

Traditions and practices of Life Writing in Progressive Education in France and Japan [Online research seminar (Zoom)]

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Friday, 19 December 2025. Start time: 12:30 PM, Paris time / 20:30 PM, Tokyo time.

Seminar duration: 120 minutes.

Speakers: Ayako KAWAJI (Kobe University), Yoshika HOSHIKAWA (Osaka Seikei University), Sébastien PESCE (University of Tours), Samuel RENIER (University of Tours).

Moderation: Akiko KAWARABAYASHI (Toyo University) and Hervé Breton (University of Tours).

Pr. KAWAJI Ayako, Kobe University

Title: Life Writing (Seikatsu Tsuzurikata) in Japanese Schools: Children's Anthologies and Teachers' Educational Discourses in the 1920s and 1930s.

Abstract: Seikatsu Tsuzurikata, translated in English scholarship as Life Writing, Daily Life Writing, Expressive Writing, or Life Composition, is a pedagogical practice in Japanese schools aimed at developing guidance on how to live through the process of writing essays inspired by their own lives. The Life Writing Movement in Japan has existed for over a century. While the emphasis has varied across different eras, teachers engaged in life writing have consistently prioritised the following points: 1) valuing children's genuine expressions over strict linguistic correctness; 2) valuing children's anthologies as alternative textbooks and reading them in school; and 3) understanding collaboration not only as editing anthologies but also as reading one another's work and sharing concerns. The teachers consulted in various ways and refined their guidance through mutual studies. Methods include "works study group" where teachers meet directly to analyse children's work, "circles" (regional study groups) where teachers report and discuss their own practices, national conferences, letter exchanges, and debates in writing education research journals. Through these discussions, they endeavoured to establish a new pedagogy. This presentation examines children's anthology creation and teachers' educational discourses from the 1920s to the 1930s.

Pr. RENIER Samuel, University of Tours - EA7505 Education, Ethique et Santé

Title: From Dewey to Freinet: Pragmatist legacy, heritage and renovation through narrative techniques.

Abstract: In 1899, pragmatist american philosopher John Dewey already lamented in *The School and Society* that "the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school". The work conducted at the laboratory school led by Dewey at the University of Chicago gives evidence of uses of narratives techniques, to make students write about their own findings and learnings within the school work, insofar as "the language instinct is the simplest form of the social expression of the child. Hence it is a great, perhaps the greatest of all educational resources". The aim of this presentation is to show the links existing between these seminal pragmatist philosophy and the way it took place within the pedagogical work initiated by the Freinet couple and their movement. We may thus distinguish between three circles of reception : 1) The heritage and parallels Célestin Freinet acknowledges himself ; 2) The legacy constructed by the other actors of the Freinet movement, establishing a distance from the pragmatist source ; 3) The historical and philosophical reconstruction of the links existing between the pedagogies.

Pr. HOSHIKAWA Yoshika, Osaka Seikei University

Title: Living Together through Writing: The Urban Life Writing (Seikatsu Tsuzurikata) Practices of TODA Tadami in Postwar Japan.

Abstract: This presentation introduces the classroom practices of TODA Tadami. He was a life writing teacher in Japan after World War II. He worked in urban public schools during the New Education Movement. TODA encouraged children to write about their everyday lives. His goal was not to raise test scores. He wanted children to reflect, connect, and live more meaningfully with others. In TODA's 1950s classroom, children came from diverse backgrounds—some from farming families, others from shopkeepers, or salaried workers who had moved to the city. Unlike rural schools, where students often shared similar ways of life, TODA's class had no obvious common ground. Through life writing, children shared their different experiences and perspectives. To support more dialogue, TODA and his students created "one-page anthologies"—brief, timely collections of student writing for discussion. Writing became a way to learn about each other's lives, discover differences, and deepen their own thinking. His practices offer insights for today's educators. Writing can help children listen to themselves and others, and find ways to live together with care.

Pr. PESCE, Sébastien, University of Tours / EES

Title: Traditions of writing and the Writing of Tradition in an alternative school in France.

Abstract: The presentation will focus on the narrative practices of an alternative school in France, within the TF/PI tradition (Freinet techniques/institutional pedagogy). These narrative practices, which involve writing as well as other media and formats, develop on several levels: narratives produced by individuals or the institution as a whole; narratives produced within the institution or by "friends of the school"; by current members of the institution, or by alumni; narratives embedded in teaching activities or in projects aiming at external communication, etc. This set of narrative practices constitutes a tradition of writing that has been refined and transformed over time, in this case over a period of some fifty years. They draw on a number of narrative principles that have long existed in Freinet pedagogy and institutional pedagogy, while also renewing them. One of the effects of these traditions of writing is that they enable the writing of the school tradition, i.e. the production of a multimodal, polyphonic and everchanging narrative about what is considered to be the tradition and traditions that constitute the identity of the school. The presentation will focus on the narrative practices of an alternative school in France, within the TF/PI tradition (Freinet techniques/institutional pedagogy).