

CLASS ACTS

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The CHALLENGE

Are you getting the most out of your information gap activities? At the risk of being condescending, boring and pedantic I thought I'd share something I've noticed recently in my classes. The change came about because of a slight alteration in the emphasis I put on what my students were doing. I've started to put greater emphasis on what should happen after the exchange information has taken place rather than the basis process of the exchange. Of course that process should still be explained and modeled for your students so that as much as possible they are neither talking to their books nor the top of their partners head. And even when you explain to your students that they should try to answer questions in the most expedient way so as to make the process simpler and quicker. i.e. communicative rather

than a long down out writing process. Anyway as I said before the important thing is what happens after the exchange. I call it 'challenge' and I simply get one of each pair of students to close their book while the other student asks the questions again to challenge her partner to see if she can remember the answers. Of course the real purpose is trying to get questions asked and answered in a more natural way-fluency building- not a memory test. So what actually happens in my classes is that students go through the exchange of information routine in a fairly subdued and studious way and as soon as the embark on the "challenge" activity there is a real transformation. You will notice that; the noise level goes way up; the speed of exchange is quicker and more natural; students are more attentively listening; students are more excited; students use an awful lot more expression and body language - raised eyebrows, smiles, more pronounced head movements and some of my students were even were doing high fives. Try it and stand back and observe your students.

A very late but nevertheless huge thank you to all those who come by the Intercom stand at the National Conference in Gunma. The atmosphere around our stand was a little pub like. So to tell the truth I would much prefer to be dishing out dahl curry, quiche and pulling pints. In fact you may well see me doing that next year. If only to try to make a few shekles. Actually our classes might go a little better if we all tried to create that pub atmosphere.

Paul Shimizu

COME & SEE US

■ Dec 5 (Sun)	Tokyo	JALT Mini-Conference
■ Jan 23 (Sun)	Hiroshima	JALT Book Fair
■ Jan 30 (Sun)	Fukuoka	JALT Book Fair
■ Feb 6 (Sun)	Kansai	JALT Book Fair

Should you require further information on our materials please give us a call. We would be happy to come to your school, college or university if you would like a presentation or workshop.

Sharing

Well it was very nice to see all those old faces at the JALT national conference. Apologies to everybody whose name I forgot. A big hello to the guy who every time I met him would peer at my shirt and say "Where are your teeth?" That repeated question coming after I told him that the straps over my shoulders attached to my trousers were called braces. I've absolutely no problem if he wants to wear suspenders. Personally I prefer them on women, but hey each to their own.

Well I imagine everybody has recovered from the conference and has got back into the classroom full of fresh ideas and energy. I came back glowing (not I hope due to my relatively close proximity to Ibaraki) and also with a slight touch of cynicism; glowing because of the enthusiasm some teachers put into their work and their willingness to share ideas; cynical because the of the business side of teaching in Japan. Anyway it's better to dwell on the glowing side and tell you about some of the simple but effective things I picked up.

Sharing ideas! I went to one of the last presentations to be held on Monday. It was given by I'll call the pizza presentation. This teachers whole style and attitude exuded

warmth and friendliness. He went so far as to encourage a mini-presentation by one of the participants. I'm sure he wont mind my mentioning his name. His name is Peter, I had already spoken with him a few weeks prior to the conference because we both had workshops with Japanese teachers of English at Japan Centre for Michigan University (*this name is not correct I think, so check it*). Anyway in the middle of Blah blahs presentation he invited Peter to relate to us what they had discussed at the breakfast table that morning. So Peter ... told us about an activity where he has his students sitting in small groups were they first list 5 things which they hold in their hands excluding writing implements and books. He explained about the huge amount of varied vocabulary that is elicited from this activity. And more importantly it is totally relevant to students experiences and interesting. I leave it to your own teaching imaginations to try explore this activity. As for the rest of the presentation, while I couldn't fully grasp all 4 methods of learning that were described, I did get a message that the learning situation for students is best done in an warm, friendly and relaxed atmosphere. But then everybody already knows that don't they. One of the most immediately useful things I got from the presentation was putting ones hand up to gain your students attention. Wow! Silent and powerful.



THIS ISSUE'S CENTERFOLD

is a listening exercise.

The main theme of this listening exercise is frequency adverbs and expressing ability, but there are a few other things thrown in to spice it up. This lesson isn't just about getting students to learn how to use frequency adverbs and express ability. It also is introducing language of agreement and disagreement. This is quite a big cultural step for students to take because here in Japan it does not seem to be so acceptable to directly disagree with someone. Especially if that someone is outside your peer group. After the whole exercise has finished you should be looking at ways to personalize this lesson. Students talk in pairs or in groups about things they do using frequency adverbs and ability expressions. The lesson finishes with an "About me!" and a "Teacher's choice." Use them to personalize the lesson even more.

A suggested procedure.

1. Photocopy the question page and hand it out to your students.
 2. Go over the questions and answers with your students. Take time to explain the meaning of questions and answers they do not understand. The answers quite often give meaning to the questions.
 3. Explain that you are Satomi reading a story about yourself and Kenji. And that they (your students) should tick (✓) the answers when they hear them. Read the monologue (we suggest the only read it once).
 4. Have students sit in groups of 4 (2 pairs) facing each other. Direct their attention to the checking dialogue below the questions. Explain about (Yes, I think so too), (I don't think so, I think ___ .) and (I don't know, I didn't get that one.). You may naturally disregard all that check language and substitute it with something that suits you. Have the 1st pair start checking with the questions about Satomi and the 2nd pair with questions about Kenji. That way students will not be put off by the echo-effect which so often happens with pair work. Be sure to tell the students to mark the questions which they don't agree on.
 5. Conduct a teacher centered activity where you have students ask you the questions they didn't agree on.
 6. Now have students try to personalize some of what they may have learnt. Perhaps you could even have students in their groups of four 'Brainstorm' some of the kinds of questions students could ask each other. Maybe you could have groups develop mini-questionnaires.
 7. Set the 'About me' homework, so students can come back next week and read each others work. Or in groups read what they have written to other group members. Or whatever suits you.
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Satomi and Kenji.

Hello my name is Satomi. I was born in Sapporo, Hokkaido but I live in Naha, Okinawa now. When I was 15 my father was transferred by his company to Naha. The hardest thing for me to get used to was the weather. The weather in Naha is very different from the weather in Sapporo. For example, it always snows in Sapporo in winter but it never snows in Naha. We also get lots of typhoons in Okinawa but we hardly ever get them in Hokkaido. I used to ski at least once a week when I lived in Sapporo. I'm pretty good at skiing. Now I'm living in Naha I can't ski anymore. However I've just started to learn scuba diving and windsurfing. I'm terrible at scuba diving but not bad at windsurfing. I have lots of new friends here in Naha but I still miss some of my old friends in Sapporo. I especially miss Kenji.

Kenji is my best friend. We have known each other since we were at kindergarten together. I haven't seen Kenji for 3 years now but we often write to each other and we phone each other once a month. We went to the same junior high school. We always used to play ping-pong after school. Sometimes we went to karaoke together. And in winter we went skiing every weekend. Kenji sings brilliantly but I'm useless. However I'm fairly good at skiing. I rarely fall over. But Kenji is not very good at skiing and often falls over. He doesn't mind falling over though because he really loves skiing. I'm really excited because I'm going to Sapporo with my family for the New Year holiday. I'll be able to see Kenji and we'll go skiing together. Fantastic!!



1 Listen to the story. Tick (✓) the correct answer.

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Where was Satomi born?	<input type="checkbox"/> Nara	<input type="checkbox"/> Sapporo	<input type="checkbox"/> Naha
Where did she move to?	<input type="checkbox"/> Sapporo	<input type="checkbox"/> Nara	<input type="checkbox"/> Naha
What was the hardest thing for Satomi to get used to?	<input type="checkbox"/> the food	<input type="checkbox"/> the weather	<input type="checkbox"/> the people
What happens in Sapporo in winter?	<input type="checkbox"/> It always rains	<input type="checkbox"/> It gets lots of typhoons	<input type="checkbox"/> It always snows
How often do typhoons come to Hokkaido?	<input type="checkbox"/> always	<input type="checkbox"/> never	<input type="checkbox"/> hardly ever
What can't Satomi do in Naha?	<input type="checkbox"/> windsurf	<input type="checkbox"/> ski	<input type="checkbox"/> scuba dive
What is Satomi terrible at?	<input type="checkbox"/> scuba diving	<input type="checkbox"/> windsurfing	<input type="checkbox"/> skiing
What is Satomi not bad at?	<input type="checkbox"/> scuba diving	<input type="checkbox"/> windsurfing	<input type="checkbox"/> skiing
Who does Satomi especially miss?	<input type="checkbox"/> her old friends	<input type="checkbox"/> Sapporo	<input type="checkbox"/> Kenji

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How long is it since Kenji and Satomi have seen each other?	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 months	<input type="checkbox"/> 15 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 years
How often do they write to each other?	<input type="checkbox"/> once a month	<input type="checkbox"/> often	<input type="checkbox"/> very often
How often do they phone each other?	<input type="checkbox"/> often	<input type="checkbox"/> very often	<input type="checkbox"/> once a month
What did they always do after school ?	<input type="checkbox"/> went to karaoke	<input type="checkbox"/> played ping-pong	<input type="checkbox"/> went skiing
What did they sometimes do?	<input type="checkbox"/> went skiing	<input type="checkbox"/> went to karaoke	<input type="checkbox"/> played ping-pong
What is Kenji brilliant at?	<input type="checkbox"/> ping-pong	<input type="checkbox"/> skiing	<input type="checkbox"/> karaoke
What is Kenji fairly good at?	<input type="checkbox"/> karaoke	<input type="checkbox"/> ping-pong	<input type="checkbox"/> skiing
What is Kenji very good at?	<input type="checkbox"/> skiing	<input type="checkbox"/> karaoke	<input type="checkbox"/> ping-pong
What does Kenji often do?	<input type="checkbox"/> fall over	<input type="checkbox"/> eat ramen	<input type="checkbox"/> get excited
What does Kenji really love?	<input type="checkbox"/> Sapporo	<input type="checkbox"/> skiing	<input type="checkbox"/> falling over



2 Check your answers with a classmate.

I don't agree.
I think the answer is _____.



Where was Satomi born?

Sapporo, I think.



Sorry I don't know.
I couldn't catch it.

Yes, I think so too.



3 About me. Write about some things you do--hobbies, sports, club activities, etc. Write how well you do them and how often you do them.

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4 Teacher's Choice - Find a partner and ask her questions like the ones above.

I'm bound to say that it's a little disappointing to see so many texts out there whose main features convey, a kind of 'point and shoot', 'easy to use', message. That kind of mentality seems to suggest that you don't need to think about what you're doing in the classroom, you don't need to think about what you're going to do before you get in the classroom, and you actually don't need any teaching skills at all. It's actually extremely insulting to any teacher who takes a little pride in their vocation. In fact it's downgrading the profession. Worse yet they are actually helping to make the teachers job boring and uncreative. And as a result many teachers are not able to discover the true reward of creating an interesting, enjoyable, learning/teaching environment. If the teacher stops thinking, so do the students.



*Ere you are squire.
Try this, it worked
for me.*



Bear with me.

Last summer, this summer. Which is it? Anyway last summer I went back to England for the sum total of seven weeks. I sold a house which wasn't a wreck and bought a house which was. So during the course of the summer hols, I spent an inordinate amount of time on the phone. I spoke to solicitors, financial advisors, building society employees, bankers, builders' merchants, insurance company employees, plumbers, electricians, roofers, plasterers, carpenters, bricklayers, locksmiths, carpet fitters, scrap metal merchants, skip companies, electricity supply companies, gas supply companies, water supply companies, the gamut of shop assistants, and Uncle Tom, Cobly and all. Whenever I spoke to anyone on the phone and they wanted me to wait while they looked up some additional information they all said 'Bear with me, please.' or 'Please bear with me.' or 'Could you bear with me.'. Now all of the people I spoke to were situated all over the place. So this is not local feature it is countrywide. It's such a gentle, powerful request I was wondering if anybody out their seen the phrase 'Bear with me.' in a text book? Does anybody teach it to their students?

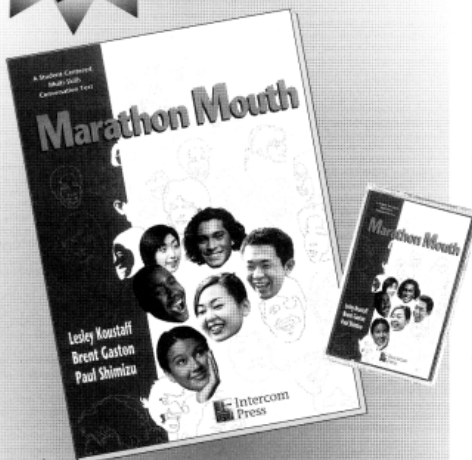
**Hot Off
the
Press!**

Marathon Mouth

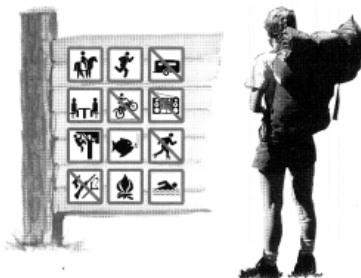
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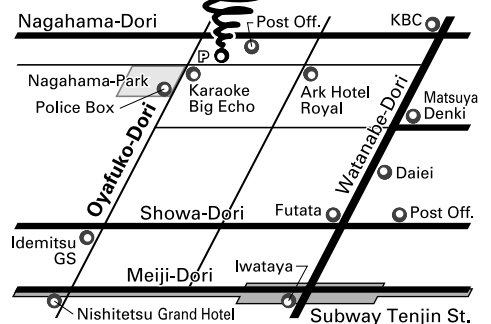
Hobson's Choice?

Well, you all know Henry Ford's great Hobson's Choice expression. " You can have any colour you like, as long as it's black." He probably said it without the "U" but I'm sorry I just can't help the way I spell. ANYway, the question is, who is Hobson and what was it he said that gave life to the lie?

POP IN

If you're in the area please feel free to pop in on us. We have back issues of our newsletters, sample texts, tea, coffee, and talk. We have Japanese and English speaking staff.

Here!



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Intercom Press.

3-9-10-701 Tenjin, Chuo-ku, Fukuoka 810-0001
Tel: (092) 726-5068 Fax: (092)726-5069
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http:// www.intercompress.com