

Eliciting Reactions to and Deepening Understanding of Reading Texts Through Writing Response Journals

Liu Wen-Yun

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ABSTRACT

While lecturing instruction is still widely being practiced in reading and literature class, students' responses and their interactions with instructors and peers however have been greatly valued and strongly encouraged. Response journal writing activity thus has become one of the frequently used tasks that instructors of reading and literature class would assign as a course requirement for students to fulfill. This paper conceptualizes the task activity of utilizing response journals with students. The paper covers and discusses the following aspects: 1) benefits of implementing response journals, 2) suggestions of types of response journals to be applied, 3) suggestions of types of responses to be included and identified in students' journals, and 4) key factors to make the activity successful.

Keywords: journal writing activity, writing assignment, reading-writing connection, English learning and teaching

閱讀心得札記：喚出讀者反應與深化閱讀的寫作活動

劉文雲

摘要

雖然在文學和英語閱讀課堂上，教師授課仍是普遍常見的主要教學方式，但是學生對閱讀文本的心得想法卻也逐漸受到重視，師生間因閱讀文本所產生的意見交流以及對談表現也備受鼓勵及歡迎。受上述原因之影響，閱讀心得札記也因此成為教師常布置的作業選項之一。本文針對在閱讀課程中實施閱讀心得札記寫作活動做一概念性之論述。文章內文包括三個主軸：第一，闡述閱讀心得札記寫作活動對學生學習所帶來的實際效益；第二，說明此一寫作活動可在課堂中實際運用的方式；第三，對於同學從事此一寫作活動可練習的寫作內容提出建議；以及第四，歸納出讓此一活動達到有效運作的關鍵要點。

關鍵字：閱讀心得札記寫作、寫作作業、閱讀與寫作關聯性、英文閱讀

Introduction

In recognition of the increasing concern of communicative approach and interactive learning pedagogy, changes have been detected in the practice of English language teaching and learning. The foci of research in the field have thus been redirected from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction and from test-oriented curriculum to multiple evaluations. Concepts about recognizing students' needs and designing student-centered activity have been brought up and constantly emphasized (H. C. Chia, Johnson, H. L. Chia, & Olive, 1999; Davies, 2005; Van, 2009).

The dramatic influences do not only occur in the English language class but also in English reading and literature classes. The conventional view that teachers ask students to respond to the reading materials merely for the purposes of making sure that students all read their assigned reading materials and answer the "right" or "preferable" answers in teachers' minds is certainly not universal anymore. In contrast to a traditional one-way teacher-lecturing class, the idea of encouraging students to voice out their responses has been developed to be a prevalent belief and is implemented as a part of teaching (Peyton, 2000). Many instructors of literature class are willing to invite students to have dialogues about reading texts with instructors and peers. This new trend of teaching and learning creates an opportunity for response journal to be adopted as an activity or an assignment task to be used with both ESL and EFL students in the English language and English reading and literature classes (Carlisle, 2000; Lin, 2006; Manyak, 2008)

According to educational resources (eg., Kostos & Shin, 2010; Pearson Education, Inc. 2008), journaling is often described as an ongoing record or practice that records a collection of thoughts, experiences, observations, personal learnings, understandings, and explanations about ideas or concepts in a notebook. In general, response journal writing, also termed as literary journal (Zainor, Arbaayah, Roselezam, & Deni, 2010), reflective journal (Cisero, 2006; Hubbs & Brand, 2010), or literary letters (Frailey, Buck-Rodriguez, & Anders, 2009) in a way is a kind of course task that combines and demands both reading and writing skills.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky and Rosenblatt are the two major figures that were often cited and referred in the empirical studies and conceptual literature papers that involved using response journal as a course activity. According to Vygotsky (1986), our thoughts are shaped by "external speech" which serves as a tool to explore ideas and create social dialogues with others. Based on Vygotsky's notion, Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo (1999) and Kim (2011) regarded response journal as a tool that helps

students develop reading ability and learn various content subjects. Williams and Hufnagel (2005) further concurred and identified journal writing as an “evolving activity” which is constructed through the social interactions and negotiations.

The concept of aesthetic reading proposed by Rosenblatt (2005) was emphasized by Bean & Rigoni (2001), H. R. Kim, (2005), Meyer & Schendel (2014), and Wong, Kuperis, Jamieson, Keller, & Cull-Hewitt (2002) who deeply believed it to be an appropriate method to engage students and inspire them to read texts and literary works. In addition, reader response theories highly stress and value personal meaning-making of and personal interpretations of the texts. Knoblauch & Brannon (2002) stated that all reading involves transactions between the readers and texts. When writing journals, students take a reflective role and go through a thinking process in which they construct their personal interpretations, express their personal thoughts and feelings about the texts, sometimes make real-life connections, refine understanding and shape ideas (Liaw, 2001; Zainor, Arbaayah, Roselezam, & Deni, 2010) In this way, aesthetic reading evolved from Rosenblatt’s transactional theory can be achieved.

The other important theoretical base discussed for promoting journal writing activity is associated to “Funds of Knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). “Funds of Knowledge” refers to valuable cultural and social knowledge that learners possess. Researchers who advocated the concept highlight the importance of recognizing the direct experiences and connections to what readers have read (McGough, 2013; Kim, 2011). Through journal writing activity, learners are provided with opportunities and possibilities to draw on what they already knew and then move on to what they can explore.

Benefits of Implementing Response Journals

In general, response journal writing activity brings a range of benefits to students in various aspects. First, students’ motivations for learning and writing are promoted. Second, response journal writing helps students a lot in improving their reading and writing skills as well as their thinking, comprehension and organizing abilities. Moreover, their self-understanding is deepened. They also receive more effective help from their teachers, and their teachers get to know more about their students. The following section provided detailed descriptions and explanations of each feature respectively.

Response journal writing in essence is a kind of free writing, and students are encouraged to write whatever topics and contents that they think are important to them (Larrotta, 2009; Peyton, 2000). “The free form has provided an efficient means for tapping responses to reading by capturing the spontaneous inner language of the

mind in a natural written form” (Grabe, 2004, p. 37). Besides, response journal incorporates some of the natural aspects of oral language conversations in written form (Peyton, 2000), and the language is used in a relaxed way which is closer to speech than to formal structured writing (Denne-Bolton, 2013). All these features help reduce the fear of writing (Uduma, 2011), so students in a way generate a connection with writing task and change their views from seeing writing as a fearful task to a non-threatening exploration where they develop and express personal ideas. This particularly unique characteristic is considered by many teachers and researchers as the most significant benefit of using response journal because it helps students see writing in a more positive way and provides authentic writing experiences (McGough, 2013). Kim (2013) moreover stated that response journal features an authentic purpose of writing, and EFL students can gain confidence in English writing.

When students compose response journals and use them to communicate with their teachers or peers, writing is not just seen as a boring assignment to be accomplished but becomes a meaningful task with a particular purpose. It is undeniable that students will benefit greatly when writing is meaningful to them, and it may help students develop a more open attitude toward writing. Pfeiffer & Sivasubramaniam (2016), for example, observed their students growing a sense of confidence and identity as writers when they were allowed to express emotional and irrational aspects in their thinking in their own words in journals.

Furthermore, it gives students reasons to write legibly, and somehow it helps students recognize that “their writing has the power to communicate to others and accomplish goals” (Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1999, p.5). Similarly, when Greene and Serro (2015) made an investigation on perspectives of both graduate and undergraduate students, their participants shared a common feedback that they enjoyed the activity and recommended that the activity should continue to be implemented because they felt empowered and being appreciated for their opinions of the readings were valued by and conveyed to the instructors. .

Journal writing stimulates and cultivates skills such as observation, speculation, doubt, questioning, self-awareness, problem stating, problem solving, emoting and ideation (Leslie & Roth, 2003; Wanket, 2005). In order to think of something to write, students need to first understand what they read and then make meaning from what they read. Through the whole process of meaning making, students are not only required to transfer their thinking to writing but also need to move forward to find a way to organize their thinking, synthesize information they get from their readings and then manage to articulate thoughts and feelings appropriately with appropriate words. Thus students, besides becoming more aware of what they have read, stay focused when they are reading. Additionally, it was claimed by Dymont &

O'Connell (2011) that journal writing is popular in higher education because it allows students to examine their beliefs, values and assumptions about subject matters and to actively analyze knowledge in different environments. All these skills are directly related to the levels of academic performance indeed.

Furthermore, having students write response journals will help students understand that reading and writing are not two totally separate but interrelated subjects because response journal writing provides a natural way for students to integrate reading and writing (Tunks, 2011; Kim, 2013; Greene & Serro, 2015). Through the practice of writing response journals, students get to strengthen both their reading and writing abilities (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

Frailey, Buck-Rodriguez, & Anders (2009) as well as Martinez & Roser (2008), Matsumura, Correnti, & Wang, (2015) and Wong et al. (2002) reported findings that writing response journal indeed increases students' literary understanding. By assigning students to write response journals, teachers are asking their students to examine what they read more closely than they might normally do and to integrate different sources of information to support their claims and views about the reading materials. This experience helps students become more involved in reading and makes them think more deeply about the reading works. Undoubtedly, all of these tasks demand a higher level of thinking, analytic skills, and content knowledge (Matsumur, Correnti, & Wang, 2015), and these skills and abilities are definitely what instructors of literature desire to see students to acquire. Wong et al. (2002) gave an example that journal writing activity made contributions in deepening students' understanding of themes and main characters in a complex novel, while as in the study by Martinez & Roser (2008), response journals help first graders make understanding of a challenging chapter book.

When students take turns responding to each other, on one hand, they achieve a purpose of using language for communication and they, on the other hand, are given a chance to practice critical thinking skills. After sharing their responses with their teachers and classmates and receiving comments or suggestions from others, students will be challenged to do deeper, further thinking, which is what students usually don't do in a typical teacher lecturing class or lack experiences of doing it. This kind of training thus in a way further empowers and encourages individual learning (Runkle, 2000) and improves reasoning skills (Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad, & Ghanbari, 2013). Furthermore, when sharing or discussing responses with teachers or peer members, students are asked to validate and justify their responses (Harada, Lum, & Souza, 2002). So, questions or comments from others may lead to further thinking or make students become more confident and clear about their own ideas (McDonough & Neumann, 2014).

By making students going through the process of searching for answers to questions, students also get chances to examine and understand themselves (Liao & Wong, 2010; Lin, 2006; Kim, 2011). Through writing initial responses, students explore ideas and express opinions on issues and subjects that they think are important to them and worthy thinking and discussing. Their responses reveal parts of their values and beliefs, which they themselves may not be consciously aware. Consequently, the activity creates an opportunity to force students to make introspection and self-reflection as well (Cisero, 2006). Besides, the experiences of going through the process of doing careful reading will help students recognize their own reading patterns and reading strategies that they apply to achieve reading comprehension. It may also lead students to discover their strengths and weaknesses about their own learning abilities, which may further help them identify their own areas for improvements (Abednia et al., 2013).

Another benefit of using response journal with students lies in the aspect that teachers have a chance to glance through their students' thinking processes and discover students' interests (Werderich, 2010). It is quite true that teachers are also curious about what their students think about the texts they read and why they generate such responses. By using response journals and reading the responses of students, teachers may have a better understanding of their students (J. Kim, 2005). After reading students' responses, teachers may find things about the students that they will never discover from the formal whole-class lecturing and written tests. Reading responses from students may help teachers relate to students in a more personal way. Also, individual student will be able to get attention from the teacher and establish a bond between them so that teachers will be able to give appropriate and useful guidance that suits student's needs (Anderson, Nelson, Richardson, Webb, & Young, 2011; McDonough & Heike, 2014; Liao & Wong, 2010).

In addition, it is helpful with students who are quiet and seldom speak in class; it is extremely helpful with students who learn and speak English as a foreign language (Larrotta, 2009; McDonough & Neumann, 2014; Pagcaliwagan-Davis, 2003). Unlike speaking, students in the process of writing are provided with enough time to organize their thoughts and to think how to express themselves in English. Students thus feel less nervous or frightened as they express their responses orally. In this way, students not only have chances to express what they hope to say but also practice to express their responses in English.

Suggestions of Types of Response Journals to be Applied

Because there is much flexibility in implementing response journals, teachers and instructors, before actually going into the process of activity planning, may give

a thought to the matters of teaching purposes, goals they want to achieve and reactions that students may have. Some teachers tried different types of journals in one semester; some teachers tried only one type and used it constantly. Another idea is teachers may adopt the same type of journal but use it in different ways for different purposes. Some possible ways of implementing response journal activity and the detailed procedures and practical suggestions of applying each type of response journal are stated and explained in the following section.

Buddy Journal

One way that teachers use buddy journal is to group students in pairs or to match students with buddies and partners and make time for students to write journals in class. In the buddy journals, students “talk” to each other on a wide range of topics. The only requirement is that students need to read the entire entries before they actually move to the step to write or respond to their buddies or partners. Furthermore, in order to ensure and maintain students’ interest in writing buddy journals, teachers may allow students to choose their own buddies or to change buddies periodically. One of the advantages of changing buddies periodically is that students have opportunities to read various responses and perspectives from different students.

In contrast to the usage of having students write various topics of their choices, Jellespie (1993) gave an example of using buddy journal to have her students respond exclusively and only to reading texts. Jellespie in her case stopped using traditional reading reports with her students because the students despised them and complained a lot. So, she tried buddy journal instead, and her students liked it. In Jellespie’s class, seventh-grade-students chose partners and together decided what books they wanted to read. Then they wrote to each other back and forth sharing their responses to the stories. She even tried to invite adult guests to be buddy journal partners to her students. Through sharing and exchanging journal entries, both adults and students got to see different perspectives from and experiences of people of different generations. This example fully confirms the idea that students will be highly motivated and will enthusiastically participate in their learning if teachers apply appropriate teaching activities that arouse students’ interests in learning. It also shows that teachers need to understand their students, and a change of method may be needed when the result of using certain method is not as effective as the teachers have expected.

Double-entry Journal

Double-entry journal, which is commonly practiced in the course of

writing-across-the-curriculum literature, (Millis, 2014) is another type of journal used in different ways by teachers. Typically, to create a double-entry journal, a page in a journal notebook is divided into two parts or two columns. Students are asked to write down ideas or quotes from their course readings on one part and record responses to those ideas or quotes in the other part (AdLit.org, 2014; Boyd-Batstone, 2013).

Bendu (2016) used double-entry journal to check students' reading comprehension of and higher-order critical thinking skills to books they had read. He designed a double entry journal that contained two sections: what happened and what I think. In the section of what happened, it sated the content of the texts, and the connections and inferences that students made were written in the other section. Reed (1988) in another case asked each student in her class to choose one appealing or disturbing quotation from the book that he or she read and then wrote the quotation on the left side of the journal notebook. On the right side, the student wrote his or her own responses to the quotations.

Ruddell (2006) furthermore took double-entry to another level and used it in an extended way with high school and college students in reading classes. In their reading classes, the double-entry journal approach took steps of first reading a book, then writing an affective response to the book and sharing it in a small group, and finally doing a class presentation. It ended with writing a second journal entry in which students synthesized their findings or newly learned insights.

It was also suggested that students can try Bleich's (1975) strategy of three-step response to write their first journal entry. In the first step, students find what they consider to be the most important passages in the readings and then provide explanations and passages cited from the texts to support their ideas. After that, students try to express their reactions to the passages that have been selected. The next step is to make personal connections between the readings and real life experiences. After finishing the first written response piece, students discuss their responses in small groups and share their responses with the whole class as well. Through sharing and presenting responses, students get chances to generate new ideas, connections and insights. The last step is to synthesize their learning and understanding in the second journal entry.

Dialogue Journal

Dialogue journal is another form of journal that has been frequently and widely reported to be used in the classrooms (Freire & Filho, 2015). Because response journals are usually shared between teachers and students, some teachers describe response journals as dialogue journal where they have dialogues with their students. "Dialogue journals are written conversations in which a learner and teacher (or other

writing partner) communicate regularly (daily, weekly, or on a schedule that fits the educational setting) over a semester, school year, or course” (Peyton, 2000, p. 3).

Werderich (2010) sees dialogue journal as a form of journal in which they write letters to their students. In their letter exchanges, teachers and students would tell each other about which books they had been reading and what they thought of the books. In addition, teachers and students in the letters exchanged thoughts, recommended books to each other, and responded to the previous responses written by each other. Another example can be drawn from Larrotta (2009) who tried dialogue journal with adult ESL learners. According to Larrotta, the dialogue journal activity effectively and successfully achieved the goals of engaging adult ESL learners in her class to write in English for authentic communication, to reflect the connections the learners make between the language and thoughts, and to learn new vocabulary without noticing.

Influenced and driven by the evolutionary progress of computer mediated technology, dialogue journal has transformed into different forms such as e-mail dialogue journal or blogging and is extensively applied and researched in the field of English writing (Denne-Bolton, 2013; Foroutan, Noordin, & Gani bin Hamzah, 2013; Lee, 2012; Rezaei & Manzari, 2011).

Guided Journal

Unlike conventional book reports in which students present the knowledge they possess to the class reading materials or discuss topics they want to write for the final term papers, some instructors preferred using form of structure or “question frame” (Berger, 1996; Wong et al., 2002) to guide students writing journals. Berger (1996) designed and chose to apply “question frame” response journals because she found her students tended to produce shallow responses in their writings. With the given guiding questions, the responses that the students made changed to be affective and thoughtful reactions.

To recapitulate the study, Wong et al. (2002) adopted the same guided questions and investigated the effects of guided response journal writing on students’ understanding of the main characters in the complex novel *The Great Gatsby*. The result indicated that question frame response journal did benefit the students in ways of helping them understand and think more deeply about the text they read and also promoting their literary knowledge. In addition, guided by the questions, the students were forced to “explicitly justify their answers (p. 187).

It seems that students need some kind of guidance to help them elicit intellectual and deep thoughts and feelings toward what they read. So, it can be inferred that guided journal are preferable with inexperienced students who have no

idea about what to write and how to write and with students who have hard time generating ideas to write in an English reading or English literature class. It will also work more effectively by using guided journal when teachers hope to have students pay attention to certain aspects of their reading or make penetrating analyses on more complex and sophisticated reading texts.

Self-developed Journal

Other than adopting the designated journals, teachers may also give freedom to their students to freely design and make their own journals, and to establish the rules and rubrics of writing their journals. Teachers may first give a background introduction to the students on the various types of writing journals and the anticipated ways of composing entries in the writing journals. After that, students make decisions on how they are going to do this writing activity. Having students got involved in creating their own ways of using journals may assist students establish a sense of ownership of their journals (O'Connell, Dymont, & Smith, 2015), and it increases chances that student will take the writing activity more seriously when they actually work on writing. Teachers may also scheme out a new form of response journal to be used to fulfill teaching objectives. For example, Stysliger (2004) devised a dual-voiced journal in which she required her students to make responses in two voices--one male and one female. The underlying motive was to promote awareness of gendered stereotypes and help students understand the characters from the perspectives of students' own gender and of the opposite sex.

Suggestions of Types of Responses to be Included and Identified

Although how teachers use written journal activity is important and influential to students' responses, the main foci still center on students and their responses to the reading texts. The result of the study by Dunkelblau (2007) and Frailey, Buck-Rodriguez, & Anders (2009) suggested that even though each student constructed various types of response to the same reading text, a consistent pattern of responses would occurred among different students. There were still major patterns or styles of responses that could be traced in each of individual's responses. As Hancock (1992) concluded that it is important for teachers to know and be aware of what types of responses that will emerge in students' journals because those responses serve as guidance to "assist teachers in guiding children (students) to extend their response" (p. 37). Also, responses of students help teachers know "what students understood, how they learned and how they approached reading" (Wollman-Bonilla, 1989, p. 118). It is through this way that instructors detect what aspects of responses that their students have touched or neglected so that they get a

sense of how they can and should help their students improve their learning or overcome difficulties in their learning and reading processes.

Some other researchers, such as, Bean & Rigoni (2001), Dunkelblau (2007), Lyutaya (2011), Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo (1999), and Werderich (2002) also conducted investigations on types of responses that students included in their journal writings. Even though the contents of the responses may present a huge diversity and are widely varied, the types of responses that students may make are similar; the only difference lies in the categories and terms that authors of different articles named.

The following section synthesizes and sums up the most frequently identified types of responses. Teachers and instructors may take these categories of responses as reference sources to suggest their students to explore, or they may form their own groups of categories. By detecting categories of responses that students include or exclude in their response journals, teachers and instructors get to know which types of responses their students are capable or incapable of composing, which parts of reading their students comprehend or have problem understanding, and whether or not it is necessary to guide students to think from different perspectives and write different types of responses. Moreover, the questions of whether certain types of responses are considered to be more preferable and suitable for certain ages, school levels of students and language proficiency levels are worthy exploring and discussing.

Comprehension

Students write about their understandings of plots and characters. The way they do it is to synthesize and reveal what they know through their own words or their own ways of expressing. The responses also reflect personal interpretations and ongoing thinking processes of meaning making from the unfolding plot. Retelling and visualizing are two commonly applied strategies used by students in order to make sense of the story. Sometimes, readers may also integrate connections across different texts and form intertextual references and interpretations.

Prediction, Validation and Revision

Students in this part record what they believe is the main point that the author of a text intends to argue or what is going to happen to the characters in a story. It may also happen that students later include statements that confirm or deny their predictions as the text or story unfolds. After their predictions are proved to be wrong, or after they find more information about the text or story, they may revise their assumptions in the following parts of their responses.

Question or confusion

During the reading process, there are times when students have problems understanding the reading texts and have questions about plots, behavior of characters, or information stated in the stories or reading pieces. Their responses probably will display and reveal those questions and confusions. By asking questions or expressing confusions, students reflect their efforts and struggles to comprehend the texts and sometimes ask their teachers for help. Questions or confusions also provide chances for a further study or inquiry. Some students may try to answer their own questions or clarify confusions in journals.

Character identification

Responses indicate that students assume the roles of the characters in the stories and achieve a sense of personal identification with the characters through reasoning the feelings, thoughts and motives or behavior of the characters. However, their responses may also reflect a sense of tentativeness or uncertainty in readers. Responses may directly address to the characters or offer personal advice to the characters. Students may express how they would feel or what they would probably do if they were in the situations of the characters. Those personal experiences and suggestions may be evoked and generated from their own lives or the lives of other people that they know as well. Other similar responses classified in this category include direct comments on the experiences that the characters encounter or personal feelings or emotions toward the characters themselves.

Evaluation

The responses usually involve more analysis, and evidences are provided to support the evaluation or comments that readers make. Students may express personal judgments regarding the author's writing skills, or the technique that the author used in the texts. Responses also show the reader's opinions and evaluations of the actions of characters in stories. Usually this type of response reveals part of students' own moral values, beliefs and traits.

Literary element analysis

Readers discuss various literary elements, such as setting, character analysis, symbols, tones etc. Sometimes readers may make comparisons or contrasts among literary elements in different stories.

Notes

Students sometimes turn response journal into notebooks. They synthesize their

understanding, responses and class notes to take a practice for writing papers or reviewing for tests. It can also become a wordbook which helps students deal with unknown vocabulary.

Opinions

This type of responses presents the connections that readers make with the real world. The reading texts to a certain extent serve as springboards. Readers quite often will extend their thoughts beyond the texts and express their understanding, judgments, personal insights, or opinions about what have happened in the real world.

Key Factors to Promote Effective and Successful Use of Response Journals

Although the common procedures that most teachers practice when they apply response journals include asking students to write responses on regular bases, reading students' response in each journal entry and giving comments or response to students, the three major and pivotal factors that achieve success in using response journal with students are stated to be teachers' feedbacks, a bound of trust between teachers and students, and clear instructions and guidance.

"Teacher comments should be nonjudgmental, encouraging, and thought provoking. These comments should be suggestive but not demanding" (Hancock, 1992, p. 40). In other words, teachers should provide positive and supportive comments to students' responses and be careful not to dominate students' thinking and responses or assertively impose teachers' own perspectives on students. Teachers often worry too much about if students can perceive messages and meanings that teachers think are important and significant. What teachers should keep in minds when reading responses and giving feedbacks is, as it was stated by Larrotta (2009), "learned to respect one another and to look at each other as people who have knowledge and skills that not all of us shared (p. 42). In other words, teachers need to learn to keep open minds to students' responses and appreciate their students' responses.

However, it is also acknowledged that teachers are also readers in a sense and have their own responses or thoughts. When teachers share or present their responses to students, they may provide students with new perspectives to think and interpret, which may directly influence students' thinking (Matsumura, Correnti, & Wang, 2015) and help students move to new levels of thinking process and make changes (Wink, 2000). Therefore, it might be helpful that teachers pay attention to the overall impressions, including tones, word choices, attitude, and ways of

presenting argumentation, that their responses give to the students, along with providing positive and supportive comments.

Teachers' feedbacks matter especially and make great impact on the level and depth of the responses that students would produce in their journals (Russel-Hyland, 2014). Teachers can use questions to push students to think deeper and wider. Teachers can also initially share their opinions on a certain topic to elicit students' interests and curiosities in exploring the topic. One suggestion made to teachers' feedbacks in this aspect is that a teacher should keep in mind not to overwhelm the student by writing more than the student does.

Some educators raise a concern that under the pressure of being influenced and threatened by teacher's power and authority in the classroom, students may abandon their own opinions or responses and choose to adopt the teachers' opinions. This situation happens often and easily indeed, but it can be avoided if teachers and students build a sense of trust with each other. Teachers may make it clear and explicitly explain to students that multiple interpretations are common and acceptable (Werderich, 2010), and it's more important to develop the ability to make wise judgments. When the sense of trust is gained and built among teachers and students, students naturally would exempt from fears and embarrassments and make attempts to write from their inner voice.

It takes time to build trust among a teacher and students in the classroom, but teachers' attitudes can help promote and increase that sense of trust. The best advice to teachers is to involve themselves and participate in sharing their responses. Sometimes, using response journals in class becomes a burden to teachers because it involves a significant time commitment to read through students' journal entries and give feedbacks and responses back to the students. Nevertheless, Camicia & Read (2011) discovered that teacher's participation greatly influences student's efforts and willingness in participation. In a likely manner, Hurst, Fisk, & Wilson (2006) and McIntosh & Draper (2001) attributed their success in using response journal effectively to their efforts to actually spending time writing back to their students. They found that the more they wrote to their students, the longer responses they got to see in return in their students' journals.

Clear instructions and guidance are not only crucial in achieving successful results of using response journal activity with students but also in engaging students to generate elaborated and quality responses (McDonough & Neumann, 2014; Werderich, 2010). It is reported to be extremely useful if younger students are targeted, and it is highly recommended to instructors who have students that get used to teacher-led learning style that they provide guidance and full explanations before they assign the activity. Students in Taiwan for example would appreciate

clear instructions or even demonstrations from teachers (Lee, 2012) because they, on one hand, probably lack experiences of writing response journals and, on the other hand, don't feel comfortable presenting and delivering personal thoughts and opinions to others. Therefore, teachers and instructors can model a lesson of response journal writing (Werderich, 2010) to show their students the procedure for writing in a certain type of journal or simply to show them how to start. After students become familiar with the activity, teachers are then advised to provide no further instructions.

It is also possible that some teachers may use response journal in a more structured way. Researchers suggested that instructors provide their students with a list of a series of open-ended and response-oriented questions that can inspire students to generate both personal alternative replies and extended and analytical responses that demonstrate complex thinking skills (H. R. Kim, 2005; Matsumura, Correnti, Wang, 2015). There are two reasons that they suggest teachers adopting this strategy. First, for some students who are unfamiliar with this approach to writing and reading, they may need more guidance to proceed with the activity or task. Secondly, after giving deep considerations to questions raised by teachers, students may think more broadly or elicit more profound responses.

Conclusion

Response journal really can be used in various ways depending on what kinds of students teachers have and what purposes teachers want to achieve. Response journal not only serves the functions that conventional report papers or comprehension tests do but also helps students enhance their understanding and learning about the reading text, English language, themselves and the world. It furthermore helps teachers do a more effective job in teaching, provide assistance to students and evaluate students more fairly.

In addition, the current pedagogical trend in teaching and learning emphasizes the importance of changing students' role from passive receivers to active learners. Asking students to write response journals as a way to fulfill course requirement may also help students realize that they have to learn for their own sake, not for the reason to pass tests, and at the same time set students free from the pressure of doing all kinds of tests. Also, with the spread and popularity of the conception of multiculturalism, students need to acquire a view that things can be seen from diverse perspectives. Sharing thoughts and points of views with others through response journal writing activity provides chances for and trainings to students to generate their own responses and interpretations, to acquire abilities to think and reason critically, and to learn to make wise judgments.

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Liu Wen-Yun, Assistant Professor, Department of English,
National Taitung University,
Email: annieliu@nttu.edu.tw