How an Understanding of Cognition and Metacognition Translates into More Effective Writing Instruction

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Abstract

This discussion paper investigates the pedagogical implications of the cognitive process writing model proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981). The research of Flower and Hayes (1981) provides insights into how writers go about planning, generating, and revising during the process of writing. Flower and Hayes (1981) believed that this shift in focus, from product to process, had important instructional implications. They further stated that good writing instruction should provide an understanding of the cognitive processes that make up the writing process. This paper attempts to address the following question: How does one move inexperienced writers to the point at which they can begin to engage in the decision-making practices that are used by experienced writers? Sitko (1998) found that one way to engage students in the decision-making process was to provide instruction in metacognition. Explicitly teaching students metacognitive strategies, such as summarizing (self-review), questioning, clarifying, and predicting allowed writers to develop certain strategies to the point of automaticity. Palinscar and Brown (1986) found that teaching students basic metacognitive skills and then reminding them to use those skills was beneficial in improving their ability to monitor their own thinking. Once metacognitive strategies become automatic students are able to devote more of their working memory to the hierarchical stages of writing involving planning, generating, and reviewing.

This paper identifies instructional protocols instructors might use to effect students’ metacognitive awareness of the hierarchical decision-making strategies.

Keywords: Writing instruction, Writing processes, First-year university, Metacognition, Foreign countries