Process Writing and Its Relevance to Japanese High School Students

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Writing is often neglected in high school education because it is thought to be too time consuming or irrelevant to student needs. However, implementing a writing course syllabus in my own high school revealed areas in which students could benefit from the process and process-genre approaches developed, respectively, by White and Arndt (1991) and Badger and White (2000). I explain how I implemented the stages of the process approach and illustrate these with specific examples of teaching techniques. I argue that teachers can use these approaches to focus on their learners' experience and knowledge so as to make writing meaningful, foster a regard for audience, and increase learner autonomy by improving students' writing skills.

　高校教育において、ライティングは時間がかかるものだと捉えられたり、生徒のニーズに合わないと考えられ、軽視されがちである。しかしながら、筆者の高校のライティングクラスで実施した調査によると、White and Arndt（1991）によるプロセスとBadger and White（2000）によるプロセスジャンルアプローチは生徒たちにとって有益な分野であることが明らかになった。本論文では、プロセスアプローチの段階とその具体例を用いた教授法の実践報告を行う。本手法は、生徒の経験や知識に焦点を当てるために有益である。また、生徒のライティング技術を向上させることは、有意義に文章を書くことや、読み手への関心・敬意を育成させることや、学習者の自立性を高めることに有益である。

W riting is often considered to be the most difficult language skill for learners of English (Richards & Renandya, 2002). It has also been described as time consuming, which may lead to teachers neglecting attention to learners' writing skills. Hedge (2000) observed, "As a result of various pressures of time and the need to cover the syllabus, writing is often relegated to homework and takes place in unsupported conditions of learning" (p. 301). Furthermore, the Japanese education system has received criticism for being excessively reliant on the teacher-centred *yakudoku* (grammar-translation) method of instruction (Gorsuch, 1998) and for inadequate attention to achieving its stated aims of developing students' communicative writing abilities (Kobayakawa, 2011). This suggests an emphasis on form rather than content. However, university entrance exams and exams used in place of university entrance exams, such as the Global Test of English Communication (GTEC; Benesse, 2014), evaluate content, not merely the mechanics of language such as grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, an approach that helps students to develop their communicative skills is relevant to their academic aims.

In 2011, I was asked to devise a curriculum for a Japanese high school writing course. In this paper I discuss the implementation of a course that synthesized three approaches to writing (product, process, and genre) and explain why the latter is relevant to high school students who are required to write essays for exams. This is followed by a discussion of the implementation of the stages of the writing process and the techniques that can be used. I suggest that meaningful writing is an important goal for high school students to aim for and an increasingly relevant one that process writing, augmented with genre-appropriate strategies, can help students to achieve.

Background: Approaches and Relevance
Product, Process, and Genre

Traditional writing instruction is said to favour a *product*-oriented approach. According to Badger and White (2000), such an approach is "mainly concerned with knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development [is] mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher" (p. 154). In contrast, a *process*-oriented approach "takes the writer, rather than the text, as the point of departure" (Hyland, 2009, p. 18), which is to say that it is learner focused as opposed to text focused. A process approach typically involves tasks for generating ideas, preliminary writing, gaining an awareness of the audience a piece of writing is intended for, and writing mul-

tiple drafts with feedback provided by classroom peers and teachers at each stage. The four main stages of this approach are planning, drafting, revising, and editing, though these are not necessarily followed in a linear order. Although Hyland (2009) questioned whether the process approach really does improve student writing, Kurihara (2014) reported improvement in both the quality and fluency of the work of Japanese high school students who used a process approach that included peer and teacher feedback when compared with a control group.

The process approach does not mean that the product is irrelevant. Instead, White and Arndt (1991) asserted that making learners aware of the process ultimately results in better products. Although meaning is emphasized in this approach, linguistic accuracy is attended to at the later editing stage. Furthermore, process writing fosters autonomy by allowing learners to use the skills they learn—planning, outlining and editing—to create further pieces of writing. However, it is also important to point out that different pieces of writing are written for different audiences and that each genre of writing has its own socially determined conventions. Thus, a focus on the learner is useful but inadequate for teaching students how to follow appropriate conventions. As a result, Badger and White (2000) proposed the *process-genre* approach. This synthesis involves not only knowledge about language, the skills necessary for writing, and the learner's experience, but also knowledge about the context in which the writing takes place. They suggest that in some cases, learners "may lack knowledge of what language is appropriate . . . . Where students lack knowledge, we can draw on three potential sources: the teacher, other learners, and examples of the target genre" (Badger & White, 2000, pp. 158-159). Teacher input can inform students of language that is relevant to the genre. Group work can also allow students to share their understanding of generic conventions. Badger and White also proposed "language awareness activities" that incorporate genre analysis so as to "reveal the similarities between texts written for the same reason" (p. 159). The context has implications for the relevance of any writing approach, although there has often been a dispute about what is meant by relevance.

Relevance

Hyland (2009) criticized process approaches that focus solely on "expressivism" in which students indulge their personal creativity without models or direction from the teacher. Under this "extreme learner-centred stance" (p. 20), students are encouraged to write creatively about topics that are personally relevant to them with little direction from the teacher on the difference between good and bad writing except in terms of "culturally variable concepts such as originality, integrity and spontaneity" (p. 20). Furthermore,

such approaches make unwarranted assumptions that every student has the same potential to flourish under similar conditions. Hyland suggested that the approach might fail to take into account possible individual differences as well as the cultural expectations of writers of different backgrounds. This may well be true, but the process approach needs to be judged according to its rival approaches rather than by some ideal standard that may not exist. Tellingly, even those scholars who have argued for a "post-process approach" concede that "the usefulness and power of process writing has been revealed time and again; and if I were suddenly transported into and put in charge of an L2 writing classroom, pre-writing, drafting, feedback, and revising would almost certainly be important classroom activities" (Atkinson, 2003, pp. 10-11).

Additionally, Horowitz (1986) questioned the academic relevance of this approach, particularly when proponents dismissed the requirements of examination writing as not "real" (p. 141). Hamp-Lyons (1986) concurred by pointing out that for many students, "writing examination answers is probably the most authentic use of writing there is or is ever likely to be. Restricted and restricting it may be, but so is life" (p. 792). Raimes (2002) similarly pointed out that any writing course has to take into account institutional constraints and student needs. Teachers who wish to implement a writing course will therefore need to take into consideration what is expected of their students.

Japanese High School Writing

There is something of a discrepancy between the stated goals of Japanese high school writing instruction and pedagogic practice. The importance of meaning-oriented writing instruction is set out by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Kobayakawa (2011) pointed out that MEXT's stated overall objectives are "to develop students' practical communicative abilities in such areas as understanding information, noting the speaker's or the writer's intentions, and expressing personal ideas" (p. 28). This suggests a meaning-focused curriculum somewhat at odds with the traditional grammar-translation approach that focuses on the technical aspects of the language. However, Kobayakawa's study of the writing tasks in high school textbooks found they predominantly consisted of controlled activities, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and sentence-ordering and translation tasks. She argued that such activities fail to support the MEXT guidelines and that "writing instruction in English classes should aim to develop students' practical communication abilities by proactively increasing the opportunities for free writing" (p. 42). This argument is echoed by Kurihara (2014), who advocated a process-oriented writing approach as effective for improving the communicative writing skills of high school students.

Context

The students for whom this writing class was devised made up a class of 18 third-year students on the International Studies Course (*kokusaika*) at a private Japanese high school. The International Studies Course was so called because of its emphasis on English; the students had three 50-minute lessons in oral communication, two lessons in writing, and one language laboratory class per week. They also had a homestay in Australia for a period of 2-4 weeks. Although there was some variation in ability among the students, very few could be considered advanced. For example, graded readers classified as A1 (on the Common European Framework scale) were used in the oral communication classes and most students found them challenging. Students also had the opportunity to select other graded readers independently of the curriculum, and most chose texts of a similar level to their compulsory texts. All of them had studied English for at least 4 or 5 years prior to commencing the International Studies Course.

Student Needs

I conducted a needs analysis by giving students a questionnaire and consulting with Japanese colleagues who taught English at the school. The questionnaire (Appendix A) was administered following the students' 2nd year to determine their level of interest in English, particularly writing, and their future plans, especially whether or not they wished to go to university and which universities were most popular. This showed that most students enjoyed writing but found it difficult. In addition, most students wanted to go on to university with most of them aspiring to study English. The Japanese teachers of English in the school were able to point to two important resources relevant to the students' educational aims: the *akahon*, or red books that contain past university entrance exams, and the GTEC exams that students took on a regular basis at the high school.

According to Wheeler (2012), "[a] typical *akahon* will include an individual university's entire exam from the past 2 or 3 years" (p. 24). Each book can be consulted for the types of writing activities required. There appears to be no survey available similar to that conducted by Kobayakawa (2011) on high school textbooks. A review of the *akahon* of several universities suggested that the writing items were similar to those that appeared in textbooks. However, there were some exceptions, such as the following exam question from Kobe City University of Foreign Studies: "In English, please write approximately one hundred words in answer to the following question: If you could change one thing about your high school, what would you change and why would you change it?"

I also looked at past papers and sample answers for the GTEC exams, which are administered by the Benesse Corporation. The specific test, referred to as GTEC Computer Based Testing (CBT), evaluates students on the four language skills and asks them in the writing section to compose a short essay with the following structure: a short introduction, then two paragraphs that are introduced with appropriate discourse markers and that each provide a supporting point for the argument, and a short conclusion summing up the argument. The Benesse Corporation (2014) stated that the "GTEC CBT goes beyond the scope of MEXT's 'courses of study'" and that these exams "can be used for the purpose of university entrance examinations" (paras. 2-3). The website contains a page listing the universities that accept GTEC CBT as entrance exams and the score required. One example question asks students to compare online shopping with traditional shopping and state which style they prefer. Students are asked to give reasons, and sample answers were approximately 150 words.

I therefore decided that the ability to write short essays similar to those required on GTEC CBT would be a useful educational aim for my students, and this became the focus of my syllabus. The students were taught over two terms, in each of which they wrote two essays on topics that appeared in their textbooks. In addition to this, students completed exercises aimed at improving their written fluency and read each other's texts. A description of the stages of that course—including the implementation of planning, drafting, revising, and editing activities—now follows.

The Writing Course
Planning

There are various ways in which students can plan their writing. In some cases this will involve brainstorming or outlining a piece of writing, but some students do not realize the potential of their own experience and personal knowledge. As Nation (2009) said, "Learners may already have experience they can draw on, but they are not aware of the relevance of this experience" (p. 97). One method that was useful in my class was to have students write diaries. Maleki and Wright (2014) found that diary writing encourages autonomous learning. However, an important caution is that learners must be made aware that what is written in their diaries may be shared with the class. The students in my course were told not to write anything they were uncomfortable letting others know about. White and Arndt (1991) also made the observation that writing involves trust; the teacher should ensure this is not betrayed. Consequently, the students in my course could choose to write either on personal topics such as describing their own free-time activities in a conventional diary format or on topics that appeared on exams, which

allowed them to commit to paper their thoughts on broader topics. These diaries were written on a weekly basis and proved very useful when students came to class each week as they were able to mine their own experiences for ideas.

When the diary system was implemented, students' diaries differed in appearance depending upon whether they were given a target in terms of sentences or words. Typically, students asked to write a given number of sentences would write only one sentence per line making their writing appear like a poem or a list. The sentences written in such a list would often be fairly bland and superficial statements that stood alone instead of building on each other. On the other hand, if asked to write a specified number of words, students' diary entries tended to look more like paragraphs with sentences that gradually developed themes. I favoured the latter approach, which seemed more in keeping with the format of the essay.

As well as diaries, which are useful for generating ideas, more focused planning can be achieved by making students aware of the conventions of the essay genre. To do this, I gave students a worksheet (Appendix B) consisting of two written models that asked them to think about which they preferred and why. One of these was written in the "shopping list" style of one sentence per line, whereas the other model was written in paragraphs. Students were asked which they preferred as a model for an essay and the class chose the latter almost unanimously, despite the fact that it contained more obvious surface-level errors such as spelling mistakes. This consciousness-raising exercise was conducted to have students think about the genre rather than the usual product approach, which involves simply providing a model for imitation. Diary writing appeared to benefit the students in terms of written fluency. When asked to write in class, students could immediately begin instead of sitting and waiting for inspiration, because they had written notes in their diaries. Students' diary entries also prepared them for discussions in class prior to the next stage of the writing process: drafting.

Drafting

When drafting a piece of writing, students may often find it difficult to get started, frequently beginning a sentence, stopping, erasing, and starting again. A lot of time can be wasted in this unproductive cycle with some students struggling to write anything. One technique from the process approach that remedied this problem in my classes was giving students short sessions of freewriting (Tanner, 2016), which White and Arndt (1991) called "fastwriting" (p. 46). In this task, students were asked to write on a particular topic in 10-minute sessions. In order to encourage more writing, students would be told to put away their dictionaries and erasers or even to write in pen, and then when

the freewriting session was complete to count up the number of words they had written. When implementing this task, the teacher can record how many words students write each time and encourage them to beat their previous best. In a recent course conducted with university students, I found that in 4 consecutive weeks the average word count was 47, 52, 60, and 61. This can be a motivating exercise for students and, again, is aimed at improving fluency and focusing attention on meaning rather than form. Additionally, if teachers want to increase the output of their students in fluency-building exercises, it could be worthwhile to choose topics that students are interested in. Kobayashi and DeCello (2014) found that students tend to like writing about topics that are personally relevant to them; although for academic relevance, topics that appear on entrance exams may be preferable. However, if the teacher is interested in making the exercise more relevant to the essay genre, it may be a good idea to have students focus on the topic of one of their essay paragraphs.

Revising

One of the main characteristics of the process approach is that it involves writing multiple drafts, which allows students to hone the message they want to convey as well as improve organization, content, and word choice, particularly with attention to genre-specific language forms. One important component of the essay genre is a topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph. However, students often have trouble forming these sentences. This lends itself to group work. Students placed in competing groups can be given mini-whiteboards on which to formulate topic sentences. I have found that adding an element of competition and the novelty of one student writing on the whiteboard encourages motivation and learner participation. As is often the case with writing skills, some students will grasp the idea that certain sentences are too general or specific to be topic sentences and explain why this is so to their group. Similarly, peer feedback on student essays can involve students teaching each other how to revise essays by suggesting better topic sentences. Teachers can provide students with checklists of organizational features (such as topic sentences and transition words) that are expected to appear in an essay and have students scan for them.

Additionally, in terms of revising content, teacher and peer feedback encourages students to make their writing explicable to their readers and also enables students to learn about what they may have overlooked, such as examples or other details. A particular example from my own class is an essay that a student wrote on the topic of things she did not like people to do. Her first draft was rather unfocused and began with the theme of lying, but then shifted to the observation that some lies are good before abruptly return-

ing to her original opinion that lying was bad. In her initial draft, she wrote:

> I don't like lie. I think most people think that. Liar is too bad. But, I think that there is a good lie. Sometimes lies make people happy. However, also lie isn't good.

The student's writing may be unfocused, but it has generated ideas that can then be moulded into a second draft with more consistent organization. In written comments on her first draft, I highlighted some grammatical errors and asked her to give some examples of what she meant by a good lie. She was able to foreground the fact that not all lies are bad and flesh out her point as follows:

> I don't like lying. I think most people have same idea. Lying is usually a very bad thing to do. But, there are exceptions. For example, my friend made a cake for me. She made it very hard. I felt very happy. So I said "Taste is really good!" but, in fact, this cake is not good taste. I think this is a white lie. This lie makes her happy. So sometimes lies make people happy.

The examples that she used in her redrafting improved her essay in such a way that it better conformed to the standards of the GTEC sample essays.

Peer feedback proved useful as well, not only for students to gather ideas, but also to receive encouragement from their classmates. One student wrote of one of her peers, "I am so moved to read [Student A]'s essay." Students reported that they enjoyed reading each other's essays and were sometimes surprised by the high quality of their peers' writing. Both teacher and peer feedback, therefore, have their uses and can be successful in different ways. Teachers know what an essay should look like and will usually be able to make content suggestions. Students may be less successful at suggesting ways in which their classmates could improve their writing, but they serve as each other's audiences, sometimes contributing questions and suggestions, but often simply giving encouragement. To the extent that my students offered any specific advice, they usually suggested cosmetic changes such as spelling and grammar, which is the focus of the next stage: editing.

Editing

Perhaps the least successful element of my writing course was in implementing a useful editing stage. Error correction of surface details is an area that has received a lot of attention from applied linguists. Some scholars have argued for explicit correction, others for implicit correction—either by highlighting the error or using a correction code, and still others have suggested that error correction is not effective in reducing student errors. A summary of this debate can be found in Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005.

In my classes, I found that students would copy explicit corrections in later drafts but without much attention to the purpose of the correction. For example, if the word "fright attendant" was repeated a number of times in an essay, but only corrected by the teacher to "flight attendant" at the first appearance, the student would often only correct that specific instance. This suggests that the failure of the editing stage may be because the students have insufficiently been made to think more deeply about the writing process, as well as the fact that they have adopted a product approach. I used a correction code in my classes, such as "art" for article errors, but discovered that many students had difficulty understanding the correction codes. Although I taught my students the codes and provided them with a list, the problem was that the students often lacked knowledge of parts of speech and other metalanguage to employ the codes. Therefore, although codes have the potential to be effective, teachers should know that students might require a lot of training in their use, particularly if they are to peer edit. Such training is an example of learner autonomy that contrasts with an expectation that editing is solely the responsibility of the teacher, which is something that students may well be used to in the grammar-translation method or other product approaches in which only a single draft is produced.

Perhaps the editing stage would have been more successful if I had employed error correction techniques that required more thought without being confusing. With implicit corrections, students are asked to think about the error and work out for themselves what is wrong with their writing. I have experimented with colour-coded highlighting in which verb tense errors are highlighted in green. Students then have to think about the correct form. The aim is for students to think about the most appropriate tense for the piece of writing and transfer this knowledge to later drafts and pieces of writing. Another important way in which peers can edit work is to have them look at the essays to determine whether they fulfil the conventions of the essay. In these cases, students can scan for introductory phrases, concluding phrases, and clear transition words. Having students look at other's work may help them learn more about their own work as well.

Difficulties and Remedies

One of the difficulties for teachers, and also for students, is keeping track of how many drafts and preliminary pieces of writing have been completed. For this reason, I kept a checklist that I could mark whenever a student had completed a draft, peer feedback, or teacher feedback session (Appendix C). However, another method of doing this, which also assists in learner autonomy, is for students to assemble a portfolio of their own work (Leachtenauer & Edwards, 2013; Raimes, 2002). Portfolios can consist of a clear folder

with a cover sheet on which a checklist of the various stages of the process approach appear (a mind map, an outline, a freewriting draft, a first draft, and subsequent drafts), which students can check off as each piece is added to the folder.

Another difficulty is that each student writes at a pace that is different from the other students. It is important that students who finish one particular task know what to do and are not sitting and waiting for other students to finish. There are various remedies for this. Teachers can arrange the class so that students at similar stages can swap pieces of writing to read and give peer feedback, or students could be given a list of tasks to do such as textbook exercises or diary writing

Conclusion

The ideas presented in this paper assisted me in creating a writing course as part of an International Studies Course, but teachers choosing to implement them will need to take into account their own context. I recommend that teachers conduct a needs analysis, consult with colleagues, and bear in mind the type of exams their students will take. This would be easier if a survey of *akahon* writing tasks were available, and such a survey may well be a useful area for future research. The Japanese English education system has long been criticized for its reliance on product approaches to writing and also for an excessive focus on form at the expense of fluency. A lot of the increasing interest in communicative English has sometimes been taken to apply to spoken English. However, written communication should not be neglected, because MEXT guidelines and many of the English language tests that students will take require communicative writing skills. An approach to writing that emphasizes meaning and is relevant to the learner is required, and the process-genre approach provides that. In my own situation, I discovered that students actively engaged in the writing tasks and that the process-genre approach was relevant to their writing requirements. When carefully adapted to the needs of the students, the approach can be effective. Writing *is* time consuming and difficult, but that is not a reason to avoid teaching it. In fact, it is all the more reason to teach it in such a way that learners can develop their skills, specifically in genres that are relevant to them.

Bio Data

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Appendix A
Short Questionnaire on Students' Attitudes to Writing

I am doing some research to help with the aims of your writing course.

Please answer these simple questions. You don't need to write your name on the questionnaire, but please give honest answers.

1. Do you enjoy your writing course?

Yes/ No   Reasons: _____ (optional)

2. How do you feel about writing?

Opinion	Yes	No
It is fun		
It is difficult		
It is boring		
It will be useful in the future		
It is important		

3. What do you want to do in the future using your English skills?

4. If you want to go to a university, which one (s) do you want to go to?

5. What do you want to study at university?

Questionnaire Results (N = 18)

1.

Yes	No
13	5

2.

Opinion	Yes	No
It is fun	10	7
It is difficult	16	2
It is boring	6	12
It will be useful in the future	18	0
It is important	18	0

3.

I want to go to university	11
I want to travel / study abroad	7
I want to use it for my job in the future	4
Other	2

4.

Kansai University	7	Teikyo University	1
Kansai Foreign Language University	6	Kyoto Women's University	1
Kwansei Gakuin University	5	Mukogawa Women's University	1
Doshisha University	2	Konan Women's University	1

5. English was a popular subject with 15 students saying they would like to study it at university.

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Appendix B
Two Essays

(A) Why do you study English?	(B) Why do you study English?
I like English.	I study English for three reasons. My first reason is because I woud like to become a flight attendant and I need English to do that job.
English is important.	
English is fun.	My second reeson is because I want to Travel abroad and meet new peeple.
English is useful.	
English is good.	my third reason is because I like watching movies and listening to music which is in English?
Let's study English with me.	
I love baseball too!	Let me tell you some more about my first reason . . .

1. Which essay, (A) or (B), do you like better?

2. Why do you like that essay better? (Discuss with your partner.)

Appendix C
Process Writing Progress Chart

Name	1st Essay							
	Plan	1st Draft	PR	2nd Draft	C.	3rd Draft	Ed.	Final
Student A								
Student B								
Student C								
Student D								
Student E								