A Principled Eclectic Approach to Teaching EFL Writing in Taiwan

Hui-Tzu Min

Abstract

For years non-native English as Foreign Language (EFT) writing instructors have turned to scholars and researchers in English-speaking countries such as the United States, British, and Australia for appropriate approaches to teaching writing. Yet from language-based, product-based, to process-based, and genre-based approaches, mainstream writing approaches appear to address only part of the issues facing by EFL writers. According to the three parameters of Kumaravadivelu's macrostrategic framework of post-method pedagogy — particularity, practicality, and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2006: 69), the author proposed a principled eclectic approach to teaching EFL writing. The features of this new method are adapting mainstream writing pedagogies to local needs, creating local pedagogies to address students' difficulties, and critically examining and evaluating extant mainstream writing practices. Evidence is provided to illustrate this principled eclectic approach.

Keywords: EFL Writing Approach, Principled Eclectic Approach, Taiwan

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兼容並蓄之英語寫作教學方式

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摘　要

　　長久以來，本地教師在英文寫作教學法上，均師法美、英、澳等英語系國家學者。但不論是「語言導向」、「成果導向」、「過程導向」或「文體導向」等英文寫作教學法，只能解決本地學生英文寫作的部分問題。筆者根據主張「後教學法」學者 Kumaravadivelu「宏觀策略架構」中的三大原則：地域特殊性、教師實用性及啟發學生潛能性（Kumaravadivelu, 2006: 69），提出一兼容並蓄之英語寫作教學方式。此一教學方式，不僅批判檢視主流寫作教學法所隱含之西方文化觀點，並修正適應臺灣大學生英語寫作之需要，更強調授課教師依學生及寫作情境需求自創寫作教學法。筆者除闡述此一教學方式之理論架構外，亦以實例簡介此一教學方式。

關鍵詞：英語寫作教學法、原則性之兼容並蓄方式、臺灣

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Introduction

There has been a surge in interest in English as Foreign language (EFL) writing recently, given the ever-increasing pressure to publish internationally among graduate students and academics as well as the universal desire to participate in commerce in the globalized world (Leki, 2002). In response to this growing demand on writing in English, both academically and professionally, EFL writing instructors have embarked on a search for the most efficient and effective approach to enhancing student writing. Although few still employed a single approach (Liu, 2008), most proposed a balanced or integrated EFL writing pedagogy, combining the process and genre approaches to form process genre approach (Deng, 2007; Gao, 2007; Kim & Kim, 2005). Although the synthesis of process and genre approaches reflects EFL writing instructors' careful reflection on the inadequacy of current writing pedagogies in local contexts, it lacks a critical examination of Western literacy practices that underpin the mainstream writing pedagogies. In addition, it fails to foreground local writing practice and pedagogies by only incorporating ideas from the English center countries into local contexts. Given the foregoing critique, the author proposes a principled eclectic approach to EFL writing pedagogy that not only adapts imported mainstream instructional approaches to local needs but also highlights creations of local practices. Moreover, it features a critical reflection on and evaluation of mainstream writing practices and pedagogies. This principled eclectic approach to EFL writing is premised on the three parameters of Kumaravadivelu's macrostrategic framework of post-method pedagogy particularity and practicality (Kumaravadivelu, 2006: 69). In what follows, the author first briefly outlined the current development of postmethod era in English language teaching (ELT) and the "post-process movement" (Atkinson, 2003) in second language writing instruction. Then, she discussed the theoretical framework of the proposed principled eclectic approach to teaching EFL writing. Finally, she illustrated how she used this principled

eclectic approach to teaching essay writing to a group of sophomores of Foreign Languages and Literature Department at a comprehensive university in Taiwan.

Literature Review

Principled Eclecticism in Post-method Pedagogy

In a recent review article on TESOL methods, Kumaravadivelu (2006: 60) aptly pointed out three major changes in English language teaching to non-native speakers, two of which are "… from method-based pedagogy to post-method pedagogy, and … from systemic discovery to critical discourse". Underlying these shifts is a general recognition among non-native ELT teachers that subscribing to any single centered-based method or approach fails to completely address local exigencies. A call for pluralistic and principled eclectic approach (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) is in need.

Principle eclecticism is the "desirable, coherent, and pluralistic" approach which entails diverse learning activities depending on learner needs (Mellow, 2002). It has been used interchangeably with "disciplined eclecticism" (Rodgers, 2001: 4), "informed eclecticism" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000), "enlightened eclecticism' (Brown, 1994: 74), among other names. Rodgers (2001: 4) predicted that this synergistic approach is "likely to shape the teaching of second languages in the next decades of the new millennium". Reid (2001) also echoed this viewpoint when discussing L2 writing pedagogy. Given that most L2 writing instructional approaches address only a certain aspect of L2/EFL writing (e.g., language, text, composing skills, reader expectations), commitment to any single approach can lead to a skewed perspective on the issues encountered by ESL/EFL students (Silva, 1990). Since "one size does not fit all, … the use of a variety of approaches that permits teachers to extend their repertoire" becomes essential (Reid, 2001: 32).

Debate over Current ESL Writing Approaches

Although Reid has pointed out that principled eclecticism is essential to teaching second/foreign language writing to speakers of other languages, recent literature on second language writing approaches does not appear to uniformly reflect this conceptualization. As revealed in a recent publication of a special issue of Journal of Second Language Writing, scholarly opinions diverge in the interpretation of an upcoming post-process approach. Some construed this as a herald of genre approach, a social turn from the process approach (Hyland, 2003a, 2003b); others deemed this emerging paradigm as a refusal of "the dominance of process at the expense of other aspects of writing and writing instruction" (Matsuda, Canagrarajah, Harklau, Hyland, & Warschauer, 2003: 78-79). Still others (Casanave, 2004; Leki, 2003) considered it an optimal time to critique the mainstream second language writing pedagogy.

While there are still debates and controversies over the real meaning of post-process approach in the post-process movement, many non-native EFL writing instructors in Asian countries have followed Reid's advice by advocating an eclectic approach. Most combined practices from process and genre approaches to form process genre approach (Gao, 2007; Kim & Kim, 2005) or "process-based approach imbued with product and genre based features" (Deng, 2007: 16). Although this synergistic approach reflects EFL writing instructors' attempt to best support effective EFL student writing, it lacks a scrutiny of the underlying assumptions of Western written communication and their accompanying practices. Neither does this "principled eclectic" approach reflect genuine local practices. At its best, it is a combination or adaptation of mainstream L2 writing approaches, which fails to include any contingent responsive approach when those prefabricated combinations and adaptations elude our students in class.

Methodology

Drawing on the three guiding principles—particularity, practicality, possibility—of Macrostrategic Framework (Kumaravadivelu, 2006: 69), the author proposed a principled eclectic approach to EFL writing instruction to help local EFL writing scholars and teachers "develop a capacity to generate varied situation-specific ideas within a general framework that makes sense in terms of current pedagogical and theoretical knowledge" (Kumaravadivelu, 1992: 41). This principled eclectic approach not only strikes a balance among various mainstream L2 writing approaches (e.g., product, process, genre, critical) but also between imported mainstream pedagogies and local modifications "based on a true understanding of local linguistic, social, cultural, and political particularities" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006: 69). It also seeks to foreground local practices, encouraging "a personal theory of practice" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 544) among local EFL writing instructors whose theorized practices can not only validate but also inform mainstream writing teaching theory. In other words, the principle of "practicality" aims to challenge the stereotypical role relationship between mainstream knowledge-transmitting theorizers and local knowledge-receiving practitioners. Finally, this principled eclectic EFL writing approach seeks to cultivate among EFL students both a critical and pragmatic perspective on Western and their L1 writing practices and conventions so that they can make informed choices in their writing that reflect who they are, and who they want to be (the principle of possibility).

In the remainder of this paper, the author showcased and discussed how she applied this principled eclectic approach to teaching essay writing in an EFL writing class in Taiwan. Readers should bear in mind that the three principles of this principled eclectic writing approach interweave and interact with each other in a synergic relationship, with the first principle (particularity) laying the foundation for various pedagogical techniques combined to assist students in grappling with individual

writing problems (practicality), which, in turn, help prepare them to become reflective writers (possibility). The separate treatment of each principle is merely for the convenience of discussion.

The writing class taught by the author was composed of 18 sophomores, 16 females and 2 males, with an age average 19. All were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and had passed the Intermediate Level English Test of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) administered by the Language Training & Testing Center in Taiwan before being admitted to the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at the university. Their English proficiency was approximately between 523-550 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam. The data sources discussed in the following sections were from students' compositions, journal entries, and teacher-student conferences.

Discussion

Particularity: Emphasizing Understanding of Local Context

Many mainstream ESL writing instructors are unaware of their students' writing needs due to a lack of understanding of their students' cultural background and their previous training in writing. As a result, they advocate an approach that may satisfy more of the ESL program needs than their students'. The principled eclectic approach starts with the writing instructor's genuine understanding of local exigencies, including institutional and student needs. This pedagogy is responsive to and responsible for local individual, institutional, social and cultural contexts in which learning and teaching take place (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 544). Such responsiveness and responsibility underscores the principle of particularity.

Local Context

The English writing courses that the current author offered for the last 6 years

were to English majors at Department of Foreign Languages and Literature (FLLD) at the second largest comprehensive university in Taiwan. Students of FLLD are required to take 3 hours of writing each semester for three consecutive years. Upon entering FLLD, they are assigned to one of the four concurrent writing sessions of Writing I, with each class size less than 20 students. At the beginning of their second school year, they can choose a writing session of Writing III taught by an instructor they like.

Unlike its counterparts in most North American and European universities, FLLD did not have explicit departmental curricular requirements for the writing courses, which gives whomever that teaches writing (from I to VI) absolute freedom to design their own syllabus. Facing such a constraint-free teaching environment, the current author did not feel much relief but more responsibility when she was first assigned to teach writing III and IV. As she embarked on outlining the course objectives, she principally considered two criteria: what students want to learn and what she knows about L2 writing. With regard to the first criterion, she followed Hyland's advice by performing some "present situation analysis" (Hyland, 2007: 155). She conducted an informal survey during the first class, asking students to tell me what they learned during the previous semester and what they expected to learn in my class. The following four excerpts demonstrated the varied writing experiences her students had during the previous semester:

Student A: The professor taught us how to write a procedure paragraph. We had to explain how to do something.

Student B: The professor taught us to write letters to ask for application materials for graduate programs. She also asked us to present what we received from the university once we got their replies.

Student C: The professor taught us how to write beautiful sentences in English. She said that "diction" is very important.　She also taught us how to combine short sentences into long ones.

Student D: The teacher asked us to keep journals, and she always encouraged me with compliments. But I want to improve my grammar.

Researchers, when comparing ESL with EFL writers, tend to perceive EFL writers as a homogeneous group because they share the same culture and receive the same kind of writing instruction. Yet the previous student responses revealed very little homogeneity, if not heterogeneity, with respect to their writing experiences.

Regarding their expectations of the writing class, most aspired to improve their writing ability and some desired to better their grammar:

My grammar is very bad. I want to better grammar in my writing.

I want to learn how to think in English like I do in Chinese.

I want to learn more vocabulary and expressions in English so that I can express myself freely in writing.

As shown previously, few had specific ideas of what they really wanted to learn, which is not surprising due to their much less experience in writing than in other skills. Their responses to the question of future career, however, gave the author more directions on designing the course. Most replied that they would continue further studies in graduate school or become English teachers at the secondary level ("I want to become an English teacher," or "I want to go to graduate school."). Given this information, the current author decided to introduce essay writing to them in writing III and academic writing in writing IV. While this decision on essay writing was made mostly on pragmatic and instrumental grounds due to student career aspirations, it is also a reflection of her previous training and subjective preconceptions of the importance of academic essay writing in higher educational context. She believed that by teaching students academic writing and providing with them opportunities to practice it in class can both meet the immediate needs of these English majors, who are required to write term papers for their linguistics and literature courses in their

third-year study and better prepare them for their further studies and future career (a target situation analysis).

Teacher Belief and Training

In addition to addressing student needs, the current author also followed Casanave's advice (2004: 10-21) by examining her belief and former academic training when planning course objectives and deciding on the principled eclectic approach to teaching writing. Having learned to write in English for more than two decades, she deeply believes that learning to write in English is a developmental process, requiring mastery of the English language, given her constant wrestling with appropriate expressions and correct grammar to convey my thought. Her academic training, on the other hand, helps her understand that learning to writing in English entails knowledge of and skills in cognitive strategies and sociocultural conventions. She learned that writers employ certain cognitive strategies that transcend language (e.g., planning, revising, editing) during the composing process to discover, construct and share meanings (Flower & Haynes, 1981). She also realized the distinctive features in the writing of ESL writers (Silva, 1993) and possible contributory sources, including developmental factors, L2 proficiency (Mohan & Lo, 1985), and rhetoric conventions in students' L1 writing (Connor, 1996; Hinds, 1987, 1990).

The foregoing writing experience and academic training cement her belief that writing in English is a linguistic, cognitive, social, cultural, and developmental process, necessitating a muldimensional approach (Kucer & Silva, 2006) to achieve the following four objectives:

Students can understand that:

1) effective written communication takes various lengths of time, depending on their current level of English language proficiency (linguistic, developmental);

2) writing is a recursive process wherein they would plan, compose, and revise constantly (cognitive); Students will

3) compose reader-based prose to meet the expectation of certain discourse community (sociocultural);

4) compose an academic essay and write about their reflections on this learning process in journals.

Practicality: Personal Theory of Practice

The foregoing objectives obviously defy the employment of any single mainstream writing instruction approach. Although Silva (1990: 18) cautioned against staunch support and premature abandonment of any mainstream approach without critical evaluation and deliberation, many EFL writing teachers, like their ESL counterparts, still subscribe to and practice centered-based pedagogy in their writing classes without exercising their "sense of plausibility" (Prabhu, 1990: 172) to devise a writing pedagogy that fits local exigencies. In contrast, the author chose to employ a "pluralistic" perspective (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 182) on L2 writing pedagogy. Relying on her own "sense of plausibility" and "personal conceptualization of how teaching leads to desired learning" (Prabhu, 1990: 172), the author selected and adapted teaching techniques from available mainstream writing approaches in the proactive stage (before students start to compose their drafts) and devised a proceduralized instruction to accommodate student needs in the reactive stage (during their composing process), practicing "principled eclecticism" to achieve the foregoing curriculum goals.

The basic premise of utilizing techniques from various mainstream writing approaches is to equip students with the prerequisite knowledge of the sociocultural conventions of the academic discourse community in English-speaking countries in North America, Britain, and Australia. These techniques involve a wide array of reading and writing activities from interactive reading approach such as reading like an observant writer, and writing like a reflective reader; current-traditional approach such as introducing topic sentences (thesis statements) to analysis of the pragmatic functions of some

rhetorical moves in genre approach. The creation of proceduralized instruction, on the other hand, is to accommodate student needs by offering them explicit instruction on how to incorporate their newly acquired knowledge into their own writing. This tailor-made instruction is drawn on an understanding of the underlying causes of student difficulty revealed in their journals.

To some, such an instructional practice appears to perpetuate established power hierarchies of the dominant culture of the academic discourse community. As a foreign language writer and writing teacher, the current author views this practice as "a hegemonic diffusion of the communication style judged desirable in the globalized world, rather than a direct imposition of someone else's language" (Cameron, 2002; Kubota & Shi, 2005: 102). Like the Japanese teacher in Cumming's study (2003: 87), the current author considers learning and teaching the written communicative practices in the academic discourse community mainly from a "pragmatic" perspective, as a way to get her students to the wider world. The current author wishes that her own writing instructors had explicitly taught her the rhetorical conventions in her undergraduate study so that she could have spent less time struggling with them and more time exploiting and critiquing them. She concurred with Williams (2005: 15) that part of a writing teacher's responsibility is to "introduce students to the practical reality of the discourse community" they aspired to join, to initiate them into the academic discourse community so that they do not spend an unduly lengthy period of time attempting to approximate prestigious forms without success (Johns, 1997).

Although the current author is of the opinion that EFL writing teachers should explicitly apprentice their students into the discourse community, she does not suggest that EFL writers and students need to conform to patterns of communication of the academic discourse community after they have mastered the conventionalized modes. After obtaining desirable proficiency in academic discourse, they can judiciously incorporate their L1 writing strategies into their L2 writing to create a "third discursive discourse" (Kramsh, 2002; Li, 1999; Matsuda et al., 2003). But such a "transposition"

159) must be premised on knowledge and mastery of the literacy practices of the academic discourse community. Like Bakhtin's apt argument, EFL writers need to "command the genres they use before they can exploit them" (Hyland, 2003b: 25). Until then, few readers in the academic discourse community would heed a critical EFL outsider's linguistically unsophisticated and rhetorically unconventional messages.

In what follows, the current author highlighted some modified teaching techniques of the mainstream writing pedagogies in the proactive stage and exemplified the proceduralized instruction with discussion on the rhetorical structure of thesis statement in the reactive stage. She also discussed students' initial challenge to this rhetorical structure, evaluation of its pragmatic function, and subsequent conditional acceptance to illustrate how students decide to accommodate it in the process of learning to become part of the academic community.

The Writing Class

As previously stated, the writing class is for second-year English majors, the focus of which is on academic essay writing. There were 18 students in the writing class, 16 females and 2 males with an age average 19. All were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and had passed the Intermediate Level English Test of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) administered by the Language Training & Testing Center in Taiwan before being admitted to the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at the university. Their English proficiency was approximately between 523-550 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam.

The author used "Mosaic One: A Content-Based Writing Book" (Blass & Pike-Baky, 2000) given its balanced coverage of between reading and writing, process and product, ideas and language, writers and readers, which perfectly matches the curriculum goals and my pluralistic view of writing approaches. Through the past few years, she has adopted a modified "writing cycle" (Tsui & Ng, 2000) in class. The whole cycle is shown in Figure 1.

Proactive Stage

Each writing class started with reading. The four major purposes of reading assignments—language learning, reading comprehension, idea generation, and rhetorical analysis—were explicitly explained to students before they began to compose (Kroll, 1993). Close reading for language learning and general reading comprehension may seem unnecessary for and irrelevant to native speakers, but is necessary for most ESL/EFL student writers who are in the process of acquiring the linguistic and content schema which experienced native writers expect them to have.

reading (Proactive Stage)
↓
brainstorming (ideas for writing)
↓
first draft
↓
peer review
↓
second draft
↓
oral presentation and Peer response
↓
teacher-student conference on the second draft (Reactive Stage)
↓
third draft
↓
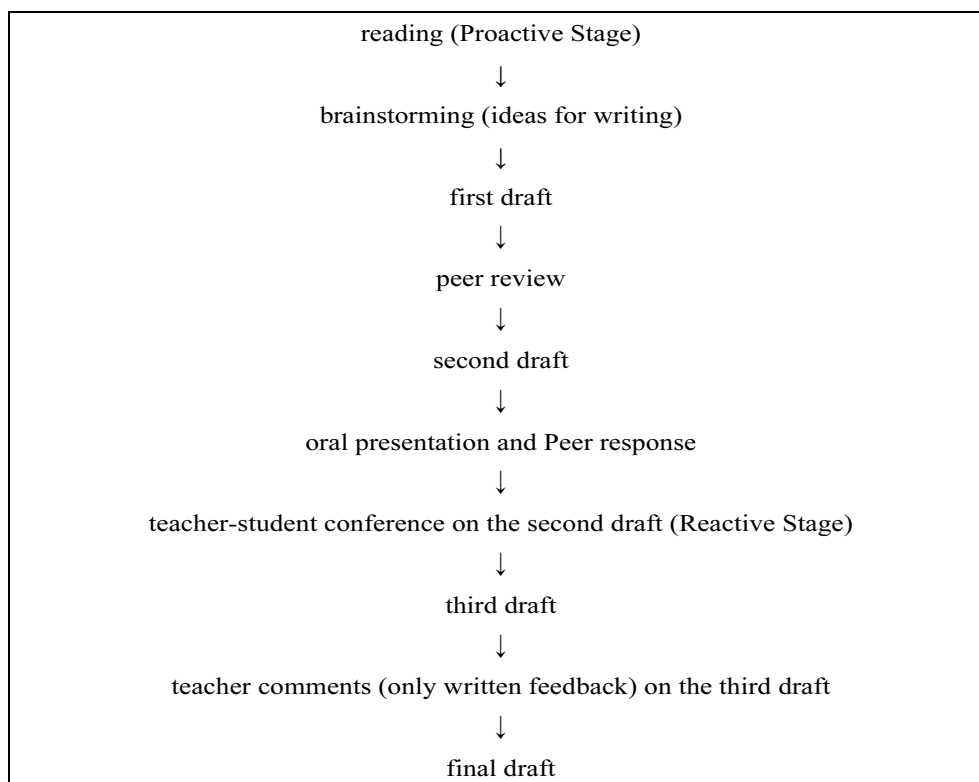teacher comments (only written feedback) on the third draft
↓
final draft

Figure 1　The Writing Cycle

Without first knowing the kind of language experienced writers use to convey ideas, it is less likely that EFL students can fully comprehend the author's messages or express similar ideas in their own writing, given the close relationship between reading and writing (Kroll, 1993). Despite the importance of reading for acquiring language and apprehending content, these two purposes are only means to the latter two ends—idea generation and rhetorical analysis. The current author always contextualized the purpose of closing reading in the writing task students are going to perform. The following instruction is an illustration of this contextualization:

> You are to write about certain aspects of a new culture that are challenging/interesting to you and explain why (or some aspects of Taiwanese culture that might be challenging/interesting to foreigners). The reading assignment will give you some ideas. You are supposed to talk about what you have learned from this reading in class. Then we will discuss and analyze how the writer informed his friend of his new challenges.

When the current author and her students met the following week, she led the students to read rhetorically by drawing their attention to "particular stylistic choices, grammatical features, methods of development" (Kroll, 1991: 254) to help them grasp the author's plan and purpose. An illustration is provided as follows. The notes at the bottom are the questions that she raised in class.

A Letter to Alex

Dear Alex,   September 30

　　Thanks for your card. Sorry I haven't written sooner. I've spent all my free time wandering around Tokyo and learning about Japanese customs. It is very

interesting here because everything is so different.[1]

You asked me to write about some of the things I've noticed that are new to me. The most striking thing is the huge crowds. There are many, many people everywhere, but[2] everyone is very orderly and polite. People at home would not be so orderly in such crowds. Another new thing for me is the way restaurants display food in restaurant windows. They arrange it beautifully on lacquer trays in simple, clean designs. The Japanese seem to[3] value the appearance of food more than the taste. In my opinion, the sushi here is more delicious than at home. (But the wasabi was so strong I couldn't eat it!)

There[4] are a few problems that I've had since I arrived. Everything is written in Japanese, and even though your mother taught me a few Japanese characters before I left, I can't read a thing. Since I can't read signs, it is difficult to travel around. Most people are friendly, but they can't help me much because they don't speak English. Another problem is the Japanese public restrooms. Nobody warned me that the toilets are not like our Western ones-That has been very hard to adjust to![5]

Well, that's about all for now. I hope I'll understand more Japanese when I write you next time. I think things will get easier when I start teaching. Please

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[1]　[Anticipate: Read like a writer, individual composing]What do you expect to read in the following paragraphs? Is David going to talk about positive or negative differences?

[2]　[Cohesion]Why did David use "but" here? What assumptions did he have about huge crowds? What made him think that way?

[3]　[Hedges]Was he very sure about this interpretation? Why not? What did he use to express his uncertainty? What other words can he use to express the same meaning?

[4]　[Unity]What is this paragraph about? Can differences subsume problems? Is this paragraph connected to the previous one?

[5]　[Audience]Do you understand what David is talking about here? What information has he left unmentioned? Were David to talk about the same problem with another Westerner who has not been to Japan, what information would he need to include here?

give my regards to your family. Write back soon.

Take care,

David

After discussing the rhetorical questions, she outlined the development and organization of the author's ideas in Figure 2. This information becomes the basis for writing, discussion, and follow-up questions. For example, they discussed aspects other than people's manner, food, languages and toilets that can become interesting topics to readers such as transportation and weather. In the meantime, she also reviewed notions students had learned in the previous year such as topic sentence, paragraph, and demonstrated how to turn a simple paragraph into an essay.

challenges of a different culture

interesting and pleasant experience

problems

-identify the experience

-describe the experience in more details

-compare it with home culture home (experience 1)

-give personal interpretation/opinion of this culture (experience 2)

-identify the problem

-expect this problem before arriving (problem 1)
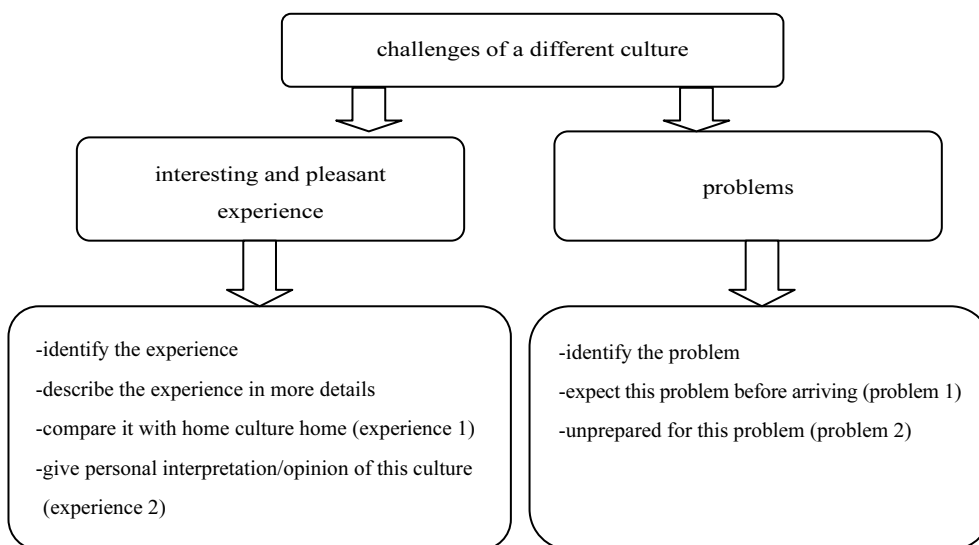
-unprepared for this problem (problem 2)

Figure 2　Analysis of Idea Development

The previous analysis is similar to the 2nd stage of Feez's (1998: 28) teaching-learning cycle—modeling and deconstructing the text, the purpose of which is to model

to students how to become observant readers who "read like a writer in order to write like a writer (Smith, 1983: 562). As pointed out by proponents of genre researchers (Feez, 1998; Hyland, 2007), writing teachers need to engage their students in this kind of conscious reading to prompt them to notice ways of reading that they might not otherwise engage in so that they can deliberately practice this skill on their own whenever they compose and ultimately turn this explicit knowledge into implicit one and be able to draw on it automatically.

Students found such an approach to reading novel, which visually helps them understand that ideas in a paragraph should be organized and required them to consider their audience when explaining their ideas. The following is a student's reflection on this approach in her first journal entry (grammar and word choice are original):

> Well, I never know that a paragraph can be analyzed in such way.
>
> In the past, I always writed [sic] down what I thought immediately and almost never thought about to arrange a paragraph. For me, writed [sic] down a paragraph is simple. But after taking this course, I knew that a paragraph would contain many ideas, but this [sic] ideas must be organized! Now this is hard to me for I didn't used [sic] to organize a paragraph well although I have learn [sic] it in my first year…." Through a semester's practice, she gradually adapted to the idea of organization, as disclosed in her last journal entry, "in this class, I have learned about how to organize a [sic] article. I am getting used to focus on the topic and what I am going to say.

Of course, "learning" and "getting used to" the idea of paragraph organization do not guarantee flawless writing because possessing rhetorical knowledge (knowing what) and using that knowledge (knowing how) are different things. Students may have the declarative knowledge but lack the procedural one. Through repeated teacher demonstration and explanation, most students understood the importance of presenting a thesis statement but experienced difficulty when applying this knowledge to their own

writing, as revealed in most students' verbal response "Oh" to the author's enquiry about the whereabouts of their thesis statement. In nowhere is the lack of procedural knowledge more evident than in Miguel's confession during a student-teacher conference, "I knew that you would ask me about it but I did not know how to come up with one."

Reactive Stage

The fact that most students found stating their main ideas in the form of a sentence is difficult is understandable given that they are not accustomed to the requirement of putting their main points in a "preview statement that forecasts the content and organization of the supporting details" (Kubota & Shi, 2005: 97), although they know that they are supposed to express a central idea clearly and in an organized way. The realization of students' lack of procedural knowledge prompted me to take reactive actions by employing a proceduralized instruction involving three intervention techniques—checking students' declarative knowledge, asking students to reread their essays and identify main ideas, and providing templates, if necessary.

When students experienced problems with generating a thesis statement, the author first ensured that they had the declarative knowledge by asking them the essential components of a thesis statement, to which most would reply "topic and main ideas." After ascertaining their declarative knowledge, she would ask them to reread their essays and if possible, identify the main ideas in their own writing. Take the previous topic a New Culture for instance, a student named Dennis discussed why traffic in the city where the University is located (Tainan) is worse than that in his hometown (Taipei). His thesis statement does not clearly indicate his purpose and the 2nd main idea is vague. During the individual teacher-student conference, the author asked him to reread his essay and discuss with me his intention.

2nd draft

The traffic in Tainan is worse than that in Taipei. I came to Tainan last summer and I found the intersections in Tainan are more confusing than those in Taipei.

> Most of the drivers and riders don't obey the traffic rules. For example, they usually run through the red light, drive or ride after driving, and so on. What stroke me most was that I've once seen a drunken driver lost his life when he drove through a red light and collide with a bus. Actually, the traffic accident in Tainan is more usual than that in Taipei because there are too many law-breakers here. Maybe the police should perform the traffic rules more strictly. Maybe the government should improve the problem of routing vehicular traffic into and out of Tainan. And more importantly, we should remind ourselves of obeying the traffic rules everywhere.

After rereading his own writing, Dennis expressed that his topic was traffic in Tainan, and the main idea was "worse." When the author probed whether his purpose was mainly to describe the worse traffic situation in Tainan, explain why Tainan's traffic was worse, or provide solutions to the traffic situation in Tainan, he realized that his intention was the middle ("I want to give reasons why traffic is worse in Tainan"). Then they discussed possible ways to make his intention more explicit by using a more precise thesis statement.

During their discussion, the author also asked him to reflect on the main ideas. Dennis expressed that the third (underlined) sentence was the first main idea because he had a lot to talk about it, including a terrifying personal experience of witnessing a car accident ("I want to point out that there are more people who do not obey traffic rules in Tainan"). But when she asked him what he meant by "the intersections in Tainan are more confusing those in Taipei" in this draft and the problem about the incurableness "of routing vehicular traffic into and out of any large city" he had mentioned in his 1st draft, he explained in Mandarin how the roundabouts and complicated traffic signs confused him ("Wo gangdao Tainan de shihou wanquan gaobudung yuanhuan de hungludeng," ("I had no idea of how the traffic lights of the roundabouts worked when I first came to Tainan"). The author encouraged him to

expand discussion on this idea because it could be another contributing factor to the worse traffic situation in Tainan. The following is the 3rd draft he turned in a week later.

3rd draft.

The traffic in Tainan is worse than that in Taipei because of its road design and drivers who do not obey traffic laws. When I cam to Tainan first time, I found that the intersections here are more confusing than that in Taipei. One of the reasons is that there are many roads intercrossed in one intersection. Oppositely, there are only four roadsat most in Taipei. In addition, what confused me most was I can hardly be sure which traffic light in the intersection I should abide by.

Another reason is that most of the drivers and riders don't obey the traffic rules. For example, they usually run through the red light, like speeding and drive after drinking. However, the drivers and riders in Taipei pay more attention on following traffic rules. It seems that faulty traffic routing design and incorrect driving attitude are the traffic killers in Tainan.

The author did not provide Dennis with any template to form his thesis statement because his language command is good. For less proficient writers who had difficulty in putting the topic and main ideas together in a thesis statement, the author would offer them some templates. Two templates for the topic of "New Culture" are as follows:

1. There are _____ (number) aspects about this culture that _____ (verb) me: its _____ (noun), _____ (noun), and _____ (noun).
2. "_____ (number of things) that made me _____ (adjective) are its _____ (noun) and _____ (noun)."

Two students using the previous templates generated the following two thesis

statements respectively:

1. "There are three aspects about this culture that attract me: its friendly people, delicious foods, and interesting customs."
2. "Two things about Thailand that made me uncomfortable are its food and traffic."

The provision of these templates to some students but not to others is another example of addressing various student needs, which is not to limit weaker students but to provide them with interim scaffold. Once these students become more experienced with producing thesis statements, they can dispense with the templates and have greater autonomy for generating their own. The foregoing procedure—checking students' declarative knowledge, asking students to reread/reexamine their own writing, and providing templates/answers, if necessary—can also serve as a guiding principle to cope with diverse student problems in a heterogeneous class.

Possibility: Cultivating Reflective Student Writers

Finally, this principled eclectic EFL writing approach seeks to cultivate among EFL students both a critical and pragmatic perspective on Western and their L1 writing practices and conventions so that they can make informed choices in their writing that reflect who they are, and who they want to be (the principle of possibility). This principle is somewhat different from Benesch's (1996: 733) critical writing curriculum that contains intentionally built-in critical agenda such as activities challenging "the requirements, and those which worked outside the requirements to create possibilities for social awareness and action." The current author did not intentionally include any critical agenda in her writing curriculum but provided students with an opinion-exchange platform—the reflection journal—to encourage them to reflect on the rhetorical differences between English and Chinese and the difficulty they

encounter in meeting writing requirements as well as voice any concern they had in and outside the writing class—be it personal, curricular, scholastic, or pedagogical.

One critical reflection made by most students in their journal entries is on the rhetorical convention—thesis statement. This student challenge is not premised on sociopolitical ideology as often seen in critical pedagogy but on pragmatics. They complained about the constriction effect of this rhetorical convention on their ideas and thus challenged its necessity in an academic essay in an indirect way. ("Is there always a thesis statement in an academic essay?") They thought that a thesis statement is prescriptive, stifling their creativity both in ideas and forms. ("The more I think about how to phrase my ideas in a thesis statement, the fewer ideas I have.") To them, a thesis statement is redundant. They did not understand why they need to pre-tell readers in a sentence about what follows in subsequent paragraphs where they will reveal their intentions in evolving examples. ("I explained my main ideas in the body paragraphs. Why do I still need to repeat them in a thesis statement?")

Witnessing this reaction in various journal entries, the author felt it an opportune time to hold a class discussion and examination of the merits and demerits of a thesis statement. She started the discussion by referring to the questions raised in student journal entries. She also brought up the notion of audience and asked students to reflect on who read their L1 writing. To this question, the unanimous answer was "the Chinese writing teacher". Then she asked them to picture a different audience that expected a thesis to guide him/her through the text. Such an expectation, she told them, is derived from a cultural literacy practice that places more responsibilities on the writer in written communication (Hinds, 1987, 1990).

The mentioning of audience in the discussion prompted some students to think about the functions of a thesis statement from the reader's perspective. Some were able to see that such a rhetorical device is reader friendly, assisting readers in identifying writers' ideas so that they can start to evaluate subsequent information, explanation and arguments in the essay. ("The thesis statement is useful to me when I do peer review. I

know at once what my classmate's composition is about and can go on reading.") In addition to reader-friendliness, one student writer also mentioned that she used the thesis statement to check the appropriateness and relevancy of her explanations and arguments in the essay. ("I think the thesis statement is very useful to me as a writer. Sometimes I write down something that is not related to the main idea. I'd check my writing against the thesis statement to see if my ideas are side-tracked.") After listing the enabling and limiting functions on the white board, the author asked students to weigh the pros and cons on the necessity of a thesis statement in an essay. The students reached a consensus that a thesis statement is necessary in this stage given their developing language proficiency, occasionally underdeveloped ideas, and developmental organizing skills. They decided that an early and explicit introduction of one's thesis imposes a less cognitive burden on the reader's part than an evolving point embedded in examples and metaphors and thus is more strategically appropriate. ("The earlier the writer introduces his/her thesis, the easier it is for reader to know the writer's intentions.")

The other critical reflection is similar to what Benesch termed "challenging the requirements" (Benesch, 1996: 733), despite a lack of intention on the part of the author. One student named Catharine challenged the same grade she received on her 2nd and 3rd revisions (B) despite her effort at minimizing grammar mistakes and producing precise expressions. She used two of the more proficient speakers in the author's writing class to express their concerted position:

> I've talked to Elisa and Lily and they also wondered why they could not get a higher grade after they followed your advice [by correcting the grammar mistakes and using precise expressions].
> We are disappointed [with the grades] because we do not think that our efforts paid off.

The author held a group conference with them after learning about these students'

grumble. All three expressed the frustration of not being able to receive a much higher grade compared with their less able classmates whose oral English proficiency is not on a par with theirs but whose compositions received a B. They also pointed out that their conversation teachers gave them much higher scores such as A-to match their excellent oral performance in class. ("Our conversation teachers gave us much higher scores and we felt our efforts have been recognized.")

After understanding the source of their frustration, the author espoused to them her grading practice and re-explained the grading criteria of that particular composition (Advantages/Disadvantages of a Modern Technological Device), which focused more on persuasiveness and thoroughness of their arguments and their ability to paraphrase ideas from source materials. Then she took one step further by showing them a concrete example from another student's composition that met the requirements and received an A- (Appendix I). The visible contrast between that student's rich content and underdeveloped paragraphs common to the three's compositions (see Catherine's composition in Appendix II) cleared their doubts about the author's score range and criteria. It also clarified their misconceptions about the relatively more weighting of micro issues at the sentence level (i.e., linguistic accuracy) than macro ones (i.e., content and unity) in overall writing.

The foregoing critical examination and thoughtful adoption of a thesis statement in their essay signal student writers' active understanding of this rhetorical convention rather than an unavoidable cultural "tipping to the opposite that results from excesses, regardless of human intention" (Li, 2008: 17). This active understanding is a result of collective critical analysis rather than an imposition of the teachers' self-initiated agenda as reported in Benesch's critical writing classroom (2001). Similarly, the challenge of classroom requirements was initiated by students themselves rather than by the current author. Like their native-speaking and ESL counterparts, some EFL students "question the status quo" (Benesch, 2001: 167) but others do not. The current author concurred with Santos (2001) that students should not be prompted by

activist-minded teachers to practice the latter's personal political agenda in a writing classroom. The writing instructor's task, in the author's opinion, is to promote an egalitarian atmosphere in the class, equip students with necessary knowledge and skills they need in their academic settings, provide them with pragmatic analytical tools to question and challenge academic standards and approaches, and establish an avenue for them to raise their questions and challenges, in case they wish to do so.

Conclusion

The author has briefly outlined and demonstrated a principled eclectic approach to teaching writing in English as a foreign language. This principled eclectic approach is premised on the three guiding principles—particularity, practicality, and possibility— of Kumaravadivelu's (2006) macrostrategic framework of post-method pedagogy. The principle of particularity emphasizes an active understanding of local exigencies, an area in which non-native writing instructors of English assume more authority than native speakers of English. The principle of practicality encourages EFL writing instructors to rely on their understanding of local students' needs to create and tailor their own pedagogy to remedy the situation where mainstream approaches fail. In this case, it is the explicit and proceduralized instruction. The principle of possibility is to give students guidance on making informed choices in their writing (i.e., conforming to or challenging extant academic norms and focusing more attention on global issues) that reflect who they are, and who they want to be.

It is a known fact that a single writing approach is inadequate to cope with the diversified needs of EFL students in the writing class, be it linguistic, rhetorical, cognitive, social, cultural, and political. A principled eclectic approach appears a feasible solution, and the one proposed here is an example from the author's particular class. EFL writing instructors need to take themselves, the writer, the reader, the text, the context, and the interaction of all these elements into account to devise their own

principled eclectic approach. Given the space constraints, this author limited her discussion to only topic sentences. More writing issues such as plagiarism and summary writing should be approached from a local practitioner's perspective under the proposed framework.

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Appendix I

The Benefits of Genetically Modified Food

At present there are 6 billion people living on earth, some already facing a crisis of food shortage in some of the third world countries. Imagine that the population continues increasing rapidly, at the time nature will not supply sufficient food. What can we do about it? In the hope of solving this potential problem, the scientists have been working on the crops with genetic manipulation approaches that insert beneficial genetic characteristics of other organisms into the agricultural plants to meet our need. Through genetic transference of DNA, the crops could be improved to benefit both the farmers and the consumers.

After genetic modification, he crops are improved on their viability, which can lead to an increase in harvest and reduction in prime cost, thus benefiting the farmers. According to the Website Science Controversies On-line, "Genetically modified food increases yields from agriculture and become more powerful control of pests and weeds to reduce use of some agrochemicals." The statistics has proven that after two thirds of the rice grown in the United States had been changed into genetically modified crops that have stronger resistance over the pests, the annual yield had increased one thousand tones than the traditional breed. This kind of improvement in the resistance over pest and weeds can prevent or reduce the use of agrochemicals, and

thus may also help the farmers save various costs. Besides the strengthened resistance, genetic manipulation makes plants adapt to severe environments more easily. Even situated in an unfavorable condition like drought, barrenness or bitter cold, plants can still survive and reproduce. The farmers do not have to spend extra money buying fertilizers for the crops, and neither do they need to worry if a cold front could frost the plants. They can benefit from high cost effectiveness because they can reap their harvest under any difficult condition.

As to consumers, the benefits of genetic transference would be buying better-looking foods with enhanced nutritional values and tastes at a lower price. Take vitamin C for example: if the scientists want to add vitamin C in a kind of crop, they would first select another plant that contains the genes of vitamin C such as kiwi fruit. They take out this gene from the kiwi fruit and insert it into the desired crop. In this simple way of genetic transference, the nutritious ingredients could have a wide range from protein to vitamin, iodine and other kinds of substances that could be modified in the plants' DNA. Such reinforcement of the nutrition values can solve the problems of malnutrition all around the world and diminish the possibility of suffering from disease like cancer. In addition to the nutrition benefits, genetically modified food can have a better taste compared to traditions crops. The genetically modified tomatoes, for example, look redder and taste sweeter than before. Some tomatoes' maturation period can be even lengthened for the sake of transportation so that they would still be fresh after long-distance travel and look good in the produce section at supermarkets. Moreover, due to the fact that genetically modified food can increase the harvest, the price of those crops could be lower, which benefits the consumers as well.

Through the biotechnology human beings have successfully found solutions to food shortage problems. Based on the statistic analysis conducted by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in the year of 2030, the population will jump to 8.1 billion, and 815 million people will be starving if people do not find any way out. With the help of genetic manipulation, people not only satisfy their needs for

food, but also elevate the quality of food to a better standard. Though genetically modified food has been under a hot debate for many years among many parties, there is still no proof that it would do harm on human beings. I believe tat fro the benefits it has brought on both consumers and farmers, such as cheaper price, stronger resistance, better nutrition and tastes as well as looks, the manipulation of the plants makeup is still a workable way to ease the food shortage crisis as well as the modern health issues going on nowadays.

Appendix II (Catherine's composition)

GM Foods? Good Matter Foods!

In recent days, discussion about GM Foods (genetically modified foods) becomes controversial. Why do these kinds of foods appear? Actually, human beings try to change living things from the original. In the past, people conjugated good genes to make them better. The big problem is that people can only use similar or even the same genes to achieve the goal. The skills of genetic modification solve this problem. Unfortunately, the other question comes: Do these kinds of artificial foods hurt us?

There are lots of benefits of GM foods. The first acceptable GM foods was beginning in 1994. New FLAVER SAVR tomato was produced. This tomato are not soft as before, meaning that it can be stored for a longer period more easily. Scientists also move the "anti-freeze protein" in artic fish into some plants to improve their ability against cold. So GM foods offer a way to quickly improve crop and so on out of traditional methods. It helps to decrease the shortage of foods in the world.

This is a new technology but no evidence showed that this is harmful for human beings. An associate professor in the Department of Plant Agriculture, E. Ann Clark, pointed out that there is not too much information for GM foods which caused people sick. Actually, GM foods were studied for long continuing tests and indeed, this is the

success of high technology. Scientists also claimed that they can add other matters to strengthen the nutritious value of foods or things anti-cancer.

Latest technology always arouses discussions. Of course GM foods are no exceptions, especially this is related to human health. GM foods may be a new thing to most of people and sounds dangerous to eat this artificial food. But even science studies show nothing harmful in this kind of new foods. Why don't we try it for ourselves?