Foreign language education can be looked at either as a science or as an art. Personally, I believe that it has strong elements of both, but Bill Young, author of *English as Spoken Art*, obviously is firmly in the teaching as art camp. The word ‘art’ is featured in the title of this textbook, which he wrote specifically for his college EFL classes here in Japan. Art work (mostly in the form of Young and his students in bars or other exotic locations) is featured throughout the book, and the themes presented are almost entirely of an artistic nature. The preface is even a quote from Ernest Hemingway, Nobel Laureate in Literature!

In foreign language teaching, the debate about art versus science is not really focused on the layout or content of a given text, but rather on philosophical distinctions. Science is thought of as logical, precise, and objective, built up over generations in a search for universal truth. Art, on the other hand, is unique, creative, and subjective. Although there are certainly schools of art, art is the creative process of the individual. Science is the work of groups, thinking together while following similar paths. In the scientific view of teaching, the methodology together with the materials dictate the pace and content of the class. In the artistic view, it is the teacher, together with the materials he has created, that determine what goes on in the classroom.

A good example of the purely scientific approach to the EFL class in Japan might be *New Dynamic English*, a CALL course previously discussed in these pages (Redfield & Campbell, 1999). In *NDE*, the student works directly with the program in front of the computer screen. Although he has a choice of materials and order of activities, each student faces the same screens, hears the same voices, and manipulates the same buttons to achieve single, correct responses. The program is based on sound learning principles; a progression from easy to hard, repetition and recycling, listening before speaking, reading, and writing. In *NDE* the instructor is secondary to the materials, and acts more as a technician than any thing else.

Bill Young’s *English as Spoken Art* is the teacher as artist taken to the extreme. The book is divided into six chapters, none of which resemble the previous or subsequent chapters. There is no progression, either in structure, length, or difficulty of activities. I guess (because with *English as Spoken Art* all the reviewer can really do is guess, there is no index, no explanatory preface, no teacher’s notes, and little or no apparent organization to the book at all) one would call this a theme-based syllabus. The themes presented are Conversational fluency, En route to thinking in English, Music and media, World travel, Movies, Magazine articles, TOEFL Boosters, and Analytical thinking. Each chapter is unique, but typical sections include long, 2-3 page model conversations, long, seemingly impossible cloze exercises, long lists of questions
for the Japanese student to memorize and then presumably use when encountering an English speaking foreigner, long readings (mostly introducing foreign locations), culture tips, cultural materials gleaned from movies, books, newspapers, menus, etc., grammar tips, in the form of what not to say (Young co-authored *Error Free English*), and photos of the author. It is a chaotic work, a hodgepodge of ideas, authentic materials, art work, and ad hoc activities, far indeed from the precision found in more scientifically designed texts.

Referring back to *NDE*, that is a program that all learners can benefit from (see Redfield for a formal analysis of *NDE*) and virtually anyone can teach. *English as a Spoken Art*, on the other hand, seems both impossible to learn from and to teach. The level is well beyond, in point of linguistic difficulty, anything that the learners at Shukugawa and Hannan (schools where Young used the textbook) are capable of. And speaking as a language instructor with over twenty-five years experience (in Europe, the Middle East, the Americas, Southeast Asia and Japan), and one who has used and successfully adapted literally scores of texts over that period, I can categorically declare that not one in a hundred EFL instructors could make either heads or tails out of *English as a Spoken Art*. The exception, of course, would be the author himself. And this brings us to the problem of self-published EFL texts, which is what *English as a Spoken Art* is (the 'alimono' in Alimono Publications refers to the street Young lives on in Hawaii).

There are basically three ways of getting an EFL text published. The first is to be commissioned by a publisher to write a text. This is for professional authors with a proven track record. The second is to write the text first, then submit it to publishers. This is how most materials developers get started. And the third is to write a text and publish it yourself. This is what Bill Young and a number of other EFL instructors in Japan have done (see Redfield for reviews on other self-published texts). At its most basic, these instructors write up their own lessons, have them published by a vanity press, and then sell the textbooks to their students, to be used in their own college classes. For instructors at the art end of the science-art continuum, this is probably the only way to get published, and also of course to derive financial gain from the creative materials development process.

The trouble with self-published texts is that there is no built-in quality control. When you submit your work, usually the results of creating lessons for your own classes, the publisher will then begin the task of editing the work, negotiating with the authors, offering suggestions, and evaluating subsequent drafts of the material. This offers a bit of quality control, insuring that the book meets certain standards. The process takes a unique work, the product of an author's own experiences teaching his own particular classes, and turns it into a more universally usable text, a text that can be used by different classes and by different instructors. The self-produced texts does not go through any of this. It remains a unique work, suitable (perhaps) for a single instructor working in a particular situation.

I would like to finish up this review by looking at the author, the whole idea of unique, self-published texts, and the professionalizing of EFL teaching in Japan.

According to the full page self advertisement (in the form of *About the author*) found inside the back cover of the book, Mr. Young has travelled extensively (a fact that is also apparent from glancing at the contents of the textbook), learned French and Spanish, and held any number of interesting, temporary jobs. The fact that he splits his time between Kyoto and Hawaii
is also indicative. In sum, Mr. Young is the typical hippie traveller, having been everywhere, done everything (including selling trinkets bought in Guatemala and Bali to pay for graduate school), and gone native on several occasions, most notably in France. As such, he is probably a uniquely interesting language teacher, with a wealth of stories to tell his students. What he is not is an EFL professional. People like Bill Young can make excellent conversation teachers, adding spice to a language program. They cannot be trusted however, to do any of the myriad of other things vital to language programs, such as designing curriculum, writing syllabus and lesson plans, making and evaluating assessment instruments, participating in teacher education and development, and more relevant here, writing effective teaching materials.

Self-published texts, of which *English as Spoken Art* is an extreme example, are invariably amateur efforts that do little to help our students and nothing for the profession (except at times to give EFL a bad name). At best, they may be a vehicle to allow unique individuals to better use their personal experiences in class. At worst, they are a craven effort to extort money from the system, and to enrich the author at the expense of education. There is room for unique individuals in a language program, for language teaching is both science and art. There is less room for self published texts, although the two sometimes go together, as in the present case.

What is worrying to this reviewer, is that people like Bill Young still abound in Japanese EFL, with their self-published texts that only do their bank account any good. In the '70 and '80 these kind of teachers were the norm. One can only hope that they are a dying breed, having been replaced by professional EFL practitioners, ones who have also travelled and speak foreign languages but who have paid their professional dues and base their teaching and materials development on sound educational principles, combining the best of art and science.

References