

## **PROMPTING STUDENT'S WRITING FOCUS AND CONTENT THROUGH INKSHEDDING**

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### **Abstract**

One of the propositions of inkshedding was that it could broaden opportunity of everyone's expressing their ideas in written form by inviting others to read and comment on the written ideas. These comments were supposed to assist the writers to improve their writing and to make their ideas easily 'heard'. Therefore, I utilized the idea provocation technique - inkshedding in my research to see the improvement of the focus and content of the written ideas. Focus was the single controlling point made with an awareness of task (mode) about specific topic while content was The presence of ideas developed through facts, examples, anecdotes, details, opinions, statistics, reasons, and/or explanations. I collected the research data from the written comments made by 13 out of the 38 students joining my class who completed all the six inkshedding tasks. Their comments were posted online in the blog and mailing list. To validate my study, I invited my a senior colleague to be the investigator triangulator by examining the written ideas, in term of the quality of focus and content using the same assessment rubric as I did. My and his scores were then correlated using Pearson correlation coefficient and the result was 93.50% for focus and 94.30% for content, which meant there was high positive correlation between my scoring and the investigator's. This was an indication of the validity of the scoring.

**Key words:** Inkshedding, Blog, Focus, Content, Blended learning

Expressing opinion, thought and feeling in a foreign language which has different cultural, semantic, lexical and phonetic system is a tough effort for most foreign and second language learners. They must acquire some vocabularies, grammars and phonetic systems as well as ideas and organizations before they can express whatever they want to utter or write. However, this is not enough to express ideas e they have learn the language for several years.

Indeed, it should not discourage foreign language teachers to be permissive with this unpleasant reality because there are still some ways to make students speak without forcing them to learn direct grammatical rules and drilling. Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious

grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill (Krashen, 2005) because the nature of Second Language (L2) is systematic stages which require correction, reward and reinforcement. In addition to that, L2 learners may be content with less than target language competence or more concerned with fluency than accuracy. Thus, it is rarely fully successful for them to acquire the language.(Cook, 1988)

Therefore in this research, I made effort to make my students to express their thoughts in English. I previously considered that my speaking class was not communicative since not many students could articulate their ideas smartly in English, however if they were asked to express their opinion in Bahasa Indonesia, they could speak

eloquently for hours. For that reason I requested my students to make some written through inkshedding strategy. After that, they could express their ideas better than before.

The ideas which were prompted during the inkshedding strategy were expressed by the 13 students of Informatics System students acted as the research subject. Therefore, the research question of this study was, “How were the content and focus of the ideas expressed in the students’ six written works (inkshedding)?”

As inkshedding was always done in writing, I investigated the ideas by exploring the content and focus of their writing, to produce evidence that leads to understanding of the case and answers the research questions – “How were the focus and content of the students’ inkshedding?” Each focus and content was divided into four levels respectively: (1) novice, (2) basic, (3) proficient and (4) advanced in order to give clear information about how their content and focus of their ideas were.

To assist in targeting and formulating the questions, I conducted a literature review and previous studies on similar topics. This led to refined, insightful questions about the problem. Investigating the formula that inkshedding strategy stimulated the expression of their in writing; I intended to explore how inkshedding prompted the ideas in writing through the dialogical and transactional written dialogues/comments – inkshedding.

### **Inkshedding Prompting Ideas**

When I requested my students to write their ideas, they had an opportunity to revive their ideas gradually into their best precision. Their ideas refinement could not be achieved in speaking because it did not

preparation before they spoke in the class

provide the same kind of exploration, discovery, and precise articulation that writing did for a number of reasons.

Therefore jotting down ideas in writing could be advantageously conducted through transactional written discussion. In this way, I could ultimately monitor, comment and improve the ideas of my students which were express in writing. This method was called ‘inkshedding’, a simple method for gauging the ideas which were produced by the response of students to such things as presentations, course materials, group activities, and discussions. Developed by James Reither and his colleagues at St. Thomas University, Canada in the early eighties, inkshedding had three identifying characteristics:

1. *The writing is done quickly (i.e., five minutes or less).*
2. *The responses are disseminated to the entire class in some form, oral or written.*
3. *The responses are anonymous (respondents may sign their names if they wish). (Wyche-Smith, n.d.)*

In this regard, the students surely learnt the language from the authentic transactional written dialogues which was the nature of inkshedding. This effort triggered them to express their ideas, feeling and though in written form of the targeted language because they were stimulated to answer or respond the prompting text or dialogue. This action resembled the real life activities of writer and reader relationship because the readers had to write their thought or opinion if they wanted to comment, criticize or respond the written information that they encountered.

Indeed, in this study, transactional written dialogue was virtually promoting learning because my students were encouraged to express their thoughts as needed by the texts which were given by their peers and me. They surely produced the language by expressing their ideas right after they read comprehensively the given texts.

Through inkshedding, I could also obtain any information I wanted by asking my students to answer my open-end question about certain phenomena I needed to know. In this way I could get an immediate glimpse into what each of my students were thinking and feeling as well as giving opportunity to all my students to access to what their peers were thinking.

Therefore I came up with my preview about inkshedding that included:

- Dialogical and transactional language activities which were focused on specific topic in listening, speaking, reading and writing which the response finally is interactively expressed in written form.
- Non ordinary responses: interesting, strangest, awkward, stupid, hazard and shocking to normally response provided topic, instead of ordinary responses, by the community/class of writing
- Language awareness and performance improvement, particularly in writing.
- Limited amongst members of the writing community / class

My point of view above about inkshedding would be the fundamental reference of this study, besides some other related references and previous studies.

### **Some Warnings for Inkshedding**

Since all inksheddors in term of those who applied inkshedding strategy in their class entailed to sacrifice their time, money or class size in order to give chance to all students to have access to one another responses, inkshedding was a cumbersome job for teachers. It was because they also needed to supervise, monitor and guide each student written work, besides giving chance to each of student to access their peer's written work. This surely would tie the teachers up, even for small classes (5-10 students); let alone for big classes (above 30 students) because there was hardly following up activities by the teachers (Elbow, 2001). To lessen the teachers' working load, partial representation which allowed only some represented or random students to express their idea in written form was better than no inkshedding at all, so at least teachers as the inkshedder still could figure out how the opinions, thoughts, and ideas of their students were.

Inkshedding strategy was not recommended to teachers who did not want to know about what their students thought because if asked about their idea about the teaching-learning activities in their classroom, for example, students would tell the situation honestly and frankly. Their straightforward expression sometimes despised integrity of the teacher of even school stakeholders.

### **Difference between Inkshedding and Conventional Strategy**

Below were some differences between the conventional writing class which placed the teacher as the key and source of all (Figure 01).

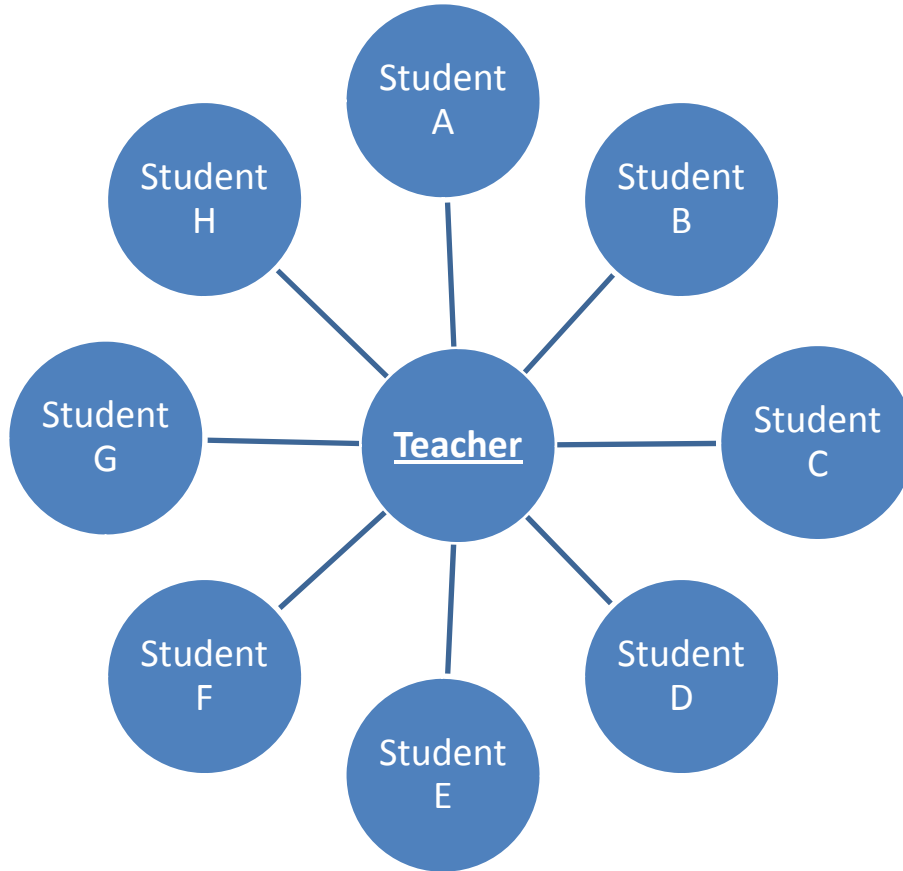


Figure 01

Meanwhile the Class using inkshedding strategies (figure 02) formed endless web which resembled the flow of communication and interaction. Here student A could interact with any students she or he wanted and vise versa. The position of teacher in this strategy was very much flexible. In my study, I could be in the middle of the class when I needed to give some comment,

motivation and evaluation to my students while seeing the progress of all. I could help one of the students who had some learning problems. When I was at outside my class, I could see the smoothness of communication flow or might detect any unpredicted evident in my class.

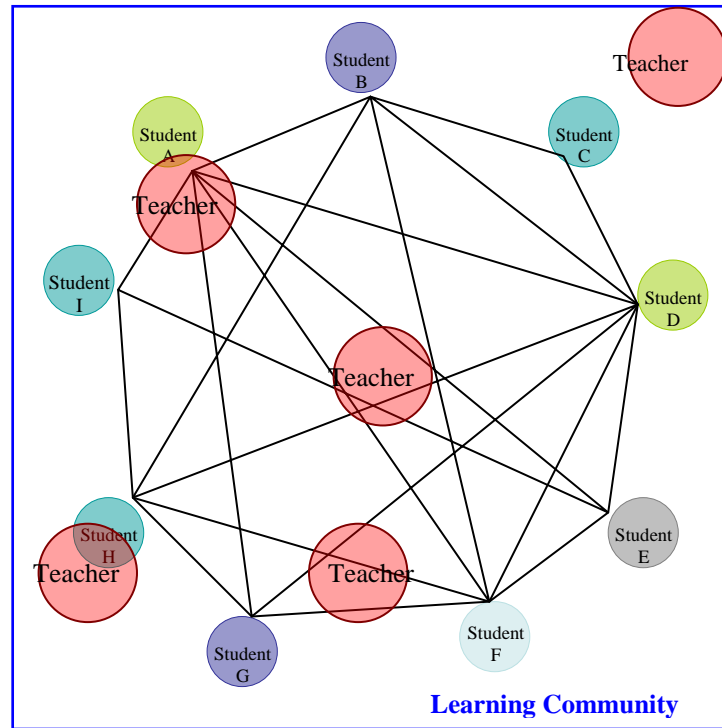


Figure 2

The points of view about inkshedding illuminated me to conduct research in order to see the expression of the ideas in the dialogical writing of inkshedding, by my students of STIKOM Technology School, East Java Indonesia.

In my research, these students showcased that automatic written transaction in the active learning community resembled writing activity in the real society: real readers and real writers or authors. Undeniably in the near and long run they would grow as good academic and professional readers and writers respectively.

In this study I was asking how the focus and content quality of the students' writing ideas was. Then I conducted the descriptive case study by applying inkshedding strategy in order to see how the students expressed their thoughts in English. In this study I blended my classroom activities with online activities through blog and mailing list

because I took my data in the form of written report. My most activities in the classroom were oral and aural because the school policy was emphasized in the oral communication skill.

As the nature of inkshedding was dialogic writing which required active writer-reader roles, in this study, the 38 students in my class were assigned to perform six inkshedding assignments and most of them did the tasks well. However only the 13 of them did all the six tasks. Therefore I examined the written works which each consisted of six comments/inksheddings, based on the focus and content quality assessment. I validated my scoring of my study by asking my colleague Mr. Amrin Batubara to be my investigator triangulation. He examined the quality of focus and content of my 13 students' writings as I did using Pennsylvania Writing Assessment Domain Scoring Guide. Then I measured the coefficient correlation between my scoring and the investigator's by manual calculation

and obtained 0.723 or 72.30% for the focus and 0.795 or 79.50% for content. It showed that the scores of the investigator triangulation were very related to the scores of the researcher. This was an indication of the validity of the scoring.

To measure the student's ideas, I divided the ideas' expression achievement level into novice for score 1, basic for score 2, proficient for score 3 and advanced for score 4, based on the on the Pennsylvania Writing Assessment Domain Scoring Guide.

Therefore, the qualities of the average focus and content were two and three respectively. It meant that quality of the focus and content of the students' writing, when they experienced inkshedding strategy, was basic and proficient respectively. Thus, the quality of the focus of their written ideas was that there was no apparent controlling point but there was evidence of a specific topic. Meanwhile, the quality of the content was that the ideas were sufficiently developed with adequate elaboration and explanation.

In accordance with the research finding that the quality of the students' writing, in term of their focus and content quality was at level basic with score two and level proficient with score three respectively. Thus, I concluded that their feature in expressing their thought was sufficiently improving, after experiencing inkshedding strategy.

It was obvious since the nature of inkshedding required transactional and dialogical writing activities. Thus, the students were obligated to write their thoughts because their peers expected their writings. Therefore their thoughts expression was emerged. In this way, they leant English language maximally because in their learning community class, they read

the text, saw the text, talked about the text and last shared about the text in written form through electronic inkshedding, definitely in communicative context. In addition to that since they only had 100 minutes to meet their English lecture, the inkshedding activities were conducted online so that they could access for 24 hours freely. This virtual learning community plus the electronic inkshedding were a blended learning which managed to improve the students' ideas to express their thoughts in English language discourse.

The nature of inkshedding in this research had positively affected the students' ideas because its dialogical transactional design caused them to express their opinion which then was read by their peers. They also had some times to think about what and how they had to write their comments for their friends asynchronously, as a result their friends would understand their ideas. This effort really helped these students to improve their writing gradually so that their ideas could be 'heard' easily. Although only 13 students completed all the six given inkshedding assignments, most students joining the researcher's class did the required tasks because they had opportunity to express their ideas in written form and surely their ideas were 'listened' by all their friends.

This kind of writing process was an exploratory writing which enables the students to write to learn. The process of this writing to learn was popular in USA teaching writing. It was understandable because inkshedding responded and elicits students' written work, as the consequence, teacher got immediate glimpse about their students' thinking and feeling, students had direct access to what their peer's thinking and surely the diversity of the classroom was revealed.

Although the students were compelled to share their thought in written form they were excited to do it because inkshedding had stimulated their critical thinking. They were at Vygotskian “Zone of Proximal Development” where they could actively participate in creation of sharing knowledge. In addition to that, their written sharing had empowered their writing quality by continuously produce better writing works, because of their peer’s role in reciprocating their written works.

When they were imposed to inkshedding strategy, they read about the given prompted text, heart, saw, saw and heart, discussed, somehow experienced and shared about the prompted text. Here they had learnt the English language in the best way since they totally immersed with the topic with all their senses. It was obvious because in the classroom they saw, read, heart and discussed the given prompted text, while outside the classroom they tried to search the similar topic with the prompted text and might somehow experience it; and they also saw, read and discussed the text in the written form in the internet – blog and miling list. Therefore they always had their words to write as their necessity obligated by their English lecturer, because they had to share their thoughts with their classmates. Their written works were also marked and commented by their lecturer, so that they could gradually refine their foreign language. It was maximal learning method to study foreign language.

As transactional writing strategy, in this research, inkshedding was indeed certainly responded by the students because each of them had committed to do six inkshedding assignments. Most of them did their tasks well in their learning community which surely required experience teacher or lecture

to facilitate their learning and also demanded all students to contribute their ideas to foster the learning atmosphere in their community.

Thus, in this study, I had to prompt and initiate my students’ participation in threaded discussion in a timely fashion which demonstrated self-motivation. It permitted commentary on whether or not the student was actively and consistently engaging in the course content - topic. I also demanded to deliver post addressed the student’s attention to detail in terms being grammatically correct with rare misspelling. I addressed the students who stayed on topic as well as the students who appeared to disengage from the topic. My expression within the post addressed the issue of how well my students’ opinions were expressed and how their ideas or comments were presented. This category also allowed me as the facilitator to acknowledge the different writing/expression styles of my students. My contribution to the learning community relied on whether or not my student made an effort to further development of collaborative learning experience. Learning community had provided distinction between the student who seemed relatively indifferent to building process of a learning community and the student who strived to reinforce the learning community as the lesson development.

When the students in this research were required to contribute their ideas to encourage their learning community, positive learning situation was highly entailed. It had to be supported with the following ten principles: 1. The culture of the classroom fostering the development of a community of learners, and all students as part of that community; 2. Good language teaching involving conceptual and academic development; 3. Students’ experiential

backgrounds providing a point of departure and an anchor in the exploration of new ideas; 4. Teaching and learning focusing on substantive ideas organized cyclically; 5. Contextualized new ideas and tasks; 6. Academic strategies, sociocultural expectations, and academic norms taught explicitly; 7. Relevant, meaningful, engaging, and varied Tasks; 8. Complex and flexible forms of collaboration maximizing learners' opportunities to interact while making sense of language and content; 9. Students given multiple opportunities to extend their understandings and apply their knowledge; 10. Authentic assessment - an integral part of teaching and learning.

In addition to that, as this research employing electronic inkshedding, individual communication and shared thinking were stimulated through internet media. Therefore the benefits of electronic inkshedding included immediate feedback for teachers and students, everyone sharing in the discussion, students finding out what others thinking, and difficult or conflicting thoughts and emotions being shared without penalty.

As the consequence, in this research, each student was required to log-in the blog and mailing list to be able to read, send and reply any messages about the posted topic. As a result every student could comment and make discussion about the topic interactively in the written form. Each person in the class was invited to read the topics posed by all the others and add comments and suggestions to his or her peers' posting. As the comments were accumulated, the student who posted the topic read the comments; in some cases these led to modifications of the topic.

This learning interaction enabled students to construct their own understanding about the

knowledge they were learning and the most important the rhetorical use of language. In certain allotted time, they could automatically repair their oversight in their interlanguage as they learnt the rhetorical use of language. Surely this kind of activity boosted their learning achievement which had to be preserved as an effective vehicle of pedagogy.

Besides allowing without academic, professional, social and public formality, inkshedding could be directed in idea-focused writing in which the form can follow the function. The students could learn and experiment with their writing in an effort to especially reflect on some of what they read. I admitted that my students were so excited doing both online assignment and face to face task promoting transactional and dialogical writing to deliver their experience, idea and feeling. It was because all these aspects which were essentially-human-need-fulfillment-demand were naturally channeled in virtual and physical learning activities.

Surely electronic inkshedding had aroused the students to share and communicate well their thoughts in the blog and mailinglist. Writing discussion on the two electronic tools enabling the students to read and respond to each other as well as the lecturer. They bounced ideas around that they could carry to their more formal writing later. This writing was surely more careful than a private freewriting and allowed students to fret less over form and attend more to articulating their own thinking.

The online learning community plus the electronic inkshedding in this study were a blended learning enhancing the students' ideas to articulate their thoughts in English language discourse. It included



combinations of technology-based materials, face-to-face sessions and print materials.

At the online encounter, asynchronous learning experiences enabled the students to complete their written task individually, at their own speed and on their own time, such as writing comments and questions to the posted articles. The students were also required to collaborate and communicate with others, for example, threaded asynchronous discussions. The assessment here was to measure the student ideas' expression to praise how deep their knowledge about the discussed topic and how they could express it in the written – ideas' focus and content qualities.

Both face to face and online activities in this study were conducted within the same academic term. It was very much helpful for both lecturer and students because some roles of the lecture could be switched into online interaction, and virtual lecture-students and student-student positively enhance physical (offline) interaction in the classroom. All of these interactions really escalated students' learning outcomes since they were reading, hearing, seeing, practicing and sharing at the same time when they learnt their targeted language.

By combining asynchronic discussion in blog and mailing list with face to face activities in the classroom, the students' communication which was the core of language learning, was enhance. In addition to that I acted as their lecturer could expose my students to variety of resources from anywhere in the world, besides bringing me to the latest development of teaching-learning innovation.

Regarding the nature of inkshedding focused on ideas' articulation development during the writing activities, idea's expression was

very important for human communication and interaction performed in oral and written form. The transaction of the oral and written discourse was the same, irrespective of the concrete situation of speech communication. Hence, the most important single fact about "concrete situations of speech communication" was oral and written discourses that were socially constructed. When the situation afforded, a reader or listener took a text as an utterance or a dialogue respectively. If the reader saw the text as an utterance in one dialogue, he or she would tend to expect certain kinds of things from it; if he or she saw other different dialogue, he or she would expect different things from it. In other words, what the reader did was very much affected by how the reader saw the text which was framed by an ongoing dialogue which could be identified as text characteristics.

The qualities of the ideas were overlooked by both teachers and students. To overcome this problem, the importance of quality communication needs to be recognized because it stimulated ideas and concepts in precise and powerful language.

For that reason, maintaining good ideas' expressions in written or oral discourses were very important.

### **Suggestion**

Related to the research conclusion, some suggestions were provided for English teachers and language researchers and me as both English teacher and researcher. Besides good tips for English teacher to create learning community amongst their students, understanding their students more deeply and improving students' ideas qualities, Inkshedding was rich research areas which could invite many more educators and teachers interested in writing to learn, understanding students' mind framework and motivating English language learners in

socially meaningful context based on the progress of students' environment and mental condition.

For the further research, I recommended that inkshedding strategy be done using pencil and paper. It definitely could be applied in most regions in Indonesia as long as they had access to the internet to review the related literature about inkshedding and its application. Having access to the internet was required because when I conducted my research, there was still no reference about inkshedding nor the similar research performed by the people from Indonesian or ASEAN countries.

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