

The Distinction Between Process Based and Product Based Approaches to Teaching Writing and Its Effects on Classroom Methodology

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1. Introduction

Traditional theories concerning the traditional product based approach to writing put emphasis on accuracy of produced texts, focusing on areas such as correct grammar, spelling and usage. However, since the emergence of a process based approach out of recent research into strategies used by writers during composition, a movement has developed to integrate this with a product based approach (Hedge, 1994). Recently, while more attention has been paid to process based approaches, in Japan the teaching of writing is still strongly grounded in the teaching of grammar. Now, it is a turning point for Japanese English teaching to think about a further direction to take. First, in section 2, I shall explain the basic theories of product based and process based approaches. Then, in section 3, I shall discuss what practical effects these approaches have on the classroom methodology and give some example activities. Finally, I shall shift my focus to the teaching of writing in the Japanese context. Some examples are shown from the most widely used senior high school writing textbook in Japan, *Powwow English Writing 2nd Edition* (1998). I look at some problems revealed in the textbook. I shall suggest

solutions to the problems raised and outline implications for teaching writing in Japan in the future.

2. Theories of product based and process based approaches

The distinction between basic theories concerning product based and process based approaches are observed from four points of view: 1) what kinds of skills are involved?, 2) What kinds of activities are used?, 3) What kind of feedback is effective? And 4) What kind of evaluation is given?

Eight component skills that writers need are shown by Hedge (1988: 8):

1. getting the grammar right
2. having a range of vocabulary
3. punctuating meaningfully
4. using the conventions of layout correctly, e. g. in letters
5. spelling accurately
6. using a range of sentence structures
7. linking ideas and information across sentences to develop a topic
8. developing and organising the content clearly and convincingly

The emphasis is laid on written texts in the composition product based approach. The traditional approach focuses exclusively on correct grammar, composing practice, spelling and usage such as 1 and 5. Accordingly, feedback focuses on form (e. g. grammar and mechanics). Fathman and Whalley's research (1990) reveals that students can improve grammatical accuracy when teachers underline

grammatical errors in the students' texts, which effectively encourages students to be aware of grammatical structures. Recently, the focus of current product based approach has been expanded to include not only accuracy but also integration with process based approach (Hedge, 1994). As one of its typical activities, observation of the range of written texts has been raised. Firstly, this activity can make students notice the conventions and style of various types of writing, for example, poems, newspaper articles, personal letters, letters of application, and academic essays. Secondly, the organisation of texts, which differs according to purpose, can be observed through their analysis. Attention can be drawn to the differences between various discourse types, for example, process description, cause and effect, problem-solving, contrast and comparison, and classification. Thirdly, analysis of the linguistic features in coherent sentences and paragraphs can make students conscious of logical related sequences. This enables students to use effective cohesive devices, such as *however, therefore, in spite of, and, but* etc. (Hedge, 1994). The means of evaluating production employed would depend on the focused skills mentioned above (Hedge, 1988: 8). While the traditional product oriented approach lays emphasis on accuracy such as 1 and 5 and partly 3, the current product based approach attempts to build up all of these eight skills. Thus, they will also be criteria for assessment. For example, observation of the range of written texts is mainly related to 4, analysis of the differences between discourse types is 8, and use of cohesive devices is 7.

Process based approach focuses on writers and their writing process. Hedge (1994) proposes three characteristics of a good writer's process:

1. planning activities with a sense of purpose

2. being aware of audience with a sense of audience
3. reviewing and revising with a sense of direction in writing

Firstly, students can prepare for effective writing through practices like brainstorming, sharing information, discussing the topics, and thinking of logical sentences in class. Secondly, successful writers are aware of their readers. They can communicate with readers through written texts. The selection of appropriate content and style depends on a sense of audience. Student writers need to keep in mind to whom they are writing, what they need to say, and always think about how they can make their writing accessible to their reader while they are writing. Thirdly, successful writers can think, write and revise not only in a linear but in a recursive process. Regarding activities, more authentic and anxiety-free, natural, meaningful activities are necessary in the classroom (Brookes and Grundy, 1990). They can be useful in the process of writing, for example, 'communicative speaking or listening activities', 'discovering ideas', and 'assessing the accuracy and effectiveness of one's own writing, and reformulating it'. In order to improve content, general comments giving encouragement and suggesting revisions will be helpful (Fathman and Whalley, 1990). Hedge (1994) introduces techniques of revision such as 'self-monitoring, exchanging work for peer review, conferencing with the teacher, class revision of selected drafts, proofreading exercises and reformulation procedures.' The importance of conferencing, in which the teacher can engage in conversation with individuals about their writing and support them to revise more effectively is emphasised.

The principles of these two approaches cannot be separated but should be integrated. Product based and process based approaches are

like two parts of the same circle. It cannot be said which should be the first or the second. Fathman and Whalley (1990) propose content and form feedback should occur simultaneously. Also, they emphasise the importance of rewriting, no matter which teacher's feedback focuses on form (grammatical errors) or content. This proves these two approaches are related to each other. Brookes and Grundy (1990) agree that 'the distinction between both product and process is not clear cut. Sometimes they are alternative final products for different relationship.' Hence these two approaches cannot be separately used, but rather integrally and either of them cannot be overemphasised.

3. Practical effects of product based and process based approaches on classroom methodology

Analysis of written texts will be an effective not only in product based but also in process based approaches. In a product approach, students can learn structure features and writing skills from the various genres of model texts and later reflect what they have learned on their own writing. An appropriate activity is extracted from *Writing* (Hedge, 1998: 62) in Appendix 1. There are three texts, whose topic is the same 'The River Thames', but whose level of formality in the style or aimed target audience is different. Students are asked to tell the differences among them and this enables them to become more aware of their own readers in their later writing. Teachers can build up a checklist of forms (letters, essays, reports) and functions (narrative, description, comparison, and contrast) and show students how the features and organisation of these different written products differ from one another.

Secondly, in case of a process based approach, the same texts can

be used in a different procedure. Before the model texts are shown, students are asked to write a paragraph about a different topic from that in the model, but in the same form. For example, the form of the second text in Appendix 1 is a private letter, whose topic is 'The River Thames'. Students are required to write a letter about a different topic, for example, 'Telephone'. After they finish writing a private letter about 'Telephone', the model text is shown. They can then learn the private letter's style or features by comparing the model text and their letters. For instance, a substantial amount of abbreviations and personal pronouns are used in private letters. The reason for choosing the different topic is that if the topic is the same, students might think that the model text is "the" answer. This will prevent them from expanding their own ideas. The purpose of this activity is to learn structural features and writing skills from the model text and later reflect about what they have learned in relation to their own writing in the process to revise their writing.

Even if the same text is used in product and process based approaches, their procedures of how to use the texts are the opposite. In a product based approach, the model texts are shown first. One advantage of this is that students can explicitly be aware of different features among various kinds of texts at one time. Teachers can easily give clear answers, therefore, the teaching methodology will be more teacher-centred. However, accurate recognition does not always mean accurate production. Also, this may lead to restricting students' ideas. On the other hand, in a process based approach, the model texts are given at the end or in the middle of the writing process, thus students have chances to make their writing creative and the teaching methodology will be more student-centred. Various applications or

interpretations of the texts are possible. However, this feature might be a drawback as well, because teachers cannot give one correct answer. In this case student control may become an issue, especially in a large class.

4. Adaptation of product based and process based approaches in the Japanese context

While there is a movement to integrate product based and process based approaches, the strong influence of traditional product oriented methodology can clearly be seen in the writing textbook most widely used in senior high schools in Japan (see Appendix 2: *POWWOW English Writing 2nd Edition*, 1998: 76-77). An example task is given from this textbook. This aim of this chapter is apparently to develop grammatical ability in the section LEARN, FOCUS & TRY < FURTHER STUDY and PRACTICE 1, 2. with grammar exercised and to write a paragraph in section PRACTICE 3. Targeted grammar structures here are ‘It seems that...’ and ‘seldom’. All grammar exercises are completing sentences by putting the appropriate words to match with Japanese translation given. Although the topic of the paragraph writing is ‘jeans’, the instructions imply students should use the targeted grammar structures ‘It seems that...’ and ‘seldom’.

What practical effects on the classroom methodology can be thought from these activities? In the grammar exercises, teachers tend to give only one correct answer, because the language is strictly controlled by Japanese translation. Even in paragraph writing, language that the students can use is controlled by the instructions to use the target grammar structures. If the language is restricted before writing, it would be difficult for students to think creatively. Also, they will

focus on grammatical accuracy. Another problem is that the aims of these activities are not sufficiently categorised in the eight component skills proposed by Hedge (see Table 1). Most of the activities are categorized in the first category, getting the grammar right, and at best the fifth, spelling accurately, can be considered. The reason I put '?' in the second and sixth categories is because the activities in *POWWOW English Writing* seem not to treat a range of but rather limited vocabulary or sentence structures. These activities might be an extreme example of the failure of the traditional product based approach. Grammar is important and should not be neglected, however, a purely grammar focused approach does not encourage creative flow in paragraph writing.

Table 1: Analysis of activities in *POWWOW English Writing*

8 component skills by Hedge (1988: 8)	aims of activities
1. getting the grammar right	+
2. having a range of vocabulary	?
3. punctuating meaningfully	—
4. using the conventions of layout correctly, e. g. in letters	—
5. spelling accurately	+
6. using a range of sentence structures	?
7. linking ideas and information across sentences to develop a topic	—
8. developing and organising the content clearly and convincingly	—

As it is mentioned in section 2 and 3, recent research has been focused on integrating the product and process approaches. The teaching of writing in Japan is still strongly connected with the so called traditional product based approach I believe. It should become more student-centred, therefore, it is necessary to adapt the current product based approach and process based approaches in the teaching of writing in Japan. However, the basis should be a product approach. One reason for this is that there is a caution to suddenly change

traditional approach. Another is that in an EFL context learners do not have chances to use English, especially writing.

Two main problems of the activities in Appendix 2 have been raised: 1) There is little grading from sentence to paragraph level activities. And 2) The ultimate aim is to improve grammatical ability. As a solution to these problems in the Japanese English textbook, more activities to develop writing skills should be added before shifting to a paragraph writing activity. For example, pre-activities such as brainstorming, can be used to develop ideas that may lead to effective writing. Another solution is to make the ultimate goal the writing of a paragraph rather than accurate grammar production. Grammatical ability should be learned in the context of paragraph writing. The eight component skills explained in section 2 are connected with one another and should be integrated, therefore, each skill cannot be acquired in chronological order. When students write a paragraph, they can learn how to integrate these skills.

Here I propose a model to change original activities in the textbook into a more effective ones taking consideration of the eight component skills. My aim is not to totally change the original activities but to adapt them to integrate product based and process based approaches. I invent revised activities using “Cause and Effect” (Jordan, 1980/1990: 56-61). The ultimate aim is to achieve cause and effect skills by writing a paragraph (see Appendix 3). The most obvious change between the original and revised activities is that while the original activities are aimed at students’ acquisition of grammatical knowledge, namely how to use “It seems that...” and “seldom”, the revised activities are aimed at achieving using “Cause and Effect skills” by writing a paragraph. I deleted the first three sections of the original

activities in the revised ones, because there is little connection between targeted grammar and the writing of the paragraph. I replace them with three pre-activities, which are sentence level and aimed to build up structural expressions for cause and effect skills before paragraph writing. Also brainstorming is used to develop ideas to lead to effective writing. In a while-activity, there is no change about the topic, 'jeans', for students' writing in the original activities. While cause and effect skills are academic, the topic, 'jeans' is more strongly related with daily life. However, the targeted students are children who also need to acquire academic skills such as paragraph structures. Therefore, I do not consider this combination as a problem, but rather, as an asset. As a post-activity, a peer evaluation activity is added. Sometimes, feedback from students is more beneficial than from teachers. The procedure of using an evaluation sheet is as follows: the teacher passes students' writing at random, students are required to read other students' writing and write some comments and go through the same procedure several times. An advantage of this is that students can see other students' writing. The teacher can do class revision of selected drafts after collecting their writing.

Table 2 : Analysis of activities in *POWWOW English Writing* in revised version

8 component skills by Hedge (1988: 8)	aims of activities
1. getting the grammar right	+ → +
2. having a range of vocabulary	? → +
3. punctuating meaningfully	— → —
4. using the conventions of layout correctly, e. g. in letters	— → —
5. spelling accurately	+ → +
6. using a range of sentence structures	? → +
7. linking ideas and information across sentences to develop a topic	— → +
8. developing and organising the content clearly and convincingly	— → +

Improved points, 2, 6, 7 and 8, can be seen in Table 2. In pre-

activity 1) (see Appendix 3), the practice of brainstorming and structure and vocabulary for cause & effect covers 1), 1, 2, 5, and in pre-activity 2), 7 and 8 can be developed before paragraph writing. These activities are based on a product oriented approach. In while- and post-activities, the influence of a process based approach can be shown such as planning, awareness of audience, peer evaluation and reviewing & revising. The most important thing is that these activities are gradually built up, from sentence level to paragraph level.

5. Conclusion

The distinction between basic theories concerning product based and process based approaches has been observed from four points of view; skills, activities, feedback, and evaluation. The basic theories are summarised mainly by using Hedge's definitions (1988/1994); eight component skills that writers need and three characteristics of a good writer's process. Product based approach and process based approaches cannot be separated but should be integrated. Regarding their practical effects, the main difference is that in a product based approach, the model texts are shown at first, however, in a process based approach, the model texts are given at the end or in the middle of writing process. The former teaching methodology will be more teacher-centred and the latter will be more student-centred. In order to effectively adapt these two approaches in the Japanese context, first main two problems in the writing textbooks are raised: 1) There is little grading from sentence to paragraph level activities. And 2) The ultimate aim is to improve grammatical ability. Then, the revised activities are invented to solve these problems based on the approaches. Although Japanese English teaching has traditionally depended on

textbooks and has thought highly of them, most Japanese English teachers seem not to pay attention to evaluation of textbooks. If there is no problem in textbooks, this may not be an issue. However, I found several problems in just the one textbook examined. Therefore, we should be more aware of what good textbooks or materials are and how we can evaluate and revise them.

References

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Appendix 1

COMMUNICATING

Look, for example, at these texts which cover the same topic, 'The River Thames'. It is easy to tell from the selection of content, the level of formality in the style, etc., what kind of audience each has been written for. Each would be found in a certain context.

The Thames retains a living role in the life of London and its region; even the dwellers in the far suburbs, in Barnet or in Purley, and in the towns beyond, are in large measure dependent upon the work accomplished along its banks. The Houses of Parliament and the government offices of County Hall. Along the former marshlands of Thames-side stand great industrial plants, and through the heart of London remains the major port of the country. The strength of the forces that create the region and determine its changing character derives momentum from the site on the river-bank at the crossing-place of routes of national, indeed of international, importance. And not only the region but also the whole nation, through its capital, enjoys the geographical advantages of this favoured site for its own internal government and trade and for contact and commerce with Europe and the world beyond.

Our house is quite close to Kew Pier which is where the sightseeing boats arrive from Westminster Bridge—full of tourists who've come to see the Botanical Gardens. Of course, that means it's always busy in the summer—which can be annoying. But, generally speaking, I like living by the river. In fact, I think ours is the best bit of the Thames. When you come, I'll take you to Kew Gardens and to Syon House on the opposite side of the river. There's a very old pub, too, not far away 'The London Apprentice' where we can go for lunch. And we can take a boat down to Westminster and look at the Abby and the House of Parliament

The fascination of a river lies, perhaps, in the variety of activities that it inspires, and the Thames is no exception.

For some—the boatmen and watermen—it is their source of livelihood; for others—the fishermen, yachtsmen, rowers and sightseers - It provides relaxation and pleasure. It's a never-ending bank of resources on which both the amateur and the professional can draw, and yet despite constant use the stimulus never slackens.

While the world rushes noisily and grimly past on either side the Thames flows on, silent and peaceful, providing a graceful setting for the elegant buildings on its banks. Painters like Turner, Whistler, Canaletto and Rowlandson have captured its varying moods and colours, whilst Wren, Barry, Hawksmoor and other architects have been stimulated into designing noble buildings. Writers like Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle, Fielding, and George Eliot found

near the Thames the atmosphere and the characters the needed; crossing the river are numerous bridges and tunnels which brilliant engineers Rennie, Brunel, Bazalgette and others were commissioned to design to meet demands for improved communications. Thus the Thames has attracted to itself a variety of unsurpassed skills on which tourists can feast their eyes. Add to this the fact that the Thames has witnessed a succession of momentous historical events and developments and you have one of the great rivers of the world. As long as Europe dominated world history and Britain was master of Europe, so the Thames remained a centre of action. The action is quieter now, less dramatic, but by taking a trip on London's river you will be able to relive some of that past excitement, understand the changes that have occurred over the centuries, and glimpse some of the splendour that is the Thames.

Appendix 2: Original activity

(Powwow English Writing 2nd Edition, 1998: 76-77)

32 衣服

It seems that she likes jeans very much.

LEARN

- | | |
|--|---|
| ① 久美子はジーンズをはくのが好きです。彼女がスカートをはいているのを見たことはほとんどありません。 | Kumiko likes wearing jeans. I have seldom seen her in a skirt. |
| ② おそらくジーンズのほうがスカートよりも格好がいいと思っているのでしょ。彼女はいろいろなジーンズを集めることに興味があるようです。 | She probably believes jeans are more stylish than skirts. It seems that she is interested in collecting various kinds of jeans. |

FOCUS & TRY

- ④ **It seems that** dark colors are getting more popular.

→ It seems that ... : 「…であるように思われる」

TRY ▶ 日本語の意味になるように、かっこのなかに適当な語を入れなさい。(Complete the sentences by putting the appropriate words to match with Japanese translation given.)

- 絵美は着る物にとっても気をつかうようです。
It () () Emi pays much attention to her clothes.
- ロング・スカートがまた流行しだしたようです。
() () that long skirts have come back in fashion.
- スティーブは着物に興味があるようでした。
It () () Steve () interested in kimonos.

- ⑧ Young women **seldom** wear kimonos these days.

→ seldom : 「めったに～しない」

TRY ▶ かっこのなかの日本語の意味にあたる語句を空所に入れなさい。(Complete the sentences by putting the appropriate words to match with Japanese translation given.)

- I a coat at all even in winter. (着ない)
I a coat even in winter. (めったに着ない)
- My sister a hat at all even in summer. (かぶらない)
My sister a hat even in summer. (めったにかぶらない)

FURTHER STUDY

- ① a. 母はそのワンピースが気に入ってないように思えました。

It did not seem that my mother liked the one-piece dress.

- b. 健は家に帰る途中で手袋を片方なくしたようです。

It appears that Ken has lost a glove on his way home.

→ a. b. の文はそれぞれ次のように書きかえることができる。

- a'. My mother did not **seem to like** the one-piece dress.

- b'. Ken **appears to have lost** a glove on his way home.

- ② a. 私はなぜミニスカートがまた流行するのかほとんど理解できません。

I can hardly understand why miniskirts are black in fashion.

- b. このクラスにはレインコートを持っている男子はほとんどいません。

Few boys in this class have a raincoat.

PRACTICE

- Ⅰ 日本語の意味を表す 2 通りの英文を完成しなさい。(Complete the two kinds of sentences to match with Japanese translation given.)

1. このネクタイはこの上着に合いそうです。

a. This tie () () go with this jacket.

b. () () that this tie () with this jacket.

2. 由美は新しいかばんをずっとほしがっていたようです。

a. Yumi () () () wanted a new bag for a long time.

b. () () that Yumi () wanted a new bag for a long time.

- Ⅱ 日本語の意味になるように、空所をうめなさい。(Complete the sentences by putting the appropriate words to match with Japanese translation given.)

1. この学校の生徒で冬に手袋をするものはほとんどいません。

..... in winter.

2. 私は衣服に興味がないので、最新の流行についてほとんど知りません。

Since I am not, the latest fashion.

- Ⅲ LEARN の文を参考に、次の質問に対する答えを利用して、ジーンズについてまとめた内容の英文を書きなさい。(Write a paragraph about jeans using your answers for the following questions with reference to the sentences in LEARN section.)

.....

.....

.....

Appendix 3: Revised activity

Pre-activity

- 1 Practice to use expressions for cause and effect

Connectives and Markers

Look carefully at the *Structure and Vocabulary Aid*, and then do the following exercises.

A. The parts of the sentences below have been mixed up. Join the 6 parts on the left with the correct parts from the 9 on the right.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. There is acid in that bottle; therefore ... | a. the road was icy. |
| 2. The effect of the fluctuation in temperature ... | b. he was unsuccessful. |
| 3. Bad labor relations cause ... | c. prolonged illness. |
| 4. The accident occurred because of ... | d. it must be handled very carefully. |
| 5. He passed his examination because ... | e. careful storage. |
| 6. Delayed treatment often results in ... | f. the icy road conditions |
| | g. the strike. |
| | h. he worked hard. |
| | i. was to kill the laboratory specimens. |

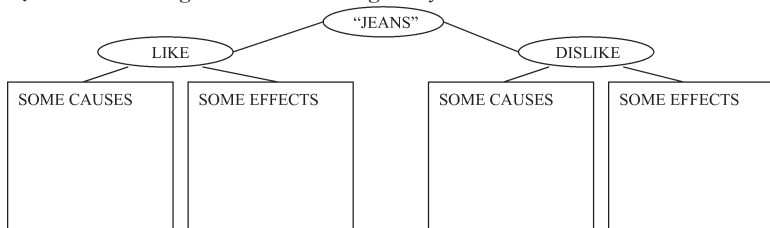
B. Making use of the information in the correct answers from the previous exercise complete the following sentences. Inside the box write the appropriate connective or verb marker (see the *Structure and Vocabulary Aid*). The first one has been done as an example.

e.g. Icy road conditions caused the accident.

- a. () he worked hard
- b. Prolonged illness often ()
- c. The strike was ()
- d. The laboratory specimens were killed ()
- e. That bottle must be handled very carefully ()

- 2 Brainstorming about the topic “jeans”

a. Fill in the diagram below relating to “jeans”.



b. Make some sentences describing the causes and effects of jeans raised above (see the *Structure and Vocabulary Aid*).

While-activity

Paragraph writing by using cause and effect

Write a paragraph about jeans using your sentences written above – its main causes and effects. (Do you have a pair of jeans? Do you like wearing them? Why or why not?) Write on a sheet below.

Post-activity

1) Peer evaluation by using a sheet to write comments

Class No. Name Date _____

Title: _____

Evaluation (Choose one of the following 4 grades)

S1	<input type="radio"/> (excellent) <input type="radio"/> (very good) <input type="radio"/> (satisfactory) <input type="radio"/> ? (unclear)
S2	<input type="radio"/> (excellent) <input type="radio"/> (very good) <input type="radio"/> (satisfactory) <input type="radio"/> ? (unclear)
S3	<input type="radio"/> (excellent) <input type="radio"/> (very good) <input type="radio"/> (satisfactory) <input type="radio"/> ? (unclear)
S4	<input type="radio"/> (excellent) <input type="radio"/> (very good) <input type="radio"/> (satisfactory) <input type="radio"/> ? (unclear)

Comments (Write your comments in detail)

	Good Points	Improvements
S1		
S2		
S3		
S4		

2) Teacher evaluation

Comments and corrections

Structure and Vocabulary Aid

Look carefully at the connectives or markers of cause-effect relationships shown below. Notice particularly how they are used in a sentence construction.

