Show, Don't Tell:

Developing a Creative Writing Community in an EFL Context

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要　旨

　外国語として英語教育を行う大学（EFL）において，第二言語を学ぶ学生（L2）が，有意義な方法で自分を表現できる場はほとんどないと言ってよい。この論文は，Hanauer による「意味を持つ読み書き能力の教育法」（2012）を通して，そのような場の必要性を明らかにしようとしたものである。この論文は，5 つの項目に分かれている。初めの第 1 項目では，EFL における L2 の読み書きの教育法について述べる。第 2 項目では，意味を持つ読み書き能力の教育法が L2 に変容をもたらす力について述べる。第 3 項目では，EFL における L2 の実践の場について，及び，コミュニケーションの作文ワークショップ（Hanauer, 2012）において学生の相互学習の有効性について論じる。第 4 項目では，日本での大学の一状況の経験に基づき，EFL における L2 の実践の場を発展させるための可能な方法を示す。最後の第 5 項目では，L2 の創作文コースの概要を示し，実践的な考えを提示する。

キーワード：第二言語（L2）の作文，創作文，実践の場，
　　　　　　意味を持つ読み書き能力，読み書き能力の教育法

1. Literacy Instruction (or lack thereof) in the EFL context

Non-English medium educational institutions in East Asia are filled with EFL writers

struggling to make sense of composition strategies that students reared in English medium academies often take for granted. North American institutions will drill the five-paragraph essay into learners from a secondary school level and simple literary devices such as simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, irony, imagery, and so on are often taught from primary school. By contrast—although EFL students may transfer knowledge of literacy instruction from their L1 education into their L2 studies—in EFL contexts there is little or no explicit literacy instruction that does not involve the writing and reading of academic prose. This paper argues that a remedy, for this lack of diversity in basic literacy instruction, is for L2 writing in EFL contexts to begin by starting from the basic act of reading and writing simple, yet meaningful texts. In such a pedagogy, the reading of peer produced poetic texts, the writing of poetic texts, and the act of participating in discourse with a community of fellow L2 writers provides a basic structure from which to build learners' literacy knowledge and achieve the final goal of producing a sustained piece of academic prose.

The importance of reading to writing and vice-versa is axiomatic. Learners benefit from engaging in classroom reading based-writing tasks and participating in workshops which require them to read like writers (Ferris & Hedgecock, 2012). Learning to interact with texts, read-as-writers, and produce close readings is imperative to literacy instruction—whether in an L1 or L2 context. Ferris and Hedgecock (2012), based on the findings of several researchers (Grabe, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2011, 2014; Hedgecock & Ferris, 2009; Hudson, 2007; Tsai, 2006), support these convictions of simultaneous reading and writing proficiency:

> Writing should not be isolated as a cognitive or academic activity, as the process fundamentally depends on writers' purposeful interactions with texts, with fellow readers and writers, and with literate communities of practice. Research and practical experience overwhelmingly demonstrate that one cannot become a proficient writer in any language without also developing an array of literacy skills, including the ability to comprehend written text both fluently and accurately (p. 94).

This ability to "comprehend written text both fluently and accurately" is by far the most difficult concept for EFL learners considering their small amount of exposure to a variety

of authentic English texts (p. 94). Moreover, learners may feel disconnected from or intimidated by texts written by native English speakers (NES). In the Japanese university context of this paper, to overcome this difficulty, texts written by fellow L2 writers were chosen as model texts which alleviated any undue stress caused by intimidation or inadequacy produced from reading texts written by NES. From this basic structure, further literacy can be achieved.

2. Hanauer's (2012) meaningful literacy as a transformative experience

This paper does not try to argue that creative or expressive writing should overtake academic writing; rather, to place value on the expressive use of language, language play, and the pedagogy of literacy instruction alongside academic prose. Through Hanauer's (2012) *meaningful literacy* methodology, he argues that when a language learner is confronted with the need to personally express themselves in a language classroom, "the whole perception of what learning a language is changes when authentic, meaningful, personal expression is at the center of literacy instruction (p. 110). This can be a transformative experience for L2 learners with substantial benefits. If a learner begins to take ownership of their own language learning, then effects on aspects such as motivation, autonomy, and agency would potentially increase (Iida, 2012, 2016, 2017; Hanauer, 2010, 2012; Maloney, 2019). The act of writing a poem and the need to negotiate the meaning of this text to an interlocutor, Hanauer (2012) argues, is a powerful experience: "The moment when you really express your innermost thoughts and experiences in a second language is a powerful one, and one that can qualitatively change a student's perception of the new language" (pp. 110–111). Arguably, this "change of perception" is a transformative experience and provides ownership of the language to a learner when "the language ceases to be a tool and becomes a personal resource and an 'owned' language" (Hanauer, 2012, p. 111).

There are further arguments that L2 creative writing should be included alongside academic writing in EFL writing curricula because of the confidence boost it can offer students of all levels (Maloney, 2019). Iain Maloney, a published author and university EFL professor in Japan, espouses the benefits of L2 creative writing to lower level students in a written interview: "Creative writing doesn't require students to learn new

vocabulary or structures, but it does allow them to explore what they have already learned and to use it in new and interesting ways" (Kubokawa, in press). Therefore, students need not struggle with learning new daily language tasks, but rather can explore and solidify previous language by utilizing creative writing.

Creative writing and specifically *haiku* poetry were chosen as an entry point to creating a community of practice surrounding L2 writing in the context of the Japanese university utilized in this paper. This was done for a number of reasons and at the forefront of this choice was the location—Japan. L1 transfer of rhetorical strategies, knowledge of the form, and previous cultural knowledge involving the genre were common features when Japanese students sat down to write haiku in English. Hanauer's (2010) meaningful literacy was also employed which situates the writer's need to express themselves and negotiate meaning as the context for pedagogy. Because the interactions between students were about the students' own experiences—and how best to convey these experiences within the genre of poetry—context naturally formed within the classroom. For the poetry itself, due to space constraints, an explanation of haiku and its history cannot be undertaken here; yet, it is important to note that nearly anyone can write a haiku in any language due to its brevity and imagistic quality which focuses on common nouns and action verbs (Kubokawa, in press). Moreover, after a brief foray into traditional haiku employing a five-seven-five syllable structure, the original syllabic nuances were abandoned for a more modern form of the genre called *shinhaiku* or new haiku because of the focus on meaning rather than constraints of form and meter. The shinhaiku form contains all the elements of traditional haiku (three lines, season word, caesura) but omits the syllabic constraints. Once learners became familiar with shinhaiku and some basic literary devices, short and long free verse poetry was introduced; learners were allowed to 'play' with familiar lexis and grammatical forms in any way they saw fit. By employing poetry as the genre and Hanauer's (2010) meaningful literacy theories, the powerful world of writing in another language opened up to the L2 writers—a transformative experience.

The Japanese context has already been explored regarding the effects of Japanese haiku writing on university L2 writers' identity by Atsushi Iida at Gunma University (Iida 2016); thus, this paper will not explore issues of identity in L2 haiku writing but does espouse Iida's findings. Iida's studies have largely shown that L2 creative writing (specifically

haiku) offers students the opportunity to increase confidence and agency through the use of Hanauer's theory of meaningful literacy (Hanauer, 2010; Iida, 2012, 2016, 2017). Iida's work in the Japanese context continues to contain both breadth and depth of knowledge. Despite the positive discourse for L2 creative writing and haiku writing, there is little evidence of the effectiveness of communities of practice and cooperative learning on the subject of L2 writers in an EFL context.

3. Towards a community of practice: Cooperative learning in the poetry workshop

Writing is inherently an individual act—unlike speaking which requires an interlocutor of some sort—yet when teaching writing to EFL students a cooperative learning approach can be beneficial. As defined by Tan et al., (1999) *cooperative learning* is a variety of concepts and techniques for enhancing the value of student-student interaction. This type of active learning forms students into groups with defined roles for individuals and an overall task for the group to accomplish (Keyser, 2000). When creating the L2 writing community at a Japanese university, cooperative learning has been at the vanguard of the mission. Rather than adopting a competitive learning environment, as can often be found in many academic communities, this L2 writing group strived for a learning experience that focused on improving attitudes towards the subject and raising the self-confidence of lower level English learners. Although the writers do not usually participate in collaborative writing processes, a cooperative poetry workshop always follows individual writing sessions.

The poetry workshop is a literacy event and an example of a read-to-write task which encourages learners to interact with each other's' texts to contribute meaningfully to their literacy development (Hanauer, 2010). This workshop community of L2 writers provides significant support for learners to acquire the skills to understand and interpret textual content while simultaneously bringing to their attention formal features such as organization, lexical choice, grammatical structures (Ferris & Hedgecock, 2012). In the Japanese university context, students in the course were encouraged to notice and extract new language from the texts of their peers creating a cooperative and literate community of practice.

Ferris and Hedgecock (2012) consider the need for "literate communities of practice" in which learners can have meaningful interactions with fellow writers and readers, yet the effect of community on L2 writers in an EFL context has not been thoroughly explored (p. 94). Christopher Kelen at the University of Macau addresses literate communities in an EFL context in East Asia by arguing for the necessity of process learning and publication orientated outcomes in a university setting in Macau:

> To teach Creative Writing in English to speakers of other languages is to marry the creativity inherent in the processes of learning and of cultural crossing. To teach Creative Writing in the university in East Asia means, I think, living the dream of the creative classroom—that classroom where learning needs to be fun to be effective, where the proof of learning (its "tangible deliverable outcome") is in creative products (Kelen, 2014, p. 101).

At the Japanese university in the context of this paper, the creative writing classroom not only provides L2 writers motivation through agency and exploration, but the deliverable outcomes provide writers with the awareness of audience and presentation. Hence, as L2 writers have an audience in their mind when writing and firmly understand what the deliverable outcome will be (publication and presentation), they are able to imagine the community in which their piece of writing will exist. In addition, the cultural readiness of Japanese students willing to write English haiku met with the understanding of the audience and the final deliverable outcome created a potent L2 writing workshop community. The workshops were, as Kelen (2014) argues, fun and effective, an essential in East Asia EFL contexts. This community was crucial to the success of the student literary journal publications that were created in the Japanese university context.

4. A structure for creating an EFL writing community

Creative writing pedagogy all over the world often uses the old adage, "show, don't tell" when instructing students on the use of sharing character details by using sensory information rather than exposition. Yet, this article takes the aphorism one step further and relates it to developing a creative community of writers within the EFL context of a medium sized liberal arts university in Japan (Aichi University). In the true cavalier spirit, from experience in this context, it has been more productive to create deliverable

outcomes first, then *show* these outcomes to interested stakeholders rather than simply *tell* stakeholders about possible ideas for literacy instruction. Hence, show the outcomes, don't simply tell others.

This "show, don't tell" spirit included a semesterly publication of student creative work, a display of student's writing known as the 'haiku board' as well as creating boutique publications and holding poetry readings in the university's autonomous learning center—the Language Café (LC). In addition, it was useful to create a group of stakeholders and participants around the L2 writers including LC staff, professors, and administrators that supported various aspects along the way. It was always more productive to have participant stakeholders writing poems in English and to *show* them what the L2 writers were creating, rather than simply *tell*.

When this project was started, there was no structure to undergird a foreign language writing community at the university. The LC was chosen as the site to begin a community of practice because it is an autonomous learning space dedicated to foreign language instruction in the center of the university's campus. In the past, the LC was used as a resource for gathering and collecting foreign language materials, and as a place for foreign language conversation practice, but it was never used as a space for a writing community. For a further description of the LC at Aichi University see Lyons (2019) *An Investigation into the Language Café—A Needs Analysis.*

The student writing resources and support that would normally exist in any given university in North America were and mostly still are non-existent in the LC, such as a writing center for peer or instructor tutoring, thesis support, student publications, student readings, distinguished speakers and scholars, fellow awards, conferences, competitions, scholarships for L2 student writers, and so on. In other words, the moment was ripe to begin creating some sort of support network for L2 writers on campus.

The workshop process itself entails the defined role of writer, followed by the discussion leader, and the student workshop participants who offer advice and support to the writer with the aim of improving communication through the text. This small group workshop environment develops the skills of English language learning in a holistic manner while

generating higher order thinking skills such as synthesizing, analyzing, evaluation, and application (Shyamala, 2015).

Below is an outline of the steps that were taken to create this community of L2 writers on the campus of Aichi University:

1. A call for poems—A flier was created; photocopies were made and distributed to English teachers in a call for submissions. Posters were also put up around the campus, distributed in English classes, and in the LC.

2. Keep the pen moving—During the lunch hour many students often came to the LC to practice English conversation. At this time, it was beneficial to explain about and write English haiku together with students while urging other staff members and teachers to get involved.

3. Raising awareness—From this handful of lunch hour poems, with assistance, the LC staff were able to create a poster board in the hallway leading to the LC that displayed haiku written by students, teachers, and staff. The poems were separated by the season which was represented in the text and decorated accordingly. Many but not all of the haiku bore the name of the poet. It was the writer's choice whether to include their name or not.

4. The creative writing course—In an English elective course, Communication Skills, which takes place in the evenings in the LC, a curriculum was designed that involves L2 creative writing, peer workshopping, peer assessment, and close reading of other L2 poets. These poems from this course were the main contributors to the literary journal. More about this course can be seen in section five of this paper.

5. Publishing a journal—After the Communication Skills course every semester, a small literary journal was made from creative work that students submitted titled *Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal*. The journal is distributed electronically and serves as the text for the following semester's Communication Skills course thus giving life to previous cohort's work and acting as a peer model for fellow L2 writers; thus, solving the problem of intimidation of lower level L2 users from using NES authentic materials.

6. Getting stakeholders involved—During the Communication Skills course, the staff of the LC would often participate in the writing exercises as well as helping out by making copies of drafts for poetry workshops, handling resources, and

providing feedback.

7. Boutique publishing—For L2 writers who could not publish in the English language student journal *Seasons* (LC staff, other stakeholders, professors, and French course participants (who were also writing haiku in French, technically L3 writers)), the Communication Skills class published a photocopied and hand-folded collection of poems just to share within this small group of writers and not for public consumption. This was done as a 'thank you' gift for all of the hard work of staff as well as to allow the French students to recognize their audience and see their work in print.

8. Poetry reading—During the final class of Communication Skills, the students held a poetry reading in which they read from *Seasons* and from their own personal journals. This created a final presentation and audience for their work.

9. Sharing is caring—*Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal* has been shared with other universities in the region and writing instructors are showing the journal to their students to provide motivation and inspiration for their L2 writing.

10. Dissemination—This article serves as a first step in disseminating information about the L2 creative writing process and community of practice at Aichi University's Toyohashi Campus in hopes that the community will grow, and more students, teachers, and other stakeholders will be interested in contributing to the community.

In creating an EFL writing community with a cooperative learning approach as well as utilizing Hanauer's (2012) Meaningful Literacy approach, students began speaking and writing about their own memories and emotions, participating in close readings, and listening in small groups. Thus, the students' work became the context of their own learning. Hanauer (2012) supports this approach: "[Experiential w]riting instruction […] makes the writer the context of his or her own language use and learning, and directs a process in which written language is directed by the expressive needs of the writer" (p. 109). Hence, the discussion material became contextualized and personally meaningful to students as they found a true need to negotiate meaning and thus communicate with others. As well, the poetry was inspired by other L2 writers from previous cohorts which created an active community in which reading and writing literacy could thrive.

5. The creative writing course

For the L2 creative writing course, a syllabus, and formative assessment program was developed for an entire fifteen-week semester for university-aged EFL students in a course officially titled Communication Skills which is an English elective course. There are six total assignments in the assessment program and each assignment contains its own rubric which is open to student interpretation. The textbook for the course is always the previous semester's *Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal* which is made up solely of EFL poetry written by the students' peers. Students also have access to consecutive years' *Seasons.* Below, this paper will outline how this course serves as an example of a formative assessment-based program with a cooperative learning that is undergirded by both Hanauer's (2012) meaningful literacy approach and catalyzed by Spiro's (2014) learner and writer voices approach.

First and foremost, this course utilizes a writing portfolio which is modeled after Shohamy's (1998) Multiplism theory of alternative assessment. Her alternative assessment theories have created a framework from which to work from: peer to peer assessment, group (peer) assessment, self-assessment, student journaling, multiple drafting, and rubric based formal assessment. All of these various assessments culminate in a final portfolio and small poetry reading "party" where students will read their creative work in a group setting; therefore, when students are drafting and editing their poems they must consider how the poem reads and feels on the page to a single silent reader but also keep in mind the auditory performance aspect as well.

The course begins by interlocking the creative discourse from previous semesters with the current semester's students. The different cohorts never meet physically; but rather, communicate through the discourse of original L2 poetry (Spiro, 2014). This class also utilizes Spiro's (2014) reading-to-writing cycle where students learn to read texts as a writer in a creative writing context. Below are the four stages to Spiro's four-part cycle:

1. Choice: Students make their own selection of text from previous semesters' *Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal* thus having ownership of the reading process from the start.

2. Articulation: Students are encouraged to articulate reasons for their choices (poetry reading task).

3. Application: Students draw on personal experiences to write creative texts of their own employing themes, techniques, and strategies that they valued most in their chosen texts. They are also encouraged to apply insights from scaffolded class material, teacher feedback, and most importantly peer feedback.

4. Reflection: Students reflect on what has been learned about themselves and one another as they exchanged their creative writing with peers and analyzed the creative work of previous cohorts. In doing so, they are actively participating in the shaping of a reading/writing literacy community of practice that has a life beyond their specific cohort (Spiro, 2014). Spiro's (2014) process can also be viewed through the lens of Earl's (2007) assessment theories in that assessment is being used in many different ways by the teacher, peers, and the students themselves—assessment of learning, assessment for learning, and assessment as learning respectively.

Using a cooperative learning approach to a meaningful literacy (Hanauer, 2012) methodology framework, university students read and write original texts in a process-genre writing approach including; shinhaiku, short and long form poetry, journals, and self and peer assessments in the form of reflections. Students will utilize close analysis of creative discourse with the end task of designing a writing portfolio and establishing a unique writer's authorial voice based on their lived experiences. At the end of the semester, the class publishes a collection of poems (*Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal*) that will be used as the next semester's textbook thus creating a community of literacy that has life beyond the specific cohort.

The aim of such a course is to give learners the opportunity to develop literacy knowledge, writing and recursive writing skills, to provide strategies for communicating about their writing, and to help foster the growth of a unique authorial voice; thus, increasing emotional engagement, agency, and ownership of their English language use. This would be useful to university students in their academic writing as well as for their confidence when communicating both written and orally. This claim is supported by Hanauer (2015): "The potential value of this is that students may, as Spiro (2014), Hanauer (2011), and Maxim (2006) claim, achieve a sense of agency, ownership, and emotional connection

with the language they are learning" (p. 83) The students work towards the goal of creating a unique authorial voice by utilizing close analyses of creative discourse as well as peer-to-peer editing and workshopping with the end task of designing a writing portfolio.

Conclusion

The creation of an L2 writing community in the EFL context of a Japanese university can yield positive effects and aid in the final goal of producing a sustained piece of academic prose; yet more needs to be done in terms of research involving communities of practice, agency, ownership, and motivation. This paper strived to provide both theoretical and practical knowledge in which future programs could undergird potential writing communities and courses in underserved or underutilized EFL communities. If such a community is intending to be built, 'show, don't tell' will produce deliverable outcomes and your community will certainly thrive. The research study associated with this course has not yet been completed and plans to be published in 2022. *Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal* can be viewed on the Institute for Language Education, Aichi University website.

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