The Effect of Integrating Portfolio-based Writing Assessment on Students' Self-regulated Learning: The Case of 1st Year Students of English, University of Constantine1

Rihame Boudjellal

University Of Constantine1, Algeria

0040

The European Conference on Language Learning 2013

Official Conference Proceedings 2013

Abstract

Learning to write in a foreign language involves learning how to proceed while writing and what to exactly produce to achieve an adequate piece of writing. In this respect, integrating assessment portfolio within the writing instruction is believed to have an effective impact for we see that it allows the application of both the process and the product approaches to teaching writing, it reflects students' performances more adequately, and it promotes students self-regulated learning processes. To see into such an issue we set ourselves to conduct an experimental research during which we used two questionnaires and classroom observation techniques. Our sample was chosen randomly from the parent population of first year students of English. These followed the experiment treatment throughout two terms. The data obtained was tabulated and analyzed to check our research hypotheses.

Keywords: Assessment portfolio; process approach; product approach; reflection; self-regulated learning processes

Introduction

 "Assessment is a major contributor to raising standards in schools in terms of teaching, learning, and students achievements" (Cohen, et al., 2004: 323). In this respect, assessment can be viewed as a central area of any teaching-learning situation that is said to be used for a variety of purposes. Yet, the crucial point about assessment is that it enhances students' awareness of their own abilities that guides and shapes their own learning practices (Cohen, et al., 2004: 323). This means that assessment can provide learners with self-regulated learning processes which would help them develop their learning abilities and control their performances more effectively. The present investigation would then take a closer view at a new believe about writing instruction and instruction in general. It focuses the idea of "Assessment FOR Learning" and not "Assessment Of Learning" (Bryant & Timmins, 2002: ííí). It has to do with the integration of portfolios as a technique within the writing classroom to promote students' self regulated learning processes.

Portfolios are regarded as an example of authentic assessment that could be applied whiles the writing instruction. A portfolio is "a collection of documents and other items that provides information about different aspects of a [student]' s work" (Richards & Farrel, 2005: 98). This collection can be used in different ways. It can be a selection of (a) best work(s) and regarded as a" showcase portfolios," or it can be just a selection of students productions within a period of time and viewed as a "collection portfolios," or it can be used for assessment purposes and known as "assessment portfolios" (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Green and Johnson (2010) define three different appellations: showcase portfolios (best works collection), growth portfolios (collection of different productions over a period of time), and documentation portfolios (a purposeful collection designed for assessment). As far as the present research is concerned, assessment portfolios can be defined as a systematic, continuous, and purposeful collection of students' written productions at the different stages of the writing process.

Within this research, portfolios are basically used for instructional purposes and assessment purposes. Being used for both purposes, assessment portfolios are said to involve the emergence of two different models. Process portfolio is regarded as a tool for teaching students how to perform and product portfolio is viewed as an instrument for providing content (Bryant & Timmins, 2002). Process Portfolio is said to reflect the various steps taken by the student to complete a given written product; whereas, product portfolio is said to provide a clear set of documents that reflects student's growth over a period of time. Both models can be beneficial in writing classroom because they provide evidence about how students proceed and what they have produced.

The integration of portfolios within the writing instruction is believed to have an effective impact. Teaching learners to write involves both learners and teachers in the application of two different approaches to writing. The first approach is known as the process approach. This approach emphasizes the idea of a recursive pattern of stages that are planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Trrible, 1996); it focuses another idea that has to do with teaching learners how to become more "knowledge informers" rather than becoming " knowledge teller" that try to avoid mistakes (Hyland, 2003). The use of portfolios at that level is regarded as beneficial because it

can be applied for process instruction i.e. teaching students how to move from one step till the other one in a strategic and purposeful way.

The other approach to teaching writing is known as a product approach. This views writing as a final product that is governed by structure, functions, and purposes. Any given text is constructed for a given purpose; it is produced in a way that is different from another text with different purpose (Harmer, 2004). Applying portfolios as a product would enhance students' productions as they can be faced and can be involved in the production of different rhetorical structures. This continuous aspect of assessment portfolio gives students opportunities to be engaged in a purposeful production of various texts. And being a collection serves as an evidence for both teachers and students to check students' growth and to evaluate their written performances, for such a collection can provide a reliable and a valid data for assessment. Reliability and validity of assessment portfolios depends on two criteria: systematization and purposefulness. Assessment portfolio is systematic when the teacher is responsible for what is to be included in the portfolio i.e. all the documents included are previously organized, and the content of portfolios is standardized.

The content of the portfolio, at this stage, can be said to be authentic because it covers the various objectives of a given course and it reflect students' outcomes. According to O'Malley & Pierce, The authenticity of portfolios is about "reflect[ing] student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes…" (1996:4). This means describing learners performances, abilities, attitudes in a "meaningful, challenging, and engaging [situations]…" (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996:5). Giving students the opportunity to perform in such situation would enhance their understanding of their own learning because the result is a reflection of their own learning processes. These reflections can lead students to promote their awareness about their own ways of learning, how to use these abilities perfectly in a strategic way, when to use some and when to exclude some (Murphy, 2001).

Having these reflections in hand learners can develop a self- assessment component that would help them improve their writing ability. "… self- assessment provides one of the most effective means of developing both critical self- awareness of what it is to be a learner, and skills in learning how to learn" (Nunan, 1988:116). This believe about assessment can be reflected in the use of portfolios. Richards and Farrell imply that portfolios can promote the components of "comprehensive self-assessment, collaborative learning, and demonstrates how learners learn" (2005: 98). Self-regulated learners are said to be active and responsible for their own learning for that self-assessment concept is regarded as a key characteristic. They are also believed to be collaborative learners and this component can appear at the stage of peer feedback provision when portfolios are used (Hump-Lyons, 2006).

This study aims basically at improving students' ability to produce correct, purposeful, effective, and efficient pieces of writing in a simple and organized way through engaging them in a continuous, systematic, and guided process of written production assessment. This means engaging students in assessment portfolio-based courses that would be integrated within the actual first year English writing curriculum at university of constantine1. It is then about improving students' self-regulated learning processes for performing better and achieving more when writing in a foreign language.

Based on a previous research at the University of Constantine1, it was found that most of students do not engage themselves in a written production because of two different reasons. First, they try to avoid production because it is not a text that would be corrected and marked by the teacher and this resulted in lowering students' motivation to write. Consequently, if the teacher does not ask his students to write and does not emphasize the idea that their works would be marked, students would not dare to produce a written text in an effective way. Second, some students tend to write, unfortunately, they cannot assess their own writing. Most of students lack the ability of self-assessment of their own reflections.

To avoid such problems, this research tries to involve both students and teachers in an alternative type of assessment that "help(s) integrat(ing) instruction with assessment, representing a coherent model of organizing writing processes and products for ongoing reflection, dialogue, and evaluation" (Hyland, 2009b: 130). This means involving learners in an active learning process through a type of assessment that involves a "collection "of students' written production throughout a period of time. Students would be engaged in a cyclical process of learning (brainstorming activities-production of draft1- peer feedback- draft2- teacher's feedback- final draft- self-evaluation-reflection) within each session of one hour and a half.

Thus, in the present study, we address four research questions:

- Does assessment portfolio enhance students' motivation to write?
- Does assessment portfolio help students develop their Metacognitive abilities?
- Does assessment portfolio enhance students' writing processes?
- Does assessment portfolio really enhance students' effective and efficient productions?

Based on the research reviewed here and our previous experiences, we set two hypotheses
- *If English students are engaged in a portfolio system; then, their written productions would be promoted.*
- *If English students are engaged in a portfolio system; then, they would develop the key concept of self-regulated learning.*

Materials
The investigation took the form of a field experiment and it involved the use of pre-post tests, two questionnaires, and classroom observation techniques. The tests were seen crucial; they were designed to check the development of students written productions/performances (dependent variable) affected by the use of assessment portfolio (independent variable). The pre-test took place at the beginning of the academic year (2012-2013) to check the actual level of students. It took the form of timed paragraph writing. The post-test, on the other hand, was conducted at the end of the year i.e. at the fulfilment of the curriculum. It was on the form of paragraphs writing, so that to check students' improvement within the writing skill. Questionnaires were used to investigate students' attitudes after the use of assessment portfolio and to check the effect of the latter on the different learning processes. Questions in both questionnaires were of a closed nature for practicality reasons.

These were collected after we conducted the post-test.

During both tests and during the whole academic year, the researcher collected some data as structured notes when observing students reactions and performances during portfolio construction i.e. he had just to mention the appearance of predicted behaviours and attitudes. The researcher in this case is a complete participant observer where He would be involved in the whole process as the teacher. But, this data was not included in this research because it provided the same data as the questionnaires has provided. It would be a redundancy to provide the same observations.

The target population of the study was first year English students at University of constantine1. The size was about 1000 students. The samples contained 60 members chosen randomly from the parent population. The sample (60) was divided into two groups: a control group (30) and an experimental group (30). The control group was involved in the actual first year English Written Expression curriculum, whereas, the experimental group was engaged with assessment portfolio- based courses as integrated with the actual curriculum. Both groups were asked to answer the questionnaires and were observed for comparison purposes. After six months the investigation was finished. This means after a whole academic year (2012-2013) which implies two terms, each with the time frame of 3 months.

This investigation followed a given procedure, which considered the actual curriculum. All the lessons are divided into two main parts, knowledge focused sessions and practice-focused sessions. Knowledge-focused sessions are equal to one hour and a half; they implement different texts to be analyzed and snapshots to be memorized. Practice focused sessions included diverse exercises that were introduced to control group (X) mainly during three hours per session. The experimental group (y) was introduced to the same content i.e. knowledge focused sessions; whereas, practice focused sessions were devoted to portfolio construction. "Figure 1" clarifies the process followed during each session.

As it can be noticed, the teacher/ researcher implemented diverse elements. Reading comprehension activities included a model text that was analyzed for genre identification, register building, and cooperative learning through paired reading mainly. This type of activities help students practice more their reading skill because they can be engaged in model analysis, comprehension of content, scaffolding, feedback, "praise and other social reinforcement," promotes their self-management skills, enhances their reading strategies, and reduces anxiety (Topping; 2001). Hyland (2003a: 17) argues that "reading [provides]... more importantly... [students] with the rhetorical and structural knowledge they need to develop, modify, and activate schemata which are invaluable when writing." Content (knowledge of the world) and formal (knowledge of language) schemata are enhanced while reading i. e. background knowledge extension (Brown, 2000). Brainstorming and outlining activities, on the other hand, help students explore more the pre-writing stage skills through engaging them in an individual task completion for organization skills development.

Peer editing work sheets contains structured headings that guide students for peer correction and develop their self-assessment strategies. Besides, scoring rubrics included by the teacher at the last stage of evaluation engage students in the assessment process more properly. It provides information about what to exactly

focus on while evaluating the adequacy of their productions/ performances. At the end of each practice- focused session students end up with 9 to 10 documents to be included in their portfolio, yet their final paragraphs were assessed by the teacher and scores obtained were considered for summative purposes.
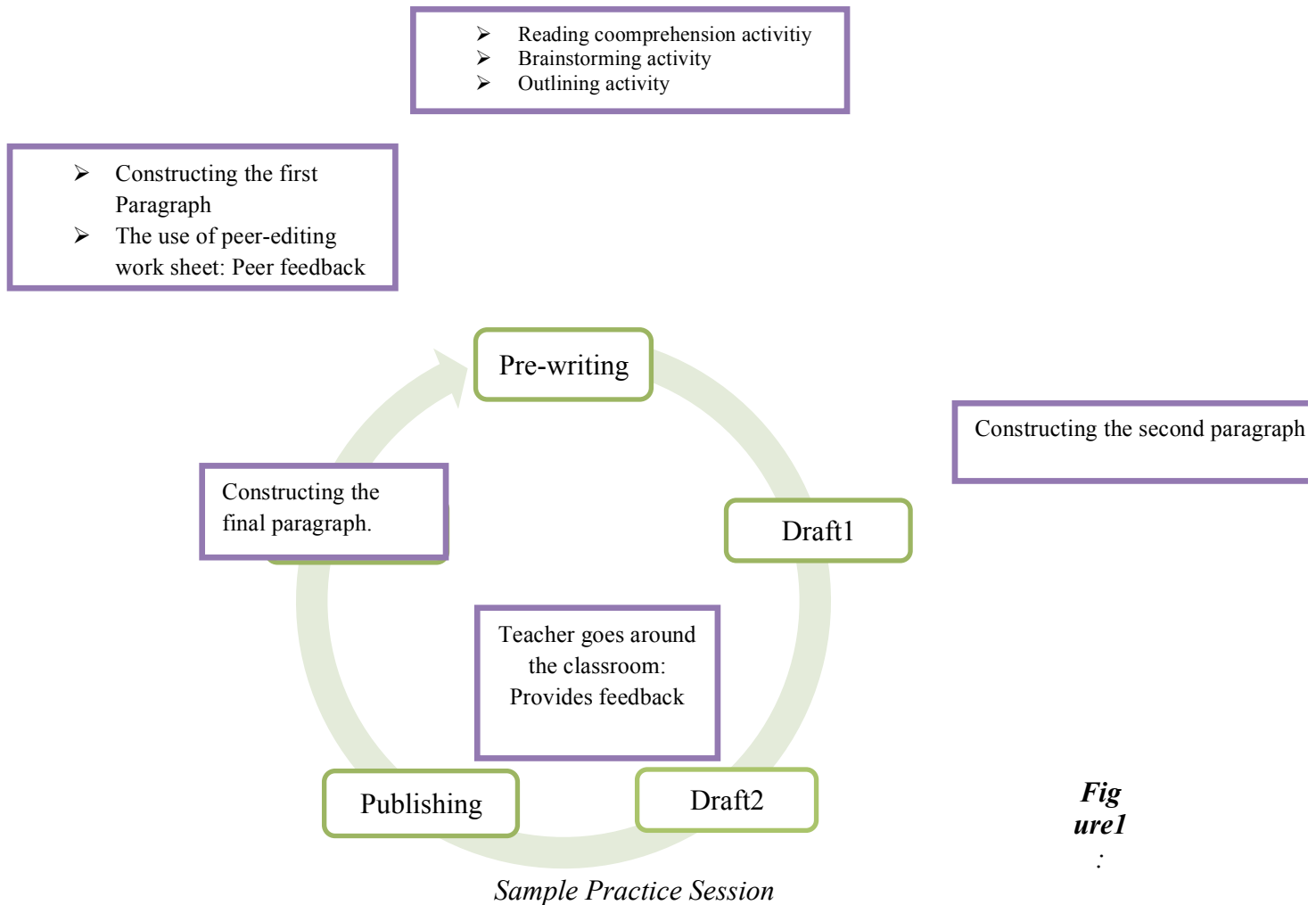
> ➤ Reading coomprehension activitiy
> ➤ Brainstorming activity
> ➤ Outlining activity

> ➤ Constructing the first Paragraph
> ➤ The use of peer-editing work sheet: Peer feedback

Pre-writing

Constructing the second paragraph

Constructing the final paragraph.

Draft1

Teacher goes around the classroom: Provides feedback

Publishing

Draft2

Figure1:

Sample Practice Session

Results and discussion

On the overall results the experimental group subjects' scores(Y) were more significant, compared with the scores of the control group's students(X). Besides, the experimental group means (My=11.12/ My'= 13.21) were significantly better than the control group's means (Mx=11.08/ Mx'= 11.31). It can be noticed from the means (Mx / My) that levels of students were homogeneous. At this stage, it can be said that the Experimental group was sensitive to the use of portfolios as an assessment tool (My'= 13.21/Mx'= 11.31). The hypothesis was claiming that assessment portfolios can promote students' ability to produce effective written texts. It is worth mentioning that both groups received the same working conditions of time (one hour and half) and space (classroom setting) while performing the task of producing a paragraph.

The t-test value for related data was used to check the difference between sets of scores at the level of both the experimental group and the control group as separate groups. Considering "figure2", the t-test value is Tx= 0.81, degree of freedom is df=

29, and at 95% level of confidence which is equal to 0.05 level of significance for one tailed test, the critical

	X	X'	Dx	Dx²
Total Sum	332,5	339,5	7.00	73.00
Mx	11,08	11,31		
(Dx)²	49.00			
N	30			
Degree Of Freedom= Nx-1	29			
Tx Value	0,81			
Critical Value	1.69			
Level Of Significance 1Tailed Test	0,05			

figure2: pre-post tests data summary of the control group

value is 1.69. Tx=0.81 is lower than 1.69 value which fails to reject the null hypothesis that Assessment portfolio is not effective. On the other hand, "figure3," Ty equals 4.12, degree of freedom is 29, and the critical value is 1.69 at 0.05 level of significance for one tailed test. Ty=4.12 is significantly higher than 1.69value which rejects the null hypothesis that assessment portfolio is not effective. Both results show that we must accept the alternative hypothesis: effectiveness of assessment portfolios. It could leave us say, as a first probative result, that assessment portfolios can be used for summative purposes.

	Y	Y'	Dy	Dy²
Total Sum	333,75	396,30	62,55	352,25
My	11,12	13,21		
(Dy) ²	3 912,50			
N	30			
Degree Of Freedom= Ny-1	29			
Ty Value	4,12			
Critical Value	1.69			
Level Of Significance 1 Tailed Test	0,05			

figure3: pre-post tests data summary of the experimental group

A t-test value for unrelated data was used to test the difference between the control and the experimental groups and to confirm our alternative hypothesis (figure4). With a level of confidence of 95% which equals 0.05 level of significance for two tailed test and with a degree of freedom equals to 29, the critical value is 2.01. T-test value (Txy) is 3.93, significantly higher than 2.01(critical value). As observed, the results confirm the alternative hypothesis that is our first research hypothesis: "*If English students are engaged in a portfolio system; then, their written productions would be promoted.*

Haliday and Hassan (1976; in Davies, 1995: 1-2) claimed the following:

> A text is a unit of language in use…and is not defined
> by its size… A text is best regarded as a semantic unit: a
> unit not of form but of meaning. A text has a texture and
> that is what distinguishes it from something not a text. It
> derives this texture from the fact that it functions as a
> unity with respect to its environment.

A text is discourse; it is used for communication. 'Discourse' is usually used to refer to written and spoken language, but 'text' is usually used to refer to written language. This means long 'Stretches' of combined sentences (Salkie, 1995: ix). A text is a set of combined sentences that are used to communicate meaning in a written form.

For a paragraph to stand alone as an informing piece of writing, it must cover the different aspects of text construction. Control group members missed the ability to write grammatically correct sentences, to construct adequately the modes of a selected genre, and to convey the exact meaning compared with the experimental group. The continuous criteria of the portfolio system combined with its cyclical process aspect allow students to produce texts, to receive all kinds of available feedback (peers and teacher), and to receive reinforcement materials such as model texts. They involve an explicit presentation of concepts that is "a clear, systematic, and direct way that promotes students mastery" of text structure and register (Hartman, 2008: 384).

	X	X²	Y	Y²
Total Sum	339,50	3 956,00	396,30	5 323,29
Means	11,32		13,21	
($\sum$X)²	115 260,25			
($\sum$Y)²	157 053,69			
Nx	30,00			
Ny	30,00			
Df= (Nx-1)+(Ny-1)	58,00			
Txy	-3,93			
Critical Value	2,01			
Level Of Significance for Two Tailed Test	0,05			

figure4: T- test (Txy) data summary of both groups

Figure5: Self-regulated Learning Processes Questinnaire Results (SRLPQuest)			
Experimental Group		Control Group	
Observation	Frequency-%	Observation	Frequency-%
Low	0- 0%	Low	0- 0%
Medium	12- 40%	Medium	25- 83.33%
High	18- 60%	High	5- 16.66%

Questionnaires provided a wider data that was calculated using the scale adopted from Oxford's scale used to calculated results of strategy inventory for language learning: SILL (1990).

"figure5" introduces a summary of the results obtained from the first questionnaire (SRLPQuest) that was adapted from the Oxfords' SILL (1990) to the actual situation and the teaching of writing. *Self-regulated learners are believed to have control over their own emotions, cognition, motives, and behaviours (Johnson, Serap & Al-mansour, 2013:266).* For these reasons, it was divided into six categories trying to investigate: strategies used to remember, cognitive processes used while writing, compensation strategies, planning/ organizing skills and self assessment strategies, self-reinforcement skills, and social skills.

Results obtained revealed that the majority of the control group students (83.33%) developed their learning processes with a medium level and 16.66% developed a high level of ability. Most students engaged in a portfolio system of assessment (60%) provided a high level of self-regulated learning processes and 40% developed a medium ability. Besides, both groups were free from students with low or no ability i.e. all the students were able of promoting their learning processes to become either medium or high self-regulated learners.

Observation	Figure6 : Attittude Questionnaire Results (AtQuest)			
	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	Scores	Frequency-%	Scores	Frequency- %
Low	1	0-0%	1	0-0%
	2	5- 16.66%	2	4-13.33
Medium	3	14- 46.66%	3	19- 63.33
High	4	9- 30%	4	6- 20%
	5	2-6.66%	5	1-3.33

« Figure6 » shows the scores' frequencies that were gathered from the attitude questionnaire: AtQuest. This questionnaire is designed to contain 5 scores. Both groups of students show great interest in the educational techniques that were used in written instruction. On the other hand, a mode of 4 to 5 students showed indifference in the instructional techniques that were used. Comparing results, it can be realized that assessment portfolio is a motivating instrument. Besides, our second hypothesis can be said to be accepted because of the difference noticed from the data obtained. This means that *If English students are engaged in a portfolio system; then, they would develop the key concept of self-regulated learning.*

Conclusion

It has become clear that assessment portfolio can serve as an effective tool of assessment and learning i.e. it can be used for both summative and formative purposes. Giving students the opportunity to think about their own learning processes, to discover new skills, to try various strategies, and to monitor their processes can promote their responsibilities towards their performances and can lower their reliance on their teachers. This aspect is believed to help student switch from bad production

to efficient and effective production. As a matter of fact, Learning to write and assessing a written text should not be separated into two different stages; they are complementary. For students to promote their productions, they need to learn how to assess their productions and their way of producing to be able of correcting their own mistakes. This is exactly what the effect of Assessment Portfolio reveals.

References

Brown, H. D., 2000. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. 4th Ed.. NY: Addison

   Wesley Longman.

 Bryant, S.L. and Timmins A. A., 2002. *Portfolio Assessment: Instructional Guide Using*

   Portfolio Assessment to Enhance Students Learning. 2nd Ed. Hong Kong: the HongKong

   Institution of Education.

Cohen, Lewis, Marrion L. and Marrion K., 2004. *A Guide to Teaching Practice*.

   5th Ed. London: Routledge.

Davies, F., 1995. *Introducing Reading*. UK: Penguin Books.

Green, Susan K. and Johnson, R., 2010. *Assessment is Essential*. N Y: McCrow Hill.Higher

   Eductaion.

Hamp-Lyons, Liz, 2006. Feedback in Portfolio-Based Writing Courses. In: K. Hyland and F.

   Hyland Eds. 2006. *Feedback in Second Language Writing: Contexts and Issues.*

   Cambridge:Cambridge University Press. pp.140-161.

Harmer, J., 2004. *How to Teach Writing*. Pearson Education Limited.

Hyland, K., 2009b. *Teaching and Researching Writing*. 2nd Ed. Christopher N.

   Candlin & David R. Hall Eds. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.

Hyland, K., 2003a. *Second Language Writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, J. M., 2001. Reflective Teaching in ELT. In: M. Celce-Muria Ed.*Teaching English*

   as a Second or Foreing Language. 2001. 3rd ed. Boston: Heinle and heinle Thomson

   Learning. pp.499-514.

Nunan, D., 1988. *The Learner-Centred Curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University

   Press.

O'Malley, M. J. and Pierce L. V., 1996. *Authentic Assessment for English*

Language Learniners: Practical Approaches for Teachers. Virginia: Addison-Wesley

Publishing Company.

Oxford, R. L., 1990. *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher should Know*.

Newbury House: NY.

Richards, J. C. and Farrell T.S., 2005. *Professional Development for Language*

Teachers: Strategies for Teacher Learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Salkie, R., 1995. *Text and Discourse Analysis*. Routledge.

Topping, K., 2001. *Thinking Reading Writing: A Practical Guide to Paired Learning with*

Perrs, Parents and Volunteers. London: BookEns Limited.

Tribble, C., 1996. *Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hartman, P., 2008. Explicit Teaching. In: Salkind, N. J. Ed., 2008. *Encyclopedia of*

Educational Psychology. California: SAGE Publications. pp. 384-6.