Dialogue journals as effective tools for teaching writing

Dialogue journals are notebooks kept by students, who choose their own writing topics.

- ✪ **Dialogue journals are beneficial for all types of students**
  - all ages and levels because they offer an interactive but individualized learning context
  - improve concentration, generate better quality writing, and promote understanding
  - offer creative, safe and open outlets for articulation via the written word
  - offer students ways to express themselves
  - offer teachers ways to individually respond to each student's needs via modeling
  - offer a non-threatening medium to model English according to each learner's need

Key factor concerning dialogue journals is that a teacher not only reads, but also personally responds to each entry a student writes. By responding fluently and correctly, teachers serve as personalized writing models.

Computer technology to create digital dialogue journals; some include multimedia formats, such as video, voice, and graphics.

Dialogue Journals coincide with learning theories adopted by ESL educators

- ✪ **(CLT)** methods support dialogue journals because they stress purpose and audience
  - satisfy L2 learners' needs to communicate in a personal and authentic fashion
  - giving ESL students more control over potential responses due to the time delay
  - integrate their classroom learning and they can internalize the teacher's modeling
  - generate their own interactive learning contexts

- ✪ **cognitive/development** theory –Piaget
  - use readily available content, thus minimizing the stress on the L2 learner's memory.
  - L2 student stays within the learning boundaries established by the instructor.
  - students free to communicate in writing, without fear of being judged for potential errors
  - teacher may respond in writing within the range of the student's understanding
  - teacher may challenge the student by going beyond the student's previous limits.

- ✪ **functional/interactive** theory --Lev Vygotsky
  - ▪ social aspects of learning; no two people are equal in knowledge – ZPD
  - ▪ ZPD is activated when the ESL teacher responds to a student's writing
  - ▪ process remains self-regulatory for each L2 student
  - ▪ the written English text has a meaningful and personal function for each L2 student
- ✪ **Sociocultural theory**

  - ▪ examines the L2 learner's social and historical context, language serving as the instrument mediating the learning
    - the language in context
  - ▪ culturally sensitive, relevant lessons to fit the needs of their students
  - ▪ deal with both identity issues and adaptation issues
  - ▪ safe outlet to L2 students to create and explore new English language identities
- ✪ **critical pedagogy-**

  - ▪ Paulo Freire- resisted this education if it only represented an extension of the colonizer or dominant culture.
  - ▪ goal is to awaken critical consciousness
  - ▪ examine cognitive, social, cultural and ideological issues
  - ▪ developing their own voice in English
  - ▪ stimulate creative consciousness and develop English writing skills
  - ▪ empower their users by allowing L2 learners to validate themselves as people outside the native speaking English speaking environment
- ✪ **Additional teaching techniques can be offered in conjunction with dialogue journals-**
  - ▪ certain students request, even demand, that I edit their dialogue journals
  - ▪ help students acquire self-editing skills
  - ▪ modeling my sentence constructions and assimilating vocabulary
  - ▪ templates to specifically comment on ways to improve writing
  - ▪ Linnell (2010) suggests that attention to form in dialogue journal writing can help L2 learners. She offers the following types of questions: "Did I spell___correctly…Is this sentence correct?"(p. 26). Other instructors (Goldman & Rueda, 1988) suggest using a genre template: a letter, a story format, or even a fixed number of sentences. I would also add the suggestion that an entries for L2 learners be written entirely in one tense, or using direct speech, or other grammatical and punctuation templates to help the student
  - ▪ counting error frequencies and then creating appropriate generic classroom activities
  - ▪ reading portions of a dialogue journal aloud can validate students
  - ▪ ask permission to publish selected work – more public validation

✪ **Conclusion:** We must expand on dialogue journals in diverse, creative ways. Learning to write, expressing oneself, is much more than a task to gain fluency: it is an adventure in expanding personal consciousness.

Valerie Sartor

CELAC UNM

Spring 2011