*Giving Learners Feedback On Their Writing*

I was working as a teacher of English for seventeen years in different High Schools in the Basque Country and I think I must start by saying that most teachers I met during those years agreed that they found their writing feedback highly time-consuming and not really effective because students would make the same mistakes once and again.

After I had spent some years feeling quite helpless about this issue, I decided I had to choose between two options: accept that students disliked writing and teachers disliked “correcting” students’ written work even more or start to think of a different approach both to teaching writing and to providing students with feedback on their written work. Obviously, I chose the latter and I would say that through some simple but effective strategies both my students and the teachers who worked on this new approach together with me changed their attitude towards writing.

What were the essential features of our approach, which fostered students’ motivation and made teachers believe that giving feedback on written work was not useless?

• Before starting to worry about feedback techniques, keep in mind that students will get engaged if they can write about a topic they like so let them choose the topics when this is possible so that they have some ownership in the process.

• The first rule to make our assessment work useful is to consider that different feedback should be given to different pieces of writing, depending on the students’ level of the language but also on the learning goals related to different types of texts. Only by reflecting on these goals, will we be able to decide on strategies, type of errors we have to correct, frequency, etc. In other words, flexibility is a must when talking about giving feedback.

• If we agree that correction criteria may vary from one piece of writing to another, students should know about this before handing out their written work. Make copies of the correction criteria for the students and provide them with checklists so that they can check on the suitability of their written work. Let them know about the correction code you will use too.

• Always include positive comments (by using the symbol +) and provide with suggestions for improvement (by using the symbol -)

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|          +                                                                      -  -  Original                                    - Try not to use the same words so many times  -  Nice presentation                      - Add connectors to joing ideas     |

• Consider writing as a process and not only as a final task. Therefore, give feedback on the drafts students have prepared so that they feel more confident when they prepare their definite version of their piece of writing. This will not take you longer than 15 minutes from a session.

• Make students write inside the classroom as often as you can. I have witnessed that they are more willing to accept corrections while they are creating their piece of writing tan after they have finished it. Focus on one or two essential errors depending on your learning goals. Otherwise, you will not be able to talk to every student.

• Students need feedback on content and impact on the reader too so this is a great opportunity for peer review. Make students read their peers’ compositions and ask them to give some feedback on them. You can do this by providing students with sentence starters such as: “My favorite part was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,” or “A suggestion I can offer for improvement is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”.

Another peer review technique that works is asking students to place their pieces of writing on the walls and make them comment on them by using post-it notes.

•A writer needs a reader or /and an audience. Try to integrate writing and speaking and provide with teacher’s and peers’ feedback on the oral presentation of the written work. I would like to share an example on how to do this with a biography[: http://clilingetxo.blogspot.com.es/2017/02/international-womens-day-2017.html](http://clilingetxo.blogspot.com.es/2017/02/international-womens-day-2017.html)

• How can we cope with so many pieces of writing? The answer is clear: we do not have to mark every piece of writing but we do have to foster students’ writing skills so we will have to negotiate the topics students will write about and increase students' writing practice by letting students write  for about 20 minutes inside the classroom every two weeks or so.  Needless to say  we will have to give feedback on  a number of pieces of writing for each of our students.

• All of us are aware of the need for ICT tools that increase students’ motivation. A very simple but effective tool is Google Drive. If you make the best use of it, students will not ignore your correction. Get students focus on your suggestions for improvement by including not only the usual comments but also links to  video-clips that show the difference between commonly confused words or verb tenses the student has difficulty with. You cannot do this if you mark 30 pieces of writing but you can do it if you choose some every week. Google drive keeps the students’ different versions of their written work so it is a great tool to value writing as a process and not as a final task.

**Conclusions:**

Writing should be enjoyed by students so we should focus the written tasks on their fields of interest as often as we can.

To improve their written work, we should let students know about the specific goals related to the type of text they will produce. Teachers should also share the correction criteria with students before they carry out the task. Helping them inside the classroom while they are working on drafts and providing them with checklists will stop a good deal of mistakes from being part of students’ writings.

Feedback on writing should be flexible, closely related to the type of text. Furthermore, it should be a joint responsibility between the teacher and the learners.

Last but not least, integrating the writing skill with other skills of the language and incorporating ICT tools will increase students’ motivation because it will help them see writing as part of everyday life and not as an isolated, boring task.