

Local Contextual Influences on Teaching

Local Contextual Influences on Teaching:
Narrative Insights from ESL and EFL
Professionals

Edited by

Patrick Ng and Esther Boucher-Yip

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Local Contextual Influences on Teaching:
Narrative Insights from ESL and EFL Professionals,
Edited by Patrick Ng and Esther Boucher-Yip

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2014 by Patrick Ng, Esther Boucher-Yip and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-6405-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-6405-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Introduction	ix
Chapter One.....	1
Local Contextual Factors in the Japanese EFL Classroom Patrick Ng Chin Leong	
Chapter Two	17
English as an Additional Language Methodology in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Modeling as an Innovative Method Colleen Shaughnessy and Liz Johanson Botha	
Chapter Three	34
The Impact of Contextual Factors on Teachers' Pedagogical and Instructional Decisions Yuliya England, Doaa Rashed, Maged Khalil and Natalya Smernitskaya	
Chapter Four.....	59
Finding “The Line” in Beijing: Classrooms as Liminal Space Patrick Shaou-Whea Dodge	
Chapter Five	77
Listening to Our Teachers’ Voices: The Contextual Influences of Teacher Motivation Heather Weger and Ana-María Neuvo	
Chapter Six.....	94
From Communicative Language Teaching to Scaffolding Language Teaching I-Chen Huang	

Chapter Seven.....	108
Finding Fire: Discovering Student Agency in the EFL Academic Writing Classroom	
Catherine Carey and Sara Osman	
Chapter Eight.....	124
Flourishing in a Difficult School Environment	
Karen Dellinger and Susan Keane	
Chapter Nine.....	138
My Journey in Teacher Development	
Akiko Tagaki	
Chapter Ten	152
Technology as a Context: How ESL/EFL Professionals Manage When Technology Use is an Expectation	
Steven K. Sharp	
Chapter Eleven	168
Teaching Practice of an EFL Teacher in a Taiwanese Cram School	
Tsui-Chun (Judy) Hu	
Contributors.....	181

FOREWORD

For so many years, it has often been taken for granted as an unquestionable premise that pedagogy for the teaching of English should be based on Anglophone values. One typical example for this attitude is the way the Audio-Lingual Approach, developed in the context of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in the United States, was brought into the teaching of English in Japan after World War II. The American method, in its original form, proved to be incompatible with the sociolinguistic and educational tradition of Japan, where “word-by-word translation” and “the written language” had been heavily emphasized in foreign language teaching for more than a thousand years (Hino, 1992).

However, with the recent surge of interest in fields such as EIL (English as an International Language) and WE (World Englishes), the significance of indigenous values is now reevaluated in the teaching of English as an integral factor for devising a pedagogical approach suited for each particular educational environment. As McKay (2003, p.140) puts it, “just as the content of EIL materials must be separated from native-speaker models, so too must EIL methodology, by allowing a locally appropriate pedagogy to be implemented.”

The present volume, based on concrete cases across the world, is the latest and most extensive work along this new trend. The valuable insights provided in each chapter with a narrative approach clearly demonstrate the impact of local contextual factors on the teaching of English. The chapter by one of the co-editors Patrick Ng Chin Leong, for example, evidently shows how he, as a university teacher raised in the Outer Circle (in WE terminology) environment, has found it necessary to accommodate his pedagogy to the Expanding Circle situation of Japan.

Reconciliation between local values and global needs is an essential task in many phases of our social life today. This book will help us greatly in tackling with this major challenge in our daily practices in the teaching of English. I wholeheartedly welcome the timely arrival of this excellent volume.

Professor Nobuyuki Hino
Graduate School of Language and Culture
Osaka University, Japan

References

- Hino, N. (1992). The yakudoku tradition of foreign language literacy in Japan. In F. Dubin & N. A. Kuhlman (Eds.), *Cross-cultural literacy: Global perspectives on reading and writing* (pp.99-111). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall.
- McKay, S. (2003). Teaching English as an international language: The Chilean context. *ELT Journal*, 57(2), 139-148.

INTRODUCTION

As former colleagues and long-time collaborators, we have had many opportunities to think, learn, and discuss with each other the teaching approaches we adopted in our classrooms and challenges we encountered in our careers as teachers and scholars. Often times we were amazed by how our practice and teaching philosophy have evolved over the years. What changed? At critical points in our careers, it was our teaching contexts. We found that as we moved from one teaching context to another, teaching locally and abroad, varied factors influenced our practice, teaching philosophies, and professional identities. Surely we are not unique in our experiences. Our interest in understanding and learning how teachers respond to their local contexts and the factors that affected their pedagogy inspired this volume. We encourage our colleagues in the English and Applied Linguistics fields to think deeply about the ways in which their current context influenced their pedagogy and to consider how they teach effectively within that context.

Teaching Contexts

Many researchers have discussed the importance of context in teaching and learning. Stephen Bax in advocating the context-approach in language teaching believes that effective teaching is shaped not by teaching methodology alone (2003). He suggests that teachers need to consider contextual factors such as the needs of students, the school culture, syllabuses, school policies, and the wider socio-political context in which learning and teaching takes place (2003). Similarly, Barkhuizen (2008) acknowledges the role of the teaching context in enhancing teachers' knowledge and claims that "doing so would enable teachers to make more informed decisions about their practice and the students' learning" (p.232).

Barkhuizen provides the rationale for a context-sensitive approach to teaching by suggesting that "teachers teach best and students learn best in situations that are compatible with their backgrounds, beliefs and expectations" (p.233). Barkhuizen's context of teaching is not merely restricted to the school context, but includes the personal context of the teacher (inner thoughts, ideas, and theories of teachers) and the sociopolitical context (national language-in-education policy, imposed

curriculum from the Ministry of education and the socioeconomic circumstance in a region). Stritikus (2003) is also explicit about the influence of the contextual dimension on pedagogical practices in the classroom. He states that the way teachers implement teaching in the classroom is closely connected to their teaching context, their pedagogical beliefs or personal ideologies.

In a similar vein, Toohey (2007) stresses that teachers are not agentive in their own right but are constrained by specific societal factors such as the institutional culture in which teaching takes place. Kumaravadivelu (2006) emphasizes the importance of a context-sensitive approach to teaching through his notion of the 'particularity of teaching.' Adopting a postmethod pedagogy, he explains that the context-sensitive approach entails encouraging pedagogical practices that are sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu. Recognizing the importance of context in language teaching, contributors in this volume offer insights to their understanding of what it means to place context in the heart of their teaching.

Overview of the Book

This book is a collection of personal narratives by teachers who teach in many parts of the world, from middle-school to university settings, and as ESL teachers, EFL instructors, teacher-trainers, and researchers in language teaching.

In Chapter One, **Patrick Ng Chin Leong** describes the challenges of teaching English in monolingual context such as Japan and the ways contextual factors affected his classroom instruction. He suggests that there is a need for teachers to adopt an appropriate pedagogy consistent with the local cultural expectations of learning English.

As lecturers at a rural, historically Black university in South Africa, **Colleen Shaughnessy** and **Liz Johanson Botha** taught undergraduate pre-service student teachers. In Chapter Two, they discuss a technique they developed to more effectively teach their students who were both the first generation to complete their schooling post-Apartheid and the first in their families to attend university.

In Chapter Three, four colleagues teaching in Egypt, Kazakhstan, and the United States share their insights about their own pedagogical and instructional decisions in different EFL and ESL contexts. Through interviews and reflections **Yuliya England**, **Maged Khalil**, **Doaa Rashed**,

and **Natalya Smernitskaya** identify and discuss the contextual factors that impacted their teaching.

Teaching in a joint US-China program, **Patrick Shaou-Whea Dodge** provides a narrative account of how he creates a safe and inclusive environment in the context of a Chinese classroom. In Chapter Four, he describes how his Chinese and American students are encouraged to engage in multiple perspectives, critique and think critically, and make up their own minds.

In Chapter Five, **Heather Weger** and **Ana-Maria Neuvo** address the contextual influence of teacher motivation. Using a qualitative approach and longitudinal design they investigate the circumstances influencing the professional motivation of English language teachers working with non-English speakers in the US.

Next, **I-Chen Huang**'s narrative is set in the English language classroom in Taiwan. In Chapter Six, she shares her experiences learning English, working as a part-time English teacher to children, and her current teaching experience at the college level.

In Chapter Seven, **Catherine Carey** and **Sara Osman** present a narrative account of their classroom practices and specific experiences that encourage student agency and acclimation to a Western-style university located in Kazakhstan. They reflect on their practices in the context of differing expectations they and their students have in the academic writing program.

Two middle-school teachers, **Karen Dellinger** and **Susan Keane**, describe their efforts in helping their students who are new immigrants in the US blend in their school context and home culture. In Chapter Eight, they describe the specific steps they took to develop their ESOL program and the impact the new context had on their students and their teaching.

Akiko Tagaki writes about teacher belief as a contextual factor that influences pedagogical practices and how it is connected to teachers' professional identity. In Chapter Nine, she reflects on her professional growth. She reveals that although she was deeply immersed in the grammar-translation method for a long time while teaching in Japanese schools, she began to accept new teaching ideas and methods as a graduate student in a U.S. university.

In Chapter Ten, **Steven K. Sharp**, shares his research findings of two ESOL teachers in the United States who learned to use technology as a tool of instruction. He describes these teachers' experiences, challenges and successes which allowed them to change how they teach in the new context and how their students learn.

Tsui-Chun (Judy) Hu's chapter is based on her reflections teaching at a cram school for secondary students in Taiwan. In Chapter Eleven, she describes her communication and interaction with her students and their parents, and suggests ways to help students establish their relevance with English language and how to extend the social function of a cram school in Taiwan.

It is our hope that readers will appreciate the complexities embedded in teaching practices across different contexts and the implications for adjusting teaching practices that meets the needs of students in the local context.

Patrick Ng Chin Leong
University of Niigata Prefecture, Japan

Esther Boucher-Yip
Worcester Polytechnic Institute, USA

References

- Barkhuizen, G. (2008). A narrative approach to exploring context in language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 62 (3), 231-239.
- Bax, S. (2003). The end of CLT: a context approach to language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 57 (3), 278-287.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). TESOL methods: Changing tracks, challenging trends. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40 (1), 59-81.
- Stritikus, T. T. (2003). The interrelationship of beliefs, context and learning: The case of a teacher reacting to language policy. *Journal of language, identity and education*, 2, 29-52.
- Toohy, K. (2007). Autonomy/agency through socio-cultural lenses. In A. Barfield & S. Brown (Eds.), *Reconstructing autonomy in language education* (pp. 231-242). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

CHAPTER ONE

LOCAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS IN THE JAPANESE EFL CLASSROOM

PATRICK NG CHIN LEONG

Introduction

Studies from around the globe have found that second language (L2) teachers practice in styles that suit the normative ways of teaching and learning that are historically embedded in their local contexts (Holliday, 1994). In discussing teaching approaches, McKay (2002) emphasizes the need for teachers to adopt teaching methodologies compatible with local values. In addition, Johnson and Golembek (2011, p.69) remind us that each teaching context is in some way pushing our emerging understanding of L2 teaching, and the feeling of tension between cognition and emotion can create a space for learning. However, the impact of local contextual factors on the teaching practice of second and foreign language teachers has not been well documented in the literature of Second Language Teacher Education. In this chapter, I narrate the impact of local contextual factors on my teaching practice as an EFL teacher in Japan. Since completing a doctoral degree at Leicester University (UK), I have been involved in language teaching at the university level for over ten years in Singapore. I was first recruited by an international university in Kyushu, Southern Japan to teach English to undergraduate students at an English language center. After teaching in Japan for two years, I was offered a tenured teaching position at my current university.

My focus on the impact of contextual factors on my learning and teaching in Japan takes the form of autoethnography which values the self as a rich repository of experiences and acknowledges that knowledge is based on one's location and identities (Canagarajah, 2012). To show that my notions of language teaching shape, and are shaped, by my teaching context, I adopt an analytical autoethnography approach to engage theories and research findings (Anderson, 2006) with personal experience. This

approach allows the readers to understand (and allows me to explore) the deeper meanings the impact of local contextual factors have on my teaching practice. It is useful because it provides “a continued interplay of commentary and exemplification as the story moves from voice to voice...a kaleidoscope of differing and complementing dialogues, which shift from the abstract to the concrete, from...[the] researcher’s voice to the voices of the researched, from the past time of the teacher respondents and the researcher as teacher to the present time of the reader and the researcher as analyst” (Aboshiha, 2008 p.79).

In this regard, I discuss how my teaching practice is shaped by various contextual factors such as the characteristics of Japanese EFL learners, my institutional learning culture, mentors in my teaching context, language policy set by the Ministry of Education in Japan and the wider sociolinguistic context of my teaching environment. Accordingly, I analysed my narrative notes from my initial years of teaching in Japan, which include comments, advice and feedback from mentors, administrators, colleagues and conference participants. In addition, I include narrative notes from class responses to teaching activities, journal entries by students and my own observations on critical teaching moments. I interweave my narrations and notes with literature on English language teaching in the Japanese context.

The purpose of sharing my ‘teaching story’ is to allow other second and foreign language practitioners to reflect on the influence of contextual factors in their classroom instructions and adopt appropriate teaching approaches to achieve the best teaching outcome. In the next section, I describe my teaching context. Then, I discuss the challenges of teaching English in monolingual Japan and the ways contextual factors affect my classroom instruction. Following this, I reflect on the effects of contextual factors on my teaching and I conclude by suggesting that there is a need for teachers to adopt an appropriate pedagogy consistent with local cultural expectations of learning English.

My teaching context

It was April 2009, and the *sakuras* had just blossomed signalling the start of the Spring semester in schools and universities throughout Japan. I was appointed an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Niigata Prefecture, a fairly small rural university located in Northwestern Japan. The university had a population of less than one thousand students. A few days before the start of the semester, the university held an entrance ceremony to welcome all freshmen. As a newly appointed foreign

language teaching faculty who had no prior experience teaching English at a prefectural university in Japan, the entrance ceremony was a novel event for me. The ceremony commenced with the singing of the school anthem followed by an opening address by the President of the university. In his speech, the President explained the vision of the university in producing a workforce to meet the needs of the country in the twenty first century. In particular, I remember the President reminding the in-coming freshmen to hone their English communicative skills and to participate as English users in the international community. Individual faculty members were then formally introduced to the freshmen. At the end of the ceremony each faculty member stepped forward and moved to the centre of the stage when their name was announced. We then bowed in front of the audience. It was a 'culture shock' moment for me as I had least expected the entrance ceremony to be so formal, elaborate and organised. In Singapore, there is no entrance ceremony to welcome freshmen into the university because a ceremony would be considered too formal and time-consuming. I began to realize that the Japanese culture and society highly value a university education.

As a new staff of the university, I was determined to demonstrate high standards of teaching professionalism by leveraging on my teaching experience in Singapore. However, in the days that followed, I came to realize that teaching English at a prefectural university in Japan is very different from teaching English in Singapore in terms of the students' learning behaviour, attitudes towards the learning of communicative English, the institutional learning culture and the examination-oriented culture. These cultural factors had a great impact on my teaching practice and led me to become critical of my classroom instructions.

How did I come to teach in Japan? Since 2000, I had been teaching at a local public university in Singapore for several years. However, in 2007, when I first visited Japan for a conference, I was interviewed by a professor for a contract-based teaching post at an international university in Kyushu, Japan. After teaching for two years there, I applied for a tenure-track teaching position at a prefectural university located in Northern Japan. Along with four other teachers from the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, I was recruited as a 'native-English speaker' to teach English at the university.

The university opened in December 2009 with a student population of about 200 students and operates as a local independent administrative institution (public university corporation). It comprises two faculties: the Faculty of International Studies and Regional Development and the Faculty of Human Life Sciences. A majority of local students stay on the

outskirts of the city and commute to the university daily by train. There are also students from other neighbouring prefectures studying at the university. Most freshmen attending the university have little or no experience communicating with English native speakers. The Dean revealed that I was recruited because I am an English speaker from one of the “outer circle” countries (Kachru, 1992). She believed I would play a vital role in motivating students to improve their spoken English. I was also hired because the university needed more international faculty in the International Studies and Regional Development department. The subjects that I was assigned to teach in my department include Oral Communication, Business English, Core English, Project English, and Study Abroad Programme.

Since teaching in Japan, my teaching philosophy has been influenced by ‘The 2003 Action Plan’ which is a national curricular reform implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (also known as MEXT). The purpose of ‘The 2003 Action Plan’ was to help all Japanese students, particularly senior high school students, acquire comprehensive English communicative ability and be able to converse in English. The specific objective of ‘The 2003 Action Plan’ was to deepen the linguistic and cultural understanding of English as a foreign language amongst Japanese students, and to foster an attitude to actively communicate in the language (Honna & Takeshita, 2005, p.200). ‘The 2003 Action Plan’ signals an important milestone in the educational landscape of Japan as it represents a bold step undertaken by MEXT towards the realization of a radical pedagogical approach to ELT curricular innovations.

Challenges: Navigating through difficult waters

I was filled with excitement on the first day of class. I was curious to find out more about my students, in particular their learning needs and interests. The students were chatting happily when I entered the classroom. I was glad to see that the majority of students were communicative and approachable. I thought this would be the perfect English class for a novice English teacher. Like any English teacher in Singapore, I commenced my lesson by greeting the students and then asked each to reciprocate with a self-introduction. I expected my students to respond readily to my instructions. However, there was an immediate silence; some students began to look anxious and worried. I was surprised by their passive response, but I maintained a calm composure. Realising that my students had not ‘warmed up’ to me yet, I decided to write down

my instructions clearly on the board. After much explanation and prompting, some students managed to utter one or two sentences in English.

Following the self-introduction, I asked another question in an attempt to get students to share their reasons for studying English. However, there was complete silence. Each time I posed a question, the class became quiet and the non-response would be the same. After a few weeks of teaching, it dawned on me that I was teaching a class of ‘false beginners.’ I use the term ‘false beginners’ because Japanese students have been trained to read and analyse English sentences, but they have not been taught to communicate in English. The following is an example of a typical student’s communicative ability:

T: Where are you from, Taka?

S: Yamaguchi-you know where?

T: Where’s Yamaguchi?

S: Far. Very far. I everyday *densha* (train) 2 hours come here.

T: Really? Why did you choose to study in this university?

S: Cannot go to local university. Then come this university

(T=Teacher; S= Student)

I also discovered that my students could not communicate with me in English because I spoke too fast and they were not able to ‘keep up’ with me. Several students confided in me that they could not understand my strong Singapore English accent because they were not used to listening to other (non-American, non-British) varieties of spoken English; they have been taught mostly by American teachers in their high schools. Some students also expressed a desire to be taught by “native” English speaking teachers. I was disappointed because students perceived me as a non-native speaker although I had learned English as a native language since I was young in Singapore. It was difficult for me to explain to students that English has been my language of socialization despite my background.

Japanese learners and lack of prior knowledge

I soon discovered that a majority of my students had very limited prior knowledge about places and cultures outside their sociolinguistic context. In one class session I tried to initiate a class discussion about Chinatown in Japan. I had initially thought that the lesson was fairly straightforward and students would have no difficulties sharing their knowledge on the topic. However, to my surprise, I could not elicit any response from the class. As an attempt to kick-start the discussion, I provided some background

information about Chinatown in other parts of the world and then asked the class to share their experiences from when they visited the Chinatown in Yokohama. Not surprisingly, there was no response. Despite waiting for a few minutes, no student volunteered to raise his/her hand to answer my question. I felt uneasy, disappointed and frustrated that I was not able to engage my students in a class discussion about Chinatown even though I knew a lot about the topic and was eager to share my knowledge with my class. I decided to proceed to another activity in the textbook. However, suddenly, Suda Maiko, a female student raised her hand and asked, "Sensei (Teacher), what's Chinatown like?" Immediately, Yuko, another female student asked, 'Is Chinatown in Yokohama?' I realized that my students were not able to talk about Chinatown because they had never visited the place nor had they previously read about it. Instead of adopting the traditional chalk-and-talk method in my lessons, I decided to try another approach - I first played videos in class to help my students relate to the topics in the textbook. I spent a lot of time deciding on the appropriate video clips to use as teaching material by considering my students' interests, their level of English proficiency and relevance to the class. I also tried to 'spice up' my lessons with a variety of teaching approaches such as using drama, debate, oral presentation and case studies to inspire my students in their learning. To build my students' background knowledge, I decided to ask students to read up on the topic before every lesson. My subsequent English lessons were more 'productive' and students seemed to be able to understand my lessons. My students were able to answer my questions when I showed them a video related to the topic. They did not appear to be puzzled or confused when I posed a question related to the topic. Subsequently, I made it a point to build my students' prior knowledge before 'diving' straight into the English lesson.

Teaching English in a monolingual environment

One of the main goals of the university is to develop students' English communication skills in order to allow them to engage in meaningful interactions in an increasingly sophisticated, complex, and specialized society. However, I discovered that many students do not have strong motivations to speak English because there is no necessity for them to use the language in their socialization experiences. I first realized this when I was teaching a lesson on the topic 'Developing Countries' in my Speaking class. I was enthusiastic when preparing for the lesson as the activities described in the textbook seemed very interesting and doable for my students. One of the activities required students to introduce a friend from

a developing country. To build students' prior knowledge on the topic, I used PowerPoint slides to explain the various major problems faced by many developing countries. My students were surprised to learn that many countries in the world are grappling with issues such as hunger, unemployment and poverty. I then reminded students that some of the problems experienced by developing countries could also happen in Japan. After a while, I instructed students to introduce a friend from a developing country. However, there was once again the 'wall of instant silence' and a few students seemed rather confused. After a while, one student broke the silence to reveal that he did not have any friends from a foreign country and was unable to participate in the activity. I asked students to raise their hand if they did not have a friend from a foreign country. To my surprise, almost all of the students raised their hands. One of my male students explained that he had very few opportunities to interact with foreigners in his hometown; other students nodded in agreement.

Through interactions with my students, I learnt that most of them stay on the outskirts of Niigata city; except for one or two students who had previously lived or studied overseas, few had very close encounters with native speakers of English. It dawned on me that my students were learning English in a monolingual environment. Japan has been described as an expanding circle of English users where English does not have the status of an official language or function as a lingua franca. There are not many English-speaking foreigners in my prefecture which makes it challenging for English teachers to cultivate students' English communicative skills. Largely viewed as the solution to make English language education more "communicative", the use of native English speakers in Japan is prevalent in Japanese schools and universities. Native speakers of English (usually from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) have been involved in English education in Japan for over 100 years.

Although MEXT has invested heavily in supporting English language teaching and learning in public schools, colleges and universities, this has not produced the intended outcomes. One of the reasons preventing teachers from adopting a communicative language teaching approach in the Japanese EFL classroom is students' lack of exposure to spoken English. Except for a small percentage of students who have studied overseas, most students have little opportunities to interact with English-speaking foreigners in their local environment.

After teaching at the university for several weeks, I sensed that my students were not responding well to my teaching; there was frequent absenteeism and little response when I tried to encourage them to

participate in class discussions. There were moments when I experienced feelings of anxiety and inadequacy teaching English in an unfamiliar environment. I even became disappointed in my own teaching performance. I began to realize that teaching English in Japan is very different from teaching English in Singapore. Unlike students in Singapore where English skills are highly valued for career advancement, Japanese students seem to be motivated to study English only for passing examinations. Japanese students also have very little confidence to speak English in class. The teaching approaches and activities that I frequently adopted for my classroom instructions in Singapore were not really useful as I observed that my students look puzzled and anxious during lessons. Like a ship that had been hit by a powerful wave that emerged out of nowhere, I felt helpless, lost and confused.

Successes: Overcoming local contextual factors in teaching

I was not willing to be deterred by these challenges; instead, I was determined to help my students communicate in English despite the challenges. I told myself that the setback is temporary. I consulted my colleagues on the learning behaviour of my students and was subsequently informed by a colleague that Japanese students are particularly shy and afraid to speak English in class. My colleague also advised me not to expect students to respond to my questions readily in class. After teaching for several months, I observed that the fear of speaking English is fairly prevalent amongst many students. One student confided in me about her fear of being laughed at by her friends if she spoke English in class:

I couldn't say all the information I prepared. Why I couldn't say is that I am always anxious that someone is teasing me while I speak English. Therefore I should break with this anxiety, and I want to speak fluently with confidence.

On another occasion, another student explained her anxiety in speaking English when I asked her why she chose to remain quiet in class:

Before joining this Speaking class, I felt anxious about speaking English. This is because I had few chances to discuss topics in English in high school.

Being aware that my students generally experience a high level of anxiety in speaking English, I decided to help my students overcome their fears. I remember asking Mike, another colleague who had taught English

for many years in Japan, about strategies and activities he used to help his students gain confidence in speaking English. I shared with Mike the difficulties I was having in getting my students to communicate in English in class. Mike suggested that I should first help my students relax in class through some fun and interesting activities. He explained that it is not uncommon for a majority of freshmen to display high anxiety in speaking English because they were not taught to communicate in English in high school. He also suggested that I establish a class protocol that would pave the way for students to be more communicative in English. “The thing is, Patrick, you have to ‘trick’ them into speaking English,” Mike spoke with deep conviction. He went on to explain that most Japanese students are not keen to learn foreign languages and good teachers help students overcome their anxiety in foreign language learning.

I soon learned that Japanese EFL learners experience a high level of anxiety in learning English because they have been taught since they were young not to speak English unless they can speak English like native speakers (Honna, 2008). Through consultation with other experienced English teachers in my department and other English language teachers that I met in various English language teaching conferences in Japan, I learned that an effective way to minimize Japanese students’ anxiety in learning English is through group activities. Japanese schools tend to emphasize harmony of the whole rather than competition. Working in teams or *han* is a common teaching method used by Japanese teachers to engage learners with diverse abilities in a single task (White, 1987). The *han* socializes students to see the value of cooperative teamwork and fosters an environment in which underachievers are encouraged to be an active participant and to improve their own performance.

I also learned that assigning a *hancho* or group leader is a common practice in the Japanese classroom. The *hancho* would be tasked to lead a group discussion and would then play the role of a spokesperson and report the views of individual group members to the class. However, I made it a point to rotate my students through different groups because Professor Yuko, a colleague I met at a teaching conference, had cautioned me that although Japanese students generally are open to collaborative learning, there could be ‘undercurrents’ (competition or disagreement) between individual group members. After trying out various group activities, I discovered that Japanese students generally embraced group work as an enjoyable and productive activity in learning English. Weaker students who were unable to form English sentences or were uninterested in the learning of English, were often supported and inspired by other group members during the group activity.

One particular group activity that I often use to motivate students to speak English is Readers Theatre, a drama activity that requires readers to read a story and transform the story into a script through negotiations with other group members. Readers Theatre is a powerful strategy for foreign language learning as it provides an immediate motivation for English learners to improve their English fluency since the performers master their scripts for a performance before an audience (Adams, 2003). Initially, I was hesitant to implement the activity as I was unsure whether Japanese EFL learners would respond favorably to the use of drama in learning English. However, after the activity, one student wrote how she benefitted from the collaboration of her group members (minor editing to retain authenticity):

It was fun for me to discuss the script and write the script. Everyone gave each opinion about the story, so we can get the ideas into shape soon. When we were rehearsing, we tried to memorise our lines. By recording our voice, I could check my pronunciation. It was a group activity, so I could enjoy the cooperation with other members of my group.

I was grateful to my colleagues who advised me to teach English in a group setting. Through the support of my mentors, I soon learned to teach English effectively in my new teaching environment. My teaching skills gradually improved and I became more confident in my teaching abilities. To help my students understand the importance of English as a *lingua franca*, I also decided to incorporate World Englishes into my teaching. ‘World Englishes’ is a term for emerging indigenized varieties of English, which arose due to diversification of English in different parts of the world (Kachru, 1992) My inspiration came from a lecture series presentation, ‘Language Use in a Multi-Linguistic Society: A Singaporean’s Perspective’ that I gave during my first year at the university. After the session, a student wrote to tell me:

For many modern linguistic people like me, speaking only two languages need much effort. In fact, I have studied English for many years, but I can’t use English naturally. After listening to this lecture, I strongly feel the importance of studying languages. From now on, I will study English harder than before.

I was surprised that this student took no issue with my strong Singapore English accent. I began to realize that there is a strong possibility that my students may become more motivated to speak English if they are exposed to other varieties of English spoken in other cultural contexts. That was a defining moment in my teaching. After reading

Professor Honna's book, *English as a Multicultural Language in Asian Contexts*, I became more convinced that my students would need to use English to communicate with other non-native English speakers in various settings. I decided to adopt a World English text, introduce Asian Studies in my Project English class, and through an accompanying CD, I introduced my students to different varieties of English spoken by non-native speakers of English from various countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and China. To help my students realize the importance of English in communicating one's idea, I showed YouTube videos of students from Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, engaging in debates or discussions in English. My students were surprised to hear the different varieties of English. As one student explains:

I didn't realize that there are a vast number of Englishes such as Chinese English, Indian English, Arabian English and so on. In today's lesson, I learned about the diversification of English. There are many countries that speak English as a native tongue or as a second language but these countries also have their own cultures and identities. So we should try to understand even if we communicate through a common language in English. So I want to be good at speaking English and I want to introduce to other countries about Japanese cultures and traditions.

I was pleasantly surprised to discover that my student's agency in learning English is to promote his own Japanese culture. I was also encouraged when another student wrote in his journal that he is not ashamed to speak English with his Japanese accent after hearing different varieties of spoken English:

Today we learned about English as an international language. English is spreading all over the world and divided into many varieties. I've thought there are just two types, American or British and every non-native speaker is trying to make similar their pronunciation. In Japan, only American English is taught to us. We have little opportunity to hear other Englishes. So we usually are ashamed of using our own English. Now I know there is a lot of English and using my Japanese-English is not wrong. So I'll try to be proud of using English. I'll try to be more active.

I was pleased to read that some of my students have finally overcome their feelings of guilt and inferiority towards their own Japanese English. I became more convinced that there is a need to help my students 'internalise' the use of Japanese English as a legitimate variety of English for international and intercultural communication.

Reflection and Discussion

After teaching English for seven years in Japan, I observe that Japanese EFL learners are passive in class. They rarely start a new topic or initiate a discussion in class. They usually do not ask questions for clarification or volunteer to answer questions. They tend to answer questions only when called. If students do not understand part of the lesson, they would never ask me directly but rather they would quietly consult their classmates. As Honna and Takeshita (2009) observe, contrary to Western countries, speech is not as highly esteemed in the Japanese society as people generally believe that it is unnecessary to speak precisely and explicitly with one another as most people in Japan have a shared system of communalized assumptions. Understandably, some of my students do not see the need to improve their spoken English because they mostly use Japanese for communication outside of class.

On the other hand, for a majority of my students, obtaining high scores on standardized test and school exams are of paramount importance. There is a strong standardized test culture at my university. All freshmen are instructed to attain excellent scores on the standardized tests when they enter the university. While some students find communicative activities to be fun and interesting, they do not regard them as core learning activities. All English faculty staff are under pressure to ‘teach to the test’ as the President of the university expects staff to focus on helping students increase their test scores. It is true to say that in Japan, English loses its communicative purpose and is transmuted into a highly specialized written dialect called *shiken eigo* or exam English (McVeigh, 2002).

Although MEXT has made it mandatory for high school students to learn communicative English, senior high school teachers, on the other hand, spend a lot of time teaching reading and writing skills because these two components are tested in university entrance examinations. This has resulted in a passive-skill, form-focused and translation-based English classroom activities in senior high schools (Gorsuch, 2000). When I asked my students about their learning English experiences at the senior high schools, many expressed disappointment with the English lessons they had received. One student told me:

My teacher spent a lot of time preparing us for the university entrance examination. We learnt a lot of grammar and vocabulary but there was hardly any speaking practice.

Although I could sense that my students were ‘hungry’ for more communicative-based learning activities in class, I was also pressured to

'teach to the test' knowing that my teaching evaluation would be measured based on my students' performance in the standardized tests. Initially, I was 'caught between a rock and a hard place' but gradually, I managed to strike a healthy balance between the teaching of communicative language skills and academic language skills needed to succeed in standardized tests.

I also observe that a majority of freshmen are reluctant to communicate in English despite having learned English vocabulary and grammar for six years. Many of the freshmen enter university with a notion that they 'study English' but do not adopt an, 'I can speak English' attitude. My colleagues and I feel that we should encourage our students to stop thinking about themselves as someone who studies English and start thinking of themselves as someone who uses/speaks English. As Hino (2012) explains, a majority of Japanese EFL learners experience difficulties in redefining the use of English as an opportunity for real-life communication. In Japan, it is simply unusual among students to communicate in English (p. 198). When I tell my Japanese students to communicate in English with their classmates, my students will inevitably switch to speaking Japanese. Despite my attempts to persuade them to speak English in class, they will often lapse into Japanese as they feel strange or uncomfortable when talking with their friends in English. Many students still believe that English is a language to be used when interacting with foreigners. Students have told me that although they have acquired a wealth of English vocabulary and grammar skills in my class, they do not have the opportunity to speak English in their linguistic environment. I often wonder: Are my students not making good progress in their spoken English because they do not believe that there is need for them to use English for communication in their socialization experiences?

Some of my students also confessed that they are reluctant to speak English in class because they are ashamed of their own Japanese English as a 'legitimate' variety of English. Being aware that my students have a low esteem of their own Japanese English, I align myself with a constructivist perspective of learning and often help my students develop an emancipatory awareness of "linguistic ownership". However, I am also aware that in the Japanese EFL classroom, Japanese learners believe they do not have the right to position themselves as 'owners' of English due to an exonormative orientation towards the learning of English. Honna (2008, p.163) observes that the 'nativist' goal in English learning amongst Japanese students is largely responsible for the current low achievement of English abilities among Japanese students. It creates a social pressure and

a common caveat is: ‘Do not speak English until you can speak it like an American.’ As one student wrote at the end of a course evaluation:

Before I took this lesson, I was always afraid to speak English. The reason is that I care that I am not a native speaker. My English is different from native speakers or someone who could speak English well. So when I speak English, I was very ashamed.

I realize that Japan is still a conformist society. Students in Japan have been taught from a young age that, ‘The nail that sticks up gets pounded down.’ This literally means that a Japanese will be criticized if he/she tries to stand out or be different. This partially explains why students are reluctant to respond to my questions in class. Perhaps they are afraid of being conspicuous and singled out if they make any mistakes in their spoken English. Instead of the Communicative Language Teaching approach, I am inclined to believe that a majority of my students will profit significantly from the pedagogic integration of a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology with a dual focus aimed at the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language. I believe the integration of content and language learning through the 4C principles of CLIL: Content (subject matter), Communication (language learning and using), Cognition (learning and thinking processes) and Culture (the realization of global citizenship with intercultural understanding) (Coyle, 2007) will capture my students’ interest and lead them to engage in meaningful experiential learning of English. As Marsh (2000) explains, many CLIL programmes have been implemented during the last few years in many different contexts, to help improve students’ language proficiency and to ‘nurture a feel good and can do attitude towards language learning in general’ (Marsh, 2000, p.10).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained how cultural factors impacted my teaching practice as an English teacher in a prefectural university in Japan. Through an autoethnographic approach, I have shown how my teaching practice has been influenced by local contextual factors. I described Japanese EFL learners’ fear of communicating in English, the strong examination-oriented culture at my university, mentors that advised me in my teaching context, the national policy mandated by MEXT and the wider sociolinguistic context in Japan. I also described how my teaching approach evolved to meet my students’ needs. Johnson (2006) observes that constructing locally appropriate responses to support the professionalism

of L2 teachers entail recognizing how changing socio-political and socio-economic contexts impact upon the ways in which teachers are positioned and the way teachers enact their teaching practices. Teachers must be willing and able to create the kind of learning environments for their students.

To help my students improve their English communicative abilities, I had initially decided to adopt a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in my classroom instruction leveraging on my teaching experience as a Communication Skill lecturer in Singapore. However, I have come to realize that the sociolinguistic environment in which English is taught in Japan is very different from my previous teaching environment in Singapore. In Singapore, English is the sole medium of instruction in schools. University students need to learn English as they recognize English as an international language. They are motivated to improve their spoken English because they are aware that they need to use English to communicate in the workplace. However, despite its strong visual and conceptual presence, English has no official status in Japan. Many Japanese simply do not believe it is necessary for them to acquire fluency in English in their daily lives (Yano, 2011). After several years teaching in Japan, my teaching approach has evolved to fit the local context; I have since adopted the CLIL approach in teaching English as a foreign language.

References

- Aboshiha, P. (2008). *Identity and dilemma: the 'native speaker' English language teacher in a globalizing world*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK.
- Adams, W. (2003) *Institute Book of Readers Theatre: A Practical Guide for School, Theatre and Community*. Chapel Hill, NC: Professional Press.
- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, p 35, 373-95. Proceedings, 440.
- Canagarajah, S. (2012). Teacher development in a globalised profession: An autoethnography. *TESOL Quarterly* 46 (2). 258-279.
- Coyle, D. (2007). Content and language integrated learning. Towards a connected research agenda for CLIL pedagogy. *The International Journal of Bilingual education and Bilingualism* 10, 543-562.
- Gorsuch, G (2000). EFL educational policies and educational cultures: Influence on teachers' approval of communicative activities. *TESOL Quarterly* 34(4). Winter 2000, 675-711.

- Hino, N. (2012). Participating in the community of EIL users through real-time news: Integrated practice in teaching English as international language (IPTEIL). In Matsuda, A. (Eds.) *Principles and practices of teaching English as an international language*. Short run Press Ltd: Great Britain.
- Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Honna, N. (2008). *English as a multicultural language in Asian contexts: Issues and ideas*. Tokyo: Kurocio Publishers.
- Honna, N & Takeshita, Y.(2005). English Education in Japan Today: The Impact of Changing Policies. In Ho Wah Kam & Ruth Y L Wong (Eds.). *English Language Teaching in East Asia Today*. Eastern University Press, 195-215.
- Honna, N & Takeshita, Y. (2009). *Understanding Asia*. Tokyo: Cengage Learning.
- Johnson, K. (2006). The sociocultural turn and its challenges for second language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly* 40, 1, 235-237.
- Johnson,K.& Golombek,P. (2011). *Research on second language teacher education*. New York: Routledge.
- Kachru, B. (1992). *The Other tongue*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Marsch, D. (2000). *Marsh, Using Languages to Learn and Learning to Use Languages*, Finland: University of Jyväskylä.
- McKay, S. (2002). *Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McVeigh, B. (2002). *Japanese higher education as myth*. New York: M.E.Sharpe.
- White, M. (1987). *The Japanese educational challenge*. New York: The Free Press.
- Yano,Y. (2011). World English as an international language and Japanese English.In Seargeant, P. (Eds.). *The Idea of English in Japan*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. 125-142.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE METHODOLOGY IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: MODELING AS AN INNOVATIVE METHOD

COLLEEN SHAUGHNESSY AND LIZ J. BOTHA

Introduction

In January of 2009, I took a position in South Africa as an English Language Fellow (ELF) at the University of Fort Hare (UFH). The U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs funds the ELF program which sends Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) professionals to more than 70 countries to improve existing English language teaching and learning. I completed two fellowships in South Africa during the 2009 and 2010 academic years. My responsibilities included teaching English Language Methodology and Academic English. When I arrived at UFH, situated in a rural village called Alice about 60 miles (100km) inland from the port of East London in the province of the Eastern Cape, South Africa, I was met by Liz, a South African English as an Additional Language (EAL) professional, who quickly became my friend as well as my colleague.

Three years prior to my arrival, Liz had been sent to the Alice campus after a university-wide restructuring, to teach English methodology to prospective secondary school teachers. Previously, Liz had been involved in the UFH Distance Education Program, which offered opportunities for practicing primary school teachers to upgrade their qualifications to a Bachelor of Education level as required in post-1994 democratic South Africa. This innovative program was practice-based. Each small module of the program (known in isiXhosa, the dominant local language, as an *umthamo*, or mouthful) was built around a 'key activity' which the

teachers were required to enact in their classrooms or schools. Theoretical principles and readings supported this activity and subsequent reflection at fortnightly face-to-face sessions held in local centers around the province (Botha, Devereux, Adendorff, M. & Sotuku, 2006). Liz's role in the project revolved mainly around the design of learning materials, training of tutors, and assessment.

Liz and I quickly realized our mutual passion for our work and enthusiastically shared our storied careers as teachers of EAL. Through these stories, I began to make sense of the educational situation and to grasp the importance of history to education in South Africa. Additionally, I came to understand something of the political situation at UFH, which had resulted in exhaustion, disillusionment, and low morale throughout the department. Although Liz fit these descriptions well when I first met her, I found within her and my other UFH colleagues an enduring hope, even in the face of persistent obstacles.

Neither of us received much guidance with regard to curriculum and course planning when beginning at UFH. When Liz first arrived, she was shocked to discover that her English method class only met for one 45-minute period a week. Although she was experienced in teaching EAL in African contexts, she had never taught method before at this level, and became quite agitated. Her own training had been extensive and multidimensional; where should she start – theory, linguistics, methods, or techniques? – and how could she fit it all into the limited time? Things did not seem to improve as she went along; at one stage her students objected that she was asking too much of them, and when she set fun, practical tasks, they did not respond with much enthusiasm. It was a struggle, and insight was slow to come.

Luckily for me, by the time I arrived, Liz had managed to have the class time extended to two 45-minute periods a week. Despite benefiting from Liz's experience and perceptions, I initially relied on my prior approach to teaching EAL methodology as the multiple challenges of adapting to a new culture as well as to a new education system, national curriculum, and work environment inhibited much creativity. Our students' only experience of the classroom was their own learning in rural or township schools, where the Apartheid legacy of rote learning and teacher-centeredness usually reigned supreme, and where teachers were often under-qualified and unmotivated (with notable exceptions). Both Liz and I were drawn towards a very different type of teaching: communicative and active, which the national curriculum encouraged, and were keen to share these with our pre-service teacher students. Exactly how to do this proved to be the challenge. Within this chapter, I explore