

On CUE

For the Language Professional in Higher Education

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Conferences

JALT CUE SIG Conference: Developing Autonomy

May 12-13 Tokai University, Milne Kenshukan,
Shimizu, Shizuoka

[www.wild-e.org/cue/conferences/
autonomy.html](http://www.wild-e.org/cue/conferences/autonomy.html)

JALT CALL SIG Conference

May 26-27, Kanto Gakuen University, Gunma

www.jaltcall.org

Don't miss the CUE roundtable
at the CALL conference!

Thoughts to Ponder

*To write about the things around
me gives me the the way which I
should go. When you're in the
darkness and if you want to get out
of it, you should write about it.*

*Writing is the weapon we humans
have against the chaos around us.
If you don't write, you're in the
darkness forever and you won't be
aware of it.*

*Kazuya Suzuki
(student 1st year Waseda Uni)*

The JALT CUE Conference

2001

Developing Autonomy

**May 12th & 13th
Shimizu, Shizuoka
at the
Miho Kenshukan of
Tokai University**

**JALT College and
University Educators
in association with
JALT SIGs:
Learner Development
Teacher Education
&
Shizuoka Chapter**

<http://www.wild-e.org/cue/conferences/autonomy.html>

Fees:

2-day package (2 nights accommodation, 5 meals and conference attendance): ¥21,000

1-day conference attendance only: ¥3,500

JALT members: ¥1000 discount on package or ¥500 per day.

CUE members: ¥2,000 discount on package or ¥750 per day.

The Japan Association for Language Teaching College and University Educators Special Interest Group

CUE 2001 Conference Preview

CUE SIG NEWS

Eamon McCafferty
Conference Co-Chair

As expected, this year's conference theme has drawn a diverse range of topics for exploration (see schedule on the insert). It has also managed to attract a large number of pre-registrants. Indeed, we are delighted to say that at the time of going to press we already have more than 160 people pre-registered, more than the total attendance at the first CUE conference nearly one year ago. The cosy atmosphere set there seems ready to be repeated however, with the conference taking place in a self-contained facility that includes accommodation and catering.

A new feature of this year's conference is the inclusion of three featured speakers who will each address the entire assembly with a different perspective on the conference theme. As Programme Chair, I had the great pleasure of inviting them to lead us in our weekend discussions believing that all three share certain characteristics that will pave the way for a successful gathering. Namely, a dedication to their own and others' professional development, an ongoing concern with matters relating to the autonomy of students and teachers, and an ability to develop and convey important ideas in an open and engaging manner. However, if you haven't yet pre-registered for the conference (required), please don't take my word for it. Come and join us and listen to what they have to say for yourself. You'll also find that they are also joined by a large number of similarly dedicated professionals, all determined to share their knowledge gains with you and hear your own opinions.

As a taster (and hopefully a teaser), I include abstracts for the three featured speakers below. First, though, I'd like to offer a few casual words of introduction. Andrew Finch has supplied his own biographical details, but in the case of Alan Mackenzie and Steve Snyder, I have taken advantage of my longer association with them to give you a snapshot of how at least one person sees them.

Andrew Finch was born in Wales back in the mists of time, and had various teaching positions before going to Korea in 1988 to learn "Go" (Wei-Chi). He became Visiting Professor at Andong National University in 1991, moved to Hong Kong in 1993, taking a Distance M.Ed. (TESOL) from Manchester University, and was invited back to Andong in 1997 as Deputy Director of the new Language Center, where he designed and ran a three-year task/project-based conversation programme. He has just received a Ph.D. in Program Evaluation (also Man. U.), and is now Deputy Director of Seoul National University of Technology Language Center. With Dr. Hyun Tae-duck, he has co-authored three task/project-based Conversation English books for Korean students: *Tell Me More!*, *Now you're Talking!*, and *The Way Ahead*. These all incorporate self-assessment and learner-centred methodology, and they can all be viewed online at <http://www.hogusan.com>.

As a child, Alan Mackenzie's independent spirit may have sometimes frustrated his parents, but since growing up and graduating from the MA TESOL program at Teacher's College Columbia University, he has successfully funnelled his autonomous energies into academic pursuits. So much so, in fact, that he has recently been invited back to Columbia as an associate professor on the same programme convening a course on - yes, you guessed it - autonomy. Truly a life-long learner, Alan has entangled himself in so many academic projects in the past few years that it is difficult to imagine where he finds time for it all. Usually a person's social life might suffer in such a situation, but Alan has miraculously managed to remain loyal to his natural hedonistic instincts. Long being known as one to buck convention, he has recently been seen donning a suit and tie. His friends are somewhat worried about this. His parents, however, will

probably be even prouder than they already are if they ever get wind of this somewhat puzzling transformation. I personally anticipated this slow mutation one hot summer morning three years ago as I watched Alan arrive for classes at the Waseda University Summer School. He was wearing full traditional Scottish dress including heavy woollen kilt and accompanying regalia. These days nothing surprises me about him any more. I do wonder what he'll choose to wear at the conference this year, though.

Steven Snyder is currently working on his Ph.D. at Macquarie University after already completing the Masters of Applied Linguistics there. This at least partly explains why he is always so difficult to get hold of. (Let's say you were trying to chase down biographical details, for example...). Steve does come out of hiding for JALT national conferences however, where he can sometimes be seen performing a strange little jump with a click of the heels. I believe this may be due to an unflagging zest for life coupled with professional dance training earlier in his existence. But then again this may simply be the way people walk back in Steve's hometown of Buffalo, Colorado. Back in those earlier days, Steve also used to be something of an adventure sports freak but is now (he says) getting fat from lack of exercise. He has a litany of achievements but believes none of them are worth mentioning. Not wanting to intrude upon his modesty, I won't embarrass him by listing them here. Rather, I'll simply say that Steve, very much like the two gentlemen above, is quick to smile and share a laugh with all who cross his path, and, again like Alan and Andy, is just as keen to engage you in serious academic discussion if that's what takes your fancy. (Just don't get him started on ballet.)

I'll turn you over to the much more serious and infinitely more interesting words of the three featured speakers, Andy, Alan and Steve. Personally, I am very much looking forward to hearing their speeches at the conference. I hope you'll feel the same way after reading their abstracts.

ANDREW FINCH

Keynote Speech: (Saturday 10:10-11:00)

**Autonomy: Where are we?
Where are we going?**

Autonomy has figured large in recent TEFL literature and practice, and has run the risk of becoming the latest politically correct catchword, attempting to be all things to all teachers, and (because of this) defying attempts to pin down definitions of what it is that everyone seems to be agreed on. Brooks & Grundy (eds.) see it as "axiomatic that learner autonomy should be the goal of every learner and every teacher" (1988, p. 1), while Little observes that "genuinely successful learners have always been autonomous", and that educators must "help more learners to succeed" rather than following learner autonomy as an explicit goal (1995, p. 175).

Autonomy is still largely evaluated by its effectiveness in enabling learners to learn the foreign language (Dickinson 1987, p. 2), though much research has not been done in this area. However, this talk will attempt to look at the larger picture and at language learning as education.

From such a perspective, the author will argue that it is the responsibility of every teacher to promote autonomous, critically thinking, responsible members of society, and that lesson content or subject matter is a secondary goal in this endeavour.

The educational model we have at present is based on competition and aggression, which were effective survival strategies over the last thousands of years. However, we live in a different world now, and competition only denudes the world of resources.

It is little use educating students to be successful business people when the world has no fish, trees, or oxygen. In this situation, holistic objectives are all we have, and the promotion of autonomous beings must become a definition of education.

Join us in Shimizu, Shizuoka

ALAN MACKENZIE**Keynote Speech: (Saturday 15:20-16:10)
Degrees of freedom:
Teacher autonomy, textual constraint
and institutional growth**

Teacher autonomy is not one monolithic concept, although it is often talked of in those terms. The literature on teacher autonomy most often characterizes teacher autonomy as how independently a teacher can make decisions. Often this is taken to mean the teacher doing whatever they want to do. However, teacher autonomy might better be conceived as being the ability of the teacher to take control of their teaching/learning situation within constraints imposed on them and utilising the resources available to them to the best of their ability.

While it is difficult to say whether a teacher is autonomous or not autonomous, we can define a series of contexts that are more or less controlled or manipulable and teacher behavior that exhibits more or less control over that context.

Exploding the term "Teacher autonomy" reveals a number of different contextual constraints within which the teacher needs to operate. These include linguistic, intellectual, administrative, hierarchical, textual, physical and personal constraints. The intersection of these defines the individual's teaching context and thereby the limits to their professional learning context.

Viewing teacher autonomy as the ability of the individual to work within their professional learning context and manipulate it to achieve their pedagogical, intellectual and personal aims might provide a useful framework for analysis.

Further, relating this to learning organisation theory may provide opportunities for schools to manipulate constraints they impose on teachers to better enable their staff to contribute to organisational growth.

STEVE SNYDER**Keynote Speech: (Sunday 11:10-12:00)
An ethical imperative for learner
choice**

I take the position that there are ethical motivations for providing learners' with options as to the method of their instruction. I will argue that providing learner choice also has benefits to teachers as well. Utilizing the ethical perspective has the advantage of focusing on how instructional policy effects the differential needs of individual students within the context of the belief systems underlying such policy.

Curriculums are indeed based upon a small set of curricular philosophies, although in most cases it is tradition which informs the curricular design. Interestingly, there is some convergence between these curricular philosophies and learner choice. However, it can be said that only two of these philosophies give much attention to influences on the learner from outside the classroom (Critical Theory and Developmentalism).

It will be argued that much of the thought about educational input and output is confined to thinking about the classroom, even though it cannot be denied that circumstances outside the classroom have an enormous impact on the individual learner. These extra-classroom influences should not be ignored, for they constitute much of what is observed as variation in learning outcomes.

My position is this: If we know about such learner variation then we have an ethical obligation to provide options to address these differences between circumstances individual learners. I will then address how we might implement learner choice given the time constraints and role conflicts that teachers' must deal with.

**Register for the Conference Package
Online @**

<http://www.wild-e.org/cue/conferences/autonomy.html>

Getting to the Conference Site

Please note that those staying at the conference site are requested to arrive on Friday between 3pm and 10pm and that there will be no food served on Friday. Meals (breakfast / lunch / dinner on Saturday and breakfast / lunch on Sunday) will be served in the restaurant in the next building. There is no food available at the conference/accomodation centre but there is a beer and soft drinks machine.

By Shinkansen to Shizuoka and on to JR Shimizu

Take the Tokkaido Shinkansen to Shizuoka Station and transfer from there to JR Shimizu Station. From Tokyo it takes approx. 1 hour by *Hikari* (1st stop) and 90 minutes by *Kodama* (6th stop) to Shizuoka. Hikari service runs about once every hour and Kodama two or three times. The Shinkansen tracks at Shizuoka are on 2F and you can transfer to the Tokkaido line on 1F without exiting. Your Shinkansen tickets will be accepted through the turnstiles and you can pay the fare adjustment at Shimizu Station (3rd stop, 12 minutes). From there you'll need to take a bus or taxi to the site (see below).

By Bus from JR Shimizu Station

The is only one exit out of Shimizu Station. On the right hand side of the square in front is Bus Stop No. 9. Take the no. 58 bus from here until until the final stop, called Miho Land (this is written on the front of the bus). It takes 20-30 minutes. There are five or six buses every hour starting from 06:30. The last bus on weekdays leaves Shimizu Station at 20:30 and at 20:10 on weekends/holidays. The site, named (*Tokai Daigaku no*) *Miho Kenshukan*, is about five minutes walk from the bus stop. There will be a signpost on the pavement in front of the bus terminal giving directions to the site.

By Taxi

From JR Shimizu station it will take about 15 mins. and cost approx. 2,600 Yen. Ask for "Miho-rando no (Tokai Daigaku) Miho Kenshukan."

By Car

Exit at Shimizu Interchange on the Tomei Expressway and follow the signs to Miho (about 10 km). It's well-signposted the whole way. Just as you drive into Miho, the road narrows and there is a "crank" curve (a sharp turn to the right followed quickly by another to the left). About 1km after this you will see a large car park to your right. Park your car here (500 Yen) and you will find the site in front of you.

Contact eamon@gol.com if you need more details about any of the above.

CUE Conference 2001

**Developing
Autonomy**

**May 12-13th
In Shimizu City, Shizuoka,
at Miho Kenshukan of
Tokai University.**

<http://www.wild-e.org/autonomy.html>

Promoting Autonomy and/or Self-Direction in SL Teaching

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The idea of self-directed, autonomous learning is firmly entrenched in the adult education literature. It is one of only a few core concepts that have laid the foundations for the identity of adult education as a distinct field of practice and inquiry (Tennant, 1991). But like most core concepts, *self-directed learning* is open to a range of interpretations. At one end of the spectrum, self-directed learning is thought to occur when learners determine goals and objectives, locate appropriate resources, plan their learning strategies, and evaluate the outcomes (Knowles, 1978; Tough, 1967; Moore, 1980). Thus, self-directed learning would be characterized by the mastery of a set of techniques and procedures for self-learning. At the other end of the spectrum, self-directed learning is thought to incorporate the notion of "critical awareness" (Mezirow, 1985; Brookfield, 1985). Critically aware learners have the capacity to identify and challenge assumptions because they are emancipated from their psychological and cultural assumptions and are more in touch with their authentic needs. Thus, they are able to make a commitment to learning on the basis of a knowledge of genuine alternatives.

These approaches to self-directed learning have in common a concern with the psychological growth of the learner. They both assume that learning and psychological growth are connected, although the nature of the connection differs in each case. In the first view, in which self-directed learning is essentially a skill, learners are assumed to have a psychological need for self-direction. The learning processes based on this view (for example, the learning contract) are designed to acknowledge and awaken this need (Brookfield, 1985). In the second view, an assumption is made that constraints on learning originate in the social structure and become in-

ternalized by the learner. Shedding these constraints or psychological assumptions (Mezirow, 1985) is at once an act of learning and psychological growth in its own right and a precondition for subsequent self-directed learning.

Self-direction for learners happens over time

In the second language education literature, two terms, *learner self-direction* and *learner autonomy*, are often applied in relation to language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). These terms have been used in various ways. For instance, Dickinson (1987) used self-direction to refer to the learner's attitude of responsibility, and he used autonomy to refer to the learning mode, situation, or techniques associated with the responsible attitude. Holec (1980, 1981) used the same two terms but in reverse, with self-direction referring to the learning mode, situation, or technique and autonomy referring to the learner's attitude. Unsurprisingly, these two terms have come to be synonymous as they are used interchangeably in L2 teaching/learning circles.

According to Oxford (1990), language learning strategies encourage greater overall self-direction for learners. Self-direction is particularly important for language learners, because they will not always have the teacher around to guide them as they use the language outside the classroom. Moreover, self-direction is essential to the active development of ability in a new language.

Owing to conditioning by the culture and the educational system, however, many language students (even adults) are passive and accustomed to being spoon-fed (Knowles, 1975; Oxford, 1990). They like to be told what to do, and they do only what is clearly essential to get a good grade, even if they fail to develop useful skills in the process (Brown, 1994). Attitudes

and behaviors like these make learning more difficult and must be changed, or else any effort to train learners to rely more on themselves and use better strategies is bound to fail (Wenden, 1987). Just teaching new strategies to students will accomplish very little unless students begin to want greater responsibility for their own learning (Carver, 1984).

Learner self-direction is not an all or nothing concept; it is often a gradually increasing phenomenon, growing as learners become more comfortable with the idea of their own responsibility. Self-directed students gradually gain greater confidence, involvement, and proficiency (Chamot, 1987).

Establishing new roles for the teacher

Teachers traditionally expect to be viewed as authority figures, identified with roles like instructor, director, manager, judge, leader, evaluator, controller and as Gibson said (1985, p. 267), as people who "make the students toe the line". According to Harmer (1983) too, the teacher instructs. These familiar roles will stifle communication in any language classroom because they force all communication to go from and through the teacher.

The specter of role change may discomfort some teachers who feel their status is being challenged. Others, however, welcome their new functions as facilitator, helper, guide, consultant, adviser, coordinator, idea person, diagnostician, and co-communicator. New teaching capacities also include identifying students' learning strategies, conducting training on learning strategies, and helping learners become more independent (Wenden, 1985). In this process, teachers do not necessarily forsake all their old managerial and instructional tasks, but these elements become much less dominant. These changes strengthen teachers' roles, making them more varied and more creative. Their status is no longer based on hierarchical authority but on the quality and importance of their relationship with learners (Holec, 1981). When students take more responsibility, more learning occurs, and both teachers and learners feel more successful.

Project-based teaching promotes autonomy

All appropriate language learning strategies are oriented toward the broad goal of communicative competence. Development of communicative competence requires realistic interaction among learners using meaningful, contextualized language. I posit that utilizing a project-based approach to teaching L2 at the college or university level will not only help learners become more competent, but also make them more self-directed and/or autonomous.

My presentation at the CUE 2001 Mini-Conference will describe how project-based teaching, in general, leads to communicative competence and promotes self-directed learning.

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Thoughts to Ponder

The word 'revolution,' so offensive to the persecutors of Galileo, was originally used to denote the cyclical passage of celestial bodies. When the geographical movements of people are tampered with, they attach themselves to political movements... For Revolution is a liberating god, the Dionysus of our age. It is a cure for melancholy. Revolution is the Way to Freedom, even if the end result is greater servitude.

Bruce Chatwin

Developing Learning Strategies for a 'Working Knowledge of English'

Nicolaas Hart

Kwassui Women's College, Nagasaki

Features

A New Approach to ELS in Japan

In Japan there is a new enthusiasm for a higher level of active participation by learners in English language studies (ELS). It is based on the principle of learner autonomy (LA) which gives students the right and opportunity to develop their own learning strategies (LS) to engage in the learning process. LA has as its basic assumption that learning is enhanced when the student has a large measure of control over the goals, content and processes of learning (Trim, 1981; Cathercole, 1990; Little, 1991; Wolff, 1994; Dam, 1998; Cotterall and Crabbe, 1992, and Cotterall and Crabbe, 1999), and LS have been described by Chamot *et al.* (1999, p. 2) as "procedures or techniques that learners can use to facilitate a learning task."

The higher level of involvement by students is intended to be extended to all areas of education in Japan. In 1997, the Curriculum Council of the Education Ministry recommended the replacement of 'lecturing on facts' with more 'student centered approaches' to learning (Isbell *et al.*, 1999, p. 3), and "beginning in 2003, teachers will be expected to change their methods of instruction to become more experience- and activity-based. Nurturing self-learning and the ability to think as an individual will be emphasized." (Isbell, 1999, p. 5)

Parallel with this, the Japanese government has made an increased commitment to ELS in secondary education¹ because it is aware of the increasing economic importance of English language skills in a global economy. In a recent statement, *Japan's Goals in the 21st Century* (PMC, 2000) we read:

The advance of globalization and the information-technology revolution ... de-

mand that ... all Japanese acquire a working knowledge of English ... not simply as a foreign language but as the international *lingua franca*, (because) it equips one with a key skill for knowing and accessing the world.

The perception is that the Japanese population will use its English language skills at work and at home to access and converse with the rest of the world, meaning that they can freely and immediately obtain information, understand it, and express their own ideas clearly.

Whether college and university students are caught up in this enthusiasm for ELS is doubtful. Certainly, the research departments of industry and commerce are making use of the resources of the Internet, and when the Japanese economy recovers (particularly, if there is a coming together of South East Asian nations in some form of economic community), there will be an increase in job offers for workers with English language and computer skills. However, obtaining these skills does not appear, presently, to be a major priority for college and university students, who seldom have clear, personal, long-term employment goals. Except for English majors, such students are primarily concerned about completing the required ancillary English courses without any clear understanding of the potential commercial value of their skills.

The Introduction of Learner Strategies in Japan

Several researchers (Robbins, 1996; Jones, 1995; Benson & Lor, 1998; White, 1995; and, Littlewood, 1999) have indicated that for cultural reasons such autonomy is not easily intro-

duced in South East Asia where students have had little opportunity to identify their own learning goals, to engage in interactive-group learning or to develop their own learning strategies. This is not to say that students are not ready for such English language communication. Some students reported that they discouraged their teacher from switching back to an EFL textbook, which reminded them of their former English communication classes and distracted them "from the excitement ... felt at encountering the English-speaking world directly" (Kitsukawa *et al.*, 1999, p. 18). They commented:

It is important to have classes like this in which we do not learn English *per se* but apply the English we have already learned. (Ibid).

According to research by Rausch (2000), Japanese students appear to be ready for student-directed, learner-based approaches for developing autonomous learning.

There is now an accumulation of reports about successful ELS programs in Japan that have employed a wide range of approaches to empower students to set their own learning goals and to make the curriculum more flexible so that it can respond to the needs and interests of these students (Isbell *et al.*, 1999; Kluge *et al.*, 1999; and, Mackenzie, 2000), and the Learner Development – Special Interest Group (LD SIG) within JALT has, since 1994, been devoted to developing learner autonomy and improving use of learning strategies by students in both English and Japanese language studies.

The question remains, "To what extent should such strategies be taught?" Chamot, (1999, p. 7) proposes that

highly explicit instruction (should be given) in applying strategies to learning tasks (which) is gradually faded so that students can begin to assume greater responsibility in selecting and applying appropriate learning strategies. The cycle (is repeated) as new strategies or new applications are added to students' strategic repertoires.

The task of teachers is to activate the student's "metacognitive awareness", the awareness of the thinking processes involved in the strategies, including listing the strategies with definitions on a

poster. However, it is good to be reminded that this deliberate employment of LS by students is a component of American "main-stream college education" (Isabell *et al.*, 1999, p. 3). It is unrealistic to expect Japanese students with restricted L2 skills to reflect in English on their "metacognitive awareness" or even to use the meta-language to describe the processes though some might.

Student Directed Development of Learning Strategies

In a private four year women's college in Western Japan a new department was set up in 1998 in Human Relations Studies which accepted the challenge of the globalization of information. Moreover, the program was directed towards enabling students to determine their *own* values, to make their *own* informed choices, to manage their *own* continuing whole-life education and to become active members of the international community of the 21st century.

The main subjects, taught in Japanese, are Psychology, Welfare, Education and Sociology. The aim of a supplementary but compulsory four-year English Language course was to stimulate students to use *real language* that resulted from the exchange of opinions about *real life* preferably in the main areas of study and that would model activities they will be engaged in in real life. The objective of the Year 1 course was to enable students to work together as a group in order to develop the skills to understand written English language statements on a particular topic, to discuss the information in English or Japanese, and to prepare and present oral and written English language comments on the topic that reflected the information and the opinions of the members of the group, and to focus on strategies for learning English.

The text selected for 1999/2000 was Book 1 in the *New Perspectives in Social Education* (Getlins, 1995) series, a major curriculum development project of the Victorian Association of Social Studies Teachers in Australia designed to provide material for a comprehensive Social Education program for years seven to ten (ages 13-16). The topics are:

1. Our Changing Community,
2. Making Decisions,
3. Belonging to Groups,
4. Ageing and the Aged,

5. Food Production,
6. Hazards and Disasters,
7. Gender Issues
8. Rights and Responsibilities.

Each of the eight topics has six to eight separate important sub-topics providing some resource material but mainly a set of 12-20 focus questions.

The 94 students met twice a week as three parallel classes in six permanent groups, each having students in the upper and lower range. The first four and the last three topics were dealt with in 24 sessions each. Each group chose its own sub-topic and students spent the first session on understanding the questions, the second on deciding what questions they were going to write about, and the third and fourth (and fifth) sessions on reviewing information gathered from their own experiences and resources and from the internet and on preparing written and oral statements in English. The next session was spent on preparing an A3 poster. During the last session three members of each group gave an oral presentation about the poster. The posters were then put on classroom display until the completion of the new set of posters. All students were also required to make two three-minute speeches during each semester about things that interested them in their study of their sub-topic.

The students were encouraged to resolve together how best to accomplish their task and to identify their own language learning strategies. To assist them in this, students were required at least once a week to write private communications to the teacher in English. They were encouraged to comment on and to ask questions about the learning task, to write about problems they encountered in the learning process and how they dealt with them. The main objective of these communications was to encourage students to reflect on individual and group language learning strategies. The teacher presented a summary of these strategies according to specific categories derived from Oxford (1990, p. 37-55) and Robbins (1996) in handouts to the students for group discussions. The

students used these ideas to implement changes in their own LS and in the way they identified resource material, negotiated meaning and presented the relevant information in English.

Gathering the Strategies

The intent of the program was to allow the students to experience their autonomy in the learning process. They had to choose what to investigate, how to analyze the data, and how to express and present their ideas. Exposure to meaning conveyed by the target language came first and after that they focused on the wording and the presentation (Willis, 2000, p. 7). In describing this process, students incidentally expressed ideas about the LS employed. On a weekly basis, these LS were identified under different headings as *How Other Groups are Working*. Each group received a copy of the examples, which they then pasted on their cumulative file under each heading. The students were not trained or compelled to use the LS; their use was optional but often readily adopted or adapted.

A few sample statements are attached:

Obtaining and understanding information

Planning

We decided to choose not many subjects. It is better to say much about little. [(3A) 3:3]

Prior Knowledge

We talked about where our grandparents live. It gave us ideas about our topic. [(4G) 3:6]

Imagining

We talked about the how people were feeling from their words and the pictures. [(5E) 2:5]

Reference Material

We put key words in the BBC website and were surprised about many different disasters. [(5A) 1:2]

Gathering Information

We took pictures of places in and around college then we wrote about where people live. [(1A) 1:1]

Translating

I write English words in the newspaper article. Then I talk about it in English to the group. [(1E) 1:5]

Note Taking

The leader made English notes when she talked to the teacher with other leaders. I am impressed.

Summarizing

We cannot write everything, so we found the main ideas together and wrote a new story. It was easy.

Classifying

We discussed how decisions are made in young and mature families. We made a table. [(2E) 2:2]

Questioning

We didn't understand why Malaria is a problem in Africa, so we spoke to the teacher. [(5A) 2:3]

Processing information and expressing opinions**Discussing**

We discussed in Japanese what the teacher was talking about. We asked him to tell us again. [1:2:9]

Substituting words, graphs and pictures

We use an English-English dictionary. Difficult words can be made easy. [1:3:11]

Grouping words and ideas

We put the ideas about each topic on different papers. Now we understand them better. [1:5:22]

Words in context

When we write our report, we learn many new words because the other words give them meaning. [2:5:12]

Preparing written statements

We got nice graphs about female employment in the USA. Together we made sentences about it. [(6E) 3:3]

Process Writing

We looked at my sentences today. I made many mistakes. The group members corrected them. [2:6:30]

Memorizing

When one student has to speak, a group member helps in memorizing the statement. It is easier. [2:1:1]

Asking questions

We asked class members what they would do if there was an earthquake. We got many ideas. [(5F) 1:6]

Monitoring

I understood my classmates understand me when I spoke. I was excited to see them listening. [3:6:22]

Evaluating others

I am impressed with my class mates speaking. They look relaxed. I want to speak like them. [3:1:14]

Coding: [(Topic/sub-topic) Class:Group] and {Class:Group:Student}

Developing student autonomy does not mean abandoning the student to her own devices. It means enabling and equipping the student to exercise that autonomy in a responsible manner. Developing learning strategies means cultivating skills within a context of purpose. Mostly, such skills are learned from others, but they must always become a personal repertoire.

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Notes

- 1 The Ministry of Education, Japan, prescribes from 2003 of the 35 compulsory credit hours, 5 in English Oral Communication I and English I in the Upper Secondary School. In Formal Education: Elementary and Secondary Education. <<http://mombusho.go.jp/aramashi/1999eng/mnu.htm>>

A Case Study of Setting Standards of Distinction for Japanese University English Majors

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Hiroshima Jogakuin University

Introduction

An antidote to the oft-heard litany of slipping English abilities of Japanese college students is the introduction of standards. Traditionally standards, evaluation and accountability are dangerous concepts to meddle with in Japanese universities, where teachers are considered sacrosanct from scrutiny and student outcomes are limited to passing or inflated grades. This paper outlines the process followed at one university to develop criteria of superior effort and achievement or 'standards of distinction.'

Perceived Need

During a research trip to Singapore in September 1999, I read an article in *The Straits Times*, 'Mind Your English,' written by their Tokyo correspondent. The article mentioned Japan's 'shocking global TOEFL ranking' documented in the journal, *Chuo Koron*, quoting the article's author, Professor Koike Ikuo of Meikai University, "Japan needs to make a bold attempt to reform its English-language education, or in 20 years, we will be left far behind."

Professor Inoguchi Takashi of Tokyo University was also quoted, echoing that sentiment, and a book, *Nihonjin wa naze eigo ga dekinai ka?* (Why can't Japanese people speak English?) by Suzuki Takao (1999) was cited.

As an English teacher in a Japanese university, I had to take these charges seriously and personally. This was no longer a national issue, the kind of family problem which members have long learned to be reminded of without surprise or embarrassment. Japan stands almost dead last among Asian countries in average TOEFL score, behind Korea, China and Mongolia.

While some statisticians have questioned the significance of the TOEFL ranking figures

(Reedy, 1999), every English teacher in Japan is familiar with anecdotal evidence, some humorous, some bleak, of the poor results of Japanese students attempting to master English.

If the problem is as clear as it seemed, then any university English department which does not address it is complicitly condoning, encouraging and perpetuating these poor results. What could I do?

The Process I: Forming a Committee

After summer vacation, I walked the corridor of our department (called MOET, an abbreviation for the Meeting of English Teachers), talking to colleagues about the report and floating the idea of addressing the lack of progress in English in our department by establishing a set of standards. These standards would be seen as a clear articulation of what our department could expect of its students. Without encountering any objections by the disparate members I consulted (senior/junior, conservative/progressive), I was encouraged to bring the issue to the full department.

At our MOET meeting at the end of October, I brought forward a one-page proposal which stated the problem and proposed forming a committee to make recommendations to provide measurable standards of performance. With no objections, I asked permission to form a committee. For committee colleagues, I chose two younger teachers, both outspoken for progressive causes.

The Process II: The Committee Does Its Work Meeting I-Theoretical Issues

Our first meeting was to discuss theoretical issues and the scope of our work. We had to de-

cide whether we were going to design a) a program for all students or b) a more limited program for what we initially called 'honors' students.

If the former, then we must look at issues of tracking or ability grouping, yearly assessments, remediation, assessment of graduation thesis, and the restructuring of the grading system. If the latter, we could limit our scope of work to setting out objective student-centered criteria that together represented a superior level of effort and achievement in English.

We chose b), because it appeared more objective, less controversial and easier to implement. Another reason was that within the context of falling standards and inflated grades, the better students had no way of assessing their performance and no incentive to do their best work. The scheme was nevertheless not restricted to these students. A list of scores and activities would indicate the department's expectations of all students, weak and strong.

Meeting II-Performance Criteria

At our second meeting we agreed to make a list of verifiable activities, with weighted points, that would in sum demonstrate superior effort, ability and accomplishment in English. Any student who attained the requisite number of points would receive departmental recognition and graduate 'with honors.' There would be no predetermined number or percentage of students who could participate, nor would students be solicited by invitation. We wanted an open system, available to all, where the more students measuring themselves against the Honors Standards, the better.

The department already had a set of initiatives that we could draw on. For example, we had long been encouraging students to take TOEIC, TOEFL and STEP tests, allowing students to place out of entry level English classes depending on their scores. We were a local testing center for TOEFL. We had also set up a relationship with an interpretation school, where our students formed their own class at a reduced price.

In addition to these external activities, the department already had in place several study abroad programs, advanced classes, the gradua-

tion thesis requirement and a variety of English activities in school. The committee wanted to build on all those existing activities as the basis of its program to reward students who took advantage of these opportunities.

Care was taken to balance activities that rewarded students of incoming high ability with activities that rewarded effort. For example, if a student had spent five years in the United States, she would naturally excel in the standardized tests. So tests and grades were only one part of the whole scheme.

Another consideration was a balance of classroom/extra-curricular activities, with rewards emphasizing doing extra work. A third was to balance activities favoring students who had economic advantage. While study abroad and extra lessons are encouraged, care was taken to balance those points with curricular activities that did not cost extra money.

We further concluded that in addition to devising a set of criteria showing superior achievement, we would also create a set of recommended standards, which we would encourage all students to attain. Without making these standards mandatory for graduation, for the first time the department's minimum expectations of students were stated publicly.

Meeting III-Activities and Points

At our third meeting, we went through a draft of possible activities and attached points to them. One of the members, whose speciality is educational evaluation, took responsibility to assemble the list of criteria with points in time for the next departmental meeting. At the end of March, before school started and with the intention of implementing the program with the incoming freshmen and retroactively for the incoming seniors, the Standards Committee made its presentation to the MOET.

The Process III: Clarifications and Revisions

While the Committee would have wanted immediate approval, the feeling was that the MOET needed more time to study the proposal for further discussion later. The Committee made another presentation at the next two MOET

meetings in April to solicit and answer questions and concerns. Questions and answers included the following:

Q1: What advantages does this program provide?

A1: The purpose is to publicly articulate standards of effort and achievement to students. The underlying assumption is that, over time, these standards will be identified by the larger community with the university's English program.

Q2: Should this be mandatory or optional?

A2: Certainly optional, but available to all students. Making even Recommended Standards mandatory would be invoking extra-curricular evaluation.

Q3: Are the measurements objective?

A3: Yes, as much as possible. Only some extra papers and graduation theses are open to subjective evaluation.

Q4: Is the system of point distribution realistic?

A4: We plan to field-test the system and make modifications. The criteria and points could change in the future.

Q5: How do we document achievements?

A5: All activities should have an accompanying document (test score, certificates of participation or completion, transcripts, papers with evaluations, etc.)

Q6: How can this be helpful to students; for example, to get a job?

A6: Unfortunately, job-hunting takes place before the award can be made; therefore, it has no direct effect on job-hunting while still a student. What this program does is to provide motivation to work at a higher level of ability, which might be useful in a job.

Q7: What exactly will students receive?

A7: At the beginning, the Department will issue a letter or certificate to the student attesting their graduation 'with honors.'* This is similar to 'cum laude' in United

States universities. Later, it may become noted on the students' official transcript.

(* This was later changed to 'with distinction')

There were also some very vocal objections (O) from one British professor on the following grounds, with the following responses (R):

O1: It is not a program, per se.

R1: This may be a narrow interpretation of what constitutes a 'program.' It does have a point of entry, steps toward completion and exit outcome.

O2: The scheme is elitist in that it addresses the needs only of high ability students.

R2: True, the Committee decided to start by articulating standards for high ability students. However, it is not elitist in the sense that it is open to anyone to participate. The secondary effect is that it publicly sets standards for all students to measure themselves by.

O3: The scheme doesn't address the more pressing needs of the department to shore up standards of the below-average students.

R3: Correct, but that wasn't the scope of the present proposal. It is hoped that this issue will be addressed in the future.

O4: Any 'honors' program would be dishonest by creating an inflated sense of accomplishment.

R4: The criteria are objective and stand up to scrutiny. By most educational standards, they would represent a high level of performance and accomplishment.

O5: The term 'honors' has a specific meaning in the British educational system, which is not at all what this program is.

R5: The term was changed to 'distinction'. Also, the program will have a Japanese name that will also describe it.

At the end of May, a list of clarifications was presented to the MOET, addressing these concerns. One day in June, armed with transcripts, five high ability students measured their achievements and activities against the Honors Standards. Only two would have passed. But they

raised questions that required clarification regarding specific items on the list.

The Committee met one more time to clarify all items and revise the point system. This revised version was presented to the MOET two times for discussion in July. At both these times, discussion seemed supportive except for the same professor who repeated his objections, thereby blocking approval.

With the self-imposed November deadline approaching, MOET brought up the proposal one more time in mid-October. At that time, the objecting professor made his points again, but agreed to accept the scheme as long as it did not use the term 'honors.' It was at this point that the term 'Distinction' was accepted and the program was approved for implementation beginning April 2001.

Future Steps

During the remainder of the school year, the Committee set up the mechanics for implementing the distinction program:

1. Explanations of the program will be written in English and Japanese and will be distributed and announced during Orientation in April and publicly posted throughout the year.
2. Folders stored in the department office, for participating students, will house documentation of accomplishments (e.g. TOEFL scores, transcripts, language school certificates of completion, ESS activities, school paper, etc.). Students can set up Distinction Folders by attaining 10 points.
3. Twice a year, in July and February, the Distinction Program Committee will review all folders to verify records, tally awarded points and update progress reports. In February of each year, seniors will be informed if they will graduate 'with distinction.'

Conclusion

From proposal to approval, the process to establish a distinction program at Hiroshima Jogakuin University took 12 months and came up for discussion at eight separate department meetings. The actual work of the committee:

to conceptualize, design and fine-tune the program, was accomplished in four hour-long meetings, plus a late-night sprint by one member.

Along the way, the English Department, while shying away from making performance standards mandatory for all students, tacitly acknowledged the motivating function that clearly articulated statements of distinctive achievement will have on all students.

Without clear goals to work toward, students are left on their own to determine what is an acceptable level of mastery of English. It will take several years to see whether participation in this program will, in fact, motivate students to do their best. The Standards Committee will meet regularly over this time to evaluate the program. The scheme is seen as fluid, with new activities or different point distribution possible from year to year. As it stands, the Distinction Program is a public departmental challenge to all students, showing them ways to attain high achievement in English. It also publicly states to the larger community what an English degree at our university means in objective terms.

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Writing for Publication: a Short Guide for New Writers

Mark Weinkle

Publications are an important part of academic work. For teachers who want to work in universities and colleges, it is becoming increasingly important to be carrying out research. Publication is not only a crucial part of the research process, but also a tangible, and marketable, product of it. A strong track record of good quality research is a form of qualification as important as a degree, and often more so. Job descriptions often use phrases such as '... or equivalent research record,' to indicate this.

For someone who has not yet published their work, the prospect of doing so can seem daunting. Where to start? How to write? Who to approach? Without guidance, these questions can seem unanswerable.

On the other hand some teachers may feel that publication is really no part of the job they want to do. This is a fair point of view, and one to which such teachers are entitled. There are colleges and universities who will likewise place little emphasis on research. Nevertheless career prospects for those who do not research and publish are limited. Full time university positions invariably require a substantial research record, and tenured positions especially so.

Both groups of teachers: those who have not published but would like to, and those who have hitherto had little interest in research and publication, may find something of use in the following overview of the process.

Where to start?

The purpose of academic journals is to disseminate accounts of current research in a particular field. There are of course some peripheral types of articles that are not directly based on the writer's research, but these are generally written by academics with a broad knowledge of their field. Book and software reviews, and

some kinds of opinion pieces come into this category. Also, they carry little weight in themselves, unless backed by a solid research record. Therefore it's not necessarily an easy option to try to begin by writing, say, book reviews.

Keeping in mind the underlying purpose of publishing, perhaps easiest course for a new writer, as well as the most effective in terms of the development of future writing skills, is to report on your own research or classroom practice. Journals such as *On CUE*, *The Language Teache (TLT) EL Gazette*, *The Internet TESL Journal* and *TESOL Journal* are basically practitioner journals. All aim to publish accessible accounts of research for a general audience of language teachers.

Many journals also run regular sections containing descriptions of classroom activities. 'From the Chalkface' in *On CUE*; 'My Share' in *TLT*, 'Tips from the Classroom' in *TESOL Journal* and so on. These kinds of articles are good places for novice writers to start, based as they are on classroom experience. *EL Gazette* runs a similar section called 'Prospects', which carries detailed but straightforward descriptions of what particular regions of the world are like for an English teacher.

Having noted above that opinion and perspective articles should not be seen as an easy option, nevertheless *On CUE*, as well as some other journals such as *TLT*, welcome opinion and perspective pieces from first-time writers. While it's true that the writer needs to have a strong knowledge base underlying their perspective, this doesn't have to be a conventional academic background. Practitioner knowledge, arising out of reflection on classroom experience is equally valid.

The writing process

Before you begin to write it's a good idea to do a little research into the journals you are considering writing for. Reading previously published articles will give you an idea of the preferred style and content areas that each one tends towards. Some journals also give writing advice in their guides for contributors. Many will offer specific advice if you contact the editor with an initial idea before writing. *On CUE*, *EL Gazette* and *TLT* do this. *TLT* also offers the assistance of their peer support group, which pairs up writers with sympathetic but constructively critical readers to help writers work through drafts of their papers. Most editors recommend having another person read through your paper. Be aware though, that if that person is a friend they should be able to feel sufficiently detached to give an honest critical appraisal, and to ask difficult questions without worrying about offending you.

A common problem that editors encounter is long-windedness. Having to seek out the basic ideas in a long article expressed in what the writer mistakenly believes to be an academic register is very time-consuming. In fact all the editors contacted while researching this article stressed that simplicity and directness are key criteria for publishable papers. So too is brevity.

Matthew Fellowes, of *EL Gazette* offers the following advice:

Try to write simply. However complex and important your subject, it's a good idea to provide readers with an incentive to keep reading. Once you've written the draft, read it through and try to cut it down; as a rule of thumb, cutting a first draft by 10 per cent is likely to do it good.

Other problems arise when writers of conventional research reports fail to review the literature sufficiently to find out what previous work has been done on the topic, or when their ex-

perimental design lacks validity. The latter is sometimes the case when writers make the kind of statistical claims appropriate for large scale studies, even though they are themselves using very small samples, perhaps just their own class.

For all the journals mentioned in this brief overview, a key criteria is that papers should be relevant to teaching and research results should ideally have some practical application to the situation in which readers may find themselves. Most of these journals also require adherence to APA citation formatting and/or writing style. Editors vary in the level of strictness about this.

Of course the few journals referred to here are just a small sample. There are many journals and newsletters that could be appropriate. Most JALT SIGs have publications, as do TESOL SIGs. See their respective home pages. Also check the calls for papers in the bulletin board and news and announcements columns in *TLT* and *On CUE*.

If you haven't published your work yet, and this article has prompted you to try, the advice of Robert Long, of *TLT*, is well worth bearing in mind:

Enjoy your research. If you don't enjoy the process, the end result probably won't be worth publishing, or the effort.

If you do enjoy it, though, and you believe your account of it is worth sharing with your peers, write it up and send it to a suitable journal. And if you're not successful at first, don't give up. Few editors will simply reject your work outright. They are more likely to suggest ways of re-organising what you've done, so persevere and resubmit your work, either to the same publication or to another. And good luck.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Matthew Fellowes of *EL Gazette*, and Robert Long of *The Language Teacher* for their help in compiling this article.

Journal	Frequency	Reviewed?	Web page
<i>The Language Teacher</i>	Monthly	Reviewed	http://jalt.org/tlt
<i>EL Gazette</i>	Monthly	Not reviewed	http://elgazette.com
<i>The Internet TESL Journal</i>	Monthly	Reviewed	http://iteslj.org
<i>TESOL Journal</i>	Monthly	Reviewed	http://tesol.org/tj
<i>On CUE</i>	3 times per year	Becoming reviewed	http://wild-e.org/cue

Cyberpipeline: Learner Autonomy Websites

Steve Snyder

Miyazaki Women's Junior College

With the upcoming CUE Conference dedicated to *Developing Autonomy*, it seems appropriate to include some learner autonomy-related sites in this installment of the Cyberpipeline. There are quite a few sites out there, and the ones chosen here are a good jumping off point for those wanting to learn about learner autonomy.

The JALT Learner Development SIG

<http://www.miyazaki-me.ac.jp/~hnicoll/learnerdev/>

What better place for CUE members to search first than the Learner Development SIG site. This site is maintained by Hugh Nicoll, who is the coordinator for Learner Development as well as having served in many positions for the CUE SIG. The site has links to on-line versions of their publications, which include Japanese as well as English text. The site also has information links to upcoming conferences. Links to the other sites noted in this article can also be found on the Learner Development site, so this is an excellent starting place. This site also has information about the Learner Development SIG which is worth checking out.

Previous issues of *Learning Learning*, the Learner Development newsletter, cover a wide range of learner autonomy issues, such as the use of computers with autonomy, use of diaries, designing materials, and much more. There is a link to selected papers from the Conference on Autonomy in Language Learning, entitled *Taking Control: Autonomy in Language Learning*.

This site also includes some links to more tangential topics, such as the International Conference on Language Rights and Japanese computing links.

Phil Benson's Autonomy and Independence Page

<http://ec.hku.hk/autonomy/>

Phil Benson, University of Hong Kong, has one of the most complete bibliographies for Learner Autonomy online—around 600 items. If you know of something he hasn't listed, you can add it to the bibliography directly. Benson and Voller have written a book entitled *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning* (1997) and there are links to buy it on the site. For an excellent introduction to autonomy, Benson provides an introductory essay, "What is autonomy?" complete with links for each reference. The site also has links to interested groups in Asia, and there is a set of links to self-access language learning centres on the web. Some of these self-access sites are quite interesting, and worth looking into.

Luciano Mariani's Learning Paths Site

http://web.tiscalinet.it/TanteViePerImparare/learning_paths/

Here is a site with a very different flare. The site is divided between an Italian version of the pages and an English version. The above address should get you to the English version. The first impression is that there are a lot of moving graphics. Once you get past that initial surprise of this intensely graphic site, you'll find that it is intelligently organized and has a wealth of material in it. I found the links to Mariani's papers very interesting and a convenient use of the site. The links are extensive, including much material on learning strategies, learning styles and learning enhancement. There are also some unusual links that I found of mixed value. This site also includes an extensive bibliography.

The IATEFL Learner Independence SIG Home Page

<http://www.iatefl.org/lisig/lihome.htm>

This is the site of the learner autonomy special interest group of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). Their stated scope is not limited to learner autonomy, but specifically includes issues of learner independence and interdependence. Through the site you can access current and back issues of *Independence*, the newsletter. As with other sites, there are links pages and notices of upcoming events.

Learner Autonomy in Language Learning

<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/div1/ailasc/>

This is the official site of the AILA Scientific Commission on Learner Autonomy. On this site you can learn about their three main activities: AUTO-L, a list-serve dedicated to discussion on autonomy; LAPI, which is a listing of research projects on learner autonomy; and their newsletter.

To join AUTO-L, send an e-mail to Anita Wenden <wldyc@cunym.cuny.edu> asking to subscribe. Within a day or two, you should start receiving messages.

AUTO-L is a semi-moderated list which works like an online e-mail course in autonomy with different discussion moderators every two to four weeks and although the traffic is light, the conversations go deep.

Centre for language and Communication Studies, Trinity College, Dublin

<http://www.tcd.ie/CLCS/>

The above address gets you to the Centre for Language and Communications Studies at Trinity College, Dublin. This site is filled with resources. You will find links to occasional papers by David Little (a remarkable number of them), listings of staff courses offered, and links

to research papers by the staff. Through the various links you access the MOO and other resources. I found one page on the site through a search engine which did not seem to be linked to the main page. I have since discovered that by adding /assistants/ to the URL you get a listing of the assistant staff pages, and an example of an interesting paper is the following:

Talking on the MOO: Learner autonomy and language learning in tandem

<http://www.tcd.ie/CLCS/assistants/kschwien/Publications/CALLMOOtalk.htm>

Approaches to Learner Autonomy

<http://jillrobbins.com/autonomy.html>

This is a paper by Jill Robbins about Learner Autonomy in a Japanese setting. I highly recommend accessing it.

CUE Conference 2001

**Developing
Autonomy**

**May 12-13th
In Shimizu City, Shizuoka,
at Miho Kenshukan of
Tokai University.**

<http://www.wild-e.org/autonomy.html>

Take Five Brainstorming Activity

Tim Micklas

Shitennoji International Buddhist University

This activity is for anyone who has ever asked an open question and go the deer in the headlights response. Maybe they are too shy. Perhaps they lack the English ability. It may be cultural. Whatever the reason it's frustrating when students just sit silently, seeming to ignore the question. I know that my students have opinions and I want to hear them. Recently I compared the responses of two groups of freshman English 1 students to the question 'Why do you study English?' When simply asked this question, most students responded, 'I don't know.' When I used the Take Five format, students thought about the question, negotiated in groups, and I got answers such as 'I need it to take a teacher's license,' 'I'd like to travel abroad,' 'my major is English and I want to be able to communicate with foreigners.' While some students still replied, 'I don't know,' the answer seemed more legitimate now. Although this takes more time than simply asking questions, when plugged in to this activity questions are answered much more thoughtfully. In addition, I find these answers are much more useful in helping me make pedagogical decisions.

Summary

This is a game-like, group brainstorming activity that incorporates nominal group technique. In nominal groups, the members do not communicate until they have completed an initial task individually. Research has shown that this method creates more creative responses than typical brainstorming approaches.

- Focuses:** 1. Expressing opinions
2. Generation of ideas.
3. Building consensus
- Level:** False beginner and above; large groups. Can be modified for all levels.
- Materials:** Blackboard or OHP; students need paper and pencil
- Time:** 30 - 40 minutes.

Procedure

1. Pose a question to students and answer any questions they may have about it. For example, at the beginning of a semester ask, 'What concepts do you most want to learn from this class?'
2. Give students two minutes to prepare personal lists or responses individually.
3. Have students form groups of five, and give them five minutes to pool all ideas, and then reduce the list to the five items most important to the group.
4. As a whole group, ask each group to contribute one item from their list. Write these items on the board, and continue until the list contains 10 items, without duplications. This will be the group list.
5. Have the students return to their groups and choose the item from the group list that they feel will be the most popular, not the one they prefer, but the one that most groups are likely to prefer.
6. As a whole group, ask each team to report their choice, and each time an item is chosen mark one point for it on the board.
7. Award points to each group based on the number of groups that chose the same item. For example, if three groups chose the same item, each of those groups is awarded 3 points. If only one group chose an item, that group is awarded 1 point.
8. Eliminate the top rated item, rank it as number one, and continue the procedure until the top five items have been decided.
9. If there is a tie for the most selected item in any round, award points as usual, but do not delete any item from the group list. Instead give each group 1 minute to pre-

- pare a defense of their choice, and 30 seconds to present them. Continue as before.
10. Calculate the scores for each group. Congratulate the group with the highest total score, for its ability to recognize the most important issues. Also reward originality by asking each group to refer back to their original list and check for ideas that made it to the group list. Award 5 points to the top ranked item, 4 points for the 2nd ranked item, and so on.
 11. Give time at the end to allow for discussion, questions and insights to the process.

Rationale

This game like activity allows students to give input or generate ideas, and it requires minimal planning.

Evaluation

This activity incorporates nominal group theory to produce more and better ideas than by simply asking questions or using typical brainstorming activities. It encourages students to compete at achieving consensus, but even though it is game-like, it is cooperative. It allows for guided group decision-making and encourages

students to feel ownership of their final decisions. Although the object is to find the top five answers, other answers do not need to be disregarded. The teacher can note them, and try to address them in other lessons, mini-lessons, or even individually.

Variations

The activity is easily modified. It can be used at the beginning of units to find out which concepts are important or of interest to students. It can be used as a course evaluation, by asking, 'Which points were most useful for you?' As well, it can be used as a pre-reading/lecture activity, by asking, 'What do you know about ...?', or as a review, by asking, 'What did you learn about ...?' For lower level students, instead of asking them to generate the original lists, the teacher can create the group list or provide pictures to represent concepts, and begin with step 3, identifying the top five items.

(Adapted from Training and Development Journal (1991). 45, 2, pp37-42.)

From the Chalkface

To submit classroom applications, techniques and lesson plans, up to 1000 words, contact section editor: Andrew Obermeier,

Content in Language Education: Looking at the Future

Proceedings of the JALT CUE Conference 2000

Edited by Alan S. Mackenzie

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In this issue, the OP column offers two short perspectives that focus on professional development. The writers' views are the result of having gone through an experience in the classroom, a change which has resulted in a different way of seeing that classroom and the learners in it. We can all certainly benefit from sharing such experiences and we'd like to thank Alan Milne and Juanita Heigham for sharing them. Alan Milne's article was written in response to his receiving the CUE Newcomer award for 2000, for which we congratulate him.

We would like to present these articles as examples of how the Opinions and Perspectives column can be open to personalized perspectives on the learning/teaching process as well as more traditional polemical pieces. So, if other readers have experiences that they'd like to share and which in some way changed their perspective on the language learning classroom, please contact the OP editor, Keith Ford <jf6k-ford@asahi-net.or.jp>.

Of course, scholarly perspectives on current issues in language teaching are also welcome.

Staying Open to Change

Juanita Heigham

Sugiyama Jogakuen University

As teachers we all have our preferred styles of teaching, just as learners have preferred styles of learning. It is easy, when things are working well in our classrooms, to sit back and tell ourselves we've got it right and that what we are doing meets our students' needs. However, it's important not to get complacent. In this 'perspective' piece I would like readers to consider the following experience as an argument for being open to change and the trying out of new ideas in our classroom even when we think things are going well.

In particular, I would like to share a recent change in my teaching which has resulted in a raising of my students' awareness of their own role in the learning process. Through introducing project work into my classroom and encouraging students to work more autonomously, there has been a significant shift in the content of students' evaluations, from focussing on me – the teacher – to themselves – the learners.

Throughout my seven years of teaching, it has always been my goal to be a guide for my students rather than be the center of their attention. My training was relatively traditional, and I believed language rather than content should be the main focus of learners' attention. However, I have always carefully tried to make my classes

learner-centered in that I have strictly limited my own talking time and encouraged pair and group work. In the past, my classes focused on a grammar point and controlled practice of 'the structure of the day.' The grammar introduction was short, rarely more than five minutes, and then the students were guided into active communication, with activities such as information gap, controlled discussion and role play. In this way, I was essentially following a Presentation-Practice-Produce model of the communicative approach, with the importance of language instruction and grammar focus overshadowing content. I felt that the students were responsive to my methods, I was comfortable in the classroom, and in the evaluations at the end of each course, my students generally said positive things, but primarily about me.

My style seemed to work well; however, having recently tried a different teaching approach, project work, I have discovered that my learning-centered classroom was missing a key ingredient, specifically students' awareness of their own progress and a sense of growing confidence in using the language. Students had been enjoying my classes, but that enjoyment did not correlate to a strong feeling of marked improvement in their English skills.

Involvement in project work has given my students greater autonomy than in my previous classroom; they work cooperatively in groups, making joint decisions and achieving a specific goal: usually the feedback of information to their peers in the form of a presentation. This added responsibility has changed their perception of the classroom. Project work is very different from my former teaching style, and it allows for a more learning-centered classroom, and now that I have been introduced to this different style, my enthusiasm for teaching has been heightened because I feel that I am giving my students what they really want. Furthermore, they appear to be highly motivated by it.

Evidence of changes in student perception has been found in their enthusiasm and more strikingly, their evaluations. In the past, when I read my evaluations, I was always pleased with what I thought, at the time, were positive student comments. Now, I realize that while my students did enjoy my classes, the amount of actual learning and increase in confidence was not significant enough for them to remark on since the majority of the comments they wrote were about me, such as: "This class was very good because [my teacher] tried to make class work more interesting and cared for each of us" and "This

class was very enjoyable. My teacher was very funny." However, today, while my students still give positive evaluations, the focus has shifted significantly from me to themselves, where it should be. Now, I receive comments like: "At first I was shy and hesitated to speak English. But now I can speak without hesitation", "First, I couldn't express myself in English naturally. But at last, I came to have confidence to speak and have presentation" and "...this course has helped me to feel free to use English."

It appears that learning through project work has produced a natural shift from learners evaluating the teacher to learners evaluating themselves. In addition, I have learned where the focus of evaluations should be: on what the students feel they actually learned, on their growing sense of confidence and on what they can take with them from the classroom experience.

I would like to emphasize that in this brief article, I am not trying to promote project work per se. Rather, through sharing my own experience, which has changed my perspective on the classroom and on learning, I am encouraging others to challenge themselves by being open to change and new ideas. This can only benefit our learners and make our own work more fulfilling.

The Long Bumpy Road

Alan Milne

As I considered the various approaches I would take to writing this piece, I decided not only to focus on the development of myself as a teacher, but also to include how I have tried not to compromise myself in terms of personality and as a person. As recent events have dictated, this is now a kind of sketch of one part of my life where the latter intention broke down. That critical incident consequently caused me to re-view my outlook and approach to a profession I so enjoy, despite the stresses and strains such a job often brings to the fore. I would like to describe this experience along with how I feel my development as a teacher has evolved over the past three and a half years.

I must state from the outset that my origins do not lie in teaching. I am not professionally trained as a teacher but rather as an electrician. Rather strange beginnings for life as a university teacher some people might say, but several years ago, after having to endure several days working in sub zero temperatures at a building site in my former home town of Aberdeen, Scotland, I decided that there must be more to life. So, I decided with great trepidation, to give up my work and apply to study at the Department of Japanese Studies at the University of Sheffield. One of the main reasons I chose Japanese Studies was from my practising Judo for ten years prior to my application. So I suppose I was

drawn to the field through that brief brush with the culture.

It was during this time, after acting as a translator to a Japanese researcher at several special schools in Aberdeen, that I became interested in special education. That was my first real contact with the handicapped and it made a great impact on me. Motivated to become more involved in this area I applied to do a Masters in Special Education at the University of Tsukuba after graduating from Sheffield in 1992.

Upon graduation from Tsukuba in 1996, in need of work, purely by chance, I applied for a job at a conversation school as a stopgap until something better came along, whatever 'better' may have been. However, to my very great surprise, I found I actually liked teaching, especially children. Greatly enthused to be helping these youngsters take their first steps towards knowledge in another language, this was my first initiation into the world of English teaching. I have now gradually moved on to college and university-level teaching.

Working in a university environment as someone new to the profession, I have had to rely on the help of several colleagues and develop from their advice a set of my own pedagogical principles for my teaching. This has been in effect a baptism of fire. It has taken a full three and a half years before I could feel comfortable walking into a class with a rough plan of how I am to proceed, ready to change things instinctively if I sense things are not going well.

Perhaps the greatest thing I learned during this period was that the students expect not only a teacher, but also a person to whom they can relate. I began to realise that the teaching was only half of the battle: the other half had to be a projection of myself as a person to convey what it was I wanted them to learn in a way that they would enjoy. This resulted in a more relaxed approach to my teaching, which allowed me to be myself. I concluded what is probably obvious, that students will do much more work if they feel they are coming to a class they will be enjoying.

Nevertheless, in the easy-going atmosphere I try to instill, there is a very fine line between students enjoying a class but yet not doing enough work, which has often lead to the feel-

ing that I should perhaps be more authoritative. This directly relates to the 'critical incident' I mentioned at the beginning.

The case in question occurred in one class where I teach writing. The students had just completed their first major writing assignment and I was asking that they pair up and engage in peer review before I collected their essays and gave my final comments.

On this day, two students in particular, after repeated friendly warnings, persisted in reading their *keitais* much to my mounting irritation. Before long I had had enough and asked them to leave the class, much to their considerable shock, and that of the rest of the class which descended into deadly silence. What had I done? Here was a perfectly functioning class, happy, working away with the usual minimal amount of chat destroyed by 30 seconds of frustrated anger and the painful two-minute or so exit of the two students in question.

I nevertheless was of the opinion that, having shown some discipline, I would have complete control of the class on the next occasion - which of course I did. However, it was a control of a class that had no life, which felt fearful rather than relaxed. It was just a very hard-working, quiet class. As for the two students I had formally ejected, there was a sense of a betrayal of trust and friendship, and even hurt. I asked myself there and then: was this the kind of class I wanted to manage? I let the situation continue for two more lessons, during which time I reflected more on what happened on that day: I decided at the end of the second lesson after the incident to ask the offending students to stay behind so I could have a word.

The rest of the class left and we sat down together. I think they were expecting even more wrath by their terribly timid expressions. However, I told them in Japanese that, although what they did on that day was not good and going against my instructions in class, my reaction to their behaviour - to go as far as to send them out - was far too strong. In what could be termed an emotionally charged atmosphere, I apologised for my actions and, to my surprise they then most touchingly said "thank you". Two words which redeemed me from one week of torturous self-reflection and turned an otherwise over serious

90 minutes back into the friendly joyous class it used to be.

If I learned anything from that, it was that in trying to be such a disciplinarian I had left my character behind and, with it, the very essence of my teaching. I am who I am, and I have to accept the students for what they are and adapt. Usually, a sense of humour and the realisation that students are, in nearly all cases, trying their best is enough to subdue any irrational need to get angry with either mistakes or misbehaviour.

I see my future goal in teaching to further refine my teaching strategies, through both further experience and by completing a distance MA in TEFL with Leicester University. Hopefully, in doing so I will help to motivate those students whose desire to learn English, for whatever reason, has been nullified by past experience. Accepting and developing myself as a teacher finally comes down to loving what I do, respecting the students for who they are, and realising that problems along the way are just bumps on the road.

Alan Milne teaches at the University of Tsukuba, Chuo University, Keio SFC University, and Komazawa Junior College. He is a member of the WAFFLE teacher's writing group, which was the subject of a profile in the last issue of On CUE.

Thoughts to Ponder

*So long as we project onto
the collective world —
institutions, media,
society — an authority it
does not rightfully
possess, we are allowing
ourselves to be
contaminated by alien
elements. If we allow the
Self to come to
consciousness, the
authority is inside.
Happening happens. We
make the space, we
unlock the door, and wait.
We surrender to
ravishment.*

Marion Woodman

Focus on Learning Rather than Teaching: Why and How?

Little, D., Dam, L., and Timmer, J. (eds). Dublin: Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College-Dublin. (2000) \$30. ISBN 0-9058150-6-3 p. 236.

Reviewed by Steven Snyder, Miyazaki Women's Junior College

Book Review

Twenty years have passed since the publishing of Holec's seminal work *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning* and nearly thirty years since Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Despite the claims of critics that learner autonomy was just another of a long line of passing fads in second/foreign language teaching, today learner autonomy remains an important and vital conceptual approach to language teaching. It may be said that learner autonomy is now more widely implemented throughout the world than at any previous time, although its influence remains most powerful in Europe.

Two major proponents of learner autonomy have been David Little, of Trinity College-Dublin, and Leni Dam, of Danmarks Laererhøjskole in Copenhagen. Both Little and Dam have presented throughout the world and presented in Japan several years ago as featured speakers on the JALT Four-corners tour and at the JALT international conference. Their published works are many, including a series of contributions to books through the Authentik Language Learning Resources Ltd. impress, a publisher dedicated to learner autonomy themes established by David Little.

In their most recent book they have teamed up with Jenny Timmer to produce *Focus on Learning Rather than Teaching: Why and How?* This book developed out of papers from the 1998 IATEFL conference in Krakow, Poland, and represent proceedings from that conference.

Besides being the most recent book on learner autonomy, *Focus on Learning Rather than Teaching: Why and How?*, it is certainly one of the most comprehensive books published on this theme, and will be a reference that interested university level language educators will want to acquire.

The papers included in this book address a range of issues on learner autonomy, and this review is intended as a guide for those interested in any specific topic, as well as a general review of the book itself.

Learner autonomy presents two immediate challenges: the theoretical construct and implementation. *Focus on Learning Rather than Teaching: Why and How?* is intelligently divided into five sections which address the differing aspects of these two challenges.

Part I is entitled "Setting the agenda- theory, practice and research," and could stand alone as an excellent introduction to learner autonomy. The first article is by David Little and is entitled, "Why focus on learning rather than teaching?" In his paper, Little articulates a persuasive argument on the defects of teacher-centered instruction and the justifications for learner-interactive, learner-centered and learner self-instructing strategies of L2 instruction.

Much of the theoretical underpinnings of previous books on this topic by Little (e.g. Little, 1991) are summarize in this brief paper, making it an excellent resource for those wishing an introduction to learner autonomy.

Additionally, Little's paper contextualizes learner autonomy within pedagogical and psychological theory and is complete with in-text references to authorities making it a particularly useful starting point for those wishing to pursue research in this area. Briefly, Little argues for a decommodification of learning (Salmon, 1995) and a Vygotskian informed view of learner social interaction, which, taken together, advocate the desirability and superiority of learning "from the inside out" (Little, 2000). Little's explanation is clear and well developed, making the connections between the various threads transparent.

The second paper is by Leni Dam on “Why focus on learning rather than teaching?: from theory to practice.” Although the argument of this paper is similar in content to a previous works and more comprehensively addressed (Dam, 1995), this paper serves as a methodological overview and as an essential introduction to the following paper, which actually evaluates learning performance in an autonomous learning course.

The third paper is by Lienhard Legenhausen, an associate of Leni Dam, who reports on a longitudinal study of autonomous learning entitled, “Focus on learning rather than teaching- with what results?” Essentially a three-year study comparing performance of elementary school students in a learner autonomy environment in contrast to a more traditionally taught English course, this study is a model of how comparative methodological research can be conducted, and is certainly a testament to the effectiveness of Dam’s implementation of learner autonomy principles.

The comparison chosen was a German gymnasium English course, whose students represent the upper 40% of public school students in German schools. (German public education, like Japanese public education, is highly streamed, or tracked, by aptitude, with the main difference being that streaming occurs at an earlier age in Germany).

In contrast, the students in Dam and Legenhausen’s Language Acquisition in an Autonomous Learning Environment (LAAL), were 21 mainstream children mixed with 8 students who were receiving remediation in their L1.

Legenhausen (2000) found that recognition levels of target vocabulary were similar between the two learning conditions, the productive ability of the learner autonomy students was dramatically greater. In a grammar study of the two groups after four years of instruction found an interesting dissociation: when tested formulaic task the traditionally taught German students performed marginally better than their Danish autonomous group; however, performance on a subtask tapping creative use of formations the Danish autonomous students clearly outperformed the traditionally taught group.

Also investigated was a peer-to-peer discourse task performance where students attempted to talk for 4-5 minutes, in which the autonomous learners dramatically outperformed the traditional group in the quality of their discourse.

Based on Long’s (1981) assertion that L2 learners tend toward briefer and less involved interactions, Legenhausen (2000) investigated the ratios between topic-initiating and topic-continuing within the discourse task and found that autonomous learners had three times the length of topic-continuance over the traditionally instructed group.

A more complicated picture was also reported from a C-test (a partial close test) of German students in various streamed and instructional conditions over a one-year period. Of particular interest here is that between comparable levels of streaming, children with autonomous instruction performed significantly better and approached or exceeded performance of the higher streamed groups given traditional instruction.

Taken together, the findings reported in Legenhausen (2000) represent clear evidence of the superior effectiveness of autonomous instruction over traditional teacher controlled instruction of foreign language for elementary school children.

There may be some confounding in the comparison of different L1 in the two groups, but this objection is indirectly addressed in the one-year study of German students. Another objection might be that the results of this study may not be generalizable to the adult populations. Certainly, the behavioral-interaction between students of differing cultural and language backgrounds would be expected to be different, and these differences could affect learning outcomes.

A third would be age related: that there is a critical age (e.g. Scovel, 1988) for learning L2, with the students of Legenhausen (2000) being within that critical period and adult learners being outside of that period. It should be pointed out that in studies of phonological perception (Werker & Pegg, 1992) and accent evidence (Flege, 1991; Archibald & Young-Scholten, 2000) have found evidence counter to the critical-period hypothesis—adults do exhibit the ability to perceive non-native contrasts and ex-

hibit a inter-language continuum when acquiring pronunciation; it should also be remembered that Scovel (1988) referred to persistent L1 accent in L2, not to the developing of competent communication abilities in the L2.

Clearly, further methodological research is needed with adults to confirm the effects on adult learners, but the findings in Legenhausen (2000), for the present at least, represent strong justification for the use of the learner autonomy approach to L2 instruction with adult learners.

A simplistic schematic of progress within the learner autonomy construct, might be progressing from teacher-dependence toward interdependence with fellow learners, and ultimately towards a capacity for independent learning. Theoretically and practically, the greater challenge is the transition from teacher dependency to interdependence, because this transition would require the greatest change in attitude and expectations of the learners. Part 2 of *Focus on Learning Rather than Teaching: Why and How?* presents a series of papers under the heading "Some examples of practice," which directly address the problems associated with learner attitudes and expectations within the autonomous environment. The examples and discussion in this section are quite illuminating and help to address the problems inherent in the transition to autonomous learning. The first article, entitled "Involving learners in their own learning- how to get started," by Seeman and Tavares relates these teachers' experiences in initiating an autonomous learning environment, with examples and reflection on the process. Hanne Thomsen's "Learner' favoured activities in the autonomous classroom," describes a problem very close to the hearts of university foreign language teachers: what to do with a mixed-ability group of learners. Thomsen gives numerous examples and comments about the materials used and the success he had with them.

The process of acquired learner interdependence is directly addressed in the next three papers. "Between a rock and a hard place: the interdependent classroom" by Russell Whitehead, describes his views and experience on building interdependence. Marion Geddes' "Interdependence can help independence," relates her expe-

riences with an English language immersion program in Scotland.

Her situation involved short courses of only two-week durations. Even under such time constraints, she relates how students not only learned language, but also learned about interdependence and independent learning.

Leslie Bobb Wolff's paper on "Changing attitudes towards treatment of mistakes," outlines her strategies on moving responsibility for correction on to the student, rather than implicitly on the teacher and discusses the learning outcomes.

Part 3 includes four papers which report on classroom research involving learners' awareness of the learning process. Space here prevents reviewing each of the papers individually; however, taken together these four papers underline the importance of reflective tasks, such as diary writing advocated by Leni Dam, and goal reflection.

The various authors discuss learning contracts, needs assessments and questionnaires in terms of their effectiveness and validity.

Metacognitive awareness, which was central to Wenden (1991), subjective world view, which was central to Riley (1997), are addressed by several authors illustrate their instruments for tapping these areas and raising awareness. It is implied that personal reflection is an essential component to an effective learner autonomy environment.

As stated by Christopher Candlin in the preface to Wenden (1991), "Autonomy, like awareness, needs a goal." (p.xii). Indeed, given that context the four papers in part 3 take on a particular importance.

The affective and metacognitive aspects of learner autonomy are essential, vital. Unless learners appreciate the task before them, there is some likelihood of failure (Nolan, 2000; Little, 1991).

This crucial aspect of implementing learner autonomy is well presented in this section, along with comments and methods for addressing this area.

Part 4 includes three papers regarding teacher-training issues with learner autonomy. Part 5, the final section, includes only a single article on curriculum, by Candelaria Torres Diaz. Diaz

reports on an attempt in the Canary Islands to create a learner autonomy workshop in which under-achieving students are exposed to learner autonomy principles for learning in secondary subjects, rather than its application to foreign language learning.

Diaz describes the rationale and the plans for implementing the workshops which will consist of 70 hours a learner autonomy environment instead of proscribing the same time to additional conventional remediation activities.

These latter sections, though interesting in their own light, are less relevant to university educators than the previous sections and will not be reviewed here.

Focus on learning rather than teaching: why and how? is a must read for those already knowledgeable on learner autonomy, because it extends the previous literature and summarizes it in a particularly useful manner; it is also a must read for those interested in learning about learner autonomy, as it is a well connected text with clear explanatory force.

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650 words; longer, coordinated, point-counterpoint articles are possible.

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reviews of books, textbooks, videos, presentations/workshops, films, etc. 600 words, 1500 words for scholarly review essays.

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descriptions of websites that might prove useful for language teaching and professional development; length depends on how many sites are reviewed

Contact section editor: Steven Snyder, snyder@phoenix.ac.jp

Focus on Language

a column in which the writer may ask/answer common questions about language that are of interest to teachers and learners. 250-600 words

From the Chalkface

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