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Letter Writing

Introduction

Letter writing remains an essential skill in education. Regardless of the development in technology, text messages, chats and emails, letters still remain an important aspect of human communication. Different letters, job applications, letters of complaint, thank you letters, making suggestions and letters requesting changes, will have to be written at some point. This highlights the importance of teaching students the art of letter writing.

According to Knapp and Watkins (p. 14) this would encourage communication, handwriting and social skills. Students should, therefore, be taught and encouraged to write and structure letters.

In any teaching to write exercise, it is necessary to establish the starting point. Newman, et al (p. 276) highlights the importance of beginning any writing by understanding the needs and interests of the students. The sentiments of the author are supported by Smart, Hicks, and Melton (p. 72)

who suggests the necessity to discover these needs and interests through informal chats. This will allow the teacher to understand the writing tasks that can suit the needs of the students, and teach them from the perspective of fulfilling these needs. At this point, the teacher assists the students to prioritize tasks. To begin, it is important for the teacher to collect samples from writing tasks in real life. These will provide the students the necessary understanding of what is required in letter writing (Jones, Clark and Reutzel, p. 81).

A Structured Approach is the most effective approach to teaching letter writing. In any teaching context where language teasing is taking place, Newman, et al (p. 277) suggests the importance of developing the writing skill in the students. This suggests the importance of involving the learners in language-focused learning, meaning-focused use, and fluency development. It is important for the teacher to tell the students something and put them in a place where there is acceptance of the information given (Knapp and Watkins, 27). In achieving this, there is demand for the students to learn the various kinds of texts. Various types of letters require that the students learn how to write the different texts as the context demand.

The Language Experience approach can play a critical role for the teacher in starting and improving letter writing among the students, to practice in writing and to develop the writing skills further. This, according to Knapp and Watkins (p. 82) suggest the approach where the teacher applies the language and grammar of the students to develop writing and reading materials. Using the materials, the teacher should encourage the students to keep practicing letter writing to perfect the skills. This should also assume

the language experience approach. The effectiveness of the approach emerges from the fact that the learners do not necessarily worry about how to spell and how to write, allowing them time to focus on the writing's physical aspects.

In writing letters, the main problem is looking out for the mistakes that can be made in planning, formatting, and using the language (Smart, Hicks, and Melton, p. 73). Teaching letters, as a genre, requires that the students are taught how to structure and format a letter. The structure of procedural writing should be developed in an environment where the writer can be successful in letter writing. To learn, it is necessary that the students are engaged in the learning process, collaborating in analysis, interpreting and constructing the letter. Such processes and skills necessitate modeling, sharing and guiding before they can be successfully practiced in an independent writing process. This also allows for writing to be a pathway to the learning process.

Because of the possible problems in letter writing, the teacher is required to pay particular attention to the kinds of mistakes and consider them in teaching letter writing. These issues can be overcome using the process-genre approach. This is an approach that is essentially a synthesis of various concepts, borrowing from the genre-based approach and process-based approach (Jones, Clark and Reutzel, p. 88). The process approach makes it possible for recursive process of writing like prewriting, drafting, editing, and revision. The genre-based approach, on the other hand, allows understanding of things such as comprehension of the context, certain text features and the overall purpose of writing. Additionally, the teacher makes

it possible for the learners to acquire the input in developing their skills and ability in letter writing (Smart, Hicks, and Melton, p. 74)

Use of process-genre approach has been revealed in research to be an effective approach to teaching writing, especially in letter writing. The findings from research have showed improvement among students where the teacher uses this approach to teaching letter writing. Additionally, the responses of students to the use of the process genre approach to teaching letter writing have been showed to be positive. This suggests the importance of using this effective approach to teaching students how to write letters better, as well as develop other writing, communication and social skills (Newman, et al p. 277).

Conclusion

Letter writing is a necessary skill for students, and it is necessary for the teachers to understand how well to develop this skill. While there are several approaches to teaching letter writing, process-genre approach has revealed a great level of effectiveness in teaching this area. This will allow learning not only letter writing, but other forms of writing in the learning process.

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