# Explorations in Teacher Education


## JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter

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## Contents




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## And Now a Word from…The Editor

Welcome to Volume 14, Issue 2, the summer edition of Explorations in Teacher Education, the newsletter of the Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teachers (JALT).

Firstly, a few words about SIG business. Unfortunately, Miriam Black has had to step down as the coordinator. Thanks to her for her efforts over the last few months. As a consequence, the Yahoo group for the TE SIG will be closing shortly. We are looking into a different way to provide the SIG with some kind of discussion functionality. In July, I attended the JALT EBM in Tokyo. It was an interesting weekend and it was nice to meet some of the SIG and Chapter "people" in JALT. One downside to the weekend was England's World Cup quarter final loss against Portugal, despite the best efforts of the supporters in Steve Brown's hotel room!

Turning to this issue of the newsletter, this time we have six articles for your perusal. Five of them are from previous contributors and one is a first time contribution. Thank you to everyone who contributed. Paul Tanner has chipped in again, this time his article is "A Guide for Essay Exam Takers". Our treasurer James Venema has contributed some useful suggestions about getting published, based on the Teacher Education panel discussion "Publishing as a Mode of Teacher Education" at the May Pan-SIG Conference. In a well-argued piece, James Porcaro proposes that the JET programme be abolished. While I generally regard the JET programme in a positive light, James' article definitely gave me pause for thought. Speaking of the JET programme, Nicholas Doran has responded to the series of interviews I conducted with former participants in the JET programme by producing an interview which looks at things from the other side, i.e. a Japanese teacher's experiences of living and studying in an English university. Anthony Ryan's "University Supervisors of Student-Teacher Practicums: Between a rock and a hard place!" provided me some valuable insight into the experiences of some of my fourth year students who have had to do their *kenkyuu jugyou* (research lesson) this semester. Finally, the first portion of a two-part article by Ben Backwell, "Applying the Reflective Cycle to Improve Cooperative Learning Activities in a Junior High School". This first part covers the theory of co-operative learning according to Dr. Spencer Kagan. The second part, to appear in the next issue will discuss how Ben applied the principles of cooperative learning to his classroom along with the activities he used.

Hope you enjoy the issue.

**Simon Lees, Editor.**

# University Supervisors of Student-Teacher Practicums: Between a rock and a hard place!

**Anthony Ryan, Aichi University of Education**

## Introduction

Leonard (1997) wrote that, according to his observations, in Japan the evaluation of student-teachers on teaching practicum, by the trainee's university supervisor, the supervising teacher and the principal of the school to which the trainee was assigned, was, for the most part, haphazard and extremely arbitrary. He described the ritual of the university supervisor visiting the school and observing the *kenkyuu jugyou* (research lesson) with a host of other student-teachers and teachers from the school. The lesson observation is followed by a brief discussion with the trainee over a leisurely cup of tea and general discussion with the principal along the lines of about how suitably the trainee fits in with the routine of the school, the students and the staff members. After four years of supervising university student-teachers on teaching practicum, this writer can state that evaluation methods still appear as arbitrary and inconclusive as ever. The only variation appears to be whether or not the principal sits in on the post-lesson chat between the university supervisor and the student-teacher. Before presenting a bilingual version and adaptation of Leonard's student-teacher evaluation form (1997), the next section reflects briefly on possible reasons that Japanese universities appear not to have a comprehensive evaluation system for the student-teacher practicum.

## Background information

It took this writer some time to discover that besides serving as a necessary 'real world' component of teacher training, the teaching practicum also has another, arguably more important, agendum. The teaching practicum serves as a vehicle for the advancement and reinforcement of the relationship between the school and the university. Strong relationships with schools are pursued for two reasons. Firstly, there is the obvious need on the part of the university to have the students spend time in a 'real' school and 'practice' teaching during their four-year training program. The stronger the relationship with a particular school, the more likely the school is to accept other students from the university in future years. In almost all public universities (national, prefectural and municipal), administrators spend a great deal of time and exert a lot of effort in petitioning schools to accept student-teachers. In the case of private universities with teacher-training programs, the method of placement of student-teachers varies according to the prefecture or region. For example, in the Tokai region of Japan, private universities have banded together and formed an association that takes responsibility for placing the student-teachers in schools. Each semester, the private university sends a list of their student-teachers to this association. The second reason why a strong relationship is necessary, is that senior professors in education departments at universities may need to find casual and part-time teaching positions for students that fail to pass the employment examination (*saiyou shiken*) taken in July of the fourth year. Generally speaking, student-teachers that pass this examination are eligible upon graduation to become full-time, fully-fledged, benefit-receiving teachers in the school system. These students can apply to private schools or municipal and prefectural education boards for employment. Those fourth years who fail the test, but still want to become teachers the year after, have two further employment options available to them after graduation. They can either be hired by schools as part-time teachers teaching perhaps six or seven classes a week, or as full-time *casual* teachers. Employees of the former type are not eligible for benefits such as sick leave, transport subsidies and the like, and are paid for the number of hours they actually work. The latter type, work just as long as regular teachers, teach the same amount of classes, and receive some benefits. Like the part-timers, they sign a yearly contract, but each March they also receive *taishokukin* (leaving service benefit). For these two types of graduates, getting a job depends upon the administration staff and teaching faculty of the particular university having the right connections with, not only an 'old boy' network of ex-graduates, but also the principals in the district. The better the reputation of the professor and the size and strength of the network he or she has built up over the years, the greater the chance of finding jobs for this second group of students.

As a consequence of this, universities find themselves in a vastly inferior position when it comes to what can and cannot be achieved during teaching practicum. By and large, the schools dictate to the universities the whole process including setting the schedules of the students, the number of classes they teach, the grade levels, the subjects they teach, and also the timing of the *kenkyuu jugyou.* Furthermore, supervising professors are extremely careful not to appear to do anything that smacks of a lack of respect for the school or anything that could be interpreted as usurping control of the practicum. As a result, supervisors are reluctant to visit the school unannounced, or for that matter, outside the scheduled times for the *kenkyuu jugyou* classes, around which the practicum is centered. Typically, these occur in the third or fourth week of a four-week practicum.

An example of the need to show due respect to the school is the 'obligation' of the university supervisor to initially pay a formal preliminary visit to the principal of the school some time before the actual observation of the student-teacher's lesson. The primary purpose of this visit, in which pleasantries are exchanged (*aisatsu*), is to express the university's gratitude to the headmaster for accepting the student. In the third and / or fourth weeks the supervisor usually attends the student's *kenkyuu jugyou.* This lesson (how many are scheduled by the school depends upon the length of the practicum) is usually **the** lesson of the whole practicum, and whether or not due to the encouragement of the school or the reluctance of university supervisors to impose upon the school, it is generally accepted that university supervisors observe only these types of lesson.

However, in my opinion, the circumstances surrounding this lesson and the 'required' attendance of the university supervisor, make it little more than an ordeal of survival for the student-teachers. When I was a student-teacher on practicum in Australia, there were rarely more than two observers when I was teaching: my university supervisor (who always dropped-in unannounced) and my school supervisor. After observing these lessons for the past five years in the Aichi region, I have yet to see the number of observers of a *kenkyuu jugyou* drop below five. As well as myself, the usual list of observers includes the other student-teachers at the school, the headmaster, the homeroom teacher, the subject coordinator, and all the other teachers of the particular subject that is being taught. On one occasion, there were actually eighteen 'observers' of the *kenkyuu jugyou* (I gave the student-teacher an exceptional report simply for having the courage to stand-up straight.). In this instance, and for the majority of *kenkyuu jugyou* lessons, the first thing a supervisor recognizes is the exceptionality of the lesson. That is, the entire 'show' has been stage-managed to proceed as smoothly as possible - hardly the ideal circumstances in which to give an objective, and more importantly, authentic evaluation of the student-teacher's abilities. At the end of the practicum, the school sends a grade (and sometimes a brief and general written evaluation) directly to the university. The onus for practicum assessment remains squarely on the shoulders of the school while the role of the university supervisor is an 'advisor.' However, given the circumstances concerning the assignment of university supervisors to teaching practicums, this system actually seems to be the best option.

In the case of my university, teachers are required to supervise students on practicum twice a year. However, whether or not the university teacher actually gets to supervise students from their own department, is largely a matter of chance. Supervisors are assigned to schools, not students. It works like this. The university administration petitions schools to accept students, then divvies up the affirmative replies and assigns to each department a certain number of schools. The number of schools a particular department is assigned is based upon the number of teachers in the department. For example, the foreign languages department has twenty-one staff, and therefore the department is assigned to visit twenty-one schools. Each school, however, differs in not only the number of students they accept, but also the majors of the students they accept. In other words, it's not unusual for a university teacher in the music department, for example, to be assigned to a school that has accepted English, math and or physical education student-teachers. As a result, the music teacher may find themselves attending an English lesson taught by an English major, or an ethics lesson taught by a math major. If they are lucky, they might actually get a music student to supervise. The reason given for this system is that it is the only way to ensure the supervision load is evenly spread. Some departments with a staff of twenty teachers have 120 students to supervise on practicum, while others with a staff of nine or ten may have 25 or 30 students. I doubt my particular university of education is dissimilar to any other.

Positioned squarely between these two systems - the school control of the practicum, and the seemingly random assignment of supervisors to schools - many university supervisors have obviously come to the conclusion that a comprehensive and formal practicum assessment of the students at the school they are assigned, is an exercise in futility. As a result, most have resorted to merely showing up at the *kenkyuu jugyou*, and then offering a few pro forma pieces of advice to the student before going on their way. Few can blame them for this, given that the assessment system bypasses them, and that they have no responsibility to submit any formal assessment documentation to the university.

What can a university supervisor do to ensure they can make a valuable contribution to the student-teacher practicum? In addition to lobbying your university administration to allow supervisors to visit their own students on practicum, there are other, more immediate measures that can be taken. The most important is that the university supervisor make a conscious decision to take on a greater responsibility and do what they can to more comprehensively assess the practicum. Below are two documents that can assist in this. The first document, the 'Student-Teacher Evaluation Form,' is a bilingual student-teacher practicum evaluation form that is suitable for use by university supervisors when observing lessons given by student-teachers. Additionally, it can be used by the student-teacher as a valuable tool for reflection after they have taught a lesson. The document was compiled using a variety of sources including Leonard's (1997) original English language version, practicum report documents from McAuley Teacher's College (Queensland, Australia), the Rockhampton Catholic Education Office (Queensland, Australia) and Auckland College of Education (New Zealand), as well as professional assessment forms of the Board of Teacher Education (Queensland, Australia). Although it is primarily aimed at student-teachers of English, it can be adapted for use when observing non-English lessons by omitting some of the English categories and / or substituting the word 'English' with the name of the particular subject.

The second document, the 'Student-teacher Evaluation Form for School Supervisors' is, as the name says, suitable for use by the school's supervising teachers and / or the headmaster. The major difference between the two is that the latter asks school supervisors to consider the development and improvement of the student-teacher over the course of the whole practicum. The following methods can be implemented by the university supervisor to assist in assessing student-teachers on practicum.

1. Meeting with the student(s) prior to the practicum, giving them copies of the assessment form, and directing them to fill one copy out after each lesson as a personal reflection on their performance. After the practicum, the supervisor can ask to see all of them.
2. Using the first meeting with the school officials to ask permission to observe lessons - other than the *kenkyuu jugyou* - that will be taught by the student-teacher.
3. Giving the headmaster and school supervising teacher copies of the Student-Teacher Evaluation Form for School Supervisors to let them know what is being assessed (I have found that many teachers are actually very grateful for the form as many of them are unsure as to how to comprehensively assess the student-teachers).
4. Requesting that the school supervisor fill-out a copy after each lesson taught by the student-teacher.
5. Completing one copy for each lesson that the supervisor observed.

In my own experience, the most important factor in my teaching, is reflecting upon what I did in each and every lesson. If university supervisors can instill this habit in the student-teachers they supervise, whatever department they are from, they will have done a valuable service. The student-teacher practicum lesson evaluation form is a valuable aide in conducting this reflection process.

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# Abolish the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) Program!

**James W. Porcaro, Toyama University of International Studies, <porcaro@tuins.ac.jp>**

## Introduction

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program is a government operated and financed program that was inaugurated in 1987. The total number of participants currently working in Japan is over 6,200, with 90% of them working as native English speaking "assistant language teachers" (ALTs), mainly in junior and senior high school classrooms, and a small but increasing number in elementary schools. JET ALTs are from about 40 countries – about 45% from the USA, 20% from the UK, and 30% from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland (ALT Online [online]). In addition, local governments have hired more than 3,000 non-JET ALTs through private educational firms (Ozawa & McLauchlan, 2003), bringing the total number of ALTs to around 9,000. The annual cost for all ALTs in Japan may be as much as 50 billion (50,000,000,000) yen (US$435,000,000) [1]. The duties of ALTs involve essentially assisting Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) in communicative English language classroom instruction. In addition they are expected to aid in the language training of JTEs themselves and to assist in other English language activities at their schools (The JET Programme [online]).

Since the ALT program started nearly two decades ago, I have talked pointedly with scores of high school (and some junior high school) JTEs at workshops, seminars, and other events in several locations in the country about their work with ALTs. My experience in this regard affirms the longstanding existence of a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction and displeasure among many JTEs with the ALT program, though most JTEs are unwilling to risk expressing formally such views especially when they know very well that the program will relentlessly carry on. In addition, over the past few years I have observed about twenty ALTs in high school classrooms and talked with most of them about English language teaching in Japan. My own contact with ALTs and their work lends no support for the continuation of the program and there is an absence of any comprehensive, valid studies that conclude a positive effect of ALTs' work on English language learning in Japanese schools, let alone one that is worth such a staggering cost to the taxpayers of this country. Therefore, I believe firmly that the ALT program should be abolished. Following is an outline of some specific reasons to support this position.

**Reasons to abolish the ALT program**

1. Detailed data on the academic and professional background of ALTs seem to be entirely lacking. However, from personal contact and conversation with many ALTs and JTEs on this matter, it seems fair to say that the vast majority of ALTs are young people recently graduated from college with little or no experience as teachers of anything, let alone English as a foreign language, who are in Japan for the first time. A majority stay just one year, although some renew their contract for a second year (about one-third) or even a third year, which is the maximum limit (ALT Online [online]).

The vast majority of JTEs receive almost no formal teacher training and inadequate in-service training (Browne, 1998; Gorsuch, 2002; Mulvey, 1999; Murphey & Sasaki, 1998). Approximately 80% employ *yakudoku* as the only known instructional methodology (Gorsuch, 1998; Takeda, 2002). (*Yakudoku* means "translation reading" but is widely referred to as "grammar-translation".) At the same time, the overwhelming majority of ALTs are new and untrained teachers. Thus, the classroom work of paired teams of JTEs and ALTs is likely often to be much like the blind leading the blind, at least insofar as implementing effective communicative-based English language instruction. Although anecdotal, my personal experience of a number of classroom observations and conversations on English language teaching with paired teams of JTEs and ALTs at various high schools lends strong support to this characterization.

2. It seems there are no comprehensive studies with valid empirical evidence to show that the presence of ALTs in junior and senior high school classrooms over the past nineteen years has effected any notable advance in students' English language proficiency levels or the quality of communicative language teaching (CLT) on a widespread scale in Japan. There are assertions and some research that suggest the program has had some positive impact on the English language ability of some JTEs (Browne, 1998; Gorsuch, 2002). However, even this evidence is from very limited samples of self-assessment and it seems any generalizations should be made with considerable caution. I have taught at tertiary level in Japan since before the entry of ALTs into secondary school classrooms and can assert having seen no discernible evidence of their impact on the overall level of students' English language proficiency or their attitudes toward learning English over these years. Not only are the English language skills of most Japanese students still acutely limited, but also they still enter

college holding "awkward and unproductive strategies and expectations for what English study and learning is" (Christensen, 2003, p. 16).

3. At a cost of as much as 50 billion yen a year for the ALT program, a cost/benefits analysis would certainly suggest that the presence of ALTs in Japanese schools involves a massive expenditure for at best very limited and unproven gains. I believe that taxpayers' money would be far better invested by conducting long-term, intensive training of JTEs in workshops, seminars, and courses throughout the year for which they could be paid for required attendance. Instruction would be provided both to raise their levels of English language competence and to develop their knowledge of and skills to deliver effective, communicative teaching methodologies. (A recent survey by the Ministry of Education [Monkasho] itself indicates that 90% of public junior high school JTEs and 80% of public senior high school JTEs have not yet demonstrated their achievement of the required level of English language proficiency on specified tests [Daily Yomiuri, 2004]). Experienced, successful teachers and teacher-trainers from within Japan, both native English speakers and native Japanese speakers, should be employed with this money to work with junior and senior high school JTEs not only in regularly organized training sessions but also on a daily basis in their classrooms as long-term mentors. At the same time, it is imperative that Monkasho mandate the practice of basic CLT methodology in all secondary schools and the termination of *yakudoku* instruction.

The Ministry of Education has already implemented a five-year program to improve the English skills of JTEs at public schools. 60,000 junior and senior high school teachers are required to take short English training courses. Also, about 100 teachers are being sent overseas to graduate schools for further language experience and teacher training (MEXT, 2002). While such efforts are positive, they are pitifully limited in scope. Enormously more could and should be done for far more JTEs with the huge amount of money now spent on ALTs brought to Japan from other countries whose contribution to English language education in Japan seems to be extremely limited at best.

Furthermore, class size should be significantly reduced and more trained teachers hired in order to facilitate successful implementation of CLT. Normal class sizes of up to 40 students are unacceptable in a nation having the world's second largest economy. The total educational environment of primary and secondary schools in Japan would benefit enormously from major reductions in class sizes which can be funded by the reallocation of the 50 billion yen now spent annually on ALTs.

4. The single most important and desperate need in English language education at secondary level is for JTEs to use English as the language of teaching and learning in their classrooms. They are potentially the greatest resource and motivator for their students, who need to hear their teachers using English with them and to be provided with opportunities and support to use English themselves. Instead, the presence of ALTs in their prescribed roles allows JTEs themselves to continue to avoid employing English as the instructional language in their classrooms. They can continue to argue that using Japanese is more comfortable for them and their students and that it is only natural that ("we") Japanese use the Japanese language among themselves (see Murphey & Sasaki, 1998). Frankly speaking, I am appalled when I make classroom observations to see that the presence of ALTs marginalizes and diminishes the role of JTEs in their own classrooms in front of the students at a time more than ever when they need to assert themselves far more by teaching English in English.

The presence of ALTs in classrooms allows JTEs to evade their responsibilities. One JTE (Miyashita, 2002) with twenty years experience in high school classrooms publicly expressed his view on this point with compelling candor:

"The JET program should be abolished.... It is we Japanese teachers of English who should take more responsibility for bettering English education in Japan. We are the ones who should study more about cultural differences, improve our skills in verbal English communication and do our best to be role models for our students. It is our duty to help students grow into mature Japanese citizens with healthy and balanced international viewpoints. The Education, Science and Technology Ministry, therefore, should start sending many more Japanese teachers of English abroad so that they can broaden their horizons as well as acquire proficiency in their language skills."

**Conclusion**

The effects of the inadequate teaching of most JTEs at junior and senior high schools are painfully manifest. Monkasho (MEXT, 2002) has recognized this and to deal with the matter has instituted such strategies as the SELHi program (see Porcaro, 2006) with the aim of "drastically improving the English education of Japanese people." The focus of attention needs to be on JTEs. "People have been criticizing English pedagogy in Japan for the same reasons for over 100 years, from a time preceding the university entrance exams" (Mulvey, 1999, p. 135). It is long past the time when wholesale change is required in the work of JTEs in order for them to fulfill their responsibility to prepare students for engaging and succeeding in their choices of work and activity in the intensely integrated international order of the 21st century. Monkasho (MEXT, 2002) stated: "With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, it is essential that our children acquire communication skills in English… in order for living in the 21st century. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of our children and the further development of Japan as a nation."

The employment of thousands of ALTs not only does little if anything to improve Japanese students' English language education, but also retards the necessary professional growth and development of JTEs who need and deserve massive assistance and support that will produce, at last, effective English language instruction in their classrooms. As I noted in a previous ETE article on SELHi's (Porcaro, 2006), in recent years, Finland has enjoyed an international reputation for the high quality of its education system. The principal of a school in Helsinki told a visiting reporter last year that the three reasons for her country's educational accomplishments were "teachers, teachers, and teachers" (Kaiser, 2005). Indeed, they make all the difference in the quality of education for their students. The Japanese public and the Ministry of Education must recognize the essential role and the acute needs of Japanese teachers of English. They must demand far more accountability from JTEs and at the same time provide them with the means to meet the challenges set forth in Monkasho's statement "to cultivate 'Japanese with English abilities'". The ALT program, in fact, is a severe distraction from the accomplishment of these goals. I advocate that it be abolished and that the problems of English language education in Japan be faced with full frontal force until they are finally overcome.

[1] Asahi Shimbun (2004) states that it costs six million yen per teacher to maintain an ALT for a year in the JET program. (The monthly salary itself is 300,000 yen.) The cost of ALTs recruited through the private firm reported in the article is from 4.5 to 4.8 million yen per year. This may be representative of the costs paid to other private educational firms who recruit ALTs for local boards of education. (Conversion from yen to US$ is at 115 yen = 1US$.)

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## Interview with a Japanese TESOL MA student

**Nicholas Doran and Makiko Tani, <Nickdoran_2000@yahoo.com>**

### Introduction

This interview looks at one Japanese teacher's experiences of living and studying at an English university. The interview is with Makiko Tani, who went to England in 2003-2004 and studied for an MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at the University of Leeds.

Makiko is a Tokyo resident and has taught English for five years. She is now teaching at Tokai University Junior College, Takanawa and Toin University of Yokohama.

First of all, can you tell us why you decided to study in England?

I worked as a full-time English teacher for four years at high school after graduating from university in Japan. While teaching English to students, I was always wondering whether my way of teaching English was best for the students. My experience as an English teacher motivated me to want to learn more effective methods for teaching English to Japanese learners so I decided to study for an MA. The reason for choosing England was that England was the first foreign country I had ever visited. It was about 11 years ago. The impression was so strong that I wanted to go to England again. At that time, I did a home stay with an English family. I have kept in touch with them since then and having someone I know in England made me feel comfortable to live there. Also, I thought it was a good idea to study in England as a Master's degree only takes one year in England as opposed to Japan and the States where it takes two.

And why did you choose the University of Leeds?

I bought a book called "The Guide to Graduate Programs in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages" and I looked for some universities in the UK which had TESOL programmes. I applied to four universities in all: Leeds, Lancaster, Newcastle and the Institute of Education (University of London). I got offers starting in 2003 from Leeds, Lancaster and Newcastle and I got an offer starting in 2004 from the Institute of Education. I wanted to start from 2003 so I chose Leeds because it is closer to London than Lancaster and Newcastle.

Being closer to London was important to me because my host family lives near London and I wanted to visit London on a regular basis. Also the School of Education at Leeds was rated within the top 5, which was also an important factor for choosing this university.

I thought it would also be a good idea to choose a TESOL programme which was located within the Department of Education as opposed to some universities where TESOL is in the Department of Linguistics. According to the guidebook, it seems that those programmes in the Department of Linguistics are less practical and more theoretical in nature than those in the Department of Education. However, I discovered that all the modules in the Leeds' TESOL programme were in fact very theoretical and not at all practical. On the other hand, running in parallel to the TESOL programme was the TEFL programme for students who have little or no teaching experience. This programme was in fact very practical as students had teaching practice, had an opportunity to observe lessons and generally learnt a lot about the practice of teaching (as well as the theory).

Can you give us a basic outline of the costs involved in studying and living in England?

Firstly, the tuition fee for an MA in TESOL was about £8000 at that time. This compared to approximately £3000 for British and EU students.

Secondly, I had to pay for a pre-sessional course which cost me about £850. In my case this course was optional. This course generally takes place the summer before the MA starts and is designed to prepare students for studying at an English university. Often, students who have not met the entry requirements for the university attend this course. In my case I had already met the requirements and I did not have to take the course. However, I attended this course because I wanted to get used to life in Leeds and wanted to learn a little about the English way of studying, especially about academic writing. To be honest, I was a little disappointed at first because some of the classes were boring. However, I think most of the students benefited from classes on academic writing. In this sense, I can recommend this kind of pre-sessional course to people who are thinking about studying at an English university.

Books cost me about £400 although I don't think there were many students who spent as much money as me on books. I think, in general, the other students only spent £100 or less on books. If you don't buy books, you need to spend money on photocopying, which is also expensive. As far as I remember, I spent about £80 on photocopies. Whether you buy books or not is generally up to you because the university library basically has all the texts you need to read and is very well organised. The library at Leeds had a well-thought out system which meant for example that journals could not be taken from the university and high-demand books could only be borrowed for say 24 hours. However, if like me, you find that often all the library copies of important books have been taken out, you might decide it is worthwhile to spend a lot of money on books.

England is generally a very expensive place to live and with rent, entertaining, food and so on. I spent about £8000. I did not have an extravagant lifestyle while in England and lived in nice but basic accommodation. However, I did travel a lot to countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and to places like Oxford, the Lake District and so on. If you want to have a good time in England and like shopping, eating out and clubbing then this figure can quite easily skyrocket. For example, one very social friend on my course found that their budget of £15,000 was exhausted less than half way through the year.

In total it cost about £20,000 for studying and living in England. I would say that this is an average figure for foreign students doing a one-year course in an English university. As I went to university a few years ago now, I would say that if you want to study in England in the next academic year, I would add a few hundred pounds on this figure and would expect to spend around the £20,500-21,000 mark. (*Possibly a little optimistic–Ed)*

How did you prepare for your studies at the University of Leeds?

I found that studying for the IELTS exam directly helped me to prepare for the Master's degree. Although it depends on each department, applicants generally need to get at least a score of 6.5 out of 9 on IELTS in order to get a conditional offer to study for a Master's degree. When studying for the IELTS exam, I learned a lot about how to write an essay with an introduction, body and conclusion. Also, I realised the importance of "critical thinking/criticality" i.e. the importance of expressing my opinions in my writing. IELTS is not just an exam to test English proficiency but also to test whether you can cope with academic life in universities in Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

Also, as I mentioned before, I bought a guidebook which was useful because it gave me some information on the different universities I was applying to. It also had a section on some basic theory about TESOL.

Can you tell us about the application process for getting onto the Master's course?

Yes, I began to apply in February 2003 for the course starting in September. Earlier, when I decided to study in England (in October 2002) I bought some books on studying abroad and I wrote off for prospectuses from about ten English universities. The British Council in Tokyo also had a lot of information about studying in Britain. When applying to universities, I needed to hand in some documents such as references, an application form, a personal statement, a test score (IELTS or TOEFL), transcripts and so on. Just to mention something about the personal statement, this is basically an essay to introduce myself and to state my purpose why I want to study for a Master's degree. During this time I also had to prepare for the IELTS exam. After applying, I received responses from universities. I got the first offer from Lancaster University around March 2003, and then from April to June 2003, I got the results from the other universities I applied to.

What modules did you take on the course? What modules were on offer?
Can you tell us something about one or two of these modules?

There were two compulsory core modules and seven optional modules. I took "Language Study and Language Learning for TESOL" and "Methodology for TESOL" as compulsory modules in the first semester. "Language Study and Language Learning for TESOL" was divided into "Language Study" and "Language Learning". The first looked at what teachers need to know about language in order to teach language. For example, I learned about discourse, register, genre, corpus and so on. The latter told me about bilingualism, interlanguage, individual learner difference and so forth. "Methodology for TESOL" focused on the four skills.

As optional modules, I took "Materials Development for TESOL", "Lexical Approaches to Language Analysis and Teaching", "Evaluation and Testing for TESOL" and "The Practice of Supporting Language Teacher Learning." Other optional modules on offer were "Classroom Discourse", "Syllabus Design and Development for TESOL", and "Teacher Education for TESOL". I wanted to increase my exposure to English and to get some broader knowledge of TESOL, so I audited "Syllabus Design and Development for TESOL" and "Classroom Discourse". To audit basically means to sit in the class but you don't have to do the coursework.

What were your impressions of the course?

Overall, I was satisfied with the course because tutors were supportive whenever I was stuck. In every lecture, handouts were prepared and they helped me understand what the lectures were about.

In terms of the modules I took, I enjoyed “Lexical Approaches to Language Analysis and Teaching” the most. As the name suggests, this module was based on vocabulary and as well as looking at such things as Lewis’ Lexical Approach/Willis’ Lexical Syllabus, we also looked in detail at language corpora, dictionaries, how vocabulary is presented in materials and a little bit about Psycholinguistics.

In addition to the assessed modules, students also had to attend classes on “Research Methods”. These classes ran throughout the year and as well as showing us how research can be carried out, it also looked at how to write essays, how to read efficiently and how to take notes from texts and so on. Generally, these classes were very boring and at times the lecturers did not seem to be organised. That is to say, it was obvious that the lecturer would often come in without anything planned and ramble on for half an hour about some research they or their friends had done in the past. However, on saying this, I believe that it was an important module, especially when it came to writing the critical study. In these classes students had a chance to think about and discuss different ideas. Without these classes, I believe that a lot of students would have been lost when deciding what their critical study topic would be as well as how to conduct research and of course, how to write what amounts to around 100 pages of solid academic work.

What were your impressions of living and studying in England?

Overall, I had a very good time in England. I was not homesick at all. I think the people on my course also enjoyed their time in Leeds as well. However, on saying this, it was much harder to live and study in the UK than I had expected. I got used to living in Japan, where I can say with some certainty that it is much easier to do everything. In Japan, the obvious example is that trains run exactly on time but there are also other things such as the fact that in general it is safe to walk alone after dark, the service at shops and restaurants is efficient, people are very polite and respectful of one another and so on.

I may seem very controversial here and I apologise in advance but at times it seemed as though England was the exact opposite of Japan. For example, I and other people I knew avoided walking alone after dark because drunken men and drug dealers would hang around in the streets. There were lots of beggars and generally on every street in the centre of town people were selling “The Big Issue”. Another thing is that things don’t seem to work very well in England. Machines get broken and aren’t fixed. There was a time when the washing machine I was using broke and I could not open the door and take my laundry out.

However, there are many nice things to say about Leeds as well. The people are friendly and helpful. Middle-aged/elderly people are really nice, they are always saying “thank you” or “ta”, “please” and what may sound peculiar to foreigners :“love” as in: “that will be 40p, love” or “how are you love?” This is from somebody I had never met or seen before calling me “love”.

In terms of studying, I can honestly say that I had never studied harder in my life.

Do you think your studies were worthwhile?

I think they were. Considering the cost involved; the fee for a one year Master’s degree course in the UK and for two year Master’s degree course in Japan are almost the same and I was able to get much more exposure to English.

How did you find the coursework you had to do?

It was very, very hard. I had to read a lot of books. Time management was also a problem and I generally had to rush to finish my work, handing in my essays on the day of the deadline.

Regarding coursework, I think a good tip is to find somebody to help you cope a little, preferably a native speaker. There were a couple of native speakers on the TESOL course and they were kind enough to proof-read my essays and give me some useful advice.

I suppose one last thing to worry about is when lecturers assess your work. I and other students did not expect the lecturers’ comments on our work to be so critical. Therefore, at first, I think it is important not to expect to get good grades and expect heavy criticism of your work. As the course progresses this will probably change as you get used to academic life and produce better work, however, the feedback on those first few essays you write could come as a short, sharp shock to the system.

Do you think your future prospects have improved as a result of your Master's qualification?

Yes, I think my future prospects have improved although I think it is competitive to get the position I want because more and more Japanese people go abroad and get a Master's degree. Before studying in Leeds, I was a full-time English teacher at a private high school and I quit my job because I wanted to teach at university. After coming back from Leeds I found it was really hard to get even a part-time position at a university because universities in Japan generally require applicants to have at least a Master's degree and at least three publications. So I chose to work at a private junior and senior high school as a part-time English teacher. Fortunately, I got part-time positions at a university and a junior college this year, so I suppose I am drawing closer to my career goals and my Master's qualification is playing a part in helping me get to where I eventually want to be.

Is there anything else you would like to say to those people in Japan who are thinking of going to an English university to study?

Yes, if they manage to get into a university I'd like to wish everybody gambatte!!. Have a great time but not such a great time that your studies are affected. If you want to ask me any questions at all then please don't hesitate to contact me as I would be really happy to help. I can be reached at fourvalley18@yahoo.co.jp

**Nicholas Doran** currently lives in Tokyo and works as an EFL Teacher and Materials Writer at Hampton School of English. Nicholas has been a teacher for 9 years now and has taught in Lithuania, Poland, England and Turkey where he worked for the British Council. Nicholas' professional interests include Corpora, Teacher Cognition, Exams-in particular the IELTS Academic Paper and Sociocultural Perspectives on Teaching and Language Learning.

## Teachers becoming Writers: Some Suggestions for Publishing

**James Venema, Nagoya Women's University**

The saying 'publish or perish' may not always have been directly relevant to teachers pursuing a career in Japan, but publishing is becoming an increasingly important part of career advancement. This is particularly true for teachers at the post-secondary level. Many universities have traditionally included a minimum number of publications as a condition for full-time employment and, now, there are even cases where this is a stipulation for part-time employment. In addition, a more competitive job environment has many universities looking more closely at the quality as well as the number of publications of prospective teachers. In preparation for a Teacher Education panel discussion "Publishing as a Mode of Teacher Education" at the May Pan-SIG Conference "Authentic Communication: Process and Purpose" I chose to focus on practical suggestions for people at the onset, or early on, in their publishing career. The result was a number of suggestions based on my own experience as well as material covered doing the MSc. program in TESOL at Aston University. Perhaps more importantly, specific suggestions arose from conversations with a number of teachers and colleagues.

### 1) Become a reader as well as a writer

There are a plethora of journals and magazines devoted solely to ESL/EFL teaching. Many of them are specific to Japan; including TLT, the JALT Journal, as well as no less than nine different SIG journals (see the JALT website for a complete listing). Notable international magazines range from teacher-friendly articles in ETP (English Teaching Professional) to more academic journals such as Applied Linguistics. There are also a number of online journals, including the Internet TESL Journal, most of which tend to be teacher friendly. What follows is an unscientific, but a likely very representative, sample of journals that myself and 5 colleagues read or are familiar with:

**Japan based journals**:

ETJ (English Teachers in Japan)
TLT (The Language Teacher)
JALT Journal
JALT SIG journals:

- B-SIG Publications—Bilingualism SIG
- C@lling Japan—CALL SIG Newsletter
- Explorations in Teacher Education—Teacher Education SIG Newsletter
- Global Issues in Language Education—Global Issues in Language Education SIG Newsletter
- Learning Learning—Learner Development SIG Newsletter
- Literacy Across Cultures—Foreign Language Literacy SIG Affiliation Newsletter
- On CUE—College & University Educators' SIG Newsletter
- The School House—Junior/Senior High School SIG Newsletter
- Shiken—Testing & Evaluation SIG Newsletter

**International Journals and Magazines:**

ELTJ (English Language Teaching Journal)
ETP (English Teaching Professional)
Modern Language Journal
TESOL Quarterly
Applied Linguistics
Pragmatics
Asian EFL Journal
Essential Teacher
RELC Journal
CALL
Language Awareness
Internet TESL Journal (online only)

Reading fairly widely and regularly is advantageous for a number of reasons:

a) Reading can be a source of inspiration for ideas to write. Not only can ideas from authors lead to ideas of your own, but by becoming a reader we also can become aware of gaps in the literature that can be filled. In addition, by becoming a regular reader we can help to avoid the all too common error of reinventing the wheel (it is particularly important to avoid doing this from the perspective of a given readership).

b) Being a professional reader makes it much easier to situate one's writing. Many journals and magazines require a brief review of current and relevant literature on a topic. While it is possible to do a quick search of the literature, it is helpful to be aware of current writing before smattering an article with references.

c) By reading widely in a variety of journals we become more aware of appropriate venues for our own writing. What might not be appropriate for TESOL Quarterly might be entirely so in TLT or a SIG journal. The best way to know what journal might be appropriate, beyond the guidelines for submitting, is to sit down and critically read the articles and the styles in which they are written. A quick comparison of, say, ETP and ELTJ will quickly reveal that you have to package your ideas very differently depending on which one you intend to submit to.

Since it is impossible to keep up with all journals, a more practical and beneficial approach is to keep up with a reasonably broad selection of journals of immediate interest and relevance.

**2) Finding things to write about**

a) For teachers the most important source of ideas and inspiration, for teaching as well as writing, is their teaching environment. Assuming that one's writing goals are more education related than pure research oriented, those teachers lucky enough to be in a dynamic teaching environment will seldom find themselves short of ideas worth writing about. Conferences, as well as SIG and Chapter groups, are another important source of ideas and motivation. Writing, like so many other things in life, is much more difficult in isolation. Teachers should take advantage of opportunities that exist to enrich and expand their professional environment.

b) At some point teachers need to just start writing. When an article is still vague and unclear the simple fact of writing can lead to a chain of ideas and a clarification of what you want to say. Once you have something down on paper it is much easier to pass it on for proofreading and suggestions. Where ideas are clear and original teachers will find that they tend to write themselves. The most important thing is to actually find the necessary blocks of time to do so.

c) One colleague suggested there are four words every teacher needs to know: 'every survey is new'. This is true in the sense that descriptive, qualitative articles are by definition unique to a given teaching context. They are also valid and useful where they resonate with readers beyond their immediate context. A teacher's teaching context is not only an important source of ideas and inspiration for writing; it is also a valid topic as well.

3) **Writing for a Masters Program and writing an article to publish: a model for writing to publish**

A common career path for teachers would be to start a publishing career upon completing a masters program. It is important to note some crucial differences between the two kinds of writing. In a masters program the relationship between writer and reader is a subservient one and students write to show the level of their knowledge to the teacher. When publishing, writers assume at least an equal relationship with the reader and are expected to make a contribution that is original, valid, and useful. This difference has important implications for how ideas need to be written, particularly with the necessity for demonstrating that one's ideas are both original and valid. One model that is both common and useful is the SPRE model: Situation, Problem, Response, and Evaluation. An outline for writing could be as follows: (borrowed from the Aston MSc. Program)

**Situation**

Setting: a brief contextualisation, highlighting relevant local conditions

And

State: a brief review of current thinking and practice in your chosen area:

**Problem**

Problem: the specific difficulty, lack etc. on which you concentrate;

And/or

Purpose: the specific aim or objective which you pursue;

**Response**

Principles: the arguments on which your suggestions are based;

And

Procedures: your suggestions of what precisely should be done, including a plan for, or report of, the how of implementation.

**Evaluation**

Criteria: according to which the worth of your suggestions can be judged;

And/or

Evidence: according to which you can demonstrate the worth of your suggestions

**4) Selecting an appropriate venue to publish**

A publishing career could be compared to a triangle. At the onset, quantity is of critical importance whereas quality becomes increasingly important as the number of articles in a portfolio increases. Three, five, or ten articles appear to be commonly reoccurring critical minimum numbers when applying for posts at different universities. Beyond that, quality is becoming increasingly important (whereas, in the past, universities sometimes just counted pages when assessing a teacher's publishing points). When selecting venues for publications teachers should keep in mind three factors:

a) *The relative prestige of a journal or magazine*: The prestige of a publishing venue depends on three criteria: whether it is international or domestic, whether the venue is refereed or non-refereed, and (perhaps least importantly…) the number of readers. Many universities have instituted a point system where the prestige of a journal is quantified, although the descriptions tend to be vague, leaving applicants somewhat at the mercy of the evaluators. At Nagoya Women's University an "A-rank International Journal" (i.e. Modern Language Journal) comes in at 20 points whereas a university journal rings in at a relatively lowly 6 points. A common-sense approach is to maximize the number of points one can claim by taking into account the factors that affect prestige when submitting. It is worth noting that, while online journals are typically relatively low in prestige, they have the advantage of a potentially very wide readership. Indeed, a colleague has noted that a single online article in the Internet TESOL Journal has generated more responses and inquiries than all the other articles he has published in traditional paper journals combined.

b) *The relative newness of the article*: What might not be new at all for ELTJ might be ground-breaking, and even revolutionary, for a university journal. The key here is to keep in mind the readership of a given journal or magazine.

c) *The relevance of an article for a specific venue*: As already noted there are a number of SIG journals, for topics ranging from Testing, to Pragmatics, to Teacher Education. Beyond that, there is a diverse selection of relatively prestigious international journals with their own niche, from testing to phonetics to pragmatics. The plethora of journals available allows for the selection of immediately relevant venues for publishing.

**5) Proofreaders and publishing support groups**

Not only is it difficult to generate ideas for writing in isolation, it is usually a mistake to write and proofread in isolation. Before sending an article across an editor's desk it is important to find proofreaders willing to read your article closely and provide both micro-feedback (sentence structure, punctuation, and word selection) as well as macro-feedback (clarity of ideas and relevance). Articles that don't improve upon feedback and re-writing are extremely rare indeed. One source of support is the Writer's Peer Support Group at JALT which can be found on the JALT website. It is also possible to form your own support group more locally. Generally different proof-readers provide different kinds of insight (either micro or macro) and you will need a commitment from all involved to really take the time to sit down, read an article carefully, and provide quality feedback.

### 6) Articles as Part of a Professional Portfolio

One rule all teachers need to follow is to keep copies of everything they write. University journals are often very accommodating in that they provide submitters with a lot of extra copies of the article (boxes in some cases…). When you have only one original it is obviously not a good idea to submit it with an application, even when the university promises to return the submission package. It is also important to assume that all future employers will read every publication you include on a CV (sometimes to the point where they actually find misplaced commas in the reference section!), particularly the main ones for which prospective employers require copies. One colleague has commented that, as he progressed in his publishing career, he actually removed earlier articles from his resume that he thought were not up the quality of later ones.

## Conclusion

Publishing can be, and should be rewarding, in addition to being a critical tool in career advancement. For those teachers looking at a career at universities in Japan, publishing will increasingly play an important part. Keeping in mind a few general suggestions can go a long ways towards facilitating a successful publishing career.

# A Guide for Essay Exam Takers

**Paul Tanner, Nagoya City University, <pdtanner@hum.nagoya-cu.ac.jp>**

After evaluating 1200 essays for a university entrance exam, I noticed repeated mistakes that marred the essays, leading to confusion for me and lower marks for many examinees. Consequently, I vowed to write a student guide to essay examinations. In addition to some Japanese university examinations, the Eiken (STEP Level 1), TOEFL, most foreign universities, especially graduate schools, require students to take essay exams. Having taught essay writing courses preparing students for the TOEFL, GMAT, the Eiken, and university courses in essay writing, I feel comfortable offering some advice to potential test-takers. While these tips are not a substitute for essay practice or preparation, my advice is practical, and written from the point of view of a grader.

1. Don't start writing until you have three ideas supporting your argument. In this context, argument means the position you support. Brainstorm and jot down at least main ideas that explain your argument. Having these ideas will keep you focused.
2. When the question asks for you to make an argument, do not automatically choose the position you really feel—choose the argument you can most easily and convincingly make. The point of view you take matters less than the quality of your argument.
3. A good opening sentence is very important. You should demonstrate your fluency, exhibit an understanding of what the question asks for, and begin an answer to the question. Especially if there is more than one option, make it immediately clear what you are writing about. Get to the point. Essay graders are in a hurry, and are probably skimming the essay. They make a rather quick judgment, so make a good first impression. Also, begin the essay as if the reader doesn't know what the topic is.
4. Give your best examples first. You want to make an immediate, strong impression on the reader. If you decide to "save" your strongest argument for later in the essay, you may run out of time and not be able to use it.
5. Forget about trying to do everything perfectly. Your ideas are more important than your spelling. Remember, you have a time limit, and are in a test setting, so, you are going to make mistakes. Try to keep them to a minimum.
6. Some mistakes are more important than others. If you miswrite a key phrase of your argument or your basic argument is incomprehensible, you will lose points. Mistakes will be penalized when they interfere with meaning or confuse the reader. A misspelled but understandable word (most people cannot spell *hors d'oeuvres* for

example) does not really harm your essay score; however, an ambiguous or weak argument or lack of focus will lose you points.

7. Use organizational and transition words and phrases that show your intention. Words such as *first, second, finally, in conclusion, on the other hand, conversely, whereas, likewise, thus, however, nevertheless,* and *furthermore* make your paper easier to understand and provide signal markers telling where you are going.
8. Stay relevant. Answer the question that has been asked. Develop your ideas so that your views are clear. In a short, timed essay there is no time or room to get off track. Never lose the thread of the question you are trying to answer. Nor should you gear the essay to a topic you like or have prepared for. While marking essays about the meaning of ‘adult,’ I noticed one desperate test-taker attempted to segue the topic to something they had obviously prepared for. It went something like this: “An adult is a person who is concerned about the environment. Acid rain, global warming, and the destruction of the ozone layer are problems…” They continued to write about the environment. The test-taker did not receive passing marks because he or she did not actually answer the questions asked.
9. Vary your sentence structure, and do not repeat sentences. In particular, be sure to restate your conclusion or summary statement in different words than when you introduce your argument. Instead of repeating, for example, the word ‘valuable’ in the essay, use synonyms such as ‘important,’ ‘beneficial,’ ‘useful’, ‘will pay dividends,’ or similar words.
10. Take some time (up to five minutes) at the end to re-read your essay. Make sure you present all your ideas; also check for and correct surface errors. In an entrance exam essay about becoming an adult, one test-taker stated that he/she was twelve year old. The first mention was humorous, but after four mentions, it became irritating to the reader.
11. Have a clear, concise conclusion. Even a simple sentence wrapping up your view is a good idea. Sum up your argument. Do not introduce new material or present additional arguments. In short, your conclusion should explain, “Here’s what I mean.”

While this guide is in no way exhaustive, it does provide some concrete examples and a ‘thought framework’ for the essay examinee. All of the essay tests previously mentioned have information and resources on-line, and preparation books are also available. Take full advantage of the accessible resources, and prepare as thoroughly as possible. You need to be informed and ready to show off your knowledge. Good luck!

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## Applying the Reflective Cycle to Improve Cooperative Learning Activities in a Junior High School

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The main aim of this paper is to describe 3 lessons, which have activated my students' English ability through cooperative interactions with classmates. The focus is on how my junior high students learn. Through cooperative learning I hope to bring a more dynamic and humane method of learning to my students. This takes place through carefully designed activities that encourage class members to learn from each other whilst being actively engaged throughout the lesson.

In this paper I will also define the principles and theory of cooperative learning according to the education researcher, Dr. Spencer Kagan. Dr. Kagan is an educator who fine-tuned his cooperative learning experiences into four core principles and from these principles into a large array of activities. The 3 activities presented are modifications of Dr. Kagans' activities. I used the reflective cycle to adapt these activities to better suit my teaching context. The reflective cycle is a step-by-step process to help teachers improve their teaching. First the teacher describes in detail a recent lesson she has taught, then the lesson is analyzed to understand what happened, the following step is to make modifications in order to improve the students' quality of learning and finally the teacher returns to the class with a new, improved lesson to teach. The final section of this paper details the challenges and success of teaching cooperative learning classes in a Japanese junior high school.

I teach at an all boys high school in Nagoya. Students receive 6 lessons a week in English. Four of these lessons are taught by Japanese teachers of English (J.T.E.) and two by myself, the resident assistant English teacher (A.E.T.). After observing several classes taught by the J.T.E.s I came to realize that my students receive a lot of what can be termed "traditional teaching". Students learn from their teacher or textbook. Either they sit and listen to the teacher's explanation of new grammar and vocabulary or they silently complete exercises in their textbooks. The way such lessons are taught encourages students to passively soak up the language as a sponge soaks up water. One classic characteristic of traditional teaching is the *whole class answer approach.* In this approach the teacher poses a question and students who want to answer raise their hands. The teacher chooses a student who then gives an answer. Finally, the teacher responds to the attempt.

Although it is possible to cover a lot of ground in the textbook using this method there are two major problems in such a teaching style. Firstly, only one student is actively engaged at any one time. The vast majority in the classroom are passively listening. The student who answers is often not the student who most needs practice. It is the shy, “low level” student who doesn’t answer who needs to practice the most. In this classroom situation the student participation is unequal and usually in favour of those students who already can offer an answer.

From a cooperative learning perspective an even larger problem is that the whole class answer approach promotes negative interdependence between students. This means that student interaction is founded upon competition. One student gets the opportunity to answer, thus, all the other students lose their chance. Students realize that if a classmate fails to answer correctly they may then be able to give a correct response. In this way, students start to hope for the failure of fellow classmates, thereby promoting a culture of peer norms against success.

Having taught English in junior high schools for eight years I have become increasingly aware of such classroom factors as dormant (sometimes literally) students and an atmosphere where students view their classmates as potential threats to their academic success. As time passed I wanted more and more to change this atmosphere in my classroom. I wanted to create a space where students interacted with each other in order to achieve shared goals and be actively engaged throughout the lesson.

The big breakthrough came two summers ago when I attended a workshop by Dr. Spencer Kagan. Dr. Kagan opened the workshop by defining cooperative learning as:

> “Group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent upon the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others.”

The two main points to extract from this citation is that cooperative learning is both group work and individual work. Students collaborate in order to accomplish shared goals. They come to realize that each individual can reach his goal only if his fellow group members attain theirs’. In a very real sense students are linked to each other through the learning process. The term for this learning characteristic is positive interdependence and it lies at the very heart of cooperative learning. Another crucial component is individual accountability. To ensure every student is contributing and learning, a students’ individual performance is checked either by the teacher or groupmates. The purpose of a cooperative learning group, therefore, is to develop the group as a whole whilst making each member a stronger individual in his or her own right. Dr. Kagan followed up his definition of cooperative learning by outlining his four core principles for this teaching approach.

## The Principles of Cooperative Learning

***Positive interdependence**
***Individual accountability**
***Equal participation**
***Simultaneous interaction**

These four principles can be reduced to the acronym PIES. When PIES are embedded within an activity, learning, retention, social skills and other positive outcomes are the likely result. The existence of each of the four principles can be evaluated by asking a simple question examining the presence or absence of each principle.

### Positive interdependence

Does a gain for one student result in a gain for another? When the reply is “Yes”, then powerful peer norms are developed towards success for all. Students help each other because they realize in this way they are also helping themselves. It is important to check whether students have to work together in order to successfully accomplish the task. If they need to cooperate, then we know strong positive interdependence exists. Positive interdependence can be established by division of labour or by creating group challenges, which can only be achieved as a unit. Students feel a stronger “We” mentality when positive interdependence exists.

### Individual accountability

Although the ultimate aim of a cooperative learning project is to develop meaningful, effective group work, within the group it is crucial to promote individual accountability. A student should be able to demonstrate what he can accomplish on his own. If a student is required to show the group, teacher, whole class or partner what they can do, then individual accountability exists. Individual accountability can be enhanced by a quiz, students asking each other questions or any type of individual task. When there is a paucity of individual accountability in the class, students sense they can escape with making minimum effort. When individual accountability exists students feel motivated at a deeper level. We can confirm the existence of this second principle by asking: Is individual, public performance required?

### Equal participation

Equal participation is nurtured by assigning each individual student a fair portion of a project, by giving each student an opportunity to answer and by organizing learning tasks so that everyone has the same participation time. The vital question posed here is: How equal is participation amongst classmates? If equal participation is evident in an activity students feel themselves to be “on the same side.”

### Simultaneous interaction

With the final principle, the question raised is: What percent of students are overtly, actively engaged at any one moment? When the percentage of active participants increases there is enhanced learning for all.

For this reason much of Kagan’s cooperative lessons are pair work activities. In a pair, when one person is talking, then 50% of the class is using the target language whilst the other 50% is listening and preparing to respond. By incorporating the principle of simultaneous interaction into an activity students can be actively learning at any given moment. Students learn and retain more in this way as they learn by doing. Dr. Kagan noted that whilst the previous three principles are commonly found in other cooperative learning models, Kagan’s model uniquely includes simultaneous interaction as a key component.

### Kagan Structures

Before workshop participants experienced cooperative learning tasks, Dr. Kagan outlined his own work in the field of cooperative learning. Kagan’s specific contribution has been the development of what is known as The Structural Approach to cooperative learning. With a team of researchers Kagan identified and created many classroom structures, 3 of which are described in detail in the next part of this article. These structures are in essence, a series of behaviours in the classroom. Kagan’s intention is to focus on HOW students learn, not what they learn. Thus any classroom activity was expressed in a way that I found profound and simple.

Content + Structure = Activity

The content answers the question: What are the students studying? The structure answers the question: How are the students going to study? A structure is content free. The individual teacher simply puts her content into a structure to create an activity. Because the structures are content free, a single structure can be used over and over again with different content. This means that one considerable benefit to the teacher is time saved on researching, preparing and explaining new activities. One benefit for the students lies in the security of knowing how they will learn and thus being able to focus explicitly on the content they are going to learn. Kagan stressed that when using these structures, powerful cooperative learning occurs because embedded in each and every structure is the need for the students to apply the PIES principles.

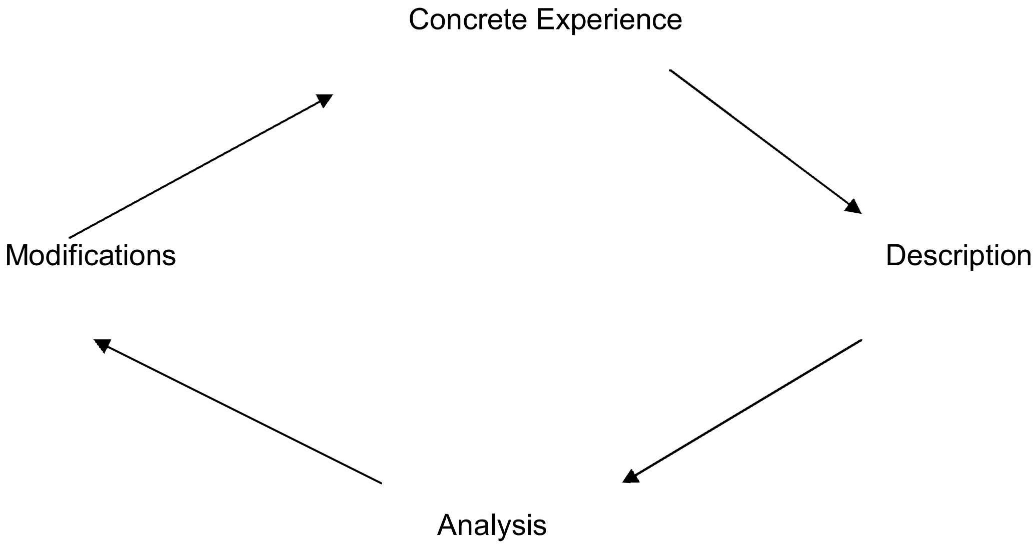
With these words we entered the world of Kagan structures by dividing up into pairs and sometimes groups of four in order to complete language based tasks. The next hour flew by as we, gobbled up these new activities and pedagogical principles. Because I had been engaged in the activities and not just passively told about them, I could remember several of them very clearly. Dr. Kagan had given us teaching activities that we could take away and apply the very next day. And that is what I decided to do. The next day I walked into class with my cooperative learning handouts and image of how to apply the PIES principles.

That day I taught 5 consecutive classes, teaching the same material. I completed the day of lessons less tired than normal and straight away wrote down in my teaching journal the success of the activity. On rereading that entry one sentence sticks out in particular:
“I have never seen my students more focused and sincere in their work.”

**Cooperative Learning Activities**

My research in this section is founded upon the reflective cycle. The reflective cycle offers teachers a comprehensive way to develop lessons into four distinct sections: first by teaching a lesson, next by describing in detail what took place, then analyzing those events and finally experimenting in the following class with the ideas generated from the analysis.

**The Reflective Cycle**




Based on Structural Dimensions Underlying the Experiential Learning Process & Knowledge Forms (Kolb 1984,42)

When applying the reflective cycle in class, the key is to remain aware of how the students interact with the materials, each other and the teacher. Describing is the process of articulating that experience. The aim is to slow down and resist the temptation to immediately jump to conclusions as to why students behaved the way they did. Simply describe the events, without interpretation. Information for the description can be gathered from various sources including the teacher's own observations, structured student feedback and videotaping the lesson. The teacher then analyzes this information, hypothesizing ways to develop and improve the lesson. Finally, our teacher returns to the classroom and modifies the lesson according to the improvements extracted from the analysis.

In the next part of this article the reflective cycle is applied to three Kagan structures (Rallyread, Same/Different and Numbered Heads Together), which I taught in my second year classes. Materials for the lessons can be found at the end of each activity. (*These activities will be in the next edition of Explorations in Teacher Education–Ed*)

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