

## CALLing all Poets Combining Writing Poetry and CALL in ELT

Brown, Ian

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# **CALLing All Poets—Combining Writing Poetry and CALL in ELT**

Ian Brown

## **I. Abstract**

One of the major innovations in language learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Whilst there are many faces to the use of CALL, often it just means using the computer to enhance the versatility and add new dimensions to already tried and tested classroom language learning activities. Writing Poetry is one such activity that benefits immensely from the use of computers and the Internet in this way. This paper will demonstrate how computers, using a word processor and optional Internet access, can be used to write formula style poetry in a classroom setting providing students of any level a full multi-faceted lesson. In addition to the benefits of creative writing this activity promotes vocabulary development, fosters communication in pair work and concludes by allowing students the satisfaction of publishing their work either on paper in printed form or online on the WWW for the whole world to see.

## **II. Introduction**

The use of poetry in the ELT classroom is recognized by many teachers as a valuable activity as is the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning, the rapidly developing new field of ELT. The two can be tied together to allow the benefits of poetry and creative writing to merge with those of the use of the computer, word processor and Internet. Together they create a multi faceted lesson that is suitable for any level of English proficiency. One key principle in CALL is that use of computers should provide some advantage

over the use of other teaching methods (Chappelle, 2001), and this lesson is a good example of this principle. Furthermore it demonstrates how CALL can be integrated to the curriculum and enhance rather than replace a traditional classroom lesson and activity.

### **Poetry in ELT**

Peyton and Rigg (1999) write how poetry can be used by adult ESL learners of all levels of proficiency and how it can allow them to 'create poems of their own to express their feelings, thoughts, or beliefs'. Zafeiriadou (2002) in her two-part article on using poetry in ESL lists historical/cultural reasons, motivational reasons and linguistic reasons as advantages for using poetry with ESL classes. She also writes how using poetry can be part of a student-centered model of learning, which is supported by Gasparro (1994) in her article about poetry use with ESL students. Gasparro goes on to say how the role of the teacher can become one of a guide or facilitator. Furthermore Tosta (1996) lists motivational and linguistic advantages to using poetry, along with the universality of themes to suit the ESL learner. He also mentions how they are suited to 'single classroom lessons'. The poetry lesson using CALL described in this paper expounds all these advantages. It is suitable for students of all levels, is motivating, and suits a single lesson (although it can be expanded if desired). It is student-centered and involves the students in using language creatively, yet at the same time focusing on specific linguistic features. Finally for much of the lesson the teacher does take on the role of a facilitator guiding and helping the students with their task.

### **CALL in ELT**

Levy (1997:1) defines CALL as 'the search for and the study of application of the computer in language teaching and learning'. Two interconnected strands run through the literature concerning the

most important factors for effective and successful CALL. The first is the importance of the role of the teacher and the second is the integration of the CALL activities into the curriculum. On the first Levy (1997:231-232) says 'teacher- related factors were the most important in determining the success of CALL materials'. On the second Pilus (1995:10) has written 'an aspect indispensable at any stage of CALL is the integration of the computer programs in teaching'. This lesson can be linked thematically to previous lessons, as a review or reinforcement activity, or to subsequent lessons, as an introductory or lead-in activity, and thus is easily integrated to any curriculum in these supplementary activity forms. Its success is dependent on the teacher firstly presenting the procedure clearly and later in the lesson monitoring and assisting the students in their pair work. Coleman writing about the role of teachers in using CALL says they 'are still in control of the content' and 'act as facilitators helping individual students as the need arises' (1996:24). The role of the teacher in this activity is clearly that of a facilitator helping students as required in polishing their creative poetry writing and checking they remain on the right track to use the correct style and theme.

The value of pair work in communicative activities in language learning is well recognized. The use of CALL can also be a helpful tool for such activities in enhancing student centered communicative learning. 'Computers can provide opportunities for cooperative learning. Students are able to pool their knowledge and enhance peer correction as they work together' (McKay & Robinson, 1997: 17). Sussex (1998) calls this the 'social dimension of CALL'. The cooperative efforts of students working together in pairs to write the poetry within this lesson gives it a new dimension with a wide range of communicative benefits, usually lacking within traditional classroom poetry, whilst students converse and negotiate on the poetry they are writing.

Lee (2000) sees Enhanced Student Achievement as one of the benefits of CALL use in ELT. It 'can help pupils strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude'. Increased motivation, building self-instruction strategies and promoting self-confidence are other benefits he sees in the use of CALL. All of these points show themselves in the students' progress through this lesson plan. Even lower level students will produce surprisingly creative poetry on their own, and enjoy doing so, due to the advantages that CALL and computers provide to the poetry writing process.

### **CALL and POETRY together in ELT**

The use of CALL and Poetry together seem natural partners. The Internet is the new housing of all forms of written genres and this includes poetry thus its use in ELT, like that of other written genres, should be a natural development. Furthermore there is a remarkable symmetry between the benefits seen in using Poetry in ELT and that of using CALL in ELT. Both mention benefits in student motivation, performance and independent learning, along with the changing role of the teacher in ELT to that of a guide and facilitator. This lesson plan is one step in their merging.

### **LESSON AIMS**

The lesson has a number of aims that are achieved concurrently as the lesson progresses. They include;

- *creative writing* with the students writing their own poetry following a formula style that is easy to use for a range of levels.
- *cooperative learning* with the students writing the poetry together in pairs facilitating a range of authentic communicative benefits associated with student based learning as they discuss and negotiate together over their writing.
- *grammar reinforcement* as the formula of the poems are largely grammar based.

- *vocabulary expansion* with the use of the electronic thesaurus, that is built into the word processor, to enhance their writing.
- *links to the weekly program / and curriculum thematically* by reinforcing topics and vocabulary done in the class previously or, alternatively, introducing topics and vocabulary to be covered in subsequent lessons.
- *student satisfaction* with the publishing in some form, paper or electronic, of the students' work so they can disseminate their work to others.

## LESSON OUTLINE

This activity uses a computer with a word processor program and web browser as a medium to assist in writing poetry and learning grammar as well as a means of publishing this material. The web pages at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html> and <http://home.online.no/~anlun/gram-po.htm> provide useful templates with formulas for writing short poems with instructions and examples. Some poems have a grammatical formula whilst others use letters or sounds. Teachers can peruse these to choose the one they feel best suited for their needs considering such factors as the class level and aims as well as their own personal teaching styles.

The poems can be written as a cooperative learning activity or written individually. As a follow up the poems can be printed or sent by email to friends, family or even published on the web. The lesson is ideal for use as an extension activity to a certain theme, building on ideas and vocabulary from earlier lesson as a review or follow-up or alternatively as a lead in to prepare for subsequent lessons on a related topic.

In order to gain the communicative benefits of the cooperative side of the activity it requires one computer per two students. For individual creative writing one computer per student is required.

Each computer requires a word processor such as MS Word preferably with a built in thesaurus. Overheads, a data projector or a whiteboard are needed for the presentation stage, A printer connected to the network is required if you wish to print out the finished poems. For emailing and /or web use the students require an email address and the computer requires Internet access and associated programs to email the poems to another party. A lesson of 60-90 minutes should be sufficient for students to understand the formula and write their own poems. The Introductory stages to the lesson can be done in the computer room at the beginning of the lesson or prior to coming to the computer room in the classroom.

### **LESSON PROCEDURE**

Following the obligatory explanation and introduction to the activity explaining what students are going to do and why, students are paired off, with higher level students together in pairs with other higher level ones and lower level students paired with other lower level ones. This is done to facilitate the level of writing for each member of the pair to be at a similar level to his or her partner. This can avoid domination in the poetry writing by the higher-level student, if teamed with a lower level student. Where possible students of different nationalities should also be teamed together. Teachers should brainstorm the students' knowledge of poetry or even get some students to recite some poems in their own language. The theme should be introduced and at lower levels associated vocabulary could be brainstormed or taught. Where applicable the connection to the theme to other work done in the classroom should be highlighted allowing students to use vocabulary already taught.

The teacher then displays the particular model poem, chosen prior from the previously cited websites, by OHT, data projector, blackboard or whiteboard. Next students in pairs are asked to Identify the structure / form of the poem (what are the parts of

speech in each line); what the feeling/tone of the poem is and what is the relationship between the first and last lines.

The following is an example of a Cinquaine Poem (Appendix A) used with this procedure taken from <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/cinquain.html>.

River  
Clear, wonderful  
Slapping, whirling, flowing  
The river is cold.  
Water

After some time for the students to think about the questions and discuss them in their pairs, the teacher elicits answers from the class as a whole and then displays the chart, using data projector, OHP, blackboard or whiteboard, ensuring everyone understands the formula. (Appendix B).

Line 1: Noun  
Line 2: two adjectives that describe the noun  
Line 3: three gerunds that describe the noun  
Line 4: one complete, related sentence  
Line 5: Noun -- synonym of the noun in line 1

Other example poems can also be given as in Appendix C. Observations regarding mood, tone synonyms and meaning should then be discussed with the class. Synonyms related to the designated topic of the scan also be brainstormed. Finally, before moving on, use of the Thesaurus on the computer should be explained and demonstrated, including how it can be used for finding synonyms, to expand students' vocabulary and make their writing richer.



When students are confident they understand the formula they can begin to write their own poems with the teacher monitoring and assisting students, as required, in using the Thesaurus and in keeping to the formula of the particular style of poem used. Students work in pairs adding a communicative side to the lesson, although this can shift to individual creative writing if desired. The teacher should also monitor and ensure all the students save their poems in a central network folder, where available, under identifiable names for later use by the class and teacher. Alternatively the students can email their poems to the teacher, also suitably identified. Later, on completion of the activity, the teacher can collate all the poems to a single word document and then print them as a class booklet and/or email them to each student in order for all the students' poetry to be read and discussed by all the members of the class. Furthermore the poems can also be converted to a web page and published on the WWW on a class page, or included in class or individual student blogs. Students can see their work published and encourage their family and friends to view their creativity in a different language. '

## CONCLUSION

The advantages of using the computer and a program, such as MS Word, for students to write their poetry, rather than the use of pen and paper, include the ease of writing that the computer allows with words able to be erased or replaced quickly and simply. Cooperative writing of the poetry is far simpler on the computer than it would be with pen and paper. This ease in editing allows the students to concentrate on the creative side of the task rather than expend energy on the mechanics of it. The online thesaurus is also a powerful tool in this activity expanding vocabulary and making writing richer, again from the distinct advantages that the ease of use that computer access direct to the page being written allows. Use of a printed thesaurus or even a handheld electronic one cannot replicate this ease of use within the computer word processing

application.

On completion their poetry can be easily and attractively printed in class sets or sent to friends or family anywhere in the world through email. Class web pages or blogs are other methods in which the students' work can be published. This opportunity for the poetry to be disseminated in paper or on the Internet and for their own work to be seen in published form gives the students a great sense of satisfaction and achievement which is a powerful impetus to spur on their study.

Writing poetry on the computer provides the best of two worlds - the creative literature of poetry with the technological convenience of the computer - and this lesson demonstrates how the two can be fused together to provide an example of a successful CALL lesson that enhances a traditional one.

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- Combine Your Grammar and Poetry Skills  
<http://home.online.no/~anlun/gram-po.htm>
- Haiku <http://www.webenglishteacher.com/haiku.html>
- Haiku <http://www.ahapoetry.com/haiku.htm>
- Pizzaz <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html>
- Pizzaz Poetry  
<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html#Poetry>

Poetry in the ESL classroom website

[http://www.tooter4kids.com/classroom/poetry\\_in\\_the\\_esl\\_classroom.htm](http://www.tooter4kids.com/classroom/poetry_in_the_esl_classroom.htm)

Poetry Links <http://www.eslcafe.com/search/Poetry/>

Poetry quizzes <http://a4esl.org/q/h/poetry-jb.html>

Popular Poets <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/1416/popular.html>

**Appendix A - From**

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/cinquain.html>

## PIZZAZ!... CINQUAINE POEMS

### River

by Miki

River

Clear, wonderful

Slapping, whirling, flowing

The river is cold.

Water

1. Identify the structure / form of the poem (what are the parts of speech in each line?).
2. What is the feeling and tone of the poem?
3. What is the relationship between the first and last lines?

**Appendix B - From**

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/cinquain.html>

Line 1:	(Noun)	River
Line 2:	(2 adjectives that describe the noun)	Clear, wonderful
Line 3:	(3 gerunds that describe the noun)	Slapping, whirling, flowing
Line 4:	(1 complete, related sentence)	The river is cold.
Line 5:	(Noun -- synonym of the noun in line 1)	Water

**Appendix C - From**

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/cinquain.html>

**Nature** by Khaled

Nature  
Beautiful, pure  
Refreshing, enjoying, relaxing  
Nature is healthy.  
Fun

**Eel** by Miki

Eel  
Greasy, long  
Winding, swimming, moving  
An eel is strange.  
Fish