

AN ANALYSIS OF ESL CONFERENCES SPONSORED BY WEBSTER UNIVERSITY, THAILAND. *“Discovering How to Help Local Thai Teachers of English Meet the ASEAN Challenge.”*

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Abstract

Arising out of a conference for local Thai teachers of English sponsored by Webster University, Thailand and held on May 4, 2012, this paper attempts to answer the question, “How can Webster University best help local Thai teachers of English?” It is a topic of discussion in many circles that Thailand must improve its level of English in advance of the ASEAN community integration process. This paper presents the results of three participant satisfaction surveys, looks closely at the ways the surveys influenced a second conference held on November 2 and 3, 2012, and analyzes the second conference in terms of how well it met the specific requests of the teachers for assistance in meeting the ASEAN challenge. It presents recommendations for the improvement of future conferences and concludes with a brief look at the broader national picture with the goal of encouraging other universities in Thailand to extend this kind of outreach to their local English teachers.

บทคัดย่อ

ผลจากการประชุมทางวิชาการสำหรับอาจารย์สอนภาษาอังกฤษชาวไทยที่จัดขึ้นโดยมหาวิทยาลัยเวบสเตอร์ ประเทศไทย เมื่อวันที่ 4 พฤษภาคม 2555 บทความนี้จะพยายามตอบคำถามว่ามหาวิทยาลัยเวบสเตอร์สามารถช่วยอาจารย์สอนภาษาอังกฤษชาวไทยได้อย่างไร หัวข้อสนทนาในหลายวงการคือการที่ประเทศไทยจะต้องพัฒนาระดับความสามารถด้านภาษาอังกฤษล่วงหน้าก่อนการเข้าสู่ประชาคมอาเซียน บทความนี้นำเสนอผลของการสำรวจ 3 แบบ คือหาวิธีการที่การสำรวจมีอิทธิพลต่อการประชุมทางวิชาการครั้งที่สองที่จัดขึ้นในวันที่ 2-3 พฤศจิกายน 2555 และวิเคราะห์การประชุมทางวิชาการครั้งนี้ว่า จะตอบสนองความต้องการทางวิชาการของอาจารย์ในการช่วยตอบสนอง

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ความท้าทายของประชาคมอาเซียนอย่างไร บทความนี้ให้ข้อคิดเห็นสำหรับการปรับปรุงการประชุมทางวิชาการในอนาคตและสรุปภาพกว้างของ ประเทศโดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อกระตุ้นมหาวิทยาลัยต่าง ๆ ในประเทศไทยให้ขยายการประชุมทางวิชาการลักษณะนี้ไปสู่อาจารย์สอนภาษาอังกฤษชาวไทย

INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge and a topic of discussion in many Thai academic, governmental, and economic circles is that Thailand must improve its English language skills in order to meet the high standards demanded by national and ASEAN regional policies. The awareness of this aspect of our national life resulted in a plan by the Webster University, Thailand English faculty to take action on a local level and work with Thai teachers of English teaching in local primary and secondary schools. This paper presents the results of that experience and is divided into three sections beginning with the research component. Following the May 4 workshop, participating Thai teachers were asked to fill out a brief questionnaire. Over the summer, another more detailed questionnaire was distributed to those who attended the first conference as well as to other interested teachers. The 45 responses to that survey formed the basis for planning the Second Webster Conference for Teachers of English which was held on November 2 and 3, 2012. At the end of this conference, another survey was filled out by the participants.

This paper begins with a presentation of the results of these three surveys and examines the manner in which the surveys influenced the second conference and the subsequent perceived value of the various workshops. It analyzes this conference in

terms of participant satisfaction with how well we provided what they asked for and presents recommendations for the improvement of future such conferences, along with an examination of how such a conference fits into the bigger picture. It is our sincere hope that the WUT experience and these findings will be useful to other universities and encourage them to extend this kind of outreach to primary and secondary Thai teachers of English in their local area.

BACKGROUND

As the formation of the ASEAN community approaches, one of the topics appearing frequently in news articles and as the subject of deep discussion in educational, business, and governmental circles over the past few years is the comparatively low level of English in Thailand. Since this research initiative grew out of just such discussions, a brief look at a few of the published comments, suggestions and conclusions is warranted.

Education Minister Woravat Auapinyakul admitted that, "Thailand is not ready for the formation of the ASEAN Community in 2015 while studies show Thais are not good at foreign languages and analytical thinking" (NNT, 2011). Here is Chaleyo Yoosimarak, the Permanent Secretary for Education, "[. . .] students

must become well equipped with English proficiency and ICT literacy in order to be able to communicate well and exchange experiences with new ASEAN friends" (Yamwagee, 2011).

From an analysis of several year's worth of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) exam results and Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency (CU-TEP) exam results of Thai students who took the (CU-TEP) in 2001, Prapphal reports that:

The results indicate that the average English proficiency of Thai students is lower than that of students from other ASEAN countries. [Thai] Science students scored an average of 450 while [Thai] social science and humanities students scored an average of 444. [TOEFL equivalent 498...] As for ASEAN, Singaporean graduates rank first with an average score of 596 while Laotian graduates rank last with an average score of 496. (Prapphal, 2002)

From the *Bangkok Post* of July 27, 2012:

Thai students' English-language skills rank below those of youngsters in at least three other member countries of ASEAN, according to a recent survey by Education First (EF), an international language school. Thailand ranked 42nd out of 44 countries surveyed for adult English proficiency -- below Vietnam (39), and Indonesia (34), with Malaysia the top ASEAN country at number nine. (Marukatat, 2012)

From another analysis of the statistics

presented in the Education First survey of English language skills:

Regardless of the ranking, it has become obvious that an average Thai is considered to have very low English proficiency. Recent online events and anecdotal evidences prove that Thais tend to be unwilling to converse in English and often revert back to use Thai among themselves. The readers probably also have experienced that Thais who are fluent in English are not common, and those that speak flawless English are considered very rare. ("Where is Thailand?" 2012)

This is but a small sample of the myriad national expressions of concern for improving English language instruction in Thai schools in order to help Thai students to meet the high standards demanded by national and ASEAN regional policies. Thai universities in a position to do so need to seriously consider joining with local primary and secondary Thai teachers of English and becoming part of a solution that will benefit the entire nation. As the theme of the Second Webster Conference for Teachers of English put it, we all need to be "Working together to meet the ASEAN challenge!"

Project objectives

This project was motivated by the experience of the first conference and the need to improve the workshop experience for the local teachers of English, as well as by the continuing alarms raised by the coming of the ASEAN community indicating that Thailand must improve its English lan-

guage skills or lose out in 2015 (Brown, 2012. Khaopa, 2012).

The initial objective was to better focus our second conference to maximize its value to local Thai teachers of English by first surveying their perceived needs and then tailoring the various workshops to best meet those needs. To do this we needed to get specific information from our respondents as to what would be of greatest help to them. In designing the questionnaires, I hoped that the respondents would identify topics which interested them, practices that they would find useful, and methods which they could take back to their classes and actually use.

The resulting information from the initial questionnaires, from the experience of holding the second conference, and from the questionnaire which followed that conference provided the basis for this research paper. The ultimate objective here was to outline procedures and identify useful practices that might play a role in helping other international universities to assist the Thai English teachers in their communities in advance of the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community.

Methodology

The Initial Questionnaire was given out to participants at the end of the first conference (workshop) on May 4, 2012. There was not enough time to either design a comprehensive survey about the experience or for the participants to fill it out with careful thought or consideration. The results of the 25 completed responses were tallied by hand.

The Second Questionnaire was more

carefully prepared and much more detailed. It was developed in the month after the workshop and circulated among interested faculty members for review. Several changes were suggested before the final version was completed, printed out, and delivered. They were given to those teachers who attended the first conference as well as to other willing respondents who had been unable to attend. Out of approximately 50 questionnaires distributed, 47 were returned.

The Third Questionnaire was distributed to all the participants following the final workshop on November 3. Time was given for them to fill these out before the conference officially came to a close and a plea was made for them to be helpful in their responses. These 33 completed questionnaires will be reported on in detail later in this paper.

Analysis of the three surveys

The Initial Questionnaire. At the time of the first workshop (conference) held at the Webster University Thailand campus on May 4, 2012, a very brief questionnaire was handed out and completed by participants (Emond Survey, 4th May 2012). The time allowed for them to do this was very short and the survey itself very general in nature. The results were predictably of limited use in planning a subsequent workshop as no specific questions regarding the various topics presented were asked. The survey was also administered in a way that went against the Thai cultural norm of *greng jai* where guests would not dream of criticizing their hosts or in any way indicating that things were not completely perfect and

totally satisfactory. This was something that also needed be considered when designing the longer surveys.

Twenty-five respondents rated five categories: overall satisfaction, organization, exchange of ideas, topics presented, and food. Nine people checked off "**strongly agree**" for all five categories (that is, they highly approved of everything) roughly fourteen people checked "**agree**" and the remaining two or three chose "**not to agree or disagree**". Not a single person checked off "**disagree**" or "**strongly disagree**" for any of the five categories. Along with the five possible rating numbers, these five categories were actually the entire questionnaire. However, there were additional written comments from eight of the attendees which were much more useful because they identified major areas of concern and offered concrete suggestions for improvement. These comments were enhanced by further anecdotal evidence in casual discussions with a few of the attendees in the days after the workshop.

Two things came through very clearly on this initial questionnaire. The first of the suggested areas for improvement: the workshop was just too short. The second point arises out of the first: there was no time left for the faculty of WUT to exchange ideas with the ESL teachers who attended.

The Second Questionnaire. In the months following the May conference, the results and ramifications of that experience generated much informal discussion, especially among the WUT English Faculty. The consensus was that we needed to do it again and that we needed to give it a better focus, provide more planning time and allow

more time for the actual conference. Out of these discussions arose the idea of a second and more detailed survey to be sent out to participants and to others who might be interested in attending future workshops at WUT. A first draft of the new questionnaire was developed and circulated among interested faculty members. Several changes were suggested before the final version was arrived at and printed out. The questionnaires were then distributed to Thai teachers of English at a number of schools in Petchaburi, Cha am and Hua Hin (Emond Survey 2012). They were given to those teachers who attended the first workshop as well as to others who were unable to attend and/or interested in attending future workshops at WUT. Out of approximately 50 questionnaires, 47 were returned. (Please see Appendix for a breakdown of responses to the questions discussed below as well as additional notes on the responses to this questionnaire.)

This two page questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first page asked for basic information and general comments, suggestions and training requests and the second page specifically referenced the May conference and was designed to be completed by those who had attended it. The first question allowed a degree of anonymity if desired by the respondent and indicated putting down a name as "optional". The following three questions requested grade level taught and school information in addition to asking how many years the respondent had been teaching English. The information gathered from the responses to these questions helped a great deal in planning various workshops for the second conference, in seeing what schools

did not send teachers and in tailoring the workshops as best as we could to meet the levels taught and the level of experience of the teachers involved.

In answer to the question “What grade level(s) do you teach?” at the Prathom (primary) level there were thirteen checkmarks and at the Matthayom (secondary) level there were forty checkmarks. (Because some teachers indicated several different grades or grade spreads, the numbers do not add up to the number of respondents.) The fact that the majority of the teachers who responded were teaching at the Matthayom (Secondary) level is significant. A majority of respondents (28) had been teaching English for more than ten years and it is impressive to note that six teachers had been teaching English for over thirty years. Thirteen respondents had been teaching for fewer than five years with five of these teachers in their first year. Seven of the respondents were Filipino and not Thai.

The next two survey items (questions 6 & 7) asked about the specific needs of the teachers and what they would like to see presented at a conference. In order, the results were: games (30), materials for class use (24), reading (18), observe an actual ESL class (17), writing (16), class planning (16), English conversation (14), pronunciation (11), quizzes (9), networking with native speakers (8), using film or TV programs (7). This list and the more detailed responses to question 7 weigh in heavily on the side of materials and things to do in class. Leaving aside “reading” and “writing” which are rather broad, the next area of importance seems to be speaking (“conversation” and “pronunciation”).

There is also a great interest in observing an actual ESL class in session.

The responses to question 8 as to how the WUT faculty might help local teachers raised the issue of ongoing conferences and the possible establishment of a resource center of some sort. Sending students and/or Webster faculty to the schools for co-teaching and/or inviting high school students to visit the Webster campus are other areas for consideration.

Although not designed with the nationality of the respondents in mind, the way in which the questionnaires came in allowed me to enter the information from Filipino teachers separately and thus see that their responses differed sharply in some respects from their Thai counterparts. They were less interested in conversation and pronunciation, for example, and more interested in class planning, the inclusion of Thai culture, and class discipline.

RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS AT THE FIRST CONFERENCE

Four workshops were presented at the first conference and this questionnaire asked teachers to rate these workshops on the basis of how much of the material was new, how much of the material was useful in their classes and if they would like more information on the topic in question. Eighteen teachers who attended the first conference filled out this part of the survey.

The four workshops were entitled, *Nonverbal immediacy*, *Teaching Pronunciation*, *Workplace Writing Skills* and *Waiter, Waiter There's a Fly in my Soup* (a

classroom activity based on jokes and riddles). In listing the results here I suspect that the Thai value of *greng jai* came into effect and rendered the responses less useful than I had hoped when I designed the questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of responses indicated that most of the material was new and that most of the material was useful in their classes. However, consider that two of the topics we presented were rather esoteric. It is difficult to imagine how "most" of what was included, no matter how valuable or well-presented, could be used in Prathom (primary) or indeed in Matthayom (secondary) English classes. For a specific example I offer *Workplace Writing Skills* which, though it was well organized and presented, by its very nature could not possibly be "most" useful, or indeed useful in any way to teachers at the Pratom (Primary) level or even the Matthayom (Secondary) level since the students they are teaching are highly unlikely to need workplace based English writing skills even upon graduation from secondary school.

Implementation of suggestions at the Second Conference

1. The first very brief survey was clear on three points: the workshop was just too short, there was no time left for the faculty of WUT to exchange ideas with the ESL teachers who attended and some teachers had hoped to visit an actual ESL class in session. The second survey confirmed these points and provided considerably more details on what prospective participating teachers of English would like to see at a conference.

How these points were addressed in the second conference: The first decision made on the basis of the above feedback from teachers was to run the conference for two days. This allowed the faculty members and the participating teachers to speak with each other and exchange ideas. The two day setup also allowed for the inclusion of native English speakers drawn from the Webster Thailand student body to interact with the participating teachers in roundtable discussions. However, arranging the observation of an actual ESL class proved to be impossible for this conference.

2. Roughly four-fifths of the respondents to the second questionnaire indicated that they taught Matthayom (secondary) level students. This meant that our conference needed to focus more on the upper level than the lower in terms of providing workshops of value to the majority of teachers. Also important is the fact that most of the respondents were experienced teachers.

How these points were addressed in the second conference: In arranging the various workshops for the second conference, much attention was paid to presenting topics of broad interest to all teachers. Given the fact that the majority of attendees indicated that they taught at the Matthayom level, the workshops successfully focused on the level taught as indicated by the responses to the second questionnaire.

3. According to the survey, the workshop topics which needed to be addressed in setting up the second conference were, **in order of importance**, games, materials for class use, reading, observation of an

ESL class, writing, class planning, English conversation, pronunciation, quizzes, networking with native speakers, and using film and TV. Some of these were very broad in nature and in the case of class observation, impossible to arrange for a group of 45 teachers. Some of the minor points which were listed included “how to teach speaking”, and “how to motivate weak students”.

How these points were addressed in the second conference: Participating Webster, Thailand faculty were given the list of topics requested by the teachers on the second questionnaire. The first topic (games) was addressed in two of the workshops presented at the conference. The second topic (materials for class use) was addressed by all seven of the workshops. The first workshop at the conference addressed pronunciation, writing was addressed by one of the other workshops, and the final workshop addressed class planning. The roundtable discussions addressed conversation with native English speakers. Two of the workshops centered on using the internet and social media in teaching English. Except for using film and TV, one of the less important topics on the list, the majority of the workshops at this conference fully addressed the requests of the participating and interested teachers as expressed on the two questionnaires.

Planning the Second Conference

Armed with the results of the first and second questionnaires, the English faculty at Webster University, Thailand proceeded to set into motion the planning of our second conference for teachers of English.

With reference to the suggestions from the teachers we surveyed, the decision was made to hold the conference for two days, to hold it in late October or early November to accommodate their school schedules and to hold it on the Webster Thailand campus. The request for papers went out to Webster faculty in September and the list of specific workshops they were asked to address was taken directly from the second questionnaire. Faculty members were asked to present on games, classroom activities, lesson planning, pronunciation, and the use of internet resources. The request for conversation with native speakers of English was met in a rather unique and wonderful way by involving Webster students. Ten roundtable discussion groups, each hosted by a Webster student, were set up following lunch on the first day of the conference.

Here is the list of workshops presented at the second conference:

1. PRONUNCIATION IN ESL
Norris Smith
2. A BARREL FULL OF...IDIOMS!
Charles Emond
3. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS
Ten Webster students
4. IMPROVING ENGLISH USING
ONLINE RESOURCES *Kulavir Pipat*
5. USING “BASIC” ENGLISH IN
THE ESL CLASSROOM *James Hughes*
6. USING SOCIAL MEDIA to
TEACH WRITING SKILLS
Allan Wichelman
7. PLAYING THE GAME (reading,
materials for class use) *Charles Emond*
8. LESSON PLANNING
Stephen Berry

The Second Conference

The Second Webster Conference for Teachers of English, sponsored by the WUT Arts and Sciences Department, was held on November 2 and 3 on the WUT campus. Teamwork and the many hours of work put in by dedicated faculty members and staff made it all run smoothly and by all accounts it was a success. The eight workshops that were offered to the teachers were developed in response to their specific requests on a previous questionnaire. The 45 participants were all teachers of English in the local primary and secondary schools around Petchaburi, Cha Am and Hua Hin.

The team responsible for organizing the conference included Professor Charles Emond, Professor Sasiphorn Getiam and Professor Stephen Berry. The various presenters, recruited entirely from the Webster Thailand faculty, were Professors James Hughes, Kulavir Pipat, Allan Wichelman and Norris Smith. The surprise hit of the conference turned out to be a roundtable discussion session hosted by Webster students. The opportunity to speak one-on-one with native English speakers had been high on the list of requests following the first conference. To the great delight of everyone involved this went amazingly well! At every table, the Webster students engaged their small groups of teachers in lively discussion, some groups even burst into song and for the entire period the participating teachers and our students shared their experiences, chatted, and laughed. Camille Lubbock and the WUT Student Council organized this valuable learning experience.

The participants filled out questionnaires just before the conference wrapped up on Saturday afternoon and the single theme that came through both on the questionnaires and as the teachers said their goodbyes was, "Thank you so much! When is the next conference?"

The Third Questionnaire

At the end of the Second Webster Conference for Teachers of English, a third questionnaire was distributed (Emond Survey, 3rd November 2012). (Please see the Appendix for the complete responses to the questions referred to here.) This two page questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part asked for basic information and general comments, suggestions, and overall ratings for the various aspects of the conference. The second part referred to each of the workshops that were presented and allowed respondents to rate them with regard to newness of the material presented and usefulness of the material for their own classes. The final section focused on the future.

The first question on the questionnaire allowed a degree of anonymity if desired by the respondent. Six respondents took advantage of this. This was followed by gathering grade and school information which is important as it informs us what schools we might have missed and provides a look at the grade levels the teachers are teaching. The information gathered from both of these questions helps a great deal in planning various workshops for a future conference. The final question on the number of years teaching English is important as the responses tell us if we are working

mainly with experienced teachers or with new teachers. Each group has its own needs.

A total of 20 different schools in the Petchaburi area were represented at this conference. Although the conference drew 45 teachers on the first day, several were unable to attend the second day and others also missed the opportunity to fill out the questionnaire, hence the 33 completed questionnaires forming the basis for this report. The question, "What grade levels do you teach?" was answered in a variety of ways using both Thai and English grade designations. Because some teachers indicated several different grades or grade spreads, the numbers do not add up to the number of respondents. This information should be looked at in terms of the number of teachers involved with a particular Prathom/ Matthayom (primary/ secondary) grade level. At the Prathom (primary) level there are seventeen checkmarks and at the Matthayom (secondary) level there are seventeen checkmarks. In comparison to the previous (second) questionnaire, which showed that the majority of the responding teachers taught at the Matthayom (secondary) level, this survey shows an even split which represents a significant difference that needs to be considered in future planning. Obviously more emphasis must be given to helping teachers at the Prathom (primary) level.

A majority of respondents (20) indicated that they have been teaching English for more than ten years and it is impressive to note that two teachers have been teaching English for over thirty years. Ten respondents have been teaching for fewer than seven years with two of these teach-

ers in their first year. It also needs to be taken into account that five of the respondents were Filipino and not Thai.

Conference ratings

Prior to the distribution of the survey conference participants were encouraged not to be *greng jai* and to be "honest" in their responses to the survey. Keeping this in mind, the 1 to 10 range saw no ratings below 6 except for two 5's. By adding the 9's and 10's together a quick look at the most and least popular aspects of the conference can be obtained. Not surprisingly, considering the excellence of our caterers, most popular was the "food" with 31 top votes, followed by conference "organization" with 26 votes. The "location" proved popular with 23 votes and with 17 votes most people seemed to have enjoyed the conference very much. However, the lowest rating using this measure is the one which ought to rank much higher and this is a concern. "Learning" received only 10 top votes.

Workshop ratings

In looking at the answers to question one in each of the workshops, the responses showed that much of the material in every workshop was new to the majority of the teachers with "all" and "most" receiving the highest numbers of ticks overall. Adding these two upper scores together, workshop #7 received the highest score (25) for presenting new material, with workshop #2 on idioms second (20). Workshop #8 on lesson planning was next (19) with the Roundtable #3 and workshop #4 tied (17).

Workshop #1 received the lowest new material score due in part (I believe) to the fact that a very similar workshop had been presented at the May conference.

Question two related to the perceived value of the workshop to the teachers in their own classes. This question allowed the teachers to rate the quality of the presentations in terms of usefulness and provided evidence from the teachers themselves that the knowledge gained in a particular workshop would improve their work back at their schools. Again workshop #7 came in first with 23 teachers indicating that all or most of the material presented at that workshop would be used in their classes. This was closely followed by workshop #8 on lesson planning (22) and the roundtable discussion with the students (22). Workshop #2 came in for 19 votes. One note of explanation here: both workshop #2 and workshop #7 featured several pages of classroom ready activities which only needed copying for use in a class. This might be something to take into consideration and encourage when planning workshops for future conferences.

The third question in the individual workshop ratings asks if the respondent would like more information on the workshop topic and the overwhelming response in every single case was "yes" with no fewer than 28 out of 33 people wanting more information on every subject. This is indicative of the desire of these teachers for further training, information and help with improving the level of what they do every day in the local schools

The Roundtable Discussions

Special mention must be made of this highly successful initiative! The ratings above as well as anecdotal information, feedback from students, and direct observation of the roundtable discussions as they were held confirm that this was a remarkably positive experience for all who participated. This workshop was developed in direct response to the requests of teachers on the second questionnaire for the opportunity to "speak with native-English speakers".

Preliminary discussion of this project with the Webster Student Council revealed a keen interest on the part of Webster students in participating in such an activity. With their generous help the word was spread until more volunteers came forward than could be used. Eleven students were selected to participate and after a pizza lunch provided by the conference, they were assigned to tables with four of the participating local English teachers at each table.

Students were given suggestions as to appropriate activities, topics, or lessons to use with their groups but it was really an individual initiative. The local teachers were most interested in having the opportunity to speak one-on-one with native English speakers.

Final Section of the Questionnaire

This section of the questionnaire asked what specific topics the respondents would like to see addressed at a future conference and what other suggestions they might have that would make a future conference

more interesting and/or more valuable. It concluded with asking for suggestions of other ways in which the faculty at Webster University might help teachers in their daily work of teaching English to Thai students.

Specific suggestions for the future:

Of the 33 teachers who filled out questionnaires, ten chose not to write anything in this section except, in a few cases, "Thank you!" The following list (table 1), in order of topics most frequently mentioned in this section, should be considered as the start of the workshop planning process for setting up the next conference.

The responses raised the issue of ongoing conferences and the possible establishment of a resource center of some sort. Sending students and/or Webster faculty to the schools for co-teaching and/or inviting high school students to visit the Webster campus are other areas for consideration, although they are outside the scope of an ESL conference for teachers. The final

poignant request, echoed by two other respondents is something to be looked at more closely and may, along with an annual conference, represent a more direct and perhaps more valuable way of helping local schools with improving the English skills of their students.

The response to a final question, "**Did you attend the workshop held at Webster University, Thailand on May 4th**" showed that half of the teachers attending this conference had attended the previous conference in May and half were new to English teacher conferences at Webster. This is related to the response to question 3 on the grade levels taught. Whereas the majority of teachers attending the first workshop identified themselves as teaching Matthayom (secondary) level students, the teachers at this workshop were evenly split between Prathom and Matthayom levels. This presents an interesting shift and requires a closer look at the demographics involved in planning such a conference as well as the level of the

Table 1

Teaching strategies and techniques (7)	ASEAN study (2)
Lesson planning (5)	Conversation (2)
Roundtable (4)	Speaking (1)
Language and culture (4)	Online question & answer service (1)
Using online resources (4)	Peer coaching online (1)
Playing the game (3)	Roundtable at my school (1)
Primary teaching (3)	Reading for young learners (1)
More activities and handouts at next conference (3)	Idioms (1)
Pronunciation (3)	Intercultural multi national classroom (1)
Use social network to connect during year (2)	ASEAN study (2)
Set up E-learning website (1)	Hold conference every year (1)

"Send some students from Webster to my school. I really need [this] because I would like my students get a chance [to speak] with the foreigners. Please". (3)

workshops we offer which, in both conferences, tended to be aimed at teachers teaching the upper grade levels.

Overall the Second Conference went extremely well thanks to a dedicated team of organizers and presenters. However one major area for improvement, outside of the scope of the questionnaires, needs to be addressed in advance of any future conference. The effort was made at the start to organize teacher invitations on an individual basis with registration by email required of each teacher. This turned out to be a mistake. Although roughly 50% of the teachers who heard about our conference emailed a request to be included and were sent return emails confirming their place at the conference, the remainder came as a list of names from a third party. This plan did not work in part because the invitations had to be translated into Thai and went out during a school break. Also, in most schools the Director/Headmaster/Principal needs to be formally informed of the conference by a mailed or hand-delivered *official* letter before teachers are allowed to attend.

Recommendation: Start earlier and build a list of contacts centered on the key administrators of various local schools. Address the conference announcement and invitation for teachers to participate to the director (perhaps with a small poster for their bulletin board) and request that a certain number of teachers be selected to represent that particular school, with that list being sent in to the conference organizing team. Including more schools and increasing the size of the conference is also something to be seriously considered.

CONCLUSIONS

The theme of this conference was **"Working together to meet the ASEAN challenge!"** and it was developed in response to speeches and articles by Thai scholars and government officials lamenting the generally low level of English in Thailand in comparison to that found in other ASEAN countries. In the words of Visanu Vongsinsirikul, director of the ASEAN Community Preparation Centre,

Foreign languages, English in particular, are our big problem. But we can learn them", he said. "Now, teachers [...] are interested in and alert to the challenges, but they have been working in the same system for a long time. I'm not sure how much they will be able to prepare students", he said. So, teachers should work harder and think "out of the box". (Khaopa, 2012)

It can be said of this conference that it was our attempt to help these Thai English teachers, who are obviously "alert to the challenges" and keenly motivated, to think creatively. It is our sincere hope that the WUT experience, as presented in this paper, will be of interest to other universities in Thailand and that this might give them the impetus to extend this kind of outreach to the English teachers in their local area.

Certainly, other methods of delivering help and support to local Thai teachers of English might be more effective than an annual two day conference. Throughout this paper references to such programs as an ongoing (internet based) resource center for teachers, student and teacher exchange programs, and more frequent conferences

have surfaced. These suggestions however, are most likely too expensive and/or time-consuming for the typical university to handle without substantial sponsorship or grants from some governmental or non-governmental agency. What Webster Thailand has done should provide a workable model for other universities because this kind of two day, annual conference is the type of community outreach activity often already covered by existing QA budgets.

Quite apart from Quality Assurance considerations, such a program creates an important connection between practitioners in the field of teaching English to Thai students at the primary, secondary, and university levels. It gives the all-important foundation and lower-level teachers encouragement and support for their efforts to “think out of the box”. To be sure, such a conference is a small step toward improving English in Thailand as a whole in advance of the ASEAN challenge, but it is at least a step in the right direction. Apart from the direct knowledge Thai primary and secondary teachers get from attending a conference, they also get connections and ideas, references to material on the internet, and links to resources to further their own education and improve their teaching methods.

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APPENDIX

Second Questionnaire

2. Schools responding:

Hua Hin High School (8), Ban Lat Wittaya (7), Watjantrawat (Sukprasarnnat) (4), Kaenchan Vittaya School (3), Cha Am Khunying Nuangburi School (3), Huaysaiprachasan School (3), Suksasongkro Petchaburi School (3), Bandonkhunhuay (2), Wat Praputtabaht Kaoulukchang School (2), Bannongjok School (1), Wat Nongka School (1), Bannong Puentak School (1), Banhuayquangjing School (1), Banroimaiphattana School (1), Bansong (Prachakorn bumrung) (1), Watrangerai School (1), Bannongrong School (1), Banthayang School (1), Banthalo School (1), Samroiotwittayakom School (1)

TOTAL: 45

3. Grade levels taught:

Lower level (Kindergarten)	=	1	Matthayom 1 (Grade 7)	=	6
Prathom 2 (Grade 2)	=	1	Matthayom 2 (Grade 8)	=	2
Prathom 3 (Grade 3)	=	1	Matthayom 3 (Grade 9)	=	4
Prathom 4 (Grade 4)	=	1	Matthayom 4 (Grade 10)	=	3
Prathom 5 (Grade 5)	=	1	Matthayom 5 (Grade 11)	=	3
Prathom 6 (Grade 6)	=	2	Matthayom 6 (Grade 12)	=	3
Prathom 1-6 (Grades 1-6)	=	5	Matthayom 1-3 (Grades 7-9)	=	13
Prathom 4-6 (Grades 4-6)	=	1	Matthayom 1-6 (Grades 7-12)	=	6

TOTAL: 13

TOTAL: 40

4. Number of years teaching English:

1 year = five teachers	15 years = two teachers	28 years = one teacher
2 years = two	16 years = one	29 years = one
3 years = three	17 years = three	30 years = three
4 years = three	18 years = one	33 years = one
6 years = two	19 years = two	38 years = one
7 years = two	23 years = one	39 years = one
10 years = eight	25 years = one	
12 years = one		

5. Are you interested in attending an EFL workshop yes no maybe

(NOTE: Most of the respondents checked or circled "yes" in answer to this question. Six people checked "maybe" and five people did not respond to this question, although all five then went on to rate the workshops.)

6. Circle any of these possible workshop topics that interest you.

writing	class planning		
reading	correction of materials		
materials for class use	games	quizzes	exams
English conversation	networking with native speakers		
using the internet for EFL teaching	pronunciation		
advice on materials you are using	using film or tv programs		
an online forum for English questions	other? _____		
observation of an actual ESL class			

Responses to #6

games = 30	English conversation = 14
materials for class use = 24	pronunciation = 11
reading = 18	quizzes = 9
observe an actual ESL class = 17	networking with native speakers = 8
writing = 16	using film or TV programs = 7
class planning = 16	

7. What *specific* topics would you like to see addressed by the workshop?

materials = 7	pronunciation = 3
conversation = 6	class planning = 2
writing = 5	use of film or tv = 2
games = 4	songs = 2
reading = 3	materials corrections = 1
exams = 1	

(NOTE: Thirteen of the teachers did not mark anything in response to this question. The majority of responses that were made here echoed the circled choices in question six.)

8. What is the *best* way for the faculty at Webster University to help you in your daily work of teaching English to Thai students?

(NOTE: Twenty-seven of the teachers did not make any specific suggestions in answer to this question. Five respondents suggested, "Have Webster students to be models of speaking English at our school". Five teachers suggested an EFL workshop and one suggested that this be held every semester. Four people suggested sending volunteer teachers to the schools. One marked "games" and another marked "It's up to you". The idea of WUT being a training center and a source of teaching materials for the region was supported by four of the responses to this question.)

10. Did you attend the workshop held at Webster University, Thailand on May 4th, 2012?

yes no

(NOTE: Eighteen respondents marked "yes" to this question, indicating that they

had attended the first conference. Three respondents marked "no" to having attended but then went on to answer the questions that follow on the questionnaire. I have not included their responses. Of those who did not complete these questions I suspect that several just did not realize that there were two pages to the questionnaire.

11. These were the topics presented at that conference: (circle your responses)

A. *Keynote speech: "Nonverbal immediacy"* **Roy Avecilla**

1. How much of this material was new to you
all=2 most=13 some=3 none=0
2. How much of this material was useful to you with your classes?
all=1 most=13 some=4 none=0
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic **yes=17 no=1**

B. *Teaching pronunciation* **Keith Fitzgerald**

1. How much of this material was new to you?
all=2 most=11 some=2 none=3
2. How much of this material was useful to you with your classes?
all=0 most=14 some=4 none=0
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic **yes=15 no=3**

C. *Workplace writing skills* **Allan Wichelman**

1. How much of this material was new to you? **all=2 most=14 some=2 none=0**
2. How much of this material was useful to you with your classes?
all=0 most=15 some=3 none=0
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? **yes=15 no=3**

D. *Waiter, Waiter theres a fly in my soup!* **Charles Emond**

1. How much of this material was new to you? **all=3 most=10 some=5 none=0**
2. How much of this material was useful to you with your classes?
all=3 most=11 some=4 none=0
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? **yes=15 no=3**

12. What other suggestions do you have for Webster University that would make the next workshop interesting and valuable for you?

Out of 45 respondents, only 9 teachers, all Thai, left detailed responses to this question. These are printed out here verbatim and lettered for easy reference.

- a. Next workshop I want to learn the teaching pronunciation, using films (movie) and TV program.
- b. You should present information about plan "Teaching English as a foreign language workshop" for us. I'm interest this workshop. Thank you.
- c. I really want to attend at writing skill for teaching Thai students with the professor of writing.
- d. The workshop at Webster University is interesting and valuable, the next workshop I want to have more time. I want to observe an actual ESL class.

- e. If Webster University has any special activities; camp, culture study, local life study...please choose our school as the main resource for your university. Therefore we can exchange our experience and our culture. (Banlatwittaya School)
- f. It would be very great if we could attend the real class of Webster students and maybe have the activities with them.
- g. How to teach the students who are weak in English. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences in teaching. Some techniques I have done. Some of them I couldn't use with my students but some are new and they enjoy studying more.
- h. I love the ways that you presented and they are very useful. I think that you should have more games suitable for the high school student (not too hard for them) I want you give me the ways to speak with Thai students and they can do understanding easy and clearly. Thank you.
- i. I spend your time for workshop at least three days. Give the knowledge the teaching skill. Give the knowledge about games more.

Third Questionnaire

(NOTE: sections of this survey reported in the above text are not repeated here)

2. Schools responding:

Hua Hin High School (2), Ban Lat Wittaya (3), Cha Am Khunying Nuangburi School (3), Huaysaiprachasan School (3), Suksasongkro Petchaburi School (1), Bandonkhunhuay (1), Wat Praputtabaht Kaoulukchang School (1), Bannong Puentak School (2), Bannong School (1), Samroiotwittayakom School (2), Banthatakrow (2), Bannongres (1), Bandonmakok (2), Banyangnamkladnoe (1), Banlaemtong (1), NangchokWittaya (1), Tanoadluangwittaya (1), Watchangtangkrajaio (1), Rajapat Petchaburi University (1), Primary Ed. Office (1), (two left blank)

3. Grade levels taught:

Lower level (Kindergarten)	= 0	Matthayom 1 (Grade 7)	= 2
Prathom 2 (Grade 2)	= 1	Matthayom 2 (Grade 8)	= 2
Prathom 3 (Grade 3)	= 1	Matthayom 3 (Grade 9)	= 0
Prathom 4 (Grade 4)	= 0	Matthayom 4 (Grade 10)	= 1
Prathom 5 (Grade 5)	= 2	Matthayom 5 (Grade 11)	= 1
Prathom 6 (Grade 6)	= 0	Matthayom 6 (Grade 12)	= 3
Prathom 1-6 (Grades 1-6)	= 9	Matthayom 1-3 (Grades 7-9)	= 7
Prathom 4-6 (Grades 4-6)	= 4	Matthayom 1-6 (Grades 7-12)	= 1
		University 1-2	= 1

TOTAL: 17

TOTAL: 17

4. Number of years teaching English:

1 year = two teachers	10 years = three	22 years = one
2 years = three	12 years = one teacher	25 years = one
3 years = one	15 years = one	28 years = one teacher
4 years = one	17 years = one	30 years = three
6 years = two	18 years = one	37 years = one
7 years = one	20 years = six	no response = three

5. Do you use a computer in preparing your classes? yes (28) no (5)

7. Do you go online for information to use in teaching? yes (23) no (10)

(NOTE: there is no #6)

(These are two new questions which were not asked on the previous surveys. The numbers are not surprising given the ubiquity of computers and internet connections. Most of the respondents checked or circled "yes" in answer to these questions.)

Conference Ratings

Please rate this conference on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is poor and 10 is excellent.)

- A. Organization three 7's four 8's fourteen 9's & twelve 10's
- B. Location (WT Campus) one 6 one 7 eight 8's nine 9's & fourteen 10's
- C. Food two 8's three 9's & twenty-eight 10's
- D. Did you have fun?) one 5 one 6 eight 7's six 8's ten 9's & seven 10's
- E. Learning (Did you learn from attending?)
one 5 nine 7's thirteen 8's seven 9's & three 10's
- F. Overall experience five 7's twelve 8's nine 9's & seven 10's

Workshop Ratings

Keynote speech: "Meeting the ASEAN challenge"

Stephen Berry

- 1. How much of this was new to you? all (2) most (13) some (4) none (15)
- 2. How much of this will be useful to you? all (4) most (0) some (16) none (10)
- 3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? yes (28) no (5)

#1. Pronunciation in ESL

Norris Smith

- 1. How much of this material was new to you? all (0) most (10) some (20) none (2)
- 2. How much of this material will be useful to you with your classes?
all (2) most (14) some (17) none (0)
- 3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? yes (31) no (2)

#2. A Barrel Full of . . . Idioms!

Charles Emond

- 1. How much of this material was new to you? all (6) most (14) some (13) none (0)
- 2. How much of this material will be useful to you with your classes?

- all (4) most (15) some (10) none (0)**
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? **yes (30) no (0)**

#3. Roundtable Discussion

Webster students

1. How much of what you learned was new? **all (0) most (17) some (15) none (1)**
2. How much of this will be useful to you with your classes?
all (2) most (20) some (10) none (1)
3. Would you like to have more activities like this? **yes (30) no (2)**

#4. Tips to Improve English Using Online Resources

Kulavir Pipat

1. How much of this material was new? **all (6) most (11) some (12) none (1)**
2. How much of this material will be useful to you with your classes?
all (6) most (8) some (16) none (1)
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? **yes (31) no (2)**

#5. Using "BASIC" English in the ESL Classroom

James Hughes

1. How much of this material was new to you? **all (2) most (11) some (19) none (0)**
2. How much of this material will be useful to you with your classes?
all (2) most (12) some (17) none (1)
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? **yes (31) no (2)**

#6. Using Social Media to Teach Writing Skills

Allan Wichelman

1. How much of this material was new to you **all (2) most (11) some (13) none (1)**
2. How much of this material will be useful to you with your classes?
all (2) most (12) some (17) none (1)
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? **yes (30) no (3)**

#7. Playing the Game!

Charles Emond

1. How much of this material was new to you? **all (4) most (21) some (10) none (1)**
2. How much of this material will be useful to you with your classes?
all (5) most (18) some (7) none (0)
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? **yes (31) no (1)**

#8. Lesson Planning

Stephen Berry

1. How much of this material was new to you? **all (5) most (14) some (9) none (0)**
2. How much of this material will be useful to you with your classes?
all (5) most (17) some (6) none (0)
3. Would you like to have more information on this topic? **yes (28) no (4)**

(NOTE: the final section of the questionnaire on specific suggestions for the future is reported in the text above)