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ARTICLES

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

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Contents

Correction

In the last issue of the *TESL Reporter* (vol. 43, issue 1), one of the author's names was inadvertently misspelled. The correct spelling is Sasan Baleghizadeh. Sasan Baleghizadeh wrote the article *The structural syllabus: The golden-egg laying goose that should not be killed.* Please use this spelling for any citations of the article. The *TESL Reporter* sincerely apologizes for the error.

Using Cooperative Learning to Prepare Students for Autonomy in Communication Tasks in Business Situations

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Increasingly teachers in the twenty-first century are being asked to not only teach knowledge, but life and work skills. As two teachers of Business Communications at a tertiary institution in Singapore, the authors were primarily interested in motivating students to improve their writing skills and enjoy the whole experience of the writing process. But they also wanted students to develop critical thinking skills, increase their self confidence and learn autonomy and responsibility. Although the course outline was set, the methodology of delivery was flexible. The classrooms were set up to allow students to work in groups when necessary as directed by tutors. We were particularly interested to find out which *method* of group work was best. What activities or combinations of activities were best able to motivate students to progress in writing skills? At the same time, could we also hope they would improve in critical thinking skills, self-confidence and responsibility? Could cooperative learning (CL) be the key to accomplishing these goals?

Literature Review

Since the pivotal work of John Dewey, educators have advocated the efficacy of CL in producing learning results. Research done in the 1920s and 1930s was instrumental in giving rich description of how and why groups work, seeing the group as more than the sum of its parts (Strang, 1946). Successful group work was characterized by: 1) members planning together, 2) individual responsibility, 3) creativity, 4) a minimum of competition and 5) a friendly, cooperative atmosphere (Sullivan as cited in Strang, 1946). In his 1980 review of research, Slavin (1980) reported that "For academic achievement, cooperative learning techniques are no worse than traditional techniques, and in most cases are significantly better" (p. 337). As well, he reported that CL was found to be effective for analysis, judgment, evaluation, feelings of mutual concern, and self-esteem.

By the 1990s, researchers had quite convincingly established the effectiveness of small group learning, as seen in another large-scale review of the literature (Cohen, 1994),

and were becoming more interested in investigating the differences in tasks, as in "What kinds of interaction are necessary for different kinds of outcomes? And what are the task instructions, student preparation and teacher role that foster the desired type of interaction?" (Cohen, 1994, p. 30)

More modern research has delved into group dynamics and its effects on motivation. Dornyei (1997) reported that CL had been shown to be a highly effective mode of instruction, and from a psychological perspective, there were two reasons for this. First was the unique group dynamics: three to six students, intense cooperation, and rewarding group rather than individual achievement. Second was the motivational process and outcomes which include heightened self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence on the part of students. Dornyei points out that both cooperative and collaborative learning share these traits. Oxford (1997), on the other hand, draws distinctions among cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction. She argues that each has its own characteristics. Cooperative learning is more structured and prescriptivist, whereas collaborative learning is theoretically situated in social constructivism. Interaction is a more general term that promotes communication among students.

Another type of group learning, problem-based learning (Feletti & Bond, 2001; Savery & Duffy, 1995), uses groups in a collaborative way to solve problems based on a constructivist framework. The 'case' approach is one type of problem-based learning, and it grew out of a medical school model that was based on authentic and challenging problems which encourage alternative views and reflection. The extension to general classrooms of this type of learning—whether it is called cooperative, collaborative or task-based learning—demands a change in classroom practice (Brody & Davidson, 1998; Cohen, 1994). Ill-conceived tasks, unclear instructions, and confusion about the roles of teacher, facilitator, and the group in general can undermine the success of students' efforts. In particular, Brody and Davidson's research shows that the teacher herself must embrace beliefs and attitudes towards the locus of control, authority, conceptions of decision-making, and the nature of knowledge that may be contrary to experience. They suggest that "certain models of cooperative learning may represent such great departures from teachers' beliefs that they are likely to be categorically rejected by these same teachers" (p. 45).

Even if teachers can embrace visions of change, they cannot always guarantee that students will. When teachers present what they consider to be a well-developed task, students also need to rise to the challenge of collaborative/cooperative learning. Students in their classroom behavior will not necessarily conform to textbook definitions of what should happen in groups (Chen, 2004). One related issue lies in the cultural context. As cooperative learning is a Western invention, what are the issues when attempting to implement this methodology in cultures where groups have not been used in classrooms? Studies in Lebanon with EFL learners showed that both children and teens who used

cooperative learning techniques showed similar results as those in Western settings (Ghaith, 2002; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1998). In a study of Singaporean students' attitudes towards CL versus whole-class methods, CL was clearly preferred although no conclusions about progress in learning were attempted (Lee, Ng, & Phang, 2002). Although many see Confucian heritage culture students as being able to use cooperative learning because of the group focus of Confucian culture, exception has been taken to this view by some researchers (Nguyen, Terlow, & Pilot, 2005). Others (Wachob, 2000) maintain that cultural attitudes are not one vision that explains all. Students in a Hong Kong pilot study (Sachs, Candlin, Rose, & Shum, 2003) showed that students were engaged and motivated while working in cooperative groups, and they perhaps could have done more if their teachers had been well-trained, as suggested by Brody and Davidson (1998). Singaporean students, though they may be imbued with Confucian heritage culture values, are certainly ones who also embrace Western values to some extent.

It appears from this review of the literature that CL has been shown to be effective under certain conditions. Within our own classes, we had been using CL and regularly employed group work in various forms. Thus, our students were familiar with it. However, we wanted to know which method of CL our students thought was best. Hence, our research questions were:

1. Which type of group involvement is seen by students as the best method for preparing them to write business documents on their own?
   - Simple group discussion
   - Group cooperative writing with peer group feedback
   - Group discussion prior to group debate
   - Group discussion with individual writing followed by individual peer feedback
2. Do students value the experience of working with peers through CL tasks in general, and specifically through peer review?
3. Do students develop critical thinking skills, increase their self-confidence, and learn responsibility by using cooperative learning techniques?

Method

Participants and Research Context

There were 127 participants in this study who were second-year students of both genders and were enrolled in a business school at a university in Singapore. The class was typically large, with almost 600 students each semester, and was called "Business and Managerial Communications." The class was designed to give all business and accountancy students knowledge and skills in writing business letters, memos, and reports

as well as giving formal and informal presentations. In order to measure the improvement in students' writing skills, the course included a pre- and post-writing task.

The class used a locally written textbook (Wong, Connor, & Murfett, 2004), which focused on theoretical concerns about business communication and included four business communication cases, all with a local flavor. The four cases were to be covered by the tutors, but no specific methodology was delineated. Therefore, in an attempt to make the most out of class time, to motivate students to develop critical thinking skills, increase self-confidence, and learn responsibility, using groups—specifically cooperative learning—seemed the best way to proceed. Students needed to be interested in the task (the cases) to be motivated. They needed to be accountable so that every student learned. Real work such as letters, memos, and presentations were the end products and the groups were small enough for all to participate.

The participants were a sample of seven tutorial groups taught by the authors. The number of students in each group ranged from 15 to 20, with an average of 18 per tutorial group. The students met twice a week for two hours during the approximately 14 weeks of the semester.

Organizing the Classroom

The classroom was prepared by organizing all students into four teams of four to five students each. The students sat in four groups and were encouraged to think of themselves as a team as all projects were based on these groups. As the semester progressed, students were assigned activities that they did as a team. Gradually, this team undertook to give peer/team feedback on presentations and written work. Students initially stayed within the team, but as the semester progressed, the teams became mixed as students went to other teams to give presentations and participate in discussions.

To focus attention on how to use the cases, the students read the chapter in their textbook (Wong, Connor, & Murfett, 2004) about teamwork and discussed within their teams some questions designed by the authors. By reading and discussing the concepts of how to work in teams, possible conflicts, and what makes good teams work, the students reviewed what they knew and internalized the importance of this to their participation in this course. It was pointed out to the students that 10% of their overall grade was for class participation and group work.

Learning Feedback

Feedback techniques were discussed and modeled. Examples of good points to comment on, how to phrase negative criticism and how to structure feedback were demonstrated by the authors within the first two or three weeks. The concept of sensitivity to affective factors that may cause students to withdraw from the group and be passive participants was discussed. However, it was pointed out that effusive praise for a poor or

mediocre performance was not an effective use of feedback. The model used was to: 1) offer praise for areas done well, 2) offer suggestions in a helpful and tactful way for areas that could be improved, and 3) end on a high note. Feedback was initially undertaken by the tutor offering some general points for the entire class, without mentioning students by name. Then feedback from within the team was practiced. This was to give skills practice to both givers and receivers of feedback. After students gained confidence in giving and receiving feedback, teams were assigned to offer critiques of other teams' work, both oral and written. This way, negative feedback could be offered from team to team, not individual to individual, until students felt more confident and sure in their assessments. Using this method, skills were built up, from whispered critique to a trusted teammate, through more open team to team critique, to a more assured, confident and tactful individual feedback.

Assessing Work

An assessment instrument was used to judge the appropriateness, completeness and quality of written work. The writing checklist (see Appendix) was devised by the authors as a method not only of preparing, writing, and checking work, but also as an instrument for feedback. Based on this list, students could decide if they had included all needed elements and also how well they had completed the task. By referring to the assignments, the textbook and other assigned readings, students learned to judge the quality of their own and peers' work.

Casework and Group Interaction Patterns

The course was built around four communications cases (Wong, Connor, & Murfett, 2004, Clark & Ho, 2004). These cases consisted of a text describing the situation and introducing characters and a series of communication tasks, both oral and written. Pre- and post-writing assessment tasks were also built around a case. The cases increased in complexity from first to last, in both the complexity of the situation and the audience addressed. Students were assigned to undertake the task in a variety of groupings and in a variety of situations. The writing tasks were done in five different group interaction situations as described briefly below.

Situation #1—Pre- and Post-writing Tests

The students logged onto the course website at a prearranged time for a window of about 48 hours. Prior to attending class, students read the pretest case and completed the written task by themselves during the first week of the course. The post-writing assessment was given at the very end of the course and closely resembled the first task, both in method of assignment and completion. The pretest was marked by the tutors as a benchmark for each student.

Situation #2—Quadra

The students were assigned the case to read before they came to class. In class they discussed the task in their respective teams. The students did the task individually as homework. The task was to persuade the manager of a local car company to change the terms of a contract to buy a new car, since the latest promotion, implemented shortly after the contract was signed, was not in the customer's favor.

Situation #3— Singsongster.com

This case concerned the issue of intellectual property rights and music posted on the Web (Clark & Ho, 2004). This is a very topical subject matter and not well defined in law, and these tasks were persuasive ones. Two teams took one persuasive task and two teams took another. They discussed the case and then wrote the task as a group. The respective letters were traded with a team that had done the other task and were then critiqued by the other team, using the writing checklist and other class materials. After the teams completed the critique, the two teams met for a final session, where each team presented its critique of the other teams' tasks. The team being critiqued was encouraged to defend and explain its letter.

Situation #4—Faber Audio

This was a complex case of deciding whether an employee should be retained or fired after being convicted of abusing her maid. As the situation in the case was a complex one, no clear answer could be given. The students discussed the case in teams, and then divided into two viewpoints, for or against retaining the employee. The students were then given time to prepare some more formal statements of their view and then a semi-formal debate was held. Prepared statements were made by each side, and then an open rebuttal session was held, open to any student to argue a point or answer a question for his or her side. Students then chose to write a memo arguing for their own viewpoint, drawing upon arguments they had heard in class.

Situation #5—PacRim Bank

This case involved a hacking incident at a bank. The written tasks involved public relations, damage control, and issues of apology and accepting blame. The students discussed the case in class in light of some specific outside readings. At the next class meeting, the students were given one hour to write one of two tasks by themselves in class. Students were equally divided between the two tasks. Then each task group of eight to ten students met to discuss the criteria of a good response for the other task. Students who did the first task were paired with one person who did the second task. These dyads exchanged papers and critiqued the letter based on the discussed criteria. Comments and rebuttals, similar to the feedback session for Situation #3, were carried out in a one-to-one peer situation.

Data Collection

To answer our research questions, we devised a short questionnaire that we administered to all of the participants (see Table 1). The questions were open-ended to allow all participants to express their opinions freely. The questionnaire was answered by students from all 7 tutorial groups, for a total of 116 out of a possible 127 students.

Findings

Responses to the first question on the questionnaire (Which situation best prepared you to write the assigned task?) showed that 50% of students preferred Situation #4, the Faber case, which involved debate followed by individual writing (see Table 2). The least preferred situation was Situation #1 for which there was no group work and no peer feedback.

A sample of some of the reasons given for choosing Situation #4 as the most helpful were: "We take different perspectives," "Debate allows us a rich exchange of ideas that prepares us to write either task," "It enabled us to get a full picture of the case," "Everyone was actively involved," "It triggered thought processes and creativity," "It helps organize thinking," and "we think critically."

Situation #2 was also useful for some students who said: "The task requirements are better understood after discussion," "The group discussion helped to generate ideas." "By writing it individually, I am better able to express ideas in my own style," "Because you get the benefits from a group discussion such as extra ideas, criticisms and yet reap the efficiency of individual work."

Table 1

End of Semester Questionnaire

1. Which situation best prepared you to write the assigned task? Why?
2. Which was the most difficult? Why?
3. Which method did you enjoy most? Why?
4. Do you find peer review helpful? Why?
5. What have you learned about the effects of group discussion and teacher/peer feedback on writing?

Table 2
Question 1—Which Situation Best Prepared You to Write the Assigned Task?

Situation	1 (pre/post)	2 (Quadra)	3 (Singsongster)	4 (Faber)	5 (PacRim)
Number	2	25	26	58	5
Percentage	1.7%	21.5%	22.4%	50%	4.3%

Situation #3, like #2 and #4, used group discussion before writing the task. Comments from students include the following: "Group discussion facilitates understanding," "Group discussion exceptionally useful," and "It made one think more in-depth about the case."

Responses to the second question on the questionnaire (Which was the most difficult?) showed that Situation #1 (no group discussion) with 42.2% and Situation #5 (individual writing and peer feedback) with 40.5% were judged the most difficult (See Table 3).

The responses to question #2 showed that students had difficulty with situations that asked students to write without any prior group discussion, that is Situations #1 and #5. Reasons for the difficulty in Situation #1 included: "It did not allow me to tap on others frame of thinking," "Only own ideas," "Because of the absence of group discussion," "Group discussion helps to provide additional points," "I have absolutely no idea how to write the pretest."

Situation #5 was stressful for many who cited the short time frame. Here is a sample of what they said: "Time constraints, stressful," "No time to think over points," "Time constraints and minimal class discussion on the case prior to writing task," "Least preparation," "No input from classmates," "Tremendous stress," "Have no idea what to write since we do not have the discussion."

Table 3
Question 2—Which Situation Was the Most Difficult?

Situation	1 (pre/post)	2 (Quadra)	3 (Singsongster)	4 (Faber)	5 (PacRim)
Number	49	3	13	4	47
Percentage	42.2%	2.5%	11.2%	3.4%	40.5%

Situation #3 was difficult for only a few students who found writing as a group to be unsatisfactory. Here is what some said: "It is difficult to write an essay in a group" and "Writing task as a group is difficult. It is impossible to divide the task into parts."

The responses to the third question on the questionnaire (Which method did you enjoy most?) showed that Situation #4 (debate, then individual writing) with 70.1% was by far the most enjoyed (See Table 4).

Question #3 on the questionnaire perhaps related more to motivation and its importance in learning than preparing students to write a task. The overwhelmingly favorite situation was #4, the debate. Here is a sample of student responses: "fun," "quite exciting," "more spontaneous," "keeps brain moving," "stimulating for the mind," "inject life in class," and "I love debates." Many found the debate particularly useful for its demand of argumentation as these comments show: "It was highly participative and I felt free to put my points forward," "It is challenging to debate for a position that you initially don't agree with," "It is a better way to learn," and "The debate allows me to see the different arguments from different perspectives, which aids in the writing later."

Responses to the fourth question on the questionnaire (Do you find peer review helpful?) showed that an overwhelming percentage of participants (85.3%) found it useful (see Table 5). "No" answers comprised 6.9% and "no clear cut answer" totaled 7.8% of the participants.

Question 4 revealed the helpfulness of peer review with an overwhelmingly positive response. Some comments were: "The exchange of ideas (peer review) makes learning fun," "We can learn our mistakes from fellow classmates who will be our working partners when we enter the workplace," "It is hard to openly criticize tactfully," "Students are more approachable than the tutor." "I also like it when people improve due to my own feedback," "We cannot always rely on the teacher to correct us," and "I now look at my own writing with a more critical stance."

Table 4
*Question 3—Which Method Did You Enjoy Most?**

Situation	1 (pre/post)	2 (Quadra)	3 (Singsongster)	4 (Faber)	5 (PacRim)
Number	2	14	13	80	5
Percentage	1.8%	12.3%	11.4%	70.1%	4.4%

**114 students answered this question with a choice of situation. One student did not answer and one student chose Situations 2, 3 and 4.*

Table 5
Question 4—Do You Find Peer Review Helpful?

Answer	Yes	No	Yes/no or not a clear-cut answer
Number	99	8	9
Percentage	85.3%	6.9%	7.8%

Question 5 on the questionnaire was an opportunity for students to put into their own words what they obtained from CL activities. Some representative responses were: "Group discussion enhances your thinking," "Cooperative learning aids the flowing of creative juices," "More ideas generated, more creativity in group discussion," "Group discussion improves the quality of the work," "Learning from others' strengths," "It is a better way of improving our writing skills," "I also learned to listen and accept other people's view rather than just my own," and "It is an effective way of learning."

Discussion

In answer to Research Question #1, which type of group involvement did the students see as the best method of preparation, the students showed their preference for group discussion coupled with debate. The active nature of the debate was appealing and fun. They seemed to understand that the interest and motivation generated by the stimulation and excitement of debate caused them to put more energy into the task. They appreciated the challenge and they spoke of the enjoyment of working in the group. This heightened awareness of themselves as learners who have been encouraged to exchange ideas and fight for space for their creativity is clear.

As well, the difficult tasks were seen as those where they had no opportunity to consult with the group and where they were required to write on their own. After having the chance to discuss with their peers the pros and cons, the style and tone, one student summed up why it was difficult to write on his/her own, "have no idea what to write since we do not have the discussion." This comment speaks volumes on the benefits of peer stimulation and support in the writing process.

The act of enjoyment of a classroom activity is a sign of motivation. Finding the right vehicle to motivate students may be one of the most difficult jobs teachers face, but also the most rewarding as students then create their own momentum. Thus, the debate, which 70% chose as the most enjoyable, can be seen not just as the most fun, but as the one that motivated them the most. As one student noted, the arguments from different perspectives "aids in writing later." This is a definite endorsement for using cooperative group work with writing tasks.

Students' responses on the questionnaire certainly pointed to the cooperative learning group as a motivating factor in writing. Their responses to the question about which situation prepared them to write the assigned task were first of all, the debate, (Situation 4) and then the other two situations that used group discussion prior to writing, Situation 2 and 3. Almost 95% of the students chose a situation that used group discussion before writing as opposed to the two situations that did not. As well, their written responses showed that they appreciated the mix of ideas. The synergy that flows from verbal exchange was acknowledged as motivating in writing. Although it appears that we cannot prove the link between increased writing ability and group work, the students have shown overwhelmingly their preference for this kind of preparation.

Research Question #2 asked whether students value the experience of working with peers through CL tasks in general, and specifically through peer review. It was obvious that students found peer review helpful although not always easy. The ability to critique tactfully was also seen as a work place skill and the knowledge of how to do it, and to practice it, was valuable. Our students realize the value of being sensitive, using polite and inoffensive language and thus this has enhanced their self-confidence and responsibility.

In Research Question #3 we also wanted to know if students could learn to be more critical, increase their self-confidence, and increase their autonomy and responsibility. There is no definitive answer to this question that could be obtained from this research project. Data from the questionnaires were incomplete as not all students responded to the question of 'why' and thus no detailed analysis could be done. However, there are many indications that students did progress in these areas, as evidenced by their remarks about self-discovery, self-critique, and increase in confidence.

Conclusions and Further Research

This small-scale research shows that students preferred situations that used group discussion (cooperative learning) as a springboard for individual writing. From our research, it appears that CL does work to motivate students to write on their own. We need to keep in mind that the design of an activity is important and it should incorporate an element of fun to keep students engaged.

It does appear from this research that if we want students to gain autonomy, we need to help them gain confidence in writing. Through group discussions, students learn by getting more ideas through brainstorming; the group process helps them to think of various dimensions to solving a problem. This is a kind of modeling of how to think of more ideas by looking at various aspects which they can transfer to themselves when they brainstorm on their own. They will then be able to categorize ideas, delete what is not relevant, retain what will advance ideas, and sequence steps that will lead to more persuasive arguments. The process is crucial to the development of critical thinking, leading students to become more confident writers working on their own.

Further research could include pursuing this method within various cultural settings to see if this methodology works with other kinds of students, especially in places where CL is a new method. Also useful would be extensive qualitative analysis of students' answers as to why they think group discussion is so helpful to them. More detailed questionnaires, focus groups or in-depth interviews might give a more complete picture of what elements of CL are crucial or most valuable for students.

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Appendix
Writing Checklist

Before you write:

1. What is the objective (task) of writing this message?
2. Have you done an audience analysis?
   - What is the context?
3. What choice of channel have you made?
4. Have you looked at the format of your text?
   - Should it be a memo
   - or letter
   - or an email?
5. What strategy have you used?
   - What information do you need to include?
6. Should you use a logical or emotional appeal as a persuasion strategy?
7. How is your message organized?
   - Is the purpose up front or delayed?

As you write:

1. How is the subject line phrased?
2. What strategy have you used in your introduction?
   - Do you need a buffer or attention getter?
3. Is there an advance organizer?
4. Is there a need for headings?
5. What sort of headings have you used?
   - Are they parallel?
   - Are they talking headings?
6. Have you looked at benefits for the reader?
7. Have you looked at reader objections?
8. If you make claims, have you given adequate support for your claims?
9. Is there a cordial close?
   - Is there a call for action?

After you write:

1. Have you looked at the tone of your message?
   - Is it positive?
2. Is your message 'you' oriented'?
3. Is the message coherent?
   - Are there transition markers?
   - What other devices have you used to enhance coherence?
4. Have you edited your work for grammatical and spelling errors?
5. If you are giving recommendations, have you looked at your modal verbs to check if you have used appropriate ones?
6. Have you checked the verb tenses for consistency and correctness?

The Role of Self-Assessment in Students' Writing Portfolios: A Classroom Investigation

Ricky Lam
Hong Kong Institute of Education

Self-assessment, an integral part of self-regulated learning, is defined as a study skill through which students are able to develop the capacity to think about their learning critically. More specifically, self-assessment in writing refers to a metacognitive skill employed by students to evaluate (1) the content, organization, and purpose of their own written texts and (2) their writing process including the selection of strategies, monitoring of strategy use, and assessing the effectiveness of those strategies throughout. When writing, self-assessment may occur within the pre-writing, while-writing, or post-writing stages and can be either formal or informal. This paper discusses a project in which students were required to self-evaluate one of the final drafts to be put into a portfolio during the last two weeks of a 15-week writing program.

Review of the Literature

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment research has been going since the 1950s and originated within the field of social and clinical psychology (Hilgers, Hussey, & Stitt-Bergh, 2000). The two key concepts embedded in the notion of self-assessment are self-observation and self-monitoring. Self-monitoring, the parent of self-assessment, provides individuals with internal feedback which allows them to compare the current level of behavior with some well-recognized social standard (Kanfer, 1975). This feedback comes partially from observation and evaluation, which have been shown to be key processes in affecting change with deep-seated human behaviors (Bellack, Rozensky & Schwartz, 1974; Cavior & Marabott, 1976).

In writing research, studies on self-assessment, which is sometimes referred to as revision within the writing process, began to receive attention in the late 1970s when the Flower and Hayes (1981a) model of the composing process permeated composition studies. This was also the exact period when cognitivism was in vogue. The view of self-monitoring, which belongs to the domain of behaviorism, was out of fashion. Hence, studies of self-monitoring were gradually replaced by studies focusing on writing coping strategies and their effects (Flower and Hayes, 1981b; Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman, & Carey, 1987). According to the Flower and Hayes's (1981a) model, revision is one

component of the cognitive writing process, and modifying writing strategies or texts is due to the constant evaluation and reevaluation of the text. Nevertheless, in 1996, Hayes proposed that a new framework for understanding cognition and affect in writing was needed. In Hayes's new model, revision was reorganized and subsumed under a new category, reflection, which is a function that requires writers to problem-solve and make decisions (Hayes, 1996).

In the 1990s, social constructivist theory made it clear that all behaviors are influenced in one way or another by the social contexts in which they are situated (Bruffee, 1984; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). However, from a behaviorist or cognitivist perspective, self-assessment is viewed as a set of isolated acts. This view does not take into account how individuals acquire self-assessment strategies and under what circumstances they make use of socially contextualized criteria to self-evaluate their own work (Hilgers, Hussey, & Stitt-Bergh, 2000). Consequently, studies of self-assessment that adopted a behaviorist or cognitivist perspective have been unable to identify ways that an individual's self-assessment practices could be made more effective, thus helping an individual become a better writer who can actively engage in the composing process. Therefore, more research is needed on how novice writers in an EFL context adopt self-assessment and its impact on their writing development.

Writing Portfolios

Since the 1990s, writing portfolios have been widely adopted as either a large-scale writing assessment or classroom-based assessment in various teaching contexts in the United States. Part of the appeal for using writing portfolios is the component of reflection, which helps students think about what they have achieved throughout the process of writing individual pieces as well as the overall portfolio construction (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Weigle, 2002; Yancey, 1998; Yancey & Weiser, 1997). Within Hamp-Lyons and Condon's (2000) theoretical framework of portfolio assessment, the terms reflection and self-assessment are used interchangeably although Broadfoot (2007) argued that they do not mean the same thing. These two terms also suggest that students will revisit their early and interim drafts to reflect upon their effort and progress throughout the course of writing. For example, when teachers adopt a showcase portfolio approach, students are usually asked to review all papers and drafts and then select the best ones either for display (e.g. to a future employer) or for summative grading. Self-assessment, as defined by Hamp-Lyons and Condon, can help students better understand what they are expected to compose as well as explore their own strengths and weaknesses in writing in order to make further improvement.

Portfolio assessment, therefore, has the potential to create positive washback on students' writing (Biggs & Tang, 2003; Hughes, 2003). Traditionally, students have been asked to write in a "one-draft, one-reader" context (Arndt, 1993). Having received a grade

and minimal feedback from the teacher, students may make corrections on their drafts. After that, the learning process is supposedly finished and students are asked to write on another topic. The product approach to writing promotes students' reliance on a teacher's summative judgments rather than helping students to self-assess their own drafts before submission. The adoption of a portfolio approach in EFL writing classrooms may empower students' active participation in self-evaluating their own work within the writing process (Weigle, 2007; White, 1994; Yancey, 1998).

Central to portfolio pedagogy is the issue of growth. Students grow and develop as writers as they reflect on and self-assess their work as they compile a portfolio. It is essential to include self-assessment in the portfolio process as students may gain a deeper understanding not only of the drafts they have written but also the strategies that they employed to write them (Murphy, 1994). More than that, self-assessment embedded within portfolio construction helps students to see themselves as writers. Self-assessment, building one's own self-consciousness in his or her writing, can make students better writers who are able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their work and formulate strategies to make further improvement (D'Aoust, 1992). Likewise, Cumming (1995) pointed out that self-assessment could encourage students to take greater charge of their writing skills. In this regard, students are more likely to get a wider perspective about different aspects of writing such as content, organization, mechanics, and rhetoric when they self-evaluate their portfolio entries. Hamp-Lyons (as cited in Hirvela & Pierson, 2000) mentioned EFL students tend to underestimate their own writing. However, after participating in the portfolio program, students may realize that not only does self-assessment help them better diagnose their writing, but it also makes them respond to their work in a much more positive light.

In connection with student learning, a one-shot approach to writing assessment may not be able to inform students how much they have achieved and what they should improve in the next stages of their development as a writer (Boud, 1995, 2000). Neither can it help students to adopt a deep approach to learning such as focusing on planning 'what' and 'how' to write in relation to their prior knowledge. In addition, Johnson (1983) contended that one-shot writing assessment in schools or colleges interrupted the cycle that is crucial to enhancing effective learning. His argument is grounded on the theories of self-directed learning that students need opportunity to reflect upon their writing experiences in order to make further revisions. Nevertheless, self-assessment has usually been taken away from this teaching and learning cycle. Worse still, most EFL writing teachers have denied students the opportunity to self-assess their own work by doing it for them. This scenario is particularly true in some exam-oriented writing classrooms in which teachers regard self-assessment as a distraction from the exam syllabus (Black & Wiliam, 1998; McDonald & Boud, 2003; Sengupta & Falvey, 1998).

From the literature reviewed above, a practice as significant and essential as self-assessment may have its usefulness in the revising process, be it strengthening students' writing standards or raising their linguistic awareness. Despite its importance, self-assessment has received very little attention in scholarship on ESL/EFL writing (Hilgers, Hussey, & Stitt-Bergh, 2000). In her work, Yancey (1998) presented a three-tier reflection framework which includes (1) reflection in action; (2) constructive reflection; and (3) reflection in presentation. While her framework is well-defined in terms of when and how self-assessment takes place, these definitions of the framework are theoretical rather than empirically backed by authentic data collected from students' self-assessment activities. Furthermore, it seems that how students perceive self-assessment as a learning activity and its impact on their learning has been scantily explored (Broadfoot, 2007; McDonald & Boud, 2003). Though the literature has highlighted the learning potentials of self-assessment, studies concerning students' perceptions towards the use of self-assessment in portfolio-based writing classrooms seem to be scant. Thus, this study aimed to address the following questions:

1. When given free choice for selecting a paper on which to do a self-assessment analysis to include in a portfolio, what motivates students' selections?
2. What are students' perceptions of the impact of self-assessment on the improvement of their writing?
3. According to students and teachers, what are the benefits of self-assessment on students' writing development in the EFL writing classroom?

Method

Context

The context where I taught EFL writing is a community college which provides 2-year sub-degree programs for students who did not complete high school. The students, aged 18 to 20, are non-English majors who are required to take a core foundation writing course as one of the graduation requirements after two-years of study. In general, students' writing proficiency is relatively weak. On the writing portion of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), two-thirds of the students scored 5.0 to 5.5 and the other third scored below 5.0 out of a total possible score of 9.

In the writing course, a process-oriented approach to writing instruction was not supported and students were expected to write their essays in the traditional one-draft, one-reader context where instructors simply judge students' final products (Arndt, 1993). Students did not receive any timely or quality feedback throughout the semester as students' essays were simply scored against the holistic rubrics and returned. The primary form of assessment was a one-shot, high-stakes writing assessment in which students had to sit for a timed, in-class writing test of 500 words at the end of the semester.

As one of the instructors of the writing course and the course coordinator, I proposed a portfolio-based assessment to replace the original timed impromptu test. The portfolio contained three different papers (a summary, a critique, and a comparison and contrast essay) with two drafts each (initial and final drafts), a self-assessment form, and a reflective journal. At the beginning of the semester, students were introduced to the purpose of constructing the writing portfolio and how portfolio entries documented and demonstrated writing abilities.

On average, students were given two weeks to write each genre and another one week to revise the first draft after I had marked their work. The written comments given by me were mainly form-focused and indirect marking was adopted so that students needed to fix their errors by themselves. After marking each initial draft, I arranged a 10-minute conference with each student to discuss his or her draft. During each conference, my comments focused mainly on content and organization.

Self-assessment was implemented towards the end of the semester when students reviewed all previous papers and drafts and selected one for self-assessment. Students had to fill in a self-assessment form to record which portfolio entry they chose for self-assessment and why they selected it (see Appendix A). Although self-assessment was new to students, adequate training was given through checklists and guided questions to self-evaluate their initial drafts informally. Apart from the self-assessment form that was a part of the portfolio, the reflective journal was another strategy to help students evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their writing (see Appendix B).

Approach

The present study employed an action research approach; therefore, I played the role of teacher-as-researcher in my teaching context. I chose action research because it helps teachers to investigate classroom situations with a view toward improving practice (Creswell, 2005). Likewise, Elliott (1991) and Nunan (1992) contend that a frontline practitioner who understands classroom contexts perfectly is the best person to conduct action research and to generate professional knowledge to improve his or her instruction.

Data Collection

Text Data

There were two forms of data collected in this study. The first was textual data consisting of students' self-assessment forms and reflective journals, which were part of the required portfolio entries. Students were asked to fill in a self-assessment form and complete a writing journal during the last two weeks of the semester. In other words, self-assessment was done retrospectively at the end of the semester. The self-assessment process involved students referring back to their drafts, figuring out which entry was the

best, and justifying why they believed it was well-written. Self-assessment forms were collected from thirty students. Twenty reflective journal entries were also collected from students. The reflective journal entries that were selected for use in this study mentioned the benefits of self-assessment and discussed them at length.

Interview Data

The second form of data was interviews of both students and instructors. Six students enrolled in the writing course were selected for interviews based upon their interest in this study and their active participation in the writing course. There were three male and three female students whose academic abilities varied. Two of them were more able students who could speak and write fluent English. The English proficiency of the other four students, assessed through the placement test conducted by the instructor, ranged from intermediate to low-intermediate. The semi-structured interviews lasted about 30 minutes and were conducted in Cantonese, the students' mother tongue. The interview transcript was then transcribed for analysis and further interpretation and translated into English (see Appendix C for the student interview guide).

Each of the four instructors, including the author, was assigned to teach one tutorial of around 30 students, carry out self-assessment with their class, and record how students perceived the impact of self-assessment on their learning. The author conducted a 20-minute interview with the three other instructors individually after the portfolio program was completed (see Appendix D for the instructor interview guide). Though the textual and student interview data were mainly collected in the author's tutorial group, the other three instructors' opinions towards self-assessment were a helpful comparison point with the opinions expressed by the students. The instructors' interviews were conducted in English and the interview data were transcribed for coding and interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Reasons for Self-Assessment Selection

The majority of students in the writing class (70%) selected the critique for the self-assessment portion of their portfolios (see Table 1). The critique was the most difficult writing task of the three portfolio entries according to instructor consensus and the course evaluation, which showed that almost 90% of the students claimed that they had not learnt how to write a critique in secondary school. The percentages shown in Table 1 suggest that the majority of students liked to write a more challenging written genre and, therefore, selected it for self-assessment.

Table 1

Number of Students Selecting Various Entries for Self-assessment

	Portfolio entry	No. of students selecting the entry for self-assessment	Level of difficulty
1.	Summary	5	Undemanding
2.	Critique	21	Challenging
3.	Comparison and contrast essay	4	Resonable
		N = 30	

The fact that writing a critique was a novelty to most students in the tutorial group suggests that students are more likely to be motivated when they explore a new written genre. When asking students why they chose the critique for self-assessment instead of the other written genres, one student remarked that since critique was a genre that he had not learnt before, he believed that self-assessment would "motivate [him] to improve the draft since [he] will fix the errors more carefully." Another student selected the critique because it was "a demanding genre" and she felt "motivated to learn how to write it" and thus wanted to "self-evaluate it for further improvement."

When coding the responses on the self-assessment form regarding why students selected the critique for self-assessment, seven categories emerged (see Table 2). The top three reasons for choosing the critique for self-assessment were (1) motivation, (2) preference, and (3) challenge. Regarding the first reason, motivation, one student remarked, "selecting critique for self-assessment motivated me to learn better how to write this genre." Similarly, one of the instructors commented that "students may be more motivated to select the critique for self-assessment as it is a new genre to which they have never been exposed. There is so much for them to learn."

The second reason, preference, refers to students' interests and liking towards writing the critique. One instructor pointed out that if students preferred writing the critique, it was likely for them to choose it for self-assessment because self-assessing the genre could inform students whether they had mastered its linguistic and schematic structures.

The last reason, challenge, indicates that students were willing to face challenges and take risks by selecting the most difficult genre for self-assessment. One student wanted to self-evaluate the portfolio entry that was "the most demanding piece of writing" because it could help her "better develop [her] critical thinking skills."

Table 2

Reasons Why Students Selected the Critique for Self-assessment

	Categories	Frequency	Description of reasons for selecting the critique
1.	Motivation	9	Students' enthusiasm to attempt a written genre that they have never done before
2.	Preference	9	Students' interests and liking to write the entry
3.	Challenge	7	Students' willingness to write the most difficult genre
4.	Interpretation	6	Opportunities for students to express their opinions and exercise their critical thinking
5.	Awareness	2	Students' abilities to compare the existing and the past performances
6.	Appreciation	2	Students' admiration of the literary text they read and respect for other cultures

Perceived Impact of Self-Assessment

As shown in Table 3, when students were asked about which aspects of their writing they could further improve, three major areas emerged. The first aspect was to use a wide range of vocabulary to express ideas. The second and the third aspects were to avoid careless grammatical errors and inappropriate sentence structures respectively. It is interesting to note that students mainly focused on surface-level errors such as mechanics and vocabulary when asked to consider how they could improve their writing. Only a handful of students mentioned fixing global errors, such as content and organization, as an area of potential further improvement (see Table 3).

Even though students were coached how to respond to both local and global errors when reviewing their own drafts, their perceptions of improvement in writing were primarily concerned with fixing surface-level errors rather than global errors. There may be two reasons to account for this phenomenon.

Table 3

Students' Perception of Areas Needing Improvement in Their Future Writing

	Categories	Frequency	Description
1.	Lack of vocabulary	11	Students' lack sufficient vocabulary items to express ideas in their writing
2.	Grammatical mistakes	10	Students' commit careless grammatical mistakes in their written work.
3.	Problematic sentence structures	8	The sentence structures used are either too simplistic or ungrammatical.
4.	Poor organization	4	Ideas are not logically and coherently connected in a piece of work.
5.	Inadequate content	3	Ideas are not rich and diversified in a piece of work.
6.	Wrong tenses and punctuation	3	Tenses and punctuations are not accurately used in the written text.
7.	Inadequate knowledge of written genres	2	Students should develop a better understanding of how to write various genres.
8.	Ineffective paraphrasing	1	Students should use more of their own words to express ideas in writing summaries.

First, students have difficulty differentiating between the processes of revising, which concerns both content and organization, and editing, in which only grammatical errors are given attention. During an interview, one student admitted that she interpreted self-assessment as an exercise in which grammatical errors should be identified and then modified. She commented: "to me, self-evaluating my own final draft means to check whether there are any spelling mistakes or other grammatical errors." This conception

was further reinforced by students' secondary teachers who only marked grammatical errors in their essays. One of the instructors interviewed for this study said that "in secondary classrooms, students were mainly trained how to correct grammatical errors. Producing an error-free essay was high on agenda in the writing classroom."

The second reason students were focused on correcting local rather than global errors was that students were perhaps incapable of revising higher-level errors such as organization and coherence in ways that matched the various written genres. One student remarked that "it was usually the writing teachers who wrote all these corrections for us" and that he was "not used to fixing these errors by [himself]." Another student commented, "I could fix some of the grammatical errors in my final drafts after doing self-assessment, but it was difficult to correct errors about content and ideas." In her journal, a third student mentioned that "it takes some time to learn how to fix errors on both content and form when doing self-assessment."

The instructors shared a similar perspective to the students. One instructor commented that "students may find it difficult to fix content errors when they have already finalized their drafts at the end of the writing process." Another instructor said that "students take it for granted that readers may understand their writing even though its ideas are logically vague and disoriented." It is evident that the students needed more training and guidance in order to self-assess global errors in their writing.

The students provided some insight into the role teachers can play in guiding students to become better at self-assessing global errors. Students suggested that the teacher can be a resource person that carefully guides the students' self-assessments or a participant that offers support when students feel frustrated and helpless when doing self-assessment activities. One student commented that follow-up work with the instructor is important. "I think follow up work can be given to us after we self-assess our own drafts. With these post-self-assessment tasks, we can make improvement in our writing."

It can be said that students' perceptions towards improvement in their writing are positive, but students need more support both academically and affectively to move beyond self-assessment of surface-level errors. Instead, they should be encouraged to focus more on global errors of their writing in order to make self-assessment a meaningful and productive activity in the writing process.

Benefits of Self-Assessment

To address research question number three, students' responses from their reflective journal entries were analyzed and coded. Though there were thirty students in the writing class, only twenty reflective journal entries were collected at the end of the semester. All the entries were read twice for coding and four categories emerged in relation to the benefits of self-assessment. As revealed in Table 4, the four categories include (1) building up linguistic awareness, (2) self-assessment as a monitoring tool, (3) improving future writing, and (4) having more practice in writing.

Table 4
Benefits of Self-assessment

	Categories	Frequency	Description
1.	Building up linguistic awareness	12	Students develop awareness of editing and revising their own work more independently.
2.	Self-assessment as a monitoring tool	11	Through writing reflective journals, students can monitor whether the selected writing strategies are effective in the learning process.
3.	Improving future writing	4	Self-assessment can help students to improve their works in the next step of the writing process.
4.	Having more practice in writing	2	Writing reflective journals can provide students with more opportunities to write English other than regular written assignments.

These data suggest that students saw two major benefits from doing self-assessment in the EFL writing classroom. The first benefit was raising students' linguistic awareness when revising their work. The second was to adopt self-assessment as a tool for monitoring the strategies used during the writing process. Most students felt that doing self-assessment towards the end of the semester could help further improve the quality of their drafts and help them become more careful writers. In one journal entry, a student remarked that "to a certain extent, I think self-assessment can make me much more conscious of the language I used in my final draft as I was given opportunities to revise my work." Another student mentioned in his journal entry that "self-assessment is a useful practice which can help improve the accuracy of my writing through the process of editing but it may not help too much with the ideas."

As shown in Table 4, many students also believed that self-assessment could help them monitor their growth and progress in writing. Through engaging in self-assessment, students were able to evaluate how much progress they had made by referring back to the evidence of their learning, specifically multiple drafts written for the construction of their portfolios. Some students reported that self-assessment made them take on a new role and become more responsible for their own writing. This helped them become more conscious

of the mechanics within their writing and ultimately more accountable for their work. As one student pointed out, "self-assessment makes me accountable for what I put in my entries, so I will check my work carefully and make sure it is of good quality." In a similar vein, this same student remarked that self-assessment made her "much more engaged in the writing process than before." Previously, she was "very passive and seldom checked [her] drafts after they were completed."

Although self-assessment was implemented toward the end of the writing process in this study, students recognized the importance of extending self-assessment throughout the writing process. Some students recognized that stronger students in the class revised their work throughout the semester even though self-assessment was not introduced until the end of semester. One student noticed that her "more able course mates always reviewed and rewrote their work independently." These students further added that less proficient students would benefit most if they were instructed to adopt self-assessment in order to monitor their own writing. One student asserted, "I think less proficient writers would benefit most from self-assessment. It would help them learn to re-examine their writing in a more thorough manner." And one of the instructors agreed with this comment saying that "all students can benefit from self-assessment, but the less proficient students may benefit more than the more proficient."

From the above discussion, it seems that self-assessment does benefit students' writing in one way or another. At the least, it can boost students' motivation and interest in writing and help less-proficient students enhance their linguistic awareness and monitor whether the writing strategies they have adopted are effective.

Pedagogical Suggestions

In this small-scale study, it is evident that self-assessment has a role to play in enhancing students' motivation and writing abilities. Its implementation in the portfolio-based writing classroom can help the less-proficient students to become writers who monitor their own work through self-generated feedback. Based upon the findings, the following are some recommendations for the use of self-assessment in the EFL classroom.

Sustaining Students' Motivation in Self-Assessment

In this study, self-assessment was only introduced and implemented towards the end of the semester. Students' motivation and enthusiasm to self-evaluate their own work was easily maintained because it was a one-time assessment practice. Furthermore, self-assessment was a novelty to most students and instructors resulting in interest and curiosity about self-assessment. However, sustaining students' interests and motivation in self-assessment throughout a semester or even a school year could be more challenging.

One idea to sustain students' motivation for self-assessment is to vary its mode of delivery and self-evaluation tasks. Semi-structured assessment forms coupled with

either open-ended or close-ended questions are one option. Checklists which characterize schematic structures of various written genres could also be employed (see Appendix E). Using forms, checklists, self-reports, journals, podcasts, and blogs are all possible means for varying the delivery and tasks in order to motivate students to engage in self-assessment.

Making Self-Assessment a Part of Our Teaching Agendas

The positive responses shown in the study indicate that both students and instructors were in favor of self-assessment and welcomed its adoption into the writing classroom. Despite the advantages that emerged in the data, some teachers may think that implementing self-assessment in exam-oriented countries, such as Hong Kong, is a luxury because self-assessment is not an exam-focused practice. Furthermore, it may take a lot of class time to carry out. Given that self-assessment can motivate students to examine their writing more carefully resulting in improved writing abilities, teachers should consider making self-assessment a part of their teaching agenda in order to facilitate better learning of writing. Initially teachers may need extra time to train students in the process of self-examining their own work. However, once students develop the habit and become automatic in the practice, self-assessment, when incorporated into the process of teaching, actually takes up very little time, and can yield substantial gains in students' learning.

Coaching Students to Attend to Global Errors

As illustrated in the data, students' perceived improvement in their writing was mainly focused on surface errors rather than global errors. In order to help students attend to global errors, such as content, coherence, and organization, teachers should first consider adopting a process approach that features multiple draft writing. A process approach gives teachers more opportunities to give both verbal and written feedback to students, and it gives students more opportunities to focus on revising and improving their writing. After providing feedback on students' writing, teachers can coach students on how to act upon the feedback (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007). Writing conferences with individual students as well as whole class discussions are two means through which teachers can help students effectively respond to feedback. If teacher feedback is selective and focuses on the development of ideas and coherence in the writing and students are trained to respond to this feedback, students will learn to shift their attention to the global errors highlighted in their writing. In order to make global error revisions a regular practice, teachers can have students keep error logs or include revised drafts as portfolio entries.

Emphasizing Self-Assessment When Learning to Write

Many students in this study felt that self-assessment could help them better monitor whether the writing strategies they employed were appropriate for the task. Writing teachers, therefore, should consider adopting in their classrooms the practice of self-

assessment so that students can learn to monitor their own work more effectively. Internal feedback, generated by students themselves while doing self-assessment, helps them become familiar with the assessment criteria of the specified written genre as well as scrutinize what writing strategies were used to tackle the genre. Self-assessment, similar to other higher-order thinking skills such as analyzing or synthesizing, is of great significance to students' writing development especially when students want to advance their writing beyond the basic level.

Conclusion

In this study, self-assessment, adopted as part of the semester-end portfolio assembly process, played a role in boosting students' motivation in their writing. Many students chose the most demanding genre written during the semester as the focus of their self-assessment. These students felt motivated to improve their work with the most difficult genre because self-assessment helped them identify their mistakes and make plans for improvement.

The impact of self-assessment on students' perceived improvement in their writing was positive. However, students tended to think that self-assessment could only help them to tackle surface-level errors such as the mechanics of writing and the appropriate use of vocabulary and only a very few of them attended to global errors with the content and organization of their writing.

Most students believed that self-assessment benefitted their writing by enhancing their linguistic awareness and helping them better monitor the writing strategies they selected for composing the portfolio entries.

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Appendix A
Self-Assessment Form

Name: _____ Group: _____

Part 1:

Choose ONE entry from your writing portfolio and evaluate your performance based upon the following guidelines.

1. *Portfolio entry to be selected for self-assessment:*

   Summary on *'A Child Called It'*

   Critique on *'Hills Like White Elephants'*

   Comparison and contrast essay on *'Matilda'* and *'The BFG'**

   (* Tick as appropriate)

2. The reasons why you chose this entry for self-assessment:

Part 2:

Answer the following questions.

3. Write TWO words (or adjectives or phrases) to describe your level of satisfaction with the entry you selected.
4. Rank with a number from 1 – 6 (1 being the best, 6 the least) the following aspects you think you have done the best in your entry.

   Vocabulary and sentence structures _____
   Grammatical accuracy _____
   Coherence and organization _____
   Completion of tasks _____
   Appropriate style and tone _____
   Communication with readers _____

5. Which of the following best describes you?

   □ an apprentice writer □ a novice writer

   □ an experienced writer □ a skillful writer

The reasons:

6. Before you wrote this piece of writing, what did you expect to learn?
7. After you completed this piece of work, what do you think you have actually accomplished?
8. Which aspects of your work do you think you are satisfied with?

9. Which aspects of your work do you think you can make further improvement on?
10. In your opinion, what have you learned as a result of this chosen entry?
11. What would you plan to do when you are asked to write a similar writing task next time?
12. I would give this piece of writing a grade* of _____ because...

    [Scoring Keys: A+, A, A- (Excellent); B+, B, B- (Good); C+, C, C- (Adequate); D (Marginal); F (Fail)]

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B
Guidelines of the Reflective Journal

Guided questions for writing the reflective journal:

1. What have you learned in the writing course?
2. Which portfolio entry do you like? Why?
3. In what way do you think self-assessment can help you improve your writing in the writing course?
4. Do you think the end-of-term self-assessment activity can help you review your overall writing performance?
5. What are the benefits of doing self-assessment in the course?

Appendix C
The Student Interview Guide

1. Can you briefly talk about what self-assessment is?
2. Which portfolio entry do you think is the most challenging to compose?
3. Which portfolio entry did you select for self-assessment and why?
4. To what extent do you think self-assessment can help improve your writing abilities?
5. What did you benefit from self-assessment?

Appendix D
The Instructor Interview Guide

1. Which portfolio entry do you think students are likely to choose for doing self-assessment? Why?
2. To what extent, do students believe that self-assessment can help them improve their writing abilities?
3. What are students' perceived benefits of self-assessment on their writing development?

Appendix E
Self-assessment Checklist

Check the boxes on your right if you have written the following in the comparison and contrast essay.

1. I have written an introductory paragraph. ☐
2. I have included a clear and coherent thesis statement in the essay. ☐
3. I have written four to five paragraphs to support the thesis statement. ☐
4. I have written a topic sentence in each paragraph. ☐
5. Each paragraph makes a different point about the topic. ☐
6. I have identified two subjects which can be compared. ☐
7. I have identified a few categories that help elaborate the similarities and differences of the two subjects. ☐
8. I have found out the similarities and differences between the two subjects. ☐
9. I have stated whether I will focus on similarities, differences or the mixture of both in the essay. ☐
10 I have used the point-by-point model to organize my essay. ☐

Conference Announcements

GLoCALL 2010 Conference. December 1-3, 2010. Globalization and Localization in Computer-Assisted Language Learning. Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. The conference aims to share knowledge, research and experience on how to use computer technology to make language learning more effective and pleasant; to explore how the technology can be adapted to better meet the local needs of students and teachers, while at the same time providing global perspectives on computer-assisted language learning (CALL); and to bring the technology within the reach of local teachers who wish to develop their professionalism in CALL. GLoCALL is jointly sponsored by APACALL and PacCALL. PacCALL is working in partnership with the ACM Chapter on E-learning and Technical Communication at the University of Aizu, Japan. E-mail: programs@glocall.org. Web site http:// glocall.org

Applied Linguistics Association of Korea (ALAK) International Conference. December 4, 2010. Korea University in Seoul, Korea. The theme of the conference is "Interdisciplinarity in Applied Linguistics." E-mail: alaksecretary@gmail.com. Web site http:// alak. or.kr

Hawaii TESOL Annual Conference. February 19, 2011. Brigham Young University – Hawaii. The deadline for proposal submissions is December 31, 2010. E-mail jamesm@byuh.edu. Web site http:// www.hawaiitesol.org

TESOL Arabia. March 10-12, 2011. 17th Annual International Conference & Exhibition JW Marriott Hotel, Dubai, UAE. The theme of the conference is "Rethinking English language teaching: attitudes, approaches and perspectives". E-mail: tesolarabia@icedxb.com. Web site at http:// tesolarabia.org

Canada International Conference on Education. April 4-7, 2011. Toronto, Canada. The theme is "Education, Pedagogy, Research." The CICE is an international refereed conference dedicated to the advancement of the theory and practices in education. The CICE promotes collaborative excellence between academicians and professionals from Education. The aim of CICE is to provide an opportunity for academicians and professionals from various educational fields with cross-disciplinary interests to bridge the knowledge gap, promote research esteem and the evolution of pedagogy. The CICE-2011 invites research papers that encompass conceptual analysis, design implementation and performance evaluation. E-mail info@ciceducation. Web site at http:// ciceducation.org

Tips for Teachers

Developing an Independent Learning Component for an EFL Course

Chi Cheung Ruby Yang, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

For some time I have known that developing students' independent learning capabilities is highly desired in a language program. However, when I decided to implement an independent learning component in one of my courses recently, I learned the hard way that it is not enough to simply tell students that they should study on their own. Fortunately, I had greater success with my second attempt. My experience may be helpful to others who wish to implement an independent learning component in their ESL or EFL courses.

These steps summarize the process I followed in my first attempt to incorporate independent language learning in my tertiary level English and Communication course.

1. I asked my students to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses in their English language learning and identify the skill area(s) they wanted to improve.
2. I asked them to write down what they wanted to achieve by the end of the semester using a simple learner contract.
3. I gave students a list of online resources for studying English.
4. I asked them to record their learning activities in a learner log.
5. I collected two entries from their learner logs at the end of the term.

At the end of the semester, however, I found that students did not show any improvement in their English learning. More important, some students wrote in their reflections on the experience that they lacked the skills to learn independently and did not even know how to begin a self study routine. This feedback helped me rethink my assumptions and improve my implementation in my second attempt.

Despite dismal results the first time, I tried implementing an independent language learning component in the course again in the next semester. Again, I asked students to identify the areas in English that they wanted to improve, set some goals for the semester,

and record them in a learner contract similar to the one in Appendix A. Again, I gave students a list of websites for self study. However, I also made a number of important changes in preparing for and implementing the self study component the second time around. These changes included the following:

1. I began by meeting my students individually or in small groups to explain the reasons for and process of self study.
2. Both the students and I signed their contract signifying our pledge to work together to achieve their goals.
3. Instead of just asking the students to explore the websites by themselves, I made an effort to match my website suggestions to the students' based on their needs, levels, learning styles, and the goals that they had set for themselves.
4. I expanded my suggestions for study beyond websites to include more authentic sources of input such as movies, TV programmes such as Friends, and magazines such as EZ Talk. (A subset of the websites that I recommend is in Appendix B)
5. Responding to the feedback I had received in the first semester regarding the need for more training and guidance, I gave students who needed it some training. For example, in one lesson, I taught how typical newspaper stories are organized with the main points of the story packed into the first few sentences and subsequent paragraphs used to elaborate on those points. This kind of instruction helps students understand where they need to focus their attention in reading for gist in a news article.
6. As before, I asked students to keep a log of their work. However, this time, I asked them to record more specific information and to submit the log more frequently. They recorded the activities they did, resources they used, what they had learned (for example, words, expressions, or grammatical patterns), and, if relevant, what difficulties they encountered. When I checked their logs, I gave some positive feedback to let them know what they had done well but I also made suggestions about areas that they could still improve.
7. At the end of the semester, each student selected several samples of their work to submit as a small portfolio. These work samples provided documentation of their learning and comprised 20 percent of the course grade.

In evaluating the project at the end of the second semester, I found that students not only improved significantly but also expressed positive feelings towards their experience with independent language learning. Many indicated that they had become more confident about learning English on their own. Additional study would be necessary to determine precisely which factors were most significant, but the combination of careful, student-centred planning, a wide range of options, continuous feedback, and student accountability seem to have led to a successful outcome in this independent learning program.

About the Author

Chi Cheung Ruby Yang is a teaching fellow at the Department of English, The Hong Kong Institute of Education. She obtained her BEd, MEd, and MA in Applied Linguistics at The University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include second language teaching and learning and gender and language.

Appendix A

Learner Contract

I _____ (your name) have identified my weakness in _____ and have set the following goals to help improve my English:

Goal 1: To _____

To achieve this goal, I will _____ this semester.

Goal 2: _____

To achieve this goal, I will _____ this semester.

Goal 3:

To achieve this goal, I will _____ this semester.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Student signature: _____

Teacher's signature: _____

Agreed to on: _____ (date)

Appendix B
Websites for English Language Learning

AudioEnglish.net (http://www.audioenglish.net/)

A collection of English conversations illustrating both practical and specific purpose contexts including Travel English, Telephone English, Banking English, and Accounting English; includes transcripts and audio files from beginner to upper intermediate levels.

Better@English (http://www.betteratenglish.com/)

Intended to enhance listening skills with podcast recordings, transcripts, and lessons on topics from telling time to perfectionism and business English with special focus on idioms, slang, and usage.

BBC Learning English (http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/)

A rich and versatile website with resources addressing all needs from business English to podcasts of radio stations for learners of different ages.

Conversations for ESL Students (http://www.rong-chang.com/book/)

An online conversation book for ESL learners at the intermediate level.

EnglishClub.com (http://www.englishclub.com/)

A portal to a host of other list of resources, lessons, and networks for English language learners and teachers all over the world. It has links for individual skills like pronunciation and reading as well as projects and games that can be used in a variety of ways.

English Page (http://www.englishpage.com/prepositions/phrasaldictionary.html)

Online English lessons and resources for students and teachers including an online phrasal verb dictionary, for example.

English Pronunciation (http://international.ouc.bc.ca/pronunciation/)

Free online English pronunciation lessons with videos and a variety of exercises.

ESLgold.net (http://www.eslgold.com/)

A virtual library of resources for both teachers and learners of English on all levels, organized by skill or topic such as business English: has links to information in 16 languages.

Game Zone (http://www.english-online.org.uk/games/gamezone2.htm)

A website with online English language games for learners of all levels.

Interesting Things for ESL Students (http://www.manythings.org/)

A free website for ESL and EFL students with word games, puzzles, MP3 reading and listening texts, and other computer-assisted language learning activities.

Internet TESL Journal (http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Reading/)

Primarily a teacher resource site but with links for students as well; includes puzzles, riddles, and a wonderful collection of questions to help with conversations on dozens of topics; also includes bilingual quizzes in dozens of languages.

Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab (http://esl-lab.com/)

A three-level collection of short authentic-like audio files on a wide range of everyday topics. Each one has pre, during, and post listening tasks. At the lowest level, students can read the transcript while they listen.

ReadingMatrix.com (http://www.readingmatrix.com/directory/pages/)

A database with nearly 150 links to interactive online reading activities such as analysing text, proofreading, and stories for learners of all levels.

Bookends: Lessons to Open and Close the School Year

Michael Rector, Ichinomiya City Bisaidaichi Middle School, Japan

I work as a native speaking assistant language teacher (ALT) in a large junior high school in a suburb of Nagoya, Japan. There are hundreds of English speakers like me employed in a wide variety of cultural and linguistic communities around the world. Essentially, we serve as cultural ambassadors for the English speaking world and assist host country English teachers in providing their students with an opportunity and need to communicate in English. However ALTs are a mixed bag. Some are dedicated and well-trained language teachers; others lack experience, training, and dedication. The majority probably fall between these extremes. Similarly, our host teachers may or may not have an understanding of communicative language teaching or effective team teaching practices. Consequently, they often do not know how to utilize the assistance of ALTs, and ALTs often do not know how to be useful. Team teaching partnerships are further strained by a lack of time, resources, planning, and coordination.

Despite these obstacles, there are bright spots. Most students are interested in getting to know their ALT, and most ALTs are interested in the young people that they work with.

In this article, I describe a lesson plan that I have used successfully to build on this interest and initiate communication between students and myself on the very first day that I meet them. It also introduces my host nation colleagues to the notion of communicative language teaching and sets the stage for additional communicative activities throughout the course. I close with a lesson that I use to give our relationship some closure and to get some student feedback on my work. While these lessons were designed to help students get acquainted with an assistant language teacher like me, they could be adapted for use by any language teacher who wants to set a tone of cooperation and communication from Day 1.

Getting Acquainted

This lesson can be used with any group of students who already know basic wh-questions in English. The objectives are to work cooperatively with a small group of classmates and become acquainted with their new teacher. You will need lined paper and photographs or other objects that reveal something about yourself such as your interests, hobbies, family, hometown, travels, friends, and so forth. For example, you might bring a photo of yourself playing tennis, or you could bring your tennis racket. There should be one object or photo for every small group of four students.

Procedures:

1. Divide students into groups of four and give each group one of your photos or objects.
2. Tell students their goal is learn as much as they can about the object and how it connects to you. They should work together, and when they have questions, they can raise their hands to call you over for help.
3. Give the students time to think and talk about their object. It may take a few minutes to warm up, but as soon as one group begins asking questions, others will follow their example. Often one or two students in each group will ask most of the questions. Do not worry. The other students are getting valuable input from listening to the interaction even if they do not directly ask a question.
4. Move quickly around the class answering as many questions as possible.
5. When it is clear that everyone has collected some information, give each group a sheet of lined paper and tell students that now they have to put the information they have collected into written form so that other groups can read and learn from it.
6. This new task will probably spark additional questions. Answer them as needed.
7. To close, or in the next class, put all the objects on display where students can see them. Redistribute the compositions so that each group has a new one. Have students read and try to determine which object is being described. Encourage them to ask you additional questions as they read. When they finish, they can

exchange papers with another group until they have read several of the papers. There are numerous ways of varying, reviewing, or extending this activity. For example:

- Guess which one. Display the objects at the front of the room. Have the class form the same groups they did in the first lesson. Read the compositions aloud to the class, one at a time being careful to omit language that directly identifies the object. The students should guess which object each composition is about. If a student guesses correctly, his or her group gets a point.
- Review and recycle. Display the objects at the front of the room for reference. If desired, give each object a number for easier identification. Write the basic wh-question words on the board as a prompt. Form new groups of four students who were originally in four different groups. Have students take turns asking one member of their group questions about the object that he or she learned about earlier. If time permits, make new groups once again and repeat the conversations.
- On your own. A few days after writing the original group composition, have students try writing individual compositions. Alternatively, after they have talked, read, and heard quite a bit of information, have them compose a short biography about you incorporating all of the information that they can.
- Dig deeper. The original lesson about you as a person can be extended to learn more about your home country or other places you have lived.
- Culture talk. Have students bring pop or folk culture artifacts that they can use to teach you about the history, culture, customs, and fads in their country.
- Your turn. Have students bring their own personal photos or artifacts from their life outside of school. Use the routines described above to help teachers and classmates learn more about their lives, particularly their lives outside of school.

Saying Goodbye

At the end of the school year, it is time to reflect on your shared experience and say goodbye. The objectives of this lesson are for students to hear a goodbye message from you, talk about their experiences in your English class with several partners, and write their own goodbye message which serves as an informal class evaluation and self reflection. You will need to prepare several open-ended but easy-to-understand questions for students to answer about their experience in your class. Write them on the board. For example:

- Tell about something you *liked* in English class.
- Tell about something you *learned* in English class.
- What would you like to do in English class next year?

Write your goodbye message to the students. Your message should be in simple, comprehensible English and contain your answers to the same questions. Your message will serve as an example for the students, so determine the best way to share it—spoken only, written on the board, or printed on a handout.

Procedures:

1. Show students how to use the questions on the board as a conversation prompt to find out what each other enjoyed or learned in the class.
2. Form groups of three or four students and give them a few minutes to talk. Circulate and answer language questions as needed. If time permits, form new groups and repeat.
3. Read your goodbye message to the class. Ask them to try to notice how you answered the questions that they have been discussing.
4. Tell students that it is time for them to write their own answers to the questions. Give 10-15 minutes of writing time. Answer their language questions as needed.
5. Collect the papers and say goodbye to the class.
6. Read each paper noting the points that will help you plan for the next year. Write a short personal message of encouragement or best wishes on each one.
7. Arrange for the papers to be returned to the students by the homeroom teacher.

Conclusion

These lessons were originally designed to help my students and colleagues get to know me at the beginning of a course and provide me with some feedback at the end. However, the same procedures can be used to consolidate learning and foster both oral and written communication periodically throughout a course, whether there is an ALT in the class or not.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Noriko Ishitobi, with whom I developed the Getting Acquainted activity, for her contribution and for encouraging me to develop my teaching skills as a MATESOL student. Without the chain of events that began when we worked together, this article would not have been written.

About the Author

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Tick Tock Verb Review

Saeko Tsukimi, Okazakigakuen Junior and Senior High School, Aichi, Japan

I have been teaching English to junior and senior high school students for several years. I have found it important and useful for students to learn irregular verb forms because many of the verbs used in daily conversation and presented in junior and senior high school textbooks are irregular verbs. It is not easy for students to learn them consciously, so I have been exploring ways to help them acquire the forms through gradual practice over a long period of time. Like the chants that are a popular feature of many language classes today, reading and reciting to a rhythmical beat can help students acquire a degree of automaticity in the use of irregular verbs forms.

First, I prepare a handout compiled from the index of the junior high textbook series with a list of all the irregular verbs introduced in the series. For each verb in the list, I list the present form, the past form, the past participle, and a translation. Some readers will disapprove of the translation column. However, I do not use it; I simply provide it. I give the same list to all age groups in junior and senior high school. This means the first year junior high school students have many unknown verbs at first. This has not created a problem, and over a long period of time, students gradually learn them all.

The verbs are divided into four different categorizes depending on the shape of their past and past participle forms.

- A-B-C verbs like *eat, ate, eaten* or *take, took, taken* have different shapes in the present, past, and past participle forms.
- A-B-B verbs like *bring, brought, brought* or *stand, stood, stood* have the same shape in the past and past participle forms.
- A-B-A verbs like *come, came, come* or *run, ran, run* have the same shape for the present and past participle forms.
- A-A-A verbs like *cut, cut, cut* and *put, put, put,* have the same shape in all three forms.

In each category, the verbs are listed alphabetically. This arrangement helps students use the list as a verb dictionary.

Once the list is made, I spend a few minutes at the beginning of each lesson reading the list to the beat of a metronome, starting slowly on the first day, and gradually going faster as students get more used to the list. In the beginning, I have students just listen as I read with the metronome. I usually spend several days doing this. When they are ready,

I ask them to repeat after me. For example, I say, *"give, gave, given,"* and they repeat *"give, gave, given"* reading all three forms as an intact set. Sometimes they cannot pronounce the verbs correctly at first, but gradually, over a period of several months, depending on the level of the students, they improve a great deal. When they become comfortable with repeating after me, I sometimes have students read together with me. Another degree of difficulty can be added by having students fold their lists so that only the present tense verb column is visible.

With first year junior high school students, I usually introduce the chant in the second term. By then they are familiar with the English writing system. I might say, "Let's look at the first quarter/half of the list today. While you listen to me read, follow the words with your finger." With students in their second year or more, I introduce the whole list on the first day, because it is review for them. The key is not to stress them and not to use more than a few minutes each day. I usually tell them at the beginning, "Don't worry if you don't get it at first. We are going to use this list for a long period of time. Gradually, you will remember all the verbs without noticing."

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is it just for fun? At first when students see a metronome, they may think it is both fun and funny and get a bit excited. You may find some of your students dancing or moving their body to the beat of the metronome. As long as they are listening or repeating at the same time, this is fine. After a few days, students will concentrate more on the language. Even after it has become routine, however, students still find the activity to be fun. I often see students in the corridor, reciting words while rhythmically moving their bodies. If my students find review and practice to be fun, I think they will remain motivated.
2. Should we go faster and faster? Sometimes students ask, with big smile on their faces, to go really fast. I try to speed up only gradually knowing that I will use the list for a long period of time. I do not want to rush it. However, once in awhile, for a change, it is not a bad idea to set the metronome really fast so students are challenged to keep up with the beat. Students can have fun, and they can also see that they need more practice. In the next class, I continue with the usual speed again.
3. Do you test students? The standardized tests that my students take are more than enough testing, so I generally do not test them on this information formally. However once I think they know all the verbs in the list, I begin informal oral testing. For example, I have students work in pairs to "test" each other.

Conclusion

This rhythmical reading of verb forms takes only a few minutes out of a busy teacher's lesson. Students enjoy the chanting routine, but they also indirectly learn the value of review and repetition. In most cases, they end up knowing all the verbs on the list. When we reach that point, I use the list less frequently, rather than stopping it altogether. For example, I might use it every other day or once a week. Of course, students need more interactive classroom activities before they can actively and confidently use these verbs in spontaneous situations, but learning the list helps. I have many exchanges like this one:

Student: I have saw this movie twice.

Me: See...saw...?

Student Oh, seen!

About the Author

Saeko Tsukimi is a MATESOL candidate at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. She is also an English teacher at Okazakigakuen Junior and Senior High School in Aichi, Japan. She has been teaching English for 7 years. Although she devotes a few minutes each day to warming up her class with Tick Tock review, she is most interested in helping her students develop their communicative English language skills.

Using Newsletters to Empower and Enrich the Learning Community

Noriko Ishitobi, Nagoya Municipal Junior High School, Nagoya, Japan

From Classroom Assessment to Newsletters

I used to wonder about my students' real feelings toward my English classes. With nearly 40 students in one class, it is not easy to monitor each student's performance or listen to their individual thoughts. Some students are very talkative and active; however, most are quite passive. It is not difficult to hear the voices of the outspoken, but it is quite difficult to hear the voices of the average, quiet majority. This is the group that I always thought about. Did they enjoy today's activity? They appeared to be having fun, but were they really learning what I wanted them to learn? What really happened in my class today?

To address these concerns, I began to ask for feedback on classroom activities and then use that feedback to plan more effective future lessons. I asked students to evaluate the degree of fun, ease, and usefulness that they perceived in our activities. I also left a bit of space where students could write comments, reflections, or questions. Now, I always insert this simple feedback form at the bottom of my activity sheets.

Comment on today's activity	Fun (4 3 2 1) Ease (4 3 2 1) Usefulness (4 3 2 1)

Student feedback on classroom activities gives me insight for planning future lessons. I am especially content when students say that an activity was fun and useful but a little challenging because that fits my goal exactly. I consider it forgivable if students rate an activity as useful and easy even if it was not fun. On the other hand, I consider it problematic if they rate an activity as easy and fun, but not at all useful. Interestingly, the results sometimes turn out to be different from what I anticipated when I was planning the activity. Sometimes, an activity that I guessed was too difficult to be enjoyable is evaluated as fun, and sometimes an activity which I guessed would be easy was not. We never know until we really listen to students' thoughts. Thus, this simple form of feedback helped my lesson planning greatly, and I was often encouraged by positive comments such as these:

- *Thanks to the pre-writing activity, I could finish writing one page essay in the class time.*
- *I really like "Easy True Stories." I want to read more stories from that book.*

Soon after I began using this form of classroom assessment, I noticed that some shy students were absolutely eloquent in writing. I appreciated their effort to write their thoughts in English, and I took pride in their trials and errors when the orthography, word order, and so many other features of written English are different from Japanese. Every time I read my students' comments or essays, I realized they were great. I gradually realized that it was not right that I was the only one who read, enjoyed, and found satisfaction in their comments. My students should also be able to learn from their classmates' comments. Thanks to a course in materials development in graduate school, I got the idea of using a class newsletter as a means of publishing my students' voices. Since then, I have seen that a newsletter can be a powerful tool for teachers seeking evidence about the effectiveness of their teaching. I am also astonished at the benefits of newsletters for both my students and myself.

Developing a Newsletter

There are many decisions to make about the process and product of developing a class newsletter. Depending upon the setting in which you teach, you may make decisions that are very different from mine. I offer the following points, not as a model, but as prompts to help you make your own decisions about beginning a class newsletter.

1. Make it attractive. Students are delighted to see their English writing printed in a cool way, and with free downloadable newsletter templates, this is not difficult to do.
2. Make decisions about what to include. I include students' compositions, survey results, comments on activities, and (because my students and their parents are frequently concerned about structure) notes on frequently tested grammatical errors.
3. Make decisions about size and space. My newsletter is one sheet of A4 paper printed on both sides. I select pieces that will have wide student appeal and publish them with the authors' initials only. In my large urban school, this means that the writer is essentially anonymous. I carry student comments as they are, positive or negative, but I also occasionally correct their grammar, particularly when I see an opportunity to reinforce a grammatical point or collocation that is frequently tested in Japan. For example:

When I talked my partner, I can't be eye contact.

When I talked [to] my partner, I ~~can't~~[couldn't]~~be~~ [make] eye contact.

Despite the grammatical errors, I appreciate this comment because the student mentions an important cultural aspect of English, making eye contact.

4. Make decisions about the use of L1. You will see some Japanese in the example newsletter at the end of this article. Some readers will disapprove, but I consider carefully whether to include Japanese notes and glosses. For example, when students use a dictionary to write compositions, they sometimes find and use interesting words that are unfamiliar to their classmates. I give glosses for these words. The Japanese comments that appear in the margins are not translations but rather reading prompts designed to trigger interest in the passage.

Functions of the Newsletter

The newsletter has brought greater benefits to my students than I had originally anticipated.

1. Noticing errors. The newsletter helps draw students' attention to grammatical form by showing errors and how to correct them as I did above. Due to its SOV structure and frequently omitted subjects, Japanese students frequently write sentences such as this one: "A uniform doesn't need our school" meaning "We do not need uniforms in our school." One student, commenting on this example, stated in his reflection: "I saw the grammatical mistakes corrected by the teacher in every newsletter. Now I am careful not to make the same kind of mistakes by myself." Having their attention drawn to these errors helped them later with their proofreading and peer-editing.
2. Creating reading material. Since Japanese students rarely have a chance to read English other than in their textbook, the newsletter, filled with the raw voices of students, has became a good source of interesting, personal, comprehensible reading material. I do not just distribute the newsletter at the end of class and expect students to read it at home; I know they won't. Instead, I distribute it and give students time to read it, ask each other for help, or listen to me read it to them. I tell them to underline expressions they like or phrases they want to use in the future and have them talk in pairs about what they underlined and why. Most students incorporate these underlined expressions in their next writing assignment. While some students claim the newsletter is difficult to read and ask for a Japanese summary or glosses, most seem to think that it is good to have a chance to read English materials other than their textbook.
3. Promoting a positive, cooperative learning environment. I see several ways in which the newsletter helps students learn from each other and take responsibility for their own learning. For example, when I publish compositions in which writers have made an effort to use new expressions, their classmates often try to emulate these peer models. When I share positive comments on activities, a better impression of the activity contagiously spreads throughout the class. Finally, I try to express my appreciation for negative comments and show students how I use their comments to improve my teaching. This openness appears to help students become more responsible for their learning and participate more actively in the class. Overall, the newsletters increase the chance for students to learn more from their classmates, not just from their teacher.

Conclusion

Enthusiastic and curious teachers are always trying out new techniques. Curiosity about silent students' perceptions of my lessons led to the creation of the newsletter described in this article. An anecdote may the best way to show the impact the newsletter has had on my students. One day last year, after their third experience with timed

conversations in which I gently forced students to change partners several times, make eye contact, express their opinions, show interest in the words of their classmates, and ask follow-up questions, I asked them to reflect on the activity. I was sure that the experience had been torture for an intensely shy third year student. Despite my concerns, however, her comments were positive, and when I published them, everyone in the class guessed that she was the author, admired her English proficiency, and expressed appreciation for what she had written about the class. From that time on, I sensed stronger motivation for our timed conversations. Here are her words: *It is really difficult for me to talk with boys. I could not see their eyes first. But when I tried to speak, they listened to me and smiled at me. I felt very happy. I think English class is precious time for me because I can learn English, and I can talk to many different students, too. My classmates are fun and nice...*

Her comments and her classmates' reaction to them illustrate what Tim Murphey described in an article about the benefits of action logs, action research, and class newsletters for both teachers and students. He wrote that "after reading comments about how some students were taking control of their learning and doing many things outside class, other students expressed new commitment to learning and striving more. The publication also gave my students a better feel for my commitment toward them and how I perceived their education" (Murphey, 1993). His words describe my experience precisely.

Reference

Murphey, T. (1993). Why don't teachers learn what learners learn?: Taking the guesswork out with action logging. *English Teaching Forum 31*(1). Retrieved from http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/forum/archives/1993/93-31-1.html.

About the Author

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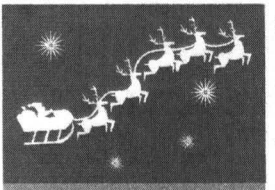

Unit 5
Reading for Communication
Pp52,53

プリントの最後で，次の3つの意見について，みなさんに考えてもらいました。

①若者は優先席にすわるべきではない。

②学校では制服を着るべきだ。

③高校を卒業したら，親元を離れた方がいい。

本当はこう英語で言いたいのに，思ったことが書けない，ともどかしい思いをした人が多かったようです。

英文を書くときにはいつも

主語＋動詞

の語順に気をつけましょう。何が主語なのかを考えて英文を書くことが大切です。

たとえば，②について「ファッションは学校に必要ない」と書きたかった時・・・

Fashion doesn't need school.

これは正しい英文でしょうか？

Ueda JHS 3rd year

Active English

Vol. 4 December, 2008

Opinions – What do you think?

Result of vote 投票結果

(146 students in 3-2, 3-3, 3-4, 3-5)

①Young people can sit in priority seat.

Agree…66 Disagree…80

☆ The best opinion Ms. Ishitobi chose☆

I agree. I think all the seats should be the priority seats!!! Anybody can sit but they always give a seat to weaker people.

② We should wear school uniforms at school.

Agree…106 Disagree…40

☆ The best opinion Ms. Ishitobi chose☆

I disagree. It is too hot to wear school uniform in summer, and it is too cold in winter.

③ We should leave our parents' house when we graduate from high school.

Agree…72 Disagree…74

☆ The best opinions Ms. Ishitobi chose☆

I agree. We need to be independent.

I disagree because living with family is fun.

「学校で英語を学ぶべきか」について，自分の意見を書きました。

What do you think?

"Should we study English in school?"

《From Michael》

マイケル先生からのコメントです。

Recently you wrote great compositions about your opinions. Some examples are printed below. As in these examples many students tried to express their own ideas and write interesting compositions. In my classes you always have a great attitude and do your best. It shows in your compositions. Even students who struggle（苦労する） with English or who don't like it wrote good compositions. Your writing is improving. I am very impressed and I am proud of all of you. Please enjoy your winter holiday. I am looking forward to seeing you in January.

【生徒作文　その1】
英語を学ぶべきだという意見を，3つの理由を述べて書いてくれました。理由のそれぞれのポイントがはっきりしていて，構成としてとても良いです。文法的には，何カ所か間違いもありますが，全体として難しい英語を使わずに，シンプルにわかりやすく書けました。

【Students' work No.1】

I think we should study English in junior high schools for three reasons. First, English is used ~~in the~~ all over the world. I want to learn about many ~~country~~ [countries'] culture. I study English to do it. Second, I like foreign movies very much. I want to be [a] movie（映画） director（監督）. So I want to learn [about] foreign movies in foreign country. And if I can speak English, I talk about foreign movies with foreign people. Finally ~~emergency~~ [emergencies（緊急事態）] in foreign ~~country~~ [countries] ~~is~~ [are] very dangerous. Because ~~I'm~~ [I could be killed（殺されるかも） by [a] gun. Gun[s] ~~is~~ [are] very dangerous. Then I can say "I'm Japanese. I'm not dangerous~~"~~ [."] It's very important. (Y・F)

【生徒作文　その2】
2つめの理由，日本の世界での役割についてまで言及したところがGOOD。

【Students' work No.2】

I think we should study English in school for three reasons. First, English is very useful because English is used by many countries people. We can communicate with foreign people. Second, Japanese people should go abroad, and we should do useful things in the world, then Japan will be able to become the most important country. Finally, we sometimes see American movies. If we study English in school, we can see movies in English! I think the people seeing the movie in English is cool. (Y・I)

【生徒作文　その3】
いつでもcritical thinkingは大切！！！英語教育に疑問を投げかけています。よく書けました！

【Student's work No.3】

I think we shouldn't study English in school for several reasons. First, why do we have to study English?? English is a language which is used in the UK, America, and so on. But, it's not used in all countries, like Japan. Second, people who want ~~s~~ to learn ~~them~~ [it] should go to an English school. Third, we are studying English right now, but most of the people have never used ~~them~~ [it] except [in]（以外に） class ~~times~~. Fourth, we should introduce Japanese culture to people all over the world. But it it's also important to understand different culture. Finally, I love English, but studying English at school like now is not good. We can't speak English that much. When we need English is when we talk with foreign people. So, it's better to speak than to write in class. (K・I)

【生徒作文　その4】
英語よりも，日本の隣にあり，そして今発展しつつある中国の言葉，中国語を学んだ方がいいという意見。興味深いです。

【Student's work No.4】

I think we shouldn't study English in school for three reasons. First, we don't have to go to foreign countries. So we don't have to study English. Second, keeping Japanese culture is more important than studying foreign language. Finally, I also think English important and useful. But I think we should study Chinese because China is nearer than countries using English and China ~~will development~~ [is developing more（より発展しつつある）] than America. So I think Chinese is more useful than English in the future. (K・Y)

Keys to Teaching Grammer to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook and *Workbook for Keys to Teaching Grammer to English Learners*

Review by Neil McBeath
Sultan Qaboos University, Al Khod, Sultanate of Oman

KEYS TO TEACHING GRAMMAR TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK. Keith S. Folse. Michigan Teacher Training Series. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2009. ISBN 978-0-472-03220-4. 368 pp. Paper: $28.95S.

WORKBOOK FOR KEYS TO TEACHING GRAMMAR TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS. Keith S. Folse and Ekaterina V. Goussakova. Michigan Teacher Training Series. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2009.ISBN 978-0-472-03338-6. 272 pp. $24.95S.

On July 26, 2010, someone called "superfly snuke" (sic), posting on the Saudi Arabian discussion threads of Dave's ESL Café, suggested, "Grammarians; get a life," opining that "Teaching ESL does not require a textbook understanding of grammar."

The infinitely more distinguished Keith Folse obviously disagrees with such pernicious nonsense, and in these two volumes he offers a comprehensive resource book and a set of highly practical exercises. Professional teachers are likely to find both extremely useful.

I would question, however, whether these books are likely to live up to the billing in the blurb, which states that they "are for all teachers, whether they are teaching grammar directly, or indirectly in a variety of classes—including grammar class, a writing class, a speaking class, an ESP class or a K-12 class."

Clearly, these books were never intended to be read from cover to cover, but having done so for the purposes of this review, it was hard for me to ignore the fact that Folse has very little to say about K-12 classes. This is particularly obvious in the *Workbook*. The exercises run parallel with the *Handbook*, and there is meticulous cross-referencing, but all the examples refer to adult concerns, there are no illustrations at all, and the superficial impression is that the *Workbook* is dull.

This is unfortunate because *Keys to Teaching Grammar* is more than comprehensive. It is divided into five chapters and three appendices, and it is clearly the result of years of experience and a wealth of learning.

The "Introduction to Grammar for English Language Learners (ELLS)" (pp. 1-30) begins with a Pre-Test on what the reader already knows before moving into a section that considers teaching approaches. This examines the roles played by the students, setting, course and teaching situation, but as these are factors that quite clearly vary from teacher to teacher, it is difficult for Folse to do more than generalize.

"Basic English Grammar; Usage and Terminology" (pp. 31-88) would probably be dismissed by people like "superfly snuke," but teachers who have only a very little more professional dedication will find this interesting. It would be particularly valuable for teachers-in-training and those who are at the start of their careers.

There then follows "15 Keys to ELL Grammar" (pp. 99-262), a chapter which examines typical grammar errors, provides detailed explanations, offers contrast with seven (yes, SEVEN) other languages, and then suggests ways in which each grammar point can be taught.

The grammar points selected include verb tenses, countable/uncountable nouns, use of articles, phrasal verbs and the passive. There are few surprises there, perhaps, but the section on contrastive linguistics will be a godsend to anyone who is teaching students for whom Arabic/Chinese/French/Japanese/Korean/Russian or Spanish is the L1, and who does not have a basic awareness of the potential pitfalls.

"Being in the Hot Seat; Grammar Questions from ELLS" (pp. 263-286) offers a further 20 specific questions that, in Folse's opinion "ELLs frequently ask about" (P. 264). This, however, is a personal selection that seems to be based on intuition rather than on statistical evidence, and it is hard to estimate quite how useful some of this material could be, unless the teacher is prepared to openly refer to the answer in front of a class.

"Specific Techniques for Teaching ELL Grammar" (pp. 287-311) offers fairly sound advice on a further 25 areas, such as #1— You don't need a grammar book to start a lesson; #8—Simple exercises might not be so simple; # 10—Use songs to practice ELL grammar; and # 25 Develop your own system for correcting grammar errors.

Again, teaching contexts may affect the extent to which this advice can be adopted. Particularly in the case of # 25, large institutions may prefer that their teaching faculty employ a common system that can work across levels, and at least one institution in Saudi Arabia would dismiss any teacher who attempted to employ #10.

On balance, therefore, it must be said that *Keys to Teaching Grammar* might be a little less practical than Folse intended, and it is certainly less practical than the blurb suggests. Teachers, students and teaching contexts now vary so widely in their wants and needs that any attempt to offer a one-size-fits-all approach is almost bound to raise

questions among experienced practitioners. As a resource book for grammar exercises, however, *Keys to Teaching Grammar* has a great deal to recommend it, and at the very least, a copy would be welcome in most staff rooms and/or teacher or self-access resource centers.

About the Reviewer

Neil McBeath served as a uniformed Education Officer in the Royal Air Force of Oman from 1981 until he refused to renew contract in 2005. During that time he took two Masters Degrees and received the Distinguished Service Medal. He is now a Course Coordinator at the Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

Notes to Contributors

The *TESL Reporter* is a refereed semiannual publication of the Department of English Language Teaching and Learning 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.

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