

Re-examining the Factors That Heighten Students' Motivation to Write

Warlito S. Caturay Jr.
Department of English and Literature
Silliman University, Dumaguete City

This paper looks at ESL university students' attitudes towards the factors that may heighten their motivation to write and their teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes towards writing, the teachers, as well as their classroom materials and activities, and their assessment process. Also, this paper attempted to find out what strategies teachers use to increase students' interest to write.

The data gathered showed that students generally have positive attitudes towards writing. They know the importance of writing in their lives and its values. Students also showed positive attitudes towards their teachers, the materials used in class, the activities in the classroom and the assessment process. It also revealed that teachers judiciously and consciously choose classroom materials, activities, and assessment strategies to increase students' motivation.

KEYWORDS: attitudes, motivation, ESL writing

INTRODUCTION

“Why should I learn to write?” This is one question most students ask, to which a number of answers may be given. Some whose lives have been benefited by writing would say that it helps shape people's lives by helping them understand themselves better and the goals that they set. More importantly, writing is one skill that cannot be dispensed with in the real world. In fact, Peter Drucker wrote, “In the very large organizations, whether it

is the government, the large business corporation, or in the army, this ability to express oneself [in writing] is perhaps the most important of all skills a person can possess" (in Reinking, Hart, & von der Osten, 1993, p. 3).

Despite this, students commonly complain when writing instructors announce to the class that they will have a writing activity. For some reason, students today have developed a strong aversion towards writing. This is not only true in a second language setting; this behavior also extends to places where English enjoys a first/native language status.

Several reasons make writing unappealing or de-motivating to students. Here are some of the observable ones:

1. Many students refuse to learn how to write because, according to Miller and Webb (1995) "...they believe that writing is a talent they were denied at birth" (p. 1). This belief may have been encouraged by the statement, "Writers are not made; they are born." Although it is true that others are more adept in writing, it does not necessarily follow that writing cannot be learned; after all, it is a skill and not a talent. Therefore, students can master how to write appropriate outputs.
2. Students take writing courses for granted because they feel that they only curricular requirements, and so a passing grade would suffice. The motivation, therefore, is to get the cut-off grade, so they can move up to the next level. As a result, students sit in the class not because they want or need to learn something, but because they want or need to get a passing mark that would get them closer to getting their diplomas.
3. Others do not perform well because they do not see the importance of writing in their field. Many students think that writing should be considered seriously if one is contemplating a writing career. Engineering students, for instance, reason that they have little need for writing classes because the nature of their job does not require them to write, discounting the fact that there are a number of occasions wherein they need to do some paper work.
4. Other times, students develop ambivalent attitude towards writing because they have apprehensions about their own capabilities. They enter the classroom full of emotional baggage, most of which spring

from feelings of inadequacy. Dalupan, Nuñez, Pascasio, and Que (2000, p. 77) observed that most students' fears stem from these statements about themselves:

"I have nothing to say."

"I've got a great idea, but how do I say it?"

"My opinion might not be worth saying."

"What if my grammar's all wrong?"

"What if I make a lot of mistakes?"

Indeed it is easy to consider the learners as the central force in the learning process. When they fail, they almost exclusively own up the blame, discounting the fact that there are other factors that may affect the learning process. For example, it is not unlikely that there are some who perform poorly because their instructors fail to stimulate their creativity. Sometimes, instructors forget that learners are individuals who need encouragement and inspiration to perform well in class.

Often ignored is the issue of motivation in language learning. What propels students to learn? How do they sustain that level of interest? Initially, few researchers did studies on motivation, leaving this research area almost uncharted territory. In recent years, however, interest in the field has improved and increased. Thus, a number of studies have been done to attempt to link motivation to language success. Although most results were non-conclusive, all of them point to the likelihood of motivation to affect language success. It must be noted that these studies delved on language learning in general and did not focus on any particular skill.

This paper attempted to relate how factors in the learning process, specifically writing, can increase the level of motivation, leading students to succeed. The assumption is that the learning process is an interplay among such factors as the learners, the teacher, and the teaching-learning strategies that include the materials, activities, and the assessment process. Aside from the learners, the teachers play a very important role in the educative process. They must wear different masks—that of a facilitator, lecturer, guidance counselor, parent, friend, among others. Because of the enormity of this role, teachers must know the kind of students they have. Tate (1994) claims

that the teachers' mental picture of their students affects how they go about teaching the course. If they can successfully find strategies to motivate students, then students' performance in the classroom will greatly improve.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Although Filipinos start learning the English language the moment they start schooling, it cannot be denied that a number of them have yet to get comfortable with the language. The struggle is never ending for those who find English a very difficult language, especially in situations where English is learned not only as a foreign language but is also used as a medium of instruction as in the Philippines' case. Whether learners like it or not, learning English is a must, and as H. D. Brown (1987) put it, "Becoming bilingual is a way of life" (p. 1). However, learning a second language is never as easy as it seems. Brown admits that a lot of effort must be exerted for one to be successful in using the language: "Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual, and emotional response is necessary to successfully send and receive messages in second language" (1987, p. 1).

The burden of learning a language, however, is shared by the students with their teachers who play an important role in the teaching-learning process. Because of this responsibility, English communication skills teachers need to understand some theories on second language learning and anchor all their classroom activities on these; only then can they really claim they do principled teaching.

Among the many second language acquisition theories is Stephen Krashen's creative construction theory which maintains that "learners construct internal representations of the language being learned" (Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p. 26). Krashen's model has five central hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, which suggests that there are two ways in which learners approach second language learning; i.e., either through acquisition or learning; the monitor hypothesis, which states that aside from the acquired system that initiates the speaker's utterance and that is responsible for fluency and intuitive judgments about correctness, there is also a learned system that acts as the editor or monitor, making changes and polishing what the acquired system has produced; the natural order hypothesis, which assumes that there is a predictable sequence in acquiring the rules of language; the input hypothesis, which states that only

by receiving comprehensible input can learners really acquire a language; and, the affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that the learner's disposition affects the acquisition of language input.

Among Krashen's hypotheses, it is the affective filter theory that deals with the issue of motivation. However, some theorists also consider it the weakest of his hypotheses because the affective factors' influence on language acquisition/learning cannot be given concrete evidence. This may be why researchers are not keen on doing research in the area of motivation. Crookes and Schmidt acknowledge this and offer an explanation why motivation is not a widely explored field in research. They claim that in second language acquisition, motivation is only one factor that could have an effect on a person's acquisition of a language (1991). Oxford and Shearin (1994) added that there are four conditions that muddle the understanding of second language motivation: (1) the lack of common definition of motivation, (2) the confusion surrounding motivation in second and foreign language situation, (3) the second language research's advertent disregard of key motivational and developmental theories in psychology, and (4) the teachers' lack of information about their students' purposes for learning the language.

In recent years, interest in the field of motivation has improved and increased, and several models have been presented. Gardner's socio-educational model has been frequently cited in all language learning motivation literature. His model can be summarized in five hypotheses: the integrative motive; the cultural belief hypothesis, which contends that the learning success of integrative-motivated students can be attributed to them being active learners; the causality hypothesis, which points to the cause and effect relationship of integrative motivation and second language achievement; and, the two-process hypothesis, which holds aptitude and integrative motivation as independent factors in second language learning (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991).

Instrumentality theories suggest that "individuals engage in activities instrumental in achieving some valued outcome" (Oxford & Shearin, 1994, p. 19). This broad category of motivation includes Atkinson's Expectancy-Value Theory, which holds that a person engages in an activity because s/he expects to be successful at it and can get satisfaction from it; the Valence, Instrumentality Theory, which says that learners always ask whether an outcome of an activity has any value to them and whether that outcome could yield good results; and Goal-Setting Theory, which proposes that individual

learner's goals affect performance (Oxford & Shearin).

Knowledge of these different theories will prove beneficial to the teacher. The discussion on the factors that contribute to learning achievement can guide teachers in all major decisions that must be made in any learning situation.

A trend that has been practiced in language teaching is the instruction on whole language; that is, the integration of the four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Although this is the ideal way of teaching the language, there are some instances, as in the tertiary level, when courses offered are focused on a particular skill. This paper focuses on the improvement of teaching and learning writing. I chose writing because I believe that this is one particular skill that is quite underdeveloped and that many students find particularly difficult.

Over the years, the teaching of writing has evolved. There have been a number of approaches that teachers have tried to implement in their classes. However, regardless of the number of approaches available, what are carried out in the writing classroom are those that the teachers themselves consider useful. Putting into words his observation, Williams (2003) opined: "Teachers often find it difficult to find their way through the resulting noise [caused by the multiple approaches to writing instruction] and therefore elect to hold to the approach that feels most comfortable—the one they experienced as students—regardless of whether it is effective or theoretically sound" (p. 43).

Berlin in 1982 surveyed major pedagogical practices in contemporary rhetoric, including classical rhetoric, current traditional rhetoric, new rhetoric, and romantic rhetoric. Williams, however, cautions that it is erroneous to pick one as the 'ideal' as these approaches, to some extent, share the same elements.

Classical Rhetoric. This approach to writing is borne from Aristotle's Classical Topics. Aristotle posited that a great way to generate ideas is to ask certain questions. These questions feature what is now known as the different methods of development like narration, description, cause and effect, comparison, contrast, etc. Miller (1999) wrote that Aristotle's topics "provided a foundation for the work of many other rhetoricians and have played an important role in education for more than two thousand years.

Current Traditional Rhetoric. This approach is grounded on the theory that "writing is thinking." And the deductive nature of this rationale led to what most writing instructors now know as the bottom

approach teaching of writing, where the instruction begins from the smaller parts and moves up to larger ones. Hence, students begin learning the basics—from the words, sentences, paragraphs, and essays. However, the focus of this approach is not on the audience or the purpose but on the rhetorical modes like narration, exposition and argumentation. Thus, there is too much emphasis on the structure. The grading system used in this approach does not offer much help to students. Williams (2003) observed that teachers using this approach edit papers “as though they are preparing manuscripts for publication.” As a result, students are rarely given the opportunity to rectify their errors. Students’ papers are immediately rated then given a comment by the teachers to explain/justify the rating.

The problem with this approach lies in its over-emphasis on the form rather than on the meaning, audience, and purpose. Ideally, teachers have to orient students that the rhetorical modes are “parts of whole essays.” Regrettably, teachers, for some reason, rarely do so. Instead, they present these modes individually and require students to come up with essays similar to the models presented in class. Clearly, the focus is on form more than anything else.

It must be noted though that this is the most popular approach to writing. This approach is usually combined with some elements of ‘the writing process’ (Williams, 2003).

New Rhetoric. This approach is greatly influenced by the seminal work of Noam Chomsky on Transformation-Generative grammar. The work of Chomsky influenced a theoretical framework for the teaching of writing that has something to do with the writing maturity of students reflected in their sentence structures and lengths. This also introduced the top-down approach to writing that led to the development of the process approach to writing. In this approach, teachers attempt to change students’ behavior towards the process, asking them to study and emulate the work of great writers. Since students are asked to write intensively, instruction is more individualized and collaborative, owing to the shift in focus on the importance of revision.

Romantic Rhetoric. This approach considers writing as a form of self-expression. Because of this emphasis, a number of people are drawn to it and become motivated because it allows them to write what they know best. They are encouraged to find their voices and write about their own personal experiences, leading them to write authentic texts. While it has some obvious advantages, experts express alarm that this approach focuses too much on self-expression that it gives people the

impression that it is the only purpose of writing. There is also the danger of students being steered away from academic writing.

Brown (1994) enumerated issues all teachers must get acquainted with before entering a writing classroom. These issues, he said, are important considerations that must be made.

The first issue is on writing as a process as opposed to the product of writing. There was a time when teachers focused greatly on the finished product—be it an essay, a report, a story, etc. This output is expected to meet certain standards, reflect accurate grammar, and be organized in the fashion that most readers deem conventional. Although there is nothing wrong with this, the disadvantage is that students are encouraged to focus greatly on the model output. If the student's output does not measure up to the model given, his/her chances of getting a good mark is compromised. Therefore, the pressure on the student is quite high. Instead of teaching students how to write, the emphasis is on the product; how the students come up with the product is somewhat disregarded. The process approach to writing, on the other hand, does the following:

- a. focus on the process of writing that leads to the final written product
- b. help student writers to understand their own composing process
- c. help them to build repertoires of strategies for pre-writing, drafting, and rewriting
- d. give students opportunities to write and rewrite
- e. place central importance on the process of revision
- f. let students discover what they want to say as they write
- g. give students feedback throughout the composing process (not just on the final product) to consider as they attempt to bring their expression closer and closer to intention
- h. encourage feedback both from the instructor and peers
- i. include individual conferences between teacher and student during the process of composition (Brown, 1994, pp. 320-321).

If teachers are going to convince students that writing can be learned, then the process approach is more appropriate because it shows students the stages in coming up with an output.

Another issue is on authenticity. This refers to how much real writing teachers require of their students. Teachers must have a strong understanding of how writing can be of use to students. Therefore, teachers must learn to differentiate what real writing is from display

writing. According to Brown (1994), real writing happens when the learner writes because s/he does not know anything and genuinely wants information. On the other hand, display writing happens when a learner is required to “display” his/her knowledge. The implication for teaching is summarized by Brown (1994): “...if you are to keep your teaching purposeful and intrinsically motivating, you must discover why your students need to write, what form their writing will therefore take, and steer your direction to those purposes and forms” (pp.324-325). This particular quotation hints at the importance of a learner-centered instruction, a practice that (Brown notes) empowers learners.

The basic principle of learner-centered instruction is to direct all classroom decisions on the needs and abilities of the students. Brown (1994, p. 80) wrote that a learner-centered instruction includes:

- “techniques that focus on or account for learners’ needs, styles, and goals”
- “techniques that give some control to the student...”
- “curricula that include the consultation and input of students and that do not presuppose objectives in advance”
- “techniques that allow for student creativity and innovation”
- “techniques that enhance a students’ sense of competence and self-worth.”

Students will write better when they truly realize the importance of writing in their lives, when they are coached how to perform better, when they have the sense of control over their learning, and when they develop the confidence that they can accomplish the writing tasks given to them.

METHODOLOGY

This study took place in Silliman University, a campus at the heart of Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental and involved Basic Communication (BC 12) students enrolled in the second semester of the Academic Year 2006-2007. The participants are those, who after having passed Basic Communication 11, are assumed to have a firm grasp of the basic rules of grammar and are ready to study Critical Reading and Writing. They were asked to fill out questionnaires that aimed to determine their attitudes towards writing and their motivation for learning. A total of 297 students participated in this study.

BC 12 teachers were also asked to answer questionnaires and participate in a focused group discussion. I also observed classes and noted down some classroom practices of BC 12 teachers. To observe how teachers use motivational strategies in their classes, I sat in their classes and noted down their classroom interaction with students, how they implemented classroom activities, and the materials they used. I observed eleven classes with eleven different teachers. Some of these teachers handled more than one BC 12 class, but I only observed one class of each of these teachers. For each class, I sat in for one lesson that extended to two to three class sessions.

RESULTS

Students' Attitudes. Based on the survey, students generally have a positive attitude towards writing. This is indicated in the weighted mean of their rating, which 3.49 out of 4. It is worth noting that among the items in the questionnaire, writing as a tool for self-expression was rated highest by student-respondents. In fact, respondents wrote that BC 12 can be more meaningful to them if the course provides them with opportunities to express their feelings through writing.

The students also believe that writing sharpens their critical thinking skills; thereby, boosting performance in other classes.

In terms of students' attitudes toward the teacher, their attitudes are favorable if the teacher explains the lessons simply and moves with a pace that they consider acceptable: neither too slow nor too fast. These students do not mind the number of writing tasks required of them as long the teacher demonstrates to the class how things ought to be done. The students also appreciate a teacher who gives ample time for students to digest explanations and who entertains students' questions even in the middle of a lecture.

Material-wise, students like those that they can personally relate to and that are highly relevant to the courses they are taking. Students have high, positive attitudes towards the materials teachers use in their classes (3.13). They strongly agree that the writing samples help them improve as writers.

Interestingly, students have positive attitudes towards the activities (2.97). Most teachers think that students find no value in writing activities; however, the survey revealed that the students consider pre-writing activities, organizing, drafting, editing, and revising essential parts in the writing process. Thus, students acknowledge that the process approach to writing is more effective

than the product approach.

Lastly, students also have a positive attitude towards the assessment process (3.0). They do not think that a teacher's notes on the returned papers are discouraging; they see the feedback as a tool that makes them become better writers. In fact when they receive positive comments from teachers, they become more encouraged to do better in the next writing tasks. The color of the ink used by the teacher to write his/her comments does not have a negative effect on students. Furthermore, students appreciate a conference with the teacher to discuss students' writing output and growth as writers.

Over-all the students have positive attitudes (3.18) towards writing, the teacher, the instructional materials and activities, and the assessment process.

The students' questionnaire included two questions that sought students' preferred activities and suggestions to make BC 12 more meaningful. Not all students filled out their answers to these questions. However, 105 of the students who took time to complete the entire questionnaire noted the following activities to be beneficial to their learning process:

- Film showing
- Writing workshops
- Outdoor classes or field trips
- Class presentations
- Reading short, interesting essays
- Collaborative writing
- Doing pre-writing activities and sharing them to the class
- Journal writing
- More group activities

When asked how their learning experience may be improved, the students wrote that an approachable, encouraging, and learner-centered teacher helps. They noted that there ought to be more interaction between teacher and students and that the teacher should explain clearly different types of essays and demonstrate to class how each should be done. Some students think that a resource speaker, possibly a successful writer, can encourage them to write better. They also noted that the choices of reading materials can enliven the class.

Teachers' Perceptions. The teachers believe that students understand the value of writing in their lives. Based on the survey, they strongly

agree (3.40) that students see writing as self-expression, and they recognize students' opinion of writing as helpful in developing their critical thinking skills—thereby, helping them perform better in other classes—and essential in getting a job.

In terms of students' attitudes toward them, the teachers agree (3.15) that the students like a teacher who explains well, shows his/her students how things are done, and addresses students' concerns. However, the respondents believe that students do not dislike a teacher who gives a number of writing tasks.

Generally, the teachers think that students have positive attitudes (3.16) towards their instructional materials. They too believe that students respond better when they are given materials that they like and enjoy. The teachers consider sample essays important, and they have observed that the best and preferred samples for students are short ones. However, teachers believe that even if students prefer short samples, long writing samples can be as effective as long as they are relevant and highly motivating to students.

The teachers agree that students have positive attitudes (2.75) towards the activities. They think that students find activities like pre-writing, outlining, peer editing, and self-editing useful. The teachers' responses also reveal that they do not make revision a punitive exercise for students. By rating the items low, the teachers show their learner-centeredness. The fact that they consider revision an opportunity for students to improve their work, teachers demonstrate how they protect and take learners' welfare to heart.

In terms of the assessment process, the teachers are positive (3.26) that students have a favorable attitude towards it. They think that their feedback are well-accepted by students. They consider their positive comments motivating to students. The teachers are also careful in choosing the color of the pen they use in giving feedback; they think that red ink pens are more threatening than other color ink marks. Usually the glaring red color ink mark on a paper is associated with failure, and because of this association, teachers might feel it can have a negative psychological effect on the student.

Correlation of Students' and Teachers' Perceptions. To check whether there is a significant difference between the students' attitudes and the teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes, the two-tailed t-test was used. In terms of students' attitudes and teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes towards writing, there is a slight difference. Although teachers agree that students have positive attitudes towards

writing, their rating is lower compared to the students'. While the students' mean is 3.49, the teachers' mean is only 3.0. Students might think that they have strong, positive attitudes towards writing, but teachers do not feel as confident as their students. Students may think that they are doing well because they have positive attitudes towards writing, but teachers assert that the attitudes of students are not up to the level of behavior that they want their students to have.

Meanwhile, there is no significant difference between the students' attitudes and the teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes toward the teachers, the materials, the activities, and the assessment process. Over-all, there is also no significant difference between the students' attitudes and the teachers' perceptions.

Teachers' Strategies. During a focused group discussion, 11 teachers freely discussed the teaching-learning process that transpires in their respective classes.

The session began with the moderator asking about the participants' ideas of what makes a good writing student. Many agree that good writing students are those that can produce well-organized paragraphs and essays. However, they also pointed out other factors that contribute to the academic growth of students. They said that students are also considered good if they are responsive; that is, they interact with the teacher and engage in relevant discourses with other students in the class. These students know why they need to write, and they understand the writing process. They appreciate the need for revision, and their revised work always shows a marked improvement.

Although not all students have positive attitudes towards writing, the teachers noted that there are factors that help students to like writing. These factors include the attitude of teachers, the materials, the activities, and the assessment process.

The teachers understand that they play an important role in the educative process. Among the many roles they assume in the classroom, the teachers are sources of knowledge, facilitators, and motivators.

The respondents think that effective teachers are those who are passionate about the subject or courses they are teaching. When students see the teachers' interest in writing, more so if teachers are writers themselves, their enthusiasm will cascade to the students. A junior faculty said:

When students see that their teachers are really into writing—that they not only talk the talk but also walk the walk—they become more motivated because they get to see firsthand their teacher’s love for the subject; consequently, the teacher’s enthusiasm will also flow to them.

A senior faculty added, “The teacher’s passion for the subject s/he teaches comes out on the strategies s/he uses.”

Another characteristic of an effective teacher is a non-threatening persona. Teachers who are non-threatening are those that students can easily approach to discuss their work. These teachers take time to confer with students and clarify meanings and intentions of what they write. They give total assessment of their students’ papers; that is, they not only check the grammatical structures of sentences, but they also consider the ideas presented by the students. When they give comments, they start with the positive ones before the negative ones; and no matter how negative their comments can be, they always explain and give suggestions for improving their paper.

Another factor noted by the teachers to improve students’ attitude is the materials. Some of the teachers said that they use materials that are available at the department. However, they found that most of the materials are dated and that the quality of their printing is poor. Thus, they adapt and adopt other instructional materials from books, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet. Among the materials that they found effective are those dealing with relationships, humorous articles, and short sample essays. They noted that a one-page sample is the ideal sample for students.

Several activities have been found by the teachers to be effective. All the teachers agree that the process approach to writing is the most effective way to teach writing. Thus, teachers make students go through the process of planning, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing. They give grammar exercises and drills to prepare students for other writing activities. They require them to do a number of pre-writing activities, either individually or with a group. Group presentations and discussions are an integral part of their classroom practice.

Although teachers agree that the process approach is the most effective way to go about teaching writing, some teachers differed in their ideas of what to teach. A senior faculty member said that it is important to really stress to students the structure of a paragraph or an essay. However, a junior faculty opined that the structure is not really important:

Teaching students the structure may curtail their creativity, so I don't really give them a prescribed structure. Besides, if you read the work of famous writers like Jessica Zafra and others, they really do not follow a fixed form.

As a writing teacher, I can see sense in both teachers' ideas. On the one hand, students, especially those who are not confident in their own writing, need to be shown how things should be done. On the other hand, over-emphasis on the structure may impose so much on students' writing. An excerpt of my journal entry for that FGD session reads:

The discussion earlier made me reflect on my own teaching practice. Although I'd like to believe that I am a very open teacher—in fact, I'd like to think that I am like a sponge—I must admit that I, too, see the importance of teaching the structure to the students. Come to think of it, one of my EL 33 [an intensive writing course] students once asked me why students have to learn the structures when famous writers disregard these conventions. I remember telling the student that everybody in the room, myself included, had to because we were all amateur writers. I told the student that perhaps we could disregard some conventions, in light of creativity, once we had developed our own style, and the quality of writing that we had had improved.

In checking students' written outputs, most of the teachers have the same practices. They said that it is very important for writing teachers to return students' papers on time. To help students improve, teachers write comments on the returned papers. Sometimes, they personally talk with the students to point out to them the strengths and weaknesses of their papers and suggest ways of improving them. The group is divided on the effect of colored ink in writing their comments. Some teachers think that red ink is threatening and discouraging because in the Philippine setting, the color red is usually used to indicate a very low score or worse, a failure. Hence, some teachers use other color ink. Others, however, believe that it is not the color of the ink that makes or breaks the student but the teacher's comments written on the returned outputs.

Since I did my observation towards the end of the semester, most teachers had group presentations/reporting. Hence, I had to modify the observation checklist I prepared and concentrated on the interaction of teachers, reporters, and students, the follow-up activities, and the materials.

I was able to observe three classes that were about to start writing a major essay. In these classes, the teachers used some elements of the writing process. Before making the students write their essays, the teachers required them to brainstorm or free write on their topics

to generate ideas. They also gave the students time to discuss among themselves their pre-writing outputs. The actual writing was done during the next successive sessions.

DISCUSSION

Teachers need to understand the attitudes of their students toward writing, the teachers, the materials, activities, and the assessment process in order for them to enhance and maintain students' motivation to write. Students, on the other hand, need to explore their attitudes towards writing and identify strategies that work for them. These provide a number of implications for the teaching-learning process.

First of all, cultivating a positive attitude towards writing is very important. The results show that students see the value of writing especially when they are given opportunities to express themselves. Indeed, their answers prove the contention of many writers that the joy of writing springs from the writer's knowledge that s/he can express his/her thoughts and feelings in writing, either publicly through publication or privately through diaries and journal. The popularity of self-expression as a motive for writing led to the rise of romantic rhetoric, an approach to writing that focuses on self-expression. People's penchant for this approach is comprehensible: when students are tasked to write about themselves, the battle of tackling the task is half-won since they do not have to agonize looking for topics to write about. They will be writing about something they know best—themselves.

Also, the act of expressing one's feelings in writing is very personal and can be very empowering. Because students are asked to write about themselves, they become less inhibited to write. The more they express themselves, the more things they could write about. Consequently, this capability to write will empower them enough for them to find pleasure in writing. This lends support to Heinomen's (2001) claim that motivation, attitude, and aptitude are among the factors that affect writing.

The students also believe that writing skills can boost their performance in other classes. They must have realized how important the skill is and that whether they are taking Mass Communication, Nursing, or Engineering, or any course for that matter, there will always be an occasion for them to write. Perhaps, seeing the importance of writing in their content classes, they too realize how

helpful the skill is in getting a job. For one, an impressive resume and business letters are products of proficient writing.

The students also think that writing sharpens their critical thinking skills. Unlike speaking that is spontaneous, writing is more structured and allows writers more time to carefully organize their thoughts for a swifter flow of communication.

These have very important implications for the writing teachers. When they find out that their students have a positive attitude towards writing, their challenge, therefore, is sustaining that attitude. This can be done if teachers perpetually require students to do purposive writing. Writing tasks need to be in line with students' interests and needs.

Secondly, the qualities of the teacher can be a motivating factor. The students surveyed revealed that they have a positive attitude towards their writing teachers who possess good qualities. Students' expectations of teachers' roles fit well into Heimlich and Norland's four quadrant models of teaching styles (cited in Madridano's study, 2006). Students need teachers who are good facilitators, providers, enablers, and experts.

Thirdly, chosen materials need to be motivating too. Students' positive ratings of the items related to materials validate the instrumentality theory (Oxford & Shearin, 1994) which holds that learners always consider whether something has any value to them and whether its outcome can contribute some good to them. Hence, teachers need to be judicious in choosing materials to use in class.

Fourth, useful activities cultivate students' positive attitude towards writing. Activities like pre-writing, outlining, peer editing, and self-editing are useful.

Finally, the assessment process encourages students to perform better. The survey revealed that students, having received a positive feedback from the teacher, are encouraged to do well in the succeeding tasks. This particular behavior typifies the expectancy-value theories that claim that the higher the learners' perceived likelihood of success is, the more positively motivated they become (Brophy; Eccles & Wigfield in Dornyei, 2001). This is also supported by the attribution theory which posits that a person's past successes and failures have an effect on the person's motivation to perform a task in the future (Weiner in Dornyei, 2001).

Another assessment activity that may prove helpful is the conference. Students appreciate a conference with the teacher to discuss students' writing output and growth as writers. As a writing

teacher myself, I have observed that students appreciate it if I spend some time with them for individual conferences. In students' reflections of their writing process, which I require them to write, some students wrote that the individual conferences made them feel that I genuinely cared about their progress.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined students' attitudes towards the factors that may heighten their motivation to write and the teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes towards writing, the teachers, as well as their classroom materials and activities, and their assessment process. Based on the findings presented in the previous section, I conclude that:

1. The students have good attitudes towards writing, the teacher, the activities, the materials, and the assessment process. The students understand the importance of writing in their lives; however, this understanding does not necessarily give them the confidence in their own writing ability. They still bank on having a good teacher who understands that his/her role in the educative process is indispensable because s/he creates the conditions upon which other motivational strategies come into play. The activities, materials, and assessment process, when carefully chosen and considered can greatly help students.

2. Teachers clearly also have positive perceptions of students' attitudes towards writing, the teacher, the materials, the activities, and the assessment process. They trust that students know the value of writing and the students' confidence in them as teachers are validations of their beliefs of their roles in the classroom. They also show confidence that students' attitudes towards the materials, activities, and assessment process are valid ones.

3. Although both students' attitudes and teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes matched, there is one component that showed a marked difference between the students' and teachers' responses. The students' rating of their attitude towards writing is significantly higher compared to the rating given by the teachers. Hence, the students' confidence on their attitude towards writing is not completely shared by the teachers. However, other components' results show that

students' attitudes and perceptions matched; thus, it can be concluded that both teachers and students rated the items congruently.

4. The strategies used by the teachers fit well to the model presented in this study. The teachers are aware how important these motivational strategies are and how they use this awareness to make classroom decisions.

Writing is cognitively challenging and may de-motivate or discourage students to learn. However, if appropriate strategies are used, students' attitudes become favorable, making the teaching-learning of writing meaningful.

When students are constantly exposed to the process of writing and made to see the connections of it to their lives, they will be able to appreciate and value writing and think of it as a challenge that is worth taking. Therefore, teachers of writing, having the central role of activating and maintaining students' motivation, need to cultivate a non-threatening learning environment, choose materials and activities relevant to the experiences of their students, and apply assessment practices that encourage and empower students to be more engaged in their own learning process.

REFERENCES

- Brown, H. D. (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (2nd ed.). N. J.: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. NY: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Crookes, G., & Schmidt, R. W. (1991, December). Motivation: Reopening the research agenda. *Language Learning*, 41 (4), 469-512.
- Dalupan, L. G., Fernandez, A. B., Nuñez, C. A., Pascasio, E. M., & Que, M. J. (2000). *Basic English for college* (Rev. ed.). Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Dornyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Mass: Newbury House.

- Gardner, R. C., & Tremblay, P. F. (1994). On motivation, research agendas, and theoretical frameworks. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78 (3), 359-368.
- Heinonen, E. (2001). Writing in English as a second language. Retrieved April 1, 2003, <http://ep.liu.se/exjobb/inv/2001/024/exjobb.pdf>
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (1993). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Madridano, L. F. (2006, March). The teachers' beliefs and behaviors related to the learning community: Its implications to teaching style. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Silliman University, Dumaguete City.
- Miller, R. K. (1999). *Motives for writing* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Miller, R. K., & Webb, S. S. (1995). *Motives for writing* (2nd ed.). CA: Mayfield.
- Ormond, J. E. (2000). *Educational psychology: Developing learners* (3rd ed.). NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Reinking, J. A., Hart, A. W., & von der Osten, R. (1993). *Strategies for successful writing* (3rd ed.). NJ: Simon & Schuster.
- Tate, G. (1994). The primary site of contention in teaching composition. In C.G. Russell & R.L. McDonald (Eds.), *Teaching composition in the 90s: Sites of contention*. NY: Longman.
- Williams, J. D. (2003). *Preparing to teach writing: Research, theory, and practice* (3rd ed.). NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.