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Postmodernism and Process Writing Pedagogy

A Cross-cultural Perspective

后现代主义与过程写作论：跨文化的辨析

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内 容 提 要

本书从不同的视角审视了后现代主义与过程教学对英语写作的影响,并追根寻源,揭示了导致这些理论和模式产生的人生观。本书涉及的学科理论包括后现代派理论、过程教学论、英语教学、社会语言学、社会学及中国哲学。全书分为8章,每一章都从不同的层面辨析了后现代主义与过程教学论的形成、特征、缺陷及影响。本书角度新颖,引用资料丰富,具有较大的学术参考价值。

Introduction

That the process approach has an orthodox place in writing theory and pedagogy may now be taken as established beyond challenge: academic scholarship canonized it with great earnestness, and at the grassroots level, English teachers, curriculum writers and policy makers have either forgotten or purposefully avoided the terminology in which they were comfortable to use in the teaching of writing in schools two decades ago.

However, it is now timely enough to ask just what that place is. Perhaps a venture of a re-examination may be judged a needless formality; the seemingly success and significance of the process approach, once it has been established as the orthodoxy, not being at all problematic. As a writing pedagogy, it is one that belongs to the decentralized tradition of schooling, of which criticisms (Myers, 1974; Sussman, 1984 and Gilbert, 1988)^① are not infrequently seen.

① Sussman's criticism was that the system did not work. The difficulty was nearly a third of the class were unable to work independently or with other children. A few could work for a while with an adult, but others seemed unable to work at all. Sussman also raised the issue of discipline problem without teacher domination in the classroom. (Sussman, L., 1988, "Innovation at Coolidge: Open Classroom", in *Readings on Interaction in the Classroom*, ed., S. Delamont, London: Methuen, p. 110.)

Myers's concern was that when the teacher was assisting a student with a problem as two or more children waited for assistance, while at the (下转第二页)

These criticisms are of course valuable academic endeavours. But the issue raised is of such a complex nature that some other hidden or less obvious difficulties inherent in the approach should be identified.

There is little to be gained in continuing to list problems. It is more useful to draw them into a larger frame. For this purpose the present book sets out a task that trespasses the borders of a number of disciplines. Yet the focus remains in the study of language and its relation with thought and culture. Any sustained consideration of the problematic, however, leads on into far-reaching theoretical considerations. It seems to us that such theoretical considerations will, in the broadest sense, have to be made within a framework of the sociology of language. In *The Common Pursuit*, F. R. Leavis (1969) writes, “Without the sensitizing familiarity with the subtleties of language, and the insight into the relation between abstract or generalizing thought and the concrete of human experience, that the trained frequentation of literature alone can bring, the thinking that attends social and political studies will not have the edge and force it should.” (p. 194)

(上接第一页) same time, one of more other students fooled around in another part of the room. (Myers, D., 1974, “Why Open Education Died”, *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, vol. 8, p. 63.)

Gilbert’s criticism basically relates to the methodological aspect of the approach, regarding it as no more than “making pedagogical prescription more palatable”. (Gilbert, P., 1988, “Authorship and Creativity in the Classroom: Re-reading the Traditional Frames”, in *Shifting Frames: English/Literature/Writing*, ed., Kevin Hart, Typereader Publications, No. 2, Centre for Studies in Literary Education, Deakin University, p. 36.)

Leavis (1969) raised two issues here: the importance of language in human thinking and the necessity of educational training to facilitate this thinking process. In the particular field of educational analysis, there is always this obvious difficulty: that most of the work we have to look at is the product of reified consciousness, so that what looked like a theoretical breakthrough might become, quite quickly, a methodological trap. The model of process writing is no exception.

It has been argued that “all human activity is an attempt to make a significant response to a particular objective situation. This significant response, whether made consciously or not, is a particular view of the world: an organizing view which is neither made by the individual nor any abstract group, but by individuals in real and collective relations.” (Williams, 1980, p.23) But this sometimes tends to create a problem of ‘domesticating the exotic’ as Bourdieu contends in his analysis of objectivations — making conscious and problematic that which is unconscious, taken-for-granted orthodoxy. Bourdieu (1988) argues:

The sociologist who chooses to study his own world in its nearest and most familiar aspects should not, as the ethnologist would, domesticate the exotic, but, if I may venture the expression, exoticise the domestic, through a break with his initial relation of intimacy with modes of life and thought which remain opaque to him because they are too familiar (p. xi).

With this understanding in mind, we will start with a macro ontological study informed by the Chinese yin-yang paradigm (Kuhn, 1962) to ‘exoticise the domestic’ (Bourdieu, 1988) as this different conceptualization may bring new understandings to the mode of thinking which remain opaque simply because they are

too familiar. This will be followed up by a micro social psychological study of the self (Mead, 1934) to see the mechanisms that constitute it. Mead's theory of the self highlights the social origin of self formation, and more significantly, the significant role of the 'other' which is seen at an early stage in the role of a parent and later in what Mead phrased as 'the generalized other' and finally, a dialectical study of language and its relation with thought and culture to map genetically the formation of higher mental development (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) , thus forming a three-dimensional typology.

The theoretical dispositions do not rest with these writers only. The detailed analysis will incorporate insights gained from myriad intellectual sources, such as Arnold (1960) , Habermas (1979) , Piaget (1962, 1972) , Williams (1980, 1983) to name only a few, who wrote respectively on this topic though in different contexts. These writers all believe there is an important 'other' in the educational process to help the young individual in the formation and development of his personality. They also emphasize the importance of interactions carried on at the initial interpersonal level, revealing a sense of developmental sequence.

The central questions to be addressed are: Who is the 'other'? And how is this 'other' or otherness awareness gained? While this may sound somewhat dogmatic, it can be easily identified with the yin-yang approach as one of the cosmic principles that complement each other in the generating of myriad things, with Mead (1934) and his notion of the reflective 'generalized other' and, with Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981) and their expounding of 'internalization' or 'inner speech'. The theorizations also show that

this other is not a prior given nor a fully-fledged entity. Its accessibility is only attainable through continuous and creative cultivation. This implies life long learning, and learning situated in a larger social context.

Other writers such D'Arcy (1959) also noted the role of the 'other'. But D'Arcy's conception of the 'other' is not quite the same as the one mentioned above. In his Christian belief this 'other' has been described as a mystic existence. D'Arcy writes:

In Christianity the truth is free from subjective fancyings; it comes down from above and exercises the severest control of symbol and image and fantasy; it can be as cold as ice and as inflexible as the historical fact on which it rests, and it beats down upon the soul with all the alien power of an existent truth which is not a dream (p. 170).

D'Arcy's understanding of the 'other' is by no means close to that of the modern postulation by Mead, Habermas, Vygotsky and Bakhtin, who we shall discuss respectively in the following chapters. Instead, it is, in essence, grounded in the Christian belief of God creating the world. Viewed in this way an image of the highly abstract divine power is projected. We may, perhaps, call it a macro-individualism, one which is not secular and functions in ways not very different from that of postmodernists, as will be argued later in this book. This permits us to have another mode of contention with the process writing approach as an individualistic approach ontologically related to the prevailing post-modern conditions of later Western capitalist society.

It is part of the argument of this book that the post-modern approach

is an alienated one in that by placing methodologically too much emphasis on the linguistic process, and by shifting politically the central position away from the dominant Eurocentric culture to that of a de-centred cultural force, postmodernists as well as process theorists have created for themselves a cultural nihilism where there is no significance given to lived tangible relations, no centre ground upon which to stand, no continuity that one can trace back for identity. This dilemma has been noted by Lynch (1991) :

In the new order, a woman, forty-eight years of age, can be both mother and grandmother — implanted with daughter's eggs and artificially inseminated from the sperm of her son-in-law-to trip-lets. No longer relevant it seems, are lines of continuity between bodily inception, social relationships, and personal identity (p. 118) .

Lynch is more concerned with the personal, legal and ethical aspects of the issue. For us it is an issue of the self-other relation. But Lynch reveals a sense of continuity which is obviously lost in the mist of post-modern theorisations, especially in its delineation of the self-other relation. It is just this 'other' that is of much significance in our argument. "The other, muteness that begs a voice from the one who speaks and demands the ear of the one who listens." (Castellanos, quoted in Lynch, 1991, p. 118) However, to have an awareness of the 'other' is not a random process. It is a complex process in which an individual must be empowered through education

or socialisation^② to meet the ‘other’ in a somehow indefensible manner. This is like what JanMohamed (quoted in Todorov, 1986) described that “genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture However, this entails in practice the virtually impossible task of negating one’s very being, precisely because one’s culture is what formed that being.” (p. 175) We shall discuss this again in Chapters Four and Five.

The conceptual vehicle for this exploration is the idea of reciprocity. The relevance of this reciprocity lies not in its connotations and representations at the methodological level, but rather its role as a higher analytical apparatus. The book will proceed in the order of the following chapters. Chapter One sets out the scene in which we spell out in some detail the arguments, such as the reciprocal nature of the process, the role of the ‘other’ and the importance of education. A

② Bernstein (1972) defines socialisation as “the process whereby the biological is transformed into a specific cultural being. It follows from this that the process of socialization is complex process of control, whereby a particular moral, cognitive and affective awareness is evoked in the child and given a specific form and content. Socialization sensitizes the child to the various orderings of society as these are made substantive in the various roles he is expected to play The process acts selectively on the possibilities of man by creating through time a sense of the inevitability of a given social arrangement, and through limiting the areas of permitted change. The basic agencies of socialization in contemporary societies are the family, the peer group, school, and work. It is through these agencies, and in particular through their relationship to each other, that the various orderings of society are made manifest.” (Bernstein, B., 1972, “Social Class, Language and Socialization”, in *Language in Education*, ed., A. Cashman & Elizabeth Grugeon, London & Boston: the Open University Press, p. 104)

review of the traditional and modern writing theories is provided to trace a link along the historical continuum. The link would enable us to develop the argument that the process approach is a post-modern product derived from Western individualism. The review alludes that, along the historical continuum, there is an 'other', though this 'other' could be identified with various entities and notions.

Having identified the connection between postmodernism and process writing, Chapter Two scrutinizes some of the fundamental positions taken by post-modern theorists like Lyotard, Foucault, Baudrillard and Barthes by setting them in contrast with theories of process writing by Graves and Murray. Like the post-modern writers who have projected in their writings a world governed by linguistic processing, and in which there is no central ground to stand on, the writers of process approach have also created a writing classroom where students are seen playing with language, and where the inherited cultural legacy and the role of the 'other' seem no longer relevant, or at least has been reduced to the level of insignificance.

With a hypothesis that the difficulty with the process approach is ontologically-induced, we start in Chapter Three to explore the Chinese yin-yang philosophy to highlight the issue from a different perspective. Chapters Four and Five further address the difficulty through an analysis of the theory of Mead's interactionist approach, and that of Vygotsky's higher mental formation to look into the nature of the writing process as reciprocal self-other interaction. In both Mead's interactive reflective approach and Vygotsky's genetic analysis of thought formation, the process of writing can be viewed as a process of personality development which evolves through different stages from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal. Chapter Six is an empirical study of the writing process in which the composing process of a

number of writers of different cultural backgrounds is examined to further illustrate our argument. These examples show not only a process of an interactive nature at both inter- and intrapersonal level, but also the role played by ‘the significant other’. In the chapters to follow we shall proceed our argument in a way that has been designed.

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Chapter 1

An Overview of the Writing Process

*What we are today comes from our thoughts of
yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life
of tomorrow*

The Buddha

Recently, in the consideration of the teaching of writing in the English curriculum, much attention has been given to the ‘process approach’, developed particularly by the North American educator Donald Graves (1983). The influence of this ‘process approach’ is such that it has simply become a slogan of numerous college textbooks, large and small, validated by enclosure within brightly-coloured covers with the imprimatur of Harper & Row, Macmillan, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Scott, Foresman (Cooper, 1986, p.364) and many writing teachers (from elementary to tertiary levels) have internalized the process assumptions. The overwhelming influence has been further illustrated by Woods and Eckart (1984) with an understanding of it being ‘a new orthodoxy’.

The Writing Process has held us captive for the past few years. The works of Britton, Moffat, Graves and Murray have influenced the way writing is taught. The notion of the composing process as

recursive, as a process of changing, revising, sharing (in a conference) and publishing has become for many a new orthodoxy (p.27) .

However, theoretical models, even as they may sharpen our understanding and stimulate new insights, blind us to some aspects of the actual writing process. It is a question of considerable potential argument as to whether the process of writing by established or experienced literary authors should be the model which is used in teaching school students. It is equally important to consider whether or not the ‘process approach’ is an adequate or complete account of the method by which a work of literature is created.

The investigation, which is central to this thesis, is one of the relationships between the writer and the ‘other’, a point which is of equal importance and has been dealt with frequently by almost all composing theorists and teachers of various process models. This comes to the author as a matter worthy of investigation through a careful consideration and scrutiny of the relationship between the two in a new perspective. The prevailing process models reveal basically two major problems; (1) insufficient recognition of the role of the ‘other’, (2) flatness of delineation of the interrelatedness between writer and the ‘other’. We will go further to argue that there exists ontologically a link between the current belief in a condition of postmodernism and process writing, which is itself grounded in the Western tradition of individualism.

In the theorization of process writing the role of the ‘other’ is also discussed at the various stages of the writing process, especially in the stage of ‘conferencing’, in which the role of the ‘author’ and his ‘personal experience’ have been given too much emphasis. However, this ‘other’ is different from what this book is going to