

# Explorations in Teacher Education

JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter

Spring 2007 Volume 15, Issue 2

## Contents

**2 And Now a Word from...The Editor**

Simon Lees

**3 Pan-Sig 2007 Conference Information**

### Articles

**7 Abolish the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) Program?**

William Matheny

**10 Applying 'Criterion' to Teaching Writing**

Takeshi Kamijo

**19 Japanese Curriculum Policy: the Problem, the Reason, and the Solution**

Wayne Lionel Aponte

### Review

**26 A Review of the JALT 2006 Conference**

Ben Backwell and Kathi Emori

**39 Publishing Guidelines for *Explorations in Teacher Education***

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## **And Now a Word from...The Editor**

Welcome to Volume 15, Issue 2, the Spring 2007 edition of *Explorations in Teacher Education*, the newsletter of the JALT Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG).

This is the Pan-SIG Conference issue. The Pan-SIG Conference is on May 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> at Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University in Sendai. The TE SIG is one of the SIGs sponsoring the Pan-SIG Conference. The TE SIG plenary speaker is John Wiltshier and there is the TE Colloquium paneled by James Venema, Douglas Jarrell, Mauro Lo Dico, Ssali V. Lukwago and Sarah Mulvey. James was our Treasurer until recently and Douglas Jarrell is a long time member of the TE SIG. Thanks to Jim Smiley, Colin Graham and Anthony Robins for the organisation of the TE SIG aspects of the conference. The schedule is on pages 4 and 5. The buffet details are on page 6.

The TE SIG has a Yahoo group. If you would like to start a discussion with other TE SIG members then please navigate to Yahoo Groups and then search for 'tedsig'. The main page has a 'Join Group' button.

This issue we have three articles and a review from Kathi Emori and Ben Backwell on the JALT 2006 Conference. The articles are by William Matheny, Takeshi Kamijo and Wayne Lionel Aponte.

One of our members and contributors, James Porcaro, recently had an article published in the online Daily Yomiuri (February 9<sup>th</sup>) and in the *Language Teacher* (March). Congratulations to James and thank you for the publicity. The Daily Yomiuri article appeared in the "Speak Up" section, was titled: "Time to end the use of ALTs," and included a link to *Explorations in Teacher Education*. The article sparked a number of letters and responses. I chose to publish William Matheny's response but I would like to thank Thom Rawson and Christopher W. Miller for their submissions. If you are interested in teaching writing you might find Takeshi Kamijo's article about the writing software "Criterion" to be useful. I certainly did. Finally, Wayne Lionel Aponte's article is about Japanese Curriculum Policy.

Hope you enjoy the issue.

**Simon Lees, editor.**

# **Teacher Education SIG Colloquium**

**14:25-16:05**

## **Perspectives on Curriculum Coordination: full-timers and part-timers**

**The panelists are:**

**James Venema (Nagoya Women's University)**

**Douglas Jarrell (Nagoya Women's University)**

**Mauro LoDico (Nanzan University)**

**Ssali V. Lukwago (Nagoya Women's University)**

**Sarah Mulvey (Nanzan University)**

The current competitive climate in Japan has encouraged many universities to implement curriculum reforms. One basic first step in curriculum reform is the increased coordination of courses as well as teachers. However there is no clear consensus among teachers on what is a coordinated curriculum. In addition part time teachers and full time teachers often have very different perspectives on the process of coordination. This colloquium will offer suggestions and opinions from the perspectives of full-time and part time teachers who have been involved with the coordination of an English curriculum at Nagoya Women's University over the past several years.

Saturday May 12, 2007

9:30-9:55

Coffee & Registration

	ROOM 1	ROOM 2	ROOM 3	ROOM 4	ROOM 5	ROOM 6	ROOM 7
10:00-10:45	<b>Gromik:</b> Vygotsky and FFL (OLE)	<b>Boon:</b> Designing Materials to enhance learner listening strategies (MW)	<b>Collins:</b> Schema-Building for High School Textbook Lessons (PRAG)	<b>Charles:</b> NLP Modelling and Language Acquisition (TE)	<b>Rosszell:</b> Measuring quantitative and qualitative changes in vocabulary knowledge (TEVAL)	<b>Cullen &amp; Smiley:</b> Integrating Music into Materials (MW2)	<b>Hardy:</b> Circles of Influence (MW2)
10:55-11:55	OLE Plenary Speech by Dr. Martina Gumske von Koellin "Are textbook designs and classrooms fit for the future AND the present?"						
13:15-14:15	MW Plenary Speech by Professor Marc Helgesen "Science of Happiness"						
14:25-15:10	<b>OLE Workshop</b> Shigaki & Yoshida Motivating Students to Learn Spanish (1)	<b>MW Workshop</b> <b>Goodmacher</b> Adapting Textbooks and Realia for ESL Acquisition	<b>Pragmatics Colloquium</b> Yamashita et al. Discourse in Japanese Language Classrooms	<b>TE Colloquium</b> <b>Venema</b> Perspectives on Curriculum Coordination: full-timers and part-timers	<b>TEVAL Colloquium</b> Practical Applications of Rasch Measurement Theory	<b>Bayne:</b> Cultural Implications for Learning Materials (MW)	<b>Falout</b> Tapping into L1 Reading Habits for EFL Reading Proficiency(TEVAL)
15:20-16:05	<b>FOSTER &amp; SILVA</b> Spanish (2)					<b>Apple:</b> Connecting theory and practice With Cooperative learning (TE)	<b>Kikuchi:</b> Exploring Demotivation to study English (TEVAL)
16:15-17:15	Pragmatics Plenary Speech by Dr. Mayumi Usami "Discourse Politeness Theory as a theory of interpersonal communication"						
17:25-18:10	<b>Seth</b> Japanese in India (OLE)	<b>Palmer:</b> Materials for building listening proficiency (MW)	<b>Howard:</b> Praise in university-level discussion sections (PRAG)	<b>Fulmer &amp; Suganuma</b> Inviting Students (TE)	<b>Nakamura:</b> A Rasch-based analysis of an English placement Test (TEVAL)	<b>White:</b> Assessment for Learning (AFL) (TEVAL)	<b>Good:</b> Houghton Mifflin (AM1)

Sunday May 13, 2007

Coffee & Registration

8:30-8:55

	ROOM 1	ROOM 2	ROOM 3	ROOM 4	ROOM 5	ROOM 6	ROOM 7
9:00-10:00	TE Plenary Speech by Professor John Wiltshier "Evidence based education - Benefits and Challenges"						
10:10-10:55	<b>Kaul:</b> Teaching of French as a Second Language Acquisition (OLE)	<b>Holster:</b> Identity and Proficiency (MW)	<b>Arnold:</b> Japanese adult L2 learners (PRAG)	<b>Venema:</b> Professional Learning Communities (TE)	<b>Leaper:</b> Group Discussion Tests (TEVAL)	<b>Sandu:</b> Culture Shock in FL/SL Acquisition (PRAG)	<b>Yamashita &amp; Tatsuki</b> KAKEN or JSPS workshop (JALT National)
11:05-11:50	<b>Reinelt</b> Productive E-mails in beginners' German (OLE)	<b>Droukdis:</b> English Interview Practice (MW)	<b>Knight:</b> Getting at humour through pragmatics (PRAG)	<b>Connell:</b> Redressing the EFL Writing and Speaking Gap (TE)	<b>Kunazawa:</b> Criterion-referenced achievement test (TEVAL)	<b>Ikeda:</b> Change-of-State Token a: in Japanese OPI (PRAG)	<b>Sato:</b> Comparative Study of Motivation to Learn English (TAVEL)
13:00-14:00	TEVAL Plenary Speech by Dr. Trevor G BOND "Using Winsteps to analyse an ESL vocabulary test: A hands-on introduction"						
14:10-14:55	<b>OLE</b> <i>Colloquium</i> Sakai Why do I learn two or more foreign languages?	<b>MW</b> <i>Colloquium</i> Long Writers' Collaborative	<b>PRAG</b> <i>Workshop</i> Matsuoka Communication Apprehension and L2 Willingness to Communicate	<b>Stillwell:</b> 360° of Teacher Awareness (TE)  <b>Kawai</b> Teaching English through Chants (TE)	<b>TEVAL</b> <i>Workshop</i> BOND Using Winsteps to analyze an ESL vocabulary test	<b>Hardy:</b> Don't say that: the local and global for textbook writers (MW2)  <b>Hamada:</b> Group dynamics In high school: A survey study (TE 8)	<b>Skier:</b> Energize Your Students with Power (PRAG)  <b>Loree:</b> Macmillan
15:05-15:55							
16:05-16:55	<b>Langham:</b> Coauthoring a Ministry of Education-approved high school textbook (MW2)	<b>Ross:</b> Junior fiction for university creative writing Classes (MW2)	<b>O'Neill</b> Getting Published in JALT	<b>Nitta:</b> Exploring strategic and on-line planning processes (TEVAL2)	<b>Newfields:</b> Engendering Assessment Literacy (TEVAL2)	<b>Sage:</b> Diffusing washback in Japanese tests (TEVAL2)	<b>Boon:</b> ABAX

# The Pan-SIG Banquet Venue:

Atabora (Italian) Basement Floor 1-1-1 Azuru Sendai Honcho Aoba Sendai 980-0014  
Tel: 022-711-3981

Cost: 4000 yen

What you get: 2-hours of 'all you can drink / nomihodai (beer, wine, whisky, cocktails, soft drinks)', 6-courses: starter, salad, pizza, pasta, main course and dessert. We'll make sure that there is a vegetarian course beyond the salad and dessert.

**Places are limited. Book early to avoid disappointment:** [jimsmiley@pm.tbgu.ac.jp](mailto:jimsmiley@pm.tbgu.ac.jp)

Information (in Japanese) from the restaurant's homepage:  
<http://r.gnavi.co.jp/t087100/menu5.htm>

See you there!

## **Abolish the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) Program?**

**William Matheny, Saya-cho Junior High Schools (Aichi), <wilheny(at)nifty.ne.jp>**

I have experienced many, if not most, of the doubts James Porcaro has about ALT programs and have questioned the goals for team-teaching from the very beginning. For me, the beginning was April 1997. As we approach the start of the '07-'08 school year, I am completing my 10<sup>th</sup> year as an ALT in Aichi Prefecture public junior high schools and am completing year number 7 in my current assignment.

Porcaro's claim that JET and other ALT programs are a waste of taxpayers' money is about 15 years too late, I'd say. If JET ALTs weren't providing some kind of perceptible value, administrators would have alerted the bean counters who in turn would have slammed the brakes on tout de suite. But they didn't, did they? And the innovation grew and took on a life of its own. Then, local governments got into the act, started hiring their own ALTs (or relying on placement agencies) and the thing grew further. Mr Porcaro's complaints are focused on the apparent failure of ALT programs to improve students' "English language proficiency levels" or "the quality of communicative language teaching (CLT)". Is the ALT innovation the only culprit? Well, let's take a look around.

What about the number of hours allotted for EFL study? *Any* instructional innovation is going to have very little impact on the "level" English students achieve unless the number of class hours of instruction rises substantially. For me, that's the Achilles heel of ministry planning. The number of classroom hours needed for the average Japanese learner to achieve communicative ability is well known and the total number of hours devoted to English in schools here is only a fraction of what is needed. But wait! There's more: Since I became an ALT, the number of hours for instruction has been *reduced* from 4 per week to 3. Talk about contradictory behaviour! Monbukagakusho – the national education ministry – is a scream. Hire thousands of ALTs to help improve the foreign language curriculum with one hand and reduce the number of hours for study with the other. We can only laugh – or cry.

What about the testing culture here? Testing is incredibly central to Japanese thinking about education. In the years I have been knocking around in junior high schools, I have evaluated students' speaking skills a few times, but in general oral ability is not tested. Does this have an impact on proficiency levels? If I was a student, would I bother learning to do something if there was no evaluation, if there were no consequences? Perhaps not. Because it's not evaluated – because it doesn't "count" – the time that students spend working on speaking

skills now, should perhaps be regarded as an enrichment activity and nothing more. In a lot of ways, that's what ALTs provide – enrichment activities and yes, such activity can be regarded as frivolous and not the "important and serious endeavor" that some people think the study of English should be. Saying that the study of English is "important" and a "serious endeavor" is an extremely value-laden statement and one that "native" speakers make with unthinking ease.

And what about the question of motivation? Supposedly, ALTs provide motivation and a desirable impetus for growth of communication skills. That assumption perhaps needs to be questioned. If student proficiency levels haven't risen, could it be that ALTs – live, breathing human beings – don't provide sufficient motivation? Also, it was thought that the presence of ALTs would induce a more communicative methodology in the classroom. Has that happened? I believe there has been some research into that area and it has indicated that JTEs tend to fall back on grammar-translation when ALTs are not present.

What about the influence of ALTs on JTE communicative ability? Have JTEs made the strides in communicative competence that were hoped for at the outset of the JET Program? If not, then that, too, may be viewed as a lack of sufficient motivation and/or incentives. ALTs have been available, right? Are the JTEs taking advantage of the resource? Somebody ought to look into that. An incident that occurred in the early days of my sojourn in junior high schools may hint at an answer to that question and may shed light on the attitudes of some toward growth of communicative ability. Speaking in Japanese, a JTE made a point of telling me that oral ability with English is not necessary in Japan – and he was dead serious and looked rather irritated when he said it. Now, how should we regard that statement? A cold, indisputable fact? An obstinate attitude? An attempt to invalidate the ALT innovation? Take your pick.

So, if the ALT innovation has not fulfilled the expectations of the various stakeholders, why has it been allowed to continue for so long? Certainly data on the first 10 years of the JET Program would have verified that the linguistic and methodological aims were not being achieved. Why are schools continuing to employ ALTs – and in some cases, employing the same ALT for years on end? Some ALT cynics have referred to themselves as "decorations" an ornament and part of school decor. This is the atmosphere aspect, I suppose. When an ALT is at school – in a classroom, in the teacher's room, or other location on the grounds – the atmosphere is different from when an ALT is not present. That may be the "internationalization" aspect of ALT programs and one reason people in the schools are continuing to buy into the innovation. Another reason might be the well known notion of



"face" or dignity pervasive in Japanese society and culture. An innovation in teaching materials or methods that is judged ineffective is rather easily and quickly discarded. With the ALT innovation, however, we are talking about living, breathing human beings who may not so easily be rejected. Indeed, for the education system here to discard the ALT innovation, a host of uncomfortable questions would appear. Rejection would be an acknowledgement of failure – a failure to integrate a communicative, “live” language element into the EFL curriculum and Japanese society; a failure to cope with “imported diversity”; and a failure to establish productive and congenial working relationships – with an accompanying loss of face that might just be intolerable to Japanese sensibilities. Abandon the ALT innovation entirely? No. Demand adequate training, expertise, and relevant experience for ALT work? Certainly. Have qualified ELT professionals (who may or may not be “native speakers”) available to consult with and assist local people when they decide to revise their approaches to JTE teacher training? Of course.

The bottom line, I suppose, is this: Porcaro did his job. He's an academic and he got his article published. That's what academics are supposed to do. However, I would say the argument is misdirected. It should be directed at Japanese decision makers and should therefore be written in Japanese. By addressing the ETE and Daily Yomiuri audiences (and the English speaking ALT community within that), Porcaro is arguing to the gallery instead of the jury.

## Applying “Criterion” to Teaching Writing

Takeshi Kamijo, Japan College of Foreign Languages, <tkmatefl(at)aol.com>

### Background of the study

The on-line writing software called ‘Criterion’ produced by ETS has been used by many educational institutions. It is a CALL (Computer-Aided Language Learning) tool which allows students to improve their writing by receiving feedback within 30 seconds of submitting their essays through the web. ‘Criterion’ rates the students’ essay based on such scoring criteria as ‘grammar, usage, and mechanics; styles; organization and development’ (ETS Criterion Website, 2006).

There have been studies on the use of ‘Criterion’ for teaching L 2 writing in the Japanese EFL context (see Benoit, 2004; Kitadai, 2004; Fujita, 2005; Nagamatsu, 2005). These studies looked into the potential advantages and disadvantages of ‘Criterion’ through teachers’ observations and students’ questionnaires. They suggested that teachers should use ‘Criterion’ to facilitate students’ writing with detailed advice and feedback but not as a complete self-study material.

Yet, little research has been done to analyze how teaching methodology may be effectively applied with the use of ‘Criterion’. Such case study examples will help teachers explore the potential for realistic use of ‘Criterion’ in the classroom.

### Writing classroom at bunsai Art College

In September 2004, I began to work at bunsai Art College as an instructor and curriculum developer (In March 2007, bunsai Art College merged with the Japan College of Foreign Languages). At this college, there are approximately 70 students preparing to learn at Art universities abroad. They learn both Art and English and in English studies they take classes such as TOEFL preparation, Art English, Presentation and Composition.

There are four classes divided by the level of English proficiency (Advanced, Intermediate, Lower Intermediate, and Beginner) through a placement test at the beginning of the school term. These classes have the name of artists, as shown below.

Picasso (TOEFL PBT 480-550/Advanced)	15 students
Rodin (TOEFL PBT 430-480/Intermediate)	15 students

Michelangelo (TOEFL PBT 390-430/Lower Intermediate)	18 students
Leonardo (TOEFL PBT 330-390/Beginners)	19 students

At this school, I teach Composition where I have given lessons for TOEFL essay writing. Before teaching writing at bunsai Art College, my work was closely related to the field of EAP, teaching TOEFL and IELTS preparation. So, I have become familiar with the teaching model of Dudley E. and St John (1998) called the 'social-constructionist approach'. I have realized it is extremely effective since it attempts to teach genre in academic writing.

I have used this genre-based teaching methodology for two years in my writing classes (see Kamijo, 2005). In the spring term 2006, I had an opportunity to utilize 'Criterion' for teaching TOEFL essays from May 15<sup>th</sup> to June 2<sup>nd</sup>. 'Criterion' has about 25 essay questions specifically for TOEFL and it is ideal for teaching TOEFL preparation.

During this time, I did some small-scale research by using my teaching records and a questionnaire to study how effective this CALL tool might be.

### **The Study and Research questions**

At bunsai Art College, the computer facility was limited, so students did their writing practice in the classroom and submitted their finished essays through 'Criterion' from their home PCs. I kept the records of the various stages of my teaching from April 17<sup>th</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup>.

My research seeks to answer the following questions:

What are the advantages of 'Criterion' for students' writing?

What are the disadvantages of 'Criterion' for students' writing?

To what extent can the social-constructionist approach to teaching writing be used with 'Criterion'?

### **Literature Review**

In the literature of teaching writing for EAP, there have been two major conflicting approaches. The first one is the product approach in which teachers give students a model composition text, so that students can analyze it and apply the model as a new input for their writing.

So the flow of teaching/learning goes like this:

Model text → Comprehension/Analysis/Manipulation → New Input → Parallel text

(Robinson,1991)

In contrast to the product approach, the process approach has been suggested and applied to develop learners' skills in writing, editing and revising. (Robinson, 1991; Tribble, 1997).

As a result, the flow of the teaching/learning covers:

Writing task → Draft1 → Feedback → Revision → Draft 2 → Feedback → Revision → Final Draft

(Robinson,1991)

In recent developments in teaching writing for EAP, students are encouraged to show an awareness of the reader-writer relationship in the academic discourse community and learn the academic genre (Swales, 1990; Tribble, 1997).

The methodology emphasizing genre analysis and cognitive learning development is called the 'social constructionist approach', which is suggested by Dudley and St John (1998). They define the discourse community and writing constraints,

Writing is a social act in which writers have to be aware of the context in which they are writing. That context places certain constraints on what writers can write and on the ways in which they can express ideas (1998:117).

They also mention the advantages of the approach, as it incorporates both product and process elements in teaching writing,

The social constructionist approach has reintroduced the idea of examining the end product in a way that is much more acceptable than the old model-and-imitation approach used in early teaching of writing. It has also, as we have noted, extended the focus on the reader to take on board the discourse community (1998:118).

They summarize the sequence of teaching in the following manner:

- Develop *rhetorical awareness* by looking at model texts;
- Practice specific *genre features*, especially moves and writer stance;
- Carry out writing tasks showing awareness of the *needs of individual readers and the discourse community and the purpose of the writing*;and

- Evaluate the writing (through *peer review* or *reformulation*) (1998:118)

The approach of Dudley and St. John (1998) includes evaluation through peer review or reformulation. It provides students with writing texts based on required academic genre features. The key element is to compare desirable L2 writing with students' own writing.

### **Results through teaching records and questionnaire**

There were four major phases in my teaching through the spring term from April 17<sup>th</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup>. During this time, I used Criterion from May 15<sup>th</sup> to June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Students' were given questionnaires about 'Criterion' in the first week of July.

#### **Stage 1 April 17<sup>th</sup> to May 12<sup>th</sup>**

I taught basic knowledge of academic writing in terms of two major writing structures: Argumentation and Exposition. There are 185 possible essay titles for the TOEFL test, but examinees are given a single title. Examinees are required to write an essay of 300-400 words in 30 minutes. Among these questions, 160 involve Argumentation while 25 concern Exposition.

In the spring term, students received lectures mainly about the rhetorical structure of Argumentation essays. Also, I gave students sample essays showing the essay organization mainly for argumentation. The sample essays include the essential moves for developing an argumentation essay.

During this stage, the research paper by Allister Cumming et.al, (2001) was applied in the lessons to explain the needs of the readers, the score raters of TOEFL essays, who evaluate writing. In the paper, several examples of the score raters' comments were provided as to how they evaluated the essays. In the class, I discussed with students concerning how essay raters approach the TOEFL essays through the transcribed think-aloud data given in this paper.

#### **Stage 2 May 15<sup>th</sup> to June 2<sup>nd</sup>**

After lessons in April, students learned how to organize their argumentation essays and did some paper-based essay writing practice. From May 15<sup>th</sup>, they had orientation as to how they would use the CALL software 'Criterion'. I gave students their registration and ID numbers to begin their practice through on-line writing. There were 5 to 6 essay assignments all of which were based on Argumentation essay questions.

During the three-week intensive use of 'Criterion', I noticed some benefits. First, students received the explicit score rate and feedback promptly, so it helped them notice the required elements for their essays. Also, they were able to rewrite their essays and submit them again by referring to teachers' feedback comments. Some students did their writing through this web-based practice twice. As they improved their scores by resubmitting essays, they could clarify the improving points of their essays.

In argumentation essays, writers are required to provide reasons and specific examples to support their views. Most students initially were not able to provide sufficient details to support their reasons, so they merely wrote a summarized message, not an argumentative essay. When they gave their own experiences, as well as observations and information from the media in their essays to support the reasons, they received higher scores.

Stage 3 June 5<sup>th</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup>

While there were some advantages to using 'Criterion', I also found some disadvantages. In particular, 'Criterion' did not provide detailed feedback for correcting students' grammar and it did not read the content of the essay as the human essay raters did. Accordingly, sometimes students' essays might receive higher scores despite some weaknesses in grammar and elements of essay content.

As the result, after three-weeks of 'Criterion', I gave students essay practice through paper-based writing in the classroom from the beginning of June. I thought that students gained the benefit of learning how to write argumentative essays through 'Criterion'. This was usefully applied within the context of the socio-cultural approach for facilitating noticing.

At the next stage, more practice and detailed feedback should be necessary, so I decided to use paper-based activities instead of the web-based 'Criterion' and I gave detailed feedback on their submitted essays.

Stage 4 July 3<sup>rd</sup> to July 7<sup>th</sup>

Individual counseling sessions were provided during the first and second week of July. These were not regular lessons. During this time, I gave students questionnaires about the use of 'Criterion' concerning its advantages and disadvantages. The questionnaire provided was designed based on previous classroom-based studies undertaken about the application of 'Criterion' (Kitadai, 2004; Fujita, 2005; Nagamatsu, 2005).

The questionnaire showed that students regarded the prompt feedback of their essay score,

grammar and other elements to be helpful and thus to be advantageous. Also, becoming more familiar with the use of the computer for writing is a clear benefit. On the other hand, the survey indicated that potential disadvantages included its lack of check on essay content and grammar, difficulty to understand feedback, and weak feedback on essay structure.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In this paper, the researcher has studied the effectiveness of 'Criterion' for teaching writing during the spring term at bunsai Art College (bAC). Like previous studies, the technical advantages and weaknesses have been considered through the use of this web-based software material for classroom teaching. In this research, however, another key element, teaching methodology, was also analyzed.

In the study, both teaching records and a questionnaire were applied to answer the research questions. Through using teaching records, the researcher found that the prompt feedback of the score and writing skills by 'Criterion' was helpful. Especially, it proved effective role in helping students notice the needed rhetorical structure in an argumentative essay. Still, the researcher learned that 'Criterion' has drawbacks in its feedback on grammar and content.

From the questionnaire similar results were provided. Students found the prompt feedback and the increased familiarity with computers to be useful. Contrary to these advantages, there were some weaknesses of grammar and content evaluation, and students mentioned that they experienced some difficulty to grasp the feedback.

Summarizing the above, it may be said that 'Criterion' can be applied effectively through the social-constructionist approach to teaching writing. Nevertheless, teachers should recognize the necessity of more detailed feedback to help students' internalize learning. Further research on the facilitative use of 'Criterion' in teaching methodology should help to further explore this matter.

As Otoshi (2005a: 31) reminds us:

Burstein et al. (2003) argues, Criterion is intended to be an aide, not a replacement for teacher writing assessment/ error feedback. Therefore, both researchers and practitioners should have critical attitudes toward *Criterion* when they use it.

## Appendix

### Results of the questionnaire

In the first week of July, I gave questionnaires concerning the use of 'Criteria' to the students in four classes at bunsai Art College. There were several students absent in each class, so the number of the students was: 12 students (Picasso), 11 students (Rodin), 16 students (Michelangelo) and 14 students (Leonardo) respectively.

In the first question, the advantages of 'Criterion' were given. The categories of these advantages were taken from previous studies (Kitadai, 2004; Fujita, 2005; Nagamatsu, 2005). Students were asked to give the replies 'Yes', 'No', or 'Don't know' to the question whether they thought these were good points of 'Criterion'. Below figures show the number of students in four classes who answered 'Yes' to the categories.

1) Advantages of the CALL tool 'Criterion'		Number of students (%)
Picasso (Advanced)	Becoming familiar with computer	12 (100)
	Fast feedback of grammar and spelling	12 (100)
	Practicing writing at my own pace	11 (91.6)
	Prompt feedback of essay score	11 (91.6)
Rodin (Intermediate)	Prompt feedback of essay score	11 (100)
	Fast feedback of grammar and spelling	10 (90.9)
	Practicing writing at my own pace	9 (81.8)
	Becoming familiar with computer	9 (81.8)
Michelangelo (Lower intermediate)	Prompt feedback of essay score	16 (100)
	Becoming familiar with computer	15 (93.7)
	Practicing writing at my own pace	14 (87.5)
	Fast feedback of grammar and spelling	12 (75)
Leonardo (Beginner)	Becoming familiar with computer	12 (85.7)
	Prompt feedback of essay score	10 (71.4)
	Practicing writing at my own pace	10 (71.4)
	Fast feedback of grammar and spelling	10 (71.4)

In the second question, the limitations of 'Criterion' were indicated. The categories of limitations were taken from previous studies (Kitadai, 2004; Fujita, 2005 and Nagamatsu, 2005). Again, students were asked to provide the answers 'Yes', 'No', or 'Don't know' to the



question whether they thought these were the weak points of 'Criterion. The figures below indicate the number of students who answered 'Yes' to the respective categories of disadvantages.

2) Disadvantages of the CALL tool 'Criterion'		Number of students (%)
Picasso (Advanced)	Insufficient check on essay content	10 (83.3)
	Being unable to check detail grammar	7 (58.3)
	Being unable to check detail structure	5 (41.6)
	Limited number of essay questions	5 (41.6)
Rodin (Intermediate)	Having difficulty to grasp the feedback	8 (72.7)
	Insufficient check on essay content	8 (72.7)
	Being unable to check detail grammar	5 (45.5)
Michelangelo (Lower Intermediate)	Inappropriate feedback	5 (45.4)
	Being unable to check detail grammar	10 (62.5)
	Limited number of essay questions	10 (62.5)
	Having difficulty to grasp the feedback	7 (43.7)
Leonardo (Beginner)	Insufficient check on essay content	6 (37.5)
	Being unable to check detail grammar	11 (78.5)
	Having difficulty to grasp the feedback	10 (71.4)
	Insufficient check on essay content	9 (64.2)
	Being unable to check detail structure	9 (64.2)

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# **Japanese Curriculum Policy: the Problem, the Reason, and the Solution**

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This essay will show how Japanese curriculum policy for language in education fails to correspond to both theory and classroom practice, and, is, therefore, inapplicable to school situations. First, I will describe how motivational levels for studying English among Japanese elementary school students decline in tandem with increases in their age, due to awkward teaching strategies employed in the classroom. Second, I will argue that students find that teaching methodologies used by Japanese instructors of the English language do not encourage conversational skills and are unsuccessful at making foreign-language lessons relevant to their lives and interests. Third, I will place the problem of declining motivational levels in a larger theoretical context. Fourth, I will recommend 1) the adoption of a new training system that promotes Task-based Language Teaching; and 2) an initiative that links increased resources to overall school performance and evaluation scores. And, fifth, I will draw attention to how change will affect the participants involved in the educational process.

## **Introduction**

How do linguists researching second language learning define motivation? Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert's study (as cited in Brown, 2006) looked at motivation as an element of various viewpoints and they categorized two broad kinds of attitudes, what has become widely known as "instrumental and integrative orientations," or contexts "to motivation" (Brown, 2006: 170). The instrumental aspect of the description relates to learning an additional language for a practical reason, such as career advancement, academic success, or to translate a document. The integrative unit describes people interested in foreign-language mastery, in order to become more fully a part of the culture of the target language. But can either part of the instrumental-integrative equation single-handedly account for the overall success or failure of second language learning?

There are a number of reasons the answer to that question is a crisp "no". Research (Brown, 2006; Carreira, 2006; Cook, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Shumann, 1986) reveals that, contrary to popular opinion, motivation alone does not determine general success or failure, but it does have a significant impact on the outcome of foreign language acquisition, when combined with other factors, such as "individual learners, educational contexts, cultural milieu, teaching methodology, and social interaction" (Brown, 2006: 172).

The research of Junko Matsuzaki Carreira (2006) showed that the motivation of about 345

Japanese elementary school students for learning English as a foreign language decreased in tandem with an increase in their age. Thus, the older the students got, the less interested they were in studying English. Carreira used a questionnaire in her study that focused in distinct categories on intrinsic motivation, instrumental motivation, interest in foreign countries, and anxiety (Carreira, 2006). The results demonstrated that a drop in enthusiasm for students in higher grades stemmed from outside influences such as, education, teachers, parents, peers, and the classroom. Carreira's study reported that what could reverse the negative phenomenon is a change in teaching methodology, materials and environment. Why? That is the case because "exciting games and fun tasks" characterized the lessons of students in the lower grades and, in turn, sustained a high level of motivation (Carreira, 2006: 150). Students in upper grades, however, became less interested in studying English not because the language itself was not stimulating, but because classroom instruction failed to make a relevant connection between the textbook and the lives of the students. Instead, teachers taught the higher grades using aspects of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), a large part of which involved learning and memorizing rules and facts (Richards and Rogers, 2001). Students found that approach tedious because it did not match context and ideas, in a meaningful way, to their interests.

The Japanese Ministry of Education's (MOE) language-in-education policy of 1999 emphasized communicative abilities and understanding (Hinkel, 2005). The purpose was to 1) "give more importance to listening and speaking, without neglecting reading and writing"; 2) to concentrate on "teaching more clearly in specific terms so that it may be more effective"; and 3) to "foster a positive attitude toward mastery of a foreign language, and enhance their understanding of foreign countries by developing their interest in language and culture both at home and abroad," according to Shimaoka (as cited in Hinkel, 2005: 1018). One problem with that grand plan is the actual amount of time available for foreign language study at public Japanese secondary schools. Hinkel (2005) observed that the combined total of teaching hours dedicated solely to such study is about 625 hours over a period of six years. That comes down to about three hours a week of foreign language study for students in both lower and upper secondary schools, in each of the three years, with one more hour allocated to the first and last years (Hinkel, 2005). Under that kind of minimal schedule, instructors and parents would be forgiven for having the lowest of expectations concerning any inroads into the second language. Looked at in a different way, expectations of students producing in the second language with a good facility, would be unlikely. A second problem involves the teaching staff. In Japan, people become English teachers through a multiple-choice examination given locally by the board of education (Hinkel, 2005). However, in spite of nominal uniformity in English-language knowledge, production, and teaching ability, results

are inconsistent. As a result, many Japanese instructors of English lack a mastery of the language they are hired to teach. Their limited control of the English language leads to a presentation in the classroom of "decontextualized grammar and vocabulary, the latter intended to inculcate as many words as possible (minimum 1,000 words by the end of junior high school), but without any sense of their connotative meanings or their frequency and distribution" (Hinkel, 2005: 1017).

A third conflict with the MOE's curriculum policy is teaching methodology. Japanese teachers of English at secondary schools in Japan today use a combination of the GTM and the Audiolingual Method. What are common characteristics of the GTM? Some features of that instructional approach, as explicated by Richards and Rodgers (2001), are: memorizing words, rules, and facts; reading and writing, primarily, with hardly any focus on speaking and listening skills; translating sentences into and from the target language; and, throughout the lessons, receiving instruction always in the native language of the student. The Japanese MOE's educational reform stressed communicative abilities and giving more importance to speaking, but with the GTM "little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 6). Furthermore, the method is without a theory. What that means is that there "is no literature that offers a rational or justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 7).

The Audiolingual Method, on the other hand, anchors itself in a notion that language acquisition results from a reaction to stimulus and different stages of conditioning and reinforcement (Yule, 1996). One feature of this approach, as with the GTM, is "memorizing dialogues and performing pattern drills," which supporters of the theory think limits mistakes (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 57). The student's role is not to generate the direction of conversation, but to listen to and repeat after the teacher, who dominates the lesson's direction and pace, even if they fail to comprehend the meaning of what they are imitating. By doing that as well as fixed activities, students are conditioned into a novel way of speaking. A major criticism of the Audiolingual Method is that it hardly accounts for any *creative* aspects of language use. In short, it does not resemble real communication.

According to Neil Anderson (2005), here is how Einstein defined insanity: "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results" (Anderson, 2005: 757). Let me not be misread. The GTM and the Audiolingual Method certainly have good and useful points. But, when the goal is conversation, those instructional approaches don't match the promoted purpose of Japanese English-language classes. Furthermore, in the hands of some

inexperienced Japanese teachers unfamiliar with how to vary lessons, and how to keep them relevant, there is a considerable drop in student enjoyment and enthusiasm. Thus, the motivational levels of students studying the English language, at domestic public elementary schools in Japan, decline in proportion to a rise in their age (Carreira 2006).

In all fairness, those same students may be affected by a kind of anxiety unrelated to teaching methodology. Gardner and MacIntyre, as well as Horwitz and Cope (as cited in Oxford, 1999) stated that language anxiety is a fear connected exactly to using, or expecting to use, the foreign language students aim to acquire. According to Oxford (1999), teachers of second languages can take active roles toward reducing the negative effects of language anxiety. They can be extremely clear about goals and methods on how students can achieve them; encourage relaxation through games and laughter; praise students, when appropriate; execute activities that incorporate many different learning styles and strategies; provide portions of time within the lesson for uninterrupted and uncorrected speaking time; and increase student confidence by offering many chances for success (Oxford, 1999).

What are some ways to resolve the problems between Japanese educational policy for primary and secondary schools, instructional theory, and classroom practice? First, the establishment of a new teacher training system for foreign language education in Japan is necessary. An updated system will expose Japanese teachers of English to the Task-based Teaching Method (TBLT), before dispatching them into domestic secondary schools. Features of the TBLT are "activities that involve real communication"; "activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promoting learning"; and supporting second language learners with "language that is meaningful" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 223). Notice that speaking and making efforts to speak with other people form the foundation of TBLT. Willis (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001) offers six types of tasks: listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks. Pica, Kangy, and Falodun (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001) divide tasks into interactive types: jigsaw ones which involve learners putting together different parts of information to make a whole; information gap tasks which give students different sets of complementary information and get them to find out what the other has in order to finish the activity; problem-solving tasks which mean that students receive a set of information along with a problem they must solve; decision-making tasks which prompt students to discuss a problem and negotiate an outcome; opinion exchange tasks which have students exchange and discuss information, without necessarily reaching an agreement. Another feature of a task is whether it is based in reality or not. That is whether it "mirrors a real world activity or is a pedagogical activity not found in the real world" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 235).

Teachers will learn how to select and sequence tasks; prepare students for activities; and raise the consciousness of students by focusing on the process of the task rather than on form. Students who are exposed to such TBLTs will assume many different roles of group participant, monitor, and a kind of taker of risk by creating and interpreting information (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). One example of an activity anchored in this method might involve the use of a newspaper to get students to prepare their weekend plans by using the entertainment section.

In addition to the creation of a new teacher-training program run by people knowledgeable about TBLT, there will be regular teacher evaluations. Ineffective teachers will receive more training. If performance problems continue over a period of time, despite their own extended efforts as well as those on the part of the training division, then, first their pay will be lowered. If the same problems persist, after that point, the possibility of job loss will become an option. A second mandatory component to reverse declining motivation for students studying English at Japanese elementary schools is for the Ministry of Education to link resource allocation to annual individual school performance. What that means is that the amount of money public schools receive will become based on whether they achieve agreed upon academic goals or not. Schools that reach their goals will get awards as well as increased funding, while those that do not will not only receive less funding, but will have their principals, superintendents, and educational board members removed ("Spitzer", 2007).

Fink and Stoll (1998) report that weak assessment methods hurt school efforts to promote change. Yet, when the overall goal is better school performance, a starting point is assessment approaches used positively, "rather than using assessment to find weaknesses, place blame, and promote guilt," instead, "change agents need to work with teachers to find more appropriate ways to use assessments to promote students' learning" (Fink & Stoll, 1998: 316). Still, there exists a discrepancy between the meaning of change for authors and for implementers (Evan, 1996). We view in a favorable way changes we demand from other people, but changes that other people demand from us we regard unfavorably (Evan, 1996). Who will be affected by the changes noted above, in response to the problem of declining motivation as age increases at Japanese elementary schools? All participants have something to lose in the short term. They will all lose a certain level of comfort, familiarity, and, in some cases, indifference previously enjoyed, as a period of accountability gets implemented. School superintendents and principals will be issued a report card of sorts, on which they will need to maintain certain grades or risk reduced funding from the Japanese Ministry of Education or, worse, dismissal. Teachers will have to open themselves up to new

and fresh teaching strategies that they can execute in the classroom. Those who have associated length of time in the education sector with teaching ability will find themselves in beginner positions, which could hurt their egos. The process will certainly require a lot of effort. Negative evaluations will produce more training before negative consequences. Students will no longer be able to place the blame solely on teachers for any potential low performance and lack of understanding. They will have to work towards becoming independent learners, who rely less on teachers for direction and for overall instruction. Taking control of their own learning schedules will ultimately empower them. None of the changes will matter if parents allow an atmosphere of anti-intellectualism at home, that is, long hours of television viewing, electronic game playing, and internet surfing. They will have to enforce in their own homes the standards that they demand from schools. Reactions of resistance, mixed feelings, as well as bouts of uncertainty are good and needed for successful adjustment (Evan, 1996). Negative responses should be seen as "a part of the solution, not just part of the problem" (Evan, 1996: 38).

## **Conclusion**

This essay 1) described a problem at Japanese elementary schools by drawing attention to policy and theoretical contexts; 2) depicted the reasons for the problem; and 3) recommended solutions.

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## **A Review of the JALT 2006 Conference**

**Ben Backwell and Kathi Emori**

Held on the Southern Island of Japan, this venue in Kitakyushu proved to be an impressive and expansive site. First impressions of many attendees were that of modern industrial tones mixed with a view of the port and the very cool architecture that focused on light and glass. The warm sun added a calming sense of comfort and relaxation where attendees could sit back and absorb all the knowledge from the experts in the field around them. It was a lovely short walk to the Conference Center, and quite an easy one, as there were signs all along the road pointing you in the right direction. The weather, at least on Friday and Saturday, was gorgeous without a cloud in the sky. The meetings and presentations were spread out across two buildings that offered a nice walk but not so far that it wasn't manageable to get to the other building for some presentation that you really wanted to see. The facilities and amenities were very friendly and welcoming as well, and I know that we enjoyed a lovely banana muffin and a steaming cup of coffee in the main hall Saturday morning while chatting with colleagues about things we could do in the SIGs. The service was always very attentive and the students helping out were quite patient with my debating of the "banana" or the "blueberry"... they both looked so good!

### **Drawing Connections between Presentations**

#### **Friday: Child-inspired Materials & Language Learning Presentations**

Now, on to the important bits: How were the presentations? Here is a report on what I saw and did. I arrived on Friday afternoon just in time for the Teacher's Education SIG AGM which was mainly concentrating on filling officer posts and thinking about having another mini-conference this year. That evening, I attended two separate presentations that used a common theme to get to a different end: the first was "Improving Communication Skills using Dr. Seuss" with Paul Tanner and Rusty Notestine and the second was "Human Rights, Disney and You!" with Matthew White. Both were using child-based materials or themes to bring out English skills in their university students.

The Dr. Seuss presentation was very informative on the intonation/pronunciation and fluency the students will gain from practicing and performing books by Dr. Seuss. This classroom idea supports what Brazil (1997) and others bring up in their research on intonation and tones. I found this particularly interesting because in all of the drama classes that I teach, I find that students' timing and rhythm are at their weakest in their performances and reading

#### **Explorations in Teacher Education**

of scripts. This rolls over into their attempts to converse in English as well. The use of Dr. Seuss is very beneficial in its repetition of lines as well, which Tanner and Notestine both pointed out. A dilemma for students is knowing what is considered “old” and “new” information, this is crucial in their ability to use rising and falling tones. The use of scripts and children’s books really draws on this awareness-raising need, which can then be carried over into the conversations the students have in English. Dr. Seuss materials are strongly based on repetition and vocabulary recycling, helping raise awareness of intonation and tones, as well as individual sound pronunciation practice.

“Human Rights, Disney and You!” with Matthew White may also sound like child-material based, however I think many attendees were slightly surprised when actually what White was gearing up for was an amazing look at how to introduce social issues to our students. I find many times that attendees are not that careful in their selection of presentations to go to, and they see “Disney” and may think – ‘I teach children, this should be useful’. This presentation was different because of the high-energy and enthusiastic style of White, and everyone quickly fell deep into the ‘human rights’ issues that our students sometimes do not have any knowledge of. With a hair-raising fast-paced cutting out of Mickey Mouse heads from a paper, and White chastising us for moving slowly in his role as sweat shop manager, we quickly found ourselves entrenched in role plays with the feeling of being sweatshop workers. Followed up by an investigation of our clothes’ manufacturing countries, we all became highly sensitive to the fact that our students would definitely be surprised by this knowledge and sweatshop ‘torture’, for lack of a better word. They might ask themselves now, what has this got to do with English teaching and English language classroom work? This all tied perfectly into tasks that White would have his students working on throughout the course, a multi-skilled lesson repertoire for these ideas really showed clarity in thought about the students’ language learning needs as well as consciousness-raising needs. From reading newspaper articles, to discussions of preconceived opinions, to writing scripts and role-plays, to letter writing to companies and other organizations around the world, to follow-up discussion and writing more post-task impressions, the students would leave this course with a full-range of knowledge of social issues from around the world as well as a new ability to talk with meaning and enthusiasm about topics they found particularly important to them. This whole presentation really drew a balance between task-based learning and meaning-based learning that would help students in moving their explicit knowledge into their implicit knowledge base and usage of English. On top of that, they would leave with White’s eagerness to talk about these issues and spread the word.

### **Moving on to Saturday: Active and Autonomous Learning based Presentations**

After a pleasant dinner out at a local restaurant on Friday evening, which had a nice buffet and an all-you-can-drink special (which was taken advantage of quite heartily by all in attendance), everyone meandered into the Saturday sessions with a ... ahem... clear head and of course desire to absorb more of what the presenters had planned for them. For me, after my scrumptious muffin, I headed to the “The Active Learner: Strategies Training” with Don Maybin. He introduced his textbook “The Active Learner: Communication Strategies for the Real World” published by Macmillan Language House. I happen to run a self-access center at the university I work at, and I am also a Learner Advisor, where I spend most of my time working with students to develop self-study programs and independent learning skills. Maybin’s title and brief introduction in the conference handbook targeted people just like me, looking for materials to use in the classroom or (as in my case) put in my self-access center for students to use. I wondered if his book was self-study friendly, and went along to learn more about his ideas on active learning as well. This played right into the last presentation I went to for the day, “Student Insights into Learner Autonomy” with Ellen Head and Eiko Okumura. I’ll first point out the question I left the conference with after attending both of these presentations: What is active learning and what is independent / autonomous learning? What are the differences?

Active learning has become the new hotbed of research in the field, and Autonomous learning has been growing for a number of years, hence the springing up of Self-Access centers around the world and conferences dedicated solely to the idea of independent learning. Maybin clearly understood that the students need to be told explicitly “this is active learning” – therefore he put it in the title. The students are held responsible from the beginning of his textbook to take an ‘active’ role in the lesson and material usage. The students were also brought through several stages of active skill development and each chapter of the text built on the previous one to reinforce the student’s ability to move on to being an independent learner. In my opinion, this is a first crucial step in creating autonomous learners. I have found in my advising that students could not start studying on their own if they did not already have a background in active learning skills, which are usually introduced and solidified in an active learning based classroom. Once the students have actually been exposed to this style of learning, they can then move into the Autonomous learning arena. In fact, from my experience at my university – we went backwards. We started a self-access center with self-study advising and the students were extremely dependent on the advisor, however, once we revamped the curriculum to include more active learning skill development, similar to that in Maybin’s textbook, we found that the advisor became an obsolete role – now I mainly recommend materials for the students to use, rather

than teaching them how to use them. This is a stage where they have moved from being active to being more independent. They basically need time-management skills as the final step to becoming an independent learner. (See Venema's article in *The Language Teacher*, March, 2007 for more information on curriculum development at the university level.)

You may be thinking, where is this going in connection to the conference? I will tie up now with my experience at the Head and Okumura presentation that focused on students' thoughts on autonomous learning. Based on my experiences, unless the students have actually had some exposure to active learning, and then work with more structured self-study – it will be hard for them to give an opinion on the usefulness of autonomous learning. For example, I myself have never tried the bench press at my local gym and if someone asked me “Do you think it would be useful to develop your upper body muscles?” I would say whole-heartedly “Sure!” However, that opinion would solely be based on assumptions and the fact that the trainer said to me beforehand “this will help your muscle development”. I would not actually know from first hand experience. Plus, if I went home, and picked up a heavy box once and said “yes, I've tried weight lifting and it's useful” – any experienced weight lifter and/or trainer would say “she has no idea what she is talking about.” Again, this analogy figures in my impression of Head's and Okumura's presentation. Great thought and time went into the research that they thoughtfully drew out for us; however I saw one flaw in the design. Similar to the weight-lifting story, the students were asked “Do you think Japanese students develop independent learning skills?”, “When do you think autonomous learning should be introduced?”, “What do you think of *yutori kyoiku* (relaxed education)?” (among other questions). The students overwhelmingly answered positively to the first question because again, lifting weights is an obvious way to get bigger muscles. The second question brought a majority to the elementary school age conclusion, but why? It sounds better, the earlier the better. And the final question I have indicated above found the majority of students thinking that *yutori kyoiku* was bad. This seems a bit odd though because the age group of students being interviewed probably were not exposed to that much of the new relaxed education standards. How did they draw their conclusions? - not from experience I imagine but from what they have heard in the media.

Finally, my last point of wondering about the conclusion of the research that the majority of students thought that ‘autonomous learning is useful’ is based on the questionnaire's opening point. In the beginning of the questionnaire the students were given a definition of “learner autonomy” as: “being able to decide what to learn, and planning how to learn it ... for example, choosing what to study, studying or practicing a language outside class time.” I found this definition fine but thinking of myself lifting a box at home and concluding “yes,

bench pressing will help me get bigger muscles” and coming to the realization that perhaps these students probably do not truly grasp this autonomous concept and what it means, my early-forming theory was then supported when a comment by a student in the research was “yes, I think independent learning is good, I often do it when I am writing my presentation for homework for my class”. This clearly showed that the student did not understand the difference between independent learning and just doing homework. In-class work and at-home work is not the defining point for independent/autonomous learning and the definition above stating “outside class time” does not clearly point out this difference, but rather may interfere in the students’ ability to accurately answer the questions. I am not trying to put down the research presented, but put it more into my context – do my students really understand what it means to be an active learner or autonomous learner? I worried about this gap.

Considering the weight-lifting analogy again, I would find it difficult to answer questions on the “in’s” and “out’s” of muscle development if I had not actually tried it myself and was fully aware of the techniques and styles associated with it. This was my thinking concerning the students’ questionnaire as well – however, not wanting to sound too negative here, I think that this questionnaire used as a post-course information seeking device for students that have gone through an intense active learning program and introduction to self-study/independent learning skill development would be quite beneficial. Perhaps, the idea of “active learning” as presented by Maybin and “autonomous learning” as presented by Head and Okumura present a gap in this area of research being talked about furtively by many teachers and researchers. What is the difference between “active learning” and “autonomous learning” and when, how, and where do we put it in our curriculums? I became highly aware of this question and feel grateful to the speakers in both presentations that they had motivated me to try and answer that through trying it out myself and applying it to my context. I hope others will now go out and look for the answers as well. I do not feel qualified or experienced enough to present an end-all be-all answer here, but I decided to start a bench-pressing routine this March!

### **Summing up Friday and Saturday**

I did attend other presentations as well, such as the plenary speakers on Saturday, which were very well-organized and insightful, even at some points extremely moving. I enjoyed the Backwell and Gage presentation on peer-tutoring and also found the Sim presentation on Tailoring English Education for Japanese Learners a good look at cross-cultural ideas towards language learning. But, as I indicated in the text above, I want to focus on an important aspect of attending presentations at conferences like this: comparisons and

contrasts of different ideas being researched allow us to gather what works for us as individual language instructors in the classroom. Everything that we hear and do at these presentations is an offering of what worked for someone else in their classroom, and it may not work for us, but we should look at how we can tailor it to fit our needs as instructors and needs for our students. At these presentations, are we active learners or independent learners and do we really know how to evaluate what we have heard until we have taken it home and bench-pressed it for a few weeks? I think in the following section on Sunday's events, Ben Backwell will show how he did take the techniques home and try them out, not only in his classroom but also personally as well. I thoroughly enjoyed the conference and left inspired to dive deeper into these issues in my classrooms, in my research and in my fitness training program.

## **Two Workshops on Sunday**

### **Brad Deacon: Demonstration workshop of "The Active and Responsible Self -Evaluation List".**

It's your language class. You are teaching when suddenly a big bee flies in and terrorizes your students, buzzing around their heads. What do you do?

Sunday at JALT started for me sitting in a horseshoe shape with fifteen other participants. Brad Deacon opened his workshop by telling "The Bee Story." This moment of challenge came from his Nagoya classroom several weeks previously, when a giant, black bee buzzed in through the open window. Brad's students immediately saw the beast and reacted by jumping away and crying out. The students had instantly been taken off task and Brad paused in concern. What was his best response? Should he squash the bee? Should he ignore it and carry on teaching? As we were wrapped up in his story wondering about the best solution Brad moved seamlessly into the main part of the workshop without completing the story, but he promised to give us the ending later on.

The essence of this workshop was that teaching and learning are about relationships. How the relationship between teacher and student will develop is determined to a large degree even before walking into the classroom. This powerful influence is our assumptions, or presuppositions. Drawing from his background in Neuro Linguistic Programming (N.L.P) Brad illustrated the difference in presuppositions of two teachers. Teacher A believes that all students are inherently curious whilst Teacher B assumes that all students are dimwitted. Obviously each teacher will approach their students in a different way and ultimately achieve

differing results with their classes.

In pairs we read a list of helpful teacher presuppositions. Brad suggested that we understand them in the framework of our own contexts. The list of presuppositions included:

- A Resistance is a lack of rapport.
- B The map is not the territory.
- C People make the best choices they can, given their maps at the time.

With a partner we took it in turns to ask each other “What does this presupposition mean to you?” Interpreting and discussing the list with our partner helped us identify and examine our own presuppositions each time we walk into the classroom. This was a five-minute exercise in knowing ourselves as teachers better.

Sometimes the teacher/student relationship suffers difficulties stemming from our assumptions or misunderstandings. We need to find solutions to these problems if unhindered learning is to take place. Brad wanted to concentrate on preventative measures when problem solving. The alternative is for difficulties to arise and then try to find a cure. Often teachers assume there is a mutually accepted set of class rules that is implicitly understood. It is not until problems occur, such as students sleeping in class or chronic tardiness that it becomes apparent the teacher and the students hold different classroom norms.

Effective teachers set norms at the start of the course. The preventative approach Brad espoused comes in the form of a list of desirable, in-class behaviours for students to be aware of. This list is called the Active and Responsible Student Evaluation List (ARSEL). The list was written by the teacher but offered students the opportunity to add any other points they thought valuable. It detailed positive behaviours such as punctuality, using English in the classroom and respecting other class members. A few typical behaviours may well be:



1. I arrived on time.
2. I brought all course materials to class.
3. I asked a question when I didn't understand.

Students at the end of every lesson spend a few minutes filling in the form and rating themselves on a scale of 1 (the lowest) to 10 (the highest). In this way students become more aware of their responsibility in learning and how their behaviour impacts not only their educational outcome but also the class learning as a whole. The list encourages students to take a more independent and interdependent approach to their studies.

Having heard the ARSEL explanation we were now asked to focus on our own contexts. To whet our appetites Brad described various "problem scenarios" in the classroom. We first determined if the scenario was a problem at all and then whose problem it was: the teacher's or the students? The three choices were:

1. No problem
2. I own the problem
3. Other has the problem.

*Situation example:*

You are teaching a class and a student puts his head on the desk. You approach him and explain in your culture it is not acceptable to sleep in class. He replies he was up late last night.

Hearing the scenario we gathered in groups based on our answers, which considered the situation in the same way and discussed why we had chosen a particular answer. It was interesting to note that after the groups had analyzed the problem some people changed their perspective and moved to another group. Also quite often participants felt that both the teacher and the student have a problem.

All this brainstorming led us to create our own ARSELS based upon the individual's contexts.

We had spent time focused on useful teacher suppositions and classroom problems. It was therefore a relatively smooth process for each of us to identify or remember the desired actions and behaviours we would like to see amongst our students.

Figure 1.

<b><i>Desired Actions and Behaviours in Students</i></b>	<b><i>Framed as a Positive First Person Statement</i></b>
Bring textbook and notebook.	I brought my textbook and notebook.
Listen when the teacher is talking.	I listened to the teacher when he spoke.
Understand the homework before leaving the classroom.	I understood what the homework is.
Complete the homework.	I completed my homework.
Arrive on time.	I arrived on time.

It is these first person statements on the right hand side that form the ARSEL. Next to them are boxes for students to grade themselves 1 through 10.

The ARSEL presentation had stimulated our awareness of teacher presuppositions and real classroom problems. By seamlessly weaving together storytelling skills, N.L.P knowledge and his experience of preventative problem solving Brad made a compelling case for the application of the ARSEL. So compelling in fact that time had literally buzzed by and we neared the presentation’s end. There was however the matter of concluding the bee story. What exactly happened once that bee had surprised the students?

First, Brad paused to take in the situation. The students were jumping about and the bee was banging its head against a glass pane. Everybody, bee included, wanted the buzzing visitor to move outside. Brad opened all the windows and soon enough the bee flew out. This is called a “win-win” situation. With a little guidance the bee found its own way out. No more hysterics and certainly no insect squashing. Perhaps this is a good analogy for the power of the ARSEL. With class norms explicit and accepted from the start of a course the path ahead is a gentler one for all involved.

### **Marc Helgerson: Workshop of “E.L.T and the science of Happiness”**

Attending a Marc Helgerson workshop is like standing at a busy crossroads where the heart of the language teacher meets the scientific mind. The flow of both is directed by the imagination. The outcome is to walk away from his workshop carrying unique and exciting techniques and ideas, which echo beyond the confines of the classroom and into everyday life.

It was late on Sunday and although many people had to work the following day, back on Honshu and Shikoku, every seat in the room was taken. Marc’s premise for the presentation was that “Happy students learn more.” Yet for many, the educational pressure cooker often passes by positive self-esteem. Marc stated that any teaching involves a type of educational psychology. A traditional approach of rote memorization, for example, may subconsciously be telling the students that passivity is required in the classroom. On the other hand a cooperative learning base would encourage learners to play a more active role in their education. The important point is to be aware that your teaching sends implicit and explicit messages to your students about how and what to study.

Happy students learn more, enjoy learning and want to continue the process, therefore how can we implement positive psychology in ELT? The answer lies in first responding to another question – What do happy, mentally healthy people do? Drawing on his research from websites, podcasts, books, magazines such as ‘Time’ magazine and personal experience, Marc wrote a chapter in the textbook “*English Firsthand Success*” (2007, Pearson) on this topic.

We, the participants were asked to look at this chapter. As a warm up exercise we drew lines connecting a column of the principles of happiness to a column of activities.

#### **Principles**

#### **Activities**

Do kind things

Exercise, smile, laugh

Remember good things

Help a stranger

Take care of your body

Make a list

Marc then went on to explain how he brings to life these principles. Students are asked to

write a “happiness journal” in which they note down anything that makes them happy. During the course he collects the diaries and students receive bonus points for anything they have written. As Marc put it “Cool – they get extra points for being happy!”

Another principle was “Do kind things.” Research shows that when we take time to make others happy, it often makes the person who is giving, happy too. Marc spoke about the importance of making people who are close to us happy. He also discussed “random acts of happiness” to people we don’t know. Reenacting what takes place in his Hokkaido classroom Marc gave us each 2 chocolates. One was to eat for ourselves and the second was to give to someone else. We could eat our chocolate there and then whilst the second delight was to brighten up another person’s day, be it a close family member or a complete stranger. The story of “Who did you give your second chocolate to?” could then be a warm up or main exercise in the next lesson

One more memorable piece of information passed on to the participants was the practice of “laugh for no reason.” Laughter has many health benefits including relaxing tight shoulder muscles, boosting the immune system and reducing blood pressure. An interesting statistic is that 3 minutes of hearty laughter equals one hour of light exercise in terms of benefits for the heart. We watched a video from Professor Agnew of Seneca College, Toronto ([bethagnewlaughpractice.blogspot.com](http://bethagnewlaughpractice.blogspot.com)) who has dedicated much of her website to explaining and developing the “laugh for no reason” practice. Professor Agnew teaches communication and one of her blog videos reminds her final year students of the importance of laughter during the preparation for their big exams. She then looks into the camera and proceeds to spontaneously chortle, giggle, snigger and roar with laughter for several minutes. Watching this video got us giggling contagiously in our seats. Whether it’s enough to have you rolling around in hysterics on your tatami is up to you.

## **Conclusion**

From attending the JALT 2006 conference I’d like to share two lessons learned on conference going:

1. A good presenter influences his participants more **after** the presentation than during it.
2. To get the most out of attending a presentation the attendee should know what type of learner s/he is

Let's look at the first premise. The key to a great presentation lies in how the audience uses the information once they are back in their teaching contexts. Ask yourself, "How can I use this presentation material in my first lesson tomorrow?" How can I use it the following week, next month and throughout the year? Each presentation is an investment in your teaching. Potentially, it is an investment in your immediate, mid and distant future.

Since returning from the conference my 3<sup>rd</sup> year students have studied Marc's textbook chapter on being happy and each student got two chocolates. When they returned to class the next day I asked "Who did you give the chocolate to?" A surprising number said "To myself" When asked "why?" several replied "Because I love myself and therefore it's natural!" One boy gave his to a girl who was handing out tissues on the high street. He later wrote in his diary "it is nice to make a cute stranger smile." Another boy offered his chocolate to his mother. When she asked the reason for the small gift, thinking on the spot he said "Because you always make my bento." His mum replied that it was the first time in 7 years that he had said thank you for his lunches. He wrote "It's nice not taking good things for granted."

One more way I've applied Marc Helgerson's ideas is his "laugh for no reason" suggestion. This hasn't been passed onto my students yet. Instead it is a secret weapon for dealing with the one "difficult" class in my schedule. Before going to class I take a minute to laugh whilst imagining I'm laughing with those students. Going into the class I then feel better and though no miracles have happened the atmosphere at times has been lighter. Of course it is important to plan a lesson well and adapt to the ever-changing situation but it may also be worthwhile to learn to laugh at serious matters too. As Brad Deacon suggested, better long-term results will come from the teacher who believes all students are curious. Whether true or not I believe a more positive learning environment comes from a teacher who can imagine enjoying time spent with the students, even the "difficult" ones.

The second point on conference going that finally dropped for me at JALT 06 is knowing what type of audience member I am. Gardener (1983) states that there are 3 main types of learner:

Kinesthetic

Auditory

Visual

Gardener (1983) goes on to argue that teachers need to be aware of this to ensure that all these senses are activated during lesson time and that one type of learning style is not ignored. Likewise, going to a conference, a teacher can choose to play to their own

strengths. I am first and foremost a kinesthetic learner. In other words I learn by doing. I search out workshops because generally the audience is actively involved and therefore that's where I will remember the most. How do you learn best? If you love listening to music and have lots of stories on cassette then possibly you are an auditory learner and attending lectures suits you. If you love sports and moving your body then like me workshops could be best. Attending presentations where the content is meaningful **and** the process of learning suits you provides a powerful learning vehicle.

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