Second language poetry writing in the Japanese EFL classroom

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English language learning in the Japanese secondary school context has focused on the acquisition of L2 linguistic knowledge (Iida, 2016a). In general, students do a lot of drill exercises and they are expected to memorize grammatical rules and lexical items in the language learning process. While this learning approach may be effective for the preparation to the tests (e.g., entrance exams or Standard Test for English Proficiency), Japanese students are not sufficiently trained to *use* the language practically in the classroom. Lack of attention to individual language learners' mind, bodies and social behaviors prevent them from developing L2 literacy (Hanauer, 2012; Iida, 2016a; Kramsch, 2006). In such a situation, it is quite difficult for students to become aware of and develop *voice* – "the writer's self-representation of identity in writing" (Iida, 2017, p. 1) in the language classroom. Without the concept of voice, Japanese students would not learn to feel attached in their writing. However, how can we teach students to develop voice in such an uncommunicative classroom?

One possible approach is poetry writing. As discussed by other scholars (Chamcharatsri, 2013; Hanauer, 2012), poetry writing as a form of meaningful literacy practice helps L2 writers not only to construct and express voice but to develop L2 linguistic knowledge, raise cultural awareness, and build genre knowledge in the language learning process. My own work on poetry and L2 writers also provides empirical support that Japanese L2 writers have the ability to construct voice and express emotions in such diverse topics as the Great East Japan Earthquake (Iida, 2016a), study abroad experiences (Iida, 2016b), and L2 learning experiences (Iida, 2016c). In other words, these studies show that poetry writing in English is a feasible and accomplishable task to Japanese students.

However, teachers must pay attention to several points in the teaching of L2 poetry writing. One of the most important pedagogical perspectives is to put students at the center of the learning process and make their language learning personal and meaningful (Hanauer, 2012, Iida, 2016a). We human beings have something we want to say and share with others in our daily lives. On the other hand, none of us is same: we have different educational and cultural background; and our perception is different, too. In other words, each of our existence is unique. From this point of view, teachers need to respect individual learners and make the most use of their personal experience and history in poetry writing. Incorporating this perspective into literacy practice can make a stronger connection between language learning and students' daily lives and allow them to understand the core nature of L2 learning – using the target language to express themselves in the real-life context. Poetry writing provides L2 learners with ample opportunities to reflect on their personal experiences, consider some possible ways to construct meaning in the text, and explore effective ways to express themselves in the target language. Through the task of poetry writing, L2 learners can be more engaged.

As suggested by Hanauer (2012), the following four components, *individual learners, personal experiences, personal history,* and *social contextualization* are crucial for meaningful literacy learning. Poetry writing is a form of literacy practice, which these four components are interweaved, and it can make students' language learning in the L2 classroom more personal and meaningful than traditional L2 learning. Thus overall, poetry writing has a lot of benefits in L2 learning and the potential to empower L2 learners through literacy practice.

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