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Global Textbooks in Local Contexts: An Empirical Investigation of Effectiveness

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Summary

Global textbooks (GTs) – full-featured English language teaching materials containing a range of workbooks, videos, CD-ROMs, and online materials – have become a major feature of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) pedagogy in the 21st century. However, they are much maligned by some scholars as tools of cultural imperialism that damage local cultures and contribute to the learners' failure to acquire proficiency in English as a Foreign Language. This chapter uncovers a number of the sociopolitical dynamics that give rise to GT opposition, and questions some of the more strident claims of anti-GT scholars. The chapter then presents a six-year empirical study conducted at a university English language program in Japan, where nearly 700 students have used a GT as the core material. Drawing from both qualitative and statistical analyses, this chapter concludes that GTs have significant potential for becoming an effective resource for second language learning, but the greatest chance of pedagogical improvement seems most likely in language programs where major institutional stakeholders achieve an acceptable degree of political equilibrium.

Introduction

The industry of English language teaching (ELT) textbook publishing is not only big business; it is a major driver of the global economy. A recent article in *The Sunday Times* found that in the year 2011 alone, among the top four publishers of ELT textbooks, total sales were in

excess of £1 billion (Tryhorn, 2011). At Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press, even during these recent years of global economic austerity, internal reports reveal that annual sales in ELT textbooks and related learning materials have continued to increase by between 9 and 12 per cent, and make up 40–50 per cent of their total profits (Cambridge University Press Annual Report, 2010; Cambridge University Press Annual Report and Accounts, 2011; Cambridge University Press Performance Study, 2010; Oxford Annual Report of the Delegates of the University Press, 2010/2011). Many ELT textbooks sold every year are what some (Gray, 2010; Tomlinson, 2008; Wallace, 2002) have called global coursebooks or, as they will be referred to in this chapter, GTs. GTs are comprehensive pedagogical packages containing a student textbook, a teacher's book, workbooks, computer CD-ROMs, DVDs, and accompanying websites that serve as an 'e-learning platform' (Cambridge University Press Annual Report, 2010: 70). While GTs are beginning to be seen in English for Academic Purposes classrooms of Anglophone countries, they have been found in secondary and tertiary classrooms of the 'outer circle' countries (Kachru, 1982) such as Brazil, Iran, South Korea, or Japan, where English is spoken neither as a native language nor in any of the major socio-linguistic domains outside the area of education (Hadley, 1997; Tollefson, 1981). Examples of GTs can be seen in multiple-level series such as *Top Notch* (Saslow and Ascher, 2006), *Interchange Third Edition: Full Contact* (Richards, Hull, Proctor, and Shields, 2005), and *New Headway* (Soars and Soars, 2000), which is in its fourth edition and has sold over 100 million copies (Oxford Annual Report of the Delegates of the University Press, 2010/2011: 7).

However, in the wake of this significant economic and, one would hope, pedagogical activity, the international TESOL community has become increasingly polarized on the issue of such materials. While Nunan (1991: 209) noted this trend over a generation ago, Harwood (2005: 150–153) explains that, at present, TESOL professionals fall into two groups, one being an anti-textbook community (with its respective 'strong' and 'weak' camps) and the other a pro-textbook faction.

Arguably better represented in the literature, those who argue against GTs portray them as 'highly wrought [...] carriers of cultural messages' (Gray, 2002: 152), as having 'serious theoretical problems, design flaws, and practical shortcomings' (Litz, 2005: 8). The weak anti-textbook camp also view GTs as defective but resign themselves to the notion that their presence in the second language classroom is often unavoidable (Allwright, 1981; Harwood, 2010). Even those supporting the use of GTs are less than inspiring in their defense, framing them either as valuable time-savers for tired teachers or as helpful guides for those too

inexperienced to develop their own materials (Gabrielatos, 2004: 28; Harmer, 1998: 116–117; Ur, 2000: 182; Woodward, 2001: 146).

The scholarly debate surrounding GTs leaves one with the impression that, for many language teachers, GTs have taken on a role similar to a fraught relationship where people find themselves inextricably bound to someone they both hate to love and love to hate (Sheldon, 1988: 237). Yet beyond the rhetoric and hyperbole, pressing questions remain that are related to the efficacy of such materials. Is it true that, as Tomlinson claims, ‘ELT materials (especially global coursebooks) currently make a significant contribution to the failure of many learners of English’ (2008: 3), or can they, as Richards (1993: 6) argues, serve as ‘an authoritative and accessible tool which can both facilitate learning and make it more enjoyable’? Is there any empirical evidence of GTs succeeding in local contexts, and if so, under what conditions? Increasingly, language teachers find themselves in places where GTs are used either because they are the only option for staving off professional burn-out from crushing course loads. Can language teachers in such environments return home at the end of the day with a measure of confidence that their use of GTs has been effective in helping their learners in their language studies?

I wish to explore these issues, first by addressing some of the sociopolitical dynamics that contribute to the anti-GT stance of some in the ELT community. I will then shift to an empirical, mixed-methods study of how one GT, *Interchange Third Edition: Full Contact* (Richards, Hull, Proctor, and Shields, 2005, referred to hereafter as *Interchange*), was implemented in the local context of a private Japanese university. Drawing from Ellis (1997: 37; 2011: 215), who distinguishes between macro-evaluations of language programs and micro-evaluations of specific teaching methods, I will present a macro-evaluative insider account explaining the rationale for how this GT has been utilized. This chapter will also present something that is rare in the debate on GTs: several years of statistical data generated from nearly 700 participants investigating the effectiveness of *Interchange*. Near the end, I will discuss the implications of this empirical study, reflect upon the issue of GTs in local contexts, and offer some tentative answers to the questions posed throughout.

Contextualizing the opposition to GTs: A sociopolitical survey

What has given rise to the view among some scholars (e.g., Meddings and Thornbury, 2011: 12) that GTs represent a stiflingly oppressive

presence in the second language classroom? Such attitudes stem in part, I believe, from a reaction to several sociopolitical dynamics that have affected the role and status of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Anglophone, European and East Asian nations. Often associated with 'globalization', three factors that have had the most bearing on attitudes regarding GTs and changes in tertiary-level ELT are corporatization, massification, and the steady deconstruction of 'culture' following the end of the Cold War.

'Corporatization' refers to when the organizational culture and practices of universities are transformed to emulate aspects of the service and manufacturing industries (Castree and Sparke, 2000; Donoghue, 2008; Jarvis, 2001; McKenzie and Scheurich, 2004; Silvey, 2002; Steck, 2003; Tuchman, 2009; Washburn, 2005; Woolgar, 2007;; Yamamoto, 2004). This trend first started in the US over 30 years ago, when national funding for higher education began shrinking, due to a combination of a declining tax base and a change in the attitudes of policymakers about the overall purpose of HE. Faced with yearly reductions in public support, Stanley Aronowitz (2000: 83) writes that American HEIs rapidly began 'retreating from the ideals of liberal arts and the leading-edge research it always has cherished' in favor of a corporate model. 'By the mid-1990s', he continues, 'the corporate university had become the standard for nearly all private and public schools' in the US, and has now expanded internationally. Policymakers in the UK, Japan, the EU, and even Scandinavian countries, such as Norway and Iceland, have implemented similar versions of America's Corporate University Model (Baber and Lindsay, 2006; Block, 2002; Bockock, Baston, Scott, and Smith, 2003; Hubball and Gold, 2007; Itoh, 2002; Kinnell, 1989; Power and Whitty, 1999; Stanley and Patrick, 1998; Tjeldvoll, 1996; Welle-Strand, 2000; Yamamoto, 2004; Yonezawa, 2002).

The term 'massification' in educational discourse refers to the process by which governments seek to reduce the number of unemployed while encouraging innovation and economic growth through greater participation in higher education (Alexander, 2000; Fox, 2002; Guri-Rosenblit, Sebkova, and Teichler, 2007; Kitagawa and Oba, 2010; Smeby, 2003; Teichler, 1998). HEIs undergoing massification tend to experience larger classes, limits on hiring new teachers, and significant increases in teaching loads. Japan features an extreme form of massification called universalization (Kwiek, 2001; Mori, 2002). In the past 20 years, over 200 new HEIs (ostensibly labeled as 'universities') have been established, bringing the total number of universities to 783. Because the population of college-age students is continuing to shrink, today there are

more places on undergraduate courses than there are students ('Relaxed Rules Led to Too Many Universities', 2013). These issues had a significant bearing upon the study that will be discussed later in this chapter.

In terms of the deconstruction of culture, Readings (1996) notes that this trend emerged following the end of the Cold War, when national governments no longer needed universities to serve as the ideological arm of the state. During the Cold War, higher education was seen in both the Western and Soviet Blocs as an intellectual bulwark in the national defense strategies against each other (Mauk and Oakland, 2002: 252); the study of foreign languages often highlighted national and local cultural ideals, as this served to foster identities that were both distinct from and resistant to enemy propaganda. However, the idealization of national or local culture concerns, whatever else they may have meant to educators, were increasingly downplayed by policymakers after the Cold War, as these could become potential obstacles in forming a globalized society. Corporate-style concepts such as quality and excellence began entering the discourse of universities, with the goal of exposing formerly protected universities to the forces of globalization and to prepare learners for participation in the international marketplace. Today in 'managed' universities, it is not uncommon to find EAP program administrators seeking to de-emphasize the unique aspects of the local culture in the curriculum.

The convergence of the above sociopolitical dynamics has implications for language teacher identity and the emergence of GTs, especially at universities whose organizational cultures now feature entrepreneurialism, a focus on the global over the local, and authoritarian central control of teachers – what Deem (1998, 2001) has called the 'new managerialism'. Whereas previously many language teachers, to borrow liberally from anthropologist Paul Friedrich (1988, 1989), were linguacultural artisans who initiated students into many aspects of the host culture through tailor-made materials designed to improve their language proficiency, the new managerialist ethic of corporate universities has transformed their professional identities into that of linguistic service technicians – those who are charged with fixing broken language and maintaining a streamlined system of course delivery (Giroux, 2004: 206). The experience of language teachers today is often one of diminished classroom autonomy and of being managed by business-savvy administrators. Within the matrix of increasingly large class sizes structured for cost performance, students are to be treated as knowledge consumers, and language teachers are expected to successfully deliver a standardized language content that results in measurable, often

marketable, improvement. GTs thrive in these environments, partly because such pre-packaged material is seen both as already quality-tested on a wide range of learners, and partly because GTs, which have been created by large corporations that espouse a worldview often similar to the new managers of corporatized universities, have sought to strike a balance between the needs of administrators, language teachers, and learners (as an example, see interviews with managers of ELT publishing companies in Crewe, 2011: 60–78). The result is that GTs are rapidly becoming what Sheldon foresaw as ‘the route map’ of many an ELT program around the world, ‘laying bare its shape, structure and destination’ (Sheldon, 1988: 238).

Understanding and addressing the critical response to GTs

It should be noted that even the more outspoken critics of GTs are not against ELT textbooks per se, since some develop their own textbook materials or encourage materials that emulate pedagogical values hearkening back to those days when most language teachers were still linguacultural artisans, who were free to address local concerns in their classrooms (e.g., Bolitho and Tomlinson, 2005). However, the deconstruction of Cold War ideals at most universities after the collapse of the Soviet Union, combined with the aggressive rise of a neoliberal form of globalization, are sociopolitical changes that have led to the problematization of GTs. For those resistant to what is seen as the spread of neoliberalism in the face of retreating liberal humanist ideals in HE, GTs are fearsome tools by which language teachers are de-skilled and recast as mere deliverers of course content (Apple and Jungck, 1990; Bax, 2003: 283; Shannon, 1987). Allman states:

Many feel that they are no longer educationalists – professional educators – but technicians whose intellectual and creative skills have been incorporated into learning packages the consumption of which they now only disseminate, manage and assess.

(Allman, 2001: 71)

Accordingly, GTs are ‘Trojan Horses’ (Littlejohn, 2011) used to engineer second language classrooms on a global scale: artifacts of a pervasive form of neoliberal globalization that erode the pedagogy of tertiary-level TESOL in outer-circle countries by isolating learners from the concerns of their local contexts (Frank, 2005: 276; Gray, 2010: 730).

It should be further noted that I share many of concerns voiced by opponents of GTs. Criticisms about the blandness of the course content of GTs, and of the need to challenge learners to think critically about the underlying values communicated in GTs, raise issues that we should take seriously (Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996; Kubota, 1998; Wette and Barkhuizen, 2009). Nevertheless, current attempts to problematize GTs appear to have several shortcomings, which can be better understood if viewed through a well-established framework that was developed by the American sociologist and Symbolic Interactionist Herbert Blumer (1971). Blumer observed that claims-makers can progressively convince larger groups and academic communities that certain issues are problematic, but only if they have successfully completed the following five stages: (i) identifying the emergence of a certain empirical change as problematic; (ii) legitimizing the problem; (iii) mobilizing action; (iv) creating an action plan; and (v) implementing the action plan (Blumer, 1971: 301).

According to Blumer's framework, the faction currently opposed to the implementation of GTs in second language classrooms has certainly identified the emergence of a problem. The sociopolitical changes discussed earlier violate their constructs about how the pedagogy of TESOL should function. They have also successfully legitimated these claims through the publication of scholarly books and journal articles (e.g., Block, 2002; Gray, 2002; Masuhara and Tomlinson, 2008; Meddings and Thornbury, 2011; Tomlinson, 2011). However, the final stages, those of creating a movement with the conviction both to form an action plan and to implement it, have not been forthcoming. As an example, Block (2002) denounces task-based language teaching and learning (which publishers claim to be the operative pedagogy for virtually every GT on the market) as a major feature of the way second language pedagogy has become pre-packaged, predictable, and controllable, something he calls the McDonaldization of language teaching. However, he offers alternatives that are sufficient for no more than a few class sessions and which would require language teachers to devote even more time to developing lessons. Another example is in Meddings and Thornbury's (2011) 'Dogme ELT', which eschews the types of resources usually provided by GTs. They call on teachers and students to unplug from the topics of their textbooks, to focus instead on local concerns, and to talk to each other in a framework similar to that of improvised drama, thereby allowing language to emerge in a natural way. Their instructions on how to accomplish this are enthusiastic and helpful, but seem more appropriate to low-risk classes in private language schools than to large university

classes of risk-averse learners. In corporatized HEIs, time and the freedom to develop such materials and techniques are resources that, as Harwood (2010: 4) acknowledges, many language teachers lack: 'Time is short, teaching schedules are heavy, and practitioners are sometimes not permitted to deviate from a rigid syllabus by introducing their own materials.'

There are obvious challenges in creating such action groups which could provide alternatives to GTs, especially in a community as diverse as TESOL, but I believe there are at least three reasons why anti-GT proponents have failed either to stimulate action against GTs or to formulate viable solutions.

The first has been their inability to convince a significant number of second language learners to reject GTs. A number of studies investigating student perceptions of their language texts suggest that most are not as dissatisfied with GTs as some of their teachers, though for reasons that are not always pedagogical in nature (Hawkey, 2006; Harmer, 2001: 117; Litz, 2005; Peacock, 1998). In addition, the lack of voice afforded to students on both sides of the GT debate creates what Ardener (1997) has defined as a muted group. Second language learners have been relegated to the periphery of the discourse surrounding GTs. They have little input, and claims-makers on both sides can represent the learners however they see fit, or in crafting questionnaires that may, on a sub-conscious level, encourage learners to supply claims-makers with the data needed to further their agenda (see Toivonen and Imoto, 2012: 17). Gaining the support of more learners and allowing their voices to be heard would certainly aid in developing action groups that would garner the attention of publishing companies as well as administrative managers and policymakers.

Another reason has been the clear preference of GT critics for ideological issues over those of pedagogical concerns. While White, Martin, Stimson, and Hodge (1995: 169) rightly note that all formal education is an expression of a particular ideology, and that language teaching is not immune to this tendency, the difficulty, as Waters (2009) observes, is that a Critical Social Theory perspective has so pervaded Applied Linguistics that papers dealing specifically with pedagogical concerns are dwindling in number. Rowland and Barrs (2013) as well as Menkabu and Harwood in this volume have also recognized this trend, and with specific reference to GTs, Crewe (2011) states wryly: 'For a subject so central to the practice of ELT there are relatively few examples that focus directly upon it' (p.7). Harwood (2010: 18) is correct in suggesting that it is easier to critique pedagogical materials in an abstract

manner than to predict their potential success or failure in the classroom, but I would add that an ideology of critical theory is also a major influence.

Interrelated with the issue of ideology is the third reason, that of subjective and incomplete forms of analysis. By 'subjective', I mean that many studies can be found of teachers who have either evaluated the materials based upon their experience of what they feel might or might not work in their classes, or through conducting questionnaires investigating only teacher and student impressions about the materials rather than actually measuring the effectiveness of the materials in facilitating acquisition (see Shannon, 1987; W. C. Wang, Lin, and Lee, 2011; Wette and Barkhuizen, 2009; Wong, 2011). Some reports do study the actual use of commercial materials in second language classrooms, but investigations were conducted primarily through qualitative diary studies or ethnographic observation (e.g., Canagarajah, 1993; Rowland and Barrs, 2013; Yakhontova, 2001). I am not suggesting that there is anything inherently wrong with these forms of qualitative inquiry. The concern I have is about the lack of evidence that the findings of these studies were triangulated or further interrogated by other forms of inquiry and datasets. This measure of incompleteness leads to questions about whether the problems which have been observed have more to do with the personal constructs of the researcher than the concerns of other stakeholders, such as students and administrators (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Spector and Kitsuse, 2006; Williamson, 2006). This is why specialists in qualitative research methodology (Charmaz, 2001, 2006; Glaser, 1978, 1992) encourage the use of multiple sources of data and suggest that close attention should be given to events that contradict the developing ideas that researchers form through field observations. The goal is to challenge the researcher to rethink observed events in multiple ways and to help readers define the limits of the researcher's conclusions. These features are not readily apparent in many, if not most, of the published studies of commercial ELT textbooks in second language classrooms.

This disturbing lack of criticality and subjectivity has long been embraced by scholars who have problematized GTs or other commercial textbook materials, explaining that it is 'something of a "black art"' (Low, 1989: 153) and 'fundamentally a subjective, rule-of-thumb activity' (Sheldon, 1988: 245). Masuhara and Tomlinson (2008: 23), citing their '70 years of experience using ELT materials', explain that their research on the effectiveness of seven GTs is 'subjective and can

do no more than reflect our own personal views of what facilitates language acquisition', and represents what they 'intuitively feel' about the potential success or failure of GTs in local contexts.

One must respect the level of expertise represented in such statements, and impressionistic evaluations of GTs from scholars and classroom practitioners most certainly contain many insights and interesting observations. The concern, however, is that a confirmation bias springing from attitudes and dispositions about the globalized encroachment of corporate power may have colored the conclusions of many textbook studies. Because GTs are known to be created by for-profit, multinational corporations, it is no surprise that some critics who have relied on observation and personal reflection find such materials to be either pedagogically faulty (Block, 2002; Gray, 2002; Phillipson, 2001; Sheldon, 1988: 239; Tomlinson, 2008: 7), damaging to the local concerns of language teachers and learners (Asgari, 2011; Bax, 2003; Frank, 2005; McKay, 2003; Meddings and Thornbury, 2011; Ur, 2000: 185; Zarei and Khalessi, 2011), or simply incompatible with their style of teaching. In the spirit of the linguacultural artisan of an earlier age, these teachers prefer instead to use textbooks and classroom materials that have been crafted in their intellectual workshop, as these are seen as inherently superior to GTs:

Global coursebooks from English-speaking countries [...] seemed impressive, with more fashionable approaches promising success, but their contents seemed too alien to be imported directly in my classrooms. The only time that adoption was minimal was when I had tailor-made the materials myself.

(Masuhara, 2011: 236)

Given the sentiments of the community engaged in anti-GT discourse, it is not surprising to find more intemperate pronouncements emerging, such as the claim by Tomlinson (2008: 3) mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, which criticizes GTs (and by implication, the teachers who use them) as contributing to the failure of their learners, or by Meddings and Thornbury (2011: 11–12), who write approvingly of a 'visionary' teacher who consigned all of her language textbooks to her school's incinerator.

I would suggest, however, that such subjective and implicitly biased critiques do little in the way of offering hopeful solutions for the large numbers of TESOL teachers working in today's corporatized HEIs, many of whom have neither the time nor the freedom to choose classroom

materials. There needs to be more empirical evidence provided that would give credence to the claims that GTs damage local cultures, de-skill teachers, or are unusable, or that they are detrimental to the second language acquisition of learners. There seems to be, at least in my reading of the literature, a paucity of such evidence. Additionally, the question of whether GTs have the potential to be pedagogically effective seems to have been lost in the ideological discussion.

McDonough and Shaw (2003) have called for more post-course evaluations of such teaching materials, arguing: 'We must bear in mind that their ultimate success and failure can only be determined after trying them in the classroom with real learners' (p.71). Smiley and Masui (2008: 247) add that, in the context of evaluating textbooks, 'statistical tools to place subjective knowledge within a broader framework of objective fact' are needed, especially when the 'individual author's impressions underpinned a great many of the statements' of observational or diary study research. Such data could objectively support or refute the claims made by those in the GT debate, including any claims that I would wish to make in this chapter.

This discussion brings us full circle to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: is successful second language learning possible with GTs? If so, under what sorts of conditions, and if not, why not? I will now turn my attention to a six-year study of a Japanese tertiary-level TESOL program that implemented GTs as part of its curriculum.

A macro-evaluation of GT implementation in localized Japanese settings

Ellis (1997, 2011) states that macro-evaluations of the type which is to follow should consider not only the choice of teaching materials but also the issues surrounding administration, teachers, and students. He adds that a mixed-methods approach consisting of both qualitative description and quantitative investigation can enhance the overall quality of the report (Ellis, 2011: 219–222). Therefore, so that readers can better contextualize this investigation, I will highlight features suggested by Woodward (2001: 19–20) and Masuhara and Tomlinson (2008: 21) to provide a qualitative account of the background settings, institution, students, teachers, and program features that contributed to the reasons for choosing a GT over the alternative of using teacher-generated materials. This will be followed by a quantitative investigation to determine whether statistically significant improvement took place among the majority of language learners in the program.

Contextual factors

The story begins with my appointment as a tenured lecturer and coordinator of the Intensive English Program (IEP) at Nippon University of Global Studies (NUGS), a small, private, four-year undergraduate institution located about 300 km north of Tokyo on the coast of the Japan Sea.¹ Although I was still working at another college and would not start at NUGS for another four months, I was contacted by members of the IEP steering committee as they expected me to develop all aspects of the IEP before starting at NUGS the following April. In my free time I began conducting a preliminary needs analysis, designing a curriculum, recruiting teachers, and considering the selection of teaching materials.

The needs assessment was conducted through interviews and e-mail exchanges with committee members and adjunct faculty. I discovered a very typical mix of political, ideological, and structural issues of the type that could have been found at any number of the small, private universities formed during the Japanese higher educational massification drive of the 1990s (Arimoto, 2007). NUGS had been created from the combined support of national, prefectural, and city funding, grants from local industries, and support from a conservative political faction that had been at their height of power during the Nakasone-Reagan-Thatcher era. From these interconnected networks emerged the key members of the administration, some of whom had been former bureaucrats serving under a past Japanese Minister of Health and Welfare, while others who had connections with construction and farming concerns that had supported the minister during his time in office. It soon became clear in my interviews that the administration were major stakeholders around whom all others orbited.

The IEP committee represented the largest of stakeholder satellites. They espoused a mixture of ideological beliefs and structural aspirations that had a bearing upon later pedagogical decisions. The language program envisaged had clear links with the work of Japanese right-wing scholars such as Takao Suzuki (2000). Other courses at the university were taught in Japanese, but the medium of instruction in IEP was to be English, and more specifically, 'International English'. International English for the committee was less about accents or regional lexis than about avoiding the discussion of iconic images or cultural features found in Anglophone countries, such as Guy Fawkes Day or North American Thanksgiving celebrations. Instead, they wanted students to be encouraged to study English in English, but using Japanese cultural images and concepts. The hope was that students would eventually be able to engage foreigners confidently, to further a positive image of Japan,

and to help Japan to maintain its place in a global economy where English is the mode of communication. While aspects of the IEP Committee wish list complemented concerns of Global English advocates (Canagarajah, 1999; Modiano, 2001; Phillipson, 1993; Wagi'alla, 1996), other features of their ideological aims were more in line with prewar nationalist traditions, which led to the creation of English language curricula that sought to replace all Western references with references to Japanese people and cultural symbols. Similar to the concerns of the committee, the goal, then, was also to design a curriculum that would equip Japanese to hold its own in a world that they saw as increasingly dominated by Anglo-American power (Hino, 1988; Lincicome, 1999).

Structurally, the committee wanted six classes of 18–20 students, each of which was to be streamed according to language proficiency. Classes for first-year students were to be graduation requirements, and to run concurrently five days a week, divided over two semesters for a total of 30–32 weeks per year. Similar to Tudor (2001), classes were envisaged as places where students were actively 'doing things', but it was also important for them to communicate in a controlled environment that molded them into socialized Japanese citizens.

Over 90 per cent of the first-year students at NUGS come from the local community, where they continue to live at home with their parents and commute to school. Parents send what they see as their adolescent children to NUGS in order to be socially refined and so that they can find gainful employment (Warrington, 2006). Toivonen and Imoto (2012) here explain such views are common throughout Japan; undergraduate university students are 'no longer "children" but not yet "adults" or "full members of society" (shakaijin in Japanese) [...] youth are frequently viewed as a threat to the established order, as unstable agents, and as insufficiently socialized "semi-citizens" who need further training and molding in order to play adult roles' (p.17). Learners become regularly accustomed to passively allowing authority figures at various institutions to tell them what to do, and learners rely on teachers to do all manner of things on their behalf. Research in this area also finds that many university students in Japan have unclear goals and expectations for TESOL courses (Irie, 2003; O'Donnell, 2003; Riley, 2006), making needs analysis difficult to conduct. This was confirmed later, after I started at NUGS and began to talk with learners. Few had any goals with regard to their English studies apart from some day traveling to an English-speaking country, making a friend in English, or passing the course.

Two other dynamics in Japanese society have created additional challenges with undergraduate learners. One has been the effect of an educational policy known as ‘Relaxed Education’ (*yutori kyōiku*), which was introduced during the 1990s in secondary schools by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports Science, and Technology (MEXT). This was intended to replace the focus on testing with a broader curriculum giving students more free time to explore and develop into well-rounded individuals. Unfortunately, due to its misapplication at the local level, this policy has resulted in large numbers of learners entering university lacking the basic study skills and competencies of earlier student generations. The other dynamic has been the decline in the number of college-aged learners, which, due to the creation of hundreds of post-secondary institutions in the 1990s, has created a situation where there are now more university places than students. Fierce competition still exists for places in the small number of top universities, but presently in Japan the vast majority of secondary students can under-achieve and still easily enter other colleges and universities such as NUGS (Arimoto, 2007; Goodman, 2012: 165–167; Kariya and Rosenbaum, 2003: 53).

In my role as a recruiter of teachers I wanted people on a permanent basis, but administrative management was adamant about IEP teachers being kept on a term-limit, non-tenured status. Both administration and the IEP committee wanted me to find enthusiastic, engaging individuals who could both thrill and inspire learners. This concern was partly due to the imbrication of student assessment upon university teachers, which has complicated the attitudes of university students as immature adolescents. I was to seek people who were willing to walk the dangerous tightrope of requiring students to study something they might not naturally enjoy, and who could make such study engaging enough so that they would give positive endorsements that could in turn be used by the university administration for recruitment drives. However, I wanted to set my sights higher than this by recommending teachers who had lived in Japan for several years, who had recently finished one of several distance MA in TESOL programs available in Japan (Dunkley, 1997, 2007), and who were interested in either publishing research in language teaching journals or in giving presentations at teachers’ conferences. I eventually succeeded in finding enthusiastic teachers who were committed to teaching in Japan and experienced in working with today’s Japanese undergraduates, and who were developing their professional credentials through publications and presentations, so that whatever length of time they decided to stay at NUGS, they would take

the opportunity to enhance their professional knowledge and practices during this period.

Selecting materials

The major stakeholders wanted a language program that could process a large number of students with a small number of teachers. The faculty committee wanted me and the two new teachers to develop in-house materials that would last for 150 sessions (five classes a week for two 15-week semesters), and to create six different proficiency levels that would be taught, in tandem, to a yearly cohort of 120–30 first-year learners. There would be no provision of time for materials development: the committee expected that the two teachers and I should easily be able to produce materials either just before or during the time we taught in the program.

Those who have taught tertiary-level TESOL or EAP for any amount of time will know that it is not uncommon to encounter colleagues who, although they have never taught English themselves, still feel eminently qualified, due to their ability to speak English with some proficiency, to make decisions affecting the practices of language teachers and the development of materials. While hurriedly creating hundreds of untried lessons in a piecemeal manner with a team of new teachers might have been exciting, there was also the risk of confusion, teacher burn-out, conflict, and program failure. Faced with these circumstances, a GT seemed relevant to the pedagogical environment, since it would provide ready-made materials similar to those that the IEP teachers and I would have probably created had we had the time (Harwood, 2005: 152–153; Nunan, 1991: 209; Williams, 1983).

I approached the committee and soon found myself enmeshed in heated negotiations, as there were ideological misgivings about using materials produced by large American or British publishers. However, realizing that many on the committee were equally risk-averse, due to the high profile they planned on giving IEP in upcoming recruitment drives, I pointed out the danger of making large amounts of in-house materials without time for careful development and trialing. Along the lines of Nunan (1991: 219), Bell and Gower (2011: 138), and Crewe (2011: 61), I explained that, given the conditions and impending time limits, a commercial textbook might entail fewer risks, because, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, large publishing companies often invest major resources into matching GTs to the needs of students, teachers, and university administrators, and also trial the materials in classrooms (although not always, as Amrani (2011) reveals).

In the end a compromise was reached: I would be free to choose commercial teaching materials for the required first-year courses so long as I avoided any emphasis on things unique to Anglo-American cultures, and if I encouraged students to discuss issues from a Japanese perspective. The IEP teachers and I would use a GT as the core material for the course but also design a system of content delivery that would satisfy the sometimes nationalist concerns of the corporate-style management structure in NUGS. In exchange, we would have the freedom later on to develop in-house materials and work with smaller numbers of learners who would elect to study English in their second, third, and fourth years.

New Interchange Levels 1, 2 and 3 (Richards, Hull, and Proctor, 1997), was chosen for the first-year courses. Popular throughout Eastern Asia, it is a four-skills GT, though greater emphasis is on listening, speaking, and reading. The series was written in American English, but 'the course reflects the fact that English is the major language of international communication and is not limited to any one country, region or culture' (Richards, et al., 1997: iv). This point, and the diversity of races, nationalities, and role representations, seeking to overturn gender stereotypes, as well as the variety of accents in the listening materials, were appreciated by the committee. Importantly, the series had enough material to fill 30–32 weeks of instruction, and it had a placement test (Turner, Laurens, Stevens, and Titterington, 1997) which could be used to stream students into their proper classes. Video materials, a workbook, and a teacher's book with expansion materials were also available for all the textbook levels.

McDonough and Shaw (2003: 60) note that, once a textbook is chosen, it will likely become core program material for many years. This has been the case in the IEP, and we have used *New Interchange* through two of its incarnations. Confusingly, the word 'new' is no longer in the title, and the most recent version of the series that we been using for the past several years has been *Interchange Third Edition: Full Contact* (Richards, Hull, Proctor, and Shields, 2005). This GT incorporates the student book, workbook, and video textbook in one volume. On the inside of the back cover, there are CD-ROMs for Levels 1 and 2 (but not for Level 3) and an accompanying flash-based website providing extension work for all of the levels. The Teacher's Book contains additional expansion activities, and the Teacher's Resource Book (Richards, Hull, Proctor, Cory-Wright, Dorado, and Pianco, 2005) provides additional material for recycling grammar and vocabulary. The series continues to have a placement test

(Lesley, Hansen, and Zukowski/Faust, 2005), which is virtually identical to the previous version.

Each level has 16 chapters covering general conversational topics (e.g., introductions, occupations, emotional states) that have specific grammatical and lexical targets similar to other GTs on the market. *Interchange* comes either as a 16-chapter textbook or as eight-unit split editions. The eight-unit version provided greater flexibility, because students often move to courses of different levels of proficiency after the first semester. Split editions allow the purchase of a new textbook at the beginning of the second semester without the waste of having to discard a half-finished textbook containing all 16 chapters.

Materials adaptation and implementation

Despite the pre-packaged nature of GTs, '[t]hey are never intended to be a straitjacket for a teaching programme in which a teacher makes no decisions to add, to animate, or to delete' (Bell and Gower, 2011: 138). GTs are tools to be used judiciously (Williams, 1983). Adaptation, therefore, is an important part of implementation and entails a careful consideration not only of the learners, but also the political, managerial, administrative, and educational context (McDonough and Shaw, 2003: 85). As I was to be the one held responsible for failure, I was also the one who directed most of the decisions in the way *Interchange* would be adapted. Adaptation was, however, minimal. I did not simplify, add, or delete any of the *Interchange* materials, mainly because I was interested in learning whether the materials would work as they had been designed. Bell and Gower's (2011: 138–139) assertion is that many of the criticisms in GTs stem from teacher misuse, so I saw major adaptations as an unwanted variable in investigating the potential effectiveness of the teaching materials. The only real adaptations were of pair work and group work tasks, where learners were encouraged to consider discussion topics in the GT from their perspective as Japanese youths, and in sequencing the order in which students encountered the GT materials. Based upon what was then ten years of experience with teaching Japanese university first-year students, I knew that most craved a presentation—practice—production (PPP) approach, one in which vocabulary and grammar were presented before listening and speaking tasks were to be undertaken. I decided that reading, grammar, and vocabulary would be presented in the classes at the beginning of the week, listening tasks would be in the middle, and the end of the week would culminate with an emphasis on oral communication

tasks. I hoped that these modifications would serve as a scaffold for the GT and allow students to get the maximum amount of language practice, and through the tightly managed system that is explained below, equip a small number of teachers to deliver the material to large numbers of learners. Implementing these adaptations consisted first of streaming students according to their levels of language proficiency and then designing pedagogical cycles of repeated instruction, testing, and assessment.

In the first semester of the academic year, all first-year students would take the *Interchange* placement test (Lesley et al., 2005), which lasts for 50 minutes and consists of 70 multiple-choice items divided into three sections that assess listening (20 items), reading (20 items), and grammatical knowledge (30 items). We had used the earlier version of this test (Turner, et al., 1997), but shifted to the most current version in 2004, when the Japan office of Cambridge University Press asked whether IEP would participate with programs at several other universities around the world in assessing the reliability and validity of the new placement test. We agreed and conducted two unpublished investigations using a test-retest design for reliability with two groups of learners at NUGS ($n = 118$ and $n = 113$). We found reliability coefficients for the *Interchange* placement test to be adequate across two three-month intervals ($r > .75$, $p < 0.05$ and $r > .79$, $p < 0.05$ respectively).

Subsequent years have confirmed that the placement test is generally consistent in matching learners to appropriate textbook levels. Content validity is high because the placement test has been specifically designed to complement the textbooks. Construct validity is more problematic since only reading, grammatical knowledge, and listening are assessed (Wall, Clapham, and Alderson, 1994: 327–328). The placement test package includes a speaking assessment module, but it has never been possible to use it due to a lack of space, time, and staff needed to administer the test during the beginning of term, and also because of the difficulties of insuring the inter-rater reliability within the interview format of the placement package. Therefore we have had to rely upon the listening portion of the placement test as a rough indicator of the students' spoken proficiency. This is not ideal, but we take solace in the fact that some studies do suggest a moderate correlation between second language speaking and listening proficiencies (e.g., Feyten, 1991; Hirai, 2002; Liao, Qu, and Morgan, 2010).

Based on the placement test, most of the students are streamed to Level 1, 2, or 3 of the textbooks. There are often times when between three and eight students place slightly higher or lower than the levels

of the textbooks. These learners are placed in the classes with the highest and lowest levels. This is an unfortunate result of massification and new managerialism, in that with the number of students, the limits on teachers, ever growing numbers of courses added to the curriculum, and administrative concerns about reaping the highest possible cost performance between class size and facility use all made it impossible to create classes with specialized material for groups of two to six learners. In addition, while there are six classes in IEP, we effectively consolidated them into three proficiency levels according to the design of the textbook series. Once streamed, students work with the materials of their proficiency levels in series of three-week lesson cycles. During each of the four cycles within a semester, learners study two units from the text (Figure 7.1). After two weeks, all students are given listening and speaking tests. In four cycles, learners study all eight units of the split edition.

Constant student assessment was another feature of the classroom management scaffold. All marks from tests, homework, classroom participation, and in-class assessment were stored in Excel and updated on a weekly basis. We monitored the progress of all learners and quickly identified those who were having difficulties. The database allowed us to provide students with progress reports after every cycle so that could know how they were faring and, if necessary, speak with a teacher.

Quantitative investigation

Despite the daily hum of activity in the first-year IEP program, was language learning taking place? To find out, from 2006 until 2011, a two-tail paired sample t-test was conducted with six separate groups to analyze the pre-test and post-test means of all first-year students who had completed the program. The *Interchange* placement test was used because, as noted earlier, it was a sufficiently reliable and valid way of assessing the learners' language proficiency, at least in terms of matching learners to the appropriate textbooks. Each year the investigation was conducted as follows.

Learners took the pre-test during the first week of April, and the post-test was administered in the second week of January the following year. Administration of the test was in three stages, with the listening section given first, followed by reading, and then grammatical knowledge. Students had 15 minutes to complete the listening section, 20 minutes for the reading section, and 15 minutes to complete the grammatical knowledge section, for a total time of 50 minutes. The tests were graded and then double-checked by the IEP teachers and myself. The results for

Unit 5 Going places

Topics	What to say
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Travel• Vacations• Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• describing vacation plans• giving travel advice• planning a vacation

Unit 6 Sure. No problem!

Topics	What to say
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complaints• Household chores• Requests• Excuses• Apologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• making requests• accepting requests• refusing requests• complaining• apologizing• giving excuses

IC 2	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1 June 11th	No homework	Check Homework Ex 3ab p 31 (IC Unit 5)	Check Homework Ex 4a p 32 Ex 7ab p 33 (IC Unit 5)	Check Homework Ex 1-2 p 18 (NIV Unit 5)	No Homework
	Classwork Ex 12 p 35 Workbook Unit5 Vocabulary Log 5 Reading Quiz 5	Classwork Ex 2 p 30 Ex 1 p 30 Ex 3c p 31 (IC Unit 5)	Classwork Ex 6 p 32 Ex 9 p 34 Ex 7c p 33 Ex 11 p 34 (IC Unit 5)	Classwork Ex 3-5 p 19 Ex 8 p 21 Ex 6-7 p 20 Ex 9 p 21 (NIV Unit 5)	Activity day Review test (Unit 5)
Week 2 June 18th	No homework	Check Homework Ex 3a p 37 Ex 5ab p 38 (IC Unit 6)	Check Homework Ex 8a p 39 (IC Unit 6)	Check Homework Ex 1-2a p 22 Ex 9a p 25 (NIV Unit 6)	No Homework
	Classwork Ex 12 p 41 Workbook Unit6 Vocabulary Log 6 Reading Quiz 6	Classwork Ex 2 p 36 Ex 3b p 37 Ex 1 p 36 Ex 6 p 38 Ex 5c p 38 (IC Unit 6)	Classwork Ex 7 p 39 Ex 8bc p 39 Ex 9 p 40 (IC Unit 6)	Classwork Ex 3-6 p 23-24 Ex 8 p 25 Ex 7 p 24 Ex 2b p 22 Ex 9b p 25 (NIV Unit 6)	Activity day Review test (Unit 6)
Week 3 June 25th	No Homework	No Homework	Speaking Test Practice Questions	No Homework	No Homework
	Computer day Room 252-253	Listening Test	Practice for Speaking Test	Speaking Test	Speaking Test

Figure 7.1 Three-week cycle implemented as a localized scaffold for *Interchange* (IC) and the *Interchange* video materials (IV). Copies of each cycle are provided as a PDF download for students and teachers

the listening, reading, and grammar sections were then entered into an Excel spreadsheet, where they were calculated and transformed arithmetically to a 100-point scale, zero being the lowest possible score and 100 being the highest. The pre-test scores of any students who had dropped out of the course, or who had been absent from the post-test, were excluded from data analysis. The number of students excluded from the study ranged from five to eight, out of an average cohort of 117 students.

The null hypothesis of either no significant difference in the means or of a post-test mean lower than that of the pre-test was adopted. The level of significance was initially set at 95 per cent probability ($\alpha < 0.05$) in order to strike a middle ground between risks of Type I and Type II errors (Larson-Hall, 2010: 101–103), but 99 per cent probability ($\alpha < 0.01$) was also investigated.

Effect Size (ES), a mode of power analysis, is used when the null hypothesis can be rejected. It indicates whether the statistically significant findings affected a large or small number of the subjects. ES factors, which are not affected by either large or small numbers of subjects, can enhance the interpretive power of meta-analyses using statistical research that explore issues in second language learning (Larson-Hall, 2010: 114–115). A variety of statistical tools can be used to determine ES, but Cohen's *d* (Cohen, 1988: 20–21) is a popular, accessible, and clearly benchmarked means of determining the ES of *t*-tests. Low effect sizes have scores of around 0.2, medium are around 0.5, and a large ES is 0.8 or above (Cohen, 1992: 158). Several versions of Cohen's *d* can be applied to different types of *t*-tests, and Dunlap, Cortina, Vaslow, and Burke (1996: 175) found that for paired samples *t*-tests, the means of the pre-test and post-test should be used with their standard deviations instead of using the *t* value.

The Analysis ToolPak in Microsoft Excel was used to calculate the statistics for this study. The use of Excel as a tool for statistical research has both its detractors and its supporters. For those engaged in complex statistical studies, Excel has been criticized as being both inflexible and inaccurate (McCullough and Heiser, 2008). However, for relatively simple statistical studies, such as those that were used in this meta-evaluation, calculations derived from Excel have been found to be accurate, appropriate, and an economical alternative to more expensive software packages such as SPSS (Warner and Meehan, 2001). There is admittedly a clear preference for the use of SPSS in Applied Linguistics research, but examples of studies in refereed journals, where Excel was used to analyze *t*-tests investigating pedagogical issues related to TESOL,

also exist (Ekkens and Winke, 2009; Kim and Craig, 2012; Meiron and Schick, 2000; Y. H. Wang and Wang, 2010).

A more pragmatic reason for using the Analysis ToolPak in Excel relates to the corporatized nature of NUGS. Administrative managers and faculty use Excel on an almost daily basis, but many were unfamiliar with SPSS. My experience in Japan has been that, at times, administrative managers can question data generated from programs they do not recognize. Mediating analyses through Excel meant presenting data in a program that administrators trusted, understood, and could verify on their own computers. This point will be taken up again near the end of this chapter, but for the moment I shall focus on the pedagogical findings of this study.

Findings and discussion

At both 95 per cent and 99 per cent levels of statistical probability, the means of the post-tests were significantly higher than those of the pre-test at the beginning of each year (Table 7.1), thus allowing for the rejection of the null hypothesis. In five instances of this six-year investigation, effect sizes (d) were moderate to large among all of the learners. Despite statistical significance, the effect size in 2008 was quite small ($t(111) = 13.21$, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.31$). Understanding some of the possible causes sheds light on the level of support and effort needed to ensure that GTs such as *Interchange* work as effective tools for second language learning.

A closer examination of the findings from 2008 found that one grouping of learners scored considerably lower on the post-test, another scored significantly higher, but the largest concentration of learners improved by only a few points. The students even began at a slightly higher level of proficiency than in other years (average of means = 44.2, $n = 699$). However, even though the GT and other program features were the same as before, variables related to implementation may have affected the result.

During that academic year, one of the IEP teachers was hired for a tenured university post and gave notice long after the traditional autumn recruitment season in Japan. I was faced with searching for a replacement teacher during a time when only a limited pool of possible candidates is available. The teacher hired was later discovered to harbor deep misgivings about the manner in which IEP had been developed. Such occurrences are common in TESOL and EAP units, or wherever there are educated people with valid reasons for differing opinions.

Table 7.1 Descriptive statistics for two-tail paired sample t-tests of Communicative English Program pre-test and post-tests from 2006 to 2011

Year	df	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	t Stat	t Critical two-tail (.05)	t Critical two-tail (.01)	p-value	d
2006	111	38.5	11.5	49.9	12.1	15.73	2.360	2.864	<0.001	0.96
2007	125	44.1	13.0	52.8	14.5	12.02	2.356	2.857	<0.001	0.62
2008	111	48.9	12.0	52.8	13.0	5.98	2.360	2.864	<0.001	0.31
2009	111	40.9	12.1	51.3	12.3	13.21	2.360	2.864	<0.001	0.85
2010	120	47.0	13.2	58.8	13.3	17.77	2.357	2.859	<0.001	0.88
2011	115	46.0	15.4	54.6	14.5	11.43	2.359	2.862	<0.001	0.57

Unfortunately in this case, the cycle system was not followed by the dissenting teacher, textbook use was at times rather unsystematic, and there was a return to a form of leniency reminiscent of the 'relaxed education' policy that learners experienced before entering university. The situation soon developed into one where students knew in which classes study would be required and which class had the high probability of a free pass. Other reasons for the low effect are indeed possible, such as students only going through the motions of study without learning, or the sequencing and method of classroom management not being appropriate for these learners, or simply the textbook materials not working. Nevertheless, this anecdote suggests that no GT, regardless of how varied the materials, careful the modifications in sequencing, or organized in terms of classroom management, will succeed if teacher cooperation is lacking. Program administrators forget this point at their peril.

The t-tests analyzed the results on a placement test that assesses only receptive skills. High-impact, statistically significant results were found in two-tail t-tests of the paired means of the raw pre-test and post-test scores of the listening component of the placement test (e.g., Year 2006: $t(111) = 9.97$, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.91$). Because, as noted earlier in this chapter, listening proficiency moderately correlates with oral proficiency, these are tantalizing hints that improvements in the students' speaking skills have taken place. Direct observation of students in classes and during speaking tests suggests that most do improve over the year. Nevertheless, the findings of this study cannot be directly applied to questions about the potential effectiveness of GTs in improving learners' spoken proficiency.

Accepting for the moment that these statistical findings are an indication of something positive having taken place in terms of student learning, a question that must be asked is whether the cause of improvement was found in the GT, the system of classroom management, the teachers, or the students? The most likely answer is that combinations of all these elements were needed for significant improvement to take place. The system of classroom management gave teachers a handle on working with large numbers of students and helped to track student progress. The majority of the teachers taught from the GT in a coordinated manner and maintained the cycles of repeated assessment. The students, through being held accountable for their studies, became accustomed to regular study before entering the classroom, which aided their ability to interact in an active manner once classes commenced. This is significant because, despite the availability of English via the Internet and other media sources, surprisingly

few Japanese undergraduates attending middle- to low-status universities will access English in a meaningful way outside the classroom. Apart from that highly motivated minority who seek out additional resources, most seem to be satisfied with carrying a required textbook to class and to study from it only after the class has started. In addition to these factors, the role of *Interchange* was crucial not only in providing study materials but also for the considerable number of IEP students with ambiguous goals and variable levels of motivation; *Interchange* was a resource that they could hold in their hands – something that, in tandem with teacher encouragement and the classroom management structure, gave them a concrete sense of ‘clarity, direction and progress’ (Woodward, 2001: 146).

The limits of this study did not allow for an exploration of other questions, such as the effectiveness of GTs as opposed to teacher-generated materials or anti-textbook approaches using no materials at all (e.g., Meddings and Thornbury, 2011). Questions such as these present fresh opportunities for teacher-researchers interested in carrying out empirical research and meta-evaluations within their own pedagogical venues. Doing so will not only provide objective data; it will also serve as a significant contribution to the ongoing debate associated with GTs in local contexts.

A common question that has been raised by some colleagues is that, given the level of control in classroom management in this study, would not the use of another GT have been just as effective? Again, the limits of this research precluded a comparative study of GTs. This would be an interesting area of investigation, and indeed I feel such empirical research is necessary so that language teachers can better discern whether GTs are suitable for their specific contexts.

Others have questioned whether the choice of a GT in itself suggests an implicit bias in favor of such materials, thereby coloring the entire study. *Interchange* was chosen only because it was one of the very few GT packages that can provide material for over 150 lessons running concurrently at three distinct proficiency levels, but if, after years of statistical and qualitative research, the results had suggested that, along the lines of Tomlinson, the GT in this study had either damaged the learners or contributed to their failure to acquire the target language better, it would have been my duty to report such findings to the ELT community as well.

This, however, is not what emerged from this study. While other variables and limitations to this study should not be minimized, the fact that the groups in this study spent five classes a week for over 30 weeks

with *Interchange* as the core study material suggests that, far from being detrimental, the GT appears to have played a major role in the students' improvement.

The findings of this study also have important political implications for the local context in which it was situated. Returning to the point mentioned earlier about providing stakeholders with empirical evidence of student improvement in a computer format they both trust and understand, this has also been helpful when entrepreneurial faculty, for reasons other than pedagogical, propose during faculty meetings to revamp IEP completely and package it as a 'new and improved' product in order to help in recruiting high school students. When working with colleagues in corporatized HEIs who are seeking to make educational decisions about language programs either for reasons of ideology or because they see the marketing of change as a way to bring fiscal rewards to a university, rational arguments do not work. However, in universities that act like businesses, numbers communicate. Over the past few years, the yearly findings of this research has been a major help in insulating the IEP from the ambitions of faculty who would want to demonstrate their entrepreneurial potential to the managing administration, because the majority of faculty and administrative stakeholders are not willing to change the current program when students are showing signs of measurable improvement.

Conclusion

Can GTs facilitate language learning, or do they contribute to the failure of learners to acquire the language? While the research in this chapter cannot claim to provide the definitive answer, based upon six years of empirical testing with nearly 700 learners, there are strong indications that GTs can play an important role in helping, and not harming, second language learning.

This conclusion also comes with a caveat. Even with the large amount of teaching materials in GT packages, a considerable investment of time and effort is needed to make them work. GTs will not serve as a panacea for teaching environments where there is either a loosely structured curriculum, uncoordinated management, teacher disdain for the materials, uninformed eclecticism in the way the GT is used, or where learners need not study the GT in a consistent, meaningful manner over a prolonged period of time. Educators and language program coordinators should keep this in mind while wandering among the publisher booths at language teacher conferences, and as they wrestle with the question of whether a GT might work in their classes.

Another question raised by this study is whether conscientious language teachers can survive with their professional identities intact while working in the corrosive climates of calculating corporatized HEIs – places where the institutional values aspire more to those of the City than to those of the Dreaming Spires. Given the heavy course loads and lack of teacher autonomy in such environments, can language teachers and students still cling to the prospect that, at the end of the day, the commercial materials they are using can aid in fostering language improvement? Certainly, more studies of GTs used in other HEIs and teaching environments are needed before stronger statements can be made, but the answer from this study seems to be a hopeful yes.

It is this possibility of hope that is especially important for teachers of TESOL in corporatized HEIs, many of whom find themselves in an almost daily struggle against despair. Such despair is often further propagated by enthusiastic and well-meaning scholars who, this chapter has suggested, have sought to problematize GTs on ideological grounds, and who have unwittingly taken on a role similar to protesters burning flags on CNN: their words and actions make a statement; there is a certain satisfaction within the catharsis of protest; but in the end, their anti-textbook pronouncements do not change anything. Those in the corridors of power, those who make far-reaching decisions affecting tertiary programs in TESOL, are unfazed. TESOL educators must still return to the grind of factory-like language programs and endure the terrors of assessment. In such institutions, language teachers can still equip learners to acquire the language. In the process, they can encourage their learners to question, to think, and perhaps to become part of a generation of new policymakers who deconstruct the current neoliberal machinations affecting tertiary-level TESOL and higher education in general. As we look to that day when regime change may be possible, this chapter urges the use of empirical data, rather than ideology, as a prime mover for positive change.

Note

1. All place names and program designations have been anonymized.

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