Explorations in Teacher Education

JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter

Winter 2008 Volume 16, Issue 1

Contents

And Now a Word from...The Editor

Welcome to Volume 16, Issue 1, the Winter 2008 edition of Explorations in Teacher Education, the newsletter of the JALT Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG).

This issue we have three articles; one from the esteemed former editor, Robert Croker; another from Michelle Segger; and one by Hideo Kojima. We also have four conference reports; three pertaining to JALT 2007 by the recipients of the TE SIG 2007 Travel Grants Scheme; and another by our esteemed former leader, Anthony Robins about the GloCALL 2007 Conference in Vietnam last November.

In the editorial to the last issue I foolishly mentioned a "conference" issue which was intended to appear before the JALT 2007 National Conference. Obviously, I have failed. However, in my defence, it seemed logical to publish the conference reports from the Travel Grant recipients as soon as possible after the conference. In the normal scheme of things and in light of the submissions I had received, that would have been next March, so I elected to hold the issue and re-title it as the Winter 2008 edition.

Though originally planned for before the JALT National Conference, I now find myself completing this issue in the early days of 2008, so Happy New Year and welcome to any new members!

I attended the TE SIG Forum at the conference and listened to interesting talks by John Wiltshier and Steve Cornwell on the theme "Theorizing practice or practising theory – is there a difference in approach?" before the general discussion began. Thanks to the former Program Chair, Colin Graham for his efforts in organizing that. Immediately after the Forum was the TE SIG Annual General Meeting (AGM). The current SIG Officers are as follows:

Coordinator	Colin Graham (formerly Program Chair)
Treasurer	Mike Crawford
Program Chair	Chris Stillwell (formerly Co-coordinator)
Membership Chair	Paul Beaufait
Publications Chair	Simon Lees
Members-at-Large	Jan Visscher
	Tim Knowles

Not many changes then, though Tim Knowles has become a member of the committee in

recognition of his role as moderator of the Yahoo discussion list. Mike Crawford will be responsible for updates to the SIG webpage.

The Yahoo discussion list is available to all members and has been quite active recently. There has been some talk of a mini-conference to be held in Sendai in July next year. If you would like to find out more or contribute to the discussion then please navigate to Yahoo Groups and search for "tedsig". There's a "Join Group" button on the main page.

This newsletter was changed from a print publication to an online publication a few years ago now. A point was raised at the AGM that the current membership might not be aware that they could receive a hard copy of the newsletter if they so wish. So if you would like to receive a hard copy please let me know. You can find my contact details on the contents page and on the back page.

Don't forget that the Pan-SIG Conference is coming up. It's on the 10th and 11th of May in Kyoto and the theme is "Diversity and Convergence: Educating with Integrity". Hope to see you there.

Well, that's about it from me, hope you enjoy the issue.

Simon Lees
Editor

Continuing Professional Development:
Seven Reasons to do a CELTA course

Robert Croker, Nanzan University, Seto Campus <croker at nanzan-u.ac.jp>

Abstract

There are many language instructors working in Japan who have completed a masters or bachelors degree in linguistics or TEFL but have had little or no practical classroom-based language teaching training. What professional development options are available to them? One is to complete the Certificate in English Language Teaching To Adults (CELTA). The CELTA, well known in Europe and Australia, is a pre-requisite for working in many language institutions there, both language schools and universities. This paper briefly introduces the curriculum and assessment of the CELTA, provides an overview of the course itself, then explores the benefits of undertaking the Certificate.

Introduction

Although I had completed a Masters of Applied Linguistics (by distance education) and worked full-time at a Japanese university for seven years, until February this year I had never taken any practical language teaching training courses specifically focused upon improving my classroom teaching. I had consistently attended conferences and mini-workshops, read professional journals, and arranged for colleagues to come in and observe my classes, but there were still many areas of my teaching practice that I wanted to improve, in particular developing a deeper understanding of grammar, a more efficient approach to presenting new language, and a stronger capacity for organising practice opportunities.

Colleagues who had completed the CELTA suggested that it specifically addressed these three areas. As I thought that the CELTA was only an initial teacher training certificate, though, I concluded that it would probably be too easy for me and not really very beneficial. But then in November last year a CELTA trainer came to our campus for a month of teacher observations, and also led four CELTA-type workshops. I found these workshops to be systematic and practical, and addressed exactly what I wanted to improve in my own teaching practice. So setting aside my reservations I decided to enrol in a CELTA course. After checking out the CELTA homepage list of courses < http://cambridgeesol-centres.org/centres/teaching/index.do>, I found a four-week full-time CELTA course that was going to be held in February this year at the Language Centre at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. As it turned out, it was one of the most challenging professional

experiences I have ever had, and also one of the most worthwhile. It led me to think that doing a CELTA course could be a valuable professional development experience for early- and mid-career language instructors based here in Japan. The purpose of this paper, then, is to briefly introduce the CELTA, and list the seven things from the CELTA that I have found most beneficial since I returned to my classroom here.

What is the CELTA?

The Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) is designed to be a practical qualification for people with little or no previous experience teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language. It is awarded by Cambridge ESOL, part of Cambridge University. The CELTA is offered in over 250 centres around the world, from Argentina to Vietnam, and over 10 000 people complete a CELTA course each year. You can take the CELTA fulltime, typically over four to five weeks, or part-time, which may take from three months to over a year. In Japan, it is presently offered full-time and part-time in Tokyo at the British Council < http://www.britishcouncil.org/japan-teach-english-elt-celta-details.htm>, and part-time in Kobe at Language Resources < http://www.languageresources.org/>.

The CELTA is widely accepted internationally because of its standardized curriculum, available for download from the CELTA homepage:
<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teaching/celta.htm>. The focus of a CELTA course is on providing practical language teaching training. The homepage states that the CELTA:

- teaches you the principles of effective teaching
- provides a range of practical skills for teaching English to adult learners
- gives you hands-on teaching practice
- builds your confidence

In my case, over the course of four weeks, I attended forty practical teaching workshops, observed thirty hours of teaching, taught six hours, and had six hours of individual tutoring to prepare for this teaching practice.

Another reason the CELTA is so widely accepted is because assessment is consistent across all CELTA centres. An external assessor, appointed by Cambridge ESOL, evaluates the teaching and assessment on each course. Assessment is continual, and there is no final examination. There are two major components of assessment – six hours of teaching practice, and four written assignments which focus on adult learning, the language system of English, language skills, and classroom teaching. Each assignment usually takes about two to three hours to complete. To be awarded the Certificate you must pass both the teaching

practice and the written assignment components, and there are three passing grades - Pass, Pass 'B' and Pass 'A'.

A day on a CELTA course

"When I arrived at the Language Centre early this morning, I was feeling excited, curious, expectant, nervous ... There were already lots of people seated around the reception area. Our instructions for the first class were simply to 'wait in the reception area,' so I began to wonder which people the CELTA students were. I found myself looking around, trying to pick them out. What would they be like? Would they be much younger than me? Dressed more formally than my casual jeans and sweater? Nervous? Confident? Serious?

I sat down on one of the sofas. "Are you doing the CELTA?" a woman sitting nearby suddenly asked me. Ten other heads turned towards us, and I knew then that this was our team. Within minutes, they'd come over, and we all began chatting away together. I was relieved to find that they seemed to be a fun and interesting bunch of people. Soon after, our two trainers strode out of the teachers' room, gave us a cheerful smile, and motioned for us to join them as they walked up towards the classrooms. No announcement was necessary – we already knew who we were."
(Day 1 diary entry, Monday 19th February, 2007)

So began my tough but rewarding four weeks on the CELTA.

The daily schedule for CELTA courses differs in each institution, but here is a typical CELTA day at the Language Centre at La Trobe University:

8:45am to 9:30am	Teaching Practice Feedback
9:30am to 10:15am	Teaching Practice Preparation
10:30am to 12 midday	Teaching Methodology class
12:30pm to 1:45pm	Language Analysis class
1:45pm to 2:30pm	Lunch
2:30pm to 4:30pm	Teaching Practice

There seem to be two types of classes on a CELTA course. The first are Teaching Methodology classes and Language Analysis classes, which represent input classes where you learn about the English language itself, language presentation, and language practice. These classes are complemented by Teaching Practice classes, which give you the opportunity to try out what you have just learnt, with real students in a proper classroom setting. The following sections explain these two types of classes on the CELTA course I

attended.

Input Classes

The Teaching Methodology classes, held each day from 10:30am to 12 midday, covered such topics as lesson planning, teaching receptive skills and productive skills, teaching vocabulary and grammar, accuracy practice and fluency practice, teaching using texts, time lines, concept checking (asking questions to the class to ensure that they have understood the language focus, idea or concept), oral correction, classroom management, literacy issues, and teaching examination preparation classes. All of these classes are designed to provide a framework of principles for language teaching, to show us how to present new language, and to organise practice opportunities. The two tutors usually took it in turns to teach these classes. They often began with short teaching demonstrations, followed by hands-on workshops, peer-teaching, discussions, and pair and group reflections.

After a short break were the Language Analysis classes, from 12:30pm to 1:45pm. These took us systematically through the English grammar system (particularly verb tenses, from the present simple through the present perfect to future tenses then modals, and conjunctions) and the pronunciation system (the phonemic chart, word stress and sentence stress, connected speech and intonation). The purpose of the Language Analysis classes was to deepen our understanding of the English language. These classes were experiential; they always started with a short teaching demonstration of how to teach the language point being focused upon. These demonstrations increased our language awareness of that language point, and also gave us ideas about how to teach it. Peer-teaching activities at the end of each class gave us the opportunity to immediately try out our own teaching ideas and receive feedback from other participants and the tutors.

> "Today in LA [Language Analysis] we focused on conditionals. Our tutor started as usual with the teaching demonstration. To check that we knew how to make the present perfect, she used coloured cards to represent different parts of speech, which was really effective. I'd like to try that in my next TP [Teaching Practice]. She then took us through the present perfect's four main usages using time lines and concept checking. Both of these tools appear useful, but I can see that I'll need more practice with them before I can use them effortlessly. I tried to use them in the peer-practice in the second part of the class, when Judith and I presented "If he'd have known that, he wouldn't have gone to the beach." We discovered that to be able to use a timeline, you've got to really think carefully about the time aspect first. And I find that I still need to write out my concept check questions – and possible answers – before I can

use them properly. I think I'll make using them my learning targets in my next TP, along with using coloured cards in my presentation." (Day 5 diary entry, Friday 23rd February, 2007)

Teaching Practice Classes

For me, the Teaching Practice was crucial, and helped make the CELTA the practical training experience that I had sought. Over four weeks of daily Teaching Practice, each participant taught two 20-minute lessons in the first week, five 40-minute lessons in the middle weeks, and two 60-minutes lessons in the final week – a total of nine lessons or six hours teaching. When participants were not teaching, they were observing the other participants teaching – and this was surprisingly useful. We all taught two different levels, elementary level students (using *Headway Elementary*) and upper-intermediate level students (using *Headway Upper-Intermediate*), for two weeks each. Classes ranged in size from four to fourteen students.

For the Teaching Methodology classes and Language Analysis classes all twelve participants took class together but for Teaching Practice we were divided into two groups of six, and stayed with that group for the entire four weeks. Each group had one tutor for the first and last week, and the other tutor for the middle two weeks. This system worked well, as the first tutor could then assess how much the participant had developed from their first Teaching Practice to their last. Over the four weeks, our ability to analyse language and plan and teach lessons was expected to improve.

Each time we taught in the Teaching Practice, we wrote a lesson plan that followed a prescribed format, one that become increasingly complex and detailed as the course progressed. This did take a long time to prepare, but was very useful. For example, the final Teaching Practice lesson preparation had three main parts. In the Lesson Overview were the aims of the lesson, the materials to be used, the assumptions about the students' existing language and cultural knowledge related to the lesson aims, problems to anticipate and solutions to these problems, and a whiteboard plan. On the detailed Language Analysis Sheet, we analysed the meaning, form, and pronunciation features of that lesson's language focus. Finally, we wrote out a Detailed Lesson Plan, that divided the lesson into stages, explained the aim of each stage, the anticipated time it would take to complete each one, who would interact with who, and the actual procedural steps. As the tutor observed the lesson, she wrote detailed comments about each stage on this Detailed Lesson Plan, and returned it to the teacher in the next day's Teaching Practice Feedback.

"My fifth TP [Teaching Practice] today went really well! The lesson aim was to teach phrasal verbs, and the topic was being a tour guide. The 'presentation' went really well – I used coloured cards, and they were very helpful (although to keep them up on the board I need to use magnets not double-sided tape next time). I am impressed by how useful concept checking is for making sure students understand the meaning of new words and the grammar focus. I'm glad I did a thorough Language Analysis before the class – that really helped me decide which example phrasal verbs to use. It was very sensible to focus only on transitive phrasal verbs – I need to keep focusing on just one aspect of language in each TP, and not try to do too much. What else went well? My boardwork has improved a lot, particularly consistently using parts of the board for grammar presentation, new vocabulary, examples, etc. But my timing was out again – I wanted to get on to the practice more quickly. I'm going to have to write the actual time (e.g. 2:45pm) to go on to the next lesson stage on the Detailed Lesson Plan. But I feel today that it's all starting to come together. This CELTA approach is much more complex than I had thought!" (Day 10 diary entry, Friday 2nd March, 2007)

During Teaching Practice, when we were not teaching we nonetheless stayed in the classroom and observed the other participants teaching. We were provided with an 'Observation Task Sheet', which changed each week. In the first week, we noted the stages of the lesson, what we thought their purpose was, and then wrote a short comment about each one. By the fourth week, we were also noting the language the participant used to give instructions, the target language that students were producing, and student errors and how error correction was provided. These observation tasks helped to raise our awareness of the stages of the lesson and the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching strategies the other participants employed.

The Observation Task Sheet also helped us with the first activity of the following day, the Teaching Practice Feedback, when we received feedback on our previous day's teaching, or provided feedback to the participant we had been assigned to observe. The feedback participants provided to each other was usually very detailed and useful. The tutors also gave careful feedback on each lesson plan, using a detailed feedback form, and evaluated each lesson on a scale from 'below standard' to 'above standard'. After the Teaching Practice Feedback, tutors spent 45 minutes each morning helping participants prepare for the next day's Teaching Practice, which I found to be very insightful, and helped me build the bridge between the input classes and the teaching practice component of the CELTA course.

Seven Reasons to do a CELTA course

Each participant's experience and perspective of a CELTA course will be very different, and depend very much on why they chose to enrol, and the expectations they had of it. The seven reasons that I think that it is worthwhile doing a CELTA course are a reflection of my previous learning experiences and also my present professional work environment.

Number One: To develop a deeper understanding of language, especially grammar

On a CELTA course, a lot of time is spent learning about English as a language, and then how to teach it. The main emphasis is on grammar, and to a lesser degree pronunciation. I had studied functional grammar for my masters degree, but I found the grammar on the CELTA course to be much more practical and useful to my teaching. We took classes with practical titles like 'introduction to language analysis and verb tenses', 'analysing a tense', 'past simple', 'present perfect', 'past perfect', 'modals', 'future tenses', 'conditionals', and 'conjunctions'. For each of these, we learned the concept (the underlying meaning), form (word order and parts of speech), function (the speaker's purpose in speaking or writing), context (the situation surrounding the language), and pronunciation (including the sounds, stress, rhythm, and sounds of words in combination). This was a practical and useful framework for analysing language, planning classes, and teaching in the classroom. So, if you are weak at grammar or do not feel that you have the appropriate 'tools' to teach grammar effectively, you would find a CELTA course useful.

Number Two: To become better at lesson planning

I really enjoy lesson planning - it's where the science of theory meets the art of teaching. The CELTA course helped my lesson planning immensely by reminding me to consider the focus of the lesson, how the lesson could be divided into sections, and how to allocate lesson time appropriately.
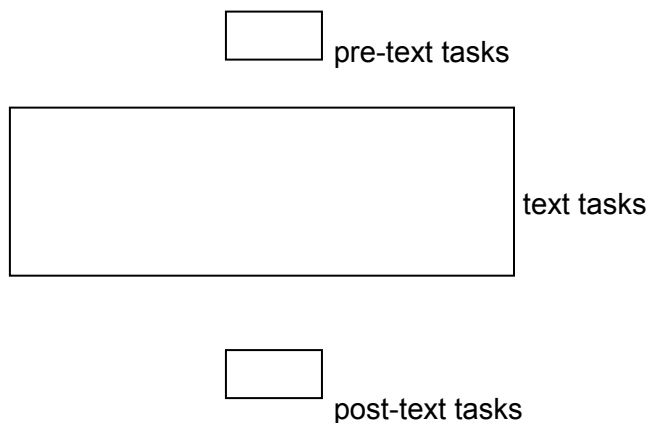
In the CELTA, there is a major distinction made between 'language lessons' (focusing on grammar and vocabulary) and 'skills lessons' (focusing on the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Each of these has a different lesson 'shape', representing the amount of time that ideally should be allocated to each section of the lesson. The principal goal of both shapes is to give students as much practice time as possible.

Language lessons have three sections – presentation of new information, controlled accuracy production, and then freer practice (the famous 'PPP' formula). To help allocate our time in the lesson, the language lessons are shaped like pyramids: presentation time should

be kept short so as to maximise the time students can practise the language point:

```
              presentation
            ―――――
          production
        ―――――――
                                practice
―――――――――――――――
```
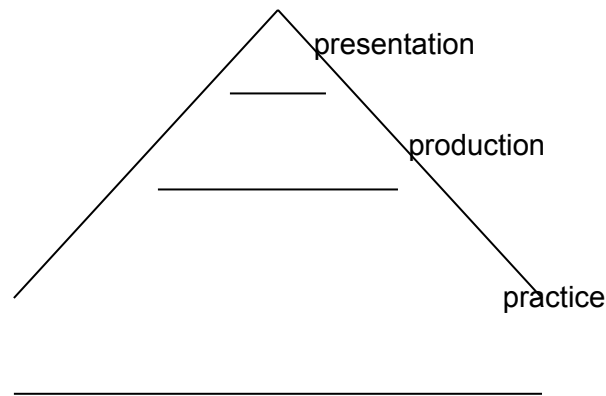
Skills lessons also have three sections – the pre-text task (warm up tasks), the text task (gist and comprehension tasks), and the post-text task (discussion tasks):

```
  ┌──────┐
  │      │  pre-text tasks
  └──────┘

┌──────────────────┐
│                  │
│                  │  text tasks
│                  │
└──────────────────┘

  ┌──────┐
  │      │  post-text tasks
  └──────┘
```

Probably you do this already, if not by design then because most textbooks also follow this pattern. The CELTA course helped me plan and set up these tasks, evaluate whether students have completed them successfully, and achieve transition to the next task smoothly.

The standard CELTA approach to lesson planning is fundamentally teacher-centred and didactic, and is just one possible approach. Other approaches are also suitable, and certainly any group of students would get pretty bored if every class followed only these two lesson shapes. However, I have found these two lesson shapes to be very useful as basic frameworks for planning my lessons. Moreover, what is particularly effective on a CELTA course is the support that the tutors provide in the Teaching Practice Preparation time before each Teaching Practice and in the Teaching Practice Feedback afterwards – both of these helped improve my lesson planning immensely.

Number Three: To present new language more effectively

Before doing the CELTA course, I felt that presenting new grammar and vocabulary was my weakest point. As the CELTA places a major emphasis on being able to present language effectively, we spent a lot of time learning how to present new language, and the Teaching Practice Feedback often focused upon this.

The CELTA has some basic procedures for presenting new language. The most important ideas are eliciting, time lines, concept checking, and writing new language on the board after drilling. *Eliciting* indicates what the students already know about the form, what their assumptions are, and which students have a stronger or weaker understanding. I have found it effective even in large Japanese university classes of 30 or more students by scaffolding student responses – giving students time to confer with their partner(s) before answering.

Time lines are a superb tool for presenting verb tenses. They are relatively easy to learn to use, and very effective for demonstrating verb tenses on the board. A very helpful book focusing on teaching verb tenses that uses time lines is *Teaching Tenses: Ideas for Presenting and Practising Tenses in English*, by Rosemary Aitken (2002). Many Japanese students are familiar with them already, and I have found them an excellent tool not just for presenting language, but also checking that students understand verb tenses during individual error feedback and student conferences.

Concept checking, asking questions to the class to ensure that they have understood the idea or concept, is a powerful method of ensuring that all the students have the same basic concept of the form. For example, to concept check the new word 'mediate' in the situation of one woman mediating between two men, I asked four questions: 'Did she try to find a solution to the problem?' (Yes) 'Did she speak to both sides?' (Yes) 'Did she prefer one man's point of view to the other?' (No) 'So, did she try to be fair to both men?' (Yes). Concept checking can use both 'yes/no' and short answer questions. They can be used for grammar (e.g. parts of speech, word order) and vocabulary (meaning, form, pronunciation). In a Japanese university classroom, concept checking usually works because most students seem to enjoy giving short answers, and it keeps them engaged during the presentation stage of the lesson.

W*riting new language on the board* at a final rather than initial stage in presentation means that students have focused on and drilled the spoken form before they see the written form, which limits the interference that the written form may have for spoken production. A simple

idea, but it has improved students' pronunciation (including connected speech) and listening in my university classes. It also means that students are focused on what is going on at the whiteboard, rather than switching off to make notes in their notebooks.

Before taking the CELTA, I had assumed that the CELTA approach for presenting new language would only work in language schools with small size classes; however, I have found CELTA procedures are also effective in Japanese university language classes.

Number Four: To get lots of great teaching ideas!

Being on the CELTA was like seeing lots of 'my share' activities being brought to life by the participants every day in the Teaching Practice – and then getting a chance to chat about them the next day in the Teaching Practice Feedback. Another great source of teaching ideas was the tutors' teaching demonstrations at the beginning of their Teaching Methodology classes and Language Analysis classes – they were some of the most impressive and creative activities that I have ever seen.

One of the cool activities I saw a participant use in her Teaching Practice was drawing a huge world map on the whiteboard, then inviting students to come up and write their names in the country where they had come from. I adapted that ESL activity to my EFL teaching context. I kept the huge world map on the board idea, but then gave each student two 'post-its', asked them to write their names on them, and then to come to the front and put the post-it on the country where they would like to go and visit. That way, the class got an idea of which countries we were interested in – and these were the countries that we focused on for the rest of the semester.

Many of the teaching ideas that I saw on the CELTA I have incorporated into my teaching 'toolbox' that I use with Japanese university students. I feel that I now have a wider range of teaching activities that I can draw on at the appropriate point in a lesson to present language or facilitate students producing and practicing language.

Number Five: To watch some very professional teachers work

On the CELTA, I was lucky to see a number of excellent teachers teaching. The most impressive were our two tutors, who would demonstrate many teaching ideas and techniques to us in the Teaching Methodology classes and Language Analysis classes. Also, some of the other participants that we observed each afternoon in Teaching Practice were experienced language teachers, some had taught other subjects, and others were just 'born teachers.' And twice during the CELTA, we went to observe other La Trobe University

Language Centre teachers teaching regular classes.

Most importantly for me, from observing teachers, I developed a deeper understanding of the mechanics of effective presentation – the use of visuals, the order to present information in, what questions to ask and when, what to say and what not to say, where to stand and when to move. Also, I could see how very experienced teachers facilitated classroom interaction – how to make the purpose of the activity clear, how to check that students know what to do in an activity, organising students into groups quickly and changing them efficiently, and how to give feedback both at the individual and group levels. Lastly, it was informative to observe the 'how to' of successful classroom management – building and sustaining rapport with students, dealing with difficult students, using humour in the classroom to motivate students, and creating an effective classroom teacher identity. Like all teachers, I already had my own routines for presenting the target language, organising classroom interaction, and managing classes, but it was really informative to observe what other teachers do. I now feel as though I have a wider array of methods and tactics to employ in my university classrooms here in Japan.

Number Six: To be observed teaching, and be given feedback
One of the features that makes a CELTA course unique is the Teaching Practice. The Teaching Practice has two major benefits: firstly, you have the chance to put into action what you've been learning in the input classes; and secondly, you are observed and then given feedback about what you can do well and what you still need to work on. It is this that made the CELTA course such an intensive professional development experience for me.

The feedback from the tutors was key to improving my classroom teaching, as it was the principal way that I could check that what I'd been learning in the Teaching Methodology classes and Language Analysis classes was being implemented properly in the Teaching Practice. In my case, I wanted to focus on two aspects in my Teaching Practice: improving my presentation of the target language, and creating effective practice opportunities of that target language. The tutors' feedback has helped me tighten up my presentation, particularly my use of visuals, 'teacher presentation talk', eliciting and concept checking, and also helped me create practice activities that are more tightly linked to the target language.

I also believe that the Teaching Practice observation makes a CELTA course particularly valuable to Japan-based language instructors, who are rarely if ever observed teaching.

Number Seven: To get experience observing and giving feedback

Observing other teachers teach was beneficial not only to have the opportunity of watching some very professionally and creatively taught classes, but also to practice how to observe teachers, take notes, then give feedback.

One reason that classroom observation is such a rarity in Japanese universities may be that many university instructors and program coordinators simply have not had many experiences being observed themselves or of observing other teachers. A CELTA course does not claim to train participants to be professional observers, nor even provide a systematic introduction to classroom observation. But it does provide participants with over 30 hours experience over four weeks observing other teachers teach, each week focusing upon a different aspect of teaching. This experience would be useful for language instructors who would like to engage in peer observations with colleagues, or for program coordinators who would like to offer professional development support for the instructors at their own institution.

Conclusion

> "Today was the last day of the CELTA course. I'm exhausted, but this has been a fantastic month! I can't believe how much I've learnt, how much fun it's been, and the great people that I've met – I'm going to miss everyone! But I'm looking forward to getting back into my own classroom next month, and trying out some of the ideas and activities that I've seen and practiced here." (Day 20 diary entry, Friday 16th March, 2007)

Completing the CELTA course was one of the most demanding and satisfying professional activities I have undertaken. If you have not done a practical language teaching course that focuses on your classroom teaching, I encourage you to consider doing a CELTA course.

Resources

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teaching/celta.htm>

Aitken, Rosemary. (2002). *Teaching Tenses: Ideas for Presenting and Practising Tenses in English*. Brighton: ELB Publishing.

Is reading your students' essays like being water-boarded?

Michelle Segger

Writing classes are unpopular with teachers because many find reading and grading the essays a form of torture they could well live without. Why is this? It is not just because our students struggle to write in their second language, we expect this from them. They are torturous because the students put pen to paper (finger to key?) before they have given the topic any consideration. This leads to poorly constructed pieces of writing which tend to be superficial and, let's face it, boring!

Many of my students are motivated speakers and listeners who I enjoy conversing with, so why is their writing so awful to read? Setting aside all the usual suspects such as cultural differences in writing styles; I took another look at the essays.

The first thing that occurred to me is that the 19 year olds in my second year university writing class just don't know much about anything, which is the main reason the essays are so superficial, shallow and frivolous. Another problem with 19 year olds is that if you tell them to go away and write 300 words, that is just what they will do; as quickly as possible, with no thought to content or structure. Finally, many of them are simply new to essay writing and don't know what is expected of them.

This gave me three issues to address.

- Don't know what is expected of them

  I made examples of everything that I expected them to do. All the presentations (more on this later) and all the essays. This sounds like a lot of work but writing a 300 word essay is not such a terrible chore for the native speaker! It doesn't have to be great, it just has to follow the rules you ask them to follow. It can also be used year after year. Providing examples of what I expect has several beneficial effects. They all have a clear idea of what I expect of them for each essay. They know roughly how many words and how many paragraphs without me being too prescriptive. I can also provide examples of specific skills I want them to work on, such as adding references. It also gives weaker students a kind of template for their work; while stronger students can use my example as a springboard for their own thoughts. An additional benefit is that students are very motivated by the fact that I do all the tasks that I ask them to do. They have a much better attitude to doing homework. I think this is because they know I did all the 'homework' in preparation for the class.

- Writing is superficial

I decided to make them give a presentation on the topic before they started writing the essay. For this class I insisted they make a PowerPoint presentation (I was able to do this as I have access to computers in the classroom. In other classes, when I don't have such resources, I ask for a poster with pictures on it). This forces them to find something for the slides. Most of them trawl the internet for pictures and information i.e. research! Also, as they have to be confident enough to talk to their classmates on their chosen theme, it makes them research in much greater depth than they do just to write an essay for me. Adding an audience seems to make a difference. Speaking is a skill that they are more familiar with so they usually structure the speaking well. The PowerPoint also helps with structure. If I want a three paragraph essay I ask for five slides; a title, three points and a conclusion. They all transfer this structure directly to their writing and the results are much better. Finally, it makes my classes more communicative. Students listen to my presentations and each others' presentations and the writing class becomes a place where they have a chance to communicate and learn from each other.

- As quickly as possible

The researching and presenting encourages them to engage with their topic before they start writing and this slows them down. It also makes them think through the structure. When they do finally start the writing, I encourage multiple drafting by only marking errors on the first two drafts. They don't get a grade until the third draft. As well as slowing them down, this process makes it easier for me as the reader and assessor; I don't have to worry about grading the essay until many of the structural, grammatical and typing errors have been rectified. My workload is reduced because most of the essays are readable, and I can focus better on assigning a grade.

These three strategies have revitalized my attitude toward writing classes. My students are far more engaged. They choose interesting and provocative topics. They enjoy learning about each others' topics and connect well with them. I learn a lot from the more in-depth presentations and essays of my students and I enjoy the process a great deal more.

There follows a semester plan for a second year English major writing class. I plan three essays a semester but you could change this to suit your classes. You could also use just one four week cycle for any class, just as a change from the usual. As a build up to Christmas, I'm planning to use this in a different class at another university and ask them to plan on the theme of 'Winter Festivals'. Wikipedia has a very comprehensive list which

makes a useful place to start.

Should anyone want more information about the examples I provide for my students and/or class organization, feel free to contact me.

Week	Lesson Plan	Essay theme
1	Class intro/ How to use Word	Essay 1: Self Introduction
2	Word and typing practice/First demonstration. A few minutes to discuss topic in groups and provide helpful websites. Homework: Choose topic and start PowerPoint presentation	
3	Making PowerPoint Homework: Finish PowerPoint	
4	Present in groups of four. Change group members and present again Homework: Draft 1	
5	Give me draft 1. Work on draft 2 and/or 3 Homework: Optional. If want to do additional drafts	
6	Draft 3 or 4. Second demonstration. A few minutes to discuss topic in groups and provide helpful websites. Homework: Choose topic and start PowerPoint	Essay 2: Descriptive
7	Making PowerPoint Homework: Finish PowerPoint	
8	Present in groups of four. Change group members and present again Homework: Draft 1	
10	Give me draft 1. Work on draft 2 and/or 3 Homework: Optional. If want to do additional drafts	
11	Draft 3 or 4. Third demonstration. A few minutes to discuss topic in groups and provide helpful websites. Homework: Choose topic and start PowerPoint	Essay 3: Process
12	Making PowerPoint Homework: Finish PowerPoint	
13	Present in groups of four. Change group members and present again Homework: Draft 1	
14	Give me draft 1. Work on draft 2 and/or 3 Homework: Optional. If want to do additional drafts	
15	Draft 3. Tidying up	

Japanese Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes towards Autonomy and Teacher Education: A Case Study

Hideo Kojima, Hirosaki University <kojima@cc.hirosaki-u.ac.jp>

Introduction

The action plan (2003) for cultivating "Japanese with English Abilities" was proposed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), and an intensive training program for all secondary school teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Japan has been implemented for five years. As a teacher educator at a Japanese university, I have helped EFL teachers to promote their professional competence and autonomy in a training program. Becoming an autonomous EFL teacher in Japan may be a challenging and complex learning/teaching process. The importance of developing learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in language education has not yet been much discussed in Japan. EFL teachers need to be much more encouraged to develop their professional autonomy through teacher education. This paper aims to examine a group of Japanese secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards learner/teacher autonomy and teacher education, and to promote their professional consciousness-raising through teacher education.

Theoretical Background

Learner Autonomy

At the dawn of the 1990s, notions of learner autonomy and autonomous language learning were generally viewed as belonging to the "lunatic fringe" (Allwright, 1988). In the following decade, autonomy moved into mainstream educational thought to the point of becoming a "buzz word" (Little, 1991). Since Holec (1981) introduced the term *autonomy* to the field of second langue pedagogy, definitions of learner autonomy have varied (Wenden, 1991; Benson and Voller, 1997; Little, 1996, 1998; Littlewood, 1999). In light of Sinclair's (2000) definition, which appears to be one of the most comprehensive definitions, learner autonomy, which is emphasized in education reform in Japan, is likely to have a social as well as individual dimension. Interestingly enough, more attention has recently been paid to this aspect of autonomy in the West. One of the familiar definitions of learner autonomy is as follows:

> Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person. (1989

'Bergen definition', cited by Dam, 1990:17)

Teacher Autonomy and Teacher Education

Little (1995:179) tells us that genuinely successful teachers have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching. In line with Little (1995) and Benson (2000), McGrath (2000) suggests that teacher autonomy may be viewed from two different but related perspectives: teacher autonomy as self-directed professional development and teacher autonomy as freedom from control by others.

Teacher education is the field of study which deals with the preparation and professional development of teachers. Freeman (2001:72) states:

> … the term teacher education refers to the sum of experiences and activities through which individuals learn to be language teachers. Those learning to teach—whether they are new to the profession or experienced, whether in pre- or in-service contexts— are referred to as teacher-learners (Kennedy 1991).

The term *teacher-learner* refers to the person who is learning to teach and focuses on the learning process in which he/she is engaged. Smith (2000) suggests that teacher autonomy can be defined at least partially in terms of the *teacher's autonomy as a learner*, or more succinctly *teacher-learner autonomy*. EFL teachers need to enhance their own readiness, capacities, and control in relevant areas of teacher-learning autonomously and intrinsically. Little (1995:180) suggests that "language teachers are more likely to succeed in promoting learner autonomy if their own education has encouraged them to be autonomous."

Method

Purpose of the Study

In order to find ways of developing Japanese secondary school EFL teacher's professional competence and autonomy, I examined their perceptions and attitudes towards learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, and teacher education. By analyzing the data, I proposed a number of pedagogical implications for the development of teacher education in Japan.

My research questions were:

(1) What do the participants think of learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, and teacher education?

(2) What kinds of pedagogical implications can I propose for the development of teacher education?

Participants

The study involved 83 secondary school EFL teachers who took part in the 2003/2004/2005 intensive training programs, where they were generally expected to acquire instructional skills to make EFL learning active and to develop their teaching abilities and communicative competence in English.

Materials

In order to analyze the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, and teacher education, I used three open-ended questions: "What do you think of learner autonomy?", "What do you think of teacher autonomy?", and "What do you think of teacher education?" I also made some comments on my workshop observation.

Procedures

In the seminar, as an instructor, I organized a workshop on a variety of topics, such as language policy, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), task-based instruction, reflective teaching, team-teaching, action research, cooperative learning, good language learners/ teachers, learner-centeredness, learning styles/strategies, and learner/teacher autonomy. At the end of the workshop all the participants were asked to answer the three open-ended questions above. The data was analyzed and its pedagogical implications were considered.

Results and Discussion

Observation

Observation enables researchers to document and reflect systematically on workshop interactions, as they actually occur rather than as we think they occur. The participants were divided into small groups for discussion and presented collaboratively their ideas about various key terms such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), cooperative learning, and task-based learning. They became interested in these new approaches to ELT, but it was not easy for them to understand all of them in only a day or so. CLT, which has been recommended by the government, is a relatively new approach for traditional teachers in Japan. In the workshop some participants already knew about communication-oriented language teaching, but very few of them recognized the features of CLT including the components of communicative competence.

In the workshop, as teacher-learners, the participants learned how to implement a learner-centered, collaborative, and communicative approach to ELT. Almost all of them, accustomed to teacher-centered instruction, were surprised to know the real meaning of learner-centeredness, and they were eager to understand teacher roles in the learner-centered

classroom. Among the key terms in the workshop, the term "learner/teacher autonomy" appeared to interest the participants most.

Open-Ended Questions

I gathered the participants' ideas about learner autonomy, teacher autonomy and teacher education through the following open-ended questions. In the workshop, most of them claimed that they were learning about learner/teacher autonomy for the first time. Some of their answers were simply parroting what I had said in the workshop. Taking into consideration to what extent the participants' answers were based on their own ideas, I summarized their answers written in English/Japanese as follows:

Question 1: What do you think of learner autonomy?

1. I have never heard about autonomous language learning, but it should be fostered in the daily classroom. I need to give my students more opportunities to be involved in the process of learner-centered instruction.

2. My students lack internal motivation to study English. I have to help them to set their own goals for language learning. When they make their efforts to realize their goals, they will be able to be an autonomous learner.

3. My students are different in their interests, abilities, and learning styles. I should understand these differences and give them opportunities for learning how to learn.

4. I am interested in cooperative learning in the classroom. Individual students will be able to develop their autonomy through cooperative group work, where each student is responsible for playing his/her own role.

5. I can understand the importance of learner autonomy. However, it is very difficult for me to develop my students' autonomy because I do not know how to help them practically.

6. In my lower secondary school, I have to teach my students a lot in three classes a week. In Japan, teacher-centered EFL instruction is effective in developing students' English abilities to enter universities.

7. It is too idealistic for all Japanese students to be able to promote their autonomy. The number of the students who dislike English is increasing. They lack internal motivation to study English.

8. EFL teachers in Japan need to promote innovation in ELT at secondary and tertiary education levels. Unless teachers improve their teaching principles, they will not be able to develop learner autonomy.

(my translation)

For a learner-centered, autonomous approach to work well in the EFL classroom, students will have to learn more than just the target language. According to the participants' answers above, some of the participants became aware of the significance of promoting autonomous language learning; some of them did not know how to develop their students' autonomy in the classroom; and some of them felt it necessary to innovate EFL education as a whole. In order to promote learner autonomy in the learner-centered classroom, EFL teachers in Japan may need to resolve a variety of issues, such as their examination-oriented instruction, their students' negative attitudes towards EFL learning, their understanding of learner differences in EFL learning, and their development of professional competence. In the workshop I introduced my teaching experience in which I helped my students develop their metacognitive strategies involving a) thinking about their mental processes used in the learning process; b) monitoring their learning while it was taking place; and c) evaluating their learning process and product. Learner autonomy is an educational product, and helping students acquire it can be very rewarding for teachers in both personal and professional terms. Here, I need to consider the participants' ideas about teacher autonomy.

Question 2: What do you think of teacher autonomy?

9. I think that learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are two sides of the same coin. I would like to have both of them as a teacher-learner.

10. I have participated in a few kinds of seminars to learn teaching skills. From now on, I have to learn how to promote my teacher autonomy so that I can be responsible for my own teaching.

11. I have never known the terms of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy. I have taught English to my students without promoting teacher autonomy.

12. I would like to implement a reflective approach in the classroom. However, I do not know how to implement reflective learning and teaching in the classroom.

13. We need to develop teacher autonomy as well as learner autonomy. It is difficult for us to discuss a sweeping reform in ELT.

14. Taking a variety of requirements from students, parents and communities into consideration, I have to do my daily activities as a staff member of my school. I would like to ask for more freedom to be self-directed.

15. I am usually very busy doing various kinds of work except teaching subjects, although I would like to maintain an inquisitive mind in trying out new approaches.

16. I understand that collaboration among teachers is now more stressed than before. Without the promotion of collegiality, it might be almost impossible to

promote teacher autonomy in educational institutions.

(my translation)

Most of the participants claimed that they had not paid so much attention to the development of their teacher autonomy. They felt a variety of constraints in their institutions such as demanding working conditions, insufficient discussion about innovation in ELT, and no promotion of collegiality. Ideally, the participants should be aware that teacher autonomy as self-directed professional development requires a certain level of preparedness—attitudinal and technical, and that it requires efforts and ways of thinking that have not been emphasized until recently in educational contexts in Japan.

One of the fundamental purposes of reflective practice is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in educational contexts. Critical reflection questions the means and ends of education, and needs to be a judicious blend of sensitive support and constructive challenge. The participants, who claimed that they did not know how to practice reflective teaching, may be interested to note that the interdependence of reflective teaching and research should be stressed. Teacher education could help EFL teachers to become autonomous and reflective practitioners and researchers.

Question 3: What do you think of teacher education?
- I have not attended teacher education programs for a long time. I would like to make use of this workshop for my teacher development.
- I would like to welcome a teacher education program in which I can share my own ideas about ELT with other teachers.
- I hope to attend an overseas program to learn how to teach English as a foreign/ second language, but I do not have enough money or time to realize my hope.
- I can understand why teacher education is important. However, it is not easy for me to apply what I learned in teacher education programs to my instruction in the classroom by myself.
- Even if I am interested in action research, I do not know how to implement it in my classes. Teacher education should help us learn how to integrate theory with practice.
- I will be able to improve my teaching abilities by attending various teacher education programs, but it is not easy for me to leave my school when I am in charge of daily classes and club activities.
- There should be a variety of teacher education programs we can choose freely

depending on our own needs, interests and abilities. We are often forced to attend some programs we do not like to.

(my translation)

Most of the participants claimed that they have not had many opportunities for professional development. They pointed out the significance of teacher education, but in charge of daily classes and after class activities, they claimed to think it very difficult to attend teacher education programs outside the school. Also, some of them expected the program organizers to help them to enhance collaboration with fellow teachers in their schools. Taking into consideration not only teachers' needs, interests, and abilities, but also their working conditions and collegiality in their educational institutions, we teacher educators may need to develop teacher education programs for in-service teachers. The social contexts of their institutions could perhaps have a strong influence on their professional development.

Some of the participants claimed that they took an interest in action research. In the traditional form of in-service teacher education, which is still popular in Japan, questions of education are usually approached from an "objective" stance, where issues tend to be viewed by comparison with other issues. In contrast, action research presents an opportunity for the participants to become uniquely involved in their own practice, to professionalize themselves, and to give reasoned justification for what they are doing. Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry that is now being used in school-based curriculum development, professional development, and school-improvement schemes. It might be a powerful approach to bridging the gap between the theory and practice of education. The participants need to develop their own personal theories of education from their own class practice. Thus, I could perhaps make use of action research as an approach to improving the participants' education, by encouraging them to be aware of their own practice, to be critical of that practice, and to be prepared to change it.

The term 'teacher education' refers to the sum of experiences and activities through which individual teacher trainees learn to be language teachers. I would like to expect the participants to consider the nature and extent of their own autonomy, in the same way as they might wish to assess their students' autonomy. I encouraged them to understand the significance of leaner/teacher autonomy and the effect of teacher education on professional development, which might have three aspects: professional knowledge and understanding, professional skills and abilities, and professional values and personal commitment.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

In order to find the answers to the research question (1): *What do the participants think of learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, and teacher education?*, I have analyzed the data of the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards learner/teacher autonomy, and teacher education. As a result, through in-service teacher education, the participants needed to learn a) how to develop their students' learner autonomy as well as their communicative competence, b) how to promote their own professional consciousness-raising, c) how to enhance their own technical knowledge and pedagogical skills, d) how to foster their own inner change more voluntarily, e) how to promote collegiality in their institutions, and f) how to develop their professional competence and autonomy continuously.

In this section, I will consider the answer to the research question (2): *What kinds of pedagogical implications can I propose for the development of teacher education in Japan?* In my workshops, I implemented the craft-model and the awareness-raising model. In the craft-model, the participants learned by imitating my techniques and by following my instructions and advice. On the other hand, in the awareness-raising model, I shifted the focus of our discussion about teaching from the methods and techniques to the thinking and reasoning. The workshops involved trying to open up the participants' thinking, which could help them to find and develop their own teaching theory, and the methods and techniques which matched it.

As some of the participants noticed, one way of opening up the participants' thinking might be through reflection. I proposed a reflective practice model of professional development adopted from Wallace (1991). In order to foster autonomy among their students, the participants needed to be both free and able to assert their own autonomy in the practice of reflective teaching and research. The same would apply to department heads or educational bodies who might wish to experiment with an autonomous and learner-centered mode of teaching on a larger scale.

MEXT encourages individual schools to show autonomous ingenuity in developing unique educational activities. Taking this into consideration, I advised the participants to reconsider and re-conceptualize ELT as comprising collaborative or organizational activities. They may need to implement collaborative action research for their school-based innovation in ELT. Administrative and peer support could perhaps have a significant effect on their decision to use an innovation in the classroom context. The change process might be a tricky one fraught with problems, anxiety, conflicts, and unanticipated difficulties. The participants' attitudes towards an innovation could be influenced by how worthwhile and important their

managers might perceive the innovation to be. Thus, the managers of the intensive teacher education program might be expected to develop a thorough understanding and sensitivity to the culture of the participants' institutions and to try to mould innovatory programs to the institutions' realities. Appropriate teacher education programs and ongoing support would be essential for the participants who would like to explore their own ideas of autonomous leadership including teamwork and collegiality in their education settings.

References

Allwright, D. (1988). Autonomy and individualization in whole-class instruction. In A. Brookes & P. Grundy (Eds.), *Individualization and autonomy in language learning*. London: Modern English Publications and the British Council.

Benson, P. and P. Voller (Ed.). (1997). *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. New York: Longman.

Dam, L. (1990). Learning autonomy in practice: An experiment in learning and teaching. In I. Gathercole, (Ed.), *Autonomy in language learning.* London: CILT.

Freeman, D. (2001). Second language teacher education. In R. Carter and D. Nunan (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy in foreign language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Little, D. (1991). *Learning autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.

Little, D. (1995). Learning as dialogue: The dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy. *System* 23 (2), 175-182.

McGrath I. (2000). Teacher autonomy. In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath, and T. Lamb (Eds.), *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions.* London: Longman.

Sinclair, B. (2000). Learner autonomy: The next phase. In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath, and T. Lamb (Eds.).

Smith, R. (2000). Starting with ourselves: Teacher-learner autonomy in language learning. In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath, and T. Lamb (Eds.).

Wallace, M. (1991). *Training foreign language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wallace, M. (1998). *Action research for classroom teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenden, A. (1991). *Learner strategies for learner autonomy*. London: Prentice Hall.

Conference Report

Wilma Luth

In the Teacher Education SIG roundtable discussion, "Theorizing Practice or Practicing Theory," Steve Cornwell said that, "teaching is making choices." We can't try every new activity that we hear about and not every idea that we hear about resonates with us. I think it was Paul Beaufait who commented in the same discussion, that we seem to have receptors that soak up what speaks to our own experience. We become attuned to certain ideas because of what we're working on in our own learning about teaching. After 16 years of teaching what I most want from a conference are new ideas or activities that I can integrate into my teaching practice. This doesn't have to be a smooth integration – I like it when what I believe to be true about teaching and learning is challenged. That's when I truly learn and grow as a teacher. These are some of the ideas that I've been playing with and thinking about since the conference.

I teach a number of reading classes and so tried to attend presentations about teaching reading. In a recent presentation in my local chapter, Neil Anderson had described "Think Aloud Protocols," an activity in which students talk about what cognitive processes they've been using as they're reading. This activity was in the back of my mind as something I'd like to try someday but even though Anderson modeled the activity, I couldn't envision how my students might be able to do it. In Fulmer et al's presentation, "Dismantling conscious reading strategy notions," the presenters mentioned the very same activity, but said that in their experience it's too difficult for anyone but advanced students. They suggested using "Think Along Protocols" in which students write about rather than talk about what they're doing and thinking as they read. Now the idea is percolating and I think I'll be able to develop an effective activity for next year; an activity that will help raise student awareness of how they read.

A common claim in practical workshops is that you will have something to do in a Monday morning class. Well, Paul Nation's session, Speed Reading, challenged a long-held belief that I had and forced me to drop an activity from my Tuesday afternoon lesson plan. Nation referred to research that shows that English speakers don't actually read in chunks as is commonly believed – they actually focus on 90% of the words that they read, only skipping words such as articles. Apparently what native English readers do is read practically every word but process those words in chunks. I decided not to do the reading in chunks activity that I'd been planning to do in my next reading lesson until I had time to think through the implications of this finding.

Nation's presentation also provided the idea for a project for the upcoming vacation: to compile a bank of reusable timed reading articles for my reading classes next year. (These could be taken from old textbooks and placed in clear folders with comprehension questions behind the readings.) It would be a time-consuming project, however one that is quite useful for students. Later that same day in Richard Day's presentation, "Fluency in foreign language instruction," Day explained how he uses timed repeated reading with extensive reading materials. The students read something that they've read before to build their reading rate and count the number of words that they read afterwards. I already have my students check their reading speed using the graded readers that they have chosen to read. Perhaps they can also work on increasing their reading speed at the same time thus deepening the activity? Now I have two ideas to work with during winter vacation.

Nation also made an interesting link between fluency and accuracy. I've always told students that when they are doing fluency practice they don't have to worry about accuracy (and vice versa). Nation explained some research that has shown that the 4-3-2 fluency practice activity also helps students become more accurate. In this activity, students give a 4-minute talk to a partner or in a small group. They then switch partners and give the same talk in 3 minutes, then they switch again and give the same talk in 2 minutes. Apparently, when learners have to give the same talk in just 2 minutes, they show an increase in accuracy and complexity. This is definitely something that I want to try out in classes next year. In fact, I'm going to try it out with some of my higher-level students first so we can discuss it afterwards to see if it's true for them or not.

Jennifer Claro's short paper, "The Shy Japanese," was a good example of how theory can explain what makes certain classroom practice effective. It went beyond the stereotypes implied by its title and explained several fundamentals of Japanese society using the framework of Geert Hofstede's 5 Cultural Dimensions, including Uncertainty Avoidance, which relates to being able to accept ambiguity and take risks. Good language learners need to take risks, but risk taking isn't that easy for students from a culture that values avoiding the uncertainty that risk taking involves. That combined with an extreme focus on accuracy means that many students won't say anything if they're not 100% correct. This attitude can be frustrating for teachers from cultures that value risk taking and can also cause misunderstandings and in the classroom.

What was especially enlightening for me was the description of three domains in Japanese society: the ritual domain, intimate domain, and anomic domain. The classroom usually falls

into the ritual domain – students sit quietly, take notes, and listen to the teacher. But for real communication to happen the classroom experience needs to be brought into the intimate domain, which describes how the Japanese behave among family, friends, and coworkers. Claro's suggestions for doing so include not using a "teacher voice" when instructing, smiling a lot, being strict but nice, giving students positive evaluations before negative ones, and having fun in the classroom.

From time to time on course evaluations students have written comments like, "I like your smile." I used to think of it as a shallow comment, but now I'm wondering if what the students are trying to describe, in their limited vocabulary, is how the experience in the classroom was in that intimate domain. Comments like this take on new meaning (or the real meaning becomes clearer) when seen through the framework of theory.

These are the ideas that I talked about when I was asked what I had learned at the conference. They are the ones that resonated with me and having this opportunity to reflect on them in this report will help to deepen my learning as well as strengthen my resolve to integrate what I learned into my teaching practice.

JALT 2007 Conference Review

Darren Elliott – Meijo University, Nagoya

My first JALT conference, although not my first big conference, required preparation. Comfortable shoes? Check. Hotel located nearby? Check. And of course, a carefully annotated timetable with all the presentations I needed to see highlighted.

Friday

I caught the early train from Nagoya and got to the venue in time for the opening session, and a quick look around the site. It was fairly compact and like most people I took advantage of the free coffee, courtesy of Oxford University Press.

The first presentation I attended was Stillwell and Waller's 'Three methods of collaborative teacher development'. The staff at Kanda University of International Studies have set up a non-hierarchical, voluntary observation project which enables participants to both refine practice and target particular problems. Teachers work in groups of three to observe one another's classes and give feedback, and are also involved in 'Lesson Study', to collaboratively prepare and deliver lessons. In 'Kenkyuu Jyugyou' the *lessons* rather than the *teachers* are evaluated. Observation has always been a valuable learning tool for me, and I came away with plenty of ideas about how to make such a programme work.

It serves us well to remember that the learners' view of what happens in the classroom often differs from that of the teacher, and Leah Holck's research into her own learners' beliefs about classroom interaction fitted into that category. Her students seemed to find less value in peer interaction and considered contact with the native speaker to be more important for learning.

My Friday was rounded off by Richard Day & Junko Yamanaka's 'Fluency in foreign language reading' presentation, to promote their new book 'Cover to Cover: Reading Comprehension and Fluency'. The presenters gave us an overview of reading strategies as well as demonstrating how to use their book, which looks like a good resource for educators.

Time to get back to Shinjuku to decant the bags, grab a bite to eat and get some shut-eye.

Saturday

After a good night's sleep I returned to the conference centre with my schedule for the day

mapped out. I was particularly interested in finding ways to help my students help themselves, and picked out three sessions over the day in this area.

In the first, Mami Ueda & Emika Abe talked us through how they had attempted to introduce reflection to their students to develop self-efficacy. They felt that many of their students were demotivated and sought to improve the situation by having them reflect on the learning experience. They are still wrestling with ways in which they can reach more of their students through this concept.

I also saw Bonn, Clarke, Heigham & Kiyokawa from Sugiyama Jogakuen University, who showed us how they are 'Supporting language users through learner training' in a great interactive workshop. They reported success in helping learners understand why they were performing tasks through learning plans and explicit training tools such as explanation boxes at the top of each worksheet.

The other presentation I saw in this area was by Nanci Graves & Stacey Vye. They talked us through their beliefs regarding Learner Autonomy in a more general fashion. It was a gentle and meandering journey through the field, bringing in ideas from a variety of sources for a very receptive audience.

Saturday was a big day and I took in several other presentations. It wasn't the first time I had seen a conference plenary of Ronald Carter's, so I was expecting an engaging and informative speech. I wasn't disappointed as Professor Carter gave us his insights into the differences between written and spoken discourse based on his research with spoken corpuses. He certainly raised plenty of questions regarding the validity of what we teach and the materials we create.

Ken Wilson gave several presentations at the conference; I went to see 'Turning passive students into active learners' on the Saturday, which was a hugely entertaining hour. In addition to practical tips for adapting textbooks, we all had a good laugh….no bad thing!

Trevor Sargent, Mike Guest & Paul Tanner put together a Critical Thinking Forum which addressed some theoretical and practical points. The three presenters dovetailed nicely and spoke passionately about their subject, making for a lively question and answer session.

I finished the Saturday at Maggie Lieb's presentation 'EFL: Are we uniting or dividing people'. She was concerned that too much is made of cultural difference and otherness, and not

enough of commonality, and gave us a few hair-raising examples from recent English language textbooks. Her research study gives us hope in that her students generally held positive attitudes towards cultural interactions with 'Westerners'.

Time for a quick drink and a shuffle around the yakitori district, then back to bed.

Sunday

Paul Nation gave the final plenary, posing the question 'How large do learners' vocabularies have to be?' The answer? About 8000 – 9000 words should be enough to get 98% coverage in most reading texts. Nation highlighted a few practical implications for language teachers, especially teachers of reading. He suggested further work on graded readers and computer assisted reading programmes.

And so ended another conference. It was a great experience which left me feeling refreshed and replenished for the semester ahead. A few tips for those looking forward to their first conference next year….. firstly, don't feel you have to see everything! Taking time to absorb what you've heard, have a look around the bookstalls and SIG tables, and a chat with your peers will help you avoid brain overload. I'd also recommend going to see something that is not in your usual field of interest – conferences like this are a great opportunity to open your mind up a little. Finally, if you hear that someone is a great speaker, check them out – no matter what the topic. Corpus linguistics might not get you excited usually, but Ron Carter really knows how to put it across.

I'd like to thank the Teacher Education SIG for helping with the travel expenses, and I'm looking forward to next year already!

Conference Report

Jillian Schlicher

The theme of this year's international conference – Challenging Assumptions: Looking In, Looking Out – is particularly relevant to our SIG and to each of us as educators, as we continue our development amid the constant shifts in the government and their education policies. Whether we teach a modern foreign language like English or train new teachers for the future, it is important for us to always take the opportunity to critically examine ourselves and the assumptions that we build our teaching styles upon.

Challenging Assumptions

Our presenters, from the honored plenary speakers to the humblest first-timers, offered up ways to challenge our beliefs about ourselves, our learners, and the current state of language teaching. In a presentation on achieving fluency through common words and chunks, plenary speaker Ronald Carter of the University of Nottingham introduced evidence from corpus data which shows that what our students get taught in their English classes is not necessarily all they need to know to understand English, particularly native English speech. These most commonly occurring chunks of English are probably not found in any textbook commonly in use in Japan. Still, the fact remains, as Carter himself points out, that the corpora consist of native speaker data only. Is it really necessary to teach our students these phrases and chunks that native speakers use?

The fixation on native speakers in the Japanese EFL context is another idea that needs to be reconsidered. It is often bandied-about that the JET Program is the largest program in the world for recruiting native speakers to teach in public schools. Also, despite the largest private conversation school recently and publicly collapsing, the teaching English industry in Japan continues to boom and young foreigners continue streaming into Narita airport to have their fingerprints taken and to jump aboard the teaching English 'gravy train.' But how long will this native model persist?

I had the opportunity to see Kayo Sugimoto of Umemura Gakuen give an outline of the status of English as an international language and the need for world Englishes to be presented in the Japanese classroom. She reviewed current textbooks in use in her area and found an extreme lack of representation of English as a global or international language, though the situation has been slowly improving in the last several decades. Sugimoto was not the only one to question the status of different Englishes in Japan, however, as there were also two forums which dealt with the subject of English as an international or global language, a workshop, and at least two other short talks on World Englishes and Japanese English.

Even if we can't change the national mindset or curriculum in these regards, however, we can make sure that we are giving our individual classes what they want and need. Paul Rowan of Yokohama City University gave a lively presentation and workshop on how to make and use student-created rubrics to not only cut down on your own workload but to help the students create recognizable goals for themselves and allow them to measure and understand their own progress and weaknesses with guidelines that they decide on as a group.

Writing out a rubric may seem rather low-tech with technology use in language teaching remaining all the rage, but sometimes a bit less reliance on technology may be needed. Peter Ruthven-Stuart of Future University questioned whether all of our technological advances are beneficial to language acquisition in a study on the use of translation programs. I imagine all of us have experienced our students' dabbling with translation software, whether we feel very confident in recognizing it or not. And perhaps we should not – feel very confident, that is. In his recent study, which included 132 language teachers, Ruthven-Stuart found that his respondents incorrectly identified nearly a third of the sample essays they were given, either by misidentifying student-written pieces as being composed by a computer program or misidentifying a computer-written piece for an actual student's work. As such technology continues to improve, we will have to continue to question whether all technology is indeed good for language learning.

Looking In, Looking Out
The need to reexamine ourselves, our peers and our students never ceases – and in fact, it probably grows with time for most of us, as we become more fixed in our ways and ideas. A number of our presenters, luckily, gave us the opportunity to take a fresh look at our situations and to examine things from perhaps a forgotten or new angle.

With the current 'population time bomb' lurking in the back of everyone's minds and the approaching need for even more foreign workers as Japan faces significant labor shortages in the near future due to the struggling birthrate, Adam Komisarof of Reitaku University gave his plan for how both Japanese and immigrants need to compromise so that together we can form a working society. With cultural sensitivity, he suggested that the onus must be shared and outlined several steps that would need to be taken for immigrants to be successfully and smoothly integrated into Japanese society. His thoughtful comparison of the cultural norms of Japan and America (the Western country which he chose for his initial research) can help remind both sides of the deep-seated socio-cultural factors that shape the way we see each

other and how small changes may lead to more stress-free integration for all.

Gregory O'Dowd of Hamamatsu University also reminded us to examine the needs and expectations of ourselves and our students as we investigate why some teaching styles just don't seem to 'work' in the Japanese context. In the medical school where he works, the attempts to introduce PBL or problem-based learning have struggled greatly, due largely to various factors in both the students' and teachers' backgrounds and expectations which can make sudden, drastic curricular changes grind to a standstill. O'Dowd reminded us that we must be careful of trying to import teaching styles from other cultures without being prepared to lay the groundwork for them and make adjustments to the target culture.

These are only a small number of the many, many worthy speakers who presented, and of course we know that there are not only lectures to be attended at the conference. At the Annual General Meeting for our SIG, the small but dedicated turn-out also came ready to ponder our continued development, not only as individual educators but as a SIG which can provide for both our members and for the greater JALT community. With our newly elected officers and some exciting plans on the horizon, look forward to our growth in the near future. In closing, I would like to repeat that this conference has been an ideal opportunity for reexamination and to add a gentle reminder, though I'm sure the members of our SIG need no reminding: the opportunity is always there and the need for reflection never ceases – so let's not wait for the next pithily-named conference before we do this again, shall we?

Conference Report   GloCALL 2007   Ho Chi Minh City   November 2007

Anthony Robins (Aichi University of Education)

I joined the GloCALL conference in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, as a member of PacCALL (Pacific Association for CALL). It was my second opportunity to attend and present, following last year's conference in Nanjing, China. This year's conference was actually in two parts, with the Ho Chi Minh City session (5th to 7th November) preceded by one in the capital, Hanoi (2nd to 4th November). However, budget and time constraints precluded me from attending both.

The conference brought together local teachers at both cities and presenters from a wide range of countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific. Some of the presentations I attended will indicate this range. On the Tuesday, Neny Isharyanti from Satya Wacana Christian University in Indonesia talked about use of online chat with her students. While I favour visual and audio link-up using webcameras, it obviously suited her situation where access to the Internet is mainly dial-up and relatively expensive. On the Wednesday, both Siew Ming Thanh and Jacqui Cyrus talked about training teachers to use CALL tools. Siew Minh from the National University of Malaysia described the EU funded development of an 'eEducator' course. This trains course tutors, for example on applied linguistics courses, to deal more effectively with issues such as material delivery and feedback to participants. It is being piloted in China where it fits the geography which favours distance learning. Distance learning of another kind was described by Jacqui Cyrus from the University of Guam who described and analysed a course she ran to improve the technology skill levels of teachers from the remote Micronesian island of Kosrae.

Plenary and featured speakers included Yueguo Gu, Deborah Healey and Scott Windeatt. Professor Gu, from Beijing Foreign Studies University, was as energetic in his delivery as in Nanjing in 2006 as he compared 'situated and distributed' learnings. Healey from Oregon State University followed advice from the conference organisers in giving a more theoretical presentation entitled 'What do we know about CALL? Claims and evidence', partnered by a practical presentation on searching more efficiently with Google. Official sponsorship of Healey by the English Language Office of the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok showed its renewed involvement in the country during the last decade after the postwar period of non-engagement. Windeatt from Newcastle University provided a similar balance of theoretical and practical, with case-studies from former students and even a 'hot potatoes' activity.

One of the main challenges of this kind of conference is to successfully combine two needs. First are those of the local teachers providing some presenters but mostly the 'audience' who are in a different country each time. Second are those of the presenters, looking both to find out about developments in other locations and to add to their 'gakureki' (academic CV). Although, as mentioned above, the organisers' advice was to go for a balance of more theoretical and practical presentations, there was at least a little evidence of dissatisfaction from local teachers. Having also been to Nanjing, I realised that a key factor in improving this situation is time for the 'insiders' and 'outsiders' to socialise so that they can learn about each others' teaching environments. This worked very well at both Nanjing and, apparently, previously at Kunming in Yunnan, China. However, this year, two factors reduced this socialisation. One involved time constraints resulting from the back to back sessions in two different cities and the other was the fact that most local teachers were commuting in, rather than staying alongside participants, as happened more in China. Returning to presentations which I attended, the most welcomed by local teachers seemed to be Rita Niemann's on using 'Wikis' for collaborative writing. Although Niemann, based at the National University of Singapore, described her experience teaching writing in German, it was not difficult to extrapolate it to other teaching environments and was practical on such basic issues as the pros and cons of various 'Wiki' providers.

How about Ho Chi Minh City as a location? I referred to commuting above. The main mode there remains small motorbikes, said to number about 3 million. There were times when it felt like they were all bearing down on me in the lowly role of pedestrian. One travel guide stated that it could not really recommend bus travel because on alighting you become a mere pedestrian. However, the snakelike stream of motorbikes, apparently now an equal feature in Hanoi, seemed to symbolize the dynamism of a country on the rise, where stores selling famous brands were cheek by jowl with posters featuring Lenin which commemorated the 90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Progress was also symbolized as I left from the brand new Japanese ODA funded international terminal at Tan Son Nhat, a former airbase which featured prominently in the war, and which itself will be replaced by a new international airport at Long Thanh in the next decade. If you are interested in participating in next year's PacCALL conference, current plans are for a location either in Indonesia or the Philippines.

Pictures from the conference and city can be seen at:
http://www.kokusai.aichi-edu.ac.jp/78/g20071.html

Information on PacCALL can be found at: www.paccall.org

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 up 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:

TE SIG Co-Coordinator, Colin Graham < colin_sumikin(at)yahoo.co.uk >

Submission Guidelines:

See inside back cover

Editor:

Simon Lees

Kinjo Gakuin University

Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, JAPAN

Contact:

<simich(at)gol.com>