

Between the Keys

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Coordinator's Column

Greg Goodmacher
MW-SIG Coordinator

I am the new coordinator of the MW group, and I believe that the most important part of my role will be to encourage the membership to be more active. My hopes for this group are that our newsletter will be full of great articles, reports, and other forms of sharing, that our Yahoo Group Site will be utilized by many members asking and answering questions of each other, that many members will give presentations related to writing and publishing teaching materials, and that we will all help each other. The one thread that connects all of my hopes is the concept of 'sharing'.

Our membership includes internationally published authors, locally published authors, self-published authors, people who want to be authors, editors, teachers, and students.

We have all of the resources that we need to develop ourselves personally and professionally, but, unfortunately, many of us are too shy or too protective of our work to share. Let's make the most of each other! If you have questions, ask them. If you need help, request help. If you are proud of your work, share your work. This is the time of the year to think about New Year's Resolutions. Why not resolve to be a bit more active in this group? If everyone is just a little more active, the entire group will be incredibly active, and that would greatly benefit all of us.

BtK

From the Editor

Simon Cooke
Publications Chair

Dear readers,

With the end of 2009 upon us, I'm sure many of us are reflecting upon the professional ups and downs of the last year and/or decade. I hope that the majority of those reflections are positive ones. The Materials Writers SIG has been undergoing some upheaval this year, with the unfortunate result that this will be only the second issue to be published in 2009. In just the last couple of months however, the officers have begun to regroup and we are looking forward to some exciting developments for the publication in 2010. To compensate for the paucity of issues of BtK in 2009, at least FOUR issues will be produced in 2010, featuring some new features which are sure to inspire and interest you.

As always, we welcome any submission for consideration and are looking forward to your contributions in 2010. The next issue is scheduled for March 2010.

Submissions should be sent to the editor at: publications@materialswriters.org to arrive by early February. For further details, please refer to our webpage at: <http://www.materialswriters.org/>

This issue brings a flurry of activity from teachers and learning advisors at Kanda University of International Studies, located in Chiba. Katherine Thornton details measures aimed at encouraging student involvement at the university's Self-Access Learning Centre, Thomas Lockley reflects upon use of global issues in creating resources for the develop-

ment of language classes in the UK and Bob Morrison details the benefits of introducing a “genre approach” to writing classes.

From all here at BtK, we hope you had a very Merry Christmas and best wishes for 2010.

BtK

Materials for self-directed learning: getting students involved

Katherine Thornton, Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba

The Self Access Learning Centre (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) has over 10,000 resources, including textbooks and self-study books, reference materials such as dictionaries and grammar books, CALL software, graded readers and more ‘authentic’ texts such as novels, magazines, DVDs, screenplays, audiobooks and music CDs. It also contains a significant quantity of in-house materials, designed specifically with our students in mind by teachers and advisors. These range from strategy worksheets, DVDs of cookery and other activities introduced in English by teachers, to pathway and supplementary worksheets designed to make existing authentic texts such as movies and TV dramas more accessible to learners.

As a centre whose *raison d’être* is promoting learner autonomy, advisors working in the SALC often struggle with the degree to which student voices may, at times, be missing from the centre, stifled by the sea of published materials. A major contribution that can be made from students is in the materials design and evaluation process. As they are the ones who will be selecting and using the materials, it is only right that their contributions and ideas are properly represented at all stages of development. In this way, we hope to foster a sense of ownership of the SALC among its student users, a vital part of what makes a self access centre successful.

This article details the ways in which-

students have successfully been involved in the materials design and evaluation process at KUIS, and suggests other ways in which their contributions could be encouraged in the future. It is hoped that the examples given below may provide food for thought for other teachers and educators, whether working in a self-access environment or a classroom environment.

Students as the subject of materials

In line with its stated mission of developing learner autonomy, the SALC contains a section called Learning How to Learn in which language learning strategy sheets, books on language learning and other tools to help develop learners’ metacognitive skills are featured.

One of the major projects implemented by the advising team in this section is a set of DVD and videos called Good Language Learners, in which students identified by advisors or teachers as “good” independent language learners are interviewed and filmed. These DVDs have been divided into skill areas and are available for other students to watch.

In these short (6-10min) interviews, done entirely in English, students discuss their beliefs about language learning, their learning histories and any particular strategies that they have found successful. A worksheet that goes

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with this resource asks students to respond to the content of the video and relate it to their own language learner goals and study style, helping them engage more deeply with the materials and apply them to their own situation.

Murphey (1996) argues that the near-peer, a role model who shares a similar age and background with the learner, may play a more powerful role in motivating a student than an 'expert' teacher with whom they have little in common. Learning Advisors often give similar advice to that offered by students in the videos, or share their own language learning experiences with learners, and many learners appreciate and value this 'expert' advice, but others may be more likely to listen to and respect the views and experiences of their near-peers. This may be particularly true in Japan where the role of one's sempai is deeply respected. Written reactions from students who have watched some interviews and completed the accompanying worksheet, show that the 'if they can do it, so can I' motivating factor is very much present in students who feel that the tips and advice are immediately relevant and useful for their own situation, as they can see evidence of success in the English conversational skills of the interviewee.

While the Good Language Learner DVDs are an example of an audio-video material, a written resource using students as subjects is the SALC newsletter, which appears 4 times a year. While currently written and edited by advisors and other staff, student voices feature heavily. Recent articles have included A Day in the SALC, in which students largely unfamiliar with the Self-Access Centre gave their impressions after using various resources and sections, and articles on good language learners similar to the DVDs mentioned above. This newsletter is fully bilingual and can be used for reading comprehension and as a vocabulary resource, as well as providing accessible advice on using

the centre effectively. There are also plans to get students even more involved in the newsletter as writers and designers.

Students as promoters

Although Learning Advisors and teachers have their own ideas on which materials in the SALC may be useful for learners, this is no substitute for the opinions of learners who have actually used resources and found success with them. Projects currently running which are aimed at giving voice to these valuable student opinions include graded reader and movie reviews.

All our graded readers contain a quick form on the inside of the back cover in which students are asked to give a star rating and a quick, one line comment about the book they've read, which can be consulted by other students looking to borrow a book. Movie reviews written by students in classes are also available in DVD cases, with spaces for further student comments to be made by others who watch the movie. These kind of materials, especially the movie reviews in which students share personal responses to the films they have seen, are an example of what Tomlinson (1998) terms access-self materials, in which students are given opportunities to complete open-ended tasks which involve a greater degree of self-expression than the controlled, language focused activities which are traditionally popular in self access centres. Instead, learners are given space to reflect and express their own opinions.

While these projects are a good start, we are keen to expand the ways in which recommendations and reviews of materials can be made more readily available for other students to read, and guide their material selection. Ideas currently in the pipeline include:

Giving students quick feedback forms when materials are returned to the counter. The information collected could be included in the SALC newsletter, published online

on the SALC website or displayed in the SALC.

Making an online materials blog or wiki available for students to contribute to.

Providing student written book reviews. Many teachers require students to write book reviews as part of their extensive reading classes. There are plans to display good examples of these in the reading section along with simple worksheets, or with spaces for students who have also read the book to add their own opinions.

Students as evaluators

When teaching materials are designed for use in the language classroom, the teacher can get immediate feedback on how successful they have been, through their own reflection on having used the materials and by seeking student reactions, either indirectly by observing the materials in use, or directly by asking the students for their reactions. Such materials will often be developed and improved gradually, with the teacher making changes based on experience of using them and adapting them for different classes. In a Self-Access Centre, students are the primary users of materials, usually with little or no teacher input, and therefore any in-house materials, and some published ones, must be piloted extensively before being placed permanently on the shelves.

Both teachers and learning advisors are responsible for developing and adapting materials, and both teacher and student feedback is gathered during the development process. First, proposals are made and then accepted, with or without suggested improvements, by the SALC director. After an initial material has been designed, teacher and advisor feedback is sought before a second draft is piloted by students. Students are asked for their opinions on all aspects of the materials, from their appearance, content, interest and difficulty level, to the clarity of instructions

and language used. Only then do successful materials enter the final production phase. Recent projects involving student piloting and feedback include song worksheets, podcast-based materials and CALL materials using Skype.

In the case of published materials, less self-access friendly materials may be piloted by students to find out how advisors can provide simple instructions or worksheets which can make the materials easier to use. Creating such pathways is an important step in ensuring that students can use the centre successfully. While adaptations of existing published materials are often desirable, copyright restrictions often make this option impossible.

Students as writers

Both independently and as homework and class activities, students are also involved in the SALC as materials writers. Student-developed materials, which, if made in class, are often seen by no one but their teacher, can be excellent resources for learners, and I would encourage all teachers, working in any environment, to take advantage of their students' creativity and make such work accessible to as many people as possible, even if they are not lucky to have access to a ready-made centre that can display such materials. Students can also be involved in designing the tasks which may accompany such resources, in ways such as writing comprehension questions for reading or listening resources or thinking of extension tasks for further writing or speaking.

Making student-made materials available for other students to use as learning resources adds an extra dimension to the development process, as their design becomes a more authentic task, with students understanding that their work will be displayed and used by other students. This can be a powerful motivating force for students, pushing them

to produce excellent work. Such materials, because they are student-written, contain language that is naturally graded to provide comprehensible input for other students, and are more likely to appeal to the interests of the student body, as they have been produced by students themselves, not by teachers or professional materials writers 20 years their senior who can only guess at what may be of interest to university students.

Examples of such materials currently available in the SALC include: movie reviews, singer/band biographies and student-made magazines, with articles researched, written and illustrated entirely by students. Another example is the student scrapbook, in which students are encouraged to contribute pages about their holidays using photos, captions and stickers. Other students can then comment on the pages they see. There are also plans to create a database of student writing in different genres, possibly in corpus form. Student models can be powerful tools in promoting better writing skills (Flowerdew 2000), and if these are accompanied by worksheets to help students focus on certain features, or made available as a concordance programme that students can access directly, it is hoped that students will see the benefit of learning from each other rather than relying exclusively on teacher feedback in their writing.

Students as users

Finally, maybe the most obvious way in which students are involved in materials in the SALC is as its primary customers. Students choose and borrow resources that they feel are useful to them, and are able to request materials that they would like to be made available, which the SALC can then purchase if considered suitable.

Faced with such a vast selection of materials, however, many students find it challenging to select suitable materials. This process is made easier for them in two ways:

1. By organizing materials clearly:
 - a. Through well-signposted skill sections
 - b. Through colour-coded difficulty levels (with coloured stickers on every resource)
2. By educating students in choosing appropriate resources, through self study modules and class workshops.

Being able to select suitable materials is one of the characteristics of a good independent language learner (Rubin & Thompson 1996), and is one of the areas focused on in SALC modules designed to enhance learner autonomy. In such modules or workshops, students are encouraged to set specific study goals based on their language learning needs, and to keep these in mind when choosing resources. They are also encouraged to consider other factors such as the difficulty level and their own level of interest in the subject material. They are taught to look at blurbs and pictures, tables of contents, and to check a sample unit before borrowing a potentially useful material. In this way, learners can make better decisions about the resources they use and be more successful in their language learning.

Conclusion

KUIS is very proud of its Self-Access Learning Centre and the services and resources it provides for students, but more can always be done to make the centre as user-friendly as possible. While many smaller SACs on lower budgets may rely more on student help to keep the centre running, Kanda is fortunate to be able to staff its centre entirely with professionals. While this is undoubtedly a good thing, some of the potential for greater student involvement may have been lost in this desire for professionalism. One way of promoting a sense of ownership of the SALC among students is to find as many opportunities for student involvement as possible, and the materials design process is an ideal focus for such involvement. As materials subjects,

promoters, evaluators, but most importantly as materials writers and users, students can make a valuable contribution to the centre and play an active role in their own language development.

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BTK

How global issues made compulsory language lessons compulsive

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This article will present a series of resources developed by a teacher of Modern Foreign Languages in an English comprehensive school (non-selective, ages 11-16) and will argue that these resources increased motivation and overall learning, while increasing students' awareness of global issues.

Background

In 2007 the UK government published the findings of a report by Lord Dearing called the Languages Review. It had been commissioned to investigate reverse the decline of modern foreign languages (MFL) learning in English educational institutions.

Lord Dearing's conclusions were damning and shook the very foundations of language learning in English schools. The report found that the MFL curriculum in England in 2007 lacked age appropriateness, relation to real-life scenarios, sufficient cognitive challenges for higher achievers and incentives for less-motivated learners.

The report recommended that to "Improve the experience of learning a language for

pupils, to increase the motivation to learn, and to enhance pedagogy [schools need to have] more varied languages [on] offer with a range of appropriate outcomes (assessments), the possibility to recognise and celebrate achievement in small steps and engaging curricular content (including links with the real world in which the language is spoken)" (Dearing 2007 p.8).

In almost all developed countries, a foreign language is compulsory until at least the age of sixteen.¹ The English national curriculum, which had long specified a modern foreign language as a compulsory part of secondary education until the age of sixteen, dropped that requirement in 2004. MFL tuition is still required until 14 however, and languages will soon become a necessary part of the primary school curriculum.

The current situation

English schools are free to choose their own text books from those published or to make up their own course of study. In surveys carried out during the making of the resources in this study, students almost unanimously complained about the text books, saying that

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they are childish, boring, uninspiring and unconnected with their daily lives. The text books published are often full of cartoons, which attract 11-year-olds, but by the age of 13 can seem very childish. As Tomlinson points out, “textbook selected mainly because of its attractive appearance could turn out to be very boring for the learners to use” (Tomlinson 2003 p.22).

The MFL curriculum in the comprehensive school where this article is based, had typically followed a pattern in which vocabulary and grammar were taught by topic. A class would typically study between four and six topics a year and then re-visit similar topics the following year in a more complicated form. Vocabulary was normally not reinforced in subsequent units, so the students had often forgotten it by the time they were asked to undertake a similar topic the following year. Grammar was often taught in an explicit way rather than being embedded and was sometimes shied away from altogether. Furthermore, emphasis was often placed upon vocabulary and single words, rather than building understanding and fluency throughout the course.

Why and How the Global Issues Resources were developed

The school in which these resources were developed was approached by an educational charity called Leeds Development Education Centre (DEC), with the aim of promoting global awareness across the curriculum in schools in the Yorkshire region. The Charity’s aim is to increase awareness of global issues and areas of the world currently ignored in standard English school curricula. Their guidelines are based on the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, following the idea that if students become more aware of globally recognised problems, they will become

better global citizens. Leeds DEC offered subject-specific training for teachers, some resources and a forum in which to share ideas with other language teachers.

This training, coupled with a previous training session on ‘The storyline approach to language teaching’² inspired the composition of stories (written in the target language) based on imaginary characters, situated in various countries around the world talking about issues in their everyday lives. The stories were constructed so that they use, expand on and re-enforce the vocabulary that the curriculum demands. The issues pertain to deal with ‘real’ characters and deal with various socio-economic constraints that it was thought the students might be able to relate to easily, such as the lack of access to education, or poverty. The characters are made more ‘real’ in that photos and maps detail where they live. Colourful, culturally interesting photos often expand on and support the texts.

Where possible age-appropriate cultural insights are included, like the eating of guinea pig for Christmas in South America or that Japanese teachers rarely challenge the use of mobile phones in class (mobile phones are banned from most English schools). These parts of the stories proved particularly popular among students.

Each story is connected with a unit from the conventional language text book. The unit on ‘house and home’ changes focus to talk about poor housing and lack of material possessions in Paraguay; the unit about animals and family becomes the story of a girl called Isabella living on a farm in Chile; the chapter relating to food examines eating customs in Japan and Nigeria; the unit on transport deals with China and India; and a chapter on body parts is linked to the civil war in Sierra Leone where thousands of victims had limbs cut off by rebel militia during the 1990’s.

The resources normally include elements of reading comprehension, sometimes in Eng-

lish and sometimes in the target language. Extension work often comprises a 'find the ... in the text' exercise, which picks out conjugations of verbs and parts of speech. As much as possible, the resources cater to different learning styles: some questions might ask students to draw pictures illustrating what they have read while others allow students to choose their own activities based on the text. Finally, for high achievers or quick workers there is a translation challenge.

At all stages students are encouraged to work things out for themselves or discuss their ideas with another student, with the aim of increasing autonomy, teamwork, motivation and confidence in the language studied.

The issues raised were dealt with in a plenary at the end of the lesson (normally in English), where students shared their reaction to and opinions of the topics covered. Students were asked to make connections with other subjects in their curriculum, especially geography, citizenship, history and science.

The Limitations and Results of this Study

These resources were not developed with the aim of carrying out an academic study and their value has yet to be fully assessed using a conventional academic methodology or survey group. However, in existing practice, from limited class-room surveys and such alternative evidence as the comparative grades recorded in the teacher's mark book, the appeal and success of these resources is strongly suggested. The grades showed students that were taking part in lessons based on the Global Issues Resources performed consistently well in tests, with often the majority of the class obtaining the higher levels attainable at their stage. Teachers also found that the same classes seemed to demonstrate better motivation and an improved atmosphere than when not using the resources.

The surveys indicated that the storylines

drew the students in, and their mentally challenging nature (remembering previously learned vocabulary, finding new vocabulary, working out the conjugation of a verb to answer a question correctly) maintained interest. In the area of verb conjugation, students appeared to show a marked improvement in their overall performance and understanding. Vocabulary retention also appeared to improve.

The highest and the lowest achievers in particular were very motivated by the resources. When questioned, the higher achievers reported finding the more difficult activities, in particular the translation, very satisfying. Many responded by showing a real sense of achievement at the amount of output writing (as much as two or three pages in an exercise book when a normal language lesson might comprise less than a page).

Lower achievers indicated that they liked being able to choose the level and type of exercise they wanted to carry out as well as the opportunity to work with and share opinions with their peers. The potential problem of copying and cheating rarely appeared, it seemed that students were interested enough in the stories to want to find out for themselves.

The resources were not universally popular. Initially almost all students were very interested, but some classes and students appeared to lose interest after doing two or more stories - what might be termed 'poverty fatigue'. This manifested itself in comments such as: 'not another one of these' and 'I don't want to learn about poor people anymore'. Despite this minority of negative responses, the global issues resources proved very popular.

Conclusion

For the author of this paper, the materials concentrating on global issues, made the job

of teaching compulsory languages to often unwilling students more interesting, more fulfilling and easier. The lessons became more involved, autonomous and compelling for most students and language levels for the students involved appeared to improve. As students were more motivated and involved in the learning, less time and energy had to be given to behaviour management, thereby allowing the teacher more time to work with individual students.

Given Dearing's findings in *The Languages Review*, such an approach to language teaching and learning could prove crucial to the future of language education in the England and informative for many people beyond its borders. At the very least it deserves deeper scrutiny as one possible way to revive the flagging fortunes of Modern Foreign Languages in English schools.

If you would like to view, use or translate these resources for use in different language classes, they are available at <http://www.tes.co.uk/resourcehub.aspx?navcode=70> type "global schools" in the keywords box. I would welcome any questions or comments you have on their implementation.

Footnotes

1. Australia. The Republic of Ireland, Canada and New Zealand all teach national languages in their schools, Gaelic, French/ English and Maori respectively, but do not specify that a foreign language is necessary.
2. Developed by Steve Bell, Sallie Harkness and Fred Rendell at the Faculty of Education of the University of Strathclyde Glasgow (then Jordanhill College of Education). The method, usually used in primary education, employs stories to make learning more interesting. Although it often involves the students in the development of the stories, the resources discussed in this paper only occasionally involved students, rather using the stories themselves to make learning more interesting.

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Writing for writing: Implementing a genre approach in materials design

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I have been involved with teaching English for Academic Purposes and IELTS for several years now. Moving into this area required me, inevitably, to teach a lot of writing. Having used numerous course books on the market, I became weary of teaching students to write 'hooks' and pushing paragraph concluding sentences when I knew that I never used these in my own academic writing. Given my dissatisfaction with commercially available material such as *Reason to Write* (Colonna & Gilbert, 2006), *Writing Academic English* (Oshima & Hogue, 2006) and *Effective Academic Writing 2* (Savage & Mayer, 2005), I started to produce my own or cherry-pick and adapt from certain parts of the textbooks, i.e. those which do not present an academic style unique to the book.

The problem is that some writing textbooks perpetuate myths about what EAP writing actually is (Harwood, 2005). *Writing Academic English* (Oshima & Hogue, 2006), for example, presents unauthentic examples specifically written to exemplify prescriptive rules. Rather than this example-written-for-the-rule approach to producing writing materials, I advocate taking a genre-based approach to materials production integrating multiple exemplars, which I shall argue for using my experience of developing a distance writing course for the IELTS exam as an IELTS teacher and examiner. It is important to bear in mind that although this article deals with IELTS writing, the same framework can be used with any kind of genre-specific writing course from written business communication to EAP genres.

The two main approaches that tend to

be debated when discussing the teaching of writing are process and genre. The process approach focuses on writers and the various processes they go through before the text reaches the finished stage. The genre approach, by contrast, focuses on the readers and their expectations. In all writing, to write in a way which is inappropriate to a particular situation impacts on the intended communicative purpose, with exam takers the outcome is underperformance.

Some critics of genre approaches claim it stifles creativity and muffles personal voice. However, making genres explicit is not inherently prescriptive. Genres do restrict us, whether they are postcards or laboratory reports, and to argue against genre restriction is disingenuous (Hyland, 2005). A genre that does not restrict is not a genre. Likewise, a successful piece of writing may flout conventions, but its success is in knowing what the conventions are and how to flout them (Tribble, 2005; White, 2005). Within an exam situation, of course, flouting conventions is not recommended.

Having established why I advocate a genre approach, it is important to consider what this means in practice. There are two main points that differentiate process from genre when developing materials and teaching. The first is that the genre approach advocates providing models for the writer to analyze since genre conventions vary with several factors, not least of these being culture and language. It is therefore important that learners are aware of acceptable register and other conventions in their target genre. The second is explicit instruction, which is a cornerstone of the

genre approach. Previous exposure to target genres is not enough: there is no direct relationship that has been established between the amount read and the quality of students' written work. Although good writers are often prolific readers, prolific readers are not always good writers (Stainthorp, 2005). Exposure to a target genre is important, but explicit analysis is deemed necessary with this approach.

This outline of the genre approach and reasons for implementing it are not new (Derewianka, 2003), however sometimes moving from the rationale to implementation can be a little more problematic. Therefore to cast some more light on how this could be done, and to highlight a few of the pitfalls, I will describe the process I followed when producing the materials for a course.

The course was initially mapped out into two separate modules because, although there is a significant overlap in the academic style, there are still fundamental differences between the two writing tasks, for example, task 1 requires description of a diagram while task 2 is a discursive essay where justified opinion is sought. Due to these features, each task became 1 module which was then divided into five lessons and a syllabus designed based around the parts of IELTS essay writing that were important to the reader i.e. the four grading categories of task completion, coherence and cohesion, vocabulary, and grammar. Bearing in mind the common writing problems I have encountered when teaching and assessing IELTS in Japan, such as mechanical recounting of detail in task 1 and inadequate paragraphing in task 2, the end result was a syllabus which at its most basic followed the outline below.

Although there was separation in the syllabus outline, the lessons were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, certain salient points were not specifically referred to until later lessons but were nevertheless present in earlier

exempla and references to previous lessons to further illustrate a particular point were common.

Lesson 1

- Task 1 Introductory paragraph
- Task 2 Introductory paragraph

Lesson 2

- Task 1 Compare & contrast / Range of vocabulary / Paragraph organisation
- Task 2 Organising main paragraphs / paragraph transition / coherence and cohesion

Lesson 3

- Task 1 Describing trends / range of vocabulary / paragraph organisation
- Task 2 Lexical sophistication / synonymy / Academic Word List

Lesson 4

- Task 1 Describing a process / Signalling devices
- Task 2 Hedging / Complex grammar

Lesson 5

- Task 1 Describing a map / Summary paragraph
- Task 2 Concluding paragraph

As discussed previously, I had built up a bank of writing resources and this enabled me to integrate these into the materials I was writing. Of course, they needed adapting to guide the user but more importantly they contained no example IELTS essays, an integral part of a genre-based course. Therefore, I wrote numerous example essays in order that learners could then be led to investigate how the essays were constructed and the functions of the parts.

An analysis of students' previous essays allowed me to focus on aspects of the genre that were poorly dealt with. These writing samples gave a general notion of where learners could make the most improvement in the

shortest time. For example, in my experience it is not uncommon for a learner to write a one-sentence introductory paragraph, half of which is 'I agree with the opinion because...'. Therefore, by providing a variety of good introductory paragraphs and asking the learner to analyze these through a variety of exercises leading to a writing task, the learner can develop a greater understanding of the genre and attempt to emulate this.

As I finished worksheets, I trialed the new resources with a variety of one-to-one students in class. The first trials with the material were not as successful as envisioned. It soon became apparent that rather than provide a shining example of a carefully honed IELTS essay, my exemplar texts were impenetrable walls of words that had students reaching for their dictionaries. Not only had I produced essays that were too difficult for the learners, I had written them all – one of my criticisms of certain textbooks.

Although I have no doubt that I would have hit the maximum 9.0 on the IELTS with my piece of prose, the model I was providing was inappropriate. It dawned on me that Japanese students should not be aspiring to write like me and encouraging them to do so is to set them up to fail. After all, they are aiming for an IELTS score somewhere between 6.0 and 7.0. In addition, the learners have an outlook and worldview which reflects their age, upbringing and experience, just as these factors influence mine. Some ideas often overlap with my own outlook and worldview but general knowledge is rarely general and instead is culturally or regionally specific, therefore this is bound to influence the content.

It seemed like an opportune moment to apply what Tribble (2005) advocates when providing written models: rather than consider native-speaker texts, use good models by expert writers. In this case, expert writers could be viewed as those who had achieved IELTS 7.0 or higher. I had a few IELTS

examples by such learners which I had shown to other learners (with permission) to give an idea of what they were aiming for. I therefore corrected the minor linguistic errors in the texts and inserted these as the model texts in the materials I was producing. It soon became clear when piloting the materials in subsequent lessons that the language was clear and understandable; the ideas were familiar ideas and support focused on Japan, Asia and views that were familiar. My ideas and views, by contrast, reflected the beliefs of my peers, which I now understand to have been, at times, quite different from Japanese learners and their peers. To give an example, my essay on the merits of free education was replaced with the more common consensus in Japan that free education would be abused by lazy students.

The source of the models now decided, it was still important to consider how to get learners to use the material for their own means. As well as utilizing worksheets that, for example, isolated conjunctions and other signaling devices, explored the grammar and function through categorizing and gap-fills, there were other features in the model texts that could help students write more fluently within a genre if they could identify useful phrases, learn how to use them appropriately and memorize these for future writing. The two examples below could easily be part of an IELTS writing task 2 essay.

One of the main points to consider is that...

... has several advantages such as ...

Therefore the material encouraged students to underline words and phrases that they may use in their own writing. This means that genre-appropriate language can be lifted from a model, or even from their own essay submissions, for re-use in a later piece of writing. Learners are also encouraged to

build up a phrase bank. An on-line version of this is already available for students writing at university level with The University of Manchester's (2005) phrasebank and although the idea of encouraging or requiring students compile their own bank of phrases is not new, it is, in my experience not particularly common, perhaps because there is so much emphasis in EAP programmes on not plagiarizing.

Despite the apparent lack of uptake regarding student-compiled writing phrase books, it would seem that explicit learner awareness of multi-word units and the widespread use in language could allow students to move beyond a view of language as vocabulary slotted into grammar frames. As learners see that particular lexical units are used repeatedly and identify texts as belonging to a particular genre, they can be guided into using them. Encouraging learners to identify and integrate appropriate multi-word units not only has the potential to allow writers to increase their speed and add grammatical complexity, but perhaps more importantly, the writing looks more 'natural', it becomes appropriate for the genre and accepted by the discourse community to which the learner aspires.

Following the successful implementation of this material, the improvement in writing skills and the positive feedback from learners, when considering material production for writing it is worth giving serious thought to a genre-based approach integrating non-native exemplar texts. The restrictions on language and language use imposed by the register and genre could conceivably reassure the learner. The vastness of the English language becomes restricted and is used with a communicative purpose and social context, which may authenticate texts. As an informed materials writer, you can build an understanding of texts, raise awareness (both personal and for the learners), and inform learners. Grammar

becomes less central, yet remains important and is contextualized by the communicative purpose it performs and the effect it has on the reader.

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