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

The Voice of America: Moving ESL Students Toward Listening Success

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With the continuous development of China's economic and political reforms and the present policy of opening China's doors to the outside world, studying English is becoming more and more important and popular, especially in the colleges and universities of China. Presently as teachers and students pay more attention to developing the skill of listening in English studies and with the facilities for teaching listening becoming updated, students' ability in listening is greatly improving.

The textbooks popularly used for listening courses in the colleges and universities throughout the country have generally been successfully compiled and are applicable. But using only a textbook is not sufficient in an EFL context. Some extra listening material should be chosen and used in coordination with the textbook in order to provide more opportunities for training and improving students' listening ability. Such supportive listening material, easily obtainable in an EFL as well as an ESL environment, are radio programs. However, effective application of this readily available resource is not easy. It requires careful analysis and planning. A teacher should not simply record the news in English from the radio, take it to class, and play it again and again for the students' so-called listening privilege regardless of student comprehension and interest. The right choice of programs and the appropriate use of them in class is extremely important for the successful application of radio news in English listening skills development.

Among the many English radio programs broadcast the world over, the Voice of America (VOA) is a good selection based upon its wide spectrum of authentic listening materials. This program not only enables students to hear the most natural and idiomatic American English, but also helps them gain more knowledge about practically every facet of human activity. Some of the programs of VOA are broadcast in "special English"— English especially designed for listeners who study English as a second language. It is delivered at a slower rate (about 90 words per minute) and has a smaller vocabulary (about 1,500 basic words with a small number of technical terms) than does regular news which contains sentences of simple grammatical structure, and presents a variety of programs including "News," "Words and Their Stories," and "Science Reports."

The "News" is the main part of the program. It has two distinguishing features: 1) up-to-the-minute, and 2) short and pithy. It reports the latest happenings in the world, and each news item often consists of only three to five grammatically simple sentences. Students who have received some systematic training in listening for a certain period of time—say a year at the college or university level—will not find it very difficult to follow this program, thus allowing the application of the news program to motivate listening comprehension development. How many news items can be dealt with during each class period may depend on how well the students can comprehend the news and how long each news item is. Before class, the teacher should list the words or phrases in the news that the students may not be familiar with and explain them in English to help the students better understand the news. After listening twice, when the students have gotten the general idea of the content, the teacher asks questions s/he has prepared in advance for the students to answer according to what they have heard. The teacher may also ask the students to organize the news facts according to time and to retell the news orally in English in order to enhance their speaking ability in the listening class.

After a period of training with the news program, students may benefit from the other programs on VOA, such as "Words and Their Stories," another Special English program, which explains the origins of some words and phrases in English based on scientific studies or folk etymology and which helps the listeners understand the English language and remember these words and phrases. Yet another English program, the "Science Report," introduces listeners to the latest developments and discoveries in modern science and technology and helps them update their knowledge in simple and easy-to-follow English. Though some words in the reports may sound entirely new to the students, they will be able to understand the meaning of the words after they comprehend the reports with the help of their teacher, at the same time enlarging their vocabulary and increasing their understanding of the changing world around them.

In the process of support and training, it is essential that the teacher give directions to the students whenever needed in order to ensure effective listening in the class. Sometimes some students cannot understand a news story, not because they are poor in listening, but because they are not familiar with the content of the news. To remedy this, the teacher should ask the students to read magazines and newspapers in English, or even in the native language, and to frequently listen to the radio or watch TV so as to broaden their scope of knowledge and enlarge their vocabulary. In so doing, they will be able to understand the radio programs more easily.

Furthermore, from the early stages of such listening training, the teacher should not only clarify language points, but also help the students learn about special features of English news and understand related skills in comprehending news stories. For example,

the students might be given some idea about how a typical news item is composed and tell them that the leading sentence (the first sentence) of a news item conventionally contains all the significant facts—the who, what, when, where, and occasionally the why and how, with each succeeding sentence being less significant than the preceding.

It is advisable that, at different learning stages, the training be conducted in the form of intensive and extensive listening. Intensive listening, to be conducted at the early stage of the training, consists of catching the general idea of a news story, correctly answering the questions raised by the teacher, and being able to understand and repeat each sentence. Care must be taken in the intensive listening stage, however, not to wrongly lead the students into putting their listening emphasis on individual words or sentences instead of the main idea of the news. In the extensive stage students should be able to retell the news story in their own words. They can retell the news once together as a class, with everyone orally contributing main ideas and details of the news story in an organized fashion. Then they can retell the news stories in groups of two or three. Finally, they can each write down the news story individually for their instructor.

After having gained some experience in listening to the Special English program, the students will have both a stronger desire and a better ability to challenge the VOA's more advanced Standard English program, a program delivered at normal speed with a larger vocabulary and more complicated grammatical structures, whereby similar learning strategies are applied. Once a student can follow this program, s/he will have little difficulty in understanding other English programs on radio stations throughout the world and can thus comprehend up-to-date knowledge, impossible to gather from dated textbooks, but readily available from English radio programs such as Voice of America!

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Improved Listening Comprehension Through Video

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Unfortunately for many students, listening to audio tapes produces the same results as trying to learn a language over the telephone — frustration and boredom. Yet few TESOL instructors would advocate disposing of audio tapes. Perhaps our repertoire of tools, while effective to a large extent, needs simply to be augmented. Despite our best efforts as teachers, the second language classroom, especially the EFL classroom, simply lacks some of the prime ingredients of the human interactive aspects of language learning needed to aid comprehension and make learning meaningful.

Comprehensible Input and Cultural Cues

The typical foreign language classroom lacks sufficient depth in supplying the non-linguistic cues that aid listening comprehension.   One reason could be an overly narrow definition of comprehensible input. "One of the obvious things we all know is the fact that we communicate with our facial expressions, clothing, gestures, tone of voice . . . as well as through spoken or written words" (Fanselow, 1992, p. 148). In addition, the rate of delivery, eye contact, body language, schemata, situational contexts, and especially cultural references aid native speakers in comprehending a message.

The language redundancy provided by these non-linguistic cues fills in communication gaps and reinforces and clarifies meaning, not written scripts of conversation. As is, the typical language classroom can provide only a single model in the teacher and limited support in the form of modified discourse, print sources (including scripted textual drills), computers, and photographs. Such models and techniques are effective. Nevertheless, studies (e.g., Hanley, Herron, and Cole (1995)) suggest that more is needed to provide truly comprehensible input. The use of video can fill the gap.

Jorden (1991) says, "The linguistic code is only part of the challenge of learning a foreign language: the delivery system must be analyzed and drilled with equal emphasis, and video is an ideal medium for this component of foreign language learning" (p. 386). This delivery system includes non-linguistic conversation cues within cultural and situational contexts which supply redundancies and elaborations that native speakers and non-native speakers alike use in normal listening comprehension. Video-based language

classes can present the whole delivery system (comprehensible input, redefined) in a framework that also addresses psychological needs of the students, such as attitude.

Before video-based learning can be considered seriously, however, definitions of comprehensible input in the classroom need to be expanded to include not only modified discourse, but also cultural and other non-linguistic cues, as well as the effect of class materials and teaching methodology on student attitudes and motivation to learn. "Theorists today stress the importance . . . of providing the language learner with contextualized and meaningful input (Herron, 1994, p. 190). Such input suggests much more than listening to speech and reading, regardless how varied and interesting the supplemental material may be. Krashen (1988) says, "There are basically two ways in which the teacher can aid comprehension, linguistic and non-linguistic" (p. 334). This type of "contextualized and meaningful input" (including the nonlinguistic) nearly completes the definition of comprehensible input that students need to fully acquire a second language.

Research on the Benefits of Video Learning

Non-linguistic cues and the specifics of video notwithstanding, several studies have shown that syntactic modifications (such as restatements or other forms of repetition) provide "information redundancies and elaborations" (Rubin, 1994, p. 203) that aid language students in listening comprehension. One study by Chaudron in 1983 and another by Chiang and Dunkel in 1992 showed that redundancy improved listening comprehension. "Chiang and Dunkel found that modification (repetition of constituents, paraphrase, and use of synonyms) works best with high-intermediate students as compared to low-intermediate students" (Rubin, 1994, p. 203). Studies by Pica, Young, Doughty, and Glisan found similar evidence that redundancy helps listening comprehension for low-intermediate and advanced students respectively (Rubin, 1994, p. 203).

It is reasonable to deduce that other forms of redundancy and elaboration may likewise aid in listening comprehension, and effective listening in the classroom can itself act as a marker or advance organizer for comprehending later reading passages. The use of video can, therefore, potentially aid language students in not only listening comprehension, but also reading comprehension. Furthermore, acquired cultural and contextual cues provided by video learning may enhance an ESL student's comprehension of class lectures in the target language.

Research studies support the idea that contextual cues related to the language culture can serve as one form of redundancy and elaboration that aids listening comprehension. Schumann's Acculturation Model holds the premise that, "Acculturation, and hence SLA,

is determined by the degree of *social* and *psychological distance* between the learner and the target language culture" (Ellis, 1988, p. 305). Language teachers report success in the classroom with cultural studies. Rivera, who teaches Spanish classes at Artesia High School in Artesia, California, includes cultural studies in her classes. "Discussions [of culture] are conducted entirely in the target language aided by props, maps, and a lot of visuals" (Richard-Amato, 1988, p. 271-272).

Jorden (1991) advances the theories of cultural language acquisition with the concepts of acquired culture versus *learned* culture. Jorden defines acquired culture as:

> the mindset, the patterns of behavior, generally outside the consciousness of natives of the society. Acquired culture, like acquired spoken language, is gained without awareness, and it becomes so much a part of natural, automatic, daily behavior that it is often assumed by natives to be universal human behavior. (p. 384)

Learned culture, by contrast, is cultural behavior that is studied, much like Krashen's concept of learned knowledge (Jorden, 1991, p. 384). Of course, cultural studies are already part of many foreign language classrooms, such as Rivera's in California. These are effective in the area of learned culture; however, Jorden makes a further observation, "Target native instructors are particularly apt to overlook . . . the need for [acquired culture] instruction" (p. 385). This is where video instruction can be of immense help in the classroom.

"Of all the new technologies being adapted for foreign language study, video held the most promise for introducing the learner to a spoken language with a cultural orientation" (Jorden, 1991, p. 386). Since culture is but one non-linguistic cue that aids both listening and reading comprehension, Jorden's view is not surprising. Several studies have concluded that the use of video improves listening comprehension. For instance, Rubin (1994) found that "the listening comprehension of high-beginning Spanish students who watched dramas on video improved significantly over students who received no video support for their listening training" (p. 204). In another experiment by Secules et al., second semester university French students were divided into control and experimental groups with the control group using a direct method text and the experimental group using the *French in Action* video series. "The experimental group scored higher overall in listening comprehension than the control group" (Rubin, 1994, p. 205). Also, Herron et al., found that "for first year university French students listening comprehension improved more after one year's exposure to a video-based curriculum than after the same length of exposure to a text and audio-based curriculum" (Rubin, 1994, p. 205).

Apparently the language comprehension of non-native speakers benefits as much as that of native speakers from a total delivery system of linguistic and culture specific non-linguistic input. In fact, Vogely (1995) broadly—and appropriately—defines language comprehension as "a process of constructing meaning based on multidimensional relationships between the learner and all of the internal and external influences and the intrinsic and extrinsic elements involved in that learner's reality" (p. 41). A video-based curriculum can address all of those issues, within their cultural contexts, in a way that textbooks and audio tapes alone cannot.

Video in the Classroom

Baltova (1994) says, "In real life listening comprehension we not only 'listen' but more often than not 'view' the message as well, and interpret the two modes of information in a similar way" (p. 508). Video tapes provide the "two modes" and so have proven much more interesting with their engaging stories, cultural contexts, and listening/viewing interaction. The results of Herron's studies favored the Advance Organizer + Video condition. Herron's conclusions are that use of an advance organizer enhances student comprehension of a foreign language video, and that "simply providing video material is not enough" (p. 194). The likely order of class material would be: Advance Organizer for the video, followed by the video with class reinforcement and a second viewing, and ending with a written text. In this context, advance organizers work in a way similar to schemata but are not precisely the same. In 1960, Ausubel used this term to describe a process of "linking the 'unfamiliar' to what is already known by the learner" (Hanley et al., 1995, p. 57).

In this case, the "unfamiliar" is the video scenario and, depending on the nature of the course, an accompanying written text. The teacher should choose a video based on the content area lesson, conversational topic (greetings, telling time, etc.) or the written text. Instructional videos, movie or daytime TV segments, or taped commercials are all appropriate. For further inspiration, teachers can peruse the *French in Action* or *Destinos: An Introduction to Spanish* video series. The lessons presented are all designed for enhanced comprehension within an informative cultural context and entertaining story. Try to find similar tapes in English in which the language is spoken clearly and relatively slowly.

Depending on the class level and content, the video could run from one to thirty minutes. From the prepared video tape, the teacher would then prepare an advance organizer consisting of three segments. The first is a casual class discussion to lower the affective filter. Such a discussion, familiar to ESL and EFL teachers, would introduce the video topic along with two or three relevant vocabulary words. The second (introduced or

not, depending on the teacher's philosophy) is a more complete vocabulary list, introduced verbally and in written form, including flash cards, pictures, or any other instructional aids. The third segment would include any new grammatical forms which the teacher wants to introduce through the video.

If the grammar lesson concludes the first day's class, the next class would begin with a short review of the vocabulary and topic. Depending on the nature of the course, this can include journal writing. The teacher then shows the video for the first time. Allow students to work in small groups following the video. Encourage students to use the new vocabulary as they respond to pictures, realia, or discussion questions relevant to the material covered in the video. A general class discussion can follow.

The next class segment begins with a second viewing of the video, followed by a first silent reading of the accompanying text and a multiple choice or true/false comprehension check (or the comprehension check alone if the class focuses on conversation). After the individual work, pair students or sit them in small groups. Have them discuss their answers orally, with the teacher moving from group to group. Students should be encouraged to reread confusing parts, model how they arrived at their answers, discuss vocabulary, etcetera. The segment can conclude with a third viewing for lower levels and then the teacher's preferred assessment tool.

Conclusion

Student interest and comprehension should both rise significantly with the addition of the videotape to the lesson; however, a videotape is not a complete lesson plan. Research results suggest that video would work well as a comprehension aid to augment—not replace—traditional classroom methodology within well-defined parameters. The video does not become culturally enhanced comprehensible input without a teacher's moderation and a good advance organizer.

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Bridges into Diversity: An English Language Immersion Program

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Understanding comes from that which is within.
No two people perceive any happening identically. (Authors)

Public schools are becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse. In the U.S., the percentages of Americans who are Asian, African American, and Hispanic are increasing rapidly. Simultaneously, there has also been a tremendous increase in the number of language minority students that U.S. schools serve. Approximately one of every three Americans comes from another culture or non-English speaking home. The minority school age population is predicted to increase from 25 percent in 1980 to 42 percent before the turn of the century (Commission of Minority Participation in Educational and American Life, 1988). In many large urban centers, 80-90 percent of the school age population will be non-white (Astin, 1982; Gonzalez, 1990). These culturally distinct students perceive multiple realities based upon their various backgrounds of experience. So with the changing demographics, a shift is occurring. Instead of bringing people into a corporate identity as Americans, our culture is searching for ways to educate these children without the loss of their cultural roots. Public school programs are seeking to connect students with their roots while they are enhancing their abilities so the next generation of Americans will experience acceptance and dignity through its diversity.

A research study of ethnicity in middle-school-based readers used in U.S. schools (Campbell, 1993) found that some cultures of the students are still not currently represented in the materials used for reading instruction. Asian and Pacific Islanders were seldom found in the three basal series despite the groups having more than doubled from 3.5 million to 7.3 million, according to the 1990 U.S. census. The representation of African American characters in this study was found to be similar to that of studies conducted a decade ago. Only 1.8 percent of the characters in the readers were Hispanic.

Truly, the schools face a challenge. Public school speech clinicians and reading specialists must develop programs to meet the needs of these students, without taking from them their ethnic heritage. Program models must be developed that will provide instruction which can be measured. At the same time, these children must be received as

Americans with traditions which will add and enrich what is already here. Schools must become havens of acceptance where all students within the classroom community feel safe in sharing who they are and their cultural origins.

The purpose of this article is to share *Bridges Into Diversity (BID)*. This program was a collaborative effort within the School of Integrative Studies in Teacher Education at Western Kentucky University to provide an English language immersion experience for middle school students to improve their English abilities so they can communicate more competently in the English speaking community and school. The literature is very clear about the need for intensive English language training to help ESL students succeed (Rivera, 1988; Soto, 1991). The purpose of the BID program, therefore, was to improve the two fundamental aspects of English proficiency (Cummins, 1984), Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency (CALP) of the students, depending on their English language ability, not their age or native language. Such an alternative instructional approach as BID was needed in the community because the wide-range of English language ability represented within each language, made grouping by language unfeasible.

Past Language Instruction Perspectives

In examining historical accounts of American history, it is evident that because of the local control of public education, monolingual approaches to teaching English have not always been the norm (Baron, 1990; Daniels, 1990). However, shortly before the turn of the 20th century, public sentiment began to change. Nativism and antiforeign political sentiment began to surface, and with the approach of World War I, loyalty to the Americanized form of standard English began to increase. Mass immigration from southern and eastern Europe served to reinforce patriotism and immigrants were expected to learn English through direct methods rather than through methods which permitted the use of students' native languages (Auerbach, 1993).

Currently, there is much discussion both for and against using English only in the classroom. There is favorable public sentiment toward teaching ESL students in both their native language and English (Owens, 1988; Riven, 1988; Snow, 1990). According to Auerbach (1993) the findings concur that using the students' native languages "reduces anxiety, enhances the affective environment for learning, takes into account sociocultural factors, facilitates incorporation of learners' life experiences, and allows for learner centered curriculum development". As language instruction focuses on comprehension and communication, current theoretical models of instruction for ESL students are becoming more learner centered (Ali, 1994; Cheng, 1996). However, the ideal models of instruction are often not put into practice. Local school systems are faced with budget

constraints and personnel limitations in accommodating the multiplicity of native languages. Many local school systems would have to accommodate a dozen or more native languages. Therefore, what is theoretically sound is often practically inefficient.

Current Language Instructional Perspectives

Children with limited English proficiency must learn standard language forms such as phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, and semantics through speaking, listening, reading and writing. Their experiences must include acquiring social/cultural understandings as even greetings in different cultures take on different meanings. Instruction needs to be authentic and include doing, practicing, participating, and discovering language forms in meaningful interactions. Communication is a by-product of doing authentic activities together. Shared experiences are a springboard for developing both spoken and written language. New vocabulary is acquired readily because the students have a need to talk to one another in order to participate in the activity. Vocabulary that is acquired through shared experiences must be practiced in order to be maintained. Whole language activities provide students opportunities to experience comprehension in authentic ways. Because of the interactive nature of communication and the multiple interpretations possible, it has been suggested that learners participate in collaborative text encounters with both teachers and peers (Benton & Fox, 1990; Ali, 1994). Because of the instructional need for both speech and reading, ESL students benefit from collaborative efforts of both their speech instructors and their reading teachers. Instruction centered on allowing diversity of responses to printed material and engaging in authentic experiences which promote communication in small group settings has been used successfully (Ali, 1994).

Collaboration Model for Service Delivery

Because of the growing number of bilingual students in the regular classrooms, school boards are feeling the pressure to hire staff to help these students succeed in school (Roseberry-McKibbin, 1995). The educational community has recognized the need for collaboration when educating these ESL students in an immersion curriculum. Commins and Miramontes (1989) reported that teachers generally had three main opinions concerning low achieving ESL students: (1) the students didn't have the concepts needed for work in either language, (2) the students lacked academic support at home, and (3) the students internalized that English was the language for school, but used their native language outside of school.

All too often when teachers perceive that their students lack the cognitive base needed for learning because of what students cannot do in the classroom, the teachers fail to look

for basic underlying abilities that could enable those students to be successful in school. Language proficiency is based on a "need to communicate" or a sociolinguistic perspective. This perspective recognizes that language is used to create a proposition or statement which conveys a wide range of possible intentions which the listener must appropriately interpret. The authenticity of the message reflects each speaker's intent. Language acquisition also requires participation between speakers and listeners in the sharing of either narration or dialogue. Just as the richness of language is acquired by children through play and social interactions, ESL children learn language the same way. Language is learned through experiences which are used to teach content, functional vocabulary and syntax, as well as the pragmatic use of language through speaker-listener interchanges. ESL students also need practice time in which they learn to modify different aspects of the message.

Bridges into Diversity (BID) Program

Bridges Into Diversity, (BID), was a collaborative effort within the School of Integrative Studies in Teacher Education at Western Kentucky University and a local school district to provide an English language immersion experience for middle school students to improve their English ability. Reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of the community, the students who participated in the program were from three cultures: Spanish, Hindu, and Bosnian. The direct implication of such language diversity is that a bilingual Spanish-English instructor for example could help only a few of these students. Those students whose native language did not match one of the teachers' languages, would not receive instruction in their native language. Faced with the reality of a multilingual classroom and teacher expectations/bias, it was critical to provide those students with the necessary cognitive and language base to learn, since the primary tenet in Kentucky's Education Reform is that "all students can learn."

The instructional model (see Figure 1), therefore addressed language from a communication proficiency perspective using four elements: authenticity, participation, discovery, and practice. These elements were implemented in an input/output construct with the input modalities of auditory comprehension and reading, and the output modalities of verbal expression and writing. The over-riding context of the model remained "meaningful communication." A structural build-up moving from Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) to Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency (CALP) was used to determine the focus of the modality-specific content.
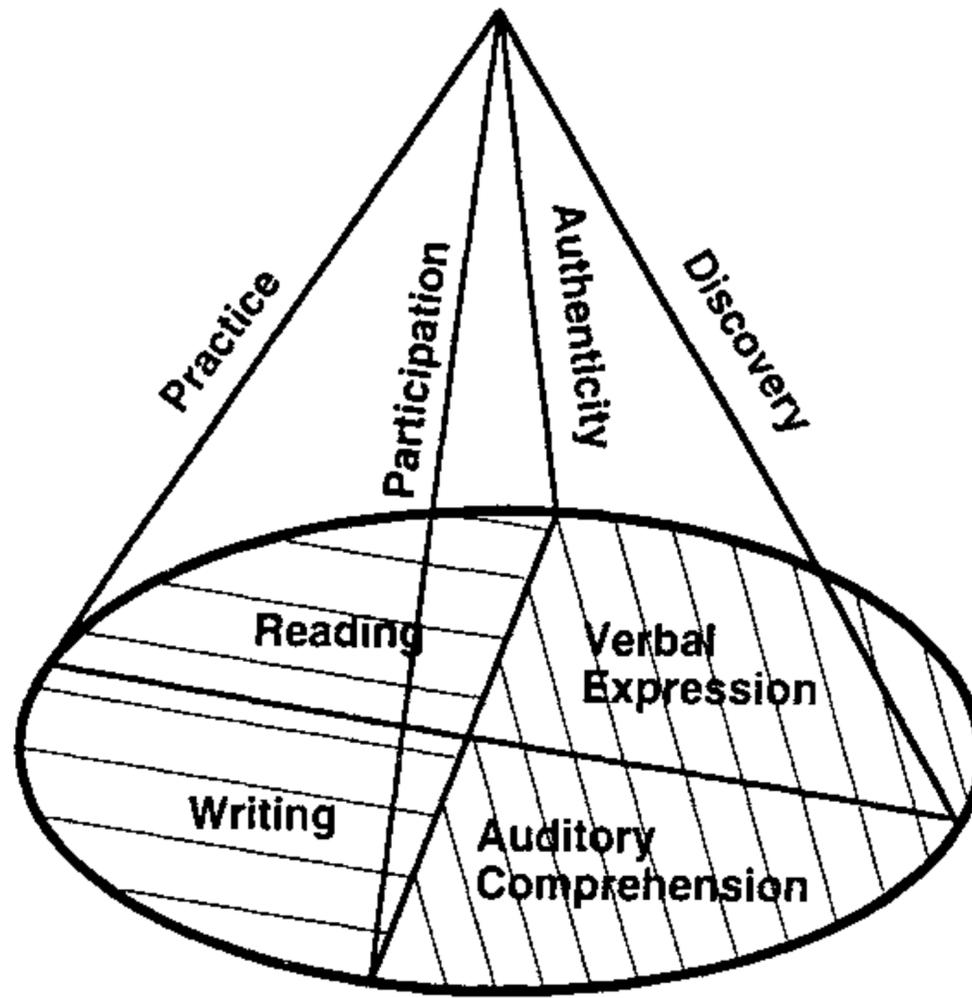
Figure 1.

Bridges into Diversity Program Model

Students were informally assessed for English proficiency with any future grouping not based on native language spoken but on their degree of English language proficiency. Because the students were adolescents, all received instruction in auditory processing, verbal expression, reading, and writing. The curriculum content was modified according to students' proficiencies and interests, ability and the emphasis was either Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) or Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency (CALP).

Goals for students placed in the BICS program were initial communicative competence for a range of communication intents, such as requesting, informing, questioning, greeting, and humoring, as well as acquisition of receptive and expressive vocabulary and sentence patterns for use in narration and conversation. Goals for students enrolled in the CALP program were higher level pragmatic skills practice, as well as curricular topics selected by the group. Curricular topics studied included comparative world civilizations and science. When given opportunities for choice, the CALP group consistently selected math word problems from *Developing Key Concepts for Solving Word Problems* developed by Panchyshn and Monroe (1987). These word problems were written with controlled vocabulary and mathematic concepts.

Regardless of the type of program, BICS or CALP, students read and wrote as part of the total program. Texts were selected from the library and were read both in a group and

individually. Texts ranged from student-selected big books to age-appropriate adventure stories. To more directly assess reading fluency and comprehension, self-paced short stories of interest to the students were used, as well as follow up comprehension questions.

Specific skills were identified for each modality (see Figure 2). Using these skills as a reference, it was possible to develop instructional goals and assessments for each modality. For example: Student 1 was proficient in auditory processing but needed additional instruction in narration, which also became the vehicle for improving his reading and writing skills via the Language Experience Approach (Allen, 1976). His expressive language skills were also developed in social situations. Reading improvement was addressed through a whole language perspective (Freeman & Freeman, 1992). Student 2 had recently arrived in our community so her English was very limited, but she was placed in a middle school setting because of her age. The focus of the program for her was introducing BICS both aurally and orally. For reading, big books were used to familiarize her with English vocabulary and English language narration. Narrative writing in Spanish was used as a cultural bridge so that the student could express herself in her native language. The written narrative was then used as a discussion point for English instruction. This procedure followed the "additive approach" in that the focus was on enrichment through the addition of a second language, while still supporting the native language (Soto, 1991).

The students were grouped and regrouped throughout the day participating in multimodality instruction (see Figure 2). Initial large group sessions focused on the social, informal nature of language interaction as the research of Langer, Bartolome, Vasquez, and Lucas (1990) suggested since they propose that second language skills are learned and exhibited more quickly in informal situations than in formal, academic situations. Informal situations the students participated in included drawing pictures on the chalkboard and looking at situational pictures and sharing how they were perceived by each individual student. Broken sentence cards and picture books were used to teach vocabulary and to generate communication. Experiential activities such as bowling, ping pong, and visiting places such as a museum, a library, and an athletic center motivated the students to practice their English language skills. These shared activities gave the students experiences they could dictate during Language Experience Approach sessions. The students also used the computer lab to type their daily journals. Social studies games were played to provide the students who were less English proficient with information in their native language to clarify ambiguous messages. Later in the morning, the students were regrouped by ability, using the BICS—CALP dichotomy.

Through the collaborative efforts of speech and reading teachers, the students participated in beneficial, educational activities designed to enable them to improve their

ability to communicate in English. Some students began to speak English, while others became more fluent. Over the course of the summer program, the communication skills of the middle school students were enriched as they received academic support in both formal and informal learning.

Oral Expression   **Conversation   Narration**

    Auditory Comprehension

    Verbal Expression

Reading

    Silent Reading

    Oral Reading

    Text Comprehension

Writing

    Microanalysis (Structural elements)

    Macroanalysis (content)
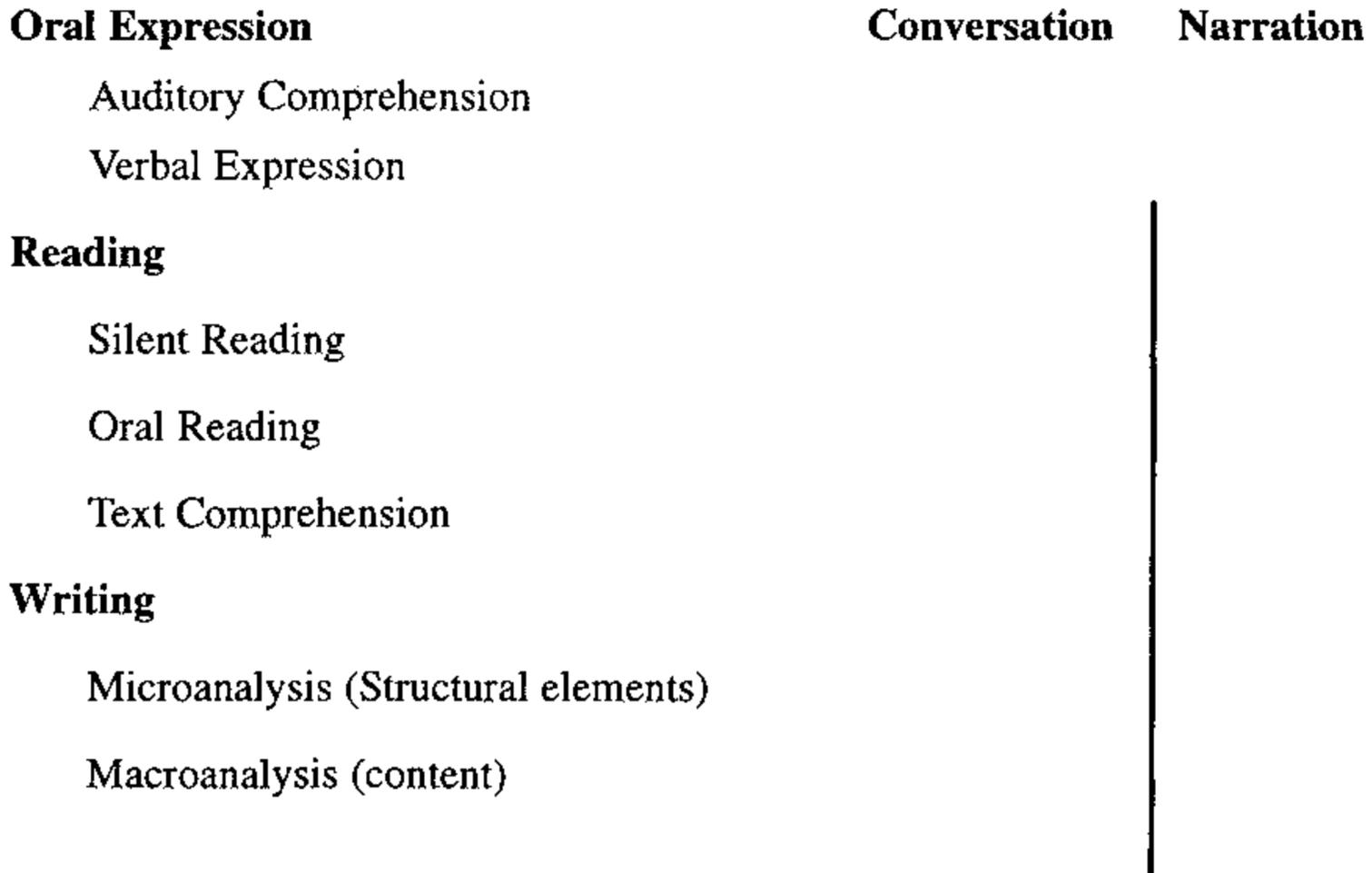
Figure 2.

Multimodality Instruction

Conclusion

An ESL program is a critical component of the services schools need to provide ESL students. Numerous variables need to be considered in student placement, such as age, prior education, and ability. In many school systems, more than one other language is typically present. Thus, a bilingual program such as those used in the past (e.g. Spanish-English) in areas such as Arizona will no longer meet the needs of all the students.

Consequently, school systems need to investigate programs where English is taught from the perspective of a communication model, meaning that language is authentic, participative, features discovery, and affords students' practice. The program content is dictated by either the need to teach Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills or Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency. In either case, the four modalities of communication need to be addressed: receptive and expressive language, as well as reading and writing.

If educators believe that "all students can learn," then schools must provide programs that enable Limited English Proficient students to succeed. *Bridges into Diversity* provides a powerful model that addresses the communicative and literary needs of ESL children (see Figure 1) and demonstrates that a summer program can make a difference in students' English language proficiency.

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L₁ and L₂ Use in the Classroom:
A Systematic Approach

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Introduction

Speaking activities, such as ranking, information gap and problem-solving tasks, can meet several language-learning goals. They can be used to learn vocabulary and grammatical structures, to develop the skill of speaking, and to develop fluency in listening and speaking. But most of these goals will not be reached if the learners spend a large part of the time during an activity speaking their first language to each other. In countries where English is a foreign language and where learners share the same first language, teachers are often reluctant to use small group speaking activities because the learners do the ranking, bridge the information gap, or find an answer using their first language. This article looks at this problem and suggests a range of solutions.

At a more general level, the article suggests two principles that should be considered whenever teachers face a problem in their teaching. The first principle is that, as a matter of professional pride, teachers should try to solve classroom problems through the application of pedagogical skills rather than through administrative or disciplinary procedures. The second principle is that most problems have a variety of causes which to some degree reflect the variety of individuals in a class. There is thus likely to be a variety of solutions, and so a teacher may need to put together a package of complementary solutions rather than just try one possible solution.

Let us look at ways of encouraging the use of the L2 by considering causes of L1 use under the major categories of learner proficiency and task difficulty, circumstances of the task, and learner attitude. In this section of the paper we will assume that L2 use should be maximised. At the end of the paper we will look at a role for the use of the L1.

Matching the Demands of the Task and the Learners' Proficiency

Learners may feel they are forced to use their L1 during a speaking activity because their L2 language proficiency is not sufficient. They may also feel that the task alone is difficult enough without the added difficulty of having to do it in a foreign language. There are several ways of systematically bridging the gap between the demands of a task and the learners' proficiency (Nation, 1990). Because we are considering non-guided

group work tasks, we will only look at ways of making tasks involve knowledge and skills that are largely within the learners' previous experience.

One way of bringing a task within the learners' experience is to give the learners a chance to learn what they need before they begin to do the task. If the teacher does this, it is best to focus on a few language items, for example no more than five or six words, and practise them thoroughly. But the teacher is not the only source of language input in the classroom. The expert group/family group procedure is another kind of pre-teaching where learners learn from each other in tasks where information is divided up among the group members. For example, in a ranking activity, each learner in a group can be given responsibility for knowing a lot about a different set of the items to rank. In the expert group stage, all the learners with the same set of items or the same piece of information get together in a group or groups to help each other become expert with the material. The members of the expert group help each other understand the items and prepare the words and sentences they need to discuss them. The teacher could give each expert group a guide sheet to help them. After the learners have worked in their expert groups, they then split up to form family groups made up of one person from each of the different expert groups. Some expert group work could usefully be done in the learners' first language.

Pre-teaching can focus on skills as well as language items. The teacher can give the learners models and practice in negotiating with each other. Another useful way to focus on skill preparation is to get the learners to observe a pair of learners negotiating with each other and to note the phrases used in the negotiation and the strengths and weaknesses in the negotiation. This can be done by dividing the class into groups of three, with two learners working on a split information task and one as an observer.

The teacher can also choose tasks that are easy for the learners to do, and gradually from lesson to lesson increase the difficulty of the task. In a ranking task, for example, the learners could be given just a few items to rank and could be given model sentences to use in the discussion.

Changing the Circumstances of the Task

Learners may be using their first language when completing the task because they are doing things which are normally done in the first language, for example, negotiating a procedure for doing a job, or clarifying misunderstandings. The teacher needs to change the circumstances of the task so that it seems just as natural to use the second language.

For example, one might have learners pretend to be someone else during a task, making the use of English seem more natural. This may mean introducing a role-play element to a task. In a ranking activity learners can do the ranking from the viewpoint of

a particular role. The content of tasks may also be chosen so that they represent situations where English is more likely to be used than the first language. Being a tourist, making an international phone call, showing a foreign friend around make the use of English more natural.

Some activities make English an unavoidable part of the task. The strip story actually requires learners to repeat sentences in English that need to be put in order. The discussion of the order may be in L1 but at the least the learners need to say their English sentences aloud so that the others can think about them and discuss them. Similarly, in a ranking task, the learners are likely to say the items in the list in English. This can be made even more likely by splitting the list among the learners in the group so that they have to tell their part of the list to the others.

And finally, to encourage learners to use English in a communication task it is useful for them to be well practised or well prepared for tasks. Taking part in a communication activity involves a lot of different kinds of knowledge. In a ranking task for example, learners have to understand the content of the task, they have to know the language needed to do the task, they have to be able to use this language in appropriate ways during the task, and they have to know how to do a ranking task. By having repeated opportunities to do ranking tasks, learners can become very skillful with the procedure for doing such tasks and thus be able to give more of their attention to the content and language of the task.

Changing Learners' Attitudes to Using English

Learners may be reluctant to use English because they feel shy, because the task does not engage or motivate them, or because they see no point in it. They may wish simply to get the job done as quickly as possible even using the first language. In general the ways of dealing with the lack of a positive attitude towards the use of English involve getting learners to see the benefits of using English during the tasks. The discussion and presentation of information which can be used to help learners change their attitude towards the use of English can be done using the L1 if necessary.

Inform learners of the learning goals of each task

Arthur Lydiard, the coach of many Olympic track champions, considered that the greatest motivation to encourage someone to do a particular kind of training was to know why they were doing it. Tasks can be classified into the categories of "blind" and "informed." In a "blind" task, learners do the activity but they do not know why they are doing it. In an "informed" task the learners are informed and aware of the learning goal. It is useful to make a distinction between the goal of a task and the outcome of a task. The goal is what may be learned or begin to be learned as a result of doing the task. Typical

goals involve learning particular vocabulary items, gaining some control over a grammatical construction, becoming skillful in the use of a discourse strategy and so on. The outcome of a task is the decision or material that learners make to complete the task. For example, in a problem-solving task the outcome may be a solution or a list of solutions. In a ranking activity the outcome is a ranked list of items. In a split information task it may be a successfully combined set of sentences. In an informed task, learners need to be aware of the learning goals of the task as well as the expected outcome.

Being aware of the goals of the task may not be sufficient. It may also be necessary to inform learners how to reach these goals. This is beyond the scope of this present article, but is an important step in helping learners become autonomous language learners (Crabbe, 1993; Cotterall, 1995).

Discuss the value of using English

Using the first language if necessary, the teacher should also explain to the learners the benefits of using English in activities. This explanation can be more convincing if the teacher is able to show examples of how using English in a task helps learners. The examples could include instances of effective negotiation of the meaning of words taken from previous uses of the task, before and after examples of individual learners' improvement in speaking as a result of using English, and for older learners some of the experimental evidence. Learners may also be encouraged to contribute to the discussion by suggesting benefits that may occur.

Discuss the problem and seek a collaborative solution

The problem facing the class is that the learners generally do not speak English when doing language learning tasks. The teacher can outline this problem to the class and then get them to come up with causes and solutions. The discussion could be organized using a pyramid procedure. For example, individually or in pairs the learners make a list of causes and solutions. Then they get together in groups of four to come up with one list per group. They may rank the solutions according to their likely effectiveness or according to their desirability. Then the whole class tries to come up with a common list for the class. The teacher may stay out of the discussion or participate in one of the groups. The discussion has three aims: (1) to make the learners aware of the problem and the need for change, (2) to come up with practical suggestions for change, and (3) to get the learners to become actively involved in bringing about change. It might happen that achieving the first aim of informed awareness makes the second aim, a list of suggestions, unnecessary. The teacher's goal may be to place the responsibility for solving and dealing with the problem in the hands of the learners.

Set up a monitoring system

Learners may be willing enough to speak English during activities but they forget and fall back on the first language. In some tasks it may be possible to have a member of each group whose job it is to keep reminding the others to speak English and to point out when English is not being spoken. This monitoring may be accompanied by a penalty-and-reward system. This may be something like the systems that family members or colleagues set up to reduce swearing. Whenever a person swears they have to put a certain amount of money in the pot. Token systems have often been used in schools and they have their supporters and opponents.

Use non-threatening tasks

Learners may be reluctant to use English because they feel that the task is threatening or embarrassing. There are several ways to deal with this. One way is by letting learners choose the groups that they will work in, so that they feel comfortable with the members of the group. Another way is for the teacher to stay out of the groups as the teacher may be the cause of the embarrassment. Yet another way is to give careful attention to the choice of the topic of the activity as learners may be reluctant to talk about some issues. Allowing the learners to prepare for the task may be another way of reducing the threat of the task. If the learners come to the task well prepared they may feel much more confident and positive about it.

Approaching the Problem Systematically

The range of solutions suggested here have covered language proficiency, the nature of the task, and learners' attitudes. They should not be seen as alternatives but mainly as complementary ways of dealing with the problem. That is, it may be more effective to try an integrated set of various ways of dealing with the problems. The problem can be approached by a combination of proficiency, attitude and circumstances-based solutions. Acton (1984) gives a very useful description of such an integrated approach for dealing with pronunciation improvement.

Another quite different approach is to consider whether L1 use really is a problem or if it is always a problem, and to gain the benefits where possible by treating it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

Using the First Language Can Help Learning

Auerbach (1993) discusses the role of English in ESL classrooms, warning that an English only policy in classrooms "is rooted in a particular ideological perspective, rests on unexamined assumptions, and serves to reinforce inequities in the broader social order"

(p. 9). While her focus is mainly on ESL classrooms where English is the dominant language outside the classroom, as in much of the United States, several points she raises are important in EFL classrooms in countries like Indonesia and Japan where little English is spoken outside the classroom. Auerbach argues for the reasoned, appropriate use of the learners' L1 in the L2 classroom wherever this will have positive effects on the learners and learning. Examples include using the L1 to explain the procedure for a task where confusion would result if it was done through the L2, using the L1 to prepare for tasks that would be too difficult without this preparation, using the L1 to allow learners to say what matters to them, and to give them a role in managing and directing the classroom, using the L1 to explain some vocabulary and grammar points, and using the L1 to show it is a valued resource in the classroom. For further consideration of the role of the first language (L1) in second language (L2) classrooms, see Duff and Polio (1990).

Research and observation indicate that some learning goals can be achieved and even enhanced if learners use the first language during some parts of an activity. Lameta-Tufuga (1994) compared limited English proficiency Samoan students doing academic tasks through the medium of English and through the medium of their first language, Samoan. The learners were tested in English on vocabulary learned during the task, their knowledge of the topic, and the quantity and quality of the information contained in a short account they wrote in English based on the task. Lameta-Tufuga found that on all three measures the learners who did the task in their first language, Samoan, outperformed the learners who did the task in their second language, English. Both groups were tested in the same way, in their second language, English. A study of transcripts of learners doing the tasks showed that the learners speaking in their first language were more focused on the demands of the task and were involved in higher quality discussion.

An interesting aspect of the discussion in the group using Samoan was the use of English words and phrases in the discussion. Here are some examples.

> . . . um e pei o mea ei lalo e malo i le **pressure** ao mea ei luga e **semi-fluid**.
> (It's like the things below are rigid due to pressure and those above are semi-fluid)
> **Because** o le **membrane**, magakua le **membrane** le **cell membrane** lea e
> **allowiga** le vai e alu mai leisi iku lea e kele ai le vai i le mea lea e kau leai se vai.
> (Because of the membrane, remember the membrane, the cell membrane that
> allows water to move from one side with higher water concentration to where
> there is less water)

This discussion gets attention to both the form and meaning aspects of important words in the text and places the English words in a rich, meaningful context.

Friedlander (1990) found that if writing in English about a Chinese topic, Chinese speakers would benefit if they produced a plan in Chinese and then used the plan to generate their English text. Similarly if writing in English about an English topic, their writing would benefit if they produced their plan in English (p. 123).

Observation of learners performing speaking activities (Knight, 1996) shows that foreign language vocabulary learning can occur when learners negotiate in L1 the meaning of L2 words in the written input to the activity.

When learners use the L1 in speaking activities, the teacher should observe this carefully to see what opportunities for learning are occurring. Are the learners usefully negotiating and clarifying the procedure that they will follow to complete the activity? Are they explaining unknown L2 items to each other? Are they gaining a good understanding of the idea content of the activity so that they can then do it with full understanding? Looking for answers to questions like these may lead a teacher to consider encouraging learners to complete a part of the activity in their L1.

Systematic Approaches to Dealing with Classroom Issues

A secondary goal of this article has been to find ways of dealing with classroom issues in a systematic way. In this article, this has been done by approaching the problem of getting learners to speak English from four directions, from a proficiency viewpoint (Does the learner know enough?), from a circumstances viewpoint (Is the situation helping to create the problem?), from an attitude viewpoint (Does the learner need to feel differently about the problem?), and finally by seeing it not always as a problem and turning the seeming disadvantage to an advantage.

There are other ways of systematically approaching classroom issues. One way is to see problems as a symptom of the need for change and innovation. Generally, innovation theory classifies solutions into three major categories (Chin and Benne, 1969):

1   **Power-coercive** In this approach to change, change is brought about by the use of rules, rewards and punishments. For the problem of using English focused on in this article, this would include the use of rewards and penalties, staged tasks, making English an unavoidable part of the task, and the use of repeated tasks.

2   **Rational-empirical** Change is brought about through learners understanding and appreciating the benefits of change. This approach sees learners as reasonable rational beings who will change when they understand why it is good to make the change. This would include the use of informed tasks, reminding and monitoring, and teaching learners how to negotiate.

3   **Normative-reeducative** In this approach, change is brought about by getting those involved in the change working together with the common agreed goal of bringing about external change and change in themselves. This includes discussing the problem with the learners to reach agreement on solutions. This approach sees the learners as capable of determining and implementing their own solutions.

This article has focused on a variety of ways of bringing about change in the classroom particularly with regard to classroom language use, and has outlined two frameworks for doing this. The use of an organised framework ensures that important sets of solutions are not overlooked. One framework was used to look at a range of complementary options to encourage the use of the L2 in classroom activities. A well-designed approach would make use of several options.

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Conference Announcements

TESOL Italy Conference. "Teachers as Learners, Learners as Teachers," Rome, Italy. December 5-6, 1997. Contact Lucilla Lopriore, c/o TESOL Italy, via Boncompagni 2, 00187, Italy. Tel. 39-6-46742432. Fax 39-6-46742478.

Victoria Association of TESOL and Multicultural Education (VATME) National Conference, "Beyond Tokenism: Education in a Multicultural Society," Melbourne, Australia. January 19-22, 1988. Contact Alan Williams. Tel. 61-03-9479-2783. E-mail: Alan.Williams@latrobe.edu.au

Thailand TESOL (ThaiTESOL), 18th Annual Internation Conference, "Maximizing Learning Potentials," J. B. Hotel, Hat Yai, Songkhla, Thailand. January 22-24, 1988. Contact Naraporn Chan-Ocha, Chulalongkorn University Language Institute, Phaya Thai Rd., Pathum Wan, Bangkok 10330, Thailand. Fax 66-2-252-5978, 66-2-218-6027. E-mail: fflnnco@chulkn.car.chula.ac.th

The Center for Business Eduation and Research (CIBER), The twelth Summer Workshop for the development of Intercultural Coursework at Colleges and Universities. July 15 to 24, 1998. The University of Hawai'i will offer a workshop for college and university faculty who wish to develop courses in intercultural and international topics. Housing is available at the East-Wester Center, on the University of Hawai'i campus. For more information, write to: Dr. Richard Brislin, University of Hawai'i, College of Business Administration/MIR, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822. Tel. 808-956-8720, Fax 808-956-9685. E-mail: brislinr@busadm.cba.hawaii.edu

Arguments Against Providing Model Answers in the Writing Skills Classroom: The Singaporean Case

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Introduction

When teaching written communication skills, the long-standing practice has been to provide students with a model answer. In business writing classes, students are given model memos and letters covering the different kinds of situational needs. Engineering students study model reports. And in general writing skills courses, model paragraphs and essays are a staple input. This approach is likely to continue and even expand given the proliferation of software packages offering model letters for business people.

My experience in teaching communication skills for business has indicated that model answers generally work against the goal of the writing skills course, namely, to enable students to produce suitable prose pieces for different situations as they arise. In this paper I shall look at some of the reasons teachers still adhere to providing these template-type documents, assess the negative effects of such an approach, and then discuss an alternative approach.

Of course, stimulating creativity is only one aspect of improving writing skills. Students must learn to apply this creativity within the requirements and confines of particular business settings, as well as improve their grammar, expression, formats of letters, and so on. The objective of this particular approach is to get my Singapore students, who have developed in a rigid, non-creativity enhancing educational environment, to start thinking in creative terms rather than using learnt formulae when writing business letters.

The students I teach are in the First Year of a degree course in Business or Accountancy and are between the ages of 19 and 21. All their university education is conducted through English and they have a broad knowledge of business and general English. They all have A Level (final high school exam) English. Their course in Business Communication focuses almost exclusively on writing skills for the business world.

The pedagogical basis of my approach fits in with the didactic techniques developed by David Kolb (1984, 1991). This approach to learning focuses on what is called the Experiential Learning Model. In this, a critical incident or problem is presented for study

(in my case, the need to communicate something in the business world or other context). Various solutions are reviewed and manipulated to meet the specific needs (brainstorming and composition of letter, memo, etc.). From this experience the learner can deduce rules and patterns which, one hopes, will be internalized for effective handling of subsequent analogous situations. This is an investigative approach to language learning where students become "doers" rather than passive learners

Reasons For Popularity of Model Answer Approach

The mindset of students (especially Business, Engineering and other students), who do not have access to the focus on creativity that students in the Humanities tend to absorb, is such that they tend to want a "correct" answer for all their assignments. This is encouraged by the other subjects they study such as statistics, math, accountancy, and the sciences where such correct answers frequently do exist.

In Singapore, as in other parts of Asia, the structure of primary and secondary education is such that there is little emphasis on open-ended questions. This encourages the belief that there is a finite number of correct answers to any particular piece of assigned work. This situation gives the student little opportunity to explore ideas. This fact is borne out by the Cambridge Exams in English, for which Singaporean students commonly sit. The examiners' feedback to schools is frequently that the Singaporean students, though achieving high levels of accuracy, are generally unable to formulate ideas in answering and are reluctant or unable to express original responses to questions.

English is widely used in Singapore as the language of communication, and knowledge of the language is generally quite high. However, it is not the native or dominant language of the majority, who use Mandarin, another Chinese dialect, Malay, or Tamil as their first language. This fact further encourages teachers' and students' keenness for model answers.

Negative Impact of Using Model Answers

Many items of business communication are formulaic and the writer needs to do little more than follow the existing model and "fill in the blanks." However, certain writing tasks require some flair, for example, writing persuasive messages (e.g., sales letters) and composing sensitive or "bad news" messages. We need to make students aware that such acts of communication have different actors, different requirements, and a different desired outcome. It is essential to stress this to students so that they can become more sensitive to the varying priorities and approaches to adopt in each situation. This is a basic fact of communication. Providing models negates this reality in the students' psyche. If we provide model answers as a matter of course we perpetuate a "template" approach to

writing in which they feel they need only learn a template type composition and "fill in the blanks" with different names and facts. What happens is, we revitalize the belief that certain stock phrases are appropriate in all contexts. We, hence, encourage the use of clichés and the stock range of frequently outmoded phrases in writing. Expressions such as "It is company policy," "We regret to inform you," "We hereby enclose," and "We thank you for your support" are freely used and condoned. However, as practitioners of good communication, we know that such expressions have a low communicative value and reduce the positive impact of letters and other items of communication.

In writing, and particularly in business writing, we have to encourage students to be creative. They must develop some flair for dealing with the common requirements of the business world such as providing reasons in sales and persuasive type letters and buffering features in sensitive messages. We need to teach them strategies to inject vitality and impact into their writing. If we introduce a particular topic in writing skills via model answers incorporating good techniques, we rob students of the chance to assume responsibility for the creative process.

Halliday's (1985) functional grammar focuses on how using language involves constantly selecting from a series of options. This process of selection is influenced by the social and interactional features of the situation, and is hampered when the language users limit themselves to a few formulaic expressions. Students must be aware of the varying interactional realities that pertain in different situations.

It is easy to fall into the trap of assuming that non-native students need more guidance with their composition and hence provide them with instruction that denies the inherent creativity of language. However, precisely because these students are not native speakers of English, we need to extend their practice of writing creatively as much as possible. If we deprive them of the opportunity to enhance their ability to produce original prose, we are denying them a valuable learning experience and a professional skill.

Another drawback to giving model answers is the actual models themselves. A model answer is generally composed by one person whose style of writing substantially reflects one cultural context. Frequently in Singapore, as in other parts of Asia, the teacher of communication skills is a native English speaker from the UK, USA, or Australia. The memos, letters, and other sample writing they compose are based on a communicative approach and writing style that derive from the interactive norms of their native society. It is difficult if not impossible to incorporate the local usage patterns into these models. Communication styles are such deeply entrenched reflections of anthropological facts that they are not easy to eradicate. Hence, often the model answers are not well suited to the local cultural context. Similarly, the local Asian student using English may produce a

model answer that is less than a perfect mix of an English language, style and awareness of the locally sanctioned patterns of communication.

An Alternative Approach

In my experience, students can feel some frustration if the habitual model answers are not provided. They feel that the instruction is not solid enough and they often tend to look elsewhere—frequently to textbooks for these models. With my business communication students I stress that model answers cannot be reproduced, either fully or partially, in the final exam. In Singapore, the education system is very exam-oriented. Therefore, if my students understand that in the final exam, creativity rather than accurate reproduction is the key, they are less keen to want to rely on model answers.

I adopt the following general approach in the classroom. When introducing a particular area I want to cover, for example, writing a "bad news" memo to the employees of a company, I first discuss the scenario. I get the students to assess the situation from the points of view of both management and employees. They look at the conflicting desires in an example of a real-life situation. For instance, management wants to introduce a working policy that will be unpopular with employees. I make the goal, the anticipated responses, and the conflict of interest clear. Working in groups of three to five, the students then draft possible memos to use in the situation. They then write these on a transparency. I then encourage the students to go through each of the memos and identify the good and bad elements stating their opinions as to why one expression is effective or not, how it could be improved, and the kind of reader response it is likely to provoke.

In this way, the teaching process becomes one in which students must investigate so their role changes from that of passive learner to that of "doer" or investigator. This "change of status is emancipating and is a way of engaging learner autonomy" (Kenny, 1993, p. 217).

My Singapore students tend to include the phrase "We thank you for your support" in every letter regardless of whether there has been any support of any kind or whether thanking the receiver is appropriate. "Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries" is another that appears all the time. It is of course quite unsuitable when, say, writing to a superior for a favor.

At this point I take advantage of the opportunity to highlight and discuss any of the clichés or stock phrases that students are likely to have learnt in school and have incorporated into their memo in the belief that it looked "professional" or whatever. It is useful to explain the vacuousness of such clichés and point out why they contribute little to the vitality and impact of the memo. In a business skills course, avoiding clichés and

empty phrases assumes much more importance in the sense that business writing, especially sales letters, applications, and other kinds of persuasive writing, must engage reader interest.

Once we complete this discussion of better ways to compose a memo or letter, the students can then draft another memo incorporating what they have learnt. These can then be discussed in the same way as the original memo, but the new memo will almost certainly show much improvement in approach, style, and effectiveness. The exercise can be consolidated with a completely different scenario but which still involves the same kind of basic task, in this case, formulating a letter or memo giving bad news in the most positive, reader-friendly way possible, and aiming to reduce the negative impact as much as possible. If time permits, different scenarios can be set for practice writing. Other kinds of writing such as sales letters, rejection letters, letters of collection, and so on, can be introduced in the same way.

It has been suggested to me that sample answers could be presented but making it clear to students that they are only possible ways to deal with the particular situation they were composed for. However, I would argue that any kind of answer offered by the teacher is received by students as the "right" one. Insisting that they are just samples rather than "correct" answers would have little impact on the students' desire to use them as models.

Some teachers may argue that it might be good to provide model answers after the students have had some initial practice without access to them. However, providing any kind of answer that will be interpreted by students as "better" or "correct" will diminish their sense of responsibility to create for themselves. Even if they do not learn the model in its entirety, they will inevitably be tempted to use parts of it, and possibly in inappropriate contexts. The best way to drive home the message that specific responses have to be created for each specific situation is to eliminate all use of "good" answers (other than those produced by the students themselves as part of the exercise).

We need to boost students' confidence in their ability to compose their own work. The essence of this is that we must give them the chance to practice. This experience will enhance their sense of their own capacity to compose prose to suit a particular given context without relying on learnt phrases.

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Attention Readers!!
New Category for Submissions

"Tips for Teachers"

The *TESL Reporter* will introduce a new category of contributions which will begin in the April 1998 issue (Vol 31, 1). The category will be called "Tips for Teachers". This new category is for shorter contributions which describe a technique, an activity, or an idea that worked, without the usual theoretical or methodological discussion that accompanies the typical refereed manuscript. Contributions will be read and selected for inclusion by the Editor. These may be sent to:

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"You are" — "We are": A Tale of Two Cultures

Sharon Reimel de Carrasquel
Simón Bolívar University, Venezuela

Introduction

Awareness of the language-culture connection and its importance within the foreign and second language context has grown out of the vast body of work done by sociolinguists, social psychologists, educators and language teachers during the last forty years. For the early researchers in sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1964; Fishman, 1965; and Trudgill, 1974) it was imperative that all models of language take into consideration communicative conduct and social life; a position made explicit by Hymes (1974) who affirmed that "Within the developmental matrix in which knowledge of the sentences of a language is acquired, children also acquire knowledge of a set of ways in which the sentences are used. From finite experience of speech acts and their interdependence with sociocultural features, they develop a general theory of the speaking appropriate in their community," (in Pride & Holmes, 1972; p. 279). Some years later, this proposition would be reconfirmed by Bloome & Egan-Robertson (1993) who postulated that "It is through language that social relationships come into being (e.g., parent-son/daughter, teacher-student), social acts are created, conducted, organized (e.g., marriage, graduation, litigation, education), and social groups are formed (e.g., through names such as *class, team, family,* and through the use of lexicons, registers, and dialects associated with class, ethnicity, and gender)" (p. 309). Furthermore, according to these same authors, "People textualize experience and the world in which they live, making those phenomena part of a language system." (p. 311)

Other authors such as Savignon (1983), Robinson (1985), Snow & Shapira (1985), Omaggio (1986), and Wright (1987), to name but a few, were also of the opinion that culture played an important role in both the teaching and learning of foreign languages, because, as McGroarty & Galvan (in Celce-Murcia, 1985, p. 82) pointed out, "culture shapes one's views of language and education in profound ways, and these views affect expectations regarding the nature of language teaching and learning in the classroom." During this same period of time, the use of the literary text as a vehicle for teaching culture in the foreign or second language program was also attested to by many experts, among them Carter & Long (1986), McKay (1986), and Stem (1987). For these authors, literature constituted an ideal media for learning about the values and customs of the target culture which, in turn, would lead to a greater degree of tolerance for cultural differences for both

the students and the teacher. This relationship was described by Stem who wrote: "Literature can help students understand, empathize with and vicariously participate in the target culture. Just as a language is both reflective of and determined by its speakers' culture, so too is its literature. In fact, language, literature and culture are integrally related." (p. 47)

In the decade that followed, the presence of cultural values and artifacts in both literary and expository texts and their effects upon the foreign or second language teaching-learning process was of interest to authors such as Brown (1990), Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes (1991), Mejia, Xiao, & Pasternak (1992), and Murphy (1994), while Field & Aebersold (1990) addressed the issue of teaching English as a second language to immigrant students in the United States, commenting upon the difficulties encountered by the person who finds him or herself in a situation which obliges him or her to deal with the parent culture and the culture of the dominant society simultaneously. In a similar vein, both Hones (1992) and Hugh (1992) suggested pedagogical activities for bridging the gap between the ESL students and the community in which they live, and Tang (1993) offered a model for overcoming the difficulties encountered in the teaching of English as a second language in a multicultural setting. Cross-cultural interaction was also referred to by Winer & Steffensen (1992) in relation to EFL/ESL teacher-training programs, and, from the social-psychological perspective, Paige (1990) described the importance of cross-cultural awareness in the fields of counseling and orientation, particularly with regard to international students in the United States who, according to this same author, accounted for 6% of the entire university population in the country between 1987 and 1988. This situation prompted a number of specialists in counseling and orientation (Saltzman, 1986; Westwood, Lawrence, & McBlane, 1986; Bhawuk, 1990; Cushner, 1990) among others, to examine cross-cultural issues within the context of higher education and, subsequently, in multicultural corporate settings.

The previously cited publications are but a small sample of the work being done in the field and, according to Tomalin & Stempleski (1993) the study of cross-cultural interaction with regard to foreign and second language teaching and learning has increased significantly during the last few years and will probably continue to do so during what remains of the century. They suggest that this trend is probably the result of both linguistic and socio-economic factors, citing as possible reasons the rise in economic importance of the Pacific Rim countries, the influence of increased immigration on curricula, the study of pragmatics and, the study of non-verbal communication. Whatever the reason for this increase in interest, it seems evident that language and culture are intimately related and this connection cannot be ignored in the ESL/EFL setting.

Typically, the language-culture relationship is dealt with in the so-called "culture courses" that are frequently included in university-level EFL programs. These courses are designed to provide the student with an understanding of specific cultural elements which he or she is likely to encounter when studying in an English-speaking country, while simultaneously increasing his or her communicative competence through situationally-based activities in the classroom. Unfortunately, this is often a one-way process in which the student's own culture is often overlooked or played down, reducing the possibility of subsequent positive experiences in cross-cultural encounters. As Saltzman (in Paige, 1986) has pointed out, people who are effective in their interactions with others from different cultural backgrounds are those who can appreciate and value both the host culture as well as their own. Furthermore, according to Saltzman, "they have positive sentiments toward their own heritage and feel no need for either condemnation or uncritical acceptance of the new culture." (p. 251)

The Activity

"You are" - "We are" : *A Tale of Two Cultures*, which is a variation and extension of Tomalin & Stempleski's "Ten Word Game" (1993; p. 32), is intended to increase the students' understanding of elements of the target culture by increasing their understanding about their own culture. At the same time, the activity attempts to demonstrate how one's cultural background influences many of one's reactions to culturally specific stimuli and how it effects one's behavior in particular social situations. Rather than teach *about* culture, the activity facilitates *cultural awareness* by involving the student in a dynamic process which allows them to analyze the cultural patterns of both groups, thus promoting an exchange of ideas and opinions about both cultures in a non-threatening environment. Ideal for moderate size classes of 20 to 30 upper-intermediate to advanced level, university students, the activity, when used at the beginning of the course, establishes a basis for a more insightful analysis of each of the subsequent topics contemplated in the syllabus. It also contributes toward more meaningful verbal interaction between students and between the students and the teacher, and offers ample opportunities for developing listening, speaking, and writing skills in English. In addition, it sets the stage for introducing the topic of "stereotypes" and how they function in cross-cultural interactions. Depending on the number of students, three 50-minute class sessions are usually sufficient to complete the work, and apart from a blackboard, chalk, paper, and pencils, no other special materials are required. Although culturally-related reading materials are not referred to, it is assumed that reading is an integral part of the course and that many of the opinions expressed by the students during the realization of the activity will have been triggered by information encountered in the texts read outside of class.

Procedure

First Class Period

<u>Forming the groups</u>: Divide the class into two groups of ten to fifteen students each. Tell the members of one group to pretend to be natives of the country where English is spoken. Instruct the members of the other group to assume their own cultural identity. If there are students in the class who have lived or traveled extensively in an English-speaking country they should be included in the group that will assume the identity of the target country (e.g., the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia). The desks of each group should be arranged in a circle to facilitate communication between members.

<u>Providing the word list</u>: Next write from ten to fifteen words on the board that are normally associated with values, and social roles, situations and/or conditions. Some typical lexical items are: *money, win, mother, loose, privacy, work, success, marriage, the elderly, fairness, freedom, youth, and failure.* The number of words will depend on the size of the groups and the amount of time that can be devoted to the activity, although there should be at least one word per group member. If the teacher has access to a copier, this word list may also be photocopied and handed out to each of the groups

<u>Making up the story</u>: (Approximately 20-30 minutes): Tell students in each group to make up a story using each of the words in the list in a sentence. One student should be nominated by the other members of the group to write the story which will be made up of each of the sentences put forth by the other members. To begin the story, one member selects any word from the list and uses it in a sentence. The next student must select another word from the list and use it in the following sentence. This process is repeated until all of the words have been used and all of the members of the group have had an opportunity to contribute a sentence. Remind the students that the story should be told from the perspective of the national group that is being represented (e.g., American-Venezuelan, Canadian-Chinese, British-Pakistani). Also remind the students that each of the sentences should be logically related to the previous one. The students may consult with one another with regard to customs, national characteristics, the meaning of specific words, and grammatical points, and they may also change the form of the word (e.g., verb tenses or pluralization). Circulate in the classroom in order to clarify points and answer questions. Encourage students to be spontaneous and creative in their responses while composing the story. Assure them that they will not be penalized for mistakes in grammar or spelling. When each group has finished writing down their story, collect them and save them for the next class period.

Second Class Period

Reading the story and note taking: (Approximately 15-25 minutes): At the beginning of the class period tell students to arrange their desks in two semi-circles in order to allow both "national" groups to face each other. Once the members of each "national" group are seated, return their written versions of the story. Give the students a few minutes to re-read the story and to make any last minute corrections. (The teacher may select the group to read first or flip a coin to see which group will go first). Explain that the stories will be read twice and that the written version should be passed from student to student in order for each pupil to have an opportunity to participate in the reading. Instruct each member of the other group (listeners) to note down any aspects of the story which they feel reflect values and behavior that typify the culture of the "story-tellers." Sometimes it is necessary to read the story a third time to facilitate the note-taking. This same process is then repeated with the second group who read their story while the members of the other group take notes. The correction of pronunciation during the second or third reading of the story is left to the discretion of the teacher who may prefer to promote spontaneity rather than focus on language skills for the moment.

"You are" - How others see us: (Approximately 15-25 minutes): After each of the stories has been presented and the students have written down their notes, a few minutes should be allowed for the students to analyze those characteristics that they felt exemplified the cultural standpoint of the opposite group. Next, tell the students to write a single statement about the other cultural group. The statement must begin with the "you are," and should reflect a specific characteristic that appeared in their notes. Some examples of this kind of statement are "You are more interested in money than in people," "You are dependent upon your mother," "You are centered on winning no matter what," "You are pleasant to strangers," or "You are not interested in sharing things with others," etc. It is important to explain to the students that they should not incorporate value judgments (good-bad-right-wrong) in their statements. When each of the members of each group has prepared his or her statement, each group takes turns in reading their descriptions to the other group, explaining exactly which aspects in the story caused them to formulate their opinion. Once again, tell the students to take notes on the opinions of the members of the opposite group. Collect the notes and opinion statements and give them back at the beginning of the next class session. The opinion statements may be corrected and graded if the teacher chooses to do so.

Third Class Period

"We are" - How we see ourselves: (Approximately 45 minutes): Return the notes and opinion statements to the students at the beginning of the class period. Tell the students to write down what they consider to be a typical characteristic of their own culture (or the

one they are portraying) and formulate opinion statements beginning with the words "we are" (e.g., "We are hard-working," "We are thrifty," "We are not athletic," "We are hospitable," etc.). Each group then reads these opinions to the other, followed by a discussion in which members of one group can ask members of the other why certain behaviors or ideas were perceived as typical of the particular culture or why characteristics or ideas were not mentioned.

"A Tale of Two Cultures" (Written homework assignment): Tell the students to write a comparative description of each of the cultures involved, pointing out important similarities and differences. The title of the essay should be "A Tale of Two Cultures," and should be based on the student's interpretation of the "You are" - "We are" statements. The length of the essay and the grading criteria should be determined by the teacher, although most upper-intermediate or advanced level students are capable of producing a one to three page essay. A second homework assignment, consisting of a prediction of individual and/or group behavior in specific situations by members of each of the cultural groups based on the characteristics discussed in class, can also be derived from the activity. An appropriate title for this second essay could be "You will" - "We will." Another possible written assignment could deal with how people *should* behave with different members of society (peers, teachers, hosts, bosses, children, the elderly, salespeople, etc.) in specific settings such as work, school, grocery shopping, attending sports events, dating or dining out in each of the two cultures. The title for this essay could be "You should" - "We should."

Discussion

With regard to specific language skills, the activity has proven to be an asset in developing listening, oral production, and written production since all are practiced throughout the process. A number of language functions such as describing people, habits, and behaviors, expressing opinions, asking for more exact information, clarifying, criticizing, responding to criticism and, contrasting and comparing, are present in the different stages of the activity, which means that the students are given plenty of opportunities for using appropriate language. Other language functions such as predicting and explaining cause-effect relationships are also realized in the written homework assignments. This means that the activity can be easily incorporated into programs based on the communicative approach. It is also important to mention that both the oral and written components of the activity contribute towards increasing vocabulary.

Because the students work together in small groups, exchange and discuss information with the intention of forming a more complete picture of the situation, and interpret the information from the perspective of both cultures, the activity is based on the

principles of cooperative learning recommended by Tomalin & Stempleski (1993) for teaching culture in the ESL/EFL setting. Furthermore, classroom experience has demonstrated that the activity also stimulates creativity and spontaneity and serves as an excellent vehicle for integrating both cultural and linguistic knowledge.

Finally, in relation to cultural awareness, the possibility of examining the target culture from the perspective of one's own culture allows the student to find value in both, thus enhancing his or her chances of success in his or her future educational and/or professional environment while, at the same time, reducing his or her chances of entering into cross-cultural conflicts. As Smith and Bond (1993), have pointed out, a little cultural knowledge would go a long way towards improving the outcome of many cross-cultural encounters. Hopefully, it would also contribute towards a greater *awareness of* and a greater *tolerance for* diversity, and promote greater *understanding* between individuals and nations.

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Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties

Review by Yoshiyuki Nakata

Himeji Hinomoto College, Japan

UNDERSTANDING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES. Madeline E. Ehrman. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1996. Pp. xvii + 346.

Many language teachers face students who appear to have severe learning difficulties when it comes to second language learning. Often the root cause is that instructors try to force upon their students methodologies that conflict with the students' needs and preferred learning styles. *Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties* addresses this issue with particular insight, taking into consideration such matters as learning styles, learning strategies, personality, dispositions, motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety. The text devotes a significant amount of attention to the practical implications of the aforementioned styles and strategies as well as to affective factors. As such, this volume could be used as an effective introduction to the study of learner variables in second language learning.

This book consists of twelve chapters in which the issues receive attention from practical and theoretical standpoints. Each chapter includes case studies, exercises, and an easy to read summary to enable the reader to fully understand the concepts being developed. Chapters two and three introduce practical techniques for direct data collection, and for interviewing students, whether formally or informally. Chapter four, five, and six review traditional theories concerning learning styles, while focusing on field independence and field sensitivity, and on relating to personality models. Chapter seven highlights the affective dimension and deals with motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety. It focuses on defense mechanisms within the dimension of students' anxiety and with that of teachers' feelings concerning the learning/teaching process. Chapter eight deals with concerns related to background such as sex, age, native language and culture, etc. Chapter nine complements and completes the theme of data collection raised in earlier chapters and chapter ten presents five extended case studies which demonstrate the necessity of going beyond surface appearances when studying the learning context of students. Chapter eleven provides a taxonomy of learning disabilities, some case material, and a few very general approaches which could help teachers meet students' individual needs. The final chapter stresses the need for educators to continually review learning strategies, student feeling mismatches, and to test our hypotheses before accepting them.

One minor drawback of this book is the vast amount of material on multiple theories and models which might seem confusing. That being said, the material is comprehensive and should encourage patient readers to understand the need to widen our focus when considering their students' needs.

The author is particularly careful to stress the need for varied approaches to meet varied needs. As an educator myself, I have found that a close reading of this volume has provided me with ample insight and many useful tools for dealing with students having problems learning a second language.

About the Reviewer

Yoshiyuki Nakata received his MA in TESL from St. Michael's College in Vermont. He is a full-time lecturer at Himeji Hinomoto College. His interests include pronunciation and language learning motivation.

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Notes to Contributors

The *TESL Reporter* is a semiannual publication of the Language, Literature, and Communications Division 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.

Manuscripts relevant to teaching English as a second/foreign language, bilingual education, intercultural education and communication, and teacher preparation in these areas are welcomed and should be submitted (in duplicate) to the editor. Manuscripts dealing with classroom implications of the above are especially encouraged.

Manuscripts should be typed and double spaced through out, generally not exceeding fifteen 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.

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.

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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.

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"Tips for Teachers"

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