

# ESL IN THE MAINSTREAM

## BETWEEN MODULE ACTIVITY #1

by Craig Dwyer

Christian

Polite

Adult  
Books

Smiling

PhD  
Father

Lots of  
Friends

Son

Youngest  
Child

Artistic  
Creativity

Yoshida Sho

Trauma  
3.11  
?

Fear of  
Radiation

Can't  
play  
outside

Gamer

Avid  
Reader

Much  
Older  
Sister

Japanese

Mask  
(otherness)

Pastors  
Child

Articulate  
Japanese  
Speaker

Struggles  
with  
Listening

Translates  
Everything  
in his head

# ESL IN THE MAINSTREAM

## BETWEEN MODULE ACTIVITY #2

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### The Context

**Genre:** To define the term conjecture as it relates to mathematical thinking

**Field:** Mathematics

**Tenor:** Subject student and small group; one native speaker of English (Koichi) and one other high functioning ESL student (Nini)

**Mode:** Talking and recording thoughts into a formal writing piece

### Making the naturalized visible

The main purpose of this interaction was to come to group consensus of the meaning of a concept we had been working towards. The students had been reading graphs and determining what conclusions they could draw, and they contrasting those conclusions with conjectures. Ideas that are not represented in the graph, but may be conclusions if further data was gathered. They talked as a group and wrote down their main ideas in a Venn diagram comparing the two, and then used the Venn to write a definition of conjecture.

This activity encompassed several areas of communication. Since the students were sitting at a table with pencils and paper, this took the physical space to communicate out. It created an environment where the necessary form of sharing ideas was to write them down on a shared surface (the paper) or express those ideas orally. I did not assign roles to the students, rather I let them self-regulate and self choose how they work as part of a team.

### Yoshida Sho

When working with Koichi, Sho shows no signs of shyness and is able to relax and be himself. The same is true for the other student. Nini is a very relaxed and easy going girl who does not have an overpowering personality. She is very much a *go with the flow* type of person. Koichi poses a problem for any group he works with since his mathematical reasoning and language is so strong. Sho was able to contribute to the group, though he did not touch the pencil and paper, and instead left the writing work to Nini and Koichi. He let the group get started before he joined in with his own ideas. Sho did contribute ideas to the collective, but they were brief and limited to short sentences and one word answers. Sho often uses humor as a device for working with group members, and in this interaction he made several jokes that made the group laugh. One student wrote the word *guess* in their definition of conjecture, and Sho insisted on adding the word *educated* in front of it to complete the phrase *educated guess*. This was discussed previously in our group *Tuning In* session and was written on the whiteboard in front of the class. After he made that contribution, Sho did not add any new ideas to the group, but was passive, listening to their discussions and making an occasional joke. In the end, his contribution was essential, but the overall scope of the interaction was limited.

### Personal Reflection

I think the key here is that Sho is able to contribute to the group, but only does so in ways that are comfortable for him. He understood the task, but I think at the start of the activity he lets the other students get started as a way to check his comprehension of the task. He is never the type to jump right into the task, but always waits passively for others to start. This is a big realization for me, and I wonder how I can get help him be more assertive from the beginning, or if I should? Also, the fact that Sho always uses humor might be a way of guarding against his possible misinterpretation of the task. I don't want to limit him, because I know humor is a communication style that makes him confident. Lastly, I would like Sho to be more involved, and I am unsure if I should assign roles to the teams, or allow them to emerge naturally?

# ESL IN THE MAINSTREAM

## BETWEEN MODULE ACTIVITY #4

by Craig Dwyer

### Developing and implementing oral language assessment criteria

#### Process and Context

As part of a unit on Japan's physical environment, students were placed in groups and asked to create a google presentation with 10 pictures that encapsulated the culture, people, landforms, and weather of a chosen region of Japan (Hokkaido, Tohoku, Kanto, Chugoku, Kinki, Shikoku, Okinawa, Chubu, Kyuushu).

The students were then asked to present their images to the class using the presenters notes on Google Presentation. Each student was responsible for 3-4 images, each representing as aspect of the region. The criteria for effective presentations was agreed on as a class and consisted of:

- eye contact
- natural speech with notes as guides (no reading, talking)
- finding the balance between rehearsed and casual talk
- body gestures and facial expression
- confidence

As a group, we deconstructed all 5 assessment elements and named their entailments. I then gave a presentation and the students used that opportunity to assess me, allowing them practice to look for and leave meaningful comments about the criteria. I then gave feedback to each student on what an appropriate and useful comment looked like.

During the presentation, the students were live blogging their responses to the 5 aspects by leaving comments on a googlesite. After the presentation, the presenters were able to read the feedback and use it to write an individual self-assessment.

#### Effectiveness of Process

I felt it was well scaffolded and was a meaningful activity. On reading the self-assessment, my comments carried equal weight in the self-evaluation, thus giving the class more control and empowerment over their learning. However, I do think that our list of essential elements was too long, and may have diluted the impact. In the future, I think I would focus on only 2-3.

#### Effectiveness of ESL language assessment

It gave me a good sense of where some students struggle. I understand the cultural difference of western sensibilities to presentations compared to Eastern ones. I could tell which students were more comfortable reading their presentation, due perhaps to a lack of confidence in oral speaking. This is an area we can focus on. Each student gave me different strands and areas of focus for our next project.

#### Future use

Things I will do differently; less elements (2-3), follow it up with a chance to re-do the presentation focusing specifically on weak points.

# ESL IN THE MAINSTREAM

## BETWEEN MODULE ACTIVITY #5

by Craig Dwyer

### Linguistic and Visual Demands of a Text on ESL learners

#### Context

During a unit on Money systems that centered around the question of what an economy is, we had inquired into what goes into the pricing of a product, and how we determine value of products. I wanted the kids to read about the rules of supply and demand. I found an easy to read guide that was online, printed it off, and gave it to each child.

#### The Linguistic Demands

The text was very word heavy, about three pages in length with largish font. It was told in two styles, non-fiction informative text, and fictional story-telling to act as an analogy. It used words that were out of context and unrecognizable for some kids such as laws (not legal, but pertaining to method) and some new nouns related to the analogy that may have been culturally different for some students (mostly around christmas trees). Most of the vocabulary that was content related had been covered and understood previously; market, producer, consumer, spending, production, service, product. The big new words were Supply and Demand, but that was the explicit purpose of reading this passage.

#### The Visual Demands

The text was prepared in largish letters with lots of space between paragraphs. We marked the sheet up so this gave plenty of room for notes and question writing. There were pictures that broke up the text into smaller pieces that made it seem less intimidating. Each section was clearly marked with a heading that was bolded and in larger font. The key words in the passage were highlighted a different color, drawing attention to them. All of these visual cues were one of the main reasons I chose this text. It looked inviting and not intimidating.

#### Individual versus Collective Sense-Making

During the activity, one of the things that struck me was how they reacted to struggles with new words or different phrases in a context they had never heard. During the individual reading, I felt they struggled, all of them, but when debriefing in small groups they were able to talk their way through it. I didn't intervene much, only to explain a few phrases or concepts. The collective was able to answer most of the individual questions more than adequately. I simply oriented attention to the people who knew, so they could inform the group. It ended up being a very powerful reading activity, and they were very pleased with themselves when they heard that I took the reading from a grade 10 resource site! Slow, purposeful reading is what allowed us to decipher this complex text.

Also, this text had been wonderfully scaffolded. I felt that all our previous work (four weeks worth of inquiry) allowed this moment to be much easier than it would have been on day one, suggesting to me that *choosing* appropriate texts is as important as the *timing* of appropriate texts.

# ESL IN THE MAINSTREAM

## BETWEEN MODULE ACTIVITY #6

by Craig Dwyer

### Fore-Grounding

At the beginning of the year I introduced a paragraph organizer to help students structure their non-fiction responses to open-ended questions. The organizer was set-up like a traffic light.

**Green - Introduce the topic with a general topic statement**

**Yellow - Present your first main point**

**Red - Give an example, or make a personal connection**

**Yellow - Present your second main point**

**Red - Give an example, or make a personal connection**

**Green - Give a conclusion sentence that sums up your thoughts or feelings**

This was combined with a graphic organizer (usually a mind-map) to organize and sort your main ideas and connections/examples. The pattern we used depended on the student, but was usually, GRYRYG for grade 5 students, or GRYRYRYG for grade 6 students. Of course, this depended on individual ability.

At first, I asked them to physically color their sentences to make it visual how they were using the organizer. They did this by highlighting or changing color on the computers. This helped them to be aware of their own structure. Over time, I stopped mentioning the organizer, or only occasionally explicitly asked them to use it. For some students, I felt they still need the structure, so I am still suggesting it. For others, they have evolved beyond it, and are now playing with structures and making up their own ways to organize. This allows for them to reflect on their inventions and compare their effectiveness to the Traffic Light.

### Context for Analysis

Student A came to class at the beginning of the year with little confidence in writing. She relied heavily on the traffic light. As the year progressed, he began to try and move away from it and try new things. For the text below, he was responding to a quote by the Buddha, and asked if she thought that this was good life advice.

"I think this 'the mind is everything. What you think you become' phrase tells us that you should believe in what you think is right, and people has there own way of understanding the way of things, and that we should respect there differences and acknowledge it. Also, by learning other people's thoughts, it can also help you to open up you new path. For example thinking alone, and deciding something is very difficult to do, so what happens the most is that, you get ideas from others and ask for advice. At this point it also makes sense that, why and how the Buddhism thinks that, thinking for a long time and meditating is important.

I think some people meat misunderstand the meaning and the purpose of what 'the mind is everything' means. From my understanding, I think that for certain levels, you need to understand and know that (for example) taking things from other person's property is a bad thing to do. I think that the phrase means that you should know the basic things that other people will know but you can also struggle in choosing important, and big decisions but that does not mean that you can just give up quickly and chose to live in a easier path, you can just calm your self down and take time to think and choose."

I think it is clear from this that she does not need the organizer, but she could still incorporate elements from it. Her use of transitions from one point to the next is wonderful. There is a clear evolution of thought with examples and personal connections. However, the foregrounding, or the introduction is not as tight. This suggests to me that she is writing to unveil her purpose, rather than knowing her purpose and then writing. This in itself is a wonderful skill, but we need to be explicit as to when this type of wandering with words is acceptable, and when a more polished piece would be appropriate.