Flaws, Fallacies, and Infelicities: A Critical Look at Culture in ELT Research

Michael Guest
Miyazaki Medical College

Introduction

What would one think of a discussion on metaphysics that begins with, "Since God exists..."? Or an essay that begins with the premise that "women are intellectually inferior to men" and, from this basis, proceeds to 'prove' that men should therefore be leaders in all important matters? What about a scientist who argues that, "given that the universe is 80% made up of gasses, since computers are part of the universe, it follows that they too must be 80% made up of gasses"? We would, in the first two cases, sense that the speaker must not be speaking from any research or scientific standpoint but one of dogma. In all three cases, we'd surely question the credibility of the claims and those who made them. In fact, we would likely dismiss these arguments immediately because we recognize that the egregious logical mistakes in these examples render them invalid. Yet claims logically similar to these can readily be found in ELT culture research. They may not be as egregious as the invented examples above but they are common nonetheless. As a reader of many such studies, I had long questioned many of the premises underscoring such research, not to mention the validity of the steps that take researchers from these premises to their conclusions. In order to elucidate these criticisms, I have collected a number of studies on the effect or relationship between culture, language, pedagogy and learning habits printed over the past 5 years in Japan-based ELT journals, as well as studies focusing upon Japan and East Asia printed in worldwide ELT journals. I have focused upon East Asia, and most specifically Japan, because it is with these cultures that I am most familiar, and thus able to make more objective comments. In approaching each study I have asked three questions:

1. Is the research founded upon untenable premises?

2. Is the research circular, that is, does it 'beg the question'? Is the conclusion pre-ordained in the premises?

3. Does the research provide a reasonable or acceptable sample of data and an unbiased methodology or are there variables present that would render it unreliable? The following discusses some of the recurring problems that I noted.

Cultural Determinism
Unexamined notions of causality

The clearest example of how the outcome of the research can often be rigged is the pervasive application of cultural determinism as an unexamined premise. Such assumptions regarding the nature of cultural-individual causality can readily be found in Hall (1976; 1994) ("Culture designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore" 1994, p.60), as well as in his frequent use of terms like 'programming' and 'innate contexting' in describing an individual's 'cultural imprinting'. Similar presumptions are echoed by Kaplan (1966) Each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself, and that part of the learning of a particular language is the mastery of its logical system" p.14) and Barnlund (1979; 1994) Culture norms so completely surround people, so permeate thought and action..." 1979, p.35), and further backed up by cultural anthropologists like Rosaldo (1989) Even when they appear most subjective, thought and feeling are always culturally shaped" p.103), so it is no surprise that determinism is readily and unquestioningly accepted by much subsequent research.

The reason is not surprising. The above samples come from what we may call 'seminal 're-search in culture studies, largely from the field of Cultural Anthropology. References to these works litter ELT studies on culture where they act as a type of 'received wisdom' for much subsequent research. For example, Shibata (1998) argues that, "...so many things about us are culturally determined, our culture thus becomes our mode of communication. Each of us is a product of a particular culture. Growing up with a particular culture programs us to think a certain way" (p.106). Oi (1999) states that, "Rhetorical logic.... is shaped by culture" (p.85). Harklau (1999) begins by announcing that, "Language is inextricably bound up with culture" (p.109). Ryan (1996) starts with, "That language and culture are inseparable is a truism that needs little documentation here" (p.114), as well as arguing that, "...using a language... means entering into its culture" (p.114). Such statements, when used as starting points for inquiry, are bound to influence, if not restrict, the results of any cultural-based research. But the de facto acceptance of this tenet of cultural anthropology has its problems. It brings into question as to how scientific and objective the original studies actually were. In fact, many of these foundational studies were largely subjective, anecdotal and based upon personal observation (Connor 1996; Guest 2002b; Kubota 1999). Atkinson (1999) is quite right when he takes many such authors to task for making assumptions about culture and individuals without holding any critical discussion as to what their notion of culture entails.

Moreover, for anyone with a background in philosophy, the cavalier acceptance of cultural determinism should come as a shock. The questions of free will and determinism, the nature of causality, the relationship between the individual and society are classic dilemmas that cannot and should not be accepted in such an uncritical manner. Yet strict determinism, based upon a linear causality from a culture to individuals, is treated as a simple and obvious given in so much ELT literature. Why? Pinker (1994) equates the common man's acceptance of the 'truth' of the Sapir-Whorf (1956) hypothesis (that cognitive categories are determined by linguistic ones which in turn are determined by culture) with other widely-accepted, but unexamined, myths,

such as the allegedly myriad Eskimo words for 'snow'. It is, for Pinker, a case of people believing it simply because they heard it from somebody else and because it appears to hold some intellectual gravity, hardly a basis upon which one can claim objectivity. Once one accepts the notion that there is a wholly deterministic relationship between culture and language/thought/cognition it is quite simple to draw almost any causal connection that the author wishes to pursue. This is particularly true when the nature of this determinism is often simply assumed a priori since the authors rarely, if ever, discuss the nature of causality.

Of course one could never plausibly deny that there is some correlation between culture and groups or individuals but a simple correlation does not immediately warrant a model of determinism. And if culture and cognition are connected it does not necessarily follow that culture is the singular, inexorable determinant of cognition. When terms like 'programmed', which imply a view of people as mindless passive drones, are used without hesitation or discussion, this monolithic, deterministic model, assumed on the basis of mere correlations, not surprisingly aids in bringing the researcher to the conclusion he or she hopes to find, or has already pre-scripted. For example, Shaules & Inoue (2001) base their advocacy of ethno-relativism largely on the basis that, "We feel that it is impossible to go beyond one's culture" (p.6), and, "We assume that we are all unavoidably ethnocentric"(p.6). Hazel & Ayres (1998) begin from the premise, "Because of cultural differences it is hypothesized that Americans would employ self-select turn-taking procedures proportionately more often than Japanese..." (p.91). Is it any surprise then that their conclusion begins, "...as anticipated, this study found..."(p.96). Nonaka's (1998) inquiry starts from a position arguing that discourse patterns of Japanese and English subjects can be expected to highlight their cultural values. Having a hypothesis or expectations about the outcome of research is perfectly natural, but operating from an uncritical acceptance of cultural determinism as an established fact, or otherwise starting from a strict notion of causality between cultures and individuals surely loads the rhetorical dice. The logic in such cases needs a lot of fine-tuning.

Some further implications of accepting a hard determinism

Cultural determinism is a position that is, in many cases, self-defeating. After all, if like Shaules & Inoue (2001) we believe that, "we are all unavoidably ethnocentric"(p.6), surely that statement includes the authors too. Since the writer who believes in ethnorelativism or determinism is subject to the same criteria, one must then say that such writers' perspectives are themselves merely products of the writers' culture, unconsciously portraying their own cultural proclivities as objective truths. The only way around this is to decide that you, the writer, are somehow exempt from this analysis of human nature, a stance which surely reeks not only of intellectual dishonesty and inconsistency but of elitism (see Sargent's, 2000, critique of Shaules/ Inoue, 2000). One can qualify the claim to exempt oneself (note Barnlund's, 1994, claim that, "few ever recognize the assumptions on which their life and sanity rest", p.35, or Kamada's, 1997, "It is natural for people to evaluate their world from their personal perspective", p.155), but this runs some of the same critical risks with its implicit assumptions of 'everyone else but not me' and its 'I'm aware of this but everyone else is not' pretense.

Two More Fallacies: Composition and Existential

This often-unquestioned acceptance of a highly disputable hypothesis (determinism) tends to lead to two more ubiquitous fallacies. The first is the existential fallacy. The existential fallacy holds that if something may said to be true in a general sense one cannot logically apply that general truth to any particular part. In short, that which is true of the whole is not necessarily true of the parts. It is within this fallacy that essentializing finds a home. Essentialism is one of the main charges leveled at the contrastive school of cultural anthropology and its adherents in ELT by post-modern critics such as Kubota (1999), Susser (1998), (Spack, 1997), and Pennycook (1998). By reducing complex, dynamic cultures to a few static essences, particularly binary opposites that serve to contrast them, and we lay the groundwork for a kind of 'orientalizing' in which we reduce the foreign cultures to exotic 'others'. The tendency to reduce and essentialize also results in 'constructing' other cultures as monolithic, singular entities with little variation or nuance.

How does this manifest itself in ELT culture studies? Well, for example, if we are to accept on some level that Japanese learners in general display avoidance characteristics (to use Hofstede's 1980 model) it does not follow that this particular Japanese person or group should necessarily display this characteristic. Yet, often researchers do treat individuals or small groups as necessarily manifesting characteristics attributed to the whole. This is evidenced in Ryan's (1996) claim that, "...the micro-culture of the monocultural classroom is imbued with the culture that surrounds it" (p.114). A similar fallacy lays behind Holliday's (1994) notion that all learning and teaching contexts should be seen primarily as cultural constructs. Although some correlation surely exists, the equation cannot be this simple.

The fallacy inverse to the existential is the composition fallacy, which holds that one cannot make generalized conclusions from particular instances. To assume that a micro-sample necessarily reflects truths found at a macro level is logically untenable. Hazel & Ayres (1998) explicitly make this assumption when they describe the basis of their inquiry as, "...believing that a microscopic examination of one aspect of verbal communication should further serve to demonstrate the significance of cultural differences...", (p.92). Nonaka (1998) does likewise in her premise that general cultural values of native English and Japanese speakers can and will be noted in particular discourse samples. In fact most studies with very small samples regularly run this risk, but while vague suggestions may legitimately be made from such data any pretense to a logical connection between the micro data and generalized conclusions is untenable. The composition fallacy is the fallacy which argues, for example, that any utterance from an individual Japanese or a Westerner will be essentially Japanese or Western and display 'essences' of that culture as a whole. According to this schema, if a Chinese person happens to have an idea or opinion it is no longer, strictly speaking, just an idea or opinion. It is now a Chinese person's idea or opinion since it is assumed that

his/her general Chinese-ness must somehow be indelibly contained in the idea. Not surprisingly, some alleged element of Chinese culture likely will be discovered in the idea only because the researcher has been methodologically pre-disposed to find or invent, it. This is the logic, for example, that allows the media to present a viewpoint as an "Asian View" or an "Islamic view" merely because the presenter happens to be Asian or a Muslim. Whether or not his or her perspective typifies or is in any way representative of Asia or Islam is made irrelevant.

One article that serves as a prime example of many of the aforementioned logical shortcomings is Stapleton's (1997). In this article he proposes a curriculum for culture study that is thoroughly derived from a contrastive analysis approach. He selects fourteen aspects of daily life, one for each week of the course, which he believes serve as microcosms of or pointers to deeper cultural values, the composition fallacy at work. For example, he argues reductively that in golf, the Japanese are concerned about equipment and clothing but Americans are more concerned about scoring and winning. This, to Stapleton, reveals the essences of the two cultures, namely that the Japanese like to fit into a group and display perseverance while Americans reveal their individualist desire to compete and win. In every case, Japan and the U.S. are treated as singular, monolithic cultural constructs with completely polarized values. In every case, the so-called deeper cultural truth is nothing but a pre-scripted stereotype graphed post-hoc on to uncritically accepted premises about 'us and them'. One may well wonder how, if learning about each other through such binary reductions, Japanese and Americans could ever interact meaningfully.

Methodological Obfuscations and Infelicities
Category confusion; genre and sub-culture

Category errors are also rife in the literature: cases in which terms seem to shift at will and thus obfuscate the inquiry. In both Oi (1999) and Nonaka (1998), 'America' morphs inexplicably into 'English' which later itself morphs into 'The West'. These three distinct categories are used almost interchangeably which allows for a variety of untenable conclusions. Nonaka says that, "the absence of aizuchi in English as a sign of consideration for others ... suggests the inevitably confrontational nature of Western discourse" (p. 161). But how does English conversation equal Western discourse? (Let alone the question as to how a perceived lack of aizuchi equals a lack of 'consideration for others'. In Hinkel (1999), similar conclusions are reached regarding directness in English discourse, but here the qualities are predicated to 'Anglo-American' rhetoric. So, just who are we talking about here? Moreover, these ethnic and geographical entities are often treated as if they were single constructs lacking any consideration for variation or sub-cultural factors. The habit of morphing racial and national groups uncritically is crucial in creating untenable conclusions since much of the supportive data cited (i.e., Gudykunst & Kim 1992; Hofstede 1980) draws fairly strong distinctions not only between Western countries but, for example, even between regions of the United States.

The question as to which genre of discourse is being dealt with is also often left unclear. Connor (1996) has criticized Kaplan (1966) in particular on this account and complains of, "small sample size, a mix of genres and generalizing from L2 data to L1 behaviour" (p.162) in the literature. As a particular example, Oi & Kamimura's (1997) study claims to be analyzing 'organizational writing' in Japan, a very general term, but surely the form of a scientific report will differ from that of, say, a business letter. When Rose (1996) considered genre patterns in his study he concluded that, "no single characterization is adequate to describe patterns of language used by any one group in every context" (p.78) and concluded that genre is more important than culture in determining discursive features such as directness. Yet this plea seems to go unheard. Other potentially mitigating variables also seem to be ignored or unduly dismissed, particularly the roles and effects of sub-cultures. Why is the cultural matrix in these studies inevitably nation or race (see Mabuchi, 1995, Guest, 2002a)? Surely other factors affect who we are and how we behave (note how Edge, 1996, for example, skillfully begins his analysis from the matrix of educational sub-cultures)! For example, wouldn't a group of well-educated fifty-year old Japanese

nuns be expected to exhibit at least some features of the sub-cultures of being women, educated, middle-aged and Christian rather than have everything they are be subsumed under the monolithic construct 'Japanese'? Although people are an amalgam of various competing cultures, sub-cultures and their respective discourses (see Yoshida, 1996 ; Gee, 1990) so much ELT literature seems to assume that we are fundamentally reducible to national or ethnic categories, which in a world of rapid change, globalization and 'hybrid cultures' (see Clifford, 1992), seems all the more negligent.

Occam's razor and the rationalization of 'problematic' data

Perhaps most surprising in my analysis was the number of occasions in which results that did not cohere with the researcher's pre-scripted conclusions were either ignored or otherwise rationalized away. Cogan (1995) seems aware of the dangers of reducing cultural complexities to user-friendly dichotomies but nonetheless announces that, "by necessity, a number of gross generalizations which ignore significant differences between, ...various Japanese and Western sub-cultures, will be made" (104). As research, this methodological admission is rather surprising. It is as if he is saying that certain variables will be ignored in order to limit the scope of the study, which will surely help to produce the 'desired' result. Hofstede (1986) does something similar when moving the Japanese away from a collectivist characterization into a more individualistic category (although many who cite Hofstede still seem to 'prefer' his earlier conclusions). Hofstede explains that this change can be explained as a product of increased wealth. In other words, it is economic considerations that are determining the culture, not something indigenous to the ethnic group. Unfortunately, once Hofstede brings in this variable many of his conclusions, as well as the conclusions of those who cite him start to crumble. It seems that Hofstede has found data that contradicts his earlier depiction of Japanese culture as collectivist but he does not want to say that the earlier depiction was incorrect. Rather he wants to say that new factors have changed the Japanese character. But then why not apply such an economic criteria

as the interpretive principle, replacing culture as the main determinant? If economics is the prime cause then why otherwise focus solely on national/ethnic culture as the categorical determinant? In fact, the whole question as to whether so-called 'Western values' are largely made up of 'middle-class values', the result not of an ethnic, racial or national culture per se but one of having a moneyed, educated middle-class, is widely discussed in sociology circles but seems to enter only tangentially into ELT literature, which tends to stick to more 'stable' national and racial categories. On this point, Hofstede's approach seems infelicitous.

One can't help but note another point of inconsistency in Hofstede's treatment. How is it that one can characterize a culture as 'individualist' and then proceed to list the norms or schemas of that culture that its members supposedly abide by. After all, by definition an individualist culture's mandates and norms rest with the individual and cannot be easily or readily reduced to general overriding cultural traits. Ochi (2001) takes this type of rationalization of 'unwelcome' results one step further. When her research showed that Japanese academics were in fact generally using an allegedly 'English-style' approach to academic writing she assumed not that the Japanese and English writing styles must therefore be fundamentally similar but instead argued that Japanese academics must have been unconsciously influenced by the 'English' style. Likewise, Oi & Kamimura (1997) explain the appearance of English-type constructions in their Japanese subjects' written data as a result of the teaching of English rhetorical styles in Japanese schools. In short, it seems that what Japanese writers write will not be considered to be Japanese unless it corresponds to some preordained belief as to what Japanese writing is supposed to be like.

Even though application of Occam's razor to the data should lead to the conclusion that written Japanese and English are rhetorically similar, it seems that some researchers are so intent on proving differences that similarities are explained away even when the research results explicitly indicate them. Yet similar examples abound. Shibata's (1998) data shows that Japanese students scored higher than expected on individualist categories, but this is explained

away as a 'young person's' thing. The pre-set fixed model of Japanese collectivism is never challenged or altered by the data. Hazel & Ayres (1998) admit that the results of their cultural turn-taking habits study were limited and unclear when subjects were in mixed groups, as opposed to uniform culturally separate groups, but this in no way prevents them from concluding their pre-conceived notion that, "because of cultural differences, we hypothesize that Americans will employ more self-select turn-taking procedures", (p.91). Flowerdew (1998) cites studies that seem to contradict her findings regarding alleged Asian preferences for group work over individual work and admits that the research is inconclusive, but nonetheless concludes that group work is preferable in Asia because of the Confucian culture.

This propensity to interpret according to pre-conceived expectations about cultural behaviour is similar to what Fujita & Sano (1988) noted in a paper in which American and Japanese teachers watched videotapes of each other's day care centers. American teachers noted that the Japanese day care centers seemed noisy and chaotic. This was at odds with the stereotype of paternalistic, authoritarian Japan. As a result, their interpretation of the chaos reverted to pre-conceived stereotypes as evidenced in such interpretations as, "(Japanese) society itself is so structured, that traditional values (alone) can control the children" (p.90). In short, obvious hard facts were rationalized away by interpretations that reverted to stereotypes and pre-conceptions.

Other methodological problems abound. Hazel & Ayres (1998) analyze their Japanese subjects' discourse patterns when their subjects are speaking English, their non-native language, as if this would allow for an accurate display of Japanese discourse habits! In analyzing the discursive patterns of American versus Japanese subjects, Nonaka (1998) gives her American subjects the controversial topic of 'homosexuality in the military' to discuss while her Japanese subjects engage in casual chat. Is it any surprise then that she concludes that the Americans display a 'high-confrontation' style, which reflects "the importance of the individual in the West" (p.143), while her Japanese subjects are characterized as 'non-confrontational'?

Infelicitous comparisons that serve to exaggerate cultural differences are also legion. In Oi's (1999) and Kimball's (1996) analyses of Japanese students' writing style, it really fair to compare a rhetorical style employed by skilled educated writers of English academic articles to those of college students as they did? Mightn't it be that college students are immature writers in any language or culture? Isn't it true that even in English-speaking societies students write in muddled and inconsistent ways? Why interpret this as a 'cultural difference' when the simpler conclusion (Occam's razor at work again) is that the writers sampled were simply undeveloped, immature writers?

As an example of a proper usage of Occam's razor, readers would do well to note how Cribb (2001) characterizes breakdowns in Korean learners' English discourses with English NS's not as a result of differing cultural rhetorical norms, but rather by much simpler and obvious explanations such as problems with lexical specificity, coherence and improper sequencing. The default choice of explanation - culture - found in so much of this literature simply does not reflect a detached objectivity on the part of the author. More often than not, the tendency to resort to cultural explanations is little more than a thinly veiled research prejudice.

Conclusions

In this paper we have identified numerous common fallacies and methodological inconsistencies in the literature pertaining to the relationship between Japanese or Asian culture and language learning. Among these we have noted:

1. a habit of uncritically accepting the highly disputable notion of strict determinism and failing to adequately examine the nature of causality it implies.

2. a propensity to reduce complex cultures to a few essential cultural pegs for the sake of easy interpretation.

3. a tendency to 'rig' the outcome of the inquiry by begging the question. That is, by limiting or accepting a priori certain premises, the results have been gerrymandered to produce the expected or desired outcome.

4. regular application of both the existential and composition fallacies, which leads to the propagation of stereotypes and the exag-

geration of alleged differences

5. methodological concerns that are likewise sure to prejudice the outcome. For example, the shifting of categories between The West, English and America (equivocation) and a failure to consider other possible causal factors, such as genre and sub-cultures.

6. an unwillingness to use Occam's razor in determining more realistic conclusions. All of this is not to argue, of course, that cultural differences do not exist. Moreover, I certainly cannot deny that many researches have contributed greatly to our understanding as to how to apply cultural considerations to particular pedagogical or classroom issues. But if researchers wish to maintain credibility in publishing their findings, if they are operating under the rubric of research objectivity, it behooves them to pay greater attention to the logical foundations of their argument. Researchers should not assume, as premises, simple truths about complex philosophical matters so readily. Researchers should avoid the temptation to reduce complex realities to workable, but distorting, patterns such as binary opposites. Researchers should not try to force pre-ordained beliefs onto data that clearly does not support the hypothesis. I hope that this critical survey may caution some future researchers so that they will be less likely to fall into the same traps, and that they may then be more able to present a balanced, accurate picture of both culture and its relation to language teaching and learning.

References

Atkinson, D. (1999). TESOL and culture. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33 (4) 625-654.

Barnlund, D. (1975). *Public and private self in Japan and the United States; Communication styles of two cultures*. Tokyo: Simul Press.

Barnlund, D. (1994). Communication in a global village. In L. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader*, (pp. 26-35). Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth.

Clifford, J. (1992). Traveling cultures. In C. Grossberg, C. Nelson & P. Triechler (Eds.), *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*, (pp. 96-116). New York: Routledge.

Cogan, D. (1996). Classroom cultures: East meets West. In G. van Troyer, S. Cornwell & H. Morikawa (Eds.), *On JALT 95: Curriculum and Evaluation* (pp. 104-108). Tokyo: Japan Association For Language Teaching.

Connor, U. (1996). *Contrastive rhetoric: Cross-cultural aspects of second-language writing*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Cribb, M. (2001) An analysis of discourse miscues in the oral production of non-native speakers of English. *JALT Journal*, 23/1, 111-129.

Edge, J. (1996). Cross-cultural paradoxes in a profession of values. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30, 9-30.

Flowerdew, L. (1998). A cultural perspective on group work. *ELT Journal*, 52/4, 323-328.

Fujita, M. & Sano, T. (1988). Children in American and Japanese day-care centers: Ethnography and reflective cross-cultural interviewing. In. H. T. Trueba & C. Delgado-Gaitain (Eds.), *School and society: Learning content through culture*. 73-97. New York: Praeger.

Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies; Ideology in discourse*. London: Flamer Press.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1992). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Guest, M. (2002a). A critical checkbook for culture teaching and learning. *ELT Journal*, 56/2, 154-161.

Guest, M. (2002b). Culture research: A hotbed of myths, folk wisdom, and stereotypes? In M. Swanson (Ed.), *On JALT 2002: A language odyssey*. Tokyo: JALT.

Hall, E.T. (1976). Beyond culture. New York: Doubleday.

Hall, E. T. (1994). Context and meaning. In L. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural Communication: A reader*. (pp. 60-70). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Harklau, L. (1999). Representing culture in the ESL writing classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning*. (Pp. 109-130). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hazel, M.T. & Ayres, J. (1998). Conversational turn-taking behaviours of Japanese and Americans in small groups. *JALT Journal*, 20/1, 91-99.

Hinkel, E. (1999). Objectivity and credibility in L1 and L2 academic writing. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 90-108). Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, Ca: Sage

Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10, 301-320.

Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press.

Kamada, L. (1997). Comparing cultures through critical thinking: Development and interpretations of meaningful observations. In S. Cornwell, P. Rule, & T. Sugino (Eds.), *On JALT 96: Crossing Borders*. (pp. 154-157). Tokyo: JALT.

Kaplan, R. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, 16, 1-20.

Kimball, J. (1996). Writing on academic topics: Externalizing rhetorical processes in an intercultural setting. *JALT Journal*, 18/1, 55-66.

Kubota, R. (1999). Japanese culture constructed by discourses: Implications for applied linguistics research and ELT. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33/1, 9-35.

Mabuchi, H. (1995). The problem of Japanology. In K. Kitao (Ed.), *Culture and Communication*, (pp. 33-47). Kyoto: Yamaguchi Shoten.

Nonaka, K. (1996). Cross-cultural differences in involvement strategies: A case study of English and Japanese spoken discourse. *JACET Bulletin*, 27, 143-168.

Ochi, K. (2001). The Organization of introductions in Japanese research articles in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. *JACET Bulletin*, 34, 73-92.

Oi, K. (1999). Comparison of argumentative styles: Japanese college students vs. American college students: An analysis using the Toulmin Model. *JACET Bulletin*, 30, 85-102.

Oi, K. & Kamimura, T. (1997). A pedagogical application of research in contrastive rhetoric. *JACET Bulletin*, 28, 65-82.

Pennycook, A. (1998). *English and the discourses of colonialism*. New York: Longman.

Pinker, S. (1994). *The Language Instinct*. New York: Wm. Morrow and Co.

Rosaldo, R. (1989). *Culture & truth: The remaking of social analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rose, K. (1996). American English, Japanese and directness: More than stereotypes. *JALT Journal*, 18/1, 67-80.

Ryan, S. (1996). Student behaviour: Whose norms? In G. van Troyer, S. Cornwell, & H. Morikawa (Eds.), *On JALT 95: Curriculum & evaluation*. (pp. 112-115). Tokyo: JALT.

Sargent, T. (2000). Relativism vs. universalism: A hoax?. *The Language Teacher*, 24 (11), 5-6.

Shaules, J. & Inoue, A. (2000). Relativism and universalism. *The Language Teacher*, 24 (5),13-17.

Shibata, A. M. (1998). Intercultural communication concepts and implications for teachers. *JALT Journal*, 20/2, 104-118.

Spack, R. (1997). The rhetorical construction of multilingual students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, 765-774.

Stapleton, P. (1997). A Japan-America cross-cultural syllabus: Focusing upon some essential elements of culture. *The Language Teacher*, 21/10, 77-80.

Susser, B. (1998). EFL's othering of Japan: Orientalism in English language teaching. *JALT Journal*, 20, 49-82.

Whorf, B. L. (1956). Language, thought and reality. In J. B. Carroll (Ed.) *Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. New York: Wylie.

Yoshida, K. (1996). Intercultural communication as interpersonal communication. In G. van Troyer, S. Cornwell, & H. Morikawa (Eds.), *On JALT 95: Curriculum & evaluation*. (pp. 112-115). Tokyo: JALT.

What is a Japanese class really like? Using classroom research to reveal and negotiate Japanese students' expectations of classroom culture.

Tom Whalley
Douglas College, British Columbia

Introduction

"I want this class to be more like our classes in Japan. Answer Yes or No". This simple question stimulated classroom research into the role that expectations of classroom culture played in determining the satisfaction levels of a group of Japanese ESL students in Canada. Placed at the end of a mid-course evaluation, this question drew an affirmative response from 17 of 32 Japanese students enrolled in an intensive ESL program in summer 2001. This affirmative response was not reassuring. The implied negative evaluation of the course, in contrast to the very positive response to all other questions on the evaluation, was disappointing. What does this response mean, I wondered. What steps can I take to deal with the dissatisfaction implied in the answer to this last question, I asked. Having taught in Japan in the early 1970's and having had frequent contact with Japanese universities in the nearly three decades since, I had some idea of what classes were like, but I wanted to know how my students had experienced a Japanese classroom. A classroom research project emerged from this desire. Designed to clarify our understanding of their experience of Japanese classroom culture, as well as my expectations of classroom culture, the project made the students and I collaborators, each disclosing our expectations. As partners in this research we were building a mutual understanding to help us negotiate our classroom culture to make it a more comfortable place to learn. This process of revealing our expectations held surprises for all. This paper reports on the results of our classroom research and these surprises. One of the surprises for me was to find in the course of the research that the question I was really asking, and the only one I could answer with certainty, was not 'What is a Japanese **classroom** like?' but rather, 'What is **this** group of Japanese **learners** like?'

The students

The students involved in the research came from St. Andrew's University in Osaka to study at Douglas College, a sister institution, located in suburban Vancouver, British Columbia. Divided into two classes of roughly similar ability, the 8 young men and 24 young women were second and third year students. Almost all were non-English majors. The program included 16 hours/week of instruction in ESL and a further 8 hours of socio-cultural events in English. Also for some time each week they were teamed with local students studying Japanese. Structured activities provided opportunities for the Canadian and Japanese students to communicate with each other in their respective target languages, using Japanese and English in turn. The five week long, mid-July to mid-August program also included a home-stay with local families. St. Andrew's University students have been attending such programs at Douglas College for almost 20 years.

Designing a classroom-based research project

The students and I, as well as my colleague teaching the second class and her students, were soon involved as collaborators in the research project. Our efforts provide a good example of

classroom research (Cross & Steadman, 1996), an activity defined simply as the "ongoing and cumulative intellectual inquiry by classroom teachers into the nature of teaching and learning in their own classrooms" (p. 2). Cross and Steadman sum up the characteristics of classroom research describing it as:

1. learner-centered since it is focused primarily on teachers and students observing their experience in order to improve learning,

2. teacher-directed since it springs from a conviction that we are able to conduct useful and valid research on classroom learning,

3. collaborative since it requires the active participation of both teachers and students,

4. context-specific since it is designed and conducted to illuminate specific questions in an identified classroom,

5. scholarly since it builds on a knowledge base about teaching and learning,

6. practical and relevant since it investigates questions that are practical and present in the classroom, and which when pursued deepen teachers' and students' understanding of learning in a particular classroom and may lead to ways to improve learning.

It is important to understand that classroom research is not a matter of using the classroom as a research site for questions conceived outside that context. Classroom research is quite the opposite; it is initiated by a specific "problematic" in a specific classroom. In my case the research question arose from the observation that my students were dissatisfied in some way that had to do with the culture of the classroom. My desire to understand the source of this feeling in these students and improve their learning was the impetus for this research project. My motivation was not to add to the research literature on classroom culture by using my students as research subjects.

Gathering data

Gathering data to reveal expectations of classroom culture and conflicts that might arise from differences in my and the students' expectations, relied on three activities. The first of the three activities was a classroom discussion, guided by

questions such as, what is a "good" Japanese classroom like? These questions engaged students in an analysis of the values and norms of a Japanese post-secondary classroom. A second source of data came from letters which they were asked to write to Canadian students leaving to study in Japan advising them what to expect a Japanese class to be like. A survey based on a conceptual framework to describe classroom culture (Stefani, 1999) provided a final source of data. From these three sources of data a rich portrait of students' experience of a Japanese classroom emerged. For brevity's sake, only the data from the survey is treated in this paper.

Defining classroom culture

The question, "What is a Japanese classroom like?" is deceptively simple. Below its surface it is an enquiry about students' expectations for communication and relational styles, the norms and values of the classroom and other aspects of what can be called classroom culture. So in reality the question about what a Japanese classroom is really like becomes more a question of what these particular Japanese students are really like.

As it turned out, this was the only question I could answer with assurance, and it was also a question that steered away from the stereotypic to the nuanced and personal. With the idea of conducting a survey in mind and needing to develop more focused questions, I turned to the professional literature. The concept of classroom culture is not new. There is body of conceptual literature, and empirical studies have been done. For my purposes I needed a narrow focus that students could relate to easily in their second language and in the time we had in class. The work of American scholar Lisa Stefani (1999) proved very useful to me.

Stepfani's (1999) work on culture's influence on classroom communication is a broad treatment of classroom culture. Although she also treats learning and motivational styles as aspects of classroom culture, I was most interested in her treatment of the influence of culture on communication and relational styles (See Figure 1). She includes among these styles direct versus indirect styles of communication, a concept that appears frequently in discussions of intercultural commu-

nication, for example. She identifies eight such pairs of communication and relational styles. Each pair is dichotomous and reasonably presupposes that culture influences the preference toward one or the other of the pair. Her work on this specific aspect of classroom culture provided the focused framework I needed for a survey.

Figure 1: Lisa Stefani's categories for understanding classroom culture

1. **Preference for formal vs. informal communication**. The former is characterized by de-emphasizing status, commitment to equality of speakers, and the use of names, not titles. In classrooms teachers and students are on a first name basis. The latter is characterized by structure, that is, speakers reflect traditional roles. Teacher/student relationships are extremely formal and respectful and involve the use of titles/last names.

2. **Preference for dependent vs. independent learning**. The former is characterized by completing assignments alone, generally not with the aid of teachers and other non-peers. The latter is characterized by a reluctance to take initiative unless a teacher has approved or made instructions very, very explicit.

3. **Preference for reflective vs. impulsive learning**. The former is characterized by an aversion to making quick judgement and guesses. Students take time to think through issues and examine all sides before answering. The latter is characterized by quick guesses and fast responses. Students are adept at thinking on their feet.

4. **Preference for participatory learning vs. passive learning.** The former is characterized by active participation in learning by asking questions and discussing matters. Students are likely to be both physically and mentally active. The latter is characterized by students learning by listening, watching and imitating. Critical thinking and judgmental questioning may be inappropriate.

5. **Preference for energetic vs. calm learning.** The former is characterized by class-

rooms that are highly active and animated. The latter is characterized by calmness and limited movement around the classroom.

6. **Preference for direct vs. indirect style.** The former is characterized by straightforwardness, bluntness, frankness and openness. The latter is characterized by careful attention to the impact of what is said on group harmony, the avoidance of dissent and a process of alluding to the issue instead of coming at it head-on.

7. **Preference for topic-centered vs. topic-associating communication.** The former is characterized by a focus on a single topic or closely related topics, which are ordered in a linear fashion, and lead through argument to resolution. The latter is characterized by associating with the topic through linking it to stories of people or themes so that the links are implicit and not necessarily stated.

8. **Preference for aural/verbal learning vs. visual learning.** The former is characterized by backgrounds and skills that value oral traditions, rote memory and listening to understand words and concepts. The latter is characterized by the ability to use imagery to understand words and concepts.

The survey

Describing the classroom activities used to prepare students for the survey (See Figure) is beyond the scope of this paper, but considerable time was spent working with the framework before the survey (See Figure) was administered. To further ensure that there was a consistent understanding of the concepts involved, important terms were glossed in Japanese. The instructions for the survey itself, as well as the key concepts, were also in Japanese. To keep the survey manageable, I used only five of Stefani's conceptual categories.

Before they began to fill-in the survey, the students were asked to keep a post-secondary classroom context in mind. The survey itself asked them to rate preferences for the five communication and relational styles on a scale of one to five. The numbers represent a preference for one end of the continuum or another. Students were asked to rate preferences to indicate:

1. What they perceived the general preferences for communication and relational styles in Japanese classrooms to be.
2. What they thought their own preferences for communication and relational styles to be.
3. What they perceived the general preferences for communication and relational styles in Canadian classrooms to be.

The first set of ratings allowed the students to identify what they experienced as preferred styles in Japanese classrooms. The second set of ratings allowed students to explore the nature of intra-cultural and well as inter-cultural differences by identifying their own preferences. The third set of ratings, their predictions of the preferences for communication and relational styles in a Canadian post-secondary classroom, later formed the basis of a task to interview the Canadian Japanese language students about their preferences and thus determine the accuracy of these predictions.

The survey results

The students collaborated in gathering data through the three classroom activities described earlier, but they were not involved in the analysis of the data. In many instances of classroom research students are involved at this stage. Here too the students could have been involved in some data analysis, but the brevity of the program as well as competing demands on our time, led me to undertake the analysis myself and then share the results later for comment.

Contrary to what I expected, the results (See Figure) show that students' preferences do not show a conformity to the often cited stereotypes of Japanese norms and values whichoften produce a post-secondary environment preferring formal communication, dependent learners, and reflective, passive and calm learning. In contrast, this group of students diverges quite significantly from the stereotypes. While it is clear that these students show a preference, as popular stereotypes might predict, for formal communication in the classroom, about two-thirds of the

Figure 4 Communication and Relation Style preference survey

(Within the appropriate bracket, place the number closest to the point on the scale that reflects: 1. your preference, 2. your perception of your culture's preference and, 3. your perception of Canadian's preference.)

1.	Formal communication			Informal communication	
	1	2	3	4	5
		Japan ( )	Me (…)	Canada (…)	
2	Dependent learning			Independent learning	
	1	2	3	4	5
		Japan ( )	Me (…)	Canada (…)	
3	Reflective learning			Impulsive learning	
	1	2	3	4	5
		Japan ( )	Me (…)	Canada ( )	
4	Participatory learning			Passive learning	
	1	2	3	4	5
		Japan ( )	Me (…)	Canada (…)	
5	Energetic learning			Calm learning	
	1	2	3	4	5
		Japan ( )	Me (…)	Canada (…)	

students rated their own preference to be for just such a style of communication.), in other areas there were surprises.

Figure Results of the Communications and Relational Styles Survey

1. Formal (1) vs. Informal (5)

Rating	Japan	Me	Canada
1	17	13	2
2	10	11	0
3	3	3	0
4	0	3	8
5	2	2	22
Total	32	32	32

2. Dependent (1) vs. Independent (5)

Rating	Japan	Me	Canada
1	18	6	0
2	11	9	1
3	1	14	4
4	2	2	9
5	0	1	18
Total	32	32	32

3. Reflective (1) vs. Impulsive (5)

Rating	Japan	Me	Canada
1	11	9	6
2	9	6	4
3	6	12	4
4	4	4	6
5	2	1	12
Total	32	32	32

4. Participatory (1) vs. Passive (5)

Rating	Japan	Me	Canada
1	5	4	20
2	2	8	6
3	2	12	4
4	7	4	0
5	16	4	2
Total	32	32	32

5. Energetic (1) vs. Calm (5)

Rating	Japan	Me	Canada
1	5	6	20
2	1	7	7
3	5	8	1
4	5	6	2
5	16	5	2
Total	32	32	32

Analyzing the data

In analyzing the data, I took ratings of 1 and 2 and 4 and 5 to indicate a strong preference for the communication and relational style indicated. As will be seen later, a rating of 3 can be interpreted as either a shift away from or towards a preference depending on the context. Figure summarizes the data for self-preference and for the perceived Japanese preference.

It is clear that the preferences the students express, summarized in the figure above, differ significantly from those they perceive as expected in Japanese classroom culture, perhaps with the exception of formal communication style. Interestingly, significant numbers of students, 12 to 14 depending on the category, indicate a preference mid-way on the continuum. Taking this preference as distant from the one associated with Japan, the results for those 32 students show a very strong rejection of these preferences. This finding was unexpected to me, but not to the students.

Less surprisingly, the communication and relational styles that the students identify as the preferred ones in the Japanese classroom closely align with popular images of Japanese education. Taking a rating of 1 and 2 or 4 and 5 to indicate strong preferences, the students unambiguously (see the numbers in brackets) portray the post-secondary classroom in Japan as an environment preferring formal communication (27/32), dependent learners (29/32) and reflective (20/32), passive (23/32), and calm learning (21/32).

In contrast to this portrait of Japanese class-

Figure 2 survey data summarized

Category	Self-preference	Perceived Japanese preference
formal vs. informal	24/32 prefer more formal communication	27/32 indicate a Japanese preference for formal communication
dependent vs. independent	15/32 prefer more independent learning	29/32 indicate a Japanese preference for dependent learning
reflective vs. impulsive	15/32 prefer more impulsive learning	20/32 indicate a Japanese preference for reflective learning
participatory vs. passive	12/32 prefer more participatory learning	23/24 indicate a Japanese preference for passive learning
energetic vs. calm	13/32 prefer for energetic learning	21/32 indicate a Japanese preference for calm learning

rooms, the students' images of the preferred communication and relational styles in the Canadian post-secondary classroom portray an environment that is almost the mirror opposite of Japan. In my students eyes, the Canadian classroom appears (see the numbers in brackets) as one preferring informal communication (30/32), independent learners (27/32) and impulsive (18/32), participatory (26/32) and energetic learning (27/32). This data might suggest that some of these Japanese students see themselves more like Canadian learners than traditional Japanese learners, another surprise.

Discussion

The purpose of this classroom research was to answer the question what is a Japanese class like?

In the end, the data does provide an answer of sorts to the question. In general it describes a Japanese classroom reflecting common stereotypes of Japanese norms and values, eg. valuing of harmony, respect for authority and a cautious approach to expressing individual opinion, as well as traditional educational practices that rely on rote memory or on copying a master model as in many artistic traditions. But the answer to the question of what Japanese students were like, or more precisely what these Japanese students were like, was the fuller answer this research project revealed: that at least half the class had preferences for communication and relational styles which were quite at odds with the traditional expectations of Japanese classroom cul-

ture. In fact, when they really examined what a Japanese classroom was like in contrast to their own preferences, most students agreed that they didn't really want a classroom like the one in Japan at least in regards to the operative communications and relational styles. In the end the affirmative answer to the question of preference for a Japanese style of classroom over a Canadian one was more smoke than fire.

But of course this research project was not about wanting my students to reject one classroom culture or the other. The thrust of this research project was to understand the nature of classroom culture and to identify our preferences for the communication and relational skills that are central to this cultural context. Armed with new knowledge, we could negotiate a classroom culture to accommodate everyone, myself included, better. The survey (and other) data made it clear to the students that they differed from one another significantly in their preferences for communications and relational styles. And this was a surprise for Japanese students who are often willing to accept a view of themselves as exceptionally homogeneous group. This project thus helped students develop a new appreciation of their own diversity. For my purposes, the most important outcome was a realization on their part that what each thought a "good" class was could differ widely from another classmate's opinion.

This shift in viewpoint, allowing them to see themselves as less homogeneous than before, opened a space for us to evaluate learning in

the class in a new light. The title of this paper refers to negotiating classroom culture precisely because this new space allowed us to adopt a different stance to classroom activities. I see them as options rooted in different preferences. This new stance meant I could share with them the challenge of creating a classroom that met a wide variety of learners' expectations. Freed from the constraints of seeing themselves as all wanting a familiar Japanese approach to learning, we were able to negotiate a wider variety of classroom activities. The renegotiated classroom culture that this research project and the subsequent discussions allowed for can be described, to use a widely know paradigm, as a more learning-centered classroom than the teaching-centered (Barr & Tagg, 1995) one common in Japan.

Conclusion

Informed by this simple act of classroom research, one broad conclusion can be drawn and several more narrowly focused recommendations can be made. To begin with a broad brush stroke, we can conclude that doing research to understand learning in our classrooms in partnerships with learners opens spaces for us to change and improve classroom practice with the support of learners. To maximize the chances of this, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between classroom research and other types of research. Classroom research asks a question specific to an identified classroom. The research impetus arises from a desire to improve students' learning in that one class. Its particularism is its strength. Classroom research indeed may make a valuable contribution to the professional literature, but it does not start with this goal in mind. For that reason, this paper does not conclude with recommendations for further research, though I hope that readers will be stimulated to think of research questions specific to their classroom and their students.

More specifically with regards to classroom culture, this research suggests that we need to be aware of our own expectations and related behaviour since these impact the satisfaction of our students. We need also to make the cultural assumptions underlying our classrooms clearer since classroom tasks are located within a web of norms and values, communications and re-

lational styles and other elements of culture. Tasks where these contexts are ambiguous raise hidden barriers to students' comfort and ultimate success. Students, especially those who may be crossing cultural boundaries to study, need thus to be aware of their own expectations for classroom culture. They will benefit greatly from classrooms where different tasks and activities meet a variety of expectations of classroom culture. In encouraging students to respond to this challenging variety, we can hold out the ideal of developing cultural flexibility and becoming an international person in a meaningful way. Finally, the results of the survey here suggest that fearing to change educational practice in Japan out of a perception that Japanese students will resist changes to traditional practices is misplaced. If the students in the two classes at Douglas College in the summer of 2001 are as typical as I think they are, educators in Japan will find many students willing, even deeply desiring, to learn differently. These students can be allies in thoughtful, collaborative projects of educational reform.

References

Barr, R., & Tagg, J. (1995). From teaching to Learning: New paradigm for Undergraduate Education. *Change: the Magazine of Higher Learning*, November/December 1995, pp.13 - 25.

Cross, P. & Steadman, M. (1996). *Classroom Research: Implementing the Scholarship of Teaching*. Jossey-Bass. CA: San Francisco.

Stefani, L. (1997). The Influence of Culture on Classroom Communication. *Intercultural Communication; A Reader, 8th Edition,* Larry Samovar & Richard Porter (Eds.) Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Tom Whalley holds a Ph.D in Communication from Simon Fraser University and teaches ESL and Intercultural Communication at Douglas College in New Westminster, BC. He holds a BA from Sophia University, Tokyo and has taught EFL and conducted research in Japan. He can be reached by email at: whalleyt@douglas.bc.ca

OPINION & PERSPECTIVE:
Chopping Out the Dead Wood

Alan Mackenzie
Keisen University

The Japanese tertiary education system is buckling under the weight of the number of institutions that do not deserve to be termed colleges or universities. It is also encumbered by a large number of teachers (especially within EFL) that should not be teaching at all, never mind in tertiary education. I am aware that these opinions are highly inflammatory. They are meant to be.

For too long the question of whether teachers are qualified and/or able to teach effectively in universities has not been seriously addressed. Of course, most job descriptions do make reference to the educational qualifications required, such as an MA or PhD. But more often than not, teachers are hired through word of mouth or personal recommendation rather than by open, thorough interviews that attempt to address the candidates' teaching ability and principles. This situation tends to lead to a hiring committee that may already be biased in favor of one candidate and may not even interview candidates that do not come recommended by a current faculty member.

As for what actually takes place at interviews, in my own experience and through conversations with other teaching colleagues, very few interviewers actually ask any significant questions about teaching principles, ability, or techniques. More often than not, questions are asked about previous schools and positions, or academic activities like publishing, presentations or involvement in academic organizations. While these activities reflect interest in professional development, the emphasis placed on them is at the expense of focusing on actual teaching ability, views and experiences. By this, I do not mean to imply that all universities have the same hiring procedures, but in the vast majority of cases that I have heard of over the last six years, job interviews tend to be nothing more than a brief formality to confirm employment rather than a thorough examination of a teacher's ability to teach the classes available.

Furthermore, it seems that personality is valued more than actual teaching and "Will you fit in?" is often the most important question on interviewers' minds. Very few interviewers ask about the number of life-changing moments that occur in your classroom. Very few ask about the changes in students' attitudes or abilities. This appears to be seen as a private matter, something that you and them go together in the privacy of your classroom/study room/office/apartment/wherever the learning takes place. But shouldn't these things be what institutions should be looking at in terms of criteria that can be used to gauge the value of their teachers and teaching ability for their students?

Once a teacher has entered an institution, little attention is then given to their teaching practice. It is assumed that they are competent, and if there are no complaints about the teacher, everyone goes about their business. Recently, however, many institutions, including my own, at the behest of Mombusho, have implemented a 'self-evaluation system' which is actually a system of teacher and course evaluation. The purpose of this system is to give feedback to teachers about their performance and about what students think of their course. However, the problem is that all conscientious teachers do this already, issuing mid-term and/or end-of-term questionnaires simply because they want to do a good job. These are not the teachers that we should be concerned about. These are the change-oriented teachers: the ones who want to make a difference and the ones who are going to try their damnedest to improve their teaching no matter what. The teachers that I think these evaluations should be aimed at are the ones who do not ask for feedback, do not wish to change and do not really care about the results of such evaluations. Furthermore, it is my opinion, based on ten years of educational administration that

any evaluation that is not linked to a full peer or management evaluation is likely to fail. In other words, simply giving teachers feedback forms and expecting them to act on them is unlikely to spur teacher change. In order to accomplish any meaningful, personal or institutional change there needs to be built-in support from and accountability to the institution.

It must be said that teachers who do not act on feedback from students and administrations are not necessarily uncaring or bad teachers. They may simply not be aware of how their actions are perceived by others, or may not have the tools to change those behaviors, which is why a support system needs to accompany implementation of any course/teacher evaluation. However, teachers who do not care about their teaching are likely to know that they are bad because they have seen it re-affirmed umpteen times. Term after term, they fail in class because they are not committed to any real form of change.

Perhaps it is time for these people to be removed from education. Perhaps it is time for our institutions to implement a radical review process that removes them from the system for good. The students do not want them. Their fellow teachers do not want them. Their institutions don't need them. For the good of the system, they need to be removed so that genuine, meaningful education within genuine meaningful tertiary educational institutions can take place.

What I suggest is an open and informed debate about how this can happen. Having been involved in concrete, triangulated evaluation systems, including classroom observations, peer, self and management evaluations, quality circles and student evaluation within a private language school framework, I can attest to the value of using these forms of feedback to encourage teacher development, spur individual change and increase faculty quality. This is exactly what tertiary education in Japan, at this point in time needs. The many institutions facing an uncertain future need to remove the 'dead wood' from their ranks. The education system as a whole needs to remove the institutions within their ranks that constitute 'dead wood'. This may happen through natural selection, which is a terribly long, painful process, where individual schools and departments will die out due to their persistent failure, taking educationally healthy faculty members with them.

A swifter, cleaner cut is required: a rational clearance of the dead logs sitting under the canopy of tertiary education, coordinated nationally and involving both public and private sectors could lead to a much more dynamic, adaptable, quality education system. Given the lack of ability of the Ministry of Education to coordinate anything nationally, I realize that this is likely to remain a blip on the screen of educational opinion. However, I stand by my view that there is a lot of dead wood out there and it needs to be chopped out in order to enable a sustainable, quality-based education system to flourish.

From the Chalkface:
Anchoring your activities

Charles Adamson
Miyagi University

Anchoring is an NLP (Neurolinguistic Programming) technique in which a stimulus is associated with a specific response. Anchors happen naturally. For example, a specific song causes you to recall a certain person. Anchors can also be set up intentionally. If you have ever written something on the board, erased it, and later pointed to the empty spot to remind the students of what was written there, you have used an anchor.

The trigger for an anchor may be visual (pointing to a spot), auditory (a specific word or tone), or kinesthetic (a touch). There are three criteria for anchoring:

1. the experience must be intense and as pure as possible,
2. the anchor, or cue, must be set when the experience is at its peak, and
3. the replication of the anchor must be accurate.

One particularly useful application of anchoring in the classroom is the construction of visual anchors for each type of activity in that lesson. By doing this, the teacher can implicitly inform the students what they should be doing at the moment. The teacher does this by always using the same location for a single type of activity. For example, the teacher might sit in the left front corner of the room when telling stories, stand at the board when giving content instruction, stand in the right corner when asking the students questions, and stand in the middle of the room close to the students when giving administrative instructions. If the teacher does this systematically and conscientiously, the students will always know exactly what sort of activity is taking place and what their role in it should be.

Teacher preparation is easy. First, the teacher thinks about the course and determines the activities that it will encompass. For example, a course might commonly include the following: giving organizational details, students working alone on an exercise, teacher giving answers and explanations, student/teacher dialog, questions from students, and student pair or group work. After making a list of these activities, the teacher visualizes the actual classroom layout to determine in what location to anchor each activity. Some things to consider are whether you will be sitting or standing, whether you will need the board, tape recorder, etc., and the sequencing of the activities in a typical class. You want to be sure that the anchors are clean, that is, that the students will not confuse them, so it is best if, after using one anchor, you move to a different part of the room for the next. Now all that is left to do is to sit down and relax, look at an actual lesson plan, and visualize yourself moving around the room and stopping at the selected site for each activity. At least for the first few times you use anchoring, it is a good idea to mentally preview each class so that you know what to do and remember to do it.

Anchoring is particularly useful for those who teach younger students where discipline is a problem. The solution is again anchoring. First, pick a location in the room that you will never go to by accident. A good site is the top of a table or desk. When you need to discipline the students, deliberately move to the site. If it is the top of a desk, you may have to use a chair to reach it. Do not say anything until you get settled in the location. Now blast away. Let it all out. When you have finished, leave your own feelings at the site and move back into the regular area, continue as if nothing had happened. The next time that you need to discipline, look at the site and then deliberately move to it and do your thing, leaving it all there when you finish. After doing this a few times, you will find that all you have to do is look at the site and the objectionable student actions will stop. Most teachers who have tried this have

found that discipline problems soon fade away and the class becomes a pleasure to teach.

Although discipline is sometimes important and the image of the teacher actually doing it is quite funny, this technique is much more valuable for what can be done with it in your classroom, where there is unlikely to be a discipline problem. One of the notorious problems in Japanese universities is to get the students to talk. I have successfully solved this problem by making two spatial anchors.

One is for small group discussions. I anchor the use of English, not Japanese by the group. To do this, at first you only stand in the location when the students are speaking English. If they begin using Japanese, you move to a random neutral location, a different one each time so that the only consistency is the desired student action and you standing in the selected location. When they start using English again, return to the location for the anchor. Soon the students will use English when you are standing in that location.

The other is for students to answer or ask questions in front of the whole class. Again you move in and out of the location according to the response you are getting. If the response is what you want, stand in the location. If it is not, move to a random neutral location, changing each time. Once you establish this anchor, it becomes possible to ask a question, move to the location, and get a response from the students.

The effect appears to be magical which is why John Grinder and Richard Bandler, the originators of NLP, used the metaphor of magic in their early work.

Additional reading:

While the best source of further information about anchoring would be a good NLP practitioner training course, the following books will give you further insight into anchoring and other elements of NLP.

Dilts, R. (1990). *Changing Belief systems with NLP*. Cupertino, CA: Meta Publications.

Lewis, B. and F. Pucelik. (1982). *Magic Demystified.* Portland, OR: Metamorphous Press.

O'Connor, J. and J. Seymour. (1988). *Introducing Neuro-Linguistic Programming.* Cornwall, England: Aquarian Press

Letter to the Teacher

Thomas C. Anderson
Aoyama Gakuin University,
Nihon University, Tokai University

Summary

This technique is an alternative to journaling. Although much has been written about the value of journals, they are time consuming and difficult to manage. A much easier technique is what I call Letter To The Teacher.

Students

As with journals, this technique can be used with all levels, and is especially suited to larger classes that exist in most Japanese post-secondary institutions.

Materials

The beauty of this activity is its ease of administration. Students only need a piece of loose-leaf paper. This is great for the teacher as it is much easier to carry twenty or thirty pieces of paper (and to read and write comments on the train!) than a class set of journals.

Time Required

Fifteen or twenty minutes of class time and perhaps thirty or forty minutes of teacher reading and commenting time.

Rationale

This activity is an authentic context for writing. It provides a non-threatening means of communication between the teacher and students. Students can express concerns, share ideas, and ask questions without worrying about grammar,

spelling, "using the right words", etc. Teachers should use the letter as a tool for continuous assessment, and more importantly a means to become and remain connected with students as people. In an atmosphere of acceptance and trust, students begin to open up and write about things that they would never mention in class. By connecting what is important in our students' daily lives to what we are doing in the classroom and validating their experiences, we can encourage them and help them to build the self-confidence they need both to succeed as students as well as responsible adults.

Procedure

I introduce this activity in the first class of the semester. Instead of doing the typical oral self-introduction, I give students a copy of my written self-introduction entitled "Letter To My Students". I read it while the students follow along. I then ask them to write a similar letter about themselves, which will be collected. I give them about fifteen-twenty minutes to write, and then collect the letters. I read them and keep them on file until the end of the term. This first letter serves as a writing sample, needs assessment tool, and source of information. I then have the students write letters periodically throughout the semester. With my lower level students I like to do this activity at least once every other week; with my advanced students I do it three or four times per term, due to the volume they write. This level of frequency makes the marking load manageable. In the second or third to last class of the term, I let my students free write. After writing my comments, I staple their first letter to the last before returning them. The students are then able compare the two letters, to see the improvements they have made during the semester.

For the letters during the semester, depending on the student level, I either let them write freely, or give them ten possible topics for them to choose from (with the proviso that they are not limited to them). In one class, a student suggested that I give the class a list of topics at the end of the previous class. He wanted to have time to think about topics and not feel pressured. I incorporated this into the activity the following term.

Assessment

As the focus of this activity is one-to-one communication, I do not make corrections unless requested to by the students. I feel that this would be too inhibiting.

I make a note of error patterns, which I can address in other activities, and react to the content of the letters with questions and short comments in the body and/or at the end of the letter. I believe that what gives the students the trust to share their writing with me is that I make it my purpose to write at least one positive comment to even the laziest, most passive and frustrating students in the class. Some students need close monitoring. An experience with one male student springs to mind. After twenty minutes of "writing", his letter consisted of "I like sports." I handle situations like this by challenging the class to increase the number of sentences they write (e.g. "I want everyone to write at least four sentences"). I sometimes take students aside at the end of the class and encourage them to write more and, of course, praise them when they meet the challenge!

Reflections

I came up with this activity while struggling to get a class of lower level students to write more than just a sentence or two. They responded well to the assurances I gave them that their letter was privileged information to be seen by only me. They liked the non-threatening positive feedback I wrote. Students felt comfortable in sharing with me concerns and problems that they would never mention in the classroom, occasionally even relationship problems; not that I'm an expert in matters of the heart! I had a male student who told me that he was a "low rider". I asked him to explain that and he told me about how he and his friends soup up old cars and race them in the middle of the night. This led to him sharing his dream about wanting to open up an automobile detailing business after graduating. Another male student told with me in a letter that he had missed a week of classes because his mother had just died of cancer. I was able to relate to this by sharing with him my experience of dealing with my own mother's and mother-in-law's cancers. By opening up to students such as these with thoughtful comments, I found that

many of them responded by making more of an effort in class. This really made me feel like I had accomplished something as a teacher.

Variations

While the use of journals may be a tried and true activity, I am constantly in the process of making them work better. Next semester, I plan to make a copy of the first letter to keep on file while making comments and returning the original with the intention that the process of building a relationship with the students will begin sooner. Another idea I am considering is to have the students brainstorm possible topics in groups, so that the list of topics I provide will be more relevant to them. In the middle of the term, when student motivation tends to wane a bit, it might be an idea to ask (urge?) students to include a photograph with their next letter. This could be expanded to include realia such as ticket stubs, movie/concert program covers or whatever might be important to the students. As with journaling, "The Letter To The Teacher" provides an infinite number of possibilities for communication.

For those interested in further exploration of journaling procedure, Toby Fulwiler's The Journal Book *is a good place to start. Progoff's* At a Journal Workshop *was a major influence on the popularity journals have attained in teaching, as was much of the work of Peter Elbow. Joy Kreeft Peyton's* Dialogue journal writing with non-native English speakers*, is a practical guide to using journals in TESOL, and her* Students and Teachers Writing together*, as well as two recent studies, by Mlynarczyk, and Burton and Carroll, have more reflective accounts of teachers using journals in a variety of situations. Readers may also remember Christopher Kelen's article in ON CUE vol 9,2. (Ed)*

Resources

Burton, J. and Carroll, (M. 2001). *Journal Writing.* Case Studies in TESOL Practice Series. Alexandria, VA TESOL

Elbow, P. (1973). *Writing without Teachers.* NY: Oxford University Press

Fulwiler, Toby (ed.). (1987). *The Journal Book.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann - Boynton andCook.

Fulwiler, T. (1987). *Teaching with Writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann - Boynton and Cook.

Kelen, C. (2001). 'Journal Writing: Some Observations from a Hong Kong High School Classroom'. *On CUE*, 9, (2) 11-14

Kreeft-Peyton, J. (1990). *Students and Teachers Writing Together: Perspectives on Journal Writing*. Alexandria, VA TESOL

Peyton, J. K., & Reed, L. (1990). *Dialogue journal writing with non-native English speakers: A handbook for teachers.* Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Mlynarczyk, Rebecca (1999) *Conversations of the Mind: The Uses of Journal Writing for Second-Language Learners.* NY: Lawrence Erlbaum

Progoff, I. (1975). At a Journal Workshop. NY: Dialogue House Library

Teaching General English Classes Through Resume: Gently avoiding the horns of a dilemma!

Daniel Droukis
Kyushu Kyoritsu University

The Dilemma: "Best laid plans o' mice an' men gang aft agley"

One of the joys of teaching at the university level is that we most often are allowed a great deal of freedom in planning curriculum and choosing textbooks. But, what happens when our plans go awry? In a recent second semester course I found that my class consisted entirely of repeaters. Some were taking the course for

the third time. After a few weeks of trying to force the textbook I had to admit that the book was clearly beyond their abilities. Changing textbooks mid-semester is always problematic, not to mention unfair to the students' wallets. I needed to do something that would help the students, was manageable given the class make up and time period, required little additional material, and would also vindicate your humble curriculum designer/narrator.

Rationale:

What could a teacher do to make this class work? One thing that I could safely assume was that my students knew more about their own lives than they knew about most other things. Therefore, I decided that finding ways for them to give information about themselves was a reasonable process to follow. Having the students work toward preparing a resume of their experiences was something that was achievable for the students and could be done in the class with minimal outside resources beyond a dictionary and examples of typical resumes. The students needed to know that this activity was simply a way to tell people about their experiences. In support of this effort I needed some theoretical justification for the activity. Chamot (1996) provides us with a variety of learning strategies appropriate for foreign language students. A strategy is simply a plan, which is made to achieve some goal. Through some of the strategies put forth by Chamot I had a strong basis for using a variety of learning strategies to complete this project.

Materials:

The students provided dictionaries and I consulted examples of resumes from 101 Great Resumes (1996, Career Press). I chose complete resumes written for their level of experience students used these as a guide to the standard make up of a resume.

Time Period:

As described, this activity took about eight classes to complete. In hindsight, I am sure that with more advance planning I could have done it faster. In this time period however, it was quite successful. Teachers can easily modify the timing of this activity to suit their individual needs.

Class Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they will be writing resumes and describe what a resume is. This was done in the first lesson. It took about 15 minutes and included writing a simple resume on the board and discussing what the headings entailed.

2. Give students a simple example of a resume that they can follow. Following the explanation, I showed copies of resumes from the book 101 Great Resumes (1996). I again explained while trying to connect the resume example on the board to the more complex one they were looking at. This coupled with step #3 perhaps takes the remainder of the class.

3. Simple resumes include students' name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, job goal, education, work experience, extra-curricular activities and awards etc. On the second lesson, I asked students questions about the sample resumes they were looking at. They then practiced writing the first section of the resume. I followed by asked them questions about what they had written. This continued along with #4 below. Students did a lot of correcting, checking dictionaries, and asking each other what should be done. This took almost three lessons, and involved a great deal of work with vocabulary.

4. Continue to compare student resumes with the sample resume.

5. While students are writing their versions offer assistance, and encourage questions and use of dictionaries. During this time monitor students' progress and decide if you want to translate for them when you can, or to strictly encourage them look things up. During the fourth and fifth sessions we reviewed how items are listed on the resume and further compared the versions they had written with actual resumes. I also asked questions which required students use information from the resume to answer.

6. Once students have completed their resumes check them for errors and return the corrected version. Have them completely rewrite any that have many serious flaws. This

was done in the sixth and seventh lessons.

7. Once students have a version that looks well done, call them for an "interview". In this interview, ask them questions that can be answered by referring to the resume. The final interview was conducted in the seventh or eighth lesson.

Comments on Various Sections of the Resume
Addresses:

Students started writing and quickly they started asking each other questions (in Japanese). They wanted to know how to write the different parts of a Japanese address. What was the correct order? What are ku, chome, shi and ken in English? Did the address have to be in English? Isn't it the same as it is in Japanese? They were really confused by this. Some students wrote out the entire address without using any numbers. I showed them my address in Japan and they followed the example. This aspect of the activity demonstrates things that can be taught easily through this experience. When they had successfully written out their addresses I followed this up with questions, which they answered verbally. This exercise allowed them to do more speaking in English than they were used to, but they rose to the challenge.

School Experience:

Writing up their school experience was the easiest for students to understand. They needed to know what information to include in this area. To help them understand, I asked specific questions about their school life. Where did you go to high school? When did you attend school? Where was your school located? They then asked each other these questions and wrote their answers in chronological order. Again, some had difficulty with vocabulary such as attend and locate. However, they were asked to look up these words and try to find another word they might know. Some students successfully substituted attend with go to but had difficulty with located. These vocabulary problems occurred throughout the lessons and simpler words were often used.

Work Experience:

Most resumes will contain work experience but not all university students will have this experience. Fortunately, all of my students had some part time work experience. Again, I prompted them with questions about where they worked, what their duties were, and other pertinent information. They were able to answer these questions and filled in their experiences such as yakitori shop, Torimatsu, waiter, etc.

Focusing on career goals:

The second part of the resume required students to state their goals. What did they want to do in the future? I asked them for some ideas and wrote them on the board. This activity also required that they consult the dictionary. Many students had specific ideas about what kind of jobs they wanted and with the help of the dictionary were able to articulate them. Others had much more difficulty. I gave them suggestions on possible jobs including typical part time work such as waiter or convenience store clerk. They could easily identify with the jobs that they were currently doing. Again, I asked to talk about the kind of jobs they wanted to do. When students were asked why they wanted to do a particular job they often had difficulty explaining. To address this, I asked them to think of words that could describe the job. These words were then inserted into their goals for the future section. Since they were economics majors, students often said they were interested in money. When they made a connection between the job they wanted and their interests, they were then able to write their goal or objective. I asked several questions related to this. Did they like talking with people? Did they like to be active? Did they like working with computers? From these answers they could more clearly give a goal for their resume.

Checking the results:

Once the students had written out their resumes I copied them and gave everyone a copy of each resume produced in the class. They were not typed and were occasionally difficult to read therefore if there is enough time and the students have access to computers or word processors, it may be best to have them type the final version. The students were then asked questions on what was written

on their resumes. How long did you work at ….? Where did you go to high school? What is your telephone number? Once I demonstrated this process, they took turns asking each other about their resumes. As a final activity they were interviewed in pairs in front of the class. Since it was such a small group this was not a threatening activity. This was the best way to check their ability to understand and respond to questions, and provided a nice conclusion to the activity.

Reflections: Chamot's Learning Strategies Revisited

This activity incorporated several of Chamot's (1996) learning strategies that can be easily identified. Students had to make and follow a plan. They frequently had to cooperate to produce parts of the resume. In the process they activated prior knowledge and brainstormed words that could be used to make a more effective resume. They were required to use resources (dictionaries). While they did not use much outside information they were sometimes called on to listen to introductions and give back information on what they had heard. This required them to do some note taking, questioning, and summarizing.

Conclusion:

If I were to encounter a similar situation in the future where students did not meet the level expected I would have a better way to deal with such a class. This activity was originally begun in an act of desperation but turned into a valuable learning experience for students, and helped to make for a successful class. Can this activity be done over an entire semester? Year? It is not as clear, but if we can plan this type of "emergency" course then we will be able to do more for our students in difficult situations.

References

Career Press Editors. (1996). 101 Great Resumes. Franklin, N.J., Career Press.

Chamot, A.U. (1996). Accelerating Achievement with Learning Strategies. Glenville, Il: Scott Foresman Addison Wesley.

Chamot, A.U. (1999). Learning Strategies Instruction in the Classroom. (On-line) http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/jalt/pub/tlt/99/jun/chamot.html

Call for Papers
The JALT Hokkaido Journal

The JALT Hokkaido Journal is an annual journal produced by the local chapter in Hokkaido. Previous to this year, this publication was a journal that strictly published papers resulting from the annual conference held in the spring each year. Last year, we broadened the scope of the journal to include papers from both the conference as well as some non-conference papers. From 1998 to 2001, the journal was called JALT Hokkaido Proceedings. Last year, it was called JALT Hokkaido Proceedings Plus. We have eliminated the word "proceedings" to reflect the editors' (Alan M. Cogen and Paul Stapleton) intentions to widen the scope of the journal.

In an effort to continue this format and widen the authorship, we are inviting papers, especially those related to language teaching research, from authors whether they are planning to present at our conference or not. We are accepting papers from all Japan. All papers will be vetted by the Journal Review Board.

Papers must be no longer than 3,200 words including two abstracts (maximum 200 words in English, 400 characters in Japanese) and reference list. We will only accept submissions by e-mail attachment formatted as a Microsoft (MS) Word document.

The DEADLINE for submitting a paper is JUNE 30. For those interested in submitting a paper, please contact Paul Stapleton paul@ilcs.hokudai.ac.jp in order to receive a copy of the submission guidelines.

Conference Reviews:
ELT Textbook Rubrics: The Nature of the Beast. Featured Workshop, JALT 2002. Kristopher Bayne, Aston University

Reviewed by Ellen Head
Momoyama Gakuin University

"If promising moves toward more learner independence and learner-centred classrooms through self-access and cooperative learning are to be realised, wresting the control away from the teacher and giving it to the learner is an important issue." (Bayne, 2001)

Rubric: originally it meant the part of the manuscript that was illumitated in red, instructing how the text was to be used. As a teacher and learner I am faced with decisions about rubrics every day, and recently writing in-house materials for my university has added a new dimension to my concern. I therefore leapt at the chance to find out about Kristopher Baynes' research at the featured speaker workshop, "ELT rubrics: the nature of the beast."

Baynes's idea is that students don't understand the language of rubrics and waste time reading them. "A student admitted to spending 10 minutes on translating the rubric in his homework tasks" (Bayne, 2001) If the task type is familiar to students they don't need the rubric anyway. He demonstrated this at the workshop by asking us to do three tasks without a rubric. He also showed us some rubrics created by his students when confronted with the same activity. The variety of approaches was interesting, and I could see that at a certain point in a course one might want to have students get involved in critiquing the rubric or creating alternative rubrics.

However there are many variables involved, and it seemed to me that rather than throw away the rubric, the solution, at least for beginning learners who are literate in the mother tongue, might be to have rubrics using L1. My own experience as a beginning learner of Japanese convinced me that having a readily understandable explanation of the content encouraged me to focus on the task itself. This is especially important in a self-access setting.

Baynes' research project involved interviews and surveys of the three interested groups, students, teachers and materials writers. He found that the teachers who were judged most effective by learners used examples and gestures to explain the rubric. Allowing "wait-time" for students to absorb the instructions, was also important.

Learners tended not to rely wholly on the rubric, as, when interviewed, they admitted they also used prior experience or asked their friends when deciding what was required by the task. Materials writers, on the other hand, tended to see the rubric as a way of making their task "teacher-proof."

I identified most strongly with the materials writers, having recently gone through the process of designing a course book for beginning learners. In the first part of the book we used a work-book style layout with a lot of speech bubbles and free placement on the page. In the next volume of the book we made a very simple and repetitive layout, with almost identical task types from unit to unit. In one case a rubric was missed out at the printing stage, but as the task was already familiar the only loss was that of contextual information.

It seems to me that a good criterion for judging a rubric is "does it make the task more interesting? Does it enable the teacher to deliver a task

that couldn't be communicated to these particular students any other way?"

In our workshop, we were asked to create a rubric for a task involving two lists of adjectives. Most people wrote an instruction to find opposites in the lists. One materials writer in the group suggested selecting traits desired in a future partner. It seemed to me that this latter task was far more motivating that the obvious task.

However, Bayne might argue that the exploratory process of writing their own rubric, would benefit students more than following a given rubric. Constructing one's own task stimulates an active cognitive engagement with the content, and is a very real way of giving students more control over their own learning.

In creating learner-friendly materials, we need to achieve a balance between familiarity and newness. When I was writing for my false-beginner audience I was aware of the danger of making the materials "student-proof", devoid

of challenge and space for investment by the students. It seems to me a very valuable idea to raise students' awareness and explore alternatives in relation to a given set of linguistic content. At the workshop we discussed the idea of a course with progressively diminishing rubrics, until in the end the students were given the linguistic content only, with no task or instructions. Although such a course would need very careful sequencing, it is an exciting idea. In the meantime, we can help our students by raising our – and their – awareness of rubrics as subvertible, dispensible, servants rather than masters of the learning process.

(1) Bayne, Kristopher. (2002). "How Students Know What To Do: Learner Access to ELT Textbook Rubrics," Dokkyo University Studies in Foreign Language Teaching, 17, 253-283. Research Institute of Foreign Language Teaching, Dokkyo University.

Culture, Content and Competency: ThaiTESOL 2003 Reviewed

Nanci Graves, International Communication Program at Kobe Steel; Juanita Heigham, Sugiyama Jogakuen University; Alan S. Mackenzie, Obirin University; Stacey Vye, International University of Health and Welfare

Relaxed and easy going. These are words typically used to describe Thailand, and the 23rd Annual Thailand TESOL International Conference was relaxed, but it was much more; it was also well-organized and dynamic. This year's conference was held at the Imperial Queen's Park Hotel in Bangkok from January 23 through 25. The site easily accommodated the 1200 participants and 177 presentations, and the lunch and coffee breaks provided at the hotel each day allowed for easy mixing.

The conference theme, 'ELT 2003: Culture, Content and Competency', was addressed by the keynote speaker Sawitri Suwansathit, Deputy Permanent Secretary for Education and Secretary-General of The Thai National UNESCO as well as plenary speakers Donald Freeman, Simon Greenall and Tom Hutchinson. Professional de-

velopment, socio-cultural training and project work were topics addressed by the plenary speakers. All the 20 content areas in the general program had a fairly strong presence, with Methodology and Reading being the best represented. This review will highlight four sessions to give a broad overview of the conference.

Featured speaker Beverly Derewianka ('Implementing a Text-Based Syllabus') detailed the process of building a text-based lesson. She defined texts as "meaningful stretches of whole language that can be spoken or written". A text-based approach to teaching language begins with identifying the *purpose* for which students need to use language (e.g. instructing, explaining, recounting, etc.) Once the purpose is established, tasks should be developed around it. Derewianka recommended using a *Curriculum*

Cycle for Teaching Text-Type at includes four basic steps. The first, 'Building the Field', is the introduction of topic-related vocabulary and the staging of oral interaction around the topic. In the second step, 'Modeling the Text-Type', a model is given to students, and they are asked to answer questions about it such as what it is called, why it is used and where it is used. The third step, 'Jointly Constructing a Text' , is when students and teacher work together to create a text similar to the model. In the final step, 'Independent Writing', the topic is changed slightly and students must create their own work independently. Derewianka's presentation provided a sound, step-by-step approach to help teachers develop a text-based syllabus and made the process seem manageable for even a novice teacher.

Recent reforms that are making sweeping changes in Thai education were discussed in the panel discussion 'Making the Most of EFL Education Reform in Thailand'. The discussion was conducted in Thai, with simultaneous translation, and two groups of two people each from the Thai Ministry of Education and ThaiTESOL comprised the panel members. The reforms discussed constitute a paradigm shift in Thai education which is being managed in a particularly chaotic way. Basically, the education system is taking a huge leap from structurally-based instruction to communicative, content-based and project-based instruction. Although these plans have been around for about eight years and some schools have actually implemented them, the shock of being *forced* to implement these plans now seems to be a major problem in Thai English education circles. These reforms firmly place Thai teachers in the role of curriculum developers which is a positive move, but at present the teachers are not sufficiently trained to take on this role; the degree of freedom being afforded them may be too much too fast. The education ministry acknowledges that these reforms constitute a burden on teachers. From this year, the education ministry is planning teacher-training workshops. This is beginning a full year after compulsory implementation of the curriculum guidelines and seven years after the initial implementation in so-called model-schools.

Throughout this session it was plain by the exhortations of the panelists that the education ministry wants these reforms to succeed.

In fact some schools have already gone a great way to ensuring that they do and with enough application and effort on the part of the education ministry in developing sustainable teacher training programs and professional development networks, the reforms have the potential to lead to great improvements in the general language ability of students in all schools in Thailand.

In 'Sustainable Educational Development' (SED), presenters Susan Carbery, Tony Campbell, and Robert Croker comprehensively described the acute limitations that English teachers face in rural Thailand. Rural teachers often experience isolation, large class sizes, and few opportunities for teacher-training due to distance from educational centers and lack of support from the national Ministry of Education. The presenters advocate for and organize self-sustainable teacher networks at the grass-root level to help overcome these obstacles. They encourage rural teachers to make the most of their resources, organize local teacher support networks and share effective methodology. Together they have established Volunteer Educational Network (VEN) to provide local support networks for teachers through English-teaching workshops for teachers in economically disadvantaged regions. This program encourages local teachers to become regional workshop presenters and leaders in order to continue inspiring teacher development amongst their peers. VEN provides teacher-training in Thailand as well as other countries. For more information, please consult http://www.vol-ednet.com regarding VEN and teacher-volunteer possibilities.

Participants in the thought-provoking workshop 'Developing Autonomy in the Classroom' were given the opportunity to observe a humorous "language lesson from hell" performed by the three presenters Rachelle Jorgenson, Stacey Vye and Miki Kohyama. In this lesson, a textbook-blinkered instructor gave full marks to her 'model' student's parroting of the day's language point while being driven to near frenzy by her communication-minded 'troublemaker's' earnest but disruptive attempts to discover the real meaning of the language being used. By clearly demonstrating how the spirit of autonomy in learners can be dampened, or remain dormant altogether, when teachers themselves are bound-and-gagged by curricular demands, the skit reinforced the

importance of placing a high value on learner curiosity and prioritising a learning-centred focus above other administrative concerns. As a result, while working together, the audience was able to come up with many practical suggestions for how teachers can act autonomously to make their textbooks work for them and their students, rather than the other way around.

The 2003 ThaiTESOL conference allowed participants to view the state of English language education from a variety of perspectives. And while the conference was fairly large, it maintained an atmosphere often found at smaller conferences, atmosphere that encouraged discussion far beyond the presentation rooms. For those interested in attending next year's conference, 'Prioritizing Teacher Development', to be held in Khon Kaen January 29-31, you can get more information at http://www.thaitesol.org.

Upcoming Conferences

World CALL 2003 Conference
> Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 7
> www.worldcall.org

2003 Kyoto JALT-Pan-SIG Conference
> Kyoto Institute of Technology, May 10-11
> jalt.org/test/conference.htm.

3rd ASIA CALL International Conference
> Bangkok, Thailand , May 14-16
> www.asiacall.org

The 3rd Annual Conference of the Japan Second Language Association: J-SLA 2003
> Daito Bunka Meeting Center (Itabashi, Tokyo), May 24-25
> www.daito.ac.jp/access.html

Information Technology & Multimedia in English Language Teaching (ITMELT) 2003
> The English Language Center of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, June 6-7
> www.elc.polyu.edu.hk/conference

Computer Assisted Language Learning CALL Conference
> Kinjo Gakuin University, Nagoya, June 7-8
> www.jaltcall.org/

Fostering Partnership in Language Teaching and Learning
> Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, June 24-28
> www.lc.ust.hk/~centre/conf2003

Summer International Conference of the Korea Association of Teachers of English (KATE)
> Yonsei University, Seoul, June 26-28
> Contact: Prof. Hwa-ja Lee, Conference Chair, <Lhj@sunchon.ac.kr>

Japan Association for Language Education and Technology Annual Conference
> Kansai Gaidai, Hirakata, Osaka,
> July 31-August 2
> www.LET-kansai.net/LET2003information-e.html

The 8th International Pragmatics Conference
> University of Toronto, July 13-18
> ipra-www.uia.ac.be/ipra/8th_conference.html

Second International Conference on Speech, Writing and Context
> Kansai Gaidai University, Osaka, August 6-8
> www.kansaigaidai.ac.jp/teachers/toyota/ICSWC2.htm

THE JACET 42nd ANNUAL CONVENTION
> Tohoku Gakuin University, Sendai, Sept. 4-6

The Peace as a Global Language 2003 Conference
> Seisen University, Tokyo, September 27-28
> www.eltcalendar.com/PGL2003/main

JALT Learner Development SIG and CUE SIG Mini-conference: Learner Development: Contexts, Curricula, Connections
> Kobe YMCA, October 17-19
> allagash.miyazaki-mu.ac.jp/CUE/MiniConference

The 11th Annual Korea TESOL International Conference 2003
> Seoul Educational Training Institute, Korea, October 18-19
> www.kotesol.org/conference/

5th Pan-Asian Conference on Language Teaching at FEELTA 2004
> Far Eastern National University, Vladivostok, Russia, June 24-27, 2004
> www.dvgu.ru/rus/partner/education/feelta/pac5/

Reflections: Kicking Chickens out of the Classroom: A Narrative on Teacher Training at a Refugee Camp

Brent Poole
Kansai Gaidai

Are you interested in a working holiday? Then why not volunteer to teach for a NGO at a refugee camp between the border of Burma Thailand. Well, that is precisely what I did last year during spring break. I was inspired to take such an adventure from a former colleague who is currently working for an NGO in Northern Thailand. The following will outline my experiences in the refugee camp in the hope that it will generate interest and action to help address the issues that relate to the Karenni people, but I should admit that as a 'parachute teacher' my experience was limited to only two weeks.

After about 12 hours of travel from Kansai International Airport I finally arrived in Mae Hong Song, which is located in Northern Thailand. After I got settled into the surroundings of the small town, I went to the main office to do some lesson planning. I was told before I came that I had to use resources at the main office to create teaching aids for the obvious reason that photocopy machines were not available in the refugee camp. Also, books were hard to come by, and when they were donated they were often culturally inappropriate. I had to present and use material that my students could replicate in their own classrooms. That said, I started using flip charts consisting of large sheets of recycled paper attached by two pieces of bamboo. After I finished the preparation, I went out and had dinner and then came home and went to bed.

The next day I woke up and met some other people from the NGO and then jumped in a truck for the hour and a half ride on a bumpy and dusty track to the refugee camp. Once in the camp I took me a while to get adjusted to my surroundings, as this was the first time I had ever taught in a bamboo hut with a dilapidated blackboard and a dirt floor. My students were predominately female primary school English teachers who were participating in the two-week teacher training during their spring vacation. The attendance rate was good despite the fact that the teachers had other pressing responsibilities: this was the season to repair the roof of one's hut because the rainy season was quickly approaching. (1) Most of the students were in their mid- to late twenties with a few exceptions, and in terms of their formal education they ranged from high school graduates from the school in the refugee camp, to college graduates from Burmese Universities.

The first task was to identify the English proficiency level of students in my classes, and after the first day I had a fairly sound idea. The second was to become familiar with my students cultural learning requirements. This was rather difficult at first because I was not familiar with their cultural heritage, nor the experience of being a refugee. It dawned on me like a ton of bricks that topics such as international travel and shopping, things my Japanese University students find interesting had little or no relevance to this context.

My lessons were fairly straightforward in that they concerned themselves with phonology, grammar, and basic English conversation. I stuck to topics such as health, parts of the human body, describing people, feelings and emotions and other basic topics. What was lacking in variety of topics was overcome by the motivation and earnestness of my students. I have taught in the United States, Korea, and in Japan and there is no doubt in my mind that the Karenni refugees were the most focused, self-disciplined, and motivated people I have ever taught. One of the

reasons for this is that they perceive education as important for their independence and for the future of their people.

With regard to the issue of classroom management, the problems were quite different to the usual ones. For example, my class was often visited by the chickens that wandered round the camp. This was not really a problem until they started to peck my feet. I literally had to kick them out of the classroom. There was also the issue of chewing betel nuts in class and spitting the juices over the bamboo walls. After I tried chewing some myself, I really could not blame them for spitting out the juice.

The most of classroom experience was educational for me. I was taken on several tours by my students, after class, and I had the opportunity to visit various places of social interaction such as the noodle shop. I was invited to share meals with some students, and heard stories about their forced relocation inside Burma and about various human rights violations, such as extra-judicial killings, forced portage, torture, and the burning and looting of karenni villages by the Burmese military.

After conducting the two-week teacher-training course, and interacting with my students, I made the commitment to go back next year. For those of you who are interested in learning more about the plight of the Karenni people please contact the Japan based Rainbow Foundation. The point of contact for this NGO is Dominique Maidment and he can be contacted via e-mail at dmmaidment@yahoo.com

(1) As a general rule women are primarily responsible for hut repairs. This process involves walking a few miles into the jungle each way to extract leaves and then binding them together to make a new roof. Men are primarily responsible for childcare.

Cyberpipeline:
Really Useful Web Sites?

Steve Snyder

Kyushu University of Health and Welfare

While taking a recent transcontinental flight, I was leafing through a computer magazine and ran across a listing of "Really Useful Sites." There were lots of them, round 80. Some of the sites listed were suspiciously commercial or of little relevance outside of the US, but a small number of sites I was motivated to check out in more detail. As I checked out these sites, few were as useful as claimed. Below are my reviews on sites that might be of interest to our readers.

Going Google

Two sites that were recommended are related to the Google porthole. The first site is the Google News Page http://news. Google.com that presents global news organized on a single page. It might be difficult to find someone who is not familiar with Google, but it is surprising how few people know about the news page. This page is updated several times each hour and items are given tags as to when they were posted (eg. "12 minutes ago"). Even though the Google News Page is well organized, up to date, and easy to use, I have found that items listed tend to run along fairly mainstream reporting of events, although a number of differing links are provided. Google, though, is fast and uncluttered. Also, you can find a lot of non-mainstream items through the Search News search engine. Also, check out the categories in the left-hand column. Google is extremely fast at image searches as well.

So once you've gotten updated at Google, you may want to go to Reuters AlertNet Newsdesk http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/ to find items which may not make it into mass distribution. From the Newsdesk page you can link to any items you did not see in in other sources or click on a link that follows a major thread. For those interested in the impact on relief agencies working in Iraq there is an ongoing page dedicated to this topic: http://www.alertnet.org/ thefacts/reliefresources/ that also gives links to the University of Cambridge campaign against sanctions on Iraq. Be warned that AlertNet is for members and that nonmembers can access only limited parts of the site. If your tastes run more towards commentaries on the news, you may want to look at Arts & Letters Daily, which you can find at: http://www.aldaily.com .

Also recommended on the Google site was the downloadable toolbar http://toolbar. Google.com that allows you to extend your searching options. To use this toolbar you must have MS Internet Explorer 5 or later. I haven't tried the toolbar yet, but I may do so in the near future. Be sure to read the FAQ before getting it.

Travel Items

The next site is only for those who really want to be aware of travel health hazards: the CDC Traveler's Health website http://www.cdc.gov/ travel for those who are not familiar with US agencies, CDC stands for "Center for Disease Control." The site provides health information and alerts of disease outbreaks for traveling to any location in the world. This site is not just about vaccinations. You will find recommendations on food and water, traveling with children, as well as risk factors for known diseases. There links to world health agencies and phone and fax emergency information numbers. If you want to know what the US Department of State has for travel warnings and information on travel in various countries you can go to http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html and while you are there check out the CIA fact book link. You will find a lot of facts on countries, including literacy rates, birth and death rates, ethnic ratios, sex ratios, HIV/AIDS deaths, GDP, unemployment and other commerce statistics, general military info, information on infrastructure and a very interesting entry on "transnational issues." Potentially a very useful source of data

on countries and easy to access. The fact book is updated regularly.

A site you may want to know about if you are planning multiple flights in North America is FlightArrivals.com http://www.flightarrivals.com/ This site got high ratings from Yahoo and PC World magazines, but I have found the site more limited than stated in reviews and I cannot access the site through my firewall at work. Nevertheless, this site may in the future offer information on international flights, and the current information on airport status and schedule changes in North America can be useful if you are visiting multiple sites. If not, I would check out the homepage of the airline you are flying. Extra travel note: If you are planning to rent a car, be sure to check out any discount packages offered through the airline you are traveling with – I receive much lower rates through the online reservation system than I could get through telephone reservations. Promotions can be found on most of the web sites for major airlines.

A travel support site recommended in one magazine was at http://www.travisa.com/. It provides online visa applications to a number of countries. When you follow a link to a country you will find an information page about the country with links to further information. Another recommended web site that claims to be a travel language store can be found at http://www3.travlang.com/ has language courses, both offline and online, at a range of prices. I found these sites very commercial, but that was to be expected. For those who are curious about trying the Rosetta stone software, this is one place to learn about it (although you actually end up purchasing it through yahoo.com).

CDs, DVDs, etc

The recommended web sites in magazines were not all travel-related. Ice Magazine lists new music CD release dates, popular music news and music business links. The lists are long, but can be searched by using "find" function on your computer. Useful? I found that Amazon.com had more useful information, for the music I buy. If you are anticipating new releases, especially for emerging pop/rock groups, maybe http://www.icemagazine.com is for you. A recommended site for DVD releases was http://www.thedigitalbits.com, although I have yet to actually connect to the site. A CD site that I could connect to and was recommended was http://www.audiogalaxy.com, although the free music section called "satellite" requires a registration. If you are really motivated to get different sources for your music, then look into these sites, but I found them disappointing. If you are desperate for a PC driver for your computer, you might go to http://www.drivershq.com. A subscription will cost close to $30US, but they advertise access to over 70,000 drivers. That really would be useful, depending upon your needs.

SPECIAL JOINT ISSUE OF On CUE AND LAC

On CUE, in collaboration with Literacy Across Cultures (LAC), wish to announce a special joint issue for 2003. The theme is L2 literacy (the teaching and learning of FL/SL reading and writing) at the university level in Japan and Asia.

Possible topics for submissions could include the following, but other topics which relate literacy to L2 language learning will also be considered:

teaching reading; teaching reading, discourse and genre skills; teaching reading as part of an integrated approach (such as with listening or writing); teaching literature (reading it, writing it), teaching cross-cultural understanding through written texts, testing reading comprehension and vocabulary, teaching and evaluating composition courses, running reading programs (intensive or extensive reading), case studies in learning a FL language through reading managing the language support elements of content teaching dealing with the subject-specific aspects of ESP/EAP/EST.

Papers published elsewhere (such as other JALT publications or in local research bulletins) will be considered; however, please make sure you are able to tell us where the paper was first published and who holds copyright.

Both 'On CUE' and 'LAC' are intended for international audiences, many of whom are not native users of English. Therefore, it is best to stick to a 'plain English' style of writing. That is, use a variety of sentence lengths and types, but keep most sentences shorter than 25 words. Keep paragraphs fairly short and start new ones frequently. Use a lot of headings and sub-headings of an explanatory nature. Don't be afraid to present long lists of information as lists with bullet points instead of overly long sentences. Consider covering and repeating key information in figures and tables to help present and reinforce your ideas in ways that are easier to understand. Please use APA style for in-text citations and the reference list.

To see a sample of LAC articles on line, check out http://www.literacyacrosscultures.org for html and the file archive at the yahoo group,

(http://groups.yahoo.com/group/literacyacrosscultures/files) for PDF versions.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS

31 July 2003

Send your submissions to both of the following points of contact:

For LAC: Charles Jannuzi
    <jannuzi@mint.ocn.ne.jp>

For On CUE: Michael Carroll
    <carroll@andrew.ac.jp>

Format for submissions: Please send your files in .rtf and .doc so that it can be opened and read on the latest forms of MS Word. Sending it in .rtf is a safer way to share files and often proves easier to open on different versions of MS Word and across PC and MAC platforms.

The usual On CUE article types are sought, though variations are also possible:

Feature articles: 1800-3000 words written from teacher and classroom perspectives. Overly long lists of bibliography having only minor relevance to an article's topic and thesis are not encouraged. Authors should adequately document the works that they have consulted and read in conducting their teaching and classroom research. If an idea or fact or piece of information appears at least twice under different sources, then it might well be something that can be taken as 'common knowledge' in the field.

The feature article does not have to be limited to reports on research (either in qualitative or quantitative traditions). Articles that emerge from non-traditonal research and reflective practitioner modes (such as the phenomenology of teaching) are also welcome. Articles in which the author relates existing theories and others' research findings to their own actual classroom teaching are strongly encouraged. Conceptual pieces in which the author demonstrates an ability to work across various disciplines and cultures to produce clarity and synthesis for actual classroom practitioners are also warmly invited.

Scholarly reviews: 1200-2500 reviews comparing, contrasting and reviewing two or more recent publications that cover similar

topic areas. The list of references might include key background books and articles that have preceded the works being reviewed.

Reviews: 500-1500 word reviews of titles relevant to language teachers and their students, to include professional development titles, resources collections, textbooks (both full course and supplementary), and software.

WWW links: 500-800 word list of reviews of web sites useful to teachers and students related to the theme of this issue.

'From the Chalkface' (Classroom activities): length of these will vary depending on the activity, but explanations should include a clear, step- by-step description of classroom procedures. Also helpful would be including rationale and the type of learner and classroom the activity is for. If you have a set of related activities, please consider writing up a somewhat more scholarly presentation as a feature (see above). The usual submission in this section is like the activities published in Modern English Teaching or English Teaching Professional.

Opinions & Perspectives: (500-800 words). A chance to take on topics and positions in the form of a persuasive essay. Example: 'Difficult reading passages should be eliminated from university English entrance exams'. The most persuasive articles draw on support from scholarly sources to some extent, and they should be informative.

Learner Development: Contexts, Curricula, Connections

JALT Learner Development SIG and CUE SIG Mini-conference, October 17-19 Kobe YMCA (Main sessions Sat/Sun 18-19)

Learner Development underlies a great deal of the classroom teaching of both LD and CUE members. But what exactly does it entail? How does it fit into overall educational contexts and into students' overall learning experiences? The LD and CUE SIGs of JALT will be holding a mini-conference to explore, in a participatory way, how language teachers in Japan are addressing these issues. We would like to encourage interested teachers to submit presentation proposals that address questions such as the following

Contexts:

How do institutional factors constrain or facilitate learner development within an institution?

How does learner development operate in different learning contexts: junior high schools, senior high schools and universities, language schools, etc, as well as in the teaching of different languages?

Curricula:

How can learner development be realised beyond the classroom level, in informing course and program design?

Connections:

What are the connections between different approaches to learner development? (For example, how do learner autonomy, critical thinking, learning skills and strategies, intercultural knowledge, and academic literacy interrelate?)

How can learner development approaches create links between different elements of courses, curricula, and programs, between different stages of education, and within students' overall learning careers?

Proposals are invited for one hour single presentations or two hour colloquium/forum/workshop type sessions. Presenters should aim to allocate at least 50% of their sessions for discussion or other types of audience participation. Proposals for 30 minute sessions may also be accepted, where they can be appropriately paired to make a coherent one-hour session. A limited number of poster sessions are also available.

While the aim of this conference is to move beyond the confines of single classrooms to the wider contexts, presenters are nevertheless encouraged to ground their discussion in actual experiences, making use of concrete evidence from the classroom wherever appropriate.

Prospective presenters should submit a 200 word outline including the following:
Title
Presenters' names, institutional affiliations and contact details (tel, fax, postal address and email address). Please nominate one person to be the main contact, for group presentations.
Presentation mode: workshop/research paper/discussion paper/poster session/panel discussion/ forum/workshop/other
Length: one hour/two hours/30 minutes
Send proposals as Ms Word .rtf attachment, or as a simple text file by email to: Phil McCasland proposals@kobeconference.com
Deadline for submission of proposals: 31st May