

Between the Keys

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The Coordinator's Column

John Daly

Hello Materials Writers.

I'm writing this at the end of February, so it's been about three months now since I became the coordinator of this group. During those three months I have written e-mail letters to you several times, expressing some of my hopes and ideas for this SIG. Now, in my first newsletter message to you, I'd like to reiterate some of those hopes and ideas, not only because I don't have many new ideas, but also because I know that my e-mails are not reaching all of our members. There are members, according to the membership listing that we get from the JALT Office, who do not have an e-mail address, and some whose listed address is bouncing my messages back.

So let me make this the first point of this message. If you have not received five or so e-mails from me in the last couple of months, you are not in my MW SIG mailing list. If you want to be included in that list, please contact me at <john-d@sano-c.ac.jp>. If you don't have e-mail, but you want to be kept up to date, send a note to me at Sano College, 973 Takahagi-cho, Sano-shi 327-0821.

And while we are on the topic of getting in touch with me, I'd like to make a request. I'd like you all to tell me, briefly is OK, by e-mail, postcard, or, if you like, you can write on the back of a one hundred dollar bill. Anyway, tell me why you joined this Special Interest Group, what you are hoping to get from it, and what you are willing to give to it. With this information, I may be able to generate some ideas that will lead to some activities that will make you glad that you joined this SIG.

Well, here are a few ideas from my recent e-mails. My first idea, from my first mail of 3 December, was to set up a SIG database,

so that members could find others in similar situations with similar interests, and the SIG could serve the purpose of facilitating networking among the members. This idea is still sitting on the launch pad, fuel tanks empty, it seems. I still think it is a good idea, and maybe we can find a place for it in the great new website that Jim Smiley (yes, the same Jim Smiley who is also editing this newsletter) has created for the MW SIG at <<http://uk.geocities.com/materialwritersig/index.html>>. Or maybe we can create and use a Yahoo! Group for, among other things, the purpose of networking. Shall we network?

When this SIG was established, ten years ago, in March of 1993 (come to think of it, the same month and year that my younger son was established), the SIG proposed in its Statement of Purpose to organize "regional mini-conferences". Something like this may happen this year. There seem to be a few people among us ready to put some energy into this. Whether it will be a mini-conference or, since it's our first venture into this area, a smaller-scale weekend workshop/seminar type of event, is still undecided. Indeed, whether it will happen this year or next or at all is still uncertain. Personally, I'm thinking about an onsen seminar complex in the mountains of Yufuin, a famous onsen resort area in Oita Prefecture, which member Heather Sparrow brought to my attention. And I'm thinking about October. Perhaps people in the west of Japan, SIG members and not, who are not able to get to the national conference in Shizuoka in November, might appreciate having this more local event to attend. I'll be in e-mail touch with you on this. Please tell me what you think.

Pre-occupied with making plans for our

From the Editor

Jim Smiley

This edition of *Between the Keys* sees in a change of guard and our ten-year anniversary. I'd like to take a little space here to introduce myself as the new editor and make the pledge that I'll do my level-best to uphold the standards and traditions of MW SIG. *Yoroshiku!*

If there's a theme to this edition, it is in the *how* of materials construction. Judith Johnson describes how she develops content and task-based materials taking the learner as the point of departure in a holistic approach. Jim Porcaro urges those non-producers out there to start making materials. He shows how it can be done using the example of housing. In the article, Jim explains his rationale for the actual

production process, and he provides many activity examples. Greg Goodmacher writes about *Hot Potatoes*, a software programme that helps teachers produce web-based material quickly, simply and which looks great. *Hot Potatoes* has six template programmes, each allowing teachers to personalise, manipulate and create very workable webpages for student use. As you read about how Greg creates materials using this programme, you'll want to try it for yourself. I know, I did. Finally, Daragh Hayes provides the "My Share" lesson plan for this edition; in *Problems, Problems*, he shows how role-plays can help develop negotiation skills. **IBK**

SIG's presentation(s) at that National Conference, I've been neglecting the offer from the College and University Educators (CUE) SIG to collaborate on a volume of materials and ideas related to Learner Autonomy. Time to move that off the back burner.

Networking, forum, newsletter, weekend workshop, volume of materials: there's a lot going on in this SIG, a lot of chances for you to make a contribution. As I wrote in one of my e-mails, I do consider myself to be the Coordinator of this SIG, and I see myself coordinating the flow of ideas among members. I do not see myself as someone somewhere up above

you, full of good ideas, which I benevolently shower down upon you. Rather, I see myself standing in the hurly-burly among you, something like the old-fashioned traffic cop, giving direction to your energy and ideas. Please give me some hurly, or burly even, to work with.

Finally, Jim Swan, thank you. Thank you for having the vision and the energy to get this SIG started, and for the effort and the leadership that you have given over these past ten years to keep it going. Together with the 80 or so other members of the MW SIG, I will try to give new evidence that your efforts were not for naught. **IBK**

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Instructional Design—One Teacher's Method

Judith A. Johnson, Associate Professor, Yamaguchi University,
Faculty of Engineering

This article is a description of a process of developing content- and task-based instructional materials that are designed to enhance learners' 1) knowledge of course content, 2) English language communication skills, 3) overall education and 4) personal growth. The instructor's view of the learning process will first be presented. Then, the development process will be explained and supported by research findings. An EFL module developed for Japanese university engineering students will be used as an example.

Introduction

This article has provided me the opportunity to put pen to paper to outline the fundamental steps of the instructional design that I follow and to review some of the research that supports what I do. I have tried to achieve clarity by using simple figures and keeping dialogue to a minimum. I will begin the paper by giving a brief explanation of my eclectic philosophy of education, which strongly influences my approach to instructional design and teaching.

As an educator and curriculum developer, I consider EFL (EFL/ESL) learning as one of many aspects of an individual's overall education. Learning occurs when one's mental model is adjusted to incorporate new experiences and make sense of this new information. Therefore, similar to other learning, EFL instruction should be learner-centered, experiential, relevant to the learner, related to the learner's immediate and future environments, interactive, and holistic. It must prepare the learner to

problem-solve in ambiguous situations and foster both the academic and social development of the individual. Gardner (1986), Brown (1987) and others compiled several decades of research data which show that socio-cultural, social psychological and socio-affective factors can be powerful influences in language use and development. ESL teachers have adopted integrated, content-based, task-based, and special-purposes approaches to second language learning and found that performance levels are higher when students believe that the information they are learning is relevant to their present and/or future needs.

Indeed, these approaches, plus the issues of learner autonomy and motivation, are currently "hot" issues in EFL education. The interrelationships of these educational theories are illustrated in Figure 1, a modified version of Kohonen's (1992) visual representation of the interrelationships among personal awareness and growth, the learning process, the learning task/content, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, and their combined effect on the learner.

Development of an EFL Lesson

I generally follow five basic steps in designing a lesson, module, course or curriculum (see Figure 2).

Step One: Analyze

Whether developing a lesson, module, course or curriculum, the basic factors that I take

Figure 1: Second Language Learning as Learner Education

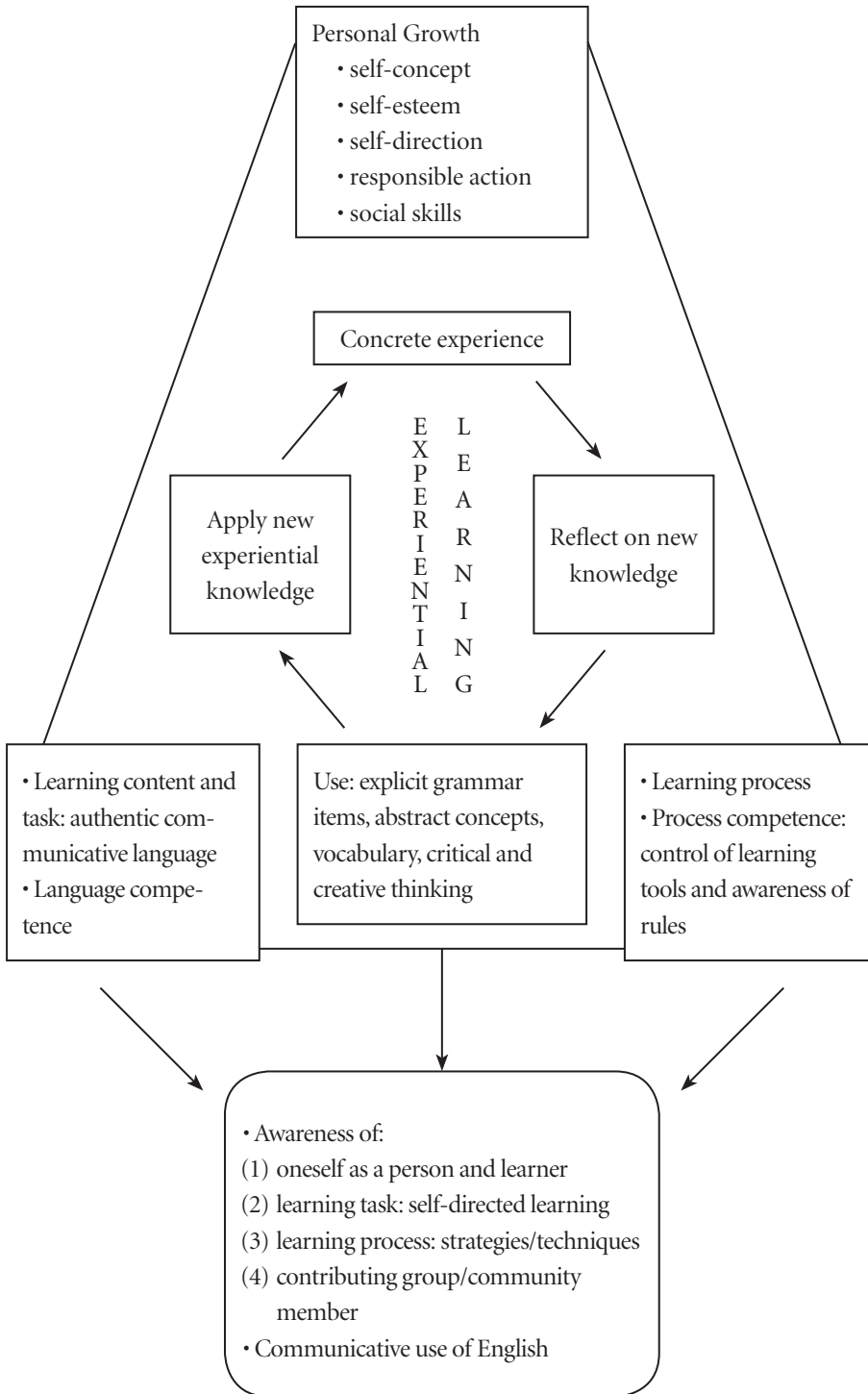


Figure 2: Instructional Design Process

- (1) Analyze students' needs, goals, etc.
- (2) Identify learning outcomes (LOs): cognitive, affective, psychomotor
- (3) Create/Select instructional materials and learning events (taking limitations into consideration)
- (4) Determine evaluation method(s) based on LOs, time, etc.
- (5) Reflect on the instruction, analyze feedback, and make necessary adjustments

Figure 3: Faculty of Engineering Instructional Outcomes

- (a) an ability to apply knowledge of mathematics, science and engineering
- (b) an ability to analyze and interpret data
- (c) an understanding of professional and ethical responsibility
- (d) an ability to communicate effectively
- (e) an understanding of the impact of engineering solutions in a global and societal context
- (f) a knowledge of contemporary issues

into consideration are:

- (1) students' English language proficiency
- (2) the amount of daily contact they might have with the language
- (3) their past, present and future use of English
- (4) the specific skills, content and tasks they will need
- (5) overall curriculum goals
- (6) expected learner outcomes
- (7) the resources required/available
- (8) appropriate teaching methods
- (9) learning sequence
- (10) students' backgrounds, interests, attitudes, motivation
- (11) age
- (12) the class size.

The sample module (see Appendix) is for second-year engineering students who have an elementary–intermediate proficiency range and almost never use English outside of the classroom. At minimum, these students need English to perform research and give oral presentations in the fourth year of their studies. Previous surveys showed that they are interested in global issues and science issues that they can relate to as students and future engineers. The module is designed to be taught in four 90-minute class periods.

Figure 4: Content

- Communication and Technology
- Environment and Technology
- Global Health Issues
- Wealth vs. Poverty
- Space Technology

Figure 5: Concepts

- justice
- cause and effect
- equality
- interdependence
- patterns

Step Two: Identify Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes differ according to students' requirements. Some of the capacities that graduates of the Faculty of Engineering (FOE) must demonstrate are shown in Figure 3. They are the framework for all the FOE curricular architecture, including English language education. Figures 4 and 5 show some examples of the content (Figure 4) and concepts (Figure 5) that I use to support the outcomes in English language courses. The content for the sample lesson used in this

article is Agriculture and Technology, and three of the concepts are change, culture and cooperation.

Step Three: Create/Select Instructional Materials and Events

Materials

The brain is hungry not for method but for content, especially content which contains generalizations that are powerful, precise, and explicit. (Frederick Turner)

The sample lesson (Johnson and Higgins, 2003) is a module in a one-semester four-skills (speaking, reading, listening, writing) course. All four skills are integrated and reinforce each other through the content. I have found that language learning is more effective when information is presented within a defined context. Therefore, I first search for authentic texts, graphs, tables and pictures that are related to a given content area, as well as current data that can be used to create new materials. The materials must provide students with the opportunity to both learn new information and skills, and to apply previously acquired knowledge and skills (from their own unique experiences) to similar and different situations. In addition to applying knowledge of the English language, students must use knowledge about science, society, technology, ethics, inter-personal communication, themselves and so on to contribute to their own educational growth and that of their classmates.

Next, I designate to the reading and listening sections those materials that I believe are most effective in helping students improve those skills. I identify vocabulary and grammar points that can help students understand and use the content to express themselves in English. Grammar points and common phrases that are useful for students, called Life Savers, are included in the Reading section. For the speaking and writing sections,

based on the main ideas of the content and grammar points, I compose several related questions and topics. Then, I decide on the learning events that will support the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and finally complete the lesson by writing the necessary exercises, instructions and supplementary materials. Conversely, I will often have a learning event in mind before I select the materials and will look for materials that will work well in that activity.

Learning Events

Success (in language learning) depends...on what goes on inside and between people in the classroom. E. Stevick (1980:41)

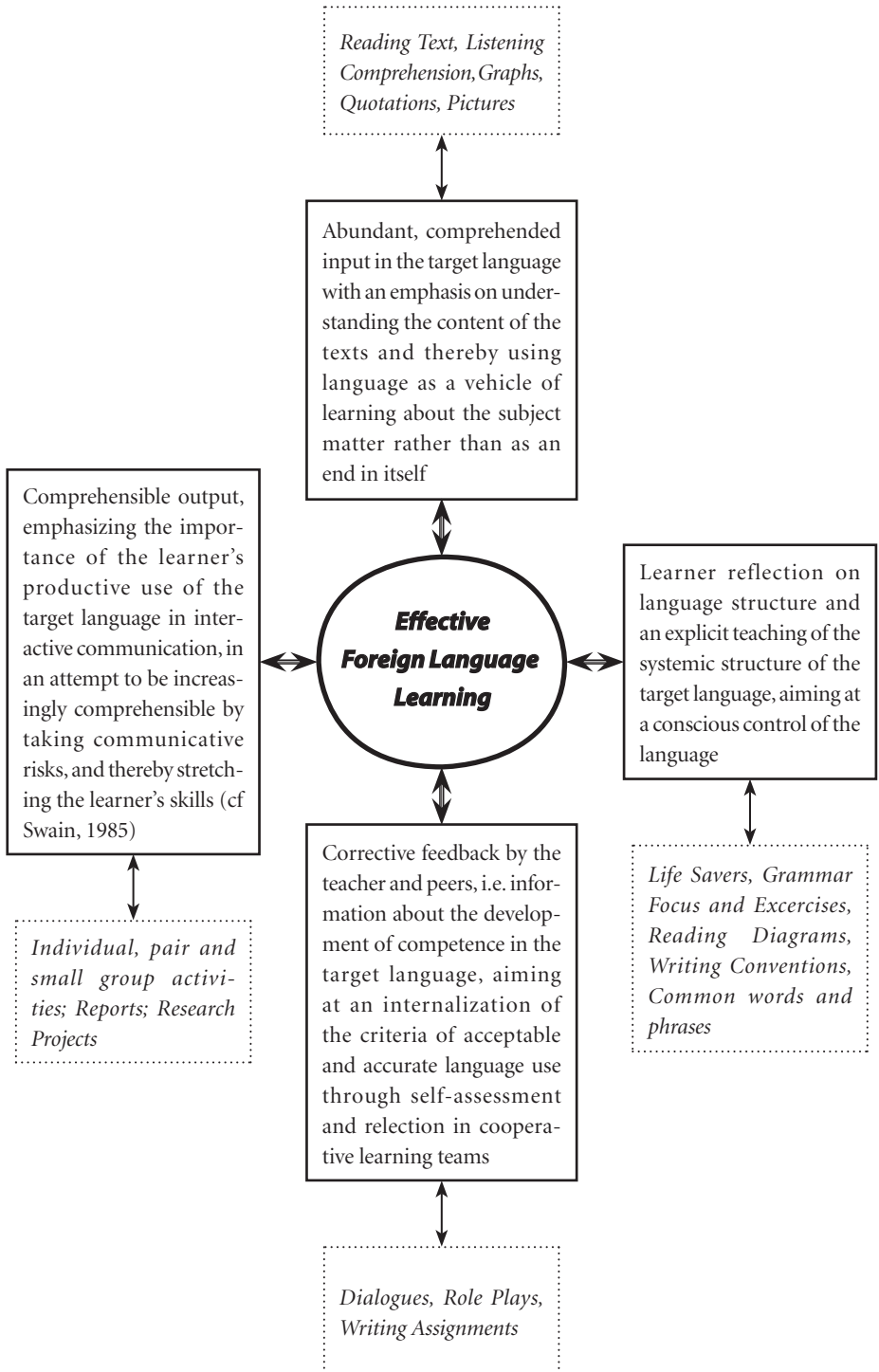
I try to select and design learning events that give students the optimum chance to practice and use their English language communication skills in authentic situations. This means that there must be motivation/or a need for them to acquire and transfer real and relevant information. As Clark (1987) proposes, learners should search for specific information, process new information and use it in some way, and give information based on personal experience. I've found that events that give students opportunity to express their own ideas and opinions in pairs and small groups usually work well. In addition to individual work (which is often assigned as homework), learning events are interactive, cooperative and require problem solving, creativity, exchange of knowledge and experiences, research, consultation, expression of opinions and ideas, questioning and answering on different cognitive levels, responsible behavior, and consideration for others. Figure 6 shows how elements of my sample module correspond to Kohonen's (1992) model of effective ESL learning.

Step Four: Evaluation

Students are evaluated on reading and listening comprehension exercises, written assign-



Figure 6: The Effective Language Learning Process and Corresponding Components of the Sample Module



ments, presentations, research projects and in-class participation. I circulate among the students observing, assisting and evaluating their performance. They are evaluated as individuals, pairs and groups, depending on the learning event. I evaluate their ability to use the language skills presented in the lesson. Their comprehension of the content and ability to express their own ideas and feelings about the content are evaluated as well.

If an individual's or group's work is exceptionally well done, they are awarded a few extra points. I usually have a voluntary, independent study activity that students can do in order to increase their English language communication skills and earn a limited number of 'extra credit' points that can boost their final scores. There are always a large percentage of students who are motivated enough to take advantage of this opportunity. Students have a copy of the rubrics used for evaluation and keep records of their points so they are able to evaluate their own performance at any time.

Step Five: Reflection, Analysis and Modification

Instruction constantly needs to be monitored for relevance and effectiveness. There are many ways in which this can be accomplished. After teaching a lesson, I reflect on how the students responded to the materials and why. If there are any problems, I try to determine the causes. I gather feedback about the instruction from students and

teachers using the materials. Based on the validity and feasibility of the feedback, I make modifications that I believe will enhance the teaching-learning process. Changes may entail replacing reading and listening texts or breaking them down into smaller chunks, replacing or re-designing an activity that is too complicated for the students to carry out smoothly, include pronunciation for key vocabulary and writing instructions and explanations using clearer language.

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Editor's Note: Appendix starts on next page. BK





Do you have something to say? Say it in *Between the Keys!* Submissions are now being accepted for the Autumn issue. Send your articles or lesson ideas to Jim Smiley <jimsmiley@beach.ocn.ne.jp>. Deadline: Ongoing.

Appendix: Excerpts from a Sample 4-skills ESL Module

Reading About Agriculture

Before You Read: Choose a country from the list below. Research it, make an outline and be prepared to make a brief presentation about where it is located, its capital, its population, its per capita income, and the most important problems it is facing at this time.

Afghanistan	Cambodia	Turkey
Bangladesh	Nicaragua	Tanzania

Quotation for Memorization: "Agriculture not only gives riches to a nation, but the only riches she can call her own." — Dr. Samuel Johnson

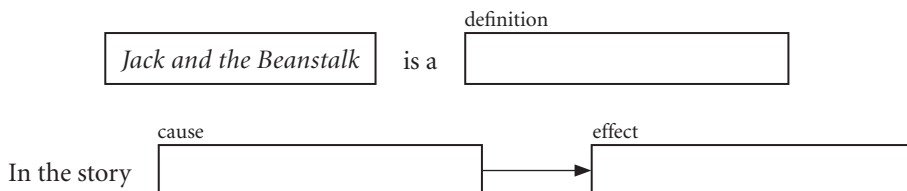
Instructions: Read the story below as quickly as you can. Mark the words you do not understand, **but don't look them up until later.** Time your reading!

In the children's story "Jack and the Beanstalk," a handful of magic beans rescued Jack's family from poverty. In Central America, there are tens of thousands of poor 'Jacks' whose fortunes have been transformed by planting beans; and this is a true story....

(265 words. Time: _____ Reading rate: _____ words/minute.)

Exercise One: Based on the reading, fill in the diagram below. Write only the essential information. **Do not** write sentences.

¶ (paragraph) One



Exercise Two: Answer the following questions using complete sentences.

Life Savers: could you/couldn't you

Examples: Could you turn off the water, please?

Couldn't you give her a ride home tonight?

Practice Drills: Use "could you" and "couldn't you".

help me

get there on time

Grammar Focus

"If ..., (then)" clauses

Examples: "If farmers plant the mucuna bean, then soil erosion will stop."

"If farmers plant the mucuna bean, soil erosion will stop."

Write complete sentences using "If...then."

1. If farmers don't have money, _____ .

Countable/Non-Countable Nouns

Complete the following sentences using the correct form of the “counting” words, nouns, and verbs.

1. (Much/A lot of) _____ (fund) _____ (to be) _____ needed for advanced technology.

Listening and Speaking About Agriculture and Technology

Pre-listening Vocabulary

vigorous (adj) [VI-gur-us]

masses (n/c) [MA-sus]

subsequently (adv) [sub-se-KWENT-lee]

maize (n/u) [meiz]

Exercise One: Fill in the missing words in the paragraph you have been assigned. Use a piece of paper to cover the other paragraphs while you listen, and **take notes** on the other three paragraphs.

More About the Mucuna Bean

1. Planting and growing mucuna beans is not a difficult or _____ process. Farmers first plant mucuna, which produces _____ of vigorous growth....

Exercise Two: Now, in your groups read your paragraphs out loud to each other and fill in the remaining blanks. After everyone is finished reading, then, in numerical order, ask the next person a question based on **your** paragraph.

Exercise Three: Explain to your group how the mucuna bean could benefit the country you researched. Tell about the social, economic, and environmental benefits it could have.

Exercise Four: Select one person from your group to make a brief oral report of the countries people in your group researched. Each report should be about two minutes long.

Listening and Speaking About Agriculture and Technology

Making Effective Outlines

Outlines are an easy way to help you organize your ideas before writing an essay or a research paper. Outlines can also be an important aid in making lecture notes. There are a few simple rules to follow on how to....

Here is a basic outline model. **Please notice that if you have a “I” then you must have a “II” at least.** The same is true for “A”—it must be followed by at least a “B”, and so on.

- I. Introduction (main idea of the essay or the main thesis of the research paper)
 - II. First major topic or idea.
 - A. Supporting idea or fact.
 1. More information about “A”.
 2. More information about “A”.
 - a. More information or support for “2”.
 - b. More information or support for “2”.
 - B. Supporting idea or fact.
- etc.

Housing

Jim Porcaro

Using the “Housing” materials

I have used the housing material presented in this article with college students from high elementary to lower intermediate levels of English language proficiency. However, it can be adapted easily for both lower and higher levels of proficiency and for students at secondary schools, as well as adults. The material could be limited to a single lesson using just a few selected items, or carried over a series of lessons to form a content-based unit of study. This kind of topical material would be used in my classes after students had worked with shorter and simpler material on other topics and had acquired an adequate level of oral skills allowing them to talk in small groups to this extent. The papers are handed out a week before they are used in class, with the homework assignment to read them thoroughly, to check new vocabulary, and to think in English about how to respond to the content items.

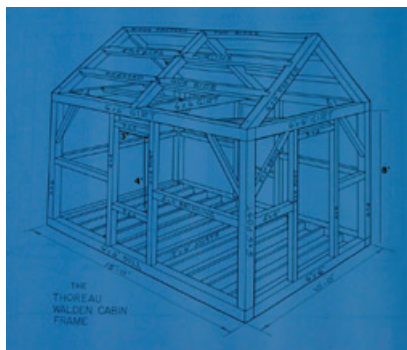
The classroom is a cooperative-learning environment, characterized by the interdependence of all the learners in a group; the interpersonal interaction among the members; the individual accountability of each learner; and the assessment by the groups of their performance. Students work together to maximize their own learning and that of everyone else in the group. Teachers maximize the opportunity for students to promote each other's success by helping, supporting, encouraging, and praising each

other's efforts (see Johnson and Johnson, 1999). In my classes, I move from group to group while students are engaged in the lesson, facilitating, modeling, and monitoring individual and group performance and progress toward the learning aims for the material and the activities. It is essential that classroom management include a well-established scheme in which both students and the teacher use English as the only language of learning and teaching.

The topic of housing may be introduced with a full-class, teacher-led brainstorming of as many different kinds of housing in the human community students can think of. EFL teachers that come from or have worked in other

countries might speak on some styles of housing in those countries that contrast with their students' general housing. For example, having lived in Uganda, I could comment on typical rural village housing in Africa.

Then, pairs or small groups of students may begin their discussion using the outline given here. It moves students through a number of functional language modes, including describing (#1, 3, 6), explaining (#5, 6, 7, 9, 11), providing information (#6), imagining (#3), comparing and contrasting (#2, 5, 8, 10), working with data and negotiating responses (#4, 8, 10, 12, 13), and formulating and expressing opinions (#5, 7, 9, 11, 13). In addition to discussions, role-plays, informal debates, and student presentations to the class can be easily developed from the



material.

Role-playing is an important device for students to develop greater oral fluency through unscripted, spontaneous use of language in a give-and-take dialog. Role-plays may be set up by thinking of conflicting personal views that could realistically arise from the housing lifestyle choices offered in the outline. For example, in #9, a young couple could disagree on where to live after marrying, or in #5, how to furnish their home, or in #8, a parent and “parasite single” adult child could have some conflict over the living arrangements at home.

Informal debates can involve students simply expressing and defending opposing points of view. This may be arranged, for example, in #2, on the advantages and disadvantages of different areas in which to live, or in #8, on the personal and social desirability of “parasite singles” lifestyle.

For group, full-class presentations, #6 provides the opportunity to explain “things Japanese” as if to an audience of non-Japanese. Public speaking skills such as voice projection and control, pronunciation, articulation, as well as posture and use of gestures are developed.

In addition to serving as an exercise for a wide range of functional language use, this housing material is also designed to advance specific oral skills and fluency in such areas as asking and answering questions; initiating and responding to statements; initiating and sustaining connected, cohesive discussion; and employing basic conversation strategies and discourse devices. Specific structural forms are also employed in students’ responses, including full declarative statements, such as “An advantage of living in a big city is...”; conjunctions, as in “I prefer

tatami because...”; and modals “I’d prefer to live in an apartment.” A range of verb tenses is also required by the nature of the content items.

Vocabulary is expanded and applied, for example, with the use of adjectives and nouns in descriptions. Students are allowed to use dictionaries, but are cautioned to limit this and rely as much as possible on words that they know. Students also become more familiar with vocabulary involving data, such as “percentage”, “average”, and numerical units. Of course, listening comprehension is also developed in the oral communication lesson. The application of discourse devices, such as asking for repetition, clarification, or further information, and promoting exchange

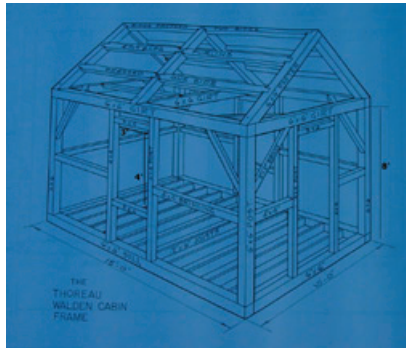
of views within the group, is particularly relevant. Furthermore, this kind of lesson also advances students’ self-confidence and motivation to use English, assumption of responsibility for their own learning, risk-taking, and tolerance of language

proficiency limitations.

In all these ways, then, with a well-developed teacher-constructed outline on a given topic, as the one on housing presented here demonstrates, students can deal with considerable detail and complexity in simple and manageable ways. In their work, students exercise far more than their language skills. They also engage with the topic thoughtfully and incorporate the knowledge, information, and personal experiences they possess in their expressions on it. As a regular feature of their language learning, this process produces greater English proficiency.

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D. Kluge, S. McGuire, D. Johnson & R. Johnson (Eds.), *Cooperative Learning* (pp. 23-36). Tokyo: The Japan Association for Language Teaching.

There is a very large number of books available at stores like Kinokuniya and Maruzen on “things Japanese”. One of my favorites is the 17-volume pocket-size series published by JTB (Japan Travel Bureau) that includes wonderful illustrations that can be used on teacher-made materials for class use.

Appendix

Useful articles on topical issues in Japan may be found in monthly magazines such as *Look Japan*, which is available online at <http://www.lookjapan.com>, and *Japan Close-up*. Daily newspapers, such as *The Daily Yomiuri* and *The Japan Times* are also available online. An excellent source of articles and information on Japan, with multiple sites linked within it, is the *Japan Information Network* at <http://jin.jcic.or.jp/index.html>.

For statistical data on Japan, the following books, published annually, are rich in information and well laid out: *Japan Almanac* by The Asahi Shimbun, *Statistical Handbook of Japan* by the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, and *Facts and Figures of Japan* by the Foreign Press Center. 

Housing

1. Describe—in detail—your home and your neighborhood.
2. What are some advantages and disadvantages of living in a big city, the suburbs, a small town, and the countryside?

	disadvantages	advantages
big city		
suburbs		
small town		
countryside		

3. Describe—in detail—a “dream” home that you would want to live in (a house, a condominium apartment, a ranch, or other form of housing). Be sure also to say where your “dream” home would be.
4. Housing data:

What is the percentage of home ownership in Japan?	
What is the average housing floor space in Japan?	
What is the average cost of a house and its land in Japan?	
What is the average number of people in a household in Japan?	

5. Which kinds of home furnishings do you prefer? Explain why.

Japanese		Western	
tatami (rush mat) flooring		carpeted flooring	
zabuton (cushion)		soft chairs or sofa	
futon (floor bedding)		bed	
chabudai (short-legged table)		high table and chairs	
fusuma and shoji (sliding doors)		hinged doors	
bath and toilet separate		bath and toilet in one room	

6. Describe and explain about the following Japanese household items (imagine you are speaking to someone who knows nothing about them): kotatsu (a warmer); furo-ba (bathing room); butsudan (Buddhist family altar); genkan (entry area); futon (floor bedding); tokonoma (alcove)
7. After you have completed your schooling and begin to work, what kind of living arrangement would you prefer? Explain why you would like or dislike *each*.
- living with your parents
 - living in an apartment by yourself
 - living in an apartment with another person
 - living in a company dormitory for singles
8. “Parasite singles” refers young, unmarried people who choose to live with their parents and thereby lead a more affluent life than their own finances allow.
What is the percentage of unmarried people aged 20 to 34 in Japan who live with their parents?

Men: (a) 20% (b) 40% (c) 60% (d) 80%

Women: (a) 20% (b) 40% (c) 60% (d) 80%

Comment on the good points and bad points of this social phenomenon.

9. After you marry, what kind of living arrangement would you prefer? Explain why you would like or dislike *each* of the following.
- living with your parents
 - living with your spouse’s parents
 - living in an apartment
 - living in your own house
10. What is the percentage of 3-generation households in Japan?
- (a) 10% (b) 20% (c) 33% (d) 50%

What might be some of the advantages and disadvantages for each of the three generations living under the same roof?

	disadvantages	advantages
1st generation (grandparents)		
2nd generation (parents)		
3rd generation (children)		

11. In old age, what kind of living arrangement would you prefer? Explain why you would like or dislike *each* of the following.
- living with the family of one of your children
 - living alone (if you are a widow or widower)
 - living in a retirement community
 - living in a nursing home
12. Among the elderly population of Japan (65 and older)...
- ...what percentage live as couples? (a) 10% (b) 20% (c) 33% (d) 50%
 - ...what percentage live with an adult child? (a) 10% (b) 20% (c) 33% (d) 50%
 - ...what percentage live alone? (a) 10% (b) 20% (c) 33% (d) 50%
13. How many homeless people do you think there are in (this city)?
What do you think are some of the causes of homelessness in Japan?
What do you think can be done about the social problem?

Developing Web-Based Materials for English Study with *Hot Potatoes*

Greg Goodmacher, Shinshu University

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MW's Between the Keys

This article provides a general introduction to the pedagogical usefulness of a software program, *Hot Potatoes*, which was designed to assist teachers in developing online language lessons, explains its usefulness, and encourages you to create your own lessons with it. Explaining the fine details of using the software is not possible in a short article; those interested in using *Hot Potatoes* will find many tutorials are online. One does not need to be a computer expert to design simple but effective language learning materials with this software. This article will not include much computer jargon, as knowledge of computer languages is not necessary for creating

basic lessons with *Hot Potatoes*. In fact, I had no experience with authoring programs before using this one and am not a computer expert. However, knowing how to download the program and upload lessons to a website is essential. To better understand this article, it would be helpful for you to take a brief look at our site. The URL is <http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/>.

Why I Chose *Hot Potatoes* For My Students

At the beginning of the fall 2002 term, several of my colleagues at Shinshu University and myself were requested by the administration to put forth proposals for projects that would further our students' English education. We debated various ideas and finally agreed

that students would benefit from self-study materials that students could access from a website in their free time. One reason for our choice was that many students often ask us how they can work to improve their English skills outside of class.

We considered using several commercially produced online courses. Unfortunately, they were either prohibitively expensive or were made for worldwide use and, thus, did

not fit the needs of our students. We concluded that we would have to develop our own materials. *Hot Potatoes*, designed by the University of Victoria Humanities Computing and Media Centre, was the answer to our



problem. The *Hot Potatoes* homepage explains that "[*Hot Potatoes*] enables teachers to create six different interactive exercise types which are perfect for a web-based delivery system." These are basically formats for many activities that are commonly used by language teachers: multiple choice answer quizzes, quizzes that require short answers from students, scrambled sentence exercises, cloze reading exercises, crossword puzzles, and matching exercises.

Using *Hot Potatoes* To Create Teaching Materials

The first step towards using *Hot Potatoes* is to download it from the *Hot Potatoes* home page, <http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/>. Be sure to register with *Hot Potatoes* or you can only enter

three questions for each activity. When you open the program, you will see the graphic shown on page 16.

The directions say, "Click on a potato to begin." After clicking, the format for creating an exercise will appear (see figure below). You will see fields for entering exercise titles, exercise questions, exercise answers, and exercise feedback. The program comes with default settings that tell students if their answers were correct or incorrect. However, the programs allow for teachers to create their own hints and feedback. An example of data that I entered for a multiple-choice reading activity is below this paragraph. Please notice the customized feedback that helps students to find the correct answer. After all of the necessary data is entered, the teacher clicks on an icon to transform the document into a webpage version, which can be uploaded onto a website.

This software enables teachers to create materials that match student needs. Each exercise type allows for variety and creativity. For example, teachers can insert videos,

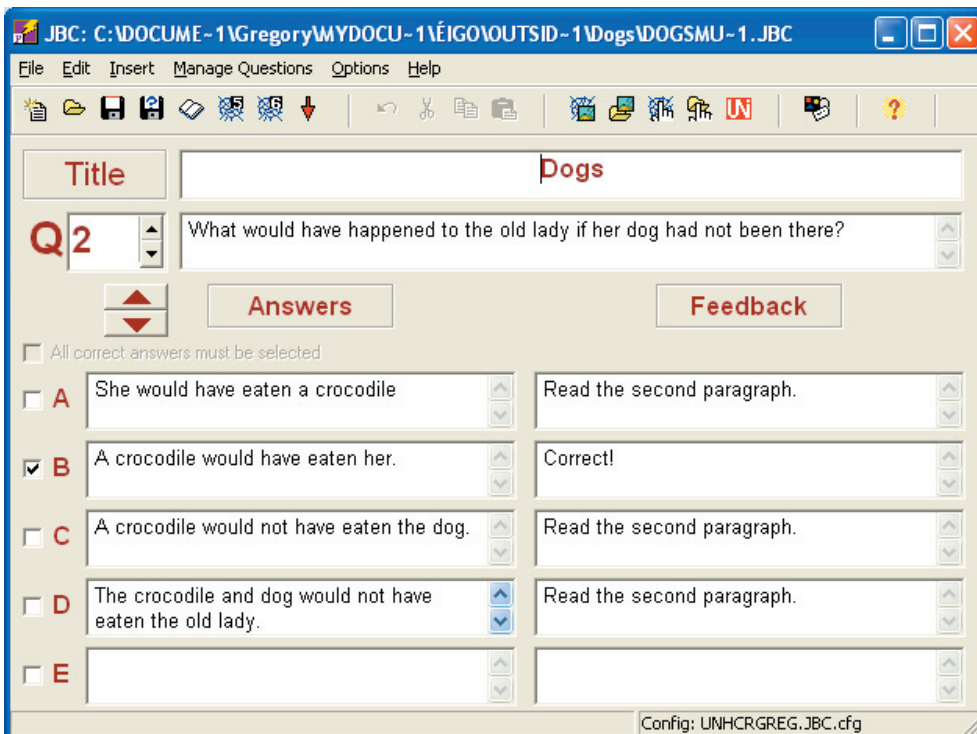
or reading texts, or pictures, or sound recordings into some of the exercises. Be aware that adding these requires a higher level of computer knowledge. Teachers can even set the time that a text is available for students to read. Students click on a button and a text and a clock appears. The following pages show examples of these:

<<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/Greg.htm>> for a multiple-choice exercise with a video;

<<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/Dogsjbc.htm>> for a multiple-choice exercise with a reading; and

<<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/airpollution.htm>> for a timed exercise.

I realized that *Hot Potatoes* is not only useful for language review and development of discrete language skills but is also useful for reviewing and teaching content. To help students with American and British literature classes, I created a matching exercise in which students match the names of authors with the names of novels, stories, or plays <<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/>



authorsandtitles.htm>. For linguistics students who were studying dialectal differences between American and British English, I created a matching exercise specific for their needs <<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/Brit&Amer.Eng.Voc.htm>>.

Hot Potatoes provides the formats for creating useful web-based exercises, but what the teacher does with them is up to his or her creativity, interest, and available time. A lack of time has limited me from creating as many exercises for my students as I would like, but I plan to add a few more exercises each month. In time, the number will grow into a very useful collection. So far, for listening exercises, I have interviewed and videotaped teachers, a tourist in Japan, foreign students studying in Japan, and copied, with permission, a United Nations video. In the future, I will add interviews with Japanese who have mastered English and videotapes of people living in other countries.



Advantages of Self-Study Materials on the Web

Once a large amount of materials are available, students can choose the levels and topics that are appropriate for their learning. This is a plus for advocates of extensive reading. Because any text can be inserted into these formats, creating exercises for different levels is a breeze. Within normal classes, students' levels vary so much that providing optimal input for each individual student is impossible, especially in reading and listening classes. In many off-line classrooms, teachers make students listen to a tape or read a text for a prescribed number of times that may be just right, or too much, or too little, depending on the particular learners. With online materi-

als, students can control the amount of times that they want to read or listen. They can also choose an appropriate level for themselves, which allows for optimal input. This state of autonomy encourages the development of learner self-direction, which Oxford (1990, 10) notes is "essential to the active development of ability in a new language." Allowing students to work at their own pace also reduces the affective filter, making learning a more pleasurable experience for those students who feel frustration when they perceive that they cannot perform as well, or as fast, as other students.

Another advantage of online materials is that students can immediately see if their answers are correct or incorrect. The *Hot Potatoes* exercises also automatically score students as they complete the exercises, whereas in a typical classroom, students must often wait a week between classes to find out their scores. After a week's delay, students

may have forgotten or have lost interest in the previous week's work.

Research into vocabulary acquisition shows encountering new vocabulary in a variety of texts and situations increases retention. Many textbooks do not provide enough exposure to new words, which is a problem teachers must solve. When a coursebook does not provide enough repetition, it becomes necessary, as Nation (1990, 44) states, "to add to the number of repetitions provided by the book." An important aspect of *Hot Potatoes* is that teachers can use the same text or vocabulary in a variety of ways, whether augmenting a textbook or another *Hot Potatoes* exercise. This creates a situation in which students will not feel bored when reviewing the same materials and content. For example, I inserted the same

reading text into:

a crossword puzzle activity <<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/dogsjcross.htm>>;

a multiple choice activity <<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/Dogsjbc.htm>>;

and a cloze reading activity <<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/dogsjcloze.htm>>.

I also applied the same content to a scrambled sentence activity <<http://fan.shinshu-u.ac.jp/~eigo/dogsjmix.htm>>.

Student Feedback


I introduced twenty-five students in a computer assisted language learning class to our web-site and asked for their feedback. These students had already experienced some wonderful language learning sites such as <www.manythings.com> and <www.eslcafe.com> (both of which I highly recommend), so this was not their first experience of sites for second language learners. The feedback was extremely positive. Several students commented that access to listening materials was very helpful as they could not afford to buy commercial materials. Students valued the exercises that reviewed content from other classes. A number of students wrote that the one listening exercise that used (with permis-

sion) a video from the United Nations was very educational. Therefore, I will add more exercises about other cultures and world problems.

Conclusion

As I wrote earlier, I had no experience with authoring programs before using *Hot Potatoes*; yet, I do not want to give the impression that it is extremely easy. I made many mistakes and was extremely frustrated at times, and I still have not mastered all of its possibilities. But as I learned how to use the software, I found satisfaction in the development of my computer-based materials development skills and in the positive student feedback. This feedback convinced me that creating a website for students to access for English self-study purposes is a success and warrants more development.

References

- Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Nation, I.S.P. (1990). *Teaching & learning vocabulary*. New York: Newbury House. 

WANTED

Your article in *Between the Keys*. Contact Jim Smiley, editor, at <jimsmiley@beach.ocn.ne.jp> for submission requirements and deadlines.

Problems, Problems

Daragh Hayes

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MW's *Between the Keys*

This lesson is designed to target the negotiating skills of pre-intermediate to high level learners through role plays. Unlike many role plays, however, the learners will not be asked to perform 'characters' or respond other than they would if in the exact same situations themselves. It is also important to note that a 'complication', or unexpected piece of information, has been built into the role plays to further ensure that the dialogues unfold as naturally as possible. This lesson allows for the learners to really take center stage during the lesson and maximize their speaking time while still allowing ample opportunity for peer and instructor feedback.



Lesson Aims

- Improving negotiation skills
- Making suggestions
- Agreeing and disagreeing

Preparation

- Photocopy role-play card sets from the Appendix.

Organization

- Pair work
- Peer feedback

Procedure

Warm-up

In this section the teacher must present the class with a request and try to convince the

learners to agree to the request, no matter how unreasonable. It is important initially that the learners believe a sincere request is being made of them so that they respond in the first person and not as if this were merely a hypothetical situation. This will also help to draw out what negotiation skills as well as agreeing and disagreeing strategies the learners already possess without the necessity of pre-teaching any new vocabulary or structures at this stage. A suggested situation/request could take the form of the following:

1. After the initial greetings, inform the learners that you need to make an extremely important request of them and that you would really appreciate their help. Inform

them that you wish to finish class "a little bit early". If the learners ask "How early?" respond with, "I was hoping I could leave in about ten or fifteen minutes if that is all right with you."

2. Ideally, the learners will be curious as to why you wish to finish the lesson so abruptly. To this end, any of the following scenarios could be used and expanded upon. It is important, however, that the request appear credible and that the learners feel you are being genuine with them.

- "It's my birthday today, and a friend just called to tell me they bought me tickets for a concert by my favorite band tonight. It starts in 90 minutes."
- "My younger cousin is going to be on TV

playing on the (country name) national soccer team. I'm really close to my family, and it's my cousin's first match with the national team. It starts in about an hour, and I would love to be able to get home and watch it live."

• "I entered a contest for a TV show last week and was picked as the winner. Tonight, I get to have dinner with Katori Shingo (or other celebrity) on TV, and I am supposed to be at the TV station in 90 minutes."

• "I am really worried because I proposed to my girlfriend/boyfriend on the weekend through e-mail and s/he didn't give me an answer yet. In fact, s/he didn't even respond until about an hour ago, and told me I have to meet her/him at our favorite restaurant in an hour. It's really important that I make it there on time."

3. If no responses are immediately forthcoming, it is really important to press the learners, individually if necessary, for a response to ensure that there is no deference to the teacher, so that the learners' more passive tendencies do not dominate. It is at this point that some of the agreeing or disagreeing, suggesting, and negotiating skills should have a chance to emerge.

4. Finally, reassure the learners that this scenario is not a real one but rather designed to test their negotiating skills. Compliment the learners when effective language and structures were employed, and suggest possible alternatives where necessary. Discuss briefly with the group why people chose to respond as they did, and whether or not they expressed what they were genuinely feeling.

Role Play Session One

1. Divide the learners into pairs. Explain

that each learner will be given a role-play card (see Appendix) describing their situation. Give the learners a few moments to look over their cards and a chance to seek clarification if need be. Note that some of the cards contain "Special Information", and that they should wait for a few minutes before introducing it into their dialogues. Stress that under no circumstances should this "Special Information" be revealed at the start of the role plays.

2. Once the learners have familiarized themselves with the situations described on the cards, select a group to go first. Without the time to prepare together at first the role plays will be less scripted and definitely shorter than they might otherwise be. It

is acceptable, however, if these first attempts are brief. The goal here is to show learners are equipped to react when presented with unexpected information. Class size permitting, each group could be given a chance to see how they react and perform when

attempting to interact in a spontaneous manner. If not, select two or three pairs to quickly model the activity first.

Feedback Session One

Briefly ask the groups and class as a whole to consider what strategies, suggestions and offers were and were not successful in the role plays. Elicit or introduce any other structures or vocabulary that would prove helpful.

Role Play Session Two

Allow the groups to do the same role-plays simultaneously, this time trying to place a greater emphasis on their negotiation strategies and on attaining a compromise. Ideally, there will be a noticeable improvement when



greater attention is paid to making suggestions, offers and counter-offers, as well as negotiating.

Feedback Session Two/Wrap up

Ask learners to compare their initial role plays with the ones they have just completed. Allow adequate time to discuss what measures they felt were particularly effective, and make further suggestions where necessary. Time permitting, learners could swap role play cards and engage in another round of free practice.

Possible Follow-up Activities

Learners could prepare their own role play cards to be swapped and used in the following class. This would not only allow for further reinforcement of the skills addressed in this lesson but also allow the learners to personalize the activity to an even greater extent.

Conclusion

This lesson was designed to target learners negotiating and agreeing and disagreeing skills. The inclusion of an unexpected piece of information in the role play card scenarios serves to increase the level of spontaneity and authenticity throughout the lesson. By even the second role play, I have noticed learners exhibit an improved ability to personalize the content of their dialogues and extend their ideas and arguments much more naturally and successfully.

Appendix

Situation One A

Recently you borrowed an old book from a friend. Although you think it might have

been quite valuable, you lost it after falling asleep during the train ride home. When you woke up at your stop, you quickly ran off the train forgetting the book behind you. It was the last train of the night, so you could not try to follow the book. When you checked the Lost and Found Office the next day, the book had not been turned in. Tonight, you are meeting your friend and will have to explain what happened.

Situation One B

Tonight, you are meeting your friend downtown. You are expecting your friend to return an old book that you had recently lent him or her. The book is a favorite of yours and, because it is rare, is now quite valuable.

Special Information: You really need to use the book next week for a paper you are writing at school.



Situation Two A

Two weeks ago, you went shopping with your best friend. You saw a beautiful sweater at a store that you

both loved, but only your friend had enough money to buy it. That night you both had dinner at your house, but your friend forgot to take home the bag with the new sweater in it. You are meeting your friend this afternoon, and your friend asked that you bring the sweater. The problem is that you wore the sweater to a party last night and accidentally spilt red wine on the front. This afternoon, you will have to tell your friend what happened.

Situation Two B

Two weeks ago you went shopping with your best friend. You saw a beautiful sweater at a store that you both loved, but only you had enough money to buy it. Unfortunately, you

forgot the sweater in a bag at your friend's house and haven't had a chance to wear it yet. You are going to meet your friend this afternoon and will get your sweater back.

Special Information: You really want to be able to wear the sweater tonight when you go on a first date with somebody special.

Situation Three A

You had planned to meet your friend after work to get a coffee together. Unfortunately, just as you were leaving some unexpected problems arose. You will probably have to stay at work until at least 11 PM tonight. Since you had arranged to meet your friend outside your office in a few minutes, you decide to step out briefly to apologize and explain the situation in person as your friend will be waiting for you outside.

Situation Three B

You have planned to meet your friend for coffee tonight just after he or she finishes work.

Special Information: Although you did not make any definite plans for after you have coffee together, you have some special news for your friend. Today, you were able to buy two concert tickets to a sold-out concert by your friend's favorite band that is happening tonight. The tickets were quite expensive, but you knew how happy your friend would be to go to the concert, so you decided to buy the tickets anyway.

Situation Four A

Tonight you have made plans to have dinner with your partner. It is a special dinner because it is to celebrate your first anniversary together. While waiting for your partner

to arrive, however, you get an urgent phone call about a family emergency and learn that you will have to go back to your hometown tonight. When your partner arrives apologize, and explain that you have to cancel your dinner plans.

Situation Four B

Tonight you are meeting your partner to celebrate your first anniversary together. You are looking forward to it because recently you both have been very busy and have not been able to spend a lot of time together.

Special Information: You also want to see your partner tonight because you are worried about something. Recently you have not been spending much time together, so you

think your partner must have met someone new. You want to ask whether or not your partner has a new boyfriend or girlfriend when you meet tonight.

Situation Five A

Last week, your best friend lent you a CD. When you brought the CD to work a different friend asked to borrow it from you. Unfortunately, this morning your friend at work told you that he lost the CD. You are meeting your best friend tonight and must explain what happened.

Situation Five B

You are meeting your best friend tonight. Last week you lent this person a music CD, and tonight your friend is supposed to return it to you.

Special Information: You were nervous about lending this CD to your friend because it has a lot of sentimental value. You had never lent this CD to anyone before as it was a gift from some one you used to love very much. **BK**



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