From the Chair

Lea del Castillo, Multifunctional Resource Center

Aloha and Happy Halloween! (Hau'oi la 'BOO'!) When I last addressed you, we were in the process of tallying your responses to the questionnaires from last spring. We have completed that effort and have planned a year of activities we hope will address the many interests and concerns represented by our varied membership. Our first meeting of the year was well attended (and if you missed, you missed out!), and the topic, strategies for reflecting on our own teaching, is apparently one of interest to all of us, as evidenced by the "cooperative interaction" that transpired.

Political action was a concern expressed by almost everyone on the questionnaire, and our visit to Dr. Joshua Agsalud and Patricia Brandt of Governor Waihee's staff was an effort to begin to address these concerns. As a result of that visit, Lei Lani Hinds, the Standards and Employment and Political Action Committee Chair, has met with her committee to discuss an action plan.

The issue of the various ways to attack our problems was discussed at the October meeting, and the Standards Committee will be composing a position paper, to be printed here in The Word, for us to react to and decide how and whether or not we want to become involved.

Speaking of political action and Halloween, don't be "tricked" by the media out of the "treat" of expressing yourself at the ballot box on November 3. I understand that it is discouraging here in Hawaii to go to your polling station after work to vote, when CNN has already announced the results of the election nationwide. But remember that our numbers still send a message to national candidates, and you also have important local elections that depend on your participation. So inform yourselves about which candidates for the Board of Education and the House and Senate will fight for true educational and economic reform. And VOTE! Our collected future depends upon it. The choice is yours: TRICK? or TREAT?

See you at the next ESL Caucus meeting, Tuesday, November 17, at Tokai. Come, and bring a friend.

First Meeting Well Received

Robert Boom, English Foundations Program, Hawaii Pacific University

Over thirty enthusiastic ESL Caucus members enjoyed the academic year's first meeting on September 15, 1992. It was held at Tokai University at Honolulu, conveniently located on Kapiolani Boulevard. Rick Raker and Chris Guro, from the ESL staff of Tokai, gave informal tours of the beautiful new facility to Caucus guests. After refreshments and casual networking, Chair Lea del Castillo introduced our two speakers, Jean Coffman of Hawaii Pacific University and Graham Crookes of the University of Hawaii. The evening's topic was "Exploring Your Teaching."

Jean emphasized nine practical points for examining and improving ourselves as teachers: 1) cultivate a willingness to grow and change;

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II. Levels of Reflection
A. Techniques (do they work or not)
B. Principles (what do we want to do and why)
C. Interests (who is served or denied; power relationships; structural and organizational concerns)

III. How to Put Everything into Practice
A. Institutional support (paid time)
B. Workshops (stimulate changes but sometimes not enough)
C. Coaching (as in mainstream education, especially peer practice, perhaps most effective over time for improving teaching)
D. Colleagues (don't rely solely on senior ones; younger or less experienced staff can be very effective)

Lea del Castillo later elaborated on Jean's point #6, describing classes that filled out slips at the end of every session or once a week, for discussion at the beginning of the next class. While students do this, the teacher can make notes for the next lesson plan.

After the succinct presentations, excellent questions from the audience were discussed by the panel. Then (as good ESL practitioners) continued on page 6

Editorial

HPU Comes to the Aid of Lithuanian Teachers

This issue of The Word has an article by Sally La Luzerne-Oi, who teaches at Hawaii Pacific University. Sally recounts what happened to her when she responded to an appeal for ESL materials by teachers in Lithuania in a recent issue of The Word.

When we ran the announcement, we had no idea what would happen. It was only by chance that we learned, in talking to an ESL Caucus colleague, that anyone had paid attention to the appeal. Then Sally sent her article to us.

We congratulate Sally and her colleagues at HPU for their efforts. It is a marvelous example of how we can help one another if we only take the time. We trust that you will all join us in expressing our appreciation and gratitude to those fine ESL teachers at HPU who contributed their time, effort, and materials in this project.
In Review
edited by Jay Ercanbrack

Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom

Peter Robinson, Department of English as a Second Language, University of Hawaii

David Nunan’s book, Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom, covers a number of topics relating to the central notion of task in second language learning: how to analyze tasks into components parts; how to relate tasks to syllabus design; how to grade and sequence tasks; how recent research into skill development might inform task design; and how tasks might be used in teacher education programs. Many examples, references, and ideas for research into, and development of, language teaching tasks are presented.

Although the focus of the book is on the practical issue of task design, as its title proclaims (it is primarily intended as a how to book for teachers interested in this new area), Nunan also attempts to address the theoretical questions of why tasks should be used in the language curriculum, and why they should be designed in particular ways. Answers to these questions should be constitutive of the very notion of second language learning task that he is attempting to illustrate, but I find his answers vague and unconvincing, particularly his answer to the question of how tasks relate to decisions about the larger issue of syllabus design. Since any decision about how to design tasks must be made with reference to their place in a syllabus, I want to review his position on this issue first, before looking at other details of his book.

Nunan observes that the idea of using the learning task as basic planning tools in second language education is a relatively recent one. In the last ten years, a variety of proposals have been made for implementing task-based language teaching syllabuses. What these proposals have in common is an assumption that the units of second language syllabus design, and decisions about how to sequence those units, be based on something other than a structural analysis of the language system to be learned. Nunan’s book makes reference to some of these proposals, and it is as well to consider two of them briefly, as a way of clarifying Nunan’s own position regarding the role of tasks in syllabus design.

In the case of Prabhu (1987) and the work of the Bangalore project, which began in the late seventies, the units of syllabus design are classroom tasks that are performed by learners as vehicles for the development of their procedural ability in language use. Such an approach uses tasks to promote development of the means of communication, identified as the procedures deployed in successfully conveying information, giving reasons, and expressing opinions.

Prabhu’s claim (which he does not, it must be said, motivate with respect to psycholinguistic research into SLA processes) is that the effort expended by learners in using these procedures “to work out meaning content is . . . a condition which is favorable to the subconscious abstraction—or cognitive formation—of language structure” (70).

In contrast, Long (1985) proposes that the ends of learning, identified as a series of non-classroom target tasks that learners will have to accomplish at home or at work and requiring language skill, be the initial focus for syllabus design. This permits, it is claimed, clearer decisions to be made about what tasks should and should not be included in a syllabus. These target tasks can subsequently be broken down...
Nunan's view of the relationship of tasks to the language syllabus is somewhat different from Prabhu's or Long's. Rather than selecting tasks because they promote the means of communication, or correspond in some way with the behaviorally defined ends of learning, Nunan, in fact, proposes syllabus designers choose and sequence tasks in the following way:

Rather than identifying a particular item, say 'talking about oneself,' 'nationalities,' 'and the verb 'be,' and creating a text and a task to teach these items, one might find or create an interesting/relevant text and task at the appropriate level of difficulty, and then identify which language items on the syllabus checklist can be introduced or taught through the text/task. (19)

It is clear, then, that for Nunan the syllabus is something other than a specification of learning tasks; it is a checklist of language items, or functions or whatever, which can be practiced on tasks.

What Prabhu and Long are seeking, in their different ways—to replace the syllabus as language item inventory—remains for Nunan the covert organizing principle of curriculum design. This accounts for the feeling of déjà vu one experiences in looking at his example tasks: tasks for teaching spatial relationships (between, under, opposite on page 176); and tasks for teaching agreement and disagreement (Why not? I'd say it was a bad idea on page 161). We have all seen this stuff before in the Streamline series or the Cambridge English Course, for example. They are group and pair work activities for structural practice. It is nothing new.

So what are "the basic planning units" of syllabus design in Nunan's view; are they tasks, as he claims, or are they the underlying structural units that tasks are designed to introduce and practice? Nunan is unclear on this point, as on others. Take, for example, the issue of grading and sequencing. For Nunan, the job of the task designer is to "create an interesting/relevant text or task at the appropriate level of difficulty" and see what items on the syllabus can be taught through it. Presumably tasks are graded according to their relative difficulty level, but how is this established? Nunan looks at factors involved in determining the difficulty of tasks from three perspectives: the input to the learner, what the learner brings to the task, and the constraints of the activity itself. All of these interact, he claims, to establish a level of difficulty for a task. For example, the written input on a reading task may be more or less syntactically complex. The activity of ticking a given answer is more complex than writing out the answer itself, and the learner may bring more or less motivation, confidence, and cultural awareness to the learning task.

But to include learner factors like motivation and confidence in the equation for establishing task difficulty raises obvious problems. These may fluctuate on a daily basis making the same task more or less difficult for a learner, and so the notion of task difficulty becomes subjective and relative. How, then, is one to select a task of the appropriate level of difficulty without access to inside the head factors like motivation, etc.? What are needed for the purposes of grading and sequencing tasks on a syllabus are objective criteria. Research is needed here to establish what the parameters of task difficulty are, independently of learner factors like confidence, etc. Nunan has some suggestions as to how this research might proceed, for example, examining the effects of shared versus unshared background knowledge on task performance, but so little has been done to date, it is hard to see how any conclusions could be drawn yet about the crucial question of grading tasks. What seems clear to me is that the notion of task difficulty, if it is to be operationalised as a criterion for task selection on a task based syllabus, must make reference to shared, universal cognitive constraints that task types impose on learner's abilities to perform them. This will involve, for example, close examination of the relative memory demands and attentional demands of tasks in order to establish invariant parameters of task difficulty within which task designers can operate (see Robinson (1991) for further discussion of this issue.)

Ultimately, I think, Nunan's interest in tasks lies not in the prospect of developing a new approach to syllabus design. He is happy with the language-item inventory approach. Rather, Nunan see tasks as an answer to problems of deciding on the right methodology: "I hope that this book might be of some assistance in assigning the search for the right method to the dustbin" (2).

Again what he means here is unclear. Does he mean that if tasks are well designed they will be impermeable to the effects of different methodologies teachers may adopt in using them, and so make the choice of which methodology to adopt irrelevant? I do not think so, otherwise he would be claiming that the tasks he describes would be equally effective in the hands of an
A Teacher's Point of View
edited by Shira J. Smith

Learn to Listen; Listen to Learn: An Advanced ESL/EFL Lecture Comprehension and Notetaking Textbook

Kimberly Mehaffey, Department of English as a Second Language, University of Hawaii

Learn to Listen; Listen to Learn is designed for ESL/EFL students to aid them in their comprehension of American university lectures. It is divided into seven sections, which integrate academic listening, notetaking, speaking, and vocabulary development. This integrated approach to academic listening seems to be effective for advanced ESL students enrolled in the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Hawaii.

Each of the seven sections focuses on particular aspects of listening to academic lectures and notetaking. Section 1 allows teachers to evaluate their students' present level of listening and notetaking ability. The content of the lectures in this first section is concerned with the process of lecture comprehension and aids in students' awareness of how listening to lectures differs from listening to conversations.

Section 2 contains transcripts of lectures, and the exercises allow students to become aware of the discourse style of academic lectures. Section 3 concentrates on basic notetaking techniques. Students practice judging the relative importance of information within a lecture as well as using abbreviations and symbols to facilitate speed in their notetaking. Students are also shown how to visually represent relationships between pieces of information. Section 4 lectures and exercises give students practice in listening for numbers and statistics. One exercise in this section introduces chart reading. Section 5 shows different organizational styles of lectures. Knowledge of these differences can aid in effective notetaking skills.

Section 6 contains twelve of the eighteen lectures in the book. Each lecture allows students holistic practice for using the techniques they learned in sections 1-5. There is a pre-lecture discussion and activity section, which is designed to provide students with background information and to arouse interest among the students. There are ten steps that teachers are recommended in order to facilitate comprehension of the lectures and to promote well organized, complete notes. Teachers should choose which steps to follow based on their students' strengths and weaknesses. Section 7 has two lectures that are longer than those in the previous sections, and there are fewer pre-listening activities and less guidance provided. This section gives students a realistic opportunity to use their notes in order to study for quizzes that are in the instructor's manual.

The audio tapes that accompany this text contain a variety of speakers and lecture style and can be used in the classroom, in the language labs or both. The instructor's manual contains an answer key for all of the exercises, teaching suggestions, lecture outlines, and transcripts of the taped lectures.

There are several very positive aspects about this textbook. It is extremely flexible, which allows teachers to determine the specific needs of their students. The flexibility also enables the instructor to present the lectures sequentially or to present them by organizational style or by topic. All of the lectures can be presented "live" by the instructor or the instructor may use the audio tapes. The instructors at the ELI have asked several guest speakers to come in and present lectures so that the students are exposed to an even larger variety of accents than those available on the tapes.

Another strength of the text is that the vocabulary is spiraled so that the vocabulary reoccurs and thus the learning is reinforced throughout the semester. The content of the lectures is both a blessing and a curse. The positive aspect is that the topics cover a wide variety of subject matter and are of international interest. Topics such as "Robots in the Workplace," "Nuclear Winter," and "Amnesty International," and "The Dietary Role in Cancer" provide stimulating and informative content that lends itself well to whole class or small group discussions. Unfortunately, almost all of the facts and statistics come from the mid 70's to the mid '80's and thus are outdated. Students want to know what is happening now, so that teachers must research these topics in order to provide their students with the most current information. There are black and white photos in the text, but these are not very helpful and our teachers at the ELI try to add supplementary visual aids where appropriate.

This text, when used in conjunction with updated information and statistics, additional visual aids and an instructor who is able to ascertain students' needs, provides an excellent tool for increasing university students' academic lecture comprehension and notetaking ability.
The Teacher's Tool Kit

Ten Things to do Before You Start Reading

Steven Brown, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Level: All, ESL or EFL

Aim: To practice previewing

Skill/Rationale: Before students begin any reading, they need to preview it to see what they know about it in terms of content, vocabulary, etc. Previewing makes for smoother reading and smoother reading lessons.

Class Time Required: Varies. Usually ten minutes is adequate

Preparation: Little or none

Resources: Readings from students' books

Procedure:

Any one of these, or a combination, may be used each time a new reading is introduced. These activities may be done as a whole class or in pairs or in groups.

1. Look at the title and the headings for each section. What do you think this reading is going to be about? (Students brainstorm; teacher writes ideas on the board.)

2. Look at the pictures. What do you think this reading is going to be about? (Students brainstorm; teacher writes ideas on the board.)

3. Read the first and last paragraphs and the first sentence of each paragraph. What do you think this reading is going to be about? (Students brainstorm; teacher writes ideas on the board.)

4. Read the title. Now quickly scan the reading and circle all the words that have a connection to the title.

5. Scan the reading. Cross out all the words you don't know. After you read the reading again carefully, look up the words in the dictionary. (This promotes guessing in context.)

6. After looking at the title, pictures, etc., brainstorm the specific words you expect to see in the reading. (Teacher writes them on the board.)

7. After looking at the title, pictures, etc., write questions you think this reading might answer. (Students should always be encouraged to write their own comprehension questions, and to read comprehension questions first.)

8. Class brainstorm: What kind of reading is this? (Fiction? Nonfiction—what kind?) Why would somebody read this? (For information? Pleasure?)

9. Teacher chooses some words from the reading and writes them on the board. Students scan the passage and circle them. (This gives pre-teaching of vocabulary a task.)

10. Teacher tells a story about the background of the reading passage, or summarizes the passage itself. Students take notes or draw a picture of the story. Then they read the passage. (This is especially beneficial for lower proficiency students.)


If you would like to be the editor of this new column or are interested in contributing an article, call Richard Day (956-2788).

First Meeting

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small groups were formed for twenty minutes of soul searching and revelations, after which further ideas were presented to the entire group.

One key point was to have evaluation forms not only reflect how well teachers present material, but also how relevant the materials is for the students. Another suggestion, based on prior successes, was to have midterm evaluations and readjustment of courses that are conducted by independent observers and negotiated with the students.

Report on October Meeting

Jean Kirschenmann, English Foundations Program, Hawaii Pacific University

The ESL Caucus held its regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, October 21, at Tokai University. After pupus and small talk, Lei Lani Hinds, Chair of the Standards and Employment and Political Action Committee spoke. She reflected on a meeting with officials in the Governor's office, which both she and Caucus Chair Lea del Castillo attended. They are looking for volunteers from the Caucus who may be interested in networking with officials in business and government with a long-range goal of having a positive impact on both standards of employment and ESL instruction in the state. Anyone who may be interested in such an effort should contact Lei Lani at 843-2908.

The evening's program was billed as "Skills Night." Participants broke into small groups for round table discussions in the areas of pronunciation, content-based courses, speaking/listening, and reading/writing. As
usual, sharing ideas and discussing common problems was beneficial to all.

After a great turnout at our September meeting and rave reviews of the facilities at Tokai, we have elected to hold all of this year’s meetings at that site. On Tuesday, November 17, we’ll hear from Dr. Catherine Davis, Visiting Professor in the Department of ESL at the University of Hawaii. Her talk is entitled, “Teacher Culture and Children’s Voices.” Time is 7:00 p.m. We hope to see you there.

Connecting with Colleagues Abroad

Sally La Luverne-Oi, English Foundation Program, Hawaii Pacific University

In The Word, Volume III, Number 1, an announcement appeared asking for donations of course books, cassettes, reference and grammar books, teacher training materials, and back copies of ESL/EFL journals for teachers in Lithuania. I passed the announcement on to my colleagues at Hawaii Pacific University, and the result was enough books to fill a good-sized box that I sent in spring.

I am now corresponding regularly with Tanya Remezova, the person who took it upon herself to send out requests for assistance. Here are several excerpts from her letters.

“I was agreeably surprised to hear from you, since I never expected to get a response from distant Hawaii! That’s really amazing. It also feels extremely great when you are not left in the cold and find support and friendly encouragement, doesn’t it? So thanks a million! Clearly I feel terribly sorry I can’t send my letter of thanks directly to The Word. I only hope you’d do it for me.”

“I’ll try to give you a short account of how the things unfolded. Since I felt pretty much lonely in our local EFL ‘community’ (no materials, no information, no professional contacts, no feedback from the people in the field, etc.) and was not very much happy about EFL standards over here as well as my own professional level, I decided to try it on my own with the help of other enthusiastic teachers and attempted to break through barriers.”

“My colleague-teacher and I want to set up a self-help EFL teachers association and an EFL Centre both for teachers and students and give them a chance and encouragement, so that they wouldn’t blame the system, the government, or someone else.”

In Tanya’s most recent letter, she wrote that she was lucky to attend an ESL Summer Institute organized by teachers from the U.S. and Canada. So it seems that in just half a year, the situation for EFL teachers in Klaipeda is improving.

On occasion, TESOL Matters prints requests for assistance from EFL teachers who have few contacts with native English speakers and few teaching materials. This assistance can take many forms: sending textbooks and journals, sponsoring a TESOL membership, corresponding with EFL teachers, or arranging pen friends for classes of EFL students. I would like to suggest that more individuals, EFL programs, and maybe even the ESL Caucus become involved in forming a “sister” relationship with professionals abroad. We can all benefit from such exchanges.

The June/July TESOL Matters has a request for materials for Ms. Juliana Adnan Sirait, Jalan Sie Piasa, No. 71, Kisoran, North Sumatra 21214, Indonesia. TESOLID, the newsletter of Indiana State Affiliate of TESOL, also has an urgent appeal for materials by a secondary school teacher. Contact Alexander Ivanovich Klyuyanov, Shakhterskaya Street 46-38, 32226 Dneprorud, Zaporoshie Region, Ukraine. Tanya’s address is Mrs. Tanya Remezova, Kretingos 79-56, Klaipeda 5818, Lithuania.

Designing Tasks

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audio-lingually trained teacher, a grammar translation teacher, and a communicative teacher. This could conceivably result in the three teachers requiring students to use the materials in different ways, for choral practice, translation, etc. Does he mean teachers using tasks need no methodological training or skills? I do not think so, since the facilitation of group work, either by intervening to construct the pairs or groups, or by circulating to help students on task, is something the postman or campus security guard might find difficult to do. What I think he means is that tasks minimize the need for teacher fronted activity, or any methodological description, and are more “learner-centered.” More importantly, the nature of the task dictates the role relationship existing between students and teacher, and this may vary from task to task:

we have looked at the roles for teachers and learners which are implicit in various tasks. We have seen that roles can vary quite markedly, and that the roles which are established can have a marked bearing on the language which learners produce. (94)

But I think Nunan is confusing two things:
the fact that tasks require teachers to adopt a variety of roles in the classroom does not mean there is no methodology. What Nunan really seems to be claiming is that the task focussed classroom creates, ideally, an environment which makes great methodological demands of the teachers, as a facilitator, participant, observer, convener, and organizer in addition to deciding on appropriate groups and tasks and managing transitions between them. For Nunan, then, this is the right method. His reasons for favoring a task based approach are more rooted in his methodological preferences than they are grounded in a valid theory of why particular tasks, under particular conditions, lead to language learning. It is the latter, however, that we will have to wait for before we can reasonably, and with conviction, design tasks to promote learning in the second language classroom. Until then, any number of tasks will doubtless be designed and used to promote activity. Nunan’s book is a good source of ideas for these.

References


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1992-1993 Schedule

Sat. 10/31  HCTE Annual Convention, Hyatt Regency

Tues. 11/17  Nov. Meeting: “Teacher Culture and Children’s Voices” (Kathy Davis, U.H.), Tokai Univ. at Honolulu

Wed. 1/20  Jan. Meeting: Standards & Political Action

Sat. 2/13  TESOL Roundtable, JAIMS

Tues. 3/16  March Meeting: Skills Night,

4/13-4/17  TESOL ‘93; Atlanta, GA.

Wed. 4/21  April Meeting: Reports from TESOL ‘93

Tues. 5/18  Annual Business Meeting

Mark Your Calendar

HCTE/TESOL Roundtable

February 13, 1993

JAIMS

For more information, call Michael Powers at 395-2314.

The ESL Caucus
P.O. Box 61068
Honolulu, HI 96839-1068

The Word
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