

# **Explorations in Teacher Education**

## **JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter**

**Winter 2005 Volume 13, Issue 1**

### **Contents**

- 2 And now a word from...The Editor**
- 3 PAN-SIG Conference sponsored by Teacher Education SIG**
- 4 Professional development workshops for JTEs: impressions from the implementation**  
William Matheny
- 18 Interview with an AET: Ben Backwell**  
Simon Lees
- 22 Book Review: Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures**  
Paul Tanner
- 43 Publishing Guidelines for Explorations in Teacher Education**

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## Editorial

### **And now a word from...The Editor**

Hello and welcome to Volume 13, Issue 1 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, I'd like to wish all the members and officers of the TE SIG a slightly belated Happy New Year! A Happy New Year to all of our recent contributors as well, and thank you. We can't have a newsletter if we don't have anything to put in it, so please, don't be shy, send something along.

Secondly, an apology for the late appearance of this issue. I am writing this in my cottage in Normandy, it's snowing and there are already three inches of snow on the ground. This sounds very nice, romantic even, but there is no telephone line here, so I cannot connect to the internet. This has led to a somewhat sporadic editing process this time. So thanks to this issue's contributors for bearing with me.

Thirdly, this issue was going to include a call for papers for the JALT PAN-SIG conference, but as that deadline has passed I will have to limit myself to encouraging as many members as possible to attend the conference to show our support. As conference co-sponsors it behooves us to produce a good attendance, at least from within our own ranks. I'll be there, so if you'd like to meet your new editor you'll find me on the Teacher Education stand. Looking forward to meeting you! More information about the conference can be found in the next section.

Fourthly, a word of congratulation to the TE SIG Coordinator Anthony Robins, for his 'mention in dispatches' in the January 2005 issue of The Language Teacher. Anthony made an outstanding presentation entitled 'Making Homepages Worthwhile' at a Toyohashi chapter meeting in 2003 and won some recognition in the Best of JALT 2004 Awards. Nice one Anthony!

Other points of note from that issue include a picture of recent Explorations in Teacher Education contributor, Ben Backwell, at the JALT 2004 Conference in Shizuoka. Take a look at page 14 if you are interested in putting a face to the words (he's the guy wearing a 'beanie' to the right of the picture). The profile of the Teacher Education SIG covers our activities and interests well and mentions our Yahoo Group and the TE SIG library. If you would like to be involved in more frequent contact with the SIG membership then please join our Yahoo Group. To join contact the list moderator, Miriam Black <[miriamblacktesig@yahoo.com](mailto:miriamblacktesig@yahoo.com)>. The TE SIG library has around 120 books which have been donated and the books are available for loan for a small handling charge. The books could be quite useful to any of our members who are studying for their MA, or are conducting research for an article or paper. Please consider a donation if you are thinking of rationalizing your bookshelves. Contact Anthony Robins <[anthonycrobins@yahoo.com](mailto:anthonycrobins@yahoo.com)> for more information.

Fifthly, this issue sees the start of a new series of articles called 'Interview with an AET' in which I will interview a past or present participant to gain some insight into the JET program. As most of you will know the JET scheme involves Assistant English Teachers (AETs) in schools throughout Japan, but very little is heard about the teachers they assist, the Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs). To redress the balance somewhat we have an article about workshops designed to upgrade JTEs' English skills by William Matheny, who incidentally, is my opposite number at the Junior and Senior High School SIG newsletter. We also have a review of Krashen's book 'Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures' by Paul Tanner.

Lastly, in the next issue there will be an update about the membership of the TE-SIG and an article by former editor, Robert Croker. For the information of anyone wishing to contribute to the newsletter, the next issue will be appearing at the end of April, the Summer issue will appear in the third week of July and the Autumn issue at the end of October. Deadlines are a couple of weeks before the appearance date. Submission guidelines are on the back page. Please contact the editor, Simon Lees <[simich@gol.com](mailto:simich@gol.com)> for more information.

All the best in 2005! Simon Lees, Editor.

## **Conference Information**

JALT PanSIG 2005 Conference  
May 14-15, 2005

### **Plenary Speakers**

**Dr. Curtis Kelly** of Osaka Gakuin University will explain the trends shaping education, show why an adult boom is happening in Japan, and discuss adult education pedagogies.

**Dr. Michael Bostwick** of Katoh Gakuen will give a presentation entitled "Myths vs. Reality: What We Know About Early Language Learning."

### **Venue**

The conference will be held in Building 6 on the Kokubunji campus of Tokyo Keizai University. This campus is located about 10 minutes east of the Kokubunji Station, which is on the JR Chuo Line (Local) between Shinjuku and Tachikawa in western Tokyo.

Seven nice rooms located on the 7th floor of Building 6 will be used for this conference. The four rooms for regular presentations will comfortably seat 40-50 persons per room. A large conference room will be used for the plenary sessions. A smaller room will be used for poster sessions. And there is a spacious lounge area where the registration table and AM displays will be set up.

### **Teacher Education SIG Contribution**

Our main contribution will be a colloquium entitled "Teaching for life". The colloquium will focus on the issues involved in training new English teachers, supporting development and refreshing the experienced. This is being coordinated by our PanSIG representative, Colin Graham.

### **Fees**

Pre-registration fees for members are: ¥3000 for Saturday or Sunday, or ¥5500 for both days.

Onsite registration fees are: ¥4000 for Saturday or Sunday, or ¥7000 for both days.

## Essay

### **Professional development workshops for JTEs: impressions from the implementation**

William Matheny, Saya-cho Junior High Schools (Aichi Pref.), <willheny@nifty.ne.jp>

"I wanna bite the hand that feeds me  
I wanna bite that hand so badly  
I wanna make them wish they'd never seen me."

from "Radio, Radio" by Elvis Costello

One aspect of implementing any training program is fiscal: money will be allocated and spent. This past summer in every prefecture of Japan, money was spent to hold obligatory, "intensive" workshops for selected public junior and senior high school JTEs. It would be interesting to know the total cost of this year's effort, but I will leave that bit of data to other investigators. My interest is in the results achieved (or not achieved) through the expenditure and in what I actually saw and heard during the training sessions. Yes, I participated as a native speaker facilitator for two groups of junior high school JTEs in Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo. Yes, I received payment for my time and services and so any comment I may have which is critical of the program amounts to biting the hand that feeds me - not, perhaps as adamantly as Elvis Costello wanted to bite the hands of radio programmers - but I definitely feel an obligation to make my impressions available to others with an interest in large scale teacher training programs and professional development.

#### **Program goals and objectives**

Where the summer program for JTEs provokes questions is in the area of goals and objectives. For the workshops in Tokyo, there were objectives articulated by three separate agencies. The initial statement of purpose came from the national education ministry, which announced the program in a March 2003 "Action Plan":

"Intensive training given by the prefectural boards of education in conjunction with training at the national level will be supported so that all English teachers can undertake training in the five years from 2003 through 2007. This training will aim to improve the teachers' abilities to cultivate students' practical communication abilities. The level of attendance of training will become known through the Status Report on the Improvements in English Education mentioned previously."

The objective articulated in the Action Plan statement ("to improve the teachers' abilities to cultivate students' practical communication abilities") is clear enough, but nonetheless complex. The desired end result (students with practical communication ability) cannot be approached directly. It must be achieved indirectly through improvement in JTE ability.

In addition to the national ministry's Action Plan statement, there were objectives specified in the materials that were distributed to workshop participants. Material prepared by the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education contained the following statement: "... this program aims to have Japanese teachers of English enhance both their English abilities and teaching skills for further development of practical English skills of their students." This statement by one of the education boards actually implementing the program illuminates the dual nature of the workshops for JTEs. The program is focused on 1) ability with English and 2) teaching skills.

There were also objectives articulated in materials created by ISA - an external agency appointed by the BOE, which was also responsible for recruiting and dispatching native speaker "trainers". The material for trainers (which was not distributed to participants) contained the following three aims and their relative weightings:

- \* "To acquire techniques and approaches which help teaching English in English - 50%"
- \* "To learn areas of improvement through micro teaching session - 30%"
- \* "To provide the place for information exchange among teachers - 20%"

## **The participants**

Let us consider the teachers who participated in the program - from their point of view. Here is how it looks: You are a public school EFL teacher. Your first language is Japanese and, aside from time in the classroom, you do your day-to-day work in a thoroughly Japanese language environment. With the exception of the textbook you use, virtually all of the written material that crosses your desk every day is in Japanese. When you are not at school, you have very limited opportunities to function in the foreign language you teach. Then, during the summer break, you are obligated to attend a one-week series of workshops, which are described as "intensive training". The workshops are conducted entirely in English by a native speaker (whom you have never met) and encompass topic areas which range far beyond the language you teach and to which you may or may not have had previous exposure. Would you look forward to the experience with unlimited delight and anticipation? No? Would you be just a bit anxious?

## Evaluation/Critique

Using the objectives specified by the various agencies involved in the summer workshops, we can attempt a program evaluation. With the BOE objectives for example, we can ask: "Did the JTEs enhance their English ability?" This question connects quite directly to theories about learning generally and to foreign language learning in particular. Can a one-week "intensive" course noticeably enhance a JTE's ability with English? I suppose it depends on how one chooses to interpret the verb "enhance". If, for example, you mean adding to one's experience of communicating in a foreign language, the answer is most certainly yes. If, however, you mean broadening and strengthening a person's ability to communicate spontaneously and fluently, it is much more difficult to evaluate. For JTEs who have years of experience studying English, but in many cases, little experience in actually deploying what they have studied, a one-week workshop with a native speaker present may be a momentary stimulus to an increase in communicative competence. One must also ask, though: How much of that increase will be lasting? How much will ultimately prove to be transitory?

A further question relating to objectives regards the way the workshops were structured. Under the format determined by the Metro BOE, participants attended the sessions over five consecutive days - from a Monday to the following Friday, from 9:30 in the morning to 4:30 in the afternoon (with a break for lunch) - for a total of 30 classroom hours. Are five consecutive 6-hour days the optimum for producing substantive, lasting gains in communicative ability? Knowing how languid everyone became during the warm, summer afternoons, I have doubts about that. A more optimum format might have been 3-hour sessions spread over ten days or a program with 2 or 3-hour sessions conducted over a period of 10 weeks. I think the participating teachers knew instinctively that the course format was not optimum for improving communicative ability and as a result, some perhaps felt they were there to simply endure the week's program more than profit from it.

The goals articulated by ISA also deserve some scrutiny. Teachers certainly did exchange information about their work and benefited from spending time with their professional brothers and sisters. So, I would say that goal was achieved easily. The other two ISA goals are much harder to evaluate. Teaching English in English seems straightforward enough (especially to a native speaker), but entails acquiring language – something limited by the 30-hour duration of the program. ISA's "micro-teaching" exercise provided an opportunity for participants to actually present a lesson in front of their peers and appeared to be the most novel and anxiety-producing element in the program. Making and evaluating lesson presentations in the medium of English certainly added to participants' range of experience. But, did it help identify areas for improvement? My impression is that the JTEs benefited from watching each other and may be able to incorporate elements perceived as useful into their own classroom work.

## Why "intensive training"?

A question related to goals: Why was the program designed and billed as "intensive training"? Calling the program "intensive" seems to confer a sense of urgency – the need for the proverbial “quick fix” – and implies that the changes thereby induced will be rather abrupt. That impression is reinforced in the introduction to the MEXT Action Plan. Reference is made to “drastically reforming English education” and the “central role” English plays in a global economic environment of “mega-competition” (MEXT, 2003). Is this sense of urgency really warranted? Is it likely to help produce the desired results? While many teachers are open to change and experimentation, it is also said that “educators worldwide tend to be conservative” (Matheny, 2002). I suspect that the "intensive" label and other pronouncements by the national ministry might engender as much skepticism as positive motivation among JTEs.

Of course, participants' perception of the course format may well be quite different from mine. The equivalent Japanese for "intensive" – *shuuchuu-teki* (集中的) – may indeed have different connotations in the context of a training scheme. That's an interesting question for cross-cultural researchers. Even so, I suspect that JTE attitudes toward in-service "training" would be better if the effort was framed not as a knee-jerk reaction to some perceived crisis, but as a desirable addition to a long-term program of teacher development (See Matheny and Pattimore, 2004).

There were other areas that provoked doubts about the JTE summer workshops. The range in ability levels is one. If we regard workshop participants as language learners, individual ability becomes a factor in how each participant fared with the written material and activities which required speaking and listening skills. Some members of the groups I worked with were clearly quite advanced and experienced at interacting in English and at reading native level material. There were others, however, with much less experience (younger teachers particularly) for whom the written material and discussion activities may have been difficult to the point of being de-motivating. It was heartening to see the more able participants help the weaker ones, but the wide range of ability in each of the two groups I worked with may have limited the progress made by the more able participants. If one goal of the program was for participants to improve their ability with English, it may have been advantageous to group JTEs in some manner according to communicative ability.

Another obstacle that workshop participants had to deal with was the atmosphere created by the presence of observers. Two or three times each day, observers from either the Metro BOE or ISA came into the classroom to watch what we were doing for 10 or 15 minutes at a time. Supervision is perhaps necessary in a mandated program, but the observers quite certainly raised the communicative pressure that participants had to overcome. Though everyone became somewhat accustomed to the intrusions, JTEs must have felt self-conscious at minimum and at times inhibited in expressing themselves. Because participation in the workshops was obligatory and because there was obvious



supervision by school board personnel, one wonders how that affected attitudes among the participants. Applied linguists have told us that “the acquisition-affect relationship . . . is particularly sensitive” and that the effect of attitudes on learning can be “dramatic” (Johnson, 2001). Were attitudes among the summer workshop attendees at optimum for language learning? Of course, the affective environment was not ideal. That was one of the primary obstacles I had to overcome as a workshop facilitator and is an area that MEXT and the BOE seem to regard lightly.

### **The Workshops**

Two JTEs I work with (in Aichi Prefecture) were selected to participate in this year's workshops. Both of them expressed considerable consternation at the prospect of taking part. One of them asked me to go over material she prepared (the "homework", as she called it) and make corrections and suggestions for improvement. The fact that she felt comfortable enough to let me look at her written work is testimony to the fact that I have worked with this particular JTE for 5 years. The other JTE in question and I have only worked together since the beginning of the current school year and he didn't seek out any consultation on the written assignment. From the comments and facial expressions of both of these JTEs, it was clear that the prospect of submitting the written "homework" and being scrutinized by colleagues and unknown native speakers produced considerable anxiety. In spite of that anxiety, there was plenty to admire in what the Tokyo JTEs were able to do within the constraints of an "intensive" study/foreign language experience. That is probably the good news that should accompany any critical appraisal.

As this was the second year of the program and the second year I have worked as a facilitator, it is interesting to compare 2004 with 2003. One thing I noticed early on was attitudes. The people I worked with last summer seemed more open to experience and appeared more willing to work through the materials than the group I had in 2003. It is hard to say why, but one explanation might be professional gossip. Perhaps teachers heard favorable reports from those who participated in the first year. Another factor might be the difference in participants. The group I worked with the first year were all high school teachers. In general, that group struck me as rather cynical about administrative initiatives and because I am a junior high school ALT, seemed dubious at first about my identity. High school JTEs may have felt that my experience and point of view lacked relevance to their work contexts. In contrast to that, last summer's participants were all junior high school teachers and thus we had considerable insight into each others' work.

What was truly remarkable about last summer's JTEs was the extent to which they endeavored to function in an English mode. Time after time, I marveled at how participants truly did take advantage of the opportunity to deploy the language they know, and how they seemed to genuinely enjoy oral communication in English. Watching JTEs interact very successfully with each other, I realized I was

witnessing a functional discourse community using a medium of communication that is very much alive, language that some linguists consider to be a specific variety of spoken English - the English spoken by Japanese people in Japan. Watching and listening, it was blindingly obvious that the concept of "World Englishes" is very valid. That, in turn, allowed me to present the concept to participants very convincingly.

Another area where the JTEs performed admirably was in an activity that was very much "hands-on". Groups of 3 or 4 participants were formed and each group was given a curious set of materials: drinking straws, paper clips, one paper cup, a few lengths of string, and a roll of cellophane tape. Using those materials and within a specified time limit, participants were to design and build a miniature "Tokyo Tower". The enthusiasm that this activity elicited was remarkable and participants coped quite well with a topic area considerably removed from their everyday experience. As the groups worked, it was interesting to hear participants ask each other questions about English usage and interesting to see how the construction provided a visual focus. Compared to the more conventional activity formats used in the workshop, the "Tokyo Tower" activity seemed to engage the interest of those with a particular learning style - tactile learners. It was clear that some participants relished and had a flair for "hands-on" learning and that, in turn, led to a profitable discussion about learning style differences.

The "Tokyo Tower" activity also produced a sterling moment: One of the groups decorated the top of their tower with a paper clip bent into the shape of a heart. I consider that symbolic of the atmosphere that developed among the group and something that remains long after the workshop ended.

The workshop planners included a culminating speaking opportunity that allowed participants to reflect on their experience during the week and consider how they might like to approach the beginning of a new term at their schools. Without prompting, many participants spoke of using more English in their junior high classrooms and some seemed to have retained certain themes that had been developed during the week. At first, I thought this segment seemed artificial and that it smacked of people being forced to make promises to change - a bit like New Year's resolutions. But, I think the reflection time before speaking helped people realize that they had indeed experienced something during the week, that the experience had indeed changed them and did indeed have a direct bearing on their chosen occupation.

### **Conclusion: Eye medicine from the second floor**

As someone who was involved in the implementation of this MEXT-initiated program, I struggled with some of the goals that seemed unachievable/unrealistic and a format that seemed at odds with what I believe about language acquisition. The sense of futility I felt at times is vividly illustrated by a

Japanese proverb: 二階から目薬. Literally translated, "Eye medicine from the second floor." Picture a person trying to administer a liquid eye medicine -- eye drops -- from a second floor landing to a person on the first floor. From that height, a human eye is a rather small target to hit and a drop of liquid rather difficult to aim. Indeed, the probability of hitting the target successfully is quite slim. That image fits the impression I have of certain aspects of the JTE "intensive" workshops – particularly the goal statements about increasing ability with English. It is clear however, that the summer workshops do provide participants with experience and ideas that they would not otherwise receive. Despite my doubts, I believe the JTEs did perceive value and receive sustenance through the various workshop activities.

How might programs for JTEs be better? To make professional development for public school JTEs more effective and convincing, I believe that government ministries and local boards of education need to 1) offer clearer incentives and inducements for secondary JTEs to pursue professional development independently and to 2) view experiences like the summer workshops as part of an ongoing, long-term regimen – not an “intensive” program carried out in a “quick fix” atmosphere. JTEs need chances to discover that the path of professional development can be more fertile and rewarding when it flows from an individual’s simple desire to grow.

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## **Feature**

### Interview with an AET

#### **Introduction**

This is the first in a new series of articles for ETE. Recently, through a common love of soccer, I have had the opportunity to socialize with many AETs and ex-AETs based in the Aichi area. New recruits are brought in every year and they can stay in the JET programme for up to five years. Consequently, they represent a broad pool of varied experiences in Japan. I thought that this varied range of experiences would make for an interesting series of interviews. In addition I was curious whether the JET experience would lead to any aspirations regarding professional development.

#### **Brief History of the JET Programme**

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme invites young college and university graduates from overseas to participate in international exchange and foreign language education throughout Japan. Established in 1987, the programme has earned a high reputation, both in Japan and overseas, for its efforts in human and cultural exchanges, and has become one of the largest cultural exchange programmes in the world. The programme offers college and university graduates the opportunity to serve in local government organizations as well as public and private junior and senior high schools.

#### **This time**

This time we have an interview with a recent contributor to this newsletter (Volume 12, Issues 1 and 3) and Nagoya resident of eight years, Ben Backwell.

#### **Brief Bio**

Ben Backwell is a high school teacher at a school for boys in Nagoya city, central Japan. He has been teaching in Japan for 6 years, three of which were happily spent on the JET Programme. At his school he teaches English and plays with and coaches the soccer team. He teaches English conversation to 2nd and 3rd year JHS students.

#### **And now... onto the questions**

ETE: What is JET?

BB: Well, its an initiative by the Ministry of Education aimed at improving the level of spoken English in JHS and HS students by exposing them to native speakers of English. So, the AET is there to assist the Japanese teacher and to facilitate cultural exchange.

ETE: Why did you join JET?

BB: I'm interested in the martial arts in general and in Budotaijutsu (similar to Aikido –Ed.) in particular. When I was 13 or 14 it was my dream to come to Japan to learn Budotaijutsu in its “homeland”. Later, when I was completing a degree in French and Spanish at Bradford University some recruiters for the JET programme came along and gave a talk. I didn't really ask any questions as the opportunity to go to Japan had presented itself. The JET programme would serve as an ideal vehicle to get me to Japan.

ETE: What qualities were they looking for when they interviewed you?

BB: They were definitely looking for some kind of intercultural ability or experience but they didn't seem to want candidates who had any experience of Japan. In fact, two friends who interviewed at the same time were rejected (they felt) because of their previous experience in Japan. So, to sum up, they seemed to want fresh, flexible people with some intercultural experience but preferably not in Japan.

ETE: Did you have any teaching experience or qualifications before you came to Japan?

BB: While I was doing my degree I spent six months in France and I taught some English then. I also spent a year in Indonesia and did some teaching there. Now I come to think of it the recruiters seemed to regard my teaching experience as a very positive factor.

ETE: When you entered the classroom in Japan for the first time did you feel properly prepared?

BB: Yes, as well as it was possible to be without ever having done it before.

ETE: Could you elaborate a little?

BB: In my case, and I should emphasize that because many AETs have very different experiences based on where they go, I came to Nagoya where there are a large number of AETs. There was a strong sense of community, which was very beneficial for making newcomers feel more comfortable. That meant that many of the teething problems typically experienced by a new AET were easily solved by the experience and readily available access to that experience, of the older AETs. Also, I was able to observe my sempai in the classroom, which gave me a good idea of what to expect. Another good aspect to Nagoya is that the AETs have a weekly meeting, which allows you to ask questions and solve problems quickly. It's a simple thing, but very important. Two new activities would be presented every week as well which meant there were always plenty of new ideas. Again, as a beginning AET I found these extremely helpful.

ETE: How accurately did “Assistant English Teacher” reflect your role?

BB: Well, basically it is very accurate because you are very dependent on the Japanese teacher, not being a teacher yourself and not having any teaching qualifications. The ideal situation was where I met the Japanese teacher before the class and we planned what to do in the class, together. While that often occurred, I also encountered both of the extremes. For example, some Japanese teachers took it

as an opportunity to take a cigarette break and would just tell you to take the class, while others would just use you as a “human tape recorder”.

ETE: Was there any input on teaching methodology from the JET programme?

BB: There wasn't really any input on teaching methodology. We weren't well qualified enough or knowledgeable enough to take advantage of that anyway. However, we often exchanged ideas for activities amongst ourselves and at the weekly meetings.

ETE: How did the reality differ from how you imagined it would be like teaching in Japan?

BB: I didn't feel out of place because the British education system, which I had been through, is very similar to that of Japan. I mean that the classroom situation is the same i.e. rows of desks, and the teacher is at the front and is the font of all knowledge. I was very surprised by the reticence of the students though. At first, I used to worry about why the kids weren't responding.

ETE: You finished being an AET five years ago and yet you are still here in Japan. Why?

BB: Well, there were many reasons. One was that I liked being a foreigner in Japan. Another was that I was still doing Budotaijutsu. Also, many of my contemporaries had compelling reasons to return to their home countries, for example, some wanted to get married, some wanted to get “real” jobs, some wanted to do further education, but I didn't want to do any of those things. I wasn't sure about being a teacher though.

ETE: That ties in with the next question. Did your JET experience give you any aspirations to do with teaching?

BB: Not at first. After the JET programme I felt a little embarrassed by my poor Japanese language ability despite having been here for three years so I took a Japanese course at Nanzan University (in Nagoya) for six months. One of the teachers there really made a difference for me. Tim Murphey (former editor of and recent contributor to ETE – Ed.) seemed to be having so much fun teaching us Japanese that I thought that I would like to be able to do that, teaching English.

ETE: Have you done any professional development?

BB: Yes, I'm just completing my masters at the moment. Actually, when I was doing the Japanese course I asked Tim Murphey about continuing my education and he wholeheartedly recommended the course at S.I.T. (Vermont).

## **Conclusion**

Thanks very much to Ben for being the inaugural “victim”.

## Book Review

### Plain Krashen: A Review

#### *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures*

Paul D. Tanner, Nagoya City University, <[pdtanner@hum.nagoya-cu.ac.jp](mailto:pdtanner@hum.nagoya-cu.ac.jp)>

Stephen Krashen is one of the most influential language specialists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He has published over 300 articles and books. Most language teachers have at least a passing knowledge of some of Krashen's ideas. For those who don't, or for those who want to cull the essence of Krashen without wading through a large quantity of sources, *The Taipei Lectures* is a perfect vehicle towards that end. At only 95 pages, Krashen still covers a lot of ground. He summarizes all of his main theories in the first chapter, and explores free reading, grammar teaching and principles of good learning in the remaining three chapters.

Following is a true/false test on some of Krashen's main premises. If you know all the answers, there is no need for you to read the text or this review. If you don't score well, or find the ideas intriguing, read on.

1. Both adults and children can subconsciously acquire language.
2. We acquire the parts of a language in a predictable order, which cannot be changed and is immune to deliberate teaching.
3. Conscious learning has only one function: as a monitor or editor. The monitor has a limited use in language learning.
4. Comprehending messages is the only way language is acquired.
5. Language acquisition is effortless.
6. Language classes for beginners are not necessary.
7. It is highly unlikely that much educated vocabulary comes from conversation or television.
8. The most powerful tool in language education might be free voluntary reading.
9. Interaction is necessary for language acquisition.
10. High levels of linguistic competence are possible without output.
11. Grammar instruction is useful and productive.
12. Whether students are involved in real problem-solving is a more important determinate of success than any study skills a student may have.

Before reviewing the answers, let's first examine the outline of the book. Chapter 1 reviews "the central hypotheses underlying current theory in language acquisition" (vii). These central hypotheses are Krashen's own. Briefly, the five central hypotheses and their essence are:

*The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis*, which states that we develop language learning ability through acquisition and learning. Acquisition is by far the most important and the most natural. "Language learning" is conscious learning, and is very limited in use (1). Why he treats learning and acquisition as mutually exclusive is not clear. Couldn't there be any overlap?

*The Natural Order Hypothesis* asserts that we acquire the parts of a language in a predictable order, which cannot be changed and is immune to deliberate teaching. This supports his contention that grammar in isolation should not be taught (1,2).

*The Monitor Hypothesis* states that conscious learning has only one function, that of Monitor, or editor. This self-correction is best used when it does not interfere with communication, and there is available time. For Krashen, the Monitor (always with a capital M) makes only a small contribution to accuracy (acquisition is more important), but could be useful in the editing phase of writing (2, 3).

*The Input Hypothesis* asserts that comprehending messages is the only way language is acquired. A language student who is at level *i* must receive comprehensive input that is at the next highest level *i plus 1*. We acquire by understanding that which is a little beyond our current level. Using context is essential to this hypothesis(4).

Two corollaries accompany this hypothesis:

1. Talking is not practicing
2. Given enough comprehensive input, *i plus 1* is present.

**The Affective Filter Hypothesis.** *Affective variables (anxiety, for example) prevent input from reaching the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition. While a student may understand the input, the affective filter blocks out the information from reaching the "language acquisition device" (6).*

Chapter 2 outlines the evidence and research showing that free voluntary reading is an excellent means of increasing second language competence. He cites studies that show that it is highly unlikely that much educated vocabulary comes from conversation or television, since 95% of the words used in television or daily conversation are from the most frequently used 5,000 (22).

Chapter 3 examines some controversies, notably the teaching of grammar and the idea of comprehensible output. Krashen defends his position that the teaching of grammar rules is of little use. He points out flaws in a number of experiments that have attempted to prove the value of grammar instruction. Also within the chapter he critically examines three hypotheses. These are:

1. The *Comprehensive Output Hypothesis* where "We acquire language when we attempt to transmit a message but fail and have to try again. Eventually we arrive at the correct form of the utterance..." (59). Krashen states that there is no direct evidence that comprehensive



output leads to language acquisition (65). Actually, high levels of linguistic competence are possible without producing any output. Krashen believes that providing more comprehensive input is a better strategy than increasing output (65).

2. The *Interaction Hypothesis* asserts that interaction is necessary for language acquisition. It is not correct says Krashen, because it “denies that acquisition can occur from reading and listening.” (64) Acquisition is possible without the student actually participating in an interaction.
3. The *Need Hypothesis* states that “we can acquire language only when we “need” to communicate, when we need to make ourselves understood (64). It implies that submersion is a good thing. Krashen believes that need will not result in language acquisition if there is no comprehensible input (65).

Chapter 4 is entitled, “How Reading and Writing Make You Smarter, or, How Smart People Read and Write.” He presents his argument and research that shows the importance of reading and writing, and how learning by problem solving (rather than “intentional” learning) is more effective (71). Both reading and writing achieve cognitive development. The importance of reading cannot be overstated: reading is the primary source of our competence in writing style and grammar, as well as vocabulary and spelling (78). Krashen points to a study by Bloom that shows successful students’ most common characteristic was an involvement with problem solving, rather than subject matter courses (80).

Whether one agrees with Krashen or not, a knowledge of his ideas is essential in order for one to enter the debate about issues in second language acquisition. For that reason, *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use* is a worthwhile primer.

Now for the quiz answers:

1. True. See the *Acquisition Learning Hypothesis*.
2. True. See the *Natural Order Hypothesis*.
3. True. See the *Monitor Hypothesis*.
4. True. See the *Input Hypothesis*.
5. True. See the *Input Hypothesis*. I wonder if Krashen has ever studied Japanese or *kanji*.
6. False. Krashen believes the beginner can get more comprehensible input in a language class than from being in a country of the target language. However, the goal of a language class is to bring students to the intermediate level (and not beyond). After this, the students can improve their language skills on their own (6,7).
7. True. 95% of the words used in television or daily conversation are from the 5000 most frequently used words. (22).
8. True. This is the premise of Chapter 2 and is again mentioned in Chapter 4.
9. False. See the *Interaction Hypothesis*.
10. True. Chapter 3 covers this point in Krashen’s critique of comprehensible input.

11. False. Krashen is a crusader against the direct teaching of grammar and finds fault with the results of many studies supporting the teaching of grammar. While he agrees that grammatical accuracy is an important goal, he feels comprehensible input is a better way to achieve grammatical accuracy. (5)
12. True. This is the premise of Chapter 4. Here Krashen quotes reading specialist Frank Smith: “The laws of learning are irrelevant when we are involved in problem-solving” (71).

## References

Krashen, Stephen D., 2003. *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures*. Heinemann.

*Stephen D. Krashen* (n.d.), Books and Articles. Retrieved January 13, 2005, from <http://www.sdkrashen.com>

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