



文化学園リポジトリ

Academic Repository of BUNKA GAKUEN

服飾文化共同研究拠点／文化ファッション研究機構

Joint Research Center for Fashion and Clothing Culture / Bunka Fashion Research Institute

文化学園大学

Bunka Gakuen University

文化服装学院

Bunka Fashion College

文化ファッション大学院大学

Bunka Fashion Graduate University

文化外国語専門学校

Bunka Institute of Language

Title	英作文と自己啓発
Author(s)	坂本, 政子
Citation	文化女子大学紀要. 人文・社会科学研究 1 (1993-01) pp.125-134
Issue Date	1993-01-31
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10457/2464
Rights	

英作文と自己啓発

坂本政子*

Cultivating Self-Awareness and Social Responsibility through Writing Activities

Masako Sakamoto

要 旨 日本の大学生に限らず英語圏の学生にとっても English Composition は余り得意な科目とは言えないようで、日本の大学生が、Freshman Composition で戸惑うのは当然の事と言えるかも知れない。その理由はこれまでに多種多様に論議されて来ているが、本論では日本の大学生が「ものを書く」という体験を通して得られる「無形であるが価値のあるもの」に焦点を当てたいと思う。English Composition と言うと、とかく教師はまず第一に文法や文型の正確さ、あるいはライティングのスタイルに焦点を当てる傾向にある。その重要性を否定するものではないが少し角度を変え、学生が英語で何を訴え、試行錯誤の末に得られるものが彼らにとっていかに重要であるか、又文法でがんじがらめにするのではなく、English Composition の基礎を築くには英語を“量産”させ自信をつけさせる事の重要性について論じたい。英語で「ものを書く」と言う activities を通して自己を見つめ、考える機会を得、学生が自分や自分の周りの者だけの狭い域を超え、社会の一員としての自覚と責任をも持つようになりうると言うことを本論で述べてみたい。

Teaching English writing at college level can be rewarding, or it can be discouraging in Japan. Even a wide variety of techniques used in English speaking countries are not always successful in developing students' creativity and writing skills. Therefore, it is doubly troublesome to teach English writing to college students in Japan, who are notoriously described as least motivated language learners. Then what can we do? Lower our standards? Water down our curriculum? A solution to this dilemma might be found, if we could look at the teaching of writing from a slightly different angle. That is to say, if we could define the teaching of writing as not only teaching how to write but also helping students build self-confidence and cultivate self-awareness and social responsibility, then writing teachers would not have to be overly worried about grammar, structures or writing styles but could focus on what students actually communicate and what they gain through writing.

To illustrate how to lead students from the “scribbling” stage into the stage of writing content-oriented papers, I will discuss three examples: journal writing, social issues program and cross-cultural studies.

Journal Writing

When Japanese high school graduates enter college, the majority of students usually do not have

* 本学講師 英語教授法 (TESL)

any confidence to write in English. Simply they have not been taught English writing, except grammar translation, which has had them translate sentence by sentence without understanding the context or even having logical order. Most have not experienced organizing even a short paragraph. The tragedy is that many college English teachers more or less feel that the six years of high school English is a waste and some of them feel that it is not only a total waste but a hindrance to college English.

Such an evaluation is not very helpful in teaching college freshmen because even though the teachers would not tell their students that it is too bad they have wasted those six years, this attitude will reflect in their teaching. Instead, why not show the students how much they can use of what they have learned in high school? High school English is like an unfinished jigsaw puzzle. High school graduates have “jigsaw puzzle pieces”, but they do not know how to put the pieces together to see the whole picture. They have not learned **how** to complete the “jigsaw puzzle.”

Journal writing is not a new notion for teachers of writing; however, it is worth reevaluating its merits. For instance, journal writing can discipline students to write in quantity, develop writing confidence and facilitate motivation. Moreover, the students’ sense of accomplishment is best summed up when they look at so many journal pages. Journal writing can be employed from the so-called “scribbling” stage to discipline students to literally put words down on a sheet of paper to form sentences without worrying about word choice or grammar too much. It is extremely important to gradually build their “writing confidence”, which means at this stage they are not afraid of juxtaposing words even though they know their vocabulary is limited and grammar is poor.

Journal writing will be one of the best ways for college freshmen to see that what they have learned is not a total waste. The more they try to put English words together, the better they see some forms of English sentences and hopefully they are able to convey what they want to express in their journal notebooks. The key to success in journal writing is “quantity.” The students need to continue writing, which is not an easy task for them. Writing requires a tremendous discipline and energy since it takes an exceeding active process to produce tangible “products” from intangible thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc. Then how can we lead the students into a quantity production mode? It will be time-consuming but the following four steps of journal writing can be one way to build the students’ writing confidence and prepare a foundation for further writing skill development.

Step I (First Month)

From day one, the students ought to know **why** they are assigned to write a journal in English and what the first month goal is. They must understand the established fact that the more they write, the better they write. In order not to cut the flow of writing, discourage them from using a Japanese-English dictionary while they are writing their journals. If they are unable to think of any English words or spelling, they may leave a blank space and write Japanese equivalent words in romanization under the space. In this way at least they will not interrupt their writing flow. At the

end of each entry, they may use a dictionary to find words for those blanks, so that they can also learn new or forgotten words and phrases.

For the first month, it might be easier for the students to write about something that they are very familiar with such as an introduction of themselves, their family members or what they have done. Two to three pages per week will be sufficient to start with and the page number can be gradually increased. To find out how much they are able to use English structures and vocabulary, the teacher reads their journals at the end of the first month (ideally at least once every month) and writes comments. Surprisingly the students are looking forward to reading their teacher's comments or responses. They definitely feel good about discovering that they are able to communicate in English with their teacher. This kind of joy is also essential to start building their writing confidence and to develop rapport between the students and the teacher. Another by-product of reading journal notebooks is that the teacher is able to discover what his/her students are interested in, how they lead their lives or what sort of world views they have, etc., which eventually helps the teacher plan more interesting and worthwhile lessons and assignments for the class.

Step II (Second Month)

The second month can be concentrated on what the students think and feel. At this stage they are encouraged to express their thoughts, feelings or emotions in addition to what they did. It is quite surprising to learn how the students concisely and vividly illustrate their intangible notions in writing by employing very basic sentence structures. They are usually able to analyze themselves in a fair manner and very often are able to tell about themselves.

In writing a journal in English, the students might go through an incredible struggle: how to explain, describe and illustrate what they did, thought and felt. The goal is to have them realize that writing is a process of not merely learning writing skills but a process to assist them to stop for a moment to reflect themselves and their lives. Anais Nin (1964) writes in *The Diary of Anais Nin*:

We ...write to heighten our own awareness of life... We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection... We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it...to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth... to expand our world, when we feel strangled, constricted, lonely ... When I don't write, I feel my world shrinking. I feel I lose my fire, my color.

By using English as a foreign language, the students will have certain limits to what Anais Nin describes above; however, we ought to keep in mind that the students go through a great amount of thinking process, far more than they are actually able to write in English. This process is invisible and unmeasurable but valuable to them.

Step III (Third Month)

Toward the end of the second month, many students start to feel that they more or less have written similar events or stories repeatedly, and that their journals do not look very exciting. At this stage you can encourage them to look “outward”, to read newspapers, magazines or watch TV news, so that they have something different and new to write about such as their opinions about current issues, or just to report what kind of news they have read or watched on TV. This stage is the best chance to have the students realize that various and numerous writing materials are available to them.

Step IV (Fourth Month)

At the fourth stage, it is worth having the students read their journals from the beginning to note any changes or progress in their writing. Most of the students usually feel that writing becomes easier and faster. It is crucial to have them recognize some kind of achievement or progress by themselves, so that they will be motivated to continue writing. Finocchiaro (1974) states that “the learner should experience numerous small intermediate successes and attain short-term goals which will then motivate him or her to continue working toward individual, school, community, or nation-wide goals (depending on his or her age level and learning)” (p. 194).

After this self-evaluation, point out that in the fourth month the students are encouraged to use new descriptive verbs or vocabulary that they have not used in the previous journal pages. This presents a challenge, but it will provide them another opportunity to write a little more deeply.

Around the third or fourth month there are usually several students who complain that they have nothing to write about. For those students one alternative answer is to let them write a simple story or let them make up a “life story” which they are dreaming of. They can become ideal persons, heroes or heroines, for instance. Young people are naturally creative so you may be surprised to encounter very exciting stories in their journal notebooks.

The fourth stage does not mean the final stage of journal writing. If time allows or the students still want to continue writing their journals, there is no doubt about a positive reinforcement for their writing skill development. Journal writing not only helps students produce in quantity but eventually builds basic writing confidence and this confidence enhances their motivation. R. C. Gardner (1974) states that “... in the initial phases of second language learning, motivational variables are relatively more important than language aptitude and intelligence.”

By-products of journal writing such as heightening their own awareness of life, building rapport between the students and the teacher, finding out how young people today think and what they like to do are great assets to both teachers and students.

The next section illustrates how indispensable it is for students to see that they are able to fit bits and pieces of learning into a larger picture, so that they can become more aware and responsible individuals in society.

Social Issues Program (Research Project)

Japanese education emphasizes linear, rule-governed learning taught piece by piece, and most likely in the absence of a larger context which would allow students to put fragmented learning and information into a larger picture. One of the most important educational objectives should be to provide students with the opportunity to see a larger picture, i.e. their progress. To have students recognize their own growth and progress and let them have a positive image about themselves by their accomplishment, a program like a social issues research project which integrates language skills and content learning can be ideal. Through the program, students are able to discover their hidden capabilities and to explore new learning using English as a tool of research. One of the keys to motivating students is to let them “feel” and “see” their progress and achievement in learning and pursue something of their own interest.

The following is a social issues program (12 weeks in Tokyo and 4 weeks in the U.S.), which has been quite successful for its second year students at a language institute where I have taught for the past eight years. These second year students had already had a one-month homestay experience in the U.S. before they entered the program. Each student stayed with an American family for a month, attending regular classes and taking part in field trip activities. The social issues program is designed to use their first year cultural exposure and writing experience in English, i.e. journal, paragraph, essay and report writing.

Before starting orientation and preparation sessions for the social issues program, there are a few things teachers should keep in mind. First, how can we mobilize students’ inner resources, i.e. ideas, interests, beliefs, etc.? Generally speaking, teachers including myself, often underestimate students’ hidden abilities. We tend to consider they are more or less shallow individuals with the exception of a few special students. However, most young people are naturally creative; if we can awaken creativity in students, they will be able to create something we might not have suspected. In fact, most of these second year students achieved far beyond their own expectations and also the expectations of host families and teachers. The host families had no idea how much their host students could express in writing because they only knew what the students were able to say in English. The American teacher who designed and conducted this research program with me mentioned that one of her groups projects was similar to one done by American college students, and that she herself had received new information from the project. This example tells us that if students are well motivated, they can utilize their abilities and talents with full capacity.

Second, basically many young Japanese are not familiar with or very interested in what’s happening in society and in the world. One of the essential goals in this type of project is to build students’ social awareness and responsibility through research and writing; therefore, it is crucial to guide them in the process, which might take time but is well worth doing considering the results. Although teachers need to tap students’ inner resources, and acquaint them with social issues, it is not necessary to have all the answers for the questions beforehand because the process itself works

to guide students to find their own answers. The teachers can act as advisors.

Orientation/Preparation/Research

The first and most important thing is to clarify the goals and objectives of the program as simple as possible and also let the students know what they are expected to do and what they will gain through the program. Conceptualizing something new is not always easy, so it might be difficult for the students to grasp exactly why it is necessary to do research on social issues but gradually through the process they will perceive its merits.

One of the complicated and tedious parts of the program is to have the students choose a research topic. Some students have no trouble deciding on a topic, but it is not surprising to discover that there are always several students do not have any specific topic to explore. Therefore, it might be helpful to have all the students brainstorm about possible topics, not necessarily because they themselves will do research on all the topics, but just to list them before deciding. Research topics may have to be limited to institutions, organizations, schools, hospitals, video tapes, etc. that are actually available for their research. Narrowing down research topics might not be a drawback; in fact it can be helpful to them to focus on choosing topics.

When each student has decided his or her research topic, let the students form groups of three or four on the same topic. Research by Klopff, Ishii & Cambra (1978) demonstrates the effectiveness of using groups in Japan to stimulate motivation among learners. “Learners display affective needs for cooperation team work and mutual interdependence while working towards completion of a common goal” (McDonough, 1992, p. 61). Since this research project requires both individual and group work, the students need to learn how to work with their group effectively and productively.

All group members meet in class once a week for 90 minutes and are given instruction and advice step by step: how they go about getting right information, how they contact people, what kind of resources are available, etc. While they do research as a group in Tokyo, they also write their “context statement” individually stating why their social issue is important today, giving examples of the issue in Japan and what might happen if the issue is not dealt with seriously.

Individual group members have their own tasks to accomplish the same project, which teaches them how to be responsible to one another. It is a great opportunity to rediscover and analyze themselves through working with others. Some of my students wrote about working in a group, which was harder than they expected, but a priceless experience to be able to learn from each other and to see themselves better.

One of the strengths of this research program is that it enables the students to develop social awareness and responsibility by contacting people outside school. Outside activities of this type are extremely important because they help students discover a different mode of learning. They can learn from people other than their teachers — learning can take place anywhere and not just in schools.

Recently an Education Ministry advisory body released an interim report proposing measures in

four areas to boost awareness that education continues outside the classroom and throughout a person's life. The report urges greater support for such alternate forms of education as night classes and instruction by television, facilitation of volunteer activities and creation of opportunities to learn about current issues (The Japan Times, May 1992). The report obviously values out-of-school activities to educate young people today.

Meeting and interviewing people outside school makes a tremendous impact on students. For instance, these second year students interviewed not only Japanese but also Americans. They used both Japanese and English to conduct their interviews. Before the interviews, they practiced in role-play how to contact people on the telephone and how to ask appropriate questions to get necessary information for their research. Working with their group members, they prepared interview questions. Many of them had diverse difficulties to prepare "right" questions to ask relative "strangers", but when they were able to get appropriate information or get meaning across especially in English, they felt really good and gained self-confidence. The process of research work is a great learning opportunity where they can try to see their linguistic ability and develop self-awareness.

Furthermore, to let students be aware of what is happening in society and the world, visiting and observing different types of schools, organizations, hospitals, etc. is another effective way because they can actually see and sense various ways of living and choices in life. For example, the second year students who worked on education and women's issues visited unique places in the U.S. and Mexico, such as a Mexican high school, a high school for dropouts, a head start school for lower income children, one of the most modernized women's hospitals in the U.S., a women's business group called Soroptimist Club.

Right after each visit, the students got together in a group for debriefing. In the debriefing, which was conducted in English, all the students shared what they saw, felt, and learned, so that they were able to see the whole picture in a more comprehensive manner. This oral-oriented debriefing session helped them clarify what they had actually experienced at the visit site before they started writing their reports.

This type of prewriting activity should not be overlooked. Zamel (1987) asserts that "an important dimension of the writing process involves the period before actual writing begins, that is, how writers get and form ideas before putting pen to paper" (pp. 270-271). Judy (1980) also claims that "students need the opportunity to talk about, to expand, and even to relearn or reexamine their experiences...prior to writing" (p. 39).

At the end of debriefing, the students had a quiet moment to jot down what they learned from the visit and were assigned homework to write a short visiting report including their impressions and feelings in addition to their research project writing. They needed to write in quantity. This writing process is the key to reinforcing what they have just learned from their interviews, meeting and observing people on visits.

When students write about something that has a great impact on them, they are surprisingly ex-

pressive even in a foreign language. A program like the social issues research work mentioned above can provide students various stimuli, so that they have something they are eager to express in writing.

Most of the second year students who participated in the research program were very proud of their final product. The project reports, with covers creatively and artistically designed, contained their individual context statements, interviews and visit reports with meaningful photos and a list of important learnings they gained through their research. Many of the students made copies of the project reports for all the members of their group since each group made only one report. Several of them took a photo holding their report with their group members and some students mentioned that they could not believe what they were able to do during the research period when they saw their report a few months later.

Writing was used as a tool to produce something visible, so that the students could recognize how much they were able to attain. The research work and writing activities certainly have played a significant role. Here it is clear that if students are led in the “right” direction, creativity is awakened and they will have an opportunity to build their self-confidence as well as cultivate their self-awareness and social responsibility.

This type of social issues program is a very effective way to tap students’ inner resources and encourage them to write in quantity and quality. However, it requires reallocation of teachers, smaller classes and a different view of education taking place other than in a classroom; consequently, it might not be available to every student. In the following section, I will share some alternative ways to achieve similar results to those discussed above.

Cross-Cultural Studies

To achieve two goals, developing writing skills and cultivating self-awareness and social responsibility, cross-cultural studies can be worthy of adding to your curriculum. A comprehensive approach to writing and the development of a cross-cultural learning experience will add value to the individual learner. In cross-cultural studies, students learn about different cultures by comparing and contrasting their own culture with other cultures. In learning about a foreign culture, usually students not only gain knowledge about the culture they study but also their own culture.

In my cross culture classes, the students were introduced to American culture. Gradually they compared and contrasted the two cultures. These students were often surprised to discover how little they knew about their own culture and recognized how important it is to learn about the society and culture they belong to. At the end of each unit the students were examined to check how deeply they processed their learning through the course in essay writing. Writing essays in English was not simple for them but quite demanding; therefore, some of the essays were short, unstructured, and not well developed. However, the process they went through to write those essays is vital. This writing activity enabled them to sit down and look at their own culture compared with American culture. We sometimes need to reflect on ordinary things that we take for granted in our own

culture, so that we are able to see things more clearly.

Cross-cultural studies also enable students to see their own society objectively and they can be aware of the fact that problems exist not only in their country— young Japanese tend to have a poor image of Japanese culture. According to Edwin Reischauer (1981), Japanese young people rank the highest and Americans the lowest in terms of dissatisfaction with their respective cultures. Many first year students of mine have tended to consider the U.S. is a solution to their problems and at the same time consider Japan itself as the cause of their problems. This sort of unrealistic and naive view will be reduced if the students are given sufficient and realistic information in cross-cultural studies. Current issues of comparative cultures are worth giving and explaining to the students. Discussions on those issues and writing short essays about their opinions and learning can be a great tool to help them develop writing skills and cultivate self-awareness and social responsibility.

Another way to achieve the above goals is correspondence. Some of my former students are still writing to their host families, exchanging personal information and ideas. Correspondence is one of the best ways to encourage students to communicate in English. Students can go beyond “classroom English” and enjoy “real” communication by using English as a tool. Without noticing it, they are able to experience cross-cultural exchanges that lead into better understanding of both societies and cultures.

Last November through the cooperation of a teacher from Mexico, 127 freshmen of mine were able to have a Mexican high school student as a pen pal and they started writing to each other in English. When they received their pen pals’ names, they were very excited and motivated to write to them. In addition to their personal introduction, in their letters they described an aspect of Japanese culture or a custom. The majority of students did their best writing for this letter assignment. A meaningful writing activity such as correspondence is needless to say a motivating factor for students to express themselves. Ideally all writing exercises are realistic and exciting.

In summary the teaching of writing is more than just teaching writing skills. During the process of writing, language learners go through an enormous amount of thinking over and over which is unmeasurable yet valuable to them especially to Japanese college students, who are usually considered to be shallow thinkers. Through writing activities the students will be able to discover their inner resources and see themselves and society at a deeper level.

References

- Gardner, Robert C. Motivational variables in second-language learning. *Proceedings of the fifth symposium of the Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics*, 1974, pp. 45–75.
- Finocchiaro, Mary. English as a second language; from theory to practice. In Marina Burt, Heidei Dulay & Mary Finocchiaro (eds.), *Viewpoints on English as a Second Language*. New York: Regents Publishing Company, 1974, p. 194.
- Judy, Stephen. The experiential approach: Inner world to outer worlds. In T. R. Donovan and B. W. McClelland (eds.), *Eight Approaches to Teaching of Composition*. Urbana IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980, p. 39.

- Kloph, D. W., Ishii, S., & Cambra, R. Patterns of oral communication among the Japanese. *Cross Currents*, 5, No. 1 (1978), 37-50.
- McDonough, T. J. 'Interactive courseware' for cross-cultural studies. *Speech Communication Education*, 5 (1992), 61.
- Nin, Anais. *The Diary of Anais Nin*, Vol. 5. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1964.
- Reischauer, Edwin. *The Japanese*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 231.
- "Report stresses out-of-school activity." *The Japan Times*, May 14, 1992, p. 2, cols. 5-6.
- Zamel, Vivian. Writing: The process of discovering meaning. In Michael H. Long & Jack C. Richards (eds.), *Methodology in TESOL: A Book of Readings*. New York: Newbury House, 1987, pp. 270-271.