during the ' *Generating ideas*' stage. Each group will then present their 3 best ideas to the class. It doesn't matter if the ideas aren't used in the final piece of writing; the important thing is that it will help break through the barrier of ' *I can't think of anything to write.*' Learners then compare together what they have written, and use a dictionary, the teacher or each other to find in English any words or phrases they wrote in their L1.

## **III. Activity**

### *Actual Writing*

#### *Team writing*

Once the students have generated their own ideas, and thought about individually which are the most important or relevant, students will work together to write a previously agreed, text.

I believe that asking students to produce a text in collaboration can be quite motivating. It enables the stronger students to help the weaker ones(Adam,2012).

The teacher will ask the groups to share their text in groups so that their text can be seen by other groups.

## **IV. Activity**

- *Whole class text construction,*
- *Composing on the blackboard and*
- *Parallel writing.*

These techniques have their foundation in product writing but are effective in providing a framework for lower level students to work from. These techniques can develop a sense of collective achievement, while eliminating the fear of being left to 'go it alone', completely unguided(Adam,2012).

The teacher will give the students cues to express their ideas in the most appropriate way. The examination of model texts is often prominent in product or genre approaches to writing, and will help raise learners' awareness of the conventions of typical texts of different genres in L2 (English).

The teacher will provide the learners in groups several examples of a genre, and they will use a genre analysis form to identify the features and language they have in common. This will raise their awareness of the features of the genre and gives them some language 'cues' they can use in their own writing (Catherine, 2011). At this stage the learners will identify the function of different paragraphs in a piece of writing. For example, in a fee concession application, the functions of the paragraphs might be something like;

- a. reason for concession
- b. closing paragraph praying for a concession

Learners will be given an essay with the topic sentences taken out, and put them back in the right place. This raises their awareness of the organisation of the essay and the importance of topic sentences.

## V. Activity

### *Peer Review & Construction of text*

At this phase the teacher will move around the class listening to the comments of students and, providing feedback or answering questions on structure, lexical items, the validity of an argument, the order of presentation of the information, etc. Peer evaluation of writing helps learners to become aware of an audience other than the teacher (Adam, 2012).

If students are to write a second draft, the teacher will ask other learners to comment on what they liked / didn't like about the piece of work, or what they found unclear, so that these comments can be incorporated into the second draft. The teacher can also respond at this stage by commenting on the content and the organisation of ideas, without yet giving a grade or correcting details of grammar and spelling. This can help keep track of their progress and work out a record of most frequent questions, doubts and inaccuracies for a future 'error analysis' session.

## VI. Activity

### *Peer-editing*

While writing a final draft, students should be encouraged to check the details of grammar and spelling, which may have taken a back seat to ideas and organisation in the previous stages (Catherine, 2011).

Teacher will guide the students to exchange their first drafts of a text and point out changes which are needed to help the reader (e.g. better organization, paragraph divisions, sentence variety, vocabulary choice). At this stage the teacher will guide the students to act as each other's editors spotting vocabulary repetitions, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, etc).

Peer editing is a useful tool for any level of learner, although its specific application can vary from level to level (Adam, 2012). For example, at lower levels it can be used generally, to highlight the grammatical problems, whereas for higher levels this would be used to assess how effectively an essay question has been answered (Adam, 2012).

## 7. Conclusion

In Pakistan to pace up with the developed countries we must do something practically for the cause of success. Our student writers need our help and the best way to help them is to facilitate them in the process of writing. We must remember that writing is not any phobia a frightening process if it is handled professionally. If we are able to convert our language classrooms into a friendly, learner centered place, we shall be able to illuminate the fear of students as writers. Process approach in writing can help us finding valid ways to substantiate our success; consequently we shall be able to track the real potential of our students in the field of writing composition that is still a night mare for our students and teachers. Writing can escape from its image as a laborious activity if process writing techniques are adopted in the language classroom. Process writing not only reduces most of the problems associated with this skill, it also turns the writing class into a stimulating and communicative experience. Furthermore, using this approach at lower levels is not only feasible, but will also provide a spring board for the language learner to become a skilled writer in L2 (English).

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