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English Writing in the Micronesian Context

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English Writing in the Micronesian Context 1

English Writing in the Micronesian Context

Sylvia Henry

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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IPP Advisor: Susan Barduhn

English Writing in the Micronesian Context 2

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Abstract

How and what do students in EN 220, Writing for Teachers class, think when they write? This paper examines students' understanding of the differences between oral and written discourse, students' thought processes and how the processes correlate to their writing. The data were collected through actual classroom observations, surveys, and two essays, one written before the class and one at the end the semester. How and what Micronesian students think links to how and what they write. Understanding how and what students think can help teachers in the Micronesian context develop and implement preventive teaching strategies for students to keep their mistakes from becoming errors.

ERIC Descriptors

Language Teachers.

Oral Discourse.

Written Discourse.

Writing Instruction.

First-Order Thinking.

Second-Order Thinking.

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Introduction

The College of Micronesia-FSM (COM-FSM) is the only institution of higher learning in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). It started in 1963 when the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and the University of Hawaii created the Micronesian Teacher Education Center (MTEC) to provide in-service teacher training. MTEC began offering a pre-service associate of science degree program in teacher education. MTEC became Community College of Micronesia (CCM) and later COM-FSM. COM-FSM is the only institution of higher learning in the nation and it is where most high school graduates seek their college education. COM-FSM awards associate degrees to students who complete a program of study and it awards certificates of achievement in different areas including Teacher Preparation- Elementary.

For a number of years, instructors in the Education Division at COM-FSM have been concerned about the writing performances of students in the education courses. Students wrote an essay that was scored by two Education Division faculty using the College of Micronesia Entrance Test (COMET) rubric. Records of writing error patterns have been kept over the past few semesters. The records of error pattern and the results of the essays clearly showed a need for strengthening the areas of syntax and vocabulary. As a result, a course entitled EN 220, Improving Syntax and Vocabulary, Writing for Teachers, was created.

The Context

I have been fortunate to be the instructor for this course for the past 4 semesters, where I interacted with students and developed a learning relationship. In the past semesters, I have learned more from the students and come to understand how they think and write. Students think and write in Micronesian. Micronesian culture is more oral than written. Most things are passed

down from each generation orally. Students at COM-FSM are all Micronesians who speak English as a second or third language.

The Class

This course was designed to improve the writing skills of elementary teachers through competencies in the correct use of syntax and vocabulary in written work directly related to the field of elementary education. Students write a 250-word essay when they seek entry into the Third Year Certificate Program in Teacher Preparation at COM-FSM. Students with scores of 15-19 or an individual score of three (3) in the Syntax and/or Vocabulary are placed EN 220.

The class is held three hours a week in a well-ventilated classroom. The objectives of the course are as follows.

1. The student will be able to use parts of speech to write complete sentences correctly in lesson plans, worksheets for elementary students, journal entries, reflection papers, answers to essay questions, and essays.
2. The student will be able to apply capitalization and punctuation rules correctly in lesson plans, worksheets for elementary students, journal entries, reflection papers, answers to essay questions, and essays.
3. The student will be able to use appropriate vocabulary and spell words correctly in lesson plans, worksheets for elementary students, journal entries, reflection papers, answers to essay questions, and essays.
4. The student will be able to use formal speech in lesson plans, worksheets for elementary students, journal entries, reflection papers, answers to essay questions, and essays.

5. The student will be able to use reference helps including the dictionary and thesaurus (both in print and electronic forms) and the spell-check and grammar-check functions in word processing programs.

The role of the student is to enroll and pass the course in order to continue in the Third Year Certificate program in Teacher Preparation - Elementary. In order to do that they must write an essay and get a score of at least 20 or better. I encourage students to look at what others write, how they write, and be open minded and willing to learn from others. I believe students learn more if they take initiative to seek knowledge and take charge of their learning. I believe students are capable of learning on their own even though they expect teachers to teach them everything. I believe students can and will retain information when they discover information on their own. Therefore, I encourage students to be proactive in their learning by always seeking out other sources to verify and supplement their learning.

The Students

The students in EN 220 are between the ages of 22-32 who plan to teach in Micronesia. They had taken many English courses and completed at least two expository writing courses before they were enrolled in EN 220. They can speak English. The students know and understand the different parts of speech and punctuation marks. They can create sentences, construct paragraphs, and essays. They know how to use different references both electronic and paper. If they can write, then why are they placed in the class and what is my role to help them achieve their goal? They can read, write and communicate in English.

The Teacher's Role

My role in this process is to help the students achieve their goal, which is to pass the course by learning from the subject, and not from the teacher, because the subject is the center of our pedagogical circle. In this particular circle both the teacher and the students share a common goal and that is to learn from the subject. In doing so I introduce to the classes the notion of the community of truth described by Parker Palmer (2007). Palmer illustrated that in a community of truth, there are no pristine objects of knowledge and no ultimate authority. In a community of truth teacher and students are both knowledgeable learners learning from the subject. I emphasized that I too am a learner and will be learning along with the students. In order for this community of truth to succeed, members of the community must focus on the subject. Only then will the relationship in a community of truth begin to share observations and interpretations, correcting and complementing each other.

Before the students begin writing, they must know and understand the language. It is my role to remind students of the difference between speaking and writing. It is my role to remind the students to think and write in English and not their own languages. I must ensure that course objectives are covered and met. It is crucial that I provide language and engage students to learn and meet the objectives of the course. It is my responsibility to make learning meaningful for the students by providing opportunities and activities to practice, produce, and use appropriate language necessary for the course.

The Literature review

Elbow (1986) described first-order thinking as intuitive and creative. It does not strive for conscious direction or control, and it is used when we write fast without censoring. Second-order thinking is conscious, directed, controlled thinking where we steer and carefully choose what to write and how to write. Unlike first-order thinking, second-order thinking is committed to accuracy and strives for logic and control. Raimes (1991) has said that writing provides a more suitable setting for teachers to help students correct their errors in English. Raimes went on to say we could write our ideas, then look at them, reflect, and edit. Students write, and when they make mistakes they correct them. Writing allows to students to put their thoughts forward where they can review and edit if need. Allowing students to write freely increases their fluency. Ferris (1999) explained that it would be unreasonable to abolish correction. given the present state of knowledge, and that further research is needed to focus on which types of errors are more amenable to which types of error correction. Ferris made the distinction between "treatable" and "untreatable" ones: the former occurs in "a patterned, rule-governed way" and includes problems with verb tense or form, subject-verb agreement, run-ons, noun endings, articles, and pronouns; while the latter includes a variety of lexical errors, problems with word order and sentence structure, including missing and unnecessary words. Mehta and Al-Mahrooqi (2015), after conducting a study, concluded that continuous practice both oral and written provided students opportunities to develop their critical thinking skills as they incorporated critical ideas in their writing. There is no single best way to think and write, and mastering these two may come in different ways.

Method

The participants of this research project included 11 students who enrolled in EN 220, Writing for Teachers, at the College of Micronesia-FSM in the spring 2015 semester, and one teacher. The participants consisted of 5 male and 6 female aged between 22 and 34, with varying first languages (Pohnpeian, Yapese and Chuukese). The students speak their native languages everywhere and all the time even in the classrooms if the teacher is not paying attention. The Pohnpeian students grew up in Pohnpei and have never left Pohnpei. The Yapese and the Chuukese students left their islands to attend college in Pohnpei. These students had been in Pohnpei studying ranging from one to three years. All eleven students were enrolled in the Pre-Teacher Preparation program and they all had plans to become teachers back in their own states. At their own request, aliases are used: Myneard, Jesshain, Belihelg, Badwhenl, Erseifam, Maurleta, Brenpele, Richpetr, Joeysio, Lizastep, and Melowere. Table 1 indicates the students' age, gender, first language and state of origin.

Table 1
Participants Personal Information

| Names | Age | Gender | First Language | State of Origin |
|----------|-----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Myneard | 24 | M | Pohnpeian | Pohnpei |
| Jesshain | 32 | F | Pohnpeian | Pohnpei |
| Belihelg | 25 | F | Chuukese | Chuuk |
| Badwhenl | 24 | M | Pohnpeian | Pohnpei |
| Erseifam | 34 | F | Pohnpeian | Pohnpei |
| Maurleta | 26 | F | Yapese | Yap |
| Brenpele | 27 | F | Pohnpeian | Pohnpei |
| Richpetr | 22 | M | Chuukese | Chuuk |
| Joeysio | 23 | M | Pohnpeian | Pohnpei |
| Lizastep | 24 | M | Chuukese | Chuuk |
| Melowere | 22 | F | Yapese | Yap |

The teacher of the course is a 37 year old female from the island of Pohnpei. She is a novice teacher with a bachelor's degree in elementary education and 5 years of teaching experience. Her experience included teaching vernacular reading, writing, and math to 2nd grades, teaching English reading and writing to 6th graders, and teaching foundations courses in education to college students. The teacher's first language is Pohnpeian and her second language is English.

Data Collection

First Essay

The participants were placed in the course based on an essay they each wrote as part of the admissions requirement for the Third Year Certificate Program in Teacher Preparation – Elementary (TYC). The participants were given a topic to write a 250-word essay. Two faculty members read and graded the essays using the College of Micronesia Entrance Test (COMET) rubric. Any essay that scores between 15 and 20 is placed in EN220 with an understanding that if students pass the course with a grade of C or better he or she can be admitted in the TYC Program. Table 2 shows the scores for each of the essays. All essays were between 15 and 20.

Table 2

Participant and Total Essay Scores

| Names | Essay scores |
|----------|--------------|
| Joeyseio | 15 |
| Lizastep | 15 |
| Myneard | 16 |
| Belihelg | 16 |
| Maurleta | 16 |
| Brenpele | 16 |
| Richpetr | 17 |
| Melowere | 17 |
| Jesshain | 19 |
| Badwhenl | 19 |
| Erseifam | 19 |

Table 3 shows the breakdown of students' scores in different categories based on the COMET rubric. The sum from all the different categories make up the total points reflected in Table 2. The COMET rubric focuses on 5 categories (Syntax, Vocabulary, Organization, Cohesion, and Organization). The scores for each category ranged from 5-0 with 5 being the highest.

Under the syntax category, 5 means that grammar and word order are nearly perfect; 4 means some errors of grammar or word order occurs but communication is not impaired; 3 is described as errors of grammar or word order are fairly frequent and occasional re-reading is necessary for full comprehension; 2 and 1 show that there are errors of grammar and word order, with the latter requiring effort of interpretation from the reader; 0 means errors of grammar or word order are so severe that comprehension is virtually impossible.

The vocabulary section is described as wide, with correctly used vocabulary being the highest. The second rating is described as occasionally using inappropriate terms or relying on circumlocution; however, expression of ideas is not impaired. The third means students use wrong or inappropriate words fairly frequently and expression of ideas may be limited because of inadequate vocabulary. The next one means students' limited vocabulary and frequent errors clearly hinder their expression of ideas. The lowest score means students' vocabulary is so limited and so frequently misused that readers must often rely on their own interpretation.

The organization section is described with extremely organized being the highest; 4 means materials are fairly organized and links could occasionally be clearer but communication is not impaired; 3 points is described as some lack of organization and re-reading is required for clarification of ideas; 2 points means there is little or no attempt at connectivity but the reader

can deduce some organization. When individual ideas may be clear, but connection is very difficult to deduce between them, the score is 1. The lowest score under organization is described as lack of organization therefore communication is seriously impaired.

The fourth section rates the cohesion of essays. Five points is given when essays show strong cohesion with smooth transitions both within and between paragraphs; 4 points goes to any essay with occasional lack of consistency in choice of cohesive structures and vocabulary but overall ease of communication not impaired; 3 points is assigned when some cohesive structures or vocabulary items are noticeably inappropriate to general style. The lowest points of 1 and 0 are described as completely inappropriate or misused cohesive structures or vocabulary items that cause impossible communication.

The content section of the rubric is described as 5 being full and complete. The next highest score 4 is described as relevant and adequate to the task; 3 means the essay answers the task set for the most parts, even though there may be some gaps or redundant information; 2 means the essay bears limited relevance to the topic with possibly major gaps in treatment of topic and/or pointless repetition. Any essay that shows no evidence of assigned task gets a zero.

Table 3

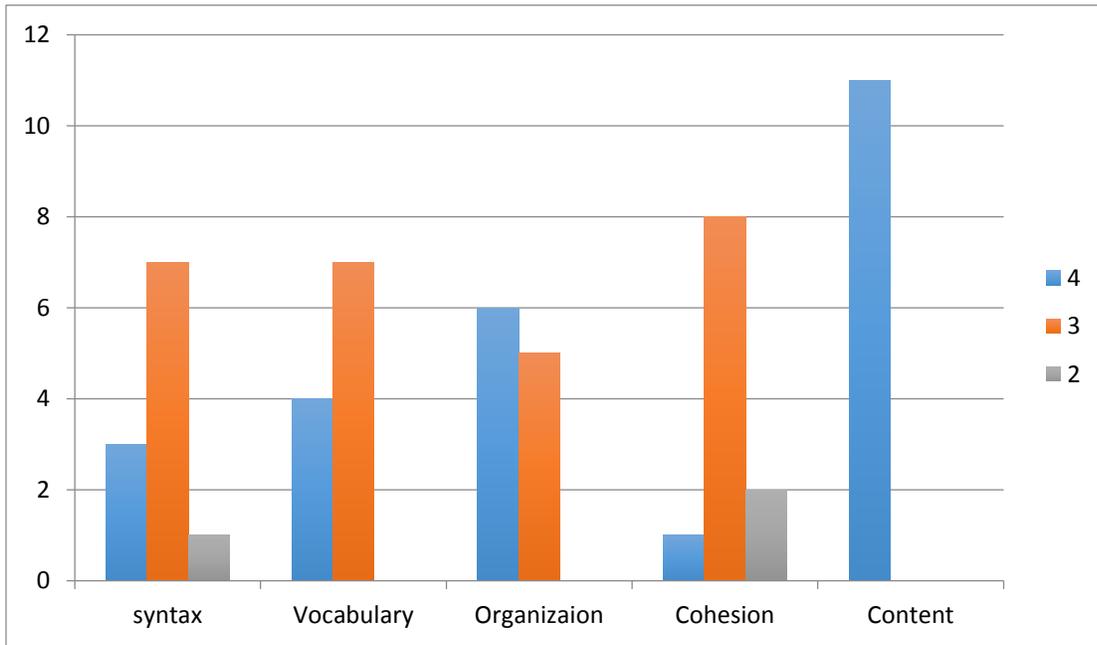
Students' First Essays Score Distribution

| Names | Syntax | Vocabulary | Organization | Cohesion | Content |
|----------|--------|------------|--------------|----------|---------|
| Myneard | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Jesshain | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Belihelg | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Badwhenl | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Erseifam | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Maurleta | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Brenpele | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Richpetr | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Joeyseio | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Lizastep | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 |

Melowere 3 3 4 3 4

Chart 1

Participants' Essays Score Distribution



First Essay Results

As Table 3 shows, all 11 essays were scored with 4 on the content. Results further show that two essays were scored with 2 under cohesion and one was scored 2 under syntax. Table 1 reveals that many 3s were given in the first four categories (syntax, vocabulary, organization, cohesion and content). All the 5 categories had 4s and the content category. There were no other ratings besides 4.

Survey

At the beginning of the semester, a survey was given to the students to find out what they expected from the class and to determine the type of feedback they would prefer to get from the teacher. The survey given included two questions. The first item asked students to state what

they expected to learn or accomplish at the end of the semester. The second item asked students to indicate what type of feedback they would prefer to get on their essays. They were to choose whether they want their teacher to identify and mark all of their mistakes, some of their mistakes, or none at all.

Survey Results

On question one, eleven students stated expectations of passing the course in order to proceed in TYC program. Two students stated expectation of improving their writing skills. On question two, all eleven students picked the first option, which calls for the teacher to indicate and mark all mistakes made on any of the students' work.

Table 4
Participants' Response to Amounts of Feedback

| Options | Yes | No |
|------------------|-----|----|
| Mark All Errors | 16 | 0 |
| Mark Some Errors | 0 | 0 |
| Mark None | 0 | 0 |

Class Observation

In order to collect the classroom observation data concerning types of errors, frequency, and repair, I observed the EN 220 class for the first 4 weeks of the semester. The class meets for an hour and thirty minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 16 weeks. At the end of every class on Tuesdays, I collect students written assignments and look for mistakes and on a separate sheet of paper, I write the type of mistake and put a tally mark every time a similar mistake occur. This was a very simple chart which I took to keep a record of the mistakes made by the whole class

and not the individual student. The data was collected on four separate days where students wrote about 4 different topics.

Students write anything for 30 minutes on Tuesdays. After the first 30 minutes of class, students exchange papers with their classmates to review, provide feedback, and edit. I read each paper, and whenever I see a mistake, I write a description of the mistake on a separate piece of paper. In any instance that I come across a similar mistake on a separate assignment, I add a tally mark next to the description and do the same for all assignments. The frequent mistakes recorded on the first day were spelling mistakes and missing capital letters. The second and third set of data included missing punctuation, word choice and word order, verb tense, missing verb, fragments, run on sentences, and missing articles.

Table 5

Types of Mistakes and Frequency

| Mistakes | 1/20/2015 | 1/17/2015 | 2/3/2015 | 2/10/2015 |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Spelling | 27 | 3 | 1 | |
| Missing capitals | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Missing comma | | 2 | | |
| Missing punctuation | | 5 | | |
| Word choice | | 19 | 4 | 3 |
| Verb tense | | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| Missing verb | | 2 | 2 | |
| Fragment | | 4 | 2 | |
| Missing s | | 3 | | |
| Missing article | | 5 | | 1 |
| Run-on | | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Missing articles | | | | 3 |

Class Observation Results

On the first day, on 11 written assignments, there were a total of 27 spelling mistakes and 2 missing capital letters. On the second day, more kinds of mistakes were found in the students'

writing and there were 19 word choice mistakes. The third set of data revealed similar mistakes occurred. Students continued to make verb tense mistakes. On the fourth day, data showed 3 mistakes concerning word choice and six relating to verb tense.

Final Essay

The students wrote a final essay at the end of the semester. They were placed in a well-ventilated classroom. The essay has to have at least 250 words. It should have an introduction paragraph, a conclusion paragraph and at least 3 supporting paragraphs. The students had two hours to write the essay and were given extra sheets of paper when they asked. The teacher graded the essays using the COMET rubric.

Final Essay Results

Table 6 shows the scores for each student under each category on the COMET rubric. One student did not write the final essay because he stopped coming to classes after week 8. The remaining 10 students wrote the final essay and their essays were graded and recorded. Table 7 shows scores on the first essay students wrote as part of the application process into the TYC program, and the final score for the essay students wrote at the end of the semester.

Table 6
Final Essay Score Distribution

| Students | Syntax | Vocabulary | Organization | Cohesion | Content | |
|----------|--------|------------|--------------|----------|---------|----|
| Myneard | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Jesshain | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 24 |
| Belihelg | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 14 |
| Badwhenl | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 |
| Erseifam | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 23 |
| Maurleta | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 |
| Brenpele | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 22 |
| Richpetr | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 16 |
| Joeyseio | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 22 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Lizastep | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 22 |
| Melowere | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 23 |

Table 7
Pre/Post Essay Distribution Scores

| Students | Syntax | | Vocabulary | | Organization | | Cohesion | | Content | |
|----------|--------|------|------------|------|--------------|------|----------|------|---------|------|
| | Pre | Post | Pre | Post | Pre | Post | Pre | Post | Pre | Post |
| Myneard | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Jesshain | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Belihelg | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Badwhenl | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Erseifam | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Maurleta | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Brenpele | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Richpetr | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Joeyseio | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Lizastep | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Melowere | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 |

Discussion

The scores given on the first essay and the last essay are not reliable. The first essays were read and scored by two education division faculty members. However, instead of getting two scores, there was only one score provided. There was no indication of the scores being based on average scores provided by the two faculty members. Inter-rater reliability was not established between the two faculty members that read the first essays. The teacher of the course read and scored the final essays. The readers of the essays were inconsistent and therefore the pre- and post scores are not reliable. The post scores compared with the pre- scores show improvement for 8 students. Results also show that one student maintained the scores on both the pre- and post essays score while another student's final score was less than the first score.

The instrument used to rate the essays was not a reliable tool. The descriptions under each category on the rubric were not consistent. For example, under the syntax category, the highest rating describes an essay to be nearly perfect and the second highest score describes an essay to have some grammar and word order errors but communication is not impaired. The third rating described an essay that shows frequent grammar and word order errors and re-reading on the reader's part. The first parts of the descriptions were objectively stated but the second part of the descriptions allowed readers to be subjective. The second part of the descriptions allowed readers to use their own interpretations, and interpretations vary depending on the readers' understanding of the writer's thinking and language.

As indicated in Table 4, eleven students wanted the teacher to mark every mistake they made on all of their writing. Students shared in class discussions that they believe they learn more when teachers correct their mistakes and they strongly preferred that their teacher correct all their mistakes. They wanted the teacher to correct all their mistakes. However, the teacher selected only 4 exercises, identified all the mistakes and provided explicit corrective feedback. Information gathered from the four selected exercises was adequate to determine the type of mistakes students make in writing.

The students make different kinds of mistakes, as recorded on Table 5. As indicated on Table 5, the mistakes identified on the first day were mostly spelling. Students showed signs of frustration when the teacher assigned a task to write for thirty minutes. The first exercise required students to write words only. Students wrote as many words as they could in thirty minutes. Because it was timed, students wrote as fast as they could. On the second day, the data shows students made more mistakes on word choice and word order. When students translate their thoughts to English by way of writing, their translation are verbatim. They translate to

English what they would say in their own language. The order of words in many Micronesian languages is different from English. For example, in the English language adjectives come before the noun in a phrase. In Micronesian languages the noun comes before adjectives. Students make many mistakes in choices of English words in their writing that are not necessarily wrong, but rather inappropriate. For example, one student wrote that there were no lights in the down. The word down is an English word and it was spelled right. The word's usage in the sentence was not right. Students make many word choice mistakes and word order mistakes when they write due to their limited vocabulary. Because students translate their thoughts from their first languages to English, word for word, they use inappropriate terms. Students write in English what they would say in their own native languages.

The data collected on the other two days showed similar mistakes, however less frequent than previous records. The second, third and fourth days that data was collected, students were given 10 minutes to review and edit their work. After they review their writing, they switched papers with their peers. Students had to read and provide feedback to each other. In this process, students provided more feedback to clarify ideas but not so much on correcting mistakes. This activity was helpful because it allowed students to look at how their peers write and apply to their own writing. It was helpful for students when their peers asked for clarification of ideas because it forces students to rewrite their ideas. The students strongly prefer the teacher to identify, mark, and correct all their mistakes. Much research supports students' preferences for the teacher's corrective feedback, and the teacher agrees that students learn more when teachers correct their mistakes. The teacher also agrees that students must learn to identify and correct their own mistakes, and so the teacher reduces the amount of correction in order to encourage

students to be more responsible for their own writing. It is important that students can identify and correct their own mistakes and not rely on the teacher for editing.

Eleven students enrolled in the course and 8 passed with a C or better. Three students did not pass because their grades were lower than a C. One student stopped attending class and missed the final essay. The other two students' overall points for the class were below C and their final essays were below 20.

Writing to Learn

To meet the objectives of the course, students had to participate and complete exercises and assignments to show they are able to use parts of speech to write complete sentences correctly. Students had to apply capitalization rules and punctuation rules correctly in their writing. Students had to use appropriate vocabulary in their writing. Students had to use formal speech in their writing and show they know how to use references such as dictionaries and thesauruses.

Writing for Fun

When students were asked to write on the first day, they all shared frustration at not knowing what to write. Instead of requiring them to write complete sentences, they write words. The first few weeks were spent writing single words, then later combining words to form phrases. After writing phrases, students then start writing sentences and later paragraphs. This process helps students to use what they know to generate text to use, and thus helps students realize they do know and do have something to write. This progression allowed students to make

connections. This process of writing allows students to express their minds in any way they see appropriate. There are no restrictions, but just to write what comes to their minds.

Daily Plan

The classes were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays for one hour and thirty minutes starting at 12:30 p.m. At the beginning of the semester, the students and I came up with our plan for the class. Tuesday is free writing. Students write about anything for thirty minutes. After the first thirty minutes, they spend 10 minutes to check their own work and edit if needed. Then they give it to another student in the class to review and provide feedback.

On Thursdays, different grammar points are discussed in class, followed by different examples, before the students work on follow up activities covering each topic. Students spend half the class period on Thursdays revising their writing assignments from Tuesday to incorporate grammar points covered on that day. After each session on Thursday, students submit their written materials for review and feedback.

Rationale for Set Schedule

Eleven of the students at the beginning of the semester indicated that writing is their least favorite subject. As their teacher, I needed to come up with ways to change the students' perception of the class. To do so, I allowed the students to choose their own topics to write about. I also allowed students to write however they saw fit. During the first thirty minutes, the students wrote words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs relating to the topics. Free writing was emphasized at the time to allow students to be creative and use first-order thinking in this process. This allowed students to build their self-confidence in their own ability to write. Students utilize first-order thinking in free-writing. Criticism is held off to allow the students to

be creative. On Thursday when certain grammar points were discussed, students were asked to generate text more carefully. This forces students to use second-order thinking and think critically as to how and why the text they generate is the way it is.

Implications for the Teacher

In order for the students to improve their writing skills, the teacher must help students differentiate between speaking and writing. Teachers should include activities to help students learn and explore similarities and differences between speaking, writing, speech, text, written and oral discourse.

Students have different needs and teachers must conduct a thorough assessment to better understand and know the students' needs. This knowledge will allow the teacher to provide appropriate learning activities that will help the students improve. Teachers should diversify activities to better address needs of all students.

Teachers must be aware of the students' culture in order to understand how students think and write. Such understanding will help teachers understand students' perspectives and eliminate frustrations in trying to make sense of students' writing. However, it is important to help students improve their writing.

Teachers must know how to diagnose mistakes correctly. It is essential that teachers' diagnosis of mistakes is correct in order for the right prescription to be applied. Teachers must know what the mistakes are in order to determine and select kinds of learning activities that will help students correct their mistakes and keep their mistakes from becoming errors. Teachers

must be selective of what mistakes to correct and encourage students to correct their own mistakes. For what it is worth, this motivates students to write.

Teachers must encourage students to write despite their fears of making mistakes. One thing that teachers must remind students is that text can be edited. Writing is learned through practice; therefore, teachers should remind students that they can learn from their mistakes. Teachers must train students to self-edit. Teachers must encourage student to write, review and revise. Shifting the focus from mistakes to what is correct may boost students' motivation to practice and learn writing.

The Future

I hope I will be assigned to teach this class and other language courses again in the future because this research has helped me identify what I need in order to improve in my teaching. I need to learn more about the types of mistakes students make and seek clarification from students, colleagues, and other experts on why students make such mistakes. I need to learn how to correct the different types of mistakes students make and know how to explain the corrections to the students. Though I am not a grammarian, I believe I am learning and can learn more to better help students in the future. This research also helped me discover ways to improve the course and delivery of lessons. I will modify the course outline to make the course a requirement for all students seeking admissions to the TYC program, and not only some. I will allow students to explore differences between speaking and writing. I will have to shift the focus from identifying mistakes to identifying the correct text and building on to students' schema. I hope this shift of focus will help motivate students to write. I hope I can ask students to write more outside of class because I believe the more students practice to write, the more they will learn. It

is dangerous to ask students to write without the supervision of a teacher because many tend to write an essay and then copy and paste information from the web. Many students spend more hours on the internet while on campus because internet access is free. I hope I can turn their dedication to the internet to my benefit and use it to help students practice writing. I have been considering different ways to incorporate the use of the internet to keep students motivated to write.

Overall this research has forced me to face my own fear and taught me there is no single way to think and write. Writing is not my best subject. Like my students, I always say to myself that I don't know what to write and I don't know how to write. I avoid writing and try to get away from writing every time I can. This research has also taught me that it is important to use teaching methods that are appropriate for my context, but that doesn't mean that I should lower the standards that I expect of students.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to this research, which should be considered. The first assumption of the teacher is that students are not able to write. The data discredits the teacher assumptions. Student can write. They can write in English; however, students write in English what they would say in their own native languages. Another limitation for the research is that the identification of mistakes was inconsistent and insufficient. The data recorded the types of mistakes and their frequency, but no specific examples were noted for comparison. There was no data collected on activities done Thursday to validate students' transfer of learning in their writing and corroborate students' critical thinking skills and applications in their writing.

Conclusion

This study concludes that students in the Micronesian context think in their own languages and translate their thoughts into English. They write as they would speak. They write in English what they would say in their own native languages. Students need to know the difference between writing and speaking. Speaking is natural, less formal, and less structured. Speaking does not require or use complete sentences and correct grammar. Familiar vocabulary is used in speaking. Writing is the opposite. Writing is structured. In writing, certain rules apply. For example, sentences must be complete, grammatically correct and with correct punctuation marks. Punctuation marks represent tone of voice in speaking. Micronesian students acquired their language and speech from their surroundings. Micronesian students learn vernacular language arts in the public school systems from kindergarten to third grade. At the third grade, level students are expected to write 5 sentences that show the use of descriptive language to clarify ideas. Vernacular writing and reading in the classrooms stops at grade three. After third grade, the public schools in Micronesia switch to English reading and writing. Micronesians students start to learn English reading and writing as early as third grade. It would take at least 14 years of English reading and writing for the students to participate in this study. Where is the disconnect? Why are students not meeting the expected standards required of students to perform in writing?

Students are not separating speaking from writing. The Micronesian culture contributes to this disconnect in two ways. First, in Micronesian culture, writing is secondary to speaking. Information is passed down from one generation to another through word of mouth. Stories, legends, myths are passed down orally. Speech is dominant over writing. The second cultural contribution can be seen in their writing and the feedback they give others.

Students have limited access to materials written in their vernacular languages. Students have very little exposure to reading and writing in their own native languages. Students have the Bible written in their native languages along with a few stories written for elementary school children. If students had more exposure to reading and writing in their native languages, they might determine the difference between speaking and writing.

There are few experiences in life that are rewarding for teachers. Every day brings a new challenge and an opportunity to help students. I believe teachers must try to understand the students' culture and their languages to better provide students what they need. Micronesian students, like all English as a Foreign Language students, benefit from seeing, hearing and doing; therefore, when teaching one must provide opportunities for students to see, hear and do. Teachers often take for granted what students bring to a class, what skills they lack. Showing students what to do and providing clear examples and expectations allows students to perform and provide what is expected.

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