

The Language Teacher

<http://jalt-publications.org/tlt>

Feature Article

- 3** NGSL Coverage of the SHS Entrance Exam and the National Center Test
Miki Iwamoto & Brandon Kramer

Readers' Forum

- 9** Assigning Roles in Small Group Discussions for Maximum EFL Learner Participation
Cathrine-Mette Mork

TLT Interviews

- 17** An Interview with Professor Karl Maton
Thomas Amundrud, Ayumi Inako, & Dominic Edsall

My Share

- 22** Classroom ideas from Jeff Au, Ivy Liwa, Philip Olson, and Luke Houghton

JALT Praxis

- 26** *TLT* Wired
28 Younger Learners
33 Book Reviews
35 Teaching Assistance
38 The Writers' Workshop
42 SIG Focus: Reflections: SIG Officers
45 Old Grammarians



The Japan Association for Language Teaching

Volume 44, Number 5 • September / October 2020

ISSN 0289-7938 • ¥1,900 • *TLT* uses recycled paper

pate in the IVEProject regularly before the exchange begins, and I hope to meet many of you there. However, even if you can't make that workshop, you are welcome to contact me and join the project, as we have a number of online tutorials that assist both students and teachers so they can participate fully. I'm looking forward to seeing more students from Japan becoming involved in this exciting international project.

References

- Keidanren. (2018). Kōtō kyōiku ni kansuru ankēto' shuyō kekka [Questionnaire on high school education: Main results]. Keidanren Policy & Action. https://www.keidanren.or.jp/policy/2018/029_kekka.pdf
- O'Dowd, R., & O'Rourke, B. (2019). New developments in virtual exchange for foreign language education. *Language Learning & Technology*, 23(3), 1–7. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44690>

[JALT PRAXIS] YOUNGER LEARNERS



Mari Nakamura & Marian Hara

The Younger Learners column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editor at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

Email: younger-learners@jalt-publications.org

Zooming Around Japan for Online Learning

Online teaching has been challenging all of us during the past few months, and since some teachers may be moving over, or back, to online in the coming months, we asked some YL teachers, from Hokkaido to Kyushu, about how they've been coping. They had some great advice, ideas, and solutions to share, which we are sure will help you in your teaching. A big thanks to all four contributors for taking time out of their extra-busy schedules to write down their stories!

Note: Parental consent has been obtained for all of the children's images in this article.

Mary Nobuoka

Keio University, Waseda University
m.nobuoka@gmail.com

Emergency remote teaching has created new challenges for many teachers, particularly for teachers of young learners (YL). Some interactive classroom activities do not transition well to online platforms such as Zoom, and lessons may become too teacher-centered. With young learners, we lose some of the movement and body language many teachers like to incorporate in a classroom setting. In addition, all activities take much more time on Zoom than in the classroom. Below are some key points and activities for using Zoom with YL.

Practice Some Key Functions on Zoom in the First Lesson

Be sure to go over some basic features of Zoom. This includes opening the participants list, possibly changing the students' names to Roman letters, muting and unmuting, using the chat box, raising the digital hand, and switching between the gallery view and the speaker view.

Use Microsoft Word with Zoom

Using Microsoft Word documents makes it easier to prepare lessons before class and also to type as you teach or make quick edits during screen-sharing. Use larger font sizes. For example, I prepared a simple "sentence scramble" game on Word so that only the mixed-up words were visible to the students. After the students unscrambled the sentence (in writing), I scrolled down to have them check their answers. I could also quickly change the color of the initial capital letter of the sentence and the period at the end to red to emphasize these often overlooked mistakes for YL. Dictation and spelling tests can also be done this way with correct answers shared on Word.

A fun game to get your students speaking is Hot Seat. In a regular classroom, one student sits with their back to the board, and after the teacher writes the target vocabulary behind them, the other students give hints until the student in the "hot seat" guesses the word. In Zoom, I recommend putting one or two students back into the waiting room, which is much faster than using a breakout room. Show and/or tell the remaining students the secret word. Then bring the student(s) back into the main session. Students should raise their digital hand before unmuting their microphone to give a hint.

Use Materials on the Internet

Mad Libs, available online, helps review the parts of speech. For YL in public schools, this game works for grades eight and above. It is also doable with higher proficiency elementary school students and returnees. Create a word list (see *Figure 1*) that students use to write a word for each part of speech in class or as homework. Be careful to not show the final story, including the title, to the students until everyone has finished their lists.

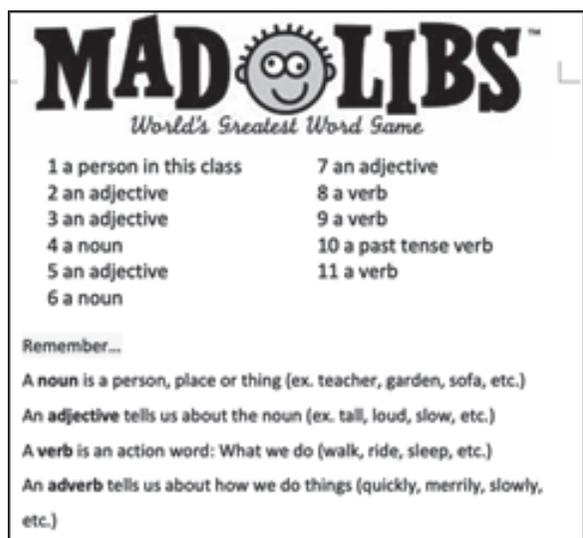


Figure 1. A sample Mad Libs word list.



Figure 2. A sample Mad Libs story worksheet.

Once completed, ask each student to read their silly story (see *Figure 2*). Use screen sharing to show the Mad Libs story so that students can insert their own words in the appropriate space. Use shorter stories to give all the students a turn. With older students, you can use breakout rooms, but they will need to have access to the story page, possibly using Google Docs and sharing the page link. Do not allow editing on Google Docs or you may have mischievous students making changes.

The numbers make it easier to insert words as students read the story aloud with their list of words.

Integrate Breathing Exercises Into Your Lesson

One useful activity to do with students during this stressful time is breathing exercises. Rhythmic, natural breathing, done regularly for two to five minutes, will help students calm themselves before giving presentations more effectively than taking deep breaths (Stanford Graduate School of Business, 2014). Teachers can screen share some YouTube videos of rhythmic breathing exercises to do with their students at the beginning of class or as a short break in the middle. Some recommended videos are presented at the end of this article.

Please try out these activities or get inspired to incorporate others. If you try something new and it fails, go easy on yourself. This is an unprecedented time, and few of us have had proper training to prepare for online lessons. Experiment! We never know what works until we try, and some of our best ideas come when we make mistakes and learn how to do something differently!

Claire Sezaki

Sunshine English School, Kumamoto Prefecture

kcsezaki@gmail

On March 2nd, schools across Japan suddenly closed. My small school with around 150 students aged between six and seventeen closed too. The first two weeks were hard. Elementary school (ES) classes started with lesson packs sent by post. Weekly reading aloud and homework were checked via LINE for Business. We then moved to recorded lessons using our private YouTube channel. It was very labour intensive as I am the owner of the school as well as a teacher with minimal part time staff.

Junior High School (JHS) and High School (HS) level classes were on Zoom. HS students were

immediately at ease with the technology. However, parents of JHS students struggled with this, so it was obvious that if younger grades ever moved to Zoom, parents would need a lot of help.

My English school reopened from March 16th to the 21st, and again after spring vacation, between April 6th and the 17th. Local schools were also open from April 6th to the 14th. From April 4th, we held brief practice sessions for Zoom, just in case. I chased every parent, and eventually everyone tried to join a meeting at least once. If a parent failed to join a session, I'd contact them immediately, express surprise and disappointment, and reschedule. On April 13th, the State of Emergency was announced. We stayed open that week in order to finalize Zoom schedules and distribute texts. Having a *just-in-case* plan in place and communicated to parents really helped.

From April 17th, all classes moved to Zoom, with supplementary homework videos for ES classes. No other options were given. Everyone did Zoom, and no one complained or quit. But we also didn't ask for opinions. It was a very steep learning curve. I watched many, many YouTube videos about Zoom, PowerPoint, and Wi-Fi strength.

I quickly realised the 4th grade classes were not doing well in online classes of eight students. A reschedule gave them shorter lessons of 30 minutes, but more interaction since I also reduced group size to four students.

To simplify preparation, lessons were scanned and then added to PowerPoint. Vocabulary was introduced with PowerPoint *games* like Hidden Picture, where a picture is slowly revealed with each click of the mouse. I also found templates of other games that could be used across classes, downloaded PowerPoint files created by other people, which I edited to suit my needs—*islcollective.com*, an online resource, was particularly good for this.

Simple grids worked well for warm-ups and wrap-ups of lessons. They could be used across many grades and were quick to prepare. Some popular grids were:

- For younger students
 - Question Words: Students answered five questions using that question word.
 - Categories: Five zoo animals, five fruit and so on.
 - Math: seven plus five and so on.
 - Colours: black plus white and so on.

- For older students
 - Unfinished sentences: When I go back to school I will . . .
 - Answers that needed a question: 'I have a fever' 'What's the matter?'
 - Categories: the sea, red, shiny.

Show and Tell online worked well with JHS/HS levels. Having to present through media made them prepare better, probably because they felt that they were really broadcasting to an audience. The presentations could be recorded easily. With follow-up questions later on Padlet, an online bulletin board, students had more time to think of deeper questions or comments than they did during class.

Padlet became a notice board for each class. The ease of copying posts to other Padlets made everything very efficient. It looked professional and was cute. We used it for some fun class projects like baking, which third graders usually do every year in class. I made a video of myself making cheese straws which students watched while baking at home. I'm sure the immersive English experience was more effective with the video as there was no Japanese involved, which doesn't always happen in class with the time constraints of a normal lesson. The end results were posted on Padlet. Just one child baked hers for 50 minutes instead of 15, a mistake she'll never make again!

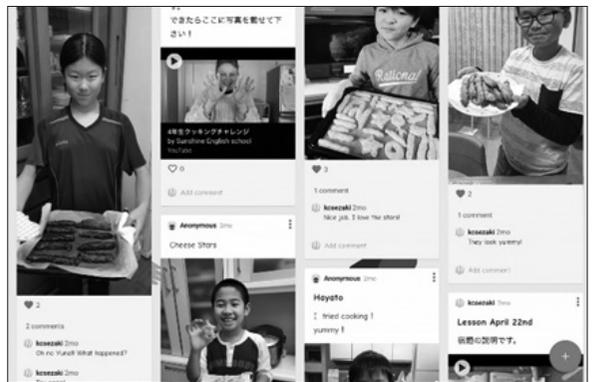


Figure 3. Baking lesson posts on Padlet.

Finally, I also used Padlet to create a whole school Challenge Page for May. Alongside my ideas, students were encouraged to add their own. We had food faces, lifting, plate juggling, Lego spinning tops, cup songs, and many other fun ideas. It was great to see another side to the students, and it made me smile after each long Zoom day!

Ruthie Iida

Rainbow Phonics English School

ruthiep43@gmail.com

When my Eikaiwa school moved online in early March, I was curious to experiment with new teaching platforms. We chose to teach our youngest students, aged four through eight, via pre-recorded YouTube videos. To make the videos personal, we attached the children's name cards to small stuffed animals and spent the beginning of each lesson searching for them and saving them from perilous curtain rails or dark cupboards. We taught content through dialogue, always focused on the camera, which represented the invisible students. Teaching phonics and writing through video was more of a challenge. Our approach was to create a character (my assistant's lovely, long manicured finger) that represented the students. This lively and talkative finger practiced the correct stroke order, printed rows of letters while repeating the phoneme, and was praised by the teacher (my own finger). Guided by parental feedback, the number of views, and our own teacherly instincts, we found that the key to producing effective content videos was attention to detail plus personalization: using students' names on camera and inserting the questions we imagined they might have into our onscreen dialogues.

Upper level elementary students participated in Zoom classes. Unlike the YouTube lessons, which were tightly controlled, these classes were highly unpredictable. Although we worked hard to familiarize parents with the basics of Zooming, we couldn't help them with their own poor Wi-Fi connections. My composure was sabotaged by students' technical issues, and even students with solid Internet connections were difficult to engage with at first. Until I became familiar with their devices and taught them how to manipulate their toolboxes, they seemed to be disparate flat faces on the screen who could not respond as one or communicate with each other. When students learned to write on my screen with their virtual pens, I finally heard delighted yells. As they became able to guess, connect, draw, and write rather than simply watching and listening, the time flew. In the end, although I found Zoom hosting stressful, most students found it to be "fun and easy".

I managed homework through the application Padlet (for written assignments) and LINE (for videos and voice recordings). Assigning hearty doses of homework, I was pleased to see it uploaded in a timely fashion. I gave feedback, my comments were

read, and mistakes were corrected, often with a note of thanks. Rather than hurriedly checking student homework during class, I was able to slow down and give more thoughtful feedback. Likewise, I was better able to concentrate by listening to students' voice recordings at home rather than having them read to me in a noisy reception room. I also noticed how students previously exhausted by after-school sports were beginning to make great progress, although children whose parents worked full-time during the pandemic were beginning to fall behind.



Figure 4. "Fun and easy" Zoom lesson.

After three months online, we have returned to in-person lessons. The gap between early elementary-age students with parental support and those who were left to manage homework on their own during the pandemic has significantly widened, especially in writing. YouTube students who watched the writing videos and uploaded the assignments are now writing swiftly and fluently. Students who read their assigned stories and uploaded to LINE are now the stars of any game involving reading skills. I have noticed less progress with upper elementary Zoom students compared to many of the younger YouTube lesson students. However, Zoom students display greater class cohesion and a narrower developmental gap, probably because they were together for three months of synchronous lessons and not dependent on parents to access and show pre-recorded videos. While YouTube students with busy or unmotivated parents sometimes had no weekly input at all, the Zoom students had at least an hour a week of English input and interaction with their peers.

For the remainder of the school year, I am keeping my homework management asynchronous by continuing with Padlet. Although this may be problematic for some families, it will ensure thoughtful

and timely feedback for families who are deeply committed to language study. I expect external circumstances may lead to further changes at my school, but I'm prepared to be flexible and continue experimenting with whatever technology will allow my students to continue learning.

Mary Virgil-Uchida

ABC House

Hokusei University, Sapporo

maryvirgiluchida@me.com

Coronavirus cases began to appear in Hokkaido in February. The annual Snow Festival brought the virus to our midst before almost anywhere else in Japan. I closed my school, then reopened it, then went partially online with those who wanted to isolate themselves, and finally totally online in mid-April. Luckily, I had started to learn how to use Zoom through the Facebook group Online Teaching Japan in early April, so I was ready to start teaching online when we were told to by the Hokkaido Governor.

Before going online, I was wearing a mask for six to seven hours a day. I had no energy to teach and needed to do something special. Digging deep into my bag of tricks, I pulled out an old activity: 75 basic questions that I photocopied and gave everyone, from the first graders to junior high students. The students made personal word cards, writing the Japanese meanings on the reverse, and practiced Q&A for the whole month. Parents were pleased to see the effort we were putting into keeping the kids' education going. Jukus and school activities were cancelled, but ABC House stayed open!

After spring vacation, classes started again. Everything seemed to be back to normal, but it didn't last! The second wave hit with a vengeance, and we couldn't allow the students to come to the school. Initially, everyone was against the idea of studying online, including my staff! I had my Japanese teachers run Zoom training sessions with small groups of parents on Sundays and in the evenings. By April 10th, all of the classes went totally online. I can't say that all has gone smoothly. The biggest problem has been my own inability to use Zoom well. However, parents were so thankful that we were working hard, and so were very appreciative of what my staff and I were doing.

With the students no longer coming to class, borrowing reading books from our lending library was not a possibility. So, I decided to use some of

the upper elementary kids' favorite books, *Potato Pals* (Jackson & Kimura, 2005), as a dictation activity. Using the CD that came with the books, they could listen to the book and songs. Then, I read the books to them and had them write the sentences in their notebooks as a dictation activity. At first, they wanted me to show the page so they could just copy, but I pushed them to sound out the words, or I spelled them out myself. Dictation was a new thing for my students. I found that because they were not in front of their classmates, they were not as worried about making mistakes! I was so happy to see them developing confidence. After they wrote each sentence, I revealed it using my iPhone as a secondary camera, and they corrected any mistakes. We used breakout rooms for them to practice reading the story together, and when they came back to the main Zoom session, they had more confidence to read in front of others.

The education and wellbeing of students is the most important thing, and knowing this, has given me the energy to push forward and work hard to provide quality lessons. Slowly, a few students were allowed to return to the classroom because of technical difficulties. I also started having those who had problems paying attention online come back to class. I set up a large TV in one classroom and sat at my computer in another room. This allowed me to teach without wearing a mask.



Figure 5. Outdoor classroom.

In June, I was finally able to see my students again in person. I started holding classes in a local park when the weather was good. They brought their own mats or chairs, and we studied outdoors. In addition, I purchased small whiteboards and markers for all of the students so they could write whatever they were working on, before writing in their notebooks. By July, I was able to have most classes back to face-to-face, but we have now start-

ed studying in the new outdoor classroom that I set up in my garden.

The future is unpredictable, but with the option of being able to return to Zoom lessons, we know we are ready.

References

Jackson, P., & Kimura, R. (2005). *Potato Pals*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stanford Graduate School of Business. (2014, Dec. 4). Think Fast, Talk Smart: Communication Techniques [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAnw168huqA>

Recommended Videos for Breathing Exercises

Orgforlearning. (2015, Nov. 13). 4x6 Breath Metronome for Diaphragmatic Breathing: 4 sec. inhale, 6 sec. exhale [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTw5BV6R4uw>

Simple as ABC. (2016, Apr. 22). Feeling anxious? Take deep breaths in sync with this! [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wdbbtgf05Ek>

[JALT PRAXIS] BOOK REVIEWS



Robert Taferner & Stephen Case

If you are interested in writing a book review, please consult the list of materials available for review in the Recently Received column, or consider suggesting an alternative book that would be helpful to our membership.

Email: reviews@jalt-publications.org

Web: <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/book-reviews>

This month's column features Matthew Philbrick's review of *FLOW: Building English Fluency* (2nd Edition).

FLOW: Building English Fluency (2nd Edition)

[Jonathan Jackson. Eurasian Editions, 2018. pp. 60. ¥1,750 ISBN: 978-4-9909792-1-8.]

Reviewed by Matthew Philbrick, Toyota Technological University

FLOW: *Building English Fluency* is a lower-intermediate level English conversation textbook written for Japanese university students, but it can also be used at the high school level. Unlike many English conversation textbooks, which have content that does not match their stated focus of helping students become conversationally competent (Kroeker, 2009), this textbook is almost entirely focused on English conversation. It is designed to help students who have studied English for many years but still have trouble holding a simple conversation.

I used this book to instruct a class of 20 high school girls for an hour a week for approximately six months. Through plentiful conversation practice and explicit instruction of effective, research-supported conversational strategies, such as asking

follow-up questions using *wh-* words, turn taking, and requesting and giving clarification (Washburn & Christianson, 1995), most students showed a marked improvement in their speaking fluency. Students were able to progress from not being able to carry on a conversation for two minutes to being able to talk for at least three to four minutes about any given topic.

FLOW consists of 14 units, with four pages per unit, fitting perfectly into a 90-minute class. Each unit focuses on a particular topic, such as food, art, technology, and entertainment. These topics are further broken down into sub-topics, with a myriad of conversation questions for each. For instance, in the unit on entertainment, sub-topics include TV, films, and celebrity culture. The wide variety of topics and questions means that teachers should have no problem selecting something to suit the composition of their classes.

Each unit also has a particular language focus. The first two units start simply by stressing the importance of sharing many details and asking follow-up questions. More advanced skills and strategies are introduced in subsequent chapters, such as asking questions about time and place, making opinion statements, checking understanding, and agreeing and disagreeing.

Each unit follows the same format. On the first page, example conversations introduce both the topic and language focus of the unit. This is