

Students Writing across Cultures: Teaching Awareness of Audience in a Co-curricular Service Learning Project

Beth Lewis Samuelson
James Chamwada Kigamwa

Abstract

We examine a model for out-of-school literacy instruction using language and cultural available designs for teaching awareness of audience across cultures. The literacy model described here engages undergraduate and secondary students in a cross-cultural story-telling exchange and calls for anticipating the needs of young readers who do not share linguistic or cultural backgrounds. We describe the process of helping the writers to understand their Rwandan audience and highlight some of the linguistic and cultural issues that arose in the early drafts and persisted throughout the editing process despite direct feedback. We describe the workshops in which we discussed available linguistic and cultural designs and track some of the responses of the writers. And finally, we examine a story from the third volume for evidence that the writers had addressed the needs of the Rwandan readers in their stories.

Introduction

Audience is a crucial consideration for effective writing, yet many students struggle with imagining an audience for their work. Questions about how to define and address the audience for a written text and how to teach students to “write to the world” (Lunsford & O'Brien, 2008, p. 234) are staple issues in the study of composition and rhetoric (Ede & Lunsford, 2003). These questions have re-emerged in theories of multimodality and literacy as a matter of design (Kress, 2010), where production and presentation of knowledge via multimodal means positions the communicator as a rhetor.

[T]he *rhetor* as maker of a message now makes an assessment of all aspects of a communicational situation: of her or his interest; of the characteristics of the audience; the semiotic requirements of the issue at stake and the resources available for making an apt representation; together with establishing the best means for dissemination ... (Kress, 2010, p. 26).

We also adopt Bakhtin's (1986) notion of addressivity as a constitutive feature of the utterance, which always possesses the quality of speaking from a point of view, always responds to something previous, and always anticipates a response. Just as an utterance always exhibits addressivity, it is also always

permeated by the social, cultural, political and historical contexts from which it emerges, providing the basis for understanding rhetorical concepts such as audience (Weiser, Fehler, & Gonzalez, 2009), voice (Sperling & Appleman, 2011), and style from sociocultural perspectives on the socially situated nature of language and literacy.

The research agenda for the New Literacy Studies (NLS) builds on anthropological work that has investigated various socially and culturally situated contexts for literacy use (Akinaso, 1991; Heath, 1983, 1994; Scribner & Cole, 1981). This agenda challenges dominant perceptions of literacy by developing models for pedagogy that can capture the diversity of and variety of literacy practices across cultures and in out-of-school contexts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). As the insights drawn from studies of culturally and socially situated literacy practice are put to pedagogical use, one of the ongoing concerns of composition and rhetoric has continued to appear as an area that needs attention: awareness of the audience and the ability to adjust to the communicative contexts and demands of different audiences. For example, in an exchange of alphabet books between schoolchildren in South Africa and Australia, much of the revision of the texts and illustrations was orchestrated around helping students to realize that their local funds of knowledge (Moll, 1994) would not travel well between schools. Through feedback from their teachers and from the university collaborators, the students in South Africa considered how representations of violence in their community might be understood by the schoolchildren in Australia who were the audience for their stories (Janks & Comber, 2006). In an earlier study, Freedman (1994) and a team of US and British teachers engaged middle school students in a year-long exchange of writing projects and found the different audience to be a highly motivating factor for most students.

In this working paper, we build upon these insights and examine a model for using linguistic and culturally available designs (Kern, 2000) for teaching awareness of audience by engaging in purposeful communication across cultures and by anticipating the needs of young readers who do not share linguistic or cultural backgrounds with the writers.

The Storytelling Project: Teaching Students to Write for a Cross-Cultural Audience

The Storytelling Project involves undergraduate and secondary students in a cross-cultural story-telling exchange that calls for anticipating the needs of readers who do not share linguistic or cultural backgrounds with the writers. It was initiated in 2008 to help students and teachers from the United States and Rwanda exchange stories about common themes and learn about each other. On the initiative of a group of middle school students and their teacher at the charter school, a partnership was formed between a living-learning residential program (Brower & Inkelas, 2010) at a major Midwestern research university, a charter school serving an urban community in the northeastern United States, and a rural Rwandan primary school to create and share collections of illustrated stories. The students

wanted to share stories and learn about their Rwandan counterparts, but they also wanted to publish materials that could be sold to support infrastructure improvements at the Rwandan school. The university students participated as mentors and facilitators to help the secondary students with authoring, illustrating, publishing and marketing a collection of their short stories. The undergraduates, usually freshmen or sophomores and residents of the living-learning center, were paired with the writers and mentor them with brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, illustrating and publishing. In addition to the writing mentors, other undergraduates served as “collaborators,” whose duties included editing and laying out the book and studying the history and culture of Rwanda so they could serve as resources to the writing partners.

In the second year of the project, with the help of their teachers and local secondary school students, the Rwandan elementary students also created their own stories to include in the collection. Each year, an anthology is printed and distributed to all of the children at the participating schools.

The Storytelling Project and the New Literacy Studies

As a collaboration across three schools and two continents, the project has several stated goals that are consistent with New Literacy Studies: (1) to foster global citizenship by promoting communication and understanding amongst students from diverse backgrounds in the United States and Rwanda; (2) to develop globally-minded students with critical literacy skills through models for cross-cultural teaching and learning; (3) to use mentoring to encourage younger students to prepare for higher education; and (4) to teach skills in authoring, illustrating, editing, publishing and marketing a yearly collection of stories written by students in Rwanda and the United States.

The Storytelling Project presented special challenges in terms of helping US students to select topics and concepts that the Rwandan children would find easy to understand.² During the first year, the strategy that worked the best was to provide individual feedback on each of the twelve stories that appeared in the book. Samuelson, Kigamwa, and other team members read each draft twice and wrote comments on linguistic and cultural concerns, which were sent back to the writing mentor, who communicated the suggestions to the writer.

Three major areas came to light as challenging issues for the writers and their mentors. Without prior preparation to help them understand the linguistic needs of their Rwandan counterparts, who were trying to learn English rapidly as their school system had recently switched from French to English as the language of instruction (Samuelson & Freedman, 2010), the US writers wrote prose that was too difficult for the Rwandan students to read. Without understanding the cultural context of the Rwandan students’ lives, the US students referred to cultural

² At the Rwandan school, the focus of the storytelling has been to help the students improve their English skills. The question of writing for a US audience has not emerged as an important concern. The Rwandan writers have often written stories that are familiar to them from Rwandan oral storytelling traditions.

constructs that did not translate well. Furthermore, the US students relied on assumptions about Rwandan culture that were poorly informed and reflected stereotypes that they had not considered critically.

Since the project is a youth-led initiative in which the students take leadership roles, the actual decisions about what to change in the story drafts were made by the student writer (mentee) and the university student (mentor) together. Some editing in the final stages of book production would occasionally override the work of the writing pair, but this was only done when there was serious concern that without the changes the stories would not be enjoyable and comprehensible for the Rwandan readers. This approach was very labor-intensive, and although the writers made some changes as a result of the feedback they received, the resulting stories needed extensive editing by a team of undergraduates and faculty advisors before they were ready to go to the printer. As a result of these challenges, our question became: How do we help the student writers and their mentors realize that the cultural differences between Rwanda and the United States will have significant impact on their writing at all levels?

With this critical question guiding our work, we turned to the research literature to learn how to help the writers and their mentors see how linguistic and cultural differences would play a critical role in their composing process. We asked if an international storytelling exchange could help students develop command of available designs in a variety of rhetorical and cultural situations (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kern, 2000). Audience emerged as a central concept as we asked ourselves what steps we could take to help relatively inexperienced writers envision the cultural situations, linguistic skills, and background knowledge of English language learners living in East Africa.

Contrastive rhetoric, based originally on theories about different expository text structures as the products of major world cultures and rhetorical traditions (Kaplan, 1966, 1987), has been a productive line of inquiry in the areas of English for Academic Purposes (Casanave, Belcher, & Liu, 2004; Hamp-Lyons & Hyland, 2004) and intercultural rhetoric (Connor, 2004; Jordan, 1997; Kaplan et al., 1994). This theoretical framework is mainly concerned, however, with flows of literacy from L1 to L2 contexts in which an L2 writer, typically an international student in a Western academic context, is composing a text for academic, professional, or technical communication. For example, the writer might be a Chinese student studying in a college ESL program (Cai, 1999) or an international student writing a personal statement for admission to a graduate program (Barton, Bragg, & Serratrice, 2009). Alternatively, the writer might be a business or technical communication specialist composing a text for similarly educated readers of other Westernized, industrialized societies.

A recent adaptation of contrastive rhetoric directed at a well-educated, Western or Westernized writer is McCool's (2009) description of reader responsible and writer responsible cultures. In a reader responsible culture, the readers of the text are expected to make the necessary efforts to follow the writer's argument. As a result, prose can be embroidered and complicated, with the burden for any

misunderstanding falling on reader. In a writer responsible culture, the writer has the task of making the text accessible and simple, as the burden for comprehension falls on the writer. McCool's guide echoes prior cognitive models for writer-based and reader-based prose (Flower, 1979; Flower & Hayes, 1994; Hayes, 1996) and does not provide a model for situated literacy that fits with the needs of young writers learning to communicate effectively with peers who do not share their culture and who are still developing their English proficiency.

The contrastive rhetoric and intercultural communication models did not adequately account for the flow of literacy from US students to Rwandan students. Instead of trying to guide each international student on how to fit into mainly Western and writer-responsible academic and professional writing cultures, we were asking writers in North America to compose texts for non-Western English learners who were not transplanted from their own culture or educated into a globalized business culture.

The following sections provide an account of our involvement in assisting the writing partners with understanding their Rwandan audience. In the first section, we describe some of the linguistic and cultural issues that arose during the first year of the project. In the second section, we describe the training sessions and the linguistic and cultural designs we discussed with the writing partners during the second and third years of the project. In the final section, we examine a story from the third year for evidence that the writers are more familiar with the needs of the Rwandan readers.

Direct Feedback in Year One

"Naomi Goes to Summer Camp"

During the first year of the project, when asked to consider what the Rwandan students might be interested in reading, the US students initially wrote about what they believed the lives of the Rwandan students to be like. Since the students had limited exposure to Rwandan culture, mainly through discussions with their teacher and through some assigned reading, many stereotypical images emerged in their writing. In Figure 1, an early draft of a story about a young girl referred to "***small African village,***" "***two tiny classrooms,***" "***a two-mile hike from school,***" "***orphans,***" and "***a place of hope.***" Some of this imagery may have been true.

to the lives of the Rwandan children, but the authors were asked to share the details of their lives with the African children, not reflect their stereotypes about Africa back at the Rwandan children.

Naomi

Once there was a girl that lived in a ***small African village*** and her name was Naomi. She was an eight year old girl who loved to sing. She lived with her father and brother and went to an all girls' school in her village that taught all grades from 2nd to 8th grade in ***two tiny classrooms***. Naomi disliked her school because it did not have a music class.

One night it was dark and cloudy when she arrived home from her ***2 mile hike from school***. As she walked into the house she spotted her father and brother packing things. But the whole family wasn't moving, only her. Her father was sick and her brother wasn't able to care for her because he wasn't well either.

"Father, Father!! What is this?! What is becoming of our family?" said Naomi.

"Naomi, I and your brother have become ill and you will be better off without us right now."

"But where are you sending me father? I don't want to be an ***orphan*** and all alone" Naomi said.

"Don't worry my child, you will go to ***a place of hope***, where you can be healthy and have a chance to succeed."

Figure 1: Excerpt from an early draft of "Naomi" [emphasis added]. Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

Naomi Goes to Summer Camp [title page]

p. 2

Naomi is ten years old. Her father tells her she is a big girl now and that this summer she will go to a summer camp for the very first time. "Daddy, what will I be doing at summer camp?" Naomi asks. "You will be sleeping in the woods, learning how to swim, and making lots of new friend," he replies.

p. 3

As Naomi lies in her bed that night, she talks to Gula, her teddy bear, about going to summer camp. ***"What if when I am sleeping in the woods the tree monsters come out? I've heard they are very scary and like to kidnap children."*** ***What if when I am learning to swim, the lake goblin comes out?"*** she asks Gula. ***"I've heard they are very slimy and like to grab children's feet."***

p. 4

"Who else is going to be there?" she asks Gula. ***"I've heard that camps are run by evil witches who like to turn kids into frogs."*** As Naomi drifts off into sleep, ***images of scary tree monsters, slimy lake goblins, and evil witches go through her mind.***

Figure 2. Excerpt from an intermediate draft of "Naomi" [emphasis added]. Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

With some feedback from Samuelson and the undergraduate writing mentor about the importance of writing from her own experience instead of trying to guess what the lives of the Rwandan children might be like, the author remade Naomi as an American girl going off to summer camp for the first time (see Figure 2). The question of cultural communication persisted, however, with the introduction of tree monsters, lake goblins and wicked witches, which may be frightening for some young readers. Samuelson provided the following feedback on the intermediate draft to the writing pair: Witches, goblins and monsters are much too scary. Try to have her be afraid of much more predictable things such as sleeping in a strange place or learning to swim.

Another issue that emerged with the early drafts was the use of complex grammar and vocabulary that was too difficult for English learners. In addition to the potentially scary topics, feedback for the intermediate draft of Naomi (Figure 2) focused on verb tenses. On this subject, Samuelson made the following suggestion: "If you change your story into simple past tense, you won't lose anything, but it will be much easier for low-level English learners to read."

Using the simple past or simple present tenses helps the writer use tensed verbs and avoid more complex verb structures containing modals, infinitives, and past or present participles (Lester, 2001). These multiple-word verb forms can create confusion for new English learners and can often be avoided by using a simple present or past tense verb. The resulting printed story incorporated these suggestions (see Figure 3). The writer also decided to remove the teddy bear, Gula, as an unnecessary character. The resulting story successfully achieved the goal of the project, which was to have the US children share aspects of their own lives with the Rwandan students in ways that were linguistically and culturally accessible.

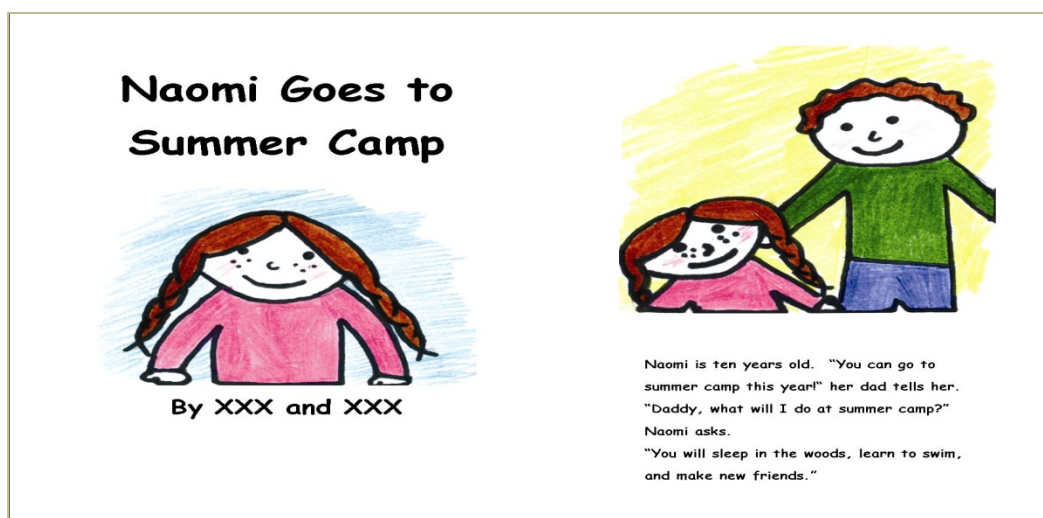


Figure 3. Published excerpt from "Naomi Goes to Summer Camp."³ Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

³ The names of the authors have been removed to preserve confidentiality. Multiple authors were listed for each story because the undergraduate writing mentors and collaborators who contributed substantially to a story would also receive a byline.

“Lux and Estelle”

Another early draft, the story of “Lux and Estelle,” highlighted some other language design issues that emerged in the stories during the first year of the project (see Figure 4). The writer started out with “once upon a time,” a formulaic opener for a narrative genre that could potentially create confusion for English learners. Other features of this paragraph that could cause problems for beginning English learners included “there lived alone a boy,” and “as brightly colored as the sun.”

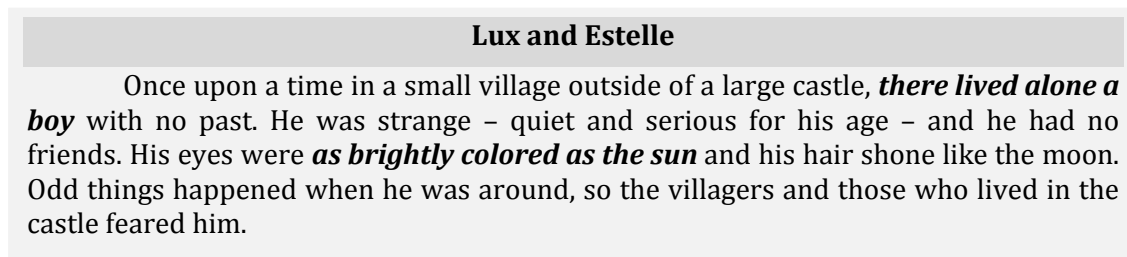


Figure 4. Excerpt from an early draft of “Lux and Estelle” [emphasis added]. Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

With this story, however, the author and her mentor did not make the changes suggested by the editors. Because of the Storytelling Project’s strong emphasis on leadership by students, the editors made only minimal changes to the final proofs. The results can be seen in a published excerpt from “Lux & Estelle” (Figure 5).

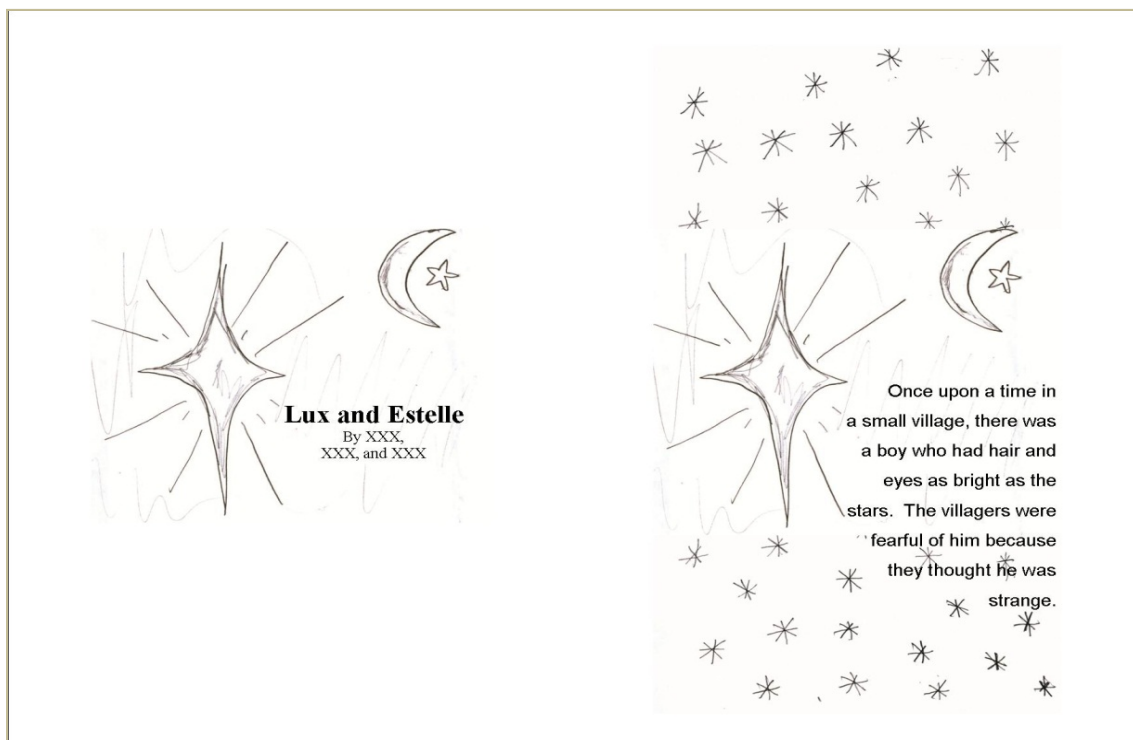


Figure 5. Published excerpt from “Lux & Estelle.” Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

Teaching Available Designs for Cross-Cultural Storytelling

At the invitation of the project organizers, we taught seminars in 2009 and 2010 that attempted to address the kinds of issues with audience that we observed in the writing of the first collection of stories. In 2010, we collected written feedback from the students to investigate what the writers and mentors had learned about considering their Rwandan audience. The participants in the 2010 seminar were 14 undergraduates and 14 middle and secondary students. The undergraduates (9 female, 5 male) were predominantly freshmen and sophomore volunteers living in the residential living-learning center. For these mentors, the Storytelling Project was a non-credit service-learning opportunity sponsored by the living-learning center as a way of engaging students in civic service. The younger students (seven female, seven male) were in grades 6 through 11. All were enrolled in one of three different schools (two middle schools, one high school) that formed part of a consortium of charter schools in their community. They participated in the program as part of an after-school volunteering activity, and were visiting the university campus to meet their mentors and learn more about the possibility of attending university someday.

The seminars covered two critical areas: cultural and linguistic available designs that could make the reading easier for the English learner. We had approximately two hours, and we knew that the students would be in charge of peer-editing afterwards. Kigamwa prepared a checklist (see Appendix A) that provided the basis for the seminars, and gave students a guide to follow throughout the year. The checklist asked students to consider whether or not they were relying on stereotypes or providing an incorrect view of gender roles in their own society or in Rwandan society. Samuelson prepared a simple guide for looking at language choices that might negatively affect comprehension for English learners in Rwanda (see Appendix B). What follows is a summary of some of more important points that we covered in the seminars.

Cultural Available Designs in Writing for English Learners in Rwanda

The fact that cultures across continents differ should not be taken simplistically to mean that in developing countries there exist only unitary cultural practices. We discussed what should be portrayed as representative practices given that within every culture most practices, values and beliefs exist in continua. The writing partners were cautioned against portraying the ideal society in short stories that will be shared with students from other cultures. They were also encouraged to revise sad stories and those with conflict, to allow them to end well, ensuring that all conflict is resolved. Furthermore, it was important to avoid themes that create controversy and to avoid extreme positions when sharing short stories about daily life. Taking the position of an insider would make the stories interesting and believable; participants were encouraged to use pronouns such as “I” and “we” rather than “they” when making reference to their communities.

Similarly the writers were asked to ensure that pictures and illustrations should represent all the races or people groups found in that community. Kigamwa

led the writing partners in discussing the roles played by the pictures and artwork in conveying the message in stories. The writing partners worked in small groups to evaluate some children's storybooks and discussed how the illustrations made them feel, whether they presented people in stereotypical roles, and whether they ridiculed or made fun of any particular culture (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2011). Tokenism and gender stereotypes received attention as well.

The writers also discussed the importance of understanding the histories of their intended audience. They reviewed the relevance of the 1994 Rwandan genocide to the stories that they were going to write. The group agreed that traumatic issues such as violence, war orphans, traumatism, and related subjects would have to be addressed in a sensitive manner since children in Rwanda must live with the aftermath of the genocide, even though they were born after it occurred.

The participants also learned about the importance of understanding the daily life practices of children in Rwanda. The participants were challenged to set aside stereotypical portrayals of children in Africa and do some research to help them understand their audience. Some possible questions to ask might be: What kinds of occupations do Rwandans have? Are they farmers? Do they keep animals? If yes what kind? What are some of common business and trade practices in the community? What kinds of shops are nearby? What kind of market would the Rwandan children typically visit, and what kinds of products are available?

African art, music and dance were addressed as important markers of a culture. The writing partners viewed short video clips from YouTube presenting the different genres of music and dance that exist in the Rwandan culture. Many participants were surprised by existence of modern Rwandan pop music alongside the traditional Rwandan music.

The session ended with a detailed discussion of the role of proverbs in African cultures. Working in groups, the writing partners discussed the meanings of proverbs from different parts of Africa. They tried to identify similar proverbs in Western societies as a way of bridging common values. The students learned that in many East African cultures, people often use proverbs when they want to be indirect and yet want to communicate effectively. They discussed possible meanings for proverbs such as:

"He who is being carried does not realize how far the town is."

"Someone with eyes is not told 'Look!'"

"The rich man never dances badly."

The participants identified the following similar proverbs in English:

"Bad news travels fast."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched."

Finally, Kigamwa emphasized that if the concepts in the story don't exist in the target community, then the writers must make sure to provide adequate background information. For example, a story on using recycling bins to recycle aluminum cans would need some explanation for Rwandan children.

Feedback from students. At the end of the session on cultural considerations, Kigamwa asked the students to write down some insights that they had gained from the session. Many of the students reported a better understanding of how language and cultural considerations should inform their stories. One student commented on the need to “be culturally mindful about our audience’s ways of life;” another observed that “background knowledge of Rwanda’s culture is essential for a good story.” Another student stated that she had learned “how to show different things without going all over the place in the story.” Still another focused more on an appreciation of the need to “give connections to your reader and the needs of your reader are the priority.”

Language Choices in Writing for English Learners

The focus of the session on languages choices emphasized the needs of the audience, and highlighted some simple strategies for keeping the language of the stories simple and accessible. Each of the suggestions follows current strategies in pedagogical grammar for teaching grammar in the context of writing (Noden, 1999; Weaver, 1998). Figure 6 illustrates the principles that were emphasized and Appendix B provides a copy of the handout that the students received.

1. Limit passive verbs
2. Stick to simple present and simple past
3. Keep it short and simple
4. Limit use of slang
5. Limit use of ‘there are/was/is’

Figure 6. Guidelines for writing simple prose for English learners. Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

The principles covered in this seminar echo writing instruction that the writing partners have no doubt received from their English or language arts teachers. The partners were reminded to minimize their use of multi-word verb constructions by avoiding passive constructions and sticking to simple past or simple present as much as possible. They discussed keeping sentences short and simple by removing unnecessary words and practiced reading through some sentences taken from early drafts and removing any words that weren’t absolutely necessary for conveying the basic idea. Simple sentences containing a single clause were ideal. Colloquialisms and slang were acceptable, but should be used mindfully and with restraint, limiting instances to one or two at the most. Finally, the writing partners discussed the need for avoiding “there is/are/was” (There + BE + noun).

An example from a Year 1 draft is “There is plenty of prey that I like to hunt,” which the partners discussed changing to “I can find lot of animals to hunt.” This construction can cause comprehension problems because the subject of the sentence is delayed. Native speakers of English don’t experience difficulties, but beginning English learners can find the construction distracting.

Feedback from students. At the end of the session on linguistic issues, the students also reported a more nuanced understanding of the importance of keeping their stories simple and avoiding certain problematic grammatical structures. Learning to write for English learners requires students to actively seek out information about their audience and tailor their writing accordingly. The middle and secondary students submitted these statements:

- I learned that the usage of phrases such as there is or there was can be confusing for an English learner.
- What I learned from this session is that writing in slang will most likely confuse a child in Kenya or Rwanda a lot.
- I learned that sentence structure is more than just changing words around. You have to put yourself in the reader's shoes and think about how it is learning a language as hard as English.
- It has helped me understand the kind of sentence you should right [*sic*] for different age groups. It also helps me understand how to break down a compound or complex sentence to a simple sentence. Keep audience in mind that their first language isn't English.
- I learned to keep my sentences sweet, short, and simple and to keep my reader in mind, knowing that they're trying to learn English.

Follow-Up to Training Sessions

We examined drafts of stories written after the workshops for any impact of the audience awareness discussion, and particularly for any impact on kind of feedback that the undergraduate writing mentors and collaborators were giving their mentees. In particular, we focused on the draft and subsequent revision of a story written by a high school student who had been with the project since 2008. What follows is a brief review of her early draft of “Going to School,” and the comments that her writing mentor gave her.

Going to School

Hey, what's this? It looks like a book to me. I love books. Everywhere I go, I find them in my school, in my house, and at the library. They're just all over the place. Wait – there aren't any words in this book... that's strange. Well, I guess that's what I'll just have to do.

Where should I start? I love my school, so I guess that's what I'll write about. Every day I get up and the first thing I do is take a shower. I don't have much time until I need to get to school so I grab a quick snack and head off to school.

Wow, what a sight. All of my friends are standing around, waiting for a bell to ring so we can get to our first class. I just remembered that I need to go to my locker so that I can get my papers and books for my first class. Off to class now the first bell has rung.

I have no time to write now. It's time for class, so I'll finish later.

Figure 7. Early draft of “Going to School” [emphasis added]. Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

Figure 7 is an early draft showing some improvement over the drafts we reviewed from previous years in the project. The writer has avoided making simple assumptions about Rwandan culture after the manner adopted by the author of “Naomi Goes to Summer Camp.” She used concepts from her school day that she thought would be more likely to fit the universal experience of going to school. This writer also used simple language, sticking with simple present and constructing simple sentences. Her writing mentor used the checklists to guide her feedback and focused on stereotypes, conflict, language choices, and unfamiliar concepts (see Figure 8). For instance, the mentor pointed out that the Rwandan students might not have as many books in their school and that they might not be familiar with school bells ringing to mark the division between classes or with using lockers to store their books. The mentor also identified language choices that could be confusing, such as “grab a snack,” or “head off to school.” These more idiomatic expressions could be revised or kept to a minimum and explained in study notes. The author made some substantial revisions to their early draft, finishing with a story about Jada, who forgot her math homework at home. A page from the prepublication copy of the story appears in Figure 9. The recess bell has been left out, but the lockers remain, and the author has provided a picture of school lockers to help to clarify the concept for the Rwandan readers.

In the workshop, we went over a checklist or whatever to check for some things in the stories. Some things I noticed in yours were:

Stereotypes: Maybe you should state that this is in fact a school in the States, because if this were elsewhere there might not be books everywhere.

Conflict: Apparently our story needs to have a conflict...

Language: We might need to change some things around, like...

- "grab a snack" to "have a small meal"
- "head off to school" to "go to school"
- "wow, what a sight" to... something I'm not quite sure about yet

Concepts that might need to be explained: lockers, bells ringing for class, etc.

Figure 8. Writing mentor feedback on "Going to School." Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

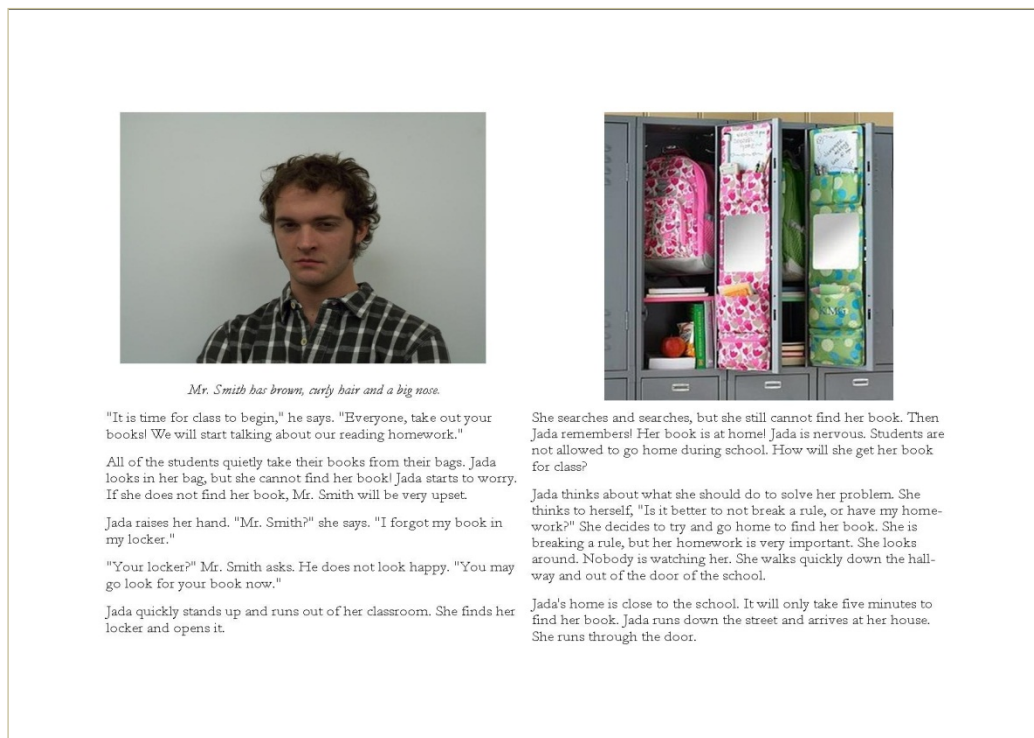


Figure 9. Pre-publication manuscript of "Going to School." Source: Reprinted with permission of the Storytelling Project.

Conclusion

Future directions for research in this vein include questions about how classic rhetorical concepts such as audience can be further adapted into a sociocultural paradigm in line with the New Literacy Studies, which has used identity as one of its major organizing themes for examining writing instruction and academic literacies (Ivanic, 1998). The gradual diminishing of the role of 'experts' in the project and the handing off of responsibility to well-prepared undergraduates suggests that the

students can develop their own understanding of their cross-cultural audience and consider how they could adapt their stories.

Further research must also adopt an approach to data analysis that is explicitly multimodal. The project is currently limited in terms of fostering digital communication with the Rwandan students simply because the Rwandan school does not yet have the capacity to provide computers for frequent emails or use of social media for networking between the students. Once this hurdle has been crossed, however, and the students are able to use digital media to create and share their stories, we will be able to follow the development of audience awareness as the students have wider selection of available designs or semiotic resources to use in creating their stories.

This working paper suggests rich pedagogical possibilities for engaging students from vastly different cultures in meaningful, planned communicative activities that not only build their language arts skills, but also help them to see the world in different ways by introducing them to an explicit awareness of their cultural differences. As the project develops and expands, we will continue to follow and report on the ways in which the Storytelling Project promotes the development of intercultural rhetorical and cultural awareness.

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Appendix A: Some guideline questions for writing across cultures

1. Has the conflict in your story been resolved?
2. Is your story free from negative stereotypes?
3. Does your story portray a balance of genders in the main characters and others?
4. Does your story portray an honest and balanced picture of your society?
5. If your story is religious, does it present religion respectfully and neutrally?
6. Are your illustrations and photographs modest and inclusive of your society?
7. Are some of the concepts you are introducing common in the target culture? If not, have you offered adequate background information?

Appendix B: Writing for beginning and intermediate English language learners

You are the authors!!

Editing always creates tensions between your unique style and the needs of your readers.

Overview of seminar

1. Describing good writing for beginning and intermediate English learners: Some guidelines to keep in mind
2. YOUR TURN: Practice editing
3. Three different levels for stories: beginner, high beginner, intermediate

Guidelines to keep in mind

1. Limit passive verbs
2. Stick to simple present and simple past
3. Keep it short and simple
4. Limit use of slang
5. Limit use of 'there are/was/is'

1. Limit use of passive verbs

"She *was accepted* into one of the top schools in the country."

Change to: "She *planned to study* at one of the top schools in the country."

2. Stick to simple present and simple past

I used to write rap music.

Change to: I write rap music.

I had been playing tennis.

Change to: I played tennis.

Wasn't the bus going to be leaving at 8 AM?

Change to: Did the bus leave at 8 AM?

She would always forget her purse.

Change to: She forgot her purse again.

He has forgotten his wallet.

Change to: He forgot his wallet.

3. Keep it short and simple

"Estelle would do most of the talking, but Moon would listen to every word that she said, no matter the subject."

Change to: "Estelle talked a lot, but Moon always listened."

"My home is a forest, filled with tamarind trees that have tasty fruit that I love to eat."

Change to: "My home is a forest. I like to eat the tasty tamarind fruit there."

4. Limit use of slang

"Me and Tookie was walking going to class."

Change to: "Tookie and I walked to class."

5. Limit your use of 'there are/was/is'

"There is plenty of prey that I like to hunt."

Change to: "I find lots of prey. I like to hunt."

Practice together

Edit this excerpt from the drafts. Decide how you would simplify it to help English language learners. When you are done, we will compare your versions with the published version.

When they arrived at the hideout, Allen immediately began planning. "How about we run home, put the money back where we got it from in Mom's purse and act like nothing ever happened," said Allen.

Reflection

Write one sentence about something new that you learned from this session. Please hand in your paper before you leave the room.