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Contents

Indirectness: A Barrier to Overcome in Teaching Writing

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Kaplan (1966) identified "the existence of cultural variation as a factor" (p. 2) in written expression. When teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing, the relationship between language, thought, and culture needs to be explored in detail. No discussion about teaching EFL writing is complete without some consideration of this relationship. Cultural variation in the form of rhetorical differences should be a major concern for all EFL teachers, who must develop appropriate strategies to help learners with their writing skills.

When teaching EFL writing, teachers must understand rhetorical differences and their influence on learners' writing. Rhetorical differences exist and differ among languages and cultures. There is general agreement that "culture is really an integral part of the integration between language and thought" (Brown, 1994, p. 185). The rhetorical organization of a text tends to be culturally specific. In other words, rhetoric as a mode of thinking is culture specific (i.e., Confucian culture, Western culture). It reflects the culture of the people whose language embodies the culture, as suggested by the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (see Southworth & Daswani, 1974). The detrimental implication of rhetorical differences on EFL writing is that native language rhetorical patterns of thinking and writing cannot be ruled out in EFL writing (Strauch, 1997). EFL learners may employ rhetorical patterns and a sequence of thought which violates the expectations of the native English reader.

This can be illustrated with rhetorical patterns employed in English and Chinese. English rhetorical patterns value explicitness and directness, attaching great importance to the experience and voice of the individual. This Western view of the self leads to directness in writing and a topic is always closely supported by connected ideas expressed in direct language, including specific details, explanations, explications and exemplification, personal experiences, illustrations, and anecdotes. Chinese literary traditions, however, value indirectness owing to ancient Chinese or Confucian culture. In the Chinese culture, individuals desire to maintain social harmony or amiable relationships among members of a group, and too much self-expression is regarded as problematic or even socially harmful. To achieve social harmony and to avoid individualism, Chinese speakers express viewpoints in a roundabout way (Matalene, 1985; Wang, 2003). They

frequently and intentionally delay the real subject by referring to something else or by using suppositions before getting to the issue in question, and they often expect the audience to infer meanings instead of stating their views explicitly.

The primary challenge Chinese learners face when writing in English is the transfer of a variety of types of indirectness into English. They tend to support and argue their topics using an indirect approach (Hu, 1993; Wang, 1993), which is typically found in Oriental writing styles. Such organization "would strike the English reader as awkward and unnecessarily indirect" (Mu, 2002, p. 30). The research reported here focuses on the rhetorical differences in directness and indirectness between Chinese and English, derived from EFL writing samples collected from three groups of Chinese learners. Based on the analysis of the samples, strategies are suggested to help learners become conscious of English rhetorical conventions and overcome indirectness.

In remedying indirectness in Chinese EFL learners' writing, or in advocating the replacement of the traditional Chinese non-linear rhetorical pattern or other cultural rhetorical conventions in favor of the English linear pattern, I do not imply that the English pattern is superior. As Kaplan (1966) asserts, "the English rhetorical system is neither better nor worse than any other, but it is different" (p. 3). EFL learners of all cultural backgrounds need explicit guidelines for organizing their ideas in accordance with the common conventions of the English-speaking world so that they can perform better and maximize English readers' comprehension. Thus, teaching EFL writing should involve developing learners' competence with English rhetorical conventions.

Categories of Indirectness

A wealth of research focuses on rhetorical differences. Wang (2003) compared English and Chinese rhetorical differences by selecting 30 English argumentative texts from U.S. newspapers, written by native English speakers, and another 30 argumentative texts from English-language newspapers in China, written by native Chinese speakers. The results revealed that 87.5% of texts written by the native speakers were structurally direct and linear (i.e., claim + justification (facts) + conclusion) whereas nearly 50% of the texts written by the native Chinese speakers were indirect or non-linear (i.e., introduction + justification (suppositions) + claim (delayed thesis statement) + conclusion).

Others have observed that EFL learners organize their ideas in ways which present interpretive difficulties for native English speakers (Matalene, 1985; Mu, 2002). Scollon (1991) found that it was difficult for contemporary Chinese in Taiwan to directly express viewpoints in a thesis statement at the beginning of an article, though some language experts hold different ideas (see Edelsky, 1982; Kirkpatrick, 2000; Mohan & Lo, 1985).

The latter argue that EFL learners transfer positive writing abilities and strategies from their mother tongue to English, and that modern Chinese styles taught at school today favor a direct rather than indirect expressive mode.

However, in my experience, I feel that these rhetorical differences impede learners' writing ability. Having closely observed the English writing patterns of Chinese learners, I have found that they have a strong tendency toward indirectness. Over four successive academic years (2002-2006), I collected writing samples from three groups of learners in my classroom. Two groups, consisting of 33 undergraduates and 48 undergraduates respectively, had an intermediate level of English, and the third group consisted of 60 graduate learners with an upper-intermediate level of English. The learners had been trained in English writing competencies and had considerable knowledge of English orthography, lexicon, and syntax. The undergraduate learners had studied English for approximately seven years and the graduate learners for approximately 10 years. In spite of this, I found unmistakable evidence that they all employed indirectness to some degree in their writing. Every semester, the learners were required to write 10 compositions each. I analyzed these compositions for examples of indirectness and categorized them as follows.

Delaying Disclosure of the Topic

One way indirectness is manifest in the learners' writing is by delaying the disclosure of the topic. The writers may refer to traditions, history, or an authority before getting to the primary issue. They might also expect the audience to infer meaning instead of stating their views explicitly. Another type of delay is beginning with an introduction that is supposedly relevant to a topic but actually is not. These problems result from the lack of a thesis statement. The learners have little conception of formulating a thesis statement and placing it at the beginning of their writing. This type of indirectness is illustrated below, and represents the transfer of the Chinese rhetorical patterns into EFL writing. The assigned topic was why English is important to scientists. (Note: all examples are original and unmodified.)

> We live in a changing world which science and technology is developing very fast. The developing of science needs scientists from all over the world exchange their idea more and more frequently. However, the scientists come from different countries usually speak different languages. If there isn't a common language that can't be understood by everybody, they won't understand each other. On the other hand, we wish to know what others are doing and what experiences and knowledge and things we should learn to improve our work, so we must master the foreign language. However, there are countless languages in the world, we can't learn them all. Fortunately, there is a common language English. Most of the scientists of the world

> can speak and read and write English, most important academic journals
> are in English, and all the international academic meetings use English.
> If we master English, we can go to any corner of the world to exchange
> with the people without know their mother tongue. We can say we are
> holding one of the very powerful weapon of study science.

In this kind of writing, every aspect of the topic is implied. General statements about the significance of knowing English are made again and again. The development of the writing turns around the topic and a variety of tangential viewpoints are made, but the topic is never examined directly. The writing ends where it should have started. While this indirectness is linguistically possible in Chinese, the composition lacks the proper directness for the English rhetorical style.

Adopting Complex Thesis Statements

Indirectness stemming from complex thesis statements is another problem evident in the learners' writing. The learners tend to formulate a complex thesis statement with multiple subordinate ideas that confuse readers and lead the learner into emphasizing the subordinate ideas too much. Thesis statements such as the following were common in all three groups of writers. The assigned topic for the example was the importance of health and life. "Although money is important and necessary for a comfortable life, compared with other things, such as health and life, it means nothing." With this complex thesis statement, several ideas could be mistaken as the primary subject: (a) the importance of money, (b) health and life are more important than money, or (c) money means nothing. This type of indirectness reflects the Chinese habit of circular thinking before the topic is finally developed. The thesis does not focus directly on the topic.

Persistent Uses of Suppositions or Indirect Interpretation

In this category, two types of indirectness frequently occur. One is that the learner develops a topic by using suppositions instead of direct expressions or direct statements (e.g., *If you . . . , you will . . .* or *When you . . . , you must . . .*). Using suppositions instead of direct expressions causes the writing to be filled with examples, reminders, conjunctive adverbs such as *if* and *when*, and auxiliary verbs like *can*, *will*, and *must*. They feature the Chinese rhetorical style which expresses and explains a topic in a roundabout writing style or with indirect language.

As mentioned previously, individualism and self-expression are thought to be offensive and harmful in Chinese writing, and therefore, should be avoided. To sound modest and balanced, Chinese speakers tend to express their ideas in comparatively indirect language. As a result, they transfer this cultural convention into EFL writing. They support their thesis statements using suppositions in the form of unvaried main clauses with adverbial clauses of conditions, or with sentences containing auxiliary words such as *must*, *will*, and *can*. They do not state their ideas in direct language.

The other type of indirectness in this category is characterized by frequent use of set phrases, repeated assertions, use of well-known quotations, imitation of previous works, and borrowing of supporting materials from books rather than stating one's own argument. Although references to other sources are expected in English academic writing, this is done to support the writer's viewpoint. Chinese writers of English need to learn to clearly state their own ideas, views, or opinions together with referring to sources to give explanation, explication, and exemplification to the topic.

Arguing Through a Repeated Question-Answer Chain

In this type of indirectness, learners begin by asking a question rather than stating a topic and then raise one question after another without answering them. Although this is fitting and proper for the Chinese rhetorical style, it should be avoided in EFL writing. The following example on the topic of success illustrates this:

> What is success? Do we have a much sober recognition of it? Does having treasure mean success? Do different people have different views of success? What is your opinion? (A sample from a student in the postgraduate group).

In English writing, we use questions as a means of introducing a thesis statement to be answered, as is shown in this example: "We learn, as we say, by 'trial and error.' Why do we always say that? Why not 'trial and rightness' or 'trial and triumph'? The old phrase puts it that way because that is, in real life, the way it is done" (Wang, 2002, p. 135). However, Chinese EFL learners' uses of a series of discrete questions are to lure the audience to infer meanings of the topic. They are not intended to be answered openly and directly in the immediate developing sentences.

Alternative Uses of Different Writing Forms

This difficulty entails EFL learners employing different writing forms alternatively such as description, interpretation, and argumentative styles within a stretch of discourse (Sun, 1999). The following is an illustrative example from an assignment using cartoons as visual prompts and written by an undergraduate student:

> Here is a cartoon concerning praise. The picture shows a husband who is quite indifferent to his wife's winning medal and how his wife disappointed [description]. It reflects people are often reluctant to give others praise while we are eager to get it [interpretation]. In the picture, the husband even did not raise his eyes from a newspaper [another description]. . . .

The main problem of alternative uses of different writing forms is not that there is something wrong grammatically but there are problems in cohesion and coherence. Alternative uses of different writing forms cause the point of view to shift, disrupt the information flow, and result in indirectness. The learner should have put together all the

sentences describing the picture and those commenting on or interpreting this social phenomenon in order to keep the information sequence clear. Keeping the information sequence clear is a means of linking one part to another to be coherent.

Why Indirectness Occurs

An inclination for indirectness is evident in the students' writing and reveals their inability to construct rhetorical and organizational patterns appropriate in English, or possibly a tendency to forget these patterns when composing (see Barkaoui, 2007). This failure to use English rhetorical patterns may be partly due to the teachers' inadequate attention to these patterns in reading comprehension activities. EFL learners' awareness of English rhetorical patterns needs to be raised and reinforced. In China and other traditional educational contexts, language teachers have focused too much on teaching grammatical rules causing them to overlook how sentences are used in communicative acts. When teaching reading, teachers have paid too much attention to the explanation of language points and failed to help students analyze the cohesive and coherent connection between sentences or to develop and cultivate the learners' sense of English rhetorical patterns. Consequently, learners gain little scattered and vague knowledge about the conventions of the target language.

Thus, teachers should be aware that teaching EFL writing goes beyond teaching the basic aspects of a text (i.e., orthography, morphology, lexicon, and syntax). EFL learners need to be constantly trained regarding the rhetorical conventions of the English language. Teachers need to involve learners in developing strategies of "engagement and response to a community's discourses" as well as "how to structure their writing experiences according to the demands and constraints of target contexts" (Barkaoui, 2007, p. 38). They should be explicitly and consciously guided and instructed about why and how texts are organized and written the way they are.

This is an arduous task for two reasons. One is the predominance of a mother-tongue learning environment. The other is the lack of awareness of English rhetorical patterns due to learners' unwillingness to read extensively in English and master these rhetorical patterns. The two conspire to bring learners unconsciously and constantly back to the use of native rhetorical conventions whenever they write in English. Observing these categories of indirectness, and according to my classroom teaching experience, four strategies can be implemented to facilitate and enhance teaching learners to overcome indirectness in EFL writing.

Suggested Strategies for Remedying Indirectness in Classroom Instruction

Strategy One: The Development of English Rhetorical Awareness

Although learning rhetorical patterns in English seems a simple task, it is not easily acquired. Even advanced learners and professional language users tend to be indirect in their writing. To overcome the transfer of the native cultural and thinking modes into EFL writing, teachers must encourage learners to read both intensively and extensively in English. Learners should be required to pay special attention to native English speakers' ways of thinking and writing to promote an awareness of rhetoric conventions (e.g., topic organization, linear development, and writing conventions) (Hyland, 2002). This can be accomplished in several ways.

Familiarizing Learners With the Basic Unit of the English Rhetorical Pattern

To deepen learners' understanding of the English rhetorical structure, I begin with teaching them the basic unit of the English rhetorical pattern, the paragraph, through reading materials and asking them to identify thesis statements, supporting items, and restatements. The questions I often use are: What is the topic sentence of this paragraph? What are the supporting sentences? What is the conclusion? I then ask them to summarize the material in writing. The summary is a miniature version of the overall rhetorical pattern.

Identifying the English Rhetorical Structure in Texts

Following the previous step, I ask my students to identify the overall thesis statement, or central idea, and text organization in professionally written English texts. This involves training learners to recognize where the topic is introduced, distinguish the main body of the text where views and opinions are expounded upon, and identify the restatement or conclusion. Supporting items constitute the body of the writing and usually consist of a series of paragraphs, the first sentence of which is often a sort of minor thesis statement. I ask my students to list or paraphrase major supporting items used to prove the thesis statement. In doing so, they can further understand how each part is linked together to form a coherent whole regarding a particular topic. For instance, I discuss a text using these questions: What is the central idea of this text and how is it introduced? How does the writer organize the following paragraphs to support the central ideas and how many parts are there? What is the conclusion? The answers to these questions form the mainframe of the rhetorical structure.

I also share with my students a simplified motto about the fundamental English rhetorical pattern that they can follow when analyzing texts and writing their own texts. "Tell'em what you're gonna tell'em (thesis statement); tell'em (body or facts supporting

the thesis statement); tell'em what you told'em (restatement or conclusion)" (McGinty, 2001, p. 21). This helps them identify the different components of the rhetorical structure.

Guided writing

EFL learners can be engaged in guided or controlled writing. To teach guided writing, I provide a topic sentence as the first sentence in a paragraph. The topic sentence contains simple and concrete key words in the predicate. These key words serve as landmarks indicating the direction in which the writing will move. Learners are not allowed to stray too far from the controlling idea.

Through guided writing, learners can use their logical thinking and imagination to do some free writing. I often provide my learners with thesis statements such as "English has a variety of uses" and "English is the language of information," and ask them to develop these statements into a complete essay. Using this method allows learners a certain amount of freedom while still making them use the required rhetorical patterns.

Strategy Two: Formulating a Specific and Concrete Thesis Statement

The first two categories of indirectness directly affect the formulation of a thesis statement. A simple declarative statement with a single subject and a narrowed-down predicate that clearly expresses the main idea of the learner's writing is an absolute necessity in order to guide learners to write effectively. Training the learner to formulate a thesis statement in the classroom involves four steps:

1.   Select an idea regarding the topic. Determine what you're gonna tell'em.

2.   Make a road-map highlighting your main ideas. Generate ideas and limit the topic.

3.   Choose simple, concrete, and specific words for the predicate based on the road-map.

4.   Use a simple and declarative sentence structure as a thesis statement.

For example, in my classroom, I have some questions to help learners construct an effective thesis statement about a particular topic, in this case, English learning:

- What are you going to talk about? (The answer becomes the subject of the thesis statement.) *Writing in English.*

- What do you want to say about it? (The answer becomes the predicate of the thesis statement.) *Writing strategies.*

- How are you going to say what you are going to say about the subject? (Reveal how you will develop your thesis statement.) *Listing some strategies.*
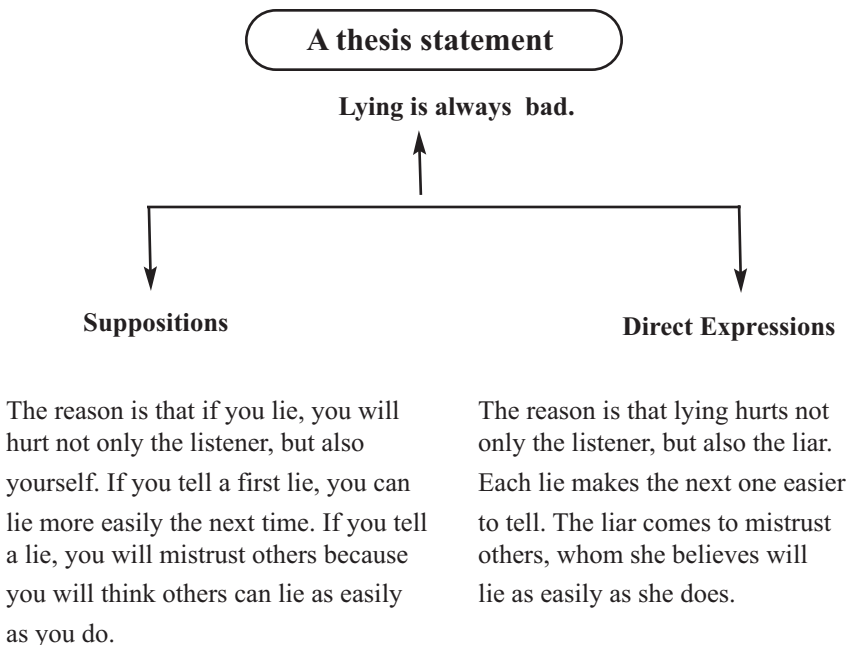
Learners are required to express these three major points in a simple and declarative sentence. Thus, the thesis statement would be: *Writing in English involves a number of strategies.*

I seize every opportunity to impress upon learners the need to formulate a thesis statement. I see to it that they understand that a thesis statement determines the clear and simple linear orientation of writing in English and make them aware that it is a mini-outline to organize the rhetorical structure. Everything in final draft should develop and support the thesis statement. Good writing begins with a good thesis statement (King, 2002).

Strategy Three: Direct Expressions vs. Suppositions

Writing in English for Chinese learners as well as other EFL learners involves developing the ability to develop a topic with direct expressions or in direct language rather than suppositions. A direct expression is defined as a report of facts or opinions (Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 2002). A supposition is something that is supposed. (e.g., Direct expression: When Mexican pilots land their airplanes in France, they and ground controllers use English. Supposition: When Mexican pilots land their airplanes in France, they and ground controllers will use English.) (Li et al., 2003).

EFL learners may find it difficult to distinguish between concrete direct expressions and suppositions. Even some advanced learners tend to support their thesis statements using suppositions. The high frequency of Chinese EFL learners' use of indirectness in writing partly results in their listing suppositions as a direct way of developing a topic. The instructional practice that I adopt is a comparative method. Using the comparative method, learners are compelled to consciously recognize distinctions between direct expressions and suppositions, and become aware of English writing requirements. Therefore, I often present an example such as this:

A thesis statement

Lying is always bad.

Suppositions

The reason is that if you lie, you will hurt not only the listener, but also yourself. If you tell a first lie, you can lie more easily the next time. If you tell a lie, you will mistrust others because you will think others can lie as easily as you do.

Direct Expressions

The reason is that lying hurts not only the listener, but also the liar. Each lie makes the next one easier to tell. The liar comes to mistrust others, whom she believes will lie as easily as she does.

This writing habit is deeply rooted in the Chinese culture. To reduce this negative transfer of culture and thinking, this method of comparison and contrast is necessary.

Strategy Four: Training for Cohesion and Coherence and the Level of Generality

Coherence and cohesion is "the quality of being integrated, logically consistent, and intelligible" (Wills, 1976, p. 145). Sentences that describe facts or supply examples, illustrations, or supporting details to develop a thesis statement should be so closely connected to one another that they flow smoothly without gaps between them or jumps in logic. When the sentences flow smoothly, one growing out of the other, the writing is coherent and cohesive. To arrange sentences in a coherent and cohesive way, the teacher needs to improve learners' ability to arrange sentences into a text. For this, I follow two techniques.

Reconstructing a Text

For the first technique, I number and scramble sentences from well-constructed texts and require learners to rearrange the sentences logically. This activity trains learners to follow the writer's organizational patterns. I also emphasize that learners must follow the road map that is indicated in a thesis statement, starting with the least important supporting argument and culminating with the most important argument (Hu, 1997). Helping learners develop their reconstructing ability trains them to recognize coherence, cohesion, and levels of generality.

Cohesion and coherence are two aspects of establishing unity in writing. They should happen together. Cohesion training involves developing learners' ability to identify cohesive devices. Coherence training refers to clear information sequencing. Here I mainly focus on training of coherence. Coherence depends on determining the semantic meaning of each sentence related to the topic and logical arrangement of the sentences. I provide learners with some scrambled sentences, as in the example below, and let them rearrange them into a perfect text.

> (1) We think our way along by choosing between right and wrong alternatives, and the wrong choices have to be made as frequently as the right ones. (2) Mistakes are at the very base of human thought, embedded there, feeding the structure like root nodules. (3) We are built to make mistakes. (4) We get along in life this way. (5) If we were not provided with the knack of being wrong, we could never get anything useful done (Wang, 2002, p. 135).

Obviously, the main idea of this paragraph is that progress is based on making mistakes. The correct sequence of sentences is (2), (5), (1), (4), and (3). Different types of texts can be used for this exercise to help students become more familiar with the ways that texts are developed.

The levels of generality (Adelstein & Pival, 1984), that is, arranging sentences from general to specific, is also an effective way to achieve cohesion and coherence. I ask learners to arrange sentences according to the level of generality using the following guideline. After a thesis statement, the most general or least important supporting argument comes first. Then the support becomes more specific, often providing the most important information. The writing is concluded with a brief recapitulation of the thesis in the conclusion. For example, learners are frequently required to do the following exercise in which they must rearrange the sentences into a perfect text:

> (1) The first, as mentioned above, is that no nation has all of the commodities that it needs. (2) Large deposits of copper are mined in Peru and Zaire, diamonds are mined in South Africa, and petroleum is recovered in the Middle East. (3) Countries that do not have these resources within their own boundaries must buy from countries that export them. (4) Foreign trade, the exchange of goods between nations, takes place for many reasons. (5) Raw materials are scattered around the world (Chen, 1985, p. 61).

According to the level of generality, the natural order of sentences in this paragraph is (4), (1), (5), (2) and (3).

Branching and Expanding a Text

The second technique, branching and expanding a text, is an effective way to help learners be more creative in both thinking and writing. It is not the same as using a prescribed English rhetorical pattern to fit a subject, but it should be regarded as a creative and imaginative writing process. It involves decision-making and an understanding of the dynamic nature of writing, and it increases EFL learners' awareness of how sentences are arranged logically in a text. This practice activity involves the teacher providing learners with the beginning of a story and asking them to write the rest of the story or vise versa. This encourages and motivates learners to go in the right direction themselves.

Conclusion

My teaching practice reveals that rhetorical patterns based on different cultures and modes of thinking have a strong impact on teaching EFL writing. Unless EFL users become competent in English rhetorical patterns, they will be unable to communicate effectively in writing with the English speaking world. Chinese EFL learners' transfer of indirectness into EFL writing is a case in point. It is a barrier to communicating. The teacher has to ensure that EFL learners' negative transfer of various cultural conventions be addressed so that they can prepare themselves to communicate in writing in the future. Motivated by the above consideration, I have recommended strategies for all teachers to use in teaching EFL writing. EFL learners from other cultural contexts likely have similar

problems with English rhetorical patterns, which may be addressed with the same instructional strategies.

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Reader Response versus New Criticism: Effects on Orientations to Literary Reading

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The past few decades have witnessed an increased interest in the Reader Response approach to literary reading as an alternative to the New Criticism approach. Although the effectiveness of both approaches has been researched, no clear conclusions have emerged that have put one approach ahead of the other. This article reports the findings of an action research study that aimed to examine the relative effectiveness of the Reader Response and the New Criticism approaches on learners' orientations to literary reading.

Rationale and Review of the Literature

The New Criticism and the Reader Response approaches to reading take different views on how readers extract and construct meaning from text. The New Criticism approach emphasizes close reading of symbols, images, and the plot in order to derive the correct textual meaning, suggesting there is one correct interpretation of the literary texts under study. Grounded in the tenets of the transactional theory of reading proposed by Rosenblatt (1978), the Reader Response approach encourages and expects readers to negotiate and construct meaning through interaction between their background knowledge and the text. Proponents of this approach believe that the reader should not be eliminated as a thinker or authority in the reading classroom. Rather, the reader should produce, both orally and in writing, these personal responses and opinions about the text being read. These personal responses are viewed as the connection between the reader and the text, irrespective of the teacher and the literary critic.

According to Probst (1994), classroom teachers should aim "to develop readers, not literary critics" (p. 37). Likewise, Britton (1984) distinguished between the participant and the spectator roles in the reader's relationship with non-literary and literary texts. Specifically, this theorist maintained that the participant role is used to fulfill instrumental needs and participate in the outside world while language in the spectator role is used to contemplate events in the literary world. In the same spirit, Iser (1980, 1987) discussed reading as a dynamic process in which the reader creates meaning through interaction with the text whereby gaps in the text provide impetus for communication in the reading process. Accordingly, students should not be given the teachers' or the critics'

understandings and interpretations of the texts under study. Rather, the connections between the reader and the text should be evoked and personal thoughts and opinions should be encouraged at the expense of the inherited, single, objective, and unchanging meaning of literature. Such a practice would yield active rather than passive readers and would ensure the human meaningfulness of literature whereby readers bring various experiences to the text and are impacted psychologically and otherwise by what they read (Beach & Marshal, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1978). A basic premise in this regards is that, as students mature, they "exhibit stronger relationships between perceived similarity to story characters and factors of reader identification and suspense" (Hynds, 1989, p. 31). They also demonstrate an increasing ability to search for the underlying psychological attributes, long range goals, and the metaperspectives of the story characters.

The Reader Response and the New Criticism approaches to literary reading are somewhat reflected in the dynamics of the transactional and the transmission methods of teaching, respectively. Specifically, while the New Criticism tends to focus entirely on the text, the Reader Response approach takes textual reading a step further and "assumes an equal closeness of attention to what the juxtaposition of words stirs up within each reader" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 137). In other words, the relation between the reader and the text becomes a dynamic process in which the reader brings into text interpretations his or her linguistic and experiential background knowledge that interacts with the symbols, images, and plot of the text in order to produce meaning. Consequently, transactional classrooms are characterized by more interaction among learners than the transmission classrooms and emphasize constructivism whereby learners are encouraged to explore and construct meaning. This is because learners' own knowledge and experiences are valued; the author and the teacher no longer enjoy the privileged place of power; and the threat of not knowing the right answer is lessened. Conversely, the transmission classroom is conducted according to an assumption that the purpose of reading is to communicate a message directly from the author's pen. Thus, instruction in literature does not seek entertainment and is rather geared towards the pursuit of knowledge and information. Consequently, teachers who subscribe to the transmission model develop guide questions and tests as well as direct students to adhere to the format, style, and content of textbooks. They model and use various reading strategies and guide students to reach eligible interpretations, which creates a dependency on the teachers' assumed correct reading as suggested by Straw (1990).

Previous research in literary reading seems to suggest that both of the Reader Response and the New Criticism approaches to literary reading could be beneficial. On the one hand, research into the interpretive processes of learners has underscored the richness of their engagement with the text and suggested certain differences in the degree of reliance on the text across levels of reading proficiency. For instance, Enciso (1992)

reported that more successful fifth grade students were able to engage with the story world and participate in a number of ways such as empathizing, identifying, merging, and feeling close to characters. Similarly, Smith (1992) concluded, based on empirical evidence, that less successful ninth graders were information-driven in their approach to reading literature whereas more successful readers did not submit as much to the authority of the text and exercised an active role in shaping textual meaning, thereby experiencing more meaningful interaction with the texts under study.

On the other hand, a number of other studies have indicated that traditional teaching according to the dynamics of the New Criticism approach is beneficial to students because it involves teaching them multiple strategies that allow for the development of a conscious control of the comprehension processes. For instance, Keer (2004) reported that explicit instruction enhances the reading comprehension ability of fifth grade students. Along similar lines, McCabe (2003) prompted teachers to model critical thought processes while answering questions in order to have a positive impact on students' perceptions of taking a comprehension test as a result of learning a new strategy. Similarly, Wilhelm (2001) called for lending learners expertise by using think-aloud protocols to model reading strategies, a practice that was also endorsed by Chamot and Kupper (1989) and empirically proven to be useful by Alfassi (2004).

As the preceding review of the literature demonstrates, there is no clear conclusion as to the superiority of the Reader Response approach over the New Criticism approach or vice versa. Furthermore, it is not clear in what ways the two approaches may impact learners' orientations to literary reading. Consequently, the present study examined the relative effectiveness of these approaches on readers' orientations.

The Reader Response and the New Criticism approaches were respectively operationalized in the context of this study as the transactional and transmission methods of instruction. Meanwhile, the variable of readers' orientations towards literary texts was perceived as a complex construct that encompassed the following components: insight, empathy, imagery vividness, leisure-escape, concern with author, story-driven reading, and rejection of literary values. More specifically, *insight* was perceived to combine personal and non-personal insights regarding the recognition of certain qualities in the reader and his or her world. *Imaginary vividness* referred to what becomes vividly present not only visually, but also in feeling, sound, and smell. *Empathy* indicated projective identification with fictional characters where projective identification is regarded as a means to make the characters seem real to the reader. *Leisure-escape* indicated an approach to reading that emphasizes reading for pleasure and as an enjoyable and absorbing departure from everyday responsibilities. *Concern with author* reflected interest in the author's distinctive perspective, themes, and style, as well as the author's biographical place in a literary or intellectual tradition. *Story-driven reading* reflected an

approach where the reader is focused on plot or story-line with particular emphasis on interesting action and compelling conclusion. And *rejection of literary values* represented a view of literary study as a compulsory and irrelevant task.

Specifically, the study addressed the following question: What is the relative effect of the Reader Response and the New Criticism approaches learners' orientations towards literary texts read in high school by learners of English as a foreign language (EFL)?

Method

Participants and Study Context

Participants in the present study were a total of 28 learners of EFL enrolled in two intact 12th grade classes at a private school located in Beirut, Lebanon. The school is a Christian establishment affiliated with the Greek Orthodox Church. The student population of the school is of middle to upper socio-economic status and the students are mostly of Lebanese nationality. The school administration had already assigned all participating students in the present study in such a manner that each class included a balanced number of male and female students of high, average, and low achieving abilities. There were 14 participants in the experimental group and 14 participants in the control group. Arabic is the native language of all participants, and they were all studying English as a first foreign language and French as a second foreign language.

The context of the study is a multilingual setting characterized by limited opportunities to use the foreign languages of English and French for daily communication. However, English is used as the language of instruction in the sciences and mathematics and is highly valued for its perceived and objective vitality in the domains of science, technology, commerce, and education.

Study Design

The study employed a quantitative experimental pretest-posttest control group design. The independent variables in the study are the Reader Response approach and the New Criticism approach to literary reading. The dependent variable is readers' orientations towards literary texts.

Instrument

The Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ) (Miall & Kuiken, 1995) was used to assess the participants' literary orientations (see Appendix for questionnaire). This measure includes sub-scales that address the seven different aspects of readers' orientation towards literary texts: insight, empathy, imagery vividness, leisure-escape, concern with author, story-driven reading, and rejection of literary values. The questionnaire contains 68 items that address the aspects of literary orientations under study as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Number of Items and Reliability Level of the LRQ Seven Sub-Scales

	Number of items	Alpha Level
Sub-Scales		
Insight	14	.82
Imagery Vividness	9	.94
Empathy	7	.91
Leisure/Escape	11	.89
Concern with Author	10	.85
Story-driven Reading	8	.84
Rejection of Literature	9	.94

Students were asked to read each item and rate how much they agree or disagree with the statement. They rated the items using a 5-point Likert system (1= not at all true, 2= slightly true, 3= moderately true, 4= quite true, and 5= extremely true).

The overall internal consistency of the LRQ as well as the consistency of the sub-scales within the this instrument are high ranging from $\alpha = .82$ to $\alpha = .94$ as reported by its developers Miall & Kuiken, (1995). Furthermore, additional analysis, based on data from the present study, also indicated similar results as shown in Table 1.

Treatment

The treatment lasted for 4 weeks at the rate of 6 sessions per week. Each session lasted for 50 minutes during which students in the experimental and control groups read the same the material. However, the transactional method of instruction was used to teach students in the experimental group. Students in the control group followed the instructional procedures suggested in their textbook, which reflected the steps of the transmission model of instruction. Specifically, while students in the experimental group were encouraged to express their emotional reactions as well as to describe, conceive, explain, connect, interpret, and judge the literary texts under study, students in the control group built background knowledge prior to reading the story, read the texts in class, discussed the content, and made inferences through teacher directed questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

All participating students in the control and experimental groups completed the LRQ prior to and at the conclusion of the study. Collected data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, and a multivariate analysis

of covariance test (MANCOVA) conducted to address the question raised in the study regarding the effect of the Reader Response and New Criticism on readers' orientations to literary study. The treatment conditions, Reader Response and New Criticism, were used as independent variables. Meanwhile, the dependent variable, readers' orientations towards literary texts, was measured by composite LRQ scores computed by adding the scores on the items in the sub-scales that measure these orientations. Students' LRQ responses collected prior to the study were used as covariates and responses collected at the conclusion of the study as dependent variables.

Results

The results are reported in Table 2 and reveal three aspects of interest. First, there were statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group on the literary orientation variables of insight, leisure-escape, and concern with author. That is, students who applied the Reader Response approach by following the dynamics of transactional teaching perceived that they recognized in themselves and in the real world some previously unrecognized qualities more than their counterparts in the control group. Furthermore, they put more emphasis on reading for pleasure as an enjoyable departure from everyday responsibilities as well as became more interested with the authors' distinctive perspective, themes, and style and in his or her biographical place in a literary and intellectual tradition.

Table 2

ANOVA Summary For Reader's Orientations by Experimental and Control Conditions

Orientation	Experimental (n = 14)		Control (n = 14)		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Insight	46.21	6.96	38.85	9.02	8.49	<.05
Empathy	20.92	5.77	16.50	7.32	3.65	>.05
Imagery Vividness	30.50	6.09	23.07	9.26	3.20	>.05
Leisure/Escape	32.71	7.69	25.64	8.87	5.59	<.05
Concern with Author	33.50	5.08	27.42	7.73	6.20	<.05
Story-driven Reading	26.00	6.16	20.85	7.10	0.88	>.05
Rejection of Literature	20.78	6.57	27.07	5.73	14.56	<.05

Second, there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in favor of the control group on the variable of rejection of literary values. Specifically, students in the control group who were instructed according to the transmission model tended to regard literary reading as more of a compulsory and irrelevant task.

Finally, the differences between the experimental and the control groups did not reach the level of statistical significance on the variables of empathy, imagery vividness, and story-driven reading. Although the mean scores of the experimental group are relatively higher than those of the control group on the above variables as shown in Table 2, the differences with regard to identification with fictional characters, imaginary elaborations of the literary world, and focus on the plot and story line were statistically insignificant between the two groups.

Discussion

Results of the study demonstrate that the Reader Response approach could positively affect students' orientations to literary reading especially with regard to insight, leisure-escape, and concern with author, and the appreciation of literary values. It appears that students in the experimental group reacted to reading differently regarding the insight factor in which the literary text fostered their recognition of previously unrecognized qualities in their world. Moreover, students in the experimental group reacted differently to reading regarding the leisure-escape factor in which they emphasized reading for pleasure, enjoyment, and departure from everyday responsibilities. Students, as well, reflected interest in the author's distinctive perspective, themes, and style. Furthermore, students in the experimental group rejected the traditional instructional presentation of literary texts.

The preceding results corroborate those of Smith (1992) and Enciso (1992) who reported that students who learn through the Reader Response approach are more willing to enter the world of the literary text and create meaning. One possible explanation of these findings could be that as students are encouraged to express their responses to literature, they develop a positive attitude towards reading literature and begin to be impacted by what they read. Conversely, students may lose motivation to read literature when they are not allowed to enter the literary world of the works under study and are simply given inherited interpretations of what they read.

The treatment, on the other hand, showed no significant results or major differences between the experimental group and the control group regarding three factors of reading orientations: imagery, empathy, and story-driven reading. Students in both the experimental and the control group were somewhat similar in their reactions towards an

imaginary elaboration of a literary text, in identifying a significant relationship with the characters of the texts, and in showing a particular emphasis on interesting actions or compelling conclusions regarding the texts that they read. These three orientations to literary reading all associate the manner of approaching literature with reading literature, and this result suggests that changing these orientations would require longer interventions. The treatment in the present study lasted for 4 weeks only and may have not been long enough to make a significant change in these orientations. Consequently, longer interventions are needed to ascertain whether the Reader Response approach would change students' manner of reading literature across the variables of imagery, empathy, and story-driven reading in various linguistic and socio-cultural context.

Likewise, further qualitative research is needed to examine the generalizability of these findings to different contexts. There is much more to challenge, interest, or enjoyment than could be simply measured by one instrument. Future qualitative research may complement and generate better understanding of the quantitative findings from the present study. Finally, the findings of the present study suggest the need for teachers to encourage students to read and attempt to form and articulate their own thoughts and feelings about a piece of literature. As students become comfortable in developing their own thoughts and feelings about a text, interaction with their classmates will become a natural response.

Ideas for Implementing a Reader Response Approach

The Reader Response approach aims to enable learners to expand their responses to literature and to enhance their critical stance towards literary texts. Specifically, learners are trained in this approach to engage with the text through expression of their thoughts and feelings about what they read. They also describe texts, understand characters' traits, beliefs, and motives, connect the text with own prior experiences, interpret the symbolic meaning of the theme and specific events, and judge the characters and the literary quality of the text as suggested by Beach and Marshal (1991). Of particular relevance to achieve these aims would be classroom techniques such as journaling, retelling, think-alouds, mapping, question-asking, reflection, and judging. Through think alouds, learners can express their thoughts and feelings about what they read. They can also generate questions about the text and map the meaning of the actions of characters as well as judge the authors' values and the literary quality of what they read. Engaging in free-writing activities and class discussions gives learners the chance to express their emotional reactions to the literary texts under study. They may also list the events and categorize them into important and less important categories in order to reproduce the information provided by the authors.

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Appendix
Literary Response Questionnaire

Read each statement carefully. Then using this scale, rate the extent to which the statement is true of you:

> 1 = not at all true (false)
>
> 2 = slightly true
>
> 3 = moderately true
>
> 4 = quite true
>
> 5 = extremely true

On the attached answer sheet, circle the number that corresponds to your rating. Please do not mark your answers on this questionnaire.

Insight

1. Reading literature makes me sensitive to aspects of my life that I usually ignore
2. In literature, I sometimes recognize feelings that I have overlooked during my daily life
3. I often find my shortcomings explored through characters in literary texts
4. I find that literature helps me to understand the lives of people that differ from myself
5. Reading literature often gives me insights into the nature of people and events in my world
6. I often see similarities between events in literature and events in my own life
7. I often find my own motives being explored through characters in literary texts
8. I find that certain literary works help me to understand my more negative feelings
9. Literature enables you to understand people that you'd probably disregard in normal life
10. I sometimes find that reading a literary text makes me feel like changing the way I live
11. In my reading, I learn to recognize more readily certain types of people or events, i.e., I can see these types more clearly after reading about a particular example in a literary text
12. When I begin to understand a literary text, it's because I've been able to relate it to my own concerns about life
13. Literature often gives special emphasis to those things that make a moral point

14. Sometimes while reading literature my feelings draw me toward a distinctly unsettling view of life

Imagery Vividness

1. I often see the places in stories I read as clearly as if I were looking at a picture

2. I can readily visualize the persons and places described in a novel or short story

3. I sometimes think I could draw a map of the places I have read about in a work of fiction

4. Sometimes a scene from a story or poem is so clear that I know its smell, its touch, its "feel"

5. I often hear dialogue in a novel as though I were listening to an actual conversation

6. When I read a literary text, a scene that is only partly described often becomes a whole, vividly present place in my mind

7. When reading a story, sometimes I can almost feel what it would be like to be there

8. I usually hear the tone of speech in a dialogue from a story or novel

9. Often when I read literary texts, descriptions of smells suggest colors, descriptions of colors suggest feelings, and so on

Empathy

1. Sometimes I feel like I've almost "become" a character I've read about in fiction

2. I sometimes have imaginary dialogues with people in fiction

3. When I read fiction I often think about myself as one of the people in the story

4. I sometimes wonder whether I have really experienced something or whether I have read about it in a book

5. I actively try to project myself into the role of fictional characters, almost as if I were preparing to act in a play

6. Sometimes characters in novels almost become like real people in my life

7. After reading a novel or story that I enjoyed, I continue to wonder about the characters almost as though they were real people

Leisure Escape

1. Sometimes I like to curl up with a good book just to enjoy myself

2. When I have spare time, my favorite activity is reading a novel

3. Very often I cannot put down a story until I have finished reading it

4. Reading literature is a pleasurable way to spend time when I have nothing else to do

5. Reading a story is a wonderful way to relax

6. While reading, I completely forget what time it is

7. I find that reading literature is a great help in taking my mind off my own problems

8. I like to become so absorbed in the world of the literary text that I forget my everyday concerns

9. Once I've discovered one work by an author I like, I usually try to read all the other works by that author

10. I am often so involved in what I am reading that I am no longer aware of myself

11. I often wish I had more time for reading literature

Concern with Author

1. One of my primary interests in reading literature is to learn about the themes and concerns of a given author

2. In reading, I like to focus on what is distinctive about the author's style

3. One of my primary interests in reading is to learn about the different genres of literature

4. I like to see how a particular author's work relates to other literature of the author's period

5. When reading, I usually try to identify an author's distinctive themes

6. One of my primary interests in reading literature is to appreciate the author's understanding of society and culture

7. I think literature is especially interesting when it illuminates facts about the author's life

8. When I find a work of literature I like, I usually try to find out something about the author

9. The challenge of literature is to comprehend the author's unique view of life

10. I am often intrigued by an author's literary technique

Story-driven Reading

1. I like to see tension building up in the plot of a story

2. The type of literature I like best tells an interesting story

3. I think the most important part of fiction or drama is plot

4. When reading a novel, what I most want to know is how the story turns out

5. I like it best when a story has an unexpected ending

6. I prefer to read fiction in which there is plenty of action

7. When reading a novel, my main interest is seeing what happens to the characters

8. I find it difficult to read a novel in which nothing much seems to happen

Rejection of Literary Values

1. I think people should spend less time talking or writing about literature
2. Even if literature were well taught, I think high schools should not devote so much time to it
3. For me a work of literature is destroyed by trying to analyze it
4. One of the things I dislike most about being a student of literature is the teacher who tells you what a literary text means
5. Reading literary texts from past centuries should be left to literary scholars and historians
6. I don't believe that literature is socially relevant
7. I disliked English in high school because most of the texts, I was asked to read I would not have chosen myself
8. Works of literature often seem to make the issues of life more complicated than they actually are
9. If I want to spend time reading, I don't choose "literary" texts

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Conference Announcements

English in Southeast Asia (ESEA). December 4-6, 2008. The 13th International Conference on English in Southeast Asia will be held at the National Institute of Education in Singapore, "Englishes and Literatures-in-English in a Globalised World." Web site http://www.ell.nie.edu.sg/esea2008/ESEAhome.html

Hawaii TESOL 2009. February 14, 2009. "Ideas That Work For the ESL Student, Teacher, and Program," University of Hawaii at Hilo on the island of Hawaii. Web site http://www.hawaiitesol.org/AnnualConference.html

CamTESOL. February 21-22, 2009. "The Globalization of ELT: Emerging Directions.: National Institute of Education (NIE) in Phnomh Penh, Cambodia. Web site http://www.camtesol.org/2009conference/index.html

ELT-Con 2009. April 22-24, 2009. "Language Matters: New Ways of Looking at English Language Teaching and Learning." Fourth English language teaching conference organized by the Penang English Language Learning & Teaching Association (PELLTA) at the Bayview Hotel in Penang, Malaysia. Web site http://eltcon.webs.com/

JALT Pan-SIG. May 23-24, 2009. "Infinite Possibilities: Expanding Limited Opportunities in Language Education. Toyo Gakuen University, Nagreyama Campus, in Chiba. Web site http://pansig.org/2009/

Asia TEFL. August 7-9, 2009. "Collaboration and Creativity in English Language Teaching and Learning in Asia." 7th Conference to be held at the Imperial Queens Park Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. Web site http://www.asiatefl.org/2009conference/conference2.html

TESOL Arabia. March 12-14, 2009. "Learning in English: English in Learning." J.W. Marriot Hotel, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. E-mail leskirkham@gmail.com.Web site http://tesolarabia.org

TESOL Greece. March 14-15, 2009. "Back to the Future: English for All Ages." Hellenic American Union, Athens, Greece. E-mail pitychoutis@yahoo.com. Web site http://tesol greece.com

English Language Teacher's Association of India. August 21-23, 2009. "Managing Mixed-Abiltiy Classes." E-mail eltai_india@yahoo.com. Web site http://eltai.org

Tips for Teachers

Using Court Cases to Foster Communication and Critical Thinking

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In teaching English as a foreign language, especially in countries where most students encounter very few circumstances to use the language outside of the classroom, teachers must go to extra lengths to ensure that lessons are meaningful and relevant to their students. Using meaningful lesson content and providing opportunities for them to express their personal thoughts, opinions, feelings, and experiences motivates students and contributes to growth in their language proficiency. Furthermore, engagement with meaningful topics contributes to their sense of ownership of English as an international language. It promotes both understanding of and practice in using English to communicate with others across linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries. Using stories from criminal court cases has special appeal and relevance for my students in Japan and, I believe, could be easily adapted for use by language teachers in other settings as well.

Beginning in 2009, some of Japan's judicial procedures will include lay judges. Ordinary citizens will oversee criminal trials side by side with professional judges, with whom they will have equal authority in deciding verdicts and sentences. There are two main purposes for the introduction of lay judges. One is to make the judicial system more accessible and understandable for ordinary citizens. The other is the hope that allowing for citizen input in the determination of criminal cases will promote confidence in and support of the system.

The topic of the lay judge system, therefore, is not only highly interesting for Japanese university students at the intermediate level of English or above but also creates an opportunity for them to engage in a thoughtful process in preparation for a civic duty they may very well be called upon to participate in one day. With appropriate local adaptations, this topic should also be both appealing and practical for English language students in other countries whether they have a jury system, a lay judge system, or yet another system

of deciding criminal court cases. In any case, the topic is likely to stimulate student interest and provide a meaningful exercise in English language usage.

Instructional Unit

The sequence of activities described below can constitute up to three 90-minute lessons. On the day before I begin the unit, I give students a homework task in which they must prepare to state and explain about five points in support of and about five points in opposition to the lay judge system.

Lesson 1

After I present a brief introduction to the topic, students work in pairs for about 30 minutes to discuss the pros and cons of the lay judge system. In other words, each student works with a partner and discusses both pro and con points. Although it will go into effect as planned, there remains considerable controversy and debate about its merits and potential difficulties. In addition to students employing English language skills to express these points, the aim of the lesson is also to advance students' critical thinking as they reason, analyze, and evaluate different views on the topic. Afterward, I elicit from the class some of the pros and cons that they have heard or presented so that each student hears more ideas. I also use this time to focus on various relevant language items used to express their ideas.

Lesson 2

The second part of the instructional unit involves students playing the role of lay judges and deciding sentences for specific criminal cases that are presented as brief summaries. Some of the most successful cases are reproduced below. Most are stories of actual cases that I have gathered from newspaper stories. I created or adapted others to provide a wide variety of cases for students to consider. The directions that I give students read as follows:

Directions

You are a group of lay judges responsible for sentencing the people in the following cases after their trials. Discuss each case. Each person in the group must state and explain an opinion on the case and recommend a sentence. Then try to reach a consensus through discussion. You can (1) order execution, (2) send the person to prison for (x) years, (3) give a suspended sentence in which the person is found guilty of a crime but is not sent to prison because of extenuating circumstances, or (4) acquit the defendant.

Groups of four or five students seem to work best for this activity. Students take turns stating their recommended sentences and explaining their reasons. Inevitably, there are differences of opinion, sometimes vast differences. After each person has spoken, the members of the group try to reach consensus through further discussion and persuasion.

Of course, during these discussions, I circulate around the classroom monitoring and facilitating the interaction as necessary and appropriate.

I typically allow about 20 minutes of discussion per case. Sometimes consensus is achieved within a group in that time and at other times it is not. After each case, I ask a spokesperson for each group to report the determined sentences from their group or, in cases where consensus could not be reached, to summarize the discussion so that the full class can compare all the results. A lack of consensus is recorded as a deadlocked decision. With a day devoted to discussion of the pros and cons of the judicial system followed by five or six cases, the entire unit of instruction can take up to three 90-minute class meetings.

Court Case Summaries

Following are six cases that I have used successfully. Cases one, two, five, and six are based on actual news stories. Cases three and four were adapted from old teaching materials whose origin I have been unable to verify.

Case 1

A six-year-old boy was kidnapped and found dead in an old well at a Shinto shrine near his home in Tokyo. Police arrested a 45-year-old man for kidnapping and murdering the boy when he appeared at a place where he was to receive twenty million yen he had demanded from the boy's parents. He told police that he had enticed the boy to go with him to the back of the shrine where he would show him some beetles. There he struck the boy several times in the head with a brick and strangled him. Later, he dumped the boy's body into the well. (This is a true case.)

Case 2

A masked man forced his way into a house in Tachikawa, Tokyo and raped an 11-year-old girl at knifepoint. Police say the girl was home alone when an unidentified man telephoned around noon to ask if her parents were home. Shortly afterwards, the masked man entered the house through a window, grabbed a kitchen knife and held it to the girl as he raped her. After a police investigation, the man was found and arrested. (This is a true case.)

Case 3

A woman, age 43, with four children, worked as a secretary. Over the past several years, she had called the police several times saying that her husband was beating her. In fact, she had gone to the hospital with serious injuries four times in the past year. One day, police received a call from a neighbor and went to the woman's house. They found her with a gun in her hand and her husband on the floor, dead. The woman told police, "I'm not sorry I shot my husband. I thought he was going to kill me." She was arrested and charged with murder.

Case 4

A woman, age 53, divorced and with no children, is an alcoholic. She had received treatment for her condition, but over the past ten years police had arrested her four times for drunk driving. One day she was driving home from an afternoon party. She was drunk. She hit a three-year-old girl on a tricycle and the girl died. The woman was arrested and charged with drunk driving and manslaughter.

Case 5

A masked man abducted a three-day-old baby boy from a hospital in Tottori. He entered a room where the baby's mother was nursing him, sprayed her with a fire extinguisher, grabbed the baby, and ran off with him. The man, age 29, and his wife, 33, wanted to raise the baby as their own rather than receive a ransom. They had the baby officially registered as their son. After an intense investigation, the police received a tip and arrested the man and woman. The baby was rescued and examined by a doctor. He was found to be in good health. (This is a true case.)

> **Case 6**
>
> *Three 15-year-old boys from the same junior high school in Nagoya came up with a plan to attack homeless people and to rob them. Then they attacked a 69-year-old homeless woman beside a river. After hitting her in the face and abdomen with iron pipes, the woman died. They were caught and arrested on charges of murder and robbery. (This is a true case.)*

Once you try using criminal court cases as the basis for critical thinking and discussion activities in your English classes, I am confident that your students will ask for more.

About the Author

James W. Porcaro is a professor of English as a foreign language at Toyama University of International Studies. He has taught in Japan since 1985 and holds masters degrees in TESOL and African Area Studies. He also teaches high school classes and is active in teacher training and other educational endeavors.

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Organizing and Retrieving Classroom Activities with Database Software

Ken Schmidt, Tohoku Fukushi University, Sendai, Japan

Over the years, I have collected hundreds of activities for the language classroom in the form of photocopiable resource books, electronic documents, and copy-masters filed in boxes. Until a couple of years ago, I frequently found myself wanting an activity on a certain topic or language point but with no idea whether I had something suitable or where to find it. I was then torn between embarking on a time-consuming search or (re)creating an activity from scratch.

One day, while working with EndNote (Mac/Windows), a bibliographic database application, I realized that I needed something similar for my collection of activities. The closest thing at hand was the database module in the now antiquated *AppleWorks for*

Macintosh, and though it was my first attempt at organizing a database, in one afternoon I was well on my way to developing a tool that has paid many dividends. My database now contains over 1,600 activities and continues to expand as time permits. In this article, I would like to share some key points for developing such a database and suggestions for sharing such resources.

Setting Up and Using a Database

The first step in setting up an activities database with applications like *FileMaker* (Mac/Windows), *AppleWorks* (Mac/Windows), or *MS Access* (Windows) is to design a simple record template such as the one in Figure 1. (A separate section on using *MS Excel* appears below.) The template contains fields for each piece of information arranged for convenient viewing. One field in my database is *Book/Folder* where I put information about the location of an activity like the name of a published book, a folder on a hard disk, or a file in a drawer. Other fields include *Title/Filename*, *Language Level*, *Language Point*, *Topic*, *Activity Number*, *Page Number*, and *Rec?* (where I mark particularly good activities). You simply click and drag to create fields, name them, and designate what type of data, such as text, numbers, or images, will go into each. Even after using a database for some time, it is easy to add new fields as the need arises. For example, you may wish to add a *Notes* field with important tips for setting up and running activities or a *Materials* field for a list of necessary materials (e.g., scissors, magnets, or CD player).
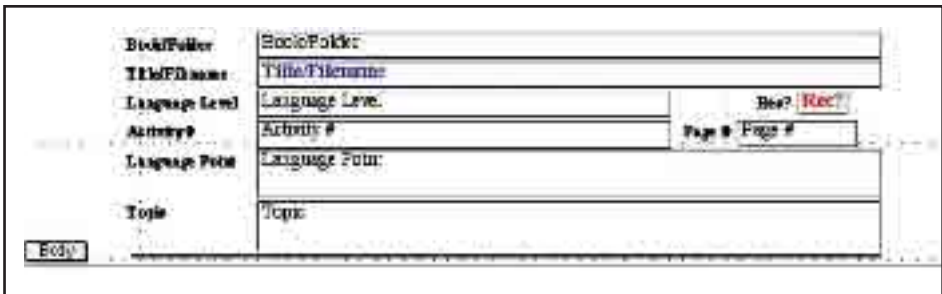

Figure 1: Data Record Template

Once the template is set up, it is an easy but time-consuming process to type in the information for each activity. For a group of records all sharing some information such as the book title and language level, save work by typing the information into one record and using duplicate or copy & paste commands to create multiple identical records. Then fill

in the remaining fields in each record one-by-one. A completed data record may look like Figure 2, and a screen shot showing several records can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 2: Example Data Record

Figure 3: Database Window

Fortunately, there are additional shortcuts to save time with data entry. Detailed tables of contents in many activity books offer most or all of the information needed for database entries. Begin by scanning the table of contents and using optical character recognition (OCR) software to convert the information to a text file. I have contacted most major publishers regarding this form of limited copying and have received no objections to scanning the table of contents. Prepare the resulting text file by deleting unneeded details and arranging all information for each activity in one line or paragraph, separating each piece of information with a tab and separating each activity with a hard return or paragraph mark. The file can now be easily imported with the database application, designating the import source as a "tab-delimited file." Fortunately, most database applications allow you to adjust the mapping of information in the text file to data fields in the database prior to import. An example is pictured in Figure 4. Publishers' online catalogs and product descriptions from online booksellers are other sources of similar information. These also can be copied, cleaned up, and imported.

Figure 4: Database Import Facility Allowing Correct Mapping of Data Fields

Even with shortcuts, inputting data can be time-consuming, but once you have the information in an accessible form, you can use it for years enjoying lightning-fast retrieval simply by typing in key words. Most applications allow general searches for a word or text-string in any field and specific searches limited to particular fields (e.g., *Topic*) or combinations of fields (e.g., *Topic* and *Recommended*). For example, in seconds I can locate the 15 activities I have that deal with "habits," browse through them, and know just where to lay my hands on the one I want, for example, the record that appears in Figure 5.

Figure 5: One Search Result for "Habits"

Using *MS Excel*

The ubiquitous spreadsheet application *MS Excel* (Mac/Windows), or similar software, also serves as a perfectly usable, searchable database platform. Each row holds information for a separate activity while each column contains a particular type of information, such as *Title/Filename, Language Point*, and *Topic*. Data is easily imported from text files, and *Excel* files can, in turn, be imported by database applications. If you select the "wrap text" cell format option to allow a more compact, convenient viewing layout, the results look like the example shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: MS Excel Database Sample

Sharing data

While organizing information on self-generated activities is an individual task, sharing database entries for published materials could save other instructors considerable time and effort. Towards that end, I have set up a website from which anyone can download tab-delimited text files with database entries for activity books that I have cataloged. Publishers have been very cooperative in allowing the posting of this information, since the activities themselves are not posted, and it enhances potential usability of their products. I would also be happy to host or provide links for database

files from others. Simply follow the instructions that appear on my website at
<http://www.geocities.com/ kjschjp/activ_ db/ index.html>.

It is my hope that publishers will eventually include this type of enhanced table of
contents with the promotional materials on their websites. Besides giving customers a
more complete picture of book content, they will be providing a valuable service to the
teaching community by making their materials easier to find and use with minimal time
and effort.

Conclusion

After spending the time and money to develop a collection of activities, it makes
sense for a teacher to maximize this investment with a simple database to make future
retrieval as efficient as possible. Building such a database is not complicated, and if other
teachers and publishers join in sharing such information, the process could become even
easier.

About the Author

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in Sendai, Japan. His interests include task design, extensive reading, self-access learning,
and learner perceptions of learning activities.*

Creative Grouping

Sally La Luzerne-Oi, Hawai'i Pacific University

I often work with student teachers who are excited about having the students they teach carry out communicative activities in pairs or small groups. Yet when the time comes to set up the activity, they often ask, "How should I pair up the students?"

In my classes, the students do not have assigned seats, so they often sit next to their friends. For this reason, I advise student teachers not to pair students with their neighbors unless there is not enough time left in the class to move them around before doing the activity. Below are some additional tips that I give student teachers about forming effective pairs and groups.

General Tips for Pairing and Grouping Students

1. Just as it is better to avoid having good friends work together, it is also better not to assign students who obviously do not get along to work together often.

2. Having students make their own groups often does not work well for several reasons. Students regularly choose to work with their friends. In addition, students who are not immediately asked to join a group may find themselves in an awkward position. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1990) suggest letting students make a list of classmates they would like to work with, and then the teacher can choose one of those students to be in the same group.

3. If a group will be working together over a period of time on a project, teachers should consider forming groups with students of different levels of proficiency, for example one high proficiency student, one low, and two of intermediate proficiency. It is also wise to consider students' attendance records when grouping for long-term projects (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990).

4. It is good to group students with similar ability for certain activities such as proofreading written assignments together.

5. Personality should be taken into consideration when forming groups for activities like debates where a balance of outgoing and quiet personalities on each team can result in a more successful activity.

6. When neither skill nor personality needs to be considered in matching students, grouping can be done randomly by having the students count off. Determine how many students you have in the class that day and how many students you want in a

group. For example, if you have 30 students and want three students in a group, you need ten groups. Students should count off to ten. All the students who said "one" form a group and so on.

Additional Activities for Forming Random Pairs/Groups

Using Names

This way of grouping works especially well in the beginning of the term when students do not know one another well. Have students line up in alphabetical order according to their first or given names. They should do this by asking one another *What is your first name*? Once the line is formed, have the students introduce themselves to the whole class to see if they are indeed in alphabetical order. Pairs or groups are formed with neighbors in the line.

Using Birthdays

Have students line up according to the month and day of their birthdays. They should ask one another, "When's your birthday?" To check if the line is in order, ask the students to name their birthdays. Pairs or groups are formed with neighbors in the line.

Using Personal Information

Ask the students to line up according to their answer to a specific question that calls for numeric information, for example: What time did you go to bed last night? This technique can be used to review previously taught expressions or structures. Again, students form pairs or groups with their neighbors in the line.

Using Vocabulary

Make cards with recently studied vocabulary. Put the word(s) on one card and a definition or synonym on another one. Distribute these randomly. Ask the students to mingle and say, "I have _____. Do you have a definition/synonym that matches?" When they find the person who has the match, they have found their partner.

Using Playing Cards.

To pair or group students, pass out playing cards. Students can be paired or grouped based on the numbers or suits on their cards. For example, all the students who have cards with the number 4 work together, or all the students with hearts work together. Students enjoy this activity, but in order to ensure everyone has a partner or that groups are the same size, the teacher must carefully choose the right subset of playing cards before passing them out.

Using Pictures

Find a number of magazine pictures equal to the number of groups you want. Then cut up each picture into the number of members you want in each group. Randomly pass out all of the pieces. Have students form groups by finding the people who have the other

pieces of their picture puzzles. More advanced students can be asked to find each other by describing what is on their piece of the puzzle without showing it.

Using Candy

Buy as many kinds of candy as the number of groups you want. For example, if you want five groups with four people in each group, put four pieces of five different kinds of candy in a bag. Students choose a piece of candy without looking. Those with the same kind of candy work in a group.

Using Strings

To randomly pair students, cut 45 centimeter lengths of string–half as many pieces as the number of students you have. Grasp the stings in the middle and ask students to gather around you. Each student should take the end of a string. Tell them not to let go of their string as you open your fist. Students holding opposite ends of the same string are partners.

Extension Activities

Depending on your curriculum and the goals of your lesson, you may want to use random pairing/grouping activities as a lead in for additional other communicative activities. Each of the following activities extends one of the pairing/grouping activities described above.

- *Using names*. Ask the students to discuss the following questions: Why did your parents give you this name? Do you like your name? Why or why not? Do you have nicknames that your family or friends call you? How did you get your nickname? Do you remember peoples' names easily? How do you feel when someone has forgotten your name?

- *Using birthdays*. Have students tell or write a story about the best birthday they or a family member has ever had.

- *Using personal information*. Ask your students to discuss the following questions: Do you usually go to bed at the time you said today? What time do you usually get up? Do you snore? Talk in your sleep? Sleep walk? Do you work better in the morning, the afternoon, or the evening? What would you like to change about your typical day?

- *Using vocabulary*. When students find their partner, they should try to make several sentences that exemplify uses of the new vocabulary word. Then the members of the class can take turns sharing their model sentences while classmates listen for and identify the new vocabulary.

- *Using playing cards*. Introduce vocabulary for playing a card game including the names of the suits and phrases like *a deck of cards, a suit, to shuffle, to deal, to draw a card from the pile, to discard a card, to turn a card over, and It's your turn.*

Next, teach the students a simple card game. Finally, have them use the key
vocabulary while playing the game.

- *Using pictures*. Once students find their group members by matching picture
  pieces, they can work together to create an oral or written story based on the
  picture.

- *Using candy*. Brainstorm a list of questions related to candy with your students or
  bring a prepared list to class. Some examples are: Do you have a sweet tooth?
  What is your favorite sweet thing to eat? What kind of candy do you eat most
  often? Give each pair of students one question and a list of their classmates' names.
  Then have them survey their classmates asking their question. With their partners,
  they report their findings to the whole class. Learning to make, use, and explain
  information in a chart or graph to do this activity works well.

- *Strings*. Show students the differences among string, thread, yarn, twine, and
  rope. Teach the following idioms: *to string someone along, no strings
  attached,* and *to be at the end of your rope*. Give students a chance to try using
  these idioms in sentences.

Conclusion

One of the first steps in setting up a classroom task is determining who will work
together. Keeping some general guidelines in mind when grouping students can help
ensure the success of an activity. Moreover, creative grouping can help build positive
group dynamics by enabling your students to work with and to get to know all their
classmates. The possibilities for random creative grouping are numerous. Ask yourself
what the topic of your next lesson is and how can you use that topic to generate a way to
group your students. If desirable, think of follow up activities that will give further practice
with the topic. Let your imagination guide you in developing your own grouping
techniques to complement the lessons you teach.

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Constructivist Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners

Review by Bill Templer

University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur

This innovative volume shows very concretely how teachers can develop a "critical constructivist practice" for teaching EFL in a variety of contexts. Adelman Reyes and Vallone introduce teachers to basic tenets of the collaborative, learner-centered classroom linking this with an approach to critical pedagogy and critical literacy that encourages ELLs from immigrant backgrounds to constructively critique their own experiences of oppression, cultural exclusion, and silencing. As linguist Jim Cummins says in his foreword, the book "represents a breath of fresh air," helping to implement "instruction that creates contexts of empowerment not just for students but also for educators."

The first five chapters lay out perspectives in second language acquisition, constructivism, and "culturally responsive" pedagogy—an "approach based on using students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources of their education" (Nieto, 2004, p. 402). Social constructivism centers on the idea that students themselves build knowledge and their own learning itineraries in dynamic collaboration, with teachers providing flexible scaffolding and affirming student identity.

The presentation is geared in particular to learner-centered instruction for ELLs in the U.S. elementary public school context. A strong argument is developed, especially in Chapter 2, for inclusive bilingual classrooms[1] as opposed to monolingual immersion approaches, today a highly controversial policy issue in U.S. public schools. The book's narrative core, 37 percent of total content (Chapters 6-8), consists of detailed descriptions of ESL teaching in three different elementary school classrooms (2nd, 5th and 8th grade), taught by Jill, Maria and Monica, with learners from a range of mainly lower-income backgrounds, primarily Latino and Iraqi.

_____

[1]See numerous papers by Jim Cummins, http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/

These windows into actual practice in the form of extended visitations to classrooms attempt to bring home to teachers "just how powerful constructivist approaches can be in engaging learners actively in knowledge building" (Cummins). And you hear many diverse students' voices shaping curriculum and engaging in authentic dialogue as description of class activity is coupled with repeated teacher reflection on what is happening. There is regular inclusion of explanation of key constructivist principles as applied in the concrete instance. Chapter 9 outlines an engaged "Critical Constructivist Education for ELLs."

A glossary provides definitions of 51 terms in SLA and constructivist pedagogy along with a useful appended questionnaire for oral history projects in ESL by Irma Olmedo. The bibliography of 101 references is a springboard to further exploration including a key volume on learning theory that substantiates constructivist, collaborative pedagogies (National Research Council, 2005).

In developing a culturally responsive ESL pedagogy, Adelman Reyes and Vallone are keen to stress the need for validating home language and heritage by bringing in students worlds and native languages and affirming their identity and self-esteem. There is also ample illustration in all three classroom narratives of "context-embedded instruction," a constructivist cornerstone: aspects of the external world—like "insects" as a hands-on class project in Jill's 2nd-grade class—provide a basis for collaborative, student-shaped, "fun" acquisition of ESL skills, often grounded on problem-solving. Monica's 8th-grade class centers on students engaged in a project of exploring their own experiences as Latino immigrant kids tapping their own cultural funds of knowledge, narratives, biographies, and problems. Maria's classroom of Iraqi youngsters offers special insight into the problems of working with heavily traumatized learners as we come to meet students like Zainab and Beyar.

The downside of this book may be its concentration on teaching immigrant ELLs in a highly specific North American context. But much can be extrapolated to wherever teachers work. The book can help turn you into critical literacy educators, teaching students to read the word and world between the lines, while seeking to build a more open and democratic learning environment in solidarity with your students and their communities.

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About the Reviewer

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Teaching and Learning Vocabulary in Another Language

Review by Neil McBeath
The Royal Air Force of Oman.

Coombe; Dwight Lloyd and David Palfreyman (eds) 2006, *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Peter Davidson; Christine Dubai, TESOL Arabia, ISBN 9948-8566-6-X

This book is an extremely important and extraordinarily comprehensive collection of 27 papers, specially commissioned by TESOL Arabia for their occasional publications series. The papers are general in application, and while there are contributions from Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, there are also papers from Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The papers are organized under four broad headings—Implications of Vocabulary Research on Teaching (10 papers); Strategies for Teaching and Learning Vocabulary (7 papers); Integrating Vocabulary into the Curriculum (5 papers); and Assessing and Measuring Vocabulary (5 papers).

Outstanding contributions in the first section come from Michael McCarthy and Ronald Carter, both of whom investigate the problems specific to the area of advanced level vocabulary. McCarthy's "What Is Advanced Level Vocabulary?" (pp. 21-34) indicates that the advanced learner comes to the task with a receptive knowledge of some 4000-5000 words. To push comprehension above 90% on typical texts, that receptive vocabulary must be doubled. The only way that this can be accomplished is by using corpus-based research with strategic learning. Students must be introduced to collocations, idioms, metaphors and paraphrase.

Carter's "What is advanced level vocabulary? The case of chunks" (pp. 35-48) extends his colleague's work by emphasizing the importance of word clusters and formulaic language. He points out that these phrases are fixed—"People go (but not turn*) mad, insane, bald, blind" (p. 36)—and these fixed expressions are far more important than the familiar, yet very low frequency, idioms— raining cats and dogs—that feature in some textbooks.

Carter distinguishes carefully between receptive and productive knowledge but concludes that chunks of language perform core communicative functions even in

everyday discourse, and that mastery of these collocations may be of more benefit than the mastery of single words.

Other interesting papers in this section are Geoff Hall's (pp. 79-87) examination of poetic language, and Mark Maby's (pp. 134-147) investigation of how Chinese, French, and Japanese students' L1 influenced their processing of polysemous senses of the English word *over*. Maby, however, admits that his work is purely theoretical and that it "does not attempt to draw direct implications for the classroom" (p. 145).

By contrast, all seven papers in the second section are directly classroom oriented, and these investigate, in turn, inferring word meanings from context, prefixes and suffixes, the use of word classes in guessing strategies, graded readers, vocabulary notebooks, the use of post-reading tasks, and "some basic principles that should help ensure a smooth transition for any teachers making a shift from a grammar-dominated way of teaching to a more lexically-based approach" (p. 216).

In this section, teachers must follow their own interests, but it is interesting how closely Robert Ledbury's "What learners need to know about prefixes and suffixes" (pp. 163-172) seems to mirror current thinking among materials writers. Harrison (2006), Phillips (2006) and Philpot (2006) all include work on prefixes while Soars and Soars (2006) devote space to compound nouns based on the combination of prepositions and verbs, for example, *bypass* and *update*.

Section three moves from the classroom into the broader curriculum with Jan Cambrensis and Maxine Gillway (pp. 237-247) and Caleb Pritchard (pp. 275-282) showing how technology can be exploited to assist the learning process. From Japan, Pritchard explains how even a tool as crude as the Google search engine can be used to determine the frequency of lexical phrases while Cambrensis and Gillway explain the work of the Concordance Committee at the United Arab Emirates University, effectively offering a case study on the successful application of corpus linguistics.

In the same way, Adam Simpson (pp. 222-236) explains how a vocabulary syllabus was developed at Sabanci University in Turkey while Andrew O'Sullivan (pp. 248-259) demonstrates how the integration of vocabulary work with an existing syllabus has led students from the UAE Colleges of Higher Technology to extend their vocabulary and to use IT research tools. O'Sullivan's paper therefore validates Pritchard's research.

Turning to assessment, Christine Coombe's "Assessing vocabulary development in the language classroom" (pp. 285-297) offers a master-class in how-to-do. This is a paper that should be read by anyone concerned with the assessment of lexical knowledge. It answers basic questions like "How should I test vocabulary" (p. 286) and "How many items should I include?" (p. 287) before referring the reader to helpful tools and resources

and giving examples of multiple choice questions, matching formats, sentence completion, and gap-fill items.

Anne Marie Papadakis and Raja Mallek Bahoul (pp. 311-320), however, offer evidence from the University of Sharjah suggesting that many learners do not incorporate "learnt" vocabulary in their writing, raising the question of the stage at which passive lexical knowledge becomes active.

In the final paper of the collection, Averil Coxhead (pp. 331-342) examines the same problem and suggests, among other things, that L2 writers must be given the opportunity to develop flexibility by using words in a variety of contexts and situations. She points out that, under pressure, many L2 writers "play safe" and activate their old vocabulary, and so learners' concerns about risk and register should be addressed by their instructors. She suggests that "there is much to be learned from the learners" (p. 341).

There is also much to learn from this book. It is firmly rooted in theory, but offers the results of widely based empirical research to propose sensible strategies for integrating vocabulary into the curriculum, teaching vocabulary, learning vocabulary and finally for assessing whether learning has taken place.

It would be difficult to find a more comprehensive coverage of this topic.

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Neil McBeath served as a uniformed education officer in the Royal Air Force of Oman from 1981 to 2005. Refusing to renew contract, he took a two year contract with BAE systems in Saudi Arabia. He has now returned to Oman and is teaching at the Sultan Qaboos University.

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