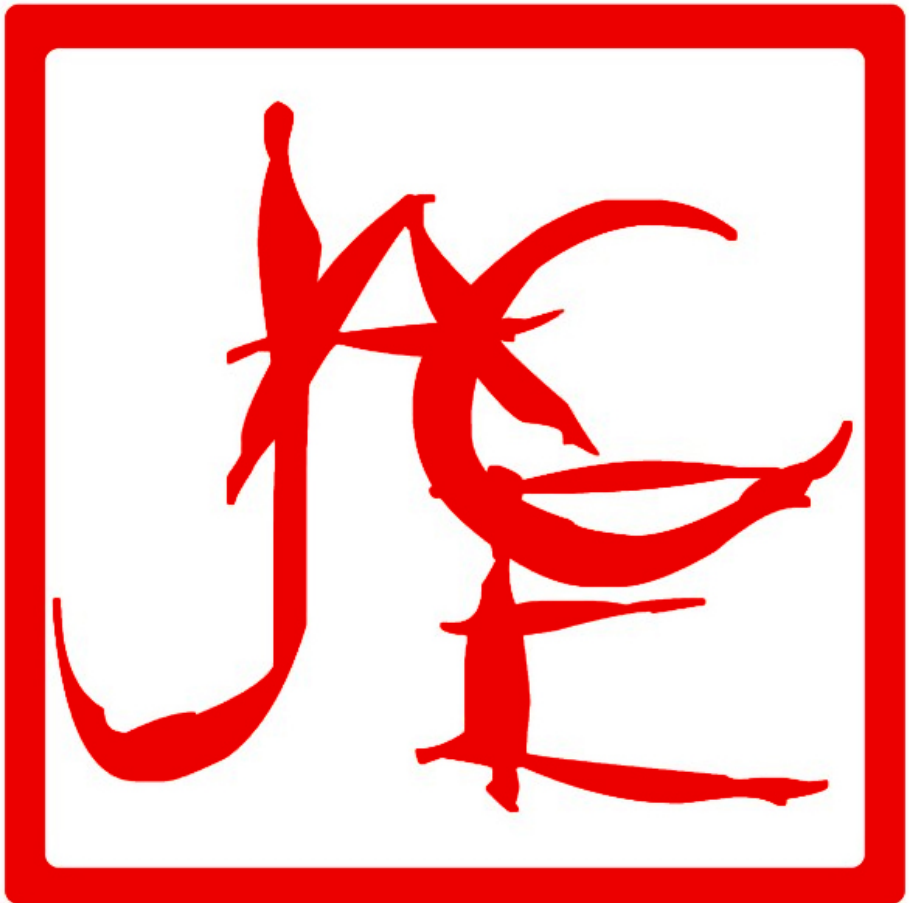


# JACE

*The Journal of Asian Critical Education*

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Fall 2012 Volume 1 Issue 1



**JACE** (*THE JOURNAL OF ASIAN CRITICAL EDUCATION*) is a peer reviewed publication of the Asian Critical Ensemble. The Journal will aim to provide a lively forum for academic and research papers with a focus on best practice in the field. It sets out to offer a keen resource for professionals, with information from experts contributing to a broader knowledge and understanding of the use of the education across the Asian Diaspora. It is intended that the Journal provide opportunity and encouragement to researchers and practitioners in the Asian Diaspora as well as research students to publish their work. It will strive to publish original articles of quality and welcomes authors from within International community.



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## EDITORIAL



**W**elcome to the first issue of the *Journal of Asian Critical Education*. The Journal aims to provide a lively forum for academic and research papers that are located in practices of critical inquiry and engagement. *JACE* sets out to provide a research resource for professionals and aims contribute to a broader knowledge and understanding of education across Asia and the Asian Diaspora. It is intended that *JACE will* provide a forum for researchers and practitioners as well as research students to publish their work. The editorial team invite the submission of original articles of quality from authors whose work takes a focus on exploring the ways in which respectful and ‘non-colonised’ research is able to relieve the negative aspects of imperialism in educational domains and life worlds.

The content of this tri-annual journal has a wide scope to address ethics, artful-praxis, social media, refugeity, women’s rights, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity ageism, other able-bodiedness, language, power and social change. Established with the remit of disseminating critical scholarship *JACE* is a peer reviewed publication of the Asian Critical Ensemble and invites for submission articles of quality showing academic rigour, originality, relevance and of interest to the Journal based on the Asian Critical Education readership. Subsequent issues of the journal will be themed for focus and Issue 2 aims to examine Vietnamese educational contexts of pedagogical innovation in teaching and learning English

language across a variety of institutional setting through the voice of Vietnamese emergent English teachers and researchers. Volume 2 (1) will focus in on the glocal aspects of education in China and Volume 2 (2) will explore Cambodian scholars perspectives on educational praxis. It was the intent of the editorial team in establishing the journal to disseminate scholarship that would

## **ADDRESS**

- I. The nature of educational inequality viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy and praxis.
- II. The diversified educational need and nature of educational services deliveries in Asia.
- III. Future development of equitable education in Asia .
- IV. The manner in which Asian students, their families and teachers experience financial and psychological burdens in the delivery of education.
- V. The widening gap between the rich and the poor and increase in regional disparities that impacts on education in developing and developed parts of Asia.
- VI. How psychological pressures and educational stress are becoming normalised in Asia for students to pass tests in English proficiency.

## **CRITIQUE**

- I. The adoption of the neo-liberalist approach to education
- II. The growing prominence of the 'privatised' and costly education system
- III. The manner in which educational institutions at all levels of schooling are active in establishing English teaching in their learning collaborations.
- IV. How some remote non-urban communities are significantly limited in their opportunities to equitable access to education as their urban counterparts.

- V. The significant economic transformations and social educational change occurring in education across Asia.
- VI. The emergence of the transnational 'citizen' and how the people of Asia can assert their global presence.
- VII. The impact of the least advantaged in terms of their social access and the economic injustice that has emerged in the growth of varied social classes in Asia.
- VIII. How the market economy in the delivery of education in Asia has inevitably been changed and challenged.

## ENGAGE

- I. In authentic teaching that can transform Asian societies on their own terms
- II. In the collaborative process of developing an interdisciplinary praxis based curriculum to redress inequities and social struggle.
- III. In the use of multimodal Englishes in teaching and learning methods.
- IV. In working with children of least advantage (especially poverty schools) —those students who cannot afford or enjoy meaningful educational opportunity.
- V. In debate around the balance between economic growth and the nature of 'healthy' social development in Asia.
- VI. In discussion around the manner in which Asian countries, when faced with the global trends of privatization, marketization and commoditisation
- VII. In development of policy and guidelines so that schools provide education equipped to the needs of society.
- VIII. In planning for culturally specific self-reliance to develop an understanding of the relationship between poverty, health and education

Methodologically, the journal calls for the need to critically consider how research methodologies can be disruptive to dominant forms of power within contemporary teaching and learning contexts and JACE will privilege works that are based in narrative, autoethnography, biography and bricolage to productively trouble and unsettle everyday narratives of teaching and learning. These non-traditional forms of representing data are at the heart of this journal, which focuses on inter-culturality and interdisciplinary qualitative inquiry and the papers in Volume 1 (1) attest to this eclectic mix.

Hong and White address in their paper the idea of higher education and the parallel reinvention of China through a high investment in creativity while within higher education the teaching of English remains dominated by mechanistic training practices. In their article, they examine how critically informed pedagogies might open up possibilities for addressing the relationship between the writer, inclusion of voice and volition and the critical in contemporary Chinese pedagogy and curriculum. Tran's paper focuses on the change in worldview of the researcher in a Vietnamese context from a post positivist position and her paper, discusses the turning point of a researcher who finds herself experiencing methodological infidelity in doing her research. McKenna & Cacciattolo in the first of their papers "The Role of CLT in Teaching and Learning" address how a communicative language teaching (CLT) philosophy based on 'Artful Practices' facilitate learning environments that welcome student voices and personal experiences. In the second paper, they build on the theoretical positions of critical pedagogy to explore the concept of motivation in ESL/EFL classrooms. They thematically continue a consideration of how artful practices in the space of learning generate rich activities for ESL/TESOL learning experiences and theorise the role of motivation, reflecting upon the intersection of practice, motivation and a positive classroom.

Yelland, in her paper explores the synergy between teaching and research, suggesting how engaging with research in school contexts enables teachers to participate in rich contexts for innovation and reflection that benefit their personal growth and professional learning. Advocating partnerships between teachers, children and academics that are mutually beneficial, Yelland poses the question 'Who cares about your research?' And if the answer is 'because it will generate a research grant, a publication, promotion or a doctorate of education – then as practitioners, we should increasingly question if that is a sound basis on which to proceed. Araki-Metcalf in the final paper of this issue explores how the teaching of communicative skills in English has become the centre of attention of educators in Japan and how they have started to seek alternative assessment and evaluation methods. Her paper considers the aim and interpretation of how language policy by schools and teachers and explores the obstructions and confusion that



has emerged from ‘Top-down’ educational reform in English language curriculum in Japanese primary schools.

We hope you enjoy the inaugural issue of JACE and we look forward to receiving and reading your work.

— Marcelle, Tarquam, Shirley, Mark

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# WRITING WITHOUT FEAR

Creativity and Critical Pedagogy in  
Chinese EFL Writing Programs

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Since the end of twentieth century, the rapid expansion of English in China's education and the country's increasing integration into the global economy has confronted English learners with unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Young people with creative abilities and powers of communication and cultural adaptability have become the most valuable asset of job market (Robinson, 2001). To meet these challenges, language policy-makers in China have revised the English teaching syllabi for secondary and higher education, placing special emphasis on the cultivation of students' creativity and critical thinking abilities (Foreign Language Teaching Supervision Committee (FLTSC), 2000; Ministry of Education (MOE), 2003, 2004).

In reality however, English education in China faces the charge of 'too much time, too little efficiency' (Dai, 2009) with a consistent focus on examinations and technical competence. Second language writing in China is generally viewed as a means of developing linguistic accuracy in order to meet standardized assessment criteria (You, 2004). Most Chinese programs follow traditional pedagogy in which controlled and mechanical training tends to suppress creativity and enjoyment in writing.

This paper shows how students perceive the teaching of writing in Chinese Higher Education, and considers ways in which critical pedagogy might open up

possibilities for critical literacy practices. It also explores how creativity might be employed to bring out writer voice and verve (Grainger, Gooch, & Lambirth, 2005) in China's EFL writing context. Progressive writing programs in a Chinese university are used to illustrate the potential of critical pedagogies.

## **CREATIVITY, PERFORMATIVITY AND EFL WRITING EDUCATION IN CHINA**

The creativity discourse has become increasingly widespread in China since 2008 (Keane, 2010) and like the West, creativity has been coupled with international competitiveness and identified as panacea, particularly within the educational sphere. However it remains to be seen if the mismatch between creativity policy rhetoric and educational practices identified in Australia and the UK (Burnard and White, 2008) relates also to China. In Australia, White and Smerdon (2008) have pointed to the conflicting demands of creativity and performativity and the significant restrictions teachers face in their work. Measuring students against externally devised standards increasingly requires that teachers 'teach to the test', which limits the creativity they can both employ and foster.

In China, 'creativity' (Chuangzaoli) has become a widely used term heard in all walks of life in contemporary China. The task of cultivating and fostering creativity has been given high policy priority at all levels of education. In higher education, the importance of creativity is repeatedly emphasized in English writing requirements. Explicit statements such as 'Students should be able to express personal views on general topics' (MOE, 2004, p.28) are readily found in policy and curriculum documents. This emphasis on individual expression in writing accords with China's reformed educational principle that 'focus should be placed on students' creative spirit and individualistic development' (FLTSC, 2000, p. 39).

Though efforts have been made to generate students' creativity in the teaching and learning of English, this is a relatively new endeavor in China. The teaching of English writing has been dominated by the audiolingual approach in past decades (Matsuda, 2003) which has left little room for creative learning and teaching practices.

For example, English majors in most Chinese universities have a four-year curriculum during which two years of English writing is taught predominantly using the lecture format. Writing teachers usually use the textbook *A Handbook of Writing* (Ding, Wu, Zhong, & Guo, 1994), which emphasizes format and grammar (Ouyang, 2004). All university students (including those who are not English majors) are required to take national English tests to have their English proficiency assessed. The tests consist of a writing module, requiring students to write an essay on a given topic, with a specific length, and within very limited time (usually 30-60 minutes). Both students and teachers are highly motivated by these exams

because they are the primary criteria to measure the level of student competence and teacher performance. So English writing teaching in Chinese Higher Education is oriented around the practice of such writing tasks, in which students are trained to follow rigid mechanical rules. This training has served to suppress creativity and pleasure in writing, even causing a widespread fear of writing. As one student reported: 'I hate taking excursions, because we are asked to WRITE about it afterwards!' (Ye, 2010, p.153).

In a similar vein, in much of China's intellectual history, the examination system was a 'dead hand' that discouraged the 'assimilation of popular literature into living forms of literacy' (Hay, 1995, p. 88). Chinese students have traditionally been denied the opportunity to openly discuss 'what they hold sacred and important in their world outside the classroom' (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999, p. 22). If teachers do not recognize and provide access to the differing literacies, including literacies related to popular culture and personal lives, their students may become alienated from or even resistant to educational literacy practices. (Hickman, Huck, Kiefer, & Hepler, 2004).

Though some universities have been experimenting with pedagogical innovations in the light of local needs and circumstances, a critical examination of these endeavors in China's EFL education is lacking. Shortly we will turn to consider how connecting writing with student's real life interests might offer greater levels of motivation, pleasure and creativity in writing. Also we will take up the point of culture again with an illustration of how popular culture and individual student's interest can be included in the progressive Second Language (L2) writing classroom.

We now turn to the question of how EFL writing is perceived by students in Chinese Higher Education in order to develop the argument about the importance of critical pedagogies to improve the teaching of EFL writing and to obviate fear and anxiety.

## **TROUBLING VOICES FROM THE STUDENTS**

In an earlier study (Ye, 2010, 2012), examination of innovative teaching programs in some Chinese and Australian universities identified the importance of critical intercultural pedagogies. As Ye observes the effects of performative EFL writing pedagogies are significant. Here, we consider the potential of critical pedagogy to emancipate the personal and cultural self and help them achieve personal emancipation or liberation (Kincheloe, 2011) in English writing.

One obstacle for the oppressed individual to overcome is the realization that they are oppressed. Once a person becomes aware of limitations and pressures, and acknowledges their own potential, they become a true, self-aware person (Freire,

2000). In reality however, many students are bound by the misguided perceptions or ideologies about writing. One common tendency is to mystify writing

As a child, I was an avid reader, and I never doubted I could become one of the famous writers I read about. In my young mind, they were so close to me and the things they wrote about were nothing but life which everybody could tell if they really, seriously wanted to. But my ambition was laughed away by adults around me, who told me that writing is a very special thing which only talented professionals can do, and all I need to learn about writing is how to write a letter, a report, and above all, to pass examinations. So I started to back away from my 'silly' ambition and chose to wait for teachers to direct me the way to write. (Ye, 2010, pp.15-16)

The mystification of writing has the effect of intimidating budding writers and can make them feel inadequate and helpless. Expectations held by university students that formal education will overcome this may not be met:

To my great disappointment I found my long-awaited writing class was not a writer 'incubator', rather it was a writer 'disillusioner'. We started with the choice of words, making sentences, writing paragraphs – mainly through reciting and imitating – and the whole gamut of tedious writing tasks. In the meanwhile, the little writer inside me got farther and farther away, and when she did occasionally come back to give me a little inspiration, say a brilliant idea of writing, a crazy metaphor, or a rebellious argument, it tended to be either ignored or criticized by my teachers, until finally my writer's instinct completely evaporated and I succumbed to be a reverent reader with no ambition of writing at all.

What is worse, I felt anxious every time I was asked to write something. After hours or days of painful work with references, sample writings, and dictionaries, all that came out is a little piece of dry and tasteless writing, which reinforced the belief that I am no writer and can not possibly be one! (Ye, 2010, p.16)

On the other hand, the pressures on teachers to ensure their students 'perform' on examinations—particularly the writing modules in National Proficiency Examinations—severely constrains the way they are able to undertake their work:

We began our biennial 'cramming' about ten weeks before the national exams. Of all the strategies to instantly raise students' writing score, a '10/12 sentence-essay writing formula' was most popular. The formula was deemed magical by both teachers and students. There was no more 'empty' lecturing and practising on writing, just blank-filling exercises following these instructions...

...Based on this 'guidance', students were asked to recite a number of sample sentences for each part of the essay. These sentences were called 'all-mighty' sentences, because they could fit in any essays and any topics. In this way writing became so easy and manageable that some teacher took such strategy as a golden rule.

After a few weeks' training, our students could pass their exam with very satisfactory scores. But did they learn how to write? I doubted it. In fact I couldn't

help feeling guilty about it. At the turn of the new millennium when ‘quality education’ and ‘creativity’ began to be highly valued and actively promoted, I wondered what we were doing to our students? Were we teaching them to write, or to fear writing? (Ye, 2010, pp.30-31)

While learners struggle to find their voice and creativity in writing, they are often held back by perceptions of discipline value and status within Higher Education. EFL subjects tend to be considered as ‘add-on luxuries’ (Burnard & White, 2008) to important disciplines:

The way I was brought up, we were made to feel the arts were inferior to sciences. Hence little importance was attached to arts subjects, including writing, not to say L2 writing. Those kids who were admired most and praised most often in class are those who could quickly solve mathematical or physical problems, whereas those who could write interesting pieces were regarded as doing little tricks, or diligent readers, to sound better. Therefore creativity displayed in writing was not worthy of being proud of, or could hardly be called creativity at all. (Ye, 2010, 158)

These negative perceptions are not uncommon among Chinese Higher Education students which tends to distance students from developing their creativity in writing, or to devalue those aspects of education that cannot easily be measured, like writing. If language students erroneously perceive writing as the domain of a lucky few, how can they be expected to be motivated in writing or to acknowledge their oppression?

## **CRITICAL THEORY, CRITICAL LITERACY AND THE VOICE**

Critical theory has become a powerful ‘voice of empowerment’ of both the researcher and the researched (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Teachers face a fundamental dilemma and are drawn in different directions. The pragmatist, who wants to ensure their students achieve good results is in tension with critical and more progressively inclined teacher who is confident that more innovative pedagogical approaches would engender greater confidence and higher levels of competence in their students. Fundamentally, whether a L2 teacher’s role is to teach students functional writing skills, or to develop their critical awareness of the political and ideological implications of writing and ‘possibly contribute to social change?’ (Casanave, 2004, p. 3) requires consideration.

Critical scholars have discussed the ideological nature of literacy and the importance of empowering students by including their voices in school literacy and curriculum. Literacy is generally understood as a social practice ‘defined by the social and communicative practices with which individuals engage in the various domains of their life’ (Hamilton, 2000, p. 1) which contrasts with the performa-

tive (Lyotard, 1984) pedagogy under discussion here. Literacy is not a unitary, neutral entity, but a relational and varied activity that is historically, socially, and ideologically situated. The profound changes in the social, economic and technologic aspects of contemporary life in China calls for a distinctively different era of writing education, where the meaning of ‘literacy’ is broadened in accordance with Western theory and allows the inclusion of all communicative resources to be utilized in teaching and learning process.

Discussions of identity tensions and challenges in language learning has shaped the landscape of writing language education, since second language learners can experience and display ‘both servitude and emancipation, both powerlessness and empowerment’ (Kramsch, 1998, p.77). In second language writing for instance, the competing voice of the writer’s social and personal self has given rise to a succession of writing approaches, such as the expressionist approach, controlled composition, current-traditional rhetoric, the process approach and writing for academic purposes (Matsuda, 2003). Meanwhile in China, the evident imbalance in learners’ native and target language and cultural identities has been conceptualized as ‘*ti-yong*’ (essence versus utility) conflict that has been documented in the history of foreign language teaching (see Gao, 2009). Such dilemmas have acquired increased intensity and complexity in contemporary China and relate to Higher Education pedagogies and the constraints and expectations for both teachers and students..

While acknowledging that voice is a complex methodological and theoretical issue (see Jackson and Mazzei, 2009), in this context of critical writing pedagogy, voice can be considered to be the ‘imprint of ourselves on our writing. It is that part of the self that pushes the writing ahead, the dynamo in the process’ (Graves, 1983, p. 227). The notion of personal voice is not just an expression of personal feelings. As Pennycook (1994, p. 311) points out, it suggests instead a process that ‘starts with the concerns of the students... through an exploration of students’ histories and cultural locations, of the limitations and possibilities presented by languages and discourses’. In L2 writing, this might be achieved through the questioning of writing conventions, and negotiating new writing agendas that gear towards students’ personal and cultural needs (Benesch, 2001; Bruner, 1986; Kramsch, 1993). As Grainger argues (2005, p.42):

If the author’s voice is to ring with conviction and meaning, then the writer’s own individual imprint needs to surface in the writing. But written conventions tend to standardize language and as we move from speech to writing we lose the immediacy and interpersonal contact with our audience, and run the risk of losing our individuality and personal voice.

Critical writing pedagogy should enable students to develop the confidence and capacity to express personal meanings that may challenge and change tradi-

tional practices (Kramsch, 1993). Critical teachers should lead students to uncover the underlined values in text and rhetoric production, encourage them to resist the uncritical acceptance of such reproductions and empower them to articulate their own cultural voices through a creative use of rhetoric and conventions (Hardin, 2001). Thus the critical classroom, where students are empowered through critical thinking, writing and reading, is a significant site in the reconfiguration of larger social structures and processes (Canagarajah, 1999).

## PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITY

In this section a number of illustrations are provided to ground this discussion of criticality and progressive pedagogies for EFL programs in Chinese Higher Education. Drawn from an earlier study (Ye, 2010) these fragments serve the purpose of suggesting and imagining how the inclusion of creativity and the personal have potential to markedly improve the development of language learning.

This particular university under consideration was Southern University (pseudonym). It was reputed to be open to the influence of theory and higher educational practices outside China and progressive in pursuing reform (Ouyang, 2003). Of particular interest in that study was that institution's development of English writing pedagogies over the past decade and experimentation with creative programs, some of which have subsequently exerted influence over teaching programs in other Chinese universities.

Southern University has promoted a new understanding of human capacity and of the nature of creativity and writing. Their students have been led to believe that human intelligence is more complex than that can be demonstrated by examination results. We all have distinctive profiles of intellectual abilities, such as those in visual imagination, in sound or movement, in mathematics or writing. As learners we can develop creative strength in different ways. In Higher Education students possess the creative capacity and potential that can be developed through systemic strategies (Robinson, 2001).

To support the development of creativity in the EFL classroom at Southern University, the curriculum was revised to emphasize the connection of individual student lives with English writing, which was conceptualized into four sequential stages of writing development:

Stage A 'write for passion' is the beginning phase of the writing journey, in which students are encouraged to write freely about their lives or the topics they are interested in. The main goal of this phase is to stimulate the writing urge inside our students and cultivate their habit of writing extensively. Stage B 'write for argumentation' is the crucial stage in which students are introduced to basic forms and techniques of writing, which is explored and summarized through discussions. In Stage C 'write for creation', we return from logic thinking to



imagination, from evidence to storyline, from reason to feeling. Stage D 'writing for publication' motivates students to write for sociocultural purposes. Since this involves literature review, social investigation and data collection, it is a great leap in the students' writing journey. (Ye, 2010, pp.134-135).

This writing program differs from traditional pedagogy mainly in that it prioritizes whole-text level writing over the learning of linguistic forms and elements. In addition to helping students gain confidence and interest in writing and at its centre is the valuing of the students' voice, agency and identity. Southern University provides multiple channels to publish student writing including printed and electronic journals, websites, recitation parties, drama shows, and edited collections. In the course magazine, one student wrote about her early experience in the program:

In the past month, we wrote five essays, all of them longer than 300 words. In the beginning I did feel I was forced to do it, and didn't know how to go about it. But when I started to write, my brain was activated and began to track what was going on in my mind. There were times when I wasn't satisfied with my simple sentence and structure, but after careful contemplation, inspirations would spring up. At that moment some relevant words that I had collected before would automatically come into my mind, giving me a pleasing sense of achievement... (Ye, 2010, p,130)

In Southern University, considerable effort has been made to transcend conventional conceptions of literacy pedagogy and to develop progressive programs of study. Teachers lead students to recognize and relate to diverse literacies practices and to develop voice and verve in writing. In this program, writing begins with personal relevance. In contrast, traditional L2 pedagogies interpret the main purpose of writing as being to demonstrate to teachers what they have learnt, particularly of technical correctness. In Southern University 'relevance' has been one of the key principles in choosing topics for writing classes:

Topic design is the most important part of the approach. A major reason that writing doesn't engage students is because teachers do not spend enough time on designing stimulating tasks. Good topics have at least some of the following elements: First they are closely linked with students' past or present lives. Second a good topic is relevant to the knowledge student learned through other courses, so they can bring them into full play through writing. Thirdly a good topic can stimulate students' creativity and imagination. Finally good tasks are those that can promote social and cultural understandings. Sometimes students should be given freedom to choose their own topics. (Ye, 2010, pp. 142-143 )

The appeal of popular culture in the lives of university students also offers great potential for students to extend their writing beyond the personal. Drawing

on students' interests and knowledge of popular culture, it is possible to motivate students to write creatively:

I found my students have grown tired of the writing topics we gave them. So the other day, I played a TV clip for them. It is part of a soap opera named 'Exchange Love'. The title itself is fascinating for the young university students, who are trying to figure out the meaning of love and relationship for themselves. Romantic affairs are an important part of university life, but in classroom this is usually a taboo topic. You can imagine the excitement and enthusiasm my students showed for the topic.

From this experiences I know what we plan to teach is not always what interests our students. But if we want to engage our students and generate their motivation in writing, we must place their interests in mind and adapt our teaching to their needs. Quite often this involves the clashes between classical knowledge and pop culture. For me it is relatively easier to cope with since I myself have just graduated from university therefore I share lots of interests with my students. But for the elderly teachers, it is much harder... (Ye, 2010, pp.149-150)

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to encouraging student voice in writing in curriculum design and reform, Southern University has included students' sociocultural experience and personal voice in and through the English writing program where the students are active learners, who internalize knowledge and skill in English language through critical pedagogies that enhance and include. Through problem-posing education (Freire, 2000), students learn along with the teacher how to 'read' and 'write' in relation to the lives and actions of others around them.

In one instance, for example, a writing task was assigned to EFL students, to write about the migrant workers on their campus<sup>1</sup>. Since the students in Southern University are mostly from economically advantaged families in urban cities, many of them are fashionable care-free young people what hadn't previously noticed the existence of the migrant workers around the university. In order to learn about these workers and their lives, the students thought of many ways, to find them on their work place and talk to them, to help tutor their kids in their homes, and even to offer to show them around the city.

When the students finished their investigation, their report 'The Invisible Men: Migrant workers in Southern University' describes the harsh working conditions of the migrant workers, their shabby temporary homes, their problems in child rearing and family lives, and above all, their unrecognized contribution to

<sup>1</sup> These migrant workers are mostly from rural areas in China. They work as cleaners and construction workers on the campus. Many of them live in very shabby temporary residences on or near the campus.

the development of the city. Through this assignment, students not only learned to 'write', but also learned to 'right' the world with their investigation, developing awareness and writing, which links with Friere's important notion of problem-posing discussed above..

This writing assignment turned out to be a very transformative experience for most of the students. many students admit that their attitudes to migrant workers changed completely after this writing experience. They became much more appreciative and respectful to their work; some students maintained contact with the workers they became acquainted with, some offered necessary help when they could. A few students even began to show interest in social and political issues and began to write to newspapers or government to appeal for the rights of the disadvantaged groups in the city, including the '3-none residents' (city wanderers without a job, a shelter or an ID card). Few would expect that the effort of these students, as well as other social forces have led to the abolishment of a statute and the implementation of a new regulation in China. In August 1st 2003, 'The Deportation Regulation of City Wanderers and Beggars' was replaced by 'The Regulation of Aiding City Jobless Wanderer and Beggars', by which the forcible measures of deporting the homeless people in cities has been replaced by more humane means of supporting and aiding. (Ye, 2010, p.167)

Through their investigation and subsequent writing, students were no longer positioned as passive recipients of knowledge, as in Friere's banking model (1971), but become active knowledge producers. This can be further demonstrated by issues chosen as course writing topics and the enthusiasm behind the interactive international exchange platform on the website for student writers (see Ye, 2010). 'Cross-Pacific Exchange' is a web-based interactive writing program launched by Southern University and their pen-pals overseas. The purpose of this program is to improve students' writing in Southern University through facilitating their internet communication with the students in overseas institutions, such as The Pennsylvania State University in the US. This program is designed to improve students' mutual understanding, increase their intercultural awareness, and enhance their sense of contemporary English styles in different linguistic circumstances (Zheng, 2009).

A different but most interesting example arose from one student writing of her obsession with the Western pop culture who boldly revealed her intense interest in the American TV series 'Sex and the City'.

I admit that I am an open-minded girl, somewhat early mature. Sex and the City may feel guilty, undisguised, sexual, these probably are the shallow understandings for it from the public [The bold graphic display of and discussion about sex makes the audience feel embarrassed and guilty to watch]. For a long time, western culture is defined as rotten to the core. Sexual issues discussed publicly, laissez-faire, feminism can never dwell together with conservative Chinese value.

Yet, I was born in a New Age when feudal and old-fashioned thoughts should be abandoned. It is with a brand new concept that Sex and the City broke into our minds. Four strong-minded women chased after their dreams. Their bright personalities light up their images. Professional women can stand up. Social status of women, their roles and expectations in society have changed. Women can be the centre of the world. As a woman, I am ready to experience both my independence and loneliness. We can choose our life style without restrictions and discriminations. (Ye, 2010, pp. 168-169)

It should be noted that such cultural explorations in Southern University is not merely a pedagogical solution; but a genuine effort to seek intercultural knowledge for students who will meet the challenges of an increasingly internationalized future. In this way the students are not simply learning the technical elements of a language or writing – they are learning ways of ‘viewing others and reviewing themselves’ (Corbett, 2003, p. 18). Such cultural learning also brings the transformation of identity and ideology, therefore it achieves the ‘deepest purpose of schooling’, by ‘opening up the minds of learners to difference and otherness’ (Lo Bianco, 2003, p. 34).

## CONCLUSION

Learning a language is a complex process of socializing into and maintaining a given speech community and the acquisition of a means of expressing personal meanings that may challenge and change traditional practices. ‘If the author’s voice is to ring with conviction and meaning, then the writer’s own individual imprint needs to surface in the writing’ (Grainger, 2005, p.42). Critical pedagogies free students from the confinement of performative writing instruction, and empower students by including their voices in curriculum and literacy practices. By revisiting data in previous studies, we came to see these accounts had real significance for all L2 learners. By dissecting how the writer’s suppressed voice was emancipated through critical pedagogical practices, we open up new possibilities to address the prevalent problems in current EFL writing education.

The illustrations from the pedagogically progressive program at Southern University are not typical of Chinese Higher Education. Through these examples, however, we have tried to illuminate our key points in our argument. What has been proposed in this article is the importance of developing authentic and individual voice in writing, through the use of critical approaches, including reshaping writer’s perceptions and ideologies about writing, forging links between writing and student’s real life literacy, and leading students in sociocultural explorations. Pedagogy that allows and encourages students autonomy has great potential to nurture student voice and verve for writing, which otherwise tends to become suppressed in favour of the performative.

This critical pedagogy applies beyond Chinese Higher Education and calls for writing educators and learners to re-envision the nature, objective and content of foreign language teaching, and to empower student writers. Such pedagogies not only offer an almost unlimited source of potential writing topics, but may also cultivate students' critical awareness and prepare them for intercultural world citizenship (Byram, 2008). Finally critical pedagogy assumes a social responsibility for teachers and students of foreign languages, and enables them to act as cultural diplomats in the globalised world and as promoters of social cohesion and cultural tolerance, rather than as acquirers of a set of linguistic competences.

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# WHEN YOU HAVE ENOUGH RICE, YOU DESIRE NOODLES

## A Narrative About Methodological Infidelity

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In Vietnam, we have a famous saying ‘Chán cơm thèm phở’ (when you have enough rice, you desire noodles), which was originally used to describe the relationship of a married couple. When they have been in a relationship for a period of time, they may start feeling bored with their relationship, bored with their everyday ‘rice’<sup>1</sup>, their husband or wife. They start searching outside for someone new to freshen their emotional life, that someone is referred to as the ‘noodles’<sup>2</sup>. This paper, however, is not about an affair of any couple in real life, but it does relate to the saying in that it discusses the turning point of a researcher who finds herself experiencing methodological infidelity in doing her research. In the context of research methodology, ‘rice’ would be quantitative research and ‘noodles’ would represent qualitative research.

This paper indicates the change in worldview of myself as a researcher in conducting research on ‘Enhancing graduate employability’ in a Vietnamese context. I first approached the problem from a postpositivist worldview. Postpositivism has been considered the most appropriate paradigm driving my direction in doing research since the time I became a lecturer and a researcher. This seemed

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1 Rice is the most popular food in every meal of Vietnamese people.

2 Vietnamese noodle or ‘phở’ is the most famous Vietnamese food. It takes time to prepare and to cook, but at the end, it tastes delicious.

to be the perfect paradigm to conduct this research at the beginning as I had been working and conducting research in Vietnam, a collectivist culture with a very strong quantitative research orientation. In addition, in regard to the topic of 'Enhancing graduate employability', when the claim of lacking soft skills or employability skills of Vietnamese university students seems to be very obvious (Tran Ngoc Ca, 2006; Truong Quang Duoc, 2006) and is often taken for granted in the country, this paradigm seemed to be the most appropriate to drive this research. I aimed to build up a survey with a list of necessary skills to raise all related stakeholders' awareness of the importance of those skills in enhancing graduate employability in Vietnam.

However, the more I engaged with the research project, the more I wanted to get away from my favourite and familiar research worldview. I was challenged by such questions as how to build a proper list of required skills in the Vietnamese context? How to make sense of each skill in the list? Why should it be a skill list, not something else? Or is a list of skills enough for enhancing graduate employability in the specific context of Vietnam? I also became curious: how do I know the reason behind each tick of my research participants? Why did they choose one option over the others? All these questions led me to search for another research worldview which could help me find a better way to approach my research problem and answer the above questions. To answer these 'how' and 'why' questions, the constructivist paradigm would offer an appropriate view since it puts a high value on 'the process of interaction aiming individual' (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). It also allows the historical and cultural setting of the research.

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Vietnamese higher education is expected to provide a highly skilled workforce for the development of the country. This expectation comes from both the student and the demands of modernization and industrialization in the country. Culturally, Vietnamese students as well as other Asian students are motivated by the prospect of a good career. They expect their course to be both interesting and to provide a good preparation for their future jobs (Kember, 2000). Universities are traditionally mono-disciplinary and are highly job oriented (Tran Ngoc Ca, 2006). Parents pay for their children in higher education with the hope that after graduation their children can get a proper job and earn a high income. The issue of enhancing graduate employability is of concern for every stakeholder in the system.

In Vietnam, since the application of the open door policy in 1986, the economy has developed rapidly with very high demand for a highly skilled



work force. One of the major tasks of the higher education system set by the government is to provide highly skilled workers to meet the demand of the modernization and industrialization of the country (MOET, 2006). The higher education sector of the country has also developed very quickly, the number of students enrolling in and graduating from the system has increased more than 16 times in 2010 compared to 1987, from more than 100,000 students to more than 2.1 million students<sup>3</sup> (The Vietnamese General Statistics Office, 2012). The Vietnamese government and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) have issued stipulations and instructions defining clearly that career oriented and jobs consultation for students is one of the major tasks of each university (MOET, 2008, p. 1; 2009, p. 9). For which one of the major requirements is that universities have to take responsibility to ‘equip’ students with necessary skills before graduation (*ibid*, p.1).

However, the outcome of the whole process does not seem to meet its expectation. Many university graduates stay unemployed or underemployed after graduation, while employers still complain about the difficulties in finding graduates with the necessary knowledge and skills. In a survey of MOET, almost all graduates are employed, but less than 20% of them can find jobs in accordance with the knowledge and skills they learnt in university (Pham Thi Huyen, 2008). Since they did not need their knowledge and skills they had acquired at university for their jobs, they eventually became underemployed. There seems to be a big ‘gap’ between what university provides and what graduates are required to be successful in the graduate labour market. There is a need to build strong capability to gain and to maintain employment for graduates in Vietnam.

## THE START OF A JOURNEY

In Vietnam there is a strong belief that the reason for the above situation is the weak capability of university graduates in developing such skills as communication skills, thinking skills, team work or problem solving skills – the so called soft skills or employability skills in the literature. Sharing the same belief, I wanted to explore the literature, build a list of employability skills and collect different perspectives from employers, lecturers and students to find a common voice among all related stakeholders regarding the way or ways to enhance graduate employability in Vietnam.

Regarding my research background, I had been favour for the postpositivist worldview (Lincoln & Guba, 2005) and unquestioningly accepted this as the only way to conduct research. I believed that reality is objective, and exists

<sup>3</sup> The number of 2,162,000 students in higher education in Vietnam in 2010 is not including in-service, distance learning, and second undergraduate degree students in the system ( The Vietnam general Statistics office, 2012).

‘out there’ in the world (Creswell, 2009, p. 7), and formerly accepted that the duty of the researcher is to capture the ideas, then reduce the ideas into a small, discrete set of ideas that could be tested (p. 7). I found the scientific approach to be straightforward, uncomplicated and readily liked the idea of developing numeric measures via conducting and analysing research surveys. In the past, the only conceivable approach to research and the only one my colleagues and I ever employed in Vietnam was a survey based on quantitative research methods. We often carried out careful observation; sometimes we did some interviews, all with the same aim: to build the most meaningful and reveal questionnaire to send to the research participants. We, in general, were quite successful in doing our research objectively, with very high attention put to its validity and generalisability. All of the ‘positivist’ terms such as validity, anti-bias, objectivity and reliability are favourable terms in conducting research in such a collectivist culture, a ‘we’ culture, like Vietnam (Hofstede 2005).

With my research background and my pre-understanding of the chosen topic, I assumed that this is how I would conduct this research too. I did not think otherwise about employing my favourite research method as the list of skills I wanted to measure, including communication skills, creative thinking skills, problem solving skills and team-working skills, was meaningful and impressive to me at that time. I thought that these skills were really the skills that the contemporary market in Vietnam needed from its graduates, and that the problem was simply that universities and graduates have failed to develop these skills. I also believed that by drawing attention to these skills, I would help draw the attention of both universities and students to the importance of those skills and thereby meet the needs of employers.

## **PROBLEMATIZE MY RESEARCH WORLDVIEW**

I started to reconsider my research worldview since the more I read about lists of skills, the more I began to question because the ‘rice’ does not satisfy the needs. In the international literature, researchers have been working on developing lists of skills expected from higher education. The lists of skills differ and they are often very long (see, for example Cox & King, 2006; DEST, 2002; Hambur, Rowe, & Le, 2002; Hartshorn & Sear, 2005; Meisinger, 2004; Raybould & Sheedy, 2005). I experienced difficulty when trying to understand some of the skill lists. Another point that occurred to me after this reading about skills was that after nearly 20 years working as a university lecturer in the higher education system in Vietnam, I do not think that I possess all these skills. Later I found Hinchliffe’s (2006) argument very interesting when it supports my view. He criticizes the long list of skills by asking ‘How many employers themselves possess such a dazzling array of attributes?’, and ‘Can we realistically expect young men and women in their early twenties to already

possess all those skills and attributes which takes years for any normal intelligent person to develop?’ (2006, p. 91). He then concludes that most current notions of graduate employability place unrealistic demands on graduates (p. 100).

Therefore, two obvious issues would arise if I chose to employ these skills in my survey. Firstly, how could I make the research participants, who are expected to spend about half an hour filling in the questionnaire, understand the list of necessary skills that I am still struggling to understand after spending a year working on it? Secondly, if employers and educators like me, who have been employed for nearly two decades, are still not sure whether we possess all these skills, how could we expect our students, who are half of our age and who have never been in the labour market, to possess those skills?

Later, I found out one of the reasons why I have difficulty in understanding some of the skills in the published lists. They ‘make no sense unless they show they are grounded in practical judgements and that the reasons practitioners can give for their judgements are articulated among their peers’ (Beckett & Mulcahy, 2006, p. 262). Or in other words, these workplace skills are culture dependant and context dependant.

Bearing in mind that employability is culturally and contextually dependant, I searched the academic literature for research that addressed the employability issue within the Vietnamese context. Although employability is a new concern in the Vietnamese literature, I did manage to find some reports of related studies. For example, Truong Quang Duoc (2006) carried out a large survey with university graduates, staff and employers on skills which he claims represent quality of graduates from business master programmes in Vietnam. Tran Quang Trung and Swierczek (2009) also explored the status of skills development in universities in Vietnam and identified factors they purported have impact on skill development.

However, although these studies were conducted in Vietnam, their research was based on the skills identified in foreign literature and lacked the contextual specificity I had become increasingly interested in. While such a list of required skills, in general, appears to be an important issue on which to comment, it does not actually reveal what is important in specific work contexts (Yorke, 2006). With the previous research I had been involved in, it was not very difficult for me to design a survey based on my own observation, on my experience and that drew upon similar research undertaken in Vietnam. With employability, however, I became stuck at the very first stage. What skills should be included? And how do I know that any list of skills was the ‘right’ list? How could any list of skills make sense to participants? And how to address could I ensure that my survey was culturally relevant and appropriate? It was at this point in my inquiry that I realised that I needed to find another way to approach my research problem. I also resolved at that point not to add another list of skills to the literature.

I stopped reading the lists of skills and instead, I spent much time reading more widely about research methodology. I have benefited much from reading these conceptual and methodological explanations and discussions. It has helped shifted the change in the philosophical underpinning of this study and clarified important research issues for me.

## THE CHANGE IN RESEARCH WORLDVIEW

First, in terms of research philosophy, I realised that I need to be flexible in my approach to research. With the specific issue of graduate employability in Vietnam, when the basic understanding of the subject matter in the very specific context in Vietnam has not been established, the postpositivist lens does not seem to be appropriate in guiding this particular study. Knowledge is accumulated, but the transfer of skill lists from foreign literature into the Vietnamese context seems to be highly problematic. What were left aside or unknown are the specific cultural norms and values in Vietnam as well as the specific level of development of both the Vietnamese industry and its higher education system, which I strongly argue to be very important in this research. I needed to find another way to approach my research questions. The one thing that I was certain was that ‘rice’ did not seem appropriate for this research. I found that the argument of constructivists really thrilled me. They argue that ‘realities are local, specific and constructed; they are socially and experientially based, and depend on the individuals or groups holding them’ (O’Donoghue, 2007, pp. 16-17). Creswell adds that:

Constructivist researchers often address the processes of interaction aiming individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work, in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (2009, p. 8).

Constructivism therefore promised to be of an appropriate ‘lens’ in my study particularly as I wanted to investigate the problem of graduate employability in the very specific historical and cultural setting in Vietnam.

The second benefit of reading widely about research methodology relates to the acquisition of research data. At first, White, Drew, and Hay’s argument (2009) startled me. They criticize the idea of ignoring the influence of the researcher in doing research. They questioned the objectivity of research inquiry, and argued that the researcher’s job is not to ‘capture’ the stories of participants, which sit ‘like the shells on a beach, waiting to be picked up’ (White, et al., 2009, p. 20). Instead the researcher should be considered formative in the process, as they are actively involved in producing data with the participants, whose stories are ‘made rather than found’ (White, et al., 2009, p. 22). This challenged my research belief. I paused here and reflected back to the times I had previously undertaken ‘research’.

Even though I had tried conscientiously to be objective in my former studies, my experience, beliefs and closely held arguments influenced my conclusions.

At this point, I realised that survey is not the only way to acquire the data, or to conduct a research inquiry. And it is not the only way to communicate with research participants. Perhaps by working together with them, a better understanding about the subject matter might be built up?

Constructivism opens a whole new horizon for me to explore the viewpoints of my research participants and understand how and why they look at the issue in a particular way, which I used to investigate only by measuring it against numbers, such as how many ticks they had in their returning questionnaires. The next question that arises relates to the participants of my study. Whose story should I choose to tell, or 'whose truths' (Sikes, 2011) should I approach?

In the literature, there seem to be much focus on the voice of employers and academics. However, what seems to be missing is the voice of the young people themselves. After careful consideration, it seems to me that the current circumstance in the higher education system in Vietnam as well as the relationship between it and the labour market, lacks this perspective. 'Which sense actually makes sense?' (Smith, 2011) when students and graduates are considered to be the first to take responsibility for their own study, work and life, but their voice is subtle? I, then, decided to consult final year university students and the recent graduates to be the main research participants. I employed both individual interview and focus group interview with these two groups.

With constructivism, I now can be confident to bring my own experience in the research process, to be actively involved in producing data with the research participants, the students and graduate in Vietnamese universities. Becoming a constructivist, I also understand that I should 'value reciprocity and reflexivity the researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfold before the eyes of objective viewer' (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522). I also become interested in researching their perspectives and experiences from the standpoint of Vietnamese tertiary students and graduates, who are living, studying and seeking work in Vietnamese context. I also become interested in understanding the cultural factors affecting their perspectives, their direction and their decision in job seeking and their choice of work. Some of such cultural factors could be the Vietnamese family oriented tradition, the preference of stable over high income but more demanding work of the traditional Vietnamese women, the hierarchical layers at work, especially in public sector in Vietnam which often mean that the older is the senior. All such distinctive features of Vietnamese culture promise to bring more insight to my research.

I also understand that bringing my experience into this study may have both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, my experience will be helpful for designing appropriate questions because I am familiar with the setting and I can readily approach the target participants. On the other hand, this familiarity may

also bring me difficulties, particularly related to my capacity to distance myself from preconceived ideas and understandings. I may influence the participant responses, or may unconsciously lead the conversation toward the direction of my own interests and expectations.

Confronting reflexivity is not an easy task. However, I agree with and will follow the Stake's (2008, p. 128) helpful suggestion to 'place your best intellect into the thick of what is going on' in conducting this research. I also plan to follow the assumption of a relativist ontology in which there are multiple realities, and of a subjectivist epistemology, where the knower and the respondents co-create understandings, which relates to the constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 32). On the one hand, I do not deny that I do bring my own working experience and my own preconceptions into this research. On the other hand, however, I also understand that 'local meanings are important' (Stake, 2008, p. 128), and that the voices of the participants provide much valuable information. I have a particular interest in listening to their voices. This interest will draw my understandings toward what is important in the world of the participants, which may not be the same as my world. Making the familiar strange in this way will hopefully enrich my study.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of 'reducing ignorance' (Gough, 2002) and the desire to address personal and external circumstances as well as the socio-cultural context in researching the issue of graduate employability in the very specific context of Vietnam have changed my worldview from postpositivist to constructivist. It drove me away from my favourite and familiar research method of using survey, the 'rice' that I often ate every day before. Then I met the inspired 'noodle', the fresh exploration of the questions what, how and why in relation to students' capability in the transformation process from university to the workplace in Vietnam. It urged me to make sense of the 'truth' from the students and graduates perspectives in the broader Vietnamese socio-culture context and the Vietnamese workplace culture. By localising the issue in the very specific context and culture of Vietnam, my study is located firmly within a constructivist paradigm where 'realities are local, specific and constructed' (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 16), where we, both the researcher and participants, could be confident to bring our own story to create a meaningful story about the university-workplace transition in Vietnamese context.

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# THE ROLE OF CLT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING



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This article will address how effective EFL/ESL teachers can develop activities and outcomes that are embedded within a communicative language teaching (CLT) framework. Communicative Language Teaching engages in the practice of teaching language as if it is in real-life situations. This approach is in stark contrast to more traditional forms of knowledge acquisition. This teaching philosophy is based on the capacity of language teachers to engage their learners in purposeful and authentic ways. Further, the use of what the authors call 'Artful CLT' practices in motivating students to be skilled in the use of language is a common theme addressed in this article. The two authors espouse that teachers who adopt an Artful CLT philosophy do not restrict their activities solely to the 'mechanics of writing' such as having the correct grammar formation, spelling and pronunciation. Rather, the CLT approach embeds teaching and learning strategies focus specifically on communicative modes of *knowing and being*. Additionally through adopting communicative modes of teaching, practitioners can encourage learners to use language in pragmatic ways.

The article emphasises how in an Artful CLT teaching environment learners are expected to use and play with language in a 'naturalistic' and artful manner so that their language use and their L2 acquisition is significant and profoundly related to the functionality of their everyday life situations. In the presence of



teachers who welcome ‘spontaneous dialogue’, role-plays and group work activities, there is also a greater likelihood of constructing a learning environment that welcomes student voices and personal experiences. (Brown, 1997)

## **POSITIVE BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING**

The positive benefits of utilising the CLT approach in EFL/TESOL classrooms are well documented (Brown 2007; Li 2003; Rao 2002). As indicated above, CLT teaching and learning activities are aligned with a range of teaching and learning methods that place the learner at the centre of his or her investigation into language acquisition. CLT assessment tasks also involve a range of tools and technologies that favour in-class presentations and role-plays representative of real-life situations. Savignon (2002, p.4) comments of the need to present learners with ‘holistic assessments of learner competence’ that are rich and diverse. In the presence of ‘poems, reports, stories, videotapes and similar projects’, English Language acquisition can be built on a range of communicative tasks where the diverse learning needs of students can be addressed. The linguistic, kinaesthetic, visual or auditory learner can have his or her learning needs met when there is engagement in a variety of assessment tools and tasks. Gardner’s theory of motivating language learners to successfully engage in speaking a second language is deeply connected to the motivation to ‘flourish’ (1987). Giving learners the opportunity to self-select language outcomes is an essential ingredient for the construction of emancipatory learning. We hold to the notion that as a critical educational practice English learning must be as much as possible negotiated with the class. Through collaboration with peers and a re-framing of traditional notions of what classroom teaching ought to look like, students know and learn that ‘articulating’ themselves by breaking their silences is powerful and has real implications for influencing how their lives are lived. Maslow’s (1987) theory of self-actualisation connects here. According to Maslow, individuals who achieve a sense of self-actualisation not only embrace the uncertainty that new ideas bring, are able transcend egocentric ways of knowing. Being open to different viewpoints is a necessary trait for the language learner to step outside taken for granted assumptions of how things ought to be.

It is a known fact that teacher-led language acquisition activities based solely on pronunciation accuracy do very little to assist learners with everyday life situations (Yen 1996). Life situations are always politically based on either advantage or disadvantage and the impact that knowledge has on social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 2000). At best students who are able to conjugate a verb or give the past participle tense are experts in grammatical structural sequences. Ask these same students to use this new knowledge to order a meal at a restaurant, to debate

a community decision or to ask for a pay rise based on their life circumstances and they might be hard pressed to give you an answer. With this in mind, the quality of engagement with the learning process in CLT classrooms therefore over-rides often necessary assessment tasks that are solely test-centred or based on formulaic linguistic frameworks. Additionally when reflecting upon the use of text books many teachers assert that they 'should take the responsibility for student's low motivation, poor attitude, high levels of anxiety, or lack of effort in learning... because they turn learners off' (Yien 1996:265). Rather than completing grammar exercises from text books, or participating in grammar drills that are repeated over and over, our Arful CLT approach as discussed here will pay attention to the implicit power in the language usage and adds another dimension to learning a language—language learning is most powerful when it equips students with skills to competently connect, interact, establish and sustain socio-politically contested meaningful communication with others. It is in this communication that language learners can achieve specific social goals that can improve their life-worlds.

There are also other benefits for the teacher who takes on a CLT approach to teaching language in a classroom. Richards (2005, p.4) identifies a number of positive attributes for learners who are involved in CLT classroom practices. One of these attributes includes the importance of group activities. The human condition is such that 'no person is an island' and groups are by definition the space in which human beings learn to know others. According to Richards, group activities provide students with opportunities to learn from each other through purposeful interaction and conversation. This learning can be simple or complex as has been experienced by the authors in their own teaching. Learning from peers can assist students to take on new understandings and meanings of the nature language and the politics of its use. Group activities also assist language learners to reflect on those skills needed to navigate their way through, divisive, confronting and other forms of challenging, discussions. Some teachers shy away from the 'hard' conversations that emerge in their classes with diverse values being expressed through histories of difference. Choosing to bracket off these experiences as 'not appropriate to teaching' they forget that all language teaching which is authentic, meaningful and purposeful and will by definition enter the realms of challenging and value shifting moments.

Pronunciation, intonation, the use of past and present verb tenses, are often accompanied with drills and linguistic sessions that follow Freire's (2002, p.36) banking concept of learning. In taking a teacher directed lens, learning how to converse in another language is dependent on the learner listening and modelling the sounds that come out of the teacher's mouth. The dangers of this kind of approach are espoused by Freire;

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.

Conversation that is based on the regurgitation and memorization of sounds and vocabulary lists do little to instil free flowing conversation needed for communicative purposes. Like the use of grammar textbooks to teach language expression, ‘it does not necessarily force the learner to make choices as true communication does’ (Walz 1989, p.161).

Moving beyond traditional notions of the ways in which conversations are structured assists in promoting self expression and reflection. Further, being able to attentively and respectfully listen and comprehend feedback that is given by peers, making meaningful choices about language power and its use, as opposed to just hearing what a teacher has to say, is necessary in the fostering of critical and informed awareness. Tapping into the different ways of saying or interpreting, racism, refugeity, sexism, religion, gender through language informs and widens a student’s authentic language repertoire.

What of artful CLT practice as a bridge to the gap between language acquisition and authentic moments of learning? The practical and theoretical foundations for CLT as defined by Savignon (2002, p.3) notes that the teaching of CLT should be *artful*, purposeful and personal. She notes that the engagement of ‘theatre arts’ can and should inform the *act* of learning language and that this learning should always be progressed to those arenas beyond the classroom. It is her contention that the communicative components of a language learning curriculum be employed to enable ‘real communication’ rather than simply learning the grammar, structural regulations and vocabulary of the language. Her emphasis on CLT is meaning which has a place for art and artfulness. Meaning making and the manner in which this is the focus of CLT and the goal is genuine or authentic communication but we critique how many ESL classes really engage with artful practice?

As one author in this article who trained in arts education, visual arts psychotherapies and visual image making we now see art making, viewing and critiquing as a vehicles for comprehension and expression of L2 language. The author’s notions of Artful CLT’ is predicated on the teaching and learning occasion where teacher and students alike are in ‘encounter’ real life—as does all CLT but employ creative encounters which are playful, meaningful and context specific to real life learning using art tools. The Artful CLT communicative language teaching approach will vary according to the skill level, reactions and responses of the stu-

dents. The students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in L2 by using images, music, poetry, dance and other artful encounters. This is always in a personal non-judgemental manner but is always political and the art works may reflect meaningfully on ways they have used L2 to deepen their understanding of the language as a collectives in a class of learners but also as individuals.

Immersion	The Linguistic learner needs to be surrounded by an environment where there is a total immersion in the written and spoken form
Demonstration	The linguistic learner needs to engage in tasks that allow for the of spoken and written language as is used in daily life of a L2 speaker.
Engagement	Linguistic learner needs to become involved in speaking, reading and writing activities that are based on their meaningful age-related life experience
Expectation	Linguistic learners need to be in an environment where they feel confident in the acquisition of their English language skills and where the teacher always expects they can walk 'make the hard road' to language use.
Use	Linguistic learner must use their new language as written and spoken for throughout their daily lives as much as possible.
Approximation	Linguistic learner should be encouraged to develop their expertise in conventional reading writing and speaking with estimations not being seen as a 'deficient' but rather an approximation of achievement that must be appreciated.
Response	Linguistic learner needs to be adequately mentored and receive accurate and affirming feedback regarding every attempt at speaking, reading and writing in their second language.
Artful Encounter	Linguistic learner encounters the language in an active and artful manner (Savignon) from knowledgeable people who appreciate their attempts at speaking, reading and writing. Art forms such as media, music, dance, song and images are all used as meaningful forms of evoking spoken descriptive English.

All humanity is impacted on by and through art forms, which enable internalisation of images known in both the first and often in the second language by the learner. Migrating from one culture to another requires a fundamental restructure of a person's ability to create, read de-code and express their self with language and art works from the new language context. Using what we can call 'Artful CLT' is predicated on the occasion where teacher and students alike are in 'encounter' with that which mirrors real life and whilst these encounters are playful, meaningful and context specific to real life learning they use all of our ways of

knowing. The capacity to attend to real life and meaningful learning in the second learning class is different to the audio-lingual method of language learning and teaching, which requires the student to undertake repetition and drills. An Artful CLT communicative language teaching approach will vary according to the skill level, reactions and responses of the students. The real-life simulations change from day to day. But the students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate using images, music and other artful encounters in meaningful ways based on their collective and individual preferences. Artful CLT is based on the human need for a life coloured with aesthetic processes – art forms that affect functional language acquisition for both the EFL, NESB and for low level literacy learners. Developing functional literacy for everyday life is vital for the English as a Second Language (ESL) learner but what about using the Native speaker's artistic lifeworlds?

Richards and Rodgers (1986, p.83) note that the teacher has a great deal of capacity to discern, design and vary the interpretation of CLT. In this sense CLT as an approach is very open and this may account for some of the criticisms that will be reviewed later. In adapting the Australian Scholar Brian Cambourne's conditions for learning English as an artful encounter lets see what might happen. Cambourne created these conditions some time ago but these attributes are still valid and needed in our estimation for the CLT artful class to occur.

Traditional approaches to teaching English language that are based on 'didactic' and teacher directed teaching and learning are widely critiqued by many academics and language teachers (Crozet & Liddicoat 1999; Hu 2002; Richards and Rogers 2001). Understanding behavioural, social and political codes of conduct and fostering an understanding for the multiplicity of cultural ideologies whilst being able to effectively negotiate and co-ordinate oneself when contentious issues arise is rarely addressed in teacher led text-book activities. The authors value teaching methodologies such as the 'Audio-lingual' and the 'Grammar-translation' methods of learning but these are seen as being a form of primacy learning and are oppositional to the notions disbudded earlier. These texts are almost always completely reliant on teacher direction, teacher knowledge and teacher expertise (Fotos 2005; Ellis 2002; Richards & Rodgers 2001). Further, the privileging of 'Audio-lingual' and the 'Grammar-translation' methods places the teacher at the centre of constructing the language learning experience and leave little or no room for learners to engage in relevant and purposeful psychosocial processes based on functional 'information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction' (Nunan 1991:34). Within these two teaching methods, the teacher controls the pace of the class, the resources utilised in the class and the learner is perceived from a position of deficiency and at worse as a passive entity. Typical to these two more conventional methodologies is also the emphasis of *accurate* speaking and listening skills and a drive for learners to have concise knowledge of grammatical

rules, accents and syntax. This as noted above is not within the authors' preferred adaption of the Cambourne framework where 'expectation' and 'approximation' are indeed an achievement worthy of respectful acknowledgement. Heavy pattern drills, phrase collocation and rote learning are commonly used teaching styles in classes observed by the authors. Accuracy, as opposed to fluency in language pronunciation is also privileged. We critique the practice where language learning is based solely on the centrality of the regurgitation of error-free utterances and grammatical lexicons (Richards and Rodgers 1986; Nunan 1991).

Richards (2006) attests our belief in part as he notes the importance of providing language learning spaces that are not confined to right or wrong answers, or constant teacher approval. The deficiency model of expression of approximation is aligned with his stance. Further, his discussion of the role of teachers and learners in the CLT classroom necessitates that there is always a respectful inclusive and friendly classroom climate—where learners are free of being constantly corrected or judged deficient by the often 'powerful' teacher. As we see it and aligning ourselves with Richards, the artful CLT classroom students will always be invited to co-create and to, 'take on a greater degree of responsibility for their own learning'. It is here that the teacher becomes a conduit to learning and is what we know as 'guides' of as he states, where teachers 'assume the role of facilitator and monitor' (2006, p 5). Further the artful and respectful teacher, 'rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error free sentences, has to develop a different view of learners' errors and of his/her own role in facilitating language learning' (*ibid*). Our artful CLT approach is more favourable in that it gives learners a space to not only make 'mistakes' which are their approximations, but we work collectively to decide on appropriate actions in which to address these approximations. Pedagogical principles, as espoused by Cambourne, Richards and the authors in this instance are deliberately democratic as opposed to autocratic. The nature of this discussion that addresses what happens when the political, private, public and professional Englishes intersect will be addressed in the future. Our learners are permitted to set his or her own pace in attaining accuracy and fluency along with their own political, private, public and professional language acquisition.

## NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY

The writers also acknowledge the power of narrative and how it can be used by learners and teachers to describe and reflect on the EFL/ESL space. It is through the process of storytelling that teachers and students can use imagery and past events to annunciate their sense of self alongside those cultural and historical factors that embody their way of being in the world. In an earlier paper one of the two authors (McKenna, 1999) noted that story and in particular narrative can be

used to add credence to the students' experience. McKenna notes that narrative facilitates a way of uncovering meaning and interrogating assumptions around learning and factors that can either hinder or encourage new ways of knowing. Sharing stories enables learners to have a place of personal voice in the collective of the classroom for the narrative shared is both private and public. The 'intra-reflexive' private self gets to share the 'inter-reflexive or public self' (1999; p 17). The telling and re-telling of personal stories in the classroom precipitates the development of a sense of community as well as sense of identity and belonging.

Within ESL/EFL contexts, narrative is central to assisting learners to move across first language and second language acquisition and into a place of deeper knowing of themselves and others. The classroom becomes a space 'for co-created relationships' where the students discover personal and public relevance in their learning through sharing their stories (p 179). ESL/EFL teachers, who move beyond thick descriptions of grammar to a 'relational pedagogy, asks of students that they critique and challenge why language is being learnt in the first instance. Such learners are also invited to inquire and interrogate of themselves the style of their knowing and learning that best suits their academic and social needs. The skilled practitioner in this sense creates a learning environment that fuels empathic, caring engagement and encounters between class members that move beyond the copying and pasting of notes written on the board. Rather, in this model the learners do not refuse themselves but confidently come forward with their cultural, social and spiritual life worlds that that make them who they are.

A narrative form of relational pedagogy has at its core self-life meaning where a deeper understanding of one's place in learning circles is informed and transformed by sharing a story. Different views and varied cultural knowledges are present in the classroom. There is a quality of encounter when language learners start to tell their stories empathetically – it is in the telling of stories that there is an engagement with other. Further through the sequencing of events and in privileging the oral form, the story teller makes and remakes language in their own tellings; their second language becomes real and meaningful because it is doing a job of engaging with real life and the others in the group.

It is important to note that alongside the characteristics of the CLT approach as noted above, another key element of this teaching model is that the activities facilitated by teachers are still task based requiring the learners to use language to 'obtain an objective' (Skehan 2003:3). Or as Richards and Rogers (2001) point out, CLT can also involve 'competency-based instruction' which is still a chief concern in the outcome of effective English language learning. Whether this means being able to effectively ask for directions at a train station to get to a specific destination or knowing how to correctly fill out an employment form, the CLT approach provides learners with opportunities to discuss and actively play out or dramatise situations that creatively reflect their social, emotional and

physical wellbeing. In the absence of activities based solely on grammar books and tests, learners are skilled up to foster ‘illocutionary competence’ in the face of ‘unforeseen difficulties’ or circumstances (Brown 2007: 243).

## WHY IS COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING NOT WIDESPREAD?

There are various arguments for why CLT method is not adopted by language teachers across the world. One suggestion is that many teachers of the English language find it easier to *direct* their students to completing text book exercises with right or wrong answers. Further, these same teachers have a very traditional notion of what teaching and learning looks like, which can be based on a variety of reasons ranging from one’s culture, gender, ethnicity or political values (Brown 2000). They may not recognise the power relationships or have been taught that teacher is always a political practice. They might be afraid, as is one author’s expertise of what happens when a group of learners are permitted to collaboratively set their own pace in attaining accuracy and fluency along with their own political, private, public and professional language acquisition as noted above. This acquired teacher fear is a falsehood and demands redressing in all forms of teacher education training at preservice and postgraduate levels.

There is also the skill and effort required by teachers to ‘know their students’ within our Artful CLT framework. What is perceived as difficult for some language teachers is the effort needed to embed a CLT approach into their classroom practice. Rather than giving students a ‘grade’ based on a test or an examination score Artful CLT requires assessment strategies aligned with an approach, which requires constant planning, creativity and monitoring on the part of the teacher. The relational pedagogy that we mention earlier requires you develop authentic, meaningful, respectful and purposeful encounters with every class member. This in some teachers’ minds is simply too hard. We beg to differ. Teachers must also feel comfortable to recognise the teachable moments that arise as spontaneous activity.

The Artful CLT model is often unrehearsed and definitely not based on repetition and formulae to redress deficiencies. For this kind of classroom climate to evolve, teachers must have a solid empathic grasp of the ESL learner and how her student is stretching herself beyond grammar and syntax rules. All students are driven by the need to make meaning. Teachers need to feel comfortable when taking on the role of a, guide, enabler and facilitator and often display flexibility in using a range of teaching and learning techniques. They have to surrender up the role of ‘director’ and ‘instructor’ as their preferred and at times required position. Finally teachers need to see learning as being strengthened when students experience approximation. Trial and error are by definition proactive ways of be-



ing – this is a strength in this model in learning of a new language. For those teachers who feel that the Artful CLT approach is too difficult and exposes them to vulnerabilities in their own use of the language that is being taught, the use of a grammar-translation method provides a good cloak in which to hide behind.

Despite all the positive research that has been conducted on the CLT method, Chowdhury and Ha (2008:305) go so far as to criticise it stating that, ‘even though CLT claims to create a democratic classroom that is responsive to students’ needs, it is often inappropriate and incompatible, neither sophisticated nor responsive enough for the complex educational needs and cultures of students in certain settings’. Chowdhury and Ha note that in countries like Bangladesh the CLT method is not favoured. This is familiar to the authors of this article but given the occasion to co-create compatible and sophisticated teacher moments and using art especially the benefits are patently obvious. In many countries the rather didactic and teacher centred approaches like the grammar-translation method is commonly used. One of the reasons why the grammar-translation method is most popular amongst language teachers in these countries is because it *places the teacher at the centre of knowledge management, control and delivery*. Language teachers in the grammar-translation methods are the ‘tour’ guide and they direct their students almost always passively through required aspects of the English learning process because this is what students have come to expect and need. Teachers using these didactic and teacher centred approaches ‘do not encourage students to participate due to the culturally situated role of the teacher...students see the teacher as a ‘father figure’—nurturing and authoritative at the same time’ (2008, p. 310). Power political, private, public and professional languages are therefore seems to be a less important driving force. This ideological stance prevents many teachers from choosing to relinquish a perceived ‘authoritative’ presence.

Another often cited criticism around the potential usefulness of CLT attends to the idea that the practice of CLT may encourage ‘inaccuracies’ in language forms. Hiep (2008, p.198) sites three Vietnamese students who selectivity document their concerns around their experience of CLT. Whilst some teacher create the ESL class as a ‘fun’ space one of the respondents Xuan noted that CLT at times ‘encouraged students to use the language in a meaningful way not necessarily in an accurate form....’ She writes, ‘I know that CLT can promote pair work, group work and role-play but it is difficult to use it in my country. A major challenge in my country is the motivation (for learning language). They only want to pass for a university degree.... people in Vietnam of the same status are not willing to collaborate with each other.’ As noted above our proposed Artful CLT method of teaching is based on communication that requires performing, drawing, writing, acting, reviewing, critiquing, persuading in the second language based in the host countries a real life social contexts. With adult learners this is so vital, It is essential in the authors’ minds that matters of racism refugeeity, sexism, religion, gender and

poverty through language exchange widens the adult student's authentic language repertoire. These are the matters of living and loving fully,

Research conducted by Exley (2001) on EFL teaching in central Java in Indonesia showed a clear distinction between teaching and learning techniques used by Indonesian and Australian EFL educators. Indonesian EFL educators were seen as having 'teacher centred lessons, passive learning and a mode of punishment in Indonesian classrooms rather than a reward' (pg 8). One of the reasons why Indonesian teachers justified this approach was because 'Indonesian EFL learners, like all off shore learners, needed to master the IELTS for university entry and non-measurable aspects such as English for academic purposes and take up the conduct, characters and manner of an Australian learner' (pg 10). As a result, Indonesian teachers felt it their duty to ensure that they had full control of the classroom. Also given the large size of students in these classes, alongside limited time to develop their English language skills for the IELTS test, it was believed that a teacher-driven curriculum was the only way to help language learners to achieve university demands. In comparison, Australian EFL educators in Indonesia 'generally focused more on learners and learning, less teacher dominance, a lot more pair-work and group work and introducing independent and individualised learning' (pg 9). One of the authors engaged in two years of in country Indonesian study and the inverse was true. Real life, artful exchange ensued and were the daily negotiated basis for the learning that took place. The Australian educators in Indonesia desired and encouraged their language learners in their classrooms to feel comfortable to engage in academic, complex and at times contentious debate characterised by high order language functioning and having critical inquiry embedded in the lesson. In one author's process in learning L2 sexism, sexuality and Islam were openly debated, critiqued and respectfully considered. This was rich learning. . At the same time some Australian language teachers adopted and modelled on some of the teaching and learning strategies that they had been exposed to over the years when they were students. This is another reason why teachers felt comfortable when adopting a more informal and artful CLT communicative language approach.

## CONCLUSION

For the ESL learners who have been provided with a range of teaching and learning styles, being taught in a teacher-directed way can be quite confronting and challenging. This article whilst highlighting a number of important reasons as to why the CLT method is not widely used in particular teaching and learning contexts is actually endorsing the practice through the field of shared and engaged learning. The cultural views held by a teacher as to the role of the learner in his or her classroom must be examined in ESL training. The deliberations and research

round the nature of the class size and best management through privileging a teacher directed approach must be explored. The article offers some models of pedagogical practice whereby a teacher does not teach in the same way as he or she was taught but rather engages in what we call a democratic and ‘relational pedagogy’

Many language teachers would say that there is no right or wrong way to teach language, but rather it is about the quality of the learning experience presented to students. We hold to this notion. Essentially however what is important in a language classroom are the ways in which language teachers adopt particular strategies to facilitate inclusive, engaged and authentic teaching and learning outcomes. The Artful practice CLT method proposed here is an opportunity to open up a conversation of what innovative pedagogical language teaching looks like. It has many positive attributes as discussed in this article and it must be seen as a source of co-creation. The lessons we aspire to teach are enjoyable, informative and will encourage collaborative and self-directed learning. Principles of metacognition and the fostering of team building skills are at the heart of the shared engagement. Further, this Artful CLT approach, when combined with other key learning areas using English is in the authors’ minds far more effective in providing students with a range of opportunities to develop their political, private, public and professional language knowledge base alongside the skills needed in their new language.

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# BUILDING SUSTAINABLE RESEARCH PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Who Cares?

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## ACADEMIC LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

**A**cademic life today, especially in the context of the discipline of education, is very different to what it was a decade ago. Academic roles and performance criteria have changed considerably in those places where teacher education has moved from a college context with a 3 year program to a University based Degree with a four year requirement. This was the case in 1988 in Australia where the Dawkins reforms (Dawkins, 1988) created a unified university system that saw the end of Colleges of Advanced Education and the creation or consolidation of universities new and old. In Hong Kong the so called '3-3-4' system will be implemented in 2012 and will mean that there is a 5 year program for candidates to become qualified teachers in the SAR, since the existing degree was already 4 years.

In addition to their teaching role, academics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are required to conduct research and disseminate it to their professional communities as well as be engaged in service both within their institution and with their local and global stakeholders in education. In fact, to many it would seem that there has been a major shift in emphasis from teaching to research, with research now constituting the major focus of performance for academics in many locations. While education academics are quick to recognize the synergy between teaching and research in which research informs the nature and quality of teaching, which in turn inspires new research in teaching and learning and associated educational

investigations, many feel that their teaching roles have been devalued and that the only outcomes worth pursuing are those related to publishing academic papers in esteemed journals. Unfortunately, this has become increasingly problematic over the past few years in systems where accountability measures have resulted in the ranking of educational journals so that everyone in the field wants only to publish in what are A\* (the top 5%) and A ranked journals (the next 10%) when there are not enough in number or editions to go around.

Sparkes (2007) encapsulates the change in atmosphere vividly with a composite story of a contemporary academic who is attempting to survive the audit culture. It is a grim narrative with academics being devalued if they are not contributing to research and scholarship despite heavy teaching loads and working with stakeholders in communities. It emphasizes the ways in which research has come to be the major focus of academic work in contemporary times. It resonates with so many feelings that academics are currently experiencing and serves as a warning to those who are currently studying for their doctorates in order to find their own place in academe.

When engaged in research most academics would claim that one of their main goals is 'to make a difference' or to support teachers through a period of rapid change. For myself, in Australia over a period of 20 years, this meant establishing partnerships with teachers and students and working with them over periods of time exploring the ways in which new technologies could impact and enhance what they traditionally did in school. These were intimate longitudinal studies of intact classrooms which examined and contrasted old and new learning and involved rethinking traditional conceptualizations of some of the basic tenets of our belief systems about learning, ways of teaching and the role of schools in society. I was also involved in a project that considered children's learning in out of school contexts and made comparisons of formal and informal learning opportunities which were very different. I was passionate about this work but was also aware that some of my contemporaries were not so enthusiastic about research and regarded their role first and foremost as teachers. They saw themselves primarily as being responsible for preparing the next generation of teachers with a skill set that was classroom based and focused. These academics lamented about 'the good old days' when teaching was valued and class sizes were small so that you could not only have more intimate discussions, but you could also manage the workload associated with marking assignments. They had good relationships with colleagues in schools when they visited pre service teachers on their teaching practica, but could not envisage conducting research in the same contexts for one reason or another. At the time of the Dawkins reforms (1998) in Australia the majority of staff in teacher education faculties did not have doctorates, and once the new system was installed they were required to enroll and complete the program, which is research based in Australia, in order to maintain their positions.

This has been a global trend in terms of the shift in emphasis from teaching to research and has generally changed teacher education as a result. In this context then there were those who were excited and passionate about the new conditions at one end of a continuum and those who wanted to remain focused on teaching at the opposite end.

Over the past decade I have noticed similar situations occurring in the Hong Kong context. Changing conditions have meant that academics who were traditionally teaching orientated were required to gain doctorates in education and then follow up with scholarship in refereed journals. This is not an isolated trend as Sparkes (2007) has shown in the context of the UK. Academic life is characterized by activity in teaching, research and service and maintaining a balance between them is regarded as being fundamental to surviving in the role.

## EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN THE SECOND MILLENNIUM

As we move into the second decade of this millennium it is apparent that the landscape of educational research once celebrated for its diversity of scope and methodologies is becoming increasingly more conservative and uniform. There are parallels in schooling in terms of the outcomes based focus of student performance and the emphasis on student behaviours that can be directly observed and quantified. While evident in Australia, it is more pervasive in Hong Kong where a cursory inspection of projects funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) reveals a preponderance of quantitative studies that are very specific in nature and seem to have a special preference for survey data. Similarly, attendance at conferences in the region show the same levels of skewed bias towards more positivistic research that is characterized by minimal times in school contexts with students and teachers, control and experimental groups, surveys of stakeholders in the schools and studies of leadership models derived from survey data or interviews with selected participants. In a culture where 'saving face' is of paramount importance it is particularly relevant to note that many teachers do not want researchers in their classrooms observing them as they go about their daily lives and are reluctant to participate in interviews in case they 'say the wrong thing'. For me, there was the additional fact of being a westerner who does not speak Cantonese as well as not having a complete understanding of cultural issues. As a Professor of Education I was accorded a certain elevated status which meant that I sometimes felt as if the principal, deputies and teachers were in awe of me and again afraid that they might say something that either offended me in some way or would not match with my expectations of them. Conversely, my Research Assistants, as young females were given no status at all and treated very differently by the teachers. While the students seemed to regard them as being very 'cool' and fun to talk to and be with. It had been difficult to

find kindergartens and schools that would be willing for us to visit for observations and conduct surveys with parents and children (P1 and P5 year groups). It was only through a series of personal introductions with friends of previous students and/ or family members that we found four sites that were willing to participate in our work.

For local researchers the situation is slightly less problematic but they still report difficulties associated with access, which in turn tended to shape the types of projects that they thought would be feasible. It became apparent to me that the type of research environments that I was used to was much less possible in this context and what I observed was that there were many more short term projects and ones in which the time spent in data collection or interacting with teachers and students was minimized. I heard about a lot of surveys being conducted, short term observations that incorporated some brief interviews with teachers and testing of students that caused minimal disruptions to busy schedules. There was a preponderance of control and experimental group designs and a focus on specific teaching methods that could be accommodated into existing timetables and methodologies without too much disruption. Findings were simply explained as the result of the implementation of such approaches, and there was little or no overall discussions about the potential impact of the findings in terms of changing practices in the broader context of schooling and society. The outcomes of research in terms of publications are monitored in a rigorous system that incorporates international reviewers, but the ways in which they impact on local systems is less clear.

Why do we do research in education? I would suggest that it is to improve pedagogies and learning and give us greater insights into the complex nature of the issues that face stakeholders in education in contemporary societies. How can we conduct research that can achieve these goals with short term 'hit and run' research projects that do not engage with the communities that they are studying and attempt to uncover it with all the complexities that are inherent to living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? When I see research projects with a title like: 'Making requests in Cantonese by preschoolers of Pakistani origin in Hong Kong—A pilot study' I think of all the difficulties that children of migrant workers face when they come to Hong Kong and wonder why this particular aspect matters? I have met 11 year old Pakistani students who have recently arrived in Hong Kong and who are then placed in Primary 1 classes with 6 year old local children because they cannot speak Cantonese. There are no special classes provided for teaching them Cantonese and their families do not have the resources to pay for additional tuition for any part of their schooling. The flow on of this to all areas of the curriculum and their lack of understanding in mathematics, science and social studies will ensure that they will have a problematic existence in school and fall behind their contemporaries, as well as those who are 5 years younger than them in their own



classes. Additionally, they are far away from their natural environment with parents and siblings who rarely speak the language and maintain a happy disposition in difficult circumstances. Making requests is probably the last problem on their mind at this stage of their education. In what ways is focusing on one aspect of the language (presumably in isolation) going to help them in any way or indeed add to the research corpus about the lives of immigrant children and the ways in which their schooling might be facilitated?

What follows details a sustainable research project that engages with school communities and the people in them. In this case the research goals have been related to improving teaching and learning in literacy and occurred over a period of 3 years. The approach to teaching and learning used was a pedagogy of multiliteracies.

## A PEDAGOGY OF MULTILITERACIES<sup>1</sup>

Becoming literate is a fundamental goal of schooling in Australia, as for many countries, and the ways in which we provide contexts for this in the early years of schooling has been recognized as being very important for later learning and success in school. One of the problems associated with becoming literate relates to children from low socio economic backgrounds who might not have had the focused experiences prior to coming to pre school that those children from middle class families might have had and take for granted. Education in the early years has very much regarded this situation as one in which a deficit needs to be corrected with an intervention along traditional lines of making up for lost time. My research partners and I felt that a new approach was needed that recognized the strengths that children brought to their schooling experiences so that their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti et al. 1992) could be built upon. We posited that the pedagogies of multiliteracies (New London Group 1996) would enable teachers to conceptualise literacy in new ways that incorporated new technologies for learning that enabled a multi-modal approach to literacy.

The New London Group (1996) used the term multiliteracies to link print, visual and audio texts and also considers the communicative skills of speaking, writing and reading. The term is based on the premise that making meaning from texts has become increasingly complex as a result of new technologies and social conditions that have fundamentally changed how we make meaning and create new understandings. For example, the way in which mass media permeates everything we see and do is essentially carried out in linguistic and visual modes. This means that we need to be able to read them effectively and derive our own meanings about their effectiveness and purpose. Additionally, everyday actions require that we coordinate and make sense of linguistic meaning in written texts together with other modalities such as the spatial. Even in a visit to a shopping mall we

need to negotiate signs that are both written and use visual symbols as well as to understand the spatial architecture of the building.

Over a period of 3 years we worked with teachers to support children's literacy learning. We started in preschools and then followed case study children in their first two years of school in order to find out more about how they became literate from aged 4 to 6 years of age.

Our work is documented in a book that we called 'Rethinking learning in early childhood education' (Yelland, Lee et al. 2008) and in it we outline the strategies that we used in the project with teachers. The work was based around our shared understandings about the goals of literacy, the role of information and communications technologies (ICT) in education, and more importantly how we could build partnerships with schools and teachers to improve learning outcomes for all children.

We designed a collaborative action research project with a group of 36 teachers in three of the Australian States. Working closely with the teachers we designed a program that had as its main goal to establish how ICT can most effectively be used for enhancing children's literacy learning and to identify a range of specific ways in which teachers could build on their existing skills by incorporating ICT (Yelland 2007)(Yelland, Cope et al. 2008)). We wanted to empower teachers so they could employ independent, critical thinking in the use of ICT in their teaching environment, so that they were able to extend their pedagogical repertoire and create learning opportunities for their children which were challenging, stimulating and engaging.

The specific aims of our research were:

- To *establish* a pedagogy of multiliteracies that would prepare children for today's technology-rich society
- To *design*, in collaboration with teachers, approaches to embedding the use of new technologies into their program planning that was responsive to their educational philosophies and practices
- To *investigate* the value of multimedia in relation to the learning needs of minority and disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous children, children from language backgrounds other than English and children with special needs.
- To *enable* educators to identify the extent of the impact of early access to ICT on children in families from low socio-economic areas.

- To *create* communities of practice with technology, including mentoring and collegial support groups for professional learning, use of online resources and communication tools, and the development of an online network.
- To *document and showcase* exemplary practice with ICT in early childhood contexts to improve learning outcomes.

## SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

This project initially involved 12 pre-school and childcare centres located in disadvantaged communities in three different states in Australia. This included children with Indigenous backgrounds, recent arrivals with first languages other than English and children with special needs. Each pre-school/childcare centre teacher chose 2-3 children as case studies during the first year of the research. As these children moved on to primary school, their new schools and teachers were invited to join the research project. This invitation extended to teachers of the children for their first two years of primary school. Four university-based researchers worked with the teacher researchers over three years and facilitated research circle meetings that occurred twice a year.

### *Research design and rationale*

Two major issues that guided our research design were the consideration of how teachers would directly benefit from engaging in the research and how the design could emphasise research *with* teachers, not *on* them. Thus, we attempted to avoid the traditional stereotype of being researchers who come into educational settings, gather as much data and information as possible, then leave and analyse the data back in the university. The research process was also designed to act as a catalyst for change, a process that supported rethinking and new actions for all involved.

Hopkins (Hopkins 1987) argued that traditional educational research has been inadequate in terms of helping classroom teachers to improve their practice and suggested that one way to make it relevant was to involve the teacher as researcher who was an integral and essential part of the process. This was supported by Stake (1987) who observed that the results of educational research were often framed as either specific or general recommendations and contained few signposts for action. Hopkins (1987) stated that as a consequence of this, 'teachers often regard educational research as something irrelevant to their lives and see little interaction between the world of the educational researcher and the world of the teacher' (p. 114). This would appear to be applicable for Australian teachers who rated participation in academic research projects towards the bot-

tom of a list of preferred methods to gain or improve teaching or administrative skills (Conners, 1991).

In planning our project we were clear that we wanted to work collaboratively with teachers to transform practice, and thus create more effective contexts for learning for young children. We thought this would not be possible in the context of traditional research paradigms. Thus, all participants in the research were regarded as researchers, each of whom had different roles and responsibilities, but were regarded as equal members of a collective. Decisions about direction and focus were made as a group and documentation, planning and analysis of the research artefacts were done collaboratively. Kruger, Cherednichenko, Hooley and Moore (2001) point out that one impact of post-modern research has been to separate researchers in universities and practitioners in schools, both discursively and practically. Their study developed a methodology around the notion of 'collaborative practitioner research' (CPR) where teachers and university researchers came to a 'co-learning agreement' (Wagner, 1997). Wagner characterized this relationship as being a 'reflexive, systematic inquiry, stimulated in part by ongoing collegial communication between researchers and practitioners' (p. 17). Our methodology was designed around a core strand of collaborative action research which was developed with participatory principles and critical theory in mind. A complementary strand of social inquiry was also developed with an aim to be both reflexive and respectful. This strand of the research drew upon interpretivism, constructivism and critical theory.

The constructivist position meant respecting the world views and experiences that all participants brought to the study. By sharing multiple perspectives, we attempted to come to more informed, insightful and sophisticated views. The seeking of multiple perspectives was also considered as a strategy to assist in constructing a view of cultural changes that occurred in teachers' workplaces and classrooms. The constructivist or interpretivist tradition of social inquiry recognizes that the very presence of a researcher is likely to impact on and cause changes in the context, however this is not the primary goal. Rather it focuses on uncovering new understandings that assist us to explain 'what is' and in turn this might lead to a rethinking about practices that might be modified or extended as a result of the reflection.

## PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Our methodology was thus based on collaborative practitioner research (Noffke & Stevenson, 1995), action research and critical inquiry involving teachers as co-researchers. We built on earlier work by Cherednichenko, Davies, Kruger and O'Rourke (2001) and addressed recommendations to include both collaborative analysis and theorizing in collaborative practitioner research (CPR). Variations of

this methodology had been successfully used to identify learning outcomes, confirm understandings about teaching and learning, and enable teachers as researchers to ‘identify and speculate on new findings with regard to links between teaching practice, school organisation and student learning’ (Cherednichenko, Davies, Kruger, & O’Rourke 2001, p. 2). Our intention was that our collective research process would also act as a form of professional learning and be of direct benefit to the teachers and their education communities. Some of the teachers in fact enrolled in our Master of Education programs.

The CPR process challenged the traditional divide between teacher practitioners and academic researchers. We sought to connect the reflective insights of teachers in different schools to emerging research propositions. This required us to go beyond action research if we were to reach a stage of proposing generalisable research findings while still being mindful of our study’s democratic intentions (Cherednichenko et al, 2001). The resolution of this problem was the collaborative analysis and theorizing strategy which complemented the reflection and systematic inquiry and documentation by teachers. What resulted was a pathway towards the proposition of *research* findings, which could be accorded the status of fuzzy generalisations (Bassey 2001). The coordinating researchers synthesised a map of connections that emerged from the teacher data, which was then returned to the teacher researchers for further debate and validation. Connections with the literature were also incorporated at this stage. This constituted the collaborative analysis phase. Bassey, (2001) also noted that teachers generally seek ‘practical guidance based on credible evidence’ as opposed to the sociologist who seeks ‘theoretical insight based on methodological probity’ (p. 17).

Local insights informed local practice in the spirit of action research. But we wanted to expand the impact of the work. So we organized a final symposium near the end of the 3 years which brought together all the teachers who were part of the project, the coordinating research team, other interested researchers and education professionals. A further collaborative validation took place following reports by teachers of their local insights and these were also integrated into our emerging framework of findings. Through the collaborative validations, academic researchers and school colleagues confirmed local interpretations, leading to a mapping of similarities and differences in the form of a multiliteracies portrait, profile and pathways. These validated findings were then available for additional local testing.

Our research was designed to include practitioners in a process of collaborative theorising, an inquiry similar to the collaborative analysis stage. Two criteria are necessary for collaborative theorising. The first is that findings be evaluated as *trustworthy* (Mishler 1990; Yeatman and Sachs 1995) by their explicit connections with practice and the interests of practitioners and their students. Collaborative theorising must also have the potential for research *validity*, by connecting with

research literature and by being available for public scrutiny, using, for example, the public tests of validity outlined by Anderson and Heer (1999). They proposed five validity tests: outcome (research leads to resolution of problem); process (research allows for learning); democratic (research is collaborative); catalytic (research leads to understanding and transformation); and dialogic (research accorded peer review).

During our final research circle meetings, teachers identified examples of children's literacy practices that aligned with the revised multiliteracies profile. The act of translating theory into practice and practice into theory, led to significant insights being reported by both teacher and coordinating researchers. Collaborative theory building was not only desirable but was a crucial aspect of the knowledge creation process.

## **DATA, EVIDENCE, ANALYSIS AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION**

An important consideration for this research was how to generate new knowledge that was created on the basis of empirical data that was analysed in a rigorous and valid way and identified 'signposts for action' that practitioners regarded as relevant and accessible (Anderson & Heer, 1999; Conners, 1991; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Hopkins, 1987; Stake, 1987). As part of the Collaborative Practitioner Research (CPR) process, teachers synthesized the documentation they produced, their learning from actions taken during their inquiries, and student artefacts were collected. In dialogue with the coordinating researchers, they interrogated the multiliteracies framework and identified examples from practice that enabled more grounded analysis, interpretation and theorizing. As primary teachers joined the project, collaborative analysis and interpretation was encouraged between the teachers. Pre-school teachers began to assume the role of the coordinating researchers, asking reflective and probing questions that caused their primary colleagues to begin rethinking their literacy and technology practices. Insights from the teacher researcher analysis and reflection were compiled into a collective response by the coordinating researchers and returned to teachers for 'member checking' (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Our knowledge creation process was based on data and evidence gathered through what Wolcott (1992) proposed as being a full range of data-gathering techniques:

Experiencing, with emphasis on sensory data, particularly watching and listening; enquiring, in which the researcher's role becomes more intrusive than that of a 'mere observer'; and examining, in which the research makes use of materials prepared by others. (p. 19)

For our purposes this consisted of:

*Classroom observations:* Both teachers and coordinating researchers engaged in classroom observation with a specific emphasis on the focus children

*Reflections:* Both teachers and coordinating researchers developed and shared reflections about practice, pedagogy and children's emerging facility with multiliteracies and ICT.

*Group dialogue and discussion:* The coordinating researchers facilitated structured discussions to explore teachers' learning processes, gain feedback about their specific inquiries and how these were impacting on their professional learning.

*Individual Interviews:* Individual interviews with teachers were conducted as part of the classroom visit cycle of observation.

*Literature:* Literature related to multiliteracies, early childhood education and use of ICT was provided to the group for discussion and reflection. Research literature was accessed by the coordinating researchers and used to position and strengthen our approach.

*Documentation:* Teachers and coordinating researchers documented practice, photographed artefacts and children engaged in literacy and learning practices, minutes of meetings and summaries of discussions in addition to their reflections.

## SUMMARY

At the conclusion of our research we felt that the methodology was successful in supporting and facilitating teacher learning as they explored a multiliteracies approach to encouraging children's literate practices. Additionally, we co-constructed a multiliteracies portrait, pedagogies and pathways framework that acted a practical guide to decision making in relation to responsive and personalised learning for children.

New forms of collaboration with teachers enable a more grounded approach to inquiry and research partnerships that produce new knowledge. Here I have focused on outlining the way we worked with teachers and children in a range of educational settings, in order to elucidate how such collaborations make new learning possible. Our ways of working with teachers aligned with the literature on effective professional learning which suggests that teacher must become researchers of their own practice and part of the theory building and knowledge

construction process and were characterized by collaboration, dialogue, reflection and an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.

Our research also revealed a number of enabling and constraining factors that affected the effectiveness of our collaboration and partnerships. Enabling factors included the provision of time for teachers to engage in dialogue and reflection; opportunities to visit one another's classrooms; supportive school leadership; partnerships and support of coordination researchers; responsive opportunities for skill development and professional reading. Teachers reported an increased sense of professionalism as a result of their participation in the project and several volunteered to make presentations of their work to others.

Challenges or constraints to our research design included those involved with attrition; losing children to new schools; teachers of the case study children who were not willing to be involved; short term contracts for pre-school teachers which meant that they were unwilling to commit for the duration of the project. Further, in the second and final year of the project it became apparent that some primary school principals who were not interested in the research, were unwilling to provide time to for teacher release to participate in it and also it became evident that a lack of knowledge about and access to ICT in schools raised a number of issues around possible activities and the increasing focus and compliance associated with alphabetic or print literacy in the form of State and National testing regimes meant that some principals and primary (early years) teachers were reluctant to embrace a broader perspective of literacy which was not part of such a viewpoint.

Overall, the teachers reported their appreciation for the research design and the opportunity to participate in practitioner research. This was especially the case with the pre-school and childcare centre teachers who participated for all three years of the project. They could see that they had knowledge and insight about their focus children that was worth sharing and also realized that they had indeed become increasingly 'multiliterate' themselves as they continued engaging in discussion with primary school teachers. Primary (early years) teachers also indicated to us that they valued the opportunity to collaborate with others to interrogate their pedagogical practices rather than simply build up content and activities, which tends to be the traditional approach to professional development.

All co-researchers became more consciously aware about the ways in which knowledge of the diverse lifeworlds of children can be used to inform and enrich the curriculum and the importance of focusing on the strengths of the child, their preferred ways of learning and making sense of the world and the 'funds of knowledge' that they bring to any learning relationship. The need to provide children with multiliterate pathways to print as well as the opportunity to develop as multiliterate young people became evident as an equity and access issue. My argument here has been that this is the type of work that we should be doing *with*



teachers, not *to* them. It exemplifies the theme of the conference creating learning communities for sustainable research.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has described one way of engaging in collaborative practitioner research in a three year project centered on a pedagogy of multiliteracies. It required a lot of initial organization, coordination and collaboration in a collective of educators who were all regarded as researchers. The project added value to the lives of all participants in different ways and was meaningful and sustainable as a result of this. At the beginning of the paper I posed the question; Who cares about your research project? I remember when I was learning to be a teacher – on my few first teaching practices it was all about me! How I would perform in front of the students. Gradually, I came to realize it was not about me at all, but rather about the students and creating optimal learning environments in which they are able to realize their full potential and supporting them to achieve this. The same can be said of research. We frequently start out thinking what can I do? How will it make me look good – how can I do strategic research that will be funded? But really it is about what makes a difference to the lives of teachers and their students and how we can transform education and learning by enacting the research project. Focusing on the minutiae in clinical trials will not achieve this. We need to reflect on who cares about the research that we do? Who will it benefit? How will it transform lives? And how can we contribute to educational research for the future benefit of our citizens? It is challenging but worthwhile.

## NOTE

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# WHAT DRIVES MOTIVATION IN ESL/EFL CLASSROOMS?



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If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the people to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead teach them to yearn for the endless immensity of the sea

— Antoine de Saint-Exupery

## INTRODUCTION

**M**otivation is central to infusing any effective classroom setting with hope, enthusiasm and meaningfully rich teaching moments. Motivating students to aspire to successfully learn is an area that is extensively written about in various teaching and learning texts. But, what does it really mean to have a love of learning of another language with acuity around the politics of learning English? Motivational research tells us that the most successful teachers are those who can draw on innovative and informed teaching approaches that elicit meaningful moments. This is important to the two authors who deliberate on motivation in this article. Ur (1991, p275) notes that motivation is one of the most significant factors in successful language learning and should have 'a very high priority'. Likewise, teachers who are self-reflexive and self-aware are more likely to adapt and modify teaching tools that promote effective learning in ESL/TESOL settings. As

Souto-Manning (2010, p161) notes, 'competition, bids for power and knowledge can characteristically be perpetuated in classrooms'. But this is not the style of motivation that we aspire to – we want to promote optimism, effusiveness, mindfulness and purposeful in ESL/TESOL learning (Seligman, 1992).

Building on the theoretical positions of critical pedagogy we note that Paolo Freire (1994) would argue that there is a greater likelihood of individuals developing a yearning for learning's sake when intrinsic motivation is apparent and central to finding meaningful moments in the classroom. A motivational teacher should always be life changing; he or she must make hope practical when the challenges of daily life as an ESL/EFL learner can appear insurmountable. The skillful, respectful and motivating teacher can re-create and re-invent the world of the learner. They must not only recreate what is already apparent in the spade of their teaching but also expect reflexivity and deep inquiry. Through 'action and reflection-on-action' (Schon, 1995), the student and teacher alike can have high aspirations as they co-create, collaborate and re-invent what is always by definition a politically rich teaching and learning encounter. We see this when Freire asserts the need for education to promote criticality void of passivity and numbness;

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. Although the dialectical relations of women and men with the world exist independently of how these relations are perceived (or whether or not they are perceived at all), it is also true that the form of action they adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. Hence, the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action (1993, p83).

When private, public and professional Englishes intersect there are opportunities for strengthening notions of agency, civics and respectful citizenship. This can only emerge when students and teachers are actively involved in questioning, probing and critically evaluating the construction of learner identities. The motivating teacher will encourage his or her students to take safe risks and to experience 'disequilibrium' as a way forward to new learning (Brown 2007, p173).

In ESL/EFL settings, where learning can be sometimes self-directed and at times dis-empowering, the student is at the core of crafting pathways to personal and social enlightenment. Their confidence, self esteem and a vision for the future must be urgently understood as fully as possible. Skilled ESL/EFL educators, equipped to motivate learners through emancipatory teaching approaches are committed to a style of student inquiry that privileges the student voice. Aligned with Freire's philosophy of teaching and learning ESL/EFL students need

to deepen and extend their understanding of literacy so that it becomes part of their repertoire of the lived experience. As Street reminds us

Whether we are researching the literacy practices of diverse communities, teaching in classrooms that are either widely heterogeneous or narrowly homogeneous, or participating in professional conferences where we make arguments and claims about the work we do, we need to keep in mind our responsibilities to individuals and communities: that in doing research about literacy and in teaching literacy to a variety of people we are also working to create opportunities, to reveal inequity, and to act in the interests of social justice (2004, p117).

When researching student identity and their literacy practices as we are compelled to understand and be mindful of the diverse communities that students belong to. Such communities are made up of varied political ideologies, religious affiliations and varied gender and sexualities. Allowing the students' social, political and cultural backgrounds to be unreservedly present allows for emergence of their belonging, identity and feelings of collectiveness in the class. Inclusion of such serves to solidify a deeply rooted sense of 'place' and 'space'. The class must give voice to the students' unique and various socio-historical selves: it is these that shape the space of the quality teaching encounter in the ESL/EFL classroom and forms the basis of this discussion. Language learners should always have the capacity to announce an independent voice; a voice never silenced by stereotypical, cultural and historical views that espouse what second language teaching ought to look and feel like.

## DEFINITIONS OF MOTIVATION

Defining the term motivation is complex. Generally speaking to motivate is to inspire, stimulate and encourage learners in a way that validates and supports their personal and academic goals and interests. Brown (2007, p85) defines motivation more pragmatically as 'the extent to which you make choices about (a) goals to pursue and (b) the effort you will devote to that pursuit'. Zhou (2009) asserts that motivation is synonymous with 'student voice'— that is in the presence of locating one's learning in the present moment, English language students are more likely to view learning in meaningful and practical ways.

Again from a pragmatic and definitional stance motivation can be either intrinsic or extrinsic (Johnston, 1996). Intrinsic motivation, as referred to by Deci (cited in Brown 2007, p88), is said to take place when individuals 'engage in activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward'. These authors aspire for deep intrinsic engagements that are continually understood by teachers and students alike. The sense of self-hood implied here is open to interpretation and analysis. Of great importance to the authors is the belief that intrinsic motivational activities are aligned with a deep desire to develop and nurture

internal awareness and emotional self-discernment. What comes with this level of consciousness and discernment is self-knowledge that can lead to a deepening of positive character traits and ‘feelings of competence and self-determination’ (ibid).

When comparing the benefits of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation psychological and sociological research tell us that intrinsic motivation is far more powerful (Kohn, 2006; Kant, 2003; Pearl & Knight 1999). The writing of Kant (2003) below typifies why intrinsic motivation far exceeds extrinsic motivation in its ability to enhance feelings of personal growth and proactive decision making processes;

If you punish a child for being naughty and reward him for being good, he will do right merely for the sake of the rewards; and when he goes out into the world and finds that goodness is not always rewarded, nor wickedness always punished he will grow into a man who only thinks about how he may get on in the world, and does right or wrong according as he finds either of advantage to him (pg 56).

In linking this to ESL/TESOL learners, the words of Kant suggest that teachers and integration aides do better to motivate students to learn English by abandoning reward systems and avoiding an abuse of their power. Indeed the classroom relationship between teachers and their students is imbued with indescribable power and indefinable status. The teacher must be fully informed around the rights, privileges and obligations of the new comer to the country. Both student and teachers alike will relate to their learned capacity to employ and engage with power.

Extrinsic motivation is not oppositional to intrinsic motivation. Rather it is part of the same process and commonly associated with engagement in an activity for the purpose of achieving external reward. Such rewards can include financial gain or a heightened status, or can be used for socio-political advancement. In this instance satisfaction relies heavily upon external factors and having power over those external factors—especially those oppressive factors such as poverty, racism, sexism and disability. Recognising coercive, referent or reward-based power is central to most academic discussions around motivation but what is this in relation to our ESL/TESOL student? The significant question arises—how we motivate ESL/EFL learners when they have been subject to power relationships that bring in to question styles of engagement based on other notions of gender, compulsory heterosexuality, explicit racism, alienation through perceived or actual ethnicity and least privileged socio-economic factors? How do we motivate ESL/EFL students who feel as though their every utterance is under constant surveillance? As a teacher how do we motivate post-traumatised refugees who as learners in the past were silenced and had no power? What do we do when we are perceived as the ‘experts’ who supervise, closely observe, watch or ‘threaten to watch’ these ESL/

TESOL learners? How do we use our notion of power to define and demand the normative practices that are the daily rituals of our schools?

Academic theory holds to the notion that teacher behaviour is a commanding ‘motivational tool’ (Dornyei, 2001, p120) occurring when ‘setting the scene’, or before engaging (preactional conditions) with the class: during engagement (actional conditions) in the teaching exchange and after the learning and teaching encounters (postactional conditions) have finished. It is the teacher’s role to avert conflict and inter-cultural, racial or religious tensions but perhaps this need to be spoken of in the class too. These tensions can be spoken of when there is a quality of mutual respect and a teacher who overtly models the core of heartfelt and enthusiastic teaching. By hiding on to a genuine love and interest in their learners the teacher as model is presenting the right to have voice, and to state diversity. He is a living strategy that paves the way for motivation to be encountered by the learner.

## THEORIES OF MOTIVATION

Theorists like Kohn (2006) and Bruner (1942) write extensively on the danger of basing learning on ‘reward’ and ‘punishment’. Bruner promotes the view that a negative side to extrinsic rewards ‘is its addictive nature’ (Brown 2007, p 89) where the learner forgoes learning for learning’s sake. It is therefore important that motivation be based on meaningful, purposeful and internal satisfaction rather than driven by external factors such as materialistic gain. That said it would be negligible for us to dismiss the gain of the material of certification, diploma or such qualifications as unnecessary and their legitimacy is contested. We will deeply examine Seligman and Positive Psychology and Optimistic learning in this series but for now we highlight the belief there simply are other ways of doing motivation!

Artful LT is discussed elsewhere but artfulness a keystone to our thinking. Freire’s notions and notably the banking theory, is at antithesis to motivation and innovation which positions learners as silos needing or be filled. In the presence of the controlled didactic teacher centred on imparting didactic and instructional/functional ESL/EFL approaches, their ceases to exist a space whereby students can ‘steer their own ship’ or become co-collaborative active agents of change. As Freire argues, such paradigms and hegemonic ideologies of learning seek to position teachers as having a sense of supremacy characterised by ‘authority’ and ‘privilege’ of knowledge (Apple 2004). Motivation needs to accompany teaching and learning styles that cater for the diverse learning needs of all students along with attention paid to their own political, private, public and professional language needs.

The use of Multiple Intelligences is another example where Howard Gardner as a theorist (2006), positions visual, audio and kinaesthetic teaching approaches

so ensures that learner modalities which are political, private, public and professional are engaged meaningfully. Motivation is to be valued in the classroom (Gangwer, 2009; Hedge, 2000; Taguchi, 2002) but is strongest when ESL/EFL teacher's lead in ways that locates learner intentions at the core of their private need, which is politically situated. It is this, which is the basis of authentic and meaningful ESL/EFL classroom practice. The heart of artful teaching as we note earlier is the relatedness that drives the learning and teacher liaison to deepen and more beyond mere functional matters of grammar and audio-lingual teaching. The quality of this deliberate intention on the teacher's behalf is to know the student at her best and on this basis a quality relationship can be formed.

Conjoining learner identity and motivation around the knowledge that learners bring to a classroom is a fundamental principle of the 'Constructivist Theory'. Vygotsky's (1978; 1986) educational theory asserts the need to consider the social and cultural background of learners and the impact of 'place' and 'space' on cognitive development. In ESL/EFL contexts as we describe them, scaffolding techniques affords learners with the opportunity to incorporate their cultural, political and spiritual experience into the classroom. The language learning by definition is never dislocated from his or her worldview—they are not automata attending to grammar driven tasks to be comprehended. Instead language learning is a living life-world and is a statement of the political, private, public and professional spirit that fuels the 'zone of proximal development' (1978).

The ESL/EFL teacher motivates his/her students to learn through validating their experiences. The conversations around language become ways to address, critique and review the various socio-historical selves; it is this intention that language learning becomes the space for the teacherly encounter. To scaffold learning, is one thing but to provide ESL/EFL students with a quality of direction beyond mere goal setting and 'rewards' for tasks, is another. In practice, the teacher is a witness to the quality of story and affirms and appreciates the quality of meaning that is co-jointly constructed in the ESL/EFL space. Erben et al (2009, p98) provide examples of how teachers can embed digital pedagogies in the teaching to motivate students to learn a language. They discuss the use of Web 2.0 technologies such as Movie Maker, PowerPoint, Pod-casting and interactive presentations as being valuable resources. At the core of the methodology is always the personal story but this story is politicised. Teachers can utilise to motivate their students to learn English which is richer and more purposeful by going beyond surface features of language. By incorporating e-learning and social networking technology into the classroom with 'Blogs' 'Wikis' or Facebook, ESL/EFL teachers and students can collaborate to document their everyday ordinary interactions. This style of talk using images based on the English language in a public way is very



powerful and an emancipatory practice in itself.<sup>1</sup> This purposeful real life learning of a second language can certainly be enjoyable and rewarding, but is also political. This is especially the case when technological skills are aligned with 21<sup>st</sup> Century ways of knowing break silences and fears of the unknown.

For ESL/EFL preservice teachers, having an ICT platform can motivate them to record their insights, that can be variously confronting or become a place to 'easily' view films, clips and images—but this must now happen with or the visual gaze of the teacher. This is the ethics of care that we espouse and note is at the core of this pedagogical encounter. Cacciattolo et al (2007) document the benefits of using Webct, computer mediated communication, synchronous and asynchronous communication forums in teacher education programs. One of the first year lecturers reflects on the benefits of using chat forums in her class;

One of the great success stories of our revamped lecture series was the online chat forum. During one lecture students were asked to log onto a chat site. Interestingly enough what I observed during this session was that one student, who had hardly spoken throughout the tutorial, had quite a lot to say through his fingertips. I took great delight in reading his responses to the questions raised and those of us who were logged on began to feel his presence in a different way. His shyness, which was apparent in tutorials, was shed through a computer screen and his voice was loud and clear through the use of technology. This led me to question the value of such exercises. Frequently I have had students in my classroom who barely say a word. Such students, when forced to give group presentations must endure increased modes of nervous tension. Often the sleepless night accompanies the over-stressed mind and what evolves is the presentation nightmare. For such students online technology can help to ease their burden. Whilst group presentations are important, especially for preservice teachers who must present to school students and their mentor teachers during their practicum, chat forums can be a way of gaining confidence in the public sphere. Building up pathways for such students can help to make their learning that much more powerful and an increase in confidence to express one's thoughts can spill over into the tutorial (pg 8).

For ESL/EFL learners who find public speaking intimidating, having an opportunity to share their thoughts about English language acquisition through a 'chat forum' could and must be engaged so that her English will be well received. Such an opportunity could also enhance the self-esteem of ESL/EFL students in the learning process thereby improving the quality of engagement they have in classroom/learning sites. It is therefore important that ESL/EFL teachers/facilitators regularly engage in professional development and up skilling as new tech-

1 Of course it is up to the teacher to ensure that each student is comfortable and equipped to use technological resources and that they do not feel threatened in any way to share their learning experiences.

nologies change almost on an hourly basis. Teachers in ESL/EFL should not be risk averse and develop skills to attend to all aspects of the lives of their students. Students in ESL/EFL classrooms will have revealing moments, which need to be accepted and realistically managed so that which Web 2 and ICT discourse is accessible to all people.

Working collaboratively with other ESL/EFL teachers is a requirement that these authors hold too. It is only through and by working with other mentors who are equally skilled in the specialised need of ESL/EFL pedagogies and in a team teaching situation with other ESL/EFL colleagues that teaching becomes more critically commented on. By now the reader is fairly assured that we hold that motivation and learning can only occur within a relaxed, real-life supportive atmosphere. The classroom is by definition a place for cohesive and cooperative encounters. Whilst the teacher is working to maintain a cooperative and cohesive classroom Dornyei also addresses 'self-confidence' as a key to learning and the learner's motivation. He notes that the teacher's role is to increase the student's self-confidence within their 'world view, self identity' and the existing cultural patterns.

Connell (1993) and Putnam (2000) note the extent to which learners in educational contexts can make informed decisions about learning goals or what they term, 'cultural capital' They see this as strongly aligned with the ESL/ TESOL's legitimate personal, public and sometimes contentious social and cultural circumstances. In the absence of a sense of 'cultural capital' the student directions in their learning are dramatically affected and as a result their access to mainstream schooling is severely compromised and they are thereafter even further disenfranchised. For students who are the least advantaged (McInerney 2004), motivation can be diminished in the presence of poverty, limited literacy and numeracy skills as well as minimal access to support services and networks.

The Good Shepherd Low Income Awareness Checklist that emerged from the Brimbank Emergency Relief network meeting (2004). This tool can be used by the ESL/ TESOL teacher to plan curriculum. The checklist acts as a prompt to ensuring that students are not disadvantaged in any way because of their socio-economic status and is attached as an appendix. ESL/EFL teachers who plan accordingly using tools such as the Low Income Awareness Checklist show a willingness to take a 'Standpoint' of the needs of all kinds of learners including the least advantaged ESL/EFL students. In taking a standpoint of the least advantaged student there is a sounder education philosophy in action which acknowledges the likelihood that a student's personal, social and academic needs are being met and addressed because they are not invisible. Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943) also alludes to this when he makes the example that there are levels of fundamental human basic needs that need to be met before an individual can move onto a level of consciousness, which he termed as 'self-actualisation'. How our

students self-actualise will also be examined and is defined in this context to mean optimal functioning in all aspects of the learners' life-worlds. For the student who comes to school hungry, homeless or lacking in family ties, there is less likelihood of a progression towards growth learning and their personal agency. According to Maslow, only when physiological, safety, social and esteem needs are met can a person reach their full potential. Here we note linguistic ability. When designing an excursion or the creation of a book list, language teachers must ensure that no student is very overtly disadvantaged by the curriculum. The ESL/EFL teacher who plans her/his lessons accordingly and who considers Maslow's hierarchy of needs, along with the other notions discussed here will by definition of their role understand the relationship between academic success and life stories.

## THE ROLE OF OPTIMISM AND POSITIVE EDUCATION IN PROMOTING MOTIVATION

Motivation and goal setting have been intrinsically intertwined in our discussion so far and this linkage is purposeful. Having a clear mindset on navigation tools needed to achieve a sought after aspiration, can motivate and inspire individuals to function more effectively in the long term. The role of learned optimism (Seligman 1992) and motivation within teaching and learning settings is written about extensively by psychologists, experts on leadership and academics (Seligman, 2002; Reivich & Shatte, 2007; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Ben-Shahar's (2007) work on happiness for example highlights that successful learners are those who are motivated to set personal and professional goals in their everyday lives and will be examined in the series later. Moreover authentic goal setting, at its best, helps learners to not only focus on achievements that are desired, but addresses learned hopelessness! Of course this article shows how challenges can hinder or inhibit an individual's ability to succeed. We have alluded to and recommended co-creational goal setting must be taken into consideration so particular skills and mindsets that are needed when unforeseeable events surface are accessible. In essence, 'goals are indispensable to a happy life- to be happy, we need to identify and pursue goals that are both pleasurable and meaningful' (pg. 65). In connecting this back to ESL/EFL settings, it is important that ESL/EFL learners are enthusiastically motivated to document realistic self-concordant goals tied to English language proficiency (Dornyei 2003). Establishing self-concordant goals, which are co-created with the whole class, small groups, and the teacher do provide ESL/EFL students with clarity around that which is truly desired in learning. 'I have often thought', wrote William James, 'that the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensively active and alive. At such moments, there is a voice inside which speaks and says, 'This is

the real me' (1920, p199). Self-regulatory learning is by far the most sort after and most productive way of knowing in the in the ESL/TESOL classroom. The artful teacher, mentioned earlier is employed as a conduit to deep knowledge as they co-create, collaborate and re-invent politically rich teaching and learning moments.

## CONCLUSION

This article has identified that ESL/TESOL learners and their teachers must adapt 'authentic' and real life learning engagements to make the ESL/EFL setting real, authentic and purposeful in ways that respond to Web 2 technologies and artful practice. This purposefulness has been a theme of the article – and is about how we are ethically obliged to motivate the students in our care. The quality of artful practices in the space of learning will be more fully examined, but even the simplest form of art making as poetry images and photographs are task rich activities for ESL/TESOL learning experiences. The paper has theorised around the role of motivation, has drawn on theorists and practitioners and especially recommended that the ESL/EFL teacher review the optimistic and artful classroom. When reflecting upon those characteristics that either hinder or support 'motivation' in ESL/EFL teaching and learning contexts it is important to consider the intersection of practice, motivation and a positive classroom. In summary the following key points identify that motivation;

- is best facilitated in learning environments that are free of stereotypes and assumptions (Waterman, 2008)
- is related to self-regulatory and informed learning that the students and teachers co-create in the ESL/EFL setting (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Burridge, 2007)
- occurs when realistic expectations are placed on the potential of language earners (Zhou, 2008)
- is heightened when facilitators are very aware of the unique backgrounds of students and are inclusive of language learner needs (Song, 2006)
- motivation arises when language learners are 'inspired' rather than managed (Stein, 2010)

The ship that we are asking the students to captain, after St Antoine required the fullest internship. The classroom is the safe vessel to take the students across the somewhat stormy, calm and uncertain waters of their lives. The desire to cross

the waters has been part of the stories of many ESL/EFL students and the respectful and informed understanding of their motivations for learning need to occur. Motivation is not only central to academic and social success for all learners but is defined as a life force to bring new horizons closer to the lives of the students in our classes. In the presence of ESL/EFL teachers who are able to inspire students through encouraging autonomous, self-regulatory and affirming self-directed learning and meta-cognition ensures that their English language acquisition is more likely to flourish.

The didactic and authoritative English language teacher, whose self-perception is that of a liberator and reward giver, does little to promote student led awakenings. The teacher needs to build the community (ship) of scholars so that the tasks of knowing (work) can be undertaken with pride and self-respect. The truly inspirational language teacher takes seriously the role of evoking the 'yearning' for knowledges of the second language. It is her job to captain the crew in the role of facilitator, mentor, and witness as she aligns herself with democratic, emancipatory and liberatory teaching repertoires that motivate the learner. The political and personal customs that arise in diverse co-created curricular activities are always to be steeped in the practice of participatory democracies. This leads to personal and social growth, which 'at its heart generates and requires dialogue—each one speaking with the hope of being heard, each one listening with the possibility of being changed' (Souto-Manning 2010, p194). Motivation is therefore at the core at artful and heartfelt teaching moments where student identity is reframed so that passivity in the ESL/EFL classroom is deposed of.

This article is an overview of 'motivation' and the critical nature of politicized motivation within an ESL/EFL context and has by definition, a firm commitment to the position of individual freedom and empowerment. The metaphor of the 'immensity of the sea' that Antoine de Saint-Exupery writes of reminds us that language learners come to us from tumultuous spaces and do not need to be 'tamed'. Rather learning needs to be fuelled by motivational forces that lead to empowerment, critical insights, self awareness and agency. Horizons, psychosocial wellness and new beginnings can evolve if learning is seen as a pathway to liberation and political voice (Freire, 1993).

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# TOP-DOWN EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM IN JAPANESE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Its Implementation and Evaluation

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*Evaluation is not an alien activity for most of us. We engage informally in evaluative activity in our everyday lives (Owen, 2006: 1)*

**A**s of April 2011, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Japanese primary schools became compulsory. This new language policy is one of the major educational reforms, under the educational principle of 'zest for life' (*ikiru chikara*). The Ministry of Education Culture, Sports, Science, Technology (MEXT) has been promoting this new concept, which aims to enhance '[new abilities demanding] new pedagogical approaches, most of which would fall under the term 'student-centred' as it is understood in the West' (Bjork, 2011:152). The globalisation of the world and the notion of the English language as *linga franca* are behind the new implementation for 'enhancement of foreign language education' (MEXT, 2011a:8) in primary schools. Most educational reforms follow a top-down policy implementation in Japan, and teaching EFL at primary schools is no different from any other policy implementation. In order to instigate a smooth transition of the English language curriculum for primary school students, MEXT has gradually introduced, in the last decade, its aims and concepts to primary schools nationwide. When evaluating this early stage of the new EFL curriculum implementation, several vital questions to be considered are: What



was the aim of the new language policy? How was the language policy interpreted by the schools and teachers? What obstructions and confusion have emerged? Since the official implementation has just began, the evaluation in this article concerns its early stage of implementation and 'the logic of the program' from the involved participants' perspectives: in this case the primary school teachers.

Traditionally, quantitative assessments have been the most popular medium of assessment in language education. Students' language ability has usually been measured in this way. The common assessment tasks are written tests, which assess students' learning numerically. However, since the teaching of communicative skills in English is the centre of attention, educators in Japan started to seek alternative assessment and evaluation methods. In particular, in the area of primary school curriculum qualitative assessments are urgently required, as the current overall objectives focus mainly on enhancing students' positive attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language rather than their English skills. Although the Japanese educators recognise the urgent need of qualitative assessment, it is quite challenging to identify what qualitative assessments should be in the primary school context, let alone how these can be implemented. Kanamori and Oka (2007) recognise the gap in Japanese teachers' perceptions of qualitative assessments. They are often focused on quantity such as 'How many friends did you interview in English?' 'How many times were you able to say the target words in English?' and 'How many stickers did you get for asking questions to your classmates in English?' This demonstrates that their understanding of communication means to have conversations with as many people as possible, which totally ignores the quality of the conversations. Through the implementation of the new EFL curriculum in Japanese primary schools, the study of qualitative assessments and evaluation has gained some recognition. At the same time, the objectives and contents of the language activities need to be re-examined to ensure that students' attitudes towards learning are assessed fairly, which should be supported by a range of evidence gathered from qualitative assessments.

## DEFINITION OF EVALUATION

As far as the term, evaluation, is concerned, it is perceived as vague, since it can be interpreted in various ways according to specific contexts. In Educational evaluation, Patel (2010) suggests three ways to define evaluation: evaluation is 'an act or a process that allows one to make a judgement about the desirability or value of a measure' (p. 6). The second definition is that evaluation is 'a process of delineating, obtaining and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives' (*bidi*). Evaluation, thirdly, does not occur once in one particular moment but it is rather an ongoing and comprehensive process focusing on every aspects of educational program. Thus, it is 'the systematic inquiry into instructional sequences

for the purpose of making decisions or providing opportunity for reflection and action' (Lynch, 2003:1). Lynch (2003) believes that there are certain assumptions lying underneath about what is assessed and evaluated, assumptions are based on our beliefs, the nature of reality, and our position within the reality. If these assumptions are leaning more towards perceptions of individual institutions, organisations, and educators, where is the validity of evaluation lying? Perhaps, there are no agreed procedures, set processes, and/or 'right ways' in evaluation, therefore evaluation requires vast amounts of collected data, either or both qualitative and quantitative, and various aspects of a particular program to provide validity and reliability. Robinson (2003) summarises evaluation as 'perceptions of a [program's] value' (p 199), which is integral element in education.

When evaluation of a second/foreign language program is examined, evaluation and assessment are often discussed together, and some aspects in evaluation and assessment can overlap with each other (Lynch, 2003, and Butler, 2005). It is common to observe in EFL contexts that assessments are to measure the learners' language abilities, in addition the evaluation is made based on collections of evidence from various types of assessment. However, more EFL programs with diverse pedagogy and curriculum have been recently introduced, which are not focused on the traditional language assessments, alternative evaluation methods are in demand. Much research is needed especially in the East Asian region, as Butler's (2005) extensive research findings suggest. While Butler's (2005) research focuses on EFL curriculum at primary schools in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, Peacock (2009) investigates the situation of teacher training in Hong Kong. Further, Peacock (2009) states the urgency of research in the same area, in particular the research area on 'how to conduct overall evaluations of [Foreign Language Teaching] FLT education programmes' (p. 261) is lacking.

## **EVALUATION FOR THE EFL PROGRAM IN JAPANESE PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

The compulsory EFL curriculum for Year 5 and 6 students at all public schools in Japan had just begun in April, 2011. MEXT announced the following statement regarding the new educational policies: 'efforts are underway to enhance foreign language education, starting with the arrangement in response to the introduction of foreign language activities at the elementary school level nationwide from fiscal 2011 onwards' (MEXT, 2011b). It is too early to provide a summative evaluation of the program, as the nature of the summative evaluation is 'to make an ultimate judgement about the [program's] worth, whether it has succeeded in meeting its objectives or not' (Lynch, 2003:10), and this type of evaluation usually occurs at the end of program sequence. Thus, in this article, I would attempt to evaluate the EFL program at primary schools in Japan by applying a formative evaluation,

which is to be utilised during the program implementation. According to Lynch (2003), it aims 'to recommend changes for improving...and...it focuses on programme processes' (p. 10). Furthermore, the English language levels of Japanese students are not the main concern here. The concern lay with the investigations of possibilities and limitations of the new language policy when it is implemented into practice. The focus is the program operators' perspectives, who are primary school teachers. Therefore, traditional language assessments and evaluation are not the centre of the attention in this article.

Another theoretical framework on evaluation utilised here is Owen's (2006) theory on program evaluation. Owen's framework contains five forms, including Proactive, Clarificative, Interactive, Monitoring, and Impact forms. These forms are sequential from the early stages of the implementation through to the later stages. One of Owen's (2006) categories of evaluative enquiry, Clarificative form, particularly caters the needs of evaluating the earlier stages of the implementation. This form of evaluation is designed to assist people involved in the program 'to conceptualise interventions and improve their coherence, and thus increase the chances that their implementations will lead to desired outcomes' (p. 191). Owen (2006) recommends this form of evaluation for a program, which has 'vague goals that provided little direction for those responsible for program delivery' (p. 192). Considering the overall objectives for EFL activities in Japanese primary schools relying on promotion for positive attitudes towards international understanding and intercultural communication, the goals of the new reform set by MEXT can be seen as vague to homeroom teachers (HT) in primary schools who are appointed to deliver the new program in their classrooms. From 2002 to 2010, the preparation phase of implementation of the EFL curriculum, MEXT insisted that HTs are the appropriate ones to teach the curriculum, with a condition of receiving assistance from a native English speaker or Japanese Teacher of English language from junior high schools. These HTs are not specialised in English language education, nor have they received any training for teaching English as a foreign language; they are just ordinary homeroom teachers. Further, they did not become primary school teachers to become English language teachers (Yoshida. K, 2008). It can easily be imagined that this issue will be of great concern to people in Japan, especially the teachers themselves. Nevertheless, Matsukawa (2004) points out that the decision is sensible, even though HTs' lack the knowledge and skills in teaching the EFL program is a major issue, and especially since there are no qualifications available for teaching EFL for primary school students in Japan. As an internationally qualified educator, who is also Japanese, this open admission causes me great concern.

The preparation stage between 2002 and 2010 was such a challenging phase for the teachers who were asked or volunteered to teach and lead the early EFL program. Most of their schools became model schools, and received extra fund-

ing by MEXT. During this phase, the EFL curriculum was part of the Integrated Learning hours, which was proposed in 1998 and implemented from 2002 (Willis and Rappley, 2011). According to the MEXT website, 614 primary schools in 2008, which is equivalent to one out of forty primary schools nationwide, received extra funding and became leading model primary schools of the EFL curriculum within the Integrated Learning period. In the last decade of this preparation phase, I have personally worked collaboratively with many Japanese teachers, including many from the model schools, for improvement of the EFL policy into practice before it became compulsory in 2011.

Thus, the 'voice' of the Japanese primary school teachers, who are at the heart of the program, will be the main source of this evaluation. 'While program staff can sometimes develop a workable program design alone, an evaluator with strong analytical and creative skills can contribute to a program design that more accurately and comprehensively represents its intentions and implementation characteristics' (Owen, 2006:215). The program staff, in this case, are Japanese primary school teachers and principals of public primary schools in Kyushu, and the evaluator is myself. I took the role of 'inside' as well as 'outside' evaluator. As an 'inside evaluator', I had worked with these teachers and principals within the school communities. My role as an 'educator researcher' in the area of second/foreign language pedagogy and curriculum provided a viewpoint from an outsider evaluator. Taking multiple roles allowed me to investigate the insights and perform an in-depth evaluation of the program. The data used for this evaluation are observation and interview based, which included formal and informal discussions with teachers and principals whom I collaborated with and the participant teachers from the teacher-licence renewal course in 2009, as Owen (2006) clarifies the fundamental aspect of evaluation is that 'we often assemble information 'in our hands' based on a variety of sensory inputs, such as observation, and our existing knowledge, to make judgements about the issue under consideration' (p. 1).

## **PRIOR TO THE NEW LANGUAGE POLICY**

Before the new language policy implementation, English language had traditionally been taught for six years in the secondary schooling system from the first grade of Junior high school, which is the equivalent of Year 7 in Australia. English is one of the major academic subjects in the secondary school curriculum in Japan. It is required to assess the students' English language abilities in all the university entrance exams. The students who receive tertiary education also continue studying English for two more years. Therefore, Japanese people usually receive six to eight years of English as a foreign language education. Does this mean that they can communicate fluently in English, since they have learnt English for so many

years with intensive curriculum? Due to the limited methodologies being available in Japan, Japanese people's communicative competency in English has been a major concern to MEXT, and that it has been deemed not sufficient enough, based on the curriculum which heavily relies on the audiolingual method and the grammar-translated method of teaching. The similar issue of how to increase communicative skills in English have been discussed not only in Japan, but also in Korea and Taiwan (Butler, 2005). These traditionally popular teaching methodologies may be best suited for exam-oriented curriculum, and the particular class structure often seen in Japan where forty to fifty students are located in one classroom. The necessity for reviewing teaching contents and methods in the EFL education in Japan has been discussed for more than twenty years. During this time, MEXT's attempts at several strategies were to incorporate more communicative activities and to introduce the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET)<sup>1</sup> to recruit non-Japanese people from overseas, in order to allocate them in local schools as English language assistants. These efforts produced some positive outcomes and issues, and in addition McConnell (2000) provides the detailed insights of the JET program from the non-Japanese participants' view.

Another suggested reform was, then, to introduce the EFL curriculum from the earlier grade of Year 5 (MEXT, 2008). Otsu (2004), from a linguist's point of view, strongly disagrees with the recent trend or movement of introducing the EFL education to earlier grades. He emphasises that several vital issues were not fully discussed, and he also believes that it is not necessary to introduce English language into the primary school curriculum. Hence, he questions the concepts, objectives, structures, curriculum contents, and teachers' skills and knowledge in the EFL program for primary schools. Therefore, the movement of the EFL curriculum being compulsory for Year 5 and 6 students from 2011 is irresponsible in that this is a desperate attempt with no sufficient discussions, lack of careful planning, and lack of teacher-training (Otsu, 2007). An additional issue is that the EFL curriculum is not an academic subject for primary schools and is taught by HTs. Otsu (2007) raises serious concerns if the EFL curriculum for primary schools is suddenly introduced in the context where the language is not necessary for daily life, a consequence might be to give an impression to primary school students that the English language is 'special' and 'better'. He also warns that this hierarchical image may also encourage developing a false impression of native English speakers being somehow better. This is due to the notion of English as a global language. He argues that in fact many Japanese people still greatly admire others who can communicate in English fluently. Despite people who are against the program like Otsu's (2007), MEXT had concluded that the EFL program as a compulsory curriculum being introduced into the primary education, hoping

1 The JET official website: <http://www.jetprogramme.org>.

that this might contribute towards Japanese people being able to communicate more effectively using English as a medium in the global community.

## THE EFL PROGRAMS AS PART OF INTEGRATED STUDIES CURRICULAR FROM 2002 TO 2010

Considering long discussions on whether introducing EFL from primary school levels would contribute towards increasing Japanese people's English language competency, MEXT has decided that, in the early phase, the EFL activities be introduced under the curriculum called 'Integrated Studies'. The curriculum was introduced from 2002. One of the concepts for the Integrated Studies period is to promote Japanese people's 'international understanding'. Integrated Studies require inquiry-based learning as an innovative pedagogy under the initiation of 'Relaxed Education' reform. 'Ministry officials hoped that the introduction of Integrated Studies (IS) curricula would catalyze substantial changes in instruction methodology, as well as students' views about learning (Bjork, 2011:151). Therefore, the curriculum should facilitate 'students' mastery of content knowledge, their ability to express themselves verbally and in writing, their problem-solving capabilities, creativity, and critical-thinking skills' (*ibid*:155). The very recent concept of 'zest for life' along with the EFL curriculum becoming compulsory has developed from the previous reform of 'Relaxed Education'. Both reforms shared some similar concepts of promoting more alternative and innovative pedagogies to be implemented, in order for Japanese people to become global citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

From my countless visits to primary schools, observations and teaching of the EFL classes collaboratively with HTs, there was a clear indication that the concept of inquiry-based learning was somehow ignored or was not taken into account as far as the EFL activities were concerned, especially from the first half of the preparation phase between 2002 and 2008. Although the EFL activities are part of IS curriculum, many teachers who I worked with tended to separate the EFL activities from the concepts of the IS curricular, based on their assumptions that the EFL is language learning, in which you mainly learn linguistic features. In their eyes, they could not see that the EFL and IS intertwined with each other. Therefore, individual schools interpreted its concept according to their needs, the availability of resources, and teacher's prior experiences as English language learners. The hours schools spent on the EFL activities varied from a few hours once a month, to once every week during the period of 2002 to 2010. Mostly, they offered the EFL activities focusing on singing songs, introducing a set vocabulary using flashcards, and playing language games based on the just recently introduced vocabulary. These activities were often organised according to a set topic

such as food, colour, numbers, and greetings. Otsu (2007) emphasises that the set of three ‘enjoyable’ activities: dancing, singing and memorising set daily phrases, does not sustain their motivation in the long term. Observing many EFL classes and discussing issues with teachers, I witnessed that students started losing their interest after a short period because of the repetitive patterns of the language program under different topics. This was often seen in Year 5 and 6 students. Otsu (2007) raises an issue that in general Japanese people expect the EFL curriculum at primary schools to be focused on developing the language skills. This is not the intention of MEXT for the primary level.

The principal from one model school raised issues of demotivation of students in Year 5 and 6 in 2008 after offering the EFL program since 2002 in his school. His request was for me to develop a curriculum with the teachers for Year 6 students, in order to increase students’ motivation. From observing and interviewing the students, Year 6 students in his school felt that some EFL activities are ‘too childish’ and ‘boring’ because they had already learnt the vocabulary at an after hours private English conversation school. After analysis of the collected data from the teachers, students, and the written curriculum and lesson plans, I found out that a meaningful context was missing in the offered curriculum. Each activity and lesson was separated and segmented and did not provide students a reason for why they were learning what they were learning. The suggestion of incorporating integrated curriculum (Gibbons, 2002) was made and their curriculum was re-structured accordingly. The Year 6 students then used English more effectively and purposefully, and were more engaged and motivated.

The model schools, such as the one discussed above, that have committed to a weekly offering of the EFL activities had received extra funding from the central MEXT. The principals who agreed with and committed to the idea of promoting international understanding through the EFL programs voluntarily applied for the funding. According to the MEXT website, in 2007 one in forty primary schools became model schools. The total number of public primary schools in Japan in 2007 was 22,420 in accordance with the result of school statistics (MEXT, 2011c). The model schools that I was asked to assist used most of the extra funding to employ Assistant Language Teachers (ALT),<sup>2</sup> who were native English speakers. The principal of the model school above explained that he followed the MEXT payment standard of 3,800 yen per an hour. The study between 2006 and 2008 showed that about 30 % of these ALTs are volunteers who do not receive any payment, and the small amount of paid volunteers were about 25%. Less than 30 % of the ALTs are employed on a casual-based and the average payment was 1,900 yen per an hour (Yoshida. H, 2008:22). It is obvious that these model schools were able to pay more than the average hourly rate. Some ALTs were individually

2 ALTs are either native English speakers or Japanese people who have received education in teaching EFL, have lived overseas, or speak English a little and are interested in teaching the language.

hired by the schools, and others were sent by the local Department of Education, which had drawn up a contract with a private company to contract out native English speakers to local schools. Alternatively, JET program participants were sent out to the schools. These native speakers often do not have any experience in teaching, nor a degree in education. Another school, which I visited for observation, had a group of Japanese mothers assisting the mainstream teacher to fill in the shortage of ALT's availability. This school was not a model school, therefore the budget for the EFL program was tight. Some of the mothers had a reasonable understanding of the English language and/or had completed a teaching degree. On one hand, the ALT was paid the top rate, and on the other hand these mothers worked voluntarily, not only assisting the teachers in the EFL class, but they also made all the necessary teaching materials and organised seasonal events for the students such as Halloween and Christmas. This is evidence of the hierarchical structure that Japanese people hold towards 'native vs non-native' issues as Otsu (2007) was seriously concerned with. In this day and age, the notion of English being *lingua franca* suggests the discussions of native speakers and non-native speakers are outdated. Thus, this questions the idea of 'let's learn English from native speakers' or 'we should be able to speak like natives', and also the definition of who is a native English speaker becomes more vague as the number of bilingual and trilingual people has increased (Butler, 2007). I often heard from teachers at schools where they had just started a trial EFL program that the students felt more engaged with native English speakers than Japanese language assistants. In some way, the previously discussed Otsu's (2007) concerns are actually witnessed in some schools. However, schools which continued offering the EFL program on a regular basis for a while, such as the model schools, started realising that ALTs can demonstrate a model for how to use the language, but they cannot be the main teacher because they are not qualified, and do not know the students as much as the homeroom teachers do.

## THE NEW LANGUAGE POLICY FROM 2011

MEXT announced that two years prior to the official implementation of compulsory EFL curriculum should be spend as a crucial preparation period for all the public schools. In other words, schools that had not offered the EFL program before had to start preparing themselves for the new curriculum. The schools were expected to understand the overall objectives first. The overall objectives for 'foreign language activities', which is the official title for the EFL curriculum (Yoshida, K, 2008), in primary schools stated in the new Course of Study – National Curricular Guidelines and Standard (2008:7) by the MEXT in Japan are as follows:



外国語を通じて、言語や文化について体験的に理解を深め、積極的にコミュニケーションを図り、外国語の音声や表現に慣れ親しませながら、コミュニケーション能力の素地を養う。

*To lay the groundwork for students' communicative abilities, to foster a positive attitude toward communication, and to deepen their understanding of languages and cultures by familiarizing them with sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages (translated by MEXT).*

These objectives do not place any emphasis on developing students' foreign language abilities. It concerns itself more with preparing the 'groundwork' for becoming global citizens. Therefore, the main focus is on fostering positive attitudes in students and providing both linguistic and cultural 'experience'. The EFL program for primary school students should not concentrate on the teaching of the language; it should provide activities that directly link with international understanding and communication (Yoshida, K, 2008). Therefore, the stated objectives above specify listening and speaking, not writing. Writing is not encouraged at all at this level.

In this context, assessments for students' English language levels are not required, since it is not introduced as an academic subject (Yoshida, K, 2008, Butler, 2005) yet it is introduced into the compulsory curriculum as of 2011. The position of EFL in primary schools from 2011 is in the same category as Moral education. In other words, the area of EFL became independent from the Integrated Studies. Thus, thirty-five hours, the equivalent of once a week, should be spent on the EFL per year for both Year 5 and 6 (MEXT, 2008). MEXT (2008) suggests assessments should focus on the students' positive outcomes and progress, not to measure their language skills using numerical measures for other academic subjects. This is clearly stated in the new Course of Study – National Curricular Guidelines and Standard (MEXT, 2008). Butler (2005) however raises a question as to whether it is possible not to have formal assessment of any kind for learning. An alternative assessment rather than traditional language testing, therefore, would be on-going observation, self-assessment, and peer assessment. Fujita (2008) explains that assessment is not simply giving grades to students based on their skills and knowledge in the English language, but teachers should utilise it for reflecting their own teaching and improving the lesson content, in order to further promote students' motivation towards learning. In the classroom context, focus points should reflect on students' attitudes towards learning, for instance, whether they are actively participating in the activity and communicating with others by 'trying to' use English. Assessing students' linguistic errors or mistakes should not be appropriate as it only focuses on the negative, not the positive outcomes (Fujita, 2008). The schools I observed also used similar strategies for assessment. Some teachers demanded students answered as a group in a very loud voice,

to perhaps show their enthusiasm. Thus, it is the teachers' responsibility that they set out communicative and engaging EFL activities for the students to be able to actively participate in the EFL classrooms. Fujita (2008) emphasises that they need to make sure the activities are not to be passive ones where students just sit and listen to the teacher and only a small group of students who have advanced knowledge in English can participate. In other words, language activities, which have no students' initiatives required, are not suitable. This challenges Japanese teachers' understanding of what communicative activities should be.

## DILEMMAS OF TEACHERS

'I learnt English through memorising vocabulary items and did lots on drill work on the grammar, you know 'repeat after me' and do the repetitive work. I don't know what we were supposed to teach, and especially how to teach it in my primary school' (a primary school teacher's comments who attended the teacher-licence renewal course at a university in Japan, August, 2009).

Unlike Korea, where teachers receive 120 hours of concentrated training specifically for teaching EFL (Yoshida, K, 2008), MEXT in Japan has not actively provided enough workshops and seminars for the teachers to be ready for this new venture. From my observation, at the individual school level, the EFL coordinator was asked to organise twelve to fifteen study sessions per year for teachers. The coordinator utilised this opportunity to report back to other teachers what s/he observed the EFL activities in other schools and what s/he learnt in professional development organised by the local department of education. A few schools ran successful meetings with support from other teachers and from the principals, but coordinators in other schools often felt isolated and under enormous pressure to lead the curriculum. One teacher who attended the teacher-licence renewal course (MEXT, 2011d) expressed her concerns as a coordinator for the EFL professional development session, which involved fifteen hours per year within her school, and she did not know what she needed to do or how to lead other teachers, as her idea of successful EFL curriculum was vague. Although these coordinators were allowed to attend the open curriculum presentation day in other schools and teacher study groups organised by the local Ministry of Education to study the EFL curriculum, the opportunity to do so was extremely limited considering the heavy workload that Japanese teachers are already committed to. According to Sato (2011), Japanese teachers work '52 hours per week, though they receive no additional pay for the extra hours they must put in' (p. 227). This results in more than 50% of the teachers quitting before their retirement (*ibid.*). Teachers are even required come to school and work during the school holidays. The teacher-licence renewal course was thus held during the summer holidays for the teachers to be able to attend the courses at the local universities during non-teaching period.

Attendance of the courses was counted as part of their work performance, while other teachers worked and prepared the curriculum for the following school term.

The teachers who attended the licence-renewal course were all experienced teachers who had been teaching at least ten years. Although they had read the new curriculum and standard documentations, the vagueness of the objectives was their main concern. The phrase of 'to lay the groundwork' was particularly confusing and invited unsureness of how to put it all into practice. Their prior-knowledge of EFL in general was related to the traditional language pedagogy that was not communicative at all. Therefore, their interpretation of the new curriculum objectives was to teach conversational English and to teach English to enhance students' language skills, similar to the curriculum in junior high schools where EFL is taught as an academic subject. Some teachers in the course therefore heavily relied on CDs, interactive whiteboard, and assistant language teachers (ALT) in the lessons. This was why they felt inadequate to teach the language, and some teachers commented that their language lessons tended to be 'dry' as the focus was on how well students could remember the set vocabulary. Consequently, students who received extra English language tuition in private conversation schools, after school hours, performed for better or felt bored with the lesson content, and the other students felt that they had been left behind. Naoyama (2007) admits that it is a very hard task to ask Japanese teachers to plan, develop curriculum, create teaching materials, implement the curriculum, deliver each lesson, and provide some sort of assessment task to evaluate students' progress in learning. These teachers have never been required to go through this process before the EFL program was introduced. They are all used to teaching the set curriculum for primary school students through already existing authorised textbooks in other subjects. These textbooks are all written according to MEXT objectives and learning outcomes. Naoyama (2007) further points out that countless discussions for the necessity of introducing the EFL program have been carried out, however a lack of a detailed model curriculum and its implementation is terribly remiss. She also acknowledges the fact that there is no perfect curriculum as such, and that MEXT, local department of education, educators, and academics all need to collaborate more towards developing appropriate curriculum and materials supported by a theoretical framework, which can accommodate the needs of teachers and students in the EFL context at the primary school level.

Another finding from the course was the teachers' perceptions of what communicative language activities should be. They felt a need to deliver the activities with 'a happy face', 'full of expressions', 'using high-tension' and 'being more animated'. A teacher in the course expressed his concerns that he was hesitant to teach the English language activities. For instance, he found it very difficult to say 'let's sing a song in English!! OK?' with a beaming face to his students, especially straight after he had reprimanded some of his students in the previous lesson. It

seemed that there were many myths that some Japanese primary school teachers held, based on their own personal assumptions of what English activities should be at primary schools. The importance of using non-verbal elements in communication, including gestures and facial expressions, is often discussed. Ogawa (2008) recommends demonstrating the effective use of these non-verbal strategies in the classroom, however they need to know that it is not expected of them to suddenly change their teaching styles, preferences, or personality just for the English activities. This can apply for students as well. Teachers, like the one above, can use some activities within their comfort zone first. On another occasion, I observed students singing songs with louder voices, with high tension, and pronouncing set phrases again and again until they can say them with joy and excitement where no appropriate context was provided. A teacher, who I observed, kept telling her students in the beginning of the lesson ‘Let’s enjoy English, OK?’ until her students finally answered with satisfactory volume of voice in order to put their motivation up. Ikeda (2008) says teachers need to be more aware that the activities should reflect students’ initiatives and spontaneity, and not be teacher-centred. Perhaps, some primary school teachers need to understand more about what student-centred activities are about. One of the Butler (2007)’s suggestions is, instead of spending the limited budget on employing the ALTs or buying expensive commercially advertised teaching resources, schools should send their teachers overseas for practicum experience at a local primary school. She further explains that the practicum experience does not have to be in an English speaking country, since the aim of EFL program is not to develop students’ English language skills at primary schools.

### **THE USE OF ‘EIGO NOTE’ (ENGLISH NOTE) AS A TEACHING MATERIAL**

‘I use Eigo note and follow the teachers’ manual that came with it, but all the English words and phrases used in the manual are too difficult for me. I simplified the language and use it in my class, but I am not sure what I am doing is correct. I wouldn’t say my class is interesting and exciting. I cannot suddenly become a ‘happy’ teacher for the English class just because we need to do communicative activities’ (A male Year 5 teacher’s comment in the teacher-license renewal course in Japan, August 2009).

The above comment shows that some teachers use Eigo note (refer to Appendix 1) as a textbook in the same way as the other academic subjects. At the same time, they appeared to be unsure as to what they should be doing with Eigo note. Yoshida, K (2009) draws attention to the content of the Eigo note manual being written for someone who understands English language teaching and learning, not written for primary school teachers who have never taught English before.

The danger of using Eigo note in substitution of a more formal textbook would be for the teachers to feel pressured with completing all the units, without considering their students' understanding and progress in learning. Eigo note is not a textbook, which means that teachers are not strictly bounded by it, nor to have them follow it in an orderly manner according to the Eigo note content. Additionally, they should not use it with the combination of the grammar-translation method (Yoshida, K. 2009) as most teachers learnt English this way, especially experienced teachers (Ikeda, 2008). Therefore, flexibility is required when Eigo note is used in the EFL program (Ikeda, 2008 and Ferguson, 2003). Some schools, like model schools, with a longer history of implementing the EFL program may have already developed useful materials and appropriate curriculum. These schools can still use their own recourses as well as Eigo note (Yoshia, K, 2008). Eigo note can be extremely useful for schools that have just begun the EFL activities from 2011, however teachers need to be aware that they should manipulate it to cater for their students' needs and to enhance their intercultural experience, not being totally controlled by the Eigo note content.

Through participating the licence renewal course, the teachers learnt that the EFL curriculum at primary schools is not the same as the one in junior high schools and high schools. They closely examined the objectives and outcomes that MEXT announced. At the primary school level, students need to be given ample opportunity to become familiar with the sounds and expressions of the English language and to experience the related culture of the language. As a principle co-ordinator of the licence renewal course, I planned and organised the course to be inclusive in both aspects of theory and practice for the teachers. Demonstrating the detailed activities and explaining how these activities linked up with the objectives, the teachers gradually developed their confidence and felt that they could now try the EFL program in their schools. One teacher wrote in her feedback, 'I didn't learn anything about the pedagogy of EFL when I was at a university, but I now have to teach English at my school. I always felt inadequate about doing that, but through attending the course I was able to review the main objectives and how they can be reflected into practice. I also learnt a lot of activity ideas to bring back to my school. I now can see potential in the EFL program for the future' (August, 2009). The teachers paid the registration fee for the course themselves. This type of professional development should be fully funded by the government, and should be offered more frequently to all the teachers who are involved in the EFL program.

## BEYOND EIGO NOTE

At the teaching licence renewal course, I demonstrated how to use Eigo note more effectively by looking beyond this teaching material. As previously discussed, the

common views of teachers in the course were to follow the teaching manual and structure of Eigo note. This is evident in their comments: 'I never thought of arranging and re-arranging the contents. I basically thought that I have to follow it.' 'Before the course, I really believed that my main task as a teacher was how accurately I could cover the suggested contexts in the note.' 'I never looked at making a link between Eigo note and communicative activities. I didn't really know what communicative activities meant anyway.' 'I always thought Eigo note as a textbook that I needed to follow properly. I tried very hard to memorise the sentences printed in the manual before the class, which reminded me of the English language classes that I attended as a student a long time ago. Honestly, it wasn't my favourite class.' It appeared that the lack of providing a clear vision and guidance by MEXT for implementing theory into practice has created serious confusion and unnecessary pressure for these teachers.

Although the teachers participated in the EFL activities based on Eigo note, these activities were much more engaging and communicative. I demonstrated the use of other resources for teaching, such as hand-made teaching materials and an English picture book. One of the activities developed from Lesson 8 in Eigo note, *Let's make an original play* (refer to Appendix 2), was particularly an eye-opening one. My intention was to demonstrate student-centred approach where students were allowed to express their ideas, and to fully participate in the activity, in order to create their own version of a story. I chose a well-known picture book called *Rainbow Fish and the Big Blue Whale*, by Marcus Pfister (1998). The book was also translated into Japanese. All the participant teachers knew the story. Until they had experienced improvised role-play, the typical role-play activity that they had used was to provide a script written by them, and then their students practised the lines until they had memorised them. This did not allow students' to be creative and motivated as their initiatives and ideas were not included, however most of the teachers believed this was the best way to do role-play since it was not so time-consuming.

During the course, I had the teachers participate in some warm-up activities based on educational drama (O'Toole and Dunn, 2002; Cusworth and Simons; 2004) to prepare them for exploring an imaginative world. Then, I read the first few pages of the book and stopped where a big blue whale came to meet the rainbow fish. Then, they were asked to improvise a role-play on a scene of 'before' and 'after' the big blue whale approached the rainbow fish and his friends. The improvisation of role-play was totally new them. In a group of four or five members, they came up with interesting and imaginative ideas in their improvised role-play, utilising the props that I had prepared. In the group discussion, they used their first language, Japanese, but their task was to present their own version of the story in English. Giving advice such as 'try not to explain everything using long sentences in English', 'try to accept other's ideas instead of denying them

completely, so that you can build your ideas together in a constructive manner’, ‘use non-verbal communication skills to make your play more effective’, and ‘use props and move your body in a dynamic way’. For the role-play, any new vocabulary items were introduced beforehand, but they were encouraged to ask questions of any of the English words used for their play. The aim was to demonstrate a different approach to stimulate students’ curiosity and desire to learn the language by not providing too many vocabulary items beforehand.

When the participant teachers presented their own play in the classroom, each group created a variety of scenarios. The use of both verbal and non-verbal cues was accurate and appropriate with the assistance of the provided props. I organised a presentation in a way that all teachers were able to participate while they were watching the other’s performance, by asking questions before the individual role-play started, such as ‘Why did you come here, Big Blue Whale?’ and ‘What happened to the rainbow fish and his friends?’ I used these questions as a cue for starting their group presentation, and also played a CD with the sounds of ocean waves during the presentation to create an appropriate atmosphere for the scene.

The participants responded very positively to the innovative approach to role-play. One teacher wrote the following comment, ‘I experienced the importance of group work by cooperating with each other to make a creative piece of work full of imaginative ideas. I realised that we didn’t have to use long and difficult English sentence to get the message across. We put key words and phrases together and used appropriate gestures, voice, facial expressions, and body movement in our play.’ Another teacher commented that she had experienced the enjoyment of creating her own version of the story and fully immersed herself into the world of the Rainbow fish, therefore she did not pay much attention to her negative feeling towards using English. The innovative approach to role-play clearly showed an example of student-centred learning that could give value to student’ initiatives and creativity. In the activity, I took a ‘director role’, instead of controlling the students’ learning too much as these teachers used to do. I also clearly explained how this type of learning encourages and fosters student’ positive attitudes towards learning. By participating in the activity, the teachers each personally experienced how students would feel when they were immersed in an activity where they could be creative and express their ideas freely. It also created the feeling of ‘I want to find out more about...’ or ‘I want to learn how to say ...in English’ to the participants. This positive experience will hopefully lead to further learning of English and intercultural understanding. The activity suggested a model of how a language activity can become more communicative and student-centred learning. These teachers commented that they would try it out in their own classrooms and would introduce them within their school as an example of engaging and motivating EFL activity.

## CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the early stages of the EFL program in Japanese public primary schools was examined through the lens of Owen's clarification form of evaluation. In the early stages of the EFL program between 2002 and 2010, I was involved in the EFL programs throughout various schools as an educator researcher. My involvement was as follows: I clarified the vague objectives set by MEXT to the teachers; provided vast amounts of student-centred foreign language activities for primary school students; clearly displayed the linkages between the new language policy and the expected outcomes within the classroom practice; and developed with the teachers an EFL unit of work for their students, which was built upon students' prior knowledge and interests. As Owen (2006) suggests, the clarification approach could 'provide a valuable contribution to the successful implementation of complex policy, for improvement and accountability purposes' (p. 215). In other words, I assisted the program providers, the Japanese homeroom teachers, 'with these complex interventions' (Owen, 2006:215) by working together from inside of the program.

Through this experience of taking the role of an inside and outside evaluator, it became very clear to me that many teachers in primary schools were confused with the MEXT intentions. They urgently needed assistance from experts from outside who had knowledge and practical skills in the area of primary school education and EFL in Japan. The way that the EFL program was introduced by MEXT can be seen as a program forcefully being squeezed into the already existing heavy workloads set for the teachers. In particular, teachers with a reluctant attitude towards the EFL program and with prior negative experiences as English language learners did not welcome the program. Although some teachers had a better understanding of the ideal EFL program, when theory was implemented into practice, unsureness became visible in their planning and teaching. Thus, several issues emerged through this investigation of evaluation, including a lack of support from principals and teachers in many schools, a lack of preparation and discussion time for the program, a lack of on-going support from the Department of Education at both local and national levels, and a complete lack of funding and educational training to assist teachers in the implementation of this program. Consequently, some enthusiastic teachers slowly lost their motivation and any future direction of the program.

I was also alarmed with the introduction of Eigo note in the later years of the preparation stage. This can be seen as a backward movement, in that teachers would interpret the EFL program as more linguistic focused. Just before this introduction, I had witnessed in some schools that some original, innovative, and engaging activities were just about to emerge. Certainly, it was obscure for them in the beginning, but with countless trial lessons and discussions amongst the



teachers, their curriculum became more focused on student-centred learning. As a result, the students' positive attitudes were more often seen in the EFL class, and it influenced an encouraging and corporative learning environment in the entire school community. The teachers started to enjoy the process of constructively reflecting their own teaching and revising the curriculum to be more communicative. The new direction of Eigo note might have brought some guidance and a sense of relief to teachers who were new to the EFL program; nevertheless Eigo note took the opportunity away from other teachers to evolve their pedagogy and practice to another dimension.

Further, the following recommendations are made from this evaluation of the program. At the national level, more detailed, frequent, constructive interventions by MEXT would be required to demonstrate how the theory works into practice. At the local level, more positive feedback and clear direction for further initiative at individual schools should be given by specialists in both the area of EFL and the primary school curriculum. More professional development sessions both on theory and practice are required for the principals to fully understand the benefits of the foreign language education and the promotion of the intercultural understanding within the primary school curriculum. Lastly, but most importantly at the school level, principals need to re-structure the system and staffing within the school for an EFL coordinator to be able to focus more on the development and coordination of the program with other teachers. All the professional development and discussions I attended were more concerned with the language teaching and learning, whereas these Japanese teachers require much more understanding on how to develop student-centred curriculum, based on their students' pro-knowledge and interests. Once these teachers gain a better understanding of that, they might be able to increase their confidence while delivering more engaging activities in the EFL classroom, rather than totally relying on Eigo note and their own experience of learning English as a student. The top-down policy implementation like this one, especially not only new knowledge of a foreign language, but where new pedagogy and practice are involved, it is MEXT's responsibility to allocate enough time and funding to allow teachers to study from academic experts in this specific field, and how to make this new implementation a success. If not, it will be doomed not to succeed it like so many other attempts at EFL programs beforehand. What has been done, so far, is unfortunately not enough to ensure success. Giving full support, time, funding, autonomy, and expert advice on an on-going basis are keys to achieving the MEXT's objectives.

## APPENDIX 1



## APPENDIX 2



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