

## Prompting second language writers for productive reflection using narrative questioning prompt

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### Abstract

This paper aims to introduce a novel form of reflective tool ‘narrative questioning’ to facilitate students’ elaborate and graded reflection in two ESL composition classes in a university in the US. Little has been written about a reflective tool where students need to produce a graded and elaborate reflection and this paper will seek to narrow that gap. Narrative questioning is developed primarily from Barkhuizen and Wette’s (2008) narrative frames. Narrative frames employ “a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths” (Barkhuizen, 2014, p. 13). Narrative questioning utilizes a series of questions through which students reflected on their perceived learning gain throughout the semester. This paper will first discuss research in narrative reflective tools. Then, it will describe the classroom pedagogical lesson that I conducted to introduce and guide students to write their reflection using narrative questioning. Thirdly, the data gathered through students’ reflection and individual interviews of 10 students will be presented and discussed. The data illustrates the different ways of narrative questioning facilitate reflection. Limitations of the narrative questioning elicited from students’ interviews will also be presented here along with the pedagogical implication of the study.

**Keywords:** narratives, narrative frames, ESL composition, reflection, narrative writing, narrative

### Introduction

The use of student reflection in the classroom has marked a significant shift in the way teachers position learner voices in the classroom. By understanding teaching from students’ perspectives, teachers can narrow the gap between teacher’s expectations and what students actually learn. This can be seen from Hiratsuka’s (2015) and Macalister’s (2012) studies. As a newly-hired teacher, Hiratsuka utilizes student reflection to explore student initial expectation about the course and the teacher as well as to what extent his teaching has met those expectations. His analysis of 20 student reflection provides information on the teaching materials he needed to modify to

enhance student learning. Different from Hiratsuka's method who gathered students' reflection at the end of the course, Macalister implemented it to gather initial data about the English language learning experiences of a large group of young seaman in Kiribati. Both studies illustrate that when teachers provide a space for students to express their voices, they can better accommodate student needs and enhance learning.

While many would agree on the significant role of student reflection for second language learning and teaching, not all student reflection can provide effective learning potential. Davis (2006) differentiate between 'productive' and 'unproductive' reflections when teaching reflection among pre-service elementary teachers. According to Davis, unproductive reflection refers to "mainly descriptive, without much analysis and involves listing ideas rather than connecting them logically" (p. 282). Unproductive reflection might lead to students forming a judgmental rather than evaluative and critical stance toward a particular topic. By contrast, by writing 'productive reflection' students are able to evaluate assumptions and/or beliefs as well as depict "many ways of seeing" (Loughran, 2002, p. 39) of a particular issue based on evidence (Dewey, 1933). Another indicator is the ability to connect and integrate ideas about multiple aspects of teaching contributing to effective teaching. Despite Davis's satisfying attempts to define reflection, many scholars continue to emphasize the complexity of reflection mainly because it varies with regards to definitions (Davis, 2006), types (Grossman, 2009), depth, structures, and goals (Fernsten and Fernsten, 2005).

The complexity of producing reflective writing points to the fact that reflection needs to be taught. Giving students a reflective prompt alone will not automatically lead to reflective content (Davis, 2006, 2003; Grossman, 2009) and should go beyond 'What do you think...?' question (Fernsten and Fernsten, 2005, p. 305). One reflective tool that has recently gained attention is narrative frames (Barkhuizen and Wette, 2008; 2014). Narrative frames are "a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths" (Barkhuizen, 2014, p. 13). It serves to give "skeletal" (Barkhuizen, 2014, p. 13) structure and a content focus to participants' stories. Narrative frames were first introduced and utilized by Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) to document 83 teachers learning experience participating in a summer education program in China. While Barkhuizen and Wette's identified several limitations of narrative frames related to, among others, spatial constraints and content depth, they were able to gain variety and general insights about teachers' working lives collected in a relatively short time.

Since the publication of Barkhuizen and Wette's narrative frames, a growing number of studies utilizing narrative frames emerge. They utilize narrative frames mainly to serve an "exploratory purpose" (Barkhuizen,

2014, p. 13) providing preliminary knowledge for teachers entering “a new or unfamiliar” (Barkhuizen, 2014, p. 13) teaching contexts. Studies conducted by Barnard and Nguyen’s (2010) and Shelley, Murphy, and White (2013) utilized narrative frames to understand how teachers experience a particular or changing teaching methodology and or/practice. Macalister (2012) employed narrative frames as a need analysis tool before designing an EFL curriculum for training seamen in Kiribati. He found that narrative frames provided information about potential students, the seamen, that other traditional need analysis instrument (e.g. questionnaires and surveys) could not. While many utilized narrative frames to (practicing) teachers, Hiratsuka (2014) implemented narrative frames to understand high school students’ learning experiences in English language classes in Japan. He found that narrative frames were effective in facilitating learner autonomy. In another study, Hiratsuka (2015) showed how narrative frames can be used by a new teacher, such as himself, to gain initial information about students’ wants and needs. Studies employing narrative frames highlight the need for storying experience to be carefully crafted so that they can serve as an effective reflective tool for both teachers and students.

The purpose of the present study is to introduce a novel form of narrative frames called ‘narrative questioning’ which is inspired by Barkhuizen and Wette’s (2008) narrative frames to guide students’ graded reflection. Rather than utilizing sentence starters to stimulate written expression as in narrative frames, narrative questioning, as the name implies, includes a series of questions to enable students to mine information creating a narrative reflection about a particular learning gain. In doing so, it is a response to Barkhuizen and Wette’s (2008) call to further explore “the construction and use of narrative frames” (p. 384), especially how the concept of narrative framing can elicit students’ reflection. The aim of the study is to explore how the narrative questioning could be a futile ground to mediate student reflection and the kinds of reflection it generates. In particular, the present study aims to answer the following research question: “How does narrative questioning facilitate students’ reflection?”

I start by describing what narrative questioning is, the role it has to guide student reflection as well as how student reflection was generated in ESL composition classes. I then examine the data gathered from students’ narrative paragraphs to find the kind of reflection generated from them. The article ends with the benefits and limitations of narrative questioning in facilitating students’ reflection as expressed by the students in the individual interviews. I also suggest some ways in which narrative questioning can be used effectively to serve as both a reflective and evaluative tool in the writing class.

## Narrative questioning

### *What is narrative questioning*

Narrative questioning aims to facilitate students' reflection on their learning. It generates reflection through a series of questions to reflect upon one's learning gain. The followings are the questions of narrative questioning:

1. What is your learning gain?
2. What is the evidence of learning gain?
3. What is the source of learning gain?
4. What process did you go through to achieve the learning gain?

Many scholars (see, for example, Brockbank and McGill, 1998; Black and Plowright, 2010) have pointed out the role learner's experience as a platform of reflection leading to meaningful and transformational learning. Therefore, the first question of the narrative questioning 'What is your learning gain?' attempts to elicit what students perceived as their learning gain throughout the course.

The construction and selection of the questions constituting narrative questioning were developed over the course of one year and piloted in different ESL composition classes prior to the one utilized in the present study. When I first developed narrative questioning, it only consisted of a question (item 1 above). However, the paragraph students produced as a result of this question were more of a reproduction of the teacher's lectures and did not contain any reflective content. The following paragraph is a common example:

*In this course, we learned how to write an argument essay more deeply. To write a good essay, the first thing that we need to do is write a good outline. A good outline can make our essay has a better organization and it will be helpful for our writing. A good introduction is also very important; to write a good introduction we should use a hook to catch readers' attention at the beginning. Then, we should give readers some background information to help the reader understand why you write this essay. A good introduction also needs to include the thesis statement, the organization of your essay and the purpose (Eddie).*

Here, Eddie's 'reflection' is what Davis (2006) refers to as 'unproductive reflection.' His reflection reads like a lecture-note on how to write an argumentative essay. A reflection needs to depict information about the individualized way learners internalize the knowledge presented in the

class. His use of pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘our’ and ‘you’ appears to position himself as a passive receiver of knowledge. By doing so, we fail to learn how he personalized the knowledge, what facilitated him during this internalization process, the challenges he faced as well as the evidence of this internalization.

The questions of narrative questioning are carefully selected to ensure so that each body paragraph focus on one learning gain. Also, ‘What is your learning gain?’ is selected as the first question to form the topic sentence. Question (2) ‘What is the evidence of learning gain?’ was developed following Dewey (1933) that for a reflection to be meaningful it needs to be informed by evidence. Question 3 ‘What is the source(s) of learning gain?’ attempts to help students’ to review their learning and identify factors resulting in their learning gains. Question (4) ‘What process you went through to achieve the learning gain?’ was added last so that students can elaborate on how they manage the different sources of learning to achieve the learning gain.

Some scholars may say that the use of questions can be constraining for stimulating reflection (Ford, 2016) since they might prescribe and direct participant’s reflection. However, when students’ reflection needs to be assessed, as in the case of the present study, I would say these questions are necessary to make explicit what the teacher expects to see in students’ reflective writing. Additionally, reflection varies greatly concerning the definition (Peltier, Hay, and Drago, 2005), types (Grossman, 2009) and depth. Students can come into the classroom with various definitions and experiences in writing reflectively, some may not according to what the teacher expects. Under this circumstance, the series of questions aims to detail my expectation of content and structure of reflection more explicit so that students can better match their reflection to those expectations.

### ***The narrative questioning lesson***

The narrative questioning lesson follows typical steps found in a process approach to writing focusing on multiple-drafting strategies. It was conducted over four meetings (75 minutes for each meeting). Students started by brainstorming all the learning gains they felt throughout the semester. Hatcher and Bringle (1997) and Grossman (2009) suggest when facilitating students to write reflectively, the teacher needs to provide an opportunity to practice and this is what the narrative questioning lesson does. In the lesson, I started by asking students to free-write each learning gain into a fully developed paragraph. To enable students to extract appropriate information, I gave more structure to respond to the questions. For example to respond to question 2 ‘What is the evidence of learning

gain?' I asked students to describe the learning gain in a before/after format. The before/after format helps students to see learning as a continuous process resulting from "interaction between previous experience and new experience" (Shelley et al., 2013, p. 563). For question 3 'What is the source of learning gain?', students needed to think of in- and/or out-of-class activities that significantly facilitating the learning gain.

After developing each learning gain using narrative questioning, students soon learned that not all learning gains could be developed into a reflective paragraph since some learning gains might not have evidence. Since this also serves as a final exam, I only gave teacher feedback on a paragraph level by selecting three or four of the students' paragraphs and gave class feedback on them. Students, then, developed a complete first draft which went through a peer feedback session. For the purpose of illustration, I include here one complete reflective paragraph (Extract 1) elicited through narrative questioning. The number in the square bracket refers to the number of narrative question in which it responds to.

### **Extract 1**

*[1]Through the course I have gotten better in writing the purpose of the essay. [2]My Inquiry 1 literally didn't have any purpose. [2]My purpose from Inquiry 2 was "If looked on a small scale the purpose of text 'Game Names' is to show how many people have a foreign name and the purpose of the picture book 'My name is Yoon' is to show that how small children react to changing their name into a foreign language. [2]But if looked from the top, on a large scale, what both authors are talking about is the identity of an individual." [2]As you can see the purpose of Inquiry 2 was very long and unclear. [2]This is my purpose from Inquiry 3, "I expect after reading this essay, international students would make up their minds to have English names." [2]It is short, simple and clear. [3]I realized about my tendency to write a long purpose at the writing center when the consultants pointed out this mistake. [3]Also during the peer feedback session for Inquiry 2, my friend wrote that my purpose needed to be made shorter. [4]After all this, I thought about the purpose a lot for Inquiry 3. [4]I took the feedback from my friend and teacher and incorporated it in the purpose of the essays, to make it short and direct.*

## **The study**

The learners in this study were second language writers in two sections of ENG 109 ‘Second Language Composition for Second Language Writers.’ It is a first-year ESL composition class in the US. It is a 4-credit hour first-year writing course designed for international students to develop basic writing and rhetorical skills. The course met three times a week for 16 weeks, with each class session lasted for 75 minutes. Throughout the course, students wrote five assignments termed ‘Inquiry’ which includes personal rhetoric (Inquiry 1), rhetorical analysis (Inquiry 2), public argument (Inquiry 3), remediation (Inquiry 4) and final reflection (Inquiry 5). The narrative questioning created in the present study aimed to facilitate students’ reflection for Inquiry 5.

In each section of ENG109, there were approximately 18 students. For the present study, a total of 36 students were registered in the three sections of ENG109 but only 33 students gave written formal consents to participate in the study. They have assured confidentiality through anonymity. The majority of the students were from China, others were from Burma, Vietnam, Bolivia, and India with ages ranging from 18 to 20 years old. The instructor/researcher was a multilingual English teacher from Indonesia. Students enrolled in ENG108 were considered beginning ESL writers.

The data collected consisted of two main sets. The first data set (A) comprised of the reflective paragraph collected from Inquiry 5 ‘Final Reflection’. Inquiry 5 follows a typical essay structure such as the introduction, body, and conclusion. The body paragraph was written following the questions in the narrative questioning prompt. The first data set only includes the body paragraph. A total of 97 narrative paragraphs was collected from 33 students. Among 97 paragraphs, only 89 paragraph was written by following the narrative questioning and these were the one which was utilized as the first data set.

The second data set (B) was interview transcripts collected from ten students from both sections of ENG109. The intention of conducting an individual face-to-face interview with the students was to explore further how students experienced framing their reflection using narrative questions and to identify the advantages and disadvantages of narrative questioning based on their experience. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted for approximately 15-40 minutes. The interview was semi-structured allowing both the researcher and students the flexibility to discuss specific issues as they arose.

The data analysis started with content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) where data from the two data sets were read reiteratively

to identify reoccurring themes. The data analysis of the reflective paragraph (A) started with identifying sentences that were a response to question 1 'What are the learning gain?' and question 3 'What is the source of learning gain?' of the narrative questioning. They were later color-coded accordingly and analyzed quantitatively to develop categories from the raw data into a framework that captured key themes illustrating the learning gain students' perceived throughout the semester and learning activities that they contributed to that stated learning gain. These categories were later refined as more data were analyzed until I was confident there were no more categories that emerged.

Similarly, to the first data set, the second data set (B) also were analyzed thematically. First, I transcribed the interviews. Second, the interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify recurring themes and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1993) of students' responses illustrating the benefits and drawbacks of narrative questioning. Finally, illustrative examples of the benefits and drawbacks of narrative questioning and related concerns were identified from students' narrative paragraphs to provide further supports for the benefits and drawbacks students' expressed during the individual examples.

## Findings and discussion

Table 1

### Learning Gain Elicited from Narrative Questioning

| Learning Gain                                    | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
| <b><i>Rhetorical Structure</i></b>               | 54     | 64.3%      |
| Writing a thesis (19)                            |        |            |
| Using sources (8)                                |        |            |
| Writing opinion critically (8)                   |        |            |
| Writing multimodally (8)                         |        |            |
| Writing an introduction (5)                      |        |            |
| Writing an opposing argument (2)                 |        |            |
| Integrating personal experience (4)              |        |            |
| <b><i>Writing as a Communication Tool</i></b>    | 11     | 13.1%      |
| Rhetorical appeal (11)                           |        |            |
| <b><i>Revising Strategies</i></b>                | 9      | 10.7%      |
| Attending to feedback from different sources (4) |        |            |
| Checking own grammar (3)                         |        |            |
| Revising run-on sentences (2)                    |        |            |
| <b><i>Pre-writing strategies</i></b>             | 4      | 4.8%       |
| Free-writing (3)                                 |        |            |
| Brainstorming (1)                                |        |            |



|                                |    |      |
|--------------------------------|----|------|
| <i>Affective Gain</i>          | 4  | 4.8% |
| Increased confidence level (4) |    |      |
| <i>Miscellaneous</i>           | 2  | 2.4% |
| <b>Total:</b>                  | 84 |      |

### ***Students' learning gain elicited from narrative questioning***

The analysis of students' stated learning gain (as a response to question 1) showed 15 main themes. These themes are organized further into the following categories: (1) Rhetorical structures, (2) Writing as a communication tool, (3) Focus on the self, (4) Revising strategies and (5) Pre-writing strategies. Table 1 illustrates the frequency distribution of each theme.

It is not surprising that 'Rhetorical Structures' is ranked the highest (64.3%). Among these, 'writing a thesis' is the rhetorical structure students learn the most from the class. Ray, for example, wrote that "Before taking ENG109, I have no idea what the thesis is. I just wrote what I like and I didn't care which sentences conveyed the overall idea of the paragraphs of the essay." This was confirmed by Jay who wrote he "had no idea that our introduction paragraph should include a thesis." This, perhaps, is understandable since prior to taking the course, both of these students have never written a multiple-paragraph essay that required a thesis.

It was also unsurprising that students learned pre-writing and revising strategies since I adopted a process approach wherein the present writing class, students went through several drafts and feedback sources from teachers, peers, and the writing center. All of the students interviewed admitted that prior to writing in the university, their writing never went through several drafts and their main audience was only the classroom teacher and never their peers. It is, therefore, understandable when 'writing as a communication tool' ranked the second highest. For Gučen's, this was achieved when she learned about the concept of rhetorical appeals as she wrote in Inquiry 5:

*I learnt how to use rhetorical appeals especially ethos and logos in my essays to make my perspective more reasonable. I didn't understand what are rhetorical appeals and how do they work until we started working on inquiry 2. In inquiry 2, we were asked to analyze two articles and make presentations. After analyzing and comparing essays as well as understanding my classmates' different perspectives, as an audience, I understood how different rhetorical strategies would affect me. After I found out the answer, I tried to use*

*rhetorical strategies in my essay to achieve my purpose. I mentioned my identity, an international student, in the introductions of Inquiries 3 and 4.*

A similar learning gain was written by Leo who admitted that “before coming to college [in the US], I have never asked myself who is the target audience I am writing for when composing an article.” The fact that many students perceived ‘rhetorical structure’ and ‘writing as a communication tool’ as the strategies they learn most illustrate their awareness of the need to structure their essays differently.

### ***Students’ stated sources of learning gain***

Narrative questioning is not only beneficial for students. For teachers, particularly newly hired like me, question 3 ‘What is the source of the learning gain?’ addresses types of class activities that contributed to students’ stated learning gains. The insights gained from this question can help teachers in evaluating the class activities that students perceived as important to their writing development. Table 2 below illustrates the quantitative data of students’ stated sources of learning gain written in the narrative paragraph.

**Table 2**  
**Sources of Learning Gain Elicited Through Narrative Scaffolding**

| <b>Source of Learning Gain</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Teacher Feedback               | 60            | 51.3%             |
| The Writing Center             | 21            | 17.9%             |
| Peer Feedback                  | 18            | 15.4%             |
| Self-directed                  | 15            | 12.8%             |
| Class Debate                   | 3             | 2.6%              |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>117</b>    |                   |

Unsurprisingly, more than half of the students mentioned teacher feedback as to their main source of learning gain in their reflective journals. For Eric, teacher feedback made him aware of the need to write a concise sentence. In his words:

*I learn how to avoid run-ons from ENG 109. Several months ago, I tended to write a long sentence with redundant words. ... When I just came to the US, I thought the ability to writing long sentences in English define one’s writing skill. I learned this false idea to define one’s writing ability when I was in*

*China. ... The first teacher feedback for my Inquiry 1 is kind of a breakthrough to let me know that I should avoid run-ons.*

For Ke, teacher feedback provided him with ways to write an opposing argument (naysayer) for his argumentative essay (Inquiry 3):

*Putting a naysayer properly to add strength to my thesis is another new concept I learned in this course. In the past, I have never heard of something called a naysayer. It was in Inquiry3 that I first had contact with it. [...] In Inquiry 3 I wrote about the advantage of using an original name, which was a counter-opinion from my standpoint. It was not until I met with my professor for one-to-one feedback did I learn how to write a proper naysayer. I used to think that writing a naysayer was just directly put a counter opinion into my article. After the feedback, I came to know that I should write and then entertain and finally address it.*

Both comments written by Eric and Ke confirms earlier findings (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2014; Hyland, 2003) of the value of teacher feedback.

However, the high-value students placed on teacher feedback does not mean that teacher feedback is clear and unproblematic. When writing the process of achieving the stated learning gain –as a response to question 3 of the narrative questioning, some students wrote several mediational tools they utilized to navigate their ways through unclear teacher feedback. In the reflective paragraph below, Liu reflected on how she gained an understanding of writing a rhetorical analysis essay. In writing the process to achieve the learning gain, Liu wrote how she navigated disappointing teacher feedback through the assistance of the university's writing center. As she wrote in her narrative paragraph:

*Another writing skill I learned in this class is how to analyze an essay rhetorically. ... I was confused about how to analyze the essay rhetorically, so when I analyze one of the pictures of the storybook, I just describe the picture that shows in the storybook [...] I think my essay is good but I really disappointed by the teacher feedback. The comment of the professor said I need to discuss the topic rhetorically. And then I came to HOWE writing center for help. After reading my essay, the consultant talked to me that rhetorical analysis is about examining "how" a text makes a reader feel certain ways. He said what I write is literary analysis rather than rhetorical analysis (Liu).*

Similarly, in her narrative paragraph below Tian shared the process she went through in revising her thesis and how she finally reconsider her initial stance of not following the teacher feedback:

*I had different opinions with my professor about the thesis of my argumentative essay. She could not understand what I wanted to express in the thesis whereas I think it was clear. I could not accept her suggestions until the peer-feedback session. Before peer feedback session, I was confident because I thought my assignment was complete and everyone could understand my thesis. But when I saw the feedback and comments from my classmates, I was totally confused. Everyone chose “No” to the question: If the thesis is clear? At that moment, I realized that it is not enough to create a good assignment if I do not consider the reader. So I read lots of articles and rewrote my thesis (Tian).*

Different from Liu who went to the writing center to resolve her disagreement with the teacher feedback, Tian examined her opinion of teacher feedback only after all the peer feedback corroborated the teacher feedback. I found Tian’s initial position of teacher feedback was uncommon. Rather than ‘blindly’ following teacher feedback, she showed a critical position in following teacher feedback.

The quantitative finding of the source of learning gain in Table 2 illustrates the significant role of the university writing center to students’ writing development that is rarely addressed in the literature of feedback sources. Prior to the course, all students admitted that they have never visited the writing center and some even admitted that they did not know that such a service exist. Many of them admitted that initially, they visited the center mainly to claim the bonus point. However, they later learned the different ways the writing center could improve their writing. The most common reason written in their reflections is to mediate unclear (teacher) feedback as Liu’s earlier narrative shows. Other students pointed out that the writing center extends their understanding of writing skills and concepts, as illustrated by Ery’s and Le’s reflective writings below:

*Inquiries 1, 2, 3, and class discussions taught me how to write a clear thesis statement and purpose in the introduction of the essay. It is much better when I went to HOWE writing center to improve my thesis. The instructor and I made a general outline of my thesis (Ery).*

*In Inquiry 3, during the teacher's feedback session, the professor told me that my essay had a lot of details from different sources but it lacked organization and transition. I realized that I had never paid much attention to the structure of the essay before. ... To improve the structure, I have gone to Howe Writing Center, in which the instructor had helped me a lot in understanding the logic of the essay. He told me that after the evidence, I should put some reasoning to show why that evidence is effective (Le).*

One student, Michael, admitted that since going to the writing center he has gained a tool to revise his writing that is through reading aloud:

*In addition to citations, I also gained a new technique in revising my essay through the Howe Writing Center, which is reading out loud. I first went to the Howe Writing Center when I had finished my first draft for Inquiry 1. It was my first every assignment and because of our teacher's bonus point policy, I booked an appointment there. Yet, I didn't expect much from them as I didn't believe that my writing skill could get better by just going to their session. However, when I first showed the staff there my draft, I was given a strange request by her: to read my draft out loud. I was really surprised at first because I hadn't read anything out loud since I started middle school ..., so I was really flustered by this request. But the staff convinced me it would be better, and since I had nothing to lose, I began reading it. At first, I read it crudely with my voice as I was embarrassed to read out loud. Yet, after a while, I was comfortable with it and finished it. The staff asked me how it felt and whether I noticed any part particularly unnatural. That was the moment when I realized the purpose of reading out loud. It was meant for writers to know how their writing appeals to readers. Usually, it was only me and my draft so it was almost impossible to find any mistakes. Yet by using this approach, I could have a more critical point of view towards my writing. ... This technique really helps me a lot in perfecting my essays and I have tried to apply it to my papers since then (Michael).*

Here we learn how reflective writing provides the opportunity for Michael to integrate his experience in the writing center into his self-revising strategies. Through narrating the process of reading aloud, we can

see the affective journey he went through from initially doubting the approach, the foolishness he felt when he did it the first time, until how he comes to the realization of the pedagogical value of such an approach. For teachers, Michael's reflective narrative above shows that in cases where teacher pedagogical approach might not be in accordance with "learner agenda"—that is "the learner's perception of what she/he wants to learn and the way to achieve the learning" (Krishnan and Hoon, 2002, p. 231), learning might still take place as illustrated in Michael's reflection.

Students' reflection elicited as responses to questions 2 and 3 of the narrative scaffolding may help teachers to understand the class activities that students found useful in developing and revising their writing. The reflective narrative students wrote about navigating through unclear teacher feedback through other sources of feedback (in this case, feedback by peers and the writing center) supported Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) that teacher feedback should not be the only feedback utilize in the classroom. Due to the many students who cited the university writing center as the source of learning gain, I would also note the vital role of a teacher in encouraging students to utilize these outside sources.

### ***Pedagogical benefits of narrative questioning***

The pedagogical benefits and limitations of narrative questioning presented in this section are elicited primarily based on the interviews with ten students from both sections of ENG109 classes. Nine of out 10 students interviewed stated that the narrative questioning facilitates their reflection. Five students mentioned that the questions in the narrative scaffolding provide "a skeleton" as pointed out by Leo during the interview session:

*The structures are detailed... if it is not because of these structures I would write as [mention the name of his friend] did for every paragraph which is randomly write something for what I learn. So with these structures the best thing about structures it can give you a skeleton just to think to help you think so with this one I say better arrange my ideas my mind what I learn.*

A similar idea is put forward by Jay who stated that without a reflective structure, "we don't actually know what should we write about." Therefore, the narrative questioning provides aspects students needed to elaborate on and "helps to fill up the word limit" as stated further by Jay.

The stated benefits of narrative questioning stated by Jay are first observed by Barkhuizen (2008). He notes that writing reflectively is not always easy to do especially for the first time. Although some students have

some experience in writing reflectively as in the case of Jay and Wang, they all admitted that Inquiry 5 was the first time they needed to write a multiple-paragraph graded reflection. It needs to be noted that Inquiry 5 drafts were lengthier and none of the students seem to have problems filling the page even though not all paragraphs were produced by strictly adhering to the narrative questions. This shows how narrative questioning provides directive content for students' elaborate reflection.

Another student, Michael, stated that narrative questioning helps him to search for appropriate evidence that could support the learning gain. In his words:

*I think it's useful because when I wrote my application essay I tend to tell a lot not show. My teacher always gives this kind of example like ... instead of saying I work hard just say that I do my homework until 2 AM. I always like it seems kinda struggle with it showing and telling. I kinda struggle in how to apply it and this [narrative questioning] helps me to identify and show my learning development.*

Michael's comment above illustrates a common problem that many students often made when asked to write a reflection (also in Grossman, 2009). While students as in the case of Michael might not have problem 'telling' or identifying their learning gain, they may feel unnecessary to provide evidence because they feel "what they say was "true" to them and needed no further justification" (Grossman, 2009, p. 16). In this case, the series of questions in narrative scaffolding provide them with "a catalyst for reflection" (Shelly et al., 2013, p. 563) through which students can revisit their learning and mine information supporting their stated learning gain.

An unanticipated byproduct of reflecting learning gain through narrative questioning is the depth of reflective account students produced. Few students were able to write "metacognitive reflection" (Grossman, 2009, p. 17), that is, "the awareness and knowledge about one's thinking" (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 65). When describing the process of achieving the learning gain, some students were able to demonstrate the way they engage in a critical dialogue about writing skills and course concepts.

### ***Limitations of narrative questioning***

Despite the pedagogical benefits of reflection elicited through narrative questioning for both teacher and students, in the interview session students mention several limitations. One student, Liu, stated that if students adhering closely to the narrative questioning, their reflective paragraphs might lack creativity. This might be true considering that everybody's

paragraph of the final reflection needs to provide information elicited through narrative questioning. For some students, this might bring some challenges to structure the reflection paragraph in such a way so that it does not sound repetitive.

The questions constituting narrative questioning might also not be compatible with the way a student would like to structure his/her story as stated by Xin during the individual interview:

*I don't quite understand why we have to follow the format. I just feel weird I feel in reflection I can write whatever I want not to follow a specific format. I am the kind of writer who wants to write whatever. I don't want to follow the specific format (Xin).*

Xin's concern was also echoed by Michael's who stated during the interview that not all learning gains can be written through narrative questioning. Therefore, he needed to "dig deeper, reading and rereading his previous writing, drafts, and cover letters" to find a learning gain containing all the required elements of narrative questioning. Liu and Wang stated that they needed to discard some of the learning gains because they were not able to identify a step-by-step process of achieving the learning gain. Other students found the difficulty of pinpointing and articulating the source of learning gain.

## **Concluding thoughts**

In this article, I have described how I design and use a reflective tool 'narrative questioning' to facilitate student graded reflection in ESL composition classes. I also have presented a selected sample of student reflection elicited through narrative questioning. I presented students' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of narrative questioning elicited from individual interviews. Students stated that narrative questioning provided them with directive contents where students could mine relevant information from their writing as materials for students' elaborate and graded reflection. Some questions in the narrative questioning such as questions 3 'What are the source of learning gain?' and question 4 'What was the process you go through to achieve the learning gain?' gives teachers an understanding of how students utilized classroom activities leading to their stated learning gain.

Barkhuizen (2011) defines 'narrative knowledging' as "the meaning-making, learning. Or knowledge construction that takes place during the narrative research activities of (co-) constructing narratives, analyzing



narratives, reporting the findings, and reading/watching/listening to research report" (p. 395). Barkhuizen's conceptualization of narrative knowledging is dense with research-related terms such as 'research activities,' 'reporting ... findings' and 'research reports.' This might be misunderstood as narrative knowledging can only occur when narrators are engaged with formal research such as those in graduate studies. The finding of the present study, however, illustrates that even beginning language writers can engage in narrative knowledging even at the preliminary level given that the teacher scaffolds it with an effective reflective tool as some examples of student narratives in this present study illustrates.

I would note that the effectiveness of narrative questioning depends largely on the lesson teacher conducted before assigning students to write the reflection. Students need to be provided with models and practice different ways they can respond to each question. It is interesting to point out that the questions that lead to reflective content were the ones that students have many difficulties with. For question (3) 'What is the source of learning gain?', I remember we needed to brainstorm various responses such as a particular class activity, readings and even, students' own learning strategies such as asking feedback from previous teachers or domestic students. Another question worth practicing is question (2) 'What is the evidence of learning gain? The most common learning evidence students' cited when we first practiced responding to question 2 was grade and/or teacher feedback. To enhance students' autonomy, we also brainstormed other possible evidence that can be presented. Finally, narrative questioning provided a practical frame that teachers can use when assigning students to write an elaborate and graded reflection. They provided a much-needed scaffolding facilitating students to extract relevant information from their learning experience to craft a reflective essay.

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