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Response to students' writing : suggestions for high school english teachers

Response to Students' Writing: Suggestions for High School English Teachers

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　This paper suggests the effective response to students' writing and discusses the error correction for Japanese high school English teachers. It also proposes useful suggestions to activate written communication in Japanse schools which have 40 students in one class on the average.

　One possible suggestion for dealing with the time for error correction and the class size is paying more attention to three types of feedback. First, peer feedback is an especially useful technique to overcome the difficulties which Japanese teachers of English face to teach written communication. Second, teachers should pay more attention to the objectives and audiences when they teach students written communication. Third, teachers should pay more attention to their students' level and cultural background to spark students' interests and improve their writing skills.

Introduction

　Oral communication has been stressed in Japan recently since the Japanese　Ministry of Education effected the new Course of Study (1989) and introduced the　importance of oral communication in studying English. Since then, Oral　Communication A, B, and C have been introduced and teachers and students have paid　more attention to these subjects. As a result, the opportunities for studying Oral　Communication A, B, and C have increased and a plethora of teaching methods and　activities have been developed. Although the importance of written communication　has been stressed for a long time, many teachers have not taught written　communication to students very well because of a lack of time and suitable teaching　methods. However, teaching written communication is very important because it is　related to other communication skills such as speaking, reedling, and listening. They　work interdependently or synthetically for fostering communication in the real world. Nevertheless, the majority of the students are not given opportunities to communicate　with native speakers of English and they don't have enough opportunities to express　their feelings, emotions, and opinions in English outside of the school, That is to say,　teachers

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have yet to give students sufficient opportunities to develop their writing skills.

Fortunately, there are a lot of ways to facilitate written communication through activities such as a diary, the Internet, self introduction, a guidebook of the town, a class newspaper, and so on, Moreover, many suggestions are possible for teachers to stimulate their writing class. Therefore, it is high time that written communication should be taught positively.

Raimes (1983) explained that writing encourages students to use grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary which they have learned, and this activates learning through the steady use of eye, hands, and brains (p.3). She also mentions that when they want to express their real feelings, students must find suitable words and sentences for their draft which expands their vocabulary (p,3). In addition, teachers can improve students' writing techniques by giving their comments to students because their comments affect students writing significantly.

In this paper, teachers' response to students' writing, and error correction are mainly discussed, and useful suggestions to activate written communication in Japanese schools, which on the average have 40 students in one class, are proposed.

Ⅰ. Current Situation of English Education in Japanese High Schools

Although the Japanese have studied English for six years at least in school, writing English is not stressed in the current school curriculum. There seems to be four main reasons for explaining this situation, First, historically Japanese society has focused on receiving information from European countries and has not paid attention to sending its message to foreigners. This means that many Japanese have not understood the necessity of their expressing their opinions and introducing their culture or traditional customs in English when they communicate with foreigners for a long time. Second, many Japanese teachers of English do not have suitable strategies for teaching English writing to their students effectively because of a lack of training. Third, teaching English writing is a time-consuming activity and it is very difficult for teachers to have enough time to teach it or for talking about writing with students through face-to-face conferences. Fourth, many teachers think that accuracy is the priority in teaching English writing because they have paid more attention to the usage of correct grammar, expressions, and organization. The Japanese Ministry of Education (1994, p.2) explained that "instruction is becoming increasingly communicative, but emphasis is still often placed on teaching reading comprehension (or rather translation), and grammar. Therefore, many of the Japanese teachers of English are not willing to teach English writing and this situation is one of barriers to stimulate written communication.

Nowadays, fortunately, due to the computer society, Japanese have to communicate with people in English speaking countries through computers. Now they write English to exchange their ideas with each other spontaneously through the Internet. From now on, it is expected that we will be exposed to more opportunities to exchange our information through writing. According to the new Course of Study, the objective of writing is defined like this: "To further develop students' abilities to write their own ideas etc. appropriately, and to foster a positive

attitude toward writing in English"(p,113). In other words, the communicative approach is stressed in teaching because this approach helps students create and organize their ideas through communication among peers and teachers. In this situation, written communication should be encouraged in school to motivate students to write.

Why is writing important in English education? Raimes (1983) explained that "writing helps our students' learning". In Japan the importance of written communication has increased gradually recently because of the opportunities of exchange programs among English speaking students and Japanese students, economic globalization, the popularization of computers in schools and homes, and telephone-conferences, etc. In this situation people tend to have significantly more opportunities to write English as a way of communication.

II. Concept of communicative writing

Communicative writing means that people communicate with an audience through describing, discussing, requesting, and expressing their own ideas and opinions based on the process writing technique using different kinds of tasks.

Traditionally, teachers have taught students writing skills through grammatical matters or translation practices, including occasional product writing, but today written communication needs to be increasingly stressed in their classes through process writing. Teachers should bear in mind the concept of both purpose and audience in teaching written communication because these two concepts help spark their students interest and express their opinions freely. Thus, two questions in communicative writing should be paid more attention to: "Why am I writing this?' and "Who will read it?'

In addition, topics related to real life should be stressed. To further stimulate written communication, teachers should also make a good plan for their classes because a good plan leads students to the goal they want to reach. Raimes (1983, pp,12-22) points out the seven key questions which teachers must bear in mind in their written communication classes:

1. How can writing help my students learn their second language better?
2. How can I find enough topics?
3. How can I help to make the subject matter meaningful?
4. Who will read what my students write?
5. How are the students going to work together in the classroom?
6. How much time should I give my students for their writing?
7. What do I do about errors?

Therefore, the existence of audience and process writing are taken into consideration in communicative writing.

III. Difference between product and process writing

It is important for teachers to understand the differences between product writing and process writing because they are completely different from each other in their procedures. However, when students are taught writing as a process, product writing is also bound to be improved (Zamel, 1982, p,207). In other words, process writing is important for students to improve their writing skills because it makes up for a lack of product writing.

Richards, et al (1992, p.290) define process approach and product approach as follows:
In teaching composition [the process approach is] an approach which emphasizes the composing processes writers make use of in writing (such as planning, drafting and revising) and which seeks to improve students' writing skills through developing their use of an effective COMPOSING PROCESS ... [the product approach is] one which focuses on producing different kinds of written products and which emphasizes imitation of different kinds of model paragraphs or essays,

That is to say, more time to discuss, organize, and construct ideas is given in process writing; on the contrary, the imitation of paragraphs or essays is stressed in product writing. In process writing, teacher encourage students to write by giving time, suitable feedback and questions such as "How do I write this? How do I get started?" because they are very useful to stimulate written communication (Raimes, 1983, p.10; Zamel, 1982,p.199). More time is needed to reach the target point in process writing, but time is essential for students to improve their writing skills because their progress in writing is impossible without spending enough time. It is also very important for teachers to help their students express their ideas freely. As Keh (1990, October) mentioned, some regard the process approach as unrealistic or "too time consuming", and giving comments may show authority over students (p.294). However, the process approach is the best way for students to become good writers because syntax, vocabulary and rhetorical form are related to the expression of meaning in teaching written communication. At the beginning stage it may take more time to write, but at the final stage it will be easier for students to create their ideas through their experiences in process writing. In process writing, three stages are given attention to: pre-writing, writing (planning, drafting, and composing),and revising, These three stages are very important for students to motive their writing because they can negotiate the meaning and be more creative in process writing,

IV. Problems with error correction for teachers

There are no ifs, ands, buts about it. It is a very time-consuming job for teachers to revise students' writings. Have teachers tried to use their time effectively to teach writing and to improve their teaching of written communication? Why are so many teachers willing to teach grammatical matters? Why do they hesitate to teach written communication? In teaching written communication, both teachers and students are suffering from a kind of traditional chronic vicious cycle. The problems teachers have faced are addressed in this chapter.

Teachers should play important roles in teaching writing, but they don't in many cases because they have some problems to overcome, The problems which teachers face can be divided into four categories. First, many Japanese teachers of English don't have enough knowledge to respond to students' writing because they have not taken any special seminars or training to teach writing effectively. As a result, they have not paid attention to it. Unfortunately writing English with their own words has not been very important for students to pass college entrance examinations because they are not required to write an essay in English in the entrance examination. Second, most teachers tend to correct only grammatical mistakes when students write, This means that teachers do not pay a lot of

attention to the meaning of students' writing. Third, teachers don't have enough time to analyze students' writing because of the large number of students in a class, This means that they don]t give suitable feedback to students' writing and they don't understand students' strong points or weak points in their writing because they do not have enough time to read them. Moreover, they don't give feedback sessions such as peer feedback and conferences as feedback, Finally if they question the meaning of the sentences or words, they don't have time to do so, If there are some questions which teachers want to ask students directly or in face-to-face interviews, teachers don't have enough time to share time with each individual student.

Thus, teachers have some problems to overcome in teaching written communication or responding to students' writing, However, they can conquer these problems by useful suggestions and activities.

V. Suggestions for teaching writing in Japan

As mentioned earlier, most teachers have some problems to overcome in teaching writing because of a lack of practical and useful knowledge. As a result of this, these problems have been blown out of proportion, What kinds of factors should be targeted, to overcome this situation? It is also important to understand that spending a lot of time on individual writing is impossible for teachers because of the large number of students. Reducing the number of students per class is not possible for Japanese schools now schools now because the Japanese Ministry of Education has not proposed a significant reduction in the number of students. Given this situation, teachers should pay more attention to practical alternative ways to overcome the difficulties they face in their classes in motivating students to write freely. Therefore, the problem is how to encourage students to revise their writings among peers or by themselves. As a result, practical ways to provide feedback should be given more attention.

It is very important to establish practical and real ways to save time when teachers respond to students' written and error correction. For most Japanese teachers of English, responding to students' writing, if they try to do it, is a time- consuming job. According to an estimate (Sommers, 1982), teachers in ESL spend 20 minutes to 40 minutes on individual student writing. This means that Japanese teachers of English must spend a lot of time dealing with their responses to students' writing and error correction because there are 40 students or more and students of different levels of English ability in one class in Japan. Thus, effective teacher response to students' writing is an almost impossible task. As a result, teachers must develop some practical ways to lessen their time spent performing these tasks or duties.

Given this situation, it is very important for teachers to think about what kinds of techniques or practical ways are useful for teachers to save time in responding to students' writing and which can also help spark students' interest in their writing. Therefore, teachers need to pay more attention to the importance of feedback. Keh (1990, October, p.294) defined feedback as follows:

> ... a fundamental element of a process approach to writing. It can be defined as input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision. In other words, it is the comments, questions, and suggestions a reader gives a writer to produce `reader-based prose' (Flower, 1979) as opposed to writer-based prose.

Thus, feedback is a very important technique to overcome the difficulty which teachers face in teaching written communication in Japan. If teachers apply this to their classes, they can save time in teaching written communication and their students will also find written communication more interesting. According to Keh (1990, October), there are three kinds of feedback which can apply to Japanese high schools: peer feedback, conferences as feedback, and teachers' comments (p.295). Teachers should pay attention to these three kinds of feedback in teaching written communication.

1. Peer feedback

Peer feedback is the reaction which students give their fellow students in comments and when they question the meaning of other's writing in the revision stage. In is often done as pair work or group work through discussion, giving suggestions or comments after reading each other's writing. And it is divided into four subcategories: peer response, peer editing, peer critiquing, and peer evaluation. An example of the procedure of peer evaluation is presented in Appendix A. An example of peer conference is explained in Appendix B.

What kinds of advantages does this have in teaching written communication? This is a very useful technique for both students and teachers because it gives the students opportunities to discuss, organize, and construct their ideas without stress or mental pressure. This also gives them time to negotiate their own ideas for written communication. Keh (1990, October) explained that teachers can save time on "certain tasks", that peer feedback helps students develop their own ideas, and that, "Learners can gain a greater sense of audience with several readers (i.e. readers other than the teachers). The reader learns more about writing through critically reading others' papers" (p, 296). In other words, readers can have opportunities to develop their writing skills because they have to read others' writing from a view point of giving suggestions and discussing the meaning of them, Raimes (1983) also explained that one of the advantages of peer evaluation is that it is group work which is helpful for second-language classes because students are required to use practical language (pp,18-19). That is to say students second language is integrated through discussion or asking questions. Yagelski (1995, May) indicated that students tend to revise more in response to peers' responses than teachers' written responses and they have a tendency to change more structure and content in their second drafts than surface and stylistic elements in their second drafts(p.229). According to Stanley (1996), peer evaluation gives students benefits such as reducing anxiety, improving the sense of audience, and increasing fluency (p.81). Edge (1993, p,53) also pointed out some advantages of peer correction as follows:

> When two students work together on correcting each other's work, the discussion
> work helps each one to learn from his or her own errors, Two heads are better than
> one. We all have difficulty in seeing our own mistakes, even if a teacher has given us
> a signal as to what sort of a mistake it is. Cooperation helps develop an ability to see
> our own mistakes.

Thus, there are many advantages to peer feedback to spark written communication in revising or getting information through discussion or suggestions for the next draft. Talking about students' writing with each other - in other words, face-to-face discussion - is very

helpful for them to think about the meanings which they want to express in their writing or give or receive some advice from each other directly without stress or pressure.

To enhance the effectiveness of peer feedback, teachers should bear in mind the importance of clear and understandable guidelines to students to improve their level of written communication. Teachers should pay attention to the characteristics of peer evaluation in discussing students" writing as a draft when they write it for the first time because students can't produce what they want without discussion with peers or specific guidelines from their teachers. There are a lot of rules or suggestions which help peer feedback work well. Raimes (1983, p.149) suggested the important points in students' responding to students' writing as follows:

1. In small groups of four or five students, each student reads his composition aloud. As he reads, he will very often notice sentences that are unclear or need grammatical correction.
2. Students form groups of three or four, They exchange their first drafts of compositions with another group. Each student in the group makes an outline of each essay he reads.
3. A student composition written on the board, shown on overhead, or duplicated and distributed can be analyzed in the whole-class or in a small- group discussion. What is good about the composition? What point is the writer making? List any generalizations the writer makes. What details support the generalization? Students can look at each other's grammar, too, as long as they are given very specific guidelines.

As Raimes mentioned, teachers give specific guidelines or clear instructions to motivate students' interests in their writing because they foster students' discussion, negotiation, questions, and suggestions, White (1995,pp.128-129) indicated the examples of guidelines as follows:

For the reader:

(1) Read the draft carefully (be a good reader)
(2) Re-read the drafts, fill out peer response sheets, and write down your reactions as you read
(3) In class, while discussing each other's drafts, don't quarrel with other reader's reactions
(4) Be prepared - your group depends on you to contribute

For the writer:

(1) lf you want comments about a particular part of your draft, ask
(2) Be attentive and listen carefully to the reader's comments
(3) Don't argue, reject, or justify
(4) Remember that comments from your group members are suggestions and that it's your draft - you make the final decisions about how to write it.

Furthermore, teachers should also pay attention to students' personality and their strong points or weak points including their level of English ability because one of the advantages in this task is to help each other to get good ideas from each other. To do so, establishing a

comfortable atmosphere is also important for discussing or sharing their opinions among peers freely. In other words, everybody has the possibility to become a risk-taker in such a situation. That is to say teachers are required not only to teach English but also to understand students themselves like counselors. Raimes (1983) mentioned the point that teachers should pay attention to students' personalities, abilities, and interests when asking them to participate in groups or pairs, as well as individual work or tasks. Moreover, selecting a group leader is helpful for students to lead the group to the right direction(p.20). A leader is very important to activate peer feedback sessions because a comfortable atmosphere is necessary to encourage students to be risk-takers, Thus, there are many advantages to peer feedback to spark written communication in revising or getting information through discussion or suggestions for the next draft. Keh (1990, October, p,298) gave an example of questions as guidelines and training for peer-group feedback as follows:

    1. What is the author's purpose in writing?
      - to show the importance of something;
      - to convince the reader to do something;
      - to explain how something is done,
    2. <u>Underline</u> the author's topic sentence
      Does the topic sentence tell you, the reader, what to expect in the remainder of the paper? Yes   no
    3. Are the author's points clearly presented to the reader?
      Put triangle △ around every logical connector.
      Can you suggest any other connectors?
    4. Does the author give enough examples to support his / her point?
      Put a question mark? beside anything not clearly explained.
      Put an exclamation mark ! beside a good example.
    5. Does the author provide a good conclusion?
      As the reader, do you feel satisfied with the ending?
      <u>Underline</u> the author's restatement sentence.

Checklists work very well in peer feedback. When teachers give students checklists, they use checklists as guidelines. They are very useful to help students create and construct their ideas and for teachers to save time in teaching written communication. It is essential for teachers to make suitable checklists for their classes.

2. Conferences

    Group conferences are sessions in which teachers give the example of good writing and introduce some mistakes or errors which affect the meaning of contents or many students have made. Then they ask and answer or discuss the cause of mistakes or errors to reduce them in their writing.

    Traditional conferences as feedback between teachers and students is also an important technique to improve the understanding of students' writing and to save time because conferences give meaningful suggestions to make main points clear and improve students' motivation to revise their next writing in one time. According to Keh .(1990, October), group

conferences tend to be more useful than individual conferences because of the comfort level among groups, more discussions, and direct questions as readers and writers (p.300).

In feedback sessions, teachers must bear in mind some important points, One of them is that teachers can't play their roles as judges or evaluators in order not to decrease students' motivation for the next draft. In this point, Keh (1990, October, p,300) explained as follows:

> ...conferences fail when they are not non-directive, Conferences fail when teachers assume an authoritarian role, when they lead the conversation and ignore questions that do not fit into their preconceived 'ideal' agenda, rather than focusing on the concerns of the student as they emerge in dialogue.

In other words, the teacher should take part in the conference sessions as one of the participants because when students regard the teacher as a evaluator or an authoritarian, it can interrupt the free discussion among students. However, before a session, it is definitely important for teachers to prepare a lot of things for the conference such as clear guidelines, information to analyze common mistakes or errors to make the conferences become meaningful ones. Moreover, questions as checklists from teachers are also very important because students can know what kinds of questions are required or useful in these sessions. Keh (1990, October, p.299) showed examples of useful questions for this sessions as follows:

1. What is the main point of your essay?
2. How have you organized your points?
3. Who are you writing to?
4. Who is your audience?
5. What do you hope to achieve?
6. What specific area do you want the teacher to look at?
7. Are there any words, phrases, etc. that you feel insecure about?

Raimes (1983, p.147) also mentioned about the importance of checklists, "a checklist can be very short and used first by the student to check a piece of writing and then the teacher to evaluate it," and she shows the examples of question:

1. Which sentence expresses the main idea?
2. Which sentences develop the main idea?
3. Is every verb in the correct tense?
4. Have you used the correct form of each tense?

In this conference, correction competitions help motivate students to write well-Edge (1993, p,55) mentioned the example of correction competitions as follows:

(1) With forty students in the class, the teacher can put ten mistakes on the board or ten sentences which contain seven or eight mistakes.
(2) The class is divided into ten groups of four.
(3) The groups work to correct the sentences,
(4) Then the teacher calls out one of the sentences on the board and asks one of the groups to say if something is wrong,
(5) If so, they must say what is wrong, and what a suitable correction would be. For each of these steps, the group gets one point if they are right.
(6) Other groups can challenge their answer and win points for themselves.

(7) Eventually, the mistake is corrected on the hoard and the class moves on to answer item and another group.

(8) Finally, the points are counted to find the wining group,

3. Teacher Comments

Comments are the teacher's response to students' writing in which teachers give suggestions to students to revise their writing, There are mainly three types of teachers' comments: individual interview, taped comments, and written comments,

Teachers' comments are very important for students to revise their writing for the final draft. It is important for teachers to decide what kinds of techniques are most useful: written comments, taped comments, or e-mail. As a process this is the final stage for students in revising their writing based on teachers' comments. Of course, the importance of the other two types of feedback - peer feedback and conferences as feedback - should be stressed also, but students pay more attention to teachers' comments for their final draft. However, teachers must bear in mind that the effectiveness of teacher's comments depends on the success of peer feedback and conferences because they work interdependently.

What kinds of techniques are useful for students to revise their writing when they give students their comments. First, personal interviews are useful techniques for teachers and students to construct clear ideas for the final draft because they give students opportunities to ask questions about their writing and then negotiate the meaning of what they want to say in their paper. Consequently, students can revise their writing effectively. Raimes (1983) explained, "One of the best ways to help a student revise a paper is to discuss it with the student, in person... Talking to a student about what he has written is often the only way to find out what he has really trying to say' (p.145), To top that off she mentions that when they express their real feelings, students find suitable words and sentences for their draft (p,3). In this situation, teachers-can improve students' writing techniques in giving their comments directly to students.

Second, taped comments are also very useful because "this allows more detailed, natural, and informative remarks while increasing teacher-student rapport" (Hyland, 990, October). They are also a very useful way for teachers to save time because red marks need more time for teachers and they give a lot of important and beneficial information to students in a short time. Students can repeat it if they need. If they need more help from teachers or have some questions, they can ask them through the tapes. It creates a situation like a face-to-face discussion. White (1995, pp,112-113) explain about the procedure of taped consultations as follows:

1. Have each student hand in a cassette with each composition.

2. Read each composition and record on the corresponding student's tape your comments on the aspect(s) of writing (e.g., content, organization, mechanics) that you are focusing on.

   a.Try not to address all issues in a single pass, This works especially well for multiple revisions, or the process approach, in which organization and content are covered in one draft, mechanics and sentence level grammar in another.

b.Reference mark the student text before or during recording, Some suggested markings are paragraph numbers, line numbers, or comment numbers (where you place a number near the points of the text that you comment on).

c. Comments can be as individual as needed but should offer praise as well as points for revision.

d.Your tone of voice will also communicate a message to the students. Aconversational style is appropriate for these tapes.

3. Return tapes and drafts to the students for revision.

4. Students listen to tapes and revise their compositions. Allow time for students to listen to their tapes outside of class and ask questions about anything that was unclear.

5. Repeat with subsequent drafts as necessary or desired,

Third, written comments are also very important to revise students' writing well. What are the main roles of written comments? Keh (1990, October, p,301) answers it incisively:

...I tend to write comments from three different roles or points of view. Firstly, I write as a reader interacting with a writer - that is, responding to the content with comments as 'good point' or 'I agree'. The next role is that of a writing teacher concerned with points of confusion and breaks in logic, but still maintaining the role of a reader. ...The final role I play is that of a grammarian,

This means that when teachers give comments on students' writing, teachers should pay more attention to students' expectations and not play roles as judges or evaluators in the process of writing.

What are suggestions for dealing with errors in students' writing? They should be paid attention to because how to handle students' writing errors is an essential factor in motivating their writing. Sommers (1996) points out that "we need to develop an appropriate level of response for commenting on a first draft, and to differentiate that from the level suitable to a second or third draft" (p.ls4). In other
words, teachers need to establish their own style of comments suitable for them and students.

Teachers analyze the errors of students' writing to give useful feedback and stimulate students' interest in creating their own ideas. Therefore, it is important for teachers to establish their own techniques for students' writings, Raimes (1983) mentioned one example of a way to deal with errors as follows:

1. With each set of student papers, don't try to mark all errors but decide which errors you will deal with. You might decide to mark only errors in grammatical areas taught in class, for example.

2. Examine errors carefully. Try to determine the cause of the error, The more we can point out to our students why they are marking certain errors, the more they will be able to avoid them.

3. Look for what the student has done correctly.

4. Write down and duplicate student sentences that contain errors.

5. Establish a set of symbols for indicating clearly identifiable errors.

6. Provide a reason for careful editing and elimination of errors.

7. Do not let concern for error dominate your writing class.(p.151-153)

Beates, et al (1993, pp.33·34) pointed out how to mark errors in students' writing as follows:

1. Give top priority to the most serious errors, those that affect comprehensibility of the text.
2. Give high priority to errors that occur most frequently.
3. Consider the individual students' level of proficiency, attitude, and goals.
4. Consider marking errors recently covered in class.

What are important points to give students as teachers' comments? First, teachers should know what students expect from teachers' comments. Keh (1990, October) indicates that students want to know their improvement or "What they did well" in their paper (p.302). As Keh mentioned, it is important for teachers to give positive comments to students to improve their motivation for the next draft, Hyland (1990, October) pointed out that when teachers correct students' writing, they should pay attention to how to encourage students to write without negative effects (p,279), Zamel (1985, March) indicates that "...we should respond not so much to student <u>writing</u> but to students <u>writers</u>"(p.97).

Second, teachers should pay more attention to the quantity of comments, Keh (1990, October) also indicated that minimum comments based on "fundamental problems" are useful because students can't concentrate on everything at the same time. Edge (1993) states that in correction, it is important for teachers to help students master how to make themselves understood without correcting all of the mistakes (p.56).

Third, teachers must also think about the differences between "high order" and "lower order" and give written comments on the process writing (p.301). In other words, it is important for teachers to minimize the comments as much as possible and to focus on specific problems and pay attention to the students' level of writing skills. As mentioned above, three types of feedback: peer feedback, conference as feedback, and teacher's comments are very useful techniques to stimulate written communication as a process writing. To top that off, self editing is very useful to corroborate written communication because students can do it by themselves regardless of peers and they can consequently save time. As a result of feedback, students can revise their writing by themselves based on information from the feedback process. Raimes (1983) declared, "What students really need, more than anything else, is to develop the ability to read their own writing and to examine it critically to learn how to improve it, to learn how to express their meaning fluently logically and accurately" (p.149). In the other words, the ideal goal of revision is that they can revise their writing by themselves the same way peer feedback does, Raimes (1983, pp,149-150) pointed out the importance of self editing:

1. It is very important for the students to write their ideas down on a paper in writing a draft. Then it is also important for them to write freely.
2. The teacher encourages the students to write a draft and advises them to wait a few days before reading their drafts. Then the teacher recommends that students read it aloud.
3. The teacher asks the students to proofread while paying attention to the lines which have been marked with a pencil.

4. "Teach students how to use a dictionary and a grammar reference book,"

5. The students should be given enough time for using checklists, reading their drafts, making an outline of their composition, referring to a handbook, and using a dictionary,

Charles (1990, October, pp,292-293) explained about the advantages of self' editing as follows:

1. It doesn't take time for teachers to respond to students' writing.

2. It makes students' purpose in their writing clear,

3: It shows that "how student writers see their writing, what they consider their problems to be, and what sort of help, in the form of teacher response, they consider they need,"

Thus, peer feedback, conferences as feedback, teacher's comments, and self-editing are essential techniques to stimulate students writing through discussion and questions as readers and writers, to save time. The bottom line is that the teacher trains students to participate in the feedback to reach the certain level which both teachers and students have wanted. As a result, students' motivation to write is encouraged and they can construct their ideas incisively.

VI. Activities

In this chapter, audiences and activities will be introduced for both Japanese teachers of English and Japanese students, Audience and activities are correlated and interdependent because they are like the wheels of carts. When teachers decide on certain activities, they should pay attention to audiences for stimulating written communication. What kinds of activities are useful to spark students' interests in their writing?

First, an example of self-introduction and its procedure are presented to stimulate students' writing.,

..Students' introducing themselves is very interesting because it has an awful lot of activities including discussion, negotiation, questions, and so on. The target audience in activity are peers. The procedure is as follows:

a. The class is divided into several groups of four or five.

b. Students select a group leader,

c. Students discuss strong point or positive characteristics which they have and write them down on paper, but writing weak points or negative characteristics should not be allowed because positive comments stimulate this activity

For example:
- She/ He is good at playing basketball,
- She/He likes reading.
- She/ He likes cooking.
- She/ He is kind to others.

d. Students decide positive sentences which express their strong points and make strips for the number of students.

e. Students decide the person who is the right person for the sentence and put it in his/ her back.

f .Students collect sentences on their backs and write their introduction based on the sentences.

g. Students introduce themselves in front of the class.

This activity is definitely fun for students because they are interested in themselves and pay attention to how peers evaluate them. In addition, they are protected psychologically because negative sentences would not come up.

Second, an example of drawing pictures and the procedure are introduced to motivate students' writing.

Drawing pictures is also very useful for students to energize written communication. This is a kind of competition. The procedure is as follows:

a. The teacher divides the class into five groups of eight or seven and gives them guidelines for this activity and the title of a picture, such as "picnic."

b. Students select their leaders.

c. Students decide on their picture and the rotation order in which to draw it. Everyone should draw a picture in rotation.

d. After drawing, they are given opportunities to express the strong points of their pictures and receive questions from other members.

e. At the end of the class, they select the best one based on their explanation.

f. Students write about the strong points of their own pictures and others' pictures and a representative reports it in front of the class.

In this activity, students should negotiate their pictures which they will draw and decide who will draw. As a rule, everybody should participate into this activity, so they discuss with each other in order to draw the picture on which they have decided.

Third, other useful activities are introduced to spark students' interests to write because they are very arranged for real audiences. The procedure is explained in detail in Appendix E.

1. Writing letters is useful for students to stir written communication. For example, they can write to would-be host parents in foreign countries, a new ALT, an overseas student who is a exchange program student, and so on. In this activity students can negotiate the sentence and its meaning through discussion and questions from each other.

2. Making a guide book to the village and town for tourists or other visitors is also good idea because they are familiar with their own town. The target audience is a real one and this helps students.

3. Making brochures about local events or sports events for tourists or other visitors stimulates students' written communication.

4. Writing a brief history of the school and town for visitors such as a new ALT and an overseas student is also helpful.

5. Writing about their class or school, and writing magazines for themselves as audiences is to enhance students' motivation in written communication.

6. Conducting surveys on their school or town and writing the results in order to give a presentation is an interesting way to spark their motivation.

7. Writing a diary is very useful because students write about themselves,

8. Summarizing the story of a book, TV program, the movies is likewise useful.

9. Writing to some universities to ask to send the student a copy of application form is useful.
10. Asking some questions through Internet. In this activity students pay more attention to time limitation, so they should help each other very well. Warschauer (1995) explained advantages about writing through the Internet for written communication:

    (1) High speed transmission

    (2) Capability of transmitting large amounts of information at one time

    (3) Easy data management

    (4) Possible transmission to multiple receivers

    (5) Low cost

Next, writing to imagined audiences is also helpful to motivate students to write, The most important thing is that students know about the person and want to communicate with them.

Two examples by using imagined audiences are presented.

1. Writing to J.F. Kennedy.

He is a very famous American among Japanese high school students and many of them want to know him. In addition, they have heard about the presidency a lot recently Students have a lot questions such as why he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

2. Writing to their future spouses.

Students are interested in their future spouses, They also have a lot of requests and these stimulate discussion among students before their writing.

Conclusion

When Japanese teachers of English teach written communication as a foreign language, they can not help thinking about some questions: "How can I teach written communication? How can I arrange my time to deal with it? How can I respond to students' writings effectively? How can I stimulate students to write? How can I evaluate students' writing? How is written communication useful for students to pass the entrance examination?' Historically, since the beginning of studying foreign languages, Japanese have paid more attention to introducing knowledge from foreign countries than regarding written communication as an important skill because importing information was the priority. As a result of this, Japanese had spent a lot of time reading books to receive information. Moreover, the importance of reading skills had been emphasized in the entrance examination, but written communication skills had not been stressed a lot. Therefore, Japanese teachers of English have not paid enough attention to teaching written communication and have not taken training to teach writing effectively. In addition, the number of students per class is large and it has been impossible for them to teach written communication effectively. In this situation, it is very important for Japanese teachers of English to think about how to teach written communication effectively in the class which has 40 students or over and different levels of English ability.

One possible suggestion for dealing with such difficulties is paying more attention

to three types of feedback. Peer feedback is an especially useful technique to overcome the difficulties which Japanese teachers of English have face to teach written communication. It is very important because it helps teachers save their time and improve students' interests in learning written communication, Students can improve their writing skills by themselves through discussion and questions among peers about their writings, Using peer feedback is like "one stone kills two birds."

Next, teachers should pay more attention to the objectives and audiences when they teach students written communication. They are very important factors for students to stimulate their interests toward written communication. The more objects are incisive, the more students' writing skills are improved. Furthermore, teachers should modify the contents of textbooks because they are not written for certain students. Finally, teachers should pay more attention to their students' level and cultural background to spark students' interests and improve their writing skills.

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  schema theory. In B. Leeds (Ed.), Writing in a second language (pp.137-146).

Appendix A

Peer Evaluation

Write a brief paragraph (5-7 sentences)

1. Trade papers with someone. Read the other person's paragraph, and underline the "best sentence" in it, (Thanks to Lin Spence, Northern Virginia Writing Project)

Starting with the "best sentence" in your paragraph, write a paragraph. Do not try to recreate the first one: see where this new topic sentence takes you.

In this paragraph very different from the first one? How did a new starting point change the direction/ focus of your writing?

Robert and I are planning to go to France in May, after school's out. We might rent a *gite*, a guest house; I know we'll rent a car. I'd like to fly into Orly Airport, because I think it's smaller than Charles de Gaulle. From there, it should be an easy drive to Dijion. We want to eat and drink our way through the Burgundy and Rhone areas of France. We especially want to eat at one of Paul Bocuse's restaurants.

2. Questioning Peer Conference: In a group of three, read your paragraph aloud. When you are a listener, ask questions when the reader has finished. Ask questions only about ideas and content, not about grammar. When you are reader, write down each question that is asked; *do not answer it at this time!* (Thanks to Dr. Robert Kilmer, Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge)

Now take a couple of minutes and write out quick answers for the questions. Think about which of these pieces of information could strengthen your writing.

(from Claudia Kilmer. 1998, WATESOL 98)

Appendix B

Peer Conference

Author: Date:

Title (or subject):

Peer comments:

    1. Name

    2. A compliment ("I really like the way you... "I like the... ")

    3. A request ("I'd like to hear more about..." "Please explain... ?')

Name: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

(from Claudia Kilmer, 1988, WATESOL 98)

Appendix C

Error Awareness Sheet

Directions: This Error Awareness Sheet will help you to discover what your sentence-level errors are and to learn to prioritize them. Put a check in the second column for each error marked on your returned paper. Then, from the most frequent errors in the second column, select two or three that you can begin working on first and put a check next to them in the third column. Always remember that you need to work on frequent global errors first.

Name of Student: Essay

TYPE OF ERROR	TOTAL NUMBER OF ERRORS	TOP-PRIORITY ERRORS TO WORK ON
GLOBAL ERRORS(more serious)		
vt		
vf		
modal		
cond		
ss		
wo		
conn		
pass		
unclear		
LOCAL ERRORS(less serious)		
sv		
art		
num		
wc		
wf		
nonidiom		
OTHER ERRORS		
cap		
coh		
cs		
dm		
frag		
lc		
p		
pro ref/agree		
ro		
sp		

Appendix D

EDITING CHECKLIST

Name: _____   Project: _____

Title of paper: _____   Date: _____

_____   1.Lack of agreement between subject and verb
_____   2.Lack of agreement between noun and antecedent
_____   3.Omission of-d or -ed ending
_____   4.Omission of some form of be do, or have
_____   5.Faulty pronoun reference
_____   6.Tense shift
_____   7.Wrong tense
_____   8.incorrect use of infinitive
_____   9.Incorrect word order
_____   10.Incorrect form of adjective
_____   11.Incorrect use of-ing or-ed ending
_____   12.Omission of-ing
_____   13.Lack of possessive ending
_____   14.Incorrect verb form
_____   15.Double negative
_____   16.Sentence fragment
_____   17.Cornma splice
_____   18.Use of although or because with but or so
_____   19.Lack of parallelism
_____   20.TeacheFassigned item:

Teacher's comments: _____

_____

_____

Suggested item(s) to focus on next time: _____

(from Nancy A, Cramer. 1985.<u>The Writing Process</u>. P.271)

Appendix E

LESSON PLAN : FOCUS ON WRITING

<div align="right">

November 6, 1998

Toshihiro Shimoji

</div>

1. **Level of Student**: High Intermediate (2nd grade students of Japanese

Senior High   School)

2. **Number of students**: 40

3. **Objective**:
   (1)   function: Self-Introduction to host families
   (2)   form: My name ~   / I like ~   / There are ~   / My hobby is ~   / I
          am good at ~ / My favorite food (sport / movie) is ~   / I have ~

4. **Materials**:
   (1)   worksheet for writing /talking activity
   (2)   OHP
   (3)   Computer
   (4)   Pictures

5. **Context**: Self-introduction to host families
       In this lesson students write self-introductions to host families in
   Honolulu, Hawaii for a school study trip.   Students introduce
   themselves, and their hobbies, favorite movies, sports, strong points, and
   so on to their host families.   Students also practice writing letters.

6. **Introducing the new language**:
   (Using an OHP, the teacher shows the new language after group work)
   -I like bookkeeping / accounting / physics / earth science.
   -There are five of us in my family.
   -My hobby is doing karate / doing judo / attending classical concerts.

-I am good at cooking Japanese food.

-My strong points are being cheerful and kind to others.

Students are divided into small groups of three or four students and try to find the right words or expressions in English to introduce themselves to host families.　When they can not find them in English, students ask them to the teacher and he/she shows them using OHP in the class.

7. Practice:

(1) Questions and Answers

The teacher asks some questions to students related to self-introduction.

T: What is your hobby?

S: My hobby is playing the piano.

T: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

S: I have two brothers and one sister.

T: How many people are there in your family?

S: There are seven of us in my family: grandmother, parents, brother, sister, and me.

T: What is your favorite food?

S: My favorite food is sushi.

T: When is your birthday?

S: October 10th.

(2) Pair Work

Students make pairs and ask some questions to each other.

S1: Which subject do you like best?

S2: I like bookkeeping best. How about you?

S1: I like accounting best.　What is your hobby?

S2: My hobby is listening to music.

S1: What kinds of music do you like?

S2: I like country music.　Do you play any musical instruments?

S1: Yes, I do.　I can play *shamisen,* the traditional Okinawan guitar.

S2: That's great.

(3) Writing

Students write self-introductions based on pair work.　After

writing, the students exchange their self-introduction with their partners.   Each partner reads the other's self-introduction and gives some comments.(*Handout #1*)

8. Communication:

(1) Purpose:

-to have students introduce themselves to host families clearly

-to have students understand how to write a letter in English

-to have students experience an interest in communicating in English through writing a letter

Moreover, they have opportunities to send e-mails about their activities on their study trip in Honolulu to their school and also to send a thank-you letter to their host families after coming back to Okinawa.

(2) Audience

In this activity the audience is classmates.   However, the target audiences are their host families living in Honolulu, Hawaii.

(3) Writing process

(a) Pre-writing activity

In introduction stage, students think about necessary words and expressions to introduce themselves through questions by the teacher and through pair work.   In the practice stage, students find and ask the teacher difficult words and expressions to explain in English.

(b) Writing(1st Draft)

Students write the first draft of their self-introduction letter to host families using a handout.(*Handout #2*)   While students try to write a letter, the teacher walks around the class to check if students have any problems.   The teacher does not correct any mistakes, but answers some questions about words or expressions which are difficult for students to explain in English.

(c) Group Work and Peer Correction

Students are divided into small groups of three or four.   In each group, each student asks one question to others in rotation after reading their self-introduction letter.   Then the teacher shows an Toshihiro   24

example to students.   After that, they discuss whether they have the necessary information for a letter.

S1: What kinds of information did you get from my letter?

S2: I got information on your family, your hobby, your favorite subject. How about you, S3?

S3: I got information on your favorite baseball players, movies, and food.   By the way,   do you think we need more information for a letter?

S1: Well, we need information about our school life.

(d) Revising

Each student revises his/her letter.   The teacher walks among the students and gives advice.   The teacher pays more attention to meaning and content.

(e) Feedback

The teacher collects their self-introduction letters.   Then the teacher chooses some of the best letters from each group and comments on their good points using an OHP.

(4) Error Correction

The teacher walks among the students and gives an advice while the students are writing letters.   The teacher collects the letters and corrects important mistakes before sending the letters to their host families.   In the process of error correction, the teacher pays more attention to the meaning of the students' writing because he/she should bring out the natural flavor of students' words and expressions in their letters as much as possible.   The teacher ignores trivial mistakes which do not interfere with the meaning of the story that students are trying to tell in their letters.   The teacher also asks the students for clarification of ideas which she/he does not understand .

(5) Publishing

After coming back to Okinawa, the students will publish a book which contains their self-introduction letters, e-mails from Honolulu to their school, and thank-you letters with pictures taken in Honolulu. The book will be published as a guidebook for students, host families, and teachers.   For students it is a memento which evokes happy

memories of their school study trip.　It is also a good introduction book for the teacher who takes charge of this program next year because a different teacher takes charge of this program every year.

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