

TROUBLESHOOTING AS A FORM OF SCAFFOLDING IN THE TEACHING OF WRITING

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Abstract: Arti “troubleshooter” adalah seseorang yang mencari dan memperbaiki kerusakan mesin atau seseorang yang bertanggungjawab dengan mencari dan menghilangkan sumber gangguan dalam proses kerja. (Morris, 1969). Istilah semacam itu kemudian diadopsi dalam pengajaran menulis. “Trouble shooting” dalam konteks ini adalah salah satu moda mengajar–belajar dengan melibatkan sekelompok kecil mahasiswa senior untuk membantu teman sejawat (teman sekelas atau adik kelas) mengatasi gangguan atau masalah dalam ketrampilan menulis. Mereka diharapkan dapat mengoreksi atau memeriksa masalah–masalah bahasa. Karena proses belajar–mengajar sudah berubah dari yang berpusat pada guru ke yang berpusat pada murid, kegiatan “trouble shooting” menjadi cukup penting dalam proses belajar-mengajar. Berdasarkan observasi, “trouble shooting” mempunyai beberapa manfaat untuk guru dan murid seperti membagi beban guru, memberi suasana yang lebih demokratis dalam ruang kelas, meningkatkan rasa bahasa, memberi kepercayaan atau tanggungjawab kepada para murid.

Kata kunci: trouble shooting, proses belajar–mengajar, ketrampilan menulis

Introduction

In general, writing course is one of the hardest subjects for the students of the English department. There are several reasons for that. First, English is treated as a foreign language in Indonesia; second, it is quite difficult for the students as they are not accustomed to write journal/diary in English, and third, writing is not yet a culture for Indonesian people or for eastern people. Trouble shooting was firstly introduced to me when I was a student of the English department at the Faculty of Letters, Gadjah Mada University a long time ago in 1978 by my favorite lecturer, Mr. Alex Horo Rambadeta. I was one of the students to be involved in trouble shooting; in other words, I was a troubleshooter or a problem solver. It was such an inspiring experience to me as I could get a lot of valuable experiences while being a trouble shooter: partly, it was an embarrassing experience as I sometimes confronted a few

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excellent junior students who were quite critical in their attitude, but, as a whole, owing to my extra duty by Mr. Alex, I had to work harder and always prepared well when correcting the junior students' writing. The troubleshooting task is a kind of first filter before being finally corrected by the lecturer.

In this short essay, I would like to relate what I had done before (trouble shooting for the junior students) and what I have recently read from a collection of articles about scaffolding (Scaffolding Talk) recommended by Mrs. Helena Agustien, one of the PPS lecturers at UNNES. In my opinion, troubleshooting is, to some extent, similar to scaffolding. Hence, in the following paragraphs I will try to elaborate both methods and to prove that, in fact, trouble shooting can be categorized as a simple form of scaffolding.

1. Teaching Writing Skill in Brief

1.1. Thinking about Purposes and Audiences

People need to express and to communicate their ideas and one way of expressing them is through writing. According to Troyka (1987: 2-3), there are three reasons why people want to write:

- (1) Writing is a way of thinking and learning : by writing people can explore ideas and acquire information and, thus, they can know the subject well and gain authority over knowledge.
- (2) Writing is a way of discovering : writing will allow people to make unexpected connections among ideas and language. In this regard, a well known writer E.M Forster states as follows : 'How can I know what I mean until I've seen what I said?'
- (3) Writing creates reading: writing is an effective means of communication since reading gives information and shapes human thought. In a modern civilization , more people are free to write and, therefore, to create reading for other people.

1.2. Writing Skill

Writing is a skill which involves some factors. To be a good writer, however, mastering certain grammatical rules (e.g. the use of tenses, voice, clauses, etc.) is not enough, as writing activity involves a number of other skills. For instance, when you start writing, you have to think of how your ideas are organized into sections and paragraphs. At the same time you have to choose appropriate words, phrases and grammatical structures. Using a series of long and complicated sentences throughout the whole paper will baffle the reader; on the other hand, using a stretch of short and simple sentences will be monotonous and boring to the reader. Accordingly, to achieve a high skill of writing, you need a long practice and a lot of reading. With respect to this, Raimes (1988) states : " writing is seen as a process and not just as a set of discrete, hierarchical skills that

can be learned in a nice order”. The following diagram shows how writing skill involves many aspects:

Figure 1: Adapted from Ann Raimes (1983)



Scope of Writing Skill

For adult learners in the college level (i.e. in the English Department) writing skill is basically divided into three levels : basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. Basic writing is still concerned with sentence level, intermediate writing discusses paragraph development, and advanced writing focuses on the discourse level (narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative). According to Pincas (1982: 26), in order to write correctly and choose appropriate words, a writer needs some competence in each of the following nine areas. These are the essential writing skills from which a teacher can choose points for specific lessons :

1. Communication between people
2. Suiting a specific subject
3. Presenting ideas
4. Constructing sentences
5. Using paragraphs
6. Using linking devices (cohesion)
7. Writing in the four major styles :

COMMUNICATION

COMPOSITION

narrative, descriptive, expository,
argumentative

STYLE

8. Achieving the desired degree of formality
9. Creating the desired emotive tone

Approaches to the Teaching of Writing

In the teaching of writing skill there are various approaches which can be applied depending on the level. For instance, for teaching basic writing, a teacher may use grammatical approach since the basic writing still focuses on the sentence level. On the other hand, for the advanced writing a teacher may use discourse approaches as at that level the learners have to write composition such as narrative, expository, argumentative, etc. With regard to the teaching writing approaches, Raimes (1983) proposes six approaches which are generally applicable to all the levels of writing skill :

The Controlled-to-Free Approach

This approach was quite dominant when the audio-lingual method was introduced in the 1950s. This method emphasizes grammar, syntax, and mechanics since it still focuses on accuracy rather than fluency or originality. For instance, students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular.

The Free-Writing Approach

This approach emphasizes the content and fluency rather than accuracy and form. Once ideas are down on the page, grammatical accuracy and organization follow. Therefore, the teacher may begin their classes by asking students to write freely on any topic without worrying about grammar and spelling for five or ten minutes.

The Paragraph-Pattern Approach

This approach stresses on the organization rather than language accuracy. In this approach, the students are asked to copy paragraph and imitate model passages. They put scrambled sentences into paragraph order. They also have to identify general and specific statements and choose to invent an appropriate topic sentence or insert or delete sentences in a paragraph.

The Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach

This approach stresses on the simultaneous work on more than one composition feature. The teacher who follows this approach maintains that writing cannot be seen as composed of separate skills which are learned sequentially. Thus, the students should be trained to pay attention to organization while they also work on the necessary grammar and syntax.

The Communicative Approach

In this approach, the students are asked to think about the purpose of writing and its audience by asking questions like “Why am I writing this? Who will read it?” In other words, the students are supposed to write a real-life composition (e.g.. writing to a pen-pal, postcard, application letters, etc.).

The Process Approach

This approach emphasizes the process of writing rather than product. The students are asked to brainstorm for writing, consider purpose and audience. Thus, they are given more freedom to express their ideas in a paragraph. In other words, writing becomes a process of discovery for the students as they discover new ideas and new language forms to express them.

2. Troubleshooting /ter

The term “troubleshooter” means (a) a person who locates and repairs mechanical breakdowns, and (b) a person charged with locating and eliminating the source of trouble in any flow of work. (Morris, 1969 : 1961) Such a term was then adopted in the teaching of writing. Trouble shooting could be in the form of a series of questions or a checklist in academic writing or in the form of software which is specially designed to help the learners solve their problems in writing. For instance, Richard G. Tiberius wrote a book concerning trouble shooting in writing, entitled “A Trouble Shooting Guide : Small Group Teaching” and also in *Informing Science* a guide book entitled “An Instructional Model for Teaching Troubleshooting Skills” by Peter Fenrich (British Columbia Institute of Technology, Burnaby, Canada)
<http://www.calumet.purdue.edu/writingcenter/troubleshootng.html>.

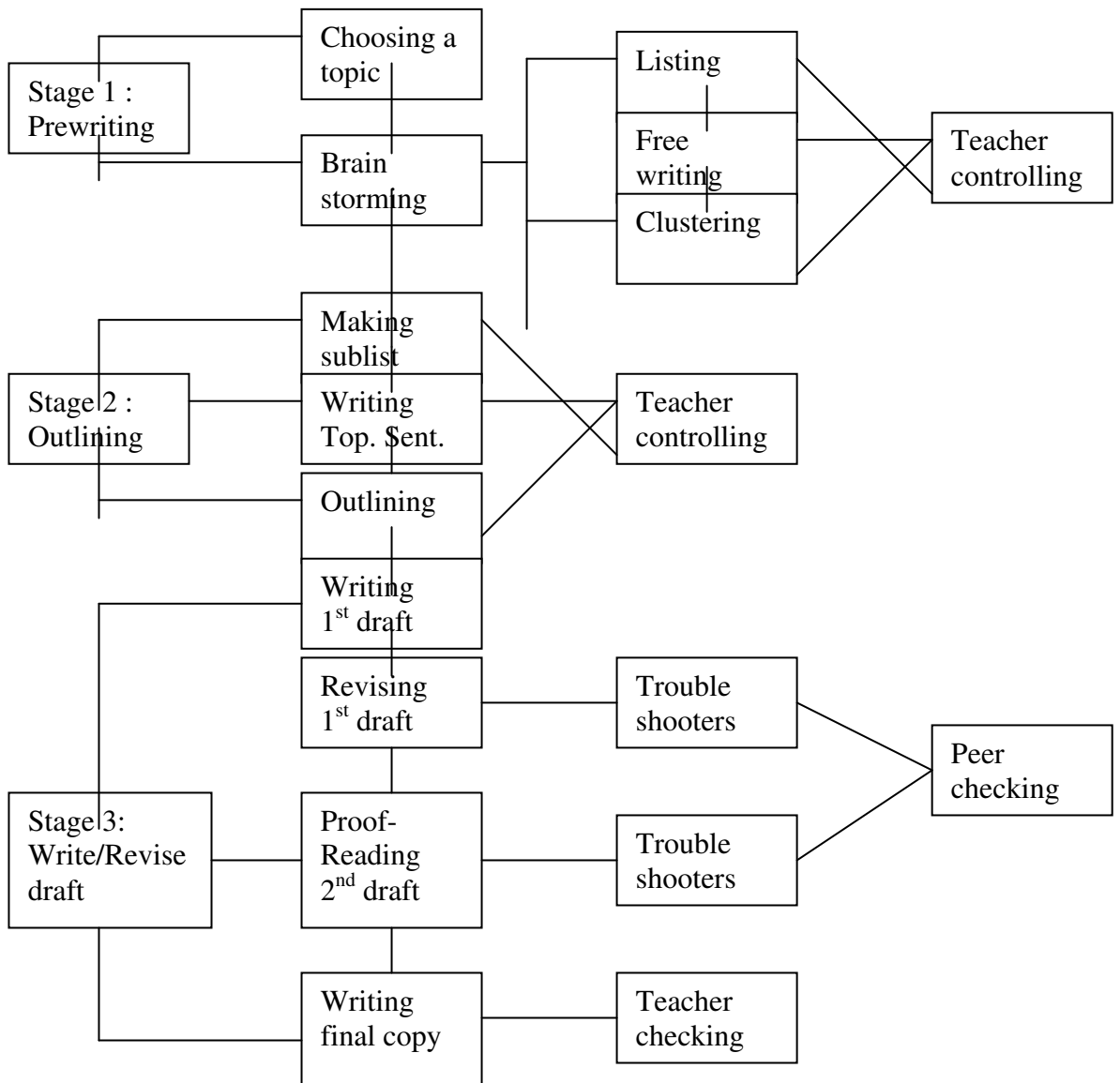
Troubleshooting in my context is one of teaching-learning modes by involving a small group of senior students or peers to help their peers or classmates shoot their troubles/problems in writing skill. Selected students (senior students or peers from the same class), usually the smart ones are assigned to be the “troubleshooters”. They are supposed to check or correct the language problems. Another term for troubleshooting is “peerchecking”. Since the teaching-learning process has shifted from teacher-centered to learner-centered, the troubleshooting activity is quite essential in the teaching-learning process. Based on my observation, the troubleshooting has the following advantages for both the teacher and the learner :

- a. For the teacher
 1. Sharing the teaching burden.
 2. Giving more democratic atmosphere in the classroom.
 3. Giving more trust or responsibility to the students.
- b. For the learner
 1. Improving the sense of language.
 2. Acknowledging the learner’s competence (for the troubleshooters).
 3. Improving the relationship among the learners.

4. Having more active roles for the learners.

In order to have a clear picture of the troubleshooting process, the following diagram shows where the trouble shooters play their role :

Figure 2: A writing process in a paragraph level (adapted from Oshima, 1991: 2-13)



Some notes for technical terms :

- Planning : gather ideas and think a focus
- Shaping : ways to organize your material.
- Drafting : to write your ideas in sentences and paragraphs

- Revising : evaluate your draft by adding, cutting, replacing, moving.
- Editing : check the technical correctness of your grammar, spelling, punctuations, and mechanics.
- Proof-reading : read your final copy for typing errors (Troyka, 1987: 1987: 13)

4. Scaffolding and Scaffolds

When the first time I heard the term “scaffolding”, I imagined an external structure which is temporary to support the process of work in the building . When the work is completed, the structure is dismantled; it is no longer used. The term “scaffolding was then adopted by some language practitioners for the teaching purposes. For instance, Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1974) first coined the “scaffolding” in the pedagogical sense for supporting the learners in their learning process. At the beginning, the scaffolding was implemented in a simple way, that is the (young) learners were interacting with an adult; it could be a parent, a teacher, a caretaker, or peer who has already mastered a particular function (Schutz, 2004 : 3).

In the next phase, scaffolding as a teaching strategy was developed in a more sophisticated way, that is by using a software. In this regard, Saye & Brush (2002) in the curriculum development proposes two types of scaffolds : soft and hard scaffolds. The former refers to a situation-specific and dynamic aid given by a teacher or a peer. For instance, in a social science, if the students are still confused with the difference between two civil rights’ mission, the teacher can give a clue in the reading texts by asking questions: “What does John Lewis mean when he says ___? Do you find similar words in Martin Luther King’s speech?” While the latter is concerned with static supports which are designed in advance based on the students’ difficulties in doing a certain task. These supporting devices could be attached to multimedia and hypermedia software.

Other types of scaffolds identified by Silliman and Wilkinson (1994) used in regular and education classrooms are called : directive and supportive scaffolds. Directive scaffolds are closely related to the teacher’s main duty, that is knowledge transmission and assessment (Cazden, 1988), teacher control mechanisms: the initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) conversational sequence (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). While the supportive scaffolds emphasize learner-centered instruction which make the learners have more active roles and interactions to each other, and, thus, provide opportunities for responsive feedback (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999).

Scaffolding in my teaching context (troubleshooting) refers to the early version, that is interaction with peers in the process of correcting and revising the writing drafts by involving senior students or the peers in the classroom activities. I will elaborate these scaffolding in the next section.

5. Application of troubleshooting as a simple scaffolding in the teaching of writing.

In the teaching of writing I always emphasize the process rather than the product which usually only covers a few topics of discussion in one semester. In the process of writing and correcting the draft I prefer to use indirect correction; it means that I just give clues to both mechanical and grammatical mistakes. For instance, I make clues by making abbreviation of certain grammatical terms such as preposition (prep.), conjunction (conj.), article (art.), capitalization (cap.), etc (See the Appendix) and underlined. The given clue drafts are then returned to the learners. At this point, the troubleshooters start to play their roles. The learners are divided into small groups (each containing 3-4 students depending on the class size) and each group is supervised by one trouble shooter (senior student or peer). The group then discusses the mistakes already checked (by giving further clues) by the teacher. The discussion usually takes a long time to solve the language problems. The teacher at this point walks around to check the discussion progress when the discussion comes to dead end, the teacher will give a further clue to solve the problem. In some cases, the correction done by troubleshooter is different from what the teacher expects. Therefore, the teacher then would return the draft with some notes to the group to clarify the matters. The following diagram shows how the draft flows to and fro from the individual, the group + troubleshooter, and to the teacher and vice-versa :

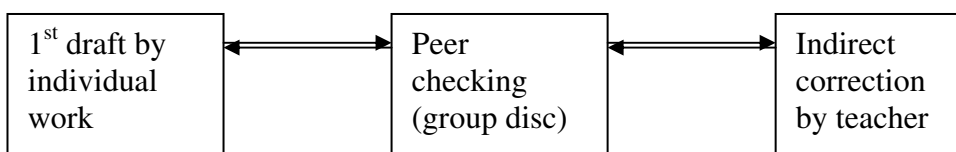


Figure 3 : the process of peer checking

The main point here in the process of correcting is interaction between the learners, the troubleshooters and the teacher. By interacting with the peers/the senior students, the learners' knowledge will develop well since the focus group discussion will make grammatical rules stick to their mind. In other words, the learners will understand the grammatical rules much better besides knowing writing mechanics and organization better. This kind of activity is in line with Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development and Krashen's Input Hypothesis which are based on a common assumption : interaction with other people (Schutz, 2004 : 4). Accordingly, troubleshooting can be said as a simple form of scaffolding since the activity of peer checking enable the learners to interact with each other.

Conclusion

From the discussion in the previous section, I can draw some conclusions as follows :

- 6.1. Troubleshooting is a learning activity which enables the learners to interact with each other.
- 6.2. Troubleshooting may increase the learners' sense of language by discussing linguistic features through their mistakes.
- 6.3. Troubleshooting can be said as a simple form of scaffolding since it involves the peers who know better about the matters.
- 6.4. The trouble shooting is in line with the language practitioners' concept in language teaching and learning.

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