



2020 Plenary Speaker • Patrick Jackson

Dear, Dear Me...

Patrick Jackson

Oxford University Press

Patrick Jackson arrived in Japan in 1996, dishevelled from running an all-night restaurant in Dublin, Ireland. He strolled into a teaching job, possibly due to being taller than some of the other applicants, and was repeatedly told how good he was at it despite his minimal qualifications. Armed with his impressive chopstick skills and near-fluent Japanese, as well as his astonishing ability to eat natto, Patrick was walking on air.

One triumph led to another. After five years teaching kindergarten and primary conversation classes, he moved on to a prestigious junior high school, then high school, private university and, finally, a community college where he taught senior citizens. Following the logic of this progression, his next career move should have been to teach English conversation to the dead, but he decided it was time to return to Ireland while his students were still extant. Now an author of ELT materials, a committed litter-picker, and an environmental activist, he has shared a letter with us, written to the earlier, just-off-the-plane version of himself.

Dear Me,

Don't be frightened by my ghastly appearance. I am you. Or should that be 'You are I'? I am writing with some good news, some bad news, and some advice. I know nobody likes to be told "If I were you..." but in this case, I actually am you, so please pay close attention.

Firstly, the good news. It's going to be wonderful. You will have a fun and fulfilling time in Japan, enjoying good health and great friendships. You will get to know an amazing country and culture. You will be able to support your family thanks to a series of fair and supportive employers and reasonably paid work in pleasant conditions. You will be on the receiving end of much kindness. Your creative endeavours will be published and used by teachers far and wide and you'll even receive an income from that activity. You will 'do well' and get to spend Christmas in Hawaii with your family with every one of you suffering from a very nasty dose of gastric flu for the whole week. The cherry on the cake will be when, long after you have left Japan and the language classroom, you are invited to deliver a plenary webinar online to the JALT community via Zoom, recorded and uploaded to YouTube, and shared on Twitter and possibly even Instagram. Of

course, you don't understand a word of that last sentence, but bear with me.

Now for the bad news. Brace yourself because I know you have been feeling pretty good about things recently. Truth be told, you aren't a great teacher. You lack any knowledge of the basics of teaching young children and are, quite frankly, making it all up as you go along. You don't even seem to have any understanding of the language you are teaching. Furthermore, your chopstick technique lacks and your general manners suck big time. Apart from that, you are appallingly scruffy. Also, being able to eat natto is not an actual skill that deserves praise. They're beans. And your much lauded 24 words of Japanese sound like English or Dutch, through a sock, from a distance. But, well done for trying.

So here's the free advice. Please heed it. Do your students, your employers, and yourself a favour and save yourself a couple of decades of dead ends and bluffing. Start by learning something about your chosen profession immediately. Whatever way you like to learn, there is plenty out there for you. Get properly qualified. There is something called CPD that you have never heard of and won't for at least five years. It stands for 'continued professional development'. Do it. There are also things called CELTA and DELTA and Masters degrees. Do them too.

This next one is important. On the occasion you are given a potato suit in Osaka by a kind Japanese teacher, think twice about wearing it on the bullet train back to Nagoya. It wasn't a good idea then, and it never will be. Especially when you are carrying a bag of Asahi Super Dry. The fact that your train fare will be paid by a well-known 500-year-old publishing company makes no difference. Lose the spudsuit on the *shinkansen*. It scares people.

Learn to speak Japanese to as high a level as you can reach as quickly as you can. Take classes. Do the tests. Put in the time and immerse yourself in it. You have an unbelievable opportunity to gain another language and understand another culture. I didn't and still regret it. Don't be me.

There are local and national teaching organisations such as JALT and teaching groups that would love to welcome you. Join them and find inspiration there, and mentorship, and direction. One day you will wander into a teaching conference by accident



and a whole new world will open up. On that day, you will see grown adults on stage pretending to be rabbits, kangaroos, and pandas. These are primary ELT authors and they should be treated with love and respect. You will become one of them.

There's a world full of experienced, interesting people who will be delighted to help you in all sorts of ways. Seek them out. Go for coffee. Ask for advice. Everything good that is about to happen to you happened thanks to a connection you made with somebody. You just took rather a long time finding them.

Listen carefully to this next one. If you find yourself about to pull open the curtain on a junior high school *Three Billy Goats* drama activity, cancel it at once. I won't go into too many details here for fear of upsetting you, but believe me, it got ugly fast. There were broken bones and profuse, prostrate apologies to pupils, parents, and principals. On that note, generally avoid trolls of any sort. Goats are fine though.

Enjoy the great teaching materials available to you and keep an eye on what's new. But also think about what you can make yourself. Getting some creative projects on the go is the fuel that keeps you going. Put a few irons in the fire and then a few more. You don't know which of your projects will grow wings and fly and ideas can have a surprisingly long shelf life.

Ask what 'extra' you can bring to your students, your colleagues, and your employer. Think beyond the timetable and the confines of the classroom. Really get to know your students. That's another regret of mine. Let them get to know the real you. Bring your hobbies, passions, and curiosities to work and put them to service, making your teaching days, weeks, months, and years unique and memorable, and keeping you fresh and inspired. Link your classroom to the wider world in any way you can think of and connect your teaching to the community. It will transform your students and help them see the real benefits of learning English.

Oh, and finally...

Enjoy the ride. And if you think it's patronising of me to drop by like this, I'll tell you a little secret. All of this advice is as relevant to me now as it was 25 years ago.

*Farewell young man,
YOU (or me?)*

Now back in Ireland after twelve years teaching Japanese learners of all ages, **Patrick Jackson** is motivated by the power of real-world experiences and community action to inspire and give meaning to classroom learning. A passionate beachcomber and litter-picker, he is currently working on projects that help children discover their role as environmental stewards. He is the author of several courses published by Oxford University Press including *Everybody Up* and *Potato Pals*. He occasionally wears a cloak festooned with marine debris. Patrick tweets as @patjack67.



The CREDIBLE Approach in the Classroom

Prof Nomad

University of Sydney

The CREDIBLE approach encourages students and teachers to create projects that address real needs of people and communities where they live. The CREDIBLE approach, which takes a transdisciplinary and translanguaging approach in developing classroom practices and goals, is an attempt to reharmonise our understandings of language and knowledge in our local settings.

CREDIBLE is an acronym used to highlight the relationship between our educational work and our social and environmental contexts.

In this session, we will unpack the notion of CREDIBLE and then look at examples of projects that classroom practitioners have carried out in diverse contexts. We will also consider possible projects that you can develop in your own contexts.

Prof Nomad (Ahmar Mahboob) is Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Sydney. His current work focusses on how humans make sense and engage with the world through the use of all their socio-semiotics, which includes (but is not limited to) language. His goal in doing this is to develop alternative approaches to doing social-sciences—ones that are more integrated and respond to real human, non-human, and environmental needs.

