

Micro-writing: small things make a big difference

Ceri Jones

Bio: I'm a freelance teacher, trainer and materials writer. I've been working in ELT since 1986 and in Spain since 1998. I'm particularly interested in student-centred materials and activities. I write about my experiences and my experiments on my blog, *Close Up* (www.cerij.wordpress.com).

Abstract: In this session we'll be exploring how a range of micro writing tasks can activate language, encourage communication and aid class cohesion. We'll be looking in particular, but not exclusively, at multi-level secondary classrooms and the challenges they bring.

I will be sharing the slideshow for this session on my blog

<http://cerij.wordpress.com/workshops/micro-writing-small-things-make-a-big-difference/>

Background reading and references

The kind of micro-writing that we'll be looking at in the session comes from the Write to Learn tradition, which is also popular in L1 content teaching. Here are a few links to articles and blog posts exploring and explaining the Write to Learn approach.

<http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop4a.cfm>

an introduction to the WTL approach in a university context

"Writing is one of the most effective ways to develop thinking". (Syrene Forsman)

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/CBS_WritingtoLearn.pdf

a WTL approach in schools in Ontario

"As we focus on the process of learning to write, we sometimes pay less attention to another kind of writing that is a very powerful tool for student learning in all areas of the curriculum. This is writing to learn – those "short, frequent bursts of writing" that are woven into a lesson or a series of lessons to encourage students to explore their own thinking (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2004–2009)."

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/college-readiness-writing-to-learn-ben-johnson>

a blog post discussing the power of WTL

"There is an amazing power to learn when you read what you have written. When we write to learn, we analyze, we revise, we organize, we rewrite, we evaluate and so on until what is written is what we want to communicate. These are all higher order thinking skills that we aspire to achieve in the classroom setting. The way it works for me is that I start with an idea and write it down. Then, if I get stuck, I play with it (sometimes like a cat with a dead mouse); I add to it, take away from it and shift it until it makes sense to me. Sometimes I have to let it sit for a while. One of my students said she lets it "marinate." Thinking is hard work. Writing to learn is hard thinking."

<http://blog.tesol.org/writing-to-learn-activities/>

a summary of classroom WTL activities in L1 content classes

Activities for the EFL classroom

These are links to posts on my blog, [Close Up](#), which explore some of the activities from the session.

The dog ate it a short initial micro-writing activity

<http://cerij.wordpress.com/2011/04/01/the-dog-ate-it/>

Carnaval bridging writing to learn and learning to write; progressing from one word to short sentences followed by questioning a reading text and writing a personal description.

<http://cerij.wordpress.com/2012/02/16/carnaval/>

Questioning the question using micro writing for ideas generation in essay writing

<http://cerij.wordpress.com/2011/04/08/questioning-the-question/>

Plan B preparing for an exam type essay question using the same approach as the lesson above

<http://cerij.wordpress.com/2011/04/13/plan-b/>