Integrating Poetry and Dialogue Journal Writing into EFL Curricula

Hae-Ri Kim
Kyungil University, Korea

This study proposes integrating poetry within EFL (English as a Foreign Language) curricula. This is done by connecting the diverse activities associated with studying poems to dialogue journal writing. First, this study presents the benefits of using poetry as a resource to develop spoken and written English. Then methods are demonstrated which can be used to integrate poetry and dialogue journal writing into existing current EFL curricula. Finally, the study introduces examples of poems which have worked well with EFL students of various abilities, and presents how to integrate poetry into an EFL classroom in meaningful ways that consider the linguistic development of language learners and provide an opportunity to extend their literary experience. Samples of writing between EFL teachers and students are also included to illustrate how integrating poetry to the classroom can create diverse activities and successful outcomes. The study concludes that EFL teachers can enrich their students' English education by employing diverse poems and activities that are enjoyable and offer many exciting possibilities.

This study proposes to integrate poetry in EFL curricula by connecting the diverse activities associated with studying poems to dialogue journal writing. Poetry is an amazingly effective teaching device, but is underused and neglected in EFL teaching because some teachers have negative experiences of it. Problems that have arisen include students being unable to understand poetry with all its implied and subtle meaning. In EFL classrooms, students have

rarely had the opportunity to encounter poems either for language learning or pleasure. This is often due to many misconceptions held about poetry. Moreover, in many countries where EFL occurs, access to poems written in comprehensible language, or for children, has limited availability for English language teachers. For several reasons, I propose that poetry–especially written for children–is a good instructional resource in developing EFL learning for several reasons. These are addressed in the next section, "Background of the Study." I also suggest that EFL teachers connect poetry with dialogue journal writing on a continuous basis in their classrooms.

Initially, this study provides background information about the benefits of using poetry and dialogue journal writing in language classrooms, and then presents a model of how to do this. In order to show how to integrate poetry into an EFL classroom routine in meaningful ways, I introduce several poems with strategies and activities that worked well with EFL students of diverse abilities. These poems were selected because they were evidently helpful to the linguistic development of language learners and provided students with opportunities to expand their literary experience. By presenting poems EFL teachers can integrate into their curricula, I illustrate how diverse activities can be germinated in a classroom environment. I employ different activities to the same poem depending on the situations that I will describe later. In addition, I present samples from students' dialogue journals as examples other language teachers can learn from. Some of the strategies and journal responses provided are from my previous study (Kim, 2002) and ongoing experiments with EFL students of various ages and English language abilities. Other responses or data came from cooperating teachers of language institutes and schools who adopted these poems and activities in their classrooms.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Poetry and Language Learning

Poetry is valuable material in an EFL classroom. It is appropriate and

effective for several reasons. First of all, poetry's brevity is ideal for EFL classrooms, and classroom teachers can easily integrate poems into their curricula (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2001). Poetry is also an effective language learning device which can increase the oral proficiency of EFL learners, many of whom do not have opportunities for oral practice or communication in English (Cullinan, Scala, & Schroder, 1995). Also, poetry is ideally meant to be read aloud. This increases confidence in reading and speaking English – a potent pedagogical-plus!

Due to the complexity of poetry – even poetry written in a learner's native language is hard to interpret – many teachers are reluctant to use it in the classroom. However, poems written for young readers, which have a simple structure, can provide a rich source of character sketches, scenes, and stories to prompt narratives from students. There are studies that provide useful strategies for introducing poetry to EFL teaching (Chatton, 1993; Cullinan, Scala, & Schroder, 1995; Gasparro & Falletta, 1994; Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2001; Kooy & Wells, 1996; Ramsaram, 1983; Vogel, 1993). Other studies look at teaching poetry writing to language learners and examine the resultant possibilities of creative and communicative language use (Fagin, 1991; Preston, 1982).

Other benefits of using poetry in EFL classrooms include boosting content learning. Poetry provides a context in which various subjects can be introduced and integrated along with a new language (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2001). Within poetry, students can connect knowledge from math, science, history and other subjects to their learning of a new language. Therefore, I suggest that for many reasons, poetry is an ideal entry point to language learning in EFL settings.

Dialogue Journal Writing

Dialogue journal writing has been known as an effective strategy in communicative language classrooms. In multilingual/multicultural classrooms where the linguistic levels and personal experiences of student are diverse,

dialogue journal writing supports individual instruction since each student can write at his/her level (Atwell, 1998; Reed, 1993). In the above studies, Atwell's students read literature and wrote responses to their teacher; Reed's students, who were learning English as a second language, wrote to their teacher about their personal and classroom lives.

Dialogue journal writing in language classrooms also provides a way of developing communicative competence since it can be used to carry out a "written conversation" between a student and a teacher (Staton, Shuy, Peyton, & Reed, 1988). Hudelson (1994) showed that second language learners could engage in an "authentic communication" situation by writing to their teacher. For language learners to become communicatively competent, both oral and written language abilities need to be developed equally. In communicative language classrooms, dialogue journal writing has been used to carry out written conversations between two people (Staton, et al., 1988). Lam (2000) realizes that language learners express themselves more easily by writing their thoughts down rather than trying to speak in front of other people. This develops their communicative competence enormously. The most effective dialogue journal writing in a communicative language classroom setting involves ongoing dialogue between students and teachers. The journals are used as ways of facilitating feedback and comments, which not only serve as language input to the next journal entries, but can also create a cycle of questions and responses (Todd, Mills, Palard, & Khamcharoen, 2001).

Literature, including poems, is a great generator of topics for dialogue journals. Many studies have explored the benefits of literature in developing writing, the process of reading-to-write, and the connections between reading and writing in language classrooms (Belcher & Hirvela, 2000; Gajdusek & vanDommelen, 1993; Reid, 1993; Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Spack, 1985). Through a literature-based approach, diverse genres can provide excellent resources for writing, since students can find an active transaction between their subjective experiences and the text (Rosenblatt, 1994).

PROCEDURE

A Three-Day Lesson Plan

I suggest a three-day lesson plan for integrating poetry and dialogue journal writing into an EFL curriculum. When classroom teachers have a fixed curriculum they have to follow, it is hard for them to use materials that take up too much class time. When classroom teachers adopt a three-day lesson plan, they only need to spend about five to ten minutes per class hour, so they can adjust the plan depending on the situation. For example, if the class students' language levels are low or the students are young, a teacher can assign more days for activities to enhance the comprehension of a text before any dialogue journals are written. A teacher can also make a one-day lesson plan if the students' language levels are high or allow for a longer period of time if a poem is available.

When introducing a new poem, a teacher reads it aloud by themselves or with student partners. The teacher also includes activities that focus on new or core vocabulary. On the second day, the comprehension is measured through diverse activities and classroom conversation. By talking about a poem, students can construct the meaning of the story. Finally, on the third day, students are given opportunities to respond personally to the poem by writing dialogue journals. When the teacher writes back to each student, he/she encourages students to respond more deeply by asking questions related to the subjects and contents of the poem. A three-day lesson plan is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Three-Day Lesson Plan

Day	Lesson
Day 1	Read-aloud, vocabulary work
Day 2	Comprehension check-up activities, classroom conversation
Day 3	Dialogue journal writing

The Format of Dialogue Journals

When introducing dialogue journal writing, a teacher prepares a notebook for each student in which student and teacher write back and forth throughout the whole semester or school year. This makes dialogue journal writing an integral part of classroom life. Each student and his/her teacher engage in an epistolary exchange. Both teacher and student start with Dear _____ and close with their signature. Below is a set of examples between a third grade student and his classroom teacher at a language institute:

> Dear Ms. Lee,
> I can go to shop and work there, because I operate the calculating machine, and recipient the money, and put the money on calculating. So I can go to shop part time job.
> Jan 13th 2003
> Sincerely,
> Kang Bin
>
> Dear Kangbin,
> You are very smart to be able to use a calculator. It is a very good idea to use your ability. Do you have hobbies? What are you good at?
> Sincerely,
> Ms. Lee

At first, students "passively" respond to the teacher by specifically answering the teacher's question. Soon they learn that dialogue journal writing is a means of communicating more broadly with their teacher so they introduce diverse questions, ask for help and suggest something for the class and so on. Students write their journals on the third day after reading the poem. The teacher then collects all the journals and responds to them individually by writing epistolary responses. This format of letter writing creates an exploratory, dynamic and personal correspondence between each student and the teacher.

POETRY AND DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING

"The Alien": A Springboard of Imagination

"The Alien"[1] by Julie Holder works extremely well with all levels of EFL learners because it provides students with opportunities to project their imaginations into space. They can think about creatures from other planets and speculate as to what their different points of view may be. Although "The Alien" is a short poem written in simple English, it provides much inspiration. The poem presents not only a brief, concise, and interesting sketch of an alien, but also a unique scene where a human being confronts an alien who considers the human to be an alien!

The Alien
by Julie Holder

The alien
Was round as the moon
Five legs he had
And his ears played a tune.
His hair was pink
And his knees were green,
He was the funniest thing I'd seen.
As he danced in the door
Of his strange spacecraft,
He looked at me—
And laughed and laughed!

When classroom teachers introduce this poem, they can develop visual images to ensure students' comprehension of it. For example, the teacher can ask students to draw an illustration for the poem without showing the illustration from the text. They then have to explain their drawing to other students. For this activity, the teacher encourages students to work in pairs or

---

[1] Quoted from Bauer (1995).

small groups in order to talk about their illustrations. Paired and group activities have the advantage of allowing students to express their thoughts in a non-threatening atmosphere. After doing this, students have further opportunities to present their illustrations to the whole class. This procedure is effective to EFL students who have limited oral skills in English and therefore little confidence in their oral presentation. The teacher can also ask students to compare the illustrations they created with the one provided in the book and then discuss them.

For students who are older or have a higher level of English proficiency, the teacher can ask for a spacecraft to be included in their illustrations. This is an opportunity to springboard into their imagination since there is little said about the spacecraft in the poem. The creation of a spacecraft not only stimulates students' imaginations, but provides them with opportunities to express their thoughts in the target language. Explaining the alien they drew is rather easy because students can simply use the language already used in the poem. However, students are more challenged when they have to explain their imaginary spacecraft, which is not described in the text.

In teaching a new vocabulary such as 'alien,' the teacher can guide students to guess what kind of creature it is. Students come up with words such as 'monster,' 'astronaut,' or 'alien' in their mother tongue and select 'alien' because of the creature's strange appearance and the spacecraft in the background.

Talking about "point of view" or perspectives is another good activity for older students since it provides a topic for classroom discussion and dialogue journal writing. In this case, I recommend teachers use the poem without the last two lines when they introduce it. The teacher can ask students to complete the poem by providing two new lines and compare these with the original text. Then the class discusses the alien's and their own points of view in the poem. Again, each student responds individually to the poem in their dialogue journals and the teacher replies to each. The example below is a set of dialogue journal exchanges between an 8th grade student and a teacher discussing "The Alien":

> Today's poem was very fun. But I think that poem's writer wanted to say about point of views. Aliens think. I am fun when I meet Aliens. But I think Aliens are fun. That's true. If I meet Aliens, I shouted "Welcome to Earth." (Byunghyun, Jan. 9, 2002)

> Everybody has different point of view. So does the alien in today's poem. … "Welcome to my class, Byunghyun." (Teacher's response to Byunghyun)

The dynamic interaction between the teacher and each student in a language classroom is significant because it provides students with opportunities to experiment with and use new language in an authentic communicative situation. Teachers need to encourage and carefully guide the active transactions of students' reading and written responses because a teacher's responses can affect students' use of English directly or indirectly.

"We Are Numbers": Developing Oral Fluency through Math Content

I suggest using "We are numbers"[2] by Thoeni Pappas to develop language learners' oral fluency in English and to support math content learning. Poetry is known to be a good resource for reading-aloud and initiating choral reading because of its brevity, rhythm, rhyme and repetition. Poems for two voices, such as "We are numbers," are especially good for pair reading since two students can develop understanding of a poem by constructing its meaning together.

<div align="center">

We are numbers

by Theoni Pappas

</div>

We are numbers.

Numbers.

First came one,

then two,

next three

---

[2] Quoted from Pappas (1999).

	and, four not far behind.
Five,	
	Six,
counting	naturals
large,	
	small,
five-hundred	
	one-third,
gigantic,	
	minute,
a million,	
	one-millionth.
We count.	We count.
We add and subtract.	
	We multiply and divide.
We keep track.	
	We measure.
We are numbers.	We are numbers.
Large,	
	small,
never ending.	never ending.

Poems for two voices are not only good for reading in pairs, but also for promoting choral reading. At an individual level, a student can read the poem with his/her partner in pair work. Or a teacher can divide a whole class into two with one group reading the left column and the other group reading the right side. When offered the opportunity, many EFL students were interested in reading a poem with their partners or in being choral-reading group members. Many students expressed this interest in poems for two voices when they had an opportunity to write about them in their dialogue journals. They used their dialogue journals to ask the teacher for more poems written for two voices to be brought into their classroom.

> I like two voice poems. "Zero," "Book lice," "The wandering Albatross,"
> … any two voice poem, I like. (Joonsub, Jan. 29)

> I want to study poems for two voices, because it'll be better than read the poems by oneself. (Kyunghwa, Jan. 7)

Reading poems for two voices with a partner became one of the students' favorite pair activities, inspiring want of more of them. Another student wanted to share this special experience with her best friend when she had an opportunity to write a letter to her friend:

> "Fishes" and "The Phoenix" are for two people to read, because they were written for two voices. When we meet again, I want that we read these poems together."

Students can learn additional content such as math, science, history and other subjects through poems. By reading "We are numbers," students are exposed to new expressions and basic concepts of mathematics. When introducing content poems, a teacher focuses on core vocabulary rather than introducing new or difficult vocabulary. In the included poem, there is a good opportunity to learn how words such as 'count,' 'natural,' 'measure' and 'track' are related to math concepts. When the teacher provides words for arithmetic units such as 'add,' 'subtract,' 'multiply' and 'divide' from the poem, he/she can provide a table with symbols in which students fill in the appropriate word for each symbol shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2
Four Mathematical Operations with Symbols

(add)	+	—	( )
( )	×	÷	( )

In learning words related to size such as minute, small, large and gigantic, students are not forced to translate them into their mother tongue. Instead, the teacher provides an illustration by using an arithmetic symbol '<' to visualize the degree of each word in terms of its size. From table 3, students can also learn the diverse meanings of a word since most EFL learners recognize

'minute' in terms of a period of time. Again the teacher can include the numbers used in the poem by using the symbol '<' shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Words and Arithmetic Symbols

minute < small < large < gigantic
one-millionth < one-third < five-hundred < a million

By reading poems for two voices as a means of arranging pair work or whole class activity, students can not only develop oral fluency, but also learn how to construct meaning through collaborative learning. In addition, "We are numbers" provides students with an opportunity to learn new language and content, simultaneously.

"My Sister Ate an Orange": Let's Talk about a Crayon-Eating Kid!

EFL students like interesting stories which provide them with topics for classroom conversation. "My Sister Ate an Orange"[3] by Jack Prelutsky is one of my students' favorite poems because of the interesting story produced by the two characters in it. In a short, three-stanza poem, the poet created a very unique character and a narrator who talks about the sister who ate an orange and so much more:

My Sister Ate an Orange
by Jack Prelutsky

My sister ate an orange,
I'm astonished that she did,
she swallowed it completely,
she's a disconcerting kid.

---

[3] Quoted from Prelutsky (1990).

My sister ate an orange,
first she chewed it for awhile,
then digested it entirely
with a silly sort of smile.

My sister ate an orange,
It's a novel thing to do,
then she also ate a yellow
and a purple and a blue.

After reading the poem, the class can carry out a conversation about the text. To begin with, a teacher can introduce the first two stanzas of the poem and talk about the characters. Then, the teacher can initiate classroom conversation by asking questions such as "How many characters are in the poem?" "Who is talking about whom?" "Who ate what?" and so on. Students can start by answering the teachers' questions and develop the conversation by discussing why the sister is described as "a disconcerting kid" and why the narrator was "astonished" by what the sister did – eating an orange and other colors! Later, the teacher introduces the last stanza with an illustration provided by the poetry book. Then students talk about what she really ate and why the speaker was astonished by what she did. Students can also talk about the situation from either the speaker's point of view or the sister's.

The teacher can use dialogue journal activity in a slightly different way by suggesting to students that they write a letter to their favorite writer. Students can choose from some poets they know and then write to their favorite poets. One of the 7th graders wrote a letter to Jack Prelusky:

> Dear Mr. Prelusky,
>   Hi there. I'm Kyunghwa who loves your poems, specially "My sister ate an orange." I always want to ask you. How can you write the poems very good and fun. Before I read your poems I thought that the poems are very difficult to read and write.
>   Now I think reading poems are not difficult, but still I'm hard to write the poems and difficult.
>   Can you tell me how do you write the book to me? Oh, I have one more

question. Where do you get your ideas about poems from? From everything? Or from some another poems? I always want to ask that because all of your poems have very different opinion or mottos. So not by the writers name we can't know it's yours but we can only guess it's yours because its funny.

Sincerely, Kyunghwa
January 28th, 2002

From the letter above, Kyunghwa reveals that poems written in a foreign language were difficult for her to understand, but that Prelusky's poem has changed this misconception. In addition, she started to think about topics for writing good poems and how to write a good poem.

"Dreams": Making Connections through "Dreams"

"Dreams"[4] by Langston Hughes is a short eight-line poem, but the impact of this poem to EFL learners was enormous. The poem is good for reading-aloud because of its short lines, repetition, rhymes and rhythm. Since it is short, students can read the poem aloud several times both alone and chorally. It is also easy to memorize the poem since it is easy to understand and repeats the concept of warning people not to lose their dreams.

<div align="center">

Dreams

by Langston Hughes
</div>

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go

---

[4] Quoted from Rampersad (1994).

Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

The poem provides a rich source of writing for EFL students. When responding to the poem, students reveal many personal attitudes, values, beliefs, and experiences by connecting the poem to themselves. After reading "Dreams," an 8th grader had an opportunity to write about her dreams and why it is important to have dreams:

Dear teacher,

After I read the poem, I thought people live by dream. Yeah, so do I. My dream is to be a computer professor. I like computer, and teaching somebody. So I want to be a good computer professor. I can't computer well now. But I learn about computer hard. I practice hard. The sometime I can computer well.
From time to time, I want to be a writer, too. I'm writing a novel. It is so hard, but I like it. But I think I like computer more. So writing is just my hobby. It may be changed. I'm young.
Anyway, I'll live for my dream because if I have no dreams life is boring. See you later.

Yours sincerely,
Soomi
2001-07-29

The impact of "Dreams" was powerful to EFL students who mostly learned a new language with materials that failed to provide relevant and effective benefits for them. Discovering that Afro-Americans are victims of racial bias and that this was within Hughes's purpose of writing, "Dreams" inspired students to offer their perceptions of the poem and how it affected them. Many students responded to the poem in a directly emotional way. One 7th grade girl expressed how important it is to have dreams when she wrote this letter to her favorite poet:

> Dear Mr. Hughes,
>
> Hello. This is first letter to you.
> You wrote "Dreams", didn't you? I read that poem. It gives me many lessons. If I don't have any dreams, my life is a bird who has broken wing. Before I read your poem, I didn't have any dreams, but now I have dreams. Thank you very much.
>
> Sincerely,
> Mihyun

Short poems also provide a context in which to understand another meaning of the word 'fast' which most EFL students understand to mean 'speed,' since they rarely have an opportunity to meet the word within other contexts. "Dreams" provided a unique context in which students can learn another meaning of the word 'fast' which extends their application of the target language.

"Wolfgang Rock": Inspiring Young Poets

In "Wolfgang Rock,"[5] Brod Bagert transforms Mozart, a famous classical musician and composer from the 1700s who seems unable to attract contemporary young people, into an exciting 'modern' character. By creating a "new" Mozart, Bagert stimulates readers to be creative and imaginative when reading and writing poems:

Wolfgang Rock
by Brod Bagert

If Mozart were alive
He'd be playing lead guitar,
Dancing in the spotlight
And prancing like a star
His hair would be dyed purple

---

[5] Quoted from Strickland (1993).

And his music would be bold.
If Mozart were alive
He'd be playing rock and roll.

The poet introduces Mozart using the subjunctive mood－"If Mozart were alive / He'd be playing lead guitar,"－and closes the poem with the same pattern. For EFL students, this repetition is somehow less linguistically stressful. However, by altering the first and last two lines slightly by substituting "lead guitar" with "rock and roll," diversity is achieved whilst retaining easy and simple vocabulary.

Although it is a short eight line poem, "Wolfgang Rock" is also good language teaching and learning material which will improve students' language ability through diverse activities. First, the classroom teacher can use the subjunctive pattern by inviting students to write their own poem with themselves as the main characters. Students can learn how to use the subjunctive mood in other context by using patterns such as "If I were Mozart, I _____" or "If Beethoven were alive, he _____" and writing freely from their imaginations.

Another activity which can improve language ability is to compare the two different genres of music in the poem i.e., classical and rock music. Students can either make a list by writing down the characteristics of the two different genres of music or talk about them - first through small group activity - and then within a classroom discussion.

Finally, the teacher can connect the poem to a writing activity through dialogue journal writing. Every student can respond to the poem with their own reflections on it. When I used this poem with middle school students, most students liked the idea of Mozart playing rock music playing lead guitar. However, one student expressed his negative view of the poem and the music Mozart would be playing within its proposed scenario:

> If Mozart would be playing rocks and roll, not looks so good. And if he's be dancing in the spotlight, …. so terrible. He had his own music.

Students can also write their own poem using the pattern, "If Beethoven were alive." One 7th grader liked the idea of creating a new Beethoven during this activity and included his favorite sport in the composition:

> Racing Beethoven
>
> If Beethoven were alive
> He'd be racing F-1 race
> Racing in the track
> And run like a psycho
> His head in the helmet
> And His race would be grandeur
> If Beethoven were alive
> He'd be racing F-1 race.

The student who wrote about Beethoven extended his imagination beyond music and proved that EFL students can write an excellent poem if they are appropriately supported. The student not only learned a new language by reading the poem, "Wolfgang Rock," but also wrote his own poem since it provided a model and topic for it.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Poetry in EFL Curricula

After teaching diverse levels of EFL learners and observing them learning with poems, I realized that poetry is valuable material to EFL classrooms. Poetry is appropriate and effective for English teaching and learning since it can be easily integrated into current curricula and it provides good language input to EFL learners. Literature, including poetry, holds promise since it provides EFL students with an opportunity to extend the language-learning environment which is significant in EFL classrooms where language learning is limited to instruction in classrooms (Krashen, 1981).

Moreover, EFL countries reacting to the global shift in the role of English are experiencing curricula reforms in which most of them prioritize the development of communicative competence. Poems which include interesting or fun stories are extremely valuable in developing oral communicative competence since they stimulate and motivate students to participate in classroom discussions. "My Sister Ate an Orange," for example, provides sources of classroom conversation with its interesting story, surprising ending, unique characters, the relationship between siblings and so on. In talking about the poem, simple question-answer exchanges (Ouzts, 1998; Raphael, 1982, 1986) helped students understand the story line and construe meaning from the text. After reading the fun story, a story about a sister who ate crayons, some students thought that they were lucky since they did not have younger sisters like her, and others wanted to talk about their sisters and brothers. In doing this, the teacher and students engage in authentic communication.

By integrating poetry into EFL curricula, collaborative activities such as pair work, small group activities, and classroom discussion were adopted to encourage students to move away from memorizing grammar, ready-made phrases, and isolated vocabulary. In particular, pair work and small group activities promoted a learner-centered environment where students collaborated to construct meaning by reading and talking about poems with their classmates. "We are number" for example was a good poem to initiate pair work, which prompted students to help each other by working together. In addition, most students acknowledged that they enjoyed reading poems for two voices including "We are numbers."

Reading-Writing Connection through Dialogue Journal Writing

By reading poetry and responding to it through dialogue journal writing, EFL learners not only develop language skills, but also extend their learning experience. In a study of EFL college students writing dialogue journals, Khaimukde (1999) found that the topics offered did not go far beyond the

descriptive level of the class and the lesson, and that a shortage of writing subjects was the biggest problem. However, when poetry was introduced to EFL classrooms, it became a valuable source of writing and was used as a generator for dialogue journal topics.

Furthermore, by reading "Wolfgang Rock," students learned how to use the subjunctive mode ("If I Mozart were….." or "If I were ….") in a real context that connected with their experiences. Students either responded to the poem with their own ideas and thoughts or used it as a format for writing their own poems. These activities occurred when students were writing their dialogue journals after reading the poem. To EFL students who were limited in the target language, the poem was helpful because the poem's given format inspired their new poems. "The Alien" was also a good example of developing language skills and extending imaginative range by rewriting the last two lines of the poem. Students, who engaged in these activities, dug into their imaginations, and greatly enjoyed creating poems and giving life to the characters they created. Overall, when students were exposed to poetry and the diverse activities associated with this, journal entry topics became diverse and writing activities were no longer abstract, meaningless exercises. Students found genuine communicative topics when they read and responded to literature.

Implications for EFL Teaching and Learning

In most traditional language teaching classrooms, literature was used mostly to teach students the linguistic and cultural aspects of the target language (Akyel & Yalcin, 1990). In most second and foreign language classrooms, literature was adopted purely as a means for learning new vocabulary, useful idiomatic expressions, and examples of specific grammatical structures when both the teacher and students focused specifically on language learning. For example, literature was used for somewhat laborious grammar translation involving word-by-word decoding and rote memorization of linguistic structures. In this context, students were not encouraged to read

literature as a means toward personal growth, or to gain insight on different experiences. A few studies, however, observed responses to literature from advanced level or college EFL students. These showed insight, through students' responses, that demonstrated EFL students not only learning the target language, but also gaining aesthetic and existential experiences (Ali, 1994; Elliot, 1990; Liaw, 2001).

This study revealed that young EFL students had a special experience when encouraged to play active roles in the process of constructing meaning from text (Rosenblatt, 1994). When EFL students in this study read poems, the experience gave them an opportunity to think about their lives. When I interviewed a couple of middle school students, I learned that "Dreams" made a huge impact on them[6]:

> S: Yeah. People here think one way, and there are other thoughts. I became able to understand such situations. And by reading poems, we read good poems right? By reading those poems, I thought a lot.
> T: What are they?
> S: Do you remember the bird from Langston Hughs's poem we read during the summer session? I thought that dream is very important when I read it.
> T: Shall we read the poem again?
> S: I think that poem is really good.

To many students, the encounter with the special poem, "Dreams" by Langston Hughes, was a unique reading experience in which they realized new meaning for their lives. Other students vocalized that they learned the importance of keeping dreams alive.

Due to many negative experiences of working with poetry in the past, there are many ESL/EFL teachers and students who think of poems purely as works of art too difficult to work with rather than practical material for teaching and learning English. In language classrooms, poetry was not thought of as a useful resource to aid students' personal growth or for

---

[6] Quoted from Kim (2002).

extending their experiences because students' linguistic abilities were not sufficiently advanced. However, from students' responses to "Dreams" included above, there is evidence to suggest that poetry can provide insights and valuable lessons for life that can transcend the limits of understanding language. Therefore, the implication of using poetry in EFL teaching and learning is significant, since poetry is not only useful for developing reading and writing skills, but also for encouraging the appreciation of aesthetics and extending the comprehension of experience.

CONCLUSION

This study looks at poetry with insights on teaching and learning English and of how to extend the literary experiences of EFL students. This study reveals that poetry can be a good resource for teaching English and provides poems and appropriate activities which are proven to work in EFL classrooms. The poems and activities presented in this study were carefully selected for use by EFL teachers to support lessons if they plan to integrate poetry into current curricula.

By employing the poems and activities suggested, EFL teachers can help their students develop language skills because poetry provides authentic language input. Students could improve their speaking skills by reading poems alone or with classmates, and then learn linguistic structures through the activities suggested. Poems can also promote oral and written communicative competence by encouraging students to talk about poems and respond to them in their journals. When students were learning the target language with meaningful materials, they voluntarily participated in classroom conversations which led to further development of their oral communication skills.

Poetry also provides many topics for writing, especially in comparison to other second and foreign language composition classes where literature is not adopted. Most students acknowledged that connecting poetry and dialogue journal writing is effective because it not only develops writing skills, but

also enhances communicating through writing. When adopted in EFL classrooms, poetry and dialogue journal writing can help teachers and students effectively complement teaching materials and any writing programs given to EFL students at all levels.

Overall, this study revealed the possibility and potential of integrating poetry and dialogue journal writing into EFL curricula. EFL students are not just interested in accumulating sets of context-free, structurally based linguistic units and vocabulary lists in the target language anymore. Rather, students want to learn a new language through literary work which promotes their language skills and extends their life experiences at the same time. Therefore, I hope that EFL teachers who are trying to integrate poetry into current EFL curricula can find some suggestions and solutions in this study. In addition, I advocate strongly that EFL students have the right to enrich their lives through good literature.

THE AUTHOR

Hae-Ri Kim is teaching at Kyungil University in Korea. She received her doctoral degree in education from Arizona State University. Her research interests include language teaching methodology, curriculum and materials development, and literacy. She has been working with teachers to develop and implement literature-based programs in EFL settings.

REFERENCES

Akyel, A., & Yalcin, E. (1990). Literature in the EFL class: A study of goal-achievement incongruence. *The ELT Journal, 44*, 174-180.

Ali, S. (1993/1994). The reader-response approach: An alternative for teaching literature in a second language. *Journal of Reading, 37*(4), 9-17.

Atwell, N. (1998). *In the middle: New understandings about writing, reading, and learning*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Bauer, C. F. (Ed.). (1995). *The poetry break: An annotated anthology with ideas for introducing children to poetry*. H. W. Wilson.

Belcher, D., & Hirvela, A. (2000). Literature and L2 composition: Revisiting the debate. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 9*(1), 21-39.

Chatton, B. (1993). *Using poetry across the curriculum: A whole language approach*. Phoenix: Oryx Press.

Cullinan, B. E., Scala, M. C., & Schroder, V. C. (1995). *Three voices: An invitation to poetry across the curriculum*. York: Stenhouse Publishers.

Elliott, R. (1990). Encouraging reader-response to literature in ESL situations. *ELT Journal, 44*, 191-198.

Fagin, L. (1991). *The list poem: A guide to teaching and writing catalog verse*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

Gajdusek, L., & vanDommelen, D. (1993). Literature and critical thinking in the composition classroom. In J. G. Carson & I. Leki (Eds.), *Reading in the composition classroom: Second language perspective* (pp. 197-217). Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Gasparro, M., & Falletta, B. (1994). Creating drama with poetry: Teaching English as a second language through dramatization and improvisation. *ERIC Digests, ED368214*.

Hadaway, N. L., Vardell, S. M., & Young, T. A. (2001). Scaffolding oral language development through poetry for students learning English. *The Reading Teacher, 54*(8), 796-806.

Hudelson, S. (1994). Literacy development of second language children. In F. Genesee (Ed.), *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community* (pp. 129-158). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Khaimukd, B. T. (1999). *Points of connection: A qualitative study of dialogue journals in an EFL college writing classroom in Thailand*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Kim, H. (2002). *Creating a foreign language learning environment through a literature-based approach*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Arizona State University.

Krashen, S. (1980). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

Kooy, M., & Wells, J. (1996). *Reading response logs: Inviting students to explore novels, short stories, plays, poetry and more*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Lam, W. S. E. (2000). L2 literacy and the design of the self: A case study of a teenager writing on the internet. *TESOL Quarterly, 34*(3), 457-482.

Liaw, M.-L. (2001). Exploring literary responses in an EFL classroom. *Foreign Language Annals, 34*, 35-45.

Ouzts, D. T. (1998). Enhancing the connection between literature and the social studies using the question-answer relationship. *Social Studies & the Young Learner, 10*(4), 26-28.

Pappas, T. (1999). *Math talk: Mathematical ideas in poems for two voices*. San Carlos, LA: Wide World Publishing/Tetra.

Prelutsky, J. (1990). *Something big has been here*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Raphael, T. E. (1982). Question-answering strategies for children. *The Reading Teacher, 36*(Nov.), 186-190.

Raphael, T. E. (1986). Teaching question answer relationships, revisited. *The Reading Teacher, 39*(Feb.), 516-522.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1994). *The Reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work* (rev. ed.). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Preston, W. (1982). Poetry ideas in teaching literature and writing to foreign students. *TESOL Quarterly, 16*(4), 489-502.

Rampersad, A. (Ed.). (1994). *The collected poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Vantage Books.

Ramsaran, S. (1983). Poetry in the language classroom. *ELT Journal, 37*(1), 36-43.

Reed, L. (1993). Opening the door to communication in the multilingual/multicultural classroom. In J. K. Peyton & J. Staton (Eds.), *Dialogue journals in the multilingual classroom: Building language fluency and writing skills through written interaction* (pp. 29-46). Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Reid, J. (1993). Historical perspectives on writing and reading in the ESL classroom. In J. G. Carson & I. Leki (Eds.), *Reading in the composition classroom: Second language perspective* (pp. 33-60). Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1994). *The Reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work* (rev. ed.). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Ruiz-Funes, M. (1999). Writing, reading and reading-to-write in a foreign language: A critical review. *Foreign Language Annals, 32*(4), 514-526.

Spack, R. (1985). Literature, reading, writing and ESL: Bridging the gap. *TESOL Quarterly, 12*(4), 703-725.

Staton, J., Shuy, R. W., Peyton, J. K., & Reed, L. (Eds.). (1988). *Dialogue journal communication: Classroom, linguistic, social and cognitive views*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Strickland, M. R. (Ed.). (1993). *Poems that sing to you*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.

Todd, R. W., Mills, N., Palard, C., & Khamcharoen, P. (2001). Giving feedback on journals. *ELT Journal, 55*(4), 354-359.

Vogel, M. (2000). Straying at the boundaries: Young adult novels in New Zealand, Australia and Canada. *The New Advocate, 13*(3), 229-240.