Between the Keys

The BBF
Ian Gleadall

At the time of writing, it's the beginning of the new academic year and I'm still catching up on what's been happening while I was out of the country recently on a combined research trip and family reunion. I guess everyone is similarly preoccupied with beginning-of-year teaching and administration, but spare a thought for Between The Keys and keep those articles coming in ready for the next issue. At the most recent JALT Business Meeting (back in February), plans were mentioned for including periodical contributions from the SIGs, including articles that have appeared in SIG newsletters such as BTK. So, you never know, your modest article in BTK may one day be picked up for publishing in a more extended form and pitched to a much wider audience. It's up to you!

BFN,
Ian

BK

From the Editor
Jim Smiley

Spring has finally arrived! Now is the time to spring. Don't wonder about what kind of year this one may be, but undertake proactively to make 2006 the year that it can be. Write up something for BTK. Get a MW-related presentation in at JALT 2006. Contact the publisher and get that book in print. One proactive step I've taken which involves you, dear reader, is the donning of the chairman's hat for the Pan-SIG conference in 2007. In May 2007, our university (Tohoku Bunka Gakuen) will host the event, and one of the co-hosting SIGs will be the MW SIG. As a co-hosting SIG, we need to present around 8 MW-SIG related presentations, hold a workshop, a colloquium and invite a recognised speaker to give a plenary. An event like this needs your support in various forms: presentations, attendance, volunteer support and committee work. If you are willing to be involved in this, please contact me: jimsmiley@pm.tbgu.ac.jp Check the Yahoo! forum and this space for further updates.

Kristopher Bayne continues his series of reports on materials writing related presentations from the recent JALT 2005 national conference, retelling Dale Fuller's personal experiences of materials writing. The 2005 conference provides another important discussion topic. The Materials Writers Contest was instigated and managed by Greg Goodmacher. As a follow-up, he presents an in-depth report based on a survey he conducted around the time of the contest in which he investigated critical ideas about the nature of, among other things, materials writers' creation, adaptation, evaluation and sharing of materials. Goodmacher's appraisal includes negative aspects of the venture as well as the more obvious positive ones, achieving a healthy balance. One

reason for the success of the contest lay in the advice Marc Helgesen gave to each entrant. In his comments, he points to an article he wrote in 1995 about considerations when devising comprehension questions. This article and a note about Barrett's taxonomy have been re-printed here. Finally, a tongue-in-cheek email from Daniel Droukis joked that this edition would be free from his work. Actually, this is not so. Not only is Daniel cited in the references in Bayne, but I thank him for his moral support he gave me with the preparation for the article I present here. I write about some more pedantic choices he made while creating a set of classroom materials for the upcoming academic year. My main impetus for presenting this article is in an attempt to show the ordinary class teacher who makes their own materials that their choices, thoughts, worries are shared by others. Writing up what may seem to be obvious may indeed either help others realise that their actions are shared within the community of material writers or that some actions are more or less unique. At least, I hope so. To finish with the very corny metaphor stated at the beginning, I know that a lot of you are like coiled springs. Now's the chance to spring into action. (Ouch.) BK

A Report on Publishing-Related Sessions at JALT2005, Part 2 of 3

Kristofer R. Bayne

"Stories from a Textbook Writer"
Workshop, Saturday
Dale Fuller

Much in keep with the conference theme of 'sharing', Fuller took us along the path from his early years in special-needs care situations to his emergence as a Japan-based materials writer. From his early days, he learned four valuable lessons which hold him in good stead in his current career:

1. Patience and rapport built up over time are vital for people with communication difficulties.

2. Thinking 'out of the box' is an asset.

3. Experience counts in teachers.

4. Those removed from the classroom (e.g. management) can be more of a hindrance than help.

Once moved to Japan and involved in EFL, Fuller's teaching experience developed, learning what did and did not work while listening to the feedback from students and colleagues. This led to the creation of more and more original materials and eventually to the first of many books.

He pointed out the process involved

using materials in the classroom, sharing and feedback from colleagues and refining before progression to the proposal stage. Fuller then outlined the basic requirements for a full proposal: cover letter; samples; and a document describing the length, audience, requirements and such. We learned much more, however, from his personal observations and perhaps trials. He warned that there can be a toll taken on a writer's life, with family, personal relationships and pastimes suffering due to the time involved. One needs to 'balance the amounts of grief' to decide whether it was important. In describing the process after a manuscript has been accepted, Fuller offers some poignant tips, such as August is a bad time to send a manuscript in and set a goal for a book to be ready for JALT or the Tokyo Book Fair.

It is unlikely everything will go smoothly with publishers as you are somewhat at the mercy of a variety of people involved – editors, illustrators, proofreaders and so on, especially for first-time authors. Authors need to be prepared for the publisher to want to have your continued involvement in the form of commercial presentations, presentations to sales staff or even teacher groups.

Fuller concluded his very relaxed and insightful presentation with some advice for would-be authors:

• Be prepared to count the costs on your time, health and relationships

• Be yourself

• Be original

• Be flexible as criticism can be positive

• Be persistent and don't give up.

Fuller provided a handout that included a very wide range of questions and suggestions publishers.

Dale Fuller can be contacted at <dwfjapan@ yahoo.com>.

Related Reading on Publishing in *Folio* (MATSDA Journal) and *The Language Teacher*

Droukis, D. & K. Yukitoki, (2006) "That first publishing experience." *Folio, Vol. 10.2*, pp. 34-36.

Helgesen, M. (2000) "Book talk: Japan-based authors discuss their craft." *The Language Teacher. Vol. 24. No.2*. pp. 13-17.

Mares, C. (2004) "Working with editors." *Folio, Vol. 9.1*, pp. 26.

Zemach, D. (2004) "Getting into publishing." *Folio, Vol. 9.1*, pp. 24-25.

Zemach, D. (2005) "Writing a publishing proposal." *Folio, Vol. 9.2*, pp. 15-17.

Zemach, D. (2006) "Working with an editor." *Folio, Vol. 10.2*, pp. 37-39.   BK

Classroom Materials: One Teacher's Story

Jim Smiley, Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University

The new academic year approaches. A new set of materials is under development. During the process of preparation, data collection, writing, proof-reading and final presentation, a great many thoughts went through my mind. In this paper, I would like to set out a few of those issues to present the methods I employed in the creation of the materials set for my new classes.

Impetus for Materials Creation

At the end of the last academic year, a questionnaire was given to all students in the Occupational and Physical Therapy General English First Year course. Their responses indicated that there was a wish for some topic-specific materials for their specialist course. The university directive, however, is not to provide specialised, content-course specific instruction in English (that is dealt with by ESP courses) but to supply general communicative English classes. There is, therefore, on one hand, the need to create materials relevant to the students' wishes, but, on the other hand, the potential to run counter to our syllabus directive.

The solution I arrived at was to create a set of readings based around occupational and physical therapy subjects, utilising key concepts, terminologies and lexis, but frame the readings in more common situations, much as would be used by the general public when discussing these topics. This method, I felt, would best help introduce my students to general communicative English at the same time as allow them to develop topic-specific lexis.

An Eye to the Future: the copyright issue and data collection

If the project is realised successfully, the resultant pile of materials may be of use to a larger population of students than my immediate charges. At the very least, there is more than one recycling option. Whether I reproduce the A4 pages on a photocopier next year, self-publish, or send the project to a publisher, any materials contained must be copyright-free.

The copyright issue is very complex, and I will not discuss it fully here. A useful rule of thumb that I use is: if it was produced by someone else, it is not mine and cannot be used. This may sound like common sense, but often we hear of materials writers wondering about: how to use texts from the internet; what constitutes fair use of photographs and clip art that come with commercial packages; linguistic simplification of complex texts which are then presented as new texts and so on. When we buy a DVD or video, newspaper (internet or paper), commercial software package, or any other product, we buy a licence to use it appropriately. Buying a DVD for personal use then projecting it to a mass audience, for example, violates that licence. This would apply to using a DVD bought for personal use and using it for multiple class use. I specified "multiple" in the previous sentence, but I am not entirely sure even if a DVD could legally be used in class even once.

Why might simply copying your own A4 handouts from one year to the next be considered a breach of copyright? If, in

making the original handout, you violate copyright, you are simply repeating that breach year in, year out.

The action of simplifying a newspaper article may seem equivalent to producing your own work, but it is not. Although the actions involved are different, consider the following: I write a text in English. Someone else translates it into Japanese and tries to pass it off as their own work. I should be unhappy at this. Simplification is a similar practice: the actual words involved are not the issue. The issue centres on the information, not on the presentation of the information.

One method of avoiding these problems would be to obtain licences that allow you to use any materials adopted or adapted for your own commercial purposes. Obtaining these, however, would be difficult in some cases and impossible in others.

The method that I used was to learn the topic and write original materials. Sitting from my university desk, learning about occupational and physical therapy may seem impossible. With the aid of the Internet, however, information collection becomes possible. The key is to bear in mind the following:

1. collect data from at least three sites. Keep a record of those sites

2. information identifiable to one source only is unacceptable. Quoting needs strict referencing

3. use only general knowledge information unless you can claim and prove expertise on a particular subject

Examples of what is and what is not possible are:

1. Many sites discuss, for example, tennis and golf elbow. A page of materials based on tennis and golf elbow is possible. A dangerous policy would be to quote Dr. So-and-so's advice on how to treat the injuries, and so would be the mentioning of a particular treatment found only on one site.

2. Actual cases of tennis and golf elbow would be impossible unless they were referred to in various sites. Of course, actual patient data even on one site is unlikely as that would violate patient privilege.

3. Using your imagination, the creation of fictional characters who suffered from these injuries and discussed possible and general treatments is acceptable. Interviewing sufferers of the injury, obtaining their permission to use their cases in your materials and the subsequent creation of the materials is, of course, acceptable.

Images, video clips, diagrams and so on, are not possible in this project. If I were to approach a publisher later, making a note of where such items appear in the materials is acceptable. The larger publishing houses would then take any necessary steps to obtain or manufacture suitable items.

Text Preparation

The theoretical question of which vocabulary and syntactic items to include in any materials project could keep materials writers occupied full time. In the past, I have based general language inclusions on particular vocabulary lists. The Longman defining vocabulary list offers a useful tool. Upon becoming competent readers of these vocabulary items, students find the jump from bilingual dictionary to the English-only monolingual Longman one much easier. This, in turn, feeds into students' general competence and confidence in using English. The JASCET 4000 word list is broader in coverage, and its segregation of items into categories supports the materials writer

when developing topic-based materials. There are many other lexis lists, including Nation's, but at the practical level, a decision needs to be made. My particular student groups at this university are non-English majors whose English level is high elementary. Being in their first year, their only prior exposure to English in the main has been through the Japanese educational system. This heavily influenced my decision to limit the general word list to that best described as the marked words in Japanese bilingual dictionaries. The Monbukagakusho-approved English text books for communicative purposes employ a very limited lexical set of around 600-800 word base item. Dictionary publishers highlight this set in various ways in their dictionaries: by printing the items in blue or red; by marking them with a system based on asterixes; by printing them in bold typeface and so on. As dictionary publishers and different editions of the same dictionary vary in their exact item inclusion, even this method does not ensure that students will be familiar with all of the main body of lexis during reading.

The decision to base the materials on the marked words stemmed from the desire to give students as much quick access to semi-known English as possible so that they could begin the process of proceduralisation quickly. I assumed that half-known items could be transferred more easily into students' active language skills than entirely new items. Topic-specific items were glossed in Japanese, as were items that fell outside the lists but whose inclusion was necessary in the text. This latter was kept to a minimum.

Furthermore, there are many loan words in modern Japanese that I feel form a useful base for English vocabulary and pronunciation development. I choose to steer clear of 'false friends' and utilise only those cognates whose primary Japanese meaning matched that of English.

Syntactic considerations were equally complex. In this particular course, there is no institutionalised norm-referenced external test by which to judge students' level or progress. Individual teachers may incorporate one as a part of their individual curriculum, or they may prepare criterion-referenced exams to test the success of their students, their teaching methodology, or their materials. I use a published TOEIC Bridge test, a limited-range norm-referenced test designed for the lower range levels of English ability. The grammar structures in any prepared text, therefore, would be drawn mainly from those present in the preparation texts for the Bridge test. This test, however, is very limited in scope, and a number of more complex structures needed to be included in the materials. These structures were introduced only when the context provided ample evidence to extract the meaning. Furthermore, these structures would be highlighted in the language support materials which accompanied the readings.

Text length setting was based on past experience with this level of student. A reading rate of 60 words per minute was decided upon This in conjunction with the desire to keep silent in-class reading of the text, discussion and activity content to around a maximum of 15 minutes fixed the text length at between 200 and 250 words, allowing for rubrics, text and questions to be completed swiftly.

A rough tool I used to grade the text was the in-built Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level checkers in Window's Word software. The Flesch Reading Ease ranks texts on a scale of 0 – 100, with 100 being the easiest. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level facility informs you of what school year an average USA school child would need to be to read the text, ranging from 1 – 12. These tools have very severe accuracy limitations in

both native-speaker and ELT uses, but as a rough guide, I find them valuable. Basically, a low school grade figure (or high Flesch Reading Ease) reminds me that the texts contain mainly mono or bi syllabic words and comprise mainly single clause sentences.

The texts are, of course, non-authentic in the sense that they are designed primarily for English educational purposes. Furthermore, they do display features of discourse most likely not found in typical English native speaker writing. The choice of writing in this way reflected my belief that Japanese learners at the elementary level require guided input even if it is slightly stilted.

A critical feature of the texts is the inclusion of a point of debate. For example, in the example text given, the common knowledge belief that stretching helps prevent sports injuries is contested. This point of debate, I hope, will provide motivational stimulus and encourage a deeper connection with the English text.

Support Material

It may seem counter-intuitive to set up a speaking class that centres on readings. This is done so as to provide students a topic for language skill development, not as a base for discussion. This decision reflects my own beliefs about language learning at the elementary level. Every materials writer and every classroom teacher will have their own beliefs that will influence the final shape of their materials. The support materials were designed to promote proceduralisation of the content: key vocabulary recycled within the framework of general language items; syntactic structures repeated within the body of the materials, and when possible, implied repetition in the answers. Themes, content, personalisation and individualisation all took a backseat to the principle aims of lexical and syntactical presentation and proceduralisation. These aims may surprise

a reader in the early 21st century, but I was discontented with the majority of students who, when faced with conversation pattern worksheets, would remain silent, and also with 'repeat after me' type lesson plans. Replacing the emphasis back on to the linguistic subject matter allows that matter to become a tool for students' later use and reinstates the anonymity of university subject learning: students often find English classes shocking as they are expected to perform in a manner alien to their other classes. Certainly, at the lower ability and motivational levels, classes whose materials require personal answers run the serious risk of being quiet. Only a few activities in the support material entail the use of personalisation or of students filling in information from their own experiences, although that facility is there should it be needed.

I felt that the units should be consistent in structure over the 15-week course. Consistency was important primarily to allow myself time to build up enough materials quickly enough. The same pattern might easily become stale for students, but I felt that appropriate changes could more easily be introduced later than try to predict and plan for unknown difficulties.

Example Reading and Support Material

I will present a unit prepared for the first-year Physical Therapy course. It contains the template that is used for a series of units. Once a template is in place, the actual data collection and writing becomes quicker. Full-scale revisions will take place after the first draft of the whole course is completed, including more precisely targeted structure and vocabulary activities designed to recycle targeted lexis and syntax throughout the course.

1. Pre-reading activities
2. Reading

3. Re-reading activity
4. Vocabulary gloss   http://www.wfot.org.au/
5. Structures   http://www.cot.org.uk/
6. Comprehension questions (pair work)   http://www.aotf.org/
7. Discussion and follow-up activity/ task   http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos078.htm

I wanted to write a reading text that would be meaningful to my student group in terms of relating to their need to see and hear genuine communicative English at the same time as being both within their cognitive reach and containing subject-specific items to boost their motivation. A google search on "occupational therapy" provided me with the following sites:

Browsing through these sites, I drew up a list of topics that would be of general interest to occupational therapists. The one chosen for this example centres on sports injuries. The word 'sport' is in the chosen list, but 'injury' is not. 'Injury' required a gloss. I decided to write a text staged in a coffee shop featuring two peoples whose names are difficult to pronounce.

Example 1.1: Sports Injuries Reading and Activities

Pre-reading Activities
Note: These activities were written after the body text.

'Injury' means 傷害. We often get injuries playing sports. Match the English injury with the Japanese one.

tennis elbow	水虫
golfer's elbow	テニスひじ
runner's knee	ゴルフエルボ
athlete's foot	ラーナズニー

In groups, discuss these questions. You can use Japanese, but use the English word if you know it.

1. What other injuries do you know?
2. How do people get injured?
3. How can we avoid injury?

Sport's Injuries

Stephen met Ralph at a coffee shop. Stephen did not look happy. Ralph asked why. Stephen said that he went running yesterday. He hurt his knee while running. Stephen had runner's knee.
Ralph laughed. Ralph said that he had tennis elbow. Stephen looked angry. "Why are you laughing?" he asked Ralph.
"I'm laughing because you have runner's knee. I have tennis elbow. My friend, Fred, has golfer's elbow. All of our injuries are sports." Ralph said.

Stephen laughed. Then he said that we should stretch more before exercising.

Ralph said, "No. People say that stretching before exercise is important. Scientists say that's not true."

Stephen looked surprised.

Ralph said, "They say that even if you stretch for a long time, you will still get injured. People get injured because of exercising too much. If you exercise too much in June, you will get injured more easily in July."

Stephen asked, "What should I do now?"

Ralph said, "Do you know RICE?"

Stephen laughed. "Of course," he said, "I eat it a lot."

Ralph said, "No. I don't mean the rice you eat. I mean RICE for sports injuries. Let me explain: 'R' stands for 'rest'. You need to rest a lot. 'I' stands for 'ice'. Put ice on your knee. 'C' stands for 'compress'. Put a bandage around your knee, and 'E' stands for 'elevate'. That means that you should put your knee above your heart."

During Re-reading

Read the text again. Fill in the chart. Who has what injury?

Name	Injury
Stephen	…………………
Ralph	…………………
Fred	…………………

What is RICE? Write down what it stands for.

Letter	Word	Japanese word
R	R _ _ _	………………………….
I	I _ _ _	…………………………
C	C _ _ _ _ _ _	…………………………
E	E _ _ _ _ _ _	…………………………

Vocabulary

Note: This gloss contains lexical items that are not in the simple list and are not obvious loan words. It also uses the dictionary (base) form of any word. All items in the body text (excluding the RICE elements) are included in the general list for reading texts for middle school English and above. It may be noted that in all probability, Japanese teachers of English may have a higher degree of intuition about the level of difficulty or the level

of probable recognition students have of any lexical item. Finding out what constitutes difficult for students is a steep learning curve for a native speaker of English.

hurt けがをする	knee ひざ	elbow ひじ
injury 傷害	laugh 笑う	stretch 伸びをする
exercise 運動する	scientist 科学者	true 真実の
surprised 驚く	explain 説明する	rest 休む
a lot 沢山	ice 氷	compress 圧縮する
bandage 包帯	elevate 高める	heart心臓
above より上に	ankle 足首	in common 共通に
problem 問題	advice 助言	treatment 治療(法)
fat 太った	happen 起こる	avoid 避ける

Structures

Read these structures. Write your own sentences.

人met 人 at a 場所
Alice met Jane at a library.

_____

人hurt 人のひざ・ひじwhile 動詞+ing
Tom hurt his ankle while playing rugby.

_____

人have・has 傷害
I have tennis elbow. She has runner's knee.

_____

If you 動詞, you will 動詞.
If you study hard, you will get a good job.

_____

'A' stands for 'B'.
AはBの省略だ。
'JR' stands for 'Japan Railways'.

_____

Fill in the missing words. Ask the questions to a partner.

1. Have you ever ……… your knee while playing sport?
2. What does 'JA' ……… for?
3. What will happen if you ……… too food?

Comprehension Questions

Student A: Ask these questions. Take turns with your partner.

1. Where did Stephen meet Ralph?
2. Stephen was unhappy because …………………………. (Stephen's problem)

3. What problem did Ralph have?
4. Fred had ………………………. (Fred's problem)
5. What do all of the problems have in common?
6. People say that ………………………. (what they say)
7. What do some scientists say about that?
8. Scientists say that ………………………. (what they say)
9. What should Stephen do?

Student B: Ask these questions. Take turns with your partner.

1. Stephen met Ralph at a ………………………. (place)
2. Why was Stephen unhappy?
3. Ralph had ………………………. (Ralph's problem)
4. What problem did Fred have?
5. All of the problems are ………………………. (kind of problem)
6. What do people say about stretching?
7. Scientists say that ………………………. (what they say)
8. What do they say about injuries?
9. Stephen should ………………………. (Ralph's advice)

Follow-up discussion

In groups, discuss these questions. You can use Japanese, but use the English word if you know it.

1. Do you agree with Ralph's advice?
2. What advice can you give to Stephen?
3. Have you ever had a sport's injury? If so, tell me about it.

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Final remarks

The primary motivation for this article was the desire to set out my working model in the hope that it would be useful to others and that others may be prompted to publicise their own methodology for materials production. Because there is no intention of writing materials for commercial publication, I can include in any classroom handout whatever I feel is best for my students at any particular time. That none of the activities presented here are original: very little is original in modern ELT and that the combination of activities is not special (as they follow a time-honoured pattern of activation of prior knowledge, vocabulary pre-teaching, reading, comprehension testing of reading and follow up) probably reflects my own conservative mindset in language education and my reaction to the 'silent wall'. Furthermore, because there is no requirement to present the material methodologically transparent for other

teachers, my own classroom materials lack all but the basic instructions. They may be altered as I see fit.

In this article, I avoided any theoretical stance to show one teacher's methodology without the baggage of theory. We can, I presume, support any decision we take in regard to how we create. Materials creation comes after theoretical study. It is the summation of the teacher's experience and the placing of our hopes into the hands of the student. BK

Reflections on a Survey of Materials Writers in Japan
Greg Goodmacher

Purpose of the Survey

The general goal of this survey was to investigate the support systems of materials writers in Japan. In particular, I was interested in what motivates materials writers to work together as a group, give feedback, express support, and interact socially and professionally, and, conversely, what prevents materials writers from doing so. Since the beginning of my membership with the Materials Writers Special Interest Group, I have been dismayed by what I consider to be a regrettable lack of activity, support, and, most importantly, sharing among the members of our group. The Materials Writers Contest held in 2005 stimulated much more activity and sharing of ideas than usual. Yet, there were some negative comments regarding the format of the contest itself and the nature of a contest to motivate writers. Those comments made me ponder why the contest motivated many members while some were indifferent and a few were dissatisfied. The focus of this article is to report on what I consider to be tentative but important findings of what is still a research project in progress.

The Methodology of the Survey and Its Potential

A pilot survey was sent to members of the Materials Writers Group who have joined its Yahoo group site and to a small number of other JALT members whom I personally know are active in materials writing in Japan. The survey was refined and sent out again, to which twenty-five people responded. The survey included one section consisting a closed-response Likert-type scale question items section, and a second section of open-response type questions (Brown & Rodgers, 2002). The scale ranged from 0 to 10 (Never 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always). "Frequency counting" was utilized to perform a quantitative analysis, and the responses to the open-ended questions were examined for what Kvale calls "central themes" (1996). From a qualitative research perspective, the written responses to open-response questions reveal why many of the materials writers in Japan want to share materials and work together and why other materials writers in Japan are reluctant. Addressing the writers' concerns after a thoughtful examination of the comments could lead to a higher level of professional development and sharing among materials writers in Japan.

Findings of the Closed-Response Section

1. Do you create original teaching materials

with others?

The average response was 3.2. Twelve out of 20 responses clustered between 0 and 3 revealing that a majority rarely create materials with others. Seven responses clustered in the 4 to 6 range, (i.e. some respondents sometimes created materials with others). Only one person always created materials with others. In summary, collaborative materials creation is rare.

2. Do you create original teaching materials by yourself?

The average was 7.4. Six of the 13 responses clustered in the 5 to 7 range. There were five responses in the range of 8 and 9 and two responses of ten. The solo creation of teaching materials is much more common than collaborative efforts.

3. Do you choose materials with others?

The average was 2.8. Eight of the 19 respondents marked 0, and five responses were clustered in the "rare" range of 2 and 3. Two people chose 5. Four responses were in the 7 to 9 range. Almost seventy percent of the respondents rarely or never choose materials with others.

4. Do you choose materials by yourself?

The average was 6.7. Choosing materials by oneself is much more common than doing so with colleagues. Only one person out of 13 respondents marked 0. Three people chose 7. Five responses ranged from 7 to 9 and three responses were 10, indicating that almost 75 percent of the respondents fit into the extended category of "often" to "always".

5. Do you adapt materials with others?

The average was 2.2. Ten out of 21 responses, almost half, were 0. Another seven responses were either 2 or 3. There was only one mark of 4. Only two responses of 8 and only one of 10 indicate that collaborative materials adaptation is very unusual.

6. Do you adapt materials by yourself?

The average was 7.4. Out of the 13 responses, only one person marked 0. Two responses were in the "sometimes" range of 4 and 5. Six responses, just less than half, were clustered in the range of 7 and 9 and one response was 10. These scores in conjunction with the responses to question 5 point out that material adaptation is predominantly a solo endeavor.

7. Do you evaluate materials with others?

The average was 3.0. Six out of the 21 responses were 0 or "never", and eight responses were between 1 and 3, indicating that two-thirds of the respondents rarely or never collaboratively evaluate materials. Five responses were in the "sometimes" range of 4 and 6. There were only two responses of 9 or "almost always".

8. Do you evaluate materials by yourself?

The average of the thirteen responses was 7.6. Zero, 3, 6, and 7 were each marked only once by respondents. There were five responses in the range of 8 and 9 and four responses of 10. The solo evaluation of materials is common for roughly two-thirds of respondents.

9. Does your teaching institution encourage you to learn more about materials writing?

The average response was 1.2. Fifteen of the 21 responses were 0. There were only two responses in the "rare" range of 2 and 3 and only three responses in the "sometimes" range of 4 and 5. The highest mark was a lone mark of 7. Seventy-one percent of respondents reported receiving no encouragement from their teaching institution in regards to learning more about materials writing.

10. Has your teaching institution ever organized any faculty development programs regarding materials writing?

The average was 0. Eighteen out of nineteen responses were 0. The only other response was 5. "Faculty development" is becoming more common in many universities and other educational institutions across Japan, yet materials development barely receives any importance or attention.

11. Are you comfortable sharing materials that you create with others?

The average of the 21 responses was 8.1. Four responses of 5 and two responses of 6 clustered near the middle of the scale. There was one response of 7 and four of 8. Two marks were 9 and eight marks were 10. Thirty-eight percent of respondents are always comfortable sharing materials and another thirty-three percent are often or almost always comfortable.

12. Do you want to share your materials with other teachers or materials writers?

The average score of the 21 responses was 7. One respondent answered 0 and two marked 3. Four scores clustered in the 5 and 6 range. There were two responses of 7. One-third of the 21 responses were in the range of 8 and 9. The remaining five responses were 10 or "always". The average responses for question 11 and question 12 are not so far apart, but some people obviously hesitate to share materials. This fact became very apparent in the section with open-response section.

Findings of the Open-Response Section

The written answers to three questions were particularly revealing regarding the motivation of the respondents to share materials and their comfort level with doing so. One question is "Do you want to share your materials with others?" The second is "Are you comfortable sharing materials that you write with others?" The third is "What would make you feel more comfortable sharing materials?"

A significant number of respondents reported worries concerning copyright protection as a factor in their reluctance to share. They fear that others in our group will steal their ideas and write textbooks. One member wrote, "I have been afraid that it'll get put into the other's book, with them getting sole credit for the 'new idea.'" Another worry is that the employer will use the materials that a teacher shares in the workplace without paying the teacher. "I don't mind other teachers using material, but I am not going to write a textbook for an employer without getting paid for it," commented one respondent.

A lack of confidence in the ability to write materials also prevents sharing. One writer explicitly wrote that he or she needs more self confidence. Another reported feeling he or she needs "more knowledge that what I am doing is correct". One respondent wrote, "I would dearly love to have my materials critiqued by people who have more experience and expertise than me. However, I am not sure that I am as prepared to critique others' materials, with lack of time and expertise being the two main reasons".

Two other beliefs came up regarding reluctance to share materials. One is that sharing material "tends to result in a few people doing all the work and most teachers just free riding." One more explanation is that "each teacher and class is different and custom written materials rarely work well with other teachers or classes".

Fortunately, a fair number of writers reported both appreciating and being comfortable sharing ideas. "I am very comfortable sharing materials with others and looking at theirs. I like to brainstorm with others actually, the best work is usually

the result of collaborating with others," responded one writer.

The question of what would make writers feel more comfortable sharing materials elicited a diverse range of answers. Acknowledgement and copyright protection were mentioned again. Two people expressed that constructive feedback would increase their comfort level. ne explained, "The chance to improve my ideas and listen to others suggestions would be very useful". Fairness and reciprocity in the sharing process is a necessity for several respondents. One of whom replied that a "more-or-less two-way exchange – give and take" would make the

"organize events and publications that will be highly regarded by others, both inside and outside Japan".

Respondents reported a variety of other important needs. Several focused on their wish for help with on-line materials writing and publishing, print on demand publishing, and the creation of reading and listening materials. One writer expressed, "for me the major thing is helping teachers select and adapt commercial texts to their classes and write supplementary material for that". Another respondent wrote, "I'd like to see more connections made with publishers, especially Japanese".

> *A significant number of respondents hope that the Materials Writers group will work together on a collaborative project.*

writer feel more at ease.

Many writers repeatedly expressed their desire for materials sharing to be a social experience in answers to the above question about comfort and to the question of what would writers want our Materials Writers group to do. For example, seven people focused on a need to get together in groups for support and feedback. One wrote, "We need to know each other more." Another came up with the idea to "organize a weekend retreat, possibly one in W. Japan and one in E. Japan". In connection with that idea, one writer asked for "a ryokan, beer, and time". One writer expressed that he likes the way our group has been "evolving into a mutual morale-support group".

A significant number of respondents hope that the Materials Writers group will work together on a collaborative project, for example, to "produce an academic text which discusses the main issues in MW development as it affects Japan today," "create a book(s) on material writing," and

To our credit, our group is already doing a few things that satisfy the needs of some members. As one writer observed, "I think from the Yahoo mailing list I look at, it is fulfilling the purpose that many teachers already want". Our group was asked to "continue events like those at JALT05" and to "continue the MSIG webpage...it is an excellent venue to keep abreast of things that everyone else is doing".

Four questions of the survey focused on the Materials Creation Contest: Did you enter the Materials Creation Contest?; Did you feel motivated or stimulated by the Materials Creation Contest?; Did you read the comments by Marc Helgesen?; Did you read any of the entries of the Materials Creation Contest? After the contest ended, many people expressed an interest in continuing it in some form or another. Anyone planning to facilitate a similar event in the future should examine the answers to the above questions.

There were considerably fewer negative

comments than positive comments. Nonetheless, those negative comments are important. Three respondents expressed an aversion to contests. One explained, "I do not like establishing losers or winners, there may be many good materials but only a limited number of winners, etc". Several people did not believe that the contest would benefit them or that the contest matched their professional interests. "Unless the judge can visit my classes and give feedback, there is not much value in their comments," explained one writer. Two people felt that their materials are "too different to be compared." Some respondents who wanted to participate did not enter the contest because of bad timing. One writer did not submit to the contest because of a lack of confidence.

Two people articulated strong dissatisfaction with the format of the contest. "I did not feel that it was fairly set up," wrote one respondent. Another explained, "This particular contest would have been better labeled 'what would be the best textbook proposal' – rather than a material creation contest. The winner and the criteria for judgment were highly publisher-biased."

On the other hand, the contest stimulated writing activity and sharing. The activity level of our group increased dramatically during the Materials Creation Contest. Eleven entries were submitted to the contest and at least three of them were collaborative entries. Thirty-six people signed up as members of the Yahoo Group site that we used for uploading the contest entries.

Respect for Marc Helgesen's achievements as a materials creator and teacher trainer clearly stimulated involvement in the contest. Eight out of nine explanations for why respondents read his feedback on the contest entries referred in whole or in part to his professional experience as a published textbook author. A representative comment was "I know Marc has a lot of experience in

writing textbooks, so I am interested to see what he has to say".

Respondents wrote that giving support to other materials writers and learning from others were reasons for reading the contest entries. One respondent explained that they had read the entries "because (1) I was interested in what people had done with the concept and (2) to support the entrants".

The social aspect of the contest was a motivating factor according to seven people. One person expressed being motivated "because it was the first time there was a collaborative effort to share in a public way". The involvement of many people in this project drew others into it. "If others can do this, I should be able to do as well...this was an extra boost of motivation for me," responded one.

The simple existence of the contest seemed to provide motivation. "It is easier to do something when provided with an opportunity," expressed one writer. Another expressed that he or she just "needed motivation." "I like contests" wrote one person.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A majority of the respondents to this survey want to share ideas, collaborate, and learn from each other, but a variety of concerns are limiting these activities. In other words, our professional development is restricted by our worries.

Regarding copyright worries, we can reduce the possibility that someone might copy if everyone puts a copyright mark on each page of their shared material, and if we create an atmosphere of trust. Perhaps every member of the group could sign a document promising to respect the work of others. Copyright issues can and should be often discussed in our communications and events.

Everyone with a lack of confidence should

keep in mind the uniqueness of their own experiences as teachers, materials developers, and students. Their insights, problems, and solutions are just as valuable as those of teachers with over thirty years of experience. Moreover, experienced teachers often need to be reminded of points that they have forgotten. Responding to the questions and comments of less experienced teachers helps more experienced teachers to consciously understand and articulate what they instinctively do in the classroom.

Concerns that some people are not contributing fairly to a collaborative activity might be reduced if the expectations of each contributor is clearly spelled out in the form of some sort of written or verbal agreement. However, we must sometimes accept that others have very valid personal reasons (e.g., illness, family problems) for not contributing as much. In the future, they may help more.

Members of our group focus on different aspects of materials writing; therefore, we have different needs. It would be helpful if those members with a particular interest, such as online publishing or listening tasks, would announce that to the group and for those with similar interests to communicate about their interests. One respondent succinctly wrote about the benefits of doing so, "If I can help another teacher with similar aims by sharing, that is nice too, and I can learn in the process also of sharing and also of feeling bolstered by someone else's enthusiasm."

Perhaps, the group could create official positions for members whose duties are to promote activities for narrow sections of the materials development field: a listening materials officer; an on-line publishing officer, etc. Their duties would be to facilitate activities for those areas. An official responsibility is a motivating factor for some people. Officials could add their titles and duties to their resumes. Improving one's resume is a motivating factor for many teachers in our field.

The Materials Creation Contest motivated a large number of people. It was clearly not perfect, but if another person or preferably a small group of people (as it requires a lot of work) were to do it again after evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the format of the first one, the next contest could be better. Those who are uncomfortable with contests can create alternative activities of their own design.

The responses to both sections of the survey indicate that most of the materials writers in Japan are working without professional development opportunities in the workplace. Where can materials writers turn? The Materials Writers Special Interest Group can be the answer, but the group will only be as good as the sum of all of the energy and time that the individual members give it. A lack of time was often mentioned by respondents as a restrictive factor. However, imagine what the group could do and how it could develop if each member were to devote just a few hours in one year to an activity: asking questions to others, giving feedback to others, writing an article for BTK, referring textbooks, arranging a social event, editing the work of another member, etc. The potential for self-development and for the MWSIG to become a major force in professional development is high if we overcome what are mostly self-imposed limitations.

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Comprehension Questions
and the whole issue of checking understanding
Marc Helgesen, Miyagi Women's University

Most textbooks limit reading tasks to answering a few questions. There is no emphasis on reading for pleasure, the reason that most of us read magazines and books. Also important is the nature of the questions. They're usually limited to literal comprehension. That's a problem since they don't teach English -- they only test. And they actually don't test much. Try this. Read the sentence below. Then, answer the comprehension questions.

The glorfs drebbled quarfly.

Q1. (grammar analysis)
  a. Which word is the subject?
  b. Which is the verb?
  c. What part of speech is quarfly?
Q2. What did the glorfs do?
Q3. How did they do it?

Answers: 1a. glorfs, 1b. drebbled, 1c. adverb, 2. They drebbled. 3. Quarfly.

Most teachers (and students) can get all the answers correct. Think about it. You answered perfectly questions about a sentence of nonsense words -- a sentence with no meaning. The problem, of course, is the nature of literal comprehension questions. Normally, they can be answered without thinking; without even understanding the meaning. There's a hierarchy of levels of comprehension questions. Unfortunately, literal comprehension questions, the most common type, tell us the least. If students get them right, we don't know if they really understood or just matched the words. If they get a question wrong, did they misunderstand the text or misunderstand the question? Since the questions come at the end, maybe they didn't know what they were supposed to find out. Or maybe they understood it but didn't think it was important so forgot by the time they got to the question.

Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension

5. Appreciation
   (Highest) Students give an emotional or image-based response.
4. Evaluation
   Students make judgments in light of the material.
3. Inference
   Students respond to information implied but not directly stated.
2. Reorganization
   Students organize or order the information a different way than it was presented.
1. Literal
   (Lowest) Students identify information directly stated.

Based on Barrett, 1968. Cited in Reading in a foreign language, Alderson & Uquart, Longman. 1984.

Does this mean "literal comprehension" is unimportant? Of course not. It's basic, both as a low-level test of understanding and because this is the most common type of

question on tests (whether we like the tests or not, they are the key to our students' future and we have to prepare them). So let's look at some ways to really check comprehension, at various levels. I should mention that I'm assuming that the following activities come near the beginning of working with a particular reading text. These activities are meaning-based and should come early on. If you are going to do other non-reading tasks (translation, grammar analysis, etc.), those can come later.

Literal

For all their limitations, these questions are important. They're the kind learners meet most often. At minimum, teach the students to read the questions before they read the passage. This is important since it increases reading speed and is an important test taking skill. One good way to do this is to make copies of the questions and answers from the Teacher's Manual. Have learners work in groups of 4-6. They open their books to the first page of the unit and turn the book face down on the desk. Ask the first question twice (you want to make sure everyone understands the question). When you say, "Go!", students look at the text and scan for the correct answer. The first student to find it shows everyone where it is. S/he gets one point. Once learners understand the activity, have them do it in groups. One learner, the "quizmaster", gets the question/answer sheet. S/he asks and other students try to find the answers.

Reorganization

Do a "jig-saw" reading. Before class, take a section (1-2 pages) and cut the paragraphs apart. Put them on the copy machine in the wrong order. It helps to put a box next to each paragraph for learners to write the numbers. It is also easier if you tell them which paragraph is first. Learners read and try to put the paragraphs in order. This shows you that they've not only understood the words, they also understand the organization and relationships between ideas. In textbooks books for high beginners on up, this is fairly easy to do. In lower level books many of the readings are dialogs that don't contain many hints as to the flow of discourse/ organization. For that reason, it is best to divide them between them like this: Question (Q) // Answer (A), Q // A, Q// A, Q (etc.).

Inference

This is where many students can't make the jump. Much of reading is really "reading between the lines." Learners need to understand what the ideas behind the information in the text. One good way to help them infer is to have the read part of the story. Stop them at a critical point and, in pairs have them predict what will happen next. Another way to make use of those readings about modern day "saints" (Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Gandhi, etc.). Write a series of statements not from the text. Some are things the person would agree with. Others are things they wouldn't say (e.g., about Dr. King, "It is wrong to hurt people." "You might have to disobey the law if the law is wrong." "If the law is wrong, and bad people try to make you follow it, it is OK to hurt them."). Have the students read the text and mark those they think the character would agree with (in the examples, the first two would have been OK with Dr. King, the last one was wrong in his eyes.")

Evaluation

This label sounds more difficult than it is. It just means deciding fact/opinion, same/ different, etc. Later, if you want, it can higher level decisions like agree/disagree or good/ bad. For example, in the JHS books, have the learners look at each character. Which character are the students (individually) the

most similar too? Why? To be able to answer includes a high degree of understanding.

Appreciation

This is my favorite, not because it's the most sophisticated (though it is). I love it for its simplicity. After a reading, simply ask the students, "Did you like this story or not? Why?" Being able to answer is a true test of understanding. One good way to get at this is to ask each learner to draw a picture of on scene from the story. (Since students sometimes spend a great deal of time trying to make their pictures perfect, it is helpful to forbid erasers and limit them to five minutes. This is English, not art class.). Then they turn to the person next to them and explain the pictures (in either English or their native language), ending with the sentence. "I liked/ didn't like the story because…"

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Appendix

The following was not part of the article as it originally appeared. For people interested in Barrett's taxonomy, it may be useful.

Note: The taxonomy was introduced at a conference in 1968. It dealt with reading although the ideas apply to listening as well. Some of the ideas may be dated (c.f., 1.2. The idea of checking comprehension for a written text by recalling it from memory might be questioned), it is still a good guide to the levels at which we are trying to measure comprehension. It was cited in Alderson & Urquhart (1984) although only the main categories were listed. What follows is a handout I got from Jack Richards. The specific source wasn't listed. It appears to be a conference handout. (Note that this order is reversed from the one earlier.)

1. Literal comprehension (concern with information stated explicitly in the text)

    1.1 Recognition (locate specific information stated explicitly)

        Recognition of details (names of characters, places, times) /

        Recognition of main ideas

        Recognition of a sequence

        Recognition of comparison (identify similarities among characters, places and names)

        Recognition of cause and effect relationships

        Recognition of character traits

    1.2 Recall (produce from memory ideas stated explicitly)

        Recall of details

        Recall of main ideas

        Recall of a sequence

        Recall of comparisons

        Recall of cause and effect relationships

2. Reorganization (analyzing, synthesizing, and organizing information that has been stated explicitly)

      2.1 Classifying (placing persons, things, and places into groups)

      2.2 Outlining (organizing a selection in outline form)

      2.3 Summarizing (paraphrasing or condensing a selection)

      2.4 Synthesizing (consolidating information from more than a single source.)

3. Inferential comprehension (using information explicitly stated along with one's own personal experience as a basis for conjecture and hypothesis.

      3.1 Inferring supporting details (suggesting additional facts that might have made the selection more informative, interesting or appealing)

      3.2 Inferring main ideas (providing the main idea when it is not stated explicitly)

      3.3 Inferring sequence (conjecturing about what might have happened or will happen when no explicit statements are included in the text)

      3.4 inferring comparisons

      3.5 Inferring cause and effect relationships (inferring the author's intentions, motivations, or characters)

      3.6 Inferring character traits (hypothesizing characteristics of persons)

      3.7 Predicting outcomes (predicting what will happen as a result of reading part of the text.

      3.8 Interpreting figurative language (inferring literal meanings from the figurative use of language).

4. Evaluation (judgments and decisions concerning value and worth)

      4.1 Judgments of reality or fantasy (judging whether an event is possible)

      4.2 Judgments of fact or opinion (distinguishing between supported and unsupported data)

      4.3 Judgments of adequacy and validity (judging whether information in a text agrees with other sources of information)

      4.4 Judgments of appropriateness (determining relative adequacy of different parts of a selection in answering specific questions).

      4.5 Judgments of worth, desirability, and acceptability (decisions of good, bad, right and wrong)

5. Appreciation (psychological and aesthetic impact of the text on the reader)

      5.1 Emotional response to content (verbalizing feelings about the selections)

      5.2 Identification with characters or incidents (demonstrating sensitivity to or empathy with characters or events)

      5.3 Reactions to the author's use of language (responding to the author's ability to created language)

      5.4 Imagery (verbalizing feelings produced by the author's selection of words that produce visual, auditory, etc. sensations or images)

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MW-SIG Resources

MW-SIG Web Site   http://uk.geocities.com/materialwritersig/index.html

The site contains articles on topics ranging from copyright to desktop publishing techniques, an extensive list of publishers including contact information, tutorials and software recommendations, and information on submission requirements for *Between the Keys*.

MW-SIG Yahoo! Group   http://groups.yahoo.com/group/jaltmwsig/

The Yahoo! Groups site houses our discussion list, a database of members' publications, a file repository for sharing work and ideas, a space for photos, and the ability to conduct polls, create a calendar, and have a live chat session.

Let's make 2006 a year of renewed vigor and activity!

On the Inside

The Materials Writers SIG is dedicated to continually raising the standards in the creation of language teaching materials, in all languages and in all media, whether for general consumption or for individual classroom use. The editors encourage participation from colleagues using new media or teaching languages other than English.

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