Persuasive Writing in Context: An Attempt to Incorporate Public Speaking

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1 Introduction

With the advent of the computer and the IT-driven age, many academic discussions and business transactions are being done through such technology without face-to-face interactions. The ability to write with critical analysis and persuasion in English has become necessary to whomever wants to pursue careers in the present world, and it has become the utmost priority in the education of any country today (Warschauer, 2000). Unlike other skills, developing writing abilities is the area where formal education is indispensable, and among the different modes of writing, persuasive or argumentative writing, in particular, is considered to be one of the most challenging areas in English language teaching. For Japanese learners the difficulty is two-fold; first, it is cognitively the most demanding type of writing among other types of writing, and second, Japanese culture has different views and approaches toward this type of writing, thus our students have to learn cultural factors as well.

First of all, there is a paramount fact that this type of writing is considered most challenging cognitively. Many researchers place persuasive or argumentative writing as the most complex, thus most difficult end on the line of writing modes. Reed, Burton, and Kelly (1985) divide writing

into three modes, narration, description, and persuasion, with cognitive engagement increasing in that order. Schultz (1991) uses four categories, i.e., narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. Referring to Flower's concepts, he groups the first three modes together as utilizing primarily linear cognitive processes that writers can utilize fairly automatically for writing purposes, while the argumentative essay requires "higher-level cognitive skills that can be conceived of as a multi-dimensional network of conceptual constructs" (p. 412). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) suggest two mental processes working behind writing activities: knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming models. They claim that persuasive writing uses the knowledge-transforming model of writing, which requires a sophisticated interplay of problem recognition and solution, whereas other types of writing such as narration require only the knowledge-telling model, the mechanism of which is much simpler. Whether this higher order thinking ability is teachable or not still remains to be proven.

In addition to the innate complex quality of this type of writing, socio-cultural and educational backgrounds in the Japanese setting have to be tackled. To persuade others one needs to know what the reader (listener) expects as the most effective way to move others. The writer (speaker) will have to adjust to the reader's (listener's) expectations to make his/her points understood. If the expectations are different in the student's second language (L2) from their first language (L1), then he/she will have to adjust his/her strategy. Since the 1960s, following Kaplan's seminal work (1966), much research has been conducted to explicate the different rhetorical patterns in Japanese and English, which also reflect the expectations of the audience in each culture. For example, in Japanese writing, the thesis statement tends to be placed at the end instead of at the beginning as in English (Hirose, 1984); the Japanese reader is expected to play a more

active role in understanding a written piece, while in English the writer assumes the responsibility to write explicitly (Hinds, 1987); the Japanese writer prefers to use the first person perspective even when writing in English (Oi, 1998); the Japanese students employ affective appeals, while the American counterparts use rational appeals as argumentative strategies (Kamimura & Oi, 1998); and the Japanese writer tends to shift sides in argumentative writing (Oi, 1998). These research findings are resonant with more general observations of society by researchers in other fields. For example, Okabe (1993) describes Japan as a non-confrontational society, where explicit verbal exchanges are often evaded; Nishimura (1997) notices that Japanese writing and speech are characteristic of a monologue, but English writing and speech have that of a dialogue, thus necessitating the English writer (speaker) to always expect and cope with responses from the audience.

In recent years, however, findings in contrastive rhetoric described above have been criticized by those who believe that different writing patterns are a result of developmental, and not of cultural reasons, and that advanced experienced learners use rhetorical patterns similar to those of English (Mohan and Lo, 1985; Kubota, 1998, 1999). However, the beginner and intermediate students we teach daily do exhibit many features of language transfer from their L1, which affect the quality of their argument. Matsu-moto and Kumamoto (2005) for example, claim that some of the Japanese students' difficulty in acquiring English causal conjunctives can be attributed to the conceptual difference of these grammatical features in their native language.

Part of the reason may be attributed to the educational system in Japan. To train students to become aware of the rhetorical differences that lie between their L1 and L2, secondary language education, both Japanese

and English, is important, but neither is reportedly done sufficiently. For example, Ishihara (2005) claims that the teaching of critical thinking and argumentation is nonexistent in state-approved secondary *kokugo* (Japanese language) textbooks. Not only in the students' L1, but also in their L2, for many of which is English, the teaching of writing in secondary education is scarcely done (Miyata, 2002), let alone persuasive writing. Thus, at the tertiary level, Japanese students have to learn a mode of writing entirely new to them without much help from their mother language or culture.

To ease the transition from the students' L1 context to L2 context, many writing textbooks use peer group activities in various phases of writing, such as idea generation, editing, and feedback. Using Vygotskean perspectives on writing, L2 peer group feedback is increasing its importance to help students become more effective, sensitive, and insightful readers for their peers' writing. It is also helpful in making students aware of the existence of audience. However, as peer group activities depend heavily on the students' prior instructional socializations and their L2 proficiency, they should be used with caution (Carson, 1992; and Nelson and Murphy, 1993).

In this author's past teaching experiences at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, peer group activities are helpful as long as the scope of the task is limited to local revision. When asked for a holistic evaluation of an essay, even a carefully designed format did not seem to help students much. With lower-intermediate students, their L2 fluency greatly affects the outcome of the activities, both in speaking and in writing; verbal interactions do not always develop into a critical discussion. They seem to transfer much back-channeling behavior that they use in their L1 into their English conversation. Maynard (1986) points out that in casual conversational discourse turn-internal listener back-channeling phenomena in Japanese and American English differ in terms of types, frequency, and

context, namely, Japanese use far more back-channeling (three times as much), and the types are not limited to grammatical completion, which is a dominant strategy in American English, but also include sentence particles and head movements. She speculates that this provides some evidence of Japanese people's conflict-avoiding and harmonious style of social interaction. This kind of behavior could undermine peer group activities when precise verbal expressions are required in a classroom setting to critically improve each other's essays. We need more confrontational activities that inevitably involve students into face-to-face interactions, which will make them aware of their audience.

Teaching how to give a persuasive speech in an academic writing class may provide students such a formal opportunity and make them face their audience directly. The rationale of using public speaking comes from a recent trend which envisages writing in a wider context. The students will better understand why they have to write in a certain way if they experience where the task of writing is located in the academic setting. In the past, ESL/EFL writing was taught separately from other skill areas and content areas. In recent years, however, the framework of academic writing has expanded and been made more elaborate and precise incorporating the notion of genre (Connor, 2004). On the same note, acknowledging the contribution of contrastive rhetoric research, Matsuda (2001) further proposes a more dynamic model trying to place the writing process in a broader context. In his social constructionistic view, both the writer and the reader form a discourse community: both of them are participants. The organizational structure of written discourse was thought to be determined solely by whom the writer was, but in his dynamic model of L2 writing, the diagram of which is replicated in Figure 1 below, the organization of the text is influenced by the writer's perception and the decision of what

the context of writing is. The process of writing is then regarded as the process of deciding how to respond to that context. Thus, "[b]ecause an effective organization of text must reflect the decisions that the writer makes based on his or her perception of the context of writing, the teaching of organization necessarily involves <u>the teaching of the awareness of the context of writing</u>" (p. 252, emphasis added). It is in this dynamic model that the teaching of individual writing skills will make true sense to the students. Not until they realize they have a public audience will they understand the importance of careful organization, grammar, and all other details they have learned in their writing class. Note also that the audience includes both native English speakers (NES) as well as users of English as a second language (ESL); thus, the text the students create will face a dynamic discourse community in which they also play a part. Tardy (2004) reports on the moment when one of her graduate students exclaimed that now he

Figure 1

The Dynamic Model of L2 Writing (Matsuda, 2001)
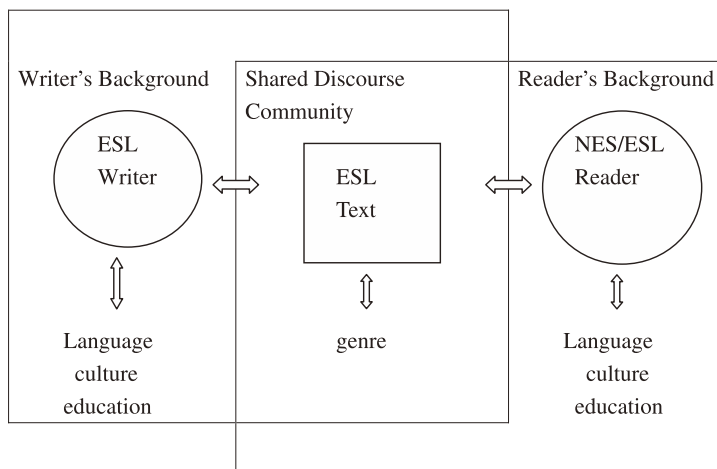
had understood what academic writing really was after having experienced two years of disciplinary participation. Her student understood writing only after experiencing the whole context of academic activities.

There is a difference in the style and diction between oral and written language, of course. However, as long as the function of language is limited to fairly formal persuasion, the difference should not be detrimental. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) refer to Biber's study on spoken and written textual variation, and call our attention not to be too judgmental:

> The implication of this line of research for the study of writing and composition is that all texts are complex multidimentional structures, including texts written by students; claims made in writing research about distinctions between oral and written language, as well as oral features in student composition, are, for the most part, greatly oversimplified, requiring caution with respect to many of the assertions based on these premises. (p. 17)

They further state that "the uses of oral and written language interact and reinforce each other as sets of practices that serve social functions" (p. 17, emphasis added). Thus, if the social function is clearly explained to students, the use of oral language will surely facilitate the learning of written language.

If this works well, support in social factors should alleviate students' cognitive burden of learning how to write. However, making less-skilled learners engage in a combination of speaking and writing activities may increase their cognitive burden. As previously mentioned, some researchers pointed out that because this kind of writing involves higher-level cognitive skills, less-skilled learners' attentions do not cover the whole range of activities necessary to produce quality writing (Reed, *et al.*, 1985). For lower-level students, the addition of public speaking activities may distract

their attention from the writing improvement *per se*. So far, there has been no empirical study in this respect.

This paper examines how incorporating public speaking into the writing class facilitates students' ability in persuasive writing. The research questions are as follows:

(1) Does incorporating public speaking help students improve their persuasive writing?

(2) Does it place any heavier burden on the students, especially on those who are in a low-proficiency class?

(3) Does it make students aware of the importance of organization, addressing the audience, and other features necessary for process writing?

2 Procedure

2.1 Subjects and How the Classes were Conducted

Two sophomore writing courses the author taught in the 2004 academic year, one regular and one advanced, participated in this study. Twelve regular and fifteen advanced course students took the pre-test at the beginning of the academic year, and the post-test at the end of it: Though there were originally 17 students in each class, five regular and two advanced students were deleted from the data because they either did not come to class regularly or missed the required pre- and post- tests. The pre- and post-tests, the prompts of which are shown in the Appendix, were given at the beginning and at the end of the year, respectively, using 30 minutes of class time each. Both courses were conducted mostly in English with occasional use of Japanese when difficult conceptual explanations were necessary. Both classes were taught in almost the same way. Though the advanced class usually finished the assigned task faster and tended to do more work during class time, the author did not feel much qualitative

difference between students or the need to teach them differently.

The first semester was used for reviewing paragraph organization and other basic skills the students learned in their first year. They wrote three paragraphs using different types of organization, including narrative, descriptive, and opinion writing, revising at least once after receiving comments from their peers and instructor. Every time they wrote a paragraph, they were asked to write an outline beforehand and submit it at the same time. The importance of the outline was stressed because it would later make the students aware of the structural similarity with speech construction. Towards the end of the first semester, essay structure was explained and students finished the first draft of their speech outlines before the summer vacation.

In the second semester, before the students' speech drafts were peer reviewed, the concept of the Toulmin model (Oi, 2005) was introduced. As the model may be complicated for the students, they were not expected to actually use it, but nevertheless it was shown to them in the hope that they sensed the necessity of carefully structured, logical argumentation necessary to persuade the public. With their revised outlines in hand, the students spoke to a group of five or six peers to get a feel of what it was like to make a speech. After this experience, they began to write the first speech draft using the outline. While they were writing and rewriting the drafts, remedial grammar reviews were made for a few weeks using error samples from the students' own writing as suggested by Moriya (1997). The grammar errors that seemed to affect the logical quality of persuasion, such as causal verbs, modals, and cause-effect relations, were chosen. When the students' final drafts were ready, some delivery advice was given, including gesture and eye contact, based on some public speaking textbooks (Payne and Carlin, 1994; Dale and Wolf, 1988; Harrington and LeBeau,

1996). Students first practiced their speech with gestures in small groups. They then went to the front of the classroom, and practiced the delivery at least once: most students tried two or three times. They were allowed to glance at their outlines, but were told not to read them. Throughout the second semester, the aim of the class was to give students a context that necessitated them to write, and to write to persuade others. The similarities that are shared in persuasive writing and public speaking were emphasized throughout the semester. Though these two skills are different communication forms, one is oral with many non-linguistic features, and the other is written, both persuasive writing and public speaking have a similar construction of three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion; they use similar organizational patterns such as chronological, comparison/contrast, etc.; and above all, both regard audience as a key element in preparing a good essay or speech (Payne and Carlin, 1994; Dale and Wolf, 1988; Oshima and Hogue, 1991). The author's original idea was to make all students participate in the annual speech contest hosted by the university, where speakers talk to an international audience using only their outlines. Only three students from the advanced class participated after all, but to have that as a goal was consistently repeated throughout the course.

Aside from the activities described above, a routine task was given at the beginning of each class throughout the year. The first five minutes in the first semester and ten minutes in the second semester were used for freewriting. Students were instructed to write on any topic they liked without worrying about grammar. They then counted the number of words they wrote, divided it by the minutes, and recorded it on a graph, which was supplied at the beginning of each semester. The aim of freewriting was to increase fluency and help students generate new ideas for their writing.

2.2 Analyses

The quantitative analyses included two phases: (1) the writing improvement made between the students' pre- and post-tests, and (2) the pre- and post-questionnaire results to look into the changes in the students' perception about writing. In phase (1), the students' pre- and post-tests were scored by Criterion[1] and the author using a six-point holistic scale. The holistic scoring guide for Criterion has six levels and includes syntactic and rhetorical criteria.[2] Differences between ratings were resolved by averaging the two scores. The holistic scores were averaged and a *t*-test was applied for each class result to see if the pre- and post-test difference in each class was statistically significant. To look at the improvement more analytically, the word count and the presence of a thesis statement and a preview[3] were also checked. The number of words in the students' pre- and post-tests was counted and compared in each class to show the improvement in the students' writing fluency. Also, the presence of a thesis statement was checked to see students' organizational improvement. The essays were classified into three groups: thesis statement in the introduction, incomplete thesis statement, and nonexistent thesis statement. In phase (2), to show students' increased awareness toward writing, their perceived difficulty in the five components of writing was compared in their pre- and post-questionnaires. The five components were grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, ideas, and organization. A year-end survey was conducted to see which of the classroom features was helpful for the students. The features included (1) freewriting, (2) incorporating speech, (3) using an outline, (4) grammar reviews, and (5) using English as the language of instruction.

In the qualitative part of the analysis, samples of a student's first and revised outlines, and another student's pre- and post-tests are introduced to demonstrate their increased awareness of the writing context.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Quantitative analyses

3.1.1 Holistic score

Figure 2 summarizes the mean holistic scores of the pre- and post-tests for the advanced and regular classes. The advanced class gained .90, from 2.10 to 3.00 on a scale of 6; and the regular class, .75, from 1.38 to 2.13. Both classes achieved significant improvement (for the advanced class, $t = -5.89$, $p<.01$; and for the regular class, $t = -6.25$, $p<.01$). Inter-rater reliability for the raters was $r = .79$ for all the essays.
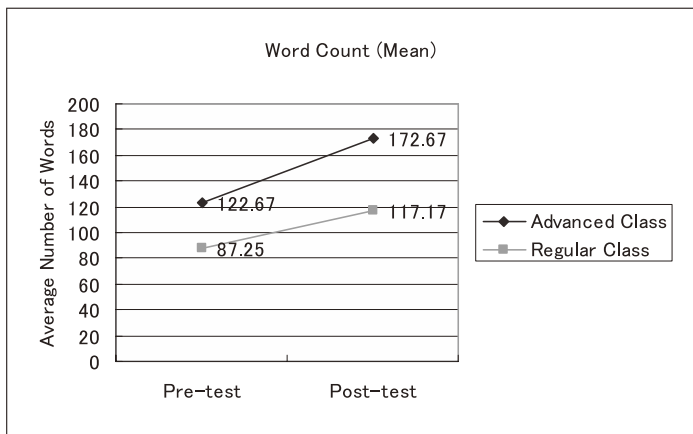
Figure 2
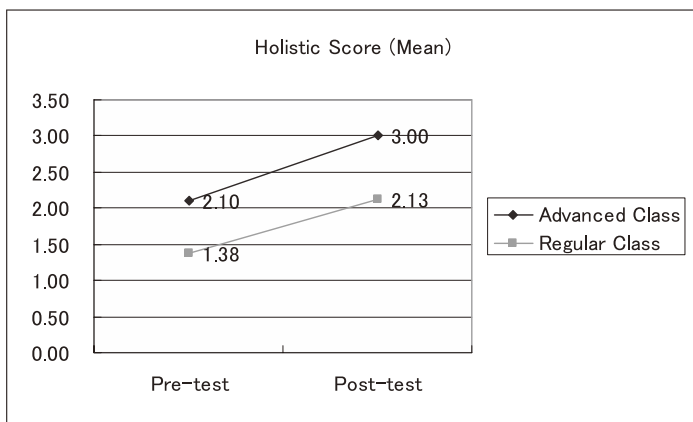
3.1.2 Word count of pre- and post-tests

The number of words in the pre- and post-tests was counted in each class, and the mean scores were obtained (Figure 3). The advanced class gained 50.00 points over the year, from 122.67 to 172.67, while the regular class gained 29.92 points, from 87.25 to 117.17. Both classes gained fluency, though the advanced class showed a greater increase than the

regular one.

Figure 3

3.1.3 The presence of a thesis statement and a preview

The presence of a thesis statement in those tests was checked, together with that of a preview. (See Figures 4 and 5 for regular and advanced classes, respectively.) In both of these classes the presence of a thesis statement, abbreviated as "T/S ok," increased remarkably. All students in both classes were able to place the thesis statement in the introductory part of their essays. At the beginning of the year, only a few students were able to do so: most of them either had an imperfect thesis statement, abbreviated as "T/S imp" in the graph, stating only, "I agree," or "I think so," or they had no thesis statement at all, which was abbreviated as "No T/S." Also, the number of students who wrote a preview increased from almost none at the beginning to about half of them in each class at the end of the year. Considering the fact that at the beginning of the year, the

students had had a year of writing class which covered basic paragraph and essay writing and still were not able to master these basic skills, the results of the end of the second year are a significant feat.
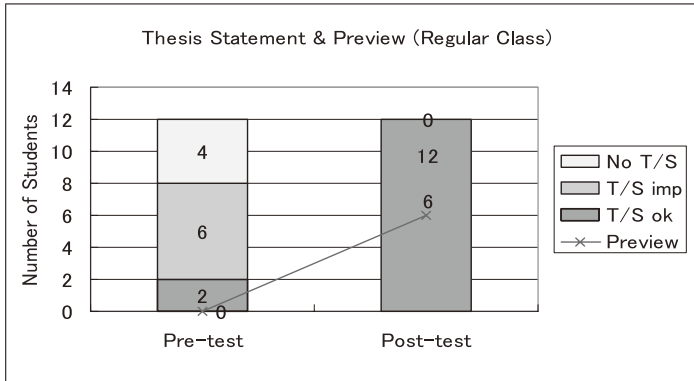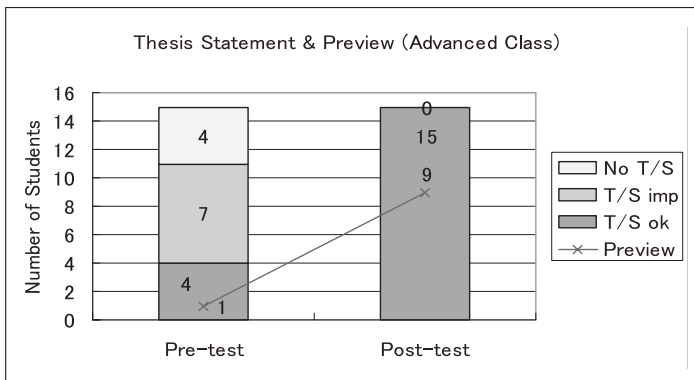
Figure 4

Figure 5

3.2 Pre- and post-questionnaires

3.2.1 Students' perceived difficulty in the five components of writing

The students were asked, "How easy are these things when you write in

English? Circle the most appropriate number," on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1=very challenging, 2=somewhat challenging, 3=somewhat easy, and 4=very easy. The mean score for each item is shown below (Table 1).

Table 1

		April 2004	January 2005
Regular Class	Grammar	3.08	2.00
	Vocabulary	2.00	2.08
	Mechanics	2.50	2.42
	Ideas	2.50	2.17
	Organization	2.17	2.25
Advanced Class	Grammar	3.08	3.08
	Vocabulary	2.33	2.50
	Mechanics	2.67	3.00
	Ideas	2.50	2.75
	Organization	2.33	2.42

In general, students in the regular class felt writing in English was more difficult, while those in the advanced class felt it was easier after two semesters of writing practice. Among the five components of writing, only Vocabulary and Organization were perceived as easier at the end of the year by students in the regular class, while in the advanced class, all the components were perceived to be easier, with the exception of Grammar, which was perceived to be of equal difficulty, at the end of the year. It is interesting to note that at the beginning of the year, students in both classes scored 3.08 (somewhat easy) for Grammar, but at the end of the year the mean score of the students in the regular class dropped to 2.00 (somewhat difficult), while that of the advanced class remained the same. The students' educational and motivational backgrounds may have played a role; i.e., those who had experienced using grammar only passively in

reading classes might have found it difficult when using it in actual written production. Students in the regular class were more likely to have studied English passively, while those in the advanced class, more actively. Facing the need of productive grammar, it is possible that students in the regular class now feel grammar is "somewhat difficult."

3.2.2 The year-end questionnaire (evaluation of the features of the course)

The students were asked to evaluate the following five features of the course at the end of the year. They answered the following five questions on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1=not at all, 2=not much, 3=neither yes or no, 4=somewhat, and 5=very much.

(1) Do you think the freewriting time helped you improve your writing ability?

(2) Do you think writing a speech and presenting it in front of other people helped you improve your writing ability?

(3) Do you think writing an outline helped you improve your writing ability?

(4) Do you think the series of grammar clinics helped you understand grammar better?

(5) Do you think the use of English in the classroom is effective for learning writing?

Table 2 shows the mean scores obtained in each class.

In both the regular and advanced classes, the students thought writing an outline helped improve their writing most: the mean score of the regular class is 3.92, while that of the advanced class is 4.27. In the advanced class, writing a speech and presenting it to the public ranked second after writing an outline, together with freewriting at 3.80; however, in the regular

Table 2

	Classroom features	Mean score
Regular Class	(1) Free writing	3.75
	(2) Writing speech/presentation	3.50
	(3) Outline	3.92
	(4) Grammar clinics	3.58
	(5) Using English	3.08
Advanced Class	(1) Free writing	3.80
	(2) Writing speech/presentation	3.80
	(3) Outline	4.27
	(4) Grammar clinics	3.67
	(5) Using English	3.40

class, it only came fourth. Since students were only allowed to have their outline when they spoke to the class, one would naturally assume that if the outline writing was the highest, the experience of giving a speech in front of the class would also score high. This was true with the advanced class, but not with the regular class. The students with a fairly high oral proficiency in the advanced class might have felt it was easy to present to the public, thus perceiving it helpful for their writing improvement; while the less-skilled speakers of the regular class could have felt the occasion too much of a burden, thus perceiving it as not so helpful. The use of English as the language of instruction received the lowest evaluation in both classes; however, here again, the proficiency level played some role in their judgment. The students in the advanced class gave the average of 3.40, while the students in the regular class, 3.08. It is understandable that regular class students feel insecure when the complex nature of writing is explained in English, especially when they do not have writing experience in their first language.

3.3 Qualitative analyses

3.3.1 Outlines

Sample outlines, the first and revised ones, produced by a student in the regular class are introduced here. After brainstorming, she wrote her ideas in her outline (shown below), which lacked global coherence: in the thesis statement she declares that she wants to talk about the danger of having mobile phones, but in the following paragraphs, she enlists positive sides of mobile phones, thus ending up not arguing for her thesis at all.

Speech Outline

Paragraph 1 (Introduction)

  Get the audience's attention/give background information:
  – *Do you have mobile phones?* –
    Almost everyone has it today.
    The price dropped.
    It gives confortable life to us.

  Thesis statement:
    There are a lot of dengerous points about it. I want to think about the ploblem.

> The thesis statement is not fully focused.

  Preview:

Paragraph 2 (Body)

  Topic sentence:
    A mobile phone has a lot of useful function.

> The topic sentence does not directly support the thesis statement.

  Support 1: *We can communicate with someone anytime and anywhere.*
            telephone, e-mail

  Support 2: *Almost all of mobile phones have camera.*
            We can record memories. Some mobile phones have TV telephone.

  Support 3: *There are any other functions.*
            Game, pay money at convenience store, TV, music player, internet

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Paragraph 3 (Body)

  Topic sentence:

    A mobile phone influences children.

    Support 1: *Almost all of children have mobile phones.*

               They can communicate with their parents.

               the prevention of crime

    Support 2: *There are a lot of dengerous sites.*

               They can meet people easily.

               There is possibility that a lot of money are demanded.

    Support 3: *They can send e-mail anytime.*

               Many students send e-mail in class.

Paragraph 4 (Body)

  Topic sentence:

    A mobile phone also causes a lot of social problem.

    Support 1: *Mobile phones are used for various crime.*

               Chain mail, take pictures secretly by camera, fraud

    Support 2: *We may bother people.*

Paragraph 5 (Conclusion)

  Conclusion: *A mobile phone is necessary for us, but we must not forget that there are a lot of danger.*

  Final thought:

    In the future, our life will be more and more affected by mobile phone.

    We must not rely on mobile phone so much.

    A mobile phone is only one of the machine.

The student exchanged her outline with her group members who checked for unity and coherence. The task is easier at this stage than later when full drafts are written. The author as instructor also helped to clarify what the student really wanted to say, that is, what her thesis statement was, how to support her opinion with effective reasons, and pointed out major logical problems. The following is the same student's revised outline done as homework.

Speech Outline (revised)

Paragraph 1 (Introduction)

  Get the audience's attention/give background information:

  – Do you have mobile phones? –
    Almost everyone has one today.
    The price dropped.
    It gives confortable life to us, but…

  Thesis statement:

    There are a lot of dangerous points about it. I want you to think about the ploblem.

  Preview:

Paragraph 2 (Body)

  Topic sentence:

    E-mail causes a lot of danger.

  Support 1: *We can meet people whose name, appearance and character we don't know easily.*
              We may be deceived by someone.
              We may be involved in crime.

  Support 2: *A lot of annoying direct e-mails are sent by someone.*
              It costs us to receive e-mail.

Paragraph 3 (Body)

  Topic sentence:

    A mobile phone also causes a lot of social problems.

  Support 1: *The crime that people use camera is increasing.*
              Taking picture in covert. Girls, book at the bookstore, etc.

  Support 2: *We may be involved in fraud.*
              Our phone ring one time. ⇛ *remain the "received class."*
              ⇛ *We call the number.* ⇛ *We are demanded much money.*
              We can get prepaid mobile phone easily without making a contract. ⇛ *be used crime*

Paragraph 4 (Conclusion)

  Conclusion:

    We must not forget that there is a lot of danger.

  Final thought:

    In the future, our life will be more and more affected by mobile phones.
    We must not rely on mobile phones so much.
    A mobile phone is only a kind of machines.

It is easy to point out that the revised outline still lacks a preview, and there are many misspellings, but the global problems are almost all fixed. The thesis was changed from "There are a lot of dengerous (*sic*) points about it. I want to think about the ploblem (*sic*)" to "There are a lot of dangerous points about it. I want <u>you</u> to think about the ploblem (*sic*) (emphasis added)." From the self-centered monologue of the first draft, the student is now clearly sensing the presence of an audience in the revised draft. Also, the second and the third paragraphs are now directly supporting the thesis statement. She is saying that one danger is caused by sending and receiving e-mails on a personal basis (paragraph 2) and that it can also develop into social problems (paragraph 3).

3.3.2 Pre- and post-tests

The pre- and the post-tests of a student in the advanced class are shown below.

> **Pre-test**
>
> [No indentation.] [The thesis statement is not clearly stated.]
>
> I agree this issue. When parents give a lot of money to their children, they think they don't need to work hard. And I guess, they use all their money for play, and after that they tell their parents to give more money. They don't realize that making money is how hard and important. They will be not able to live by themselves. I think they can't independent on their parents.
> Other reason, if parents do everything for their children, they will be not able to get knowledge. They can't live alone and finally their parents will always help their children, even they get over 20 years old.
> I think parents make their children's lives too easy is the same thing that they makes their children's lives more hard
> (129 words)
>
> [Supporting reasons are not well-developed.]

The student scored 2 and 4 in the pre- and post-tests respectively. Compared to her pre-test, she sounds much more confident in the way she presents her opinion in the post-test. The most remarkable change is that the student is now aware of the audience ("I want to tell you…"), though this is not a convention of formal academic writing. However, the awareness of the existence of an audience gave her writing a focus to carry on her argument. Each paragraph has a main idea: the first one is the introduction with a clear thesis statement, the second one tells the possibility of children bringing in dangerous things to school, the third one explains the necessity to protect innocent children, and the last one is the conclusion.

4 Conclusion

The present study has made clear that incorporating public speaking helped students improve their ability of persuasive writing. The mean holistic score of students in both the regular and advanced classes on the post-test, when compared with that of the pre-test, increased close to 1 point on a scale of 6. Also, both their fluency measured by word count, and organization measured by the presence of a thesis statement and preview have improved. Secondly, through the pre- and post-questionnaires, it was found that for regular class students, grammar, mechanics, and idea generation were felt to be more difficult as a result of taking this course, unlike the advanced class students, who felt an overall increased facility in all areas. This could well be that the demand of productive use of language for communication made the regular class students aware of their uncertainty in these skills urging them to learn more carefully. It could have been the reason of their improved mean score in the post-test, regardless of their low self-evaluation. If so, coping with cognitively demanding tasks may make students insecure, but they nevertheless seek a solution. Students in the regular class may have felt burdened with complex activities, but as the tasks were contextualized, students seemed to have taken them in a positive way. Thirdly, students began to understand the complex nature of writing, and became aware of some useful writing strategies as a result of taking this course. The year-end questionnaire revealed that both regular and advanced class students admitted that writing outlines helped improve their essays. The advanced class students also found speech presentations to be helpful, whereas the regular class students found freewriting and the grammar clinics more useful than speech presentations for the improvement of their writing. The use of English as the language of instruction was regarded the lowest in both classes.

Some research limitations still remain to be investigated in the future. The students' improvement in writing was holistically measured by comparing the pre- and post tests in the present study. In order to have a more in-depth analysis of why and how their writing improved, it is necessary to look into individual student writing and interview students on the strategies they used as in the study conducted by Cheng (2005).

What the above findings suggest to a university writing classroom seems to be simply pointing in one direction: contextualize writing by incorporating other skill areas. For low-proficiency students, though, caution is necessary as they may develop anxiety especially when productive activities are combined. More grammar exercises tied to productive activities have to be explored for this level of students to build their confidence. Also, considering the cognitive complexity that is placed upon them, bilingual instructions may be more desirable than those given in the target language alone.

The present study incorporated public speaking, but a more traditional and powerfully potential area is combining reading. It could be particularly effective for helping low-proficiency students in many aspects as illustrated in their questionnaires. Their feeling of insecurity in grammar and vocabulary building can be more efficiently dealt with if reading is combined. The lower level students' difficulty with generating ideas is mostly because they do not read. If the writing task is based on a previous reading, the idea generation stage should be easier for students. There has been a large number of articles written on reading and writing connections thus far, but many are experiential. As is the case with the present study in which the same mode (persuasion) of speaking and writing was chosen, in reading too, choosing the appropriate mode or genre may matter. Further investigation in this direction is necessary.

Notes

1) Criterion[SM] is a Web-based automated evaluation program developed by Educational Testing Services (ETS). Criterion's *e-rater*® software engine was developed in the mid-1990s using Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques. Since 1999 it has been used as one of the two raters (together with a human rater) to score the essay portion of the Graduate Management Admissions Test, a very "high-stakes" exam. It is reported that if there are any discrepancies in scoring, a human rater is called upon to resolve the score. (Warschauer & Ware, 2006)

2) The scoring standards are available only for Criterion subscribers. The TOEFL TWE scoring standards are similar, which is available at the ETS online site.

3) A preview is a statement that gives readers (listeners) a rough organizational structure of the essay (speech), such as "I have three reasons to support my opinion."

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Appendix

Pre-test:

Some people believe that when parents make their children's lives too easy, they can actually harm their children instead. Explain your views on this issue. Use detailed reasons and examples.

Post-test:

Because of many incidents involving the use of knives in schools, teachers are considering checking students' personal belongings at school. Some people say checking students' personal belongings is a violation of human rights. Others say these checks are necessary to maintain safety at school. What do you think? Take one of the positions and write your opinion.