

The road ahead: An interview with Steve Brown and Ted O'Neill

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JALTの出版業務を監督する立場にある出版委員長は、伝統的にJALT Journal誌の前の編集長や運営委員会のメンバーが務めている。今年はそのポジションがSteve Brownから前TLT編集長のTed O'Neillに引き継がれている。このインタビューでは、新旧出版委員長がMalcolm Swansonと共にJALT出版物の将来へのビジョンを語る。

Overseeing the operations of JALT's Publications sits the Publications Board Chair (PBC)—a position that is traditionally held by an ex-journal editor or executive board member. This year sees the PBC position changing from Steve Brown to Ted O'Neill, a previous *TLT* editor. In this interview, the outgoing and incoming PBCs talk with Malcolm Swanson about their visions for the future of JALT's publications.



Malcolm Swanson (MS): Steve, during your two years as PBC, there have been some major changes in JALT's publications. Most significant, perhaps, has been the shift from a monthly to a bimonthly format for *TLT*. From these initial changes, what do you see as the future path for JALT's publications?

Steve Brown (SB): Ah, I see you're starting with the easy questions! Well, it's difficult to see completely clearly what the future path could or should be, as I think we're still exploring the possibilities of the new format. I've heard some very positive comments from many different quarters: I've been told articles have a 'meatier' feel to them, and the fact there is a two-month space between issues means that people have the time

to peruse articles at leisure. But I think that's just the start.

In our own discussions within the Publications Board, we've thrown around different ideas that we might try, but personally I'd really like to see greater JALT-wide input. The larger size has created opportunities for greater flexibility and creativity which I'd love to see embraced more by individuals and groups within JALT, to help make *TLL* a more dynamic and collaborative space.

MS: Within all the changes in *TLL* and on our website, *JALT Journal* has maintained its consistency in style and format. Do you see *JJ* continuing in this vein, or will the changes taking place elsewhere creep over to the journal, too?

SB: Any publication worth its while should always be ready to grow and develop. But I don't foresee the same kind of changes with *JJ*. It is important that *JJ* remain a vehicle for longer or larger-scale research—and I think we need to be constantly working to improve quality and encourage more submissions for the journal. The area where we do need to make real progress is distribution: making our contributors' research more easily accessible and getting articles out there. We've spoken about increased online access through external academic engines and I think that's where we need to be moving forward.

MS: There is also a third publication to consider—JALT's Conference Proceedings. In the last decade, the Proceedings has grown in both size and stature. We now routinely receive over 150 submissions, and the editorial process has matured to the extent that every accepted article has undergone a rigorous process of selection and editing. However, a stigma still persists, particularly within Japan, about the rating of these articles in academic terms. Do you think this is really an issue, and if so, how do you see this being resolved?

TO: The development of the Proceedings has been remarkable, especially in the face of the stigma you mention. The fact that so many people contribute their writing and research and put time into editing shows that teachers value this publication. It is unfortunate that some

people or institutions are biased against conference proceedings. One solution that others have tried is not to use the label "proceedings" but to call the publication "selected papers" or another phrase that stresses selectivity. I'm not sure this is enough to counteract the stereotype and it winds up discarding writers who have insights to share with the profession.

We may not be able to change people's minds, but the review process already in place can be emphasized. The papers all go through a blind peer review process and editing. Also, the conference itself has already become more selective—just getting through that vetting process is a high hurdle. We should continue making the Proceedings the best it can be and promoting it as a resource for teachers and researchers. As more scholars cite these papers, the reputation of the publication will tend to improve.

SB: That's absolutely right. In the end, we can't control academic prejudice against "proceedings"; the best thing we can do to challenge the stereotype is to focus on raising and maintaining quality. Changing the label wouldn't help: as one of our editors said a few months back, if it looks like a duck and walks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.

MS: Certainly one of the bigger elements of the decision to change to a bimonthly *TLL* was the desire for more online content. And with our new website about to go online, we'll be in a position to offer more immediate access to JALT-related material. Ted, how do you see this bigger focus on online delivery affecting JALT's publications in the medium and long term?

TO: The web has been hugely disruptive to all publishers, but I think JALT is well-positioned to take advantage of online publishing. In the near term, parts of *TLL* should move online to improve the community feeling of our group. Reports of chapter and SIG events come to mind as perfect for the web. Putting this kind of communication within the JALT community online should make us more responsive, and it will allow much more flexibility in what and how much groups within JALT can share with each other. There is no good way to preview slides from an upcoming presentation in *TLL* as it is currently published, but online reports make that

kind of more dynamic content simple. The newly redesigned publications websites should draw people in and make it easy for them to find and read what they are looking for.

Longer term, JALT is sitting on a tremendous archive of past research articles, commentary on the profession, how-tos, and reports. It's the raw material of the development of language teaching over the past several decades. Putting more of this online in accessible ways will benefit everyone. And, if we are careful it should generate some revenue for JALT through a modest amount of advertising.

MS: Over the last few years we've opened up more and more of our online material to unrestricted public access. Do you think this is a trend that is likely to accelerate? If so, what merits are there for JALT in making our material more publicly available?

TO: I do think this trend can and should continue. I suppose it makes sense to define Open Access (OA) at this point. Peter Suber describes OA as "digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions." That is pretty close to what we already do with publications that are more than a year old. Making our publications freely and immediately accessible online is a small but important improvement. I see two primary benefits for JALT members from moving to OA publishing: it will improve the quality of our publications and it presents JALT to teachers in a very positive light.

Researchers publish to reach readers. Increasing the number of readers around the world by opening up access spreads the reputation of the author and makes it more likely that their work will be cited by others. If JALT publications are more freely and immediately available online, we should be able to attract more and better quality submissions.

But what about JALT as an organization? Offering our publications openly will show people just how good they are, and that quality reflects on the organization as a whole and on its members. This is similar to the way some university programs publish journals and give them away openly. It is one of the marks of a vibrant and creative professional organization that is worth being part of.

We have been doing this with older articles, but it is worth considering the timing. Which would an author rather announce? "My one-year old article is available online. Please go read it.", or "My latest article is on the web now. Please come and join the discussion online." I think the latter is clearly preferable for authors and for readers.

As a final point, it is worth noting that *JALT Journal* and *TLL* are competing with more and more professional writing which is available online for nothing. We are already competing with freely available material, so we cannot do better on cost. Our strong point is quality, and we should show that off rather than hide it behind a password.

MS: A final question. Looking ahead to say, 2020, how would you like JALT's publications to look?

TO: Academic publications tend to be conservative and slow to change. Technology for producing, distributing, and reading publications will continue to advance—probably much more quickly than we expect. By 2020, if not before, I expect all of our publications to be electronic and that we will no longer be printing and posting thousands of printed pages. That isn't to say that readers won't be able to get JALT publications on paper—they will. But, physical issues will be ordered online and printed on demand. We will continue to write and edit informative articles for teachers, but the teachers will decide how they receive them: webpage, PDF, various ebook formats, with or without audio or video, and more. Direct-to-neocortex neural downloads may take a bit longer.

MS: Steve, our sincere thanks for all you've done for both the organisation and for JALT's publications in particular. We wish you well, and look forward to your next resurrection! To you, too, Ted, we're very excited to be having a former editor as PBC, and wish you all the best in your new role.

Reference

Suber, P. (2010). *Open access overview: focusing on open access to peer-reviewed research articles and their preprints*. Retrieved from <earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>

Fall and the JALT2011 conference may seem a long way off. After all it is only March and spring is just around the corner. For some of you, classes have not ended that long ago, and for others of us, well, we are only beginning to plan for the new academic year. November seems so far away!

But in conference time, it's not that far away and so spending a little time now focusing on the **JALT2011 Conference on Teaching • Learning • Growing** will pay off. How you may ask? If the conference is nine months away, why do I have to take time to think about it now?



Well, JALT2011 is your forum as a teaching professional to exchange and engage with colleagues on many different levels—informally with anecdotes and narratives over coffee, semi-formally by exchanging teaching techniques or learning from others in workshops or at poster sessions, and even “formally” by attending sessions or presenting on research conducted or underway. We welcome your proposals and hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to communicate your experience, share your findings, and be part of one of the largest language teacher conferences in Asia. **But in order to present in November, you need to submit a proposal now, by the April 22nd deadline.** [Note: In conference time April 22nd is figuratively minutes away!]

Confucius might have been thinking of **JALT2011 Teaching • Learning • Growing** when he wrote,

Only through education does one come to be dissatisfied with his own knowledge, and only through teaching others does one come to realize the uncomfortable inadequacy of his knowledge. Being dissatisfied with his own knowledge, one then realizes that the trouble lies with himself, and realizing the uncomfortable inadequacy of his knowledge one then feels stimulated to improve himself. Therefore, it is said, “the processes of teaching and learning stimulate one another.”

This is what we are talking about—allowing teaching and learning to stimulate us in a rich professional experience of interaction and growth! Allowing them to help us to grow—personally and professionally! Allowing them to help us improve ourselves!

So take a moment right now to a) jot down the deadline for submitting a proposal (Friday, April 22nd), b) circle the dates of the conference (Nov. 18-22), and c) plan on joining us in Tokyo at JALT2011.

Remember, don't put off working on your proposal. Start today! April 22nd will be here before we know it. Specific guidelines are available at:

[<jalt.org/conference/jalt2011/jalt2011-call-presentations>](http://jalt.org/conference/jalt2011/jalt2011-call-presentations)

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