Dr Shirley O’Neill

Title of Presentation: A practical approach to modelling writing: developing the discussion genre.

Abstract for Conference Programme (75 words)
The workshop will begin with an overview of the difficulties associated with developing and assessing writing and the use of connectives to order ideas. It will focus on a practical sentence-sequencing strategy as a springboard to develop the discussion genre. Attendees will participate/interact in this activity in pairs or small groups. They will be directly involved in modelling processes and discussion to examine how this strategy can be applied to develop and improve writing.

Summary (500 words)
The workshop will be broken into four parts: introductory powerpoint presentation (20 minutes), (Handout 1) sentence sequencing activity (25 minutes) pair/small group work, feedback/discussion session (15 minutes) and (Handout 2) (a) examination of ESL writing samples and (b) individual/pair or small group modelling/writing development activity (30 minutes). The presenter will participate during the pairwork by moving around groups and discussing/responding to questions.

The introductory presentation will outline a range of factors which are accepted as impacting on our judgements about the quality of a written text. The following questions will be asked to encourage participants to think about their own opinions about what constitutes ‘a good piece of writing’: Is it easy to read and understand the message?, Is it easy to conceptualise what it is meant to be (author’s approach)?, Are ideas presented in logical sequence?, How have the needs of the audience been addressed? and Is the writer fluent in the language? From each question will be derived a list of considerations such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, cohesion, legibility, format, genre, fluency, accuracy, presentation etc. These considerations will then be
discussed in terms of both assessment and different genres to lead into the important role of cohesive devices (particularly the use of connectives) when it comes to moving the writer from the construction of sentences into composing a longer written narrative which reflects a point of view. The distinguishing features of the narrative discussion genre will be described and the way this genre can contribute to developing writing skills for various purposes will be discussed. The presentation will conclude with the assertion that one needs to directly teach the skill of composition through modelling the written text.

Having established the problem to solve (e.g. how to model/develop the discussion genre), participants will be requested to complete a sentence sequencing activity (Handout 1) in pairs or small groups. This will be a task sheet presenting a jumbled (by sentence) discussion narrative with the sentences (15–20) also presented on paper strips. The task will be to place the sentences in the best order to make meaning. Each participant will receive the task to take away and use.

On completion of this task, the ‘correct’ sequence of sentences will be presented and participants will have the opportunity to discuss the nature and value of the activity. This will identify the ‘clues’ which were evident to the reader as to which sentence was selected as the first one/last one, which sentence was a topic sentence and which sentences provided supporting information and why the topics were ordered in a particular way. How the activity can then be used as a model for developing this genre will then be revealed (Handout 2). In this part of the workshop participants will receive a copy of the model underpinning the discussion narrative along with a range of sample ESL students’ responses (at different levels) and a list of strategies to change the task and springboard to further develop/extend this written genre. The presenter will elaborate on the strategies and participants will have the
opportunity to trial a given strategy or a change to the strategy of their own, individually or in pairs or small groups actually writing.

Bibliography


Biographical Note

Dr Shirley O'Neill BEd, GradDipT, MEd.Hons.Q, PhD JCU, MACE is a Senior Research Fellow at Griffith University Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages. She is highly experienced in teaching, research, evaluation/assessment and consultancy, particularly in the area of language policy and programs in language and literacy education. She convenes the Graduate Certificates in Language Assessment & Second Language Teaching (Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language) and related Professional Development Programs and supervises PhD research in applied linguistics. Recent projects include development of vocational language competencies and framework for Australian national Tourism and Hospitality.
courses, research on the impact of apprentices' and trainees' English language and literacy skills on workplace learning and performance and delivery of professional development on mainstreaming English for ESL students P-12 in China.