

Constructivism-based pathways: Revolutionizing EFL writing instruction for adult learners

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Abstract

In the ongoing pursuit of continuous pedagogical improvement, eclectic teachers find themselves inundated with a multitude of engaging approaches, methods, and techniques. The selection of these should ideally be based on informed pedagogy, with due consideration given to the particular needs of the learners. Through reflective self-inquiry, this paper aims to reveal how a thoughtful teacher reflects on her everyday teaching practices in order to transform them into a more constructivist model of instruction by the stages of initiation, focus on the self, data collection, taking accountability, iterative reflection, and information generation. A description is provided of how the EFL writing classes taught by the author at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta were managed. This is then confronted with some literature about andragogy and constructivist learning, providing a proposed model for improving future constructivist-based EFL writing instruction for adult learners. The constructivist approach to EFL writing proposed involves several key steps, from conditioning, collaborative inquiry, engaging feedback, work display, to reflective exam, all of which become comprehensive stages within one semester learning in writing courses.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been widely held that EFL classes in Indonesia have considerably transformed from teacher to learner-centered ones and from ‘unilateral’ (Shah, 2022) to democratic instruction as suggested by constructivist pedagogy. Shifting from traditional to constructivist instructional teaching requires educators to fully understand what constructivism means so that definitions or descriptions of this approach are revisited. Constructivism is one of the philosophical systems that holds that knowledge is the product of self-formation (Asandhimitra et al., 2004). The constructivist classroom, according to Conner (2013), is a learner-centered setting where students' prior experiences are recognized and highlighted. Reflective, negotiated, inductive, and collaborative features are highlighted in constructivist teaching methods. Besides, teaching strategies associated with constructivism emphasize individually focused methods of inquiry, authentic learning settings, and independent and collaborative modes of training (Terhart, 2010). These methods differ from direct teaching strategies, which require students to respond to teacher-structured explanations and questions (Nie & Lau, 2010). Instead of imparting knowledge to students, the job of teachers is to support learning, and the experiential learning opportunities they create are considered important entry points for student learning (e.g., Nie & Lau, 2010; Singer & Moscovici, 2008). Boekaerts and Minnaert (2007) in this view, found that students who were participating in social constructivist-based pedagogy have more situational interest, satisfaction, perceived autonomy, competence, and social relatedness.

Zulela and Rachmadtullah (2019) with this regard propose seven pedagogical procedures or points that may apply in the classroom context. (1) Students participate fully and enthusiastically in their studies. (2) Students work in groups, engage in peer correction and discussion, and develop self-aware attitudes and actions. (3) Understanding is the foundation on which skills are created, and they are developed using pupils' pre-existing schemata. (4) In order to explore and develop their creativity, students are encouraged to construct writing in accordance with the context (actual), conditions/themes introduced by the teacher in various contexts, and learning aids. (5) Students are taught to be in charge of supervising and developing their specific activities. (6) Learning occurs in a variety of settings, including context and setting. Lastly, work process, work, and assessments are some of the different ways that learning results are measured.

Considering the above characteristics of learning, more and more eclectic teachers continue to find the best options for tailoring their classes (Brown & Lee, 2015) to the paradigm of “particularity” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) as suggested in the post-method era. Teachers through action research, self-study, or research and development (R&D) have worked either individually or in groups through an English teacher working group or in Indonesian called *Musyawah Guru Mata Pelajaran* (MGMP) to fulfill the needs of the learners as well as conform with the standards required by the current education ministry and offices. As found by Barella (2014), MGMP in the researched region contribute greatly to the development of teacher professionalism in terms of (a) developing the syllabus; b) annual and semester program; c) lesson plan; d) developing teaching method and the innovative learning model; e) developing the use of teaching media and the evaluation system and improving the teacher’s professional competence. Similarly, Helmy (2018) also revealed that MGMP has contributed greatly to the development of teachers’ professionalism through training, non-training, certification program, and education supervising programs. Apart from this never-ending agenda to develop professionalism, focus on learners’ motivation (Berns et al., 2016), needs (Berns et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2009; Wong, 2020; Levy, 2010), learning styles (Mupinga et al., 2010; Pashler et al., 2008; Hatami, 2013) has been thoroughly investigated for providing such a ‘particularity’.

This has been possible for teachers who develop their agency providing an ample stockpile of pedagogical implications (Brown & Lee, 2015) and enabling them to undergo constant self-transformation. Both experts see agency, the act of making choices in acts of self-determination, as the core of motivation (Brown & Lee, 2015). In relation to this, Calvert (2016) insists that teachers can act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to that of their colleagues, so they can have many choices of professional development pieces of training or agendas. For example, teachers who exercise their agency would be eager to learn how teaching can be so inspiring and engaging as well as successful in instilling characters, knowledge, and skills. They, through professional development training and supervision, will be fully powered to embrace any teaching techniques and technology for more effective instruction. Brown and Lee (2015) make it short by mentioning four core features of human agency, including intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflectiveness. Seeing the importance of teacher agency in self-transformation and pursuing constructive action in professional development, teachers in general are encouraged to have visions on their growth, set core skills and agendas to develop, and develop specific strategies for more engaging teaching. All of these should be based on Brown and Lee's (2015) core features to attain effective results.

While among the four language skills writing was perhaps considered the most challenging for some students, the current investigation limited its focus on writing skills. Writing skills which cover the ability to orchestrate grammar, vocabulary, coherence, cohesion, mechanics, rhetoric, and ideas, are essential for students to actively participate in the construction of new knowledge and showcase their competencies in any contexts, whether it is academic, business, or social. One major theme in pedagogical research on writing is the nature of the composing process of writing (O’Brien, 2004; Zulela & Rachmadtullah, 2019; De Silva, 2010). In composing, written products are often the result of thinking, drafting, and revising procedures that require specialized skills that do not develop naturally (Brown & Lee, 2015). Zulela and Rachmadtullah (2019) add their findings that learning to write with a constructivism approach combined with a contextual approach is one of the right

approaches to improve the ability to write essays in elementary school and high school students. With this method, students encounter difficult material and apply it to real-world situations, thereby empowering what they already know and have firsthand experience with. By employing good Indonesian as a medium, students are given the chance to construct knowledge that currently exists and merge it with new knowledge. This means that teachers should provide scaffolding by allowing multiple languages supporting the acquisition of English as the target language.

Considering the above discussion, this study aims to investigate whether writing instruction implemented by the first author is based on the constructivist approach as the researcher believes that the best way to help students progress in EFL writing is through practice, feedback, and revision. This is essential because it assesses how constructivist methods are used in EFL writing teaching and is in line with pedagogical ideas that place an emphasis on practice, student participation, and constructive criticism in order to maximize learning outcomes. Teachers and researchers can guarantee the implementation of successful pedagogical strategies and foster a student-centered learning environment that supports the development of EFL writing skills by critically analyzing teaching approaches. Additionally, by investigating the use of constructivist methodology in EFL writing teaching, this research closes a large gap in the literature and advances the field of study on specialized pedagogical approaches for adult learners from a variety of language and cultural backgrounds.

As producing texts process includes writers' initiative to understand how grammar, vocabulary, coherence, cohesion, mechanics, rhetoric, and ideas are orchestrated, the author believe that the best way to do it is through engaging students' active participation in constructing new knowledge of writing gained via experimenting and feedback, as well as connecting them with their prior knowledge. However, the researcher sees the urgency to revisit the first author's teaching practices to see if constructivist procedures are well implemented and to make betterment to the existing measures for finding the best options as an eclectic teacher who exercises her agency and strive for developing her professionalism in EFL teaching.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a reflective self-inquiry into a deliberate and retrospective analysis of the author's teaching practices and experiences in the first-person dimension of inquiry (Ladkin, 2016; Torbert, 2001) and deemed the most suitable method to achieve the objective of the study. This self-study (Ovens & Fletcher, 2014) was carried out through seven stages: (1) initiation, the author's realizing the need for both professional and personal development, (2) focus on the self, critical assessment on the author's teaching behaviors, convictions, and experiences in light of their professional environment, (3) data collection to gather information about her experiences and actions by creating empirical material for examination, and (4) engagement with perspectives to comprehend their activity and its ramifications more fully, enabling the author engaged with various points of view from published work. The next stage was (5) taking accountability, beyond merely self-improvement, the author was accountable for generating knowledge that could guide and reframe future practice. (6) Iterative reflection became the sixth stage where the author consciously and repeatedly reflecting on, analyzing, and gathering information about her deliberate social activities within her professional setting to develop herself as well as other people, including students, co-workers, and larger institutional and social situations. Lastly, (7) information generation was carried out to attain two types of information: conceptual knowledge that should be shared with other practitioners and advance the academic area, and knowledge rooted in the inquirer's embodied activities.

In this context the author taught Writing for Social Intercultural Communication to two groups of students who were in the second semester of their study. They were students of the Bachelor of English Language Education (BELE) Study Program, at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. The researcher collected the data through reflections on teachers' everyday practices of teaching in these two classes and then selectively use the evidence of the researcher's insights (Johns, 2020). Then, to analyze the data, more sources on constructivist teaching models or techniques would be collected, patterns are identified, interpreted, and integrated

to the literature to provide (1) judgment on what is appropriate and (2) suggestions on what to improve in the next pedagogical years of teaching this course based on this perspective. Triangulation was harnessed to assure trustworthiness of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In this part, a description of the existing teaching practices would be revealed and compared or contrasted with those of constructivism lenses. The course in which the teacher reflects on her teaching practices is Writing for Social Intercultural Communication weighted two credits of both theory and practice of writing. This course aims to provide students with skills to be able to write various types of functional texts in English fluently, accurately, and acceptably.

Preparation

The types of texts studied in this Writing for Social Intercultural Communication course include definition, descriptive, narrative, process analysis, opinion, and comparison/contrast paragraphs. Each type of paragraph usually has two meetings that should cover the theory and practice of writing. To enable students to write these types of paragraphs appropriately and acceptably, the teacher delivered the materials through PowerPoint slides and provides two accessible course books on the Google Classroom (GC), namely *Ready to write: A first composition text* (Blanchard & Root, 2010) and *Great Writing 2: Great Paragraphs* (Folse et al., 2014). To achieve its objective, this course is organized into 16 meetings as appears in Table 1. Before the class began, some days or a day before the teacher provided the selected parts of the books to be read by the students and some YouTube videos to watch. Then, the teacher did summarize important parts of the books and copy-paste them onto the power point slides.

Table 1. Course Organization

Meeting	Topic
1	Class Orientation
2-3	Paragraph Writing (Features of a paragraph & Elements of grammar and punctuation)
4-5	Definition Paragraph
6-7	Process Analysis
8	Mid-test
9-10	Descriptive Paragraph
11-12	Opinion Paragraph
13-14	Narrative Paragraph
15-16	Comparison and Contrast Paragraph

Delivering the Materials

On the day of teaching, the teacher presented what the reference books say related to the paragraph being studied as written in the ppt slides via Zoom online conference. When delivering the materials online via Zoom, the teacher introduced the function of the paragraph, its organization, language features, and examples. She invites the students to ask questions and to do a simple grammar exercise via Zoom chat. The discussion usually happens in this session. If students would like to have a separate grammar exercise, the teacher could prepare for them and upload the material separately as what is seen in Figure 1, Meeting 13-14 in which the teacher provided material on Grammar Resource and Exercise.

In this step, almost all the portion of time was used by the lecturer to make the material clear for the students and finally the teacher noticed that some of the students had no more questions assuming that they knew how to write that paragraph well. After class, the students could find the ppt in Google Classroom for independent study. With this style of delivering materials, the lecturer considered that she has provided the students with ample sources to learn, namely (1) PDF of related writing books, (2) PPT of the summarized portions of the book explained orally via Zoom, (3) a

rubric with which their first draft is assessed, and (4) Videos about writing the respective paragraph from YouTube.



Figure 1. The Presentation of the Google Classroom Weekly Menu

Writing Tasks

Classroom learning activities encompass engaging in discussions on diverse textual genres, honing individual and collaborative writing skills both within and beyond the confines of the classroom, and rectifying grammatical and structural faults in written work. These activities must be fulfilled in order to satisfy the criteria requirements. Activities that take place outside of the classroom include comparing texts, examining text structures, and completing individual projects. These activities are designed to help students enhance their comprehension of the many sorts of texts. The instructor would have the students study from the PowerPoint slide that contains the theory and examples, and they would also debate important grammar points while they were going through the practice. Students were able to locate the assignment to compose one paragraph on the final slide of the PowerPoint file, which was presented to them after the first day of delivering the content. As part of this weekly writing assignment, they have the option of writing about the aforementioned topics or coming up with their own topics. The typical amount of time they have to complete this writing work is between one and two days. After that, the students completed the quiz and reflected on GC before the next meeting that was scheduled to take place.

Teacher Roles

In this method of instruction, the instructor would take on the role of a material developer, and she would be responsible for preparing PowerPoint slides on a weekly basis, using the books that were made available through Google Classroom. In addition, the instructor was responsible for managing the interaction inside the classroom and providing a means for the students to evaluate their performance through the use of quizzes and/or reflection. The instructor also encourages students to obtain correction from their peers once or twice, and the lecturer is responsible for the remaining corrections. This is done to ensure that every student is able to receive feedback on what elements of their work need to be revised or improved.

Student Roles

On the other hand, students are actively involved in writing their first draft for each paragraph. Then, they also reflected on what they learned via quizzes and/or reflection. After receiving feedback from a peer or the teacher, they also revised the draft and submitted them to the provided channel on GC. In this part, students are accustomed to evaluating what works well in learning to write better, and they also make use of available online resources, including dictionaries, grammar checkers, and videos to support their learning. Therefore, their technical knowledge is likely prominent in facilitating this independent distance learning. Other than their role and agency in individual

autonomous and reflective learning, these students have navigated themselves through the cognitively engaging writing process and ideologically rich investigation of the topics imperative for shaping their identity as a responsible academic society.

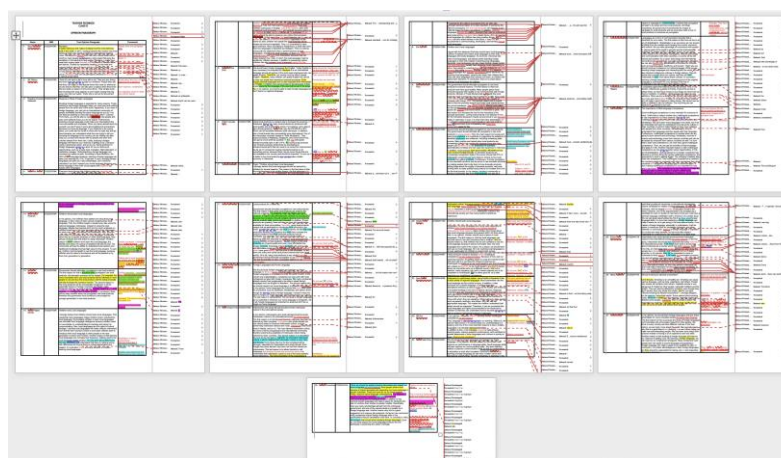


Figure 2. A Screenshot of the Individual Feedback for Opinion Paragraphs

Giving Feedback

Feedback for the first draft of paragraph writing is always given for any single submitted work. The teacher read 8 to 13 pages of compiled paragraphs after all first drafts were submitted. She used the feature of ‘Track Changes’ in the ‘Review’ toolbar of Microsoft Word. After the ‘Track Changes’ feature was activated, the teacher used Grammarly to see some spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar mistakes. The teacher also read all paragraphs to see if the organization of the paragraphs is well developed. For example, the paragraph starts with the main idea, is supported by details, and contains a conclusion. Improper idea development would be commented through “Comment” in the “Insert” toolbar. The researcher would claim that feedback becomes the point plus of this class in which students are provided with individual written feedback from either peers or the teacher. While giving feedback to 58 students is a lot of work and time-consuming, it is believed as the best way to show teacher commitment is to give the best service to the students and put away the predicate that in general teachers simply like giving assignments but not feedback.

Assessment

In terms of assessment, the instructor placed a greater emphasis on the process, which is characterized by the students' learning via the process of writing initial drafts and changing them based on the feedback they receive. This is the most prominent aspect of this course. They are asked to compose some paragraphs based on what they have learnt from the process in the previous meetings, and they will be obliged to do so for both the intermediate and final exams of the semester. In light of the fact that every category of paragraph has its own rubric, it is possible to take into account both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of their goods. On the other hand, the instructor came to the realization that the contents of the written feedback for each individual task that had been commented on were not revisited or addressed during the subsequent meeting. It is possible that as a consequence of this, students may pay less attention to avoiding making the same mistakes, and the feedback they receive may be less useful for the subsequent writing assignments.

Discussion

In light of the teaching approaches that were discussed earlier, it is likely that the instructor failed to take into account the characteristics of the pupils, who were adult learners. Knowles, an American educator who theorized adult education, is credited with introducing the term andragogy as a term related with adult education. Knowles lived from 1913 till she passed away in 1997. According to Knowles, andragogy is both the art and the science of adult learning; hence, andragogy can be

understood to refer to any specific type of adult learning (Kearsley, 2010). According to this point of view, Purwati et al. (2022) developed the characteristics of andragogy in comparison to pedagogy. These characteristics include the points that are listed below.

Table 2. Six Characteristics of Andragogy (Purwati et al., 2022)

Characteristics	Description
Self-Concept	Adults are more self-directed and responsible in their learning as they are independent learners.
Experiences	Adults have more experiences, and they rely on their experiences as the resource during the process of learning. To explore adults' experiences, teachers/lecturers may employ independent learning methods.
Readiness to learn	The readiness of adult learners in learning is also dependent on the social and professional environment.
Motivation	Adults are motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, such as salary, job satisfaction, and
Need to Know	Before learning, adult learners need to know why they have to learn particular subjects.
Problem-Centered Learning	In teaching adult learners, teachers/lecturers can employ student-centered learning, problem-centered learning, and performance-based learning.

In carrying out adult learning, as suggested by Purwati et al. (2022), teachers should, first, make the students aware that they are grownups who are independent in developing their knowledge, skills, and character. As in the beginning, the teacher in this study did not awaken the students to of think themselves as adult learners and to formulate the values that they should develop, it took more effort to encourage them to progress than they could do. The teacher then needs to count students' prior knowledge of EFL writing and exercise their readiness and motivation. In terms of confirming what they need to know, a teacher can help by providing them some space and time to reflect on what they have to learn. While a reflection space was given through a Google Form to reveal their first week's feelings after class, strategies in writing, challenges, and motivation, she did not invite the students into a more communicative and reflective discussion on this area. Therefore, to a better start, the teacher can make it clear by inviting students to discuss their quality as adult learners so that they can be more committed to doing all the required work.

The teacher is already carrying out two elements of constructivist learning design (CLD) by Gagnon and Collay (2005) which are referred to as "situation" and "bridge." These steps are carried out by encouraging the students to participate in a reflective discussion that also involves their (1) strategies for enhancing their writing skills and (2) prior knowledge in writing. Nevertheless, neither of the steps should be considered sufficient to accomplish the goals. Among the comprehensive procedures that are included in Gagnon and Collay's (2005) CLD are the following.

1. Situation: develop goals, tasks, and curriculum standards,
2. Grouping: group students and materials, and cooperative learning,
3. Bridge: recall prior knowledge using students' cognitive maps, skills, values, motivation, and expectations,
4. Question: use higher-level thinking skills and problem-based learning,
5. Exhibit: arrange student portfolios and work samples, and
6. Reflection: synthesize critical thinking and knowledge.

In its application, CLD requires students to be more responsible for unearthing answers, questioning, and drawing conclusions about a topic or concept autonomously, and teachers are consistently encouraging and supporting students as they learn (Gagnon & Collay, 2005). Having these procedures, the teacher's unveiled practices were just too far from constructivist based. The practiced start already gave space for 'bridge' and 'situation', but most of the assigned paragraph

writing in this course is an individual assignment that did not develop their cooperative entity. The stage of delivering materials was still dominated by the teacher so students were just passive listeners as happened in traditional teaching. This direct teaching approach where teacher-structured explanation and questioning practices are followed by implementation by students, therefore, differs from constructivist learning principles (Nie & Lau, 2010).

Moreover, the written products generated by the students are likely to be routine ‘questions’ or tasks rather than those enabling them to use higher-level thinking skills and problem-based learning. Even though they all ‘exhibit’ portfolios or works, these would be less meaningful for them as they are written individually without a predetermined context covering problems to solve collaboratively. In short, they just develop the paragraphing skills – writing with the main idea, supporting details, and a conclusion in different types of paragraphs without constructing a more meaningful knowledge through collaborative research or studies to solve the real problem by using their higher thinking skills. Finally, the ‘reflection’ in which the students made fortnight were still focused on what they have learned, their strategies and challenges, and have not synthesized critical thinking and knowledge.



Figure 3. Six Procedures of Constructivist Learning Design (Gagnon & Collay, 2005)

Considering teachers' role in CLD, they should facilitate learning rather than impart knowledge to students, and experiential situations organized by teachers are considered to be crucial starting points for students' learning (e.g., Nie & Lau, 2010; Singer & Moscovici, 2008). This is because constructivist-associated teaching practices emphasize self-directed and collaborative forms of instruction, authentic learning environments, and individually oriented inquiry approaches. The teacher's responsibilities according to (Parkay et al., 2006) are therefore include (1) enhancing student's ability to learn by teaching the learning process; (2) encouraging thinking about the material to be learned via cues, prompts, and questions (this helps students arrive at a deeper understanding); (3) assessing prior knowledge as the starting point, correct as needed; (4) helping students understand their learning styles; (5) interacting with other students to talk and reflect as they

construct meaning and solve problems; (6) facilitating and providing scaffolding for new material (cues, questions, encouragement, and suggestions); (7) presenting specific content extensive enough to facilitate conceptual understanding; (8) adjusting help as needed; and (9) enabling students to discover material on their own.

Tiilikainen et al. (2017) likewise create a comprehensive model of constructivist teaching synthesized to develop four dimensions of constructivism in teaching, covering (1) organization of authentic learning environments, (2) use of problem-oriented learning activities, (3) exercise of student autonomy, and (4) use of knowledge structuring activities. The dimensions identified, however, should meet the following conditions to clarify the complexity of constructivist practices in the actual classroom settings, namely (i) cover the broad range of teaching practices derived from constructivist approaches; (ii) are sufficiently robust to distinguish constructivist teaching practices from other teaching practices; and (iii) being sufficiently distinct from each other those different aspects of constructivist practices can be separated.

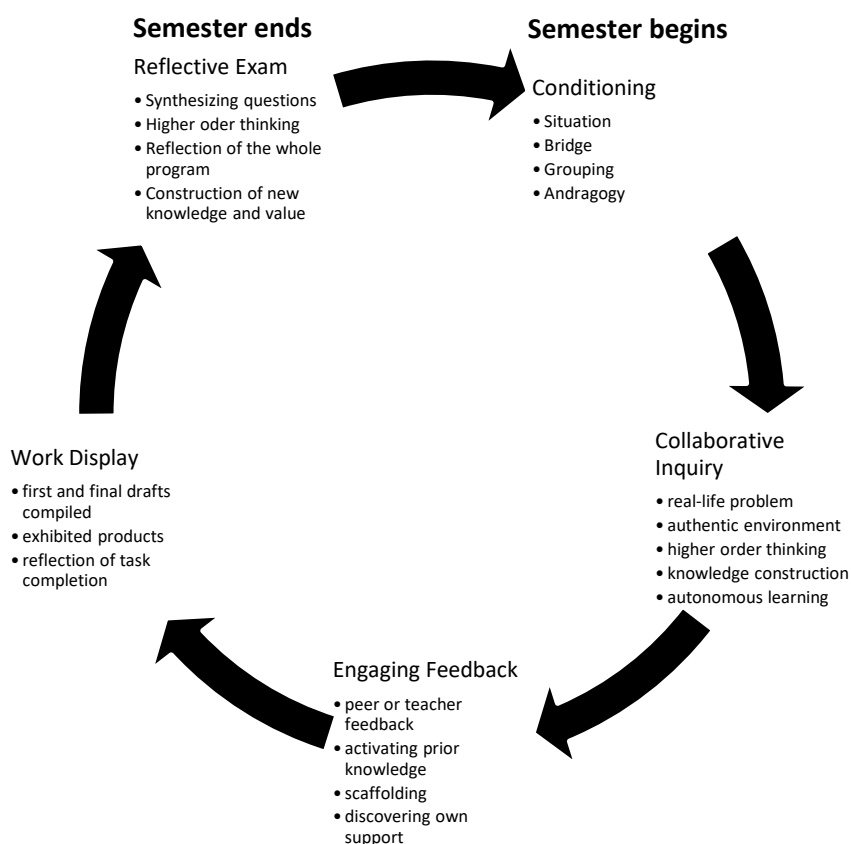


Figure 4. Constructivist Instructional Model (CIM) of EFL Writing

Considering the models proposed by experts (Tiilikainen et al., 2017; Gagnon & Collay, 2005), the constructivist learning for EFL writing should be formulated as in Figure 4, (1) conditioning - setting the situation, bridging the students' prior knowledge and their values, as well as grouping the adult learners at the beginning of the meetings. (2) Inviting them to work collaboratively to solve real-life problems in an authentic learning environment (Herrington & Oliver, 2000) that require higher-order thinking skills and active knowledge construction through autonomous learning, (3) enabling students to attain peer and teacher feedback on their writing process and product by activating their prior knowledge, facilitating scaffolding, and discovering their support, (4) At the last meeting facilitating students' compilation of work to be exhibited and self-reflected, and (5) at the final exam, exercising their higher-order thinking skills through questions that require synthesis and reflection of what they have done during the semester. As

translating the constructivist principles into instructional realm is not merely having discussions and fun activities, the lecturer should apply moderate constructivist instructional design and use emergent technology tools as suggested by Karagiorgi and Symeou (2005).

This study has shown the author through reflective self-inquiry that her current writing instruction approaches do not completely embrace constructivist concepts. This shortcoming can result from her lack of understanding of fundamental constructivist ideas, like the value of student engagement in the creation of knowledge, as well as her continued dependence on conventional, teacher-centered teaching methods that she acquired from her prior educational experiences. This knowledge gap may also have resulted from her professional development program's restricted exposure to constructivist pedagogy. The results emphasize how important it is for the author to take advantage of further opportunities for professional development that center around constructivist techniques. Besides, according to Richardson (1997) it is difficult for teachers who is intent upon creating a constructivist environment to get around the problems of authority and control as long as they still set which grades the students should achieve and set which formal knowledge on textbooks they should master.

CONCLUSION

Through this self-inquiry, a lecturer has exercised her agency in being an eclectic teacher educator by first analyzing her daily practice in teaching writing to college students majoring in English and based her analysis on the informed constructivist instructional model. It was found that the existing teaching and learning process was still teacher-centered and unilateral where students were given no choice but to use their prior knowledge to work collaboratively solving real-life problems. Students in this study still received the knowledge as delivered traditionally by the teacher so the active construction of knowledge that develops their higher-order thinking skills could not be possible. As current models of constructivist instruction were revisited along with other respective studies, practicing EFL teachers and researchers having the same interest can continue their quest to provide a more humanistic and constructivist model of teaching which is appropriate in the current multilingual and multicultural setting. Further research on cutting-edge approaches to promote real student involvement and higher-order thinking abilities within constructivist frameworks in various linguistic and cultural contexts is desperately needed.

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