

JOURNAL OF MODERN LANGUAGES

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

VOLUME 22

ISSN NO. 1675-526X

2012

Assessing and Giving Feedback to Students' Written Work: Closing the Gap Between Expert and Novice Raters

Clarence Jerry, Jariah Mohd. Jan & Moses Samuel

The Relation of Meaning to Wording in Mandela's Speech of Inauguration as President: A Systemic Functional Analysis of Rhetorical Devices, Marked Syntax and Appraisal

María Martínez Lirola

The Effects of L1 on L2 Writing and Translation: A Case Study

Yasunari Fujii

Building Morphological Analyzer for Nepali

Shahid Mushtaq Bhat & Rupesh Rai

Downshifting Discourse: Revitalizing BASIC ENGLISH 850 as a Learner Lingua Franca in Global Working-Class Literacy

Bill Templer



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Journal of Modern Languages

Jurnal Bahasa Moden

Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
University of Malaya

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Assessing and Giving Feedback to Students’ Written Work: Closing the Gap Between Expert and Novice Raters

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the feasibility of narrowing the gap in the differences between expert and novice raters in terms of expertise in assessing and evaluating writing in a training/workshop through the use of a tentative mental model which was developed in a prior research. The conceptual mental model of assessing writing deployed in this study helped the researchers to understand how expert raters could be differentiated from the novice raters in terms of their mental cognitive processes. This paper reports the understanding which was translated into a training module and trialled out in the workshop. Five participants out of twenty five course participants who came for the workshop were interviewed and the preliminary probe into the usefulness of the mental model in training yielded positive results. The findings of this study indicated that with proper intervention, beginning teachers can be trained to be “expert raters” themselves by closely following the tentative mental model recommended in the study.

Keywords: Assessing writing, Expert raters, Novice raters, Conceptual mental model, Writing knowledge and skill, Training workshop

1. Introduction

Undeniably, the classroom is a context for literacy learning and it is necessary for teachers to not only examine their teaching and assessing behaviours, but also ask themselves if they implicitly allow their students to be who they explicitly encourage them to be in the learning process. There may be numerous channels by which teachers respond to students’ ideas, but written feedback seems to be the most common teacher response to student written work. In fact, teacher’s written feedback is an essential aspect in any English language writing course. Studies done on writing suggest that feedback plays a central role in increasing the learner’s achievement. Learners of writing need to know when they are performing well and when they are not (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nelson & Schunn, 2009; Zeller-mayer, 1989). The more information learners have about their writing, the better they understand how to perform in a better

way (Cardelle & Corno, 1981). Learners of writing need feedback, not only to monitor their own progress, but also to take other's views and adapt them to make the message clearer to the readers (Flower, 1979).

Though it is important for the students to do well in the writing tasks, it is also equally important for ESL teachers to assess their students' writing and provide immediate feedback to ensure that the students' progress in their learning process. Grabe and Kaplan (1998) note that too often teacher's comments are at two extremes. At one extreme, teacher's comments are often very vague, confusing, and provide little specific direction for students when they attempt revision. However, at the other extreme, teachers may provide detailed editing comment on the surface form with minimal attention to major organizational and content issues. Thus, there is a need to go in between the two extremes. Very experienced teachers or raters may not have much problem in giving quality assessment and feedback on their students' writing. The investigation on the possible acquired skills that these 'expert' raters have and how do they differ from the 'novice' raters (beginning teachers) in terms of cognitive processes involved in assessing and giving feedback to students' writing, remains not well-addressed.

A thorough review of literature reveal that studies that compared both expert and novice raters often had their focus on quantitative measurements of the raters' testing practices (Baba, 2009; Weigle, 1999). Little attention, however, is given to the cognitive analysis of the raters' rating practices. Limited knowledge is shared in the realm of writing assessment on what is happening in the raters' mind when they are assessing a piece of writing (Bukta, 2007). Thus, the study on the "mental states" of the raters of writing is a neglected domain that needs to be explored further.

Nonetheless, one reason for the limited research on the area of raters' mental state is the lack of a proper framework or model that could be used to assist the investigation. As such, it is the intention of the present study to embark on a comprehensive scrutiny of the raters' mental state by proposing a tentative mental model, which combines the concept of knowledge states and conceptual operators. Specifically, knowledge states cover the existing knowledge that the raters have when engaging in a writing assessment task. This consists of knowledge on grammar, vocabulary and content. The conceptual operators, on the other hand, describe the cognitive process which modifies (adds, eliminates) existing or currently active knowledge states and produces new, active knowledge states (Hassebrock & Prietula, 1992). By incorporating both elements, the mental state of the raters could be analysed and revealed in a more systematic and meaningful manner. Moreover, the outcome or results of the analysis could also provide valuable input for teachers in helping students to produce a good piece of writing, which has been a daunting task for many teachers especially in the ESL contexts across the globe.

In the case of Malaysia, a student typically has eleven years of schooling (six year at the primary level and five years at the secondary level), and at the end of that period, the student will sit for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM). Attaining a good grade in SPM is

important as it plays a major part in his decision about his educational path. The student can either go for a matriculation program, a pre-university foundation program (it does include form 6), or a diploma program. Among the compulsory papers the student sits for in the SPM is the English paper. Of interest to the study is Paper Two which consists of directed writing, summary writing and essay writing. Among the three types of writing this study focuses only on essay writing.

As the study investigates feedback, a sample marking scheme was obtained from a school to gain insights into the system. The features emphasised were:

- i. Write sentences of various lengths and types, using a variety of sentence structures as an aid to meaning.
- ii. Use a wide vocabulary with precision.
- iii. Punctuate accurately and helpfully.
- iv. Write paragraphs which demonstrate internal unity and are appropriately linked
- v. Respond with relevance and precision to the chosen topic.
- vi. Engage and sustain the interest of the reader.

Based on this scope, the study is conducted to investigate the feasibility of narrowing the gap in the differences between expert and novice ESL raters, in terms of their deep structure of knowledge in assessing and giving feedback on students' written work. In order to achieve address the objectives, a mental model was formulated through cognitive task analysis (Hoffman, Neville & Fowlkes, 2009; Militello & Hoffman, 2008), which was used to tap the knowledge states that raters use when they assess writing. Specifically, verbal protocol analysis (as one method of cognitive task analysis) was adopted as means to capture the raters' cognitive processes when assessing students' written works.

2. The Mental Model

In order to understand how expert and novice ESL raters differ in assessing and giving feedback on students' written work, a system was adopted from the medical domains in uncovering their deep structure of knowledge (Hasselbrock & Prietula, 1992). This system was able to give a detailed cognitive analysis of the participants' verbal protocols and could be well suited to the assessing of writing. As cognitive processes are only indirectly and partially represented in verbal reports, it is necessary to analyse protocols by means of a coding scheme that will guide the researcher's inferences in a principled, theory-based manner. A coding scheme should be based on a theoretically grounded model of the cognitive processes and the types of information involved in the activity under study are not a mere list of strategies. Even if the verbal report data are used only as supportive data rather than as the primary data set of a study, they have to be analysed according to an appropriate coding scheme if they are to be taken seriously (Bracewell, 1994; Greene & Higgins, 1994). Through the use of a tentative mental model, a series of procedures, the verbal protocol analysis used in the study was able to identify the knowledge states and conceptual operations.

a. Knowledge States

In the tentative model previously developed by the researcher based on an extensive study, a knowledge state is a type of protocol representation (Newell & Simon, 1972) which identifies units of writing knowledge that will be used by the expert and novice ESL teachers or raters in this study. This includes their knowledge of clear writing, and the criterion for the evaluation of assessing writing skills. Writing in a specific language calls for observance to text conventions of the particular language. In this study, some of the important elements which contribute to clear writing in English are categorized into five divisions as follows:

Table 1. Elements that contribute to clear writing in English

Main Division	Sub-division
Grammar	Grammaticality
Mechanics	spelling punctuation,
Content	clarity, completeness, exemplification, non-English terms' equivalents, avoidance of translation, reasonable length, wordiness
Organisation	central idea of text, development of paragraphs, use of discourse markers, cohesion, coherence,
Vocabulary	choice of words, introduction of key terms, concepts, and individuals.

b. The Conceptual Operation

The conceptual operation is an inferred cognitive process which modifies (adds, eliminates) existing or currently active knowledge states and produces new, active knowledge states (Newell & Simon, 1972). In response to a specific data cue, a given segment of verbal protocol will constitute one or more knowledge states and a conceptual operation that produces the associated knowledge state or states. The eight types of conceptual operations and their specific operators used by Hassebrock and Prietula (1992) for analyzing verbal protocols are employed. They are data examination, data exploration, data explanation, hypothesis generation, hypothesis evaluation, discrepancy processing, meta-reasoning, and summarization. These conceptual operations were used to characterize distinct segments of a physician's problem-solving behaviour. Each basic conceptual operation was further analyzed to give a more detailed representation of knowledge and reasoning behaviour required by the task of assessing students' writing.

From the two components (knowledge states and conceptual operation), a full tentative canonical mental model for assessing and giving feedback to students' writing was formulated (see Appendix 1). In this study, this model was

used as a guide in developing a training module which was later trialled out in a workshop to investigate how novice raters can be helped in acquiring the skill of assessing and giving feedback to students' writing effectively.

3. Methodology

Based on the mental model as explained earlier, a training module was trialled out in a workshop. Due to time constraint, this 2-day workshop gave emphasis on choice of expression, especially on wordiness and variety of sentences since these are the major problems faced by novice assessors as identified by the researcher when constructing the tentative mental model. It also exposed participants to marking symbols and allow them to explore related assessing strategies to develop their assessing skill. The training package consisted of a combination of activities in varying form and length of treatment (refer to training materials in Appendix 2).

Table 2. The profiles of the participants

Name of school	Name of participants	Gender	Experience in teaching English	Experience as rater/ level
SMK Orkid	Ms. Kim	Female	1 yr	Nil
SMK Cempaka	Mdm. Mary	Female	2 yrs	Nil
SMK Matahari	Mr. John	Male	2 yrs	Nil
SMK Bunga Raya	Mr. Chris	Male	3 yrs	Nil
SMK Kemboja	Mr. Gerald	Male	2 yrs	Nil

For the purpose of getting the participants' feedback regarding their perception of the workshop that they have attended, five out of twenty five participants were interviewed. The profiles of the participants/informants, based on the personal data form completed by course participants when they registered for the workshop, are summarized in Table 2. Pseudonym names have been given to the participants and their schools to maintain their anonymity. To capture the participant's views, the researcher made use of the semi-structured interview guidelines which consisted of open-ended questions that would allow the researcher to explore the subject matter or related themes deeper. In addition, observational notes are gathered by conducting observations as an observer. According to Yin (1994), interviews are a useful source of collecting evidence for the case study as they will give the participants' constructions of the reality around them and may help provide important insights on how participants interpret some piece of the world in their own words. Interviewing the participants is necessary when required information about feelings, belief, perceptions and opinion cannot be observed (Merriam, 2001). Some of the questions asked on how the course participants (Cps) perceived the effectiveness of the workshop are as follows:

- i. What was your initial expectation of the workshop?
- ii. To what extent do you think you have learnt or acquired some knowledge and skills on assessing and giving feedbacks to students' writing through this workshop?

- iii. To what extent do you think that this workshop is useful in your own classroom practice especially in assessing and giving feedbacks to students' writing?
- iv. How confident are you in assessing and giving feedbacks to your students' writing after attending this workshop?
- v. If given the chance to improve the content of the course, what would be your recommendation(s)?

Before the interview session, the researcher briefly informed the participant of his purpose, and make assurances (if necessary) of what that would be said in the interview would be treated confidentially. After the participant had given his or her consent, the information was tape-recorded and notes were taken during the session, especially on the non-verbal expressions.

Immediately after the interview, the researcher went through the interview notes with the participant to validate the data taken during the session. The recorded interview session was later transcribed and the results were also shown to interviewees for verification (member checks) and to find out if they had any additions or revisions to the content. The qualitative data collected was used to construct the picture of how useful the mental model would be in helping the novice raters acquire the knowledge and skills of the expert raters in responding to the related task of assessing and evaluating the students' writing.

As a clearer description, expert raters in this study were graduate ESL teachers who had at least ten years of teaching experience in the English subject and were qualified raters for the SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or Malaysian Certificate of Education) English 10 – Paper Two examination. On the other hand, novice raters refer to beginning ESL teachers in their first three years of teaching appointment after completing teacher preparation program. These beginning ESL teachers were all teaching in the secondary schools.

4. Results and Discussion

During the ice-breaking session at the beginning of the workshop, a majority of the Cps thought that it would not be any different from any other courses that they had attended, whether it was at the school level or district level. They expected to be given inputs, including handouts that would serve as a guide if they need to apply in their classrooms whatever skill and knowledge that they were supposed to learn during the workshop. During the workshop, the researcher designed sessions that basically required participants to get involved in a hands-on experience of assessing and moderating marking of students' sample writings. Discussions among the participants in smaller groups of five were focused on a process which was a new experience for both the participants and the facilitators. There were evidently some challenges but also a developing awareness of what was needed to ensure that outcomes were productive for all participants. The following section explains the participants' opinions about the workshop.

4.1. Participants' Perception of the Knowledge and Skills Acquired through the Workshops

During the workshop, the researcher encouraged the participants to discuss issues concerning the pertinent knowledge states which are widely used by the expert raters such as development of paragraph (ideas), variety of sentence structures, and wordiness. The participants had also explored the marking symbols and criteria needed in assessing writing, and had produced their own guidelines in giving feedback. During the workshop, it is worth noting that the participants were enthusiastic of learning the strategy that expert raters may use in assessing writing though they expressed their concern of lack of experience or confidence in assessing writing. This is very obvious through the feedback giving by the participants during the first session of the workshop when they were asked to list down what they brought along with them to the workshop. John, one of the participants, mentioned this when asked by the researcher how he felt at the beginning of the workshop as in Example 1:

Example 1

I am willing to learn...I know I do not have much experience (in assessing writing) that I can share with others...I am certainly grateful with the knowledge and skill gained through the discussion.

Transcript/Interview/CP2/12.6.08

The workshop was seen to provide support to teachers and helped with insights into the process of assessing students' writing. This is evident in the teachers' comments. They reported that they had greater confidence and knowledge about assessing writing and this seemed to influence their classroom practice. For example, teachers commented on how they were using knowledge of key language terms and features, introduced by the trainer/facilitators and clarified during the moderation process, when assessing their students' writing. This, they noted, had assisted them to make writing instruction more explicit for their students through increased awareness of what they and students need to know about improving a piece of writing. John and Mary noted this in their response to the researcher's question on how the workshop helped them in their classroom practice, as given in Example 2 and Example 3:

Example 2

I am more aware of the (language) terms and features related to good writing especially pertaining to organisation, content, grammar, mechanics (of writing) and vocabulary...it is so much easier to give feedback if you know what to look for and want to focus on. Most importantly...I am now more aware of the positive input that any constructive feedback can bring to improve my students' writing.

Transcript/Interview/CP2/12.6.08

Example 3

...before this, giving feedback, especially constructive ones seemed like a daunting task. However, this workshop taught me to be selective on the focus of my feedback...say for example, I may just want to focus on content like development of ideas or paragraph...err maybe clarity of ideas. Now I approach it (giving feedback) with the good intention of making improvements and creating better writing rather than criticising and judging...

Transcript/Interview/CP3/6.7.08

Kim, on the other hand, focused less on the kind of feedback she could give to the students' writing and more on her increased awareness of the "style" of assessing expected by an expert rater. In particular, she provided the following response to the researcher's question about whether she thought her writing assessing skill had improved after attending the workshop:

Example 4

OK, I think pretty well. OK, maybe not so much on how to give feedback, because that would depend on what students have written. But I have to say that this workshop didn't teach me that (giving feedback), it pushed me to about how to assess students' writing though. I expected the workshop to equip me on how to give specific response to the students' writing.

Transcript/Interview/CP1/10.6.08

Here, the CP seemed to be suggesting that even if her giving feedback skill did not improve much, the workshop had at least increased her awareness of the how to assess students' writing.

Based on what we have presented here as evidence, we conclude that the workshop has succeeded in imparting some of the knowledge and skills used or emphasised on by the expert raters to the novice raters.

4.2. Usefulness of Workshop

Another main theme that arose in the interviews concerned the Cps perceptions of the usefulness of workshop. All the participants who were interviewed gave a very positive response on the usefulness of the workshop in their own practice. Kim illustrated this in her response to an interview question as in Example 5.

Example 5

I think I learnt a lot from the moderation process of marking and assessing the sample writing. It is easier with a small group because you can listen to each other giving comments on students' writing...small group means you got to know each other well enough to feel comfortable.

Transcript/Interview/CP1/10.6.08

In the above example, characteristics of the group seemed to have affected the effectiveness of the moderation. As another participant, Mary, put it: "...big groups often meant no discussion...I mean there would be less opportunities for one to speak out his/her mind" (Transcript/Interview/CP3/6.7.08). In contrary to this, I noticed that Mary did not speak much during the group discussion. When I asked her about this, she replied, "...with teacher from other schools I was a bit shy with my opinion, but I learnt a lot" (Transcript/Interview/CP3/6.7.08).

As may be remembered, the CPs only attended a workshop where they were given limited input due to time constraint. Many of the CPs who were interviewed indicated that they wished they could have had more opportunities to attend similar workshops as they needed intervals to practice what they had learnt during the workshop. For example, in the exchange below, Chris provided the following information:

Example 6

...and the other thing I would have liked is to get more opportunities to attend similar workshops...you know, I learnt something from this workshop but I need time to practise it. If there is a follow up, then it would be a good venue to share my experience with other Cps...

Transcript/Interview/CP4/4.6.08

This request for additional workshop was made by other CPs as well, as can be seen from the interview with Gerald in Example 7.

Example 7

Well, uhm, I think it's a good idea to have more workshops like this. I'm not sure if having just one workshop would be enough to equip me with the necessary skill to assess students' writing effectively. It would be very beneficial for people like me to attend a series of similar workshop. Otherwise, it would be a good idea to stretch the two-day workshop to a five-day...

Transcript/Interview/CP/3.6.08

Towards the usefulness of the knowledge and skills they acquired through the workshop, CPs generally held favourable opinions, indicating that the knowledge and skills helped them improve the quality of their assessing students' writing, as was suggested by Mary's comments on her perception of the workshop in Example 8:

Example 8

Uhh, it was good, I learned in that way. Also, for me it was very important to get familiar with effective way to assess students' writing. This workshop has given me the opportunity to explore how assessing writing can be done effectively and consistently. It also helps me in giving better comments.

Transcript/Interview/CP3/6.7.08

However, it could be suggested at this point that the CPs were merely giving their 'ideal' response. In other words, there could have been a halo effect, with the participants providing the information that they believed the researcher was expecting (Mackey & Gras, 2005). In addition, it could be suggested that these CPs, who voluntarily gave their time to speak to the researcher, may have had more favourable views about the workshop than those CPs who did not volunteer (i.e. a Hawthorn effect, Mackey & Gass, 2005). However, the CPs were not completely uncritical of the knowledge and skill they received. In Example 9, for example, John indicated that he disagreed with the kind of learning she gets from the workshop:

Example 9

...I mean some things were really helpful, you know I was completely in agreement with. You know, like the way how we moderate the marking of scripts...I seldom do this in my school. This is something different. But then, how long can I sustain this kind of skill when I get back to my school.

Transcript/Interview/CP2/12.6.08

Comments such as those in Examples 5 and 9 only provided a partial glimpse of the "hidden transcript." In light of the fact that the researcher was also the facilitator of the workshop, the CPs may have felt reluctant to express their concerns more directly, and most CPs apparently opted to avoid giving less

positive comment. Nevertheless, the fact that this tension was raised during the interviews suggested that such workshop needed to be carefully designed and monitored on an on-going basis to ensure that the CPs needs were being met. This revelation posed a considerable challenge in workshop design and implementation: the facilitators who implemented it needed a considerable effort to gain a background in the CPs' prior knowledge, working in close collaboration with experts in the subject matter (expert raters), and crucially listening to the feedback of the CPs - such as those reported here.

4.3. Participants' Confidence in Applying the Knowledge and Skills Acquired through the Workshops

One of the major themes that emerged from a reiterative and inductive analysis of the interview transcripts concerned participant's confidence in applying the knowledge and skills acquired through the workshop. As can be seen from the comments below, the CPs did not conceptualise their improvement in terms of a greater mastery of error identification, but rather focused on the gains they had made in assessing and giving feedback on writing. In Example 10, Mary articulated her view on what she gained from the workshop.

Example 10

I think that the assessing skill now has improved. I no longer rely on just error identification to decide on the kind of marks I will give to the students' writing. That is very tedious. In fact, this workshop has helped me to look beyond just error identification...more to content analysis, development of paragraphs and completeness of the piece of writing. I think I will continue to sharpen my skill through my own classroom practice.

Transcript/Interview/CP3/6.7.08

Other CPs phrased this sentiment in terms of their assessing skill more closely resembling the mental model used by the expert raters as found out by the researcher when developing the model. For instance, in Example 11 from Chris and Example 12 from Gerald, they stated:

Example 11

I managed to get the overall gist of the essays by looking at how paragraphs are developed, and to draw some nice comparisons among them and to come up with I think some strong conclusions, but it was grounded on the facts of very good writings I had found (among the essays that were being assessed), and I am pleased with that. Uh, to be able to do something that when I read it (students' writing) I thought "Oh! This really looks like the decisions that may have been made of seasoned (examination) markers.

Transcript/Interview/CP4/4.6.08

Example 12

I really liked how I made my decision, I mean, in my lack of experience in assessing writing it seems like a true assessing skill and something that is good...I would say that, after completing a task (assessing writing), I have that kind of feeling that I have made a thorough analysis of its completeness to decide what kind of weaknesses and strengths it has against real good writings.

Transcript/Interview/CP3/3.6.08

Kim, on the other hand, was rather sceptical on how well she can really apply what she learnt during the workshop in her practice. In her response to the

interview question about whether she thought her learning during the workshop would help her in her practice in her school, she articulated in Example 13 that:

Example 13

I learnt something here (during this workshop) but I think I need more practice and participation in a workshop like this to be really good in assessing writing...however, I am willing to learnt till I really acquire the skill.

Transcript/Interview/CP1/10.6.08

The analysis suggested that at the outset of the workshop, CPs were fairly satisfied with the workshop and felt reasonably confident about assessing writing. One of the obvious implications of the intervention workshop is an awareness that teachers need to collaboratively reflect on their professional needs and current understanding on assessing writing. The workshop on assessing writing had given a lot of focus on the discussion of assessing students' writing, giving opportunity to teachers to investigate their own practice and deepen their understanding of the assessing process.

During the workshop, decision about the assessing process was negotiated by the CPs working on the same task. In addition, there were many informal discussions as well. This process apparently had contributed to CPs to become skilled enquirers who could improve their own practice through collaborative mode. Thus, the workshop had provided CPs with opportunities to learn the skilled required in assessing their students' writing more effectively.

The intervention workshop has also drawn a realisation upon us that in order to assess students' writing effectively, teachers need to have an explicit knowledge of the knowledge states (Hassebrock & Prietula, 1992) such as grammar, mechanics, content, organisation and vocabulary, and the conceptual operators that will lead to better decision making that benefits students. Furthermore, teachers need a meta-language in order to describe and discuss language and able to include it as a natural part of assessing writing. This involves the deliberate control of what to think about and how to think in order to maximise progress and minimize error in any problem-solving task one is engaging in (Kuhar, 1998).

The ability to describe language in terms of text and grammatical features is invaluable because it enables teachers to focus precisely on the meaning by which writers (the students) shape and manipulate their assessors' thoughts and feelings. In this study, after a brief exposure to some of the assessing strategies in a simulated training/workshop, the course CPs (novice raters) subsequently used more conceptual operators that inferred relationships among information from the students' written work.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the gathered findings, it can be concluded that the conceptual model of the expert raters functions as a useful instrument in guiding the novice raters to improve their rating or assessing skills. The intervention workshop has provided valuable insights on the feasibility of the mental model. The workshop participants were very satisfied with the training as they were exposed to

knowledge and skills unavailable in other training courses. They were generally able to grasp the necessary skills and knowledge similar to the mental model of the expert raters.

In addition to that, the workshop conducted has also shed light on the need for teachers to be involved in a more hands-on manner. As explained by the teachers, they were pleased to note that the training sessions in a small group provided them with the opportunity to learn and hence improve the quality of their assessing skills. This shows that with proper intervention, teachers can be trained to be 'expert raters' themselves by closely following the mental model constructed. Such trainings can be challenging at times but effective in transmitting the necessary assessing knowledge to the novice teachers. In planning professional development activities for teachers, teacher educators or teacher trainers may focus more on strategies for meeting the requirements of mandated assessments rather than generally on how teachers can help students develop as writers. Short courses organized by the teacher training institution seeking to improve students' literacy skills should include a focus on helping teachers improve both their assessing skills and their feedback on student writing (Inbar-Lourie, 2008). Students do not grow as writers, and teachers do not grow as instructors, in the absence of high-quality feedback. As with students, teachers need opportunities for collaborative assisted professional development in order to improve their practice.

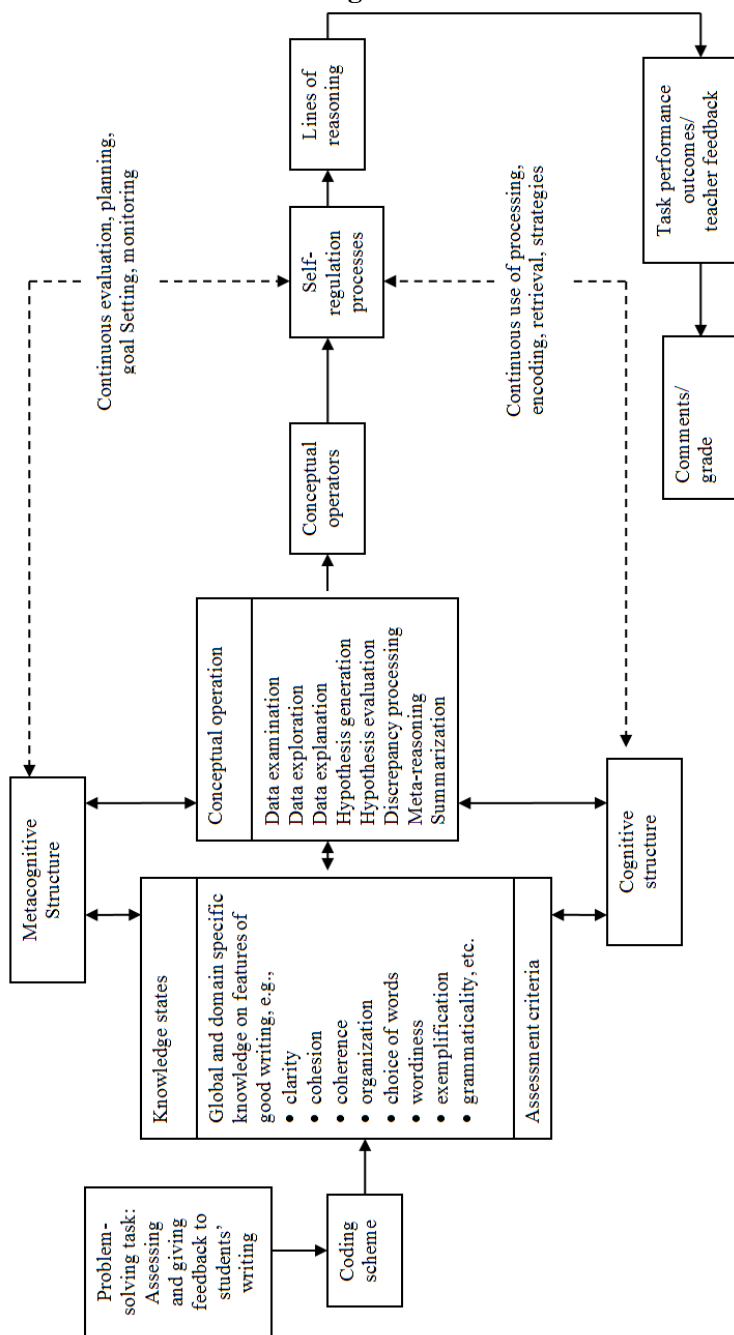
Nevertheless, future research could look more deeply at the nature of effective written feedback for younger students and attempt to categorize and describe it. Clearly, more genre-focused feedback to younger children cannot take the same form as it does for older, more experienced writers. Younger children have neither the experience nor the technical vocabulary to understand some kinds of instruction, and yet, a number of researchers have reported successful instructional practices in their elementary school studies (Orellana, 1995; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000). Future research could identify ways for both teachers and students to explore different genres and their uses. It would be important as well to investigate the type of written feedback that helps English-language learners achieve communicative fluency while mastering written language conventions.

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Appendix 1: The tentative mental model for assessing and giving feedback to students' writing.



Appendix 2: Workshop Materials

Training Materials

(a) Day 1 Session One

Time: 8.30 -10.00 am

Duration: 1 Hour 30 Minutes

Topic: Introduction to Training Session

Objectives:

1. To give CPs an overview and expectation of the training session
2. To get CPs to talk about their expectation of the course

Procedure:

1. Tr set the agenda for Activities 1 and 2 – overview and expectations.
2. Tr welcomes the participants and introduces himself
3. Tr talks through the aim of the training course with the help of power point presentation.
4. Tr provides an overview of:
 - a) the training course
 - b) the approach and methodology to be employed
 - c) your role as a facilitator
5. Tr divides CPs into group of five and gets each group to discuss the following questions and write out their answers on a mahjong paper:
 - a) List out what have you brought along to this course?
 - b) What would you like to bring back to your respective school?
6. Tr gets each group to put up their comments on the wall and later walk around the room to read what the other groups have written in their comments.
7. Tr leads a plenary discussion to draw out common issues and later tries to link the “menu” (ours) and expectations.

(b) Day 1 Session Two

Time: 10.30 am – 12.30 pm

Duration: 2 Hours

Topic: Insight into Prior Knowledge - Marking Symbols, Errors Identification and Giving Feedback

Objectives:

1. To get CPs to identify errors in sample students' writing by using the appropriate marking symbols.
2. To get CPs to share their experience in giving feedback to students' writing and produce their own guideline in giving feedback.

Procedure:

1. Tr puts up sample writing on a mahjong paper on the board.
2. Tr goes through the errors found in it, showing participants how marking would be normally done by teachers using the appropriate marking symbols.
3. Tr divides CPs into groups of five and gives each group a sample writing to mark.
4. Tr gets CPs to discuss how they would mark the sample writing using the appropriate marking symbols that they know and produce their own guideline in giving feedback and put the outcomes of the discussion on a mahjong paper.
5. Tr gets a representative from each group to present his/her group work.

6. Tr leads a plenary discussion to draw out common marking symbols, before giving CPs a handout on marking symbols, and summaries the guidelines in giving feedback from all the groups.

(c) Day 1 Session Three

Time: 2.00 – 4.00 pm

Duration: 2 Hours

Topic: Variety of Sentence Structure

Objectives:

1. To get CPs to recognise variety of sentence structure or lack of it in a piece of writing.
2. To get CPs to recognise and discuss how to vary the sentences in a piece of writing.

Procedure:

1. Tr shows CPs two sample writing on a power point – one is well-writing with a variety of sentence structure and another one is also well-writing but lack variety of sentence.
2. Tr elicits response from the CPs to identify the piece of writing with a variety of sentence structure.
3. Tr illustrates with a few examples on how to vary sentences:
 - a) begin a sentence with prepositional phrase, participial phrase, adverb clause, single adverb, an infinitive phrase
 - b) make the first clause passive; delete subject
 - c) change to complex sentence using “even though”
4. Tr distributes worksheet and get CPs to work in a group of five to discuss and rewrite the paragraph by varying the sentences in it on a piece of mahjong paper.
5. CPs present the product of their group work to the rest followed by a general discussion and comments by the trainer/facilitator.

(d) Day 2 Session One

Time: 8.00 – 10.00 pm

Duration: 2 Hours

Topic: Developing a marking criteria for assessing writing

Objectives:

1. To give CPs opportunities to share experience and discuss ideas on what to look for in assessing students’ writing.

Procedure:

1. Tr talks about the characteristics of good writing with the help of a powerpoint presentation and distributes a checklist on assessing writing (Handout D2/S1a).
2. Tr also shows a sample marking criteria on powerpoint slides to the CPs and discusses marking criteria (directed writing and continuous writing).
3. Tr divides CPs into group of five and gets CPs to discuss and improvise their own marking criteria on a piece of mahjong paper for directed writing and continuous writing.
4. Tr gets a representative from each group to present his/her group work.
5. Tr leads a plenary discussion to draw out pertinent issues related to the marking criteria presented by all the groups.
6. Tr distributes a checklist for assessing writing (Handout D2/S1a) and a sample marking criteria (Handout D2/S1b).

(e) Day 2 Session Two

Time: 10.30 am – 12.30 pm

Duration: 2 Hours

Topic: Development of Paragraph and Wordiness

Objectives:

1. To get participants to analyse content and development of paragraphs in students' writing.
2. To get participants to identify wordy paragraphs and unnecessary words in sentences.

Procedure:

1. Tr distributes two different paragraphs but on the same topic to the CPs
2. Tr elicits feedback from the CPs on the differences between the two paragraphs
3. Tr highlights the differences of the two paragraphs and emphasise on how wordiness can impede clarity and conciseness of ideas in the paragraph. Tr also draws CPs attention to unnecessary words, phrases, clauses and possible combining of sentences.
4. Tr distributes Handout D2/S2 and gets CPs to give their answers to the exercise in Task 1.
5. Tr gets CPs to work in groups of 4 to discuss the answers.
6. CPs are supposed to cross out all unnecessary words in the given sentences.
7. Tr elicits and discusses feedback from the CPs on the correct answers.
8. Tr then gets CPs to do Task 2 - rewrite the paragraph given as concisely as possible, removing unnecessary or obvious words, phrases, and clauses and combining sentences as appropriate.
9. CPs write out their paragraph in mahjong paper and present their work to the class.
10. Tr elicits and discusses feedback from other CPs on their peers' work.

(f) Day 2 session Three

Time: 2.00 – 4.00 pm

Duration: 2 Hours

Topic: Assessing Practice and Moderating Assessment of Writing

Objectives:

1. To get CPs to practice assessing writing and discuss decision making process, and
2. To get CPs to be more critical and analytical of their own practice through peer collaboration in moderating assessment of writing.

Procedure:

1. Tr divides CPs into groups of five and distributes sample writing to every group.
2. Tr assigns task to all the groups – CPs in each group will first mark and assess sample writing individually. After 10 – 15 minutes, they will do a group discussion to moderate the marking and assessment.
3. Tr gets a representative from each group to present their group assessment to the rest and this follows by a general discussion and comments by the trainer/facility

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