

## Using Wikipedia As A Model To Improve Paragraph Writing Skill: A collaborative writing activity

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*Abstract: Writing is an activity that is considered difficult for both native and non native speakers, therefore it is important for the teacher to provide a meaningful activity that will help students practice their writing skill more easily. Collaborative writing is one of the activities in writing process that is used to support students in order to get accustomed to peer reviewing their friends' work as well as to learn from one another within the group. These are useful activities for students since during the writing process they tend to ask many things to the instructor which makes them to be less independent and insecure writers. By using Wikipedia which is an open encyclopedia that is written collaborately by many writers, writing instruction can be done more interestingly and create a dynamic collaboration among students since they have to work in a group to write a certain topic based on their own choice. This study shows how students become more confident in developing their ideas and shows a great teamwork among them when they decide what topic to write and the sub topics for each member. Although they work in group, each student is responsible with their own parts at first. Since the assignment gives more freedom to all students in creating their Wikipedia, they become more creative in expressing their ideas with the help of all members in the group. This paper also presents how this collaborative assignment is conducted in order to maximize the students' writing improvement. To conclude, this activity may give a writing instructor an alternative task that is useful for students and teacher as well.*

*Keywords: wikipedia, collaborative writing, paragraph writing.*

### **Introduction**

Writing is a struggle against silence. What Carlos Fuentes, A Mexican Novelist, said perhaps refer to what experts claimed that writing is a complex activity that covers cognitive and metacognitive activities such as brainstorming, planning, outlining, organizing, drafting, and editing (Negari, 2011). Not enough to know the process but a writer needs to have sufficient knowledge about the content and the language competence as well. Therefore, writing takes much of its process as a struggle between the writer and his thought. How s/he retells and manage his/her though into a piece of writing that can be well understood by the readers is a long process that might frustrate every writer especially the beginner ones. This situation might also give more responsibility for the writing instructor to be creative and careful in choosing what activity that might be suitable and painless for their students.

In many beginner writing classes there is a tendency that students feel insecure to write in English as they acknowledge that they also have less writing experience in L1. Study show that those who are good at their L1 writing tend to be better in their L2 writing as well (Huang, Liang, Dracopoulos: 2011). Consequently, these students are likely to face difficulties in their first attempt in writing English paragraph.

Some problems that students might face when writing English are commonly deal with the content, the grammar, the punctuation, how to make topic sentence, organization and mental block. Based on the students self report paragraph, they mention those problems as the main aspects that trouble them during the writing process. Without having adequate time to read English material they will not be able to develop their writing skill either to learn how a good paragraph is written. For these, the collaborative writing activity by using Wikipedia can be undertaken to improve students' writing skill.

### **Collaborative Writing Skill**

Collaborative writing is a writing joint production of two or more writers (Storch, 2011: 275). There are many patterns that are developed by different experts, one of them proposed by Saunders (in Mutwarasibo: 2013). He proposed a five-collaborative-writing task namely; *co-writing*, *co-publishing*, *co-responding*, *co-editing* and *writer-helping*. In these tasks, all is done collaboratively started from the planning, reviewing and correcting stages. Among the stages, there is one stage, the co-publishing that delegates each member to write a certain part individually. And then share the draft to be corrected by one of the members that has been chosen or selected before in co-responding and co-editing stage.

Some advantages have been identified in applying collaborative writing in the class. Study by Mulligan and Garofalo (2011) highlights some comments that are gathered from their respondents into five aspects. The first is social skills development; the second, stress reduction and time-saving benefits; the third, motivational effects; the fourth, improvement in the content of their writing; and the fifth, gaining in grammatical and structural proficiency. It indicates that collaborative learning boost the quality of students' writing as they achieve some improvement on many aspects that are significantly important for a writer during the process of writing. Besides, it foster self confidence as well as lower the anxiety which usually becomes the cause of psychological problem that could inhibit the process of developing ideas. To put students with diverse abilities in on group is likely an encouraging situation for all the members as they can help each other and produce better writing as they collaborate.

### **Wikipedia as a Model of Paragraph Writing**

Wikipedia is a free content encyclopedia website that provides a wide range of topics which is written collaboratively by many writers in the world. It is written in many languages including

English and it becomes the largest reference website. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>). The organization of Wikipedia is in the form of essay consisting some paragraphs as the body of the essay so that by looking at how a topic is organized in Wikipedia, students learn how to divide the topics into well organized paragraphs. Besides, by using Wikipedia, students also learn read to write as they need to read the content of Wikipedia and then decide what and how to make their own Wiki.

By taking the principles of Wikipedia, teacher asks the students to work in group and observe any topic that they want to read in order to find out more about the topic as well as learn how Wikipedia arranges the ideas in its page. Some of Wikipedia pages are written as a list and the rest in the form of featured article. Teacher needs to makes sure that students read the featured article page so that they can learn the organization and get some more information about the topic they wish to write.

### **The procedures**

#### **1. Pre-writing**

This activity is a group work which means that the class is divided into some group consisting of five to six students. Each group discusses the topic that they want to choose as well as the sub topics for each member. During the pre-writing process, teacher gives an illustration about how each group to do the work and use wikipedia as the model for their writing. Ask students to googling the same topic for example, a famous group band “Ungu” and find the wikipedia page talking about that group. By observing the page about “Ungu” students will get the example of how a topic is organized in wikipedia and what sub topics provided there. This phase teaches students to learn how to organize the idea and suggest what kind of topics that might be broad enough to be taken as a main idea of a paragraph. Based on the previous study conducted in the same class, it is found that making a good topic sentence becomes one of the problems faced by these students.

After discussing and deciding the topic and the sub topics as well, each group should have a consultation session with the writing instructor not only to confirm the topic but also discuss the subtopics. It is the time for each student to say what ideas that they plan to write as their individual work. Sometimes, students might still face difficulties to find connection of each sub topic. For this, teacher might give suggestion or solution for them.

### **During the Writing process**

In this session, each student is working by themselves to write their parts first. Although originally a collaborative writing suggests that every piece of writing is done collaborately, for the sake of the writing class objective, an adjustment is made in order to make the students able to write the paragraph by themselves. Yet, students might ask the other members to help them check their sentences, grammar, spelling or the organization as well as the content. As their scores are based on the group work not individual one, this grading system should be mentioned since the beginning of the lesson in order to motivate them working collaboratively and help each other. Discussion,

proofreading, and correcting take place during this process. When a student gets stuck with the idea, she/he might see what others do with their parts and look for some suggestion from the members. Some students could face mental block as they cannot develop their ideas. Member with better critical thinking skill could be a valuable asset because s/he can give some handy ideas and help develop the paragraph.

### **Post writing**

In this phase, before submitting the work, every group could do the peer review of each paragraph. So, every member has a job to review their friend's work in order to get the best result. During this post writing, students will develop their awareness of writing components that they need to check and observe while reviewing their friend's work. By doing so, it teaches them to be more independent writer and more confident in writing. It also reduces the teacher's burden in correcting the students' work as it entails less grading time for the instructor. Moreover, teacher may create a group on Facebook or blog to post the result of the students, but for this case the writer asked the students to make it as a collection of articles with their photos next to the paragraph they wrote. It also shows how students should be proud of their work as well as to build their creativity as they are given any freedom to arrange their paragraphs.

### **The subjects**

The subjects of this case study are the second semester students who took writing 2 class. There were 36 students in this class and most of them did not have experience in writing English. In the first composition they asked to write, it was found that they could not make correct topic sentence, poor organization and grammatical knowledge as well as lots of mistake in punctuation. Due these problems, the instructor started asking the students to type the paragraph using Microsoft word in order to reduce the error in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

### **The result**

Some students come up with interesting and distinctive topics which are not even being thought of previously as they only rely on what the lecturer gives as examples. By looking up some Wikipedia topics, however, they challenge themselves with so many interesting topics and have fun with their writings. Besides, they show more interest and high motivation in doing their projects as they choose their own topics. In line with it, Huang (4: 2008) finds out that the level of difficulty in writing is based on the familiarity of topics that students have to write. The more familiar the topic, the easier the burden they feel to write. Thus, it is a right a decision to let the students choose the topic in order to build their confidence as they believe to write better with friendly topic. They also learn to do a peer-review correctly and become more alert of their writing process while at first they totally clueless about the editing and revising stage. Besides that, by working with other students, it builds their social and communication skills which consequently develop their senses of understanding toward each other.

## Conclusion

This activity could become one of the alternative tasks that teacher uses in writing class especially for beginners since they still learn how to write paragraph and they do not have lots experiences in writing. To give an enjoyable activity will motivate students' writing interest as well as build students' confidence. Moreover, Wikipedia might become a beneficial page for students to get information about countless topics and learn how a broad topic is arranged into subtopics in the form of paragraph. All in all writing instructor could use this media to help him/her create a fun and interactive writing assignment.

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>

## Curriculum Vitae:

Asih santihastuti is a full time lecturer of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Jember University. She got her master degree from The State University of Malang in 2012 majoring in English education. Paragraph writing, used to be writing 2, is one of the classes that she teaches besides literature and prose as her major subjects. She is interested in second language writing, discourse analysis, computer-mediated-communication and media in language instructions.