

The Teaching of Genre in an EFL Classroom : Poetry as a Case Study

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"Above all, literature can be helpful in the language learning readers." process because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers."

J. Collie, S. Slater

"I thought that the world of poetry is open to all of us."

from the journal of Yumiko Mimura

"We must always feel so sensitively, as we live our daily lives." from the journal of Chie Yamamoto

"In the beginning we all thought the same thing, 'We can't make a poem! But after a while, we thought that it was a lot of fun'." from the journal of Haruka Monma

"Poetry is indispensable for all animate beings to be alive. Birds, wolves, and human beings tell poetry, which are the feelings of their hearts.."

from the journal of Sayuri Tanigawa

"It was difficult for us to write a poem, but I enjoyed it very much because various expressions were born then."

from the journal of Yasuko Horiguchi

As Collie and Slater (1987) have suggested using the world of literature, in this case poetry, language learners are able to shift their attention from the usual bind of worrying about structures and mechanics to experiencing the power of language, especially stress, rhythm, and sound. As students wrote about their encounters with studying and creating poetry, as noted above, they would agree with these authors that poetry has merits worth exploring. "There is the initial advantage of length...Then again, they [poems] often explore themes of universal concern and embody life experiences, observations and the feelings evoked by them" (Collie & Slater, p. 226). However discovering the advantages of working with poetry in a creative writing class is more an end result of experimenting with literature in an EFL writing classroom than the beginning of the process. How students and I have progressed from the questions, "What is creative writing?," and "What can be included in a course with such a vague title?," to the exploration of using poetry in a writing class is the subject matter of this paper.

"Creative Writing" was a new course title coming out of curriculum changes involving the entire college. The only things known were the following : 1. This was to be a required course of all second year English and English literature majors. 2. The class size would be about 16 female students. 3. During their first year of study students would have a Japanese language teacher for composition. 4. This creative writing course would be taught by native speaker language teachers. 5. Students at Bunkyo University Women's College are

average, as measured by a test produced by JACET, administered during their first 6 weeks of study in their first year—the average score was in the 51 percentile.

A few more facts were known to this teacher from having experience teaching writing at Bunkyo for some years : 1. Students coming into the class would most likely be at a sentence level and have difficulties with paragraphing and the rhetorical organization of English writing. 2. Although usually obedient in class and willing to work, most would probably not have a great deal of time outside of class to do many written assignments. 3. It takes students time to adjust to the “culture” of the writing classroom, which is a workshop rather than a lecture, which means that most would not be used to writing in class. This also would include adjusting to differences in how students perceive the task of writing, for as (Hinds, 1987) suggests “...it may be necessary to take a further step and teach a new way to conceptualize the writing process....It is not enough for them (...students from certain countries, such as Japan) to write with the view that there is a sympathetic reader who believes a reader’s task is to ferret out whatever meaning the author has intended... Such non-native English writers will have to learn that effective written communication in English is the sole provenience of the writer” (Hinds in Connor & Kaplan, pp.151-52). This means teaching that writers must work to help their readers understand what they write. 4. Most likely each class would contain a range of student ability, for classes at Bunkyo are not tracked. This can be used in a positive way as students work together in peer conferences or in group work for certain assignments, such as poetry. Richards and Lockhart (1994)

state that group work has advantages especially in terms of student participation and involvement. "Quite simply, one learns a great deal in helping another to learn" (Gaies, p. 132). Students collaborate as learners, and teachers are enabled to act as facilitators and consultants rather than dominating a class. Making use of these known aspects of a class can help in making decisions about what is going to be taught in the class and how lessons will be organized.

Background theory and research in relation to our creative writing class

Theory has helped me to excavate and to uncover my own assumptions about writing. It has aided me in crafting a more coherent and unified course structure. It has encouraged me to try out some new methods of teaching writing. It has helped me to relinquish control and emphasize classroom community (Zebroski, 1986).

In terms of EFL language learning, writing plays important roles. Raimes (1983) has stated these roles as follows.

First, writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary that we have been teaching our students. Second, when our students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with language, to go beyond what they have just learned to say, to take risks. Third, when they write, they necessarily become very involved with the new language; the effort to express ideas and

the constant use of eye, hand, and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning. As writer's struggle with what to put down next or how to put it down on paper, they often discover something new to write or a new way of expressing their idea....The relationship between writing and thinking makes writing a valuable part of any language course (Raimes, p. 3).

This then gives a rationale for the teaching of writing, but it also means that a writing teacher needs to know about the writing process that all good writers go through. Krashen (1984) says that students all too often believe that a good writer simply sits down and writes out a completely perfect piece from beginning to end without any particular process. This makes it more imperative that teachers know and teach about the writing process of collecting information, ordering that information, drafting, revising and editing a piece of writing. None of this is done in a linear way, but rather is recursive, as writers go back and forth in the process. One minute a writer might be collecting information, the next drafting and perhaps going back to verify or find additional information to make that point as explicit as possible for a reader.

As Flower (1985) suggests, writing is a way of exploring and structuring a person's knowledge into a new representation so that someone else can understand that representation. This implies that a writer has always at least one reader. "What do readers need to know? If you can answer a reader's need you will have an effective

piece of writing” (Murray, p. 45). Thus, students need to be taught that they are always writing for an audience of readers. For this reason written language needs to be explicit. A writer does not always know who her readers will be. The amount of shared knowledge, which is what makes a text understandable to a reader, between the writer and a reader/readers is usually much less than that between a speaker and a listener. Readers need clear, explicit writing.

Readers usually come to a piece of writing with built-in expectations about what they will find. Readers of English writing expect to find : 1. the most important points of a discussion will be stated at the beginning and summarized in some way at the end. 2. a topic sentence that tells them what they will learn from a paragraph. 3. the writer's key words in grammatically important places such as the subject, verb and object positions. Plus, readers expect that conventions of format on a page will be followed, for those serve as cues to readers. However, as EFL student writers, these expectations of readers are often unknown or in conflict with known expectations (Hinds, 1984, 1987), which means that these points need to be directly taught to student EFL writers. One way of teaching this is for students to read each other's writing, which may be a very new idea to some students. The audience a student writes for is then expanded. A student is not only writing for the teacher but for many peers as well.

“Good writers, it has been found, have done more reading for their own interest and pleasure than poor writers, and programmes that get students ‘hooked on books’ help develop writing skills” (Krashen, 1985 p. 19). This connection between reading and writing is

one area that I decided to explore in the course of creative writing. However, this connection has to be explored while realizing that the communication process, including reading, differs in Japanese and English contexts. “In Japan, it is the responsibility of the listener (or reader) to understand what it is that the speaker or author had intended to say” (Hinds in Connor & Kaplan, p. 144). Both Yoshikawa and Suzuki give evidence that Japanese authors do not clarify or give full explanations and that this is what Japanese readers admire, which is of course very different from what English rhetoric demands. This means that Japanese student writers of English gain new assumptions for considering “good” writing. In the English and English literature major, it is assumed that they are reading some models of this different rhetorical style.

Students read a variety of genres. With guidance from their writing teachers, perhaps students can also learn more ways to “read.” For as Smith (1983) claims, “we must read like a writer in order to learn to write like a writer” (p. 562). Students need to read not only for the content of a piece, but also read with an eye towards learning awareness of the choices that writers have made in producing it. “Both reading and writing are acts of composing [Tierney & Pearson, 1983], and teachers need to bring this to the attention of students who are otherwise likely to believe that only writing is composing” (Kroll in Carson & Leki, 1993, p. 72). Student readers become aware of the composing aspect of themselves as they talk about what they’ve read. “They observe that there is not just one ‘right’ meaning to be apprehended by the privileged few, but that their own experience is part of the meaning, which they, consequently

must assume responsibility for constructing. A writing task that extends this process...becomes a meaningful act of personal exploration and discovery” (Gajdusek & van Dommelen in Carson & Leki, p. 199). This clear connection between reading and writing can be exploited by creative writing teachers.

Teachers need to remember that second language readers are at a disadvantage due to a greater load imposed upon their short term memories and because background knowledge differs between cultures. This will mean that some pre-reading techniques need to be used in order to aid students to accomplish the purposes intended. If the task is to analyze a text in order to see the choices the writer has made, then problems with vocabulary, for example, need to be worked on in advance so that students aren't continually stumbling. Questions to guide students, so that they will know what they are looking for, is one way of dealing with this. Hairston (1986) also emphasizes this need to make student writers alert as readers of texts who determine an author's purpose, how the author has guided his/her readers, and think of the choices an author has made in writing that particular text. These guidelines fit neatly into the writing process; for as students imagine their audience, they have a clearer idea about the need to revise and polish their own writing. The idea of one draft quickly disappears when a writer realizes that she must make herself understood to readers.

The question then becomes, besides each other's writing, what will students in a creative writing class be reading? Again, I looked at theory and some research in order to help me make decisions about this important aspect of our classroom life. “Teachers teach genres,

that is certain types of writing with certain features of form, content, use, and audience” (Lucas, in Peyton, p. 113). What does this mean when teaching genres to foreign language learners? Barnett (1989) suggests that teachers begin by finding out what students know about a particular genre before they are asked to read a model. What are the characteristics of poetry? “What do you as students know about poetry written in English?,” I often ask, or, “How does poetry in Japanese differ from poetry written in English?” As students work collaboratively to figure out these answers, they are exploring the features of form, content and use within a particular genre. This brainstorming of knowledge became the beginning session of each new genre that we explored over the year. We then worked with what the students delineated as characteristics of a genre, only expanding upon those features when absolutely necessary. In other words, our list of features was derived from the ideas of everyone in the class, but that list did not go much beyond the combined knowledge of everyone, in order that almost all student readers/writers could handle the mass of information. No one student could have come up with the entire list of features, but this list included almost all of the important features of any one genre.

We then took a model piece of text, read it, and in groups analyzed it according to the features we had listed about that genre. “Having a specific writing goal would first motivate the selection of specific reading passages (in contrast to selecting a text for its presumed interest value) and then frame a purpose for the students reading the text—either to note how an author or authors approach the task and/or to learn more background information in preparation

for writing” (Kroll, in Carson & Leki, p. 71). In this way, students became familiar with reading for different purposes. They began to try to read like a writer.

In making the choice of which poems to have students read, my rationale is similar to a writing teacher of native speaker children. “... in poetry there are two camps, the formalists, who teach and write poetry in terms of fixed forms and the free verse poets, who find their forms in the rhythm and content of what they are saying” (Calkins, p. 297). She believes that it would be easier for children to begin writing their own poetry after listening to and reading some models of poetry in free verse. “Children would spend their time trying to remember and to follow the rules, and they’d lose the urgency of what they had to say. They would get the wrong idea of what it means to write” (Calkins, p. 297). EFL student writers, writing poetry in English for the first time, need this kind of consideration. Six or seven poems by modern poets, chosen to show different characteristics of the genre, were distributed in class with a few analyzed in groups and discussed by the class according to the characteristics of the genre. Then students were asked to bring in models of poetry in English which they liked. “The effort to discover where one might find a model and then to procure it...gives the student a direct experience of the connections between the model and the contexts of its production and use” (Rabkin & Smith, p. 138). Plus, this kind of student involvement gives them the message that what happens in class is in part their responsibility. They are not only expected to read and write, but to participate creatively.

An ethnographic research study of students and teachers in a

writing classroom (Kantor, 1984) found that a non-directive teacher who encouraged students in a supportive atmosphere in the classroom enabled the class to work as a community of writers that included the teacher. "This brought about a relationship of trust, which encouraged students to take more risks with their writing and to be more confident about what they wrote" (Richards, p. 112). This, plus the injunction by Murray (1990), encouraged me to try to create a community of writers—not any kind of writers, but writers of literature. "...I don't see how you can appreciate literature unless you have tried to make literature" (Murray, p. 248). And thus we explored several genre over the year in our creative writing course: the short story, poetry, and the essay, plus, journal and letter writing, personal and business. We read and analyzed each genre as well as composed our own pieces.

Journal writing was used throughout the year for specific purposes and with specific rules which differed from that of other genres. The literature on journal writing (Peyton, 1990, Peyton & Staton 1991, Clark 1992, Casanave 1995) gives the basic tenets of this genre: 1. A journal is basically an exploratory way of thinking about an issue 2. It is usually written for the purpose of gaining fluency and, therefore, writers are encouraged to communicate their meaning without worrying too much about grammar or form. 3. Rules vary depending on whom the audience will be, usually including the teacher, who gives a written response to the content rather than a correction of errors. 4. This is a regular assignment often with free topic choice, but the goals and purposes of a particular class need to be considered. 5. "The journal writing literature generally recom-

mends that journals themselves not be revised. Nevertheless, they can be used productively as preliminary writing to prepare for formal academic writing” (Vanett & Jurich, 1990), (Casanave, p. 28). These basic tenets were followed throughout the year in our writing class.

Initially all topics were of the students’ choice. In the beginning assignments students were asked to write at least 20-30 minutes at one sitting for each journal entry. Most of the content centered on the students’ lives. Through journal writing, students became used to writing in English with some degree of fluency. Length of journals gradually increased for the same time spent. Students found it stimulating to receive comments about what they had written, and sometimes a real dialogue developed between the student and teacher. Reading other students’ journals was also a way of introducing the concept of audience and increasing the actual audience of readers. After reading, students were asked to comment back to the student writer. Journal writing was for communicative as well as other purposes.

Research studies concerned with journal writing (Jones, 1991, Staton, 1986, Kreeft, 1984) show that teacher’s responses to journals vary systematically, according to the needs of students. Many teachers adjust the complexity of the language they use, or use correct structures in response to students’ mistaken usage of the same structures, or adjust the complexity of questions asked according to students’ fluency. This kind of evidence, plus the abundance of teachers of writing saying that students gain confidence in all of their writing tasks, as they write journals, encouraged me to stress this task in our classroom. Perhaps the most persuasive argument is the

following: “They are usually eager to apply the skills they learn through journal writing to the types of writing that frequently intimidated them in the past” (Vanett & Jurich, in Peyton, p. 52). Thus, as we progressed in our classroom work, the rules of journal writing varied. Sometimes topics were assigned; sometimes a journal was used as a beginning draft for a later piece of formal writing. The other basic rules still held—students knew that they could write without too much worry about accuracy, and that they would receive comment/comments from a reader/readers.

Reading and Writing Poetry in our classroom

“What makes good poetry for me is a terrible specificity of detail, whether of object or of feeling. The poet names and particularizes and thus holds for a moment in time (and thus for all time, as long as time lasts for humanity) whatever elusive event he/she is drawn to. By terrible I mean unflinching. Honest and sometimes compassionate.”

Maxine Kumin

Students began the section on the genre of poetry by a conversation activity in which they expressed to partners what they felt about poems/poetry. They were also to ask what they thought the world would be like without poetry. Students reported what their conversational partners had said with comments such as the following: “She says she doesn’t like poetry!”; “Poetry is too hard!”; “She said, ‘I don’t understand poems. They have too many meanings’”; “I don’t need poetry”; “She likes to read it or hear it in songs, but she doesn’t understand it often and can’t write it.” Most of the comments were

negative until students realized that music, something most all of them feel is a part of their lives, would be radically different without lyrics, the words of songs. I remembered the experiences of the writing teacher of children. Her students had said, "It's boring. It is too hard to understand"; "They are talking above us and about us. They don't want us to understand" (Calkins, p. 298). My EFL student writers were expressing many of the same initial opinions.

Next, we brainstormed to figure out what everyone knew about the genre of poetry. We reviewed what we knew about the short story. We contrasted this with differences of poetry. We added more to our list about poetry. Soon three classroom blackboards were full of the features of the genre poetry and a reminder of those of the short story. Students took notes to help them remember these characteristics. As Calkins (1986) has suggested, we decided to work on free verse in our classroom.

The poems chosen were : William Carlos Williams's "This Is Just to Say" and "The Great Figure," Robert Bly's "Driving to Town Late to Mail a Letter," E. E. Cummings's "your little voice," Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Days", Langston Hughes's "Dream Variations," and one in formal style, Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." The poems for discussion and analysis were given to the students as a handout and read aloud by the teacher and/or each other several times. Students were then asked to work in pairs to analyze the poem according to the characteristics of the genre we had determined previously. Students then shared their analysis within a group of three or four students. Finally, a group reporter was chosen to report to the class about the analysis. Initially, we all worked on

"This Is Just to Say." Next, each partner in a pair was given a different poem to read, analyze and discuss with their partner and finally with the class. In this way, most of the chosen models were worked on in class. The results of this work were similar to that which Collie and Slater discussed: "Very often someone else in a group will be able to supply the missing link or fill in an appropriate meaning of a crucial word, or if not, the task of doing so will become a shared one. Shifting attention away from the text itself to such shared activity is often conducive to the creation of a risk-taking atmosphere. With the group's support and control, the individual has a greater freedom to explore his or her own reactions and interpretations" (Collie & Slater, p. 9).

Students were then asked to bring in model poems in English, which they chose because they liked them. I too chose poems. This time I chose those which had to do with what poetry is all about—what it means to the poet. I chose with this in mind because some students in their journal writing were asking questions about poetry and what it meant. We shared models. There was a broad range, but many chose poems in their textbooks from other literature courses. Some brought in the lyrics of their favorite songs. My choices were John Ashbery's "Paradoxes and Oxymorons" and Archibald MacLeish's "Ars Poetica." Both of these were difficult in content for students to understand, but analysis did teach some useful things, such as the use of metaphors and similes to specify concrete representations or images rather than talking about emotions directly. My choices, however, were given no more class time though than the models students brought in. They read their choices aloud to a

partner and discussed the content, shared their interpretations, and analyzed of what the poet did as a writer.

All of the above took three or four class sessions. Students wrote in their journals and took notes in class, as part of their homework. Finally, students were ready to write poetry. Students were told to write their own poems in a group of about three or four members. I decided to use a group as a means of creating a poem to exploit the advantages of the group to the maximum and to enhance the creative activity by having them negotiate for meaning amongst themselves. For an image to have “terrible specificity of detail” more than one mind at work might be needed to sharpen and hone the language. Plus, many students had verbally expressed that they found it difficult, and often impossible, to write poetry. And they had been referring to writing poetry in Japanese, not English. Groans filled the air when students first heard the assignment.

We talked about the fact that most anything can be an appropriate theme or topic for a poem. Williams had used a plum to give a message of love. I reminded them of the characteristics of poetry we had been working on, especially rhythm, sound, and meter as well as the need for specific images in poetry. I reminded them that when writing a short story one of the most important things was to bring the scene to life. A poet too needs to create an image or picture that is living, that a reader can experience. I was reminded of Elbow’s (1981) injunction, “You have these thoughts you want to communicate, but you can’t just give them to readers, you must get readers to construct them...You can’t give reader’s a finished product no matter how much you want to—any more than a playwright can actually

send a live play through the mail...we must talk about readers getting an experience out of words, not just a meaning” (p. 315-317). We talked then about the words Williams used to make the image of his plum so vivid that a reader can almost taste it as she reads. Then students began work on their poems.

The students had two assignments. One was to bring their finished poems to the next class and to write a journal about the experience of writing a poem. When we next met, students worked ten minutes in their groups to put the final touches on their poems and then read them aloud to their group. Afterward, we shared the poems between groups. Each group then wrote a comment to the authors of the poems. In this way, the teacher was not the only reader. These poems had many readers and the authors realized that different readers had different ideas about the poems.

The following are some samples of the poetry produced and some excerpts that are related from journals. Most of the writing is left as the students wrote in order to preserve their work :

A Splinter

I lost my small happiness.
I got a splinter in my finger,
When I carried a sheet of plywood.
I want to take it out.
It wouldn't come out.
I whispered to the splinter gently;
The splinter came out gradually.
I regain my small happiness and rejoice!

Yumiko Mimura, Akemi Murotsu, Satsuki Yoshida

“It is a good idea to write English poem by three people.
Because if one person wrote a poem, it might be a self-satisfied way
of thinking...”

from the journal of Satsuki Yoshida

“I like the poem about a plum. Then I suggested making a poem
about a splinter. I told Akemi and Satsuki that a plum could be a
theme, so a splinter could be a theme, too.”

from the journal of Yumiko Mimura

The Wind

I am Wind

I'm running over the world.

I feel sad...

Because there are wars here and there.

And some countries have nuclear warheads.

I feel hurt...

Because the air and the water are polluted.

Yet I feel happy...

Because I can hear humans laughing and the birds singing.

I feel glad...

Because I can go anywhere.

Sachie Naganuma, Noriko Hasegawa, Akiko Makino

“I wrote an English poem for the first time with my classmates.

I thought it was very difficult, so we couldn't write our English poem until the last moment. What I express in my mind is very difficult and could not be told in English very well.

"Our poem's title is 'The Wind'. The Wind runs all over the world. And then The Wind felt a lot of things and emotions. We became The Wind and wrote the poem. Since three wrote the poem, many things were given....

"Other groups' poems were very interesting, good and unique. Before I write many poems, I want to read many poems written by famous writers."

from the journal of Sachie Naganuma

Cloud Desert

I take a walk while swaying on the back of a cloud.
Many musical instruments of the moon and stars are sounding.
The world spreads from the clouds.
The smell is such that the mind is peaceful and relaxed.
Under the cloud desert, a known face goes up and down,
But I am on the cloud
And I've been waiting for you.

Miho Tanaka, Kasumi Tsukida

"mind space I feel easy. warm words straight mind music is made by many poems. I become happy. hard and pleasant expressions. It catches children's minds and adult's minds. It is used in all music. It is necessary for us. gentle nature words the mind is dancing.

"There is a lot of music in this world. Many poems are loved all

over the world. And I like poems, too.

“Kasumi and I indulged in fancies when we made our poem. I thought that we might contain many feelings. I thought a poem is difficult.”

from the journal of Miho Tanaka

In the Snow

The snow is falling.

The snow already lies deep on the earth.

Listen carefully,

A faint whisper I can hear....

I want to leave my footsteps

On this white snow.

But the steps will soon be hidden by new snow,

And nothing will be left.

Mizuho Hisaka, Ayako Hara, Yasuko Horiguchi

“At first, I thought that writing a poem was very difficult or impossible for me. Because in the poem, there are some forms like rhythm or rhyme and so on. But this thought was wrong.

“I found that a poem is not formal but free. The important thing to write a poem is to express one’s own feelings straight. And even the small thing, it can become a poem.”

from the journal of Yasuko Horiguchi.

“...This time I made a poem with two classmates. It is very hard to put three person’s thoughts together. But I think we could make a

good poem because we had a hard time.

“One of the characteristics of the poem is to imagine a situation. It differs from person to person. So I think the world of imagination is broad. I can imagine a color and a season and an emotion, etc. from the poem.

“Although we couldn’t make a splendid poem including rhymes and rhythm, I could have a new understanding of the splendor of poems.”

from the journal of Ayako Hara.

Trees

Trees gaze calmly
at the change of seasons
or twinkling of stars in the sky.

Trees listen carefully
to the chirping of birds
to the voices of insects.

Trees stand calmly
feeling the passing wind
bathing in sunshine brightly.

Yoko Kikuchi, Mitsuyo Kuriyama

“When I read a poem, the meaning comes into my heart. It’s deep. I can’t explain it, but I can see it.”

from the journal of Ami Ishii

“The other day, I had thought that even if I lost poetry in my

life, I wouldn't care a pin about it.

"But now, I think it's very important. If we lost poetry, we can't hear songs and we can't feel another person's deep emotions."

from the journal of Terumi Shinbo

As most of these students and their classmates played with the power of language, they discovered for themselves what good writers/poets have said about writing. "Don't worry about rhyme and meter....don't tell about what you are writing and don't tell the reader how to feel, just give the essential experience in images that will make the reader see, feel, think. Write in lines, not sentences, and play with the line breaks—the length of the lines—and verses..." (Murray, p. 249-250). The poems themselves, and what the writers had to say about them in their journals, hint of these ideas.

Once students had shared their poems and turned them in, we moved on to the next genre, the essay. But we moved back to poetry because we decided to make a book of all the poems from the three classes. Some grammar corrections were made and some lines polished by the authors before the final draft was turned in for printing. The process of correction in revision was of two kinds. One was the simple grammatical mistakes common to writers at a junior college level. Sometimes in working with each other, students were able to make their own corrections, but often, even a final, polished piece would be turned in with common mistakes still present.

Accuracy doesn't happen easily. In fact, EFL learners can learn a structure only to misuse it immediately. This is normal for learners, as "...natural acquisition is not a sudden jump into complete mastery,

but a process of gradually increasing accuracy” (Littlewood, pg. 94). For a writing teacher this means that correction should be used to help students towards overall understanding of meaning and that students also need to be involved in making judgments about correctness. As Edge (1989) says, the results may not be completely standard English, but if the confidence of EFL student writers is considered important, perhaps this strategy will be realistic for them.

The second type of correction has to do with meaning and good writing. Sometimes a reader might ask the author/authors for more information. That is a clue that some kind of revision needs to be made. Our student writers had many readers and were sometimes questioned about their meaning. “Good writing—poetry as much as nonfiction—delivers information to the reader...Readers hunger for information, and the writer should satisfy this hunger by constructing a piece of writing with solid chunks of information” (Murray, p. 175). Hopefully, by experience, most of our student writers learned about this type of correction and the need to write for an audience in ways that are not always called for when they are writing in Japanese.

One more assignment brought the whole year of creative writing into focus. Students were to write an essay, their first attempt using this genre, in which they were asked to compare and contrast the three major genre they had been studying—the short story, poetry, and the essay. Students used their notes about each genre, plus the journal about poetry writing, to help them in writing this more formal essay. The following is a portion of one student’s essay about poetry in particular :

“...In the second place, I noticed the difference when I read them. The essay is written with a writer’s ideas, opinions, emotions, and so on. I noticed also that an essay is nonfiction. (Nonfiction is facts, experiences and objective data.) And an essay uses an allusion. An allusion means indirect references. Sometimes they are pretty direct such as a line of poetry might be quoted. Poetry, on the other hand, is abstract and the grammar is loose. The words have a lot of meanings. And poetry has rhyme. Rhyme means the sameness of sounds between words or syllables, especially at the endings of lines of verse. In the case of the poem, Childe Harold’s “Pilgrimage,” as example : “shore” and “roar”; “sea” and “thee”; “flight” and “night”. And poetry also is the same as an essay in that both use allusions. A short story has setting....

“I thought it is very difficult to understand about an essay, poetry and a short story at this time.... I want to read and write them when I have free time. Of course, I want to write them in English!”

from an essay by Megumi Tanaka

Conclusion

Together, students in my creative writing classes and I have come to understand what creative writing means. We have also made an attempt at working on an effective way to go about the process of writing given our particular needs and purposes as students at Bunkyo University Women’s College. We tried to make use of the time available to have as many writing experiences as possible. Hopefully we, students and teacher, learned something about writing and literature, and we experienced the power of language through

creatively writing in several different genre, both as individuals and as members of a group. As we worked together during the year, a feeling of community developed that aided us in our responses to one another as writers. This in turn made my role as teacher easier to perform as a facilitator, resource person and guide. Plus, all of us gained a deeper respect for the many writers who have worked over time to hone their craft and have left us with such memorable language. By relying on the work of others in the field of the teaching of writing, I as teacher was enabled to work with students towards a meaningful answer to our questions about creative writing. In this paper, I have discussed our processes as students, teacher, and writers in our exploration of the poetry genre. Hopefully we have learned some of the meaning of this genre as it was defined in the eleventh century :

Poetry presents the thing in order to convey the feeling. It should be precise about the thing and reticent about the feeling, for as soon as the mind connects with the thing the feeling shows in the words; this is how poetry enters deeply into us.

Anonymous.

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