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Integrating MUN Perspectives

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Introduction

A common feature of MUN groups is that they have faculty advisors. Many such faculty advisors are content specialists in political science, economics, agriculture or law/jurisprudence. However, a growing number specialize in applied linguistics, specifically language learning. When working as a team, content specialists identify relevant source materials and ensure that the unit lessons include accurate and up-to-date content and methods of the discipline, while language specialists assure the pedagogical and linguistic quality of the materials, keeping in mind the special challenges of learning new content in a second language. The authors in this volume represent both types of faculty advisors. Although they are all successful in their respective teaching contexts, they do not work as content/language specialist teams.

The first three papers come from authors who live outside Japan; Ash Roy in India, Thomas Weiler in Germany and Andrea Paul (with Lori Zenuk-Nishide) in Australia. All three are long-time ardent supporters of the MUN movement and serve as faculty advisors. The first two authors are content specialists: Ash Roy—Social Science; Thomas Weiler, International Law. Andrea Paul's situation is different—she is a specialist in English language teaching and although she teaches in Australia, she got her first experiences with MUNs while teaching in Japan with her co-author Lori. Therefore she has more in common with the authors of the final three papers who are Japan-based (Todd Thorpe, Craig Smith, Lori Zenuk-Nishide, Donna Hurst Tatsuki). They identify themselves as specialists in English teaching but have developed knowledge and skills that enable them to prepare students for MUN simulations. This short paper will consider the contributions of each paper to the volume in the context of the authors' differing specialties with attention to the apparent intended audiences.

Commentary on "Flying Dragon vs Dancing Elephant" (Ash Narain Roy)

It is fitting that volume two in this journal series on Model United Nations simulations begins with a paper that examines the relationship between two countries that are likely to be central players in near future geopolitical dealings. Dr. Roy, the Director, Institute of Social Sciences, Delhi, eloquently provides the historic contexts and current directions that enable the reader to grasp the nature the on-going rivalries between China and India. In doing so he has presaged the conflicts and subsequent negotiations that will arise as a result of "their competing models of governance and world views." (Roy, this volume)

At first blush, this paper seems directed to student participants of MUNs in the future. It provides a parallel and intertwined historical overview of the two countries, showing their developments and reactions to each other from the first millennium to the present. However, it also offers teachers an excellent document that can be exploited in a number of ways. Not only can it be used for the traditional comprehension and language analysis, it can serve as a very well written model of a synopsis of background influences for a position paper. Also, the paper is a perfect example of the effective use of a rhetorical structure (comparison/contrast). The "dancing elephant" and "flying dragon" images furthermore provide a deeper level of illustration and aesthetic value. In sum, this paper is valuable both for its content and for its form.

Commentary on "National Model UN and Harvard World Model UN: a Comparison for Newcomers" (Thomas J. Weiler)

The author of the second paper in this volume uses his many years of experience with MUNs at the local level in his country (Germany) and at the international level in locations all around the world to offer readers an understanding and introduction to two of the largest and well known international MUNs: the National MUN (NMUN) which is always held in New York and the Harvard World MUN (HWMUN) which is held in a variety of locations around the world. His purpose is to provide readers with a realistic understanding of each of these MUNs so that they could make a more informed decision to attend or not.

The article's immediate value is for MUN planners as intended, of course, as it covers issues that may influence the decision to attend such as visa restrictions, degree of diversity, location, organizers, rules, etc. Both of these world-level MUNs are student-led so the descriptions of each event can offer information and inspiration to student planners. Pointing out that both organizations have advantages and drawbacks not only provides useful input, it may encourage an ambitious group to design its own world level MUN that incorporates the best of each.

Commentary on "Spoken Interaction through Discussion: Achievement Though a Focused Systemic-functional Approach" (Andrea Paul, Lori Zenuk-Nishide)

Like the first two, the first author of this paper also lives outside of Japan (in Australia) although she did teach in Japan for a number of years with her co-author and that is where she had her first exposure to MUNs. However, unlike the previous authors, Andrea and Lori are not content specialists of political science, economics or international law. Rather, like the authors of the following articles, they are applied linguists, language teaching specialists (as are all the remaining authors in the volume). So it is no surprise that this paper is structured very differently from those of the previous two. Furthermore, the target audience is other teachers, especially those engaged in helping students develop their discussion skills (including linguistically focused faculty advisors for MUN groups), and not MUN students.

Following the classic research paper format (Introduction, Review of Literature, Method, Results, Discussion/Conclusion) the authors report on the use of a test of discussion that allows examiners to evaluate the discussion participants' performances. As is the pattern of research papers, the procedures are described in such a way that another interested researcher (or teacher) could replicate this same assessment event with their own students. However, what is deeply interesting with this paper is that it gives potential for the activity called "MUN simulation" to become a means of language assessment. In other words, whereas language teaching is usually the means to the end (a more skilled participation in a MUN simulation), the end becomes the means to observe and evaluate authentic language use. Bravo!

Commentary on "Preparing Students for a Model UN" (Todd Thorpe)

This paper demonstrates how language/linguistics specialist teachers also have to strive to develop sufficient content-area expertise in order to guide students in their preparation for MUN events. Not only do they need to introduce students to the structure/workings of the UN and its rules of procedure, they need to guide students to resources about the country the student will represent and the issues/topics of current need of resolution/debate. The author describes how challenging it was for him to learn and teach simultaneously and he acknowledges that the preparation process (presumably both for him and for his students) continues to be hard work. He uses a marathon-running metaphor to convey the agony of preparation that is compensated for by the elation of a successful outcome.

For teachers who might decide to try this, the author provides comprehensive suggestions and online resources under the headings: Basic Information on the UN; Background Information on the Country; Information About the Issues; The Rules of Procedure for the Conference; Preparing Position Papers; Preparing Draft Resolutions and Making Amendments. Even student leaders can benefit from the paper, especially the appendices which consist of information that could form the basis of instructional handouts and step by step guides. These appendices are fruits of the author's many arduous years of preparation, which he has generously shared with us all.

Commentary on "Model United Nations Conferences for University Students in Japan: The Development of Self-regulated Learning " (Craig Smith)

Students, MUN organizers and faculty advisors are all potential audiences for this paper. It is difficult for faculty advisors/teachers to strike the right balance when collaborating with students to facilitate their MUN learning/preparation and yet to foster self-regulated learning. In Japan, many MUNs are student-led extracurricular events under the auspices of student UN associations with little or scant input from faculty advisors. The author of this paper explores ways that the faculty advisor can best contribute to student MUN preparation without stifling their independence and development of self-regulated learning (which he also refers to as team learning). He

does acknowledge that "the development of SRL skills without teacher intervention may be difficult for some students." (Smith, this volume)

The author sees room for faculty advisors to mediate as follows: providing guidance in practical aspects of running projects; helping students to articulate the value of their MUN experience to prospective employers; alerting students to ways that the research skills they have develop in MUN can be used in other thesis or research projects. His main position is that faculty advisors need to move from a stance of control to that of mediation. He proposes five innovative alternative MUN conferences that allow a more active role for faculty advisors to utilize the resources that they can contribute to scaffold, guide and facilitate student learning without usurping student control. Participation in these kinds of innovative MUNs may enhance students' abilities to participate more fully and satisfyingly in world level, large scale MUNs.

Commentary on "EFL Student Learning from a Model United Nations Simulation" (Lori Zenuk-Nishide, Donna Hurst Tatsuki)

This final paper reports on student reflections gathered by an online questionnaire after experiencing a 2-day MUN simulation in English and will be of interest to students, MUN organizers, researchers and faculty advisors alike. But even more importantly, the administration of such a questionnaire leads participants to reflect on their experiences and perhaps deepen their value. Reflection is an oft forgotten but highly important learning activity since "reflection is a way for us to recapture our experience in order to make sense of it, to learn from it, and to develop new understanding and appreciation [which] can lead to cognitive growth and ... inform our future actions." (Zenuk-Nishide & Tatsuki, this volume)

The other benefit of this paper (and this kind of research in general) is that it informs teachers and students of the areas that may consistently cause difficulties and therefore allow pre-emptive measures to be taken. For example the category "Discussion/Negotiating Skills" contained many things that quite easily could be incorporated as learning objectives into conventional language classes. All in all, a reflective component should become a standard part of the MUN experience.

Conclusion

Each of the six papers in this volume has something unique to offer to readers interested in preparing, managing or experiencing Model United Nations simulations. MUNs are an excellent way for students to develop communication skills, self-confidence and the discipline for life-long self-regulated learning. As such, school and college curricula may benefit by their inclusion or at the very least, student-organized groups should be more directly supported. The future ahead of us will require that more people (not just a ruling elite) be able to discuss and negotiate for the sake of their countries, communities and selves.