The English Writing Virtual Community

for Middle School Students

EIPT 6433

Theories, Pedagogy, and Tools for Online Learning

Spring 2012

Dr. Ge.

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April 23, 2012
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In order to give convenience to Korean learners, I choose Naver Café for my virtual learning community which is the most famous portal site in Korea.

http://cafe.naver.com/englishdaywriting
Part 1 Design Overview

Background Information

In brief explanation of the current conditions of secondary English education in Korea, English is one of the major subjects along with Korean, Mathematics, and Science, so that since secondary school, students put a lot of time and effort on getting good grade for entering higher education. This tends to make student extremely conscious of the exams. Therefore, English class is concentrated on the skills, which are needed to answer the exam questions including grammar, and reading skills. Also, students are expected to have a productive vocabulary.

When it comes to learning language, however, four skills should be concerned at the same time for language fluency: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The current emphasized English language education of Korea cannot make students good writers. In addition, as the growing interest and need for English writing, private institutions have been sprouting in Korea, so that the voice for this need is also growing in the public education.

Learner analysis

The main target audience for this project is middle school students and English teachers, but this community is open for everyone who is interested in English writing. Generally most students started studying English in elementary school, so that they have basic knowledge in grammar and vocabulary. Based on the Ministry of Education
Curriculum, students started studying English in elementary school, and they have basic 
English composition and communication skills, but, the level of English proficiency is 
dependent on personal training experience in English. However, most students feel that 
writing is tedious and a heavy workload, and lack of that they have a confidence on writing in 
English

English teachers and native English teachers majored in English with at least 
bachelor's degrees and more than one year teaching experience. All members are able to use 
word-processing and to access the web-browser.

**Context analysis**

The current English text book in Korea focuses on a short dialogues and basic 
conversations and articles that students are already familiar with. Therefore, it is not enough 
to motivate the learners or improve writing skills. Students’ readings are chosen from a 
selection of prescreened articles in the instructor’s guide. Therefore, the topic will be chosen 
based on the emphasis of the current school curriculum, so that students can reflect and apply 
their knowledge through the activities in this virtual writing community.

**Goals**

The purpose of the virtual writing community is to improve middle school students’ 
writing skills by daily practice and cooperative writing activity. This virtual collaborative 
learning environment helps students not only have more opportunities of writing practice, but 
also get more chances to have feedback by peers and instructors.
The English Writing Virtual Community

Theoretical Rational & Design Overview

Several learning theories has supported in my virtual learning community based on social constructivism prospect: social learning theory, discovery learning, Community of Practice (CoP), Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and dual coding theory.

Social constructivism is represented in peer revision and exchange feedback. The theory emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Derry, 1999). In this theory, knowledge is socially constructed. By exchanging ideas among members, the students learn more effectively about language. The revision and feedback from members can be reflected on what each member is doing well or what they need to improve in the next phase, also group discussion among members can enhance learning activity as well as improve self-analytic work. This collaborative learning helps students be more aware of the importance of audience in their writing, and gain more confidence as writers (Cantrell, 2003). In this constructivism-based environment, the instructors provide support to students. The synchronized online meeting of this community is the place the instructors involve reflection about what is understood and the kind of thinking with other that enables participant volunteers to continue to build knowledge (Scardamila & Bereiter, 1997).

Basically the activities in the writing community are addressed based on Vigotsky’s Social Learning Theory. According to Vigotsky, proficient language learning depends on a combination of developmental challenges, readiness, and social interactions. English writing activity is the most challenging subject for most ESL students. The online community
environment that people can communicate and interact easily helps students develop their English writing ability with authentic materials.

Unlike teacher-centered classroom environments, the virtual learning community is more student-centered in that students are directly involved in the discovery of their own knowledge with community members. Collaborative knowledge of the community is greater than any individual knowledge (Johnson, 2001). Asking difficult questions and trying out new ideas in the company of other learners empower learners to work collaboratively in a virtual learning environment. By doing so, the learners construct their own curriculum from a range of ideas with possibilities reflecting a breadth of learning styles (Meighan, 2002).

Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is also aligned with this community. Group members evolve naturally based on their common interested in improving their English writing skills. Writing is a challenging subject that most students feel pressure and difficulty while working. To be a good writer, revising work is essential. However, students are easily burdened by error correction especially when they receive the feedback from their teacher. Recent research presented students who experienced the cooperative activity on error correction had better results than the ones corrected through the traditional method, especially in the long term (Servetti, 2010).

In order to arouse interest in English writing as well as reduce the stress from error correction, students will do the independent free writing activity as a daily writing practice with given topics through their individual blog with minimal correction by peers. This activity stresses the content and fluency rather than quality of the composition such as grammatical accuracy and organization. This writing activity is considered a creative act of
self-discovery, and it can help generate self-awareness of the writer’s literate possibilities (Friere, 1974). Creative self-expression makes students learn various expressions about their feelings and opinions. By sharing personal thoughts, individuals can construct his or her view of the topic and expand the scope of his or her thinking.

If the free writing focuses on students’ writing fluency, collaborative journal writing focuses more on the accuracy and the writing process. This activity is more like discovery learning based instruction that students discover facts and relationships for themselves while doing this activity. With collaborative work in a small group, students are going to write and to design a journal based on analyzed studies, current social issues, or personal experiences. Learners are more motivated with the sense of realism embedded in learner-designed cases (Bonk & Zang, 2008). By building a journal themselves with synthesizing a huge amount of content, researching and analyzing data, students learn to present their ideas and insights in highly personal and meaningful ways (Bonk & Zang, 2008). While students design their journal, they remember knowledge about the topic, which they discovered on their own.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) can support peer feedback in discussion forum. Vygotsky defines ZPD as the distance between the most difficult task someone can do alone and the most difficult task someone can do with help (Mooney, 2000). So, the interaction among learners can enhance his or her learning achievement.

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Paivio dual coding theory (1986) states that human process visual and verbal information differently in two separate channels. Each channel is activated independently, but the interaction between the two channels allow for the dual coding of information. When learners watch a video clip with subtitles, it consists with three channels in catching the learner’s attention: one auditory channel and two visual channels; one is verbal and the other one is non-verbal. This helps the learner achieve higher results of language proficiency in short-term comprehension tasks and in both short-and long-term vocabulary tasks (Baltova, 1994). Considering the target learners are beginners, English subtitles are helpful to remember new words in the content. This cognitive load facilitates effective mental education to learners.
Part 2. Instructional Design

In order to build an effective virtual writing community, the activities were built based on the R2D2 method—read, reflect, display, and do—which provides a framework for more engaging, dynamic, and responsive teaching and learning in online environments (Bonk & Zang, 2006).

The virtual English writing community for middle school students is based on the R2D2 model to provide opportunities in improving their writing ability by exchanging feedback among members. Considering the difference of learner's levels, two writing sections will be provided to students: independent writing and integrated journal writing. The table below shows a brief outline of the activities.

Table 1. Brief introduction of the activities for the virtual writing community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R2D2</th>
<th>Learning activities</th>
<th>Examples/ resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading (verbal/auditory)</td>
<td>-Watching the YouTube video&lt;br&gt;-Tips of sub-reading material depending on the topic of each week</td>
<td>YouTube videos&lt;br&gt;Online reading materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect (reflective/observational)</td>
<td>-Synchronized online meeting&lt;br&gt;-Discussion forum</td>
<td>Chat rooms&lt;br&gt;Discussion board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying (visual)</td>
<td>-Free writing to personal blog</td>
<td>Blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing (hands-on)</td>
<td>-The collaborative journal writing</td>
<td>-Discussion board&lt;br&gt;-Chat rooms&lt;br&gt;-Publish to the Café book provided by Naver web site</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading Phase: Watching and reading the Online News

Description and purpose of the activity. Language ability cannot be improved focusing on only one skill. Reading skills serve as a foundation for writing skills. Effective reading skills provide opportunities for learners to learn new information about the world or social issues, and extend their vocabulary, so that learners can improve their writing skills. Also, learners can learn new English words or expressions to visual association created when they see a caption on the screen, and listen to a phrase. It is easy to catch new vocabulary and its pronunciation this way.

Skills and Objectives. With authentic materials of the real-world issues, students will improve their reading and listening skills as well as extend their vocabularies in a real context where they can listen to the pronunciation and the nuances of language use.

-Given the video clip, students will improve their reading and listening skills

-Students are able to reflect on vocabulary and grammar they have learned at school.

Context for using the activity. The world-wide web makes it possible to offer students authentic learning with real-world relevance. I will provide YouTube video clips dealing with a number of topics related to the current world issues, so that learners are able to not only learn English, but also accumulate common knowledge.

When including a video, I also provide relevant reading articles and questions to allow learners to think aloud. Also the learner can predict about the contents of the video and associate ideas in the video to their prior knowledge before watching the video.
through the given questions. For more productive learning, discussion forums will be opened to share their thoughts and answers. The topic will be chosen based on the emphasis of the current English education,

**Multimedia learning principle.** According to Clark and Mayer (2008), integration of auditory and visual sensory information guides the learner’s transformation of words, pictures, and sounds in the lesson through working memory, so that they can incorporate new knowledge into the existing knowledge on long-term memory. This offering of Flash video and features of voice recognition helps develop pronunciation. Moreover, subtitles help the learner perceive the speech accurately when they draw on prior knowledge of similar words.

**Activity procedure.** There are four elements--thinking box, a video clip, relevant reading materials, and questions-- and each element leads the activity step-by-step:

- **Step 1: Read the thinking box:**

  The thinking box shows the objectives of the activity. It guides the learner to guess topic of the video clips, as well as to reminisce about their prior knowledge and their personal experience and thought.

- **Step 2: watch a video clip:**

  As I mentioned above, the vocabulary and grammar rules of the video clips are highly related to the English curriculum. It provides opportunity to reflect the knowledge they have learned at school.

- **Step 3: Read and think about the given question**
Questioning before, during, and after reading allows students to think aloud (Pressely & Afflerbach, 1995). With the given question from the community, students can make predictions about the contents of the video and associate ideas in the video to their prior knowledge. For more productive learning, discussion forums will be opened to share their thoughts and answers.

- Step 4: Read relevant tips and materials on the topic

Relevant tips and materials help learners to extend their expression, as well as deepen their understanding about the topic or grammar rules.

This activity will be provided weekly.
Figure 1. Sample of the activity

- Objective:
  - The learners will
  - be able to classify "suppose" vs "supposed to"
  - be able to introduce a member of family

Guiding question:
1. Summarize the story approximately 50 characters.
2. Do you have any fun memories relating with animals? If have, let’s share your story with others.
3. Describe your grand-mother.
4. Write two short sentences including the words "suppose" and "supposed to"
Part 2 Reflection: Synchronous and asynchronous discussion commination

Description and purpose of the activity. A discussion forum is to engage in informative ideas with other members without time limitation. The main purposes of this activity are to share the answer and review the subject matter, including the reflection of the video and journal writing, and to discuss the ideas about others’ answer, and journal writing.

If discussion forum offers the opportunities to share and to compare their work with other members, in synchronous meetings, instructors or experts of the community provide proper feedback on their work, and answer the questions the learners might have.

Skills and Objectives. These synchronous and asynchronous discussions foster critical analysis, reflection, communication, insight, student interaction, and comparison and contrast (Bonk & Zhang, 2008). Also, students can get feedback through the activity from peers and experts. Writing is a way of communication between writers and readers, so that feedback is a good to know how the learner is developing their communication skills in written words. Providing meaningful and proper feedback is one of the important parts in learning foreign language. According to Jacobs et al (1998), students usually welcome peer feedback in writing, and have positive responses toward it in ELS writing classrooms.

- Through the discussion forum, the learner will identify the subject of the given topic as well as expand the scope of his or her knowledge by commenting with each other in English.

- Through synchronized online meetings, students are able to know the part that might not
understand in detail by discussing with expert.

**Context for using the activity.** The contents are different according to the subject of the activities. I provide two types of discussion forum: one, and the other one for the journal writing group discussion.

- Discussion Forum 1: This forum is for reflection on the reading activity that I introduced part 1. Questions will be given by instructors every week, and it will be developed based on the subject matter of the video.

- Discussion Forum 2: This forum is for the journal writing group discussion. Students will discuss about the topic, content, and procedure of journal writing.

Out of consideration for productive discussion, the online synchronous meeting will be held depending on the schedule of each group. During the meeting, students will present their progress, make suggestions on individuals’ work, and set up the next stage. Learners can check their schedule on the calendar offering from the community.
Multimedia learning principle. In Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL), the community members use synchronous and asynchronous tool facilities in way that support an instructional goal, such as to produce a joint product or complete a writing worksheet (Mayer & Clark, 2003). A collaborative environment leads to the best individual and group performance.
**Activity procedure.** *Discussion boards:* Based on what they listen to and read through YouTube video provided by the community, students exchange their answers about the given questions and share their knowledge and information about the topic with others. Students will follow:

- **Step 1:** Answer the given question of the weekly activity after watching a YouTube video including personal reflection and thoughts.

- **Step 2:** Commenting errors, advice, or praise each other to encourage and to improve their writing.

- **Step 3:** Summarize about what they learned through the week or topic
Displaying Phase: Interactive online individual writing performance

Description and purpose of the activity. The purpose of this activity is to provide an opportunity to think in English in daily life to make English writing a way of the learner’s life. The blog can support different learning styles. It encourages students to reflect on the topic that they have read, listened to or watched, and then share ideas by exchanging comments. For some students who may be too shy to speak in the class, the blog will give them more opportunities to express themselves well. Everyone gets a voice in each blog, and each student takes ownership of his or her learning in this individual space. In this activity, a learner will do daily free writing without any requirements by the instructor in their personal blog.

Skills and Objectives. By doing hands-on writing practice,

- The learner will construct knowledge of English vocabulary, grammar, and expression naturally.

- The learner will be able to see his or her progress as time goes on by comparing the first outcome of his or her own free writing.

Content for using the activity. There is no special content to this activity.

Multimedia learning principle. In learning journals, blogging is a good tool that individuals write commentaries on an ongoing basis (Mayer and Clark, 2003), and receive comments from not only for the community members, but also from diverse people all over the world. Blogging will be used to organize individual thoughts.
Activity procedure. As the concept of the activity is FREE WRITING, the learner makes a decision on what they write about. Free writing is an easy form of journal writing. Learners will write whatever within the specified length of time. Learners will be asked to set up the time in 20 minutes for doing this activity. An important point of this activity is what the learner writes without considering grammar or spelling errors, without stopping, and without evaluating.
The English Writing Virtual Community

Doing Phase: small group journal writing

**Description and purpose of the activity.** The main purpose of group writing activity is to consult with other members about a learner’s writing and to share ideas to complete the task. While doing the activity, the learner receives valuable feedback on his or her writing from group members and also from the instructor.

**Skills and Objectives.** With collaborative work in a small group, students are going to write and design a journal based on analyzed studies, current social issues, or personal experiences.

**Context for using the activity.** *Sample online resources of journal writing:*


Through the samples, student can understand the basic point of different types of writing and the way of writing.

**Multimedia learning principle.** Each team of five works together over a month to develop a group journal. According to the research of Lou et al (2001), when working together, the group is capable of doing more than any single member by comparing alternative interpretations and solutions, correcting each other’s misconceptions, and forming a more holistic picture of the problem. Small group journal writing is challenging task for novice writers, but assigning challenging tasks can benefit from the perspectives and expertise of several participants (Mayer and Clark, 2003)

**Activity procedure.** In group writing, each student plays a prominent and crucial role. Less than five people will work in a group. They could select a topic and sub-themes depending
on the subject matter by themselves.

Table 2. The Timetable of the Journal Writing Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Stage 1: Introducing subject matter</td>
<td>-Within given subject matter, students are going to decide the topic and then divide it into several sections. -Students will decide who does what in each section -Brainstorm some initial ideas for their group topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Stage 2: Initial writing</td>
<td>-The instructor provides some prompt questions for each group to start their writing. -Student share related articles, link, and other materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Stage 3: Revising the first draft</td>
<td>-The instructor provides a few writing models -Each student submits their first draft to the discussion forum and then gives comments to each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Stage 4: Proofreading</td>
<td>-Peer revision -Instructor revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 5: Publishing</td>
<td>-Publish on the school blog/journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment

Virtual learning environment is usually based on the self-regulated learning. Individuals attempt to monitor, control, and evaluate their learning by themselves. Even though this community is not mandatory course, I will set up a rule to lead active participation and better outcomes for the community members. The rule will address the direction how to participate and do the given activities, such as blogging, free writing, and a small group journal writing (see Appendix A).

The overall grade will be placed on the final draft of journal writing. I will expect some acquired skills. The work will be scored based on the rubric below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information/Idea</td>
<td>Incomplete or inaccurate information and ideas</td>
<td>Some accurate information and some ideas</td>
<td>Accurate information and ideas</td>
<td>Accurate information and creative and insightful ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze/Explanation</td>
<td>Present no ideas with irrelevant evidence and rational</td>
<td>Present few ideas with some relevant information and idea</td>
<td>Present some ideas and provide relevant evidence or rational to support ideas</td>
<td>Present many ideas and provide relevant evidence or rational to support ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Meaning is not clear, and do not make sense of the topic</td>
<td>Meaning is sometimes unclear, and makes some sense of the topic</td>
<td>Meaning is clear and makes clear sense of the topic</td>
<td>Meaning is very clear and makes strong sense of the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar and Organization of structures</td>
<td>A lot of errors in grammar and sentence organization</td>
<td>Some major errors in sentence organization and some grammar mistakes</td>
<td>Some minor error in sentence organization and some grammar mistakes</td>
<td>Few errors on grammar and sentence organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reference


Prentice Hall.


Servetti, S (2010), Cooperative learning groups involved in an written error-correction task, European Education, 42(3), 7-25
Appendix

Appendix A: The Virtual Learning Community Guideline

The Guideline

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E-mail: yangyuoo@ou.edu

The University of Oklahoma

Purpose

The aim of these activities is to provide students with an opportunity to produce written work, and to improve their writing by peer review and support as well as by instructor.

Exercises

This site is designed to offering writing exercises and general advises for the students who wish to improve their creative writing skills. This course is pursued perfection in performing exercises, but focused more the students to become more proficient in various writing techniques such as description, dialogue, or write using real life experience.

The first and foremost rule in this community is to write regularly on your individual blog. You should set up at least 20 minutes, and try to writing at least 10 sentences for a given
period time you set. Even if you has not complete in time, even finished half the work on your writing, mark the part you done and keep going to work the last of the part. You may see how much you improve to write a long composition is a short time.

Reading and writing are interrelated. Reading improves writing and writing improves reading. Reading widely can improve your vocabulary, particularly when you look up the words that you do not know. The YouTube video, which published by the Special Education, offers various topic to you with subtitles. Listing to the target language helps you memorize the vocabulary effectively. Also, you can generate more creative and critical thinking while you discuss about the topic with others in the forum discussion.

Choosing the topic for writing a journal is not easy to all of us. A journal can be made of anything for you to write in, for example it can be a part of a story, or movie. However, you should keep this. A Journal is not a diary. It is meant for publication that every people read. You are going to incorporative journal writing with three to four other members. It will help you build deeper knowledge on the topic you choose and improve your writing skill by peer revision. Even though we may not intend to publish journal actually, the best journal at the end of every month will be rewarded.

For your better performance, EVERYDAY GRAMMAR PRACTICE might be helpful to extend your writing skills.
Grading

Participation (30%)

The quality of a student’s participation is most important in order to meet the community goal. Individuals respect for the daily activity will contribute more meaningful learning, so each student can be expected to share his or her work. Also, students should attend online conferences with instructor. During the conference, student will discuss about their procedure and get feedback from instructors or experts. The conference will be held every Saturday afternoon. The time will be set by members’ regulation. If you cannot participate in the procedure, or attend more than two times in a week, you will be expelled from this community.

Blog (30%)

For personal creative writing, you will be asked to open an individual blog through http://section.blog.naver.com/ to possible to link directly from the community. You can write anything you want. It could be cooking, sports, gardening, puzzle, or whatever you are interested in. For someone who is not sure what you write about, the list of various topics will be given.
**Portfolio (40%)**

The grade of your group journal writing follows the rubric below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
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<th>Excellent</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Idea</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>**Analyze/</td>
<td>Present no ideas with irrelevant evidence and rational</td>
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<td>Few errors on grammar and sentence organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>**Organization of</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>structures</strong></td>
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