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Reading Journals: Solving the Problem of Input in the ESL Composition Class

Teresa Dalle, Memphis State University

The ESL composition class has undergone a significant change in approach over the past few years. Teachers once encouraged students to model their writing after professionally written works which they studied and analyzed. If the students did any reading other than this in-depth analysis, they may have had an ESL reading text. Even so, the text was used for intensive reading, with reading assignments designed to help the students develop their comprehension and increase their vocabulary.

ESL writing classes then came under the influence of a composition theory which stressed process over product. The ESL composition teacher, embracing the tenets of the theory, found that time spent on 'reading skills' was time taken away from the workshop class, where brainstorming, writing, peer editing, and revision could take place. So the reading text was often forgotten. The teacher may have felt a pang of guilt, however, knowing that the students probably were not reading much outside of class, that fiction was all but ignored, and that students did not make pleasure reading a priority. As teachers began hearing more and more about 'comprehensible input,' they became all the more uneasy, feeling that perhaps it was asking the impossible of students to expect them to write well if they were not expected to read. Then Krashen stated what most teachers intuitively felt: "The acquisition of the special dialect known as the written language also occurs in only one way—via comprehensible input of messages encoded in that dialect, known as reading" (1984:37). The problem was not how to get students to write (they were doing that in the workshop classroom), but how to get students to read. More specifically for the university ESL teacher, the question was how to fit reading into a class that met perhaps only three times a week for a semester.

An obvious answer for ESL students is extensive reading outside of class. The means of accomplishing that goal can be through a reading journal project.

Purpose

A reading journal is a means for students not only to read but also to react to their readings through short (one page) written responses. Used in a composition class, a reading journal project assures the constant input students should have to acquire good writing skills, that is, the exposure to well-written prose. Students are encouraged to read because reading is built into the writing curriculum. Although they are not tested on their comprehension, students are able to use writing as a means of assessing their knowledge and understanding of what they have read.

Benefits

Students in university-level ESL composition classes can benefit from a reading journal project by having the

opportunity to read the best works of well-known writers. Such reading exposes them to a variety of syntax, vocabulary, and creative expression in English. The readings can suggest topics for their writing, provide a common point of discussion, or become simply an individual pursuit with no follow-up in the classroom.

For the teacher a reading journal project is easy to develop, administer, and grade. Furthermore, the teacher uses time in the class for writing activities with the assurance that reading and some informal writing is going on outside of class. For the students the project is individualized, and there is no pressure on them for a grade. They are evaluated only on success in making reading and journal writing a regular activity during the semester.

Materials

The teacher may conduct a reading journal project over a semester or for the entire year. The materials needed are a notebook and a well-chosen collection of literature written in English. Teachers might prefer some representations of contemporary, international, ethnic and women writers as well as the 'classics.' Appropriate genre are short fiction, poetry, and drama; however, many ESL teachers find that non-fiction essays work well for independent reading, particularly in a composition class that stresses expository writing.

An anthology I recommend for advanced ESL students at the university level is *Fictions* (see the listing at the end of this article for bibliographic information and other possible titles). The book contains 102 well-chosen short stories. Many are masterpieces of the genre (Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," Katherine Anne Porter's "Flowering Judas," and William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"). A few are stories in translation by representative writers from other countries (Jorge Luis Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths," Anton Checkhov's "The Darling," and Yukio Mishima's "Patriotism"). There is a good representation of women writers (Willa Cather, Shirley Jackson, and Katherine Mansfield, to name a few) and black writers (Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, and James Baldwin, for example). Most stories in *Fictions* are not too long (8-10 pages), and they fit well into a short independent reading session, which students set aside every day for pleasure reading.

Another good collection of fiction, one that contains stories, poems, and plays, is *To Read Literature*. This book emphasizes contemporary works, which many ESL teachers find more appropriate than classics for use in a language class. Many of the same writers from *Fictions* are also anthologized in *To Read Literature*, and both books contain a collection which, though not designed for use in ESL, might prove to be highly appropriate for use with international students.

Those teachers who prefer assigning essays might choose an anthology such as *75 Readings: A Freshman Anthology*. This collection includes essays of some frequently anthologized writers (George Orwell, E. B. White, E. M. Forster) and some contemporary writers (Peter Elbow, Erich Fromm, Ellen Goodman). The essays are organized according to rhetorical mode (description, process, definition, comparison/contrast, division/classification, argument, etc.). The book, compiled

by the editors at McGraw-Hill, is an inexpensive and attractive anthology, which makes it very suitable for ESL students.

Procedure

Students are assigned outside reading of four to five well-chosen short stories, poems, or essays a week. They are told to set aside at least thirty minutes a day for pleasure reading at a time and place convenient for them. There are no tests or any other evaluations of their reading comprehension skills. However, students keep a reading journal in which they write for fifteen or twenty minutes after having read each story. They are given guidelines on what to write, and every two weeks they return their journals to the teacher for comments. The teacher does not grade grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead he/she may write brief comments directed toward the content. Actually, it is the teacher's interest in and reactions to the students' comments which encourage and inspire some students. Sometimes the reading journal becomes a type of dialogue journal since the students may ask questions in their entries, thus allowing the teacher to respond to the student individually. Students may be given a + (plus) or - (minus) or points (which may be added to the final grade) for each entry completed .

Here are some suggested directions I give which may help the students in their journal entries:

1. Date each entry. Try to write a page each time.

2. At first the reading may be difficult. You may encounter unusual vocabulary or unfamiliar scenarios. Relate the events of the story to something that is familiar to you. You or a friend may have had a comparable experience. Write how your experience differs from the one in the story.

3. Write about your reaction. If you reacted emotionally to the story, explore why you had that reaction. If you discovered something you never knew before, reveal that in your journal.

4. Write notes to yourself or the teacher about the story. If you thought it was particularly good or unusually bad, tell why.

5. You may wish to begin your journal entry by writing a brief summary of the story, particularly if you are confused or do not understand. Pretend you are explaining the story to someone who cannot read English. By concentrating on the major points of the story you are retelling, you may discover something you did not notice as you read it. Good writers know that they can sometimes write themselves into understanding.

6. Most importantly, ENJOY your reading.

Conclusion

The reading journal is one means of exposing ESL students to good literature by establishing an activity that fosters extensive reading in a non-intimidating format. Students are directed to react to what they read and to record their reactions in informal journal entries. They can explore ideas and question their

understanding. They may even intitiate a written conversation with the teacher on the readings. When they do this, they have arrived at an important step in language acquisition--using language as a means of understanding and sharing ideas.

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About the Author

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Conference Announcements

The twenty-third annual convention of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) will be held at the San Antonio Convention Center in San Antonio, Texas March 6-11, 1989. Contact: Richard Orem, Convention Chair, TESOL '89, TESOL Central Office, 1118 22nd Street, NW, Suite 205, Washington, D.C. 20037.

The third annual Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning, organized by the Division of English as an International Language at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and its Intensive English Institute, will be held April 12-14, 1989. The focus is on the interaction of pragmatics (including discourse analysis and conversation analysis) with the teaching and/or learning of a second or foreign language (especially English) in either formal or informal surroundings. Keynote speakers will be Charles Ferguson and Georgia Green. Proposals for papers are invited. The deadline for receipt of abstracts is February 3, 1989. Contact: Lawrence F. Bouton and Yamuna Kachru, Conference Co-chairs, Division of English as an International Language, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 707 South Mathews Avenue, 3070 Foreign Languages Building, Urbana IL 61801.

The second International Language Testing Conference, sponsored by the Japan Association of Language Teachers, is scheduled to be held March 30-31, 1989 at the Foreign Language Center, The University of Tsukuba in Japan. Proposals for papers are encouraged. The deadline is October 1, 1988. Contact H. Asano, International Language Testing Conference, Foreign Language Center, The University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba-shi, Ibaraki-ken 305, Japan.

The Good Teacher— The View from the Bridge

Madeline Haggan, University of Kuwait

As I was looking through some recent editions of the *English Teaching Forum*, my attention was caught by an article entitled: "Ten Characteristics of a good Teacher" (Miller, 1987). I periodically ask a class to write on this, and I was interested to see how closely my students' views coincided with those of Ms. Miller.

However, on reflection, I realised that there is another dimension to the good teacher configuration which both my students and Ms. Miller do not touch on, namely the teacher as seen from the administrator's point of view. My growing appreciation of the importance of this stems from my experience over the past year. Apart from my normal assignment teaching linguistics, I have been engaged in setting up a co-ordinated language skills programme. It is designed to provide remedial work in English for those students wishing to join the English Department at the University of Kuwait and also to cover freshman language courses and some subsequent writing-oriented courses. All these courses had already been offered by the department but each teacher was largely independent as far as deciding what to teach and examine. Since we are dealing with eight courses, each of which might be taught in five or more sections, each by a different teacher, it is easy to see that more stringent co-ordination was indeed called for and that implementing it was not going to be an easy task. It is gratifying to report that we have had a considerable measure of success but—perhaps somewhat predictably—earned with trauma. However, although it has been a somewhat harrowing experience at times for all concerned, it has also been a professionally rewarding one.

One of the many insights I personally have obtained has been a keener awareness of the teacher's role, not just in the classroom, but as part of the broader working canvas. This is what I would like to focus on in the following remarks. Although there is always the possibility that some of the perceptions and situations I touch on may be local, applying only to our operation here in Kuwait, I suspect, on looking back over my experience in other countries, that they may have a wider validity and may be of particular interest to EFL teachers about to embark on a career overseas.

With apologies to Ms. Miller for using her format, here then is one administrator's list of good-teacher characteristics:

1. **I want a teacher who can work just as efficiently abroad as he can at home.**

In teaching, as in any other profession, motivation is a strong factor in determing how effectively a person will function in the job and may, in fact, over-ride many negative qualities inherent either in the person or in the job. Many EFL teachers enter the profession with a high level of motivation, attracted by the idea of

working abroad and having contact with what seem to be exciting, exotic cultures. However, all too often the problems of coping with these exotic cultures on a day-to-day basis are beyond the adjustment capacities of many. In this case, a certain sourness creeps into the teacher's general persona, a negativeness that is not only unattractive and dispiriting to those around, but also interferes with that person's ability to work with a will.

As an old Middle East hand, I have seen this happen countless times. Newcomers arrive fresh from their training courses or their pleasant job teaching EFL on an American campus. They then experience culture shock in varying degrees and the result is generally the development of a protective feeling of superiority over the host establishment and the growth of an over-critical cynicism.

This is difficult enough to deal with on a simple person-to-person basis but unfortunately, from an administrator's point of view, the problem goes beyond this simple formula. In the face of what they see as muddle, inefficiency, corruption, etc. (and to be fair, it probably *is*) many people adopt the philosophy of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em". We therefore get a double-sided disillusionment taking place between the foreigners and the locals, who had always thought that westerners were models of punctuality and conscientiousness.

On this point, I do not wish to condemn or excuse. It is easy to criticise such behavior, but it is difficut to adjust to the very real cultural differences encountered in foreign postings. The point I wish to make is that the difficulties thus encountered seem more personality-engulfing for some people than for others and that, in some cases, some strange kind of masochistic drive (or perhaps it is, after all, simply the fear of unemployment) leads them on to continuing in the same kind of job situation. The problem, therefore, is not necessarily confined to the young and inexperienced, but may also persist in teachers with many years of service behind them. While it may be difficult to extract some degree of discipline and co-operation from the culture-shocked individual in late twenties or early thirties, imagine how difficult it is for the supervisor where the teacher is in his forties or fifties.

2. I want a teacher who is professionally informed.

Perhaps I should begin by explaining that in our department, the term "language teacher" may have as much to do with academic rank as it has to do with job description. This means that among our language teachers are not only EFL-trained people, but also teachers holding a master's degree in literature or linguistics.

Good teachers seem to be distributed fairly evenly throughout all groups so that it may be simplistic to insist on TEFL training. However, as an administrator, I do not wish to have to re-invent the wheel every time I supervise or discuss the preparation of an exam, for example, and I would like to feel that the teachers and I share at least a common vocabulary. For instance, I was recently disconcerted to discover that one of our teachers did not understand the meaning of the term *distractor* in the context of multiple-choice exam format. It also helps if I do not have to argue from first principles the rightness or wrongness of widely-accepted

techniques. Such discussions may be challenging exercises in a course on LT methodology, but can be emotionally draining and unproductive at the work-face.

I do not mean that I am against professional debate, but I feel there is a world of difference between that and trying to convince teachers of the appropriateness of certain techniques which may almost be taken for granted by people acquainted with the field. On this basis, therefore, I feel more comfortable in dealing with the teacher who has had some formal training in TEFL. However, in recognition of the fact that many of my colleagues do not have this training and yet are excellent to work with, I was careful to put in my heading my preference for teachers who are professionally informed and not necessarily professionally trained. Indeed, training is not enough. It should ideally be accompanied by some kind of professional aptitude. For example, I have received test items from TEFL-trained teachers who have presumably taken courses in testing, which would serve as text book examples of how not to write test items. Perhaps this is an area which shows improvement through experience and I should include this as an important corollary. However, again it has to be properly directed experience. The teacher who did not know the term *distractor* had served as an English teacher for about twenty years.

3. I want a teacher who is happy to be a language teacher.

My remarks here could be prefaced by exactly the same opening sentences as in item number 1. Given the importance of motivation and positive work attitudes, it is sad to reflect that there are many people in the teaching profession who do not really have a strong inclination to teach. However, I feel that the problem of poor teacher morale may be peculiarly aggravated in TEFL where the EFL teacher is employed in an English department in a foreign university.

Such teachers find themselves in a curious position: on the one hand they provide an essential service to that department, so they *are* a part of the department, but on the other hand, they do not teach the academic material which is the *raison d'etre* of the department, so in a sense they are *not* really a part of the department. Often highly intelligent, articulate, creative, conscientious, they find themselves in a working framework where not only are they paid less than their faculty colleagues, but they feel, unfortunately, less highly esteemed. In this sense, their position is somewhat different from that of a research or teaching assistant who may be occupying a temporary position while, or prior to, completing a Ph.D.

The situation is compounded by the fact that many EFL teachers find, after the initial enthusiasm for the job wears off, that there is a certain lack of intellectual challenge and dead end-ness in the teaching of EFL skills.

It would, perhaps, be of interest to have some concrete statistics on the drop-out rate from the profession. Speaking on a purely impressionistic basis, my feeling is that it may be sizeable. Many people I have worked with as language teachers in an English department or a language skills unit within a university have expressed dissatisfaction with their status. If we are

honest, I think we will admit that there may be some justification for this since, unless the individual goes into administration, there is no actual career structure involving promotion and concomitant salary increases. Thus, the situation of such a language teacher may be quite different from that of a teacher in a secondary school (I write from the British experience) who has a clearly-defined salary and career structure with regular increments throughout his period of service, along with prospects for promotion to posts within the same school system involving more responsibility. Once a language teacher reaches the maximum salary offered by the particular university he works for (and in my admittedly limited experience the maximum is usually reached within a fairly short space of time in terms of the over-all length of a career), then his only course of action if he wants to earn more money and still remain a teacher may be to move to work in another country.

For one reason or another, there would seem to be a fairly high degree of dissatisfaction in the profession and I often feel that TEFL is full of people who want to get out of TEFL. Whether you regard such unhappy colleagues as having a justifiable grievance or a chip on their shoulder, the outward manifestations of their plight show a certain sameness: low morale, restlessness and lack of commitment.

All of these present problems for the administrator, however much he or she might sympathize with the root cause. This may not be such a problem in, say, a language school where there is no daily rubbing of shoulders with a faculty 'elite' and where all the colleagues are of comparable status. It would be most interesting to hear from directors or supervisors in such establishments to know their experience.

4. I want a teacher who is conscientious and who will carry on the task even when not directly supervised.

One of the most unpleasant aspects of administration must be the 'policing' side of the job. In an ideal world of dedicated and paragon-like colleagues, perhaps this would not arise, but I for one do not live in this ideal world. Let me give an example. One of the attractions of teaching is the relative degree of freedom it allows the teacher in conducting the daily routine. However, this freedom may be interpreted quite widely by different individuals.

I feel that occasionally it may be more sensible to let a class leave early, say, when the material comes to a natural break five minutes before the normal finishing time rather than to try to start a new unit in the few remaining minutes. It's a matter of judgement.

However, what I am against are the teaching 'criminals' who steal time from their students on a fairly regular basis, sometimes wrapping it up with plausible-sounding rationalisations. For example, where a class is supposed to be taught on a daily basis throughout the working week for one hour at a time, these miscreants gain immediate popularity amongst their students by announcing they will hold class on only four days a week but that each class will last fifteen minutes longer. On the one hand, they overlook the fact that a class of

one hour may certainly be long enough for a skills course and that to stretch it like that may be unproductive in terms of students' concentration and attention span. On the other hand, after the first few sessions, these extra fifteen minutes have a way of being gradually whittled down to ten, then five, then zero minutes.

Proctoring is another case in point. Students would be amazed to hear some of the ingenious reasons some teachers give the supervisor as to why they were late for/absent for/would be unavailable for a proctoring assignment. We sometimes have large-scale exams with two hundred-plus students, all in one examination hall. Cheating in such circumstances is a sport many students like to take a chance at, so that proctors need the proverbial eyes at the backs of their heads. Sometimes I wonder if I am becoming paranoid about this because I have arrived at an examination hall to find only two proctors casually surveying the scene while their co-proctors were outside, having all developed a simultaneous, irresistible urge to smoke a cigarette at the same time. Other proctors, I have discovered, take advantage of the peace and quiet prevailing during an examination to read a newspaper. The *London Times* is useful on these occasions since, by holding it up full-spread in front of you, you can blot out the whole room and almost imagine yourself at the breakfast table at home.

5. I want a teacher who is well-organised and who thinks ahead.

Over the past year, I have expended considerable time and energy in sending out memos and making phone calls to teachers reminding them of the regular tasks to be done, and even more memos and phone calls drawing attention to deadlines past.

I am not objecting to this on the whole since it is perhaps a duty inherent in any supervisory system. What I do find disappointing is that teachers who have been working for a number of years in the same semester plan, where each semester follows a time-honoured course measured out by landmarks like mid-semester and end-of-semester exams, should still need reminding of dates for having exam material prepared, should still only start thinking about textbooks to be ordered for the next semester when the textbook order form is distributed. Before we initiated our present policy of co-ordinated courses and common exams, there were some instructors who gave their mid-semester exams only two or three weeks before the finals. It does not seem unreasonable to me to expect that teachers would have some sense of the structure of a semester and plan their work accordingly. If it is known that several major tasks all fall due around the same time, why not complete some of them ahead of schedule in the less busy period? Why wait until the co-ordinator or supervisor sends a reminder that the deadline is two days away, or was yesterday?

6. I want a teacher who is sympathetic but not too sympathetic.

This may be one of our 'local' problems, so I should perhaps give some details as to exactly what I mean. Since becoming involved in teacher supervision, I have been surprised at the fiercely protective attitude shown by some teachers towards

their students. I do not wish to be misunderstood on this. I am certainly in favour of being fair to students and of defending their case when they have one.

However, what I have discovered is that some teachers go to inordinate lengths to 'protect' those they teach, trying to make an exam less challenging, or pleading on behalf of a student that a paper has been too stringently marked (when two independent markers have already agreed on the grade), or being over-ready to give a student the benefit of the doubt. Facilely calling this the 'mother-hen syndrome' overlooks the fact that (a) it is not confined to women and (b) it seems to strike both motherly and non-motherly types. One misleading accompaniment to the trait often seems to be the public expression by these selfsame teachers of the need to uphold standards, to be firm, to be impartial, etc.

7. I want a teacher who is cheerfully obliging.

It is in the nature of the supervisor/teacher relationship that the former will ask the latter to perform certain tasks. These have to be done and, sooner or later, do actually get done.

How much more pleasant it would be if teachers would recognise this fact and comply with good grace. It is wearing to have to insist on something when both parties do really know that the job has to be done. As a corollary to this, I could put in a plea to have teachers who are mature enough to realise that the administrator is not everyone's enemy and that deadlines are not the product of sadistic malevolence on his or her part, but simply a necessary feature of normal working life. To be reminded of them should be looked on as a helpful service rather than simply an attempt to make their life a misery.

8. I want a teacher who shows involvement.

By this, I really mean that I want a teacher who realises that, if the job is to be worthwhile, you have to do more than the basic minimum. It is difficult not to sound priggish on this, but after many years of teaching I have found that it is true that the more you put into your lessons and the more you try out new ways of putting the lesson over, the more fascinating the whole process of teaching becomes. One's role as a teacher becomes less routine and mechanistic, and more creative and dynamic. One looks forward to going to class to see how the new idea will work out.

Of course, it's not easy to maintain this level of dynamism at a constant rate but, it seems to me that some teachers rarely experience the 'highs' that teaching can bring. They deprive themselves of much of the creative appeal of their profession by being too text-book oriented and rigidly fixed in their teaching approach. Generally this is because they want to get by on the minimum amount of preparation, but it is sad to reflect that by practising this kind of economy they may actually be short-changing themselves.

There is another aspect to job-involvement. Many teachers do not grudge their time and efforts as aimed directly at the student in the classroom, but are miserly when it comes to fulfilling tasks outside the classroom. This may be a very local grouse on my part since we are plagued by a shortage of secretarial

help so that getting examination scripts physically prepared, for example, may often cause problems. Collating and stapling of a multi-paged exam is a task which usually gives rise to considerable friction in our unit since some teachers simply refuse to do it. This means, of course, that the willing hands, as usual, end up doing the bulk of the work in a chore which would take very little time if everyone participated. A committed and involved teacher, I feel, could not simply walk away from such a task, however much he or she might resent the circumstances which give rise to it.

9. I want a teacher who can work with colleagues.

I have observed that some teachers may be excellent in the classroom, are hard-working, creative and conscientious, but are somewhat 'cagey' when it comes to sharing their ideas and material with colleagues, perhaps for fear that others will win the credit for their inspirational approach. Some teachers may feel that they are not excellent, and avoid professional contact with colleagues perhaps for fear of exposing their weaknesses.

I feel that these two attitudes are both natural and may be experienced at various times by any one teacher in the course of his career. However, where this professional isolationism is an on-going feature of a teacher's conduct, then we may expect problems. Whatever the underlying cause, whether it be professional insecurity, or the impatience of confident experience, or perhaps simply a dislike of one's colleagues, some teachers resent working in a group and cling grimly to their independence. The latter term is, of course, one which usually carries a strong positive connotation but, where an effort is being made to encourage a team approach, the fiercely independent teacher can actually—whether intentionally or unintentionally—sabotage attempts at co-ordination. Directives are ignored, meetings are missed, and the exasperation felt by others in the group is both morale-lowering and counter-productive.

However, even when they faithfully attend meetings, etc., some teachers still show an inability to work with colleagues. Teachers are nothing if not articulate and this verbal fluency can sometimes be a vehicle for extreme inflexibility. I am sure we must have all experienced the verbal steamroller who flattens a meeting through an undeviating, unyielding insistence on particularities deemed unacceptable or unimportant by the rest of the group.

Successful classroom teachers become adept at 'reading' their students and perceiving the minute signs of restlessness, boredom, interest , etc. that necessitate a change of pace or a shift of topic and it always surprises me that some teachers seem unable to transfer these skills and achieve a sensitive interaction with their colleagues. They hammer away at a point far beyond the level of reasonable discussion and may lose their case more through the resentment they incur from their colleagues than through any intrinsic flaw in their idea. However, to make matters worse, it is often the case that these steamrollers are right in what they are trying to put across but, simply because the point is being raised by *them*, the rest of the group—conditioned by previous bitter experience—falls automatically into the mode of maximum

resistance. I have indeed found that sometimes the majority *is* wrong and the rest of the group is simply trying to resist having to perform an unpalatable task. Therefore, there is a danger in simply attaching labels to people and thereby providing a means for neatly dismissing them. However, life would be so much easier if these individuals did not engage in the behaviour which earned them the labels in the first place!

My final thought on the matter of co-operating with colleagues concerns the question of criticism. Of course it would be wonderful if everyone at work could give and accept well-intentioned professional criticism on the ideal constructive plane advocated by all the best textbooks on successful group dynamics.

Unfortunately, reality is far from this utopia. Criticism is often handed out superfluously and unthinkingly among colleagues and with predictable results. Furthermore, even good professional criticism is not always gracefully accepted.

One area where this is likely to arise is in test construction, and I have known at least one very senior teacher refuse to entertain the suggestion that there was anything wrong with the items he submitted. Any discussion of his work was tantamount to a personal attack.

Being able to work well with colleagues implies that one has sufficient confidence both in them and in oneself to be able to learn from their criticism. Admittedly this is a two-sided matter, but in the absence of ideal standards of tactfulness, and assuming unfortunate thoughtlessness of expression rather than deliberate ill-will on the part of the critic, then we can all learn a great deal from colleagues and should try not to be over-sensitive.

Unfortunately, it seems that some teachers find this impossible. Perhaps feeling that teaching lacks a certain emotional excitement, they appear to compensate by injecting high drama into their working relationships. The chance word, the unpopular assignment, the inconvenient meeting time—anything can be the springboard to a major flare-up which may lead to an insidious cycle of attack and counter-attack between the individuals concerned. Another of my roles as administrator seems to be that of peace-maker or peace-restorer and it is all too easy to see from the outside how a little more patience and tolerance on the part of the protagonists would have prevented these feuds from ever getting started.

Having reached a total of nine characteristics, I'd like to see in a teacher, I seem to have reached a full stop and, from the point of view of my future working relationships, this is perhaps just as well. Other supervisors and co-ordinators may be able to add to my list and it would be interesting to read their contributions.

It has been very therapeutic for me to write down these thoughts and observations but, of course, the *raison d'etre* of the article was not to allow a harassed administrator the chance to let off steam. Nor was it aimed at trying to present the said administrator in any way as some kind of superior being. As a teacher myself, I have been guilty of many of the faults I complain about here, but have been too absorbed in the day-to-day demands of my own teaching to have been

fully aware of my role in the broader scheme of things.

Rather my aim has been to underline the importance of the out-of-class considerations that affect teachers and which may interfere with their in-class effectiveness. I feel it is valuable for teachers to maintain an aware and balanced perspective on how they slot into their particular working niche since it serves as a reminder of the responsibilities of what I can only call professionalism. It now remains for the *TESL Reporter* to carry, in some future edition, an article by language teachers on the characteristics of a good supervisor!

Editor's note: Responses to this challenge would be welcomed.

Reference

Miller, P. (1987). Ten characteristics of a good teacher. *English Teaching Forum, 25* (1), 40-41.

Conference Announcements

The sixth Rocky Mountain TESOL Convention, "Best in the West," will be held November 3-5, 1988 in the Downtown Hilton, Salt Lake City, Utah. Sponsoring organizations are Arizona TESOL, Colorado TESOL, Intermountain TESOL, and New Mexico TESOL. The featured plenary speaker will be John Schumann of UCLA. Proposals for presentations are due July 15, 1988. Contact: Cheryl Brown, 3184 JKHB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.

The 1989 Second Language Research Forum (SLRF) will be held February 23-26, 1989 at the University of California, Los Angeles. Data-based second language research is solicited in areas including, but not restricted to language universals and SLA, computers and second language research, discourse, bilingualism, interlanguage, classroom research, input, sociolinguistics, and language testing. Deadline for proposals is October 15, 1988. Contact Mohammed Daoud, Program Co-Chair, SLRF '89, UCLA TESL/Applied Linguistics Program, 3309 Rolfe Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1531.

"Ho'omake'aka: Laughter in Paradise," the seventh international Conference on Humor, sponsored by WHIM, will be held on the campus of Brigham Young University—Hawaii, April 18-22, 1989. The format will generally follow that of previous conferences, including keynote addresses, workshops, and regular sessions. The deadline for proposals is October 1, 1988. Contact Margaret P. Baker or Jesse S. Crisler, Conference Co-Chairs, Communications and Language Arts Division, BYU-Hawaii, Laie, HI 96762-1294.

Approaches and Methods Techniques and Principles

Comparative Review by Donald N. Flemming, Keene State College

APPROACHES AND METHODS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS. Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. pp. viii + 171. Paper $9.95, Hardcover $24.95.

TECHNIQUES AND PRINCIPLES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING. Diane Larsen-Freeman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. xvi + 142. Paper $6.95.

These two books, aimed at the teacher of second languages, have essentially the same objectives: to inform the practitioner, new or experienced, about the methodological diversity that continues to characterize the second-language teaching field.

Larsen-Freeman discusses eight different methods: the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, The Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, and the Communicative Approach. All of these are also discussed by Richards and Rodgers but these authors add a few topics not covered by Larsen-Freeman.

After providing a brief history of language teaching, Richards and Rodgers discuss the nature of approaches and methods in general. In addition to the methods listed above they treat the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell) and the Oral Approach/Situational Language Teaching (a method developed and used primarily in England).

The format of both books is highly structured. In each of her chapters Larsen-Freeman first presents a brief overview of the method under discussion and then leads us into an idealized classroom where we "observe" the method in action. Next she takes the reader through a series of observations about the activities "seen" in the classroom and extracts the underlying principles from these. Subsequently, the principles are reviewed in question and answer format and then the techniques employed in the method under discussion are analyzed. Each chapter ends with a summary/conclusion. Activities provided with each unit give readers an opportunity to assess their ability to implement the method.

Richards and Rodgers follow a similar approach. Their overview of the background of each method, however, is somewhat more extensive than Larsen-Freeman's, as is their discussion of the process, which is structured as follows:

Under the heading "Approach", the authors analyze the theory of language and theory of learning which underlie the particular method.

Under "Design" they discuss objectives, the syllabus, types of learning and

teaching activities, learner roles, teacher roles and the role of instructional materials.

"Procedure" includes descriptions of what might actually go on in a classroom where the method is being employed.

Like Larsen-Freeman, Richards and Rodgers sum up each chapter with a conclusion. Both provide reading lists for further study, but the lists in Richards/ Rodgers are more extensive.

In general, the Larsen-Freeman text is easier to read, assumes less prior knowledge and, because of the activities provided, is best suited for the beginning second-language teacher. The Richards and Rodgers book would also serve the beginner but should be a useful reference for the more experienced practitioner as well.

In short, while the titles differ, the content of the two texts does not. Both are talking about approaches and methods and both are discussing principles and techniques. The difference turns out to be essentially one of style although, as noted above, the Richards and Rodgers book is somewhat more extensive. Both are composed by very knowledgeable second-language teacher-trainers and are highly recommended by this reviewer. The choice of which one to obtain should depend primarily on the professional background of the reader.

Donald N. Flemming is Professor of Modern Languages at Keene (New Hampshire) State College.

TESOL Video Group Formed

At the 1988 TESOL convention, the executive board voted to recognize the TESOL Video Group as an official unit of the international TESOL organization. In the future, this group will have responsibility for up to five refereed presentations at annual TESOL conventions and oversee the convention Video Theater.

Video was very much in the convention picture at TESOL' 88 in Chicago. Over thirty presentations either used video as part of their sessions or were specifically concerned with the production and use of the medium in English language teaching. Additionally, a video hospitality room made possible informal screenings of video materials and frequent small group meetings and discussion among video enthusiasts. A colloquium, "Video in Language Teaching: Is the Medium the Method?" brought users and producers together to provide an overview of the history of ELT video as well as a look at current research and pedagogical approaches.

Membership in the TESOL Video Group is open to TESOL members. Recently launched projects include a data base of existing ELT video materials, and a library of classroom and teacher-training videos. In addition, the group publishes the *Video Newsletter*. For information on how to join, contact: Susan Stempleski, Hunter College IELI, 1025 East Building, 694 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021.

Excuses, Excuses

(Continued from page 40)

alarm clock and at some time in the middle of the night the electricity..." I now have students who have been up all night in private jets and traveled to exotic places or hobnobbed with famous actors and presidents. One arrived late for a 7 a.m. class because she "was on her way back from L.A. after a nocturnal romance, and the line at the cafeteria was very long."(She needed some coffee after such an all-nighter.) Other students have been involved in helping ALF shop for a new wardrobe.

When the excuses are given orally, they tend not to be too long, but their entertainment and communicative value is tremendous.

Written Excuses

In composition classes, on the other hand, excuses are to be written and then read to the class. I usually request a one-page minimum. Again, they should be imaginative flights of fantasy. Late compositions, which previously were rarely accepted, are accepted now, but only with an imaginative excuse attached.

No more excuses concerning electric typewriters (it seemed that the only time students decided to type homework compositions was precisely on the day when they knew that there would be a power failure), and I suggest keeping away from domestic crises when coming up with excuses. The number of students who have outer space aliens and CIA directors intercede on their behalf so that the teacher doesn't give them an absence is surprising.

It might help to dedicate one composition class to writing far-fetched excuses as training for future excuses.

Results

Students know that no matter how absurd their excuse, it will be accepted, and the more outrageous, the better. However, no excuse may be used more than once.

Excuses, which previously were used only to eliminate the red check marks next to a student's name, are now used as a communicative activity and to practice writing skills, not to mention the stimulation of student creativity.

Of course, when the teacher is late, he, too, has to abide by the rules if he wants the students to excuse his tardiness.

About the Author

Frank Quebbemann has an M.A. in Linguistics-TESOL from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has taught English courses in Bogotá, Colombia and in Chicago. He has been English coordinator at the Javeriana University in Bogotá since his return to Colombia in 1986.

Excuses, Excuses, Excuses (A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to English Class)

Frank J. Quebbemann,
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana

Students' excuses, by and large, are rather monothematic. They usually involve illness, transportation and weather.

Being a "mean, classroom taskmaster", I usually interrogate the students as to why they've arrived late, why they weren't in class yesterday, or why they haven't handed in their homework assignment. I feel that as long as students are able to come up with some kind of excuse in English, no matter how limp, they are at least communicating in English. Nevertheless, after hearing countless stories day after day about how slowly the bus driver drove and about the impossibility of catching a taxi on rainy days, or about life-threatening illnesses caught by a student or relative (no matter how distantly removed), I decided to ask for more creativity in excuses.

Oral Excuses

In English courses working on oral skills, the students, in order to have an absence excused, would have to create an imaginary tale or excuse to account for their absence or tardiness. The same would hold true for late or missing homework assignments. They would have to tell their tale to the other members of the class. This has sometimes been used as the warm-up activity for a class.

Early morning classes are no longer producing the classic "I have an electric

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