

Thank you very much.

Thank you, I'm very glad to be here in Japan for JALT, and I hope the dialogue that starts today will continue.

### Further Reading

- Díaz-Maggioli, G. (2004). *Teacher-centred professional development*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Díaz-Maggioli, G. (2012). *Teaching language teachers: Scaffolding professional learning*. Plymouth, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Díaz-Maggioli, G. (2017). Ideologies and discourse in the standards for language teachers in South America: A corpus-based analysis. In L. D. Kamhi-Stein., G. Díaz-Maggioli., & L.C. de Oliveria (Eds.), *English language teaching in South America* (pp. 31–53). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

For our second interview, we share a discussion with Nick Saville. Dr. Saville is Director of Research & Thought Leadership in Cambridge Assessment, English (University of Cambridge) and Secretary-General of ALTE. He has a PhD in Language Assessment, and before moving to Cambridge, he worked in Italy and in Tokyo. He is co-author of the volume *Learning Oriented Assessment* (Jones & Saville, 2016). He was interviewed by Aeris Wong, the Management Course English Program Coordinator at Konan University's School of Management. He has a Masters from Temple University Japan and is currently a doctoral candidate.

## An Interview with Dr. Nick Saville

**Aeris Wong:** *What led you to your work in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning?*

**Nick Saville:** Well, about 10 years ago, I became interested in automated assessment of learners' writing. This led me into the world of AI. Over the past decade, I have been working on a number of projects to assess not only writing, but also speech using automated systems that incorporate AI.

When I first got involved, not many people were talking about it outside the specialist areas of computer science and machine learning. Nowadays, everywhere you look, whether on the TV or when you open a newspaper, somebody is talking about AI. People are talking about how it can solve numerous problems, but there is also concern about the potential problems it may create. In thinking about these issues, the whole question of ethics

also comes into the discussion. If we are socially-minded, we should be predicting the impacts of technology and thinking about how we adjust society and not simply let the economic impetus of the technology impact negatively on a whole load of people. I hope that, in our field at least, we will be thinking about the impact on people like teachers and learners.

*Did you have any specific research questions in mind that you were trying to answer?*

We were trying to understand what learner language is like and what distinguishes the language of learners at different stages of their developing proficiency. Through using learner data, we can figure out how to train a tool to be able to use the same information to automatically assign people to proficiency categories or levels. So, if we can understand what it is that characterizes a proficiency level, we can train a machine to do it and, therefore, use an automated rating system alongside humans in order to rate samples of writing. We can also do the same for speech, although it is a bit trickier due to the nature of speech data.

Automated rating systems are important because they can help increase the reliability of assessment by enabling a “virtuous combination” between machines and humans. It also becomes possible to provide better and timelier feedback. Rather than simply saying, “You are (CEFR level) B1,” the feedback can be more diagnostic and targeted, such as “You are B1, and this is what your language looks like. These are the features that make it B1, and here are some things you could do to improve.” Write and Improve (a free, CEFR-based online writing assessment) is an example of this line of thinking (<writeandimprove.com>).

*The Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) is used at many universities in Japan. However, some argue that a majority of language learners fall within levels A1-A2 and, therefore, the CEFR is not sensitive enough to discriminate between these learners.*

That's correct. However, the six CEFR levels are not designed as finely-grained stepping stones on the proficiency continuum. The CEFR is designed for identifying appropriate learning goals and developing them into the smaller steps that can take you through the level or band. It is usual for publishers to have two course books to take you through each of the B bands because within that, they will be setting the smaller steps that will be measured as progress points against a more finely developed

scale. So, this is what's needed and being able to relate back to the CEFR, "Well, you're B1-" or "you're B1+" is quite helpful because this breaks you out of your local context into an internationally validated framework of reference.

*For technology like Write and Improve (i.e. cloud learning), do you think institutions already have the infrastructure to deploy this? How does it address some of the shortcomings of more conventional approaches?*

Well, I think they do because there's nothing to deploy. Interestingly, the universal tool you are finding, even in very poor communities, is the smartphone. In India, it is being targeted for social engineering purposes because they are now creating smartphones that cost \$20. Really, it is the connectivity that is offering you the access to learning because once you have the connectivity, you are connecting to the world of knowledge, and you are connecting to people. So, you create the social context for learning as well as the knowledge base for providing input. As we've seen with Write and Improve, you can get your assessment done as well. So, you begin to enter this connected world of cloud learning, which means that you can be in a classroom with no chairs or tables and still have all these resources. That is not to say that computer labs or smart boards are obsolete, but what's transforming education is the ability to connect to the internet through a device which anyone can have at a price point which is affordable.

*Many teachers and researchers have investigated how the increased presence of technology in our lives can be used/exploited for language learning. Arguments have been made that, in many cases, the learning aspect seems shoehorned in. Does technology get in the way of learning?*

In the past, it definitely has. Language laboratories were used in the 1970s where you could sit in a booth and talk to the wall. Someone had purchased the technology (the language laboratory) and there was a technician that was providing you with tapes to practice pronunciation or practice responding to various prompts. But, this is programmatic, and language learning is not programmatic. It was also very alienating. When have you ever done any speaking to the wall? So, I think the history of technology in the last 30 years has been to bring the latest technology into the classroom to then discover that it's not very good because the teachers don't have the training to use it, or the curriculum and materials provided have not caught up in time before the technology becomes obsolete. So, I think technology does get in the way a lot of the time. Hopefully in

the new world of data and devices, it won't.

*At the end of the day, many language learners are primarily concerned with passing exams. Even with Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA), do learners need to forget, if temporarily, the focus on test scores?*

I don't think they need to forget it. It is a gateway to opportunity, but it shouldn't be the case where the test is impacting negatively on their learning experience up to point they take the test. The assessment-oriented approach means that the test has an overbearing impact on the learning. So, this then means that the opportunity is not really being delivered because you are perverting the learning experience by the test.

Learning to achieve a test score or a promotion may be appropriate for certain types of learning, but it isn't really appropriate for language learning because language learning is a lifelong ambition. We need to imply that as you progress through the levels, both of education and of language proficiency, the "end point" is just the beginning of the next stage. So, this idea of looking back and looking forward should apply to all tests. This dichotomy between summative and formative is inappropriate because it implies that the end of school tests is the end of everything. Although it opens the door if you pass it, it is only the beginning of the next phase, and it should be the beginning of the next phase of your language learning rather than to imply that it's over because you passed the test. You don't want to imply that the test is what matters. It's the learning that matters and the test is the representation of it as an achievement which then leads on to the next stage of learning. So, it's cyclical and iterative and not simply linear where you get from one point to the end and stop.

*In your workshop, you mentioned Sweden as an example because English is in the streets there. But, in a country like Japan, where the exposure to English is very limited outside the classroom, there is no need or desire to use English. As such, many classroom tasks are seen as just another thing to do. Typically, the quick and dirty way to get students to do it is to make it part of their grade. This seems to conflict with the goals of LOA. How can teachers get students to buy in to this?*

Well, that's my point, really. You have to create it by breaking down the wall of the classroom and exposing people to the world outside. Not literally outside the classroom, but outside virtually. You can bring English into the classroom, or home, or society where people are using languages through technology. You can be connected to them via Skype or

Whatsapp and can be talking to somebody as if they were sitting right next to you even though they may be in another part of the world. You can deliberately create contexts of English use. In a school in Poland, the soccer team speaks English. Their project is to always use English when playing soccer. Well, a lot of the words are actually cognates from English like “corner” or “free kick,” so they’re easy but then you have to construct words or sentences around it. Then you watch the Premier League commentary in English. So, you have a reason to use English. You create it. And you make access to it available because people want to do it.

For learning to be taking place, it’s in the learning cycle which is what teachers do in setting tasks and giving people feedback. If you cannot capture any evidence, then it’s dubious as to what’s happening. If a teacher says, “My kids are learning really well.” Well, how do you know? What did they learn? You won’t be able to quantify everything. There will be some learning which is not susceptible to measurement, but certain things are. Evidence of learning is what assessment is, really. Capturing some evidence for people to be able to prove what they know. At the moment it’s very indirect, very separated, very artificial.

*What do you see as the next big step for CALL? You were demonstrating the use of Augmented Reality (AR) for broader application.*

One well-known application of AR is to help people overcome phobias by desensitizing them, like an

arachnophobe being desensitized to spiders. So, in the same way, we’ve been trying to see how we can desensitize people to taking tests. Test anxiety is one of the reasons why people don’t perform well in tests, particularly, speaking tests. If you were asked, “How long did it take for you to get here today?” in a speaking test, you actually have to start replying within a second. So how could you practice that? What we’ve done is to take people through the whole experience of sitting in an exam where real people are talking to you, and you have to pretend you are talking back. In virtual reality, you are there. When you have VR goggles on in 360, you can see the whole room. You actually have the whole experience of walking into the room, feeling what it might be like, what the people could look like, what sort of behaviours they have, how they try to put you at ease, so you become totally familiar. We don’t want tests making people so worried that when they prove their skills, they prove them in a way that isn’t representative of what they know. That’s an error of the test, really. If we can practice the test portion, why can’t we do the whole speaking test in virtual reality? We can then build in a sort of AR approach. If we can break down the barrier between what it’s like to be learning and what it’s like to be tested, then people will find the learning and the testing to be more productive.

### Reference

Jones, N., & Saville, N. (2016). *Learning oriented assessment* (Vol. 45). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

## [JALT PRACTICE] MY SHARE



### Steven Asquith & Nicole Gallagher

We welcome submissions for the My Share column. Submissions should be up to 600 words describing a successful technique or lesson plan you have used that can be replicated by readers, and should conform to the My Share format (see the guidelines on our website below).

Email: [my-share@jalt-publications.org](mailto:my-share@jalt-publications.org) • Web: <http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare>

Hi, everyone, and welcome to another fresh edition of My Share, the column that aims to inspire you with new, fun, and creative ideas to enliven your classes. In recent months, we have been fortunate enough to receive some really wonderful submissions from fellow readers and this issue boasts a really strong crop. Nicole and I feel sure that they will be of great use to many of you while you are overcoming this busy period.

In the first article, Gregory J. Wroblewski describes a fantastically practical way of utilising online corpora in the classroom. This idea is accessible enough to be utilised in a single class period, and introduces learners to

methods of identifying the nuances of words with similar meanings. Personally, I have often thought about how to use corpora with my classes to help students with word choice, but have been concerned about devoting too much time to it. This lesson is certainly something I will be taking advantage of this semester. In the second article, Philip Head and Christopher Lyons introduce a time-saving and effective method of classroom management which enables teachers to monitor attendance, memorize students names, provide personal feedback, and encourage students to set goals. In the third article, Joshua A. Kidd explains an ingenious way