Using Duoethnography to Foster Critical Multiliteracies

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This article examines the advantages and drawbacks of using duoethnography with first-year undergraduate students in an English medium university programme in Japan, using a case study of one duoethnography to illustrate the benefits and drawbacks. Connections between duoethnography, multiliteracies and critical thinking are explored. Critical thinking has been considered important in education for much of this century so far, and it has become an expectation of universities that critical thinking is an outcome of studies. One way to consolidate students' critical thinking is through a pedagogy of multiliteracies, in which students gain the ability to consider different aspects of the information they are exposed to in their studies. Since duoethnography focuses on dialogue and criticality, it is argued that carrying out a duoethnography as a class assignment is a way to teach students to apply multiliteracies.

　本稿は、英語で授業を実施する大学の学科の1年生を対象にデュオ民族誌を実施することの利点と不利点を考察する。ひとつのデュオ民族誌を事例として用い、デュオ民族誌とマルチリテラシー及び批判的思考のつながりについて探索する。今世紀の大部分、批判的思考は教育において重要なこととして考えられてきた。実際、大学はそれを学習の結果として修得されるべきものと期待している。学習者の批判的思考能力を強化するひとつの方法は、マルチリテラシーの方法論である。この方法では、学習者は自分が接する情報の様々な局面について考慮する能力を会得する。デュオ民族誌は対話と批判性に焦点を置くため、授業の課題として実施することは、学習者にマルチリテラシーを適用する能力を教える一つの方法であると、著者は論ずる。

This article outlines how the use of multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, 2015) within duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2013) can facilitate students meeting the expectations of critical thinking required at university level. Details are given of work on a duoethnography project conducted as part of an academic writing course in an English Medium Instruction (EMI) programme at a private university in Tokyo. Duoethnography can be a practical project to foster the learning of multiliteracies, which are necessary in a higher education environment that requires information literacy and communication literacy. Increasingly, interdisciplinary approaches to 'real world' problems are used as the basis for applied work, not only to motivate students but also to prepare them for work they will potentially undertake in their fields upon graduation (e.g. Bettencourt et al., 2023). As a form of academic writing which embodies multiliteracies, duoethnography requires a variety of registers and spans interaction in various media. In this way duoethnography can provide a method for students to integrate multimodal information into their communication.

In this article, the concept of multiliteracies is explored, followed by an overview of duoethnography, before exploring how the author has successfully employed duoethnography in their classroom, with an examination of a student duoethnography on the topic of working students, followed by practical considerations for those wishing to implement duoethnography in their classes.

Why Duoethnography?
Duoethnography originated in the humanities, and most notably in social and educational studies (Norris et al., 2012) before being taken up by ELT practitioners (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016; Lowe & Lawrence, 2020). It provides the opportunity to foster critical literacy precisely because it is a dialogic research method wherein the authors are the site of research as opposed to the topic (Sawyer & Norris, 2013); that is, the method is not merely dual autobiography, although biographical events are obviously relevant. Although duoethnography is accessible it is also rigorous when undertaken with due care and attention to detail. Such rigour is necessary because superficial agreement results in stasis: the status quo is maintained by providing consensus without due consideration how alternatives may bring improvement. There are 14 tenets stated by Sawyer and

Norris (2013) which provide a safeguard against superficial agreement due to situating the author as the site rather than the subject of research, and emphasising a critical, questioning stance over fixed authorial ideologies. (pp. 23-4), These tenets also reduce what Breault (2016) terms "parallel talk", which is more akin to a therapeutic catharsis than research or inquiry, with partners not probing and simply listening to a monologue. Sawyer and Norris's tenets emphasize the following: contextual situation in society and relationship with audience; experiential quality and focus on identity; positionality of authors; criticality; resonance in society.

The duoethnography is situated in a context, in a time and place, in society, and also with a potential audience who will also create their own meanings and questions, potentially also disagreeing with the findings. Furthermore, there is also a level of criticality in duoethnography in order for differences between authors to be exploited and for transformation to occur, at least for the authors. However, the criticality of the inquiry can lead to ramifications for transformation outside of the authors, through resonance with readers and the wider world.

Above all, it is my opinion that the tenets related to criticality and positionality are the priorities in undertaking duoethnography as a classroom project. Criticality can be difficult, socially, because probing questions can sometimes be misunderstood as disdain if they are not anticipated, or if such questioning is not part of the existing relationship between the student duoethnographers. Additionally, positionality can be difficult to state clearly for students because they may not have considered that they have intersectional identities (cf. Crenshaw, 1991), and how such intersectionality can manifest as privilege and marginalisation, even simultaneously. However, superficial discourse is resisted through the duoethnographic process: deep, critical inquiry is required of the duoethnographers, toward one's partner, oneself, and existing scholarship and discourse around the research topic. Through critical engagement, self-celebrating work can be avoided and a deep exploration of beliefs, challenges to personal epistemologies, and potential actions to be taken can be produced. Furthermore, duoethnography provides authentic reasons for thorough peer review of one another's work because the work reflects on both parties with their names attached, as with any other coauthored project.

One reason for the rise in use of duoethnography in language teaching research and applied linguistics is that the method is highly accessible to beginners (Habibie & Sawyer, 2024; Lowe & Jones, 2024; Lowe & Lawrence, 2020). Due to the rigorous process described above, there is also potential for deep student interaction, investment of time, and intrinsic interest in and motivation to pursue the chosen topics. This leads to the affordance of a rich, edifying process for its writing, which can result in an academically rigorous end-product. The duoethnography process requires dialogue to both manifest content and to determine what is included in the final product, and also stylistic decisions about how to write the resulting work. Many duoethnographies are written entirely in script form with authors 'taking turns' to write (e.g., Jones & Bruzzano, 2022; Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016) while others have jointly written passages linking sections of dialogic inquiry (e.g., Karas & Uchihara, 2021; Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018). Student reactions to such variation in style can range from relief, in that there is a greater leeway in academic style than they previously perceived, to confusion due to the stylistic differences creating a wider range of norms and thus no 'correct' way to conduct the duoethnography. As such, teachers providing guidance and monitoring is essential. However, when the work is done correctly, it is necessary to engage with the academic literature on the duoethnography topic, and therefore students have the potential to notice the similarities and differences between their work and that which they have read. As detailed below, this can result in students seeing their work as equal to existing academic writing, and thus facilitating their apprenticeship into the academic community as genuine, albeit junior participants.

Due to the dialogic nature of duoethnography and its emergence from critical engagement with experience, knowledge and beliefs, it may be advantageous for students to choose their own topic. Topics close to the students' own fields of interest can create a connection between personal interest and academic requirements; however, it can also result in superficial literature use, particularly selective use of research that supports preexisting beliefs and opinions. Although this selective use of research appears at first to be detrimental, it provides salient teachable examples of how to critically engage with library research and reading widely. For example, if a student were to cite only research that backs up their own biases, it may contrast to the findings and ideas of their partner; conversely, if the partner were willing to proceed with the use of highly selective citations, there should be a stage at which peers and the instructor eventually read a work in process, at which point biases can be pointed out and the students concerned can address their biased citations and use of research. Therefore, an authentic reason to conduct research is created, based upon interest, which can be harnessed in order to provide a rationale for diligent, critical library research skills.

The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies

The pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, 2015) is an approach to handling information from different sources. One facet is literacy, the straightforward

ability to parse an explicit message from the written word, but it also includes critical literacy, where the reader engages on a deeper level with a text to explore implied meaning and also what is omitted from an example of discourse. Further types of literacy also exist, e.g. information literacy, emotional literacy, organizational literacy, and all of these come under the multiliteracies umbrella. It is likely that students are implicitly aware of different literacies especially in L1, as they are already accustomed to changes in modality across media. However, facilitating and encouraging students to engage in these different literacies as bona fide academic practices in L2+, increases the probability of learning not only academic content related to their fields of study, but also learning of a situated nature: students' place, and relationship with cultures, society and community, and their potential to create change within those spheres. Multiliteracies can address considerations of audience/readership perspectives within a variety of information sources and media, through examining intended purposes for various texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, 2015). Thus, students can practice assessing varied information to evaluate its impact on society, which will likely improve their depth of reading and information management.

Methodology

The current study is the outcome of three years of work conducted as part of the required English courses for first-year domestic students in an English medium instruction (EMI) university department, the Department of Global Innovation Studies at Toyo University. Those courses are aimed at developing English for Academic Purposes in the home institution and for study abroad for up to two semesters in English, a condition for graduation for domestic students. Students frequently express their motivation for joining the department as a desire to study in English, but not actually study the linguistic systems of English.

The method of instruction for the project roughly followed guidelines from Lowe and Lawrence (2020, 2023). The students were prompted to choose a topic to explore with a partner, by finding what they had in common and also differences between one another, considering trust and the relationships between one another. Topics have included left-handedness, sports fandom, K-pop fandom among Japanese, living overseas, scouting, and working students. Partners have been set by the teacher and decided upon by the students themselves in different iterations of the course. No difference was observed in the quality or criticality of the work (see Table 1). Essentially, there are pros and cons with teacher-selected partners and student-selected partners: teacher-selected partners can result in topics that students may not previously have considered because they

cannot predict shared interests as easily as they can with a self-selected partner, who would usually be a friend. However, teacher-selected partners need time to develop a rapport in their work and to gain the level of trust required to deeply probe one another's experiences and beliefs. Upon topic selection, students were prompted to engage in dialogue and to record any spoken discussion in order to refer to it more easily later. Full transcription was not required, particularly due to the fact that the assignment was considerably shorter than a typical academic article or book chapter (1,000 words per student involved in the duoethnography). Students were prompted to critically probe the topic and the discourse they and their partners produced, either by means of verbal or written questions. This was instructed by showing simple how and why questions, or, alternatively, highly specific questions. Beyond such interrogative processes, students were also strongly encouraged to consider the extent of changes to their beliefs over the timeframe of the project, and how any such changes may be reflected in their plans for future behaviour and actions.

Table 1
A Timeline of the Class Syllabus and Duoethnography Project:

Week	Learning Focus
1	Orientation. Main ideas. Expanding notes. Library research skills.
2	Reading selectively. Simple and compound sentences. General vs academic vocabulary.
3	Main ideas in longer texts. Identifying stance. Common academic nouns.
4	Reading critically, responding to stance. Paragraph structure and cohesion.
5	Review of topic sentences and concluding sentences.
6	Predicting content. Identifying and evaluating supporting evidence. Rapid writing strategies.
7	Midterm integrated reading and writing test.
8	Definitions, explanations and examples. Defining relative clauses.
9	Referring to change in progress. Redrafting. Changing sentence structures.
10	Adding detail with adjectives and prepositional phrases. Adverbials for cohesion.

Week	Learning Focus
11	Evaluating sources. Identifying details and examples for an essay. Citing and reporting.
12	Paraphrasing and quotation. Identifying main ideas and key information. Note taking strategies.
13	Rapid writing strategies. Synthesising information.
14	Revising drafts. Close checking for details. Reflection on learning.
15	Final integrated reading and writing test.

Not only can duoethnography provide an authentic reason for writing but it can also provide an authentic reason for reading journal articles and academic book chapters, certainly beyond the rationale of required reading. However, reading in the students' topic area is still necessary. Students were instructed to log searches in case they needed to replicate them later. They were advised to sort by title, and prioritising in categories as *definitely, maybe*, and *unnecessary*, with the *unnecessary* items disregarded and then abstracts of the *definitely* and *maybe* items screened, although the *maybe* items may not be screened depending on the length and utility of the *definitely* list. After abstract screening, the articles were read, and where sections were difficult, for example statistics-heavy results sections, these were skimmed and attention drawn to main points. Article outlines were created by writing the main ideas of paragraphs.

It is important to expose students to a variety of styles. Therefore, a curated list showing the variation within the genre was given to students in the orientation phase (see Appendix). Some works are more traditionally organised (for example Karas & Uchihara, 2021), and some are more like dialogues/scripts (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016). In the current study, different examples by the author and their collaborators were also made available to students because these also vary from being almost entirely dialogic to more heavily structured. This difference was explained to students as due to journal requirements; audience norms can dictate writing forms. However, duoethnographies alone cannot provide the depth of information required to complete such a project. Therefore, as per step 11–12 in the chart above, further reading in students' own area was required.

Case Study: Hana & Koki

In this section, one duoethnography written by and about working students is explored. The students, Hana and Koki, (their real names), provided permission for the work to be shared. University ethics board approval was not required because the students could give informed consent and were asked to consent to their work being presented and quoted in an academic publication. The work was conducted in Fall 2022. In this early iteration of the course, duoethnography partners were assigned by the teacher, considering salient concord or contrast between partners' beliefs, experiences and knowledge. At an early stage the student duoethnographers found that they both worked part time but that there was also a contrast in that Hana had been in her job since high school, while Koki had just recently begun his part-time job. One of the early actions that led to their project's success is stated by the students:

> [*We read*] *past work* (i.e., academic literature) *closely and picking up crucial information and insight. For example, to ask some questions for partners to find similarities and difficulties. As a result, we could get to know what kind of experience partners have…* (Hana & Koki; my parentheses).

This passage points to the students taking the work seriously and illustrates that the problematization potentially had a positive impact upon how the students oriented to their part-time jobs while being enrolled as full-time students.

All students in the class were encouraged to read deeply, with an emphasis on literature in English related to their chosen topic. While some students tended toward random, quick reading, Hana and Koki outlined their process for selecting the literature that they engaged with:

> *Google Scholar was used to seeing and picking up some thesis related to the theme… each page showed approximately ten lists, and some papers were selected based on how the content suited the theme* (of students' part-time work)*, and the article support our opinions and experiences.* (Hana & Koki).

This shows that awareness of the topic is important for the students and that they had sorted through vast amounts of information. Effective instruction related to use of library sources was required, in line with a change in ways that learners discover "specificities amongst the enormously varied field of possibly relevant texts" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 174) through multiliteracies. However, the students also stated that they looked for articles that supported their opinions and experiences, which suggests that a certain amount of biased use of the literature did occur. In spite of this, the

students did also compare their experiences and beliefs with the findings in some of the literature that they cited.

Limitations

One weakness frequently attributed to autoethnography, is that the work is highly personal, subjective and uninteresting because it provides no new information about social phenomena (Delamont, 2009). Hana and Koki were both cognizant of the limits of their experience and how this relates to other members of their work community, as well as the academic community. As they wrote:

We cannot write about what kind of opinions or thoughts people, such as managers and actual full-time people, have [of] part-time jobs, because we only write from the student's point of view... Also, as we write, we realize that the number of papers on our subject is low and we are bothered to find academic references to support our opinions, so we hope that more scholars push for research on our subject. (Hana & Koki).

This is a clear-cut example of critical literacy, which is perhaps beyond what one might consider the usual level of undergraduate work. It is worth noting that Hana and Koki were both first-year students at the time of conducting the duoethnography in question and their work is arguably atypical of what teachers may expect at this level of study, even within EMI.

Furthermore, the work of students who undergo training in duoethnography, that is, read examples of the genre and study its tenets in order to address issues or to problematize aspects of their own lives have the potential to draw attention to hitherto little discussed or documented phenomena.

As we discuss the exchange idea, and read the articles related to the topic, we can discern that both of us were bothered by similar problems and that is not only us. We can write a realistic account of how students actually think about part-time work, therefore, it would be helpful for managers and teachers to know what kind of problems students who work part-time have (Hana & Koki).

This writing about change is important, as Breault (2016) notes that many existing duoethnographies do not explicitly state how the process of conducting the project affects society or even the duoethnographers themselves. Hana and Koki display a criticality not only of their own experiences, but also an awareness that their experiences are largely undocumented in social science research literature.

Practical Considerations

While I am clearly enthusiastic about the benefits of duoethnography, it would be remiss to avoid mentioning the drawbacks. Absenteeism can be an issue in conducting duoethnography. However, provided that at least some discussion has taken place, one student can take up the challenge of interrogating their own beliefs, knowledge and expectations in relation to what their absent partner had expressed. A further way to overcome absenteeism is to set up trioethnographies for students who have shown attendance difficulties. If one such student should fail to attend and contribute to work, then the trio should have few problems in becoming a duo.

One way to ensure that duoethnography is undertaken with sufficient criticality is to reiterate the importance of critical dialogue and questions each lesson during the project. There is a potential for students to use research selectively in order to support their ideas. Such selective use is not limited to duoethnography, and nor indeed to undergraduates. Duoethnography can devolve into mutual praise while avoiding honest evaluation and potential for change (Lowe & Jones, 2024). It is worth noting that the students in my class know one another for six months for six sessions per week together, prior to undertaking the projects, thus issues of trust and rapport are less of a consideration than in new classes, and therefore criticality is less likely to be subject to issues of trust.

Some of the predicted drawbacks of duoethnography can be easily alleviated. While Davies (2009) opines that a joint writing task where student responsibility for certain sections is not provided is an inappropriate task, in duoethnography, partners hold each other accountable. Additionally, with little input from a "free-riding" partner, a more conscientious partner cannot complete any more than their own share of the work satisfactorily. Inequality in sharing of the workload is easily prevented by ensuring that students know in advance that most online services as well as some offline software can show the document editing history, through functions such as version history or track changes, meaning that teachers can observe which parties have contributed which parts to the work. Ensuring that all students understand this can prevent students from taking control away from partners, or from delegating most work to a partner. As such, the same grade was given when partners had contributed the same amount of work to the project. In neither iteration of the course were there "free riders", but students with long-term illnesses did cause minor issues. In the first iteration, one student only attended half a semester, and so his partner used the dialogues that they had engaged in but was encouraged to write 1,000 words plus any drafted work they had produced. In the second semester, students who had health problems were assigned to groups of three who could then continue developing the work as a pair. In the work that informs this study, for

each cohort there appeared to have been a subjective increase in time spent on the work well before submission dates. Empirical research on whether this is the case is certainly welcome, but beyond the scope of this article. However, not only quantity of time but also quality use of time appears to have occurred.

Conclusion

Undertaking duoethnography with undergraduate students is challenging, though not impossible. However, difficulty may be considered desirable, because it provides a level of challenge that can result in deep engagement with the work. Moreover, when students engage in a highly rigorous qualitative inquiry project, by which means they can see their level of writing in comparison to existing academic research writing, they are provided with a visible achievement that is more concrete than a grade alone. However, the value of such an achievement depends upon not only the students themselves but also the culture of the institution and/or department.

In short, there are many benefits to using duoethnography as a way to facilitate a multiliteracies approach to developing students' information handling for writing. Duoethnography is likely to facilitate a deep engagement by students with their chosen topics and also with the texts they read in order to develop knowledge to support their writing. Students have a need to filter library search results according to relevance, and this filtering is best done according to their own evaluation. Although it is possible to complete a duoethnography project by selective, biased reading, the inherent interest in a chosen topic related to their own lives arguably means that there is a greater motivation toward high-quality work. Duoethnography can also lead to a deep academic engagement with their own lives, and making positive changes that they wish to see in themselves, their communities and society at large. Therefore, the potential benefits of conducting duoethnography can be seen: it provides affordances to foster academic literacies in handling information and synthesizing it in writing along with students' own life experiences and orientations to future courses of action and desires.

Bio Data:

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Appendix

Curated List of Duoethnographies

This list is provided as an example only. Practitioners should adapt the list to the needs of their students.

Ashlee, A. A., & Quaye, S. J. (2020). On being racially enough: A duoethnography across minoritized racial identities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1753256

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