Towards Evidence-Based Practice for Teachers Helping Teachers in Laos

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This paper explores teacher education from the perspective of volunteer teachers on short visits to Lao secondary schools. Laos has been undergoing large-scale education reforms against a background of rapid economic changes since the 1990's. This paper looks at the effectiveness of a program involving one-on-one peer mentoring by volunteer teachers. The program was designed to address a call for a move towards communicative and student centered teaching in the State English Language curriculum. Implementing a more student-centered approach has proved difficult for many teachers due to poor resourcing and lack of relevant experience and knowledge. From 2009-2011, the Teachers Helping Teachers (THT) Laos program focused on classroom observation and dialogue with Lao teachers and trainees on teaching practice. The emphasis on pre- and post-observation dialogues represented a contrast with short-term programs where "foreign experts" give workshops off-site. This paper describes our program and our efforts to investigate its effectiveness.

本稿では、ラオスの中学校への短期訪問をもとに、ボランティア教師の視点から教員養成について論じる。1990年代以降、ラオスでは経済の急成長を背景に大規模な教育改革が行われてきた。本稿は、ボランティア教師による一対一のピア・メンタリングの有効性について検討する。同プログラムは国内の英語教育カリキュラムにおける、コミュニカティブかつ学習者中心のアプローチの要請に応じて計画されたが、経験や知識、リソースが十分でなかったため実現は困難であった。2009年から2011年にかけて、The Teacher Helping Teacher (THT) Laos programでは、教室観察や現地教師や実習生との対話に従事してきた。観察前後の対話に特に注目した結果、外国人専門家が現地外で実施するような短期間のワークショップとの違いが浮き彫りにされた。本稿は、同プログラム及び我々が行った介入の内容を記述し、その効果について考察する。

TEACHERS **Helping** Teachers (THT) is an NPO which takes experienced teachers from Japan to work with teachers in Laos for anything from 2 days to a month. Coming from our Japanese universities, with their well-stocked libraries and CALL rooms, to a Lao secondary school where three upper-school teenagers shared a textbook, the contrast was stark. Despite their dingy classrooms and lack of resources, the Lao teachers and teacher trainees had great energy and commitment. Trying to help them in their own context was exciting and challenging. Written evaluations from volunteers and teachers they observed in 2009-10 showed that the program was a source of inspiration to both visiting volunteers and Lao teachers. But, we wondered if the Lao teachers and trainees really changed their practices in response to our advice. Over the period 2009-11, the feedback from volunteers suggested that the same suggestions were being made each year. Did that mean the program was not working? Getting more information about which suggestions were taken up by the teachers

might help our team to be more effective as mentors. We started to think about working towards a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of observation-based peer mentoring. This paper is based on the observations of three people, Chris Ruddenklau, the director of the THT Lao program, and two volunteers, Ellen Head and Mark Holst, who went to Laos for the first time in 2011. We hope that our reflections in this paper will be useful for sharing information about this and similar programs. The paper gives essential contextual information before describing how the effectiveness of short-term peer mentoring could be further examined. We summarise our suggestions and the changes we observed in a table which draws on our observation data. We also will look at one particular school for evidence of how our suggestions were implemented. Finally we discuss how this kind of information might be gathered and shared appropriately in future.

Background

Setting and Participants

Nonesaath School is 19 km south west of Vientiane. It is a combined lower and upper secondary school which has 1,500 students in seven year groups (approximately 200 students per year; and around 40 students per class). Although the school buildings are basic, Nonesaath is known as an excellent country school, with well above average scores in national test results and above average numbers staying on to upper secondary. This success seems to be due to the Principal of the school, Mr Bounchan, whose dynamic presence is felt from the first morning message broadcast across the campus on loudspeakers, to the evening parties he holds periodically for teachers and volunteers and the weekend visits to students families and homes by both himself and his teaching staff. He recently won an award for the most innovative approach to maths teaching in the Vientiane area, using ideas he picked up while observing one of the THT volunteers' workshops.

The teachers and trainee-teachers at the school are markedly up-beat about self-improvement based on learning new "techniques". This buzzword emerged from a Lao teacher in the school in 2009 and has since been frequently used by participants in the program. One Lao teacher said, "Teach us techniques. If we have techniques, we can teach well, even without textbooks." These comments, intended as compliments to THT, may not count as hard evidence but they show the positive climate that has been established at the school over several years. Several of the teachers we have worked with over the years have reported to Ruddenklau that this program has inspired them to remain in teaching despite the fact that their English skills could provide them with more lucrative careers in other occupations.

At the centre of the Lao THT network is Chris Ruddenklau. Ruddenklau has taught in Thailand and has spent extended periods in Laos. Consequently, he has built up a network of contacts and a rapport with Lao culture without which the program would be impossible. He has co-ordinated the program since its start in 2009. Although Japan-based, he initially found opportunities to work in Laos by liaising with WIG (Lao Women`s International Group) and institutions such as the National University of Laos, Lao American College,Vientiane College and various secondary schools. He interviews and briefs all volunteers prior to their leaving Japan. He takes responsibility for much of the logistics within Laos, keeping in daily contact with the school representatives and with each volunteer.

Both of the volunteers in 2011 had worked with teacher-trainees as part of their regular positions in Japan. Mark Holst supervised teaching practices and provided input sessions for Junior and Senior High school trainees working towards Japanese prefectural board of education teaching license require-

ments. Ellen Head taught English on a pre-service course for undergraduate Elementary School teacher trainees in Japan. The course featured extensive peer teaching and self-evaluation. Therefore both Holst and Head brought relevant experience to their role as volunteers, even though they had not been to Laos before. They each spent one week visiting Nonesaath School.

The Lao participants in the scheme included 12 teacher trainees in the fourth year of a pre-service course, in the middle of their three-month teaching practice. Roughly half of them were female and all lived in Vientiane Province. Four were students at a teacher training college while eight were students at the more prestigious National University of Laos. The university students' level of English was sufficient for most of them to understand and talk about pedagogic issues in English. The level of teacher training college students was lower. The whole group supported each other by translating for each other and attending each other's classes as observers or team teachers. The teachers' room in which students did their preparation was dark and crowded, with no electric light and dust over everything. However the atmosphere was supportive, focused and lively.

In addition to these teacher trainees, we also worked with experienced Lao teachers who lacked confidence in their English. When we observed their classes, they were businesslike but also extremely hampered by their lack of conversational English skills. One teacher commented "I can do Book 1 but I can't do Book 2 at all!" What she meant was that she has memorized the translation in Laos of the text and vocabulary for Book 1. In her teaching, it meant that she lacked the confidence and flexibility to cope with setting up and monitoring practice activities in English beyond simple repetition. The training needs of experienced teachers with low English proficiency are clearly different from those of the inexperienced but proficient trainees. In the former case, in-service training to upgrade her English, and model lessons demonstrating routines, which can be imitated verbatim, such as chants or drills, may be more useful than observation by someone who cannot give feedback in Lao. At any rate, in 2011, the bulk of our time was spent working with the trainee teachers.

Education Reform in Laos

In Laos both teacher education and English language education have been the focus of strenuous efforts at reform at a national level. As a developing country, Laos has many serious problems. In 2000 the percentage of the budget spent on education was the lowest in Asia at 7% of the GDP and has risen gradually to 14% in 2006. Education policy initially focused on school enrollment, teacher supply and buildings. Changes in the political regime and low salaries contributed to many teachers and middle class white collar workers leaving Laos, leading to teacher shortages. There are still serious concerns about teacher qualifications and supply in rural areas (Gannicot & Tibi, 2009). Large class sizes, multi-level classes and high drop-out rates at the end of lower secondary school compound the problem. The language of education is Lao, but many students speak other languages as their mother tongue. This means that students, particularly females in rural areas, lack Lao literacy and numeracy skills. Resources such as textbooks are in short supply. Despite difficulties with basic logistics, a recent World Bank sponsored report also refers to the need to develop more learner-centered teaching:

> Students are mostly passive recipients of instruction; while there is some opportunity for copying exercises there is comparatively little time devoted to practical exercises or application of knowledge. Efforts could be channeled into modernizing the pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula to better equip teachers with child-centered teaching and learning methodologies (Benveniste, Marshall, & Santibañez, 2007, p. xii).

Early reform documents similarly refer to student-centered education as early as 1994 (Teacher Development Centre, 1994). However, it is not surprising that change has been difficult to achieve. According to Hallinger (2010), the top-down nature of reform has been observed to be one of the biggest barriers to education reform in Asian countries. Wedell (2005) also emphasizes the need for training initiatives to be compatible with classroom conditions and resources, among other conditions. Government plans such as the Teacher Education Strategy Action Plan (2001-10) call for improvements in teacher training at both pre-service and in-service levels (Gannicott & Tibi, 2009). However, rapidly developing policies carry the risk of confusing everyone. One teacher-trainee commented as follows:

> Every year they change the system. For example, to make lesson plans I had learned two ways on the same course so it made me confused when I trained. The course I studied at university was 5 years but now it is 4 years. (Teacher-Trainee D.)

In such a situation, bringing in volunteers from outside might simply make the situation even more chaotic, imposing yet another way of doing things, by people who are unfamiliar with the local context.

The Laos THT program in 2009, 2010 and 2011 used a method developed by Chris Ruddenklau in collaboration with a local retired teacher. Ruddenklau felt that seminars alone were not the most effective way to enhance teachers' skills in a way that was relevant and usable in the local context. Instead, by working one on one with teachers, working with their limited resources and their curriculum, volunteers could focus on practical skills and techniques which could be implemented immediately. This process might have more direct impact than more "top-down" methods.

As the program developed, volunteers offered on-site workshop sessions on topics suggested by local teachers, such as planning communicative lessons based on the government textbook. Approximately two thirds of the time was spent on observation and feedback, sometimes with one teacher or trainee, sometimes with a pair or a group who had all observed one member. Ruddenklau developed the "Seven Steps" procedure as a basis for contracts between volunteers and observed teachers. All volunteers were briefed about using these steps but were encouraged to use them flexibly according to the circumstances. The steps are framed using the imperative with the observed teacher as "you".

1. Meet with the observer, form a relationship. (Home stay with the teacher.)
2. Share your lesson plan.
3. Teach, and the observer will join the class to watch.
4. Talk with the observer after the class.
5. Co-operatively develop a lesson plan using one new teaching technique.
6. Try out the new technique or activity in a future lesson.
7. Evaluate cooperatively: Is this technique useful in this context?

This procedure facilitates a relationship of autonomy and equality between the mentor and teacher (Balcikanli, 2009). The usefulness of an approach which invites the Laos teacher into partnership with the mentor was apparent throughout the time that volunteers worked in the school. Particularly in the case of experienced but non-proficient teachers, volunteers were often asked to take over the class and teach for them. Having "Seven Steps" to refer to made it easier to hand responsibility back quickly to the class teacher. In the case of trainee teachers, we often did not get to plan with and observe the same students. However there was some consistency of approach because we were committed to the same methodology and we perceived the same problems in the typical Lao English lesson.

A typical lesson was circumscribed by various challenges. For example, the lack of text books led teachers to depend on the blackboard. Much precious time was spent copying vocabulary lists and text-book dialogues on to the board, rather than on making meaning with those dialogues. Errors crept into the text due to imperfect copying. The board was difficult to read because it was pitted and the room was dark. Many teachers and trainees spent a great deal of time, sometimes the whole lesson, on drilling vocabulary, perhaps because they did not feel competent to deal with longer utterances. The teachers and trainees were extremely self-conscious about their pronunciation and would happily have spent the whole 90 minutes repeating sounds made by the "authentic" foreign volunteers. It is true that there are many phonetic and intonation differences between English and Lao. On the other hand the teachers' obsession with correct pronunciation seemed to be an attempt to step out of the limelight. Due to a lack of training in communicative techniques and a lack of fluency in English, the teachers and trainees were not able to explain very much in English. They tended to stay in their comfort zone, represented by writing vocabulary on the board, translating it into Laos, and drilling the same words for an entire lesson. However, it seemed that our observations and feedback did have some impact on this, as will be explained below.

Despite the difficulties explained above, we observed some attempts to make the classes more communicative, which, although very basic, were being carried out in every class. The main feature of these attempts was the use of greetings and basic instructions in English. All teachers did their best to give the basic instructions in English: "Listen to me", "Listen and repeat", "Look at me", "Close your book", "Are you finished?" Also, students began and ended all classes with greetings in English: "Good morning teacher", "Thank you teacher." After the initial greetings the teacher asked volunteers to say the date in English, which he/she wrote on the board. Use of the target language as the medium of instruction is recognized to be helpful for the development of communicative listening skills due to the fact that the communicative exchange has a tangible result (Edstrom, 2004, p. 26). The use of classroom English may represent an effective implementation of the Teacher Education Strategy Action Plan.

Another feature of classroom practice which seemed to indicate an awareness that teaching should be more learner-centred was that children were often called to the board to participate in the instruction of their peers by writing on the board, by reading words aloud off the board, or by quizzing their classmates. Sometimes two children would do this at the same time, to reduce their shyness. In practice they seldom got beyond the level of checking single words, but the fact that the children were active and teachers were attempting to share power in the class was worthy of note. In addition, the standardized text-books, where available, have clearly been designed to promote communicative language teaching. They feature topics which seem fairly relevant to students' lives and they have a reasonable balance of dialogues and reading texts.

Sharing Data From Brief Training Encounters

The next section deals with how each of the volunteers in February/March 2011 worked with observed teachers and how our suggestions were taken up. Holst kept records by videoing and journalling, Head by recording detailed classroom observations in a notebook in real time. When we reflected together afterwards, we discovered that we had often addressed similar points, because of the nature of the typical Lao English classes we observed.

As mentioned above, it was sometimes difficult to set up a situation where the same observer worked with a trainee teacher before, during and after their class. However, due to the

fact that all the students were using the Laos national textbook series and there were several classes at each level, we did observe the same lesson content several times, and trainee teachers had the chance to observe a peer teaching a particular lesson and hear the feedback given to their peer before they taught it themselves. Thus we could see changes in techniques used in a particular lesson, spreading through the trainee teachers from person to person as one student received feedback. The teaching practice is the culmination of nearly 4 years of study, which means that the students knew and trusted each other. The fact that the trainees prepared in a rather small room, often working in pairs, around the same table, helped to foster an atmosphere of collaboration.

Adoption of New Techniques

During observations, Head usually made a plan of the classroom, showing where students were sitting and marking particular students on the plan as they contributed to the lesson. She recorded the time and some of the classroom discourse, using rough categories such as "teacher explaining in Lao", "students speaking chorally in English" and so on. She also noted what was written on the blackboard at a particular time. On the other side of the notebook separated from her classroom notes by a big box, she wrote her suggestions for what she would do at this stage in the lesson if she were teaching it. After the lesson, these notes were shared with trainees, paying particular attention to the good points (such as rapport and classroom control, which were obviously important concerns for these novice teachers) and making one or two suggestions for activities which could be done when teaching the same topic in a future class. This approach was based on years of peer-observation and readings such as John Fanselow's *Breaking Rules* (Fanselow, 1987). Since trainees tended to teach several classes at the same level, dealing with the same structures and material, there was some opportunity to see if the suggestions were adopted. As the students often prepared together and listened to each others' feedback, we noticed situations where one trainee was implementing suggestions which had been made to another person or by a different volunteer. We discovered this by comparing notes retrospectively. We also discovered that our suggestions were somewhat similar in their broad import.

Our evidence comprised video clips and observation notes from classes on March 14th-17th (Head) and March 19th (Holst). We have quantified these in Table 1. To make the table, we have simply pulled out recommendations which were noted in the observation notes and which we recall drawing attention to in a planning or feedback session. Table 1 shows our suggestions, followed by the date and examples of lessons when the suggestions were carried out.

Table 1. Summary of Techniques Suggested by Volunteers and How They Were Picked Up

Technique	Used by trainees* (Y / N / ?)
Eliciting rather than telling the meaning of vocabulary	Y + 3/17/11 Lesson topic: Growing Rice Trainee teacher Mr V
Teaching vocabulary through pictures or realia rather than translation	Y +++3/16/11 Lesson topic: likes and dislikes(food) Trainee teacher Ms W 3/17/11 Lesson topic: zoo animals Trainee teacher Ms N 3/18/11 Lesson topic: irregular plurals Trainee teachers Mr S and Ms N
Using fast-paced, frequent checks while teaching a long list of vocabulary	Y + 3/17/11 Lesson topic: growing rice Trainee teacher Mr V

Technique	Used by trainees* (Y / N / ?)
Using activities rather than only vocabulary teaching	Y+ 3/16/11 Lesson topic: likes and dislikes (food) Ms We: chinese whispers race game
Setting up pair work	Y + 3/17/11 Lesson topic: growing rice Mr V used open pairs
Monitoring pair work	Y 3/16/11 Lesson topic: likes and dislikes (food) Ms We
Setting up group work	Y 3/17/11 Lesson topic: growing rice Mr V students shared a text, read aloud and translated in group
Monitoring group work	? 3/17/11 Lesson topic growing rice Mr V
Using flash cards with written words to set up a drill	N
Reducing the amount of explanation in L1	Y 3/17/11 Lesson topic: growing rice Mr V and generally
Using English questions to relate the topic to students' lives	? 3/17/11 Lesson topic: growing rice Mr V
Using teacher's personal story in English to relate topic to real life	Y 3/15/11 Lesson topic: shopping (irregular plurals) Ms Wa
Making sentences using vocabulary target words	Y 3/17/11 Lesson topic: growing rice Mr V
Using dictation of short sentences to focus on target sentences	N
Making a poster to introduce a reading passage	Y 3/15/11 Lesson topic: school rules Ms K

Y +++ = yes, noticed more than 10 times in observation notes or video, being done by two or more teachers or trainees

Y + = noticed 3-10 times in observation notes or video, done by more than one teacher or trainee

Y = noticed once in observation notes or video

N = no

? = not clear whether what we noticed was related to our suggestions

* According to the observation notes of the mentors

Since there is the opportunity to work at Nonesaath annually with teacher trainees, it might be interesting in the future to survey or interview teacher trainees and teachers about which techniques they actually incorporated into their practice long term, and why. This would give us feedback which could help us to provide better focused mentoring.

To illustrate our working method in more detail we will focus on a lesson about rice cultivation that used the passive voice, and which happened to be seen by both volunteers and several of the teacher trainees. This lesson was from the 5th year textbook (intended for 15 and 16 year olds), in other words a relatively high level. It was explained to us that as students progress through the levels the gap between the top and the bottom of the class gets progressively bigger due to the fact that some students don't have the textbook and have not really learned the vocabulary and grammar of previous years. Most students were sharing one copy of the book between three, and some did not have the book at all. Two students were teaching the class, one in charge of warming-up and logistics and the other in charge of teaching new content. The pattern of the lesson was typical in that the whole hour was taken up with explaining vocabulary.

During the class the teacher trainee called on us as native speakers to demonstrate the correct pronunciation. In the feedback session we worked in two groups, with Head and Holst switching groups at half time. In this way all trainees had about 25 minutes with each of us, thus getting two perspectives on the lesson. Both groups discussed how to deal with a reading

class when not all students have the textbook. We provided several suggestions such as making a poster or dictating key sentences (or true/false sentences) so that all students could write them down. Holst suggested forming groups for reading aloud, sharing a book. We recommended teaching vocabulary using pictures or gestures rather than translation, and changing the order in which vocabulary elements were reviewed to provide variety. Head wanted the trainees to make links to their students' lives by personalization questions such as "Do you like rice? Do you know anyone who grows rice?" Head encouraged students not to worry about pronunciation and to focus on meaning and communication. This was a lot for students to take in but they appeared receptive and excited about implementing these new ideas.

We had a chance to see the same lesson later in the week taught by another member of the group of trainees. He had changed the lesson, using some of our suggestions and other ideas of his own. First of all, he used a drawing and some paraphrases to introduce some of the vocabulary. When he checked the vocabulary on the board he went through the list first from top to bottom, then in reverse order. After introducing vocabulary, he told students to make groups of six (thus getting around the shortage of textbooks) and read aloud one by one translating the text into Laos. He set a deadline of 15 minutes. When the time was up he had students copy true and false sentences from the board and read them aloud to each other. Finally, he checked the pair work by getting students to read and say true or false before the whole class. He used short but significant classroom commands in English, such as "The same thing" (meaning, "Now please do what I have just done" and "Listen to them" ("to your classmates"). The class ran slightly over time but students were very interested and attentive.

Working as volunteers in a developing country carries a degree of privilege in terms of being protected from the working conditions for normal teachers in the country and also choice of what to do. Up to now THT has provided workshops for teachers, model lessons, and classroom observation and feedback. Targeting these methods appropriately in such a way as to make the most beneficial impact is a dynamic, on-going process. For example, one volunteer, Lori Parish, conducted workshops on the lexical approach over 5 days in 2010 and 2011. Observing in school after the workshops, she estimated that about 25% of the workshop participants were implementing the approach in subsequent lessons (Parish, 2011).

In spring 2011, "guest lectures" introducing Japanese culture in English were also offered by two volunteers. It is interesting to speculate on the effect on teachers/teacher trainees and students of seeing a model class with a guest teacher as opposed to having an observer join the class. During the period of doing observation and feedback using "seven steps", staying consistent with the philosophy of empowering teachers at grass-roots level, we tended to resist invitations to teach. On the other hand, during one lesson, some of the more forward students asked us questions and we felt compromised. Wouldn't it be better to step into the limelight and make ourselves the focus of a lesson, using our own local context as the content of a really communicative lesson? In the future we would like to observe the kind of interactions that happen in guest-lectures and especially in the classes following a full-frontal guest lecture, and compare them with the interactions in a follow-up class with a teacher who has had input through planning, observation and feedback.

A Suggested Framework for Brief, Observation-Based Mentoring

While we recognize that the informal nature of our position as volunteers in Nonesaath necessitates flexible ways of working, by keeping and sharing records of our observations, we have been able to learn something about what was effective and not

effective in terms of what trainee teachers were ready to implement given their current level of understanding and experience. The importance of a pre- and post-observation meeting is often emphasized in literature on training observations, and we feel this to be desirable, although, as mentioned at the start, it might not always be possible. Having the "Seven Steps" written down clearly on a paper which could be referred to in the meetings was very useful. Explaining the steps provided an ice-breaker which facilitated the relationship between the observer and observed, while making it very clear that the observed teacher was in a position of choice about whether to adopt new techniques or not.

The steps also provide clarity and focus for the observer, who might well be suffering from culture shock and confusion in the busy, noisy environment of the Lao school. The observers had complete freedom about how to record and communicate their observations. This seems appropriate given that the volunteer observers have various different resources and interests. Videoed feedback allows teachers to see themselves speaking English and performing in the teacher-role, which is often an empowering experience (Murphey, Chen, & Chin Li, 2005). Detailed observation schedules showing the classroom layout and time-allocation are useful for explaining the various kinds of interaction that take place in a lesson. Volunteers should make their observations available to the observed teachers and record data in a format which is easily understood by the observed. There should be a de-briefing session involving the same teacher who co-planned and observed the class, if at all possible. Where possible, it would be interesting to pool observations and sift them for changes that were common across several trainees.

This raises the question of whether it would be desirable to use the same format for recording our observations. We feel that the use of a standardized format for observations seems too prescriptive, given that the emphasis of the whole program is on autonomous sharing between colleagues. To get further data about the effectiveness of our interventions, instruments such as a standardized questionnaire translated into Lao might be helpful at the end of each season. Among other issues, the focus would be on the particular techniques which observed teacher wanted to adopt and on her perceptions about her further training needs. The possibility of running workshops in tandem with observation has already been explored to some extent. Workshops based on teachers' requests or needs perceived by volunteers produced the best feedback from both volunteers and Lao teachers.

In practice, the flexibility of the program and its members is probably one of the reasons for its success, and should not be sacrificed to any rigid exercise in ticking boxes. Although some volunteers have suggested tracking interactions between volunteers and individual teachers (Asaba & Marlowe, 2011), it is intimidating enough for teachers to be observed by a native speaker whom they have never met before, without feeling that their performance is going on record. Teachers may be very sensitive because the government are considering monitoring teachers' performance and already have profiles of 25,000 primary teachers including information about ideology and character (Benveniste et al., 2008, p.106). In contrast, we would wish our program to remain informal. Respecting the confidentiality of each teacher is particularly important. We want to provide a model which honors the process of planning and reflection by devoting shared time to it wherever possible. Continuity is important but must be emphasized first through the personal relationships between volunteers and teachers rather than through records. Using transparent methods of record keeping and sharing records with teachers will help to build trust between teachers and volunteer observers. We hope that our experiences related here will encourage others to be optimistic about the effectiveness of in-service, on-site mentoring programs and also to think about the way in which volunteers'

specific findings have been and might in the future be shared and followed up from year to year, in the case of an annual program such as THT.

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Bio Data

Ellen Head has taught EFL since 1987 and has worked in Japan since 2000. Currently she teaches at Kansai Gaidai University. Her research interests include learner development, teacher development and the connections between them.

Mark Holst teaches English language and sociolinguistics to undergraduate and graduate students at Otaru University of Commerce. He has a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Edinburgh University, for which he carried out an empirical study of the discourse of Japanese doctor-patient communication. His current research interest is in developing student-centred English language teaching at Japanese high schools.

Chris Ruddenklau is an experienced teacher having taught in New Zealand, Thailand, Japan and Laos. Currently he teaches English at Kindai University. In 2010 he was a plenary speaker at Lao TESOL. His current research interest is in developing and coordinating a successful teacher development, peer-mentoring program in Laos.

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Appendix A

Classroom observation notes (Ellen Head) Teacher trainee W from Bounkern Teacher Training College at Nonesaath, March 14th 2011

11.09

(Introduces observer in Lao)

(Great rapport with kids)

W: What day today? What date? What month? What year?
W: So today we are going to do about singular and plural nouns.
W: Are you shopping? Yes or no?
W: I like shopping. I bought Lao skirt and banana and apples.

(Personalized! Good!)

Writing on board: Lesson 1 Countable nouns and uncountable nouns. C and U

W: What does it mean in Lao?

(kids chorus the reply)
(She builds up a list on the board.)

W: Do you know how to spell?
W: Now listen to me, repeat after me.
W: Bench
W: What else?
W: Fan
W: Ask What's this? (giving clues in Lao)
W: Pen ruler pencil
W: Explain in Lao
W: Desk
W: How about uncountable noun

(she writes on the other side of the board)

W: Tell them louder! One more time!

W: Hair water rice star? Sand milk coffee sugar tea
W: Nan de boudai Anhom tia
W: Raise your hand
W: Sand

11.20
(She reads the words over repeating each word)

(it is not interactive)

W: Listen to me, countable nouns, repeat after me,

They chorus

W: Again

(give them more challenge?)

(She speeds up (?teach with collocation, a lot of?) She gestures to r and l. One group only do it on their own, then each section do it. She doesn't make eye contact til they finish – uses prompt/eyecontact if they have a difficulty. She prompts applause.
Introduces explanation in Lao, tells them to copy the list)

Writing on the board: Say and write
*singular *plural
Book books
1 cow
2 desk

W: Have you finished copying? Yes or no?

11.33
(calls student to clean the board (in Lao))

3 foot feet
Bus buses
Day
Boy
Child children
Man

Writes on other side of board Copy. Some are finished. She is chatting

W: OK finished?

Gives instructions in Lao, she asks students to write on the board

Student asks me: What is name?

Picking two at a time.

11.42
Picking students to write on board.

Student asks me:Where are you from?

Teacher points and they repeat
She explains grammar rule in Lao

W: Listen book books
Cow cows

They repeat

Post class Suggestion for one point feedback:
Try to use the words in a sentence
I want a/some.....

There are a lot of....

Increase the challenge: use double speed repeats

Vary the pattern when you drill: Teacher: foot, feet (She says singular, they say plural); Also try the pattern where she says plural, they say singular