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EDITORIAL

The articles selected for this year's journal focus on ways, through practice and professional development, teachers can enhance the language learning of their students. Interestingly, as the final article by Feryok and Barkhuizen demonstrates, the practices of English language teachers are becoming ever more relevant to all teachers in New Zealand classrooms, as learners increasingly come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The particular practices and issues, the research methods adopted and the findings of these articles will be of interest to the readership of TESOLANZ, as we continue to develop our professional understanding, to work collegially and to develop policy for the benefit of the students we teach.

Webb and Nation look at one method teachers could use to evaluate the vocabulary load of written text. In their article they show how the Vocabulary Size Test (Nation & Beglar, 2007) can be used together with the RANGE program (Nation & Heatley, 2002) to determine the percentage of known words in a text, as well as the words which are likely to be unknown. To demonstrate use of these two measures a newspaper article was analyzed. In light of their findings, the authors discuss pedagogical implications.

In the second article, exploring vocabulary from a different angle, File investigates the use of Classroom Vocabulary Learning Cards. This technique, File explains, has been developed in reaction to the negativity that can sometimes surround direct vocabulary instruction. File outlines how Vocabulary Learning Cards have been trialled in a university preparation programme at a New Zealand university. Practitioner observations based on a checklist of learner behaviour were used to observe the technique in action. File argues that this technique meets a number of principles for effective direct vocabulary instruction and shows that it can promote the three important psychological conditions for learning: *noticing*, *retrieval* and *generative use*.

The effect of a speed reading course in an English as a Second Language environment is the focus of Macalister's article. A key feature of the research design was the administration of the final three speed reading texts several weeks after the completion of the speed reading course. This placement, Macalister argues, allowed a more nuanced interpretation of 'effect' than if measured solely at the end of the speed reading course. The study found that almost all students showed gains in reading speed, and lent support to claims that a speed reading course should form part of a reading programme.

In the fourth article Griffiths aims to explore some of the factors that may contribute to successful learning in a target-language environment. In order to obtain both quantitative and qualitative perspectives for this study, questionnaires and interviews were used. Findings suggest that successful students are able to adapt familiar strategy patterns to suit the new learning environment, they are willing to maximise their exposure to the target language (for instance by living in homestay accommodation), and they actively utilise the resources available (such as TV and newspapers) in the target-language situation.

In the final article of this volume, Feryok and Barkhuizen report on a study which investigated mainstream content subject secondary school teachers' perceptions of the impact of a professional development TESSOL (Teaching English in Schools to Speakers of Other Languages) programme in which they participated. Interview and classroom observation data were collected from seven secondary content teachers teaching maths, science, technology,

and economics in different secondary schools. The findings show that the programme had an impact on the perceptions of the teachers concerning their cognitions and practices with EAL students in their content classrooms.

The book reviews that follow have been selected to cover a range of areas relevant to language teaching and research and highlight current issues being explored in the literature. These reviews should be of interest to all sectors of the membership.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the contributors who submitted manuscripts for consideration in this year's volume of the journal. It has been heartening to receive manuscripts from teachers who are seeking, through individual and collaborative research, to understand their teaching and to share their findings. Part of the process involved in preparing a manuscript for publication involves responding to questions and guidance from experienced peers. In this respect, we are indebted to members of the Editorial Board for the insight and generosity of spirit that characterize their reviews.

I encourage the many readers of the TESOLANZ Journal, established researchers and those who are just beginning in research, who have not yet contributed to the publication, to consider doing so in the following year. You will find Notes for Contributors at the end the journal, but always feel free to contact the Editor by email (s.gray@auckland.ac.nz), if you require any additional information. The closing date for receiving manuscripts will be August 31st 2009.

EVALUATING THE VOCABULARY LOAD OF WRITTEN TEXT

Stuart Webb and Paul Nation
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Abstract

Teachers must choose many texts for students to read in language learning tasks. Teachers may select news articles, short stories, blog entries, and materials specifically written for students. Selecting texts that are at an appropriate level is essential for reading tasks to be effective. However, it can be extremely difficult for teachers to determine whether texts are at a suitable level for their students. Some texts may be understood while others are not. The coverage of a text (the percentage of known words) may indicate whether or not students are able to understand written input. The Vocabulary Size Test (Nation & Beglar, 2007) and the RANGE Programme (Nation & Heatley, 2002) can be used together to determine the coverage of a text and the words which are likely to be unknown. The aim of this article is to look at how teachers can use these tools to evaluate the appropriateness of texts.

Introduction

Laufer & Sim (1985) found that vocabulary knowledge may be the best gauge of whether or not a text will be understood. Research has shown that reaching 95% and 98% coverage may indicate whether or not learners are able to understand text and whether incidental learning is likely to occur. Laufer (1989) found that for learners to be able to gain adequate comprehension of written text it is necessary to know at least 95% of the words. Liu and Nation (1985) also suggest that knowledge of 95% of the words is necessary to correctly guess words in context. Moreover, comprehension and incidental vocabulary learning through reading are likely to increase if the percentage of known words in a text is 98% (Nation, 2001). The vocabulary size necessary for reading comprehension may vary depending on the type of text and the degree of comprehension required. If 95% coverage is required, a vocabulary size of the most frequent 4000 word families may be necessary for comprehension of novels and newspapers. If 98% coverage is required, knowing 8000 word families may be necessary to understand newspapers, and knowing 9000 word families may be required to understand a novel (Nation, 2006). While these findings provide a useful guide for teachers, the question remains as to how do teachers evaluate the vocabulary loads of specific written texts used in the classroom? The vocabulary size necessary to understand individual texts varies from text to text and with shorter texts it may vary significantly. Estimating whether learners have the vocabulary size needed to reach 95% or 98% coverage of text is challenging and mistakes may lead to a lack of understanding for learners and difficulties in achieving the goals of the lesson for teachers. Two tools which teachers can use together to evaluate the vocabulary loads of text are the RANGE Programme and the Vocabulary Size Test.

The RANGE Programme

The RANGE Programme analyses the vocabulary in text. It allows the user to (a) determine the vocabulary size necessary to understand the vocabulary in text, (b) create word lists based on the frequency of occurrence and range of use of vocabulary in different types of discourse, (c) determine the number of encounters with words in a text, and (d) to evaluate the vocabulary load of text for teaching and learning language. The RANGE Programme is best known for the first three purposes. Most notably it was used in the development of the

Academic Word List (Coxhead 2000) and the 14 British National Corpus (BNC) 1000 word lists (Nation, 2004) as well as a series of studies by Nation and his colleagues which examined the vocabulary size necessary to understand different types of discourse.

Perhaps of most interest to teachers is the use of the RANGE Programme for analysing texts to be used in the classroom. Surprisingly its use as a tool for evaluating the vocabulary load of text has received little attention. This may be because originally the RANGE Programme was used together with West's (1953) General Service List and the Academic Word List to show how the most frequent 2000 words and academic vocabulary were represented in a text. Examining text using these lists allowed teachers to determine which words may or may not be known for learners with a relatively small vocabulary size. The development of the 14 BNC 1000 word lists for use with RANGE provides a more precise assessment of a text because it allows users to determine the vocabulary size necessary for comprehension of authentic texts which typically contain a small percentage of words ranging from the most frequent 3000-14000 word families.

The 14 BNC 1000 word lists were created according to the frequency and range of occurrence of word families in the BNC. The word families in the lists were created at Level 6 according to Bauer and Nation's (1993) classification of word families. Level 6 word families include inflections and over 80 derivational affixes. All word stems were free forms not bound forms. Words which are not found in the most frequent 14000 word families may be classified as *proper nouns*, *marginal words*, and *Not in the lists* (items less frequent than the most frequent 14000 word-families). The Vocabulary Size Test, the RANGE Programme, and the words lists are free to download from Paul Nation's website: <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/staff/paul-nation/nation.aspx> Using these lists with RANGE, teachers can measure text difficulty. However, for teachers to determine whether specific texts are suitable for specific learners, they also need to measure the learner's vocabulary size.

Teachers can use the software to analyse the vocabulary in a single text or as many as 32 texts at the same time. Analysing multiple texts at the beginning of a course may allow teachers to not only determine whether the texts are appropriate for the level of their learners but it also allows teachers to sequence the texts according to their vocabulary loads. Another useful feature of RANGE is that it can also show how many times each word is encountered in one text as well as in multiple texts. Because the number of encounters with unknown words may provide some indication of their potential for incidental learning (Webb, 2007) this may give teachers the opportunity to consider whether the learners may be able to learn unknown words on their own or whether items merit explicit attention.

The Vocabulary Size Test

The Vocabulary Size test provides an accurate and reliable assessment of learner vocabulary from the first 1000 (the most frequent 1000) to the 14th most frequent 1000 word families. It provides teachers with a more precise measurement of vocabulary size than the widely known Vocabulary Levels Test (Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham 2001) because it measures knowledge of vocabulary size at 14 different points, and all of the points are at an equal distance apart (1000 word families). It is slightly more demanding than the Vocabulary Levels Test because greater knowledge of the meaning of the items may be necessary to answer questions. The Vocabulary Size Test measures learners' knowledge of the same 14 1000 word lists that can be used with RANGE. Because both RANGE and the Vocabulary Size Test involve the same 1000 word lists, using them together may be the most effective method of determining which words are likely to be known and unknown for specific learners.

The Vocabulary Size test uses a multiple choice format with ten questions measuring knowledge of each 1000 word level. Because there are ten questions per 1000 word level, each question represents knowledge of 100 word families. This means that if learners had a score of 9/10 on a particular level, then they would have demonstrated knowledge of 900/1000 word families from that level. The test is easy to administer and takes little time to grade. The following are two questions taken from the first 1000 word level:

TIME: They have a lot of **time**.

- a. money
- b. food
- c. hours
- d. friends

JUMP: She tried to **jump**.

- a. lie on top of the water
- b. get off the ground suddenly
- c. stop the car at the edge of the road
- d. move very fast

It is important to note that the Vocabulary Size Test measures knowledge of word families. Thus, if learners are able to demonstrate knowledge of the headword in the test, there is an assumption that they also have receptive knowledge of the rest of that word family. The following are examples of the word families for *time* and *jump* in the first 1000 word level:

TIME

TIMER
TIMES
TIMELESS
TIMELY
TIMING
TIMED
UNTIMED

JUMP

JUMPS
JUMPING
JUMPED
JUMPY

Procedure for evaluating text

The following sections show how the Vocabulary Size Test and the RANGE Programme can be used to evaluate a text.

1) Measure the vocabulary size of the learners

The best time to measure vocabulary size is at the beginning of a course because it will provide useful information on whether or not learners have the vocabulary necessary to do certain tasks, and it may also allow teachers to chart learners' vocabulary development through a language learning program. Because the Vocabulary Size Test contains 14 tests, each measuring knowledge of 1000 word families, teachers may not wish to administer all of the sections of the test if their students are at a beginning or intermediate level. It may be sufficient to administer the first five sections measuring knowledge of the most frequent 5000 words for less advanced learners. For the purposes of this article, the following test scores will be used as an example:

Vocabulary Size Test scores

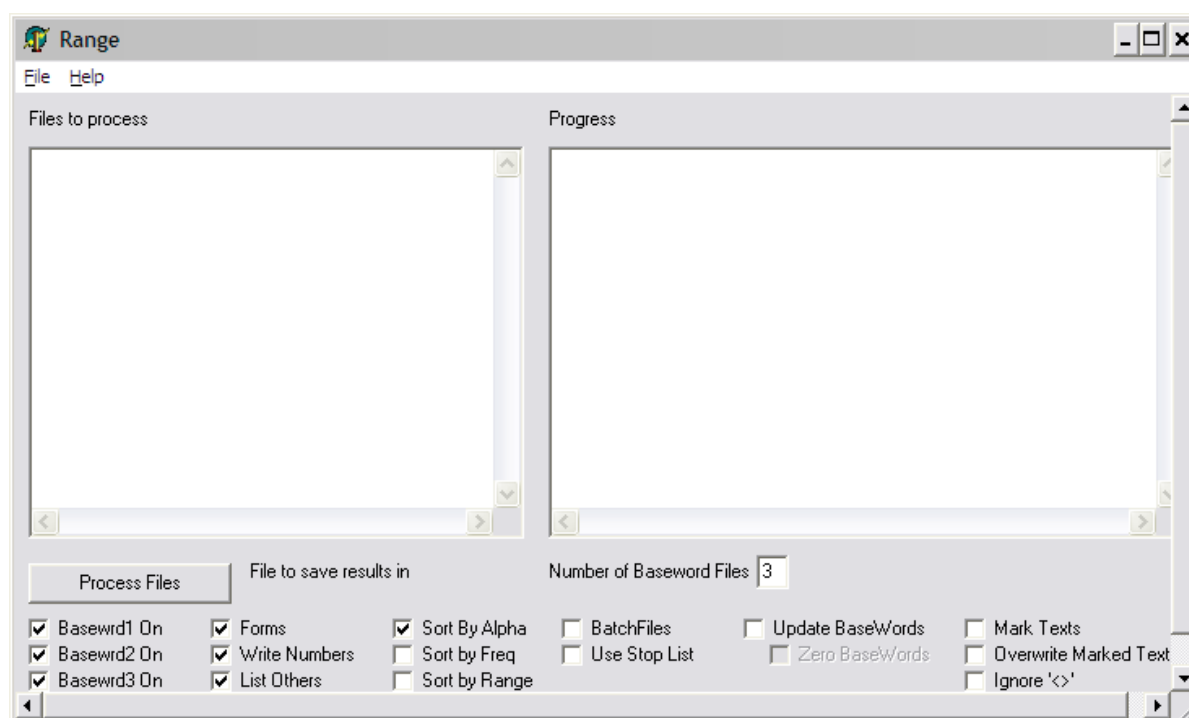
Test	Mean score
1000	9.7
2000	9.1
3000	8.5
4000	4.8
5000	1.3

The example above indicates that as a whole the learners' vocabulary knowledge is limited to the most frequent 3000 word families. However, teachers should examine individual tests to determine whether some learners may still need to learn some of the third 1000 word list. Overall, the test profile indicates that teachers can assume knowledge of the most frequent 3000 words for the majority of students. The mean score on the fourth 1000 word test indicates that most learners still need to work on learning words from this list. Teachers should therefore assume that words which are less frequent than 3000 word families might be unknown.

2) Analyse text using the RANGE Programme

Once the vocabulary size of the learners is known, the RANGE Programme can be used to determine the vocabulary size necessary to reach 95% and 98% coverage of text, as well as the number of words in the text which are likely to be unknown. The newspaper article *Canada's 2nd fastest supercomputer assigned to massive cancer project* (Appendix) was selected from the online version of *The Toronto Star*, because its length made it suitable for use in a variety of different types of classroom tasks. Once teachers have selected a text, it is a simple process to analyse it. First, teachers need to convert the text into a text file. Next, open the text using RANGE and indicate the text file in which the output is to be saved. The *Number of Baseword Files* should be changed from 3 to 16 for use with the 14 BNC word lists. The 15th and 16th lists show the proper nouns (List 15) and the marginal words such as ah, oh, huh (List 16) which occurred in the text. Finally, clicking on the *Process Files* button will complete the analysis. The RANGE Programme interface is shown in Figure 1. The time taken for RANGE to analyse the text depends on the number of tokens. Range completed the analysis of the text analysed in this article in 1 second. Teachers can then open the file where the output has been saved to see the analysis. More detailed instructions and a troubleshooting guide come with the software and word lists.

Figure 1. The RANGE Programme interface



The RANGE Programme output provides two valuable tools for teachers. The first is an analysis of the text's distribution of tokens, types, and word families in each of the different 1000 word lists. It is useful for teachers to understand the difference between the three categories. Each word in a text counts as one token and each different word in a text counts as one type. Thus, the previous sentence consists of 20 tokens and 12 types because 8 of the words in the sentence occur twice. Examples of word families were given above. The second part of the output which is useful is the data for each word found in the text. This shows where each word in the text was categorized by the word lists as well as the number of times it was encountered in the text. The RANGE output which shows the distribution of the various levels of vocabulary in the text was as follows:

WORD LIST	TOKENS/%	TYPES/%	FAMILIES
one	243/69.23	109/62.29	94
two	27/ 7.69	19/10.86	17
three	24/ 6.84	15/ 8.57	12
four	11/ 3.13	7/ 4.00	7
five	5/ 1.42	3/ 1.71	3
six	4/ 1.14	3/ 1.71	2
seven	3/ 0.85	2/ 1.14	2
eight	2/ 0.57	1/ 0.57	1
nine	0/ 0.00	0/ 0.00	0
ten	0/ 0.00	0/ 0.00	0
11	1/ 0.28	1/ 0.57	1
12	0/ 0.00	0/ 0.00	0
13	14/ 3.99	3/ 1.71	2
14	1/ 0.28	1/ 0.57	1
15	6/ 1.71	4/ 2.29	4
16	0/ 0.00	0/ 0.00	0
Not in the lists	10/ 2.85	7/ 4.00	?
Total	351	175	146

The first column of the output shows the different 1000 word lists, and the second, third and fourth columns show the number and percentage of tokens, types and word families according to each 1000 word list. In the final row of the output we can see that there were 351 tokens, 175 types, and 146 word families in the text. The output clearly shows the relative importance of knowing the most frequent words. Over 69% of the words (243 tokens) were from the 1000 word list, 7.69% of the words (27 tokens) were from the 2000 word list, and 6.84% of the words (24 tokens) were from the 3000 word list. Thus, if the most frequent 3000 word families are known to readers, they would know 294 of the 351 tokens in the text. Many researchers have taken the approach that proper nouns have a minimal learning burden and may be easily understood by readers. If we add the proper noun tokens in List 15 to the total number of tokens that would be known for readers who know the most frequent 3000 words then 300 of the tokens would be known leaving 51 unknown words. If the percentage of tokens known to the learners reached 95% coverage, the text would be suitable for classroom use without any assistance from the teacher. However, in this case only 85.4% of the tokens would be known to learners with a vocabulary size of approximately 3000 words. This indicates that the text would be too difficult for the learners to read without assistance and that further analysis is needed to determine if the text may be suitable for use.

It is also useful for teachers to look at the results in terms of word families because similarity in forms and meanings for tokens from the same family may reduce the difficulty of learning word families. Teachers can cross-reference tokens with word families by looking at the same row of columns two and four. For example, the second column of the output shows that there were 14 tokens which occurred in the 13th 1000 word list. However, when we look at the same row in the word families column we can see that those 14 tokens consist of only two word families. If we count the number of word families which may be unknown for learners with a vocabulary size of the most frequent 3000 words, we find that there are 19 different word families plus a maximum of 10 word families for the 10 tokens classified as 'Not in the Lists.' Therefore, if the scores on the Vocabulary Size Test indicated that the learners had an average vocabulary size of 3000 word families, there would be a maximum of 29 unknown word families in the text. We can see each of these word families if we scroll down in the RANGE output. The RANGE Programme lists the word families according to the 1000 word lists so it is easy to find the words which may be unknown.

The following output from RANGE shows the different word families that occurred in the text listed by their relative word frequency in the BNC. The column labelled RANGE shows the number of texts in which the word occurred. In this example, there was only one text analysed so every word was found in only one text. If multiple texts are analysed together, it is very useful for teachers to look in this column to see the number of texts in which each word occurred because further encounters with recently encountered/learned words may deepen knowledge of those words. The TYFREQ and FAFREQ columns show the number of occurrences of the exact word type and word families that occurred in the text. For example, at the 4th 1000 level (Base Four) the exact word type *acquire* did not occur, but one or more of the family members did. Whereas, we can see that the word family with the headword *grid* in the 4th 1000 word list occurred three times in the text, and each time it occurred as the word type *grid*. The output clearly shows which word families may be unknown or unfamiliar to learners. Teachers can quickly scan these words to determine if any of them may be known. For example, the compound word *supercomputer* may be unfamiliar to readers but it may be easily understood if the high frequency words *super* and *computer* are known. It occurs 11 times in the text so comprehension of this word may play a key role in understanding the text.

BASE FOUR FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFREQ
ACQUIRE	1	0	2
GRID	1	3	3
INTERACT	1	0	1
MINISTRY	1	1	1
NETWORK	1	2	2
PROFILE	1	0	1
TASK	1	1	1
BASE FIVE FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFRE
CLUSTER	1	2	2
COMPATIBLE	1	1	1
INNOVATE	1	0	2
BASE SIX FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFRE
PROTEIN	1	1	3
SNAIL	1	1	1
BASE SEVEN FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFRE
BUFFALO	1	2	2
CLASSIFICATION	1	1	1
BASE EIGHT FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFRE
PC	1	2	2
BASE 11FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFRE
TRILLION	1	1	1
BASE 13FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFRE
IBM	1	3	3
SUPERCOMPUTER	1	10	11
BASE 14FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFRE
CPU	1	1	1
BASE 15FAMILIES	RANGE	TYFREQ	FAFRE
IGOR	1	1	1
MARGARET	1	1	1
ND	1	1	1
ONTARIO	1	3	3

Types Not Found In Any List

TYPE	RANGE	FREQ
COMPUTER GENERATED	1	1
CRYSTALLOGRAPHY	1	1
DISEASE RELATED	1	1
HAUPTMAN WOODWARD	1	1
HIGH RESOLUTION	1	2
IN KIND	1	1
JURISICA	1	3

In the output, we can see that there are also two more proper nouns from the text (the city of Buffalo and IBM) which are included in the 1000 word lists. These words along with *supercomputer* may be easily understood for learners with a vocabulary size of the most frequent 3000 words. The final section of the output *Types Not Found In Any List* shows the word types that were not sorted into any of the 16 word lists. The output in *Types Not Found In Any List* should contain the lowest frequency words found in the text. However, it may list a small number of known words because it lists hyphenated words and some proper nouns which are not found in the proper nouns list. In the example, there are two proper nouns (Hauptman-Woodward and Jurisica), and four hyphenated multi-word items which contain words from the first and second 1000 word lists. Multi-item units may cause problems depending on the overlap in meaning between the individual words and the multi-word item. In the example, *computer-generated*, and *disease-related* may be understood for learners who know each of the individual words. However, *high-resolution* may be unknown to learners

because *resolution* occurs in the 4000 word list. *In-kind* may also cause greater difficulty because there is little overlap between the individual words and the multi-word unit. *Crystallography* is the only individual word which is low frequency in the list. If we subtract the items found in the output above which may be understood by the learners, that leaves 19 unknown word families and 29 tokens in the text. This represents 91.7% coverage indicating that comprehension of the text would still be difficult without some form of learning support for the learners. Teachers must then consider whether the number of unknown tokens and word families would allow them to pre-teach or modify the text to make it appropriate for learners. The following section briefly describes options for increasing comprehension if texts do not reach 95% coverage.

Evaluate the potential use of the text for the learners

Using the results of the Vocabulary Size Test together with the RANGE output will leave teachers with several options depending upon whether there is a gap between the learner's vocabulary size and the vocabulary size necessary to reach 95% or 98% coverage. If the learner's vocabulary size is sufficient to reach the desired coverage then there may be no need to assist learners with comprehension of the text. However, if there is a gap then it may be necessary for teachers to do one of the following:

1. pre-teach vocabulary,
2. ensure that dictionaries are available and learners are given time to look up unknown words during the reading task,
3. provide glosses for unknown words,
4. simplify the text
5. eliminate that text for use in the classroom and select a more appropriate text.

If the target coverage can be reached through learning a small number of unknown word families, teachers may wish to pre-teach those items or have students use dictionaries when reading the text. Both pre-teaching and dictionary use have been found to facilitate comprehension (see for example, Nation, 2001). However, it is important that there are a manageable number of words for learners to learn and look up. If there is a larger number of unknown words, glossing may be more useful. Glossing allows learners to read a text relatively quickly by checking the relevant definitions or L1 translations when necessary. Another option when there are many unknown word families would be to simplify the text by replacing the unknown words with known words or phrases which are likely to be understood by learners. This will involve more effort from teachers and may not be a valid solution for longer texts with a large number of unknown words. Because RANGE is fast and easy to use, simply eliminating the text from consideration may often be the best solution if learners do not have the vocabulary size necessary to understand the words in the text. Selecting alternate texts and analysing them with RANGE together with knowledge of the Vocabulary Size Test scores may allow teachers to find more suitable texts for classroom use in a relatively short time. In the example above, for learners who knew the most frequent 3000 word families, the small number of unknown word families remaining would make pre-teaching or looking up words in dictionaries a viable option along with glossing or simplifying. If learners had a vocabulary size of the most frequent 2000 word families, there would be 12 more unknown word families or 24 more unknown tokens. This would make pre-teaching and dictionary use much more demanding. In this case, glossing and simplifying may be more appropriate. If learners only knew the most frequent 1000 word families, this text should probably be eliminated for consideration for use in the classroom.

Determining whether texts are appropriate for specific learners can be a difficult task for teachers. When the vocabulary is too difficult learners may not understand texts leading to

problems for both teachers and students. Teachers can use the RANGE Programme together with the Vocabulary Size Test to quickly evaluate the vocabulary load of texts. Although researchers may be quite familiar with these tools, they may not be well known to teachers. The aim of this article was to demonstrate that evaluating texts with these tools can be fast, easy, and effective.

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Appendix

Canada's 2nd fastest supercomputer assigned to massive cancer project 90 million images to get sorted five years sooner

The Ontario Cancer Institute has acquired the country's second fastest research supercomputer to accelerate its effort to gain crucial understanding of cancer.

The IBM Cluster 1350 supercomputer will help Canadian scientists to identify the structure of disease-related proteins that will hopefully lead to earlier cancer detection methods and more efficient treatments.

"With the arrival of the supercomputer, the analysis of 90 million images of 10,000 proteins will be finished by 2009, five years earlier than the original time," said Dr. Igor Jurisica at the cancer institute.

The project also involves Princess Margaret Hospital, University Health Network and Buffalo's Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute. The Buffalo laboratory collected the 90 million images that now require computer-generated comparative analysis.

With the supercomputer on board, the processing and sophisticated classification of the high-resolution imaging can be done much more quickly. The time for crystallography can be reduced by about five years; the time for analyzing protein interactions drops from four days to 23 minutes, and cancer profiling is reduced from months to days.

A home computer moves like a snail compared with the IBM Cluster 1350. Introduced in 2002, it needs one second to finish 12.5 trillion calculations, a task that would tie up a PC for thousands of years.

The supercomputer also has the feature of computing visualization to create high-resolution images required for research analysis.

The supercomputer was acquired with about \$8 million in grants from the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation, said Jurisica.

IBM Canada made an in-kind donation to reduce the cost of the supercomputer.

The supercomputer is compatible with the World Community Grid, a network which has individuals donate PC processing time for scientific computations. The Ontario Cancer Institute has used 12,000 years of the grid's CPU processing time since November 2007.

Jurisica said that his research centre will continue to use donated computer time from the grid.

The supercomputer is 395th on a Top 500 global list of supercomputers, second only in this country to one used by Environment Canada for weather forecasting.

CLASSROOM VOCABULARY LEARNING CARDS: OBSERVATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A CLASSROOM DIRECT VOCABULARY LEARNING TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

A well balanced course will pay attention to the four strands of learning (Nation, 2007). These are meaning focused input, meaning-focused output, fluency development and language-focused learning. For the vocabulary learning component of a course, this means providing learners with opportunities to see words in a meaningful context through reading and listening tasks, use words in a meaningful context in speaking and writing tasks, develop fluency using these words and study these words deeply or directly in language focused learning.

This article is concerned with the language focused learning component. Unfortunately for learners, there is a lot more to knowing a word than just focusing on its meaning. Learners need to learn patterns, collocations, word family members to mention just a few. Drawing attention to these features is one of the functions of the language focused learning component. By providing opportunities for deliberate study of a set of words teachers can help learners enhance their understanding of them. The purpose of this article is to introduce a technique that teachers can use to help their learners focus on the many features of a set of words being studied in the class, as well as providing them with opportunities to retrieve these words through interaction and negotiation.

What is direct vocabulary learning and instruction?

Direct vocabulary learning involves looking at the many aspects of a word. Nation (2001, pp. 26–28) identifies ten aspects that contribute to the overall understanding of a word. They include the word's meaning, stress and pronunciation features, collocations, grammatical patterns the word appears in, semantic associations and word family members. Learners can accelerate their receptive and productive control of vocabulary items by focusing direct and deliberate attention on these aspects.

For teachers carrying out direct learning of vocabulary, or rich instruction as it is sometimes known, there are a number of different options. One popular way is to ask students to study the words for themselves by filling in vocabulary notebooks with information about the aspects of a word (Schmitt & Schmitt, 1995). Another way is for teachers to draw attention to these aspects in a class lesson, although this can sometimes lead to information overload. Rich instruction can also occur after a text has been read for meaning. The teacher can draw attention to words in the text and point out noticeable features before elaborating further to provide more information about the word. There are also several well established techniques that aim to provide direct learning opportunities in class from reading texts including Recycled Words (Blake & Majors, 1995) and the Second Hand Cloze (see Nation, 2001, p. 107). This article introduces another classroom technique that aims to provide learners with a deeper understanding of any given set of words.

Arguments for and against

There are of course arguments against providing learners with rich instruction or asking learners to do direct study of vocabulary (see Nation, 2001, pp. 95–96). The opposition to direct vocabulary study usually centres on the efficiency of studying words directly. Opponents argue that there are so many words in the English language that to study them all directly would take an enormous amount of time and may not lead to uptake of these words and their many aspects. In addition, learners may not have opportunities to retrieve the words they have studied directly and will therefore subsequently lose them, resulting in a waste of time and effort. Opponents also argue that organising direct vocabulary learning opportunities for a class can require a lot of preparation and planning. Most teachers will not want to be caught out by their students as to whether a particular word has any collocations, or whether a word family member is in fact a useful word family member. Teachers therefore search the dictionary for information about the words in preparation for lessons. Teachers may also spend a lot of time constructing worksheets that focus on aspects of a particular set of vocabulary items. Opponents therefore suggest there are better more efficient ways of gaining deep knowledge of vocabulary items.

There is however evidence that suggests direct vocabulary instruction is beneficial for learners. By engaging in direct vocabulary learning tasks, learners can speed up their acquisition of a vocabulary item and its many features (Nation, 2001, p. 97). Learners can also indirectly work on dictionary skills and become more strategic learners by carrying out direct vocabulary study.

There are some important pedagogical considerations, however, and the techniques used by teachers and the opportunities students have for direct study should be guided by principles. There are a number of principles and conditions for learning represented in the literature (see for example Willis, 1996, p. 11; Nation, 2001, pp. 72–74; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001 for detailed examinations of the conditions for learning). One of the main principles is that direct instruction is only one part of a vocabulary learning component and should not be seen as the only way to deal with vocabulary (Nation, 2001; Nation, 2007). This is an essential point. As mentioned above learners also need opportunities to see and use the word in context and gain fluency with the word if they are to successfully acquire it.

Below are six key principles the author has identified from research into second language vocabulary acquisition, with particular emphasis on principles for carrying out direct vocabulary learning tasks in class. By choosing and developing techniques based on principles such as these, teachers will create a richer learning opportunity for students carrying out direct vocabulary learning.

Principle 1:

The words must be high frequency and/or useful to the learners and their goals. There is no point for learners to study a word deeply if they are going to have no use for it or not meet it in the future (Nation, 1993; Nation, 2001).

Principle 2:

For a direct learning technique or classroom activity to be really effective, it is best that the words have already been met by learners previously (Nation, 2001, p. 95). This means that when students come to class to do direct learning tasks, they are already familiar with some aspects of the word and can begin to focus more deeply on the others. In other words, learners should have something to attach their new knowledge to.

Principle 3:

There must be an opportunity to focus on the many different aspects of a word. As mentioned above, there is more to a word than just its meaning. Amongst other things, a word has family members, collocations, stress patterns that need be mastered if a learner is to have good receptive and productive control of a word (Nation, 2001, pp. 26–28).

Principle 4:

If a teaching technique is to be successful, it should be motivating and engaging for the students (Willis, 1996, pp. 14–15). Students need to be made aware of the value and importance of direct vocabulary learning and need to be motivated to do it. This can be quite difficult for students as direct study of vocabulary is usually associated with burying oneself in a dictionary for hours filling in pages and pages of a vocabulary notebook with information that may never be revisited again.

Principle 5:

Attention should be drawn to the learning burden of a word, or what makes a particular word difficult to learn or use (Laufer, 1997; Nation, 2001). Some words are difficult to pronounce, others are difficult to spell, some have very specific grammatical patterns, others have constraints on how they can be used. A good direct vocabulary learning technique or opportunity will divert some attention to dealing with a word's burdening characteristics. This can be achieved by communicating constraints and difficulties to learners directly, or by giving learners feedback on aspects that they are having difficulty with.

Principle 6:

Finally, a direct learning technique or opportunity will also be more beneficial if it encompasses some or all of the psychological conditions for learning. These conditions are noticing, retrieval and generative use (for an introduction to these conditions, see Nation, 2003). If we look at these conditions closely in relation to direct vocabulary learning, noticing would include drawing explicit attention to aspects of the word so that students actually notice and pay attention to these; retrieval would include opportunities for students to push themselves to recall words, and aspects of these words, from their memories in a meaningful activity; and generative use would include trying to use the words in original sentences and having opportunities to see or hear the words used in novel or new contexts. These psychological conditions are not only limited to implicit learning but are also relevant when focusing on direct learning and rich instruction tasks (Nation, 2001, p. 121).

The remainder of this article outlines a student centred vocabulary learning technique which is being used for direct vocabulary instruction in our institution by a number of teachers. The technique is called the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card. It has been an action research project for over a year now and has gone through several adjustments. It began as a reaction to students' negative feelings towards, and subsequent neglect of, direct vocabulary study. It seeks to make direct vocabulary learning a more interactive and enjoyable experience while at the same time providing valuable learning opportunities. Following an outline of the technique and the procedure for carrying it out in class, there is a discussion of how the technique has been implemented in an EAP teaching context as part of the vocabulary learning component. The discussion also reflects on how the technique employs the above principles with particular emphasis on how the psychological conditions for learning are promoted. Practitioner reflections and observations of learning taking place are also included in the discussion.

Classroom Vocabulary Learning Cards – Procedure

This technique, Classroom Vocabulary Learning Cards has three stages: a pre task preparation stage, a task stage where learners actually carry out the technique in class with their classmates, and a post task stage where learners reflect further on the vocabulary items they have studied. The task stage is the most interactive stage and provides a lot of opportunities for learning, practice and revision of vocabulary. While the post stage task is an optional stage, it is recommended as it adds further learning potential to the technique. The three stages are outlined separately below.

Pre task – filling in the card

Step1:

Students are each given one of the words the class has been studying for the week and a blank Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card (see **Appendix**). Each student should have a different word.

Step2:

Students should then fill in the card with information about the word. Students must keep their card and word secret and not show anyone else in the class. This is important as it will help students gain a better learning experience in the task stage if they do not know their classmates' vocabulary items. Figure 1 below shows an example card that has been filled out by an elementary level student on an EAP course and figure 2 outlines the seven parts of the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card. Students can fill the card out for homework and bring it the next day if teachers wish to save class time.

Figure 1: An example Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card (filled out)

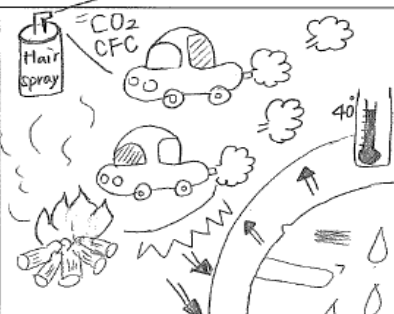
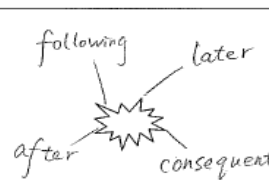
1. Picture:	2. Word & Stress:	4. Semantic map:	5. Collocations:
	<div>Subsequent</div>		Subsequent to Subsequent event
	3. Part of speech:		6. Word family members:
	adj		Subsequently adv.
7. Original sentences: People exhaust huge amount of greenhouse gases subsequent event is global warming.			

Table 1: An outline of the parts of the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card

1	A picture that illustrates the meaning of the word they have been given.
2	The word and its stress and any other pronunciation features
3	The part of speech of that word
4	A semantic map of words with similar meanings (preferable synonyms that the student already knows)
5	Useful/high frequency collocations from the dictionary
6	Other word family members and the parts of speech of those word family members
7	One or two sentences that include the word. These can be original or collected depending on class level. I usually ask my students to collect one from context (dictionary or text) and write another one for themselves.

The teacher's role at the pre-task stage:

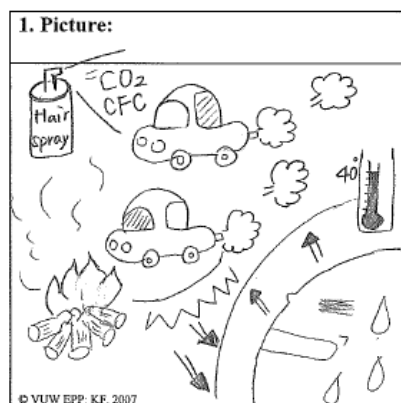
The main role of the teacher at the preparation stage is to make sure the words that students are going to study are indeed worthwhile, high frequency words. It is also best if the words for this activity come from a class list of words that have or will be studied by everyone in the class. That way this technique acts as a revision and retrieval activity for all the students. While the pre-task stage can be completed for homework and brought to class the next day, it should be done in class the first time students carry out the activity. That way teachers can monitor the preparation and provide assistance where necessary, being careful not to give each student's word away. Teachers should also provide encouragement at this stage. Encourage students who say they cannot draw that simple pictures are just as good. Students who are having trouble thinking about what to draw should wait until they have collected all the other information. While they are doing the research stage, they might generate ideas that can help them draw the picture. Teachers should also encourage students to try and use a collocation and/or the correct word family member when they write their own sentences. Part of the pre task stage can also be set aside for error correction. This can be in the form of correcting sentences, stress patterns, removal of low frequency word family members and collocations, or can even entail adding further aspects to the learners' cards, for example more word family members or more words in the semantic map. Error correction can also be carried out in the task stage of the technique as will be explored in the next section.

Task – teaching your classmates your word

Step 1:

Before starting the task stage in class, students should fold their card so that only their picture can be seen.

Figure 3: The picture part of the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card.



Step 2:

Students should now mix and mingle and find a partner. Once they have found a partner one student can begin by showing their picture, explaining it, and trying to elicit the word they have drawn from their partner. If their partner is having difficulty guessing the word, more clues can be given.

“It starts with the letter...”

“It is similar to the word...”

If the student still cannot guess the word, then they can be told it.

Step 3:

Once the word has been guessed (or given), the expert can then teach their partner the other aspects of the word – correct stress and spelling, part of speech, collocations, example uses of the word (sentences) etc. To get the best results from the task stage, students should be encouraged to actively teach their partner the other aspects of the word and any other important information or extra examples they found out about the word. They should not get their partner to just read the card.

Step 4:

The students then swap and the other person in the pair explains their picture and teaches their word.

Step 5:

Once both people in the pair have taught each other their word, they mix and mingle and try to find a new partner to repeat the activity. Students should try to speak to as many students in the class as they can, in the time allotted, as this will help them in the post task activities.

Optional step:

If students are waiting for another pair to finish in order to find a new partner, they can be encouraged to try and come up with new original sentences together in their pairs that use each other's words. Alternatively, both students can test their partner's knowledge of the word they researched.

The teacher's role during the task stage:

During this stage the teacher can monitor the activity and provide error correction where necessary. By offering error correction during the task, the teacher is giving the student an opportunity to take up this correction and use it when they move to talk to a new partner. As mentioned in the pre task stage, corrections may include providing help with pronunciation, removing uncommon word family members or adjusting sentences with errors in them. By doing this, the teacher is identifying the learning burden of these words by listening for the features that students are having trouble with. The teacher can also make notes of these features and deal with them again in the post task stage.

Post task – what can you remember: (optional stage)**Step 1:**

Once students have finished talking to their classmates, or when time is up, students should sit down in pairs and get one blank piece of paper per pair. The teacher should collect in all the vocabulary learning cards from the students.

Step 2:

The teacher then carries out a variety of further revision and retrieval tasks. These tasks can be delivered orally and competition can be encouraged. Feedback should be given after each task and points can be given to pairs with the correct information. Below are **some** examples of the tasks teachers could ask students to do in pairs – depending on time and difficulty level.

1. Write down all the words from the task and the name of the person who drew each of the words.
2. Mark the correct stress and/or separate the syllables for all of the words.

3. Choose five **[or more]** words (that are not your word or your partner's word) and
 - write the part of speech for each word
 - write a collocation for each word
 - write a family word for each word
 - write a synonym for each word
 - write an original sentence using the words
 - draw an original picture that illustrates the meaning of that word

Students should be encouraged to choose different words when carrying out the bullet pointed tasks above.

4. Choose five **[or more]** words that you still do not know very well and study them for homework (write original sentences, find out their etymology, use the keyword technique to remember them etc) .
5. Choose one word you would like the teacher to explain and give more examples of in the next lesson. Give that word to the teacher.

The teacher's role at the post task stage:

As mentioned above, the teacher has a chance during the task stage to identify learning burden and provide on the spot error correction. The teacher then has the opportunity to focus further attention on the learning burden of these words by targeting these difficult features in activities of the post task stage. If after carrying out the task stage there is no class time left, teachers may like to revisit the learning burden of these words at another time during the week. This would allow an opportunity for another spaced retrieval of the words.

Discussion: Implementing the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card activity in an EAP context

This discussion will highlight how the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card technique outlined above was implemented into the vocabulary learning component of an EAP course. It will go on to address how the six key principles outlined above are met, with particular focus on how the psychological conditions for learning are promoted.

Contextual information

This technique has been developed in a university preparation programme at a New Zealand university. Students in this institution study academic English in class sizes of between 12 and 18. The technique has been carried in four consecutive 13 week courses now as part of the vocabulary learning component and it is currently being used by five EAP classes in our department. The students come from a range of countries and have differing proficiency levels, ranging from IELTS 4.0 to 6.5. Table 1 shows the whole vocabulary learning component for one of the EAP classes in this programme. As can be seen, the technique is used in the middle of the week.

Table 2: The vocabulary learning component of an EAP class

Day:	What happens:
Friday	Students are given a list of 15 academic words to study for the upcoming week. These words are taken from a reading text that will be studied on Monday.
Saturday & Sunday	Students study the 15 words and fill in their vocabulary notebooks.
Monday	Learners will have an opportunity to meet the words in a reading skills lesson and focus on their meaning in context.
Tuesday	Students will be given a word and asked to fill in their Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card for homework in preparation for tomorrow (pre task).
Wednesday	Students will carry out the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Cards activity in class (task and post task).
Thursday	If time did not allow for this yesterday, attention will be drawn to errors and words (and aspects of words) that students found particularly difficult.
Friday	Students will do a weekly vocabulary test of the words they have studied this week. They will also be given a new list of words from a new reading text to study for homework.

Researching the technique

This technique has gone from initially being a self study task, where students completed a simpler version of the card for themselves, to now being an interactive vocabulary learning and revision task. In order to examine the effectiveness of the current form of the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card, a checklist of questions was used to observe learner behaviour during the technique. The checklist included the following questions which are based on conditions for learning presented by Nation (2001, pp. 72–74)

- Are learners using or retrieving the target words?
- Are learners exploring the meanings of the words?
- Are learners using the words in ways that stretch their knowledge of the word?
- Is negotiation of the target words successful?
- Can learners successfully complete the task?
- Are learners involved in the task?

As you will probably note, most of the above questions relate particularly to principle six (the psychological conditions for learning). The initial aims of research into the effectiveness of the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card activity were primarily to examine how observable these psychological conditions for learning were in this technique. While the discussion below will examine how all six principles are promoted in this technique, there will be a particular emphasis on the psychological conditions for learning presented in principle six.

Meeting the six key principles

Principles one to five

Looking briefly at principles one to five first, we can see that in the context identified above students study academic vocabulary from the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000). These students are aiming to do undergraduate study at an English university therefore studying

academic vocabulary directly is time and effort well spent (principle 1). Also, as the weekly routine above outlines, before engaging in this direct learning technique students have already had some exposure to the words by studying them individually and adding notes to their vocabulary notebooks. They have also had a chance to see the words in context. This previous exposure reduces the information load that students receive when they carry out the technique, and puts them in a good position to attach new information to existing knowledge and/or retrieve already learnt features (principle 2). In addition, the vocabulary card provides learners with the opportunity to learn multiple aspects of both their word in the pre task stage, and other words they have been studying in the task stage from their classmates (principle 3). Furthermore, from my experience and other teacher's comments, it is evident that students are enthusiastic about using the technique. They enjoy the challenge of guessing each other's words and love seeing the pictures their classmates have drawn. While carrying out the technique, all learners are engaged and interacting as everyone has some information that they need to convey to others (principle 4). Finally, while learners are carrying out the task and post task stages, or even before students engage in the task stage, the teacher can collect and/or act on aspects of the words that are proving to be burdening. For example, learners can have trouble pronouncing a word, they can use a word incorrectly in their example sentences, or they can include a word in the semantic map that does not actually refer to the concept of their word. The teacher can monitor the task stage and deal with the burden on the spot so that when learners move to the next partner they have an opportunity to try and use the corrected form. These errors can also be collected by the teacher and revisited at the end of the activity or on another day. They can also be added to a vocabulary test so learners have another opportunity to focus on these difficult features (principle 5).

Principle six - the psychological conditions for learning

Perhaps the most important feature of a learning technique is whether it promotes the psychological conditions for learning – noticing, retrieval and generative use. When these conditions are present, they can promote greater learning (Nation, 2003). These three conditions for learning are noticeable at all three stages of the aforementioned technique. The discussion below illustrates how these conditions are promoted by the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card technique and includes some practitioner insights and observations of learning taking place from the EAP context highlighted above.

Noticing

Research suggests that if students consciously notice a language item then they are more likely to learn it (Schmidt, 1990). For this technique, students need to explicitly search for and notice features of their word when they are preparing their card for the activity. They need to pay attention to features like spelling and pronunciation, word family members, collocations, grammatical information and example uses of the word. They then direct their classmate's attention to these features during the task stage so they can notice them. There is also constant negotiation during the task stage as learners check and confirm information that they already know or check conflicting information they have about the word with the expert. This will often be in the form of checking additional meanings of the word (if a word has several meanings), difficult pronunciation features and asking for explanation of sentences, parts of the picture and difficult collocations. One example of negotiating conflicting information occurred for the word promotion where a student drew a picture of a shop that was promoting the sale of a new stereo. This is one meaning or concept of the word promotion. After the student guessed what the word was, he checked his existing information with the expert ("I thought this word means get a better job you know go up") and was able to add to his knowledge of the word. From my observations, this kind of negotiation is common and if

negotiations can not be resolved, learners will ask the teacher for clarification and further explanation adding to the chances of successful negotiation.

Retrieval

Baddeley (1990) tells us that retrieving a vocabulary item increases the chance that that word will be remembered and is more effective than presenting the item again. This condition of vocabulary retrieval is very obvious when observing the technique in action. Learners push themselves to retrieve words in both the task and the post task stages of the activity. During the task stage learners often ask **not** to be told the word in order to push themselves even more. There is obvious strain as learners try to retrieve the words and when they successfully retrieve the word there is often a real sense of accomplishment (or relief!). If they cannot guess and they are filled in by their expert partner, their memory is jogged, and there are phrases like “that’s right” and “I knew that” constantly uttered. These moments when the penny drops, and they either guess the word or are given it, help strengthen learners’ knowledge of that particular word. Students also have a chance for further retrieval in the post task stage as they try to complete several tasks set by the teacher. This can be done immediately after the activity or later in the week to space out the opportunities for retrieval, or both.

Generative use

Students have a chance to be creative and stretch their knowledge of the words at all three stages of the technique. In the preparation stage, students need to create an original sentence and turn the meaning of the word into a pictorial form. Learners have often commented on how challenging it is to draw the pictures and visually present the meaning of the word and how this action stretches their understanding of the word. This also happens when learners see the visual representations of other words in the task stage as they attempt to retrieve the word. While interacting at the task stage, a student has the chance to hear a word explained in a way that may be previously unfamiliar to them. The picture or example sentences may also represent a meaning of the word previously unknown to them, as was the case in the example mentioned above for the word promotion. Also, if you ask students to do the optional step in the task stage, where they need to come up with new sentences together in their pairs, there are further opportunities for new and generative use of a word. In addition, while carrying out the post task activities with a partner, students will have opportunities to further build on their knowledge of a word from their partner’s contributions to the task. It is often the case that one student has picked up knowledge of a feature that the other student has not and therefore can fill in the gap for their partner.

One important point for encouraging generative use: students should be told to think deeply about their original sentences and provide plenty of context. In some cases students have prepared sentences that do not show much creative use of the word. For example for the word survey, a student wrote He surveyed me, or for the word conflict a student wrote, There was a conflict yesterday. It is therefore important to encourage students to write and/or collect sentences that show the meaning of the word as this will help learners (both the expert and the listeners) with their understanding of the word.

Conclusion/Evaluation

The Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card technique was designed in reaction to the negativity surrounding direct vocabulary study by students in the EAP context I teach in. Students will often start direct vocabulary study with the best intentions, but they can lose motivation very quickly. This technique therefore aims to motivate students into direct vocabulary study of important high frequency words while also providing students with an

outlet to retrieve and use information about the words they have recorded in their vocabulary notebooks. Students enjoy the challenging nature of the activity and from their engagement in the task obviously see it as a valuable learning technique.

The technique is also soundly based on principles of vocabulary learning. While it is up to teachers and/or students to select high frequency words when using the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Cards, and to make sure these words have been previously met, the technique itself is motivating, it allows students to focus on the many of the aspects of word knowledge, and it gives teachers the chance to directly identify the learning burden of new vocabulary items. More importantly though, this technique promotes the psychological conditions for learning – noticing, retrieval and generative use. Learners have a chance to notice new features of their word and the words that are explained to them. They also have a chance to negotiate new or confounding information about the vocabulary items with both their classmates and teacher. Additionally, the technique promotes retrieval of words (from a picture and explanation) and retrieval of the particular features of those words. Moreover students get to use and see the words in creative and novel ways that help them stretch their knowledge of those particular vocabulary items.

Future research directions

While the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card technique has been adjusted, it is still a work in progress. It has proved to be successful in the tertiary preparation course context outlined in this article. However it remains to be seen how well the technique will work at high school level or with bigger class sizes. Examination of this technique in other contexts may lead to additional changes to the features of the technique, or identify limitations for its use. In addition, the researcher would like to collect a larger amount of empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the technique. One planned future direction is to examine the hypothesis that target words appear more often in meaning focused output tasks when the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card is employed as part of the direct vocabulary learning component of the course. Also, since writing this article, questionnaire data has been collected in order to observe student perceptions of the technique. This data will be analysed for examples of how the Classroom Vocabulary Learning Card technique promotes strategic and more aware vocabulary learners.

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Further information:

More information including a PDF of the blank vocabulary cards, example cards filled out by some of my students, some troubleshooting solutions and a copy of the procedure can be obtained at the following website:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/kieran-file/file.aspx>

Appendix: The Classroom Vocabulary Learning Cards

1. Picture:	2. Word & Stress:	4. Semantic map:	5. Collocations:
© VUW EPP: KF, 2007			
	3. Parts of speech:		6. Word family members:
	7. Original sentences:		

1. Picture:	2. Word & Stress:	4. Semantic map:	5. Collocations:
© VUW EPP: KF, 2007			
	3. Parts of speech:		6. Word family members:
	7. Original sentences:		

THE EFFECT OF A SPEED READING COURSE IN AN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

'Fluency' is a familiar term to language teachers. Fluency is typically presented as a desirable goal in language learning and so it is to be expected that teachers will devote time to fluency development in the classroom. One widely-used fluency development activity for reading is the speed reading course, based around a series of short texts controlled for length and linguistic difficulty. However, little research has been conducted on the effect of speed reading courses in either foreign or second language learning environments. This paper addresses that gap in the literature by reporting the effect of a speed reading course in a university preparation course in an ESL environment. While the findings were positive, with almost all the students doing the speed reading course showing gains in reading speed, this paper suggests that there remains more to discover about the role of a speed reading course in developing reading fluency.

The importance of fluency

Fluency is a complex concept which may be loosely described as the ability to produce and process the target language with native speaker-like ease. Fluency, along with accuracy, is typically presented as a desirable goal in language learning and is also linked with understanding, and thus with learning; fluent readers, for example, are assumed to understand more than those who are less fluent. Attention to fluency development should, therefore, form part of any balanced language course. Nation (2007) describes fluency development as one of the four strands of a language course, and advises devoting roughly equal time to it and to the other three: meaning focused input, language focused learning, and meaning focused output. In order to be regarded as fluency development, Nation argues, activities need to meet a number of conditions, which are:

- all the learners are listening to, reading, speaking or writing is largely familiar to them
- the learners' focus is on receiving or conveying meaning
- there is some pressure or encouragement to perform at a faster than usual speed
- there is a large amount of input or output.

The 4-3-2 technique (Arevart & Nation, 1991) illustrates how these conditions operate in practice. In this activity, learners prepare a topic and then speak about it three times. The first speaking turn is four minutes, the second three minutes, and the third two minutes. Each time the speaker has a different listening partner, and each time is trying to convey the same content to the listener. The reduced time provides the pressure to perform faster, while the repeated speaking opportunities ensure a large amount of output. The preparation and the repetition ensure the familiarity of the material, and the change of listener each time helps the speaker focus on conveying meaning. Thus the 4-3-2 technique satisfies the conditions for fluency development.

This attention to fluency applies to each of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Within the literature on the teaching of reading, such attention is not new. Michael West (1941, pp. 8–9), for example, divided reading into two main types, observational and

searching, with the latter being “the adult, practised type, for adult life under present conditions demands an immense amount of reading in the course of a day, and that reading has to be selected out of an even more vast amount of printed matter.” The upper limit of reading speed for observational or ‘normal’ reading, he claimed, was around 400 words per minute and it was “necessary for the teacher to know the technique of speeding up reading; and this involves what is the foundation of all effective reading, namely the Searching Attitude” (West, p. 79). Control over the vocabulary, to ensure easy reading, and the use of general rather than detailed comprehension questions, typically provided in advance, were features of his approach to increasing reading speed. While West’s searching type of reading would more usually be called skimming and/or scanning today, the features of his approach are still identifiable in classroom activities aimed at increasing reading speed.

Current research on reading speed is informed by research about eye movements and fixations, and suggests that (*pace* West) the upper limit of normal fast reading is around 300 words per minute. Slow readers fixate frequently, spend time on each fixation, and frequently look back at what they have already read (Nation, 2009, p. 63). This causes problems because, as Hudson (2007, p. 96) explains, “Efficient visual processing is essential for lexical access, and consequently . . . for comprehension. As long as the learner is at a low level of processing ability, comprehension will be impeded.” Slow readers then become trapped within what Nuttall (1996, p. 127) calls ‘the vicious circle of the slow reader’. By improving reading speed, the reader can enter ‘the virtuous circle’ where reading faster links to greater quantity of reading, better understanding, and greater enjoyment. For learners in an academic context, where enjoyment of reading may be less of a concern, West’s rationale for searching reading may provide a more convincing justification for attending to reading speed: there is a great deal to read, and the quantity of required reading is simply unmanageable if one reads slowly¹.

Ways of increasing reading speed

Given that a slow reading speed is regarded as detrimental to successful reading, and to learning (at least in contexts that require a large amount of reading), then classroom interventions to increase reading speed are to be expected. The three principal approaches taken are:

- easy extensive reading
- repeated reading
- speed reading courses

Easy extensive reading

Extensive reading – the reading of lots of easy, enjoyable books – can be done with one of two possible goals in mind (Hu & Nation, 2000, p. 423). If the goal is language development, then learners should be reading books with a very small proportion of unknown vocabulary, no more than 1 – 2% of the running words. If the goal is fluency development, the reading books should contain only known vocabulary. A number of research studies have established a link between extensive reading and reading speed (e.g. Bell, 2001; Iwahori, 2008).

Repeated reading

Repeated reading requires the learners to read the same text aloud repeatedly to another person on separate occasions. In foreign language teaching, repeated reading has been found to be effective in developing fluency, but with no significant difference between the impact of repeated reading and extensive reading (Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004).

Speed reading courses

The theoretical underpinning of both speed reading courses and repeated reading would appear to be, at least in part, the mental discipline hypothesis (Tracey & Morrow, 2006) which maintains that learning occurs through regular exercise; although the mental discipline hypothesis is referred to in this paper, it should be acknowledged that a similar justification is offered by connectionism, and in particular Edward L. Thorndike's law of exercise – the more something is done, the stronger the stimulus-response connections become (Tracey & Morrow, pp. 34–36). In a speed reading course, learners read a series of texts of equal length written with a restricted, known vocabulary. Because the variables of text length and vocabulary burden are controlled, changes in the time taken to read a text are claimed as a valid indicator of changes in reading speed. However, to ensure that there is a balance between reading speed and comprehension the texts are followed by a series of general rather than detailed questions, but which are not known in advance (cf. West's approach).

Speed reading courses meet all the conditions for fluency development. Because the texts are written with a restricted, known vocabulary all that the learners are reading is largely familiar to them, and as comprehension questions follow each text the learners' focus is on receiving meaning. At the same time, as learners are recording both their speed and their comprehension scores for each text there is some encouragement to perform at a faster than usual speed. The condition requiring a large amount of input is met by the number of texts.

The effect of a speed reading course

Very little research on the effect of a speed reading course in a foreign language learning environment has been published, and none that I am aware of on the effect of a speed reading course in a second language learning environment. The existing research supports the use of speed reading programmes, and has investigated whether such programmes are best conducted in the first or the target language. West (1941) found a transfer effect from training in reading in English to first language (Bengali) reading speed and promoted the desirability of conducting speed reading courses in the first language. Bismoko & Nation (1974) and Cramer (1975) came to the same conclusion after experimental research in Indonesia and Malaysia respectively. More recently, Chung and Nation (2006) reported on the effect of an English language speed reading course on the English language reading speed of forty first year university students in Korea. This course was delivered over a nine-week period, and almost all students gradually increased their reading speed, with most of the increase occurring over the first ten texts. On the basis of this study, the authors recommended that "a speed reading course should be included in every reading class" (Chung & Nation, p. 198).

Despite that confident recommendation, the Chung and Nation study did raise some questions. One methodological peculiarity of that study, for instance, was that the students read five of the twenty-three texts at home rather than in class, which may raise questions about the reliability of the results for those texts. A more substantial question was whether the increase claimed at the end of the course was a result of a 'practice effect'; the students read from two to four speed reading texts a week for nine weeks, at the end of which period they would have become 'practiced' at reading the type of texts and responding. There was no evidence that any increases were maintained. West (1941) compares reading to physical activities such as swimming, and the analogy holds for this concern about a 'practice effect', as well as being consistent with the theoretical underpinning of speed reading. Just as an athlete aims to reach peak performance through a training programme, the learner may reach peak reading speed after repeated practice with a series of controlled texts but fall away from that peak when the programme ceases. A reasonable hypothesis therefore may be:

Hypothesis 1

If apparent gains in reading speed at the end of a speed reading course are the result of a 'practice effect', these gains will not be maintained when reading speed is re-assessed at a later date.

Another substantial question concerned the actual effect of a speed reading course on reading speed. After all, only a few minutes of class time are devoted to any one speed reading text. Within any language course, there will be many factors potentially contributing to improved language proficiency, one result of which may be faster reading speed. The control groups in the studies by Bismoko & Nation (1974) and Cramer (1975), for example, did not experience a speed reading programme but both registered increases in their English language reading speed, though considerably smaller than the increases for the experimental groups in each study. These results occurred in an EFL setting, where language learning opportunities could be assumed to be fewer than in an environment where the target language is constantly encountered outside the classroom. In an ESL environment, it is reasonable to expect that learners will be, or at least will have many opportunities to be, exposed to English in a variety of forms, and these again may potentially influence reading speed. To return to the physical activity analogy, as well as the training programme, an athlete will be controlling such factors as diet and sleep. If diet and sleep remain controlled after the training programme stops, but high performance results continue to be achieved, it may suggest the training programme was not contributing to those results, or at least not wholly. In terms of the effect of a speed reading course on reading speed, then, a second reasonable hypothesis² may be the following:

Hypothesis 2

If apparent gains in reading speed are wholly or partly a result of factors other than the speed reading course, gains in reading speed will continue following the end of the speed reading course.

As a result of these questions, data was gathered about the effect of a speed reading course in an ESL environment in order to test these two hypotheses and to provide an answer to the following question:

What evidence of an increase in reading speed does a speed reading course conducted in-class provide in an ESL environment?

Research design

The research was conducted with students in pre-university English proficiency classes delivered at a New Zealand university. Most teachers within this programme were familiar with and used speed readings (particularly Millett, 2005a, 2005b), usually in the manner discussed by Millet (2008) where they form the third part of a daily fluency programme that begins with five minutes of writing, followed by a two- or three-minute speaking activity based on the writing. I approached all teachers by e-mail and invited their participation in the research, explaining that there would be minimal impact on their teaching programme. The one change I was seeking to existing practice was that the final three readings would be given to the learners at the end of the course, several weeks after the last of the other seventeen had been used. This change to existing practice was designed to allow a response to the two hypotheses introduced above.

The decision to retain three readings for use at the end of the course was also influenced by Chung and Nation, who compared three different ways of assessing reading speed. Of the three, they concluded that the average scoring method, which compared the average of the first three texts and the last three texts, “seems the safest to use for determining overall change in reading speed” (2006, p. 191). This was the most conservative in assessing change of the three methods tried, and therefore the least likely to report exaggerated results.

Four teachers agreed to participate in the research. The four classes which participated in this project were the four highest proficiency classes in the programme, and all used Millett (2005b), which consists of twenty 400-word texts written within the 2000 highest frequency words and the Academic Word List, or AWL (Coxhead, 2000). The decision to use this set of texts rather than Millett (2005a) which is written within the 2000 highest frequency words was based on results from the Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 1990). This test provides an assessment of learners’ receptive vocabulary size at five levels: 2000, 3000, 5000, and 10,000 word levels, as well as the AWL. To meet the conditions for fluency development, learners should show mastery of the 2000 highest frequency words and the AWL before using Millett (2005b). This was the case in three of the four classes. With the lowest proficiency of the four classes, where not all students displayed mastery of the AWL, the decision to use the higher level set of readings was also informed by the class teacher’s assessment that the students were “ambitious to achieve.” In each class the speed reading formed part of a fluency programme (following Millett, 2008), although the frequency varied from two to four times a week. Three of the four classes had read the seventeen texts that formed the speed reading course by the mid-course break; the fourth class had read almost all at the mid-point.

It was only in the final week of the course that I visited the classes and explained the research project to the students. At the same time, students were provided with an information sheet and a consent form. Those who agreed to make their speed reading charts available then returned the signed consent form with the chart to the class teacher at a later date. Forty-four students from the approximately sixty in the four participating classes provided data, but upon closer inspection only twenty nine of these were included. It appeared that attendance in the week when the final three speed reading texts were used had not been as regular as it had been earlier in the course, and nine students had only recorded results for two of the three texts. The data for the other six students not included was incomplete in other ways.

Results

The first seventeen of the readings in the speed reading course were used on a regular basis by the learners in the first half of the course. In order to gauge whether any change in reading speed had occurred, the average reading speeds for the first three readings and the final three in this block (readings 15 – 17) were calculated. The results are presented in Table 1, arranged by changes in reading speed measured in words per minute (wpm), from the greatest increase to the greatest decrease. Twenty-five of the twenty nine learners showed an increase, ranging from a modest five wpm to an impressive 143 wpm. One of the four learners who showed no increase (Learner 2E) was already at a rate in excess of the currently accepted limit for normal fast reading so the lack of change is perhaps unsurprising. Three other learners who began with relatively fast reading speeds (1H, 2A, 2B) did however all increase their reading speeds, although one of the three who registered a decrease (3I) also began with a fast average reading speed on the first three readings.

Table 1: Changes in reading speed from start to finish of speed reading course

	Average 1 - 3	Average 15 - 17	Wpm change
2B	257	400	143
1L	177	315	138
1H	277	400	123
4C	132	228	96
1B	113	200	87
3F	143	228	85
2K	202	283	81
2C	177	257	80
2A	277	348	71
2D	208	277	69
3H	135	202	67
4E	195	262	67
3A	165	230	65
3G	193	253	60
2J	197	248	51
1C	182	228	46
1I	235	277	42
2H	182	322	40
2L	227	262	35
2I	168	202	34
4F	142	170	32
2M	160	190	30
3D	142	170	28
3E	140	155	15
4B	158	163	5
2E	400	400	0
3B	138	130	-8
3M	220	190	-30
3I	295	227	-68

As noted earlier, towards the end of the twelve week language course, the final three readings in the speed reading course were given to the learners. The average reading speed for those three readings is shown in Table 2, arranged by changes in reading speed since the end of the speed reading course. As can be seen, fourteen learners showed further gains in reading speed and two no change (again including Learner 2E, the student who was reading at a fast rate when the course began). The remaining thirteen students recorded a decrease in reading speed, with three of the decreases in words per minute (Learners 1I, 1H and 2B) being numerically larger than the greatest of the increases (Learner 4E increased 41 wpm). All the same, when one looks at the speeds of the two with the largest decreases, it does not appear to be a matter of concern from a reading efficiency perspective as both are still reading at very satisfactory rates. A similar comment could be made about the small decrease for Learner 2A. It is also worth noting that Learner 3B's reading speed continued to decline, and that while Learners 3I and 3M showed an increase between these two measures, both were still reading at a slower rate than they had been on the initial three readings (Table 3).

Table 2: Changes in reading speed from end of speed reading course to end of language course

	Average 15 - 17	Average 18 -20	Wpm change
4E	262	303	41
2D	277	315	38
2H	322	348	26
4B	163	185	22
3I	227	248	21
1C	228	248	20
3D	170	187	17
2I	202	217	15
3A	230	242	12
3M	190	202	12
1L	315	322	7
2K	283	288	5
2M	190	195	5
3E	155	157	2
2C	257	257	0
2E	400	400	0
3B	130	128	-2
2A	348	345	-3
4F	170	165	-5
2J	248	240	-8
1B	200	187	-13
2L	262	248	-14
3F	228	208	-20
3G	253	233	-20
3H	202	172	-30
4C	228	188	-40
1I	277	235	-42
1H	400	345	-55
2B	400	337	-63

Table 3: Changes in reading speed from start to end of language course

	Average 1 - 3	Average 18 -20	Wpm change
2H	182	348	166
1L	177	322	145
4E	195	303	108
2D	208	315	107
2K	202	288	86
2B	257	337	80
2C	177	257	80
3A	165	242	77
1B	113	187	74
1H	277	345	68
2A	277	345	68
1C	182	248	66
3F	143	208	65
4C	132	188	53
2I	168	217	49
3D	142	187	45
2J	197	240	43
3G	193	233	40
3H	135	172	37
2M	160	195	35
4B	158	185	27
4F	142	165	23
2L	227	248	21
3E	140	157	17
1I	235	235	0
2E	400	400	0
3B	138	128	-10
3M	220	202	-18
3I	295	248	-47

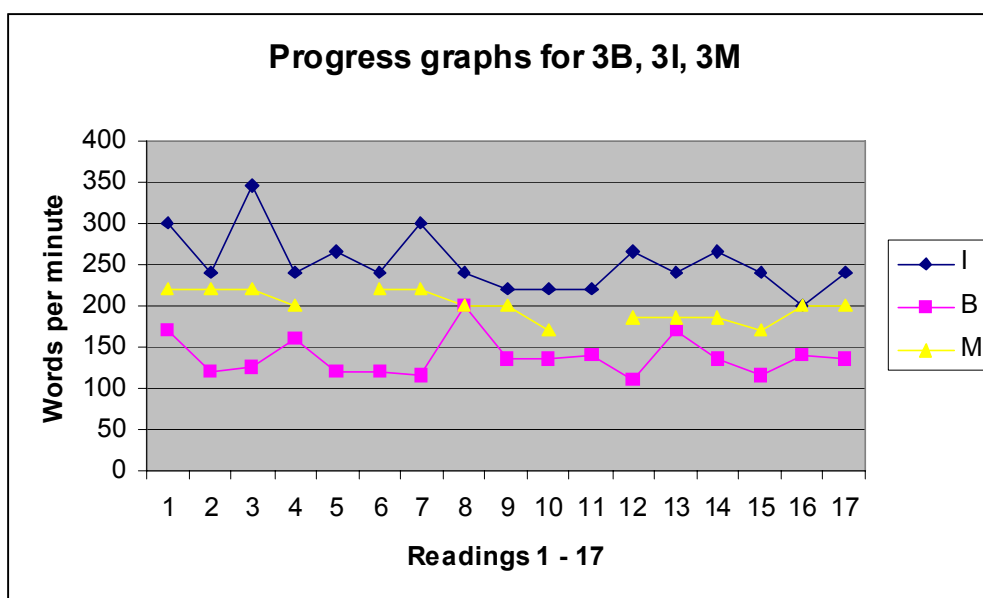
Discussion

The question that this study was intended to address was whether a speed reading course conducted in-class in an ESL environment would provide evidence of an increase in reading speed. The short answer would appear to be that it does, as almost all students showed an increase in their average reading speed from the beginning to the end of the speed reading course. This finding is similar to that for the Korean university students in Chung and Nation (2006)'s study. Furthermore, except for occasional single outliers, the patterns of increase are remarkably consistent in the two studies.

It is unclear however why three students showed a decrease. When their individual progress graphs were analysed (Figure 1), two displayed erratic patterns (Learners 3I and 3M) and the other was relatively flat, similar to patterns Chung and Nation classified as 'no change'. The fact that these three learners belonged to the same class did not appear to be a factor. All four classes used the same set of speed readings, and all four used set readings from the same study themes for intensive reading and reading strategy training in-class, although no information about which readings were used and how they were used was gathered. Extensive

reading of graded readers was encouraged in various ways in all classes, and Class 3 had an interactive pair reading activity in the second half of the course that the other three classes did not. In other words, teacher reporting suggests that the teaching of reading was approached in a relatively consistent fashion in all classes.

Figure 1: Progress charts for students recording a decrease in reading speed



While a speed reading course may provide evidence of an increase in reading speed, it does not establish that the course caused the increase. As mentioned earlier, other factors affecting language learning are present both in the classroom and in the wider socio-cultural environment. Thus, Hypothesis 2 asked:

If apparent gains in reading speed are wholly or partly a result of factors other than the speed reading course, gains in reading speed will continue following the end of the speed reading course.

As was seen in Table 2, just under fifty per cent of the students showed increases in reading speed from the end of the speed reading course to the end of the language course with the increases being of a generally smaller magnitude than those recorded from the start to the end of the speed reading course. For these students it appears that factors other than the speed reading course contributed to gains in reading speed over that period, although the possibility cannot be discounted that the speed reading course assisted in this development. However, for a similar proportion of students, reading speeds appeared to decrease from the end of the speed reading course to the end of the language course. For this finding, two possible explanations suggest themselves. The second of these, relating to the occurrence of other reading, is proposed in the final section of this paper. The first, however, is that for these students the speed reading course did contribute to an increase in reading speed but that, as with athletes ceasing training, it was not able to be maintained. Apparent gains in reading speed were a result of familiarity with the speed reading format; the gains fell away as the 'practice effect' wore off. Such an explanation would provide some support for the first hypothesis introduced in this paper:

If apparent gains in reading speed at the end of a speed reading course are the result of a 'practice effect', these gains will not be maintained when reading speed is re-assessed at a later date.

Almost all the students doing the speed reading course showed gains in reading speed, and while it is possible that these apparent gains may have been contributed to by a ‘practice effect’ (for the students who showed a decrease in reading speed at the end of the language course) or by other factors within the language learning and/or wider socio-cultural environment (for the students who showed a further increase in reading speed at the end of the language course), on balance the likelihood is that the speed reading course contributed to gains in reading speed. Therefore, Chung and Nation (2006)’s recommendation that “a speed reading course should be included in every reading class” would appear to be sound.

Furthermore, when a speed reading course is embedded in a daily fluency programme (Millett, 2008), it has additional affective and classroom management benefits. It appears to build student confidence in their ability to read faster, which in turn motivates students to read as they find it a more satisfying experience, a shift towards Nuttall (1996)’s ‘virtuous circle of the good reader’. For the teacher, it establishes a set format for the start of each day, a format which avoids time-wasting and brings an immediate focus on language learning.

However, there is clearly more to discover about the role of a speed reading course in developing reading fluency. Both Chung and Nation (2006) and this study have been quantitative, and do not investigate learner variables that may impact on reading speed. Such questions include but are clearly not limited to:

- How fast do learners read in their L1?
- How motivated are learners to read fast in the target language?
- How does vocabulary size correlate with reading speed?
- Do speed reading gains transfer to other forms of reading?
- What do learners *really* think about speed reading courses?
- How much other reading do learners do in the target language?

Two of these questions seem particularly important. The transfer of speed reading gains to other forms of reading is essentially asking whether controlled and supported fluency development activities do in fact improve the capacity of learners to handle real-time communication under real-time conditions. The second question of apparent importance is the last in the list above. If a speed reading course does contribute to an increase in reading speed, any increase would be difficult to maintain in the absence of other reading. Other reading may, then, be one of the factors contributing to reading speed gains that the second hypothesis supposes. This factor may help to explain why, for around half the students, reading speed appeared to decrease from the end of the speed reading course to the end of the language course. As an intriguing footnote to this study, the largest proportion of learners (63%) from any of the four classes to show an increase from the end of the speed reading course to the end of the language course belonged to Class 2 (Table 3), which also included an in-class extensive reading programme. It may be stating the obvious but it does suggest that gains from a speed reading programme may be difficult to maintain if learners do not continue reading. To adapt a well-known principle (Williams, 1986) ‘in the absence of reading, very little is possible’.

Conclusion

Fluency development should occupy about one-quarter of classroom time and, while there are a number of questions that require further investigation, the indications from this study are that a speed reading course assists fluency development in reading. Fluent readers are more likely to be successful readers, and to gain enjoyment from reading. Teachers should, therefore, be encouraged to include a speed reading course in their programme, whether that is delivered in a foreign or a second language learning environment.

Notes

¹ There are, of course, occasions when slow, careful reading is appropriate. Good readers will adjust their reading speed according to reading purpose and the nature of the text.

² Both anonymous reviewers made helpful comments on this hypothesis (and other aspects of the paper), for which I thank them. Their comments lead to my re-phrasing and expanding on this hypothesis a little, but I chose not to abandon it completely. I recognize, however, that the current research design was not going to produce a conclusive finding on this point, as discussed later in the paper.

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LEARNING SUCCESSFULLY IN A TARGET-LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

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Abstract

Wide acceptance of English as the global lingua franca has ensured a strong and continuing demand for English tuition in the early years of the 21st century. Since it is commonly believed that the best way to learn a language is to study it in an environment where it is spoken, places like New Zealand have become popular destinations for those wanting to maximise their learning opportunities. Research, however, has not provided unequivocal evidence that a target-language learning environment does, in fact, provide a fail-safe route to success.

This paper looks at some of the factors which may contribute to success or otherwise for learners studying in a target-language environment. It compares and contrasts two students who managed to make good progress and analyses some of the possible contributors to their success. Suggestions are made for the promotion of successful learning in a target-language environment as well as for areas requiring further research.

Learning successfully in a target-language environment: Contributing factors

Background

In recent years, the learning situation has been recognised as an important factor in successful language learning (for instance, Norton and Toohey, 2001), and there has been a widespread acceptance of the belief that a language is best learnt in the environment where it is spoken. As Mendelson (2004, p. 53) explains:

Though [the students] had various goals and objectives – fluency, improved language skills, cultural learning and immersion, increased independence and confidence – their fundamental expectation was that the [target-language] learning context would help them to realise these more effectively.

In the 21st century, English has become a “much sought-after commodity” (Tsui, 2004, p. 11). As a result, the demand for English tuition has been keenly felt in English-speaking countries such as New Zealand, where the potential opportunities afforded by a target-language context attract many English language students. According to Skyrme (2005), students who come to New Zealand to study English often expect that the mere fact of studying in a target-language environment will somehow make the learning easier, and, as Freed (1998, p. 31) observes:

It has long been assumed that the combination of immersion in the native speech community, combined with formal classroom learning creates the best environment for learning.

Some studies have, indeed, shown that significant gains in linguistic proficiency have been made while studying in a target-language situation (for instance, Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). However, the rather naïve belief in some kind of linguistic osmosis has not always proven to be well founded (for instance, Isabelli-Garcia, 2003; Pellegrino, 1998; Regan, 1998, Skyrme, 2005; Wilkinson, 1998). The reality is that students often find it difficult to cope in learning

and living situations which may be very different from what they are used to. As a result, they often find themselves linguistically, culturally and socially challenged in ways which may severely reduce motivation and threaten their very sense of identity (Kline, 1998).

From the studies noted above, we must conclude that studying in the target-language environment is not in itself sufficient to guarantee successful learning. If this is the case, what might some of the other contributing factors be? What is it that makes some students successful while others fail?

It has been suggested that language learning strategies, defined by Griffiths (2008, p. 87) as “activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning”, may be a key factor in successful language learning. Language learning strategies have long been recognised for their potential to enhance the likelihood of language learning success (for instance, Cohen, 1998; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper & Russo, 1985; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 1990). Studies have shown that higher level students use strategies significantly more frequently than lower level students (for instance Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003). According to Griffiths (2008), higher level learners are likely to employ strategies relating to managing their own learning (metacognitive), to expanding their vocabulary, to improving their knowledge of grammar, to utilising resources (such as TV or movies), and involving all four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). In other words, higher level students tend to frequently use a wide range of language learning strategies.

Vann and Abraham (1990), however, questioned the relationship between language learning strategy use and success in language learning on the basis that the unsuccessful learners in their study used many strategies. Clearly, then, we cannot conclude that frequent use of strategies will inevitably lead to success in language learning, any more than we can conclude that a target-language environment is sufficient in itself to facilitate successful learning. What, then, are the other factors?

The results obtained by Green and Oxford (1995) and Griffiths (2003, 2008) noted above used questionnaires to elicit their data. However, although questionnaires can be useful for gathering quantitative data, they are not always valid or reliable (Ellis, 1994), and may not be adequate to elicit in-depth or appropriate responses (Dornyei, 2003). Furthermore, questionnaires by their nature tend to focus on discrete, decontextualised items, as a result of which overall patterns of variables which may relate to particular phenomena can be obscured. These limitations prompt Gu, Wen and Wu (1995) to advocate a multi-method approach, and (Chaudron, 1986, p. 714) recommends interviews to add “qualitative refinement”. In order to obtain both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, the study reported in this paper used both questionnaires and interviews.

The study

In order to address questions relating to the factors which might contribute to successful language learning in a target-language environment, this report examines questionnaire and interview data relating to two successful learners studying English at a private language school in Auckland, New Zealand. For the purposes of this report, success in language learning is judged in terms of class level. Since multiple factors may determine class placement and, anyway, some students are not concerned with achieving higher class levels, it might be argued that class level is not an absolute indicator of success. However, in the situation where this study took place, most students were in fact keen to progress through the levels of the school and graduate from as high a level as they could as quickly as possible,

thereby rendering class level the criterion by which they judged their own and their classmates' success. Students were working over seven levels (elementary, mid-elementary, upper elementary, pre-intermediate, mid-intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced). Placement was determined by means of their score on the Oxford Placement Test (Allan, 1995), their performance on an oral interview, and the results of testing following placement.

Students at the school were international students of English who had come to New Zealand to study in an English-speaking environment. Though most students were in their 20s, ages ranged from teenagers to some who were in their 60s. Approximately one third of the students were male and two thirds were female. Students came from a wide variety of backgrounds, including Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mainland China, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Switzerland, Germany, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Poland, Argentina, Brazil and Tahiti.

Participants

Altogether in the course of the study, 26 students were interviewed. The interviewees were selected to be as representative as possible of the students in the school in terms of age, gender, nationality and level of English. Since this article focuses on learning in a target-language situation, the responses of two students (Fernando and Kim) whose data produced interesting insights regarding studying in such an environment will be reported here. Fernando was a 23-year-old Argentinian and Kim was a 20-year-old Korean.

Data collection

The interviewees were firstly asked to complete the 50-item version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) for speakers of other languages (Oxford, 1990). The SILL is a self-scoring, paper-and-pencil survey which consists of a series of statements such as "I review English lessons often". Students are asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never) to 5 (always or almost always). The items of the SILL are divided into six groups: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social (for more details and explanation of these groups, see Oxford, 1990).

The SILL was then used as a stimulus for questions regarding language learning strategy use during a semi-structured interview lasting about half an hour during which responses were noted. Special attention was given to items which were rated as either very frequently (5) or infrequently (1) used. According to his SILL results, for instance, Fernando seldom used a number of memory or cognitive strategies, while Kim gave 5 to a number of metacognitive strategies. During their interviews, these strategy patterns were discussed. An interview guide was also used which asked about the difficulties students had found with learning English, the strategies they had found useful, and their perceptions of how individual variables such as their nationality, gender, age or other factors affected their learning (see Appendix).

Data analysis

SILL Data were analysed for average reported frequencies of use, and for highly frequent use (defined as average = 3.5 or above as per Oxford, 1990). The numbers of strategy items rated 5 ("always or almost always") over the whole questionnaire as well as the numbers of strategies rated 5 in each SILL group were counted. In addition, interview records were examined for useful insights regarding patterns of reported language learning strategy use and how these related to individual and environmental factors.

Results

Although they came from different national backgrounds and were of different genders, Kim and Fernando had a great deal in common. They both had five-month courses and went from mid-elementary to advanced in that time. However, their courses were not contemporaneous, so they were never in the same class as each other. Quantitatively their strategy use was the same. Table 1 sets out twelve points of contrast and comparison.

Table 1: Contrast and comparison of Fernando and Kim (*Note: “5” is the highest frequency rating indicating a frequency of “always or almost always”)

	Fernando	Kim
Gender	M	F
Nationality	Argentinean	Korean
Age	23	20
Accommodation	Homestay	Homestay
Course length	5 months	5 months
Start level	Mid-elementary	Mid-elementary
Finish level	Advanced	Advanced
Motive	Job	Job
SILL average	3.7	3.7
SILL Items rated 5*	18	18
Dominant strategy type	Social	Metacognitive

Fernando

At the beginning of his five-month English language course, 23-year-old Fernando from Argentina was placed at mid-elementary level. At this stage he struggled to communicate verbally in English and his grammar was especially weak. He was, however, extremely focussed, determined and assertive; indeed the term “pushy” was used to describe him on more than one occasion. He had left a job to come to New Zealand and had financed his own studies which he wanted to use to get a better job. He was, therefore, very aware of what the course was costing him in monetary terms and there was an urgency about his determination to make the best of his time at the school which was not evident with many of the other students whose courses were often being paid for by parents or others. Highly motivated, therefore, to make the best use of his time and money, he agitated ceaselessly for promotion, making regular visits to myself, as Director of Studies, to find out when he was next going to be promoted.

When Fernando’s SILL questionnaire was examined, a high average reported frequency of strategy usage (average = 3.7) was discovered. There was also a large number ($n = 18$) of strategies rated in the “always or almost always” (rating = 5) category, of which five were from the six items (83%) in the social strategy group, suggesting a preference for this interactive type of strategy.

The most difficult aspects of learning English, according to Fernando, were prepositions, understanding native speakers, and also working out the pronunciation of English words. Although English has a lot of vocabulary which is related to Spanish, he found that it is often not possible to work out the pronunciation from the written form as is usually the case with Spanish.

Asked what he found the most useful strategies, Fernando said he liked to learn vocabulary in related chunks rather than as isolated words, a strategy which he credited to a highly-esteemed private teacher with whom he studied prior to coming to New Zealand. Other key strategies

he mentioned included keeping a notebook in which he recorded language items new to him (for instance, prepositional usage) and watching TV with his homestay family as much as possible in order to practise listening and as a model for pronunciation. Furthermore, he said he was not afraid of asking others if unsure (for instance of correct vocabulary or pronunciation) and learning from correction (though, in fact, he was often so busy talking he would continue right over attempts to correct him!).

It was pointed out that his SILL questionnaire indicated very little use of “memory” and “cognitive” strategies and suggested that he might usefully consider using such strategies (for instance writing letters, reading for pleasure) more often. However, Fernando expressed impatience with this advice and insisted that speaking English only was the most important learning strategy. His considerable South American charm certainly facilitated the exercise of this strategy by ensuring him of a constant supply of eager (female) companions, with whom he no doubt spent the time speaking English constantly! Fernando left the school from the advanced class, having moved through six levels in five months, a very good rate of progress.

Kim

Like Fernando, when 20-year-old Kim from Korea came to New Zealand for a five-month English course, she was initially placed in a mid-elementary class. She had come to study English in order to improve her job prospects and to have a “better life” and she had worked for eight months as a teacher and librarian in order to earn the money for her course. However, she was not especially demanding as far as promotion - she was promoted purely on her results. In fact, she was such a quiet, steady worker that it was actually a surprise, at the end of her five-month course, to discover that she had gone all the way from mid-elementary to advanced (six levels), a rate of progress which matched Fernando’s.

An examination of her SILL results showed the same high average reported frequency of language learning strategy use (average = 3.7) as Fernando, and also the same large number of strategies ($n = 18$) used in the “always or almost always” (rating = 5) category. Unlike Fernando, however, who favoured social strategies, Kim gave ratings of 5 to five metacognitive strategies (that is, 56% of the nine strategy items in this group), suggesting that she was very aware of the need to regulate her own learning. As she put it: “The teacher leads, but learning is up to the student”. She did not concern herself too much with strategies relating to feelings because “it is important to keep your mind on your work and not to worry too much about feelings”.

Kim said she found idioms especially difficult when learning English and she felt that Europeans had an advantage here because “their thinking is closer to English - they can guess”. Nevertheless, students like Kim provide evidence that Asian students can learn English as successfully as those from elsewhere. English vocabulary was also a problem. In spite of the Korean education system’s well-developed method for teaching vocabulary in lists, Kim found it difficult to distinguish between the many words in English which mean almost the same thing. English grammar was similarly problematic, since it is “completely different” from Korean and she found the unfamiliar conventions of English (such as word order) hard to get used to. Kim had found it necessary to pay conscious attention to these areas of English, writing idioms, vocabulary and grammar in a notebook as she came across them and consciously learning them later. Other key language learning strategies she said she had found useful were watching TV and using tapes in the self study room to improve her listening skills. In addition, she read magazines, newspapers and stories, which she found provided a model for her writing as well as practice for reading skills. She also tried to speak to her homestay family or non-Korean friends at school as much as possible in order to improve her speaking and listening skills. She lacked confidence in these areas because, she

explained, in Korea her lessons had been textbook-based and she had had no access to English speakers before coming to New Zealand. Kim said she put a lot of time into her study, believing “we must study steadily and with patience”.

Discussion

In spite of their differences in terms of nationality and gender, there are some remarkable similarities between Kim and Fernando. They were both in their early twenties, with similar motivation (they had both paid for their own courses and wanted a better job) and enrolled in a course of the same length (five months). After five months, they had both progressed from mid-elementary to the advanced class. Furthermore, their reported strategy averages (3.7) and the total number of strategies rated 5 (18) were the same. Another factor that they had in common is that they both seemed to recognise the need to adopt strategies different from what they might previously have used, such as using a notebook and speaking in English. They both lived in a homestay situation which, by its nature provides more exposure to the target language than, for instance, flatting with others who speak the same native language, as some other students did. And they both made efforts to utilise resources such as TV, newspapers and magazines, which are readily available in a target-language situation but not commonly in a non-native-speaking environment.

However, although Fernando indicated a preference for social strategies, Kim’s strategy pattern seemed to favour the metacognitive sub-group. This is an interesting difference, which suggests that although these two students were both frequent strategy users, and although they were both successful in terms of progressing quickly through the levels of the school, individuals vary in their strategy patterns. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that there is not necessarily only one way to be successful, a conclusion reached by Naiman et al. (1978) around 30 years ago. It is true that research results suggest that successful students are frequent strategy users and that some strategies seem to be more highly correlated with success than others. However, perhaps the most important conclusion from this study may be that successful learners are not necessarily those who use any particular strategy or group of strategies. It is possible that successful students are able to select and use patterns of strategies appropriate to their own individual characteristics, situations and targets, and who manage to orchestrate the chosen strategies most effectively (Anderson, 2008; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995).

A pedagogy for successful learning in a target-language situation

When we examine Kim’s and Fernando’s data for insights into why they were successful, it is apparent that many of the factors are not exclusive to a target-language situation. Clearly, they were highly motivated, but motivation is recognised as a characteristic of successful students anywhere (Dornyei, 2001; Ushioda, 2008). They both recognised the importance of developing vocabulary, grammar and skills, and frequently used a wide range of strategies, but, again, these are familiar emphases in any language learning situation.

There are several factors which emerge from the data, however, which are specific to a target-language situation, and it may, therefore, be possible to guide students to maximise the opportunities afforded by studying in such an environment by:

1. encouraging students to adapt familiar strategies and adopt others which might be more useful or appropriate for a new learning environment, such as making friends with those who do not speak their own first language, as both Kim and Fernando reported. In this regard, Kim’s comments about the need to move on from vocabulary lists and traditional, textbook-based teaching methods were especially enlightening.

2. assisting students to live with native speakers and interact in the target language as much as possible. Both Kim and Fernando did this. For many students, choosing to live in a homestay situation is a deliberate strategy aimed at maximising their exposure to the target language and optimising their learning opportunities. It is not uncommon for students to report that their most useful learning experiences came not from their teacher, their class or their school, but from their homestay (for instance, Tanaka, 1997).
3. facilitating the utilisation of resources available in the target-language environment such as TV, another strategy reported by both Kim and Fernando. Of course, it is possible that strategies such as watching TV and reading newspapers are not easy for lower-level students because of their language level (Skyrme, 2005). Nevertheless, students should be encouraged to persevere, perhaps with simplified material, in the expectation that it will get easier with practice and increased proficiency. Students should also be advised on how and where to buy suitable newspapers and magazines, and perhaps guided through the process of joining and using local libraries which, in addition to books, often have tapes, CDs and DVDs available.

Questions for further research

Some interesting findings emerge from the present study. In particular, it seems that these two students who studied successfully in a target-language environment were willing to adapt familiar strategy patterns. They were also willing to maximise their exposure to the language they were trying to learn (for instance by living in a homestay situation), and utilise the resources (such as TV, newspapers etc) available in the target-language environment. However, the study also suggests some questions for further research. In particular, it is clearly not possible to generalise with any authority from only two cases. The study needs to be replicated with larger numbers, in a variety of learning situations (such as UK, USA, Australia etc), and perhaps with a wider range of learner variables (such as learning style, personality, aptitude etc).

Conclusion

For some time now it has been recognised that successful learners are able to employ strategies of various kinds to manage their own learning, and are therefore less at the mercy of the situation in which they happen to find themselves than students who do not have this ability (for instance, O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990). Research suggests that more successful students have a large repertoire of frequently used language learning strategies (for instance, Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003, 2008). These repertoires, however, are very individual, and it would appear that successful students such as Kim and Fernando are able to select and orchestrate strategies which are appropriate to their own characteristics, goals and situations.

When considering their strategy use, it is important to remember that, although quantitatively identical, Kim's and Fernando's strategy patterns were qualitatively rather different. In particular, Fernando favoured social strategies while Kim favoured metacognitive strategies. Nevertheless, they were both successful in being promoted. This observation suggests that success in language learning has less to do with the actual strategies chosen than with matching strategies to individual, target and contextual variables. In a target-language situation, it may be necessary to adapt familiar strategy patterns, to take full advantage of the opportunities the new environment affords by maximising exposure to the target language (for instance by staying with a homestay family), and to actively utilise the resources available in the target-language situation (such as newspapers and TV).

Of course, individual learner characteristics (such as age, gender, nationality and motivation) must be considered before attempting to apply these generalisations regarding adaptability, interaction and resource utilisation to individuals. However, the cases of Kim and Fernando seem to suggest that these factors may contribute to successful learning in a target-language environment. Conversely, students who stick rigidly to established strategies, who fail to seize the opportunity to interact in the target language and to exploit readily-available resources may be missing out on golden opportunities provided by a target-language environment for success in language learning.

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Appendix

Interview guide

1. Which language learning strategies have you found most useful for learning English (key strategies)?
2. (a) What have you found most difficult about learning English?
(b) Which strategies have you used to help overcome these difficulties?
3. Do you think the strategies you use have been affected by your
 - (a) nationality
 - (b) gender
 - (c) age
 - (d) other factors

If so, what effect have these factors had?

TESSOL TRAINING AND SECONDARY CONTENT TEACHERS: INCOMMENSURABLE OR IN COMMUNICATION?

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Abstract

This article reports on a study which investigated mainstream content subject secondary school teachers' perceptions of the impact of a professional development TESSOL (Teaching English in Schools to Speakers of Other Languages) programme in New Zealand in which they participated. The purpose of the programme was to support English as an additional language (EAL) learners by providing teachers with a theoretical and practical background in language teaching methods and techniques. The data was collected from seven secondary content teachers teaching maths, science, technology, and economics in different secondary schools. Interview data shows that the programme had an impact on the perceptions of the teachers concerning their cognitions and practices with EAL students in their content classrooms. One classroom observation for each teacher suggested that they had also adopted practices reflecting those cognitions. The success of the TESSOL programme in positively affecting the cognitions and practices of mainstream teachers suggests that such programmes may provide another way of helping meet EAL learner needs by introducing content teachers to the discourse community of second language teaching.

Introduction

This article reports on a study investigating secondary school content teachers' perceptions of the impact of a professional development TESSOL (Teaching English in Schools to Speakers of Other Languages) programme. The purpose of the professional development programmes was to support EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners in New Zealand schools by providing in-service teachers with a theoretical and practical background in TESSOL. The teachers held scholarships awarded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education for participating in one of five programmes offered by different tertiary institutions in different parts of the country. This article is based on a wider study that also included primary and middle-school content and ESOL teachers, and school managers (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2005), but focuses on the secondary content teachers for reasons of comparability and space.

Increasing numbers of EAL students and limited funding for language support mean EAL students are often placed in mainstream classrooms without sufficient language proficiency to sustain content learning. Mainstream content teachers are thus challenged by language and content instructional needs. However, 'content teachers may be ill-prepared to 'teach' language or even recognize students' language-learning needs because of lack of training in language teaching pedagogy' (Snow, Met & Genesee, 1989, p. 214). They may also lack access to materials, time for materials development, and the language expertise needed to integrate language and content successfully (Walker & Tedick, 2000).

Providing ESOL advice to mainstream teachers (Harklau, 1994) is one approach. Mechanisms for delivering advice can be ranged along a continuum from less to more formal. At the less formal end are casual contacts between ESOL teachers and mainstream

teachers and self-access manuals aimed at mainstream teachers (for example, see Anstrom, 1998). At the more formal end are mechanisms such as collaborative teaching, where language teachers become ‘resources’ (Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989) or provide ‘practical pedagogic advice’ (Arkoudis, 2003) for mainstream teachers, and team-teaching (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

However, such formal collaborations are often unsuccessful (Arkoudis, 2003; Creese, 2000). Collaboration may even ‘preserve a separation’ between ESOL and content teachers (Harklau, 1994) by highlighting their different domains of knowledge because of incommensurate discourses (Creese, 2000) and epistemologies (Arkoudis, 2003). ESOL and content teachers may have differing views not only of their roles in their schools and departments as well as classrooms, but also of fundamental beliefs about the status of knowledge and the processes of learning. Arkoudis (2003) suggests since ESOL teachers are perceived to lack epistemological authority because they lack a content subject, they are forced to negotiate roles for themselves in their collaborations with science teachers. Such inequity is ultimately founded on the lack of power of ESOL teachers in school settings. Creese (2000) associates perceptions about the role of language with discourses of professional identities. ESOL teachers perceive themselves as facilitating access to learning by focusing on language, whereas content teachers perceive themselves as teaching a subject by transmitting their expert knowledge of it. The discourse of facilitation rather than transmission marks ESOL teachers as marginal in the eyes of content teachers—and even in the eyes of EAL students (Harklau, 1994). According to Creese (2000), this discourse suggests that content teachers absolve themselves of responsibility for students who cannot negotiate their own access.

Many, however, would argue that teachers are responsible for the teaching—and the facilitation of learning that this implies—of all of their students. Those who take this view believe that content teachers need to become aware of the principles and practices of language learning and teaching (Dong, 2002; Harklau, 1994; Platt & Troudi, 1997; Spanos, 1992) in order to take responsibility for meeting the language needs of EAL students in their classrooms (Grant, 1992; Milk, Mercado & Sapiens, 1992; Short & Spanos, 1989; Walker & Tedick, 2000). This assumes that developing the knowledge base of teachers is effective, which may be problematical where prior experiences may have established a body of cognitions (Lortie, 1975), leading to a host of cognitions that may be particularly resistant to alteration (Borg, 2003).

Studying teacher cognitions is not straightforward. One difficulty is that a number of terms refer to similar concepts, such as beliefs (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992); tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966); practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1983); personal knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987); situated knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991); and BAK, or beliefs, attitudes and knowledge (Woods, 1994). ‘Cognitions’ is an inclusive term for ‘what teachers know, believe, and think’ (Borg, 2003, p. 81) and will be used here. Another difficulty is that cognitions are not directly observable, but must be inferred (Kagan, 1990) from underlying beliefs, statements, intentions, and behaviours (Pajares, 1992).

Although it is difficult to determine the impact of programmes on cognitions, some studies offer evidence of their influence, such as the discourse used to articulate cognitions (Freeman, 1991, 1993; Richards, Ho & Giblin, 1996). Other research shows beliefs may even change, although the effects are neither uniform nor dramatic (MacDonald, Badger & White, 2001; Peacock, 2001).

This is also true of research on language teacher education for mainstream teachers, which has noted the value of developing teacher empathy with students (Milk, 1990) and

increasing teachers' knowledge of ESOL teaching and techniques (ESOL Inservice Project, 1995), although teachers do not always make effective use of their knowledge in the classroom (Short, 2002). Far more positive results have been reported in the long-term SIOP Model (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol Model) (Short & Echeverria, 2004). Dong (2002) also reports on the successes of content teachers providing support to EAL learners.

The research questions that our study sought to answer were: (1) Did the content teachers perceive that their TESSOL training programme had an impact on their cognitions? (2) Did they perceive that the TESSOL training programme had an impact on their practice?

The TESSOL programmes

The New Zealand Ministry of Education TESSOL scholarships were established in 2001 to support the teaching and learning of EAL students by providing both mainstream and ESOL teachers with a theoretical and practical background in the teaching and learning of English as a second language. The scholarships were originally aimed at the large number of New Zealand born Pasifika students, and later at immigrant and international students. The initiative was based on the belief that both ESOL provision and mainstream teaching of students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds would be more effective if teachers were trained in teaching English language learners.

The TESSOL programmes were taught by five tertiary providers. Although they differed, all of them addressed language learning, language teaching, and introductory linguistics. The programmes are completed part-time over two years, after which a certificate or diploma is awarded. All of the participant teachers continued to teach full-time during the programme.

Methodology

Participants

The original study consisted of a purposive sampling of 28 teachers, their senior managers, and representatives of the five TESSOL qualification providers. The purposive sampling was planned to roughly reflect the proportion of teachers taught by the five different providers. Those who responded to telephone inquiries were invited to participate; 28 accepted. These included ten primary/middle and four secondary English language teachers as well as seven content teachers. This study will focus on data from the seven content secondary teachers: four mathematics teachers (referred to as Math 1-Math 4), one science teacher (Sci), one economics teacher (Econ), and one technology teacher (Tech). Further details might compromise participant anonymity.

Procedures

Because the original study was a programme evaluation, some data sets are not relevant to this study. This study is based on the following data sets:

- One classroom observation of each teacher, collected by field notes. Note-taking was aimed at finding evidence relevant to answering the original research questions (see below), which included language teaching principles and practices.
- Semi-structured interviews with each teacher after the observations, for approximately one hour, collected by digital recording and broadly transcribed for content.

Questions set by the New Zealand Ministry of Education guided the original data collection. Data from two questions were identified as relevant to this study:

1. What aspects of TESSOL theory and practice are evident in the programme planning and delivery of teachers who have completed MoE funded TESSOL qualifications?
2. What do they regard as the most significant additions to their knowledge base and the most significant changes in their practice as a result of completing a TESSOL qualification?

Participants were mailed their transcripts and invited to review them and submit comments to the researchers, and one responded with minor corrections to the transcription.

Analysis

Data were analysed following typical qualitative procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1994) including coding and categorizing the themes, and in the process searching for patterns to answer the research questions. The analysis was both deductive and inductive (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005), the two categories of additions to knowledge-base and changes to practices based on the research questions being deductive, and the open coding of individual teacher responses being inductive (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Reliability and validity for this study was established through triangulation and inter-rater agreement. Triangulation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) was achieved through multiple participants (different teachers), multiple data sources (interviews and observations), and two researchers (the two authors). Two of the original interviews were randomly selected and coded by both researchers, establishing a reasonable level (over 80%) of inter-rater agreement (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Findings

The findings show that six of the seven teachers perceived that the programme had an impact on their cognitions and practices, with the seventh stating it only had a minor impact. This section shows that the teachers retrospectively describe themselves as facing a problem in their teaching (see 4.1), and they perceive the TESSOL training as offering solutions which have aided them in renaming (Freeman, 1991, 1993) the problem in terms of the language requirements of content learning and the language development of their students (see 4.2). Finally, the teachers perceive themselves as having acquired new practices that have enabled them to address language through modifying teacher language, direct teaching of vocabulary, and creating learning opportunities (see 4.3).

Describing the problem

The seven teachers reported feeling ill-equipped to respond to increasing numbers of EAL students. Five characterized the situation in terms of their teaching; for example, 'I felt that I didn't really have a good understanding of what was needed to deliver well to them' (Math 2). Only two teachers linked the challenges they faced with those facing their students. They described noticing how difficult it was to teach when students had problems understanding the language used by their teachers (Econ) and textbooks (Tech). Thus most of these content teachers described having had a content teaching perspective before the TESSOL programme.

Words like 'deliver' used by Math 2 (see above) suggest that the teachers were to some extent aware of the transmission approach they had taken to content teaching. This includes three of the maths teachers, the technology teacher, and the economics teacher.

Renaming the problem

One impact of the TESSOL training was altering how the teachers perceived the problem they faced by recognizing the role of language in content learning. Five stated the programme helped them ‘notice’ language. For example, two of the maths teachers noted that before the training they hadn’t realized the extent to which maths used language their EAL students did not understand, indicating they had taken maths language ‘for granted’ (Maths 1 & 2).

Becoming aware of the role of language had an impact on their perceptions of EAL students. By focusing on the language students needed, the teachers refocused their attention from teaching content to facilitating learning. For example, both the technology and science teachers noted the need to address both content and language, while the economics teacher said, ‘In a way it’s to focus on my subject, to also try to bring more focus on how they learn in terms of the language they have to deal with’ (Econ).

Finally, one of the maths teachers who had a rather negative attitude toward the training (‘It was a lot of wishy-washy stuff’) nonetheless noted that the training ‘made me think about it. The whole school here has a language focus, but the students don’t even have vocabulary’ (Math 4). Thus all of the teachers perceived themselves as having developed a greater awareness of the role of language in content teaching, albeit Maths 4 to a much lesser extent.

Five re-described the problem they originally spoke of from the teachers’ perspective as a problem from the learners’ perspective, which suggests that the TESSOL programme led them to reconsider their practices in light of the need to facilitate learning by attending to language, rather than merely transmitting content. As the next sections will show, most of the teachers believed they had acquired knowledge of practices that addressed both language and content.

Acquiring new practices

According to six of the teachers, one important consequence of the TESSOL programme was developing practices that addressed both language and content. These fall into three groups: modifying teacher language, teaching vocabulary directly, and creating opportunities for learning through language.

Modifying the language used in teaching, textbooks and examinations was one strategy teachers attributed to TESSOL, with a particular concern being instructions. For example, during one of the Maths observations, the students had a worksheet on the language used in assessments, including instruction which the teacher explained with:

The words that tell them what to do they have difficulty understanding what’s being asked for. Like if it said evaluate $2x$ when x equals 6, but it’s written words and some of them will have no idea what it is (Maths 1).

Others focused on simplifying language to ensure content was understandable, such as Maths 2, who spoke of bringing it ‘down’ to the students’ level; the science teacher, who spoke about getting better ‘at breaking down language’; and the economics teacher who said, ‘I choose things carefully or else rewrite it for them’.

Some teachers turned to visual input when students did not understand language. The technology teacher explained one incident from the observation: ‘They’re very visual, and as soon as I folded that sleeve and I put it over my arm she understood immediately’. Math 3 noted the importance of using the blackboard because EAL students sometimes didn’t understand what she said. She explained how in the observed lesson she realized one student

had thought she had said ‘forty’ instead of ‘fourteen’, leading her to begin writing numbers on the board.

All of the teachers discussed the importance of the direct teaching of vocabulary and were observed using a range of techniques. Maths 2 commented that in the observed lesson ‘there was a deliberate attempt to teach the vocabulary relating to the subject’. This was accomplished through dedicating a section of the blackboard for vocabulary; giving a cloze exercise on vocabulary; providing definitions, explanations, and synonyms of vocabulary (many elicited from the students); recycling vocabulary from previous lessons and throughout that day’s lesson; and suggesting mnemonic devices for remembering vocabulary.

Three spoke of distinguishing between everyday and technical language, as Maths 1, Maths 4, and Econ were observed doing. For example, in the economics class at one point a student said *money*, to which the teacher responded, ‘we don’t use *money* here’ and elicited a number of related terms, such as *salary* and *wages* - until she finally supplied the appropriate term, *income*. Both the economics and technology teacher noted the difficulties EAL students had with the multiple meanings of words.

Although all the teachers spoke of the importance of vocabulary teaching, not all of them agreed that the TESSOL training had helped them. One of them (Math 4) said that it was a challenge teaching EAL students because ‘We have students who don’t know the word *circle*, they say *roundie*’. However, she then added, ‘the course doesn’t prepare you for this’.

The TESSOL programme also appeared to help six of the teachers re-evaluate how learning occurred for EAL students in their classrooms. This re-evaluation of learning was tied to changes in practices, and the teachers seem to have been particularly influenced by the discourse appropriated in their training. Three mentioned their use of scaffolding, and attributed their knowledge of it to the TESSOL programme. The technology teacher, for example, said, ‘Using the scaffolding technique I find is probably one of the most valuable methods’ (Tech).

Another teacher embraced learning through interaction, especially between peers:

I’ve become more of a facilitator now rather than doing all the talking. Previously I stood in front, chalk and talk, teach, teach, teach, here’s your exercise. But now I want them to do it for themselves and you find when you give an interactive lesson, when the kids are talking and learning together, sometimes they don’t catch it when you speak . . . and when you give them an interactive task they peer teach, so I think that really helps (Math 2).

Half of her observed lesson involved group work. This extract also illustrates language teaching and learning discourse being used to describe events in a maths classroom, using terms such as ‘interaction’, ‘oral communication skills’, ‘interactive task’ and ‘peer teach’.

One teacher focused on creating ‘frameworks’ for learning that would support student autonomy later, particularly on examinations. The economics teacher adopted a pre-, while-, and post-reading framework, saying ‘I’ve got to make sure they can manage the sort of texts they might get on the exam...the bit I think that’s most important is processing, try and get them to do things’ (Econ). The activities observed in her class showed a clearly structured framework that moved from using a cartoon to elicit the required pre-reading vocabulary, developing factual understanding of the text with written comprehension questions, to inferring and critiquing through oral discussion.

Two of the teachers conducted a small-scale action research project as a part of the TESSOL training. For these, discourse was also appropriated through the research they designed and reported, as the following comments show. One of the maths teachers considered assessments. He explained that during his TESSOL training his project focussed on the following:

Looking at what goes into assessments and pre-testing and post-testing and looking for actual improvements, not what they know but have they learned anything in the process and being very aware how we write questions so that they're not testing their language skills but testing their maths ability (Math 1).

The exam preparation included ensuring the students understood the language needed to respond appropriately to questions, as the previous section shows.

The science teacher used his action research project to focus on *when* language work should be done.

Should they be exposed to experiments, a series of tasks, before the theory, or shall I unpack all the words and the theory through language exercises and save the experiment and practical work for later? In the end it came out quite clearly that unpacking words and theoretical stuff should come first and the practical experience later. That's contrary to what traditionally science teachers are practising (Sci).

This last comment shows that rather than accepting that discovery methods are effective for all students, this teacher tried to find out what was effective for the EAL students in his classroom. It shows recognition that a 'one size fits all' approach may be inappropriate with EAL students, especially at the secondary level when students may not be familiar with the local schooling culture. In other words, this teacher shifted from considering the content classroom from the teaching perspective to considering it in terms of the learning perspective.

By re-evaluating classroom events in terms of learning, the teachers saw their practices in a new light, enabling them not only to add specific techniques to their teaching repertoire, but also to change their practices in more general ways that suggest a shift to a less transmission-oriented approach to a more facilitative approach, which one of the teachers (Math 2) explicitly described.

Discussion

The research questions that our study sought to answer were: (1) Did the content teachers perceive that their TESSOL training programme had an impact on their cognitions? (2) Did they perceive that the TESSOL training programme had an impact on their practice? The findings show that both can be answered affirmatively. For the first question, the teachers attributed cognitions relating to the role of language in content teaching and learning to their TESSOL training. The programme affected both the discourse with which the teachers discuss teaching and learning and the content of the teachers' cognitions, much as Freeman (1991, 1993) has found. Second, the teachers attributed both specific techniques for dealing with the language needs of EAL students as well as broader approaches to teaching to the TESSOL programme. Furthermore, classroom observations offer evidence that these teachers used some of the practices they attributed to the TESSOL training.

The evidence suggests that the TESSOL training helped the teachers to reconsider their teaching in light of EAL student learning by making them aware of the language challenges EAL students face, thus paving the way for these teachers to re-interpret the problem they had

previously understood from their own perspective to considering it from their students' perspective. This in turn led them to reconsider their teaching practices. It is a subtle but significant shift that moves from asking 'How do I teach this content?' to 'How do I help students learn this content?' Although teaching practices are implied by this move, they are understood and evaluated in light of their efficacy for learning, with the teacher's role moving beyond transmitting content to facilitating learning.

What is of particular interest in this study is that the teachers acquired these cognitions and practices from an area outside their own expertise. As pointed out earlier, it has been theorized that the differing epistemologies (Arkoudis, 2003) and discourses (Creese, 2000) of different disciplines are 'incommensurate' (Arkoudis, 2003). However, during the two years they spent in the programme, the teachers of this study were extensively exposed to a professional language teaching and learning discourse community.

In addition to the length of the programme is the relative positioning of these teachers during it. The incommensurability between content disciplines and ESOL discussed by Arkoudis (2003) and Creese (2000) is motivated by inequitable power relationships, with the discipline subject teachers being more powerfully positioned than the 'support' ESOL teachers. It is only where relatively equitable power relationships emerge that shared understandings also emerge (Creese, 2000). In this programme the mainstream teachers were initiated into another discipline's professional community where they learned from the experts of another discipline about a problem they could hardly describe, much less solve. This resulted not only in a new way of talking about classroom events, but also new ways of practising.

It is the teacher who did not regard the programme positively who offers the negative evidence that supports this interpretation. This teacher, as noted above, felt that the programme was 'very poor for maths teachers, it's not oriented to maths' (Math 4). Unlike the other maths teachers (who also noted how difficult it could be for them and their TESSOL programme instructors to find common ground), this teacher (Math 4) appeared unable to take up the language teaching and learning perspective. Oddly, she had ESOL teaching experience, and had entered the programme with the hope of returning to ESOL, and was disappointed that she ended up continuing with maths teaching. What she couldn't do, apparently, was forge a link between the two, suggesting that for her they were incommensurate.

Conclusion

This study is limited by its focus on the perceptions of only seven teachers and supported by only a single classroom observation for each of them. However, although this study can only be regarded as exploratory, it shows the value such a programme is perceived to have. In particular it suggests that teacher cognitions and practices are amenable to change even across the different discourse communities of content and language teaching.

Arkoudis (2003, p. 172) ends her article as follows: 'The question is how we can best bring together teachers with different discourse traditions and concerns and get them into sustained and productive dialogue?' One answer is to offer sustained 'immersion' into another discourse community through long-term, in-service teacher training programmes.

Longitudinal studies, whether taking a quantitative approach with a larger number of teachers or a qualitative approach with an in-depth look at a single case, and designed with pre-programme interviews and observations, would provide a clearer picture of the impact of such in-service programmes. Given the continued increase in EAL student numbers in New Zealand, such a study could provide further insights into how to better meet the challenges facing students, teacher, schools, and communities.

Acknowledgements

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BOOK REVIEWS

Meldrom, J., and Reimer, B. (2005). *Versatile vocabulary: Games for enhancing vocabulary*. London, England: Garnet Education. ISBN 1-85964-802-9. Pp. 128.

Reviewed by Breda Matthews

“Versatile Vocabulary” is similar in content and format to a number of other resources that contain photocopiable activities and games. However there is one significant difference. Whilst many photocopiable activities target specific lexical items and can only be used with that vocabulary, this resource contains a number of activities that can be used multiple times with different vocabulary sets, hence the title “Versatile Vocabulary”.

The book contains twenty-one different activities or games plus a word list. The games are designed to encourage students to use the vocabulary in a number of ways. This includes productive recall of vocabulary items, spelling, giving definitions, using words in sentences, acting out words, changing word forms and using prefixes and suffixes. The teacher sheet contains detailed instructions on playing the games and suggests variations.

‘Cue Cubes’ for example, provides a template for a large cube. Students throw the cube and, depending on how it lands, have to spell the word, draw, act or give an example, give the definition, use the words in a sentence, give a synonym or give another form of the word. In a number of other games the focus can be changed without any additional teacher preparation so that instead of giving a definition of the word students have to use the word in a sentence.

The games provide opportunities to use vocabulary in a variety of ways that will enhance learning by providing multiple opportunities to use the target vocabulary. Creative teachers would also find ways to further adapt these games. ‘Cue Cubes’ could be played in teams with different teams members being allocated tasks for example the weakest student might be the team member who spells the word whilst a stronger learner might use the word in a sentence. The ability to change the focus of the activity would also facilitate multi-leveilling and allow fast finishers to proceed to a different or more challenging focus.

Teachers, and perhaps students will quickly notice that a number of the games are essentially different formats for practicing the same tasks. The word list also contains some quite low frequency vocabulary for example such as ‘bribe’ and ‘decisively’ and teachers would be wise to use the resource with their own vocabulary sets rather than rely exclusively on the vocabulary provided in the lists.

This resource shares a drawback common to other similar books in that teacher time is required for both reproducing the games and teaching the games to students. However, as many of these games are designed to be used with multiple sets of words, the time involved results in resources that can be used many times with the same class, rather than once, with a specific vocabulary set. Furthermore less class time would be required to familiarise students with game formats as the same game could be used on subsequent occasions to practise new groups of words.

Most teachers regularly provide vocabulary practice for their students and any resource that provides practice with a variety of well thought out games that potentially reduce teacher preparation time is a welcome addition to the teachers’ armoury.

Mackenzie, I. (2008). *English for the financial sector*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Professional English Series, Cambridge University Press. Students' Book. ISBN 978-0-521-54725-3. Pp. 159.

Reviewed by Helen Basturkmen, University of Auckland

This book has been developed for intermediate and upper intermediate level students. It targets students preparing for a career in the financial sector and those already working in the sector and who would like to improve their English. It provides around 50 hours of classroom or self study material. The book is accompanied by an audio CD and a teachers' book.

The course is organized into 24 units. Half the units are content based and focus on sectors within Finance, such as *Retail Banking*, *Loans and Credit* and *Mergers and Acquisitions*. The other units focus on general business communication topics, such as *Meetings*, *Telephoning*, *Writing Reports* and *Negotiating*. Some of business communications topics are spread over two units (Meetings 1 and Meetings 2, for example).

The units focus directly on vocabulary development with each unit presenting key vocabulary on the topic of interest. So, for example, key words in Unit 17 Mergers and Acquisitions include *takeover bid*, *friendly takeover*, and *asset stripping*. The units also offer skills development work with the inclusion of a reading and a listening text on the topic, and a speaking and a writing task. There are a number of authentic readings from sources, such as the Financial Times and the Economist, and listening texts of interviews with members of the financial community. The speaking tasks involve role play or group work around an information gap for which students are directed to different 'file cards' at the back of the book. The units also include a 'language focus' section. For example, Unit 17 has a section on the language of cause and effect with examples thematically linked to the topic of Acquisitions and Mergers.

A question that came to my mind in examining this book was – on what basis had content topics and key vocabulary been selected? I wondered if students already working in Finance might not be that interested in sectors in which they are not involved. Only a limited number would I imagine be involved in the highly specialized area of Mergers and Acquisitions. Those already working in that particular specialization would I think be familiar with the technical terms involved. I wondered about the basis for selection of the key words. Was it frequency of use as revealed by corpus-based study, for example? The teacher's book did not include information on the basis for selection of content areas or key vocabulary items but I think some mention of this would be a useful addition.

This is a book I would like to try should I find myself teaching a class of students working in Finance or hoping to work in Finance. The book is very attractively set out and includes excellent activities for skills development and a useful set of language focus sections. In addition, the teacher's book provides support by including a section of background information about the content area at the beginning of each unit and by listing addresses for financial glossaries on the internet in the Introduction.

Brick, J. (2006). *Academic culture: A student's guide to studying at university*. Sydney, Australia: NCELTR. ISBN 978-1741381-351. Pp. 263.

Reviewed by Alison Kirkness, Auckland University of Technology

This text offers any newcomer to academic learning a road map for finding their way through the maze of talk about academic knowledge. Brick's work provides an explicit academic literacies approach with each of the nineteen chapters focused on a different aspect of academic learning. Western academic conventions are demystified, expectations explained and terminology clarified. Topics such as analysis and description, inductive and deductive thinking, developing your own voice, avoiding plagiarism and writing different genres aim to clarify the ways of knowing and thinking at university. Although targeted primarily at first year students, this text is relevant for post-graduate students new to English medium universities and will also be useful for teachers.

Structured as a tertiary textbook, each chapter starts with learning objectives and a word list of academic vocabulary (e.g. *concept, journal article, source, reference, data* and *empirical study*) which may be new terms to many first year students. Figures clarify the written explanation in simple diagrams and each chapter concludes with a summary of the main points. The final skills practice section provides several tasks for the reader to practise the skills discussed throughout the chapter. The material for description and analysis, identifying voice in academic writing, and the structuring of clauses and sentences within paragraphs will be particularly useful for EAP teachers wanting examples to illustrate their teaching.

Students could use the complete guide as an introduction to university work or dip into individual chapters, although many are sequential. The chapter on sources of academic knowledge is particularly valuable, giving five clear questions (p. 68) for deciding whether information from the web is academically reliable. The related task work provides students with six websites from a Google search to evaluate. Later chapters help readers prioritise a search list for an essay and offer guidance for sequencing the readings. An earlier focus on critical reading prepares the ground for this work on sources and reliable evidence.

Brick draws clear distinctions between descriptive textbook writing which first year students will be familiar with from school work and the analytical presentation expected in assignments or journal articles. She explains the reasons for an academic practice before the rules for following it, and shares insights into aspects of academic reading and writing that will benefit many seasoned postgraduate students. For example, she sets out clear criteria for achieving elusive qualities such as *flow* and *logic* and discusses the nuances of different reporting verbs.

The chapter on writing explains the different conventions of genres including essays, reports, problem-solution texts and research reports. Each is set out with a commentary in the right hand column alongside the text. For mainstream lecturers who sense there is an underlying problem but struggle to put their finger on it, this right hand column holds the key. For example, the author demonstrates the English language reader's expectation of deductive argument and shows the "confused" structure of the same argument presented inductively.

One of the strengths of this guidebook is in the clear explanations of academic practices that many mainstream teachers may not or cannot articulate, including the position in the paragraph of the dominant voice. Another strength is in the range of textual examples that are offered to the reader to explain a point or to apply new learning in practice. Although sample

texts do tend to focus more on the humanities and social sciences than other areas, they are all topical and of general interest. This slight imbalance in the discipline source of texts is balanced by tasks which encourage readers to analyse their own writing against a set of questions or criteria.

The dominance and importance of the writer's voice is the linking thread throughout the explanation of plagiarism. The ground work in chapters 8, 9, and 10 on reading and writing academic text culminates in chapter 11 with a rationale for plagiarism framed by voice and ownership. This is a logical (western?) explanation to students who do not understand that cutting and pasting the ideas of others is not an acceptable way to present an academic argument. Voice continues to be a key to understanding crucial differences for the student between textbooks, professional magazines and their own academic work.

Traditionally book reviews note omissions and unfortunate inclusions. Unable to identify the latter, I can only ask for more of the same clarity and insight. An index and vocabulary enhancement activities are additional inclusions that would support the existing material. Another point for later editions is the textbook convention of bolding new words in the running text to help learners identify the context of word use.

The chapter on oral participation in tutorials and seminars offers students a valuable explanation of the difference between speaking and writing and unpacks a text to show students the forms they should use in each mode, as well as considerations about purpose and audience. Given the space devoted to reading and writing it is regrettable that listening and speaking skills are given such brief coverage but may reflect the greater focus of research in written modes. Nevertheless, a rationale for oral participation would have been useful so that students understand that they need to develop skills in clarifying their thoughts by formulating them orally in the discipline discourse. The chapter on group work is rather too brief to be able to do justice to the complex issues that arise with group assessment and online discussions. Universities in the 21st century are likely to blend face to face and online learning increasingly, so the absence of discussion about student reading and writing online is surprising.

All in all, this book is readable, practical and apposite in its demythologising of academic mysteries and would be a worthwhile addition to every first year student's library.

Reinders, H., Moore, N. & Lewis, M. (2008). *The international student handbook*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 978-0-230-54519-9. Pp. 240.

Reviewed by Siew Hean Read, Language Consultant, English Language Self-Access Centre, University of Auckland.

The book is part of the *Palgrave Study Skills series*, which also has its own website, www.skills4study.com. The book under review is one of only two titles in the series for EAL students, the other being *Study Skills for Speakers of Other Languages* by two of the same authors: Marilyn Lewis and Hayo Reinders. The book is a departure from conventional international student handbooks, which tend to be written for students who will be attending a particular institution in one country and focus mainly on the practical aspects of living and studying there. By contrast, this book is written in a generic way and has a strong language learning focus.

The purpose and target users of the handbook are clearly identified in the blurb on the back cover: "If English is not your first language and you are thinking about studying in another

country, this book will give you skills you need to make the most of your overseas studies.” The authors show a keen awareness of the many difficulties faced by international students, particularly the challenges in meeting the language demands of their studies. This awareness underlies the authors’ approach to the handbook.

There are 12 chapters in all. Chapter 1, “Case studies” provides an interesting start to the book and acts as an introduction to the topics to be covered in the book. Each case study is concerned with one aspect of university study, with some questions at the end for readers to identify the problem. The authors suggest that, if the problem identified is also the reader’s concern, the reader could follow the directions to the chapter or chapters for more practical advice. This approach to designing a learning pathway is both innovative and immediately engaging. Chapter 2, “Planning your Studies” has useful information about IELTS, TOEFL and foundation courses. There is even a guide to writing an application for a scholarship, showing once again the strong language teaching focus of the book. Chapter 3, “Improving your English” is a very substantial chapter (the second longest, at 24 pages). The aim appears to be to equip international students with the tools to manage their own learning. There is advice on setting language goals, keeping a language portfolio and journal, and using a self-assessment grid. For the uninitiated about the virtues of autonomous learning, it might be a bit over-whelming and seem like too much work.

In Chapter 4, “Vocabulary”, readers find useful vocabulary learning strategies, links to vocabulary websites, academic word lists and advice on how to use corpora. The section on online and mobile tools for vocabulary learning (pp. 54-55) will have strong appeal.

There are no surprises in Chapter 5, “Listening to lectures” and Chapter 6, “Small Group learning”. Both are characterised by checklists and models for taking notes, including a language bank of expressions for effective participation in tutorials. Chapter 7, “Reading”, the most demanding chapter (and the longest, at 29 pages), begins with some case studies with space for readers to write their responses. The coverage is incredibly comprehensive, looking at why and what university students read, database searching, critical reading, speed reading, reading online, and many more. In the two chapters on Essay Writing, readers will find a guided writing task for an argumentative essay, advice on thesis and paragraph development, proofreading checklists, techniques for analysing essay questions, as well as a glossary of key terms.

The last three chapters do not seem to have the same coherence as the earlier chapters. Chapter 10, “Assessment” has tips for exams, presentations and how to decode feedback. Chapter 11, “Communicating with Staff” and Chapter 12, “Dealing with Problems” touch on general aspects of living in a foreign country, and plagiarism. The remaining 35 pages contain a wealth of information, including a glossary of university words, references and a comprehensive answer key and index.

What makes the book accessible, despite its ambitious coverage, is its clear language and presentation. The chapter overviews and boxed tips, spread liberally throughout the book, will help readers navigate the content more efficiently. In addition, spread liberally throughout the book, are boxed tips of every kind: links to websites, ‘Try this’ activities, and more. I applaud the authors’ commitment to fostering learner autonomy and the consistency and thoroughness in their approach. It is certainly not a book to be read from cover to cover, but international students will appreciate the tools for learning and will have a better understanding of the demands of university study. I would recommend this book for its strong language learning focus, amazingly comprehensive coverage and its student-centred approach to learning.

Paltridge, B. (2006). *Discourse analysis: An introduction*. New York: Continuum. ISBN 978-0-8264-8557-1. Pp. 244.

Reviewed by Christina Gera, Waikato Pathways College, University of Waikato

Discourse analysis is a topic not widely written about and yet Brian Paltridge has written two books on this topic. Brian Paltridge is an Associate Professor of TESOL at the University of Sydney. *Discourse Analysis: An introduction* (2006) is Paltridge's second book on discourse analysis. This stand-alone book expands on some of the concepts introduced in Paltridge (2000).

Discourse Analysis: An introduction could be useful for students at university level studying or learning about discourse analysis, either for background reading on the subject, or it could be used as a textbook for students studying discourse analysis for the first time, both at graduate and undergraduate level. The book is visually appealing. The cover shows words, parts of phrases, and short sentences, taken from many types of articles, in different sized fonts, with different coloured backgrounds, which is an interesting way to introduce the concept that discourse analysis is about more than random words on a page.

This book is presented in an orderly and logical manner. *Discourse Analysis: An introduction* consists of nine chapters, beginning with "What is discourse analysis?". Each chapter is broken into subsections moving from the broad introduction of the topic of the chapter, and ending with *discussion questions* and *direction for further reading*. This format could make it attractive to teachers, and easy to use as a core text. There is a broad range of topics covered by the nine chapters, and there is a balance between spoken and written discourses, as well as between theoretical and applied studies. Chapter headings are: *Discourse and society*, *Discourse and pragmatics*, *Discourse and genre*, *Discourse and conversation*, *Discourse grammar*, *Corpus approaches to discourse analysis*, *Critical discourse analysis*, and chapter nine which is on *Doing discourse analysis*.

Paltridge (2006) introduces discourse analysis in a clear and concise manner, with explanations and examples given throughout the nine chapters in *Discourse Analysis: An introduction*. Many of the examples and illustrations are extracts from authentic texts. Paltridge explains concepts and ideas, and does not rely on the reader having a background understanding of the topic. The book provides activities to measure understanding and progress with discussion questions, suggestions for projects and further reading being given towards the end of each chapter. Each chapter ends with Paltridge giving suggestions for further reading, and here he does not just list books, but gives a brief summary of the contexts of each book suggested. At times the discussion questions are linked to the books listed in the further reading section.

I would recommend this book to students studying discourse analysis, lecturers teaching discourse analysis, and language teachers wanting an understanding of this subject. The book would be a useful addition to any of the above professional's personal libraries or public or university library. However, if students were being introduced to discourse analysis for the first time a useful guide to accompany this book would be Paltridge's (2000) *Making sense of discourse analysis*.

References:

Paltridge, B. (2000). *Making sense of discourse analysis*. Queensland, Australia: Antipodean Educational Enterprises.

Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN 1-4129-1607-0. Pp. 395.

Reviewed by Gary Barkhuizen, University of Auckland

The blurb at the back of this book says it is “an excellent text for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in introductory qualitative research methods across the social, behavioral, and health sciences”. In this review, I focus on aspects of this statement to highlight some of the strengths and limitations of the book.

The blurb is spot on with regard to the intended audience. This certainly is an introductory research text. It covers five approaches to qualitative research, and compares these, side-by-side in most chapters, in terms of theoretical underpinnings, study design, data collection and analysis, and report writing. The five approaches are: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. If a beginning qualitative researcher had never heard of these approaches before, they would come away after having read the book with a basic idea of the theory and procedures related to these five approaches. They would also have had the opportunity to read a real, published study conducted in the tradition of each of the approaches (included in a separate chapter at the end of the book). Without much research experience, however, they might be a little confused about their similarities and differences, despite the numerous tables scattered throughout the book distinguishing them. One reason is, as Creswell himself warns, the focus of a particular qualitative study is not always “as clear-cut as it appears” (p. 230). My advice would be to read the book to get an overview of all five approaches, to identify the one that applies most to the study the reader has in mind, and then read further about that approach to better understand its philosophy and procedures.

New researchers, graduate students for example, may find the contents of the book much more meaningful and useful if mediated by an instructor. By this I mean that the instructor would need to interpret with students some of the overly simplistic content of the book and to provide additional examples of studies conducted within the frameworks of the five approaches. More advanced researchers (e.g., PhD students) who have read more widely on qualitative inquiry would find the book less useful, and may even find some of the content questionable. Nevertheless, as an introductory text, it does its job well.

Quite a few sections in the book deal more generally with qualitative research instead of focusing more specifically on each of the five approaches. These provide useful overviews, and include: (a) philosophical frameworks – though this chapter is particularly thin, (b) a chapter on designing a qualitative study, (c) a Table summarizing the characteristics of good qualitative research, (d) a chapter on ways to introduce and focus a study – which includes very useful sections on how to state the research problem, write research questions, and word purpose statements, those tricky sentences which start, “The purpose of this study is to ...”, and (e) a good chapter which deals with issues of standards of validation and evaluation.

The five approaches are distinguished most usefully in the data analysis chapter, though once again, the text is quite basic and does not really get down to the practical nitty-gritty of analysis. This chapter does, however, provide helpful references for further exploration. In fact, all of the chapters have reference lists that point to fundamental texts related to each approach. These are clearly distinguished according to the approaches.

For those who know the first edition, what the second edition does new is the following: (1) It gives a broader coverage of narrative research, expanding the focus from only biography; (2) Interpretive approaches are discussed more broadly, including an emphasis on feminism,

ethnicity and critical theory – though very basically; (3) More recent illustrative studies in phenomenology and ethnography are included; (4) Many more examples of studies are included.

What does the book have to offer applied linguists, including language educators? There is nothing specific in the book about our field, focusing as it does more generally on the social, behavioural and medical sciences. It does, nevertheless, cover the basics in qualitative research; content which can easily be adapted to suit the research needs of budding applied linguistics researchers. Until recently, and even now, this has in any case been our practice.

Cohen, A.D. and Macaro, E. (Eds.) (2007). *Language learner strategies: Thirty years of research and practice*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0194422-543. Pp. 336.

Reviewed by Marilyn Lewis, University of Auckland.

This new, 336 page book falls into two sections. The seven chapters of Part One are general, grouped under the heading “Issues, theories and frameworks”, while the five chapters of Part Two are reviews of research into language learner strategies (LLS) over more than three decades. Almost all the chapters are co-written, with up to four writers each. The sub-title is a reminder that there’s nothing new about a focus on how language learners can help themselves.

Language learner strategies developed from a gathering of researchers and teachers in Oxford in 2004, and deals with an area of interest that has moved through a number of name changes over the decades. In 1975 Joan Rubin wrote of “What the ‘Good Language Learner’ can teach us”; by 2001 she was talking about “language learner self-management”. In 1986 Rebecca Oxford referred to the “strategy inventory for language learning”; in the present volume one of her chapters refers to “L2 learner strategies”. In 1990 Anna Uhl Chamot’s co-authored book included “learning strategies” in its title; later she helped develop CALLA (the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach). These three researchers and many more are represented in this book, for which the term *Language learner strategies* has been chosen. The editors claim that this term was “probably never used” before their 2004 gathering (p. 2). The terminology is not the only fluid aspect of the topic, as a close reading of the twelve chapters shows.

Readers of edited books don’t always feel the need to work through the chapters chronologically. In this case, though, reading at least the first two chapters in order seems a good idea. Grenfell and Macaro (from the Universities of Southampton and Oxford) start with an examination of research debates over the years. Here it would be easy to join the complaints of those who want the details of LLS to be more universally agreed on. To counter this criticism, we can turn to the forward, where Peter Yongqi Gu of Victoria University uses an original analogy. Referring to the recent removal of the planet Pluto, he points out that “no one is dismissing astronomy because astronomers can’t agree on what a planet is” (p. vii).

Chapter 2, “Coming to terms with language learner strategies: surveying the experts” is by Andrew Cohen, one of the editors and organizers of the Oxford meetings. Answers to a questionnaire he designed at the time led to a refined version that was posted on a website (still in place). The results are summarised in the rest of the chapter. The categories that emerge could be a useful guide for anyone wanting to narrow down an area for original research or to prepare learning materials for students on more or more of the aspects of LLS. Reading the chapters and their references it would be easy to have the impression that the ratio of books for researchers to books for learners is rather heavily balanced towards the former.

In the rest of part 1 the co-authoring system means that in many cases names of long standing (Oxford, Chamot, Rubin and of course Cohen) are brought together with newer names. Oxford has had a hand in two of the chapters, one bringing together psychological and sociocultural perspectives, and one with a grammar focus. The sub-title of Chapter 6 intrigued me: “L2 grammar strategies: the Second Cinderella and beyond”, the term ‘second’ referring to an earlier description of listening strategies. Following a summary of classroom approaches to the teaching of grammar, the three authors build on the premise that “no matter what the teacher does, learning is not guaranteed, and that a given L2 instructional mode does not necessarily predict a given student’s way of learning” (p. 124). Part 1 includes chapters co-authored by New Zealanders: Carol Griffiths is one of three authors in Chapter 4 interested in applying strategies to particular contexts, which in her case was an Auckland private language school. Cynthia White has co-authored Chapter 5 with Schramm and Chamot: “Research methods in strategy research: re-examining the toolbox”. Their interest is in refining some of the research tools currently in use and in particular developing “instruments appropriate for particular groups of learners” (pp. 114-5).

Part Two works systematically through the five areas in which strategies have been most often examined: listening, reading, speaking, writing and vocabulary. The omission of grammar underlines the point made in Chapter 6. The section opens with a page and a half’s introduction to the process of systematic reviewing by the book’s two editors. Like Cohen’s earlier chapter, this one could point future researchers in the right direction. A good reminder that some aspects of research are not for people in a hurry comes with a reference to Chapter 12 in which Nyikos and Fan “consulted 2000 entries from I.S.P. Nation’s website” (p. 163).

The writers of the other four chapters are no less meticulous yet, in the traditional academic style, are careful to point out limitations. Reinforcing Gu’s earlier point about blurred definitions, Erler and Finkbeiner (Chapter 9) start by referring to the challenge facing the researcher in defining the term ‘second language reading strategies’. They do, however, extract for readers the three main areas of research: relationships between reading proficiency and strategy types, linguistic and non-linguistic strategies, and thirdly instruction in reading strategies.

Chapter 10 is one of several examples of the growing trend towards inter-country cooperation for which email communication must surely be responsible. Nakatani from Tokyo University of Science and Goh from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore review oral communication strategies. They show that no topic in our field is too small to be sub-divided. Starting with the distinction between interactionist and psycholinguistic perspectives, they plunge deeper into the many further distinctions that have been made over the years, such as Canale’s (1983) compensatory and enhancing strategies.

By whom and how will this book be used? As well as being of use to researchers, this comprehensive coverage of the field will make excellent background reading for university staff called on to deliver lectures on an area of applied linguistics which they may not have explored for themselves. They could work systematically through all the entries or they could start with the chapter closest to their current interest. They could, so as not to miss a relevant point, follow threads which lead to specific research (such as learnability) or to target groups (such as young learners).

In some ways, “the top ten strategies of the good language learner” (p. 11) listed in 1975 by the late David Stern, have stood the test of time. Although the book shows all that has been examined since and the many new ways in which teachers and learners have applied the strategies, none of these ten look out of place in the light of what has followed.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

1. Contributions to *The TESOLANZ Journal* are welcomed from language educators and applied linguists within and outside Aotearoa/New Zealand, especially those working in Australia and countries in the South Pacific.
2. Contributions should in general be no longer than 5000 words.
3. Referencing conventions should follow that specified in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th Edition). This publication is available in most university libraries. In the text, references should be cited using the author's last name and date of publication. If quotations are cited, the reference should include page numbers (Brindley, 1989, pp. 45-46). The reference list at the end of the article should be arranged in alphabetical order. The reference list should only include items specifically cited in the text.
4. As far as possible, comments and references should be incorporated into the text but, where necessary, endnotes may be placed after the main body of the article, before the list of references, under the heading Notes.
5. All graphics should be suitable for publication and need no change.
6. It is understood that manuscripts submitted have not been previously published and are not under consideration for publication elsewhere.
7. Enquiries and draft submissions should be sent by email to the Editor, Dr Susan Gray, University of Auckland, s.gray@auckland.ac.nz . The preferred format is WORD.
8. All submissions should be accompanied by a full mailing address, a telephone number and, if available, an email address and/or fax number.
9. Submissions will be considered by the Editor and members of the Editorial Board.
10. Those interested in submitting a book review should contact the Review Editor, University of Auckland, r.wette@auckland.ac.nz
11. The closing date for the submission of manuscripts for 2009 is **Monday 31st August**.