

L2 Literacy Practice through Dialogue Journals

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Do you practice your first- (L1) or second-language (L2) literacy on a daily basis?

English learners constantly and dynamically practice their L2 literacy, but relatively few studies have examined English learners' daily literacy events such as dialogue journals, where literacy is a 'mosaic of utterances' (Bakhtin, 1986).

Dialogue journals weave together both the teacher's and the student's craft and art (Payton & Reed, 1990), based upon authentic conversations between the two, and promote mutuality between them, increasing the shared understanding of experience, and maintaining the values of respect, trust, and cooperation. The journals are meant to be a channel for self-expression, and an opening to share opinions about events and express feelings openly. Perego and Boyle (2008) emphasized that, by sharing writing and drawings, dialogue journals also offer a useful resource for examining clear sequences of L2 literacy practice, revealing an English learner's insightful mindsets and inviting the teacher's responses. Dialogue journals for young children are often constructed with three main components: writings, drawings, and the teacher's regular responses.

According to Bakhtin (1986), dialogue journals can be seen as dynamic and continual utterances between two people: dialogues. They demonstrate an English learner's meaning construction while engaging in a writing activity. Drawings leave a more permanent record of the learner's thought processes. As a medium, drawings, represented by images in dialogue journals, are a different form of literacy and are used

to help create deeper understandings of dialogues as another core part of written forms (Unsworth, 2001).

We consider L2 literacy practice to be a set of cultural practices and a product of cultural activities in a situated context. Gee (2002) said that learners in this situated context learn language by exchanging meanings. According to Bakhtin (1986), literacy, as an utterance, consists of three trajectories: the speaker, the active listener, and the situated boundary. Bakhtin's dialogue, taken as an utterance, creates new meanings. This continuity becomes dialogue. Dialogue is an invitation to think and produce meaning. Through meaningful L2 literacy practices, an English learner becomes "a core of self" which is closely linked to his/her social identity (Gee, 2002) - a being recognized by someone or recognizing him or herself (Kim, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the English learners' dialogic processes based on writing and drawing. The study had two research questions:

1. In what ways does an English learner engage in dialogue journals while practicing English (L2) literacy?
2. How does the English learner utilize dialogue journals, such as writing and drawing, to develop L2 literacy?

Methodology

This qualitative case study examined a first grader, Andrew's English (L2) writing process and his cognition, based on his dialogue journals. Andrew from Korea and his teacher, Ms. Lee, wrote on a regular basis for 10 months, beginning right after Andrew's arrival over the course of the research period. The five data venues included Andrew's dialogue journals (a total of 140 entries written at home and school), his drawings, his teacher's feedback in his dialogue journals, an interview with an ESL learner, and an interview with Andrew's father. I analyzed the drawings (image representation) using Unsworth's (2001) techniques and the journals based on the qualitative research data analysis and grounded theory as expounded by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Andrew's dialogue journals were helpful for listening to his emic voices. I also developed a thick description through narrative, simultaneously confirming the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

The two emergent themes included (a) Andrew as an author, (b) teacher as an active listener within the boundary constructed by dialogue journals.

Andrew as an Emerging Author

Andrew recognized himself as an emerging author from the first day of writing. As an author, he drew about himself and his mother in the airplane moving to a new country. He wrote "NLAB" which represented 'airplane' showing his substantial experience and his language proficiency upon his arrival. Three main subthemes within his journals were cultural backgrounds (e.g., Korea, Taekwondo—Korean martial arts), sports (e.g., soccer), and various genres of writing (e.g., mystery story, riddles, jokes, scientific stories). Most of the topics revealed his cultural background along with his interests. In a Taekwondo entry, Andrew showed his pride of being Korean and showed a connection to social activity, filling him with confidence and pride. In his writing, he described his energy as "Oh Ya" with his active emotion in the entry ringing clear in my ear as I read the entry.

Later, Andrew explored various writing genres such as scientific stories, riddles, jokes, and mystery stories. For example, Andrew wrote and drew a ghost story. By showing scary participants in the picture, he developed the content of the story as a genre. He also recognized the audience in this entry. Thus, this picture contains more transactional images (Unsworth, 2001) for the audience to convey how the response occurs while viewing the text and drawings. Andrew also explained the story context: "Ohhoh" and "I—th—ink i-s a —re le-goght!" I sensed his evaluation as well as his real emotional expression from his use of hyphens in the sentence. He also offered content knowledge of the principle of the Moon in his scientific story called "Ms. Lee is in the Moon." Using various vocabularies, Andrew developed more complex sentences. The entries not only showed the integration of visual representations and written journals, but also the influence between the two. Andrew's drawings were platforms, showing his thinking processes and his aesthetic communication with his teacher. Andrew understood the audience; he crafted scientific stories, riddles, or jokes in sequences. This showed concrete evidence of how Andrew, as an English learner, developed his language and content simultaneously.

Teacher as an Active Listener

Ms. Lee, Andrew's teacher was a skilled active listener. She listened as Andrew talked through his writings and drawings; she

responded positively and actively. Andrew often said he was waiting for Ms. Lee's responses, indicating his engagement.

As I read Ms. Lee's notes, I understood that her feedback and comments occurred in certain patterns. Ms. Lee's active responses empowered Andrew's writing and L2 literacy process, and he consequently obtained new information, practicing his vocabulary, writing style, and genres of writing. Ms. Lee responded to Andrew's dialogue journals in six categories: praising or encouragement (e.g., I like your pictures! Good story!), using Andrew's ideas (e.g., Do you like to play soccer?), asking questions (e.g., How was the mystery solved?), giving information (e.g., Milk group foods will make you powerful and strong), correcting without rejecting (Are you inside the rocket ship? Watch out for those fire rocks!), and giving direction (e.g., Does anyone live in the Moon?). Obviously, Ms. Lee's comments were integral for scaffolding Andrew's ideas or concepts. "Ms. Lee is in the moon" was the best example of Andrew's content knowledge development in science through dialogue journal activities.

Discussion/ Conclusion

This study revealed the power of dialogue between the learner, the teacher, and the task. Andrew, the subject in this study dialogued with his cultural background and his personal interests at the beginning of this task, and moved to various genres to engage in a deeper dialogue. Andrew was an emerging author and recognized himself as a writer. Andrew was in "a core of self," recognizing his dynamic identity (Gee, 2002) as a learner, author, and the teacher's partner. He was empowered: He knew, enjoyed, and articulated his strengths as an English learner, invoking his own cultural knowledge, experiences, and innovative ideas. He positioned himself as an author in the center of this dialogue, asking the teacher to be his audience, to evoke empathy, and to promote equal partnership.

Even as his teacher guided him through her responses, Andrew, an active learner, was concurrently giving his attention and indication to the teacher. The power of discourse was channeled into a partnership between Andrew, the learner and Ms. Lee, the teacher. The teacher became a member of Andrew's learning community, engaging,

asking questions, laughing with Andrew's humors, giving directions and guidance, and sharing information. Ms. Lee promoted dialogues with her pupil through her private and non-judgmental responses. She continuously dialogued with Andrew without any rejection, but encouraging his ability and offered to be his partner. Through her short but powerful responses, Andrew read, dialogued, and socialized through this authentic writing activity.

Andrew recognized his identity as he developed an ownership of his learning and became a member of the mutually-understanding society. Andrew developed his language and content by expanding his thinking cycle through practicing L2 literacy. Andrew's drawings in dialogue journals showed the interrelationship between L2 literacy, L2 content learning, and the learner's ownership of learning. The drawings in his dialogue journals revealed his aesthetic mindsets, personality, and celebration of authorship. He developed competence and confidence corresponding to his content knowledge and its practice through L2 learning practice. The findings of this qualitative study show that integrating language and content instruction across the curriculum through the use of authentic daily writing activities, i.e., dialogue journals will greatly help improve and reinforce English learners' L2 literacy development. ★

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