MIND MAPPING: THE WAY TO GENERATE AND ORGANIZE IDEAS

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the utilization of Mind Mapping as an alternative way for writers to generate ideas and organize them before they write. From my personal experience as an English teacher at school and college as well, Mind Mapping can be as a weapon in teaching writing focusing on solving the problems of how to generate and organize ideas. This technique can assist student writers begin to write; beginning with the generation and organization of ideas in prewriting stage, and then continuing to the other stages of the writing process – drafting, revising, editing and publishing. By starting the generation and organization of ideas the student writers can hopefully form the good content of their writing.

Keywords: Mind Mapping, Generating Idea, Organizing Idea, Writing

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menyoroti tentang penggunaan Pemetaan Pikiran sabagai cara alternatif bagi penulis untuk menggali ide dan mengorganisasikannya sebelum mereka menulis. Dari pengalaman saya sebagai pengajar Bahasa Inggris baik di sekolah maupun di Perguruan Tinggi, Pemetaan Pikiran bisa menjadi senjata untuk memecahkan masalah yang terkait dengan bagaimana cara menggali ide dan mengorganisasikan ide. Teknik ini dapat membantu penulis untuk memulai menulis; diawali dengan menggali ide kemudian mengorganisasikan ide tersebut pada tahap prewriting dan kemudian dilanjutkan ke proses menulis berikutnya yaitu drafting, revising, editing dan publishing. Dengan memulai penggalian ide dan pengorganisasian ide penulis diharapkan dapat membuat konten yang bagus dalam tulisannya.

Kata kunci: Pemetaan Pikiran, Menggali Ide, Mengorganisasi Ide, Menulis

INTRODUCTION

Writing, as one of the productive skills that should be developed in instructional activities, is considered to be the most complicated problem for students. It is an important skill that involves a whole life skill (Zainuddin, 2004). As one of the four basic language skills, writing tends to play a very pivotal role in the context of

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Indonesia.

The teaching of writing is still hampered by a number of problems. A number of problems in writing are shown in some research. A study was conducted by Jafaruddin (2006) aimed at identifying and evaluating the students' ability to write unified and coherent essays. The finding showed that most of the essays had poor coherence and unity. Another study was conducted by Nirwani (2007). It was found that the students' piece of writing was overwhelmed with a lot of errors resulted from the lack of vocabulary, besides they did not have sufficient skill in organizing ideas into a good text.

In my personal experience when I taught English at school and college as well, I found the problem in the writing class, that is, most of the students did not know how to begin to write a simple paragraph. It took them a long time before they started to write so that they felt so difficult to discover or generate and organize ideas to write for the topic. In this case, it can be concluded that there are some problems found in the writing teaching, basically referred to the idea generating and organizing. The students got

difficult to discover the ideas and organize them. Therefore, the paragraph they produced did not have the sufficient content.

Referring to the paragraph writing, Onukwugha (2007) asserts that every piece of writing judged to be good must have the cardinal factors; otherwise the writing will fall flat regardless of its intended purpose. Remember the intent of the writing should be to inform, instruct, entertain, solve a problem or show how to achieve a goal or objective so always write for the target audience. When writers connect to their audience, the rewards come back to them. The cardinal factor is the way to generate and organize ideas. The student writers need to generate and organize their ideas before they write. To do so, it is of paramount importance to find the way to generate and organize ideas in order that the students will form the good content of their writing. Therefore, I would like to show that Mind Mapping is a way to generate and organize ideas before the students write.

WHAT IS MIND MAPPING?

Mind Mapping was developed in the 1960s by Joseph Novak of Stanford University. It is a technique for visually

representing the structure of information (how concepts within a domain are interrelated). Concepts are represented visually, often by geometric shapes. The relationships between concepts are shown by links, which are represented by lines or arrows. In early 1970s, Tony Buzan, the Head of Brain Foundation, developed it as a strategy to assist students in taking notes more efficiently (Wycoff, 1991). Later on, Mind Mapping, also known as Concept Mapping, Semantic Mapping, Clustering, Spider Gram, or Webbing, has gradually been developed as one of the effective techniques in generating and organizing ideas for writing.

According to Hayes (1992), Mind Mapping can be a powerful method of instruction because it makes use of students' spatial-visual abilities for understanding and remembering complex subject matter. Through this activity, students learn skills of organization aid the development of comprehension, critical thinking, and writing skills. Mind Mapping is also called Webbing which is much like brainstorming but it is more visual and linear (Hayes, 1992). By using Mind Mapping, the students are likely encouraged to create or discover as many as they can. That is why it is very helpful when they want to generate the ideas for their topic.

Mapp (2002) suggests that Mind Mapping is a powerful accelerated learning technique that is available to both teachers and students. Its inherent simplicity and power come from its design and rules. It is used to assist thinking, learning and remembering. Once a student or teacher becomes competent in the use of the technique, it usually becomes their preferred way of organizing thoughts, planning, preparation and delivery of talks, making notes and communicating information to themselves and others. This technique, as a way to explore a topic beginning with a thought or word, can encourage the students to write. Once the strategy becomes familiar, it helps learners to handle any writing they face at schools, colleges or on jobs. In terms of discovering and organizing ideas, Mind Mapping is a worth applying in the process of writing.

Furthermore, Smith *et al.* (2003) added that Mind Mapping is a good way for organizing information so that the ideas become more visual and the chain of thought and hierarchical relations can be easily followed and turned into a paper. This technique helps students to recognize

organization problems, and determine how each part of paragraph relates to the text in writing. Moreover, Mind Mapping can help students organize their own writings when used as a prewriting activity (English Works Online, 2002). It is best to do a prewriting activity before they actually begin writing their paragraphs.

MIND MAPPING IN TEACHING WRITING

In relation to the teaching of writing, it is believed that the use of Mind Mapping enables the students to generate and organize ideas before writing. Teo (2003) maintains that it frees writers to think more creatively, to associate ideas more easily, and to organize and analyze information visually. Besides, Smalley *et al.* (2001), who refer their version of this technique as Clustering, point out that it frees the writers from following a strictly linier sequence of ideas. Thus, it allows them to think more creatively and make new associations among ideas.

In addition, Behrman (2003), who refers his version of this technique as Concept Mapping, asserts that it is an effective way to get ready to write a paragraph, an essay, or a story. It helps students generate and organize the ideas about the topic they are going to write. It is universally known that human thoughts tend to wonder about swiftly from one idea to another. Because of this phenomenon, it is well to guide the beginner-writer to get his or her ideas systemized or organized by technique of mapping so that he or she can adhere to the points gathered and agreed upon in class, especially so since he or she is to write in a foreign language.

In line with Behrman, Vacca & Vacca (1999) maintain that Mind Mapping helps the students generate inspiration for writing. He further explains that it helps the students identify important ideas and show how these ideas fit together. Moreover, it makes them become familiar in creating a logical arrangement among key words or phrases that connect the main ideas to supporting details.

From the above statements, it can be concluded that Mind Mapping provides a way for the students to mentally generate and organize information before they write. However, Mind Mapping does not rely on freely associating ideas with a key concept word. Instead, the students collect and connect related ideas by outlining on a map. This technique is especially

appropriate for writing that relies on explanation and description of people, events, characters, or process.

GENERATING AND ORGANIZING IDEAS

Generating ideas as a process skill is to produce or create ideas based on the topic which is going to write. According to Teo (2003:53), generating ideas is the skill of adding to, extending or connecting given ideas by tapping into prior knowledge or gathered information. The student writers who have acquired this skill are able to suggest many, varied and original ideas. He then suggests that the teacher must encourage the students to discover ideas. There should not be right or wrong ideas and do not be too quick to judge.

Since writing is primarily about organizing information and communicating meaning, generating ideas is clearly going to be a crucial part of the writing process (White & Arndt, 1991). "To start with a blank page and to finish with a piece of writing are to create" (Coe in Widiati, 2003). So, it is important that student writers learn to manage their time, especially to get started early. Getting started is actually one of the most

difficult and inhibiting steps in writing (White & Arndt, 1991:17). Idea generating is therefore the key in facilitating the transition from thought to paper (Steele, 2002) and it is particularly important as an initiating process.

According to White & Arndt (1991), generating ideas involves drawing upon long-term memory consisting of three main kinds of memory store, they are: (1) episodic memory devoted to events, experiences, and visual and auditory images; (2) semantic memory devoted to information, ideas, attitudes, and values; and (3) unconscious memory including emotions and feelings. In generating ideas, the above different types of memory may be tapped according to the writer's purpose and the kind of writing involved.

Organizing idea means to arrange its components in a sensible and pleasing manner (White, 1986:42). Thus, when student writers are thinking about what to include in their writing, they are simultaneously deciding where to include it. But the more involved the writing, the more likely they will want to organize ideas as a separate step.

To come up with ideas for a topic they will write, the good writers will

concern themselves with ideas and information on a topic. They will also concern themselves with the generation and organization of ideas. When the writers will start writing, it is better for them to discover ideas and information related to the topic they are going to write. Because ideas are the products of human thinking, the ideas become meaningful only through the writer's organization (Bramer & Sedley, 1981). Therefore, by starting the generation and organization of ideas the student writers can hopefully form the good content of their writing.

Content, according to Bramer & Sedley (1981), is the substance of what the writers have to say. It is the substance and the essence of their writing. Besides, it is the quality of the material the writers put out. In short, content is the heart-beat of any great writing and it is the value they brought to the audience (Onukwugha, 2007).

Referring to content of the paragraph, the way to discover ideas and organize them tends to be the urgent problem to solve. In this case, Gebhard (2000:225) says that in the writing process the teachers' role is to provide chances for students to develop workable strategies for getting started to generate writing ideas and organize

them. To accomplish this, the teachers are encouraged to have students work through a process of prewriting dealing with discovering and organizing ideas for a topic, and then continue to the steps – drafting, revising, editing and publishing (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995). In fact, the generation and organization of ideas are very necessarily conducted before the students are going to write. Therefore, Mind Mapping becomes an alternative way to do so.

HOW TO GENERATE AND ORGANIZE IDEAS UTILIZING MIND MAPPING?

In the writing process, prewriting stage encourages the generation of ideas (Brown, 2001:348) and it is a way of organizing students' thoughts and beginning to put the information they have (English Works Online, 2002). In addition, as indicated by Graves in Widiati & Widayati (1997), student writers can produce creative and interesting texts when teachers allow their students' time and opportunity. Among other things, it is for generating or discovering ideas. To do so, students should be taught techniques (ways) for generating ideas (Widiati, 2003).

Referring to the steps of generating and organizing ideas using

Mind Mapping, Smalley *et al.* (2001) and Teo (2003) explain how ideas are generated and organized by means of this technique. First, use plain white paper for individual or group work to prepare to write. Second, write a topic or the title/subject (in the form of word or phrase) that is going to be explored and circled in the middle of a sheet of paper. Then, draw a thick line from the thick line to carry supporting ideas or details, or draw a line radiating out from the center and label it with the name of a major division of the topic or subject. Next, circle it and from that circle move out further to subdivisions. After that, keep associating to further ideas and to details related to them. If possible, use a different color for each main idea and its supporting details or ideas, and add pictures to illustrate the text or ideas. When it is finished with one major division of the topic or subject, go back to the center and start again with another major division.

More clearly in a classroom setting, Vacca & Vacca (1999) describe how Mind Mapping is applied. First, the teacher or the students decide on a key concept word to be explored and write it on the board. Second, the students, depending on what they have been studying and on their prior knowledge, offer words related to the key concept word. These are recorded by the teacher on the board. This sub technique is generally termed as brainstorming, where the teacher takes the initiative of writing the words down on the board instead of asking the students to do it. This is to prevent spelling errors that might appear when the students write them down on the board. Once the list of words is generated, the teacher and the students create the mind map in a class discussion. In this way, students not only gather ideas but also connect the ideas within a key concept word. The teacher-led mapping provides the students with an awareness of how to use this rehearsing technique independently. The teacher may form small groups of students to create concept maps and then to share their constructions in the class discussion. The teacher needs to model the construction or mind map once or twice so that the students will get a feel for how to develop their own in small groups or individually.

Figure 1 shows an example of generated ideas through Mind Mapping. It shows that the topic is developed by discussing each main part or idea with its examples, facts and details in order.

When the first main part or idea is completely developed, it is followed by the second and then the third main part or idea. The order can be based on the degree of the importance and the logic of the ideas.

students should be encouraged to play with the ideas based on what they are studying and learning in class.
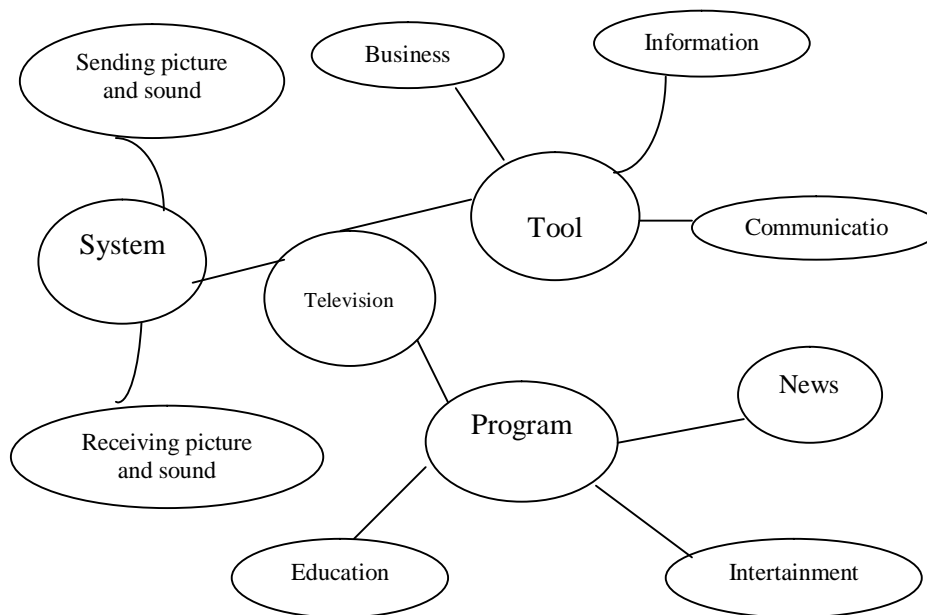

Figure 1. Example of Generated Ideas through Mind Mapping

The students should begin to develop their own mind maps for writing as soon as they understand how to use this technique effectively. They should feel comfortable enough to start with a key concept word or topic written in the center of a sheet of paper, and then to continue it by making as many word connections as possible on the paper. Connection should develop rapidly, radiating outward from the center to any direction. Since there is no right or wrong way to develop a map, the

CONCLUSION

Since writing is primarily about organizing information and communicating meaning, generating ideas is clearly going to be a crucial part of the writing process. To do so, I would like to show and suggest that the way to generate and organize ideas is through Mind Mapping. It is really applicable to apply in teaching writing since it is much like brainstorming which is very helpful to generate and organize ideas before writing for the topic. The main point to make about

organizing ideas is that it does not differ too much from inventing and information-gathering. So, it is important that student writers learn to manage their time, especially to get started early. Indeed, it is better for them to discover ideas and information related to the topic, and then to organize them before they write.

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