

Issue #2
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School Owners SIG Newsletter

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The SO SIG will be at this year's National Conference in Shizuoka! Our schedule looks like this:

Debate (topics to be decided) - Saturday the 21st, 5:15 to 6:45 PM in room 907

AGM - Sunday the 22nd, 12:45 to 1:30 PM in room 1003

Giving Students the Blues (Mark Makino) – Sunday the 22nd, 7:00 to 7:25 in room 904

The topic for this issue's For-Against column is maintaining Extensive Reading (ER) libraries. Contributing are our own Paul Moritoshi and Laura Macfarlane. ER is generally defined as reading on a variety of topics for meaning rather than for translation or grammatical analysis, which is referred to as Intensive Reading (IR). ER is widely discussed in other venues but we hope to bring a fresh perspective on the matter.

This issue's featured article is on Scott Thornbury's and Luke Meddings' Dogme Approach to ELT and issues one may face in trying to implement it in *eikaiwa*-style classes in Japan.

Visit our website at <https://sosig.wordpress.com/> or join our facebook group, JALT School Owners SIG.



Debate: Should English schools offer Extensive Reading libraries?

YES! Laura Macfarlane, EFL Club

Many schools that adopt a pure 'eikaiwa' approach, that is, teaching largely listening and speaking skills, often experience a high percentage of withdrawals of students in their tween years (10-12 years old). By comparison, a school that delivers a well-balanced English program with a focus on teaching all 4 skills, is more likely to retain students even after they enter their teenage years.

While parents of young children generally claim they wish their child to learn to speak English, many of them shift their focus towards preparing for junior high school English as the child nears their teen years. This usually means reading and writing skills.

Teaching reading and writing requires more than alphabet and phonics instruction. A solid literacy program and a well-stocked library are required. In addition to reading and writing instruction, students need plenty of opportunity to practice. Reading practice comes in two varieties - reading aloud and reading silently.

Reading aloud is useful for 2 reasons. Firstly, it allows the teacher to check that the student is reading words accurately. Secondly, provided the student is given enough opportunities with materials they can read accurately, fluency will develop naturally. Fluency, or the ability to read sentences smoothly, requires the reader to treat clusters of words, or phrases, as one unit. Reading at phrase level increases both reading speed and comprehension.

Once a student has demonstrated a good level of accuracy and fluency in reading low-level books, they are ready to begin reading silently. The material must be easy to read. Students must focus on the meaning of what they are reading, skipping over words, phrases, even sentences that they don't understand, although if they are reading books at the appropriate level, they should only be meeting items like this occasionally. Most importantly, students need to

read extensively at one level before moving up to the next. This type of reading is thus called 'extensive reading'.

In order to meet the requirement of reading extensively, each of the lower levels need to contain at least 200 books. The books are very short, requiring only a few minutes to read, so the more books available in each level, the better. As each book in the lower levels costs on average ¥300 to ¥500, preparing even one level of books can cost a lot of money. In addition to extensive reading materials, the school will also need to procure a smaller set of reading materials suited to developing reading accuracy and fluency.

To reduce start-up costs, the school may wish to purchase one level of books each year. Material fees can also be raised slightly to help cover costs. Nonetheless, setting up a reading library costs a considerable amount of money and can be a big financial burden on a small school.

Long term benefits to the school in terms of reputation as an education provider and student retention however, makes the purchase of books a good business investment and will ensure the school maintains its competitiveness in the market.

Debate: Should English schools offer Extensive Reading libraries?

NO! Paul Moritoshi, P.A.S. Communication, Chugoku Gakuen University

The body of evidence in favour of ER is growing to show it that has numerous pedagogic, linguistic and cognitive benefits. There are however several problems associated with starting and using an ER program. These are outlined below and can be classified as pedagogical, financial, logistical or administrative.

Pedagogical

- From 12 years of age students are drilled in intensive reading (IR) during school English classes such that IR behaviours which are entirely antithetical and anathema to extensive reading (ER) quickly become deeply ingrained. Training these students to switch from IR to ER behaviours can be extremely difficult and often frustrating, especially with older students. Several years' experience in ER with junior college students has shown that even when ER's principles are explained in Japanese and contrasted directly with those of IR, many students fail to develop desirable ER behaviours and persist with their ingrained IR habits. There is an almost Pavlovian response-like quality to the way some students persistently and automatically reach for their dictionaries at every unknown word rather than as a last resort. This and other IR-related behaviours greatly diminish the enjoyment and potential language learning gains and cognitive benefits that could be had from ER.
- Even if we can train students to develop ER skills, they would then need to be able to switch at will back and forth between IR and ER skills sets to meet the demands of both school English classes (IR) and our private lessons (ER).
- Choosing the most suitable series or collection of series of graded readers or other types of reading materials can be overwhelming. The choice from publishers is growing almost annually. So the school needs to be clear on its pedagogic goals before committing resources to a particular set of materials.
- To make things even more confusing, each publisher has its own grading system which does not equate exactly with those of others, making it hard to know how a book from one series compares with that of another in terms of difficulty, although work such as

the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading (EPER) has been done to show how they compare.

- Integrating the ER component in to a wider literacy program including the alphabet, phonics, spelling, vocabulary etc. is no simple task and requires staff knowledgeable and experienced in setting up, implementing and evaluating such programs.
- Finally, how will parents perceive an ER program? Will they consider their money well-spent if contact time is given to looking at picture books? As with most linguistic skills, reading takes time to develop and school owners/teachers will need to explain this to the parents.

Financial

- Effective ER requires a substantial library which costs a considerable amount both to set up and, to a lesser extent to maintain, although 'targeted buying' to meet only your immediate needs can help to spread the financial burden.

Logistical

- A library needs floor-space and shelf-space, which may be at a premium, especially in many smaller private schools.

Administrative

- Smaller collections may not need much in the way of administration. Indeed sets often come in boxes which make this very easy. However, larger and mixed collections will require some system of administration by which to organise the books for easy use.
- If students are allowed to take books home this creates an additional administrative task to keep track of who has what.

Article: Dogme ELT and the Seriousness Gap

Mark Makino

Introduction

I and many other language teachers have been swept up by the “paradigm shift” (Jordan, 2015) in our field represented by Dogme ELT, an approach to English teaching first described by Scott Thornbury (2000). As he puts it,

“The point is to restore teaching to its pre-method ‘state of grace’ - when all there was was a room with few chairs, a blackboard, a teacher and some students, and where learning was jointly constructed out of the talk that evolved in that simplest, and most prototypical of situations.” (p. 1)

and more specifically in a later volume,

Dogme is about teaching that is conversation-driven.

Dogme is about teaching that is materials-light.

Dogme is about teaching that focuses on emergent language.

(Meddings and Thornbury, 2009, heading “Dogme in ELT”)

Before hearing about Dogme ELT during my Master’s studies, I like many other ELT workers had simply assumed that the coursebook should occupy a central place in the classroom, and that maintaining student interest was largely a matter of buying the correct one. The teaching materials market seems to cater to people holding this view, offering coursebooks designed for ever-more-specific demographics. The assumption that coursebooks are a given for language classes seems to be shared across the Japanese *eikaiwa* (English conversation school) industry, of which the school I own is part, where coursebooks are seen as an integral part of pedagogy as well as being a significant source of revenue at some schools (Currie-Robson, 2015). Because I typically taught small enough groups that lessons could be built around topics they themselves raised without anyone feeling left out, Dogme ELT’s materials-light approach seemed a perfect fit for my classes. Being the owner of my school as well, I was in a position especially well-suited to foment a quick and bloodless revolution from the shackles of textbook tyranny to the freedom of a truly communicative class with the students and their lives and concerns at its foundation.

The transition has not gone as smoothly as I had imagined. While some students reacted very positively to the new priority on their real language needs, others have seemed bemused or withdrawn at having the spotlight thrown on them. The Dogme ELT focus on student-generated discourse and student-led discussions has led to roughly equal parts enthusiasm and reticence. What is surprising about this halfhearted acceptance is that theoretically, nothing should be easier to talk about than oneself; and any move from pre-ordained topics, vocabulary, and grammar points to ones that emerge as a part of conversation should make the class more intuitive and more comfortable. Not every student will be interested in the daily routine of a fictional New Yorker, how to make guacamole, or other topics which may be found in commonly used textbooks. Everyone knows his or her own interests and is motivated to talk about them frequently in their L1. A surprising revelation from my attempts to apply a Dogme approach to my lessons is that many students seem to regard their own lives and interests as less motivating than topics and content chosen by faraway textbook writers. To some students, doing away with official textbooks seems to mean doing away with some of the legitimacy of the language learned in class. I mean to explore in this article reason that this may be so in *eikaiwa*, in Japan, and anywhere else in the ELT world.

Partial Dogme Failure

The classes of mine which I call partial failures of Dogme ELT represent a compromise between normal practice within the *eikaiwa* industry and what may be called a full implementation of Dogme principles. The bulk of class time is spent in conversation, either in groups or pairs and frequently with a task to complete, and form-focused activities are generally drawn from student utterances. When a student uses a particularly effective word or expression, or I detect a need for one, I write it on the whiteboard. Two or three of these expressions are saved to a database for use in review or quiz games on a class website every week, which means that student utterances are made into material for formal study on a weekly basis. I still keep a textbook on hand which we use sparingly and sometimes use worksheets anticipating student needs rather than at the point of need (Nelson, 1991; Thornbury, 2013), which may lessen their salience to students. It should be noted that Thornbury and Meddings (2009) include a chapter of their book on teaching in textbook-mandated contexts, meaning that my compromised version of Dogme is not unique. As in many other schools in the *eikaiwa* industry

(Kubota, 2011), I also continue to follow a deleteriously light schedule of one hour-long lesson per week for most classes. What problems I have in teaching Dogme-style classes should be seen in light of the particular interpretation of Dogme, complete with compromises, that I have made.

Not every area of Dogme has met with resistance from my students; students in *eikaiwa* are generally used to conversation as a warmup or an opportunity for practice (Kubota, 2011). My difficulties have centered around the transformation of conversation from raw language material to material worthy of study. That is, in most cases students do not generally have a problem talking in pairs or small groups about their lives and interests, but distrust the viability of said talking as language learning material. Picking up expressions in need of a bit of work, or perfectly formed expressions, for analysis and study is a point where I frequently feel I lose the students' interest. The feeling seems to be: It's fine to have conversations, and it's fine to study vocabulary and grammar, but the two should not be mixed, and students' output should certainly not supply vocabulary or grammar input for other students.

Some explicit focus on the formal characteristics of the TL, called *focus on form* (Long, 1991) is an accepted part of ELT. Indeed, most of our students' prior English education has had this type of instruction almost exclusively (Guest, 2000; Gorsuch, 2001), through the medium of preselected grammar and vocabulary as part of a textbook. Because Dogme ELT attempts to replace the artificially imposed curriculum of the coursebook with one co-created in the classroom, it is imperative that student talk be upgraded from mere conversation to the focus of study. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) give several strategies for turning the process of conversation into discrete points for language practice. In my classes, these are frequently met with acknowledging nods, but then left untouched for study unless required by the teacher. Contrastingly, discrete points coming from a textbook seem to be taken more seriously, and both classwork and homework taken from textbooks are done with what appears to me to be a higher degree of dedication and enthusiasm. The textbook seems to carry a veneer of validity that students do not feel that their own language use possesses.

I am prepared to admit that there may be shortcomings in my presentation. Perhaps Scott Thornbury has greater success than I do with using student-generated language as material for language study because he has been doing it for

longer and is almost definitely a better “seller” of his teaching techniques than I am. I have an inkling though, and I am fairly certain English teachers in Japan who read this article will agree, that the educational culture that our students come from plays a role in their rejection of student-centeredness, in Dogme or otherwise. Dogme ELT, far from being the most intuitive way of learning language, seems to be an extreme example of mismatch between the expectations of the students and the theory and method of the teacher.

Mismatch of Culture and Method

There is abundant evidence in SLA literature of methods failing despite firm grounding in SLA and educational theory.

As Holliday (1994) writes,

There is a grave danger of teachers and curriculum developers, from both the BANA [Britain, Australia, and North America] and TESEP [tertiary, secondary, primary] groups, natively accepting BANA practice as superior, and boldly carrying what are in fact the ethnocentric norms of particular professional-academic cultures in English language education from one context to another, without proper research into the effect of their actions. (p. 102)

He goes on to document numerous examples of modern language teaching practices from BANA failing to produce successful classes in the traditionally didactic teaching culture of Egypt. My partial failure to implement a Dogme-style class has taken place in an educational culture with similar values (LeTendre, 1998), and has to be seen within the wider context of Japan, the narrower context of the *eikaiwa* industry, and the very specific context of my classroom and the people in it.

Holliday (1994) found that mutually dependent definitions of *learner* and *teacher* in his host culture reduced the effectiveness of learner-centered methods, which to his university students in Egypt must have felt like riding a bus with no driver. It behooves teachers when experimenting with new methods to remember that the classroom social dynamic is not simply a blank space for the teacher to fill in. There are defined roles and expectations placed on students, and culturally acceptable ways for both students and teachers to show dedication and seriousness. In many contexts in Japan, similarly to Holliday's (1994) case, two well-practiced roles of the student are receptive listener and obedient reproducer (LeTendre, 1998). In mandatory education, being a good student means quietly listening, taking notes, and never threatening the teacher's authority. In sports, which are mandatory at many Japanese public schools, students may

be expected to repeatedly drill bottom-up skills at the command of coaches and senior students (Cowie, 2006).

Mandatory English education in Japan mostly combines the former's passivity with the latter's attention to minutiae. If an English teacher begins writing on the whiteboard, thereby assuming the *teacher* role, students may find it most comfortable to fall into one of these *student* roles rather than ask questions or integrate the new information into an ongoing discussion. In the *eikaiwa* classroom, teachers may by necessity play the role of co-conversationalist and confidant rather than the stereotypical *teacher*. As a result, suddenly standing up, writing on the whiteboard and speaking to the whole class may represent a jarring assertion of authority. Teachers and students alike may find switching roles in this way uncomfortable and may therefore find transitioning from free conversation to focus on form unintuitive.

It is common in Japan for the domains of "communication" and "grammar" to be considered separate. Indeed, one often hears it said that people in Japan understand English grammar but have little skill in communicating, or have large vocabularies but no ability to use them in natural contexts, begging the question of how one can be said to understand swimming without knowing how to do it in actual water. The distinction between the practical uses of language and its formal study appears in a variety of ways in Japanese education. Classes in mandatory education are called either *eigo* ("English"), connoting formal grammar study for entrance examinations, or *ōraru komyūnikēshon* ("Oral communication"), which is rarely tested or even graded. Teachers classified as native speakers of English (who may or may not be) are typically given the latter to teach (Breckenridge and Erling, 2011; Geluso, 2013). It is unusual in the majority of educational contexts in Japan for Japanese teachers to teach communicatively or for native-speaking teachers to teach formal grammar. Therefore, any form-focused instruction in an *eikaiwa* class may breach culture-erected barriers between types of study as well as types of teachers.

Another reason that students may see their own output as illegitimate sources of input is the ideology of languages as a sort of ethnic property (Befu, 2001). The version of *native-speakerism* (Holliday, 2006) that applies to Westerners in Japan holds that authentic English flows from them and them only, certainly not from the error-ridden interactions of their Japanese pupils. The textbooks that our students used in their educations prior to *eikaiwa* most likely featured caucasian visitors to Japan as the founts of correct English (Matsuda, 2002), propagating the assumption that English must be

transmitted from West to East to be genuine. Seen in light of this ideology, it seems only natural that textbooks written by authors far removed from our students' actual lives in Japan would be considered more genuine than material authored by the students themselves.

It should be said also that not every student comes to *eikaiwa* to master the English language. As Kubota (2011, p. 475) puts it, "casual leisure" rather than academics or improvement of their linguistic abilities is at the heart of many students' participation in *eikaiwa*. Hence, as I indicated in a previous article (Makino, 2015), there may be a problem in the application of Dogme ELT (or any recognizable form of pedagogy) to *eikaiwa* only so far as one is attempting to provide a service that one's students do not want. Furthermore, assuming students do want to learn, while they may not get the full benefits of language classes if they reject form-focused activities, they almost definitely benefit from the conversational practice portion of the lesson. Hence the failure of one part of a Dogme ELT class does not mean the failure of the entire lesson.

Conclusions

My attempts to implement what I see as a forward-thinking, progressive, and theoretically sound method in Dogme ELT has spotlighted what I have decided to call a *seriousness gap*, which refers to the mismatch in culturally-defined concepts of real, genuine, serious education. While I have described Dogme ELT in prose that might be appealing to teachers, I am quite sure that many veterans of Japanese education would see the principles of Dogme ELT as irresponsible, uninspiring, and an abdication of the teacher's duty to transmit to students their valuable expertise, just as Holliday's (1994) Egyptian colleagues and students did. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been a frequent victim of *seriousness gaps* in Japan, in virtually every context in which it has been tried (Sakui, 2004; Nagatomo, 2012). Such gaps are also seen when those same students devote themselves to the task of L2-L1 grammar translation, which teachers exposed to SLA theory may see no need for (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Within ELT in Japan, and largely also within the smaller context of *eikaiwa*, *serious learning* is perceived as requiring a

textbook, focusing on declarative knowledge, and building language skill around competence at manipulating isolated grammatical forms. Despite the theoretical underpinnings of relatively new approaches to language teaching such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Dogme ELT, and the lack of research supporting the teaching of grammatical competence one form at a time, the latter may be taken more seriously than the former and lead to more satisfied students, if only because it fits their notion of what language study ought to look like. Students may be more satisfied with methods that demonstrably do not work if they feel that that is what they paid for.

As I have written before (Makino, 2015), the definition of *eikaiwa* as primarily school or business affects how we see conflicts between pedagogy and salability. Selling prepackaged curricula complete with coursebooks and lessons designed to be consumed in less than one hour seems to be a winning economic formula. Delivered by native speakers, this method hits the right cultural notes and has been part of the the success of several chains (Currie-Robson, 2015). However, if *eikaiwa* teachers see themselves as professional educators rather than only as providers of a supply to meet a demand, it may be incumbent upon them to devote some energy to explaining why they teach the way that they do rather than defaulting to methods that are more intrinsically appealing. For my part, my self-esteem as a teacher demands that I stick with Dogme ELT and dedicate myself more to making students aware of the issues behind the selection of this approach.

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SO SIG Officers and Contributors

Coordinator – Ryan Hagglund

At the School Owners' SIG AGM in November I became the coordinator. I first came to Japan in 1998 on the JET Program and have spent my entire time enjoying the wonderful nature of Yamagata Prefecture. After obtaining my MA in TEFL/TESL from the University of Birmingham and an MAT and Oregon State teaching certification from Willamette University I took over MY English School (<http://myeiigo.com/>) in Higashine, Yamagata in 2008. Since then we have grown to seven schools in Yamagata and Kansai. I truly believe that we all benefit when the level of quality in the English conversation school industry improves and want to work to help others—and myself—better educate our students and compete with the larger chains. In addition to MY English School I also teach at Yamagata University. You can reach me at rhagglund@myeiigo.com.

Membership Chair – Paul Moritoshi

Hello SO SIG members. I came to Japan in 1996 and spent three years as an ALT. In 2002, I graduated with an MA in TEF/SL from the University of Birmingham (UK), which led to a part-time university position that same year. Since then I've taught at various universities and a junior college, mainly in Okayama city. I'm currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics with Aston University (UK) in the area of Project-Based Language Learning. I'm actively involved in various areas of JALT and am also the Associate Editor for *OnCUE Journal's* Professional Development section. In 2013 I started a *kojin jigyou gaisha* called P.A.S. Communication which provides both foreign language instruction and support services in a range of foreign languages. I'm now an Associate Professor at Chugoku Gakuen University. I also enjoy presenting on a range of EFL-related issues.

Program Chair – Rob Olson

Rob Olson currently resides in Hokkaido. In addition to his own school, he teaches at Tomakomai Komazawa University.

Treasurer – Mark Makino

Hello fellow school owners. My name is Mark Makino and I've lived in Japan for 11 years now, 10 of those years running my own eikaiwa school in Fujinomiya, near Mt. Fuji, which fans of UNESCO may have heard of. I have a M.A. in Applied Linguistics with Merit (which is not as good as Distinction) at the University of Leicester in 2014, writing my thesis on Japanese and native-speaking English teachers in the eikaiwa industry. The M.A. facilitated my hiring as a part-time teacher at Tokai University. In addition to my position at the School Owners SIG, I am President of the Shizuoka JALT Chapter, which means I get to see both sides of JALT's thrilling expense reporting process. I spend the time I have between the above activities reading and playing the guitar.

Laura Macfarlane

Laura Macfarlane resides in Hokkaido and is the owner of two schools, EFL Club and Macfarlane English School. She participates in the training of teachers, oversees operations and curriculum development, and provides counseling to her over 700 students.