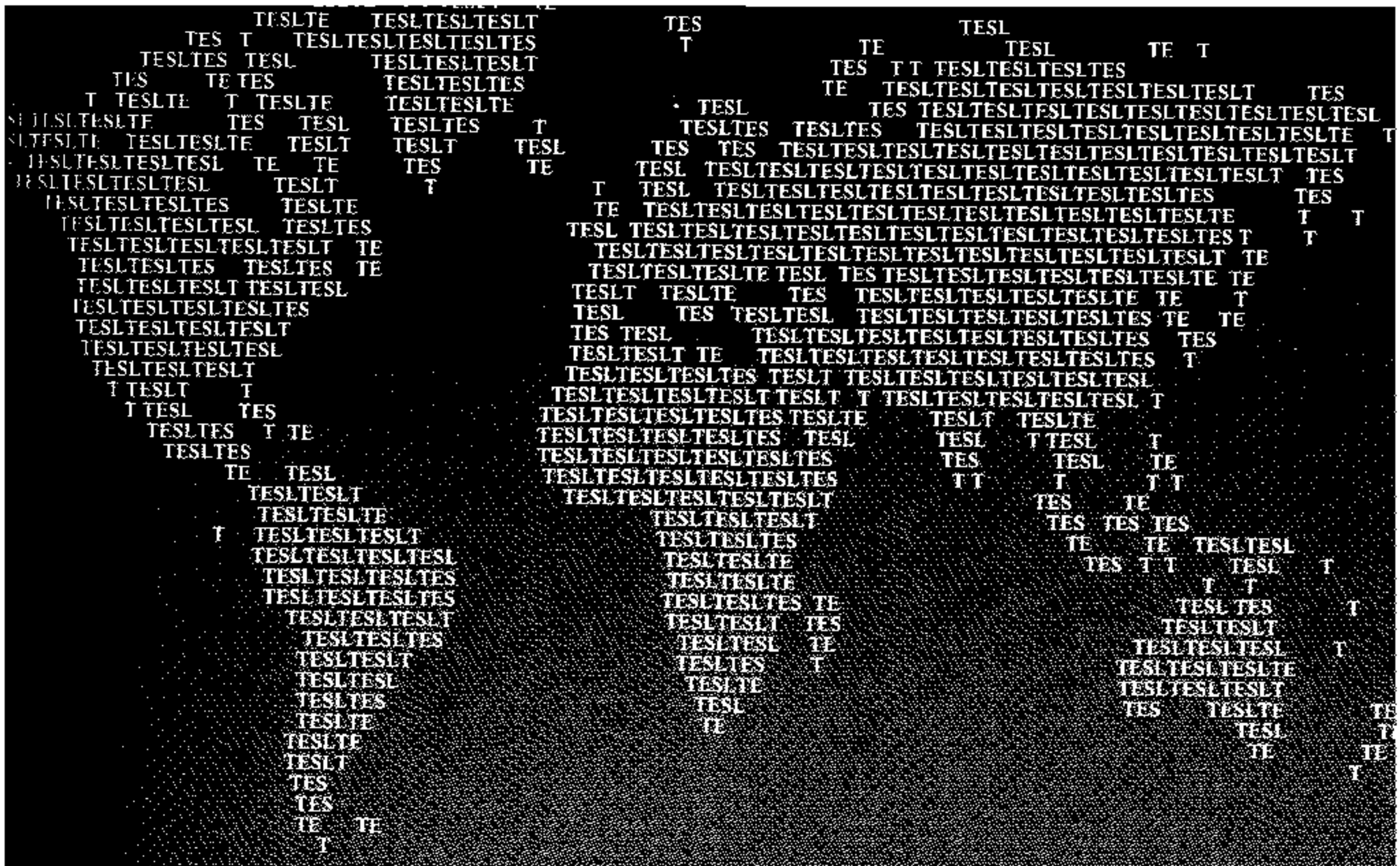


TESL REPORTER

Vol. 34(1) April 2001

TESL Reporter

A Forum for and by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

ISSN 0886-0661

Subscriptions are available on a complimentary basis to individuals and institutions involved in the teaching of English as a second/foreign language outside the United States. The subscription rate within the U.S. is US$6. Requests for new subscriptions and change of address notification for continuing subscriptions should be sent to: Circulation Manager, *TESL Reporter*, BYUH Box 1940, Laie, HI 96762 USA, or E-mail: Campbelm@byuh.edu

Persistent Issues in Assessment of English as a Foreign Language

Kassim Shaaban
American University of Beirut, Lebanon

The procedures and techniques used in assessment of language abilities have continuously come under scrutiny by educators and researchers whose main concerns have always been to ensure the suitability, practicality, and fairness of the tools of assessment and to have the assessment process generate the right impact on the various aspects of the teaching/learning process. The need for such scrutiny is certainly greater in foreign language contexts where the English classroom is normally the only place for exposure to English in the school or outside it and the teachers themselves are mostly non-native speakers of the language. Needless to say, assessment is perceived as a trying experience in first language situations, and it is more so in second and foreign language contexts where there is an ever-increasing recognition among researchers and educators alike of the role of the affective factors in second language learning (Stevick, 1990; Krashen, 1982; Lozanov, 1979).

The findings of research studies in second and foreign language acquisition (Klein, 1986; Gass & Schachter, 1989; Cook, 1993) have brought about a major shift in teaching approaches, methods, and techniques from structural, teacher-centered, audio lingual, discrete-point teaching methodologies to global, learner centered, affective-humanistic, communicative methodologies (Krashen, 1985, Savignon, 1983; Nunan, 1988; Oller, 1993; Brown, 1994). This shift was accompanied by an acute awareness among researchers and educators of the need for new assessment procedures that would be compatible with the new trends in teaching methodology. This awareness has resulted in a clear shift in testing since the 80's in the direction of making evaluation a teaching tool (Carroll, 1980, Harris & McCann, 1994; Weir, 1993; Brown, 1996). In fact, the learner-centered approaches to language teaching, which have generated "humanistic" methods of teaching, have also called for humanizing evaluation through introducing innovative assessment principles, procedures, and techniques including continuous evaluation, making assessment an integral part of instruction, diversifying alternatives in assessment, and using informal evaluation measures such as conferences, diaries, logs, portfolios, and peer and self-assessment (Oller, 1987; Burton, 1992; Pierce & O'Malley, 1992; O'Neil, 1992; Arter, Spandel, & Culham, 1995; Katz, 1997). Underlying all these new trends is the principle of the inter-relatedness of assessment and instruction. Oller (1987) states that "within such a practical and comprehensive philosophy of language instruction and

testing, every test becomes a natural rung in the ladder toward the instructional goal . . . and every instructional activity in which students participate becomes a language-testing activity" (p. 45).

The present study will discuss some of the issues that are, after years of experience with new methods of teaching and assessment, still stirring controversy and disagreement among testing specialists. Analysis and discussion of these issues will help throw light on the place of assessment in classroom teaching and in the curriculum and will help ". . . teachers and administrators be aware of the issues involved and make informed choices regarding language tests and how they are used" (Savignon, 1987, p. 20).

The Teacher as Tester

One of the immediate consequences of introducing the new alternative procedures and techniques of assessment has been that "control over the collection and interpretation of assessment information has shifted from centralized authority towards the classrooms where assessment occurs on a regular basis" (Fradd & Hudelson, 1995, p. 5). These new developments have made the role of the classroom teacher in the evaluation process a vital and decisive one. In fact, educators agree that classroom teachers are the best judges of their students' linguistic and communicative abilities. Their judgement would be the most representative and accurate, for only they are aware of all the parameters of the teaching context in which they operate. Harrison (1983) considers that the teacher has the ultimate responsibility for the content and format of the assessment tool as well as for the decision on whether to assess or not, for "he is influenced by the aims and needs of the students he is teaching, the course book he is using, the demands of the school and the system and so on, and must therefore devise tests to fit these conditions" (p. 134).

But assessment is a skill that does not come easy to the practitioner; classroom teachers usually have problems in constructing, administering, and using assessment procedures and techniques. Alderson and Clapham (1995) recognize the problems teachers have with assessing students' abilities and attitudes and attribute these problems to the association of assessment with "an arcane terminology, a heavy emphasis on numbers and statistics, and an aura of objectivity and rigor which makes people feel that testing is too difficult and that it needs to be left to experts" (p. 184). Traditionally, EFL teachers have tried to develop assessment procedures modeled after the examples given in the textbook series being used or in assessment handbooks. These procedures and techniques need to be looked at by teachers as demonstrations of the various assessment types and formats and of the content, but they should not be taken and modeled after blindly. Teachers of English as a foreign language, working with alternatives in assessment, need training in how to assess students' performance through

conferencing, reading and learning logs, performance tasks, and portfolios; all these forms require in-depth knowledge of and adequate training in the dynamics of holistic scoring, cooperative learning, team evaluation, inter-rater reliability, and design of the evaluation profile—skills that most non-native English teachers lack. Alderson and Clapham (1995) suggest that these obvious deficiencies could be remedied through training. They believe that training EFL/ESL teachers in constructing achievement and progress tests is not unattainable, for "the construction of class-based tests requires less specialist knowledge and is related far more closely to the devising of class exercises" (p. 185). They further call on teachers to develop explicit marking criteria, which would improve the construction of the tests, their scoring, and the teaching/learning process itself.

Harrison (1983) suggests seeking the help of colleagues in the design and revision of assessment procedures and techniques, for he believes that "no one person can write a test by himself . . . [there is] no substitute for the comments of an interested colleague, who will see the test from a different view point and will point out ambiguities and possibilities for error which the test writer cannot see" (p. 134-35). Heaton (1990) goes a step further and recommends teamwork in the development of tests. "Getting together with other teachers can make the writing of good achievement tests a lot easier. Indeed, such team work will improve all the various kinds of tests you may want to write" (p. 14). Brown (1998) includes in his book samples of the various types of formal and informal assessment procedures and activities prepared by classroom teachers; these activities could be used in a training course or for individual study by teachers.

Test Anxiety

Traditionally, the mere mention of tests brings to mind images of anxiety and fear in most teachers and students. Teachers are usually worried about the fairness, well-constructedness, suitability, and practicality of their tests. Students, on the other hand, are fearful of the unknown and of failure to do well on the tests. The anxiety generated by assessment could be detrimental to a student's future; it therefore becomes the responsibility of the teacher to provide assessment measures that allow students to show their best performance and ability.

Testing research has shown that some tests cause more anxiety than others. Cohen (1984), for example, reports that in tests of literature, "Open-ended questions are preferred to multiple choice and that the cloze was perceived as a high-anxiety proficiency test" (p. 71). Bradshaw (1990) studied the reactions of Spanish and Italian students to types of tests and the effects of these types on their test scores and motivation. His findings confirm Cohen's conclusions; the C-test, a variation on the cloze, was more difficult and more anxiety-generating than the multiple choice and the open-ended questions. "The C-test was, overall, the most negatively rated by all groups,

regardless of English proficiency, first language, or gender" (Bradshaw, 1990, p. 25). These findings point to the conclusion that, in order to avoid causing unneeded anxiety, these types of tests should not be used to evaluate students.

Another way of dealing with the anxiety issue is to evaluate students through using the types of assessment they are comfortable with such as open-ended and essay questions. One other suggestion is to allow students to have take-home exams or open-book exams whereby the emphasis will be on the identification, analysis, and synthesis of the needed information. This will help teachers develop and assess their students' critical thinking skills. More recently, practitioners and researchers have been calling for giving students a say not only in the format of the test but in its content as well. Thus Mayerhof (1992) calls for allowing students to discuss questions during the test quietly as long as each writes his own answers; of course, she is referring to subjective types of questions. Murphey (1994/95) goes beyond the concept of involving students in suggesting topics or points for the test, or generating some questions as suggested by Friel (1989), to having students prepare their own tests. Students choose the items to go into the test; the teacher then identifies the types of questions with the help of the students; the students, a few days later, give each other tests orally in pairs, during class while sitting at their desks, or outside while walking around the premises of the school. Later on, the test is repeated with a new partner to reinforce what is being learned, giving students the feeling that their learning is not for the test only. Students are graded by their partners for the correctness of their answers and for using English.

Finally, it is important to mention that practice with taking tests helps decrease tension normally associated with test-taking. This is especially true with objective tests where familiarity with the format, the instructions, and the question types could help decrease the anxiety of the test-taker when he or she faces the real testing tasks.

Authenticity

A major problem in classroom testing is that which relates to "the relationship between the language use required by tasks on language tests and that which is part of our every day communicative use of the language" (Bachman, 1990, p. 356). This relation is often referred to as "test authenticity." Modern approaches to language teaching, especially the communicative approach, insist that the language used in testing tasks need to be related to the language used in real life in order for these testing tasks to have credibility. One way of achieving this is through identifying examples of real-life language use required in the assessment of communicative competence and, then, designing test tasks that mirror these examples. But real-life language use is complex and varies among language users. Heaton (1990) cites the following performance objectives that could be included, rather indirectly, in a task-based test: "Can students

understand and deal with messages in English over the telephone? Can they complete an application form for a visa? Can they persuade someone in English to buy a second hand car?" (p. 29). He suggests for the first question a task involving recording a telephone conversation and using it as basis for a listening comprehension test. As for the second question, an authentic application form may be given to be filled out following the instructions usually supplied on the form. For the third question, he suggests using role play as part of an oral test.

Most testing specialists feel that these testing tasks should be evaluated through criterion-referenced scales which usually range from a nil to a perfect level of performance (Bachman, 1990; Clark & Clifford, 1988). Research relating to the psychometric aspects of criterion-referenced tests, including inter-and intra-rater reliability and concurrent validity, is being conducted. As for rating scales, though the idea is attractive, no clear definitions of such scales have emerged. In fact, the "proliferation of rating scales seems counterproductive" (De Jong, 1992, p. 43). Once such scales have been validated and the mechanism of establishing reliability and validity of these performance-based, criterion-referenced, authentic tests has been established, the classroom teacher will feel more comfortable with such tests.

In brief, the development of proficiency-oriented tests for classroom use is recommended by testing specialists who espouse the use of authentic language and authentic, performance-based language tasks; however, the reliability, validity, and practicality (for the classroom teacher) of such tests need to be established. Furthermore, teachers need to be educated and trained in the procedures of communicative test construction; otherwise, they will spend long hours trying procedures they are not sure of. This does not exclude the need for incorporating within testing procedures some performance-based tasks, especially in testing oral fluency. The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is a good example of communicative testing as it provides clear guidelines for the teacher in terms of what to assess and how to score (NCTFL, 1999).

The Place of Standardized Tests

Although standardized tests are not recommended for use as classroom tests, except perhaps for diagnostic, placement, or exit purposes, familiarity with their formats, content, and scoring is a necessity for students who will, in the future, have to be evaluated on the basis of such tests in vocational, professional, or academic contexts. Therefore, training students in how to take standardized tests to help develop the much needed familiarity with their types, formats, and content should be one of the objectives of teaching English in English as a foreign language contexts, especially in the last two or three years of high school.

It is important to point out that testing specialists are moving standardized tests away from multiple-choice, discrete-point testing in the direction of performance based, criterion-referenced, communicative testing to keep them in harmony with classroom methodologies. Thus we have recently witnessed the launch of a new project, TOEFL 2000, which "is charged with leading the way for improved English proficiency assessment in the future" (*TOEFL Update*, 1994, p. 1). The TOEFL Policy Council at Educational Testing Services (ETS) has justified its decision in the following manner.

> The impetus for TOEFL 2000 comes from TOEFL users who have called for a test that is more reflective of the current understanding of communicative competence and performance-based language assessment and provides more information about international students' ability to use English for Academic Purposes (EAP). These TOEFL scores users include representatives of the college and university admissions community...and applied linguists, language testers, and second language teachers. (*TOEFL Update*, 1994, p. 2)

Similarly, the Council of Europe calls for criterion-referenced, performance-based assessment on the understanding that "learning in our modern society must be viewed as a continuous and life-long task; such a framework should make it possible to assess progress independent of any curriculum or the time spent on learning" (De Jong, 1992, p. 42).

Another emerging trend in relation to standardized testing is the development of internationally comparable standardized language tests. Thus the Association of Language Testers in Europe has as one of its aims promoting "the establishment of common standards for all stages of the language testing process" (De Jong, 1992, p. 43). Similarly, the International Language Testing Association, established in 1991, has among its goals the development of international standards for assessment which focus on requirements relating to testing procedures and test quality. Research into the comparability of the TOEFL and the Cambridge Test has already been conducted, and more research is being done in this area (Davidson & Bachman, 1990).

A quick glance at standardized tests used nowadays in the United States and Great Britain will show a major tendency towards using authentic texts and performance-based testing (Alderson & North, 1995). However, the procedures involved are too complicated for the untrained classroom teacher to use in his class as models. Hence, giving teachers practice in the use of the different forms of assessment is crucial to the success of classroom applications.

Error and Error Correction

For a long time, learners' errors have been considered by teachers and students alike as evidence of lack of learning. The prevailing practice was to correct errors on the spot following the principle of the preference of immediate, rather than delayed, feedback. However, second/foreign language acquisition research has developed a radically-different view from the above; errors are seen as steps on the way to mastery. They are viewed as developmental in nature, reflecting the stage at which the learner's "interlanguage" is. Therefore, these errors, which represent learning opportunities, should be tolerated unless they interfere with the message (Heaton, 1988).

But learners usually expect and look "for feedback on both their spoken and written output. They must be able to recognize oral feedback when it comes, to interpret written feedback, and above all to know what to do as a result" (Bolitho, 1995, p. 47). Actually, in most EFL classes, failure of teachers to correct their students' errors is viewed by these students as irresponsible behavior on the part of the teachers. Many teachers respond to such feeling by over-correction which could engender in students a sense of total incompetence.

While it is important to stress fluency over accuracy, we should recognize that the teacher in EFL contexts provides the only model and the only source of feedback, unlike the case in ESL contexts where classroom work is reinforced outside the classroom. Therefore, EFL teachers should develop awareness of the seriousness of the error. If it interferes with the message conveyed, it should be corrected; if it is a recurring error despite sustained instruction, it should also be corrected, lest it turns into a fossilized form in the learner's linguistic repertoire.

One way of correcting errors without creating anxiety in learners is to develop among students the concepts of self-correction and peer-correction. With proper training, in the context of learner-centered education, students may gradually take more responsibility for recognizing and correcting their own errors. There are certain learning tasks, like process writing, which by their very nature reinforce the role of the learner in recognizing and correcting the error. Cooperative learning could serve as a good model of classroom interaction, especially in group writing where students are responsible for working together on producing a good manuscript. When a good student corrects the rhetorical or grammatical mistakes of another student in his group for the benefit of the group standing in the class, feelings of anxiety will be much less acute than feelings generated by teacher correction. The teacher takes on a new role in the classroom; he or she becomes the facilitator and the authority on the suitability of corrections made by students.

Conclusions

This paper has examined some of the issues in the assessment of language abilities in the English as a second/foreign language classroom that remain controversial and without clear answers. School administrators, program coordinators, teachers, parents, and students need to be aware of the nature of these thorny issues and of possible solutions so that they may help make assessment a positive contributor to the teaching/learning process. The following points raised in this paper need to be kept in mind whenever assessment of the achievement and abilities of EFL students is considered.

First, assessment procedures can not be and should not be separated from the learning/teaching process. In fact, the principle of the inter-relatedness of teaching and assessment is a major characteristic of all new EFL/ESL teaching methodologies (Oller, 1987; Krashen, 1982; Nunan, 1988). Therefore, classroom tests should reflect teaching objectives, teaching methods, teaching activities and exercises, and teaching materials. Thus, students learning through a communicative ESL/EFL program should not be tested by means of discrete-point tests.

Secondly, evaluation of ESL/EFL assessment procedures and techniques for instruction, administration, content, length, and format must be done in light of student performance and level of anxiety generated. Tests should be looked at as indicators of ability; when they fail to perform their function, they should be abandoned in favor of other more reliable forms of assessment.

Thirdly, the teacher/assessor should not look at himself as the only authority on evaluating his students. He may benefit a great deal from involving his colleagues and the students themselves in the assessment process in general, and test construction in particular.

Fourthly, practice in taking tests could be very useful to students because it could motivate them to study. Actually, examinations are, for many students, the only source of motivation; thus we can clearly see that, in most EFL contexts, both teachers and students stress reading and writing and ignore oral fluency because it is not usually tested. However, training students in test-taking should not lead us to teach for tests only because tests represent, at best, a very minor part of the learners' linguistic and communicative competence.

Finally, as questions remain about whether any form of formal assessment is a fair reflection of the linguistic behavior of the test-taker and about the fairness of tests in terms of their content, discourse structures, and linguistic complexity, teachers should be careful before using formal assessment procedures as the only basis for deciding on students' performance. Preferably, teachers should assess students frequently, using a

multiplicity of tools of evaluation, both formal and informal. Needless to say, no teacher is born with the ability to construct reliable, valid assessment tools. Test construction and test use are skills that need to be acquired through training and experience. The lack of such training and experience could lead teachers to develop or use the wrong tests for their students, to misinterpret the test results, or to misapply these results.

References

Alderson, J. C., & North, B. (1995). *Language Testing in the 1990's*. Hertfordshire: Phoenix ELT.

Alderson, J. C., & Clapham, C. (1995). Assessing student performance in the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly, 29*(1), 184-187.

Arter, J. A., Spandel, V., & Culham, R. (1995). Portfolios for assessment and instruction. Eric Document Reproduction Service (No. ED 388 890).

Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bolitho, R. (1995). Current issues: Error correction. *Modern English Teacher, 4*(1), 47-48.

Bradshaw, J. (1990). Test-takers' reaction to a placement test. *Language Testing*, 7(1), 13-30.

Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Brown, J. D. (1996). *Testing in Language Programs.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Brown, J. D. (Ed.). (1998). *New Ways of Classroom Assessment.* Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Burton, L. (1992). Who assess whom, and to what purpose? In M. Stephens and J. Izard (Eds.), *Reshaping Assessment Practices: Assessment in the Mathematical Sciences under Challenge* (pp. 1-18). Hawthorn, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Carroll, B. J. (1980). *Testing Communicative Performance.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Clark, J. L. D., & Clifford, R. J. (1988). The FSI/ILR/ACTFL proficiency scales and testing techniques: Development, current status, and needed research. In A. Valdman (Ed.), The Assessment of Foreign Language Oral Proficiency. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 10*(2), 16-21.

Cohen, A. D. (1984). On taking language tests. *Language Testing, 1*(1), 70-80.

Cook, V. (1993). *Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition.* London: Macmillan.

Davidson, F., & Bachman, L. (1990). The Cambridge-TOEFL comparability study An example of the cross-national comparison of language tests. In J. H A. L. D Jong (Ed.), Standardization in Language Testing. *AILA Review, 7*, 24-25.

De Jong, J. H. A. L. (1992). Assessment of language proficiency in the perspectiv of the 21st century. In J. Matter (Ed.). Language Teaching in the Twenty Firs Century: Problems and Prospects. *AILA Review, 9,* 39-45.

Educational Testing Services. (1994). *TOEFL Update.* Princeton, NJ: ETS.

Fradd, S., & Hudelson, S. (1995). Alternative assessment: A process that promote collaboration and reflection. *TESOL Journal, 5*(1), 5.

Friel, M. (1989). Reading technical texts: A class test. *English Teaching Forum 27*(1), 32-33.

Gass, S. M., & Schachter, J. (1989). *Linguistic Perspectives on Second Languag Acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harris, M., & McCann, P. (1994). *Assessment.* Oxford: Heinemann.

Harrison, A. (1983). *A Language Testing Handbook.* London: Macmillan.

Heaton, J. B. (1988). *Writing English Language Tests.* London: Longman.

Heaton, J. B. (1990). *Classroom Testing.* London: Longman.

Katz, L. (1997). A developmental approach to assessment of young children. Eri Document Reproduction Service (No. ED 407 172).

Klein, W. (1986). *Second Language Acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practices in Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford Pergamon.

Krashen, S. D. (1985). *Input in Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Lozanov, G. (1979). *Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopedy.* New York: Gordo & Breach.

Mayerhof, E. (1992). Communication dynamics as test anxiety therapy. *Englis Teaching Forum, 30*(1), 45-47.

Murphey, T. (1994/1995). Tests: Learning through negotiated interaction. *TESO Journal, 4*(2), 12-16.

National Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (1982). *ACTFL Proficienc Guidelines.*

Nunan, D. (1988). *The Learner-Centered Curriculum.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Oller, J. W, Jr. (1987). Practical ideas for language teachers from a quarter century o language testing. *English Teaching Forum, 25*(4), 42-46 & 55.

Oller, J. W., Jr. (1993). *Methods that Work: Ideas for Literacy and Language Teachers.* (2nd edition). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

O'Neil, J. (1992). Putting performance assessment to the test. *Educational Leadership, 49*(8): 14-19.

Pierce, L. V., & O'Malley, J. M. (1992). *Performance and Portfolio Assessment for Language Minority Students.* Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/pigs/pig9.html

Savignon, S. (1983). *Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Savignon, S. (1987). What's what in communicative language teaching. *English Teaching Forum, 25*(4), 16-21.

Stevick, E. (1990). *Humanism in Language Teaching: A Critical Perspective.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weir, C. (1993). *Understanding and Developing Language Tests.* New York: Prentice Hall.

About the Author

Kassim Shaaban is Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics in the English Department at the American University of Beirut. His main research interests are motivation and attitudes, assessment and evaluation, language-in-education policies, cooperative language learning, and teaching effectiveness.

Conference Announcements

The Applied Linguistics Association of Australia. July 6-8, 2001. 2001 National Congress, "Asia Pacific Applied Linguistics: The Next 25 Years," Canberra, Australia. Contact Melissa Howarth, School of Languages and International Education, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia. Tel. +61(0)-2-6201-2077. Fax +61(0)-2-6201-5089. Email:alaa-info@slie.canberra.edu.au. Http://www.slie.canberra.edu.au/alaa

IDP Education Australia (Cambodia). September 5-7, 2001. Fifth International Conference on Language and Development, "Defining the Role of Language in Development," Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Contact Paul Mahony, Steering Committee Chair, ACE Cambodia, PO Box 860, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Tel. +855-12-810443. Fax +855-23-426608. Email: sreng.mao@phnomphenh.idp.edu.au. Http://www.idpcambodia.org/conference

12 *TESL Reporter 34,1 (2001), pp. 12-21*

Welcoming ESL Learners into Mainstream Classes: An Experience of Classroom Research and Publication

Charles Rice
Tohoku International School, Sendai, Japan

Much research shows that ESL learners learn best in active student-centered classes which give wide opportunity for authentic language practice. However, as they leave the ESL environment to enter the mainstream, the learning environment may dramatically change, particularly since they most often enter the mainstream at a low-end track in which students are not often afforded learner-centered interactive methods considered too accelerated for them by many mainstream teachers. But what ESL learners need, and what their mainstream teachers may be apprehensive of offering the native speakers, much less students seen as language deficient, is exactly what the whole group can benefit from in a variety of ways. This paper first discusses instructional theory that stresses authentic language and reality-based work which puts learners at the center of action, and secondly, gives an example of a model that worked well in classes of mixed language ability students.

A Rationale

All learners need to know that the material they are asked to master will be functional in their own lives in some way. Language learners in particular look for utility in their lessons. What teacher hasn't heard students question the relevancy of the skills and content they are asked to master? Answers to their question often sound weak, and teachers can find it absurd and frustrating to be in competition for the minds of their students with the world students are being prepared for. Especially with secondary students, it is extremely difficult to interest them in the work at hand without clear and interesting connections to the "real world." They are much more concerned about their wider lives outside of the school environment. For both core content classes and the language classes that prepare ESL learners for core, students crave for authenticity in the work we ask them to do.

When I encountered mixed language ability classes and the special challenges they posed, I tried various methods to address the wide range of levels present. As I catered to one language level, others would feel either neglected or overwhelmed. What was needed were lessons and activities that would benefit and appeal to all, regardless of their language abilities, and what students wanted was connection to the real world. It was left for them and I to see that the class in all its diversity was the real world, a

reflection of the world in which people work together, with all their strengths and weaknesses, to get real things done. I was reminded of the ideas of John Dewey who believed that the school should be a microcosm of society in which students of all backgrounds would learn together and support each other in a beehive of community action. Working collaboratively in classroom situations to produce clear learning outcomes and tangible results similar to those of the authentic workplace is often called cooperative learning. Its strength lies in the active participation of students in their own learning. The value of cooperative learning and critical thinking as cousins in learner- centered teaching is well established and figures highly in nontraditional methods of education, but they are not recent developments. The philosophy behind them, and the hands-on activities that necessarily go along with them, lie with the ideas of Dewey, ideas as fresh and relevant today as when he offered them a century ago. In his 1899 treatise *The School and Society*, he reminds us that "Personalities which became effective in action were bred and tested in the medium of action" (1990, p. 11). Of his goals for instruction he says,

> . . . But if the end in view is the development of a spirit of social co-operation and community life, discipline must grow out of and be relative to such an aim . . . They are doing a variety of things, and there is confusion, the bustle, that results from activity. But out of the occupation, out of doing things that are to produce results, and out of doing these in a social and co-operative way, there is born a discipline of its own kind and type. Our whole conception of school discipline changes when we get this point of view. In critical moments we all realize that the only discipline that stands by us, the only training that becomes institution, is that got through life itself. (pp. 16-17)

Dewey challenged educators to build action and meaning into instruction, to connect our students with the building of society by encouraging the society of the classroom.

A higher degree of cultural diversity in the classroom today poses additional challenges, such as guiding mainstreamed ESL learners to authentic language parity with their native speaking peers while increasing whole class mastery of content knowledge and life skills in an environment that is interesting, empowering and relevant to the world our students will enter. This is a tall task, especially in respect to language instruction for non-English speaking minority and immigrant students. But, there is a good deal of evidence that learner-centered approaches are beneficial in both language and core content acquisition. In writing on learner-centered activities in foreign language teaching, Ballman (1998) discusses research and benefits and concludes that it is shown that students should be active participants in their learning and that they need an environment rich in opportunities to practice language autonomously. She cites Long and Porter (1985) who say that group work increases such opportunities while also

providing a positive affective climate and a greater degree of individualized instruction and motivation. Ballman emphasizes the importance that the type of group activity should be meaning-focused, that students must stay on task, and that the purposefulness of the activity is made clear to the students. She is speaking of instruction in the language classroom, but we must extend the same principles to the mainstream they will eventually enter.

When ESL learners are mainstreamed they must be placed in an environment of heightened sensitivity to their specialized needs and in which the selection of teaching methods will maximize their success along with the whole class. As they are not yet at the same developmental stage in their second language as their native speaking peers, their confidence must be fortified in ways that build whole group solidarity. This is particularly important for students of middle and high school ages who are keenly aware of social dynamics and to whom group inclusion is much more important than chancing public mistakes, however insignificant. It is believed that language learners do best when they identify with and admire the culture of the target language (Cook, 1996, p. 97). Likewise, if learners feel excluded by the mainstream cultural group due to language deficiencies, they may feel rejection of the target language to be in their interests. In Cook's comparison of language learning models, the acculturation model discussed emphasizes the influence of the relationship of the language learner's social group and the social group of the speakers of the target language. It is proposed that the learners will not learn the language very well if they think of themselves as inferior or superior to the target language group (Cook, 1996, p. 169). Since teachers cannot ensure the mainstream learning environment will be free of negative social factors, it is imperative to offer the classroom as a harbor where risk is relatively safe for language learners, and where their mistakes won't be damaging to their motivation. It is equally important to offer substantive content and challenging interactive lessons appropriate for the grade level of the class. Cooperative learning strategies address these issues well. Olsen and Kagan (1994) find three major benefits in the use of cooperative learning strategies: they provide ways to structure interactions between students; they address both content area learning and language development needs; and they allow for increased opportunities for individualized instruction. Content area classes structured along cooperative learning principles provide an active, learner-centered environment within which mainstreamed ESL learners can comfortably experiment with a variety of authentic language tasks, both oral and written, such as questioning, clarifying, describing and paraphrasing, and in which native speakers are equally enriched. Able English speakers and ESL learners working closely together also allows for the positive dimension of a peer support structure which both sides enjoy.

In their 1999 study, Collier and Thomas compare remedial-type ESL programs, still commonly found today, and enrichment programs using cooperative learning, process writing, performance and portfolio assessment, critical thinking, and other non-traditional strategies. They analyzed data from 23 school districts in 15 U.S. states and found a consistent negative impact of remedial ESL on the learners' long-term achievement in the mainstream curriculum. Their research shows that despite great initial progress in the first few years of any language program, English language learners lose ground when they encounter the cognitive and academic demands of mainstream classes in middle and high school in comparison to the advancing native English speakers. My experience with mainstreamed ESL learners bears this out. The mainstreamed students begin to fall behind almost immediately, from which they often perceive recovery to be impossible.

This occurs for various reasons, one being that the teaching methods employed may not be responsive to their needs. Another is that many students are overwhelmed when they realize the extent of the two challenges before them: to master the content knowledge and to continue an uphill battle with their second language. Confidence is essential, but once they find themselves treading water in a treacherous sea they begin to lose hope. In addition, cultural backgrounds which may preclude questioning the teacher or discourage involvement in discussions further hobble their success (Cook, 1996; Davidson, 1994). Also, many feel a sense of inferiority in relation to their native speaker peers even before they enter the mainstream. When ESL classes are perceived as remediation, there will be a negative influence on student success. This is so even in the case of ESL programs in international schools abroad where English is the mainstream teaching language, but the national culture is the culture of the majority of ESL learners. Stigmatizing labels can add to already low self-esteem and frustration due to inability to adequately express oneself in a new language. And though students may receive needed language assistance in an ESL program before entering mainstream classes, they often receive inadequate academic preparation. Collier and Thomas (1999) tell us that when teachers focus on remedial skills watered down curriculums are the norm, and that when students realize they are not receiving age-appropriate school work they tune out.

In response to these problems, Collier and Thomas (1999) promote replacing remedial type classes with integrated enrichment experiences in which classes of native speakers and ESL learners are challenged academically in an engaging and language rich environment where they can use their individual strengths as resources to support and teach each other. For mainstream teachers, however, learner-centered enrichment models of instruction may seem more suitable to honors level classes or gifted students rather than groups of mixed language ability students. Mainstream teachers who know little about the linguistic needs of ESL learners often do not know how to address them

in their classes, and may be apprehensive of using instructional methods that seer accelerated for the level of classes which include language learners. Others may reaso that as the students were deemed ready for the mainstream the best course of action i to expect of them what would be normally expected of the native speakers in the sam group, without special considerations. However, ESL learners must have thei specialized needs and stages of development taken into account for them to successfull overcome the transition. They need to be affirmed and made to feel comfortable in relaxed environment, but one that does not allow them to be passive.

An environment built for success is one that involves highly interactive activitie with English language modelers in the content area, allowing for much opportunity fo successful communication in many contexts. As is aptly stated by Davidson (1994) "ESL learners must have a carefully integrated program of both language-consciou content teaching and content-based language instruction" (p. 91). The question fo teachers becomes how to create an environment within the whole group setting whicl addresses the mainstreamed ESL learners' needs without diluting the instruction o neglecting the native speakers. But, is this the dilemma it seems? Good teachers knov that there are various learner types in any group and adjust their teaching method accordingly. Meeting the needs of mainstreamed ESL learners requires additiona awareness, but many of the principles applicable to their success are equally beneficia for the whole group. As language students learn faster when the language in th classroom is authentic, purposeful and content rich, so will all the students, as will al benefit from group interaction in meaningful activities. When the activities includ English language modelers as partners, the ESL learners can only achieve succes sooner. And when the classroom activities are structured in such a way that the languag learners contribute their strengths, all will benefit. Such a classroom does not only cate to mainstreamed ESL learners, it is a recipe for success of the whole group.

This is the value of the type of learning work which I give an example of in thi paper. It lies in the investment made by the students in themselves and in the group They literally find themselves in the work. As they begin to see results and understan the implications of their work and others, they find meaning in it. Students of diverse backgrounds and language abilities have the opportunity to bring to the classroom thei own ways of thinking, their culture, and their language. As they do, they find thei stream converging with the streams of their peers moving ultimately towards a fully blended final product in which they've invested themselves individually and as a unifie group, much in the same way that a group of engineers will develop a project or a grou of line workers assemble an automobile. At the end of the day each person feels a sens of accomplishment when the bridge is constructed or the cars roll off the end. Thi feeling is a powerful force in its validation of the work done and in the accomplishmen

of the individual. It is a pride-building and work-affirming force. When teachers promote this level of validation and autonomy in the educational process student perceptions of school as a generally passive system of jumping through hoops, or bypassing them altogether, may be turned around.

In particular, ESL learners greatly benefit when each is affirmed through using and sharing the unique strengths they bring to the classroom (Rosenthal, 2000; Collier & Thomas, 1999; Davidson, 1994). Their strengths may be new perspectives, a high degree of motivation to succeed, a respect for other languages and cultures, and a heightened understanding of language attributed to their bilingualism, among others, which can impact the entire group. Perhaps best are the simple contributions from their cultural backgrounds which can be truly mind opening for monolinguals in the class. I found in my cooperative learning experiences with mixed language ability students that ESL learners who were able to integrate their own cultural perspectives and materials into the mainstream class immediately began to exhibit a sense of ownership and involvement that persisted long after. From that step, motivation to persevere with their new language became easier to find.

An Example

In designing a cooperative learning project I looked for issues and topics that would address the students' concerns well. In a group discussion of issues in our mainstream world history class one problem that emerged common to all was the language of the textbook. The native speakers found it dry and the ESL learners found the academic language too challenging. I proposed that the class write their own materials from which all could learn about world regions. A project of this sort uses a tremendous amount of class time and requires real investment by the whole group. Could they do it, or would it fade into a waste of valuable time? After more discussion the students generally thought it was a good idea.

The topic of our research and writing project was the history, geography, and culture of India. Teams were responsible for researching and writing about a portion of one of these areas, and each paper they produced would become a chapter in their book. I divided the class into pairs, or teams of three, carefully considering the students' language abilities and degree of motivation (among other factors such as personality dynamics) in deciding the partners. Due to the length of time involved, it is very necessary for partners to be balanced in abilities and able to work very well together. Each team was then assigned a specific area of the topic to research.

Discussing the entire process and knowing what is expected is crucial for success. Before we began work, guidelines were laid out and discussed, including assessment criteria, so that the students would understand well the challenge before them. It is very

important that they envision what they are expected to do and learn, and how they ar expected to demonstrate that learning. It is best for students to know, and be a part of the assessment process in order for them to benefit from it. If assessment is not clear or is merely a grade on the final project, some students will do as little as possible overly rely on their partners, or work randomly in hopes of hitting it right. They mus know what the goals are, what the steps are to reach them, and what quality work look like. And they each should know what they will be held accountable for. For them no to have clear expected learning outcomes means a quality process of learning from assessment guidelines degenerates into a low level project fun-time atmosphere.

Before the work got underway we looked at model research papers in order for th students to know what a quality paper looks like and how one is put together. In thei own work students were expected to search far and wide for information and to properly document all sources. They utilized the school library, electronic data bases an Internet resources, as well as public libraries and personal contacts. Since few of them knew how to document sources, lessons and exercises in that discipline were essential Creating appendices was another area of new ground for them to cover. As the student got further into the work, more question areas came up. It was a wonderful change o pace for students who had previously been complacent or reticent to speak in class t ask for direction and advice in one area or another and to help each other out. Work became contagious and they would get right into it as soon as they entered class with most all of them accepting the project quite seriously.

Peer proofreading and editing became one of the major components of the project. As notes were taken and material compiled, it fell to the higher language ability students to help instruct their less able partners in language related issues. Written work was also proofread by other teams, marked with questions and suggestions and returned to the original authors for correction and revision. This process greatly helped students to see the importance of clarity in writing and of collaboration.

When the written work was completed we held conferences where each team participated in reporting and discussing the successes and pitfalls of group researching and writing. This was a valuable opportunity for student reflection on their own learning and on their individual responsibilities. Students saw where and why things went well, and where the process broke down. Self evaluation raised their consciousness of how they learned best and how good quality work was produced individually and collaboratively.

Finally came the compiling of all the research into chapters and the designing and construction of the book. The cover design was arrived at by class consensus and each team designed a colorful first page for their own chapter. The entire package was then

assembled for publication, pages were numbered and a table of contents was made. Pairs volunteered for these various jobs, as well as the long job of copying it all on an office copier and getting the color pages and cover card stock copied locally.

After binding and distributing, we proudly arrived at the next major part of the project: each team was to share what they had learned with the whole class. Reading of each chapter was assigned before the authors would teach and field questions. Everyone was asked to listen, take notes, ask questions and learn what each of the other teams had to teach. Teams felt expert on their portion of the history or culture of India and were able to teach the class what they knew. For the most part they were confident to do this, and were proud of what they had accomplished. They showed pictures, maps, and other items during the teaching sessions and the room gradually became decorated with pictures and goods of India. I believe the students found themselves much more interested in social studies, in writing and in the process of learning than they ever had. It was a long haul and required strong commitment on my part, and administrative support as well. This particular project took more than one academic quarter to complete, but in the end it paid off greatly for all involved. To celebrate completion, the entire class met downtown at an Indian restaurant for a wonderful self-congratulatory dinner.

The project was very successful in teaching the research writing process and the skill and necessity of producing high quality work as well as in teaching content material in a way that built in ownership and therefore retention of that knowledge. The language rich classroom environment significantly benefitted the ESL learners by allowing unlimited opportunities for language practice in informal authentic situations. It became nearly impossible for them not to be directly involved with their new language. Besides the reading and writing involved, working with their partners, whole group conferencing and student teaching created oral dimensions as well. The various project components offered opportunities for valid assessment of student knowledge and skills, and student-created exams of the core content material taught by them filled out a solid evaluation of what was learned. In addition, there was great improvement in student interaction, social skill development, and connectedness with the learning process that lent a cheerful atmosphere to the class. And especially for the ESL learners, there developed a stronger sense of self confidence and unity with the class as their native English speaking peers took on roles of partner and guide through the process. They became much more immersed in the construction and use of language as a result. Equally important, the process significantly raised student interest in learning. It gave them a sense of doing real work in a realistic situation where they saw concrete results in the final product, and felt like authentic authors. It was heart-warming to see their joy when the ninety-two page nicely designed books were distributed and each saw their name on the introduction page beside the portion they had authored. I believe it was an experience they will not forget,

and I know I won't. Students who had previously felt little connection with the learning process and disliked school were proud and eager to bring home what they had created. They felt ownership in their class and their school, but more importantly they felt ownership in their own lives through the work they accomplished, work which initiated a change in attitude and interest that lingered on well after the completion of the project. Some of the same students later went on with others to use their experience in completing school-published cooperative studies titled *The History, Culture and Geography of China*, and *The Culture of Japan.*

Conclusion

Young people want to know what school has to do with the real world outside the windows. They need meaning and results in their lives and have little patience with waiting for a "someday" payoff. Their discontent leads directly to apathy, and even anger, when they feel defeated by school or just don't see the point of it in their lives. ESL learners in particular can become quickly frustrated with the effort necessary to gain the level of fluency needed to use the second language in authentic situations. For many, the longer they are forced to stick with it, without clear results, the more convinced they become that they cannot succeed. Before this happens positive confidence building language experiences are needed to encourage the will to apply themselves to the task. With cooperative learning strategies, and others in the learner-centered toolbox, teachers have the means to make firmer connections with the actual life and work of the social enterprise beyond the school. These tools can go far in producing curriculums of greater meaning and worth to students, and the community, by better preparing them to become confident young adults. It is not just that more authentic work is brought to our students by these methods, but also that they bring themselves to it. With that comes validation of themselves in the work they do, with all the positive repercussions that brings.

Students, and teachers too, who tend to see little validation of their hard work in the incremental advancements of their students, can find a sense of accomplishment in work which so clearly comes to successful conclusion, with the added value of a tangible and meaningful final product to celebrate. In his time, Dewey clearly saw the weakness of preparing students for future society in a medium that paradoxically did not contain social spirit or relevancy to students' lives. In *The School and Society* he warned "It is our social problem now, even more urgent than in the time of Plato, that method, purpose, understanding, shall exist in the consciousness of the one who does the work, that his activity shall have meaning to himself' (1990, p. 23). Perhaps in our time it is even more important to bring real meaning to our often troubled classrooms.

References

Ballman, Terry L. (1998). From teacher centered to learner centered. In J. Harper, M. Lively, & M. Williams, (Eds.), *The Coming of Age of the Profession: Issues and Emerging Ideas for the Teaching of Foreign Languages* (pp. 97-111). Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Collier, Virginia P., & Thomas, Wayne, P. (1999). Making U. S. schools effective for English language learners. Part 2. *TESOL Matters*, *9*(4). Retrieved December 22, 2001, from the World Wide Web:<http://www.tesol.org/pubs/articles/tm991001.html.

Cook, Vivian. (1996). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. London: Arnold.

Davidson, Chris. (1994). Integrating ESL into the mainstream: An Australian perspective. In A. Blackledge, (Ed.), *Teaching Bilingual Children* (pp. 83-99). Staffordshire: Trentham Books Ltd.

Dewey, John. (1990). *The School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Original works published together 1956).

Olsen, Roger E. W-B., & Kagan, Spencer. (1992). About cooperative learning. In C. Kessler, (Ed.), *Cooperative Language Learning* (pp. 1-30). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Rosenthal, Judith W. (2000). ESL students in the mainstream. In L. F. Kasper et al (Eds), *Content-based College ESL Instruction* (pp. 71-90). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

About the Author

Charles Rice recently returned to the United States after ten years of teaching English language and social sciences at the secondary and post-secondary levels in Japan and China. He now teaches in Tucson, Arizona. He holds a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Massachusetts and will enter a University of Arizona Ph.D program in 2001. His professional interests include inter-cultural and collaborative education.

22 *TESL Reporter 34,1 (2001), pp. 22—34*

Form-focused Negative Feedback: Correcting Three Common Errors

David C. S. Li and Alice Y. W. Chan
City University of Hong Kong

Introduction: To Correct or Not to Correct?

It is well-known that advocates and practitioners of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach tend to refrain from correcting learners' errors or using explicit grammar rules to explain and to help learners overcome erroneous structures or usages (Richards & Rogers, 1986). Indeed, error correction is seen as counter-productive on the grounds that it may impact negatively on the learner's motivation to use the target language.

Recent research in second language acquisition, however, has shown that form-focused instruction and explicit feedback on students' errors can assist or even accelerate the learning process (e.g., Carroll & Swain, 1993; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Granger & Tribble, 1998; Long & Robinson, 1998; Zhou, 1992). The general approach adopted is called *consciousness raising* (CR), using form-focused negative feedback[1] to help learners notice and overcome persistent common errors by progressively approximating target language norms (Rutherford, 1998; Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1998).

In this paper, we would like to demonstrate how CR as an approach can be adopted to give collective error correction in class using three errors commonly found among Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners. The treatment of these three errors has been the focus of an empirical study, the complete details of which are being reported elsewhere (Chan & Li, to appear). The findings in the study show that the proposed model of remedial instruction is conducive to helping learners notice and overcome the erroneous structures. The correction procedure consists of algorithmically structured, cognitively manageable steps in the form of questions requiring (often) straightforward answers. As we will demonstrate below, the proposed model of remedial instruction is characterized by four design features: (a) pedagogically sound input to help learners notice the error and the correct model, (b) proceduralized steps supported by instructive examples, (c) explicit rules built into the steps to help learners conceptualize the error correction procedure involved, and (d) reinforcement exercises to consolidate the learner's grasp of the form and function of the correct model.

Collective Form-focused Negative Feedback: Correcting Three Common Errors

Three common errors among Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners were selected for experimentation. They are pseudo-tough movement (Yip, 1995; Li & Chan, 1999; e.g., *I am difficult to learn English), the misuse of the verb *concern* and the related confusion with the adjective *concerned* in the expression *be concerned about* (e.g., *your father concerns your future), and the misuse of the connective *on the contrary* to express a contrast between two different persons or things (e.g., *Hong Kong is now part of China; on the contrary, Taiwan is not). Below, we will go through the oral correction discussion of each of these three errors. To make explicit the rationale behind individual steps, the correction procedure will be structured in different phases. In each phase we will indicate what the teacher should or may do, followed by detailed instructions for learners as used in our own study. The errors or language examples, however, are for illustration only. As the context of language teaching and learning varies from place to place, readers who are considering replicating the instructional method should make the necessary adaptations to better suit the level and needs of their students.

Correcting "Pseudo-tough Movement" Errors

Phase One: Help Learners Notice the Error

Are the following sentences correct? Give a ✓ if you think so, and a ✘ if you don't think so.

(1) I am difficult to learn English.	
(2) Graduates are not easy to find a job.	
(3) Boys are easier to get their parents' permission to go camping.	
(4) You are impossible to stay here overnight.	
(5) They are inconvenient to go out now.	
(6) Hong Kong students are common to go to school late.	

Phase Two: Go Through the Error Correction Procedure Using Q-A

Can you identify and circle the adjectives in these sentences?

They are: _____

Let's look at sentence number (1):

I am difficult to learn English.

Can you work out **what** is difficult?

(a) _____ is difficult.

Now, can you work out **for whom XXX is difficult**?

(b) for _____

Okay, can you put (a) and (b) together and say what is difficult, and for whom?

(c) for _____ is difficult.

(c) is correct; can you identify the subject?

✓ <u>for me to learn English</u> is difficult

But English sentences with long subjects are not preferred. They are usually avoided. How can this be improved?

To improve (c), move the subject to the right, after the adjective, resulting in (d):

(for me to learn English) _____ is difficult ↓

(d) _____ is difficult for me to learn English

Then put the word "It" in the subject position, resulting in (e):

(e) It is difficult for me to learn English.

Phase Three: Consolidate Learners' Understanding by Repeating the Correction Procedure

Let's try to correct another sentence, say, number (5):

They are inconvenient to go out now.

Can you work out **what** is inconvenient?

(f) _____ is inconvenient.

Now, can you work out **for whom XXX is inconvenient**?

(g) for _____.

Okay, can you put (f) and (g) together and say what is inconvenient, and for whom?

(h) for _____ is inconvenient.

(h) is correct; can you identify the subject?

✓ <u>for them to go out now</u> is inconvenient.

But English sentences with long subjects are not preferred. They are usually avoided. How can this be improved?

To improve (h), move the subject to the right, after the adjective, resulting in (i):

(i) _____ is inconvenient for them to go out now.

Then put the word "It" in the subject position, resulting in (j):

(j) **It** is inconvenient for them to go out now.

Phase Four: Summarize the Correction Procedure

Now can you work out the correction of one more sentence, say, number (4)?

You are impossible to stay here overnight.

Step 1: what is ADJ?

Step 2: for whom?

Step 3: put Steps 1 and 2 together (what should the VERB be, "is" or "are"?)

Step 4: move the subject to the right, after the VERB and ADJ.

Step 5: put "It" at the beginning of the sentence.

Phase Five: Give Supplementary Information About the Error Where Appropriate

Notice that the usage problem "I am difficult to . . ." frequently occurs with the following adjectives:

easy, difficult, common, necessary, convenient, inconvenient, possible, probable, impossible, improbably, etc.

Phase Six: Consolidate Learners' Understanding Through Reinforcement Exercises

Phase Seven: Explain the Circumstances Under Which Sentences With a Similar Structure are Grammatical

After the learners have become reasonably familiar with the target structure, the teacher can deal with one residual problem: the structural pattern where "NP is Adj. to V" is grammatical.

Now look at the following sentences.

(7) Mary is difficult to convince.

(8) John is easy to please.

(9) This question is impossible to answer.

Are they correct? _____

Why are they correct? Although they look similar to the incorrect sentences (1) to (6) above, they are actually different in structure.

Sentences with verbs such as "convince," "please" and "answer," etc. require an **object** to complete them, i.e. *convince* ***somebody***, *please* ***somebody*** and *answer* ***something.***

What is the object of *convince* in (7)? _____

What is the subject of sentence (7)? _____

What is the object of *please* in (8)? _____

What is the subject of sentence (8)? _____

What is the object of *answer* in (9)? _____

What is the subject of sentence (9)? _____

What is the relationship between the **objects** of these verbs and the **subjects** of the sentences? _____

A useful rule of thumb is:

If **missing Object of Verb = Subject**

Then ✓ Subject + is (are) + ADJECTIVE + to + VERB

e.g., Mary is difficult to convince

This question is impossible to answer.

Now, can you determine whether the following sentences are correct or not?

(10) Mathematics is easy to learn. ☐

(11) John is easy to learn Mathematics. ☐

(12) John is easy to teach. ☐

(13) This lesson is hard to understand. ☐

(14) I am difficult to understand this lesson. ☐

Learners who have grasped the rule should have no problem pointing out that, unlike the rest, (11) and (14) are ungrammatical, and they should also be in a position to explain why.

Correcting the Misuse of the Verb *Concern*

Like "pseudo-tough movement," the misuse of the verb concern among Chinese ESL learners is partly the result of L1 interference. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that the word-for-word translation of the deviant sentence "*your father concerns your future" would result in a perfectly acceptable sentence in Chinese (pronounced in Cantonese):

你 爸 爸 擔 心 你 的 前 途

nei5 baa1 baa1 daam1 sam1 nei5 dik1 cin4 tou4

your father concern your future

If a similar structure is required in the learners' L1, it makes sense to alert them to this structural discrepancy by juxtaposing the correct L1 structure and the corresponding but incorrect L2 structure to help learners notice that the latter is deviant.

Phase One: Use Learners' L1 Knowledge to Elicit the Erroneous Structure

How do you express the following in English?

(1) 我 媽 媽 擔 心 我 的 考 試 成 績

ngo5 maa1 maa1 daam1 sam1 ngo5 dik1 haau2 si5 sing4 zik1

my mother conern my examination results

(My mother is concerned about my examination results.)

Phase Two: Draw Learners' Attention to Two Common Expressions For Signaling the Target Meaning

Two most common expressions we can use are:
CONCERN and BE CONCERNED ABOUT

Would you say any of the following?

(2) My mother concerns my examination results.

(3) My mother concerns about my examination results.

(4) My mother is concerned with my examination results.

Are they correct? _____

So how should we say (1) in English?

Phase Three: Introduce the Rule

Look at the sentence again and answer the following two questions:

(a) Somebody is worried about something. Who is worried?

_____

(b) What causes the worry?

_____

If X = **the person or persons feeling worried**

Y = **cause of the worry**

then X in sentence (1) is _____

Y in sentence (1) is _____

Phase Four: Summarize the Two Options and Illustrate Them With the Example Mentioned

To express the meaning of sentence (1) in English, we have two options:

Option One: Y CONCERN X

Option Two: X BE CONCERNED ABOUT Y

So we can say:

Option One: **My examination results CONCERN my mother.**

Option Two: **My mother IS CONCERNED ABOUT my examination results.**

Phase Five: Show a Few Other Contrastive Examples

Other examples are:

(5) His father's health **concerns** him.

(5a) He **is concerned about** his father's health.

(6) The fact that I lost my job **concerned** my mother.

(6a) My mother **was concerned about** the fact that I lost my job.

(7) What other people think of you **concerns** me.

(7a) **I am concerned about** what other people think of you.

Phase Six: Reiterate the Erroneous Pattern and Present the Two Rules of Thumb

What you should know is that the following pattern is ungrammatical:

(8) ✘ My mother *concerns* my examination results.

(9) ✘ My mother *concerns about* my examination results.

Summary: As a rule ...

I. Some**thing** CONCERNS some**one**

II. Some**one** IS CONCERNED ABOUT some**thing**

Phase Seven: Reinforcement Exercises

Correcting the Misuse of *On the Contrary*

Many advanced learners of English continue to have problems distinguishing between the correct usage of "on the contrary" and other functionally similar connectives such as "in contrast" and "by contrast." Very often, "on the contrary" is wrongly used to express a binary contrast, resulting in erroneous sentences such as "*Hong Kong is part of China. On the contrary, Taiwan is not." It is therefore useful to highlight the contrast between the correct usage of "on the contrary" and that of "in contrast" and "by contrast."

Phase One: Help Learners Notice the Error

Is sentence (1) correct? Why or why not?

(1) The computer system of that company is very advanced. **On the contrary,** ours is very backward.

Phase Two: Correct the Wrong Sentence by Using/Explaining the Proper Connective.

Sentence (1) is wrong. To correct it, the following connectives may be used:

Options:	**IN CONTRAST**
	BY CONTRAST
	BUT
	etc.

So we can say:

(2) ✓ The computer system of that company is very advanced. **In contrast,** ours is very backward.

(3) ✓ The computer system of that company is very advanced. **By contrast,** ours is very backward.

(4) ✓ The computer system of that company is very advanced, **but** ours is very backward.

Phase Three: Introduce the Correct Usage of "On the Contrary"

Then, when should we use the connective "on the contrary"?

Correct Usage

We use "on the contrary" when we have just said or implied that **something is not true**, and are going to say **that the opposite is true** *(Collins Cobuild dictionary)*.

For example,

(5) The assignment is not difficult. **On the contrary**, it is very easy.

(6) I don't think the marking scheme is lenient; **on the contrary**, it is very strict.

Phase Four: Help Learners Recognize the Correct Function of "On the Contrary"

To understand the correct function and usage of "on the contrary," learners should realize that the two clauses must be about the same subject, and that in both clauses

opposing qualities or views are asserted. This goal may be achieved by going through one or two sample sentences as follows:

> Let's try to analyze sentence (5) and see how the mechanism works. There is a clause before "on the contrary" (clause A) and another clause after "on the contrary" (clause B). Write down the two clauses in the space provided:
>
> **Clause A:** _____ **Clause B:** _____
>
> What is being talked about in both clauses **A** and **B**? _____
>
> Is the argument in clause **A** negative or positive? _____
>
> What about the argument in clause **B**, is it negative or positive? _____
>
> What is the relationship between the arguments in clauses **A** and **B**? _____
>
> Actually, the negative argument in **A** is similar to the positive argument in **B**.

A	↔	**B**
Negative		*Positive*
[assignment not difficult]		**[assignment very easy]**

> Now, let's analyze sentence (6) in the same way.
>
> (6) I don't think the marking scheme is lenient; on the contrary, it is very strict.
>
> In this sentence,
>
> **Clause A** is: _____ **Clause B** is: _____
>
> What is being talked about in both clauses **A** and **B**? _____
>
> Is the argument in clause **A** negative or positive? _____
>
> What about the argument in clause **B**, is it negative or positive? _____
>
> What is the relationship between the arguments in clauses **A** and **B**? Fill in the square brackets.

A	↔	**B**
Negative		*Positive*
[ ]		[ ]

Phase Five: Go Back to Wrong Sentence (1) and Ask Learners to Analyze It

> Now, let's look at sentence (1) again and see why the connective is wrong.
>
> (1) The computer system of that company is very advanced. On the contrary, ours is very backward.

In this sentence,

Clause A is: _____ **Clause B** is: _____

Do clauses **A** and **B** talk about the same thing/person? _____

What is being talked about in clause **A**? _____

What is being talked about in clause **B**? _____

Does the relationship that should exist in the use of

"on the contrary" hold? _____

Can we use "on the contrary" here? _____

Which connective is more appropriate? _____

Phase Six: Highlight the Correct Usage and Reiterate the Common Error

What you should know is that:

> "On the contrary" is **NOT** used to *compare things/people/ situations* and say that *they are different from each other.*

Now can you explain why the following sentences are ungrammatical?

(7) ✘ John is always late. **On the contrary**, Mary is always punctual.

(8) ✘ There are 40 students in this class; **on the contrary**, there are 35 students in that class.

(9) ✘ I have two brothers. **On the contrary**, Jane has four.

Phase Seven: Reinforcement Exercises

Conclusion: Key Factors Contributing to Effective Remedial Instruction

We hope to have demonstrated that, for a model of negative feedback or remedial instruction to be effective, the error in question must be shown to be "teachable" and "learnable" (Pienemann, 1984, 1985; Yip, 1995). Consider, for example, the remedial effort needed to correct a wrong complex sentence containing "although" and "but" such as *a*l*though he was hard-working, but he failed the exam*, and the remedial effort needed to make students understand why it is ungrammatical to say: **Tiger is dangerous animal.* While it takes no more than a few minutes to make the class realize the co-occurrence restriction of "although" and "but" in the same complex sentence, in the latter case it is not obvious how the teacher can help learners understand the anomalies and generate normative sentences involving the correct use of articles to express generic

reference (e.g., *A tiger is a dangerous animal; The tiger is a dangerous animal; or Tigers are dangerous animals*). All errors are therefore not equally correctible, and clearly some errors are easier to correct than others. The effectiveness of negative feedback depends on whether it is possible to break down the correction process into a sequence of cognitively manageable steps, in that the effort involved in between steps requires pedagogically minimal effort on the part of the learner. Here, two closely related research constructs "teachability" and "learnability" are relevant (Pienemann, 1984, 1985; Yip, 1995). To what extent the correction procedure of a given error type is teachable or learnable, is a research question that should be explored empirically, through a process of "trial and error" and progressively in successive stages of fine-tuning. This way, we believe, the content of the remedial instruction material thus developed is more likely to be robust and effective.

In terms of the design features of an effective model of negative feedback or remedial instruction, we think that it is best to have the proceduralized steps clearly formulated in a handout for students' reference, supported by instructive examples of typical errors, and supplemented by reinforcement exercises. In other words, the handout for learners should contain three functional parts: (a) the erroneous structure and the normative correct structure, (b) step-by-step detailed instructions leading to correction, using explicit rules where appropriate, and (c) reinforcement exercises to consolidate and deepen the learner's understanding of the error correction process. The rationale behind this pedagogical design is that, after going through the correction procedure, learners can use the handout as a self-learning aid that can be called upon to reactivate their memory of the steps, as when the learners want to use that structure in their own free writing.

Notes

1. Negative feedback refers to feedback which draws learners' attention to erroneous structures of the target language (Carroll and Swain, 1993).

References

Carroll, S., & Swain, M. (1993). Explicit and negative feedback: An empirical study of the learning of linguistic generalizations. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 15*, 357-358.

Chan, A. Y. W., & Li, D. C. S. (to appear). Form-focused remedial instruction: An empirical study. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*.

Collins Cobuild English Dictionary. (1991). London: HarperCollins Publishers.

Doughty, C., & Varela, E. (1998). Communicative focus on form. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 114-138). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Doughty, C., & Williams, J. (Eds). (1998). *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Granger, S., & Tribble, C. (1998). Learner corpus data in the foreign language classroom: Form-focused instruction and data-driven learning. In S. Granger (Ed.), *Learner English on Computer* (pp. 199-209). London: Longman.

Li, D. C. S., & Chan, A. Y. W. (1999). Helping teachers correct structural and lexical English errors. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics, 4*(1), 79-101.

Long, M., & Robinson, P. (1998). Focus on form: Theory, research, and practice. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds), pp. 15-41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pienemann, M. (1984). Psychological constraints on the teachability of languages. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *6*, 186-214.

Pienemann, M. (1985). Learnability and syllabus construction. In K. Hyltenstam & Pienemann (Eds.), *Modelling and Assessing Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 23-75). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Richards, J. C., & Rogers, T. S. (1986). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A Description and Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rutherford, W. (1988). Consciousness raising and universal grammar. In W. Rutherford & M. Sharwood Smith (Eds), *Grammar and Second Language Teaching: A Book of Readings* (pp. 107-116). New York: Newbury House.

Rutherford, W., & Sharwood Smith, W. (Eds). (1998). *Grammar and Second Language Teaching: A Book of Readings*. New York: Newbury House.

Yip, V. (1995). *Interlanguage and Learnability: From Chinese to English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Zhou, Y. P. (1992). The effect of explicit instruction on the acquisition of English grammatical structures by Chinese learners. In C. James & P. Garrett (Eds.), *Language Awareness in the Classroom* (pp. 254-277). London: Longman.

About the Authors

David C. S. Li is Associate Professor at the Department of English and Communication, City University of Hong Kong. He obtained his BA (English) in Hong Kong, MA (linguistics and applied linguistics) in France, and Ph.D (linguistics) in Germany. His areas of interest include cross-linguistic influence, contrastive grammar studies, code-switching, World Englishes, intercultural pragmatics and intercultural communication.

Alice Y. W. Chan is Assistant Professor at the Department of English and Communication, City University of Hong Kong. She obtained her BA (linguistics) and M. Phil (Computer Speech and Language Processing) in U.K. and her Ph.D (linguistics) in Hong Kong. Her areas of interest include cross-linguistic influence, contrastive grammar studies, phonetics and phonology, error analysis and lexicography.

TESOL Awards are for You!

TESOL Application Awards:

FOR ALL TESOL MEMBERS

TESOL Professional Development Scholarships

(conference registration and pre/post convention institute for each year of TESOL history—35 in 2001!)

FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Albert H. Marckwardt Travel Grants

Ruth Crymes TESOL Fellowship for Graduate Study

(supporting conference attendance and special graduate study projects)

FOR MATERIAL WRITERS

Mary Finocchiaro Award for Excellence in the Pedagogical Materials

(a cash award of $500.00 for non-published materials)

FOR RESEARCHERS

TESOL Research Interest Section/Heinle & Heinle Distinguished Research Award

(including a $1000.00 award from Heinle & Heinle Publishers)

FOR EFL PROFESSIONALS

TESOL/TEFL Travel Grant and the TOEFL Board Awards for International Participation at TESOL

(enabling EFL Professionals to attend the annual convention)

FOR TEACHERS AND TRAINERS

Ruth Crymes TESOL Academy Fellowships

(supporting attendance at TESOL Regional Academies)

TESOL Nomination Awards:

James E. Alatis Award for Service to TESOL

(for outstanding extended service to TESOL)

D. Scott Enright TESOL Interest Section Service Award

(acknowledging outstanding service in TESOL Interest Sections)

TESOL Virginia French Allen Award for Scholarship and Service

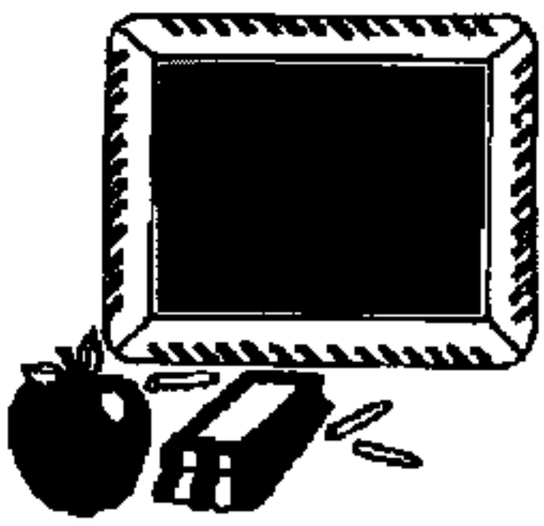
(Honoring scholarship and service at the affiliate level)

TESOL Heinle & Heinle Award for Excellence in Teaching

(to honor excellence among ESOL teachers)

To Apply or Nominate for an Award or for information refer to:
June/July issue of *TESOL Matters*
or...The TESOL Awards Website at http://www.tesol.org/assoc/other/grants/index.html
or...Tessa Epperly at TESOL Central Office (703) 518-2508

Thank you for your support of TESOL Awards...Encourage your colleagues to apply and nominate!



Tips for Teachers

Changing Roles in the Writing Process

Azzeddine Bencherab, Algeria

When one thinks of all the advantages contained in the process approach—as far as writing is concerned—the product approach falls in disfavor.

Among the advantages of the process approach, I would name but a few:

- the topic is explored
- ideas are discovered, explored and organized
- the emphasis is on fluency rather than on accuracy
- last but not least, the class is learner-centered

Below, I will attempt to describe a tried technique that worked successfully with my third year learners.

Writing assignment: What is marine debris caused by? What effects does it have?

Theme covered: Great Challenges to Mankind

Topic covered: Marine Pollution

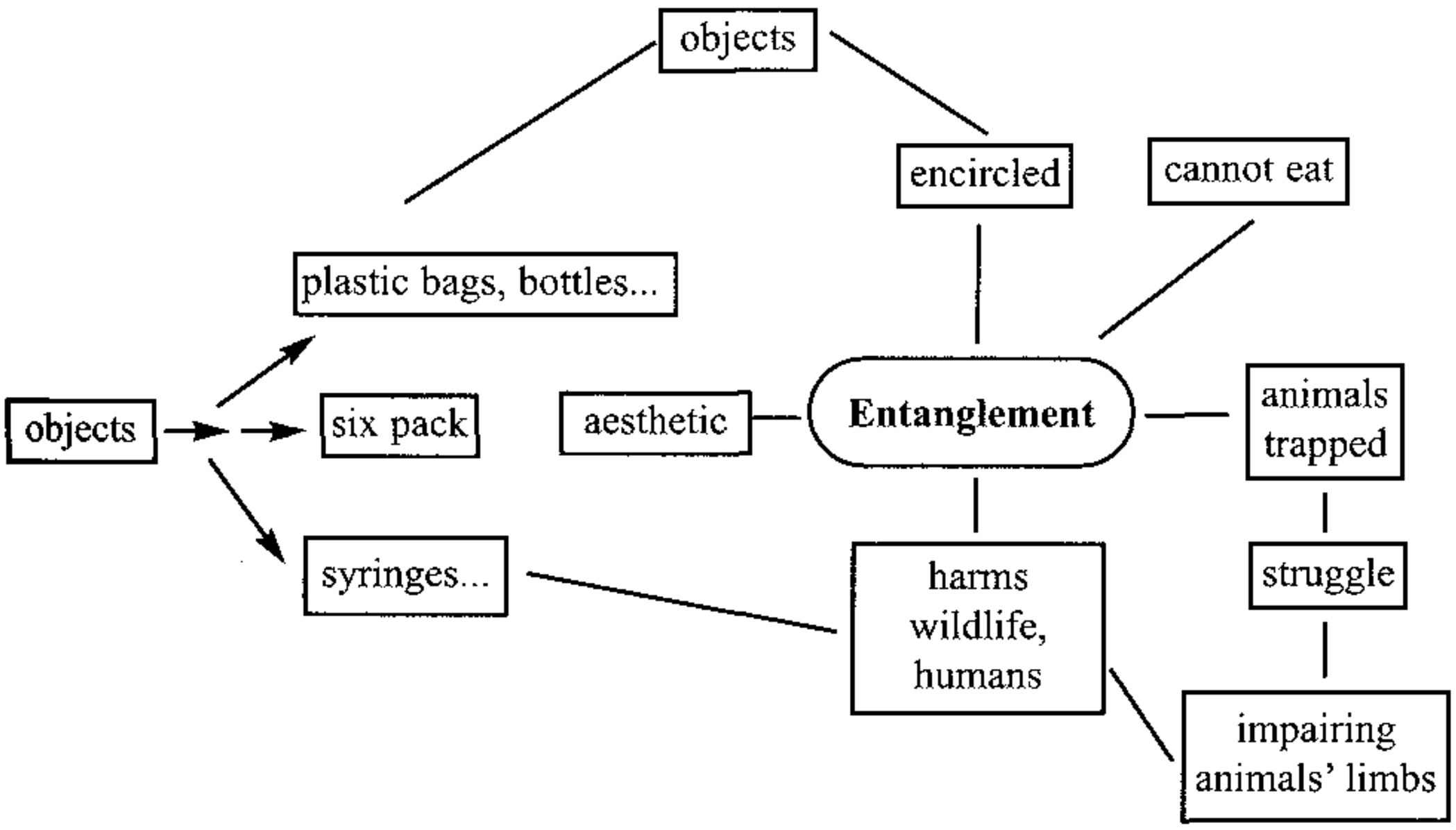
Technique: Clustering

Procedure: (See below)

Step I: Prewriting

This is a step where all those floating ideas acquired during the previous lessons are put onto paper. The word "entanglement" is written on the board. Learners endeavor to think of all lexical items relating to the word (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1



Step 2: Organizing:

Once the operation of generating ideas is over, learners start off grouping material under headings or titles and decide on the organization of their composition. In our case, it will take the following format:

a-Definition: Animals get trapped or encircled

b-Causes: Objects such as plastic bags, fishing nets, and 6-pack plastic rings

c-Consequences: Harmful:

- wildlife (endangered species, trapped animals, suffocation, impairing limbs, etc)
- to humans (provoke injuries, transmissible diseases etc)
- to beaches (unsightly, unsafe, unclean)

Step 3: Writing:

Entanglement is the main problem posed by marine debris. It results when an animal becomes encircled by debris. It can occur accidentally, or when the animal is attracted to the debris.

Entanglement is harmful to wildlife. It can lead to suffocation, loss of limbs or infection. It can also impair an animal's ability to swim, thus causing drowning.

Entanglement is a hazard to people, especially when the debris washes ashore with rotting carcasses of marine life or discarded medical supplies and paraphernalia (syringes, chemicals, needles, etc). Stepping on these objects may cause injuries or disease. This problem can also affect the economy of the community as polluted beaches may have to close.

In order to establish a secure atmosphere and instill a sense of responsibility, learners should not be forced to use all the information featured in the diagram. They should act upon their own beliefs.

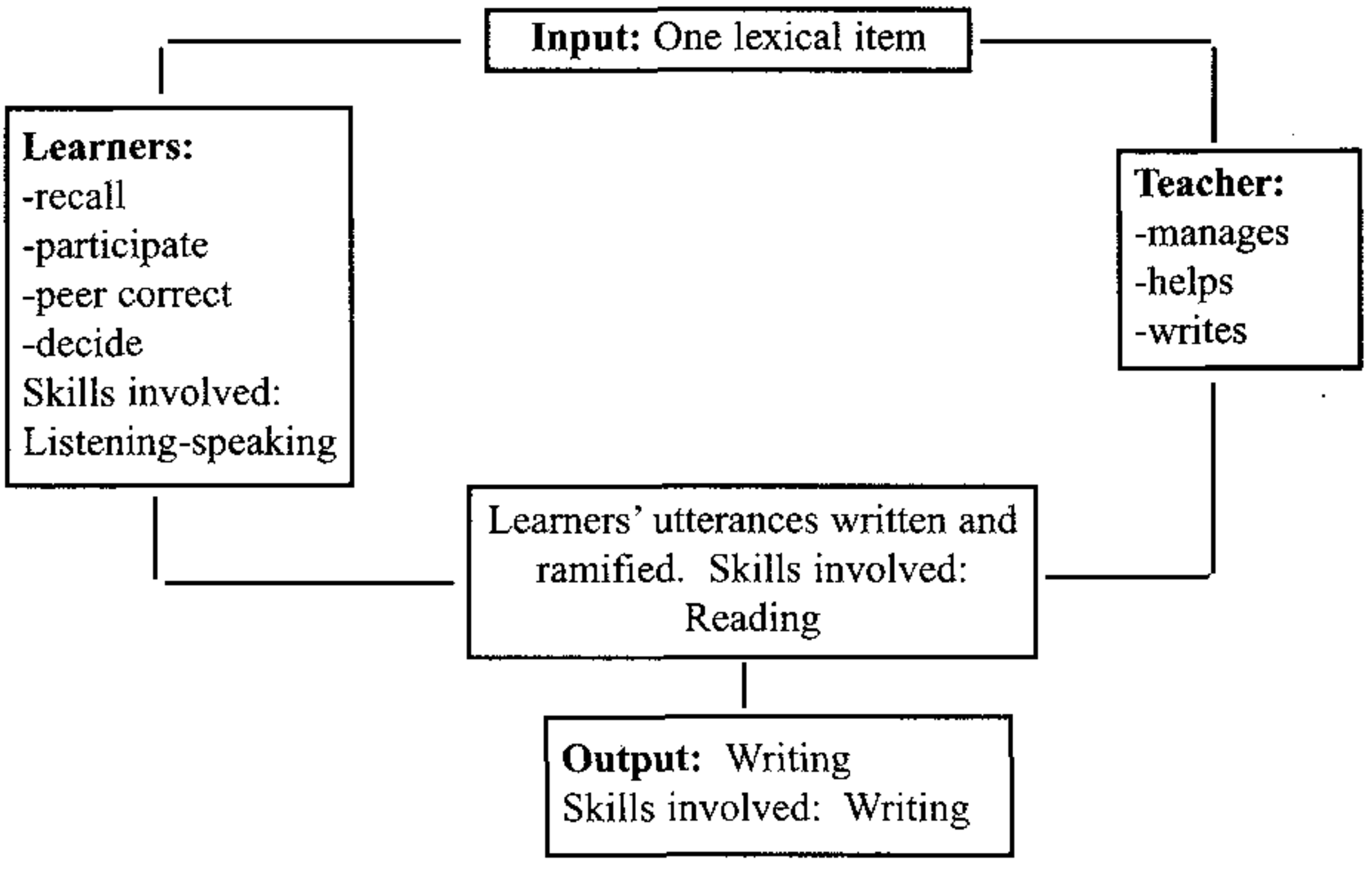
What happens in this writing session is represented in the Appendix (see below).

Conclusion

After careful examination of the Appendix, it becomes amply evident that certain clustering characteristic features are worth being mentioned.

- the task is informed (learners are aware of the learning goal)
- the teacher is no longer the absolute master and transmitter of knowledge to docile learners
- learners are not dealt with as groups but as individuals since each learner has his/her share in the process
- more importantly, perhaps, learners are exposed to a language use situation wherein the major skills are smoothly incorporated. Can we ask for more in a foreign language class?

Appendix



Technology-Enhanced Learning Environments

Review by Randall S. Davis
University of Utah

TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS. Elizabeth Hanson-Smith, Editor. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2000. $29.95 (TESOL member $25.95)

Although the development of technology continues to present new opportunities for learning and teaching, program administrators and educators sometimes find it difficult to understand the technical jargon and logistics of implementing computers in their programs and individual classrooms. Furthermore, those creating educational hardware and software often underestimate the complexity and limitations learners and teachers encounter in using computers, particularly in a foreign language (LeLoup & Ponterio, 1995; Warschauer & Whittaker, 1997).

Technology-Enhanced Learning Environments is one text which seeks to fill this void and present practical case studies within the reach of its readers. This book is part of *Case Studies in TESOL Practice,* which aims to highlight "innovative and effective examples of practice from the point of view of the practitioner (Editor's Preface, v). This particular text focuses on the role of technology within the framework of language learning and teaching and is divided into four parts: (1) Building a Computer Learning Center, (2) Organizing the Curriculum, (3) Engaging Students, and (4) Training Teachers.

Part One outlines two contrasting examples of setting up computer facilities: one in which the educator uses what he terms "guerrilla tactics," or creating a lab from the grass roots up, to build his program's facilities. Such an example will appeal to readers who have no idea where to start planning a computer lab.

Parts Two and Three give informative examples of how to organize materials and student activities around an established computer facility or technology. The examples range from detailing the creation of student activity sheets to be used in the lab to a sample project in which students developed video clips on CD-ROM. One of the challenges after setting up a lab is to fully utilize its capabilities within the logistical framework of the program or class. Each chapter in this section gives practical examples on how to accomplish this.

Finally, Part Four explains examples of teacher-training projects/courses which can help educators develop their own technical skills in the changing world of technology.

Technology-Enhanced Learning Environments is definitely a valuable volume for teachers and program administrators. Its easy-to-read style and the practical example of technology will make an influential contribution to the TESOL community.

References

LeLoup, J. W., & Ponterio, R. (1995). Addressing the need for electronic communication in foreign language teaching. In R. Steinfeldt (Ed.), *Educational Technologies*, monograph of the New York State Council of Educational Associations, 39-54.

Warschauer, M., & Whittaker, P. F. (1997). The Internet for English teaching: Guidelines for teachers. *TESL Reporter, 30*(1), 27-33. Retrieved March 26, 2001, from the World Wide Web: http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Articles/Warschauer-Internet.html.

About the Reviewer

Randall S. Davis (randall@esl-lab.com) teaches at the English Language Institute, University of Utah, and he specializes in the use of technology and web-based learning in the classroom.

Conference Announcements

University of Hawaii at Manoa. October 4-7, 2001. Pacific Second Language Research Forum (PacSLRF) 2001 Conference, Honolulu, Hawaii. Proposal Deadline April 2, 2001. Contact Jim Yoshioka, PacSLRF Conference Co-Chair, c/o National Foreign Language Resource Center, University of Hawaii, 1859 East-West Road #106, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822. Tel. 808-956-9424. Fax 808-956-5983. E-mail:pacslrf@hawaii.edu. Http://www.LLL.hawaii.edu/pacslrf

ASOCOPI (Association Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés). October 12-15, 2001. Conference, "Beyond Language Teaching: Growing Together," Medellin, Colombia. Proposal Deadline June 30, 2001. Contact Alba Lucia Calád, Cra 61 #9-90, Local 5, Cali, Colombia. Te. +572-551-5634. Fax +572-551-5634. E-mail:acalad@hotmail.com Http://www.asocopi.edu.co

Egypttesol. October 26-28, 2001. Annual convention and book exhibition, "Best Practice in TEFL," Cairo, Egypt. Proposal Deadline April 30, 2001. Contact Deena Boraie. E-mail:dboarie@aucegypt.edu or cdc@gega.net. Http://www.Egyptesol.org

Notes to Contributors

The *TESL Reporter* is a semiannual publication of the Division of Languages and Linguistics of Brigham Young University–Hawaii, and is dedicated to the dissemination of ideas and issues of interest to teachers of English to speakers of other languages worldwide.

Articles: Manuscripts (fully refereed) should be typed and double spaced throughout, generally not exceeding twenty pages. Each manuscript should be accompanied by a cover sheet with the title; author's name, position, and address; and a short (less than 50 words) biodata statement. Identifying information should not appear elsewhere in the manuscript in order to insure an impartial review. Authors are encouraged to follow APA style and review past issues of the *TESL Reporter* for matters of style. Any tables, graphs, or illustrations should be sent in camera-ready form whenever possible.

It is expected that manuscripts submitted to the *TESL Reporter* are neither previously published nor being considered for publication elsewhere. Upon publication, authors will receive six complimentary copies of the issue in which their article is published. Manuscripts are generally not returned to authors. Authors should retain a personal copy.

Tips For Teachers: Manuscripts (chosen at the discretion of the editor) should be typed and double spaced throughout, generally not exceeding eight pages. Each manuscript should be accompanied by a cover sheet with the title; author's name, position, and address; and a short (less than 50 words) biodata statement. It is expected that manuscripts submitted to the *TESL Reporter* are neither previously published nor being considered for publication elsewhere. Upon publication, authors will receive three complimentary copies of the issue in which their "tip" is published. Manuscripts are generally not returned to authors. Authors should retain a personal copy

Reviews of recent textbooks, resource materials, tests, and non-print materials (films, tapes, or computer software) are also invited. Potential reviewers who indicate a particular area of interest to the review editor will be contacted concerning recent titles in that area. Requests for review guidelines should be addressed to the review editor. Authors of published reviews will receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which the review is published.

Advertising information is available upon request from the editor.

Abstracts of articles published in the *TESL Reporter* appear in *Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts*.

The opinions and statements expressed by contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or of Brigham Young University–Hawaii.