
Research Digest

Publishing Ecologies

Tim Murphey,

Kanda University of International Studies

Miyoun Kim,

Hawai'i Pacific University

Sayuri Kusutani

Hawai'i Pacific University

Judy Lawson

Hawai'i Pacific University

Makiko Sugawara

Dokkyo University

Naoki Yamaura

Kawagoe Higashi High School

*Rational beings understand the difficulty of accomplishing arduous tasks. That is why it is the irrational and unrealistically hopeful among us who are principally responsible for the major improvements in civilization. **

Irrationally, and yet with great hope, this article seeks to convince unpublished teachers (a) that they have valuable ideas and perspectives to contribute to the professional development of their fellow teachers, (b) that KISS (keep it short and simple) publishing helps us evolve and see how the bigger publishing projects eventually take shape, (c)

that writing for others develops first *ourselves* through a creative and stimulating process of self-disclosure and self construction, and (d) that doing these things in collaboration with other teachers is immensely more enjoyable, enriching, and educational. This article also seeks to model what it proposes intertwining these four assertions in our own mini trans-pacific publishing ecology (see Appendix 1 for the Collaboration History).

Scaffolding writing for publications

When Tim's MA supervisor, Pat Byrd, first told him that he had a good idea and should write it up, he thought she was joking. But he dared to write a rough draft just describing an activity he had been doing in class and sent it to her. She modified it a bit and published it in a small newsletter, certainly no more than a page. What happened next is the important part. He saw his name in print.

Seeing his name in print, he felt a sense of possible belonging to a new group, an imagined community (Norton, 2001) of teachers striving to understand how to teach better. He felt like, maybe, the profession wanted his contributions and he began identifying himself as a teacher. Lave and Wenger (1991) would describe it as being invited in from the peripheral of merely *looking at it* to actually *doing it* as a member of a community of practice.

Because Pat Byrd had invited Tim into the arena of writing for publication, he developed *intent participation* (Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez, & Angelillo, 2003), participation in which you intend to actually use or do what you are observing or studying. Psychologists have found that when people intend to actually do or comment on an activity, their "quality of attention" is very different and they learn better. Tim started considering much of what he was learning in his MA classes and doing in his teaching as potential material for articles and even books. There was an intent to use what he was learning and to

interact with the profession which made writing just that much easier.

Pat Byrd had succeeded in creating a small learning ecology in which graduate students and teachers could begin participating and identifying themselves as participants in the activities of teaching and scholarship. The description below of language learning could easily also be applied to teacher education and the scaffolding of researchers into publishing:

Learning ecologies of linguistic contagion describe rich learning environments in which rapidly spreading activation occurs neurologically within individuals, as well as socially within groups, due to highly contagious and pervasive communications, involving persons locally in using the language constructively. “Hothousing” language development and learning is what ecologies of linguistic contagion are about. Hawkins (2005) suggests “the need for a shift in the teacher’s role: from designing lessons to designing ecologies” (p. 79). Van Lier (2004) similarly holds that “The ecological approach to education asserts that ultimately the quality and the lasting success of education are primarily dependent on the quality of the activities and the interactional opportunities available to learners in the educational environment.” Such ecologies would be rich in “learning opportunities” (Allwright, 2005) and “affordances” (van Lier, 2004) that facilitate language learning. (Murphey, 2006, p. 34-35)

The stimulation of someone’s **writing and publishing** can come from students, colleagues, or editors. Tim was once wonderfully mentored by Eton Churchill and John McLaughlin who, as grad students, were editing a Temple University Working Papers (Churchill & McLaughlin, 2001; Murphey, 2001). **That article, which grew into a 2004 TESOL Quarterly** article, brings up another point about publishing your

research: **evolving data, analysis, and understandings are worth presenting in more than one publication.** Our ideas and understandings can be constantly evolving. Exploring the same data and concepts through composing various articles from different perspectives is a splendid way to develop our thinking. Merrill Swain, whose “**output hypothesis**” has segued into “**collaborative dialog**” and more recently into “**languaging,**” **combining previous research with new analysis and understandings,** is a wonderful case in point. As Thomson (2001) notes, “**The process of writing itself always leads to new knowledge. Learn to write but also write to learn**” (p. 1). **More recently, Goleman** has proposed that, along with emotional intelligence being enhanced through interacting and co-constructing our work, we are at the same time using and constructing our “social intelligence” (2006).

A stand on re-searching

Conscientious teachers search for better ways to teach and better ways for their students to learn, and they do it again and again. Thus, they are *re-searching* continually. Teachers are also in positions to gather qualitative and quantitative data and experiment with various ways to teach and learn, even when they are somewhat shackled by “administrivia” and textbooks. We find the potential for exploratory teaching (Allwright, 2005) is enormous, but under performed. We wonder why more teachers do not engage in **writing about their classes and their re-searching.** We suspect there must be something out of order with the way we conceptualize writing and publishing. Part of the problem is the invisibility of the teaching and learning around us. Shulman (2004a) **describes the symptoms:**

Blindness and amnesia are the state of the art in pedagogy. We just don't know what our colleagues before or elsewhere have done. We don't even document and analyze our own efforts. Indeed,

we often don't know what our colleague in the next office is doing pedagogically. . . (p.43)

So how can we get more teachers, and ourselves, to go public and publish what we are learning as we teach? For, as Shulman (2004a) further insists:

Learning is least useful when it is private and hidden; it is most powerful when it becomes public and communal. Learning flourishes when we take what we think we know and offer it as community property among fellow learners so that it can be tested, examined, challenged, and improved before we internalize it. (p.36-37)

We think teachers are researchers already, and could be potential writers and provide knowledge to their colleagues. What is missing are the systemic methods to tap into the knowledge base that disappears out the door at the end of every term to be mostly forgotten and then re-enacted again the following term in much the same way, reinventing the wheel. We think these are ideal times to expand the experiential knowledge base of teachers by sharing our knowledge more widely, i.e., by publishing.

An opening of the field that wants you

Block (2003) in *The Social Turn in SLA* shows how, at times, in foreign language education, certain research paradigms reign and others seem to be pushed aside. Block's historical ethnographic depiction of SLA shows how the more cognitive paradigm of IIO (input, interaction, output) came to dominate our research publications and how recently the field and its journals have begun opening themselves to more "socially" oriented views of learning and research. Whether

teachers are doing conventional “lab” type studies or socially-oriented qualitative research based on everyday teaching, or both, they can count themselves fortunate to be in an era when there are numerous publications opening themselves up to a wider spectrum of research, methods, and theoretical positions. (An example of this opening up of genres is the previously mentioned auto-ethnographic narrative published in the *TESOL Quarterly*, Murphey, 2004).

Looking for your own ZDP of publishing and doing

Applied to publishing, Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a useful concept that describes how we can reach beyond our present levels of proficiency, out-perform our competencies, and discover and explore beyond our normal capacities with a little help from colleagues and friends. Typically, the ZPD describes what a learner can do with a bit of help from others, a process often referred to as scaffolding.

It used to be specified that these “others” had to be more competent experts, usually older, wiser, and more experienced, as Pat Byrd was for Tim. However, more recently we have come to understand that interacting even with others less experienced than us also stimulates thought, interaction, and development, as Tim’s much younger coauthors of this article have stimulated his thinking in doing this piece. The fact is that we learn from interaction, from getting our thoughts out there, and seeing others’ reactions. (Doing this alone in our own minds would necessitate an extremely oxymorific well-balanced schizophrenic ability.)

Teachers usually acknowledge that the most active students, who perform and interact a lot, are the ones who usually learn the most. Actually, the people who usually perform the most in schools are teachers—and they, not students, indeed usually do learn the most in schools. Teachers are already *going public*, at least with a certain group

of students, and they are preparing and studying to get it right. So being engaged in an activity is crucial to learning (and if we want students to learn more we need to find ways for them to go public—but that’s another article). **Writing down how things work in our classes, and using student feedback to support our views, increases our understanding of how learning can happen in our classrooms.** Presenting these ideas to a wider public in publications can generate even more knowledge.

The easiest place to publish for college and university faculty in Japan is usually in the institution’s **departmental publications, or *kiyo***. However, **most of these *kiyo* do not give editorial feedback, may frown on co-authors (especially when they are not inside the department), and are not widely distributed nor read.** Nevertheless, for beginning researchers-writers, they offer an easy way to get into print and get an idea out so that it can be cited later. **But these university publications should be seen as “working papers” only. When writers believe in their articles, they will redraft them, give them different titles, and send them out to more professional publications to give them exposure to the wider world.**

Other “**access publications” such as newsletters and online journals** are often edited and **provide a more collaborative venue to grow and develop.** If your university or institute does not have a newsletter, start one. Murphey, Connolly, Churchill, McLaughlin, Schwartz, & Krajka (2003) describe how these can be created (to access a few, see *Langaging* or *PeerSpectives* in the References).

There are a growing number of practical publications for teachers to publish in as well as regular peer-reviewed journals. A professional organization with a variety of access publications should be able to scaffold the **professional development of its members through offering a variety of options to writers.** JALT, more than any other association, seems to be able to do this. JALT publications span the spectrums of seriousness, length, and depth of research. Teachers in Japan have a

number of JALT affiliated newsletters they can contribute to that are often hungrily hunting for writers. Then there is the mostly practical monthly *The Language Teacher*, the mostly research-oriented *JALT Journal*, and occasional books by various special interest groups. Many researchers in Japan also publish in many international journals. Writers of course usually find it easier to start small and work their way up.

Why collaborate?

When we work together on something, the old adage of “two heads are better than one” usually operates, but more than that, the heads can also develop through seeing the different views presented and created in collaboration. “Engaging two minds on any line (of thought) refines not only the line but the minds” (Murphey & Carpenter, 2007).

Vygotsky (1978) wrote, “What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (p. 87). For some things like operating a new computer program, we can see the logic of this progression from others’ scaffolding our learning to eventually doing it alone. However, there are some things that are simply more enriching when they are done with others, like learning, or researching, or writing and publishing. If you want to learn how to write articles, write with others. If you want to improve your thinking, think with others. We believe that everybody has multiple ZPDs and multiple opportunities to learn with others. **Some quiet time by yourself is also nice, but the opposite is usually the case with many educators—they are over-isolated, communication-challenged, and bunkered in their offices or on the run.**

Writing, especially for publication, clarifies thinking and produces a lot of knowledge about our teaching and learning that probably would not have occurred were it not written with the intent to publish. With this added knowledge that we gain through writing about what we do, we can navigate our classes better in order to have fewer crises and

more time for learning. Note also that, “We write to change ourselves as much as we write to change the world” (Murphey & Carpenter, 2007).

Conclusion

We feel there are great advantages to teachers writing, sharing, and publishing our everyday practices, our re-searching, and our research. When we wish to improve what we are doing as a profession, an expanded network of contributors, or what Shulman (2004b) calls “the wisdom of practice,” **would be advisable. Publishing ecologies that offer a variety of scaffolded entry points and paradigms stand to nurture a professional community, a community of practice, more than one that seeks to overly restrict registers, methods, and epistemologies.**

[W]riting is so important for scholarship. Publish or perish has gotten a very bad name, but one of the beauties of publication is that as a scholar I can have little confidence that I truly understand something until I sit down to write it—at which point all the holes in the argument, all the gaps in the evidence, stare me in the face (or are pointed out by my peers, who can now review it more carefully). **It’s because this process is so powerful that we institutionalize it by creating learning communities of scholars, whether they are research teams, faculties, or journal editorial boards, which expect and reward various kinds of publication and “going public.” Critical reflection is, paradoxically, very difficult to accomplish in solitude.** (Shulman, 2004a, p. 229)

Thus, we find it healthy for the profession to invite more writing from teachers and to create access publications to scaffold and welcome their efforts. We find it extremely important that groups of teachers, young and old, newbies and experienced, write together and

collaborate to enrich their understandings of teaching and our work in the profession. Going public with our thoughts and research, be it small or big, tentative or established, social or cognitive, or all of these things, is well worth the effort. As Wilga Rivers said 30 years ago, “We are limited only by our own caution, by our own hesitancy to do whatever our imagination suggests to us” (Rivers, 1976, p. 96).

*Tim Murphey read something like this opening quote once long ago and reconstructed it like this. After hours of searching on the Internet, he found it on a quote page with a slight twist: “The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.” GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, *Annajanska* accessed June 10, 2008 from: http://www.notable-quotes.com/s/shaw_george_bernard.html

Tim Murphey teaches at Kanda University of International Studies, and is a visiting professor in the MA programs of Hawaii Pacific University and Teachers College Tokyo. He likes writing most when he can do it collaboratively with students and colleagues. As of this writing (June 2008) Miyoun Kim, Sayuri Kusutani, and Judy Lawson have all received their MA from Hawaii Pacific University and are considering PhD work. Makiko Sugawara is a 2nd year graduate student at Dokkyo University and Naoki Yamaura is now an MA graduate and teaching at a high school in Japan. Miyoun, Sayuri, Judy, Makiko and Naoki are all on track to be prodigious contributors to the profession.

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Appendix

Collaboration history

In preparing for this article, Tim asked two students in Japan, Naoki Yamaura and Makiko Sugawara, from one of his graduate school classes, to record their understanding of publishing. They were recorded in his office and prompted with multiple questions: “What is publishing all about? Why would teachers or others want to do it? How might you go about doing it?” **They talked together informally for 20 minutes.** Tim later decided to co-author this piece with them and benefit more from their repeated feedback and insights.

Neither Naoki nor Makiko identified themselves as writers or potential writers and had little idea why teachers would want to write. They are probably not a lot different from many teachers all over Japan. At one point Naoki said, **“I think it’s important because it’s a public stuff, everyone can see.”** Publishing is indeed public *stuff*, open to everyone’s eyes. Lee Shulman (2004b), **president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching**, says we need to make teaching “community property” and make it open to critique so that it can be improved. To a great extent publishing does this.

At another point, Makiko said, **“Always speaking or telling, the story will be changed, I guess. But if you write it down and publish it, it will last forever.”** Well maybe not forever, but at least awhile. Merrill Swain (2005) talks about doing this as creating an artifact, creating something you can look at and adjust and change (this piece was printed out, *artifaced*, at least ten times in order to rewrite and rethink it). Publishing your ideas and perspectives in the form of an article is a gift to the profession of an *artifact* that we can use to think with. It may not be as permanent as Makiko suggests but it can be a stepping stone to a better understanding of how we teach and learn. Swain calls this *linguaging*:

Linguaging serves as a vehicle through which thinking is articulated and transformed into an artifactual form. Writing about speaking,

Smagorinsky (1998) argued that ‘the process of rendering thinking into speech is not simply a matter of memory retrieval, but a process through which thinking reaches a new level of articulation’ (172-73). The same is true for writing. Ideas are crystallized. They become available as an object about which questions can be raised and answers can be explored with others or with the self. In other words, languaging is a process which creates a visible or audible product about which one can language further. (2005)

Like Naoki and Makiko, most teachers also have pearls of wisdom that capture the likes of Shulman and Swain. What a loss to the profession if all these wonderful minds were never to engage with each other through publications and dialogue.

During the summer of 2006, Tim gave a draft of this piece to a class of MA students at **Hawai’i Pacific University** and **asked for further feedback**. Some of their feedback was so voluminous that he ended up collaborating with three more writers through multiple drafts and revisions (Sophia Kim, Sayuri Kusutani, and Judy Lawson, each with teaching experience of 3, 13 and 3 years respectively). On her initial feedback Sophia commented that publishing is just not part of the mental picture that most teachers have of themselves:

Actually before joining this (MA TESL) program, I never thought of professional development because **my job of teaching is very guaranteed until I am 65 years old. I don’t have to worry about the security of my job. However, I came to learn that teachers should take responsibilities of professional development for better teaching, and I’m getting ready little by little.**

Sayuri, a marathon runner, insisted that we provide some sort of punch for the dry beginning that Tim had initially created. Without a good start, readers won’t get too far. Judy cautioned us about the big

leap that publishing is in many teachers' minds: "I think as a reader, I need to be reassured that baby steps are ok." And thus we suggest that teachers as well as students need scaffolding and need to be shown that contributions can start very small and even be enjoyable when done collaboratively.

Further reading

1. Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, and reflexivity. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research, 2nd Ed.*, (pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. This very readable chapter (in an otherwise very heavy book) illustrates wonderfully how to use personal experience ("I") and emotions in academic writing.

2. Murphey, T. (2000). Becoming contributing professionals: Nonnative English-speaking teachers in an EFL environment. In Karen E. Johnson (Ed.), *Teacher Education*. (pp.105-118). Alexandria, VA: TESOL. This article is best for professors of beginning graduate students who wish to scaffold professionalism (writing, presenting, and researching).

3. As we say in this article the field is changing and opening up. Perhaps the best "further reading" in a few years times will entail your own Googling: Google "writing academic articles" and variants of it.