Promoting Identity Development
in the Writing Classroom
——A University EFL Writing Course Example——

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(Received on October 14, 2003)

Introduction

The period of university can be viewed as a continuation of the time spent in adolescence in which students develop their identity — a sense of who they are as individuals. The importance of developing such human competences is evident in educational reform and university policies alike. It is imperative for classroom teachers to not only pursue academic objectives but also recognise and promote human development opportunities for students especially identity development. The writing class provides many such opportunities for students.

This paper will detail the development of a university EFL writing course that promotes students' identity development through personal writing tasks that are shared with peer editing groups. First, to provide a background of understanding, the term identity will be defined and the importance of higher education in human development will be established. The outline of the steps taken in developing the writing course will then provide a framework for promoting identity development. By highlighting the considerations and decisions made through the process of developing the course, elements of the example are hoped to be of use to other teachers when developing their own writing course. Finally, the conclusion of this paper draws from the written responses of students who have completed

the writing course.

Identity Defined

Our sense of identity, the sense of who we are as individuals, is developed in part in response to feedback from valued others. It involves genuine expressions of self that further sharpen self-definition, and involves gaining a sense of how one is seen and evaluated by others (Chickering 1993). Erikson, who similarly proposed that a sense of identity involved a feeling of "being at home in one's body", "knowing where one is going", and an inner confidence of "anticipated recognition" from valued others (1968, p. 165), saw it as the most important developmental goal of human beings. In his eight stages of human development, Erikson (1963) identifies the fifth stage (adolescence–age 12 to 18) as a time when people must face and resolve the crisis of identity in order to move forward in development and be ready to face future challenges in life. But for many young adults, the period spent at university, in the advent of entering the adult world, is the time of identity resolution and achievement.

Importance of Higher Education in Human Development

Major research, on the impact of higher education on human development, dates back to late 1950s and early 1960s with such work as Nevitt Sanford's investigation of personality development of college students (Thelin & Wells 2002). The concept that higher education has responsibilities to cultivate not only intellect but also human development rose to prominence in 1969 with the first edition of *Education and Identity* being published. The author, Arthur Chickering (1993), argues for higher education environments to be created that foster broad-based development of human talent and potentials. More specifically, he identifies the need to

develop interpersonal competences and multicultural understanding in order to function in a globally interdependent world. Similar concepts to those of Chickering's are now widely upheld in higher education and it has become more of an issue of how such environments can best be achieved through policies and practices.

The responsibility to cultivate human development is recognized in Japanese higher education policies and objectives. At the national level the University Council (Daigaku Shingikai) in their report *A Vision for Universities in the 21st Century and Reform Measures* (1998) states that as society becomes more advanced and complex, it is important to cultivate the ability of students to "independently respond to changes, voluntarily seek a future theme and judge the theme flexibly and comprehensively with a broad view". This implies a sense of identity would be achieved in that students would have a sense of "knowing where one is going". At a local level, it is commonplace for individual universities to distinguish themselves by emphasising their human development objectives. The *Academic Vision* of Hiroshima Shudo University for example states that they promote "individuals able to differentiate themselves from others in addition to fostering independent minds able to identify and solve problems" (Hiroshima Shudo University 2003, p. 5). Once again this implies a sense of identity would be achieved in that it requires genuine expressions of self that would further sharpen self-definition.

To realise these human development policies and objectives requires conscious effort from all facets of a university's community. Not only is it important to improve the administrative structure of a whole university and enlighten all faculty members, the further improvement of teaching methods and curricula are essential (University Council 1998). This infers that university classroom teachers have a responsibility to incorporate human

development objectives when planning and implementing their courses. An example university EFL writing course that promotes identity development through personal writing tasks aided by peer editing groups will now be outlined and examined.

Writing Course Development

Course development is a dynamic ongoing process of assessment and decision making carried out by the teacher that includes the stages of planning, teaching and modifying as shown in Figure 1.
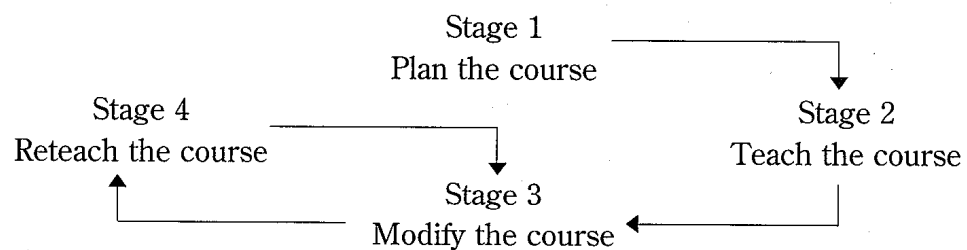
Stage 1
Plan the course

Stage 4   Stage 2
Reteach the course   Teach the course

Stage 3
Modify the course

Figure 1   *Process of Course Development*

In the case of the writing course example that follows, it has been retaught 5 times which has lead to its further refinement. For this reason, though an ordered approach is used to outline the course's development (see Table 1 – adapted from Graves 1996, p. 13), it is better to view the course of components as not necessarily sequential or equal in importance. Each course development process has its own unique

Table 1   *Course Development Components*

1. Needs assessment
2. Determining aims and objectives
3. Conceptualising content
4. Selecting and developing materials and activities
5. Organisation of content and activities
6. Student and course evaluation

issues to be considered.

1. Needs assessment:

Needs assessment involves finding out about the students to be taught, what they know and what their needs are so that the course developed can bridge the gap. It is important to not only consider the academic background of students but also their developmental needs. The needs assessment for this course was carried out in the planning stage before meeting the students to be taught. Assumptions about their needs were made based on prior teaching experience.

Background

The developed semester writing course has evolved from been taught to six classes at Hiroshima University (national) and Hiroshima Shudo University (private) in semester 2, 2002 and semester 1, 2003 respectively. The classes taught represent a cross section of students in their first year (148 student) and second year (24 students) from numerous faculties (see Figure 2). Four first year classes were taught at Hiroshima University in the
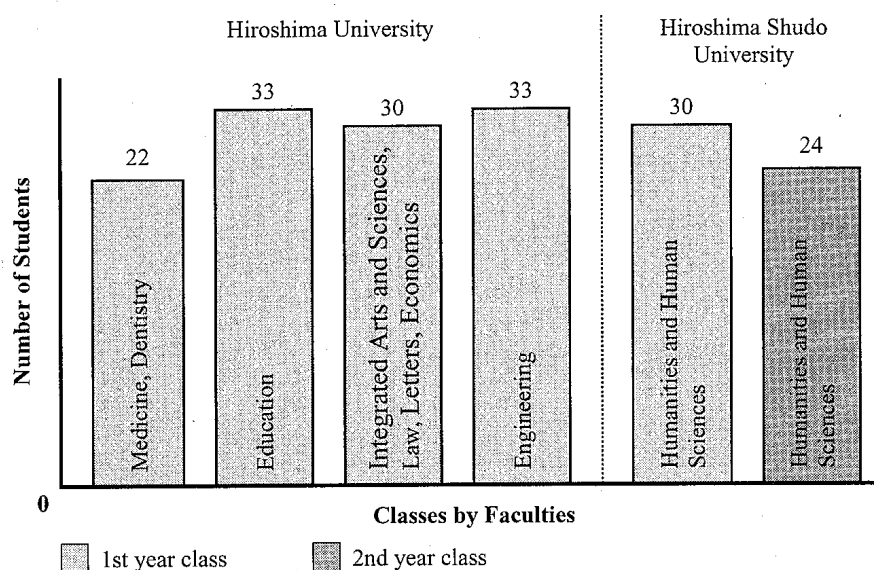
Figure 2 *Writing Classes Taught*

Faculties of Medicine and Dentistry, the Faculty of Education, the Faculties of Intergrated Arts and Sciences, Law, Letters and Economics, and the Faculty of Engineering. A first year class and a second year class were both taught at Hiroshima Shudo University in the Faculty of Humanities and Human Sciences (Department of English Language and Literature). For all first year students it was their first English writing class taken at university. The second year students had taken other English writing classes with other instructors in their first year at university.

Assumed Needs

As identified earlier, university students may well be in a state of "identity crisis" (Erikson 1968). As a means of identity resolution, students have needs for genuine expressions of self and for gaining a sense of how they are seen and evaluated by valued others. The meeting of these needs at the planning stage is reflected in establishing the aim, objectives, content and activities of the course as outlined in the sections that follow.

Further issues to be considered in the planning and teaching of this course are that students may have concerns about adjusting to university life including making friends. They may lack self-confidence in their English language ability and their ability to perform in an English only learning environment with a native English speaking teacher. Students may also be unaccustomed to sharing their opinions with each other and working together in groups.

2. Determining aims and objectives:
Aim

The aim of this writing course is for the students to develop the ability to express themselves by communicating their opinion effectively through writing.

This applied personal writing approach is potentially something new for students who may not have studied writing in the past or whose English writing education had largely focussed on the mechanics of the language.

Objectives

The students will:

- complete several writing tasks of self expression that display good paragraph structure.
- work together in groups to aid each other through writing processes.

By setting objectives pertaining to self-expression and peer groups, opportunities to address identity development are created and can be taken advantage of to maximise the learning outcomes of students.

3. Conceptualising content:

Writing skills derived from a writing process approach (see Figure 3) forms the backbone of what is taught. Relevant vocabulary and grammar structures are acquired through personal writing tasks. While correctness at the sentence level makes writing accessible to the reader, emphasise is

Prewriting
Getting and Organising Ideas

First Draft
Putting Ideas in Sentences

Peer Editing
Checking Meaning

Second Draft
Making Changes

Peer Editing
Checking Mechanics
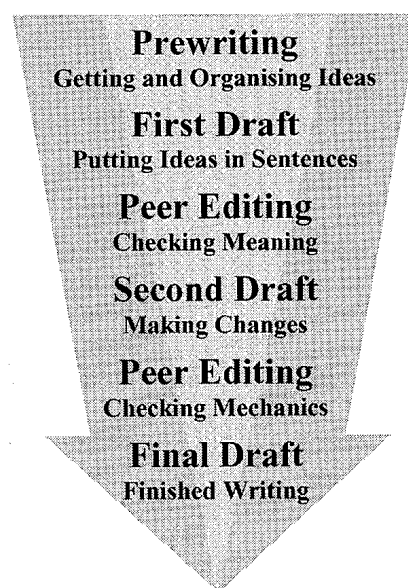
Final Draft
Finished Writing

Figure 3   *Writing Process Approach*

on self-expression where students see language as a means of communicating with others or as a source of pleasure.

As argued by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) the writing process approach creates opportunities for promoting identity development in the writing classroom by encouraging:

- self discovery.
- meaningful writing on topics of importance or interest to the writer.
- prewriting activities and multiple drafting with small group peer feedback between drafts.
- content information and personal expression as more important than final product grammar and usage.

4. Selecting and developing materials and activities:

A large selection of ESL writing course books are available that use a process writing approach to personal writing (see Hogue 1996, Kelly & Gargagliano 2001, Miller and Cohen 1996, Olsher 1996, Zemach & Rumisek 2003). However, in selecting the materials and activities for this course, new core materials and activities are developed by the teacher. The factors considered in making this decision include the material's effectiveness in achieving the aims and objectives of the course and its appropriateness for students and teacher. Graves (1996) identifies appropriateness to include student comfort and familiarity with the material, language level, interest, and relevance. In order to address these points of appropriateness, instructional tasks must allow students room to make their own contribution to activities, giving them a sense of ownership of what they are doing. Writing activities must serve real language functions, for example, persuading or informing the reader and writing tasks must give scope for students' opinions to be shared.

For each writing task, groups of 3 or 4 students are formed. The formation of groups in an English writing course provides many opportunities for students to develop a sense of identity that in turn proves advantageous to the learning environment. Jaques (2000) points out the sense of identity and social belonging that a student can gain from a well-run group should not be underestimated. Group members working together through the stages of the writing process help each other to explore their own minds and to develop their own ideas. This kind of interaction is seen as extremely significant (Franco 1996) as it engenders both learning and development. The key opportunities for such interaction occur during the prewriting and peer editing stages.

In the prewriting stage, students are involved in group activities that promote the sharing of knowledge, the discovery of new ideas, the gathering of information, and the organization of ideas in preparation to write. The peer editing stages give group members the opportunity to read each other's paragraphs and give feedback to the writer. Mittan (Bartels 2003) argues that peer editing gives students a sense of audience, increases their motivation and their confidence in their writing and helps them learn to evaluate their own writing better. Furthermore, by gaining feedback from valued peers on writing of genuine self-expression, students gain a sense of how they are seen and evaluated by others — a sense of identity.

5. Organisation of content and activities:

The organisation of the writing course content and activities are based on a sequence of building and recycling. Over the course of the semester, writing process concepts are introduced, built upon and recycled through a series of writing tasks (see Table 2). Furthermore, the overall organisation of the course includes elements of both "cycle" and "matrix"

Table 2 *Organisation of Writing Course Content and Activities*

Week:	Writing Task:	Content and Activities:
1–3	1. Special partner	• Introductions • Writing process: Interviewing / parts of a paragraph / editing for interest / correction symbols / composition format
4–5	2. Special place	• Task 1 feedback • Writing process: Listing / topic sentence
6–7	3. Person you respect	• Task 2 feedback • Writing process: Brainstorming / support sentences/ concluding sentence
8	4. Information request	• Task 3 feedback • Formal letters: Formal letter format
9–10	5. Greatest invention	• Task 4 feedback • Writing process: Idea bubbles / paragraph unity
11–13	6. Movie opinion	• Task 6 feedback • Writing process: Note taking / paragraph unity
14	7. Letter to partner	• Task 6 feedback • Informal letters: Informal letter format
15	Course feedback	• Task 7 feedback • Written Exam: Multiple choice / paragraph writing

approaches (Graves 1996). The course follows a "cycle" of activities for writing that reflects the steps of the writing process. Whereas, the writing tasks, established in the course planning stage, suggest a set or "matrix" of possible tasks that can be used within a given time and that can be modified as the course progresses. Such course organisation offers flexibility in adressing students' developmental needs while maintaining their sound writing skill development.

6. Student and course evaluation:

Students are evaluated on their ability to express themselves by commu-

nicating their opinions effectively through the writing tasks. Final drafts are collected and assessed by the teacher. The primary response is that of an interested reader, seeking to understand and clarify what the student wants to say, rather than focussing mainly on mechanics. Final drafts with constructive comments from the teacher are then returned to each student with reference copies going to their peer editing partners. Students may have to rewrite their final drafts to achieve their own expressive goals on top of satisfying academic requirements. Students explore and share their own values freely irrespective of the teacher's opinion. They are assessed based on the strength of their paragraph structure in clearly stating their opinion with supporting ideas and a conclusion.

The course is evaluated in order to improve its effectiveness. Formative evaluation takes place during the development stages of the course for the purpose of modifying it as it is being developed. Summative evaluation

Table 3 *Students' Course Evaluation*
Most Valued Aspects of the Writing Course

Classes by Faculties	Expressing Opinions	Making Friends	Skills Learnt	Other	Student Total
Medicine, Dentistry	7 (32%)	1 (4%)	11 (50%)	3 (14%)	22
Education	2 (6%)	12 (36%)	16 (49%)	3 (9%)	33
Integrated Arts and Sciences, Law, Letters, Economics	12 (40%)	5 (17%)	12 (40%)	1 (3%)	30
Engineering	7 (21%)	11 (33%)	12 (37%)	3 (9%)	33
Humanities and Human Sciences	7 (23%)	6 (20%)	17 (57%)	0 (0%)	30
Humanities and Human Sciences	6 (25%)	3 (13%)	15 (62%)	0 (0%)	24
Response Total	41 (24%)	38 (22%)	83 (48%)	10 (6%)	172

First year class   Second year class

takes place at the conclusion of the course been implemented.

Written summative feedback was collected from all 172 students on completion of their respective writing course. Students commented on what they valued most from the course in a paragraph response that included examples to support their opinions. Four categories of responses were identified: expressing opinions, making friends, skills learnt, and other (see Table 3).

Expressing Opinions

As the most valued aspect of the writing course, 24% of students directly commented on the opportunities provided in the course to express their opinions. Example student responses from this category include:

"In this class I could express my opinion in English. What is more, I can learn my partner's opinion from checking their draft. Their opinions are different from mine, so I could learn from many different ideas." (Education)

"When I read and check other paragraphs my friends wrote, I can know various opinions and feelings. I can understand what other people think. It is very interesting to me." (Engineering)

"I was able to make great progress with my English by exchanging opinions with my classmates." (Integrated Arts and Sciences, Law, Letters, Economics)

Making Friends

As the most valued aspect of the writing course, 22% of students directly commented on the opportunities provided in the course to make friends. Friendship was clearly linked to providing group interaction opportunities. Example student responses from this category include:

"I can make many friends because I went into partnership with some classmates. I felt a sense of identity in this class." (Second year Humanities and Human Sciences)

"I can make many new friends in this class. And group activities are very nice because I can learn many ideas which other people have." (Integrated Arts and Sciences, Law, Letters, Economics)

Skills Learnt

As the most valued aspect of the writing course, 48% of students directly commented on the opportunities provided in the course to acquire writing skills. Example student responses from this category included:

"I learnt to organise my opinion in various ways. I'm sure this will help me when I use English in the future." (Integrated Arts and Sciences, Law, Letters, Economics)

"In this class, I realised that the most important thing when we write is the structure of our paragraph. Thanks to this, I can write a more convincing paragraph and I can communicate my idea more clearly." (Medicine, Dentistry)

Other

The 6% of students, whose responses came under this category, wrote suggestions rather than what aspects of the course they valued.

Conclusion

As highlighted in the comments from students, both academic skills and human developmental needs are valued components of an EFL writing course. Though this is not an extensive survey as such, it still shows the importance of developing courses that cater for both these aspects as they

prove complementary in attaining overall objectives.

This paper has detailed the development of a university EFL writing course that promotes students' identity development through personal writing tasks that are shared with peer editing groups. Writing is more than the skills of accuracy in spelling, grammar and form. By developing writing courses that are based on expressive group activities, the writing process leads students to the discovery of self and the opinions of others. A sense of identity is promoted in the classroom which is in support of educational reform policies. The conclusion of this paper is that providing identity development opportunities in the foreign language writing classroom proves advantageous to the learning environment with the ultimate goal of making language learning more communicative.

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アイデンティティーの確立へ向けて
——ライティングクラスにおける試み——

ウェズリー　デニス

要　　約

　大学において学生達が過ごす期間は，アイデンティティーすなわち，自分とは何であるのかという意識が芽生えはじめる思春期の延長線上(青年後期)に位置するものである。学生達が大学で過ごすこの期間において，アイデンティティーを模索し，確立させていくことは今後の彼らの人格形成にとって大変に重要なことであり，これは現に教育改革案や大学教育指針の中においても指摘されているところである。授業において，学生達に豊かな人格形成の育成，特にアイデンティティーの確立を促すような機会を提供していくことは，教師としての責務であろう。

　ライティングの授業において，学生達は書くという行為を通じ自分自身についての考えをめぐらせることができるだけでなく，また，その行為そのものを通して得たものをクラスの中で仲間と共有するということを経験することができる。ライティングの授業において，彼らにこのような経験をさせることで，学生達は豊かな人格形成の育成やアイデンティティーの確立にとって必要な機会を得ることになるのである。

　このように，外国語のライティングクラスにおいて学生達に必要な知識や文法，文章作法を習得させるのみでなく，アイデンティティーの確立にとって必要な機会を提供することは大変に重要なことであり，また同時に可能なことでもある。