Introduction
The purpose of this paper is to argue for the inclusion of slang in the ESL/EFL classroom and textbooks. Slang is realia and authentic and should therefore be taught to students who want to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the English language as spoken by native English speakers. Many English language learners often express frustration at not being able to follow the slang, jargon, colloquialisms and idioms ubiquitous in the conversations of native English speakers. Therefore, logically, it seems, an attempt should be made to introduce students to some of the more common slang expressions used by native English speakers.

What is Slang?
Dalzell & Victor (2008) define slang as “... slangy jargon, a colloquialism, an acronym, an initialism, a vulgarism or a catchphrase. In all instances, an entry imparts a message beyond the text and literal meaning” (p. ix). A colloquialism is a slang term that makes its way into the mainstream. In other words, it is a subculture term that is now in wide usage. An example would be the word “cool.” Some researchers say slang originated as a secret language = slanguage (American Webster Dictionary, 2000), particularly among subcultures concerned mostly with crime, sex, drugs and music. War, especially unpopular wars, also appears to breed slang terms. In short, slang or slanguage as it is known among linguists – perhaps they could be called slanguists – in all likelihood began with the beginnings of English itself and stems from the desire to amuse and abuse. Some linguists suspect the name is derived from the Scandinavian word slengenamn. The Oxford English Dictionary discounts this based on dates and early associations (Harper, 2001).

Not all slang words are derived from unscrupulous activities. Music, sports, and many forms of entertainment have also been rich sources of slang. How often have we heard the phrase “hitting a home run” to talk about one's performance on a test? There is no denying the value of slang. Slang serves different purposes:

- It's fun. It's got oomph, zip, zap and zing. One can high step it.
- It's amusing. It's got razzle. One can yok and yak. It cops the laughs.
- It dares to be different. *It is not from this joint. One can get all hot for it.*
- It paints a picture. *It ups one's game.*
- It's surprising, even shocking. *It's a spine-tingler, or a snorter.*
- It's to the point and refreshing. *It's not as daft as one looks.*
- It beautifies the language. *It angels the gobbledygook.*
- It gives scope and description, solidifying abstractions. *It's in the groove, not hell west and crooked.*
- It plays down the seriousness of a situation. *It makes everything all fine and dandy.*
- It creates intimacy. *It rubs the gonads. It plays with one's mojo, dig?*
- It's inclusive. *It makes one a part of the crew, the wise guys, the firm, the push, a made man.*
- It's fashionable. *It makes one a cool cat, a hipster.*
- It can be a hidden language all its own. *It can whitewash, keep the peep.*

Slang is generally associated with oral rather than written speech; however, there are exceptions. For example, some linguists have argued that SMS texting is a type of slang (Slang, Wikipedia, 2009). Informal letters and emails among friends are also frequently characterized by slang. That said, for the most part, it could be argued that writing tends to be governed by more formal conventions and rules than the spoken word.

**Neglect of slang in the EFL Classroom**

*Among Teachers*

No doubt some English teachers will wince at the idea of including slang in English language teaching, adhering, instead, to the belief that English is being corrupted, and that it must maintain structure and formality, and operate within the bounds of what is well-established. However, this fails to take into consideration how English has evolved. None of us today speaks in the words of Shakespeare: “Here thou I go forth.” Today we would say, “Let's go” or “I'm leaving” or “I'm outta here” or “Let's make tracks.”

*In Textbooks*

English textbooks often fail to take advantage of informal English and slang and steer too often into the realm of proper, sober English. Too often sterile, stagnant language is the norm:
“Hello, Mary. How are you?”
“Hello, Frank. I am fine. Are you going to the concert tonight?”
“Yes, Mary. I am going. Will I see you there?”
“Yes, Frank. I will be attending around 7 p.m."
“I am delighted to hear that, Mary. Take care. Good bye.”

American teenagers would be full of scorn and reprehension for such a conversation because it is stiff, guarded and unnatural. It is not authentic. Yet this is what many textbooks offer second language learners. Even if the sentence structures are correct, they sound wrong to the ear of a native language speaker. A more realistic conversation would go something like this:

“Hey, Mar, what's up?”
“Hey, Frankie. Not much. You catching the show tonight?”
“Yeah, wild horses couldn't drag me away. I'll be there at seven.”
“Cool. See ya there. Ciao.”
“See ya, Mar.”

This is real. This is authentic. People talk like this. This is what is heard in movies, not that clapboard drivel in staid textbooks. But slang can be difficult to teach. Different social strata use different slang, not to mention regional varieties in slang from country to country. It is imperative for ESL/EFL teachers to cater to the needs of their students and tailor the slang to be taught in their classrooms. One can begin with the most common slang expressions used in a society or in the targeted subculture.

**Emphasis on written English**

The problem is further exacerbated because some teachers teach written forms of English as conversational English, failing to take into consideration that conversation involves many factors. Guest (1998) addressed this problem by saying:

“If one is purporting to teach 'conversation,' it is therefore necessary that written forms not be used as models of the spoken language. To do so would be simply out of place, since spoken forms often employ unique and distinct means of realizing various interpersonal functions of real-time discourse (attitudes, highlighting, evaluative markers, personal relations, repair, etc.) or allow one to more accurately identify or utilize a specific genre (narrative, language-in-action, etc.) of speech. It is not as if spoken and written forms are parallel systems separated only by degrees of register.”

Carter and McCarthy (1994) expressed concern at the lack of realia in textbooks and in classrooms and suggested that many teachers are producing L2 speakers who are unable to cope
with natural English. In effect, the students graduate speaking unnatural English.

Some teachers may balk at teaching slang because it can be time consuming, requiring some advanced preparation. Others may insist on it not being standard English and refuse to teach it. But like it or not, there is no denying that we all use slang one time or another and often every day, in his or her own way. The beauty of it is that it is not the same as written English. Spoken English is generally simpler, much less complex than written English. That is because we often leave out words, using ellipses, which we would not do in written English (Guest, 1998).

**Why include slang in the EFL Classroom?**

_Motivation_

Including slang in the EFL classroom can have a positive impact on student motivation. The best indicators for overall success, according to Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, and Todesco (1995), are “... attitude and motivation.” According to Gardner's (1972) language learning motivation can be categorized as integrative versus instrumental. Instrumental motivation is related to the functional use of language - as a tool - to accomplish certain objectives. Integrative motivation is characterized by a genuine interest in integrating with the speakers of the target language (Gardner & Lambert, p.132). This is reiterated by Rubrecht (2006) who refers to it as "a learner's desire to enter into the target language and interact with native speakers” (p.73). Learning slang can help accomplish both of these objectives.

_Relevancy and Authenticity_

Another way in which slang positively affects motivation is that it offers both relevancy and authenticity, both of which are directly linked to student motivation. If students feel that what they are studying is relevant to their everyday lives, and usable when communicating with native speakers, they will be more motivated to study. Students also desire to go beyond the textbook and speak real, living language. Slang allows for them to do this as it has real world application. It is the way native English speakers speak when speaking with friends and coworkers. If we want to motivate our students to excel, where they can put what they are learning to work, then teaching slang is an ideal way to do it. As many of us know, home stay programs are an integral part of the L2 experience. It is no coincidence that L2 learners return with a deeper appreciation for English than their counterparts who haven't spent time abroad. Research done into home stay programs where students who are immersed in the L2 achieve higher levels of fluency than those exposed to traditional textbook learning alone. Students
achieve a higher degree of speaking fluency because of their exposure to native English speakers using natural English – not textbook English (Bodycott & Crew, 2000).

The Affective Domain
Learning slang can be a motivator because it taps into what students want to be part of the group or the in-crowd. Its more colorful and descriptive terminology – far more than formal language – begs for inclusion. It engages minds through humor and sarcasm and cynicism. Young people especially revel in the creative expressionism which is on display – just listen to rap or hip hop. Research shows that if students find learning fun and engaging, then they are more likely to succeed, and they have a better chance of remembering more of what they learn. In other words, success breeds success (Bandura, 1977). This is tied to the affective domain, the emotional part of the brain. In his affective filter hypothesis, Krashen (1982) maintains that optimal learning takes place when a positive attitude is present, as negative emotions lead to a strong affective filter that can serve as an impediment to learning. Researchers like Mori (1999) show that student attitudes and beliefs are predictors of success. So if the students find value in what they are learning, then they will have a greater potential for success. Hence the importance of connecting what they need to learn to what they want to learn.

Demonstrating the evolution of language
Teaching slang demonstrates to students that English is not a stilted and stale language. It is forever changing, evolving to suit the needs of its users. Slang, in particular, breathes new life into the language and makes it vibrant and living. We need look no further than the differences between generations. Teenagers are notorious for wielding words and forming new euphemisms, especially when it comes to sex. For example, sexual intercourse becomes horizontal dancing. Things that are good are called bad.

Enhancing informal communication
Slang serves several purposes, but the main one seems to be to enhance informal communication. In many cases, it makes conversations more informal and enables the user to more closely connect with others in the group. According to the Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English: “We have considered for inclusion all unconventional English that has been used with the purpose or effect of either lowering the formality of communication and reducing solemnity and/or identifying status or group and putting oneself in tune with one's company” (Dalzell & Victor, 2005). It could be argued that
this is particularly valuable in the Japanese ELT context where group membership is highly valued.

To Supplement English for Specific Purposes
The case could be made that slang also has value similar to English for Specific Purposes programs. Some have even put forward the idea of English for Conversational Purposes (ECP) as a distinct subdivision of English language study, on a par with ESP (Campbell-Larsen & Cunningham, 2009). Slang would be an integral part of ECP. While all native English speakers habitually use slang (some of it gaining wide use among the general public), it also could be utilized when studying language patterns of certain social strata or subcultures. This researcher has personal experience teaching military English to the Japanese Ground Self Defense Forces, a program that necessitated the inclusion of military slang in addition to general English.

To Supplement TOEIC and TOEFL
While the TOEIC test is suitable for the workplace, and the TOEFL is indicative of a student's academic suitability for admission to an overseas university, neither test gives a quantifiable scoring of a student's ability to mesh with different social groups in natural settings. Thus, inclusion of slang in English language teaching helps bridge the gap between what students have to learn to pass tests and what they need to learn to be naturally communicative in English.

Cultural Considerations
Halliday (1990) describes spoken language as being nearer “the ideational bone” of language and is therefore easier for non-native English speakers to understand. In the case of Japanese English language learners, he says that, structurally speaking, spoken Japanese is closer to spoken English than it is to written English. Halliday calls for more attention to be paid to spoken English, which to be complete, should include slang.

Caveats
Some linguists have cautioned that slang should meet certain criteria before being defined as slang. Dumas and Lighter (1978) suggest that slang may lower “. . . the dignity of formal or speech or writing.” They say that the speaker needs to be well-versed in the subject matter and that slang must be recognized as a “. . . taboo term in ordinary discourse with speakers of high social status or greater responsibility.” Finally, they say that it must be made clear that slang is a substitute for “. . . a well-known conventional synonym.” In other words, the teaching of slang
must also incorporate clear instruction on its correct pragmatic usage.

Slang can be taught much the same way conventional vocabulary is taught. Movies, in particular are an extremely rich source for slang. This author believes that film scripts can be used to enhance the learning experience in the L2 classroom, as well as films with and without subtitles. The most popular films can be analyzed for their slang value and serve as discussion points.

**Conclusion**

Slang has real world application in today's L2 classroom. It is realia. It is authentic material. It is a pragmatic, living, breathing part of the English language. Slang can be a motivational tool, providing color, humor, and intimacy where there was none before. It breathes life into English. It fosters communication. Slang does this by lowering the affective filter. Slang appeals to students studying English, bringing immediacy and inclusion to conversation, and sometimes breaking down the walls that surround taboo subjects. It should be taught because it is not only an integral and intimate part of the English language but because it fosters an understanding not yet frequently found in mainstream textbooks and materials. It serves a purpose that years and years of studying for the TOEIC or TOEFL cannot.

**Biographical Statement**

Jon Lieb has degrees in journalism and international relations and has been associated with Teachers Helping Teachers since 2005. He teaches English in the Japan Ground Self Defense Forces language immersion program. Prior to teaching English in Japan, he was a California high school teacher, a journalist and a businessman.

**References**


**Appendix A - Slang IQ Tests**

Numerous sites on the Internet provide the opportunity for students to test their coolness. Below are just a handful of sites that offer the opportunity to test student slang IQs:

American slang: http://www.schandlbooks.com/AmericanSlangTest.html

Teen slang: http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/family/teens/test-teen-slang-quiz

Australian slang: http://www.helloquizzy.com/tests/the-australian-slang-test
London slang: http://www.helloquizzy.com/tests/the-can-you-speak-london-slang-test

Drug slang: http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/524609/?sc=dwtp


Cyber slang: http://www.kdz.com/slangtest.htm

English slang idioms: