

# Between the Keys

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## Working Together

**Jim Smiley**  
**MW-SIG Coordinator**

Dear Materials Writers, The Pan-SIG Conference 2009 will be held on Saturday and Sunday, May 23rd and 24th, 2009 at Toyo Gakuen University, Nagareyama Campus, in Chiba featuring J D Brown, and Deryn Verity as the plenary speakers.

There will be a short materials writers programme on the Sunday. At 9:00, we feature Steve King of Pearson Education who will give a talk entitled 'Publishing past, present and future'. Also at 14:00, Eric Skier will tell us why 'Materials for ESP: More than just words', and at 15:00, Myles Grogan questions 'Should we or shouldn't we give electronic assignments?' All talks are 45-minutes. If you're in the Tokyo/ Chiba area, the pop along to the Pan-SIG Conference

<http://pansig.org/2009/>. With around 60 presentations over the two days, there's something for everyone in a smaller, relaxed atmosphere.

On a personal note, this column will be my last for a while. Soon, I hope to describe myself as a cancer survivor, but in the meantime I'm hospitalised undergoing chemotherapy. The MW-SIG is in good hands as the other committee members are fulfilling their roles wonderfully, but in November, it is likely that there'll be a need for a new coordinator as I won't be standing again for that position until at least 2010.

Arra best,  
 Jim Smiley




## From the Editor

**Simon Cooke**  
**Publications Chair**

Welcome to the first edition of *Between the Keys* for 2009. No doubt you are all full of fresh ideas for the new academic year; your minds overflowing with new designs for research and teaching. Why not share those ideas with us? The materials writers SIG is always keen to hear from writers new and experienced. We are looking forward to hearing from you! Please see the submissions page for guidelines.

Our first article offers a glimpse into the lesson materials developed by the late William Balsamo over his forty-year teaching career. The four lessons offered are from the store of lessons and teaching ideas that Professor Balsamo created over his long career as an educator. Each was generated by memories of presentations given by Professor Balsamo at local and national JALT events, Teachers Helping Teachers con-

ferences, or at AsiaTEFL. They are offered here as mementoes of a master teacher.

The second article, from Damian J. Rivers details a versatile, fun and culturally-relevant communicative activity requiring little preparation time - surely the perfect lesson and inspiration for any teaching funk.

Our third article is from Ben Shearon. Faced with the challenge of putting new names to new faces at the start of each semester and addressing the challenge of introducing students to the idea of community in the classroom, Ben offers his remedy for teachers and students alike.

In addition to our three articles this month, please be sure to read Greg Goodmacher's call to join him at the MW JALT Forum at the JALT national conference in November!

Best wishes for the year!



# Bill Balsamo's Legacy: A Quartet of Lessons from a Master

Patrick Dougherty, Elizabeth King, Maggie Lieb, and George Mano

*Past BTK editor's note:* I, like many people, was greatly saddened to hear of Bill Balsamo's passing. I only knew Bill via conferences whereas others had worked with him on JALT-related projects, through his charity work or as a local educator. He had seemingly boundless energy and was inspiring in all fields. I always made it a point to look for Bill's name on conference programmes. He always had something new and interesting to say. I take it as a huge compliment that he also attended some of my presentations.

My best memory of Bill was at THAITESOL in Chang Mai a few years back. He was dragging around a huge case on wheels and when I asked why he told me he made a point of going to a presentation in every time slot so he collected a lot of handouts! I had the great fortune to run into him at a market later in the afternoon and we spent the early evening drinking beer and chatting. About teaching, about his charities, about life. Besides being a marvellous human, he is one of the funniest blokes I have ever met. I don't believe I have laughed harder nor been amazed at what he had done. He just squeezed the life out of life. His contribution to materials at the grassroots is obvious to me. I wondered if as materials writers we could do something to honour Bill so I asked the Himeji chapter if they could recall some of his more memorable ideas. I sincerely thank Patrick, Elizabeth, Maggie and George for their time and effort. — Kristofer Bayne

## Introduction:

When William Balsamo passed away this past April 22 in Himeji, Japan, the educational community lost a leader, friend, and a man who felt passionate about his role as a teacher. That role had taken him from a city school in New York, teaching Russian and theology, to high schools and junior highs in Japan as a JET teacher, and finally, to a position as a professor of English at a junior college, the last being where he spent the last half of his professional career. And what a career it was, full of thousands of students, of all ages, abilities, and aptitudes, all of which were served by this dedicated educator who took each and every class seriously and seriously prepared for each educational moment, placing his students first and creating lessons that were provocative, interesting, and often quietly amusing, as Bill believed that humor in the classroom was as essential as anything else. Humor, engagement, and fun, he believed, were vital in any class but especially so in the language classroom where the simple act of communicating in an L2 often proves psychologically daunting to many people. Interesting lessons, a caring teacher, and great attention to preparation, made Bill Balsamo's classes wonderful arenas for learning. Many students of Bill have mentioned to me how he made learning English so enjoyable that they forgot how much work it was and how hard he, in reality, was pushing them to succeed. That is the mark of a great educator.

Here we offer four of Bill's lessons and programs, Shapeshifting Listening Lesson, his Airline Directions Listening/Performance Lesson, his On-line Reading Labs program,

and Using Storyboards in ESL Classrooms. Written down from memory and gleaned from notes taken at conferences where Bill presented some selections of his vast store of lesson plans and teaching tips. These lessons are just a small bouquet of lessons from Bill's store of materials, but they give insight into the thinking of a master teacher, one whose memory is cherished and whose efforts impacted the lives and learning of so many students and colleagues.

## Bill Balsamo's Shapeshifting Listening Lesson

**Patrick Dougherty**  
**Teachers Helping Teachers**

### *Quick guide*

Key words: Listening skills, Shapes, Directions, Colors

Learner English level: Elementary to Advanced

Learner Age: Elementary school and up

Preparation Time: Five minutes

Materials: Scratch paper, pencils, and (optional) crayons or coloring pencils

Due to his work with Teachers Helping Teachers, Bill was always interested in promoting what he called 'PC' lessons. That meant, simply, pencil and chalk lessons, ones which a teacher in a village school in Bangladesh, or in a hamlet in Vietnam, or a school on the outskirts of Vientiane, Laos, could do with limited access to technology or materials. One of these exercises that Bill showed me was his shapes and diagram lesson. The objectives of the lesson are to introduce or review basic shapes and to introduce or review directions via a listening exercise with kinesthetic properties.

### *Procedure*

First the instructor introduces or review shapes with the class. He or she does this by drawing a circle, heart, square, diamond, star, rectangle, triangle, and oval on the board and making sure that the students understood the vocabulary word for each shape. Next, the instructor makes an empty table or diagram on the chalkboard. The diagram consists of twenty-five empty boxes, made up into a square, being five boxes high and five boxes deep. This replicates a completed diagram that the instructor has already prepared but kept hidden from the class. The students then copy the diagram on a sheet of paper. Before starting the exercise, the instructor reviews directions with the students by drawing a shape or two in the diagram and explaining that the shape is in the upper right hand corner box, or three rows from the left and down four boxes, etc. After this the lesson continues with the instructor stating a shape and where the students are to draw it on the diagram. After filling up the diagram, the instructor reveals his or her diagram and fills in diagram on the chalkboard, reviewing the language as he or she does so. Students then check their diagrams to see if they got all of the correct shapes in the correct locations.

If students have access to coloring pencils or crayons, a color element can be added to this exercise. Students can be told to draw a green oval, or a red circle in certain squares. You can examine the completed diagram in Table 1 to see the possibilities.

This exercise can also be done, with experienced groups or at higher language level, as a student generated exercise where students make and complete a diagram and then are selected to go the front of the class and give directions to the students to correctly replicate the leader's diagram.

Table

				
				
				
				
				

### Conclusion

This is a very simple lesson to set up but provides a great deal of learning for the students. Using it one can cover, or review, directions, shapes, colors, and work on listening skills. It also lends itself to being simplified or expanded based on the class level. I have done this exercise with students in a village school in the Philippines as well as with my college students in Japan, and I found it to be student engaging, interesting, and fun.

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## Bill Balsamo's Airline Directions Listening/Performance Lesson

Elizabeth King  
Kyoto Bunkyo University

### Quick guide

Key words: Listening Skills, Performance, Pair-work, Directions, Imperative form

Learner English level: Elementary to Advanced

Learner Age: Teenagers and up

Preparation Time: Variable, depending on the activity

Materials: Recordings of Airline pre-flight information

The first time I met Bill Balsamo he was giving a short presentation on a lesson he had

recently developed. From this presentation alone I learned a lot about him as a teacher and as a person. For one thing, Bill was an innovative and dedicated teacher who looked for new ideas everywhere, incorporating incidents from his active life into lively and life-like lessons. For another, he thought nothing of spending hours in preparation (he once told me he had never entered a classroom unprepared), even for the simplest, most straightforward lesson. 'The kids are worth it!' he'd say, with his shy and gentle smile.

While on a flight to Bangkok, he used his pocket recorder to catch the flight attendant's crisp and clear safety presentation before take-off. When he returned home from his trip, he made 15 audiotape copies of the presentation, enough for each pair in the 30-member class, in which he intended to reinforce an earlier lesson about giving directions and using the imperative form.

### Procedure:

In step one; he asked the class how many had previously flown in an airplane, and what they recalled about the safety presentation. He elicited some vocabulary from the class, then played the recording a few times. As this was a listening lesson, students were not given a copy of the text. They could ask questions about unfamiliar vocabulary only.

For homework, he assigned the listening lesson, instructing the pairs to schedule time together and practice for a polished presentation. One student was to play the role of the flight attendant, with the other member of the pair listening and following the instructions, as they understood them.

### Conclusions:

Most students didn't recite the exact instructions from the audiotape, and some branched out precariously on their own, contributing to the hilarity in the actual performance time. Bill of course captured the variety of interpre-

tations and ways of performing the instructions on video. As simple as this lesson was, it provided a surprisingly long list of learned vocabulary which was duly tested during the next lesson, many successful attempts at giving and following instructions, and no small amount of hilarity among the class members and subsequently the teachers who attended this mini-presentation. On many occasions following this one, I reminded myself that the amount of energy put into preparation usually results in energetic production. And in the case of a master teacher like Bill, we could substitute 'almost always' for 'usually'.

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## **Bill Balsamo's On-line Reading Lab for ESL Students**

### **Maggie Lieb**

### **Meiji University**

*Quick guide*

Key words: Reading skills, CALL activities, Online ESL activities

Learner English level: Elementary to Advanced

Learner Age: Teenagers and up

Preparation Time: Variable, depending on the activity

Materials: Computers with Internet access  
Online Reading Lab

Presented by Bill Balsamo at the 10th Annual JALTCALL Conference on June 4th, 2005, at Ritsumeikan University, this website encapsulates a plethora of ESL learning opportunities, including, but not limited to reading skill development.

Available at <http://www.geocities.com/yamataro670/readinglab.htm> , this site is particularly useful for students who wish to test or improve their reading comprehension skills. The site includes 70 essays which first appeared in the book "America - Today and

Tomorrow". Each 450-word essay is timed so that students have five minutes to read it before answering 10 accompanying multiple-choice questions. The timed portion of each activity is useful for encouraging the development of speed as well as accuracy, both of which are necessary for reading fluency. Simply by clicking on the text, however, students may review any portion of the text if necessary. They then receive a grade for their quiz, which is scored automatically by the computer. Suitable for intermediate level readers, this site allows students to progress at their own pace, and receive immediate feedback. There are also mixed sentences activities requiring students to reorder sentence fragments from the essays, thereby solidifying syntactical structure. The text of Bill Balsamo's book of fables, "Disappearing into Clouds", is also available on the website complete with comprehension activities such as cloze exercises, mixed sentences, cross-word activities, and hangman.

*Other Links*

Balsamo's site also has many other valuable links for teachers and students. The 'Crossword Puzzles' link contains crosswords in three categories - The Alphabet, Categories, and Countries & Cultures. The link to "Activities for ESL Students" is particularly useful as it provides grammar and vocabulary quizzes, as well as crossword puzzles that are classified from easy to difficult. There is also a wide selection of bilingual quizzes incorporating over 40 languages, as well as links to ESL podcasts on current topics. This link also contains support for teachers and help in writing quizzes. Furthermore, the site contains an Online Library link that, in addition to including Bill's short stories ("Short Stories by Yamataro"), allows students to access an online library of literature, great books,

great writers, and the complete works of Shakespeare and Chekhov among others. Great speeches and great quotations from famous people are available on another link, with audio and visual components to accompany the written text in many cases. Over 900 dictionaries are linked to the site on the “Online Dictionaries” link; ensuring students will never be short of a definition. Bilingual, monolingual, and visual dictionaries are among the offerings, as well as dictionaries for children. The “Reader’s Digest” link is fun and easy to use and provides opportunities for easy reading and vocabulary building through the “Word Power” quizzes. Registration is required for this site, but it is free and easy. Bill has also linked “Film Scripts” and “Movie Trailers” to his site, which provides ESL students with a high-interest context in which to practice their language skills. This site contains movie trailers and accompanying language exercises. The final link is “Games for ESL Learners”. This site is a wonderful resource for students to practice their language skills using anagrams, tongue twisters, palindromes, “Hangman”, spoonerisms, “Hilarious Headlines”, and others.

#### *Conclusion*

Bill Balsamo’s Online Reading Lab contains an abundance of activities that teachers of English can use immediately, and is resplendent with topics that can be adapted to almost any class and teaching context. Even more impressive is the fact that Bill constructed the entire site without having his own personal computer. Those of us fortunate enough to know him will recall that he carried enormous quantities of ESL materials with him wherever he went, and as a result, has left us with an impressive compendium of resources

that we can now draw upon to enhance our own teaching situations.



## **Bill Balsamo’s Using Storyboards in ESL Classrooms**

(Plenary Presentation: FEELTA Conference, Blagoveshchensk, Russia, 2000)

**George Mano**  
**University of Hyogo**

#### *Quick Guide*

Key Words: Storyboard, Movies

Learner English Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Learner Age: Teenager and up

Preparation Time: 30 minutes to one hour

Materials: DVD or Video Tape, DVD Player or Video Player, Storyboard Sheets prepared by the teacher, pencils

People who knew Bill well knew that he had two passions outside of teaching: opera and movies. Bill had a collection of hundreds of DVDs and he probably watched a movie every night that he stayed in his apartment in Japan. Naturally, a teacher who loves movies that much would try to bring them into the classroom somehow. This lesson was one way that he could fit his passion into the day’s activities.

For people who are unfamiliar with the art of moviemaking, storyboards are used by directors to plan the shooting of the scenes for a movie. Essentially, a storyboard is a piece of paper with one drawing or several drawings on it and a few words written below or above each drawing. The drawing represents how the director would like one moment from a scene to look on the movie screen. As soon as there is some change in the scene, such as a different angle, a new character, or a new location, a new drawing is needed. A simple scene with few changes, therefore, might have

one or two drawings only, but a complex scene (think of something like *Matrix*) might have a dozen drawings for one minute of screen time.

#### *Procedure*

First, the teacher should select a scene from a movie. Ideally, the scene should have no dialogue, so that the students can concentrate on the images they see. For Bill's presentation at the FEELTA conference, he selected the famous crop duster scene from Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece *North by Northwest*. In that scene, Cary Grant stands by the side of a road next to a cornfield waiting to meet someone. Instead of the person he is expecting to meet, a crop duster (bi-wing airplane) flies out of another field and starts shooting at him. The scene is several minutes long.

After selecting the scene, the teacher needs to prepare blank storyboards. These should be pieces of paper with six or eight rectangles and lines for writing below.

The teacher also needs to have a completed storyboard from another movie scene or one or two completed drawings from the scene the students will see. These are needed for modeling. If the teacher uses a completed

storyboard from another scene for demonstration purposes, he/she will also need to prepare the DVD that goes with that scene.

In the classroom, the teacher begins with modeling. He/she hands out the finished storyboards (if he/she is using them) and shows the movie scene related to those storyboards. The teacher will also need to stop the DVD at appropriate frames to show how those frames resulted in the drawings that are on the paper.

Next, the teacher will hand out the blank storyboards (Table 1) and will begin showing the DVD. Again, he/she will stop at appropriate frames and allow students time to make quick sketches of what they see on the screen.

After the teacher has shown the scenes and the students have drawn them, the ESL part of the lesson begins. On the lines below the drawings, the students are to describe the scene using one or two complete sentences.

#### *Conclusion*

This lesson is ideal for a writing class or a class with a cultural content. Many of our students enjoy watching movies, so this is a lesson they will do eagerly.



## Communicative Vocabulary Building Through Culturally Appropriate Materials

Damian J. Rivers, Kanda University of International Studies

### Introduction:

Communicative activities that are highly stimulating are always a welcome sight in the foreign language classroom. Creating activities which are able to cross cultural boundaries, be relevant to the students' immediate social environment as well as possessing the flexibility to account for a wide range of levels with minimum

preparation time are few and far between. The lesson presented here uses a simple high-interest, culturally relevant concept which permits students to talk and have fun, whilst at the same time expand their vocabulary. I have used this lesson numerous times in both Japan and the U.K. and it has always received positive appraisals from the students.

*Preparation:*

The teacher will need to prepare a copy of the three single page handouts for each student. These three handouts should easily get you through a typical 90-minute lesson.

These basic materials can be used in a number of different ways depending on class ability

## Blood Type & Character 1

**Blood Type A** Population: About 34% of the world is Blood Type A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Blood Type B** Population: About 10% of the world is Blood Type B

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Blood Type AB** Population: About 4% of the world is Blood Type AB

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Blood Type O** Population: About 36% of the world is Blood Type O

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Blood Type & Character 2

**Blood Type A** Population: About 34% of the world is Blood Type A

**GOOD:** Obedient, Careful, Sympathetic, Polite, Honest, Loyal, Emotional, Calm, Even-Tempered, Team Player.

**BAD:** Very Sensitive, Introverted, Shy, Nervous, Pessimistic, Hesitant, Indecisive and Dislikes to be touched.

**Blood Type B** Population: About 9% of the world is Blood Type B

**GOOD:** Cheerful, Optimistic, Active, Sensitive, Kind, Sociable, Entertaining, Humorous.

**BAD:** Forgetful, Unorganized, Noisy, Eccentric, Selfish, Individualistic and Likes to get one's own way.

**Blood Type AB** Population: About 4% of the world is Blood Type AB

**GOOD:** Social, Easy-going, Sympathetic, Diplomatic, Outgoing, Laid-back, Creative, Artistic, Flexible and Compelling.

**BAD:** Unpredictable, Moody, Aloof, Get bored easily, Mysterious and Dislikes to be touched.

**Blood Type O** Population: About 36% of the world is Blood Type O

**GOOD:** Confident, Strong-Willed, Proud, Dedicated, Sociable, Energetic, Extroverted, Frank, Realist, Showy, Fearless, Generalist, Positive, Independent.

**BAD:** Risk-Takers, Dislike taking orders, Insecure, Stubborn, May have short attention span.

Write your top 5 good points in the box on the left below. You read them try to guess your partner's top 5 good points. When you get a correct answer write it in the box on the top right. Repeat this process for the bad points below.

|                    |                           |                                     |                    |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>GOOD POINTS</b> | My TOP 5 good points are: | My partner's TOP 5 good points are: | <b>GOOD POINTS</b> |
|                    | 1 _____                   | 1 _____                             |                    |
|                    | 2 _____                   | 2 _____                             |                    |
|                    | 3 _____                   | 3 _____                             |                    |
|                    | 4 _____                   | 4 _____                             |                    |
| 5 _____            | 5 _____                   |                                     |                    |
| <b>BAD POINTS</b>  | My TOP 5 bad points are:  | My partner's TOP 5 bad points are:  | <b>BAD POINTS</b>  |
|                    | 1 _____                   | 1 _____                             |                    |
|                    | 2 _____                   | 2 _____                             |                    |
|                    | 3 _____                   | 3 _____                             |                    |
|                    | 4 _____                   | 4 _____                             |                    |
| 5 _____            | 5 _____                   |                                     |                    |

see  
[http://www.materialswriters.org/betweenthekeys/17\\_1/rivers.php](http://www.materialswriters.org/betweenthekeys/17_1/rivers.php)  
 to download full-sized versions of these handouts

and time constraints (e.g., introducing adjectives / cutting out character definitions and using them like a quiz / cultural comparison of belief systems and beliefs concerning character measurement). It may also benefit the teacher, especially in lower level classes to compile a list of commonly used adjectives with Japanese translations; this use of the students' native-language is of course at the discretion of the teacher and will depend on the exact circumstances surrounding the lesson.

#### *Deployment Stage 1:*

The teacher should begin by framing the lesson content through writing something on the whiteboard such as; 'Character Assessment'. They should then invite the students to comment on what they think this is referring to. The teacher must now try and elicit information from the group concerning various aspects of character assessment. If the students warm to the concept quickly, invite them to suggest some ways in which a person's character can be predicted based on different cultural norms. At this point I have found that students will usually mention one of the key points, these being; blood type, the Zodiac or the Chinese Zodiac. If the students are not so quick to latch on to these ideas drop a few hints until they do. This process is all valid skill based language practice for the students and is an important part of the lesson. I would suggest that after 10-15 minutes you should have something along the lines of the following written on the whiteboard:

#### **Character Assessment**

- **Blood Types (A, AB, B, O)**
- **The Zodiac (Birth Month)**
- **Chinese Zodiac (Birth Year)**

#### *Deployment Stage 2:*

The teacher should now inform the stu-

dents that they will be using one of these character assessment systems to assess their classmates' characters (this usually brings many nervous smiles and increases anticipation and suspense). The teacher should firstly give the students the handout entitled BLOOD TYPE 1. The students are then instructed to form an image of a stereotypical character based upon the different blood types - assuming that your students will be Japanese this should not be such a difficult task, especially if you are allowing use of the native-language in the classroom. It is possible to further assist students by giving them a list of adjectives at this point to stimulate their thought processes. After about 15 minutes invite the students to report their ideas to the class, this could be done in small groups or as a whole class. These ideas can be written on the whiteboard by either the teacher or individual students as shown below. Again, the flexibility of this lesson allows the teacher a large degree of freedom in how each stage is carried out.

#### **Our Stereotypes of Blood Type & Character**

**TYPE A: strong, confident**

**TYPE B: selfish, demanding**

**TYPE AB: extroverted, happy**

**TYPE O: relaxed, out-going**

#### *Deployment Stage 3:*

After the students have finished reporting to their classmates the teacher may wish to comment on the words shown on the whiteboard in order to check that all students understand each one. After all the students are clear the teacher can then present the students with the handout entitled BLOOD TYPE 2. It is then possible to read through the suggested answers as a group, checking on the meaning and pronunciation of different words whilst at the

same time comparing the answers with those written on the whiteboard. At this point, with the more enthusiastic classes I invited students to act out each adjective. The teacher can act as a model here by showing the students what, for example, stubborn looks like; demonstrate how to be sympathetic etc. Students will enjoy analyzing their own character in relation to this information. Some phrases that I find helpful to provide at this point are:

**I agree with this because.....**

**I disagree with this because.....**

**I think that my strongest point is .....**

**I think my weakest point is .....**

**I would guess that he/she is a .....**

**I would guess that he/she is blood type .....**

Of course this all depends on the level of the class. It is also possible to introduce degrees of certainty (e.g., I am positive that he/she is..... or I have no doubt at all that he/she is.....).

#### *Deployment Stage 4:*

The teacher should now ask all students to look at the handout entitled BLOODTYPE 2 and to analyze all of the adjectives used to describe a person's 'good points' only. The students should then be instructed to choose the five adjectives from the paper which they feel best represent their own character 'good points'. Whilst students are doing this please give out the handout entitled BLOODTYPE 3. Students may find this a tough task but if explained carefully it should become easier. For example, if a person considers their strongest character 'good point' to be kindness, then kindness would be written as No.1 on the BLOODTYPE 3 handout, if the student thinks that they are very sensitive, then sensitive would be No.2 and so on, until the student has a list of their five strongest character points. At all times throughout the

lesson the students' bloodtype as well as this list should be kept private and not shared with other students.

The teacher should then instruct the students to make pairs and sit facing opposite each other- this works best if you match students who would not usually work together as the next part of the lesson is a great way to create new friendships. Whilst still hiding the BLOODTYPE 3 handout the students must ascertain the five best points about their partner by making guess-based statements. A typical scenario would go something like this:

**STUDENT A:** I would guess that you are a generous person.

**STUDENT B:** Yes, I am a generous person. That is my 4th best point.

If the guess is correct then student A will write down generous in the 4th place position on the handout BLOODTYPE 3. It is then the turn of student B to make a statement. This continues until one of the students guesses all five of their partner's answers. When one of them has all five answer they have the chance to guess their partners blood type based on the five good points attained. At this point you can declare a winner and a loser. It is fun to then tell the students to repeat the steps above but this time they are to choose their five 'bad points'. Now that students are familiar with each other and with the activity focusing on the bad points creates a much more talkative atmosphere with student exchanges typically going like this:

**STUDENT A:** I am positive that you are a stubborn person.

**STUDENT B:** No, I am not stubborn at all, why do you think that?

Of course at this point conversation usually branches off so try to allow more time



for the 'bad point' part. You can also instruct the students to change partners for this part, maybe pairing winners with winners, losers with losers and then play again. This game is always great fun, especially if you pair students who do not know each other so well together.

As a final quiz ask the students to guess your blood type and to shout out some adjectives which describe you ... expect the worst!

*Feedback:*

Whilst the lesson described above is communicative and great fun, students should gain an increased vocabulary of adjectives and descriptive words. At the university level I have incorporated this activity into various Writing classes when teaching students how to construct descriptive paragraphs. With writing it certainly refreshes the students by moving the focus away from the more tiresome structural elements of paragraph construction. It is also

a great lesson for getting students to remember how to write topic sentences, main ideas and supporting sentences. To conclude, this lesson is based on a strong culturally relevant theme, features only three simple sheets of A4 paper, can last for 90-minutes and gives the teacher maximum flexibility to modify or deploy the materials in ways which they deem to be appropriate for their own teaching context.

Damian J. Rivers (B.A, M.Sc, M.A) is a Lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies and a PhD candidate researching Japanese ethnolinguistic affiliation and L2 learner motivation. His pedagogical interests include issues associated with task-based language teaching, the promotion of monolingual classroom language environments and the adoption of mobile technologies in L2 learning.

Damian's English Language Resource website can be found at: <http://www.eapstudy.com> 

## Collaborative Materials Generation: Class Profiles

**Ben Shearon, Tohoku University**

*Introduction*

First off, I would like to acknowledge the debt I owe to Curtis Kelly and Chuck Sandy for featuring this activity in their textbook *Active Skills for Speaking*. I first read about the idea in Curtis' column in the April 2009 *ELT News Think Tank*, and it struck a chord somewhere, so much that a few weeks later (and three weeks into the new academic year) I dug it out and tried it with my classes. The idea has been modified somewhat, and I have included some ideas to complement it within a lesson below.

*Class Profiles*

This is an activity to be done at the beginning of the year or semester with a new class where the students don't know each other very well. It is best suited to courses that will be doing lots of student to student interaction, and can be a way to create or reinforce a friendly and supportive atmosphere.

The activity was conducted over three sessions, but this could easily be combined into two if necessary. In the first session, the idea of creating a class 'yearbook' was introduced, and the students were asked to brainstorm possible categories for inclusion into the

profiles. This was done in groups, with one student in each group being responsible for recording ideas and writing them down. Students were encouraged to brainstorm in English, making this a chance to explore the vocabulary they would be using in subsequent sessions in advance. The students' ideas were collected at the end of the class.

Between the first session and the second session profile handouts were created, integrating as many of the students' ideas as possible. Some overly personal categories were intentionally included, as well as space for the students' own ideas. The final list of categories was as follows:

Name, Birthday, Major, Picture (to be drawn), Email address, Blood Type, Age, Height, Weight, Where from, Favourites (colour, sport, food, drink, music, type of movie, TV program, comics, animal, singer/artist), Why did you choose your major?, What is your dream?, Message (to classmates). There were also four blank boxes for students to include their own ideas.

Experienced teachers will probably have winced at the inclusion of email address, height, and weight, but these were deliberately left in in order to provide an opportunity to refuse to answer questions. Before the activity a simple way to refuse was introduced and practiced (saying "I'm sorry," smiling, and following it with "that's a bit private", "I'd rather not say", or "that's a secret") and students were encouraged to use these with any question they did not feel comfortable with. The effectiveness of this practice was revealed in subsequent sessions when some students used the same strategy independently while doing an unrelated task.

Students were encouraged first to work in groups to confirm the language they would need to elicit the information in each category, and then assigned random partners to work with for the interview stage. During this stage, partners would try to have a conversa-

tion in English, writing down the information for each category but allowing themselves to go off on conversational tangents as topics of mutual interest came up. Around 40 minutes were allocated to the interview, and this included sketching a portrait of partners.

After the second session, profile handouts were collected, copied, and collated into class 'yearbooks' that were then distributed to students during the next class. Students were pleased with the yearbooks, and a few minutes were given to look through them. Possible follow-up activities could include information searches within the profiles, asking students to compile data (proportions of blood types in the class, for example), or reading activities. The authenticity of the material increases its interest, and as students were involved in both designing and writing the profiles, there was a real sense of ownership and pride in the finished work.

#### *Thoughts*

I did this activity in English for communication (speaking and listening) classes, in order to encourage the students to see their class as a community and to make sure that they know a little about each other. I have found that spending the first two or three classes building a supportive and active atmosphere, along with practicing how to do pair and group work, is worth the time invested, as students then find it easier to engage with the material later in the course. The activity also provided a gentle introduction to group and pair work, so that students could get used to working with their peers in English with simple content, getting comfortable with the format before more challenging material is introduced later.

There was another, unexpected, benefit that only came out after the yearbooks had been produced. I have found myself consulting mine to find information about the students. Major, birthday, goals for the future,

interests: all of these are more useful than I initially thought. I may well tweak future editions in order to increase this usefulness.

All in all, the Class Profiles activity worked well for my purposes, provided my students with highly interesting material, and gave everyone lots to talk about. I will probably be making it a regular feature in my classes in the future.

### References

Kelly, C. & Sandy, C. (2008). *Active Skills for Communication 1*. Boston: Heinle.

Ben Shearon was born in Germany, but claims to be British. After arriving in Japan in July 2000, he has worked at the elementary, junior high, high school, and university levels, and after a stint as an advisor at the Miyagi Board of Education, he is now a lecturer at Tohoku University. shearon@he.tohoku.ac.jp ☎

## MW JALT Forum at the 2009 JALT National conference

### MW JALT Forum at the 2009 JALT National conference

35th Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Expo

**Where:** Granship, Shizuoka, Japan

**When:** November 21st - 23rd, 2009

**Link:** <http://jalt.org/conference>

Greg Goodmacher will be hosting the MW JALT Forum at the JALT National conference in November.

#### *From Proposal to Publication*

For the next MW Jalt Forum, I would like to arrange for accomplished writers and experienced editors to discuss the path from

proposal to publication. Writers will present their side of the story in regard to dealing with the compromises and directional changes that take place from the time that they presented their proposals until the textbook is actually published. In addition, editors will share their perspective. Attendees will learn how to write a better proposal and how to interact more successfully with editors. The path from proposal to publication is a two-way street. Come to this presentation and hear how to safely drive down this road on the way to your textbook destination. Curtis Kelly, author of *Significant Scribbles*, *Writing from Within*, *Active Skills for Communication* and many other textbooks has promised to be one of the panelists. I am still in the process of arranging for other panelists. If you have suggestions, send e-mail asap to Greg at [ggoodmacher@hotmail.com](mailto:ggoodmacher@hotmail.com) ☎

*Between the Keys* is published by the JALT Materials Writers Special Interest Group (MW-SIG). The editors welcome contributions in the following areas: publishing issues, classroom activities, page layout or desktop publishing, experiences in publishing or materials design, announcements of materials-related meetings or newly published materials, or any other articles focusing on aspects of materials writing or publishing. For information about reprinting articles, please contact the editor. All articles contained in *Between the Keys* ©2008 by their respective authors. This newsletter ©2009 by Materials Writers SIG.

# Harnessing the Creative Commons

Jim Smiley

Very few of us are blessed with an artistic touch able to produce professional quality graphics for our materials. The Internet has given us access to countless quality and interesting photographs, tempting us to download and use any image we find. However whenever we use other peoples' images, up pops the questions of copyright and reusability. It is now 21st century common sense that downloading content off the Internet is not necessarily legal. The trend to punish illegal downloading is stepping up worldwide. In May, the French parliament voted to ban illegal downloaders from accessing the Internet for a year if caught three times. The Swedish Pirate Bay BitTorrent tracking service's eventually doomed fight with the authorities generated enough support for their case that when they formed a political party, they won a seat in the European Parliament in June. Closer to home in the same month, it has now become illegal in Japan to download copyrighted material. It is unclear what this means for residents in Japan as there is no punishment associated if caught. Perhaps we are supposed to feel guilt-ridden into stopping? Yet the undeniable reality of our interconnected lives is that people share, give, spread their personal lives' content and goods on the Internet.

User content generated sites like YouTube, MySpace, Flickr and so on contain masses of materials that we teacher-writers would love to take, adapt and use in our projects. Whereas some (usually but not always corporate bodies) fight for more copyright protection, others give freely. They want to share; they want their products to have a voice, however tiny, in a content-rich, variable quality, free-for-all that is the Internet of today. The question remains literally and legally: Which images can we use for our projects?

Since 2001, the Creative Commons (CC)

[<http://creativecommons.org/about/what-is-cc>] has been making it easier for uploaders to declare their intentions, meaning that downloaders have more security when choosing content. CC provides three mechanisms to protect content; a descriptive icon, a brief textual description that outlines the acceptable use of the content and a fuller legalese blurb. There are four types of licence: (1) Attribution, where the creator's name is presented, (2) Share-alike, where any works created with the content must also be shared, (3) No derivatives, where the content cannot be altered and (4) Non-commercial, where the content must not be used in a commercial product CC's categorisation presents some questions. Does, for example, a Share-alike licence mean that any work created with the original must be non-commercial? How can the work be 'shared' otherwise? And if so, how does this differ from the Non-commercial licence? However, by sticking to content labelled as 'Attribution', we may safely use content for our professional needs.

In the past few months, the major search engines, except Microsoft's new Bing, have added Creative Commons to their services allowing users to search directly and expressly for useable images. Yahoo has a dedicated Creative Commons search page which is still in beta mode [<http://search.yahoo.com/cc>], but as they own Flickr (who have their own advanced search page containing CC filtering: <http://www.flickr.com/search/advanced/>), their content is vast. To access Google's search, you need to select the advance options function [[http://images.google.com/advanced\\_image\\_search?hl=en](http://images.google.com/advanced_image_search?hl=en)]. There you can select the file type, image dimensions and apply more search filter criteria. .

Safe searching to you all.



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