

USING THE THINK PAIR SQUARE TECHNIQUE IN TEACHING WRITING A DISCUSSION TEXT

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Abstrak

Makalah ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan cara penggunaan sebuah teknik pengajaran kolaboratif yang bernama *think pair square* untuk memudahkan siswa sekolah menengah atas menulis *discussion text*. Dengan teknik ini siswa pertama diminta untuk mencari argumen sendiri kemudian mendiskusikannya dengan teman yang menjadi pasangannya dan diteruskan dengan diskusi dengan kelompok yang terdiri dari empat orang. Dengan diskusi ini diharapkan kesulitan siswa dalam mengumpulkan argumen-argumen yang mendukung dan menentang topik yang akan ditulis dapat teratasi karena siswa dapat saling melengkapi argumen satu sama lain.

Key words: Think Pair Square Technique, Discussion Text

A. Introduction

The ability to write has become an important skill. Through writing, a writer and a reader who are separated by place and time are still able to communicate. Writing also enables the writer to convey information, thoughts as well as feeling with great details and provides chance for the writer to review or evaluate them. Considering the importance of writing, Indonesian government regulates writing as one of skills that should be taught in English subject starting from fourth grade of Elementary School to the twelfth grade of Senior High School. And it is taught through various kinds of texts which one of them is discussion text.

However, many students face difficulty in writing a discussion text because they should be able to see the topic of the text from two sides: pro and con and give their arguments for each side. According to Gough (2012: 94), the problem often arises because the students tend to respond to a problem emotively rather

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than objectively. Therefore, they will be difficult to give arguments from the side with which they may not agree.

Another problem comes when the students have to write an unfamiliar issue. Having no background knowledge about the issue being discussed makes the students difficult to give their arguments. And it is getting worse when the teacher does not realize it and asks the students to write the text individually without giving the students sometime to discuss their arguments with their friends. Whereas, Gough (2012: 94) says that in writing discussion text the students can support their points of view through survey results, interviews and research. The lack of background knowledge will make the students confused and reluctant to start writing.

More problems can arise if the teacher uses wrong technique in teaching writing. Because of the limitation of time, many teachers omit some steps in writing process. The students are often asked to write the draft directly without doing the pre-writing activity. This is definitely against the nature of writing. Harmer (2004: 82) says that writing cannot appear directly in the final form. It needs process and time to get the finished product. He says that the writer should go through the first step in writing process that is prewriting. In this step, the writer thinks about the topic and then organizes the ideas which can support it. The activities can be in the form of thinking, reading, talking and writing in order to warm up the brain before they start to write the first draft. This step should be done to help the students to collect the arguments for their discussion text. The second step is writing the first draft using the ideas generated at the previous step. The third step is revising. In revising, the writer improves the first draft by adding new ideas to give more support toward the topic or deleting the unnecessary sentences, checking the punctuation, spelling and grammar and if necessary changing the order of sentences to assure the message sent correctly. Thus, omitting some steps in writing process will only make the students difficult to produce a good writing.

In order to solve the problems above, there have been some efforts done by experts to encourage students to start writing a discussion text. One of them is by using think pair square technique. Edmonton (2010: 73) says that think pair square is actually a variation of think pair share technique. In think pair square, the teacher gives a lecture for a period of time and then asks a question, problem, test item or issue for students to think individually in a brief time. After that, each student is asked to share their thought with a friend nearby. Unlike think pair share technique in which the pair then shares their responses with the class, in think pair square, after sharing and discussing their thought in pair, the pair shares their findings with another pair. Thus, they share their responses in a team of four rather than with the class. From the explanation above, it can be seen that by doing the pair and the square works the students can enrich each others' idea in collecting the arguments and elaborations for and against the issue so that their hesitation to start writing can be eased.

In regard to the above view, this article is intended to describe how the think pair square technique is used in teaching writing a discussion text to senior high school students.

B. The Implementation of Using the Think Pair Square Technique in Teaching Writing a Discussion Text

1. Teacher's preparation

There are some preparations which should be done by the teacher in order to use the think pair square technique in teaching writing a discussion text. First, the teacher should prepare a model discussion text that will be discussed in exploration stage. Each student should get a copy of the text. The text can also be prepared in a slide show to ease the discussion.

Second, the teacher provides each students two discussion scaffolds proposed by Gough (2012: 97). The discussion scaffold contains column for statement of position, column for list arguments for and against the statement as well as for the evidence, and column for recommendation or conclusion. This will be used to write the issue, arguments, and conclusion or recommendation from the model text discussed in the exploration stage. The other discussion scaffold will be used as guidance for the students to make framework of the text before writing a complete text in elaboration stage.

Third, the teacher prepares two issues: one issue will be used for joint construction text in the elaboration phase and another one will be used for individual construction text in the confirmation phase. The issue should be able to invite pro and con among the students and should be interesting for them. Teacher can use the same issue for all pairs and squares or give several issues and let the pairs and squares to choose one that interests them much. An example of the issue is the following: "There are different opinions about students using uniform at school."

Fourth, the teacher prepares some papers and markers that will be used by each square to write their text in the elaboration stage. These papers will be stamped in front of the class to be discussed with the whole class members. The size of the paper should be big enough so that the students writing can be seen by the whole class members.

Fifth, the teacher can also use a picture about light issue related to students' world in order to catch students' interest in pre-teaching activity, for example a picture of a girl who is using a laptop until late at night.

After preparing the materials and the media, the teacher should also consider how to assign the group. Each group should have a mix of abilities so that the opportunity of peer teaching activity is available. The group should also have a mix of motivation so that they will encourage each other. The teacher should keep changing the group so the students will have opportunities to work with others and to develop good relationships within the classroom.

2. Teaching Process

a. Pre - teaching activity (3 minutes)

Teacher tells the students what they are going to learn that day. Then the teacher shows a picture which has been prepared and gives a statement about the picture. Since the picture is about a girl using a laptop until late at night, the statement can be the following: “Some people say that face book gives no advantage and the others say that it gives many advantages.”

After giving the statement, the teacher then gives his or her arguments about the issue and asks some students whether they agree or disagree with his or her opinion. The students then are invited to give their reasons why they agree or disagree with it. At last, the teacher tells them that they have done a discussion that is going to be learnt that day.

b. Whilst – teaching activity (84 minutes)

Three phases included in whilst teaching are exploration, elaboration, and confirmation.

i. Exploration

In this phase, teacher gives each student copy of a model text and a discussion scaffold which have been prepared before the class. The text can also be shown in power point to ease the whole class discussion. The teacher first asks some students by turns to read the text loudly and find the meaning of difficult words in the dictionary. Then, they are asked to underline the statement, the arguments, the evidences and the conclusion or the recommendation before discussing their findings with the teacher. After discussing, the students copy them into the column of discussion scaffold.

When the students have understood the generic structure of the text, they then discuss the language features used in the text. The teacher highlight the connective words, thinking verbs, adjectives and modality used in the text. They then discuss how those words are used and what the function of those words is. Through this discussion, the students will learn the language features of discussion text.

ii. Elaboration

Having been explored with the model text, the students are ready to do joint construction text. In elaboration phase, the students do the writing processes by using think pair square activity.

First, the teacher writes a statement of the issue on the board and asks the students to see the issue at least from two points of view. Each point of view

should be supported by arguments as well as evidence for each argument. They should also make a conclusion or recommendation about the issue. The arguments, evidence and the conclusion or recommendation can be in the form of key words or phrases. They can do this in ten minutes on the discussion scaffold. This is the process of “think” in think pair square activity.

Second, the students are asked to work in pair and share their work with their partner. This time, the students are given five minutes. By sharing their idea, the students can get more appropriate and more persuasive arguments for their writing because one student may have different view with their friends about the issue.

Third, the students collaborate in group of four or in other word do a square work. Before the students do the square work, the teacher distributes each group a piece of large paper and a marker (as stating in the preparation phase). They are asked to discuss their previous share and find the best arguments for and against as well as the conclusion or recommendation.

Then the teacher asks them to combine all arguments into a good and cohesive text by using suitable connective words, thinking verbs, adjectives and modality discussed in the exploration stage. They then write their arguments and conclusion on the paper provided by the teacher. The teacher should also confirm that each group member should be able to present it later.

After the group discussion, each group presents their text in front of the class. The teacher then discusses the texts with the whole class members in order to find out whether the texts have sufficient arguments for and against the issue, whether they have conclusion or recommendation, and whether the language features have been used correctly and shown cohesion.

At last, all students write the revision of the text in their workbook. This is done to assure that they have got the idea of the discussion.

iii. Confirmation

In the confirmation phase, the teacher asks the students to write a discussion text individually because they have experienced writing in group. Individual construction is done to get feedback from the students in order to know whether they have understood how to write a discussion text.

c. Post teaching activity (3 minutes)

In post-teaching phase, the teacher concludes the lesson by summarizing what the discussion text is, what the generic structures of the text are and what language features are usually used in the text.

The teacher then checks students' attendance and marks the students' name who participate and do not participate in pair and square work.

3. The Advantages of Using the Think Pair Square Technique in Teaching Writing a Discussion Text.

As being explained in the previous chapter, writing discussion text demands students' background knowledge about the issue being discussed. They have to see the issue at least from two points of view and give the arguments for each view. This often makes the students overwhelmed to find the arguments because sometimes they are not familiar with the issue being discussed. Thus, think pair square is really helpful because by sharing in pair and then in square, their friend's opinions will enrich their ideas in collecting the arguments and the elaborations and vice versa. Therefore, the first advantage of using think pair square in writing discussion text is to ease students' hesitation to start writing. Furthermore, students can produce a better discussion text rather than by doing it themselves.

The second advantage of using think pair square is to encourage each group member to contribute in discussion. It is because the discussion is done in small group starting from pair work and then square work. The limited group size makes each group member has plenty of time to speak and does not have to compete with many students especially with the students who are really talkative in discussion. Big group size or even whole class discussion often makes some students feel uncomfortable to participate in discussion because they often feel anxious when everyone stares at them or feel not confident with their opinions. Furthermore, think pair square can gradually build students' confidence because they will get accustomed to speak in front of their friends.

Another advantage of think pair square is to develop students' thinking and reasoning skill because while working together they are discussing the problem, explaining their arguments, negotiating the best answers, agreeing with other's opinions as well as helping and encouraging each other. They also learn how to appreciate other contribution, show respect for different points of view, and learn how to give and receive praise and criticism constructively.

It also develops good relationships within the classroom because the students are grouped and regrouped over the school year so that the students can socialize each other and get involved in their community. This is another advantage of using think pair square in learning.

C. Conclusion and Recommendation

1. Conclusion

Think Pair Square belongs to collaborative language teaching in which the students first are given some times to think about a problem or a question and then

are asked to share their thought with their pair. After sharing in pair, the students then form a square, a group of four, based on teacher' choice to discuss their share. Their final answer then is discussed with the whole class.

Think pair share is suitable to use in teaching writing of discussion text because discussion text requires students' background knowledge to give arguments for and against the issue and elaboration of each argument as well as conclusion or recommendation towards the issue. Lack of background knowledge about the issue often makes the students feel reluctant to start writing. By using think pair square, their friend's opinions will enrich their ideas in collecting the arguments and elaborations for and against the thesis statement and vice versa.

2. Suggestions

In order to give best result in using think pair square for teaching writing of discussion text, the teacher has to consider several things. First, the teacher should manage the time wisely so that all activities planned in the lesson plan can be done. Second, the teacher should keep changing the group so that the students will have opportunities to work with others and to develop good relationships within the classroom. Third, each group should have mix of abilities, gender and motivation rather than a group of friends. Then the teacher should confirm the students that all group members can explain how the result of discussion was arrived. Next, the teacher has to make sure that all students take part in discussion session and ask whether they face problem or not. The teacher has also to make sure that the students discuss their finding in pair and square work, not copying their friend work.

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