Explorations in Teacher Education

JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter

Autumn 2006 Volume 14, Issue 3

Contents

And Now a Word from…The Editor

Hello and welcome, particularly to new members, to Volume 14, Issue 3, the autumn edition of Explorations in Teacher Education, the newsletter of the Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teachers (JALT).

This issue has been timed to coincide with the JALT National Conference 2006 in Kita-Kyushu, so to anyone reading this at the conference I hope you enjoy yourselves and I ask you to support some of the TE SIG membership by attending their presentations. In addition, any members who wish to have a say in the running of the SIG should attend the AGM from 14:25 – 15:25 on Saturday in Room 21D.

I attended the Professional Development in Language Teaching Conference at Okayama University on October 7th and 8th and it was a most enjoyable weekend. The event was organized by Neil Cowie, former coordinator of the TE SIG and currently Okayama JALT chapter president. Congratulations to Neil for organizing such a successful event and thank you for all the work you put in. Thanks also to the event committee and the student volunteers of course. Neil hinted that he might be willing to run a similar event in 2008, so if you meet him please give him your encouragement. Neil will be presenting on Sunday 14:25 – 14:50 in room 21D on 'Gambaru – Japanese students' learning persistence.'

Turning now to the newsletter, this issue has five articles. The first is 'Current Trends in British Master's degrees by Distance Learning,' by Daniel Dunkley. Dan has published on this theme in 'The Language Teacher' before and this is an update on the situation. Having acquired an MA through distance learning from a British university, I found this article pertinent. The next is by Tim Knight and is about how to avoid stress in your teaching situation. The third piece is an interview with Moteki Hiromichi by Mark Rebuck who contributed a piece last year too.The titles of some of Mr Hiromichi's books sound contentious but a lot of his views are valid. Please give it a read. The next piece is by Miyuki Usuki, who like Daniel Dunkley has published in 'The Language Teacher' before (coincidentally, both in 1997). Her article is entitled 'Interview Research.' Finally, we have the second part of Ben Backwell's article about cooperative learning activities (the first part was in the previous issue). Ben will be presenting on Saturday 13:50 – 14:50 in room AIM-C. Please give him your support.

Hope you enjoy the issue.
Simon Lees, Editor.

Current trends in British Master's degree courses in TESOL by Distance Learning

Daniel Dunkley, Aichi Gakuin University, <ddunkley@dpc.aichi-gakuin.ac.jp>

Distance Learning (DL) Courses in TESOL for serving teachers abroad grew considerably both in number and popularity in the 1990s (see Purgason (1994)). The relevance of this form of learning to English teachers in Japan was indicated by several articles in *The Language Teacher* and other journals: Barfield and Katsura (1996), Dunkley, (1997,1999) and Kaye (1997). The interest in DL M.A.s in TESOL has been generated by teachers' desire to improve their career prospects by gaining a further specialist qualification. These degrees are relevant to teachers aiming for university native speaker teaching posts (see Dillon and Sower, 1996, Glick 2003, Stapleton 2001) but also of interest to teachers aiming for promotion to management positions in language schools or aspiring to work in teacher training. This article has two purposes: to give the general reader an overview of what is happening to DL courses, and also to inform the prospective DL course student.

TESOL Masters course options

If you have decided to improve your recruitment chances by earning a Master's degree, what are the options? Firstly you can return to your home country and take a full-time course. Information about these in the U.S is available on-line (TESOL 2005a) and in print (Christopher, 2005) and for the UK from the national university admission service (UCAS (2005)). Naturally this form of study forces you to interrupt your career in Japan, and may involve leaving your family behind in Japan. The second option is to take a Master's degree part-time in Japan. Two well-known U.S. universities offer these courses: Teacher's College Columbia University (New York) at its branch in Tokyo, (TC 2005) and Temple University (Philadelphia) in Tokyo, Osaka and Fukuoka (TUJ 2005). This option has the advantage of frequent contact with fellow students. This contact can be helpful both academically and also in terms of career networking. As two M.Ed. TUJ graduates recently wrote, "The fellow students can become valuable educational and professional resources." (McCrostie and Romanko 2005,16). However, for many people it is not practical in terms of study time and traveling to attend these universities at weekends.

The final option is to study at home. With a distance learning course you can use your time efficiently; nevertheless, it is quite demanding, since you are expected to do an average of 12 hours work per week over two to three years. The typical style of a DL degree is not vastly different from on-campus learning, except that it is individualized. For each module of the

course you receive a study text (in paper or on-line) from your provider. Then, using these materials and other books which you have bought, you work through a series of exercises, culminating in a report or essay on the subject. You then submit your work to your tutor for assessment and advice. It demands considerable self-discipline and perseverance, since you in effect have no leisure time for the duration of the course, but it does allow you to continue to pursue a full-time job while studying. Moreover it is an economical solution. It costs about ¥1 million to ¥1.5 million compared with the part-time course costs of ¥3 million for tuition alone, with traveling and accommodation expenses still to be added.

DL degrees in TESOL are offered by universities in many countries. Information on distance learning courses in the US may be found at the TESOL website (2005b) and in Australia at the Open Universities Australia (OAU) website (2005). In this article, we review DL Masters degrees in TESOL from several British Universities. The British providers are the universities of Aston, Birmingham, Dundee, Edinburgh, Leicester, Sheffield Hallam, Surrey and York.

We examine only this relatively small number because they are all particularly worthwhile courses supplied by reputable institutions and are therefore comparable. Furthermore, many teachers currently active in Japan are graduates of these courses.

New features

What are the new features of these courses in the 21st century? The three clearest changes to be seen are in the number of courses on offer, the content of the courses, and in the technology used.

New providers and courses

Firstly let us examine the increase in courses and universities in the DL arena. Whereas ten years ago six different universities offered DL TESOL degrees, now the total is eight. One university, Sheffield has withdrawn its course, and three universities are offering DL Master's courses for the first time. These are Sheffield Hallam, Dundee (Scotland) and York. However, these universities are by no means new to professional courses in TESOL, since they all have well-established full-time campus-based TESOL courses for either undergraduates or graduates, and thus have the necessary expertise. For readers unfamiliar with the relative standing of UK universities, detailed rankings are available on line: see Guardian (2005). For the sake of completeness we must mention that Canterbury Christ Church University College, a university with a very strong Education department, offers part of its M.A. in TESOL by DL, and also offers the complete MA TESOL course in *distance mode* "to special groups"

(Canterbury 2005). It also offers MA TESOL (Young Learners) and MA TESOL (Multimedia and Internet Technology) courses.

More significant than simply the number of DL MA providers is the number and variety of courses now available. In ten years the number of courses has doubled, from six in 1996 to twelve today. This increase can be ascribed not only to an expansion of the number of TESOL teachers worldwide but also to the widening range of TESOL jobs to which Master's degrees are relevant.

New course areas

The second broad category of change is the course content. The striking novelty here is specialization. The 20th century courses were mainly generic, with the exception of Aston's MSc in Teaching English for Specific Purposes. By contrast, recently there has been specialisation in several respects. Some courses are for teaching specific age groups. The age group can be younger learners, (York's and Aston's *Teaching English to Young Learners*) or adults (Dundee's *Teaching Modern Languages to Adults*). By young learners is meant those of compulsory school age, that is, six years to sixteen years old. Indeed, within this band there is scope for further specialization in terms of age range. Again, Dundee's T*eaching Modern Languages to Adults* course specifically focuses on the age range from eighteen to university graduation and beyond. These specialized course offerings reflect the fact that Master's degrees are actually relevant not only to people seeking university teaching posts, but also to people engaged in careers in the whole range of teaching situations, including Pre-18 education (K-12) and language schools.

However, the TESOL profession involves more than simply class contact-time with learners. Surrounding this central activity is a complex system of educational management. Accordingly, it is not surprising that educational management is offered as a specialized DL Master's degree. The two offerings in this field are Surrey's M.Sc in *English Language Teaching Management* and the M.Sc in *Educational Management in TESOL* from Aston. The demand for these courses indicates the fact that some teachers will take up management positions in language schools or other institutions, and consequently need specialized knowledge in fields such as human resources, personnel and financial management, and in educational marketing.

New technology

With the recent rapid changes in technology it is not surprising that technological changes can be seen in DL courses. That is not to say that technology was absent ten years ago; web sites, discussion lists and student-tutor communication by email were common. But compared with the late 20th century we are now surrounded by a new world of communications media. In education too, communications technology is increasingly popular, and some would argue, increasingly effective (Bush and Terry (2005)).

Accordingly we are seeing the first stirrings of internet-based DL in teacher education. In particular, a new entrant to the DL scene, Dundee, has by-passed the first generation paper-based learning system and launched an ambitious fully on-line learning DL system called a Virtual Learning Environment. It is claimed that this is not simply a more convenient version of paper-based DL, but rather a qualitatively different form of education. Thus the Dundee brochure argues: "…online courses allow for a higher degree of reflective interaction between lecturers and students, leading to the establishment of a rich, intercultural learning environment which can open up a whole new world of educational experience." (Dundee, 2005)

This technological change in DL is slowly growing. In addition to Dundee, two universities well-established in traditional DL, Edinburgh and Surrey, have also announced on-line courses. The Edinburgh new MEd TESOL Distance Learning On-line programme will begin in September 2006. In this new DL style, not only the students' access to material but also communication, both with the tutor and fellow-students, will be on-line. "Students will access input on-line, and read e-journals, set texts and reprints of articles. They will do short exercises to check comprehension, and then take part in discussion forums on-line, doing collaborative tasks with their peers..." "The tutor will monitor the tasks and give group feedback. Students will also have individual attention through email with the tutor."(Edinburgh 2005).

A similar change is taking place at Surrey, albeit on a small scale at the moment. From October 2005 students will be able to take one module with the help of "full online delivery and associated e-pedagogy". (Surrey, 2005)

Clearly there are several obstacles to reaching the long-awaited goal of "paperless DL". A university must make a considerable investment to just make everything work, and then it must make a great marketing effort to attract students to a new course. In addition, not all

language teachers have the correct computer system and internet connection, whereas all teachers without exception can use the traditional postal service.

To gain an impression of e-learning, readers can access a sample on the "Online learning" section of the Dundee website. Students do tasks in two ways, using *asynchronous* and *synchronous* modes. An asynchronous task is similar to a traditional DL assignment. The students are assigned a text to read, and have to comment on it. However, the students do not communicate with their tutors only; but also send their comments to a discussion board, so that there is a sense of community, and a chance to learn from others' experiences. The tutor also participates in the discussion. By contrast, there are sometimes optional *synchronous sessions* when a time is agreed for all interested students to be online at the same time to participate in discussion.

In the long term, online learning must be the shape of the future in DL. The main reasons are access to material and interactivity. To begin with, the problem of obtaining books on time and at a reasonable cost in remote parts of the world dogs the fortunes of DL courses. This problem emerged clearly in a survey of DL students, in which teaching materials and feedback from tutors attracted the strongest criticism (Dunkley, 1999). Eventually, if the copyright problems can be overcome, access to texts online is the only viable solution. Then, use of communication computers is the only practical way for naturally gregarious students to overcome the isolation and resulting lack of stimulation from other people that slows down creativity in traditional DL. Computer communication can of course also improve feedback from tutors. Finally one can imagine on-line dissertations on TESOL methodology in "hypertext" form, including "quotations" in the form of video clips, becoming the standard.

Changes in assessment

The major change in assessment is that examinations have been abolished. Out of the five DL courses surveyed in 1996 (Dunkey,1997), three had examinations. These emerged as a very unpopular feature of the courses in our survey of student reaction (Dunkey,1998). In their place, assessment through a series of marked assignments is the usual system; the assignment may be a collection of short tasks, as Leicester's system of a "portfolio of written assignments and tasks". Alternatively there may be a succession of progressively longer assignments; so for example, Sheffield Hallam requires "online assignments and classroom-based portfolios" for their first stage, then three 6,000 word reports for stage two. On the other hand, one unchanging feature of the assessment system is the demand for a substantial Master's dissertation.

Entrance requirements

DL course providers generally ask for a good first degree and two years' relevant (in other words TESOL) teaching experience. The degree need not necessarily be in a Humanities subject, and also not necessarily be from a British university. If you have not completed a first degree, you may ask for any formal education over the age of 18 to be taken into account.

On the other hand, if you have a degree but do not have enough teaching experience, another option is to take the Edinburgh "Pre-M.Ed TESOL Access Course". This consists of five months' DL followed by ten weeks on campus, including teaching practice, in the summer. This brings you up to a standard to apply for the M.Ed TESOL. Finally, for all the courses, students who are not native speakers must prove their competence in English by providing relevant examination diplomas.

In addition to entrance qualifications, we must also point out exemptions. If you already have a qualification in TESOL, you may be able to be exempted from part of the course. For example, the Trinity College Licentiate diploma in TESOL can gain you exemption from the first part of the MA course at Sheffield Hallam.

Attendance

Three of the universities surveyed here have compulsory attendance at courses. Many students find that this is the most exciting part of the course. The most convenient course for Japan-based students wishing to take a DL course with a residential course is the Birmingham degree, which involves a week's course in Hiroshima. For example, the Birmingham website quotes a graduate of the course: "One of the best aspects of the programme was the contact with the teaching staff from Birmingham." On the other hand, some students may find a visit to the main campus of the DL provider rewarding. They can meet fellow students from other countries, and also meet face to face with their teachers. This need is filled by both York and Edinburgh. The York TEYL course includes a summer course in York or a November course in Singapore. A longer period of on-campus learning, namely two periods of two months, is part of the Edinburgh M.Ed course. In some cases it is also possible to take part of the degree on campus rather than by DL. For example, Birmingham allows you to take your three second-year modules in a single semester on campus, and Leicester has a similar system. While these periods on campus increase the cost of your course, they also increase the thoroughness, and thus the credibility of the degree.

Which course?

If you are thinking of taking a DL TESOL course, the first decision to make is your course title. What are your career goals? Do you want to take a specialist Master's course, or a generic one? If a generic one, which topics are most relevant to your career? It is important to consider these basic points well before you start filling in application forms.

Course structure

In choosing a course, look carefully at the structure and content. Most of the DL courses in our survey have a three-stage structure. The advantage of this is that, if for any reason you are unable to work through to the end of this fairly long process of two or three years' study to graduation, you can leave with a certificate which vouches for the work you have done. Thus, after one year you gain a certificate in TESOL, after two years a diploma and finally after presenting your dissertation you finish with the Master's degree. The exception to this structure is York where the M.A in TEYL is not divided into these three stages.

How about the content of the courses? The first stage of all the courses has a fairly similar content. It includes study of how languages are learned (Second Language Acquisition), the English language as a system (Grammar and Discourse Analysis), how to teach English (Methodology), and what an English course should consist of (Syllabus or Curriculum). The second half of the course involve several options, some not at first sight directly related to the classroom, such as Sociolinguistics or Language Typology, and others which are closer to everyday practice, such as Testing or Phonetics.

To ensure that you take a course which really suits you, you should pay attention to the list of modules. You must be sure that your personal interests are catered for. For example, if you are particularly interested in computer analysis of linguistic corpora, you need to choose Surrey or Birmingham for their *Computers and Applied Linguistics"* or *"Corpus Lingusitics* modules, but if you are planning to write a textbook, look at Edinburgh where *Evaluation and Design of TESOL materials* is offered. By the same token if you particularly want to avoid a certain topic, choose your course accordingly.

Conclusion

Distance learning Masters degrees in TESOL, certainly those from the British universities mentioned in this article, are now well established as worthwhile qualifications for

advancement in the English teaching world. As we have seen, these courses are changing rapidly in their content and in their means of delivery. With the promotion of DL course graduates to positions of responsibility in English departments, we can look forward to a growing respect for these courses. Potential students should choose carefully to ensure that they experience a course which will be not only intellectually stimulating, but which will also provide long-term benefits in terms of career development.

References

Barfield, A. and Katsura, H. (1996) "Mastering Distance Learning" *The Language Teacher* 17(12), 37-38

Bush, M. D., Terry R. D. (Editors) (2005) Technology-Enhanced Language Learning Alexandria VA, ACTFL

Canterbury (2005). *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)* retrieved September 17th 2005 from (http://prospectus.canterbury.ac.uk/postgraduate/current/TESOL.htm).

Christopher, V., (Editor) (2005) *Directory of Teacher Education Programs in TESOL in the United States and Canada, 2005-2007* TESOL

Dillon, K and Sower, C. (1996) "Job Hunting in Japan: qualifications and information", *The Language Teacher* 20(10) 46-48

Dunkley, D. (1997) "A guide to British M.A.s in TESOL by Distance Learning" *The Language Teacher* 21(3), 7-11

Dunkley, D. (1999) "Student Reaction to British Distance Learning M.A.s in TESOL" *Aichi Gakuin Liberal Studies Journal* 47(2), 27-42

Glick, C. (2002) "Considerations for securing an English teaching position at a Japanese university (part I)" *The Language Teacher 26(8),*7-10

Guardian (2005) *Guardian University Guide 2005* Retrieved Sept 14th 2005 from: www.education.guardian.co.uk/universityguide2005/

Kaye, A. (1997) "MA by Distance Learning" *The Language Teacher* 21(10)

McCrostie, J. and Romanko, R. (2005) "Is there a doctor in the house?: Getting your doctorate and a better job in Japan." *The Language Teacher* 29(9), 13-17

Nixon, T. (2001) *"*Distance Learning for ESL/EFL Professionals." ESL Magazine *September/October*

OAU (2005) *Open Universities Australia* retrieved September 17th 2005 from <www.open.edu.au>

Purgason, K (1994) "Distance Education for Training ESL/EFL Teachers" in Richards, K., and Roe, P. (Eds.) *Distance Learning in ELT* ,46-59 London, Macmillan

Stapleton, P. (2001) *"Applying for a university job in Japan: A view from the inside."* *The Language Teacher* 25(9), 29-32

TC (2005) *Teacher's College* retrieved September 17th 2005 from<www.tc-japan.edu>

TESOL(2005a) *Professional development* retrieved September 17th 2005 from <www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=5&DID=6>

TESOL(2005b) *TESOL distance education programs* retrieved September 17th 2005 from <www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=5&DID>

TUJ (2005) *Temple University* retrieved September 17th 2005 from <www.tujac.jp>

UCAS (2005) *Universities and Colleges Admission Service* retrieved September 17th 2005 from <www.ucas.com>

University of Dundee. (2005). Teaching Modern Languages to Adults. Retrieved September 17th 2005 from < www.dundee.ac.uk/languagestudies/tmla/learning/>

University of Edinburgh. (2005). MEd Tesol Distance Learning On-line. Retrieved September 17th 2005 from < www.education.ed.ac.uk/crd/tesol/MEd-Online.html>

University of Surrey. (2005). TESOL. Retrieved September 17th 2005 from < www.surrey.ac.uk/postgraduate/arts/taught/tesol.htm>

10 tips to keep stress from your teaching situation at bay

Tim Knight, Shirayuri College (Tokyo), <tknight@shirayuri.ac.jp>

Introduction

The idea for this paper came out of a presentation I made at the 'Professional Development in Language Teaching' conference at Okayama University in October 2006. I argued, with reference to surveys, research and personal experience, that there was, in fact, little reason for most college teachers to lose their motivation for teaching and little reason to feel stress (Knight, 2006). It was clear that some delegates among the audience were skeptical about this view. Two or three people pointed out that stress was a problem for some people, so could I offer any advice? I do not deny that I have felt stress at work but I have learned to keep it to a minimum. I am not a counselor and do not claim to be any kind of expert, but from my experience in managing stress in my 16 years as a teacher in Japan, I would like to suggest the following ten tips.

10 Tips

1. Learn to use the word 'No', or the softer Japanese version, "*Chotto*…" It's good to be hard-working and co-operative with colleagues, but the surest way for stress to build up is to feel snowed under with too much work. Therefore, if you're in a full-time position, learn how to decline the offer to take on evermore extra duties; it means, if you're a part-time teacher, knowing how many classes you can comfortably do and do reasonably well without becoming over-tired and over-stressed. Don't be greedy and seek more classes than that just for more money.

2. Minimize contact with stressed-out, can't-relax, energy-sapping colleagues. It's easier than we sometimes think. If, in Sartre's words, "other people are hell", probably the best way to avoid this kind of stress is to work part-time in different colleges because it usually means having only to deal with your classes and almost no one else.

3. Following on from no.2 – if there are other reasons such as institutional management practices that are stressing you out, don't wait until you go crazy to leave. There are lots of universities and colleges in Japan and there's a good chance somewhere has a job which will suit you. If you can't find another full-time job, unless you have particular economic commitments related to family, you're better off finding part-time work. Don't be seduced by

the idea that your status is lower if you don't hold a full time job. Health and peace of mind are more important.

4. Don't feel guilty about not filling all hours of the working day productively. Teaching at college is not a nine-to-five job. As teachers we probably sometimes work late at night and/or at weekends at home, so now and then, if there's no class or meeting you have to attend, skive off for an afternoon and relax. And tell yourself, if you have to be persuaded, that you need to do that sometimes – because it's true.

5. Use the holidays wisely. Most of us have several weeks, if not months, each year when we don't have to go to work. A colleague said to me recently that he'd felt depressed having to come back to work for the second semester, in contrast to my eagerness. Perhaps that was because I had refreshed myself with a couple of nice (inexpensive) trips and plenty of relaxation, whereas he hadn't ventured out, even for a change of scene and not for any particular reason.

6. Don't blame your stress on work if it's really connected to general living in Japan. One must acknowledge that for most of us, some aspects of living in Japan can be stressful. But the Japanese have also provided, for everyone, ways of relieving stress, such as hot springs. I remember once going to work on a Saturday morning, about 7 or 8 weeks into the first semester, and other teachers saying they were feeling not only tired at the end of a busy week, but also stressed. I wondered at first why I didn't feel that way. Then I remembered that the day before, immediately after my classes had finished at 2:30pm, I'd gone to a local hot spring spa for several hours, emerging refreshed enough to keep me going until the end of term.

7. Try not to get too worked up if things don't go according to plan. Our job involves dealing with other people and equipment, and both are liable not to co-operate sometimes. It's annoying when something goes wrong, but learn to accept it. The stakes when things don't go right aren't that high. No one's going to die if you're late for class or the DVD player doesn't work. But one way to lessen the chances of feeling stressed is to 'be prepared'. Despite its connotations with the scout movement, it's a useful motto. Don't be too dependent on one piece of equipment for a class or a presentation. Have a back-up plan. Bring important documents and audio clips you want to show your students or audience in more than one format. For my Okayama presentation I'd hoped to use an OHC and an MD player. Neither were available when I got into the room, but I was able to use my computer clip drive to show documents and a cassette player for audio, both of which I'd brought 'just in case'. Without

them I would have started flustered, having to calm myself and knowing that my presentation would be less effective.

8. Don't take it too seriously. This is possibly the most important one. We're teaching English in Japan. To anyone who's been here more than a few weeks it's clear that there are certain cultural, and probably institutional, constraints which native English speakers can do nothing about however much we might want to. So, a) don't try, and b) don't worry about them. Do your job conscientiously and positively but with a light touch. Develop a sense of humour if you don't have one.

9. Don't try too hard. Teach in a calm way. Be sensitive to your students. If you're teaching the kind of class which is quiet, responsive to the minimum degree and generally not enthusiastic about having to take an oral communication class, don't think you're going to turn the students into non-stop-talking-in-English-CLT-dream students by leaping around over-enthusiastically to try to compensate for their lack of energy. Most students will think you're a foreign lunatic. Better to nudge them along quietly with an air of professional decorum and careful organization, and with activities they are willing and/or able to do.

10. The reverse of no. 2. Maximize friendships and contact with work colleagues you do feel compatible with. Don't be afraid to seek guidance, advice or just someone who can lend a sympathetic ear – but it needs to be someone who understands your situation clearly without being the kind of person who will see your concerns as a weakness to be used against you. Sadly, such people exist. But not, I feel confident in predicting, in the Teacher Ed. Sig.

Conclusion

Almost any worthwhile job has its own forms of stress and I do not mean to pretend that teaching is without them. However, in many ways we have an enormous amount of freedom and control over what we do. Most of us do not have people monitoring us in class, we can usually choose, and even make, our own teaching materials and in most jobs we don't have to clock in and out. We should be rejoicing in these factors which mean the amount of stress we need to feel is minimal.

References
Knight, T., Making a Difference: Teacher Motivation and Stress Management. Paper presented at the Professional Development in Language Teaching conference at Okayama University in October 2006.

Tim Knight is an associate professor at Shirayuri College in Tokyo. He's been working as a teacher, mostly part-time, in various universities in Japan for a dozen years. Before that he worked at a high school and also as Tokyo correspondent for broadcast media news outlets in the U.K., the U.S. and elsewhere. In London, where he's from, he worked as a radio and TV journalist before coming to Japan. He has an M.Ed. (TESOL) from Temple University, Japan. He thinks a little stress keeps life interesting, but doesn't like a lot of it.

Interview with Moteki Hiromichi

Mark Rebuck, Nagoya City University, <rebuck67@yahoo.co.jp>

In March of 2006, the Central Council for Education's subcommittee on foreign language published a report recommending that English be made a compulsory subject in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school. If the subcommittee's report is implemented, pupils in the last two years of elementary school will have to take at least one hour of English a week. English, as many readers will know, is already part of the life of many elementary school children; according to a 2006 survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (usually shortened to *monkasho* in Japanese) 93.6% of public elementary schools organize activities that involve English, frequently during comprehensive studies lessons (*sogo gakushu*) ("English Education," 2006).

The issue of compulsory elementary school English (CESE) is an emotive one that has generated a fair amount of heated debate. One vocal 'nay' in this debate is Moteki Hiromichi whose book, entitled *Monkasho ga eigo wo kowasu* (Monkasho will destroy English) (Moteki, 2004), I happened upon in my university's book shop (1).

The profile on the inside cover said that he had penned several other books with equally direct titles, including *Shogako ni eigo ga hitsuyonai* (English is unnecessary in elementary schools) (Moteki, 2001) and *Yutori kyoiku no otoshiana* (The pitfall of pressure-free education). His latest literary contribution is a chapter in a 2005 Keio University Press book, *Shogako de no eigo kyoiku wa hitsuyonai* (English education in elementary schools is not necessary). Moteki's chapter is entitled *Shogako eigo nado to tawagoto wo ittiru tokika* (Is this the time to be talking about such nonsense as elementary school English?).

Born in 1941 and a graduate of the Tokyo University's economics department, Moteki Hiromichi worked for a number of years in Japanese companies (his life as a *salaryman* took him to London for an extended stay). He established a publishing company, Sekai Shuppan, in 1990. The company helped to launch *Mangajin*, a magazine popular with learners of Japanese in the 1990s. A look at the company's website (www.sekai-shuppan.com) will show that included in the books it has translated and is distributing are two about the Nanking Massacre, which could be described as revisionist. The purpose of this interview, however, was to find out more about his views on education and his thoughts on other matters were not touched upon.

I met Mr Moteki in his office in Tokyo, where our interview, conducted in Japanese, began with a question concerning CESE. It soon, however, drifted to cover other educational issues.

Mark Rebuck: Thank you for the tea and also for a copy of the petition (2), which you put your name to, asking for *monkasho* to rethink their policy on CESE. What are your objections to making English a compulsory subject at this stage of education?

Hiromichi Moteki: As you know, the Japanese suffer from an abnormally acute inferiority complex when it comes to English. And I would have to say that we are truly hopeless at the language. But the thing is that we have blamed this situation on the wrong things.

MR: And is one of those things not teaching it from an earlier age?

HM: Yes, but before I come on to that specifically, you need to understand that I regard the proposed introduction as just another folly committed by the *monkasho*. It seems that they haven't realized the harm being done by the general dumbing-down of English education.

MR: I take it that you're referring to the emphasis on conversation and communicative English that you describe in your books?

HM: That's right. The Course of Study introduced in 1977 began what we now call *yutori kyoiku* (pressure-free education). In the same way that it has lowered the academic level of children in other subjects like mathematics and Japanese, it has also undermined the standards of English. You just have to look at the decrease over the decades in the number of grammar and vocabulary items being taught in junior high school to see what's happened (3).

MR: What's your evidence *yutori kyoiku* hasn't worked?

HM: Well, until the 1980s Japan hovered between fifth and seventh from the bottom in the Asian TOEFL ranking. Now the only country below us is North Korea. And we have seen this decline during a period when the environment for learning English in terms of access to videos, DVDs and the Internet has greatly improved. Many university and teachers at private cram schools will also attest to a decline in English levels.

MR: You write in your book of 'hamburger English' as embodying the English-education version of *yutori kyoiku*. What do you mean by this?

HM: Well, how to order a takeaway in a fast food restaurant may seem practical, but this sort of English is unlikely to contribute to the development of skills that will help children become competent users of English. Unfortunately it is this superficial, conversation-orientated 'hamburger English' that is mainly being taught in junior high school. What angers me is that soon such methods are to be extended into elementary schools (4).

MR: So you don't believe that starting children off young, even with this kind of communicative English would be beneficial?

HM: It's a fallacy that studying English early on will automatically enable you to somehow absorb it naturally. People think this way because as infants they learnt to speak Japanese seemingly without any effort.

MR: I also don't remember sweating over English in my cot.

HM: But it's not a process that happens overnight. You see, a child until the age of six is exposed to Japanese for around 25,000 hours. People think that this can be replicated by an hour a week of English in elementary school. In my book I explain that even returnees with high English competence lose most of their English within a year, even with two hours a week of so-called maintenance English lessons (5). How can we expect elementary school children starting from zero to retain anything in an EFL environment like Japan?

MR: We had the Winter Olympics some months ago. Almost all of the top skaters, including the gold medal winner Arakawa Shizuka, started when they were very young. I think most people assume that language learning works in the same way.

HM: Again in my book, I describe why starting young does not necessarily give a long -term advantage for language acquisition (6). Anyway, I really don't think you can compare learning English with the training of young sports champions. Do you think that Arakawa was coaxed into training by playing games and singing songs? Why should children be made to enjoy English in this way? Is it some kind of holy language?

MR: As someone with experience of doing business overseas, you do surely recognize the benefits of learning English, if not from elementary school age?

HM: Of course I do. I am well aware that English is of importance for Japan's future prosperity. And that is why I lament the policies of the *monkasho*. They're not educating people who will be able to use the language at a high enough level for business.

MR: But in your book you don't just criticize English education, you seem to resent the place English has in Japanese society.

HM: Resent is not an appropriate word. I think it is ludicrous that English is worshipped as if it were God's language. There's an almost hysterical attitude that without English your life will remain in a perpetual cul-de-sac and the laughable notion that learning it will somehow make you international seems to be taken as read in Japanese society.

MR: Surely English can help you to understand the world.

HM: If you desire international understanding go into any large bookshop; there are books from every country in the world that have been translated into Japanese. The very idea of relating English to internationalization may have suited the Meiji era when information from abroad was at a premium, but it's not valid today when we are overflowing with information (7).

MR: Just going back a bit and unpicking what you have said, it seems to me that you are contradicting yourself. On the one hand, you're lamenting the fact that the Japanese education system is too lax and not teaching it in a way that you believe to be effective, while on the other you imply that English itself is not really needed.

HM: There's no contradiction if you realize that I'm talking about different things for different people. I believe that English is a necessity during compulsory education. For the sake of equality in Japan, each child should be given an equal opportunity to study this subject to a specified level. But after compulsory education, it's a different matter; the whole population shouldn't feel compelled to learn it. Japan does definitely require a relatively small number of people, perhaps 10 or 20% of the population, to be extremely competent in the language. I'm worried because the education system, by failing to give a basic grounding in English to everyone, is also failing in its job of developing such people.

MR: What should be done during compulsory education to ensure the system doesn't fail in this job?

HM: Firstly, more time needs to be spent on English during junior high school rather than adding an hour or so at elementary school. The government actually got it right soon after the war. The very first Course of Study for English in 1947 advised that six hours of classes a week was necessary for effective language learning and advised that doing less than three hours was almost meaningless. If you're going to teach it, teach enough hours for children to actually learn something. At least five hours a week is necessary instead of the three hours that are presently being taught. Secondly, English teaching needs to move away from an obsession with being practical. Most of what is taught in other subjects is probably not immediately useful in a child's life, but it provides a foundation for future learning. Yet, for some reason, English is treated differently. What a child should say if, by some outside chance, a foreigner asks for directions on the way home from school seems to have become more important than building the basics.

MR: Out of interest, how would you respond to such a foreigner?

HM: I would initially give directions in Japanese. Most foreigners living here speak the language. When in Rome, do as the Romans do is a global standard after all.

MR: And instead of communicative English, would you return to teaching methods that concentrate more on grammar?

HM: Yes. Grammar is the most efficient way of consciously learning the rules of a language. I would also reverse the trend of reducing the amount of vocabulary that is required to be learnt. The idea that you can make up for a lack of vocabulary by relying on context is simply unrealistic (8).

MR: In what other ways would you improve the teaching of English?

HM: Pronunciation has long been neglected. Children do learn the phonetic alphabet but this is not enough. I don't know if you've heard of Kunihiro Masao, but he was a pioneer of simultaneous translation in Japan and a renowned instructor on NHK's English course for many years. He coined the idiom *shikan roudoku* (9), which means reading aloud unceasingly,

to describe a method of study that helped make him one of Japan's greatest masters of English. There is a complex neurophysiological basis for the effect of reading aloud, but simply put, it helps to internalize language and form nerve pathways in the brain (10).

MR: I think many teachers would feel reluctant to make their students read passages over and over again as Kunihiro-sensei recommended.

HM: This is another symptom of the damage done by *yutori kyoiku*. Teachers feel that they have to respect the learner's autonomy above all else and are reluctant to make them do anything. Unfortunately, it's the pupils who are missing out on the chance to be "compelled" to practice such a fundamental skill.

MR: I put a lot of thought and energy into making my lessons lively and interactive, but even so there are always students who just dislike English. I can't help feeling that going back to a more regimented way of teaching of English would just produce more of these *eigo girai*.

HM: Such people should be able to quit once they've completed their compulsory education. As I said before, we don't need a whole nation of English speakers. Most Japanese can get by quite happily without English in Japan, so having people hate what they don't need is not such a problem.

MR: Would there be any role for conversation practice in your school system?

HM: I strongly believe that conversation should be seen as a sport. You don't learn tennis in the classroom and it's also not the place for conversation. If it's done, it should be as an after-school activity and practiced every school day in the same way that children practice judo or baseball in school clubs.

MR: We started today talking about English elementary school and I'd like to finish by asking your opinion on that hurdle facing students at the other end of the system. I gather from your book that you see *juken*, the university entrance exam system, as a positive influence.

HM: *Juken* is the one saving grace of the Japanese education system. It serves to bring students closer to a level that I call *tsukaeru eigo,* a level at which English can actually be used to do things. With *tsukaeru eigo* a person should be able to read a newspaper or

business correspondence with minimal effort (11). *Juken* provides the incentive to take high school students a good deal closer to the *tsukaeru eigo* target.

MR: As someone involved with writing the questions for my university's entrance exam, I'm often surprised that, even after passing such a difficult test, many students are still unable to really communicate in English.

HM: You are mistakenly thinking of *juken* as a deliverer of the finished product. As I explain in my book, it can take us at the most, three-quarters of the way up the mountain but a lot still needs to be done after *juken*. However, remember that without it your students would have only climbed to the foothills. Numerous diplomats and business people using English in their work have told me that the experience of grappling with the grammar and vocabulary of *juken* instilled a valuable resource that they frequently draw on.

MR: You comment in your book on universities also failing to perform their role in English education (12). What should those teaching in university bear in mind?

HM: In a nutshell, universities are not meant to be mere extensions of high school. English education needs to be made more demanding at this level.
MR: Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today.
HM: And thank you for negotiating the streets of Kanda to reach my office.

Notes

1) Those interested in Japanese books that critique English education and other aspects of English in Japan will find numerous titles at any large bookshop. Two interesting reads are *Eigo kyoiku wa naze mondainoka* (Why is there a problem with English education?) by Yamada Yuichiro and *Kokka no hinkaku* (Dignity of the nation) by Fujiwara Masahiko. The latter, a best seller in 2006, although not specifically about English, has acerbic comments on English in elementary schools and the link between English and internationalization.

2) The petition delivered to the monkasho was entitled *shougako deno eigokyoikuka ni hansuru youbousho* (A petition against making English an official subject in elementary school). It was signed by one hundred people, mostly academics and teachers.

3) According to statistics in Moteki (2004, p.23), the number of grammar items (*bunpou jiko*) taught in junior high school was reduced from 21 in 1969 to 13 in 1977 when the new Course of Study was introduced. In 1989 the number was further cut to 11.

4) *Shokuminchi eigio* (English of the colonies) is another epithet Moteki (2004) uses to describe the English of simple greetings and conversations. Such English may be fine, Moteki argues, as the language for "obedient slaves" but not for fostering "assertive" English users (p.95).

5) See Moteki 2004, p.51.

6) See Moteki, 2004, p.49.

7) Moteki (2004) suggests that where English is much more valuable now is as a transmitter, a way to tell the world about Japanese culture and ideas.

8) Folse, in his book Vocabulary Myths (2004) also rejects the idea that context can be a substitute for an adequate vocabulary. He states that "if the learner does not know a large number of words, then there is no context to use for clues" (p. vi)

9) The kanji for *shikanrodoku* is 只管朗読.

10) The mechanism is described in Moteki 2004, p.103.

11) According to Moteki (2004, p. 138) to reach *tsukaeru eigo* level requires 2,000 hours of instruction and knowledge of at least 10,000 words.

12) See Moteki 2004, p.159-180.

References

English education: should schools be allowed to decide on lessons. (2006, March 31). *The Asahi Shimbun.*

Folse, K. (2004). *Vocabulary myths*. Michigan: Michigan University Press.

Fujiwara, M. (2005). *Kuni no hinkaku* [The dignity of the nation]. Tokyo: Shinchosha.

Moteki, H. (2005). *Shogako eigo nado to tawagoto wo ittiru tokika* (Is this the time to be talking about such nonsense as elementary school English?). In Otsu Yukio (Ed.) *Shogako eigio deno eigokyoiku wa hitsuyo nai!* (Elementary school English is not necessary!) (pp.37-55)Tokyo: Keiyo University Press.

Moteki, H. (2004). *Monkasho ga eigo wo kowasu* [Monkasho will destroy English]. Tokyo: Chukoshinshya

Moteki, H. (2002). *Yutori kyoiku no otoshiana* [The pitfalls of pressure-free education]. Tokyo: Kokuminkaikansousho.

Moteki, H. (2001). *Shogako ni eigo ga hitsuyonai* [English is unnecessary in elementary schools]. Tokyo: Kodansha.

Yamada, Y. (2005). *Eigo kyoiku wa naze mondainoka* [Why is there a problem with English education?]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho

Interview Research

Miyuki Usuki, Joetsu University of Education, <usuki@juen.ac.jp>

Overview of the research

Interviews can be selected as a data gathering tool for the researcher to understand the world from the subjects' own perspectives (Kvale, 1996). The interviews enabled native language use by both the interviewer and the interviewees in order to obtain the participants' interpretation relating to their internal perspectives.

Books (1997); Byram, Duffy, and Murphy-Lejeune (1996) state that the most advantageous point of conducting interviews is the opportunity to gather a large range of meaningful data. Other advantages include: naturalness, face-to-face contact, and assessment of non-verbal communication, and the immediacy of using follow-up questions for clarification and extension. Taking account of other researchers' explorations informed the current researcher's choice to use the interview as a data-gathering tool.

Wenden (1986) conducted her interview research in the USA with twenty-five adult ESL learners. She analysed verbal protocols by using a grounded theory methodology, and then identified five dimensions of learner beliefs about language learning in relation to the learners' learning strategies. These were "(i) the language, (ii) their proficiency in the language, (iii) the outcomes of their learning endeavours (iv) their role in the language learning process, and (v) how best to approach the task of language learning" (p. 186). Her research showed some relationships between learner beliefs and the learners' preferred strategies such as, what the learners attend to in learning, and how they evaluated the effectiveness of activities.

Benson and Lor (1998) studied sixteen participants in the Independent Learning Program at Hong Kong University, and carried out case study interviews for the purpose of investigating learners' conceptions of learning. These researchers wanted to discover the relationship between the students' conceptions and their readiness for autonomous learning in the context of the researchers' own programme. Benson and Lor analysed this relationship through learner discourse about language learning and autonomy. Benson and Lor concluded that learners' willingness and capacity to engage in dialogue about their beliefs, their conceptions of language and language learning, may indicate their readiness for autonomous learning. Essentially, they indicated that listening to learners' perspectives about language learning could be one way of promoting autonomy. Interview data could show the learner's awareness

of autonomy, and the interview itself would become an opportunity for raising the learner's awareness of autonomy.

Victori (1999) used interviews with think-aloud protocols for her case study of two effective and two less effective EFL writers. Her study revealed that differences in metacognitive knowledge could be distinguished between successful and less successful writers. Palfreyman (2002) used interview research to obtain students', teachers', and administrators' perspectives at his university in Turkey as a major part of an ethnographical study. He concluded that learner autonomy is a matter of how different participants interpret the idea of autonomy and learning.

As seen from the above studies conducted through interviews, the interviewing provided a means of discovering native terms and meanings. Often, these may offer interpretations of the concept of autonomy (Byram, Duffy, Murphy-Lejeune, 1996). Benson and Lor (1998) considered the best approach to discover the learner's readiness for autonomy is, "to listen to learners and to pay close attention to what they say" (p.1). Interviewing is one methodology that encourages listening in order to glean learners' insights.

Grounded theory provided a theoretical framework for the analysis of the interview data. Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory whereby the exploratory analysis can provide "a representational theoretical model of participants' experience" (Frontman and Kunkel, 1994, p.493). The analysis can facilitate the conceptualization of the data into explicit and meaningful schemas and maximize the reliability and validity of the findings (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). When developing a grounded theory, there is no requirement for a hypothesis, rather, the procedure follows a "bottom-up" interpretation of a situation or event (Yacci, 1994). The procedure is grounded in data that is systematically gathered and analysed, and a theory evolves through constant comparison of variables (Cocklin, 1996; Ellis, 1993; Frontman & Kunkel, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). The comparison of meanings of sentences and words within the data is continued until internal coherence, adequate for the description of all relevant elements, is achieved (Frontman & Kunkel, 1994). In Carter's (1996) terms, "the data determines the outcome". According to Polkinhorne (1994), "this method is appropriate to produce carefully crafted, data-based theories and models". Further, this methodology is approached "from a constructivist position", where "theoretical formations are always unfinished and retain a perspectival dimension" (p. 510). The advantages of grounded theory are well documented and include the use of the inductive process of discovery; the natural

development of key experiential concepts; systematic data collection; and a reciprocal relationship between data collection, analysis and theory (Ellis, 1993; Strawderman, 1994; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). According to Yacci (1994), grounded theory is useful for bringing to light an understanding of a situation. It has been shown that grounded theory holds significant promise for exploratory analysis (Frontman & Kunkel, 1994).

My research as an example

For an example of interview research, let me explain about my study by using interview research.

(1) Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to gain a greater understanding of high achievers' beliefs about foreign language learning in a particular context by conducting in-depth interview research. An investigation was made into learners' beliefs concerning the use of effective foreign language learning strategies, teacher/learner roles, classroom expectations, self-motivation strategies and their beliefs about themselves as learners.

The study aimed at identifying the nature and degree of influence exerted by learners' beliefs on their language learning. I examined high achievers' beliefs in order to reconsider interpretations of learner autonomy. It is hypothesized that language learning is influenced by learner's beliefs, and, as such, research in this area may lead to a better understanding of learner autonomy from a consideration of the learners' viewpoints.

(2) Research questions

The following research questions were considered:

(1) What beliefs do high achievers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) hold about the effectiveness of their own learning strategies?

(2) What beliefs and expectations do high achievers have about the teacher's role in helping them to learn and the use of class time?

(3) What beliefs do high achievers have about self-motivation strategies?

(4) What perceptions do the students have of themselves as language learners?

In the study, Little's (1995) definition of learner autonomy, the framework informing this research, was used to examine whether or not the data supports Little's theory. His theory, widely accepted as the basis of learner autonomy, is the acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning, which has both socio-affective and cognitive implications. In the study, learners' self-responsibility was considered as both awareness for self-direction and for collaboration on the basis of Little's theory. How learners reflect on language learning was investigated from the points of their affective, social and cognitive awareness.

(3) Target population

In total, sixteen students majoring in English at a private university in Japan were chosen. These students had been identified as high achievers who had significantly improved their TOEIC score during their time at university. Their responses make up the descriptive case studies of learner beliefs. The high achievers were selected on the basis of their score improvement by comparing their present score with their first examination score. Out of approximately two hundred students in each year after the first year, the top ten students, who showed both high achievement and improvement, were selected. (The TOEIC examination is considered to be an international standard of English proficiency).

(4) Design and procedure

The research procedure for this study consisted of gathering retrospective self-reports of the participants' beliefs about language learning. The semi-structured, open-ended, and audio tape-recorded interviews were conducted and transcribed by the researcher in order to obtain the similarities and differences of the participants' beliefs in detail. Consent forms were given to all participants for reading and signing. Before the interviews, the participants' background experience in foreign language learning was obtained by questionnaires in order to gain information about their past English learning experiences and overseas visits. The participants' background experience was obtained in order to choose the students who had learned English most of the time in Japan and had less experience staying overseas. The questions were given to each interviewee prior to the interview. Each interview took approximately one hour. Interviews were conducted in Japanese, which was the mother tongue of both the participants and the researcher. The students' TOEIC examination scores, pilot interviews in English, together with their oral test results were combined to determine their overall English proficiency. Also, the participants' school marks of all English related subjects were obtained. From the interview data, the students' insights for self-direction were explored by comparing and contrasting key words and sentences in their responses. All data were then translated into English.

(5) Data analysis

Interview transcriptions were scrutinized and irrelevant information was identified and discarded. Data was classified as irrelevant if it was devoid of meaning for the purpose of analysis. Relevant responses were those which were information rich with regard to learner beliefs about language learning. These responses were classified into eleven categories.

When transcribing the responses, each point made by the participant was set on a separate line and assigned the descriptor that most closely matched the intended meaning of that point. The descriptor was then a label for that point. With regard to the analysis of the qualitative data, Frontman and Kunkel (1994), Glasser & Strauss (1967), and Strauss and Corbin (1994) have used a similar procedure.

For the identification and categorization process, the data were compared and contrasted by categorical analysis to ensure that there were no contradictions between the responses and the categories to which they had been assigned (Ellis, 1993; Strawderman, 1994; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991; Yacci, 1994). For validation purposes, an independent monitor who was working as a language teacher at the university was asked to randomly check approximately 10% of the categories and descriptors to see if he agreed with the analysis. Furthermore, to adequately represent all relevant elements of the participants' responses and in line with Little's notion of the learner's acceptance of responsibility based on socio-affective and cognitive factors, five categories emerged from the data.

For the purpose of explicit and systematic data analysis, textual elements such as sentences and phrases that seemed to express discrete ideas and meanings were grouped into several descriptors within each category. This was undertaken so that the model of learner autonomy could be derived from the empirical data analysis.

(Categories and descriptors about learner beliefs relating to language learning were omitted in this paper because of the limited space).

(6) The findings of the study

Successful learners' positive beliefs regarding the self and their metacognitive awareness were derived from in-depth interview research. Most importantly, the degree of learner autonomy for each student was confirmed from the data, by way of differences in internal attitudes. As in the archetypal cases of autonomous learners, an active internal attitude was

also displayed externally. Such autonomy could be considered as the ideal for language education. Another significant finding was the identification of two different awareness groups among high achievers, which were labelled 'Heterogeneous' and 'Homogeneous' learners. From the interview data, some learners were aware that they were different from other students and demonstrated a positive attitude in making this admission. Being aware of this difference made them more active and willing to challenge themselves. Conversely, there were learners who were afraid of being different from others. These students were also very serious about their language learning and had in fact been making considerable effort to improve their TOEIC scores and their school marks. However, instead of possessing a clear future goal for utilizing English, they were distracted by an admiration for native-like English and a vague desire to acquire it. Their ambiguous beliefs about language learning such as lacking objectives for learning in spite of their desire for English proficiency improvement, and their passive external attitude, could have created a barrier against their further success in language learning (more details in Usuki, 2003).

Finally, I established a model for learner autonomy from the basis of the research findings (Usuki, 2004).

The meaning of the interview research

As you can see from my own study, interview research can allowed us to conduct in-depth investigation. From the data, we might derive new perspectives which are difficult to see from the students' actual classroom attitudes. The grounded research method can lead us to generalize the data. This generalization could motivate us for further investigations of various kinds. Such interview research has given me some deep insights into the students' views. In that way, I believe that we, as teachers, need to learn from our students as well as teaching. Our learning from students' views can lead us towards our own improvement as teachers.

References

Benson, P. & Lor, W. (1998). *Making sense of autonomous language learning.* English Monograph. No.2. Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong.

Books, M. (1997). In-depth interviewing as qualitative investigation (Chapter11). In D. T. Griffee and D. Nunan (Eds.). *Classroom teachers and classroom research* (pp137 - 146). Tokyo: The Japan Association for Language Teaching.

Byram, M., Duffy, S. & Murphy-Lejeune, E. (1996). The ethnographic interview as a Personal Journey. *Language, Culture and Curriculum.* 9(1): 3 - 18.

Carter, P. D. (1996). An Analysis of Grounded Teaching and Learning. *Journal of Adult Education*. 24(1): 14 – 23.

Cocklin, B. (1996). Applying qualitative research to adult education: reflections upon analytic processes. *Studies in the Education of Adults*. 28(1): 88 -116.

Ellis, D. (1993). Modeling the information-seeking patterns of academic researchers: A grounded theory approach. *Library Quarterly*. 63(4):469 - 486.

Frontman, K. C. & Kunkel, M. A. (1994). A grounded theory of counsellors' construal of success in the initial session. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*. 41(4): 492 - 499.

Glasser, B. G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: SAGE Publication.

Little, D. (1995). *Learner autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems*. Authentik: Dublin.

Palfreyman, D. (2002). *Learner autonomy and culture in one particular setting.* Unpublished PhD thesis. Zayed University in Dubai.

Polkinghordne, D. E. (1994). Reaction to special section on qualitative research in counselling process and outcome. *Journal of Counseling Psychology.* 41(4): 510 - 512.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N.K.Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp273-285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strawderman, J. A. (1994). The incarcerated adult basic education student: A qualitative study. *Journal of Correctional Education*. 45, Issue 4, December: 172 - 185.

Usuki, M. (2003). Learner Beliefs about Language Learning and Learner Autonomy: A re-consideration. In Barfield, A. & Nix, M. (Eds.) *Autonomy You Ask!* JALT LD-SIG, Tokyo, Japan: 11 – 24.

Usuki, M. (2004). *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning: An Exploratory Analysis of Japanese Learners.* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Edith Cowan University, Australia.

Victori, M. (1999). An analysis of writing knowledge in EFL composing: A case study of two effective and two less effective writers. *System*. 27: 537 - 555.

Wenden, A. L. (1986). What do second language learners know about their second language learning: A second look at retrospective accounts. *Applied Linguistics.* 7(2): 186 - 201.

Wilson, H. S. & Hutchinson, S. A. (1991). Pearls, pith, and provocation – triangulation of qualitative methods: Heideggerian hermeneutic and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*. 1(2), May: 263 - 276.

Yacci, M. (1994). A grounded theory of student choice in information - rich learning environments. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*. 3(3/4): 327 - 350.

Further Reading:

Books, M. (1997). In-depth interviewing as qualitative investigation (Chapter11). In D. T. Griffee and D. Nunan (Eds.). *Classroom teachers and classroom research* (pp137 - 146). Tokyo: The Japan Association for Language Teaching.

The author introduces and describes the advantages of in-depth interviewing as classroom research.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: SAGE Publication.

The author explains how to proceed with interview research.

Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J.F. (1995). *The active interview.* Thousand Oaks:CA:Sage.

The authors see the interview technique as aiming at a conversation rather than at an investigation.

Applying the Reflective Cycle to Improve Cooperative Learning Activities in a Junior High School *(Part 2)*

Ben Backwell, Nanzan Boys Junior High School, <benbackwell@hotmail.com>

(This is the second part of Ben's article, following on from the previous issue−Ed)

In the following pages the reflective cycle is applied to three Kagan structures (Rallyread, Same/Different and Numbered Heads Together), which I have taught in my second year classes. Materials for the lessons can be found at the end of each activity.

Activity 1: Rallyread

Level: 2nd year Junior High School
Time: 35 minutes
Class Size: 20
Activity: Information gap exercise. Understanding and completing a dialogue with a partner.
Materials Needed: Dialogue handouts

Activity Description

Step 1:   In pairs, students decide who is Jim and who is Bob.

Step 2:   Students take their handout and the teacher explains that this handout is top secret and not to be shown to their partner. The teacher goes through the pronunciation and meaning of any difficult words.

Step 3:   In pairs, students read through the text one time.

Step 4:   Jim reads his first sentence. Bob listens and repeats it. If he repeats correctly, then Bob reads his first sentence and Jim repeats. The two students go through the dialogue alternating between the roles of tutor and student. If the sentence is not repeated correctly then the tutor should practice chunking (breaking down the sentence into manageable parts for their partner to remember more easily).

Step 5:   Students take it in turns to dictate their sentences to their partner. Again, use chunking if the sentence is too long or complicated to remember in one attempt.

Step 6:   In the same pairs, students translate the dialogue and the teacher checks once it is completed.

What happened/Results

At the beginning of each step of the activity I modeled with a student what I expected the class to do. A student read the part of Jim and I repeated, purposefully making a couple of mistakes e.g. Who are kinder Miss Green or Long? (see page 36). I asked the class if the sentence had been repeated correctly and many students said there was no problem. I explained that there were, in fact, two mistakes and that during the activity those acting as tutors were expected to listen carefully and not be on automatic pilot. I then asked the students to listen again and identify my mistakes. During the activity the students were told to pay careful attention to their partner's output and if he made a mistake ensure he corrected himself.

This explanation seemed to pay off, as throughout Rallyread many students leant close to hear the words of their partner. Whilst students wrote down their dictated sentence, the tutors looked over their partner's shoulder to check spelling and punctuation.

The dialogue and translation were successfully completed by all the pairs. The English writing was accurate and the translation seemed comprehensive. This activity was new for the students but it was not too surprising that they all had an understanding of the text as all the grammar points and vocabulary had been covered in previous lessons.

My one concern was that when some students could not understand a word, they sometimes looked at their partner's handout to read it. Occasionally, Japanese was used between partners to clarify uncertainties in spelling or grammar.

What I learned/Findings

All four PIES principles were in action throughout Rallyread. Positive interdependence existed because the dialogue could only be completed thanks to a partner sharing his information. As the students already held half of the dialogue in their hands, the challenge was both tantalizing and clear.

Individual accountability surfaced every time one of the pair took the role of tutor. His oral transference of the sentences on his sheet needed to be clear and manageable. A good tutor adapted to the level of his student and helped them identify any mistakes. For example, when chunking down, some tutors stressed the word his partner had forgotten to say. A tutor was responsible for his partner's learning and the overall quality of the final translation. Those in the role of student were accountable for active listening, repetition and transcribing accurately.

The third principle, equal participation, was ensured in the teacher's preparatory phase by careful construction of the dialogue. It was important that each member of the pair had a similar amount of words and sentences to read. Also, a balanced variety of vocabulary and grammar points in each handout helped to make both students feel they had an interesting and important role to play. Of course, turn taking to be tutor and student promoted a sense of fairness in the pair relationship.

Simultaneous interaction was guaranteed because students were working in pairs. At any one moment, one person was speaking and the other had to listen carefully or write down accurately. Therefore all students were actively involved throughout the activity.

It quickly became apparent that Rallyread stands out as a good activity for practicing the same lexical input and output, using all four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). Because students are recycling the same grammar and vocabulary, their confidence and motivation grows with each step of the practice. This also has a positive influence on the students' ability to tutor each other.

Although I was pleased that the PIES principles were easily observable, I did not overlook the fact that students resorted to their native tongue when they didn't quite understand what their partner was saying. If students were to successfully complete the task solely in English, they would need more skills in communication strategies. There were therefore one or two modifications I needed to make.

How to modify the activity/Possible solution
At the start of the activity we practiced clarification requests.

Key phrases included "How do you spell _____?" and "Could you repeat that, please?" Students first repeated these sentences after the teacher. Then, in pairs, one student intentionally mumbled a short, simple, textbook sentence and his partner asked. "Could you repeat that please?" Having heard the sentence clearly, the asking student then repeated it.

I also set up the classroom in two lines for Jims and two lines for Bobs. Pupils were now sitting face to face with their partner, making it more difficult to show their handouts to their partner and more physically interactive:

Jim   Bob   Jim   Bob

Jim   Bob   Jim   Bob

Rallyread Materials

Jim

J. Who is kinder, Miss Green or Mr. Long?

B._____

J. Is he as kind as Mr. Terada?

B._____

J. Mr. Terada is kind and he is wise.

B._____

J. I am of course. My cousin is not very wise.

B._____

J. Yes, she is.

Translation

J._____

B._____

J._____

B._____

J._____

B._____

J._____

B._____

J._____

Bob

J._____

B. Mr. Long is. He's kinder than Miss Green.

J._____

B. Mr. Long is kind but he's not as kind as Mr. Terada.

J._____

B. Who is wiser, you or your cousin?

J._____

B. Your cousin is not wise but she is prettier than you.

J._____

Translation

J._____

B._____

J._____

B._____

J._____

B._____

J._____

B._____

J._____

Activity 2: Same/Different

Level: 2nd year junior high school

Time: 30 minutes

Class size: 20

Activity: Information gap for preposition practice.

Materials Needed: Two similar pictures and Same/Different note taking paper.

Activity Description

Step 1:   Before class the teacher photocopies a picture and labels the original A and the copy
B. Then she draws various items onto the pictures to make them different, making
some differences easy to spot and others more difficult.

Step 2:   In pairs students decide who is A and who is B.

Step 3:   Each takes his handout. As with Rallyread, students do not see their partner's paper.

Step 4:   The teacher reviews vocabulary linked to the pictures and if necessary writes a
framed sentence on the board to help the students in describing their picture
e.g. In my picture there is/are _____ in_____

on

under

Step 5: Back with their partner students take it in turn to say a sentence describing their

picture. A says one sentence e.g. "In my picture there is a bird in the window". B checks to see if his picture is the same or different and responds accordingly e.g. "That's different, in my picture there are two birds in the window". On the second handout students write a list of what is the same and what is different about their respective pictures. Students continue taking it in turns to identify same/different points and noting them down.

Step 6: After a fixed timespan, such as twenty minutes, pairs compare pictures and note any items missed out.

What happened/Results

Again all four of Kagan's principles were in action during this learning task. Positive interdependence lay in the shared goal of searching for and noting differences and similarities between the two pictures. In a joint effort the pairs put pieces of the puzzle together. These sentences resulted in a clear understanding of each other's picture. Individual accountability occurred every time a student attempted to describe his picture to his partner. When a student described his picture correctly, he had taken the pair a step closer to their goal. Equal participation was ensured by students taking turns to say a descriptive sentence. Finally, simultaneous interaction was guaranteed by the describer describing and the listener promptly comparing and stating whether his picture was the same or different.

Circulating around the class it seemed most students were moving through the activity at a healthy pace. Certainly their written lists were getting longer and longer. Within 20 minutes the first pair approached to say they had completed the task, but on checking their list we discovered they had missed 4 same/different points. I then announced to the whole class that there were at least 13 same points to identify and 12 different points to find. Again the students put their heads down and got to work, yet I started noticing a strange phenomenon amongst some pairs. Though they had written down in correct English many of the same/different points, when I approached to hear their oral English they fell silent, just looking at their papers and playing with their pens.

Having decided to video record the class I sat down to watch it afterwards. The first pair the camera focused on spoke almost entirely in hushed Japanese. They simply asked questions in their mother tongue and then wrote the sentences in English. The second pair on the video mixed Japanese and English. B student often used the correct sentence structure in English, however, his partner, if the description was the same in his picture would merely reply "Onaji" ("same" in Japanese). The third pair almost exclusively used English. They steadily went

through their handouts in the target language identifying and noting down whether a detail was identical or not.

Watching the last pairs' interactions gave me hope that students could accomplish the task as I had expected. On the other hand, I felt irritated that having provided a lively, fresh and well-researched communicative activity, whose content was well within the grasp of the students, some of the class members, to varying degrees chose to ignore the activity's rules. I wanted to pretend the camera had not shown these unsatisfying student to student interactions. I wanted just to focus on the positive points of the class. After a day or so I put my irritation to one side and started to explore why such student interactions had occurred.

What I learned/Findings

My only previous experience of the same/different activity was during Dr. Kagan's workshop. There the atmosphere was lively as the participants had a positive attitude towards cooperative learning. The room contained teachers who had voluntarily come in order to develop their professional skills. In a sense, Dr. Kagan was preaching to the easily converted. These activity demonstrations aimed to show how cooperative learning actually works, however, the difference between the success of the demonstrations and the reality of application in my junior high school is clearly shown in the above description.

I believe a critical reason why some students did not respond to the same/different task, lies in the school's general culture of what can be termed traditional teaching methods such as rote memorization and the translation method of studying English. Hino, N. (1988) observed that in traditional classrooms, teachers tend to dominate the talk time, thus students have fewer opportunities to speak and improve their oral communication skills. Soo-Im Lee (1999) in his study of an Osaka language school found that students who had a history of studying with traditional methods tended to be less active and positive towards cooperative learning activities. Bearing in mind Nanzan's learning culture, these two pieces of research would provide clues as to why certain pupils demonstrated a distinct nonchalance towards the activity.

In order to promote a learning environment where students retain more responsibility for their learning and accept and enjoy the challenge of cooperative, communicative activities, it would be wise to coordinate a teaching strategy that was agreed and acted upon by all the members of the school's English Department. Such a strategy would encourage cooperative habits of mind that would be reinforced in every language class. This paper, however, remains a

smaller scale study, focusing on a way for a single teacher to improve the immediate situation in terms of promoting an atmosphere of oral communicative collaboration.

In essence, I believed that student motivation was the key to the problem. Nunan's research (1988) into adult learners' motivation to study English, suggested that such students were less interested in learning for learning's sake than in learning to achieve some immediate or not too distant life goal. Combining Nunan's findings with my observations, I postulated that student resistance stemmed from a sense that the activity was disconnected from other classes and tests. A more successful class, which in this case means more interactive, communicative behaviour in the target language, may well be established by activating the saying "teach as you test and test as you teach." Based on observations of the lesson, it seems plausible that the students who rose to the challenge of completing the activity in English were motivated to learn for the sake of interest and pleasure. On the other hand, students who mixed Japanese and English may need motivation from another source, i.e. a grade.

How to modify this activity/Possible solutions
At the beginning of class I explained that the following week students would be tested on the same/different structure. Although the content would be different, the structure would remain very similar and so this class could be considered a mock exam. During the mock test the conditions were the same for the following week's test, e.g. the mock lasted 20 minutes as this was the time limit for the real test. Also, I decided the assessment criteria would be written accuracy. However, for that to occur, the students needed to realize oral fluency and accuracy were prerequisites.

With a student I modeled all the steps of the activity so students could see what was expected of them. Modelling is an effective way of explaining. Coupled with this, crucial information such as how many same/different points there are to identify and write down within the time limit was provided.

As the structure was new to the students, I made the content not too easy but also not too challenging. If the exercise were too hard, it would give little practice and frustrate and demotivate the students. They should be able to feel a sense of success both with the mock and real test. This provides positive motivation towards future cooperative learning activities. Considering this principle of giving students successful experiences, I drew a new picture to use as picture A in the test and modified a copy which then became picture B.

Name-

Class-

Date-

Banana
And An
Apple

car
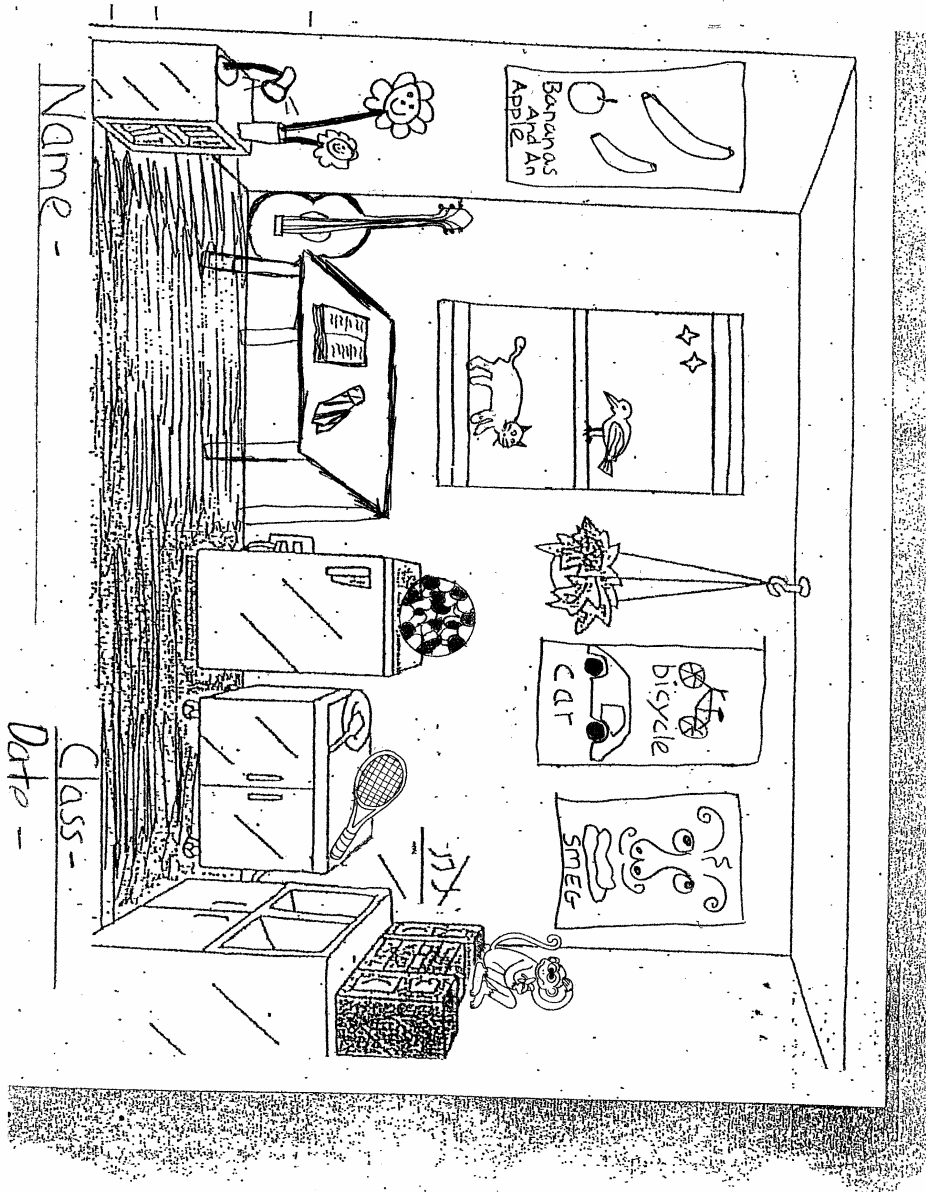bicycle
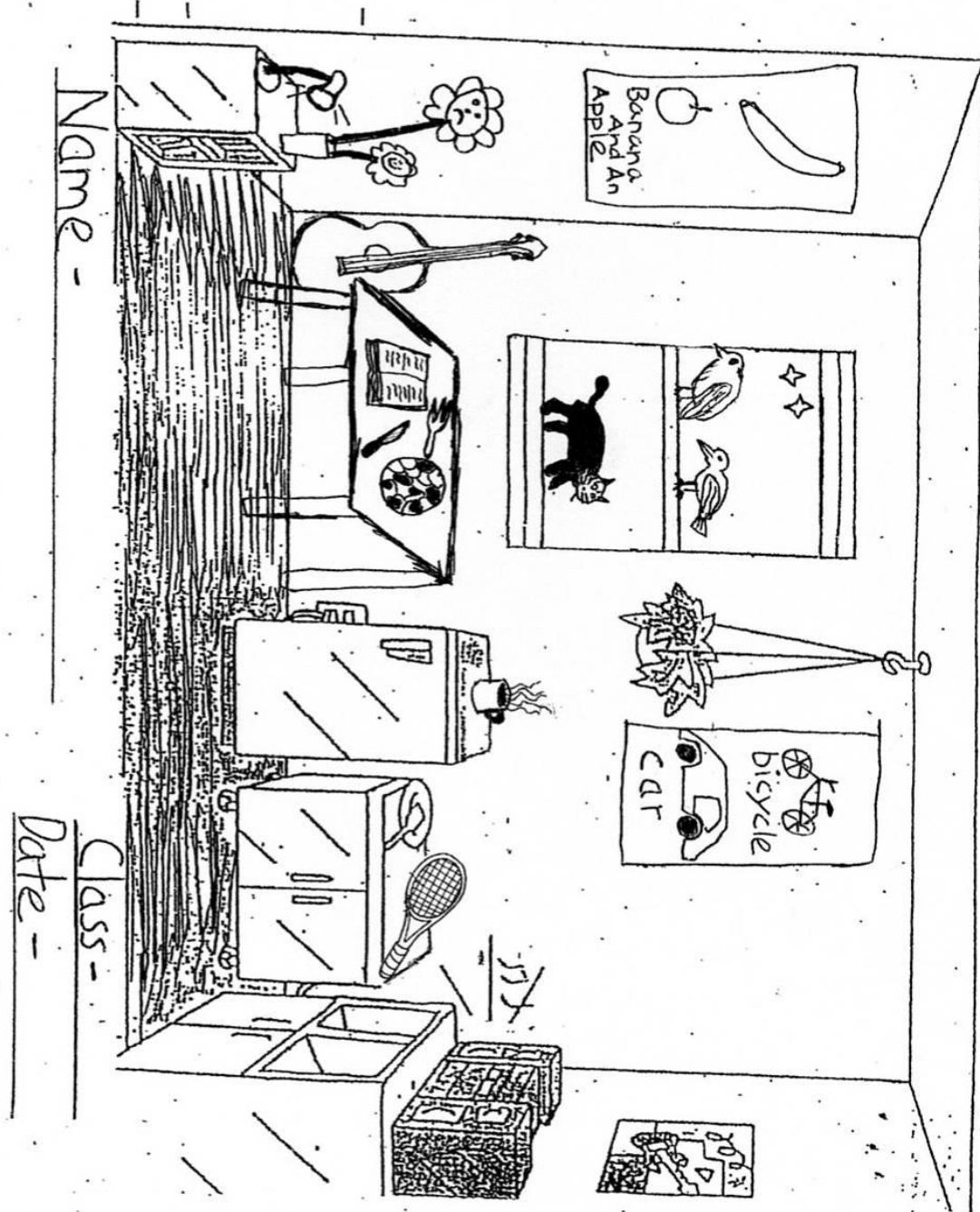
Name _____   <u>Class</u>

<u>Same</u>

<u>Different</u>

Activity 3: Numbered Heads Together

Level: 2nd year Junior High School

Time: 35 minutes

Class size: 20

Activity: Team brainstorming and individual answering.

Materials Needed: A student topic and question paper.

Activity Description

Step 1:   Students number off into groups of four.

Step 2:   The teacher asks questions based on a topic students have recently studied.

Step 3:   In their groups students discuss the answer.

Step 4:   The teacher selects a student number (from 1 to 4) and that student responds for his group using complete English sentences.

What happened/ Results

Most students actively participated during the group discussion time. Students who had an answer shared it with their group and students who didn't have an answer leant forward and listened intently. A few students did not concentrate. They fidgeted and talked with their friends about other matters. When these boys were individually responsible for transmitting their group's response to the class their answers were often not in complete sentences and they needed to clarify with teammates what had just been discussed.

What I learned/ Findings

Most class interactions were full of positive interdependence between classmates. A student shared his answer because he knew that, even though he may not be called on, one of his team members would be. A student who lacked an answer listened intently in case his number was called on to articulate the group's response.

A few students were not concerned by this type of assessment. Once again the assessment was not graded. It was in the form of answering a question in front of the class and teacher. The motivation stems from wanting to represent the group adequately in front of others. Having spoken to these students it became apparent that, as with the same/different findings, a small minority are motivated to learn solely by the need to pass tests. When there is no concrete grade to attain, their energy and commitment wanes.

How to modify this activity/ Possible solutions

Numbered Heads Together does not use groups of two but groups of four. I was concerned that due to the larger numbers in each group the principle of simultaneous interaction was being diluted. I, therefore, gave each team a pen and paper and asked students to choose a different group member to write down each question and answer. In this way, after every group discussion there was now a group member who responded orally to the whole class and a scribe who wrote down the team's response. The scribe also noted any important points other groups made. A new scribe was selected for each new question. At the end of the activity all the students wrote down the information gathered on the paper. This information was studied for homework and used in a subsequent, individual test.

I also introduced a competitive element to the task. Putting a scoreboard with the teams' names on the blackboard, groups now competed for points. A correct answer received two points, a partially correct response one point and an incorrect answer no points. Adding competition gave a buzz to the interactions between students. It fostered and strengthened team spirit. The revised lesson had a more cheerful and dynamic atmosphere as students focused intently on giving a clear, correct answer in order to gain points for their team. During group discussions members checked they had understood the answer by repeating it back to the group. Students also concentrated more on other teams' responses. Students' positive interdependence within the team had deepened thanks to the challenge from other teams. One student said that even though his best friends were in another team he immediately felt close to his group members and wanted to support them to do well in the quiz. Adding competition to this type of activity is called positive outside enemy interdependence.
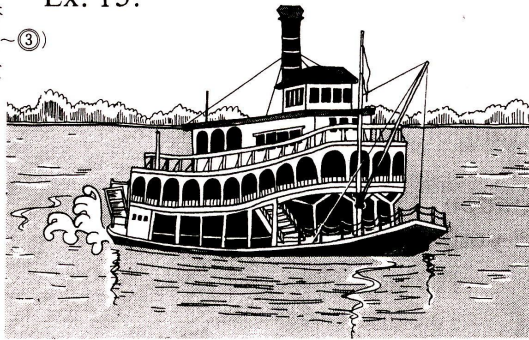
Numbered Heads Together Materials

Ex. 13.

83 全体
(①~③)
84 1文
①

"OLD MAN RIVER"

There are many great rivers in the United States: the Hudson River, the Ohio, the Missouri, the Mississippi, and so on. The ₅ biggest of these is the Mississippi. However, it is not the longest river in the world. The Nile River in Egypt is longer than the Mississippi. The Nile is more than 4000 miles long. It is the longest river in the world.

② ₁₀ The Mississippi River is not as long as the Nile, but there is more water in the Mississippi than in the Nile. Many other big rivers, such as the Ohio and the Missouri flow into the Mississippi and make it bigger.

③ The Mississippi, of course, is the most famous and important river in America. They call it "Old Man River." There are many stories about ₁₅ the Mississippi. One of the most famous stories is *Tom Sawyer.* Mark Twain wrote this story. Do you know it?

Progress in English (Flynn 2005, 20)

Questions on Old Man River

1. Name 3 rivers in America.
2. Spell Mississippi.
3. What is the longest river in the world?
4. How long is it?
5. Which river contains the most water in the world?
6. Who wrote Tom Sawyer?
7. What is the longest river in Japan?
8. Name 5 rivers in this prefecture.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper I had no idea where exactly cooperative learning would take my teaching, nor how it would affect the quality of my students' learning. From personal experience however, the difference between purely reading a book and answering questions about it and cooperative learning, seems vastly different. As Kagan explains:

> "The basic premise of the structural approach to cooperative learning is that there is a strong relation between what students do and what students learn. This is because students learn more from what they do than from what they are told." (P.12 The Language Teacher Oct. 94)

Having to tutor peers and receive peer tutoring, as took place in the Kagan structures, renders the exchange of information much more dynamic than rote memorization and individual textbook work. The education researcher M.C. Bateson (1994) argues that. "participation precedes learning". This is supported by research in the U.S that shows students retain approximately 10% of what they read, 26% of what they hear, 70% of what they say and 90% of what they say and do (quoted in Murphey, JALT presentation 2006). Such information suggests that if we want students to maximize their learning then to a certain extent it is necessary to give our students the role of tutor, so that they may participate in both explaining and answering in the target language. In short, the aim is to give pupils the opportunity of saying and doing in English.

Of course, student memorization of the lesson is a key goal for all teachers. When the four PIES principles are an integral part of lessons, however, learning goes beyond the academic realm. Dynamic and positive, student interactions in the classroom lead not just to academic but also social skills development. Cooperative learning emphasizes information sharing and social skills awareness. Everyone is participating, supporting one another and articulating the words. The students have shared goals and specific responsibilities towards each other. This learning style promotes better interpersonal relationships and psychological health. As Johnson and Johnson have observed:

> "The more kids work together, the more they like each other. The more they like each other the harder they work to learn, the more they work to learn the more socially competent they become. The more socially competent they are, the more skillful they are at helping each other." (P. 31 Oct 94 The Language Teacher).

Such interactions mean that a cooperative learning classroom can quite often be noisy. This however, is not a place of random chit-chat, but a place where language is used in a meaningful context, within a structure which is designed to maximize the potential of human cooperation.

A supporting reason for introducing cooperative learning to Nanzan conversation classes came from my observations of student interactions. Nanzan pupils tend to form very cohesive groups. Cohesiveness is crucial for cooperative learning to be successful. A core element of cohesiveness is interpersonal attraction, i.e. group members like each other. Nanzan students go to lessons together, practice sports everyday in their respective school teams and meet up in their free time to enjoy each other's company. Even without such bonding influences all pupils are united in a sense of group pride at having passed the challenging entrance exam and thereby attending one of the city's prestigious schools. In the English conversation classroom, students can choose whom to sit by and work with, further enhancing the likelihood of interpersonal attraction.

At times, indeed, it appeared that students were too cohesive and as a result, they were not prepared to take risks for fear of standing out amongst the group. In Japan, the classic example of this is the silence, which so often ensues after the teacher asks for a volunteer to answer her question. In a context where the learner expects to gain his knowledge from an outside source, such as a textbook or a teacher, there exists the tendency for a student to be self-conscious, inhibited and reluctant to answer a question, even if he knows the correct answer. And yet outside the classroom these boys transform into noisy, spontaneous and playful teenagers who clearly wake up in the morning looking forward to seeing their school friends. It was exactly this energy which I hoped to harness and channel in the twice a week oral communication classes.

A degree of success in this objective is illustrated in student feedback. In a questionnaire given at the end of term more than 80% of students stated that cooperative learning is interesting. One of the most frequent verbal comments given was that they enjoyed working with their classmates, even if, they were working with peers outside of their own friendship circle.

Despite this accurate assessment and harnessing of natural student inclinations, I had been shortsighted in underestimating another significant element in the motivation of Nanzan students – the 5 tests per year. In her thorough article on motivation in the L2 classroom

Norris-Holt (2001) describes two principle types of motivation – *integrative* and *instrumental* motivation. Integrative motivation inspires students, who to a greater or lesser extent desire to identify with and integrate into the cultures in which the target language is spoken. According to Falk (quoted in Norris-Holt), students motivated by integrative influences are, over the long term, the most successful language learners.

Instrumental motivation on the other hand is identified by a desire to obtain a concrete, functional goal such as passing a test or graduating from university. Norris-Holt notes that "instrumental motivation is often characteristic of second language acquisition, where little or no social integration of the learner into a community using the target language takes place" (P.2 TESL Journal. June 2001)

This definition fits the case of most Nanzan students' learning histories. Opportunities to integrate into the target language community are limited. Except in English class these young boys are immersed in the Japanese language and culture, which to this day remains a predominantly monocultural society.

If integrative motivation offered little incentive to learn English then instrumental drive needed to be considered more carefully. At the start of my cooperative learning classes, I believe that a lack of goal orientation was evident in student behaviour, such as off-task talk or focus on the task but ignoring certain rules. Throughout the lessons the principle of individual accountability raised motivation to complete the task, yet in the long run, it may have been unclear to students how these tasks were connected to their tests. After applying the reflective cycle it became apparent that by adding occasional competition and making a direct connection to the tests students' interest could be augmented. This attitude is further illustrated in student feedback. Although the majority of students considered cooperative learning activities interesting, only 40% defined them as useful. This can be explained by the students not specifically receiving an explanation as to how exactly the lesson would interweave with future tests.

Of all the challenges addressed in this paper, perhaps the biggest was simply the courage to bring cooperative learning into my classroom. Cooperative learning asks the teacher to reduce her ownership of the classroom, thereby confirming a certain level of trust in the students. Having taught previously from a more traditional perspective, it felt unnerving to release these young learners to an autonomous learning style where I could not hear and

assess every word said in the classroom. Successful cooperative learning however, is fostered by, exactly this type of teacher respect and trust in the learners.

In the first classes, I provided detailed guidance to support the students. With time, students were encouraged to play a larger role. Small, subtle steps such as asking students to pass out handouts and later inviting the class to create the scaffold sentences ensured the students gained more and more control of their learning. Roger Johnson says it very succinctly:

> "The teaching is only necessary to get the learning started."
> (P.31, The Language Teacher, October 1994)

This is a massive shift in classroom expectations, which may feel uncomfortable for both teacher and students who are unused to such pedagogy. It is recommended to make cooperative learning a gentle step-by -step process of learner autonomy. Ultimately we can only know how much cooperative learning a class can manage by applying activities and observing closely, adjusting the quantity of structures and scaffolding accordingly.

When I began this project the obligatory textbook focused heavily on individual grammar exercises and vocabulary repetition. Students were accustomed to the teacher as the classroom authority and their motivation resided in the need to gain good test results. Yet despite these apparent barriers, with knowledge of the context and attention to detail, it is clear that even in traditional learning environments, cooperative learning can flourish as a humane, efficient and dynamic way of learning.

Appendix A – Student Questionnaire

A. Do you practice group work in other classes?

1	2	3	4
No	a little	sometimes	often

B. Group work is interesting.

1	2	3	4

1	2	3	4
No	a little	sometimes	Yes

C. Group work is useful.

1	2	3	4
No	a little	sometimes	Yes

D. Did your group work well together?

1	2	3	4
No	a little	sometimes	Yes

E. Did you make individual effort?

1	2	3	4
No	a little	sometimes	Yes

References

Dornyei, Z and Murphey, T. (2003). *Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, R.T. (1994). Cooperative learning in second language classes. *The Language Teacher*, 18(10), 4-7

Kagan, L. Kagan, M and Kagan, S. (1995). *Cooperative Structures for Classbuilding*. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing.

Lee, Soo-Im. (1999). Implementing cooperative learning at a language school. JALT Applied Materials, 67-79

Nunan, D. (1998). *The learner centred curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rodgers, R.C. (2002) Voices Inside Schools. *Harvard Educational Review*. Volume72, no. 2

Sugie, S. (1999). Cooperative learning in Japan. JALT Applied Materials, 38-49.

Be published In *Explorations In Teacher Education*!

Guidelines

Articles – sharing your research with other teacher educators. Up to 3000 words.

Essays – your opinion or ideas about a topic relevant to teacher educators based in Japan. Up to 2500 words.

Stimulating Professional Development series – teacher educators are often quite professionally isolated. Write about your teacher education activities, and the institutions that you work in. See previous issues for examples. Up to 3500 words.

Conference Proceedings – did you give a great presentation recently? Write up your presentation. Up to 2500 words.

Conference Reviews or Conference Reports – did you attend an interesting conference? Share your thoughts with the TE SIG members. Up to 2500 words.

Book Reviews – have you recently read an interesting book related to teaching, teacher education, language acquisition, or education? Up to 2000 words.

Font: Arial 11 point, single spaced, one line between paragraphs, SINGLE space between sentences.

Notes: Please include a catchy title, your name and professional affiliation, an e-mail address to go at the top of the article, and a 75-100 word bio-data for the end.

Deadlines: ongoing. Submit by e-mail to Simon Lees <simich(at)gol.com>. Attach as a Word document, titled with your surname, such as 'croker.doc' or 'robins.doc'.

Also, please cut and paste your article into the body of the e-mail, in case the Word document does not open.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Editor if you have any questions or ideas.

What is the Teacher Education SIG?

A network of foreign language instructors dedicated to becoming better teachers and helping each other teach more effectively, the TE SIG has been active since 1993. Our members teach at universities, high schools, and language centres both in Japan and other countries. The TE SIG focuses on five areas: action research, teacher reflection, peer-based development, teacher motivation, and teacher training and supervision.

If you would like further information about the TE SIG, please contact:

Acting TE SIG Coordinator, Simon Lees < simich(at)gol.com >

Explorations in Teacher Education

Newsletter of the Japan Association of Language Teachers

Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG)

Submission Guidelines:

See inside back cover

Editor:

Simon Lees

Kinjo Gakuin University

Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, JAPAN

Contact:

<simich(at)gol.com>