USING GRAPHICS TO TEACH THE CULTURAL CONCEPT OF LOGICAL THINKING IN COMPOSITION

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Writing is one of the most complicated tasks that human beings undertake. It requires a combination of skills that begin in primary school and develop through life. Each culture has its own special way of thinking which determines how thought patterns are structured into complicated written material. English thought normally follows a pattern of development different from Spanish which has its own structural development. Those who need to learn to write in English need to understand and imitate these cultural patterns in order to successfully master written skills. Dean Theodore Gross of the City University of New York says, "...for most students, writing is expository, and exposition is standardized and should be clear and logical. It is the obligation of every English teacher to give students this primary skill."[1]

There are many textbooks that develop the process of constructing English composition. It is said that all writers need common sense, a little thought, and a little work. Common sense can mean learning all the skills presented by the text books, a little thought the improvisation, free association, and knowledge of research methods, but a little work means getting down to the business of organizing, developing, and manipulating the material to be used.

The last is the area in which non-native speakers of English have the most difficulty. Most texts do not take into consideration the cultural significance of the writer's own thought patterns in his native language. Kaplan uses a very effective graphic to illustrate the difference between two languages.

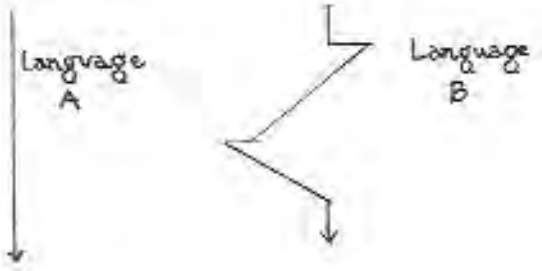


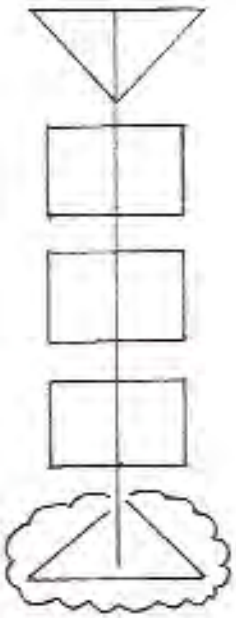
Figure A

Note that they are very different. Language A follows a straight vertical direct method while language B often digresses; these digressions often develop before returning to the original point of the thought pattern. These two examples are models of normal and accepted forms in each language. Anyone who wishes to master another language must consciously take this into consideration and learn to imitate the accepted structure.

However, there is a large discrepancy between learning the thought patterns to be used in conversation and learning the thought patterns to be used in written expression. Oral communication is facilitated by body language, timing, voice tones and even pauses anticipating help from others; whereas the writer has nothing to draw on but his own devices. He must convey all his thought in such a way that they follow the logical patterns of the language. Helping the student understand and adopt this natural phenomenon with simple graphics makes logical construction easier to imitate.

There are the experts who insist that outlining is the only logical way to teach expository composition. Outlining <u>is</u> vital - but can a student outline a theme, argument, or composition if he cannot think logically in the language? This simple graphic system can be used by itself, before making an outline or simultaneously with outlining. Here is a simple graphic to illustrate the structure of the introductory paragraph of this article:

Figure B



Outlined it looks like this,

Mini Outline

I. Topic Sentence
   A. Idea 1
   B. Idea 2
   C. Idea 3
II. Conclusion

Figure C

Since the introductory paragraph was developed into a longer unit the final step or conclusion is omitted. This is shown by the irregular line. However, when teaching only one paragraph structure, it is a part of both the graphic and the mini outline.

If we expand the graphic to illustrate a longer composition the figure might look like this:

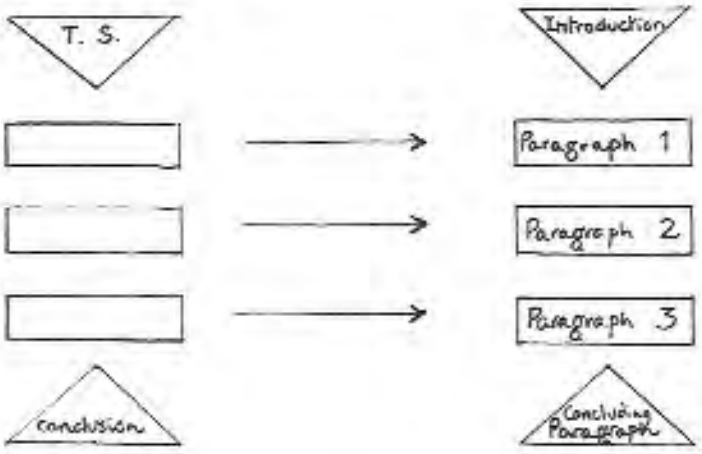


Figure D

Simple outlines can thus be presented by graphics.

To get the strength of the introductory paragraph across the triangle can be illustrated with a heavier point for emphasis. (Figure E) The conclusion figure is opened at the top to indicate the flow of ideas into the final paragraph. (Figure F)

Figure E

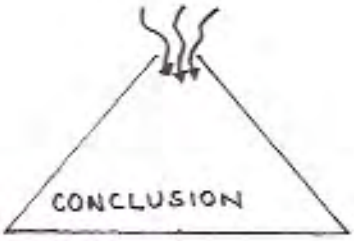


Figure F

By this time, the structure should be familiar and the process of the logical thinking firmly established. The next step is to illustrate transitions and connectives. Squiggly lines suggest a chain which conveys the concept of linkage.[4]

Figure G

Vocabulary is added as the process continues. When teaching coordinating and subordinating paragraphs, the blocking out can look like this.

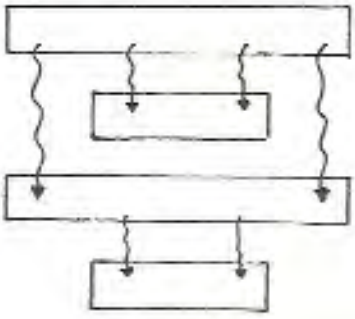
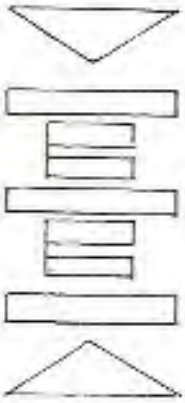


Figure H

The student can also be shown the outline structure of whole composition. If the outline structure has been presented along with the graphic it now becomes a maxi outline.

Figure I



MAXI OUTLINE

I —
II —
A —
B —
III —
A —
B —
IV —
V —

One of the most difficult steps for a student is learning to develop a thesis statement. By using the inverted triangle or funnel, the student can be helped to see that his generalization belongs to the wide section and he can develop it into a specific thesis statement.[5]

Figure J

When this has been mastered, the argumentative essay can be introduced and its construction illustrated.[6]

Figure K

The basic paragraph graphic can also be used for teaching logical relationships and methods of construction. Chronological order, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, just to mention a few, are easy to illustrate using the primary design, figure B. The data can be manipulated around the figure and the figure itself imposes the uniformity.

In order to build composition skills, it is useful for students to dissect the work of other writers. By using the graphic method, a student is able to examine the work of others and the teacher has another valuable aid for instruction and reinforcement.

Composition takes conscious effort with continuous thinking to achieve any measure of success. It is not easy to keep the student interested and inspired. There are no games, no community involvement. Applying cognitive concepts without losing motivation is challenging to the teacher but sometimes boring for the student. Patterns as symbols help and become a part of the meta-language of writing skills. They also perform a very needed service - that of helping to simplify the often involved thought patterns of a complex culture.

NOTES

1. Gross, Theodore, L. "How to Kill a College" Saturday Review. February 4, 1978. p. 16.

2. Diagram for Robert B. Kaplan, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education" Language Learning. Vol. XVI, Nos. 1 and 2, p. 15.

3. Payne, Lucile Vaughan, The Lively Art of Writing, New York, Follett, 1969, p. 47.

4. Wittig, Susan. Steps to Structure. Cambridge, Winthrop Publishers, inc. 1975. p. 135-140.

5. Stanford, Gene. Steps to Better Writing. New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1972, p. 79

6. Payne, op. cit. p. 52

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