

Critical Writing: Exploring the Needs of Students in a Writing Classroom

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Abstract

This research project investigated Japanese students' secondary school L1/L2 writing experience and how this experience helped or hindered their transfer to a tertiary writing program. The study was completed in 2006 and involved a total of 308 first year students at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in Chiba Prefecture. The project's objective was to provide a 'snapshot' of student experience which would influence the design of a more student-centered writing curriculum created by instructors. After presenting a brief description of the teaching context and curriculum previously used at KUIS, qualitative and quantitative findings of this study will be presented in order to justify the suggested curriculum implementations made for the 2007-08 academic year. The first semester of the 2006-2007 writing curriculum introduced students to the genre and characteristics of academic writing through descriptive writing tasks. However, from findings of the study, students reported having significant L1/L2 descriptive writing experience. This suggests the need for a university first year writing curriculum to focus more upon critical writing skills, such as the argumentative or critique essay, while introducing students to the genre of academic writing. Doing so in a first year class would allow more time and practice to develop higher level

cognitive processing skills to be used in the following years. This paper will be of interest to university writing instructors and anyone interested in second language writing.

Background

Before explaining the process of creating the writing curriculum at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), it is necessary to understand the underlying educational philosophy of the university. The English Language Institute (ELI) at KUIS started as an ‘experiment’ 20 years ago with the main goals of accommodating different styles of learners, developing learner autonomy and creating a personalized curriculum for each student. Some essential features of this curriculum include flexibility of route, rate and mode of learning as well as allowing choice and developing learner responsibility (ELI handbook 2006-2007: p29-32). This approach was radical in the context of Japanese higher education at the time, where the university experience was seen as a vacation period between senior high school (SHS) and career employment.

Some of the ‘new’ approaches KUIS introduced since its inception include placing students in tiers according to their performance on various sections of the Kanda English Proficiency Test (KEPT), using English to teach course content and limiting class size to 25 students per class. Also, materials development became the responsibility and research focus of limited term lecturers and overseen by tenured professors at KUIS in the first and second year writing courses. It is important to note that the reading and writing skills committee, which has been comprised of limited term lecturers, has been

responsible for the Basic Writing (BW) course curriculum and that tenured professors have been responsible for the Advanced Writing (AW) curriculum. Over the years in BW, a textbook has been used; other times original materials have been created, used and re-written. For BW, there has always been freedom and flexibility in choosing the course materials depending on the decisions of the research committee. The first year curriculum assumes that students have little writing experience in English; therefore, writing must be taught from the creation of a sentence, then the creation of a paragraph, and finish first year instruction with the creation of an argumentative essay. As for the second year Advanced Writing (AW) curriculum, the guidelines and outcomes were created by tenured professors and taught mostly by limited term lecturers. The second year's main goal has been to develop critical writing skills such as the research paper. Following the second year AW course, students have not been required to take additional writing courses.

Just as Takagi (2001) found in the study of writing instruction in secondary schools, first year students at KUIS come from a variety of academic backgrounds which greatly affects their L2 writing acquisition. Such varied backgrounds as attending an after-school cram school, attending special lectures on writing or having experience studying abroad greatly influence how an individual views and learns writing. As a writing instructor of students and a language education researcher, I saw a need to create a student questionnaire (appendix one) and elicit information from students about their various L1/L2 writing experience. This was followed by a student focus group discussion on their transfer process from a secondary to tertiary writing program (appendix two). BW instructors were also consulted on their concerns with the class and curriculum (appendix three).

It is also important to note that this study was similar to Kobayashi and Rinnert's report, which focused on high school students' perceptions of their high school L1 writing instruction and how this affects L2 writing (2002). However, my study focuses more on how writing experience during secondary school in L1/L2 effects students transfer to tertiary education in addition to how a curriculum can be created which utilizes student experience, making the transfer easier to a university writing program.

For this study, the needs of the students were elicited by group administering of questionnaires, interpreting responses and following-up with qualitative focus group discussions. The initial stage of creating questionnaires was carefully monitored before administering to avoid common pitfalls of questionnaires such as irrelevant or leading questions, bias, direction ambiguity, confusion, unstructured ordering of the questions, editing mistakes and questions that respondents are unable to answer (Brown 2001). After these factors were taken into careful consideration, a questionnaire was administered to students, and from these responses, focus group discussion questions were created for more in-depth feedback from students.

The questionnaire was originally written in English and translated into Japanese. After trialing this translated version, the questionnaire was slightly modified. Following this, BW teachers administered the questionnaire to their students. A total of 272 students completed the questionnaire. As shown in appendix one, the questionnaire contained 14 questions that included multiple choice, closed-ended questions. Question grouping was determined using a combination of Rosset's (1982) and Patton's (1987) categories that elicited

behavior/experience, abilities, attitudes, solutions, opinions and knowledge. The questionnaire was given during weeks 11 and 12 during the fall semester of 2006 in order to provide a 'snapshot' of student attitudes of their writing experience and transfer in mid-semester. Following this, six focus groups comprising of six students met for 30 minutes and were given conversation prompts based upon responses to the questionnaire which they could discuss in English or Japanese. The questionnaire questions were broken into four categories.

- I) High School Experience 1-7
- II) Importance areas of writing 8-9
- III) Transfer to KUIS – questions 10-13
- IV) Student recommendations – question 14.

Questionnaire and Focus Group Findings

As one can see from the results of the questionnaire table 1.1, the first seven questions (student experience) indicated that students had little experience writing in high school L2, most of which was short in length and focused upon essays for university entrance exams. The focus groups stated their writing class in L2 was an optional lesson, and this writing was descriptive in nature with emphasis on grammar and structure. A majority of students had little extra-curricular writing and those who did found this helpful before entering KUIS. Concerning questions eight and nine, 50% of students ranked grammar as being the 'most important' and an overwhelming 77% of students ranked structure as being 'very important' or 'most important' in L1 writing experience. Both grammar and structure also were ranked very important

in L2, which reinforces students' interdependence and transferability of L1 and L2 writing skills and concepts. When asked which was important in L2 writing, 35% of students ranked 'content' and 'original ideas' in questions eight and nine as 'very important' and 26% stated 'most important,' which were in opposition to the views of the teachers' opinions elicited in the think-aloud session (appendix 3). Two of the focus groups agreed that these ideas of content and original ideas were difficult for them to understand when first studying at KUIS.

In question ten, students perceived concepts such as brainstorming, the writing process, and peer revision groups as new for them. In peer revision groups, students would discuss and justify their writing, which was something they had never done in L1 or L2. The focus groups reported they were first confused about the educational value of such an activity, yet, on the questionnaire, students stated they wanted more peer reviewing (62%) in the classes, compared to teacher led feedback (54%). The focus group reported the opposite of this, stating they want more feedback from the teacher as they do not feel confident in classmate's editing ability.

Questions 11 and 12 investigated what kind of general writing experience students have in L1 and L2. As stated before, students mainly have had writing experience with entrance test practice sessions, journals, e-mails and chat (mobile phone or internet) in both L1 and L2. Though students have experience writing descriptive essays in L1 and L2 (L1 75% L2 55%), which are a part of BW; 48% of students stated they have had L1 argumentative writing experience, and only 17% of students have had argumentative L2

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writing experience. As for the critique, a very small percent of students have had experience with the critique essay in L2 (10%), but 57% of students claimed they have had critique writing experience in L1. During several of the focus groups, students stated they were unclear on the differences between the argumentative and critique essay, which could explain such statistics.

Finally, in BW computers are used both inside and outside of the classroom. During the think-aloud session, instructors stated they have students who are not familiar with using computers. This was shown in question 14 where 74% of students stated they want more computer training as a part of the BW course. Also, when asked what they would like to see changed in the course for the future, in addition to more computer training, it is predictable that students would answer that they would want more time and fewer assignments in the first semester of the course.

Table 1.1 Summary results of student questionnaires

- Students had 25-25 hours of study in L1 but less than 25 hours of instruction in L2 and that in terms of writing length their assignments were between 10 and 30 sentences.
- An overwhelming majority of students had no outside or specialized training in Japanese or English writing, but those that did reported that they felt this instruction helped them in transferring ability to the tertiary level.
- Percentage of students that rated the following as extremely important (4) in L1 writing

Original ideas	26%
Content	39%
Grammar/vocabulary	50%
Structure	40%

- Percentage of students that rated the following as extremely important (4) in L2 writing

Original ideas	27%
Content	32%
Grammar/vocabulary	33%
Structure	27%

- Students who stated the following were new for them at KUIS

Brainstorming	70%
The writing process	55%
Paragraphs	22%
Thesis statements	26%
Transitions	34%
Categorizing ideas	38%
Evaluating ideas	51%
Organizing ideas	36%
Peer editing groups	80%
Using computers to write	65%
Conversation about my writing	53%
Writing Drafts	31%
Using a writing textbook	39%

- Students were asked what kind of L1 writing experience they have had

Entrance test practice	72%
Journals or diaries	71%
E-mails	86%
Blogs	19%
Chat (kei-tai or internet)	70%
Poetry or creative writing	16%
Essays	39%

- Students were asked what kind of L2 writing experience they have had

Entrance test practice	65%
Journals or diaries	52%
E-mail	66%
Blogs	6%
Chat	46%

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Poetry or creative writing	6%
Essays	25%

- Students were asked what kind of essay writing experience they have had

	Japanese	English
Descriptive	<input type="checkbox"/> (75%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (55%)
Argumentative	<input type="checkbox"/> (48%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (17%)
Critique	<input type="checkbox"/> (57%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (10%)
Business	<input type="checkbox"/> (6%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (4%)
Biography	<input type="checkbox"/> (8%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (5%)
Compare and contrast	<input type="checkbox"/> (40%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (17%)
Summary	<input type="checkbox"/> (67%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (42%)
Historical	<input type="checkbox"/> (18%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (9%)
NONE		<input type="checkbox"/> (8%)

- Students were asked what they like to see change in the current BW class

	More	Less
Assignment length requirement	<input type="checkbox"/> (38%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (62%)
Time allowed to complete assignment	<input type="checkbox"/> (74%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (26%)
Feedback from peers	<input type="checkbox"/> (62%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (38%)
Feedback from teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> (54%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (46%)
Computer use	<input type="checkbox"/> (44%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (56%)
Computer training	<input type="checkbox"/> (74%)	<input type="checkbox"/> (26%)

Curricular Implementation

Looking at the results of the questionnaires, focus groups, and instructor think-aloud findings, one can see that instructor and student opinions about writing were at times in opposition. Students thought the BW course would concentrate and develop their grammatical writing skills similar to the style of instruction they had been exposed to previously. However, some university instructors wanted to disregard this grammar and structure, citing that students have been learning enough of this during their SHS years and there must be more of a focus on content and original ideas. Instructors must acknowledge

their students' backgrounds in terms of what kind of writing experience students possess as well as be in agreement on the scope and sequence of the writing course in order to build a bridge from SHS to tertiary studies.

Such a bridge will be made by having the first couple of weeks of BW dedicated to grammar by building on student experience. Students would start by talking about what they are going to write in group brainstorming sessions. This would be followed up by writing descriptive journal entries or e-mails that have a series of imbedded grammar focus tasks. Students would work together to not only correct but produce language for each other and monitored by the instructor. After this, students could be coached in the procedure and explained the justifications for activities such as peer editing. It is critical that every step of these first few weeks be in small group, as Japanese students tend to be very group-oriented, learning more effectively in a small group setting where individual differences of grammatical knowledge can be standardized in a new learning mode and atmosphere. While this is being done, the instructor must repeatedly set forth expectations in terms of content and ideas by example. Neither grammar nor content can be mastered in a year or two year writing course; these two skills must be concurrently developed, and, most importantly, be based upon previous writing experience. Instructors cannot expect first year students to absorb everything during their first few weeks at the university. By building on experience and known genres such as journals or e-mails at the beginning of the academic year, students can rely on their previous experience in the L1 and L2 writing genre but in a new atmosphere, with new expectations, thus making the transition smoother. Lastly, instructors must be careful to avoid overkill on journal writing as

sometimes students are required to write journals for other non-writing classes in addition to a writing class.

Making a bridge also applies for the teaching of new concepts. The writing process, brainstorming, thesis statements, and idea evaluation such as in peer feedback (revision and editing) were rated by students as being new and carry a certain amount of L1 socio-cultural ‘baggage’ which can have both positive and negative effects. Such positive L1 baggage that benefits peer feedback is consensus in social groups. A negative effect of L1 could be level of inter-group politeness which may view individual opinions about a peer’s writing as detrimental to the group member. Taking into these considerations, an instructor cannot expect to successfully introduce peer feedback in classes one or two times and expect students to understand and repeat what has been done as Tsui & Ng (2000) and Conner & Asenavage (1994) concluded in their research. It is better to ‘sprinkle’ these activities into a class rather than dedicating large amounts of time. As can be seen in figure 1.2, activities like peer revision need constant modeling, coaching, reviewing and practicing in order for students to not only see there purpose of the activity but develop understanding of its use and proper application in writing. Initially peer revising in class may be a slow process but once students are used to the procedure and process, it does not require much time as one would think.

Figure 1.2 Using peer revision in class

This is a process of using peer revision in a writing class (group or pair work) that I have used before in my writing classes. At first students were reluctant, as these activities are new, but once a routine was established students and rationale for using peer revision explained, students accepted and participated in this activity.

It is the instructor's responsibility to constantly monitor, model, repeat and give correction where it is needed in this process. The following activities can be used separately or together. The important factor is they must be repeated.

After showing students the video which demonstrates the process of peer interaction for giving feedback, more focus should be made upon the checklists which focus on aims of each writing unit.

1. Self-reflection time (10 minutes)

At this time students put their paper on their desk so that others can read it. The class is told to walk around and scan other student writings. Following this, student return to their desk and write several strengths and weaknesses in their own writing compared to their classmates.

2. Introduce peer revision (15 minutes)

Rationale must be given explain the benefits of peer to peer feedback such as: immediate feedback, negotiated meaning, direct communication with audience, social skills, development of class as better writers etc.

Show students the language used in peer editing and ask them to label the functions of the language used such as advising, narrating or commenting.

Watch a short video (created by instructor) that shows the process of peer revision (reader and writer talking calmly, asking questions, clarifying meaning, making changes). To make this more of a listening exercise while students are watching they could complete a worksheet that requires them to complete cloze exercises and

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multiple choice questions about language they hear on the video and see on their handout.

3. Explanation of content checklist (5-10 minutes)
A series of checklists should be made which focus on the unit content for writing e.g: unit one's content focuses on the creation of topic sentences, amount of details, organization, paragraph format, computer font and format; unit two, in addition to focusing on unit one content, checklist content includes conjunction use and relevancy of ideas.
 4. Peer revision with classmates (10-20 minutes per paper)
Using the peer revision language learned previously and checklist, students meet with a classmate to discuss their writing. During each session, one student's writing is discussed.
 5. Reflection of peer revision (5-10 minutes)
Students fill out a brief questionnaire to give feedback to the instructor on their opinions of the revision process
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One of the unexpected findings of the questionnaire was that students rated peer feedback slightly higher than teacher feedback. This could be either because they like to have feedback from a readily available resource (peers), or students feel more comfortable talking to their classmates than their teachers as they have never had the chance to talk about their writing. Another reason could be because students have been successfully coached during their peer editing process by their instructors. As stated before, the focus groups reported they wanted more feedback from instructors as they did not see value in feedback from peers. A conclusion could be made that while having students peer review, the process must be constantly coached, modeled and monitored in addition to the teacher giving feedback to the class

on common mistakes and errors present in the class.

In addition to the area of peer feedback, students also stated that using computers was a new experience, and they needed more instruction. When this was discussed in the Reading and Writing Skills Committee during semester one in a meeting with the Basic English Proficiency Project (BEPP) Committee, which is responsible for Freshmen English, a class that meets four times a week for 90 minutes, it was determined that BW instructors would be responsible for teaching computer skills. Members of the committees agreed to organize L1 instruction by colleagues in the Media Education Center (MEC) early in semester one. L1 instruction would be used for the sake of expediency and would require an hour for a refresher course with handouts to cover the basics of using a computer. Another option would be for the university to offer a series of workshops in Japanese, at the beginning of the semester during lunch to assist absolute beginners in the use of computers. Either way, responsibility for teaching computer skills must be clearly delegated and proper time be given to teach it.

As students reported, they had little experience writing an argumentative essay in L2, and, as writing an argumentative essay in Japanese is different than writing one in English in terms of directness, more time should be given for this portion of the BW course as this is a MAJOR new area of study for students. The concept of arguing in English and Japanese can be seen as ‘at odds’ with each other. This also has more serious implications as the English concept of argument leads into the English concept of a critique. Without a firm understanding of these two genres, how can a student be expected to write a

research report? As 57% of students reported they had L1 critique experience, but only 10% have L2 experience, much more time must be given to teaching this essay if BW is to prepare students for year two AW, which the supervising professor of the AW curriculum and AW instructors agreed as a necessary skill that students need before entering the advanced writing course.

Suggestions for the future

Looking at the teaching of writing in terms of developmental psychology, if a course is to be seen as effective in the eyes of the students, a course must take into consideration their previous experience in order to help foster transference and constantly seek to expand an individual's 'Zone of Proximal Development' in L1 and L2 (Vygotsky 1978). Under the current system, students spend their first semester writing multiple drafts of five to six descriptive paragraphs. Then, at the beginning of semester two, students have three to five weeks for making the transfer to writing a descriptive essay. Following this, five weeks are dedicated to teaching the argumentative essay, and the remainder of the time can either be spent briefly teaching the critique essay or giving students strategies for taking the KEPT test.

One cannot ignore the fact that the process of teaching the argumentative and critique essays is not just a matter of teaching the format, structure, grammar, transitions etc, it is teaching an understanding of a new way of thinking, a new psychology paradigm. Students cannot possibly develop their understanding of this process in a mere five weeks. The more time spent on teaching the argumentative and critique essay, the better. A great way to do so would be through genre-analysis. Students are given an example of the genre

of writing and in groups deconstruct it into outline format. Once this has been completed students are instructed to get ideas and organize them into an outline of an essay. This approach to teaching writing developing students' awareness of the genre and sharpens their critical understanding of the paragraph or essay. By developing these critical thinking skills students can develop their understanding of what constitutes a valid argument or criticism.

In order to make the curriculum more streamlined and efficient in the teaching of writing, students would finish the descriptive writing (paragraph and essay) during semester one, as this would be a more natural progression of difficulty in the course. Then during semester two, there would be no need for students to write descriptive paragraphs, and they could move on to higher level writing tasks. Not only have students been writing descriptive paragraphs throughout the first semester, they have had experience with this writing genre in senior high school. Less time should be spent on description, and more time should be spent adequately teaching the argumentative and critique essay to not only better prepare students for AW, but also for beyond.

As an instructor of writing, not only grammar, structure and format of writing must taught but also the abstract concepts such as making a good argument, logic and reasoning. To dwell on one type of writing such as description, in hope that grammatical accuracy will develop, is an ineffective approach to developing students as writers. It is an instructor's duty to expose students to as many different genres of writing as possible in order for students to practice their writing.

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Involving peer feedback in writing will make the learning of writing reflective as well as collaborative, which is essential in the learning context of Japan. Students can use their individual strengths and experience to assist their classmates to become stronger writers. At first, students may be reluctant to participate in such an activity, but through coaching, modeling and repetition, they can develop a better understanding of the process and value of peer revision and editing. This is not to say that the instructor should solely rely on peer revision or editing as means of feedback, but keep a balance between instructor and peer feedback.

Lastly, as I found out first hand during the instructor think-aloud sessions, writing and the teaching of writing is a very personal issue for those involved. We all have different definitions of what is good writing. To some, the ideas are the most important; to others, it is how the ideas are put together and presented in a logical recognizable format. Every instructor has his/her own style and method of teaching. Every student has his/her own style of using writing. As instructors, our mission must focus on expanding a student's usage of writing and get students to write as much as possible. If one wants to become a better speaker, one practices speaking as so is true with writing, and the old saying goes, 'practice makes perfect'.

APPENDIX 1

Survey for KUIS year one writing students

Survey focus: How was the transition from SHS to KUIS in terms of writing readiness and experience?

1) Do you enjoy writing?

1-----2-----3-----4
Not at all a little much very much

2) Overall, how was your transition from senior high school to university writing class?

1-----2-----3-----4
Very Difficult Difficult Easy Very easy

3) To what extent was your High School writing experienced utilized in Basic writing?

1-----2-----3-----4
Not at all a little much very much

4) How much writing instruction in Japanese did you receive in SHS year three?

- 1) 10-25 hours
- 2) 25-45 hours
- 3) 45-75 hours
- 4) 100 hours plus

5) How much writing instruction in English did you receive in SHS year three?

- 1) 10-25 hours
- 2) 25-45 hours
- 3) 45-75 hours
- 4) 100 hours plus

6) How would you describe your SHS writing in terms of length?

- 1) short (10 sentences)
- 2) medium (30 sentences)

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- 3) long (60 sentences)
- 4) very long (90+ sentences)

7) Before attending KUIS did you receive any extra-curricular instruction in Japanese or English writing (*Juku, eikaiwa, bukatsu*)

1-----2-----3-----4
None 5-10 hrs 10-20 hrs 20+ hrs

Do you think this experience helped you?

- Yes
- No

8) Rate the importance of the following in your Japanese SHS writing class?

(1= not important 4=extremely important)

Original ideas 1-----2-----3-----4
Content 1-----2-----3-----4
Grammar and vocab 1-----2-----3-----4
Structure 1-----2-----3-----4

9) Rate the importance of the following in your English SHS writing class?

(1= not important 4=extremely important)

Original ideas 1-----2-----3-----4
Content 1-----2-----3-----4
Grammar and vocab 1-----2-----3-----4
Structure 1-----2-----3-----4

10) Check which of the following were new for you at KUIS?

- brainstorming ideas
- the writing process
- paragraphs
- thesis statements
- transitions
- categorizing ideas
- evaluating ideas
- organizing ideas
- peer editing groups
- using computers to write

- conversation my about writing
- writing drafts
- using a writing textbook

11) What kind of **JAPANESE** writing experience do you have?

- Entrance test practice
- Journals or diaries
- e-mail
- Blogs
- Chat (kei-tai or internet)
- Poetry or creative writing
- Essays

12) What kind of **ENGLISH** writing experience do you have?

- Entrance test practice
- Journals or diaries
- e-mail
- Blogs
- Chat (mobile phone or internet)
- Poetry or creative writing
- Essays

13) What kind of essay writing experience do you have?

	Japanese	English
Descriptive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Argumentative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Critique	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compare and contrast	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
NONE		<input type="checkbox"/>

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14) If you could change something about basic writing what would it be?

	More	Less
Assignment length requirement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time allowed to complete assignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feedback from peers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feedback from teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX 2

Please help us improve Basic Writing for next year by discussing your opinions about the following questions for the next 30 minutes.

Say whatever you want, you can speak in English or Japanese, which ever you feel comfortable with.

Thank you!

1. Do you feel your high school writing lessons helped you prepare for KUIS?
2. What kind of writing did you do during high school? For example...?
3. Did you have a lot of writing instruction during high school?
4. What activities were new for you in BW (e.g. peer editing, the writing process, brainstorming, outlining, using computers etc)

5. What was a difficult area for you with the BW course?
6. Do you find it useful to look at your classmates work and offer suggestions?
7. Do you need more time for writing assignments?
8. What would you like to change in the BW course?
9. Anything else...

APPENDIX 3

Report on Basic Writing Teacher's think-aloud session

5/24/06

Members of the Basic Writing curriculum design sub-committee met with Basic Writing teachers and the ELI research supervisor Dr. Fenton-Smith to discuss the BW curriculum and students progress throughout semester one and the potential starting point for the curriculum for semester two.

It was agreed that students need to make the move from paragraphs to essays and start writing essays during semester two as some higher level sections are bored with the standard textbook descriptive paragraphs. It was suggested that these sections start writing descriptive essays at the end of semester one. This was a point of contention though as some teachers felt some students still

do not understand the principles of grammar or writing a complex sentence, giving justifications and sufficient details.

It was also determined that some classes may not be able to complete all six units of the textbook because of some teachers using three weeks to teach a unit and others completing a unit in two weeks.

Teachers also discussed the use of computers in the classroom. As some instructors are using the on-line course delivery program 'Moodle' as well as having students write assignments using computers, the instruction of this process takes much time for a class that meets once a week for 90 minutes. In opposition to this concern, several instructors saw no reason to teach or use computers in class.

A discussion arose as to what was more important to teach in basic writing, grammar or the process of getting ideas on to the paper. A conclusion was reached that though the focus of the class should not be grammar, it should still be taught because of student shortcomings and inabilities in this field. Original content should also be an emphasis, as students are used to studying grammar from junior high school, several instructors stated that it is more critical for students to focus on content and ideas.

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