ON BECOMING AN EFL WRITING TEACHER-RESEARCHER

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PRESENTATION BACKGROUND

- This presentation stems from a chapter written for a forthcoming edited volume. The article is still under review.

- The edited volume is about EFL writing teacher education and development

- This is a "voices from the field" narrative account.

- The style of inquiry is narrative and reflects on my identity of becoming an L2 writing specialist (teacher-researcher) in the Japanese EFL context

INTRODUCTION 1

- Discuss how I negotiated constraints and opportunities for professional development and identity construction.

- Describe and reflect my MA TESOL program experience at a Japanese university while simultaneously working as an assistant professor (teaching EFL) in the Humanities department of a different Japanese university.

- Style of inquiry is self-reflexive analysis of how current EFL writing teacher education is situated in relation to dominant North American themes, trends, and pedagogical conceptions.

- Finally, the presentation offers insight into negotiating the challenges of becoming an L2 writing teacher-researcher in terms of professional development and identity formation before discussing theory-praxis implications.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

EDUCATION

- MA in TESOL (Japanese University)
- BA in Literature (U.S. University), creative writing, writing center work

WORK:

- 15 years experience teaching EFL in various contexts
- Currently Assistant Professor in a Japanese University

DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT ONE: THE MA TESOL PROGRAM (1)

- Participated in one of a handful of **English-medium** MAs in TESOL in Japan—2 year program.

- Handbook states: The goal is to "graduate students who can effectively implement **a CLT approach**, including task-based teaching, in their own classrooms"

- The implementation of the CLT approach centers on conducting ongoing classroom-based action research (AR) where teachers are asked "to apply newly learned theories, principles, and techniques to their teaching and to improve their classroom practice."

- This AR requirement necessitates students hold a teaching position—with MA classes being held on Saturdays and during summer to accommodate teachers' schedules.
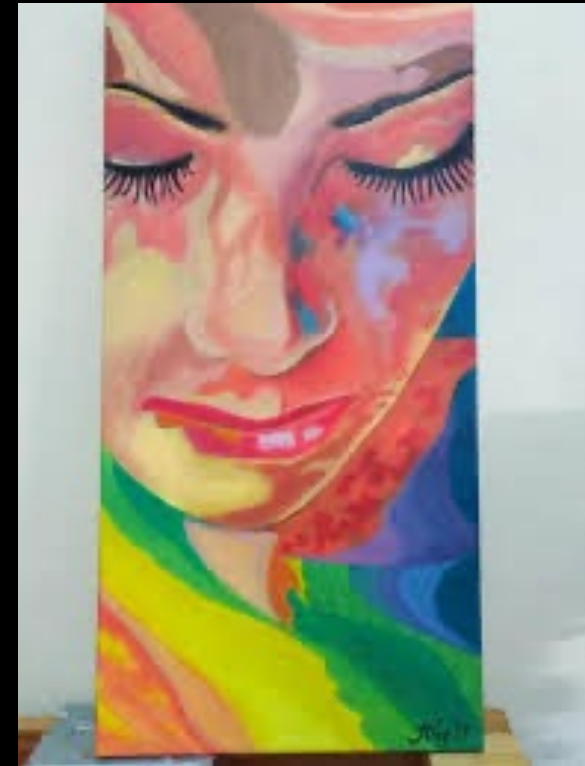
DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT ONE: THE MA TESOL PROGRAM (2)

- To graduate, students must complete:

- 1. Fifteen academic courses—six compulsory and nine electives chosen from a list of thirteen (see Table 1).

- 2. A culminating project is either a traditional MA thesis or an extended AR report, both are comparable in breadth and length to MA programs around the world.

- 3. Attend required monthly workshops with invited presenters that are followed by AR reporting sessions where MA students share practices and findings.
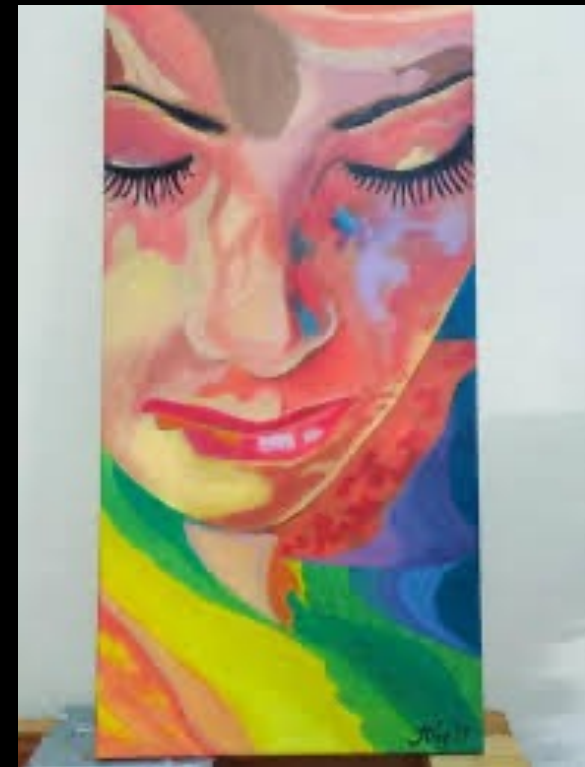
TABLE 1: MA TESOL PROGRAM COURSE LIST

Required Courses (6)	Elective Courses (13, choose 9)
Second Language Teaching	Discourse Analysis
Second Language Acquistion	Vocabulary Teaching and Learning
*Action Research 1 (AR1)	Learner Autonomy
*Action Research 2 (AR2)	Introduction to Action Research Methods
*Curriculum Design 1 (AR3)	Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods
*Curriculum Design 2 (AR4)	Qualitative Research Methods
	Sociocultural Theory
	Cross-cultural Communicaiton
	Language Assessment
	Syntax and Semantics
	Positive Psychology in ELT
	Introduction to Linguistics
	Materials Development and Classroom Dynamics
*Attend workshops and present	

What's missing?

DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT TWO: TEACHING EFL AT A JAPANESE UNIVERSITY (1)

- Teach EFL at a university with around 9,000 undergraduates. Of these students, on average, about 30 select the EFL major (Contemporary International English (CIE)) as a major (0.33%).

- I do not teach in the CIE program as I am a yearly contracted instructor appointed to teach general EFL courses—one of these being Communication Skills.

- In the Communication Skills courses, instructors are given the opportunity to construct unique syllabi based on interests and specializations; thus, I have created an EFL creative writing course (poetry)

- This freedom of course topic is, in part, due to the university having a less structured writing curriculum than programs in North America.

- Much of the writing organization and infrastructure prevalent in North American universities are not commonly being utilized, such as a
  - first-year composition (FYC) programs
  - writing across the curriculum/writing in the disciplines pedagogies
  - academic writing centers (WCs).

- This is common among Japanese universities.

- To provide a general idea of writing support offered to university students in Japan—in total there are around 795 universities in Japan; however, there are 19 WCs listed on the WC Association of Japan website (*Writing Center Resources*, n.d.).

- In my teaching context, most of the EFL activity stems from the Institute for Language Education (ILE), which houses the self-access learning center (SALC).

- All Communication Skills courses are taught in the SALC and while sections have a core of enrolled students, others can join informally at any time.

- In my teaching context, the central issue is **the absence of a university-wide writing curriculum and a lack of infrastructure to support student writers.**

- In my opinion, these issues are due to the low percentage of English majors (.33%) and this being common practice across the country.

- In preparation for a 6,000-word academic thesis, CIE majors complete four courses; these courses have thus far been sufficient in providing instruction in writing EAP.

- Students rarely have an opportunity to express themselves in genres external to academic writing or participate in EFL writing activities outside the classroom setting e.g., EFL publications, EFL presentation opportunities, WC tutoring, and so on.

- The significant issue in my MA context is **the lack of an EFL writing pedagogy course.** Therefore, writing teacher preparation is subsumed within the second language teaching (SLT) course, which focuses on implementation of the "four-skills" via CLT approaches.

- A secondary issue is the "discourse analysis" course, which focuses solely on *spoken* discourse (conversation analysis) and is technically mislabeled.

- I believe this is a missed opportunity to train EFL teacher-researchers in *written* discourse analysis because…

- In my opinion, as Web 2.0/participatory culture globally diffuses and multilingual, multimodal, digital texts become the norm, understanding discursive approaches to writing is becoming increasing important to EFL teachers.

- Perhaps issues in the MA stem from the lack of writing organization and infrastructure in universities across the country.

- Or is there a lack of writing organization and infrastructure because of gaps in EFL writing teacher training?

- These issues seem to share a relationship of mutual causation. EFL writing *implementation* and writing teacher *preparation* are caught in a feedback loop where deficiencies in one cause deficiencies in the other.

- As a concession, it is possible I am imposing North American writing education ideologies onto the Japanese context; however, in both my teaching and MA contexts the capstone project features a final *written* display of knowledge (albeit accompanied by an oral defense).

- Due to these challenges, I realized that if I was to become an L2 writing specialist in this context, I would need supplemental instruction and guidance.

- To illustrate my experience, I will share an anecdote:

- The course was early in the morning in Japan and the content was challenging; however, my knowledge in the field, qualitative methodology, and L2 writing pedagogy expanded immeasurably.

- I was so motivated that I registered for Paul's next course: Advanced Studies in L2 Writing. After completing this course, my first article was published in a peer-reviewed journal in the ILE in my teaching context. The article stemmed from a paper written in the course. I try to be deliberate in my writing and publish most of my class papers.

REFLECTING ON CONTEXT AND IDENTITY: A WORKAROUND (2)

- I also created two video poster presentations, both eventually becoming conference presentations—one at a local symposium and one at the 2022 TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo.

- This course would act as my gateway to the world of L2 writing—connecting my local context to the global. While the MA does not accept transfer credit from ASU—I invested in my self-efficacy and my future. To others in EFL contexts with similar challenges, I would suggest doing the same.

- The challenge of not having an EFL writing pedagogy course in the MA became an opportunity afforded by a creative workaround, a patient mentor, and the use of technology. However, more than just a workaround, the CoP at ASU unlocked resources and extended my CoP considerably.

REFLECTING ON CONTEXT AND IDENTITY: AN EXPANDING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (1)

- In Paul's course, he and three other professors started a private Facebook group "to facilitate interaction across courses in L2 writing taught by Paul Matsuda, Lourdes Ortega, Charlene Polio, and Christine Tardy. […]to foster collaboration across participants in these four courses" (Collaborative Efforts in L2 Writing, 2020).

- There were three important take-aways from this collaboration:

  - (1) the group page provided a discourse community for sharing ideas and disseminating information about L2 writing;

  - (2) networking within this CoP created further opportunities for professional development and mentor/mentee relationships; and

  - (3) participating in a collaborative interuniversity assignment broadened the scope of my L2 writing knowledge and pedagogy.

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- IIn the culminating assignment, students from the four universities were asked to undertake reflective discussions about what they learned, compare and share that knowledge, and finally report back to their classes.

- This collaborative cycle of (1) articulating learning acquired, (2) identifying gaps in knowledge, (3) filling these gaps by participating in an extended CoP, and (4) consolidating understanding was highly effective. In this way, the scope of knowledge was expanded by indirectly gaining familiarity with all four of the professors' specializations and research directions.

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- I will share another anecdote to illustrate the efficacy of the Facebook collaboration.

- From the Facebook collaboration, I witnessed firsthand what Atkinson (2017) was referring to when he wrote: "one wonderful thing about the SLW [second language writing] field is that it is relatively flat—there are no real rock starts or prima donnas" (p. 24).

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- The professors in the Facebook group were always approachable and I never felt that my opinion was not of value.

- These professors provided examples for forming a professional identity and afforded me the confidence to write for publication and present at conferences.

- Moreover, through menteeships with Paul and Charlene, I was introduced to resources and a CoP that I continue to utilize to this day. These connections have been invaluable to my identity formation and development

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REFLECTING ON CONTEXT AND IDENTITY: FILLING THE GAPS (1)

- In my teaching context, one of the challenges of working in an international setting is the perspective that EFL teachers can have on writing pedagogies. For example, an applied linguist from Australia once shared that there are (almost) no FYC programs in Australian universities. "Why?" I asked. They replied, "because you either learn to write in high school, or you don't attend university."

- Evidence of this can be found in the dearth of FYC programs outside of North America.

- This terse outlook on teaching writing is rather different from my undergraduate experience in the U.S. Hence, finding like-minded scholars abroad has sometimes left me feeling isolated.

REFLECTING ON CONTEXT AND IDENTITY: FILLING THE GAPS (2)

- Nevertheless, colleagues in my teaching context have always been receptive to my ideas for addressing EFL writing issues.
- After submitting a proposal to start an academic WC on campus, I was allowed to pilot the program, and utilize the SALC.

Aichi University Writing Center

愛大　ライティング・センター

みなさんは課題やレポートを英語で書いたとき、相手に伝わるのか心配になったことはありませんか？
みなさんが書いた英文をランゲージ・カフェでお馴染みの先生に、マン・ツー・マンで相談することができます。相談は無料、時間は20～30分です。

例えばレポートや論文、テスト勉強、小説、twitterやインスタに載せる英文等々、英語で書いた文章なら、何でもOKです。学生のみなさんが英文を書くお手伝いをします。気軽に相談してください。

ライティング・センターの相談は事前予約制です。

1. チューターの時間割から希望の時間を選び、希望の日時をtgoken@ml.aichi-u.ac.jpへメールしてください。
2. 予約確定のメールが来たら、相談日の前日までに、英文の原稿を先生にメールまたは提出してください。
　原稿はワードファイルで提出。（拡張子がdoc.docx.に限る）
3. 予約の日時にランゲージセンターで対面で行うか、ZOOMで行うかは、その時の状況によって決めます。

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Lunch Hour 12:30～13:20	O	O	X	O	X
3rd Period 13:30～14:50	O	O	X	O	X
4th Period 15:00～16:30	O	O	X	O	X
5th Period 16:40～18:10	O	O	X	O	X

注意事項　・必ず事前に原稿を提出してください。（ワードファイルdoc.docx.）
　　　　　・英文を代わりに書くことはありません。
　　　　　・大学で参加する場合は2号館の学生待機室などを利用してください。

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tgoken@ml.aichi-u.ac.jp

REFLECTING ON CONTEXT AND IDENTITY: FILLING THE GAPS (3)

- I have launched an L2 creative writing journal titled *Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal*— submissions originating from my L2 creative writing course. The open access journal is digitally published on the ILE website and is now in its fifth edition.

- These achievements illustrate that because I view my teaching context through the lens of my own background and U.S. education, I observed gaps in the writing organization and infrastructure that could benefit L2 writers.
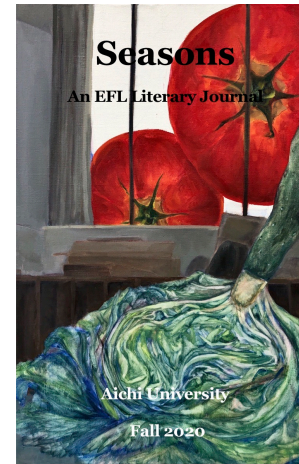
REFLECTIONS OF THEORY-PRAXIS BRIDGE: ROOM TO MANEUVER AND TRAJECTORIES (1)

- EFL writing constraints in my teaching context have unexpectedly provided affordances—I have discovered room to maneuver

  - e.g., providing EFL creative writing and digital publishing opportunities for L2 writers,
  - developing an undergraduate L2 creative writing community (Kubokawa, 2021b),
  - utilizing translingual onomatopoeic practices (Kubokawa, in press),
  - and activating cultural artifacts such as *haiku* (Kubokawa, 2021a) as initial low stakes EFL writing activities.

- In the U.S., these unique opportunities would not likely have been available.

- My development as a EFL teacher has taken a different trajectory than my development as a *writing* teacher.

- As a writing teacher, I have followed an essentially North American pathway simply because EFL writing teacher training was not available in this context, thus it became imperative to pursue alternative instruction.

- However, the AR emphasis and rigorousness of the MA has compelled me to develop as a EFL teacher and researcher.

- Although there has been no explicit instruction in L2 writing, there have been presenting and writing deadlines, demanding coursework, and AR workshops asking me to articulate pedagogies and findings.

- This has obligated me to produce and—because I try to publish most of my course papers—my research activities have been prolific.

- Ironically, *not* having L2 writing resources has compelled me to work harder and expand both my CoP and my knowledge in the field.

REFLECTIONS OF THEORY-PRAXIS BRIDGE: MUTUAL CAUSATION(1)

- Regarding the relationship of mutual causation, I believe there could be a foundational difference in epistemology between my current context and my educational background.

- In my U.S. university experience, I was trained to display proof of knowledge in *written* form. In the Japanese EFL context, emphasis is often placed on *verbal* forms to exhibit mastery.

REFLECTIONS OF THEORY-PRAXIS BRIDGE: MUTUAL CAUSATION(2)

- Paradoxically, Japanese EFL learners are often incorrectly typecast as reticent students overconcerned with accuracy.

- In response to this stereotype teacher training programs may be emphasizing oral communication pedagogies as the gold standard.

- However, with educational modes of delivery ever-changing there is increasing significance on written communication in a Web 3.0 future.

CONCLUSION (1)

- As I near graduation and begin my applications to doctoral programs, I realize that *not* having a dedicated EFL writing pedagogy course in my MA prompted me to work harder at becoming an L2 writing specialist.

- I created opportunities for my students and for myself by being proactive, resourceful, and self-efficacious.

- Building from a foundation of familiar pedagogies in my teaching context (creative writing and WC work), I expanded my knowledge base by interacting with an international CoP.

CONCLUSION (2)

- I was able to overcome some of the challenges specific to my EFL context by utilizing online courses, networking internationally, and creating mentor/mentee relationships.

- Even without the affordances I would have had in MA programs in North America—I have found unique opportunities to work with and for EFL writers in the Japanese context.

Q&A

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING AND PARTICIPATING IN THE DISCUSSION.

PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY FURTHR QUESTIONS.

OR YOU CAN EMAIL ME: JAREDKUBOKAWA@GMAIL.COM

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