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Learning to Teach
Teaching to Learn

In this month's issue . . .

Greetings, and welcome to the July/August 2021 issue of *The Language Teacher*. At the time of writing, it is still unclear whether the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics will be held in July and August. Regardless of the decision, I do hope that you can enjoy some much-needed time off this summer, and that your family remains safe and healthy during these challenging times.

The Featured Article for this issue presents a study by **Charles Mueller** and **Yasuhiro Tsushima**, examining Japanese university students' English article usage. After revealing the types of errors students tend to make, it concludes with a suggestion of the pedagogical implications. In the Readers' Forum, **Davey Young** makes an argument for the importance of quality assurance as it applies to language teaching and professional development.

You can also check out two *TLT Interviews*. The first one, conducted by **Michael Ellis**, is a discussion with Yoshi Grote on the subject of approaches to supporting diversity in the classroom. The second, by **Torrin Shimono**, is a discussion with Patrick Jackson on his long career of teaching in Japan. Finally, as usual, *My Share* showcases several classroom ideas for you to take a look at over the holidays. Enjoy the issue!

— Nicole Gallagher
TLT *Coeditor*

こんにちは。2021年7-8月号の*The Language Teacher*へようこそ。原稿執筆時の段階では、東京オリンピック並びにパラリンピックが7・8月に開催されるのかどうかは、まだ不透明という状況です。いかなる決定がなされようとも、皆様が今夏の休暇をお楽しみいただき、また困難な時期であってもご家族が安全かつ健康でありますよう、心からお祈りしています。

今回のFeatured Articleでは、日本人大学生の英語冠詞の使い方について調査した**Charles Mueller**と**Yasuhiro Tsushima**の研究をご紹介いたします。学生の誤り傾向を分析したのち、教育技法を提案しています。Readers' Forumでは、**Davey Young**が質保証を言語教育及び専門性の向上に応用しつつ、その重要性について論じています。

Continued over



2つの*TLT Interview*もご覧下さい。一つ目のインタビュー記事は**Michael Ellis**によるもので、教室内における多様性を支援する取り組みについてYoshi Groteにインタビューしたものです。二つ目は、**Torrin Shimono** による、長年日本で教えた経験のあるPatrick Jacksonとのインタビュー記事です。いつものことですが、最後はMy Shareです。休暇中ご覧いただける教室でのアイデアをいくつかご紹介しております。皆様どうぞ7-8月号をお楽しみください！

— Nicole Gallagher
TLT *Coeditor*

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Acquisition of English Article Uses by Japanese EFL Learners

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https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTLT45.4-1

College-level Japanese learners of English find articles difficult to acquire. To determine which uses of English articles pose the greatest difficulties to this population, the current study examined first-year students' (*N* = 178) performance on an article assessment instrument. Results indicated patterns of difficulty somewhat different from those reported by Liu and Gleason (2002), who conducted research on ESL learners from diverse L1 backgrounds. In the current study, participants displayed greater accuracy on uses that could be captured by easy-to-apply rules involving linguistic form (i.e., those consistently marked by specific lexical items, iterative use of lexical items, or grammatical constructions) and lower accuracy on uses captured primarily by semantic rules. The results are useful to EFL teachers in determining which uses of the articles should receive primary focus in instruction aimed at first-year Japanese college students.

英語の冠詞の習得は、大学生レベルの日本人英語学習者にとってかなりの難題のひとつとなっている。本研究は、これらの学習者にとって冠詞のどの用法の習得が最も難しいのかを特定化するために、冠詞を試す測定テストで大学1年生（N=178）の成績を検証した。結果として、英語以外の言語を第1言語としてもつESL学習者を調査したLiu and Gleason (2002) によって報告された難しさとは幾分異なったパターンが出た。本調査において、被験者は、（特定の語彙項目、語彙項目の反復的な使用、あるいは文法構文といった）言語形式を含む適用しやすい規則によって捉えられる用法では正確さがより高く、他方、主に意味規則によって捉えられる用法では正確さがより低い結果を示した。本研究の結果は、日本の大学1年生の英語教育において、どの冠詞の用法に主たる焦点を置くべきなのかを決定する際に、EFL教師にとって有益となる。

The current research examines Japanese college students' knowledge of the English article system, with the primary focus on the definite article. The English definite article is the most frequently occurring word in English (Francis & Kučera, 1982). In spite of its pervasiveness, its use presents a major challenge to Japanese learners, who, even at advanced levels, only attain around 70% accuracy (Yamada & Matsuura, 1982). The difficulty can be partly attributed to crosslinguistic differences (Larsen-Freeman, 1975). Japanese, like most languages (Lyons, 1999), lacks an article system, and as a result, Japanese pedagogical materials often attempt to convey article use through L1 lexical glosses (e.g., *sono* [that], or *hitotusuno* [one]) that fail to convey the full range of article uses (Kuno & Takami, 2004). Other factors hindering acquisition include semantic complexity (Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2001), a multiplicity of functions (Young, 1996), lack of phonological salience (Collins et al., 2009; DeKeyser, 2005), the redundancy of information provided by articles which results in blocking (Ellis, 2018), difficulty in integrating multiple sources of information when processing an L2 (Papadopoulou & Clahsen, 2003), and faulty explanations in pedagogical materials (Lopez & Sabir, 2017), such as the conflation of definiteness and specificity (Ionin et al., 2004). In light of these difficulties, teachers and materials designers have a crucial need for guidance regarding the systematic features of this system that pose the greatest challenge to L2 learners at each stage of L2 development.

The current paper reports an analysis of learners' knowledge of articles based on an empirical study involving 178 Japanese college students. The first section discusses some mainstream linguistic analyses of articles before turning to empirical research on L2 acquisition of the system. The paper then briefly describes the design of the instrument used to collect the current study's data and the results of the analysis, which sheds light on which uses of the definite article present the greatest challenges to Japanese learners. The final section discusses the pedagogical implications of the study.

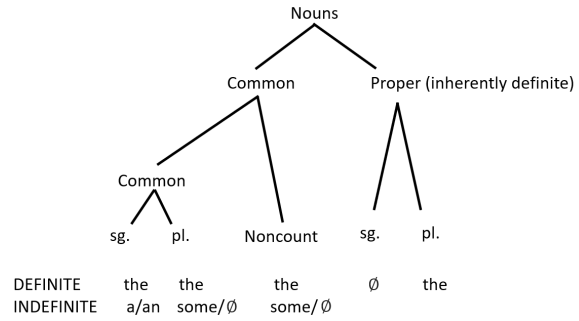
Literature Review

According to Bickerton (1981), English articles can be largely understood in terms of two binary discourse features: whether a noun phrase involves a specific referent (+SR) and whether the hearer knows the referent (+HK). This results in four types of noun phrases. Those in which the hearer lacks knowledge (-HK) require the indefinite article if the referent is singular, and no article if the referent is plural. Noun phrases with a specific referent (+SR) and hearer knowledge (+HR) require the definite

article. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) provide another commonly used set of criteria based on countability, number, and definiteness as shown in the decision tree depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Criteria for Selection of Articles (adapted from Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 283).



Other researchers have provided more fine-grained analyses. Those in this paper primarily come from Hawkins (1978) while taking into account some clarifications put forth by Huebner (1983). When discussing the article use categories, the corresponding categories employed by Liu and Gleason (2002) will also be noted in order to facilitate comparisons of the current study's results with their results. The categories are described below.

Encyclopedic uses of *'the'* are instances in which the hearer relies on general world knowledge to determine the referent as in, '*The sun was bright yesterday*'. Also included would be encyclopedic knowledge that is limited to a local context. In a small village, for example, someone might say, '*There's a potluck at the church tonight*' if there is only one church, and people in the village generally know about it. Liu and Gleason (2002) call this a *cultural* use since it relies on cultural knowledge.

Anaphoric uses of *'the'* are instances in which a referent is mentioned again, often in a subsequent clause or sentence. An example would be the use of *'the'* before *apple* in '*She held out an apple and a pear. Her horse ate the apple*'. This use of the English definite article is often taught in pedagogical materials aimed at L2 learners.

Associative uses of *'the'* are similar to anaphoric uses but do not involve repetition of the same word. In many cases, mention of a previous referent implies the existence of a subsequent referent. Examples include '*I went to a wedding last weekend. The bride was beautiful*'. The definite article is appropriate here since our mental model of a particular wedding taking place makes the notion of a bride present at the wedding highly accessible (cf. Ariel, 1990). As Lyons (1999) points out, association need not involve the same part of speech. For example, in '*I fished all day, but the trout just weren't biting*', although *fish* is a verb, it sanctions use of the definite article before the noun *trout*. Liu and Gleason (2002) classify both anaphoric and associative uses as *textual*.

Nonexplanatory modifier (hereafter, *nonexplanatory*) uses of *'the'* are instances in which a modifier limits the scope of the noun phrase. In English, a specific group of adjectives (e.g., *first*, *same*, *only*) and the superlative have this function. Learners of English as an L2 often memorize the co-occurrence of the definite article and these words as rules or as collocations (although as Hawkins, 1978, notes, there are exceptions).

Cataphoric uses of *'the'* involve instances in which a noun phrase is modified with an explanation. An example would be '*The movies shown here are all rated R*'. This use often coincides with the occurrence of relative clause constructions which modify a head noun marked with *'the'*. Learners can use this correlation between modifying grammatical structures and the definite article to establish easily applied albeit imperfect rules of thumb (e.g., If you see a relative clause, put *'the'* before the head noun). Liu and Gleason (2002) refer to both nonexplanatory and cataphoric uses of *'the'* as *structural* in apparent reference to their close association with regularities involving linguistic form (i.e., lexical and grammatical patterns).

A further use, which occurs frequently in face-to-face communication, involves the visible and immediate uses of *'the'*. In these instances, the referent is readily accessible due to its presence in the immediate environment. For example, in the sentence '*Can you hand me the salt?*' the referent is knowable by the hearer since there is presumably only one saltshaker on the table in the immediate vicinity of the hearer. Liu and Gleason (2002) refer to these uses as *situational*.

The current study examined Japanese learners' sensitivity to specificity when choosing indefinite articles. According to Von Heusinger (2002), a noun phrase is specific when it is "functionally linked to the speaker of the sentence or to another referential expression in the sentence such as the subject or object" and when the interpretation of a specific noun phrase "does not depend on the interpretation of the matrix predicate or semantic operators such as modal verbs" (p. 247).

While the above treatments of articles capture many of the main features of the system, it should be noted that English articles are notoriously full of exceptional cases, complicating learners' attempts to inductively acquire the rules and patterns from the input, whether this be accomplished through implicit or explicit learning mechanisms, or their synergy. For example, consider the null use of articles found in many common phrases (e.g., *abandon ship*) or the use of so-called weak definites (e.g., *When should babies go to the dentist?*)

The linguistic categorization of article uses has provided the impetus for research that seeks to specify the nature of L2 learners' interlanguage systems in greater detail. As perhaps the most cited investigation of this type, Liu and Gleason (2002) conducted a study of 128 ESL students from various L1 backgrounds. All the learners had TOEFL scores below 500 (paper version) and were divided into "low", "intermediate", and "advanced" learners. In terms of the CEFR levels (Council of Europe, 2001), the participants would therefore be primarily at the B1 level or below. The participants took a test with 91 sentences and supplied the missing articles. The results indicated that participants achieved greatest accuracy on anaphoric and associative (textual) items, followed by nonexplanatory and cataphoric (structural) items, visible/immediate items (situational), and then encyclopedic (cultural) items.

Like the Liu and Gleason (2002) study, the current study addresses the question of which uses of English articles pose the greatest challenge to college students. To answer this question, the current study examines Japanese learners' knowledge of English articles but with a finer grained analysis than that used in the Liu and Gleason (2002) study. Based on six types of definite article use and some indefinite article uses as discussed above, the current study goes beyond previous empirical research through the use of more specific categories that avoid conflation of anaphoric and associative uses or conflation of nonexplanatory and cataphoric uses. Moreover, by focusing more narrowly on Japanese learners, the study's results are more readily generalizable to the Japanese EFL context.

Method

The participants (N = 178) were Japanese EFL students from eight first-year English classes. Participants from four of the classes (n = 124) attended a large public university, and those from the remaining four classes (n = 54) were students at a private women's university. The participants were roughly at the B1 level of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001).

An articles assessment instrument was created similar to that used by Liu and Gleason (2002). The instrument presented sentences with most of the required articles missing. The directions asked participants to supply the necessary article (or articles) but to make no changes to the sentence if an article was unnecessary. There was nothing to indicate where an article might be required. Participants were asked to make a V-shaped mark to indicate where the missing article should be inserted and then write the missing article. There were 52 points (hereafter, *items*) in the sentences where the definite article was needed, and 22 where the indefinite article was needed.

Among the 52 items requiring the definite article, 5 items targeted encyclopedic, 10 anaphoric, 10 associative, 5 nonexplanatory, 10 cataphoric, and 10 visible uses. In addition to these items, which targeted the article uses that were the main focus of the study, 2 items targeted the use of '*the*' before plural proper nouns. These final two items were not of theoretical interest in this study but were included to make the items on the instrument more varied and realistic.

To ensure that participants considered the indefinite article as a possible choice, 22 items targeted '*a*' or '*an*'. Among these, 10 items involved specific referents, and 10 involved nonspecific referents. The former use is exemplified by the sentence '*I finally found a woman to marry*'. In this case, the speaker has a particular referent in mind. Nonspecific uses of the indefinite article occur when the specific referent is unknown by both speakers. Consider the sentence '*Jerry didn't read a book on Egypt for his history class because he couldn't find one*'. The sentence does not suggest that the speaker has a particular book on Egypt in mind. Two further items involved the use of the indefinite article in equative constructions (e.g., *I am a student*). These were not of theoretical interest but were included to make the items on the instrument more varied and realistic. Participants were given 40 minutes to complete the test. In scoring, errors involving the choice between *a* and *an* were ignored.

Results

The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. For ease of explication, all results are shown as percentages.

Statistical tests were conducted using SPSS. Type-Subtype combinations (e.g., cultural-encyclopedic) served as the independent variable and were treated as a within-subjects factor. Since the study focused on uses subsumed by the Liu and Gleason

Table 1

Item Type, Number of Items Per Category, and Participants' Mean Level of Accuracy

Type #	Article	Type (Liu & Gleason, 2002)	Subtype	Items	*M* % (*SD* %)
1	THE	cultural	encyclopedic	5	36.7 (22.1)
2	THE	textual	anaphoric	10	64.1 (19.6)
3	THE	textual	associative	10	36.4 (18.8)
4	THE	structural	nonexplanatory	5	52.0 (32.5)
5	THE	structural	cataphoric	10	73.3 (15.2)
6	THE	situational	visible, immediate	10	58.7 (19.4)
7	THE	N/A	plural proper noun	2	14.3 (23.3)
8	A/AN	N/A	specific	10	67.5 (17.0)
9	A/AN	N/A	nonspecific	10	74.7 (17.8)
10	A/AN	N/A	equative	2	70.5 (32.1)

categories, only six type-subtype combinations (the first six rows in Table 1) and two indefinite article types (specific and nonspecific) were included in the statistical analysis. Percentage accuracy scores were treated as the dependent variable. A one-way repeated measures ANOVA indicated that there was a significant effect of Type-Subtype on percentage accuracy scores, Wilks' Lambda = .138, $F(7, 171) = 152.3$, $p < .001$. Follow-up pairwise analyses showed that at an alpha of .05, accuracy on each set of items was significantly different, except for the differences between Category #6 and #4 and between Category #1 and #3. This would suggest the acquisition order #5 > #2 > #6, #4 > #1, #3, as depicted in detail in Table 2. The table is to be read from left to right. Looking at the first line, for example, it can be seen that participants were more accurate on Category #5 (the cataphoric use of the definite article) than on Categories #2, #6, #4, #1, and #3, and that the differences between Category #5 and each of these other categories were significant at $p < .001$. The differences that fall short of significance at $p = .05$ have been shaded.

If the results from the current study are analyzed using the same four categories employed by Liu and Gleason (2002), that is to say, by collapsing the anaphoric and associative categories as well as the nonexplanatory and cataphoric categories, the percentage accuracy would be 62.6% for structural uses, 58.7% for situational, 50.3% for textual, and 36.7% for cultural. If we then collapse the Liu and Gleason results across proficiency level (i.e., regard all of their participants as a single group), their participants achieved 73.0% accuracy on situational items, 64.8% on structural items, 56.9% on textual items, and 36.0% on cultural items. The two sets of results are shown in Figure 2.

As can be seen, the results of the current study closely parallel those in Liu and Gleason (2002), except for markedly lower performance on situational items. Except for this discrepancy, the order of difficulty for article use is similar for both groups. Unfortunately, the coarse-grained categories used by Liu and Gleason do not show the whole picture. For example, the participants in the current study

Table 2

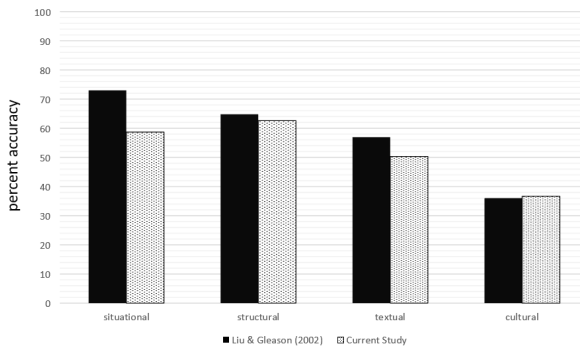
Accuracy Order (From Left to Right) of Key Uses of Definite Article

	Highest accuracy	← →		Lowest accuracy	
#5	#2 ($p < .001$)	#6 ($p < .001$)	#4 ($p < .001$)	#1 ($p < .001$)	#3 ($p < .001$)
	#2	#6 ($p < .027$)	#4 ($p < .001$)	#1 ($p < .001$)	#3 ($p < .001$)
		#6	#4 ($p < .067$)	#1 ($p < .001$)	#3 ($p < .001$)
			#4	#1 ($p < .001$)	#3 ($p < .001$)
				#1	#3 ($p < 1.00$)

were nearly twice as accurate on the anaphoric use types than they were on the associative use types, both of which were treated as the single category "textual" in Liu and Gleason's study. Similarly, the current results for the cataphoric and nonexplanatory categories were strikingly different, suggesting that there is little value in treating these as part of the same broad category of "structural uses". In short, the more specific categories of the current study are able to capture important features of learners' interlanguage that would be missed using more general categories of article use.

Figure 2

Comparison of the Results of Liu and Gleason (2002) and the Current Study



The current findings, when viewed in terms of the more specific categories employed in this study, suggest that learners' accuracy largely reflects the use of easily applied rules. Consider the discrepancy between the high scores on anaphoric and low scores on associative use types. This may be explained by the fact that learners can achieve accuracy on the former by applying a simple rule such as, if a noun repeats, use *the* for the second occurrence. Associative contexts involve greater subtleties. Consider the sentences, '*I went to a wedding. The bride was beautiful*'. In this case, the learner must recognize that the noun *bride* requires the definite article due to the close association between brides and weddings.

Regarding the results related to the indefinite article, pairwise comparisons showed significantly higher accuracy on items involving nonspecific (#8) versus specific contexts (#7), $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.29, 11.02]. This finding is in line with the Fluctuation Hypothesis (Ionin, 2006; Ionin et al., 2004), which suggests that learners' interlanguage representations of the indefinite article initially fluctuate between representations based on definiteness (as in native speakers' English) and specificity (as occurs in languages such as Samoan). This should result in the overuse of '*the*' in specific indefinite contexts and overuse of '*a*' or '*an*' in nonspecific definite contexts. The current study is therefore in accordance with other studies which confirm the Fluctuation Hypothesis in learners from a range of backgrounds; this includes Korean-L1 (Ionin et al., 2004), Chinese-L1 (Snape, 2009), and Japanese-L1 (Tanaka, 2011) speakers. Looked at from the perspective of prototype theory (Rosch, 1978), the Japanese learners in this study apparently developed interlanguage representations that regard nonspecific and indefinite contexts as the prototype of the indefinite article category, and specific and definite contexts as the prototype of the definite article category.

Discussion

The analysis of this study suggests that first-year college-level Japanese learners find it relatively easier to master article uses that are governed by easily stipulated rules that are generalizable. While not part of the main analysis, the low accuracy on plural proper nouns is an exception and suggests that Japanese learners would benefit from instruction on this easily applied rule. Participants' accuracy declines considerably when it comes to uses that rely heavily on semantic considerations. The associative use appears to be particularly challenging, so classroom instruction and pedagogical materials may benefit from closer attention to this use. It may be worth pointing out to learners that many instances of associative use involve whole-part relationships (e.g., the definite article use in '*I like my new smartphone, but the screen's a bit small*'.)

The current study's findings related to the indefinite article are of theoretical interest as they lend support to the Fluctuation Hypothesis (Ionin, 2006). At a practical level, they suggest that a great deal of exposure to English within naturalistic discourse contexts may be necessary for learners to develop sensitivity to key semantic features that are relevant to article use. Inconsistencies between the current study's findings and those of Liu and Gleason (2002) strongly suggest that their use of overly broad categories is problematic. Future researchers should therefore use more detailed distinctions. Ideally, even more specific than those used in the current study.

This study has several limitations. First, it focused on L2 learners from a specific L1 background (Japanese) and at a specific level of proficiency. More research therefore needs to be conducted to

determine whether the patterns of acquisition are the same for learners from other L1 backgrounds as well as for untutored learners in an immersion setting. Second, the results are based on limited sets of items representing each type of article use. As is often the case when using discrete response formats such as the test used in the current study, there is always the possibility that participants' performance was affected by extraneous features of items such as vocabulary or grammatical structures. For this reason, future researchers adopting this methodology may want to reduce the number of categories being examined while increasing the number of items representing each type of article use.

Finally, learners should be made aware of the inherent difficulty in acquiring articles and should not hold unrealistic expectations of acquiring the system after short periods of instruction. Teachers may remind them that even native speakers fail to acquire this system fully until the relatively late age of five (Warden, 1976, 1981). At the same time, teachers also need to have realistic expectations. There is still considerable debate over whether explicit teaching or error correction involving articles has any value. Some researchers claim that such instruction is essentially a waste of time (Dulay et al., 1982; Umeda et al., 2019). Others have voiced a more optimistic view (e.g., Akakura, 2012; Muranoi, 2000; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Sheen, 2007). Taking a middle position, Master (1997) argues that instruction, while ineffective for most learners, may have some benefits for intermediate learners in particular. Master (1990) suggests that instructors teach the system by focusing on a single binary distinction at a time (e.g., countability). Future researchers should also consider which particular uses of the definite article benefit most from explicit instruction. It is likely that some uses are amenable to pre-planned explicit instruction or to incidental interventions such as focus on form (Muranoi, 2000), whereas other uses can only be mastered through implicit learning mechanisms that require copious input.

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Yasuhiro Tsushima conducts research on various linguistic constructions from the perspective of English studies and comparative linguistics using a cognitive linguistics framework, drawing specifically on the cognitive grammar analysis proposed by Ronald W. Langacker.

Appendix

Articles Test

To save space, only the sentences are shown here. In the actual test, difficult words such as "equator" appeared with a Japanese gloss. In some sentences, more than one article is required.

次の文のうちいくつかは、本来入るべき冠詞("a"、"an"、"the")が抜けています。各文を読み、例A・Bにならって正しい冠詞を書き加えなさい。抜けている冠詞が複数ある文もあれば、何も加える必要のないものもあります。

1. I look after a little girl and a little boy on Saturdays. Little girl is smart, but boy isn't.
2. Sarah wants to meet friend of mine named Keiko Suzuki. Keiko's really famous.
3. This is book that I was telling you about.
4. Jane must read book about horses for her class, but she can't find one.
5. If you buy this car, you'll need to repair brakes before you drive it.
6. Painting on this wall was very expensive.
7. President of the U.S. lives in White House.
8. Tomorrow afternoon is only time I can meet you.
9. Did you hear that house we saw last week burned down last night?
10. When Jane grows up, she wants to marry millionaire.
11. Water in this glass is dirty.
12. The wife hears a noise and tells her husband, "Doorbell is ringing. Answer door."

13. Man I met in New York later became my husband.
14. Sally Ride was first woman to fly into space.
15. David's looking for girl. She dropped her purse and David found it. He wants to return it to her.
16. When you're in class, you should listen carefully to what teacher says.
17. I need to buy computer, but I can't decide which model I should get.
18. Our office got new computers last week. Someday, I really think that computers will replace people everywhere.
19. Can you please turn on light?
20. He put two-dollar stamp on his package, so he must be package letter overseas.
21. Sun is shining. It's a beautiful day.
22. Tom is student we discussed in our office.
23. Many people are coming to our city these days.
24. While driving in their car to work, the father says to his son, "Please turn on radio."
25. Jerry didn't read book on Egypt for his history class because he couldn't find one.
26. We went to a basketball game on Saturday. Players at game were all very tall.
27. This is example of what I was talking about.
28. After you're finished using the ketchup, put lid back on top of bottle.
29. I have papers you asked for.
30. I read a few science-fiction books this semester. Science-fiction books are really interesting.
31. If you want to meet next week, Friday is only day I have free.
32. Handle of that cup is broken.
33. The boss says to his employees, "I'm not happy with your work. Things are really going to have to change around here."
34. I saw man walking his dog yesterday. Man was walking so fast that dog could barely keep up with him.
35. We got new TV for our house. I enjoy watching some programs, but in general I think that people shouldn't watch TV so much.
36. Phone that I wanted to buy is sold out.
37. Jane bought a ring and a necklace for her mother's birthday. Her mother loved ring but hated necklace.
38. I went to concert last night. I had a great time at concert. Singer's voice was so lovely.
39. I heard that you were in an accident. I know how you feel. I had similar experience last year.
40. When you make green tea, you should heat water to 60°C.
41. I'm doing research and would like to talk with student from one of your classes. Any student is fine.
42. I invited our neighbors, Yamamotos, over to dinner tomorrow.
43. I read book about Japan. Author was from Sapporo.
44. This is third time I've been to Hokkaido.
45. Did you see letter I left on your desk yesterday?
46. The manager asks her secretary, "Could you please check schedule for me?"
47. Student cheated on math exam that we had last week. We're trying to figure out who it was.
48. I'd like to see movie this weekend. Do you have any suggestions?
49. My husband met us at airport. From there, we went to our neighbor's house for small party.
50. Woman who lives next door just called and said she'd like us to come over for coffee.
51. June is sixth month of the year.
52. When you eat with chopsticks, you shouldn't set them on table.
53. While driving in their car to work, the husband asks his wife, "Could you open window please?"
54. I bought smartphone last week. Unfortunately, screen is too dark.
55. Mary might be meeting friend tonight. I called her, but she didn't answer.
56. Day and night are of equal length at equator.
57. John is looking for pretty girl to ask to the dance party.
58. I saw a man in a car this morning. At first I wasn't sure, but then I realized that man driving car was a friend of mine.
59. When I listened carefully, I could hear woman who lives next door talking to her son.
60. Man just asked me out. I'm too embarrassed to tell you who it was!
61. She lives in Russia, next to Ural Mountains.
62. If man is in the girls' dressing room, tell me. No men should be in there.
63. I'm in Sapporo to visit friend from college.
64. Mount Aso, in Kumamoto, is active volcano.
65. In a bright, sunny room, the woman asks the man, "Could you close curtains? It's too bright in here."

A Call for Greater Quality Assurance in Postsecondary English Language Education in Japan

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Quality assurance (QA) is a necessary component of language education that is too often overlooked or absent in Japanese higher education institutions. This paper discusses the notion of QA in language education generally, briefly outlines the landscape of QA in postsecondary English language programs in Japan, and discusses some organizational factors that may help or hinder QA in such contexts. The paper concludes with recommendations for how postsecondary English language programs in Japan can offer more robust QA measures in order to provide a uniform standard of course and lesson delivery to all students.

質保証は言語教育になくてはならない一要素であるが、日本の高等教育機関においては、あまりにも見過ごされたり、欠けていたりしている。そこで本論は言語教育一般の質保証の観念について述べる。まず、日本の高等教育の英語教育プログラムにおける質保証の状況を簡単に概観し、その中で質保証の助けまたは妨げになるようないくつかの組織的な要因について論じる。最後に、日本の高等教育における英語教育プログラムが、全ての学生に対し、コースや授業の統一された基準を提供するべく、いかにより堅ろうな質保証の対策が講じられるかを提案する。

Increasingly, quality language education is being regarded as a human right (Little, 2019). The ability of an institute of learning to demonstrate that standards for educational quality are consistently met is often tied to institutional accreditation, a process which extends from both commercial and civil needs for quality assurance (QA) in education (Chalmers & Johnston, 2012). The use of external bodies to provide both QA and accreditation of higher education institutions (HEIs) is common practice in many parts of the world (Chalmers & Johnston, 2012), including the Asia-Pacific region (Neubauer & Gomes, 2017). There are also accreditation bodies solely focused on English language education. The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation, for instance, conducts accreditation across the United States and elsewhere, primarily in the Middle East, to promote and ensure uniform standards of educational quality within English language programs in those locations (Reeves, 2019). In Japan, "the massification of higher education, combined with a declining birthrate, and the capacity of the system of higher education to satisfy all potential demand have contributed the basic impetus for quality assurance to become a significant issue" (Li, 2017, p. 112). An institution's ability to demonstrate quality therefore serves a dual purpose of attracting prospective students and safeguarding educational quality as a human right.

In many ways, "quality is situational—it means what it means to those addressing a given situation and circumstance. Yet, the *idea* of quality is familiar to us all" (Neubauer & Gomes, 2017, p. 2). While defining quality in educational terms is a problematic and culturally dependent task, full agreement on a definition of quality education is not necessary for change agents to improve quality in any given educational sphere (Adams, 1993). In language education, considerations for course design can help us understand the parameters or degrees of quality, and this understanding can in turn help us describe and measure language education in such terms. Richards and Rodgers (2014) identify six core components of an instructional design: learning objectives, the syllabus, types of learning and teaching activities, the roles of learners, the roles of teachers, and the roles of instructional materials. For the present paper, quality in language education will be defined as the extent to which learning outcomes are defined and realized as effectively and efficiently as possible, as this definition can be understood and applied across a variety of instructional designs. Bearing this conception of quality in mind, an examination of existing QA in postsecondary education in Japan reveals the need for more localized and grassroots approaches to safeguarding quality English language education within such educational contexts.

Quality Assurance in Japanese Institutes of Higher Education

Historically, the Higher Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been charged with overseeing QA in HEIs across the country (MEXT, 2009). MEXT's Higher Education Bureau uses a QA framework that oversees the application of the Standards for Establishing Universities, first drafted in 1956, and these standards are ostensibly upheld by the Establishment-Approval System (MEXT, 2009). According to MEXT, the "intention here is to respect the independence and autonomy of universities, and thus assume that universities which are once approved would be ready to autonomously assure their own quality" (p. 19).

Noting concerns about allowing HEI's to self-assess without any evaluation by a third party, MEXT created the Quality Assurance and Accreditation System in 2004 (MEXT, 2009). This system was meant to make up for earlier shortcomings in quality assurance in Japanese higher education by mandating that all HEIs be subject to a standards check once every seven years to maintain accreditation, though with relaxed requirements to maintain accreditation after it is initially obtained. Three accrediting bodies—the Japan University Accreditation Association, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation, and the Japan Institution for Higher Education Evaluation—have been certified by MEXT under the Quality Assurance and Accreditation System to perform these checks. As part of their standards for accreditation, these agencies leave universities to conduct internal QA before external site visits (Nakano et al., 2016), giving them substantial leeway in how quality is defined, ensured, and reported. Despite MEXT's inability to determine quality in Japanese HEIs in any uniform, objective, and meaningful way, there have been calls for MEXT-certified accrediting agencies to seek recognition from and align their standards with international quality assurance agencies (Nakano et al., 2016).

Considering the toothless nature of external accountability in postsecondary education in Japan, it should come as little surprise that many English language programs in Japanese HEIs conduct little to no QA of their own, although practitioners in such institutions have proposed context-specific guidelines (Blackwell, 2016). The lack of internal QA in particular has been linked to the need for systematic faculty development schemes within EAP programs in Japanese HEIs (Iijima et al., 2020), and a recent case study of a curriculum revision at a private university in Tokyo found that the loss of several QA measures in a strongly unified and mandatory academic English discussion course was closely tied to the deliberate dismantling of an extant faculty development scheme (Young, 2020). In a survey of full- and part-time EAP instructors at 15 Asian universities, seven of which were located in Japan, Honisz-Green (2013) found that many EAP programs lacked the course and faculty organization to achieve a high enough degree of unification for QA control measures to exist. The author further attributes this lack of organization to the two-tier staff systems common in Japanese HEIs, noting that several respondents working in such contexts "mentioned that tenured faculty are often too distant from the day to day running of the EAP programme to truly understand the efficacy of their decisions" (p. 69).

While many EFL programs in Japanese HEIs typically favor curricular and teacher autonomy at the expense of top-down coordination (Prichard & Moore, 2016), there is research to suggest that non-tenured faculty in two-tier systems may prefer more course structure over such a laissez-faire approach (Brereton, 2019; Mebed, 2013). Investigating faculty organization within a coordinated English program at a private university in central Japan, Mebed (2013) found that the part-time teachers wanted more clearly defined course objectives. Additionally, Brereton (2019) found that full-time teachers at a private university in Tokyo perceived a number of benefits to teaching within the strongly unified curriculum there. These benefits were broadly categorized as a reduced workload, the creation of a community of learning, benefits for students, the possibility of reflective development, and overall course quality.

Creating a Quality Culture

Quality teaching results in quality learning, a connection that is foregrounded in teacher education (Komorowska, 2017). Considering the findings of the studies discussed above, English language programs at Japanese HEIs would do well to create more top-down structure to clearly define course objectives and provide systematic faculty development to help ensure that teachers are able to meet objectives to a uniform standard. For Mercado (2012), this begins with thoughtful hiring and transitional training to onboard new instructors; next, ongoing in-service training should "build upon teachers' background knowledge, provide new knowledge, and highlight ways in which to apply new knowledge to the classroom" (p. 131). Engaging stakeholders in this way helps establish a *quality culture* within the given context (Rose, 2007). For

departments or programs that value QA, such a culture is preferable to one that prioritizes faculty autonomy when designing and implementing a curriculum.

One well-established form of faculty development that also serves as a QA instrument is classroom observation, "the cornerstone of quality assurance" (O'Leary, 2013, p. 11). Video recording lessons for later observation has also been shown to have a wide array of benefits for teacher development, including but not limited to mediating teacher reflection, encouraging a focus on concrete details to encourage improvement from lesson to lesson, and supporting the voices of novice teachers (Mann & Walsh, 2017). Additionally, classroom observations give language program administrators something more than self-reports, hearsay, and assumptions upon which to base their awareness of teaching quality (Bailey, 2006). In this way, classroom observations are an effective and efficient way to foster teacher development and help ensure a uniform degree of quality within a course. While observations may focus on the teacher's role in a course, they can also help ensure quality of the other five elements of course design as described by Richards and Rodgers (2014), namely the intended learning outcomes, the syllabus, the types of activities, the role of learners, and the role of instructional materials.

Given the lack of policy oversight from MEXT, language program administrators should be proactive in fostering a quality culture that integrates faculty development and additional QA measures that best suit their individual contexts. Other possible QA measures for language programs can include instructor handbooks, critical evaluation of instructional materials, norming of assessment instruments, support systems for students, and student surveys (Young, 2020). Such measures are vital for positioning and safeguarding language education as a human right in Japanese HEIs.

Conclusion

Honisz-Green (2013) did not mince words when he wrote,

> As equal paying customers, all students should be entitled to the same levels of consideration and quality. To not offer the same conditions is arguably a breach of contract on the university's part with what was promised when recruiting students into the university, school, programme, or class in the first place, and is tantamount to a type of as yet undefined academic discrimination and/or neglect, where management do not care what the students receive as input, just as long as they get some form of input. (p. 60)

Accepting that language education is a human right, it is hard to deny that offering poor quality English language education to enrolled students amounts to professional negligence. By acknowledging this simple fact, we as English language educators can begin to define how such negligence manifests itself within Japanese HEIs and design our courses in ways that guarantee quality for all students. Ideally such design would stem from principled program management that allows teachers to focus on best practices in teaching and to improve throughout their careers. Effective course management should also allocate managerial resources to evaluating the quality of a given course and make improvements accordingly. Barring that, there is little to prevent teachers from collectively organizing to drive change and create a quality culture in their program or institution in a bottom-up way, as teachers on the frontlines of the educational experience are too often students' best and only advocates.

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Torrin Shimono & James Nobis

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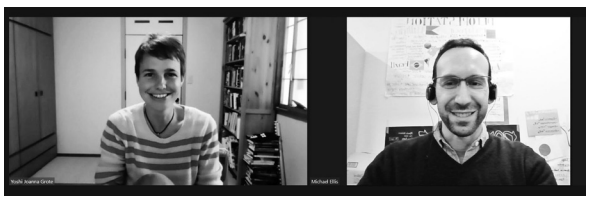
Welcome to the July/August edition of TLT Interviews*! For this issue, we bring you a couple of enlightening conversations with two of the plenary speakers from the JALT2020 conference. The first is with Yoshi Grote, who talks with Michael Ellis about queer inclusion and acceptance among faculty and students as well as the importance of supporting diversity in the classroom. The second conversation features Patrick Jackson where he discusses with Torrin Shimono about his experiences of developing content and facilitating language learning during this quarter-century.*

To begin, we present Yoshi Grote, a lecturer in intercultural skills and gender at Kyoto Sangyo University. Her research interests include the visibility and belonging of liminal identities with a special focus on third culture and LGBTQIA+ issues. In 2019, she organized the first Living on the Edge *Conference in Kyoto. She has lived in 12 countries but is now somewhat* settled *in Northern Kyoto with her wife and five-year-old daughter. She was interviewed by Michael Ellis. Michael coordinates the EFL program at International Christian University High School in Tokyo. He holds an MA in TESOL from Teachers College Columbia University. His research interests include reflective teaching practice and the use of CLIL to amplify marginalized voices. Without further ado, to our first interview!*

An Interview with Yoshi Grote

Michael Ellis

International Christian University High School



Michael Ellis: *Your bio indicates you have lived in 12 different countries. Could you explain your upbringing and how it has influenced you as an educator?*

Yoshi Grote: My father worked for the foreign office, so that meant we moved every three to four years, and I attended international schools. That had its own benefits and pitfalls, but mostly benefits, as you can imagine. One of the unexpected consequences was that the momentum had started, and it was very tough for me to stop living in that way. After university, I tried to stay put and get a regular job, but it didn't really work out for me, so I took a teaching certificate and went to Tanzania at first, and then I took a position in the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme. This influenced me as an educator by making me more aware of intercultural issues and intercultural communication. Especially in my time as a JET, I found myself in a position of mediator between ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) and JTEs (Japanese Teachers of English), and I developed a fascination with that kind of communication and conflict resolution, which then led me to study intercultural communication. I feel that I bring that into the class a lot as an educator; that language and culture can't be separated and shouldn't be separated. Of course, you have to be level-appropriate with your approach, but especially because I teach content related courses, many of which were multicultural, I was able to bring in intercultural general training into the classroom. I guess my overall pedagogical feeling is that we really shouldn't teach language without teaching culture.

It sounds like from your experience that you flourished from moving around so much, and you feel more natural in motion than staying put. Is that accurate?

Yeah, I think so.

You've written that it isn't uncommon for third culture kids to lack a true home in this way, and the concept of nationless belonging. I wonder if this is one reason it isn't uncommon to think of third culture kids as economically privileged and to lack sympathy for them. Can you speak to people who hold this belief, about why a home culture is important, and the difficulties that come from not having one?

First of all, I think it's absolutely understandable to lack sympathy because as you say, for the most part, third culture kids do tend to be economically

privileged. I think there are some exceptions; for example, some missionary kids, but for the most part, we do tend to come from privilege. However, I think also research from wellbeing has taught us our relationships tend to contribute to wellbeing more than money, so when I was doing the research into home and belonging with these people a very long time ago, I found that some people, like me, very much felt a sense of what Janet Bennett calls constructive marginality, a feeling of belonging everywhere, a feeling of being at home everywhere, having a sense of belonging to an invisible community of other people like you, and therefore, didn't really struggle much apart from when they had to answer, "Where are you from?" But there are other people who struggle far more, and I think it depends a lot on your experience, the depth of your relationships, and whether you consider home to be in people or in places. For example, I think my daughter would technically be considered a third culture kid because her parents are from different cultures, and her nationality and where she's living are different. If she were to grow up her whole life here in Japan, she might feel quite a strong sense of belonging to the place, but it may not be reflected back to her. I don't know how that will affect her, but some of the people I interviewed echoed that sentiment of belonging being a two-way street, and they might feel very much at home somewhere, but they are not considered as belonging, which can be quite difficult. I think it also depends on your experience growing up, whether you had a tight-knit community of people in your family. These days, it may be different because when you say goodbye to people in a country, you're still relatively connected by Skype, Zoom, and social media, whereas when I was a kid, it really was farewell forever. Unless you were willing to write letters that took two weeks to get somewhere, you probably were never going to see that person again. At least you didn't think you would.

I'd like to pivot now to queer inclusion and acceptance as that was the main topic of your talks over the weekend. You've written on how the queer community can seem to be an invisible abstract, the historical reasons for this, and the importance of visibility of sexual and gender minorities and allies. I wonder if you have any advice about ways to come out to students and colleagues as queer allies or as queer ourselves? Personally, I felt relief from coming out to my colleagues once in a faculty meeting several years ago in order to say thank you for a wedding gift from the teacher's union, but the teachers who have joined the school since then don't know about my sexuality. I think there are many teachers like me who would like their colleagues and students to know about their queer identity, but don't feel comfortable saying, "Hi, nice to meet you. I'm gay." In your plenary, you gave one example of a teacher who put a rainbow sticker on his laptop. Can you recommend any other subtle but effective ways to "shake our tail feathers?"

The first thing I always say is I think the most important thing to consider is your own sense of comfort with your own identity as well as your comfort with your job security. Those two things are vitally important. Coming out is the responsibility for those who feel comfortable and want to do so. I don't think that people who don't feel ready or comfortable in themselves yet should feel pressure to come out in any way. In terms of my own experience, I didn't do it like you in a faculty meeting. I think that's very brave. I became slowly more visible with my coworkers over time until I was in a place of security. In terms of security, I also mean likability in the workplace by students and coworkers. Unfortunately, I think we need to be more likeable in order to come out in an effective way. Then, of course, it is a process as you mention. Coming out isn't just a one-time thing that we do and it's over. If you do want to come out yourself, it is easier if you have a partner because that's not as direct. That's not saying, "I'm gay." It's saying, "My partner was in the garden yesterday and *she* …," and just using that pronoun. As for allies, support can come in terms of really small things like stickers, key chains, words of allyship on PowerPoint slides, anti-discrimination policies in our materials or syllabi, pronouns in our email signatures, and even the way that we get involved in the community. You can be a part of your institution's diversity committee or help plan a pride festival, and you can do all of those things without explicitly coming out.

Thank you for those practical suggestions. By the way, during your plenary, since it was online, I opened another browser and ordered a rainbow sticker which will go on the homework submission box outside my office.

Oh, that's awesome! That's so great.

That story was a great impetus for me to finally do that.

I'm so happy.

Can I ask more deeply about the suggestion of referring to your same sex partner to come out indirectly? During your workshop, you challenged us to consider how to bring our authentic selves into the classroom, and I understand that mentioning our partners certainly is one way to do this. However, you also say that coming out is a choice that not all queer people have to make. This actually describes my partner, and this has become a bit of a hindrance for me in bringing my

own authentic self to my classroom. Our relationship isn't just mine to share. Could you speak a bit about the ethics of this? I'm curious if you have any strategies for being authentic while still respecting the privacy of others close to us.

This question really gives me pause. I have known a lot of couples with this struggle, especially bicultural couples in Japan. Please take what I say with a pinch of salt as my experience is not of the same context as yours. You said that your relationship is not just yours to share, and I would agree that's true, but also say that your identity is not synonymous with your relationship. If I were in your position, even if it was hard for me, I would absolutely not mention my partner's name or share any photos in the work context with my students, but many of us feel that our sexual identity is a part of us regardless of whether or not we're in a relationship. I would still be gay regardless of who my partner was, and that would be part of my identity. I would want in my relationship to be able to share that about myself *if* I wanted to, *if* I felt that was something important for my authenticity or job. In your job, authenticity is more important than, for example, it could be for a banker, so that's another layer of complication. But again, you don't have to be authentic about your sexuality to be authentic in the classroom. There is a certain level of ownership in your own identity, and the decision for me would be about what extent of pain it causes me to keep that hidden. I would balance that in the discussion with my partner but keep the partner and their identity definitely private.

I know you don't want to speak for people in bicultural couples, but your advice really resonates, specifically the point that we can be authentic about our gender identities and sexual orientations, separate from our partners. For me, teaching language classes at high school rather than content at university, these issues don't come up so much outside of discussions of my partner, but perhaps that can be my homework: how to make them come up.

Right, and every little step that feels tiny to you can be so huge for someone. Even the choice of film that you make, which has the smallest line about someone's gender identity or someone's sexual orientation, can have a huge impact on a student. I think we're all quite hard on ourselves that we're not making as much of an impact as we can.

Thank you for saying that after a full week of conferencing. It can feel intimidating that there is so much to do! In your plenary, you explained how a specific student's struggle with their queer identity and that was the catalyst for you to become more open about yourself in your classroom in order to better help and support all of your students. Since this change, I wonder if you've noticed any changes, positive or negative, from your colleagues and how they treat you?

Rather interestingly, the same people that were asking me to proceed with caution ended up being my biggest supporters, I think mainly because those people were my friends. Those are the ones who are worried about you, your job security, or any kind of harassment that you might receive. They saw I was fortunate in not receiving any harassment and in fact, that it seemed to be having a positive effect on the students and the university. For example, I was asked to make a presentation to our diversity committee about how to make our university more inclusive, and I brought a student who was this fantastic, very open, and powerful activist type. We did it together, and those friends who were concerned about me saw this positive impact that it was having on everyone and became wonderful supporters. I think I haven't noticed any negative changes, only positive.

You gave four clear steps for teachers who want to make their classrooms a generally more inclusive space. Do you have any practical advice for teachers who are interested in explicitly approaching queer content in their classrooms, but don't feel confident?

Yes! The advice that always comes to me is you don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to do it perfectly to be doing a good job. When I first started introducing gender issues into the classroom, I remember teaching to my class the term *transexual* and—surprise, surprise—just being gay doesn't make you well-versed in gender issues. Later, one of my students, an exchange student, came to me and said, "That term is really offensive, and you shouldn't be teaching that." So I researched to make sure that she was right and the next week I went in and said, "I'm really sorry. It was brought to my attention that this is really offensive for these reasons, and people are now using these terms." I think that's the important thing. We shouldn't worry about being perfect. We're never going to be perfect because the language and terminology is evolving all the time. The only thing we need to aspire to be perfect about is owning our mistakes, owning that we're human. I think that's vital for language teachers because that's what we want our students to do, too. So don't worry about being perfect, and also as a gay person who's been asked a lot of questions by people who have hesitated to ask those questions because they're not sure if they're phrasing them correctly, I would say that for me and many people

I know, dialogue is always better than uncomfortable silence or not asking. I would much rather that someone use the wrong words and say offensive things if it's in the context of them trying to learn or comes from curiosity.

That's very encouraging. I think teachers often don't want to make mistakes, but if we give ourselves permission to, then even with an imperfect unit on these difficult topics, we can do a lot more good than we would by completely avoiding them.

Yeah, and you can always say to your students, "I'm no expert in this area, but I think it's important. Let's learn about it together."

Surveys you conducted have reflected positively on the open-mindedness of Japanese youth in understanding and accepting sexual and gender minorities. I wonder if you've seen any cases of prejudice among your students. You mentioned in your plenary that LGBT discrimination in Japan takes the form of invisibility rather than hostility. Is that consistent with the nature of prejudice you've come across in your research, or have you come across any hostile attitudes towards queer people?

Before I was out to my students, I would occasionally hear the term "gay" or "homo," just being bandied about. I often didn't understand the context because it was being done in Japanese usually, but I pretty much always jumped on that person and just asked them some questions in English. At that point, it never escalated from there. It usually just ended in the student feeling a bit embarrassed, usually because they couldn't explain why they were using that word because I was asking seemingly innocent questions. "Why are you saying this person is gay? What evidence do you have?" Because I have been open in the university setting for quite some time, and because people tend to be quite conflict-averse, that has kind of protected me. It's a selfish motivation for coming out, as it has protected me from discriminatory talk or thoughts. That's not to say it hasn't happened at all, but it hasn't happened from a student. I've not had that experience.

It's great that you haven't seen any active discrimination from your students, but I imagine that there are some students who hold problematic beliefs. I wonder how you handle them in your classroom. This is something I'm struggling with right now. We do a unit on racial equality, and there are students who hold passive but unambiguously racist ideas. I always question, is it our responsibility as language teachers to open their minds, and if so, how can we approach this?

First of all, I think a language teacher's job is to teach language, and language's function is communication, and communication in its essence is about exchanging ideas, so you're automatically opening minds. The extent to which we open minds is connected to our content, and content has to be level-appropriate of course. But I think a huge benefit of being language teachers is that we can put content in at any language level; content that actually motivates the speaker to communicate. I certainly know from my own experience of learning Japanese that I feel far more motivated and interested in learning when I'm trying to express something to a friend about cultural differences or a difference in parenting styles than I am when I'm trying to be Ken-san in *Minna no Nihongo* going through those roleplays. So firstly, I think that one way to open minds is to be aware of your content, choose content that will inspire students to exchange those ideas, and also teach language that helps them know how to disagree, agree, negotiate and state their opinions. That's one part of it. Then you have the problem of students having discriminatory opinions, and I face that too. The first thing that I do is question the student because I feel it is better if they arrive at a change of thought process themselves rather than me simply telling them I think that's incorrect. I'd rather they revise their opinion by themselves. We can't always change their opinions about others. We can only engage them in dialogue. However, I do feel that there are things you can do outside of that exact moment. I often have students who say, "Some people think…" and then state a racist idea. They find it hard to see themselves as having any bias, or that the thing they've just said is biased. We do a lot about implicit bias in the classroom. We use that Harvard implicit bias test, which is something you can find online to see if they hold implicit biases about gender and race. We do *The Danger of a Single Story*, and at lower levels I do the Japanese translation and talk about what their single story is, what people have assumed about them that is not true. We go through various different groups of people and how they might be perceived. Then I try to show TED Talks or films that might break that stereotype. Occasionally, I tackle it head-on. I've had students come back from overseas who say things that do sound quite racist or otherising, though they don't know it. The intention isn't there, so I try not to put that person on the spot because I've found students are incredibly sensitive to that kind of criticism. They are devastated if they are considered to be racist.

Not just students. Adults too!

Right, everybody. So, I try to then pull up something that maybe a few students have said; maybe

include something that one of the students in the class has said recently and try to lead them through a process of looking at that and talking about implicit bias. If it's actually discriminatory action, as there's a difference between voicing a discriminatory opinion and then saying something directly to someone or open hostility towards someone else, then I feel it's absolutely the teacher's responsibility to step in, stop that, say it's not OK, and explain why. Otherwise, you're just a bystander, and we have to model being upstanding citizens for our students. In general, I struggle with this topic so much because I also worry about how much I put my own opinions on students, especially in a culture where teachers have quite a lot of power. I don't want my students to feel that my opinion is inherently superior. One of my students was trying to be culturally aware while describing a time he had had overseas and how he had been the victim of a lot of homophobic harassment, but that he had to respect that because it's a different culture and there are different opinions. He said that some people think this, and their opinion matters too, so at that point I just said, "No, there are some things that are just not right, and what happened to you was not OK." I still wonder if that was the correct thing to say as a teacher in the classroom, but we all make personal choices as teachers.

There must be some balance of how much to let students decide for themselves and how much to lead them. Perhaps the takeaway is that doing nothing is not enough, and that we need to actively search for that balance, even if we make mistakes.

Yes. It's so hard, but in my experience, having an open dialogue is always better.

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For our second interview, we happily bring you a discussion with Patrick Jackson. Patrick Jackson is a textbook author for young English language learners, which include several courses published by Oxford University Press such as Everybody Up and Potato Pals. He is particularly interested in the use of songs, stories, and real-world connections to help motivate learners. As an educator, Patrick Jackson is motivated by the power of real-world experiences and community action to inspire and give meaning to classroom learning. He now resides in his home country of Ireland after 12 years of teaching English to Japanese learners of all ages. He is a passionate beachcomber and litter-picker and is currently working on projects that help children discover their role as environmental stewards. He was interviewed by our very own Torrin Shimono, who has taught English to Japanese learners of all age groups for more than a decade and is an associate professor at Kindai University in the Faculty of Law. He received his doctorate from Temple University. His research interests include reading fluency, reaction times, phonology, self-efficacy, and testing. Now, for your reading pleasure…

An Interview with Patrick Jackson

Torrin R. Shimono

Kindai University

Torrin Shimono: *I was really impressed by your plenary speech, particularly how relatable and engaging your stories were, especially to my own path to becoming a language instructor. It was very powerful.*

Patrick Jackson: I think we all have interesting stories to tell from our paths—both as recipients of education and people involved in *dishing it out*.

Did you always have an interest in teaching young learners? I remember when I first came to Japan, I was told I would be teaching a lot of kids' classes. To put it plainly, I was mortified. I hated it at first—them running around with their sticky hands and capless pens—but I really grew to love it because it challenged me as a teacher. I also saw a lot of discernible improvement with the kids. I took a lot of what I learned to the university level and guess what? It still seems to work!

Absolutely. I started teaching kids when I got to Japan. I mean, teaching was the only job I could do. I didn't speak Japanese, and I wasn't something like an engineer. Teaching kids was the only job I could get. As I said in my talk, there was so much I should have known when I started that I didn't know—so lacking in any training or qualifications. I think that really needs addressing. I had a degree in English literature which is somewhat relevant, I guess. But as long as I had a degree in anything, I could have gotten that job. That's why I think it's a really

important role for JALT to reach out to people who are arriving and say listen—at least know *this* stuff. I mean, it was a year before I knew about songs in the classroom for young learners. Somebody gave me a cassette and said, "Have you tried singing with them?" I was like, "Okay..." It was that *We Sing*. It was a series of American songs like *Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes*. I think that was a year after I started teaching. For the previous year, I was just doing flashcards and storytelling. But I didn't do any music, and it was because I didn't know, and I wasn't part of an organization. Now, I suppose you go on YouTube and other websites on how to teach kids, but that information was not so easily available then.

Exactly. If you could go back in time and talk to yourself when you first came to Japan, what kind of advice would you give your past self?

Well, I would say to myself, "Everybody is calling you teacher. Everybody is calling you sensei. That is a sign telling you not to be an imposter. Step up and go and find what that really does involve. Find out what the best practices are, meet other teachers of young learners, get involved in an organization, and don't just make it up as you go along." I just didn't know that any of these things existed, and it wasn't malicious in any way. I was just happy people said, "Oh, you are very good at teaching kids." I took it without really looking into it. So, I'd say to myself, "Don't believe the hype. You are going to get a lot of positive feedback just by existing as a foreigner in Japan. Don't believe it. It will just detract from what you should really be focusing on, which is to be a better teacher. Also, there is a lot of fun to be had by connecting, networking, learning, reading about this stuff, and sharing activities like games and songs." I think this is more of a problem at the lower end, age-wise, because there are an awful lot of teachers in little *eikaiwas* [English conversation schools] around the country who have literally just arrived and have a similar experience as I did. If you arrive in the country with a university job, you'll probably be part of a network sooner and have more qualifications. So, I think this is a specific problem for those who work in the private *eikaiwa* world. I lived in a bubble back then and there were several other teachers who were in a similar situation.

You mentioned the importance of music. I remember I used a woodblock when I was teaching children the rhythms of English, which is a stress-timed language as opposed to Japanese which is a syllable-timed language. What are your ideas regarding how music helps young learners become more proficient in English?

Well, there's lots of reasons for using songs for young learners. They can get a feel for the intonation, the repetition, the memorability through repetition. And they're fun! People naturally like music. And you sing together. When you are singing as a group, it doesn't matter if the weaker people don't know all the words. If you don't know a song, you can still sing a song with a group of people because you can just join in with the bits that you know. "Hmm, Hmm, knees and toes, knees and toes." It doesn't really matter if you know what all the words mean. You might not know what toes and shoulders are, but with things like TPR (Total Physical Response) (Asher, 1969), you are going to begin to make those connections in a fun way. This is much better than a teacher standing at the front of a room in front of a picture saying, "This is the human body. This is the head. These are the shoulders. Let's say, Shoulders! Shoulders! Shoulders!" This would put you to sleep or make you want to give up straight away. So, I think songs are the magic ingredient. If you'd excuse me for talking about the *Everybody Up* course, which is the biggest project I did for Oxford, they really prioritized songs. They have got this fantastic lineup of songwriters, and it has been the most popular part of the course. There were also some friends who were also teaching in Japan called *The Super Simple Songs*, and they have written songs that are worldwide hits. Julie Gold was a Grammy-winning songwriter, and we've got Kathleen Kampa and Charles Velina. So, songs have really been key to the success of the course. In fact, for Oxford University Press, the five top-watched videos are *Everybody Up* songs, which makes me very pleased.

Are there any other points that differentiate your textbook series from other textbooks out there?

The guiding theme was "Linking your classroom to the wider world." That was the tagline for the course. We spent a lot of time on the structure of the units which leads to the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) aspects and projects. In some ways, it's quite a traditional approach in the first couple of lessons, but gradually, it attaches these more real-world goals to the course. There are other courses that do similar things, so it is not the most unique course. A lot of these courses tend to follow a similar pattern, and I think that pattern was laid down by *Let's Go* which has been so popular. One of the first things we did was look at *Let's Go* and say, "How can we take this one step further?" It has worked well. So *Everybody Up* has gone into its second edition now and hopefully will last a long, long time. But things are always mov-

ing so fast in the ELT (English Language Teaching) publishing world, especially with digital content, so there is always lots going on, which is only a good thing.

Could you explain a little more about how you come up with a textbook series. How does it work? How do you come up with all the content?

With a big series like *Everybody Up*, it is very much publisher led. They decided they wanted to create a successor to *Let's Go*, so they wanted to include certain elements. They did market research, surveyed 6,000 teachers, got a lot of feedback regarding what this course was going to look like, recruited authors, and had team meetings year after year in New York. For every level, we went to New York for a week. They're big projects, these coursebook projects. It's very cool to be part of, but it's not led by an individual person who says, "Oh, I feel like doing a course." It's part of their strategy, and it's part of a global publishing program, which actually makes it so much more extraordinary than some other books I did. For example, I did *Potato Pals*, and those were literally our babies. We sent them off, and they published them. But that was rather different. A course is quite a big animal—you've got your designers, editors, and there's also marketing. There are all sorts of parts to it.

Were there any constraints to working with a big publisher?

When you're setting out to do a global primary course, *Everybody Up* is popular in Egypt, Brazil, Vietnam, Japan, Korea—it is a type of project that brings all sorts of constraints as well as thinking creatively about what is the common ground here—what are the common values. A big part of *Everybody Up* is we have a whole-values syllabus in the course. So, you're thinking, "What are the key values that we would like to be in this course and would be relevant to everybody in the world?" What do we want for every nine-year-old? We want people to be kind. We want people to share. We want people to be fair. These are universal values that we wanted to portray. So, are those constraints? Yes, but I think if you're creating anything, whatever it is, there are constraints. And within those constraints, those are the things that force you into a creative solution. For example, every third lesson of every unit, there is a six-scene story. It's six scenes, not seven scenes. You couldn't just add one. So, you had to get in your vocabulary, your functional language, practice the grammar you've learnt, and recycle some stuff. So, within that, you might end up with a story that looks really simple. But the amount of work that has to go into that because of your constraints, because it's got to be a one-page story, and the design has got to be a certain way. So, it's all about constraints.

I imagine so. Wow, publishing textbooks really must be tougher than it seems!

It is certainly exhausting.

Did you do any of the artwork or write any of the lyrics of the songs?

No. With the songs, you provide the language that you would like to use in the songs and the songwriters do their thing. Although I have written some songs. With the artwork, you send in some horrible scribbles, like stick men—it's a rough sketch but shows how you want it to look.

In your plenary talk, you used the metaphor about how the textbooks are the skeletons and the teachers add the meat to bones, if you will. Could you talk about the importance of supplementary materials and teacher's guides for your textbooks?

It's crucially important. There are loads of supplementary stuff, and there are other readers they recommend you use. So, there is always a lot of teacher support material. This is particularly helpful for inexperienced teachers, and there are a lot of ideas that can be connected and shared across teachers and even potentially textbooks. With the metaphor you alluded to, I was also talking about how we all have our individual stories, interests, passions, and personalities, and we really can imbue the coursebook with those. Yes, I teach *Everybody Up,* or my school does *Everybody Up,* but you're not saying, "I'm switching off" and then just push the *Everybody Up* button and run this program all year, and I'm not going to do anything. What you're saying is we are using this as the scaffolding, or the skeleton, and then all of us are doing it in our own way with our own input. So, when we talk about whatever the topic for the unit is, we are bringing our own experience to that, and that is what makes it interesting for your students. That creates the magic. I know that it's difficult for publishers because they want to appear that their course is the complete solution to all English learning needs. It is in some ways; the language is there but the passion and personalization—the really juicy stuff that happens in a classroom—is not there, so that's got to be provided.

I think there is also a common notion that kids' teachers should be fun and goofy, but I think a lot of different types of personalities can be effective.

Sure. Being the entertainer, it kind of grows old pretty quickly I think, in terms of energy. Also, being that way, you are setting the dynamic up—as students are coming along to be entertained, which is not what you really want. What you really want is your students to become entertaining. You want your students to lead. Of course, you want to be bubbly, sparkly, fun, and funny, but you don't want that to be the main thing about your lesson. You want the main thing to be facilitating their growth rather than have them go, "Oh! Patrick! *Omoshiroi* [What a funny guy!]"

Exactly. Going back to the content of your textbook series Everybody Up*, is there a promotion of global citizenship?*

Yes, we have the characters in the book doing things like beach cleaning and getting involved in their community, and those are the kinds of things we want to promote. Because the course is used all over the world, it creates a community of its own. For example, if you look up online—*Everybody Up*—Global Singalong—you'll see kids in different countries singing the same song. This creates a nice community. I'm aware that you want to have people engaged in their own local stuff, and you want to use the course so it will be relevant to them, but you can do both.

When I worked as an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) to teach 5th and 6th graders, I found one of the most challenging things was team teaching, which is prescribed by the Board of Education. Coming from the eikaiwas, I thought the majority of people in Japan had favorable attitudes towards English, but I realized I may have been in a bubble, and the reality was there was a fair amount of resistance against English education.

I believe teaching English in Japan is riddled with various historic issues, especially when you see them from an outsider's point of view. As I mentioned in my plenary, in the junior high school that I worked at, it was like the Berlin Wall between the *eikaiwa* department and the English department. But I think things are improving in that particular school at least—not to be ageist—but there seems to be a bunch of younger teachers who have overseas experience now. You know, teachers in their 20s and 30s. The *Old Guard* is moving through. I think there are many more teachers in Japan who have overseas experience and speaking English in front of others isn't some sort of weird or embarrassing thing. And I think those are the sort of teachers who have energy and would be associated with JALT. It really shows up when we have groups of Japanese junior high school students come to Ireland and the teachers that come with them now are immediately interacting with the other group and speak English comfortably. I think they are good role models for the students, so things are changing.

I am concerned that while English might be fun in elementary school, once they hit junior high, students are hit with the same old boring grammar translation and studying for tests.

Yeah, I've seen it in action, and I've seen the product of this style of learning. I still am hopeful seeing those young teachers because there is a move in the right direction. For example, companies are adopting English as their lingua franca within the company. So, it's getting harder to say, "I don't do English" now. I guess you can say, "*Eigo wa muri. Dekinai*. [English is impossible. I can't do it.]" But it's like saying, "I'm not going to participate in the world." So, I think that mindset is on the backfoot.

Right. If you could wave a magic wand, what part of English education system would you change anything in particular?

Well, it would be a disastrous thing if I ended up being that person with that power. From what I know of Japan, it's bound to be a gradual, careful, and very cautious process. Going back to the study abroad project I talked about, it took about two years of conversations in the school I worked at before they even decided that we can do this—we will run this program. And we went through every single aspect of what could go wrong. There was a lot of resistance for doing any sort of study abroad at all because we'd be losing boys in Piccadilly Circus, and the world was going to end. There were all these reasons for not doing it. But eventually, it just happened. But it wasn't like, "Off we go!" because we had to send teachers on *shitami* [a preliminary inspection]—so two teachers had to go to England to check the program in detail, and then they came back the following year. The entire process would take, in a less cautious culture, maybe a month instead of three years. But once it has happened, it's been amazing because every aspect of it is done really, really well. We're all behind this idea now, so let's do it!

Do you feel that Japanese young learners lag behind other countries? For example, Korea and China have had mandatory English education in the elementary levels since the late 1990s.

This is just a thought. We have this in Ireland where Irish language is compulsory. So, if you go to primary or secondary school in Ireland, you have to

learn Irish, which is the original Celtic language of Ireland. It has kept going because it is a compulsory subject. But if you talk to a lot of Irish teenagers and ask, "How's your Irish? Do you speak Irish?" I don't speak Irish, and I hate it. But they have to do it. I think there are a lot of awful ways to put people off from learning languages very quickly and demoralize them. The way it's taught isn't interesting. People then develop a dislike for it. I think the best approach then are things like projects; email projects where kids are using a bit of English to actually do stuff. Then, they can see it is a bit of fun, it's useful, it helps do XYZ, it helps me understand this so I can do that. So, if you can imbue that. I almost don't want to use the word "study" because that word is such a downer. "I am going to study English" treats English like a separate thing. It really should be, "I'm going to use English. I'm going to do that, for which I need English. Full stop." I can really see the value of CLIL and Task-based Learning. Putting people off is very easy.

What are your thoughts about testing and assessment for young learners?

Yeah, unfortunately it is so established as the way we organize things. But it is so unhelpful for so many people. I think we need to move toward a more collaborative and cooperative thinking about how we should address problems instead of saying, "Okay, you 40 [students]. You are going to try to learn this lump of stuff all in the same way, you are going to be tested all in the same way, and then you are going to be judged accordingly and then rewarded or not rewarded based on a test. This is not the way people respond well to things, it's not the way people work, it's not the way humans are, it's not natural, and there's nothing good about it, as far as I can see. It pushes people, it depresses a whole bunch of people, it drives people to mental health issues, and it elevates a certain type of behavior—In essence sit down for hours on end and consume this information. Lots of people aren't good at that. Lots of people hate sitting down and studying, reading books, but they are brilliant at this and that. So, judging them and saying, "He's not very bright. He only got 46 in his maths test." You know, that's not helpful.

Yeah, it would be nice to move away from this strict environment. As you alluded to in your plenary, the headmaster punished you when you were very young, and that left an indelible imprint on your memory.

But you know, it's very difficult when you have 40 kids or more, in rows, in uniforms, and there is a system where everyone is passing though; it's a big one to change. It's not just Japan or Asia. The whole world is playing this game. But visualizing an alternative is a real challenge. I often see these things posted on the Internet like, "Look at Finland! They're all on beanbags and they're doing exactly what they want. Isn't that great!" Maybe that's the reality that would create a different society, but how you organize that economically, how that becomes a reality, how would you do that? But it's worth being aware of when you are teaching to tests or teaching in a particular environment to do what we can, to reach out beyond the walls of the classroom, reach out beyond the test, reach out beyond the established syllabus, and if more humanity seeps in through the cracks, maybe then we can see change. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against people learning, but it shouldn't be damaging to people.

Yeah. The reality is a lot of students from a young age develop a dislike for learning English.

I think there is often the clown on one side—the entertainer—and on the other side, there is the test. So, you have this duality—neither of which is particularly helpful.

Do you have any other projects you are currently working on?

I've developed a project called *Picker Pals*. It is an environmental program getting young kids out picking up litter. My passion is environmental work, so I've connected up my educational writing and storytelling with this environmental project and come up with this thing called *Picker Pals*, which is about equipping primary schools with the tools they need to clean up their local environment. There's lots going on and lots of fun to be had.

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Steven Asquith & Lorraine Kipling

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: jaltpubs.tlt.my.share@jalt.org • Web: https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare

Hello everyone, and welcome to My Share, the column where TLT *readers share their practical and original classroom ideas. As the spring semester draws to a close, it helps to have a new activity (or four) up your sleeve to freshen things up, and this edition is a real treat for teachers looking for fun and creative ways to engage students in a range of skills practice.*

First off, Claire Ryan provides an accessible vocabulary review warm-up that will get students energized with zero preparation. As with many My Share activities, this can be used in a variety of teaching contexts, and can work just as well online as face-to-face. Next, Annelise Marshall encourages students to broaden their use of descriptive vocabulary by brainstorming the senses in preparation for a writing activity. After that, Tina Brown and Christine Pemberton offer a fun way to practice predictive and argumentative communication skills by using authentic choose-your-own-adventure style materials. Finally, Deepti Mishiro puts students in the director's chair to build creativity, teamwork, and organization skills, as they devise and present a poster on an original movie idea.

We hope that you find these activities useful and enjoyable to bring to your own classrooms. Please do get in touch to let us know if something has worked for you–our contributors love friendly feedback! As always, we welcome submissions of new and interesting activities, so if you have devised an original idea that you would like to share, get in touch via our new email address: jaltpubs.tlt.my.share@jalt.org.

In the meantime, we wish you a smooth end to the semester, and a well-earned break over the summer!

—Lorraine Kipling

What's Missing?

Claire Ryan

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *Question-and-answer, vocabulary, guessing game, warm-up activity, online lesson*
- Learner English level: *Beginner and above*
- Learner maturity level: *Elementary School and above*
- Preparation time: *0-5 minutes*
- Activity time: *5-10 minutes*
- Materials: *Whiteboard, marker pen, eraser, vocabulary list*

A good warm-up activity will get students thinking and speaking in English. A great warm-up activity will do this while also helping to review and reinforce their previously learned vocabulary and grammar points. If you can do both, you'll ensure your students are having fun and improving their English ability with ease. This activity combines a warm-up with a chance to review vocabulary from previous lessons. This lesson can be adapted for both a classroom setting or an online lesson using a platform such as Zoom. All you need is a whiteboard—or the whiteboard function in Zoom—plus a marker pen, eraser, and a good memory of your students' previous lesson topic!

Preparation

Step 1: Use a whiteboard to jot down some key words that students have learned recently.

Step 2: Elicit the vocabulary from the students as you take note of it. In an online lesson, take advantage of the Zoom whiteboard function and copy and paste a list of vocabulary onto it.

Procedure

Step 1: When you have written 10 or so words, show the whiteboard to students for 15 seconds and give them a chance to memorize it.

Step 2: Take the whiteboard away and erase one word. If using the Zoom whiteboard function, unshare the screen for a moment while you erase one word.

Step 3: Show the word list to the students again. The first person to guess the missing word is the winner.

Step 4: Rewrite that missing word, show the board to students again, and repeat the process with the other words.

Variations

Option 1: This warm-up can easily be adapted for higher level students by adding some extra challenges. Encourage students who guess the missing word to give a definition of the word for an extra point. A student who can use the word in a complete sentence will receive a bonus point.

Option 2: If it's the first lesson or if there isn't a large amount of vocabulary to review from the last class, you could use categories instead, such as animals, colors, or shapes.

Option 3: For larger class groups, divide students into smaller groups and allow one student to play the role of the teacher. This can easily be done using the breakout room function on Zoom, which can be monitored by the instructor. Students can write the words on the whiteboard and erase them, with the others in the group guessing the missing word as before.

Conclusion

This warm-up activity does double duty for instructors, as it gets the class thinking in English while also reviewing any language that was taught in previous lessons. This means that students are ready to start their class with a solid foundation upon which to build. It is easily adaptable for both online or classroom settings, using whiteboards in the classroom or the Zoom whiteboard function in online lessons.

The group variations also allow students to feel empowered by giving them the confidence to use their English freely in front of others. This is a particularly great activity for young learners. The guessing element may seem simple at first glance but, in my experience, a list of 10 words is challenging for children to remember and recall. This allows the game to run for a long time, until you are sure the key vocabulary has been assimilated.

Brainstorming With the Five Senses

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *Descriptive writing, brainstorming*
- Learner English level: *Intermediate to advanced*
- Learner maturity: *University level*
- Preparation time: *15 minutes*
- Activity time: *45 minutes*
- Materials: *Presentation slides, whiteboard, worksheets (see Appendix)*

In this activity, students prepare for descriptive writing using a brainstorm activity based on the five senses. By building a strong foundation of sense-related vocabulary, students are able to write rich and evocative paragraphs describing a location. This exercise encourages students to enjoy writing, while teaching them to incorporate creativity and detail into their work.

Preparation

Step 1: Prepare presentation slides for the beginning of the lesson. Slides should introduce the words for the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. For each sense, provide a sample of vocabulary words suitable for the class level that relate to that sense. For example, words related to smell might include *sweet* or *grass*. The slides should also include an image of a place to be used for the practice description. This could be a location around campus, or a famous place that students would be familiar with. Ueno Park or Tokyo Disneyland are examples that work well for students in the Tokyo area.

Step 2: Prepare worksheets with columns for making notes of sense-related vocabulary, and space to write a descriptive paragraph (see Appendix for an example you can print or adapt). Print enough worksheets to have one for each group in class and one for each student for homework.

Procedure

Step 1: Using the presentation slides, introduce the vocabulary for the five senses. Provide level-appro-

priate examples of vocabulary words related to each sense.

Step 2: Show students the image of the place to be used for the example activity. Ask if they are familiar with the place, and elicit answers about where it is and what can be done there.

Step 3: On the board, create five columns. Elicit the names of the senses from the students, writing one at the top of each column.

Step 4: Tell students to close their eyes and imagine they are at the chosen place. Ask students to focus on *sight*, and imagine what they can see there. After 30 seconds, let students open their eyes, and ask what they imagined seeing. Write the answers on the board.

Step 5: Repeat with *hearing*, *touch*, *smell*, and *taste*, filling in the table on the board.

Step 6: Put students in groups of three or four and give each group one worksheet. Tell groups to choose a place that is familiar to all members. Then, ask them to brainstorm and complete one worksheet per group with notes of what they can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste at that place.

Step 7: After brainstorming time is over, tell groups to work together to write a paragraph describing their place. Paragraphs should include at least one idea from each of the five senses, but should not include the place's name.

Step 8: Have groups share their paragraphs, either by joining two groups together, or having each group read their paragraph to the whole class. After a group has read their paragraph, other students will guess what place it describes.

Step 9: For homework, students will individually complete a fresh worksheet about a place of their choice by filling out the brainstorm columns and writing a descriptive paragraph.

Conclusion

After participating in this activity, students will be able to write a descriptive paragraph about a location with confidence. Students can enjoy working collaboratively, while learning new ways to improve their descriptive writing. Furthermore, they will be encouraged to include rich detail in future writing activities.

Appendix

The original appendix is available from the online version of this article at https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare.

Describing Places: Brainstorm

Choose a place to describe. Imagine that you are at that place. What can you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste there?

Sight	Hearing	Touch	Smell	Taste

Describing Places: Writing

Write a paragraph about the place. Make sure to include at least one idea from each of the five senses.

Choose Your Fate

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *Listening, fluency, arguing, predicting, authentic material*
- Learner English level: *Intermediate to advanced*
- Learner maturity: *Post-secondary*
- Preparation time: *10–20 minutes*
- Activity time: *60–90 minutes*
- Materials: *PC with Internet access, large screen with speakers, YouTube, voting record, picture prompt document*

Choose Your Fate is an easy-to-prepare, *choose your own adventure* (CYOA) video activity. The objective is to challenge learners to make predictions, express their opinions, and give reasons to support those opinions. Students will be able to hone their communication skills by practicing the same task repeatedly. They will also develop their listening skills with the use of engaging and authentic materials. This activity can easily be adapted for online use by utilizing the Zoom breakout room function.

Preparation

Step 1: Find a CYOA video on YouTube. This plan uses "A Heist with Markiplier" (Markiplier, 2019). This series is suitable for mature audiences due to some mild language and adult situations.

Step 2: Make a picture prompt document with photo clues about the video (see Appendix 1).

Step 3: Make a voting record (see Appendix 2).

Procedure

Step 1: Show students the picture prompt document. Ask them to tell you what is happening in the pictures, then teach them the word *heist*.

Step 2: Explain the activity procedure as follows: They will watch a CYOA narrative made up of multiple short videos. The story progresses depending on the viewer's choices. The first video is about a heist. At the end of the video, two new video options will appear, and their group must discuss which one to watch next. Each group will share the reason for their selection with the whole class. The class then watches the most popular video choice, and the procedure will be repeated until an ending is reached. The purpose is to be able to argue their point in English.

Step 3: Model some of the language that students might use by writing some examples on the board.

Step 4: Watch the video as a class.

Step 5: Divide students into groups of three or four.

Step 6: Write the titles of the next video choices in the voting record while students are discussing which video to choose next.

Step 7: Monitor the groups. End the discussion time once each group has decided.

Step 8: Have one member of each group share the reason for their vote with the whole class. Keep track of the votes and record which video was chosen on the voting record.

Step 9: Repeat steps 4–8 until you reach one of the endings.

Step 10: If time remains, start the video again and let students try making different choices. Alternatively, if time runs out, the voting record indicates which route was taken so it can be resumed in the next class.

Step 11: To conclude the activity, ask students a discussion question or two. For example, do you think you made the right choices? What surprised you? If there is time, give feedback on any common mistakes they made or expressions that might be useful for them in the future.

Variations

To save time, you could ask only one group to share the reason for their vote in each round.

Conclusion

Choose Your Fate is an engaging, low-prep classroom activity. It allows students to refine their argumentative and predictive skills through repetitive communicative practice and the use of authentic listening materials.

References

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Appendices

The original appendices are available from the online version of this article at https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare.

Appendix A: Movie Images

Appendix B: Voting Record

Write the name of each video option and circle which video was chosen for each round.

Round 1:	Left video *All Sneaky Like*	Right video *Guns Blazing*
Round 2:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video
Round 3:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video
Round 4:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video
Round 5:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video
Round 6:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video
Round 7:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video
Round 8:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video
Round 9:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video
Round 10:	Left video / Top video	Right video / Bottom video

Director's Chair

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *Speaking, imaginative, creative thinking*
- Learner English level: *Intermediate*
- Learner maturity: *University*
- Preparation time: *30 minutes*
- Activity time: *2 classes*
- Materials: *Movie poster slide, digital device, worksheet printout*

Movies are an excellent way to spark a discussion among students. They are a brilliant tool to enhance students' vocabulary, creativity, and boost cooperation. This activity enables students to work in teams and create a movie plot using set guidelines. It aims to foster teamwork and the organisational skills of students in order to formulate and present their ideas for an interesting movie plot as a director. In addition, it gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their technological skills.

Preparation

Choose a movie poster slide that is popular among university students to elicit answers for the worksheet (Part I in the Appendix). Print out the worksheet (Part II in the Appendix) for each student to create their movie plot.

Procedure

Step 1: Elicit answers from the students for the questions in Part I of the worksheet.

Step 2: Ask students to work in groups of three and tell them to discuss what movie genre they would like to use for this activity.

Step 3: Tell students that they will create a movie plot as directors and make their movie poster slide using their device. Finally, they will present their movie poster slide to their classmates.

Step 4: Ask students to use Part II of the worksheet to create their movie plot and to feel free to make it interesting. It might be better to model a popular movie poster and set expectations. For example, "This movie takes place in . . .", "It is a story about a (main character) who wants to . . . but . . .", "So, (main character) decides to . . .", "An action sci-fi that will leave you wanting more. Entertaining and full of action . . ."

Step 5: Remind students that their movie poster should communicate key information about the plot in a way that persuades their classmates to want to know more. Give students 15 minutes to brainstorm and write their ideas on the worksheet.

Step 6: Next, once they are ready with their plots on paper, assign 15–20 minutes to the students to create their poster slide on their choice of website or on the website recommended in the reference below.

Step 7: Once students' movie slides are completed, ask them to decide who will talk about each part of their movie plot when presenting their poster. Give them five minutes to practice.

Step 8: Each group takes turns to pitch their movie plot as a director. Once all groups have presented their movie plot, ask them to reflect and give feedback as to what went well and what needs to be improved on each other's movie plots.

Step 9: Finally, ask students to vote for the best movie plot, giving reasons.

Variation

Students can make a movie poster of their favorite book and come up with a tagline. This will foster enthusiasm for reading and enhance their skills of identifying key information in order to be able to create a poster.

Conclusion

Students can come up with excellent ideas when given the opportunity. This activity makes the language learning process entertaining and enjoyable. It allows students to use their imagination in order to come up with a unique and interesting movie plot. Additionally, it provides students the opportunity to collaborate with their classmates on a technological platform.

Reference

Canva Pty Ltd. (2012). *Collaborate & create amazing graphic design for free*. Canva. https://www.canva.com/

Appendix

The original appendix is available from the online version of this article at https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare.

Director's Chair Worksheet

Part I

1. What's the title of the movie?
2. What's the genre of the movie?
3. Who are the main characters?
4. Where was the movie set?
5. What's the plot of the movie?
   - A. What does the main character want or need to do?
   - B. What problems or difficulties the main character face?
   - C. What action does the main character take to solve the problem

Part II

A. Title	B. What does the main character need/ wants to do?
Genre	C. But what problems or difficulties the main character face?
Main characters	D. So, what does the main character do next?
Location / set in	E. Why is your plot the best one?

[RESOURCES] *TLT* WIRED

Paul Raine

In this column, we discuss the latest developments in ed-tech, as well as tried and tested apps and platforms, and the integration between teaching and technology. We invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editor before submitting.

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Paul Raine has been a Japan-based teacher and coder since 2006. He has developed the web-based language teaching and learning platform *TeacherTools.Digital*, and many other web-based tools.

Teaching with Technology: Transnational Video Vidcasting and Peer Feedback between China and Japan

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Most EFL students in Japan and China have likely had little or no contact with anyone from the other country, or indeed from any other country. Unfortunately, various factors make

it difficult for students to meet foreigners in person, especially over the last year or two during the COVID pandemic. Here we describe a virtual-exchange video podcasting project between tertiary students in China and Japan through the medium of English. Students in Japan and China produced video podcasts (vidcasts), exchanged them through a dedicated website and provided peer feedback Peer feedback, in which students evaluate each other's work and give comments to one another about their impressions and suggestions for possible improvements, is discussed widely in the EFL literature, though often focusing on writing (e.g., Park, 2018; Ryoo & Wing, 2012). In this project, feedback was given on content, English pronunciation, and video production, which students used to edit their vidcasts before submitting them for final grading. We will focus on the process of developing and producing transnational vidcasts utilising peer feedback. We will explain step by step how this was achieved and offer tips and suggestions regarding issues to be considered when implementing such a project.

Technology Employed

This project is not restricted to any particular software application. We decided to use free options wherever possible. Students need access to the Internet, computers, tablets, or smartphones. They used video editing software to create their videos. We introduced Shotcut, a free, open-source video editing application, though students were free to use different apps. We created a website to display the vidcasts using WIX, an online website builder. The vidcasts themselves and other related documents were exchanged between teachers using Google Drive or Skype.

Project Activities

The project can be summarised in six steps, though some steps may require more than a single lesson. The total amount of time required may vary according to subject matter and availability of ICT resources.

Step 1

Explain the important basics of the project to students, including the aims of the project and showing a sample vidcast. Explain the basics of video editing (importing videos and images, assembling them in the correct order, applying transitions, recording a script and importing it, adding appropriate background music, etc., and then editing all these elements to create a final project).

Discuss the importance of copyright with students and encourage them to either take photographs and videos themselves or download copyright-free photos from Internet sites like Pixabay or use Creative Commons licenced materials.

Then, in pairs or small groups, students should select a topic which they think will be of interest to students in another country. In our project, we asked the students to focus on topics of historical and cultural significance.

Step 2

Students should write a script to introduce the topic and begin looking for digital materials to create an appropriate visual description of it.

The teachers should provide feedback to students to help them craft an English language narrative which clearly describes their topic. Students should be encouraged to avoid using local terms or concepts which may be obvious to themselves or classmates but may not make sense to students in another country.

Students should also begin planning to ensure that the spoken word and the images in their vidcasts fit well. This may entail some re-writing of scripts if students are unable to source images that match the narrative.

Step 3

Provide ample time for students to work on their vidcasts with the teacher present. Some students will need more assistance in using the video editing application than others, and it is important for the teacher to be available to help when required. Encourage students to speak English as much as possible and help each other during the production process. For example, if one group finds a good resource for copyright-free images, they should share that with others, or if a student discovers a useful function in their editing application, encourage them to teach others.

Many Chinese and Japanese university students are very adept at using their smartphones to work out how to edit their vidcasts by themselves. They should be given the freedom to be creative while the teacher acts more as a monitor during the class.

Step 4

Set a completion date and have the students submit the first draft of their vidcast. This can be done in various ways, such as utilising university com-

puter systems, as e-mail attachments or physical transfer with a USB memory device.

We then exchanged the vidcasts and uploaded them to the website we had created. In this project, the website was password-protected, so only those involved in the project were able to access the vidcasts. However, depending on circumstances, other options for exchange can be used, such as cloud technology, e-mail attachments, and so on.

Step 5

Students should then watch the vidcasts and provide feedback to one another. Teachers should help in class by ensuring that the feedback provided is clear and of an appropriate nature. In our project, students used a standard form and a rubric which focused on three areas, content, oral English, and video production, to offer feedback.

Depending on the number of videos, you can have students watch them all as a group, or assign certain videos to particular students. The key point is that all videos are reviewed and that all students receive a similar amount of peer feedback. Teachers then facilitate the exchange of peer review. In our project, the feedback forms were scanned and converted to pdf format, which was then emailed to the instructor in the other country.

Step 6

Students should use the feedback from their counterparts abroad to re-edit and produce their final video project. This was then submitted and graded by the teacher.

Conclusion and Discussion

Designing interesting, attainable ways to teach EFL through technology is a fruitful endeavour. This project was interesting for the students and taught them how to produce and edit vidcasts, encouraged cooperation, and developed pronunciation, storytelling, and other useful skills. Students perceived peer feedback as useful and motivating.

A transnational vidcasting project such as this raises some concerns that need addressing. In regard to ethical concerns, we carefully discussed and strongly directed students in the area of copyright. We explained to students that even if they made a good vidcast but did not have the copyright for the photos or other materials, they would not be able to release it on the open Internet and take credit for it. For many students, this was something they were insufficiently aware of. We also asked students to sign ethical release forms, which explained to them that their work would only be used for research and education and not in any commercial way. Some examples of the final vidcasts from this project can be found here: http://juepod.libsyn.com/.

We suggest attempting to ensure that students have similar levels of ability in English so that feedback will be balanced. We also went through pronunciation drills and worked on common problematic aspects of English that students tend to make. There will be some mistakes which are common for most learners regardless of background, but equally there will be certain errors that students tend to make according to their own L1. While classmates can usually negotiate these common mistakes, students in another country may very well be confused.

It is also of great importance to investigate the technical capacities of your school or educational context (for example, issues surrounding Internet access for certain sites from countries such as China can be problematic) prior to beginning a project such as this. Discovering halfway through that you cannot complete one of the steps will of course result in a failed project, but also in confusion and disappointment for students.

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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 editors at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

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The Virtues of Story-based Activities

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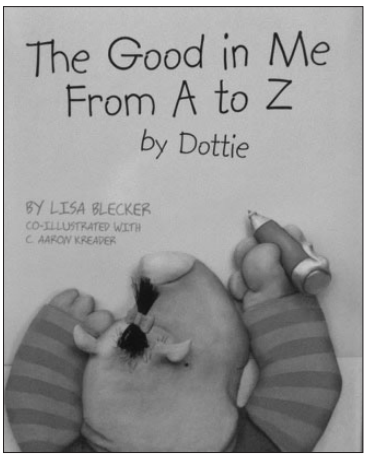
The Virtues of Picture Books

Children love stories and picture books. I often see them at school, huddled in front of their teacher in rapt attention, on the floor at the bookshelves, or peering gleefully into their bag at a book they checked out for the weekend. So much can happen when a child engages with a book that works to build their character, self awareness, and imagination, and encourages them to feel curious, brave, and joyful.

Figure 1

The Good in Me from A to Z *by Dottie by Lisa Blecker and C. Aaron Kreader (2009)*



In the previous *TLT*, the article on "Today's Plan" briefly mentioned our class mascot, Dottie chan the Rhino, and her book of virtues, *The Good in Me from A to Z* by Dottie (Blecker & Kreader, 2009). Dottie chan and her book have become essential resources that bring much joy and learning into our English program.

A Rhino Roaring with Personality

The curtain rises on a kindergarten English class. The teachers and students are about to finish the *How Are You* chant with the final emotion, excited. Everyone knows what, or rather who, is coming. It is Dottie chan, our cute rhino classroom mascot, dressed appropriately for the weather, dancing to the tune of the Can-Can, with all the children clapping and chanting for her to introduce the virtue message of the day. It is funny and magical, and our students are excited to see her and curious about what she will present.

Dottie Chan's Book

The Good in Me, From A to Z by Dottie is a book that introduces 26 virtues from A–Z. Dottie chan's book is full of delightful pages, each depicting a virtue in words and actions. It is even possible to sing the book to the ABC Song. Some of the virtues in the book are: Courageous, Determined, Encouraging, Kind, Patient, Questioning, Respectful, Supportive, and Zany. For the sake of simplicity for our 4-to-6-year-old students, some of the virtues above and throughout the book were changed to: Be Brave, I Can Do It, You Can Do It, Be Curious, Be Polite, Be A Good Friend, Be Unique, and so on.

Dottie Chan's Messages

Dottie chan's book works as a great resource with rich concepts that we can match with picture books and other activities that we introduce in our classroom. Dottie chan often brings us a "Message of the Day" to help us act out and understand the feelings and situations that can happen in our daily lives. One day, Dottie chan presented the virtue, "Show Self Control" from her book. In the picture, Dottie chan is in front of a television screen that has gone black. She has watched her allotment of cartoons and has turned off the TV. We take this time to talk to our students about their ability to exercise self control at home and in the classroom, and then we give them a chance to experience self control for

themselves. A timer is set for 20 seconds, and the students are told to remain quiet and still until the timer goes off. That goes well for about 10 seconds, when the teacher starts making funny faces and some students start to giggle, but others will retain their self control. Then, it is Dottie chan's turn to try her luck at showing Self Control with a plate of cookies. We ask the class, "How many cookies are ok to eat?" The students call out answers like, "4, 2, 10, 1!" We all decide that Dottie chan can have two cookies. Hilariously, it takes Dottie chan a couple of tries to regain her self control as the students yell "Show Self Control!" to encourage her.

Dottie chan also interacts with other components of our lesson plan, like the Mystery Box, where, after passing it around and shaking it, we might open it to find a pair of her lost underwear (so embarrassing, but helpful to show and learn the difference between "pants" and "underwear" before reading a story with that very important vocabulary word).

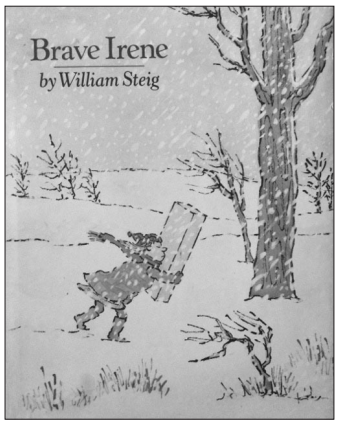
Favorite Books and Activities

Brave Irene

Last winter, we read the book, *Brave Irene* (Steig, 2011). In the book, Irene's mother, a dressmaker, makes a special dress for a customer, but is sick and cannot deliver it. Her daughter, Irene, puts on her winter wear, places the dress in a box, and treks out into a raging snowstorm. Irene is battered by the wind, tripped and struck by branches, loses the dress, twists her ankle, is swallowed up by the snow, and is finally all alone and lost in the woods. Will she give up or go on?

Figure 2

Brave Irene *by William Steig (2011)*



Before we read the story, we sing the "How Are You?" song from the Greeting Block in Today's Plan. The emotions featured in the song are Happy, Sick, Sad, Mad, Surprised, and Excited. These emotions were taken from the story to reinforce the language in the book. After singing "How Are You?" Dottie chan pops in to showcase the message, Be Brave, from her book. On that page, little Dottie chan is seen holding a toy rhino and standing in front of a big doctor. The students talk about how Dottie chan might be feeling about being there. The teacher then pulls out a toy injection needle and prepares to give Dottie chan an injection. Dottie chan shivers with fear. The class encourages her with soft chants of "Be Brave, Be Brave, Be Brave!" Dottie chan takes the injection well! Some students then volunteer to come forward to be brave and get a shot, while their friends cheer them on, as they did for Dottie chan.

- Brave Irene Activity: "Against the Wind"
- Dottie chan's Virtues: Be Brave, Kind, Loving, Creative, Trust Myself, I can do it, You can do it
- Props needed: a box bigger than a kindergartner
- Characters: The Wind and Irene.
- The scene: The Wind and Irene push and pull on the dress box to wrestle it away from the other. Classmates cheer Irene on by pointing and chanting, "You can do it!" as Irene says, "I can do it!" The Wind makes whooshing noises and pushes and pulls Irene. One or even two students can fight together against the Wind.

Figure 3

Fighting Against the Wind

All of our students got a chance to engage with the Wind. The more outgoing kids got up first, one by one or in pairs to fight. The Wind gave them all a good battle before getting pushed back against the wall. The smallest boy in the class, Nao, waited until last and walked up with an expression of trepidation on his face. He put his hands on the

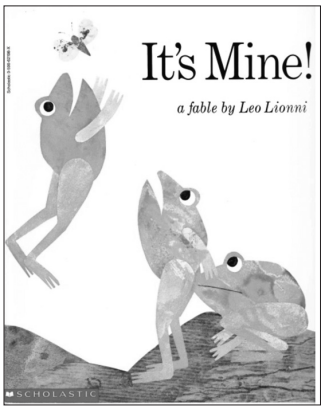
box and pushed. The Wind fell back a bit, regained footing, and pushed him back for a few seconds, but then faltered backwards as the boy pushed and pushed the Wind into the corner easily, as the other children in the room chanted, "You can do it! You can do it!" Nao's face was alight with happiness, and the other children in the room were amazed that he beat the Wind quicker than they did. At the end, Nao went up to another teacher and said proudly, "I didn't even use 100% of my power."

It's Mine

Another of our special virtue books is *It's Mine!* (Lionni, 1996). It is a story about three frog siblings who do not like to share and are always fighting with each other. However, by the end of the book, they finally learn kindness and sharing. As we close the book, we ask the students if they think they can be kind and share, and of course they always say "Yes, I can!", so, we put them to the test.

Figure 4

It's Mine! *by Leo Lionni (1996)*



- It's Mine Activity: "It's MY Island!"
- Dottie chan's Virtues: Be Brave, Giving, Kind, Helpful, Patient, Good Friend
- Props needed: Non-slip material for circles (20-25 cm), 1 circle per person, music, a shark puppet or doll
- Characters: Students, teachers, and the shark!
- The scene: Islands (non slip circles) are spread across the floor. Everyone finds their own island, jumps up and down on it, and says "It's MINE!" When the music starts, all walk around stepping from island to island. When the music stops, everyone finds an island to stand on, jumps up and down on it, and says "It's MINE!" At this point, everyone has their own island. The music repeats and stops, and little by little, the islands disappear, and people are left without an island. Teacher says, "It's ok, just wait, and you might get an island next time." About the fourth time the music plays, the *Jaws* theme comes on, and a shark puppet slowly starts swimming around the islands.

As the islands disappear, the mood starts to change, and the activity and squeals intensify. The Shark disappears suddenly, the previous music resumes, and students continue their walk around the islands. Teacher removes more circles, the Jaws theme begins again, and the Shark returns to swim around the room.

Things are more hectic now. There is laughter and squealing as the Shark circles the islands and comes close to those without a place to land. It is at this point I see a young girl on an island reach out to a classmate running by and pull her onto the island with her. The look of happiness and satisfaction on her face at what she did is heartwarming. Other island dwellers see this and start pulling people onto their island as well, leaving the Shark alone to say, "I'm disappointed!" More islands disappear until finally, only one island remains! The Shark circles and circles and finally starts sobbing. You see, the Shark is actually lonely and just wants some friends to play with. When the students realize this, they invite the Shark to join them, and everyone is happy.

A few years ago, I did this activity in a presentation for teachers, and when we finished, someone asked me why I did not just directly teach the children how to be kind. It was a marvelous question, one that I actually was not prepared for at the time, but when I saw the above young girl's expression in that moment when she was kind to her classmate, it hit me. I want our students to have a spontaneous, personal, firsthand experience of kindness and the other virtues when possible. Young children carry with them a bag of emotions that they run through every day. Some of those emotions they know well, but others are new and strange and have no name yet. As teachers, we have opportunities to help our students discover and understand their feelings as they learn to communicate in English in our classrooms.

Transcendent Virtues

This final virtue story is not from a book, but from an English class of our 5–6-year-olds. Dottie chan has a younger sibling named Ricky, who goes to live with a student for a week, when it is their turn to take Dottie chan's book home. One of the most moving episodes occurred in this "take home activity," when Mashu, whose name was always last on the roll call, finally got his turn to take home a

rhino. For weeks before his turn, he watched his classmates go home with Ricky, and every week he would say, that since his name was always last on the name list, that he should get to take Ricky home for two weeks instead of one.

Finally, Mashu's turn came, and he took Ricky the Rhino home. We wondered if he would keep Ricky for two weeks, but at the end of the first week, Mashu brought Ricky back to the Kindy. He told us about the fun he had with Ricky, Dottie chan's book, and the games that came with it. Then he paused and said, he thought it would not be fair to keep Ricky for another week because it would make someone else wait longer for their turn. There was silence. Here was a real-life episode, not in a game, not in a story, not in a Mystery Box, but in the heart and mind of a little boy, where the whole class could experience working with real virtues in real time. We opened Dottie chan's book and asked the children to say the good things they saw in Mashu. They said he was "nice," he was a "good friend," and that he showed "patience" and "self control." Mashu beamed at being recognized for his thoughtfulness and kindness. The children showed their awareness of the virtues they had learned, and, together with our exploration of them through discussion, picture books, songs, chants, and drama, they could use these powerful English words and concepts for themselves and each other.

These stories are a necessary part of the classroom, where our goal is to give our students the language to express themselves in English. Using Dottie chan's book and other picture books helps us to keep this language fresh and pertinent to guide the students through their learning. Making activities from these books to complement and support the book material multiplies student engagement and growth. Picture books are rich fountains of slices of life for our students to splash around in where they meet interesting characters, face curious problems and situations to solve, and create dreams to aspire to, as they put themselves into the story and experience the feelings, awareness, and growth offered.

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Kim Horne is from the U.S. and has been crisscrossing cultures since infancy. She has loved to sing, act, and dance since toddlerhood. Teaching, doing presentations, taking pictures, moon viewing, and writing haiku are some of her favorite things. Kim currently works at Izumi Chuo Kindergarten in Gifu City.

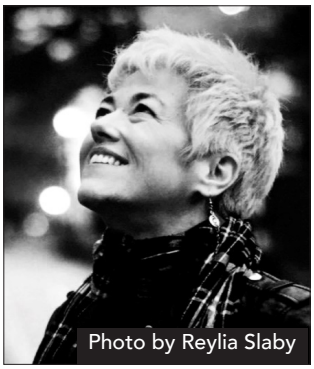

Photo by Reylia Slaby

[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.*

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This month's column features Thomas Amundrud's review of Think Smart: Critical Thinking in Critical Times.

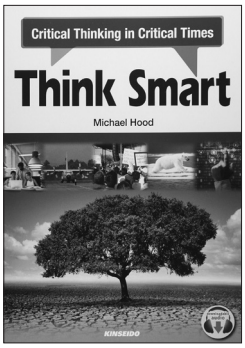
Think Smart: Critical Thinking in Critical Times

[Michael Hood. Tokyo: Kinseido, 2018. (Teacher's Book and listening materials available online) pp. 91. ¥1,900. ISBN: 978-4-7647-4043-3.]

Thomas Amundrud, Nara University of Education

Think Smart is an oral communication textbook for classes of CEFR B1-B2 students or higher. It has 15 thematic units that explore a variety of issues of social concern relevant to university

students in Japan, such as nuclear power, women in the workplace, American military bases in Japan, and living together before marriage. Each unit introduces specific critical thinking skills that, while cumulatively organized, are still self-contained enough for teachers, like me, who are unable to utilize the entire textbook in a single year. Each unit also contains the following sections: a reading passage, key phrases for discussion, listening activities, and topics for possible writing or presentation assignments. In addition to the textbook, there is a teacher's manual PDF downloadable from the publisher's website that contains answers to unit exercises and Japanese translations of the unit readings, and downloadable mp3 files for the listening activities.



I used *Think Smart* in my year-long, 30-week oral communication class as a starting point for discussions and presentations, and for this purpose it was more than adequate. Through the range of issues covered by *Think Smart*, students have ample opportunities to share their opinions and deepen their knowledge on a variety of topics through discussion and further research. For example, in each unit, I used the warm-up questions as a chance for students to build up their background information for the different topics in that unit; information which they shared on a collaborative document and which facilitated further discussion and understanding. In solicited feedback, students replied that the range of topics in *Think Smart* was one point they particularly liked. In addition, while this is not a reading textbook, *Think Smart* includes in its reading sections a variety of written genres that can be explored on their own merits by teachers wishing to include a greater reading and writing focus in their classes. Similarly, although the textbook does not have an explicit, built-in presentation pedagogy, the final topics in each unit are easily adaptable to teaching informational or persuasive presentations, and potentially other genres as well. Finally, *Think Smart* provides an attempt to develop students' argumentation skills in both unpacking the ideas of others and expressing their own. For instance, the comprehension questions often ask students to identify the possible audience or perspective of the writer, thus helping students identify possible biases. Additionally, the useful expressions, which are recycled in the subsequent listening audio, help students learn how to express disagreement constructively.

Considering these strengths, however, there is one apparent discrepancy between the concern for social issues expressed throughout the textbook content of *Think Smart* and its implementation in the listening program specifically. In this section, 11 of the 12 listening activities are accompanied by the faces and names of the two purported speakers: one that is Western, with names like Ann, Jane, Frank, or Sam; and one that is Japanese, with names such as Shiori, Aya, Koji, or Taro. Only the chapter on US military bases in Okinawa features the faces and names of two purportedly Japanese speakers alone. Despite the visual representation of speakers whose names and appearance imply that they are not from *inner circle* countries (Kachru, 1992), the accents of both speakers in the audio program resemble those of majority white North Americans. The use of a particular, recognizable inner circle accent in the textbook audio is likely due to concerns, however misguided, by the publisher regarding its intelligibility, so that student listeners can understand what is said, as well as regarding the comprehensibility of passages within their contexts (Smith & Nelson, 1985). In doing so, however, this textbook, like many others on the Japanese ELT market, continues the privileging of a specific accent according to a raciolinguistic (Rosa & Flores, 2017) and native speaker-centered hierarchy of who English belongs to and whose English *sounds right* and is more highly valued (Ramjattan, 2019). That said, *Think Smart* should not be singled out too harshly since most ELT textbook audio programs on the market in Japan share this flaw. Nevertheless, it is hoped that future editions of textbooks like *Think Smart* that focus on topical social issues will feature a greater variety of Englishes and English speakers so as to represent the language as spoken by most people with whom students may use English outside the classroom, and also because studies suggest that greater exposure to greater varieties of English can lead to their improved comprehension (Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2008).

In closing, even with the above concerns, *Think Smart* remains an excellent choice for teachers, particularly those of students with sufficient maturity, interest, and motivation to pursue the the topics it contains.

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Recently Received

Julie Kimura & Ryan Barnes

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A list of texts and resource materials for language teachers available for book reviews in *TLT* and *JALT Journal*. Publishers are invited to submit complete sets of materials to Julie Kimura at the Publishers' Review Copies Liaison address listed on the Staff page on the inside cover of *TLT*.

Recently Received Online

An up-to-date index of books available for review can be found at http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/recently-received.

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Books for Students (reviews published in *TLT*)

Contact: Julie Kimura — jaltpubs.tlt.pub.review@jalt.org

Evolve Level 2 (2nd ed.) — Clandfield, L., Goldstein, B., Jones, C., & Kerr, P. Cambridge, 2018. [Evolve Level 2 is part of a six-level English course that gets students speaking with confidence. This student-centered course draws on insights from language teaching experts and real students while focusing on the most effective and efficient ways to make progress in English.]

** Inspiring voices: 15 interviews from NHK Direct Talk* — Kobayashi, M. Fujita, R., & Collins, P. J. Kinseido, 2021. [Students can watch 10-minute-long interviews with creative problem solvers. This coursebook builds students' fluency, develops their critical thinking skills, and motivates them to explore a variety of contemporary global issues. Lesson plans include background readings, comprehension tasks, and activities that culminate in mini-projects. Downloadable audio for self-study.]

! Japanese English: A descriptive grammar — Olagboyega, K. W. Shumpusha Publishing, 2020. [This book is a descriptive guide to English as it is used in Japan. The author begins with an introductory overview of English in Japan, and continues with descriptions of grammar and vocabulary as they are used by Japanese users of English.]

Movie time! (3rd printing) — Bray, E. Nan'un-do Publishing, 2020. [Students and teachers will have the unique opportunity to watch a great film together. The coursebook contains 16 units that include language development activities, a journal for recording reactions and ideas, as well as opportunities for in-class performance.]

! Ready to present: A guide to better presentations — Kostiuk, M., & Bartelen, H. Cengage, 2019. [This text was written to help learners develop the skills they need to create content and deliver it. The teacher's manual includes answer keys, teaching tips, and supplementary comprehension questions. Students have online access to classroom audio and video.]

** Science at hand: Articles from Smithsonian Magazine's Smart News* — Miyamoto, K. Kinseido, 2020. [Students learn relevant vocabulary and discuss scientific topics that they have read about. Downloadable audio for self-study.]

Unlock Level 2: Listening, speaking & critical thinking (2nd ed.) — O'Neill, R., Lewis, M., & Sowton, C. Cambridge (2019). [Unlock Level 2 is a part of a six-level academic-light English course created to build the skills that language students (CEFR Pre-A1 to C1) need for their studies. It develops students' abilities to think critically in an academic context right from the start of their language learning. The coursebook can be supplemented with a mobile app and online workbook with downloadable audio and video.]

** World insiders: Authentic videos from Insider* — Yoshida, K., & Allan, A. Kinseido (2021). [This textbook is based on the US-based news site. Students learn English through videos that are accompanied by reading passages as well as listening activities that support all four language skills. Teacher's manual available with useful features, including vocabulary tests.]

Books for Teachers (reviews published in *JALT Journal*)

Contact: Greg Rouault — jaltpubs.jj.reviews@jalt.org

** Language teacher noticing in tasks* — Jackson, D. O. Multilingual Matters, 2021. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800411241

**Professional development in applied linguistics: A guide to success for graduate students and early career faculty* — Plonsky, L. (Ed.). John Benjamins, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1075/z.229

David McMurray

Graduate students and teaching assistants are invited to submit compositions in the form of a speech, appeal, memoir, essay, conference review, or interview on the policy and practice of language education. Master's and doctoral thesis supervisors are also welcome to contribute or encourage their students to join this vibrant debate. Grounded in the author's reading, practicum, or empirical research, contributions are expected to share an impassioned presentation of opinions in 1,000 words or less. Teaching Assistance is not a peer-reviewed column.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.ta@jalt.org

In this issue's Teaching Assistance column, a recent master's degree graduate who majored in English Education describes a classroom activity that helped her students to increase the number of words they could utter within a set time limit. Putting her study abroad experiences with Global Englishes and language education theories into classroom practice, she facilitated roundtable discussions and non-confrontational debates to develop learner confidence and increase fluency. She explains how these novel classroom speaking activities improved her learners' fluency by shifting their focus from how many mistakes they were making in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary to how many words they were communicating.

Three-Way Debates Promote Measured Vocabulary Growth

Kaoru Nishihara

Kamimura Gakuen College

Prior to studying at graduate school in Japan, I lived in cosmopolitan London. There, I met people from all over the world. I felt welcomed in the polyglot multicultural society as a temporary resident from Japan who could communicate in English. I tended to interact with ethnic minorities from many different countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. We freely spoke together in English with accents influenced by our various mother languages. I enjoyed the way we exchanged opinions as a group. Suenobu (2010) suggested that although there are differences in the pronunciation and grammars of people speaking English around the world, we can communicate smoothly with each other when we share good intentions and make sincere efforts.

My Global Englishes Class in Japan

When I returned to Japan, I hoped to incorporate Rose and Galloway's (2017) concept of Global Englishes and vibrant roundtable discussions into my English language classroom practice. I applied for an instructor position teaching an English communication course to nursery school and kindergarten teachers-in-training. There were 31 students enrolled in this course and their ages varied greatly; about half had just graduated from high school and the other half were in their 20s to 40s.

Higuchi and Shimatani (2007) emphasized that the main goal of English courses in Japan is to get students speaking English in all junior and senior high schools. Unfortunately, the first-year cohort that entered my classroom in this private college indicated to me that this goal had not yet been achieved. I had also thought that all my students would have had experience debating at high school. According to the needs analysis survey that I conducted, however, only two students had previously debated in English. From the outset, several students told me they were not confident in their English abilities. They said they were ashamed of making grammatical and pronunciation mistakes and in the classroom, hidden behind masks, I noticed many of their voices would often falter when speaking in English. Guided by Hirata's (2019) practical advice for underperforming students at universities, rather than start with discussions and debates, I assigned remedial study of English from textbooks during the first semester starting April, 2020.

In the second semester, as the fear of COVID-19 lessened, I had students form groups and assigned communicative tasks such as visiting sightseeing spots and doing role plays of tour guides. In this latter example, the students would practice describing the local sights to a foreign visitor. Toward the end of the semester, these students were asked to challenge themselves by debating a topic and to also try roundtable discussions.

Debating in English in Japan

Debates, as an educational method developed in British universities, are expected to be active and exciting. The standard format for a debate is to have two opposing teams pitted against each other while a team of judges keeps time and observes the

exchange of opinions. When I lived in London, I interacted with people from the UK where individuals are expected and encouraged to have different opinions. I soon became comfortable with sharing my opinions.

McMurray (2018) demonstrated in his university and high school classrooms that three-way roundtable debate was suitable for Japanese students. Allowing discussion in the form of presentations, questions, and answers to flow from team to team to team is slower paced and less confrontational than traditional head-to-head debating. In Japanese culture, the sharing of common values in groups and communities is often highly important.

Methodology

I hypothesized that pitting two confrontational teams against each other might not be an effective strategy for encouraging students to communicate in my class. Having one group's opinions on a topic quickly refuted by an opposing group might descend into classroom chaos or worse, utter silence. Therefore, I also formed a second hypothesis to test. I felt that a roundtable discussion with three successive teams—perhaps building on one another's creative ideas, questions, and answers—could work more effectively as a debate. To test these two hypotheses, I chose to record the number of utterances for two-team style debates as well as for a three-team, roundtable style of debate.

Adopting the principles of McMurray's (2018) Active Learning guidelines, the students and I jointly decided upon ten guidelines for our class. Allowing them to set the rules and schedule may have reduced their fear of speaking, and it did seem to increase their motivation to participate.

1. Five two-way debates would be held during the first five weeks of classes, followed by five three-way roundtable debates, which would then be held during the next five weeks of classes.
2. Students were to be divided into groups of those who would compete in the two-way style debates or those who would participate in the three-way roundtable debates.
3. The remaining students in the class were assigned roles such as judges, moderators, recorders, and timekeepers. All students were expected to take part in a debate.
4. Four students would be asked to form one group and decide on the order in which each member would speak.
5. The topics to debate were given at the beginning of the class. For example, two-way topics included: "Beds are better than futons" and "Cats make better pets than dogs." Three-way topics included: "Kindergarteners must wear uniforms, can freely choose their own fashion, or can alternate between uniform and free-style," and "Tokyo Olympics should be called off, postponed, or held."
6. Although individuals might have different opinions about a proposed topic, they had to agree as a group to start by using one of the solutions suggested for the debate topic.
7. Each speaker on the team would have one minute to speak in English.
8. The first speaker selects a solution, the second asks questions to the others, the third answers the other team's questions, and the fourth speaker summarizes the group's opinion.
9. The order of speaking in roundtables was decided as: 1st speaker of Team A → 1st speaker of Team B → 1st speaker of Team C → 2nd speaker of Team A → 2nd speaker of Team B → 2nd speaker of Team C→ 3rd speaker of Team A → 3rd speaker of Team B → 3rd speaker of Team C → 4th speaker of Team A → 4th speaker of Team B → 4th speaker of Team C.
10. When students were debating, all of the utterances would be recorded and the number of words in every utterance would be counted. The initial and highest number of utterances by each person were tabulated (Table 1).

Observations

As an example of student discourse that was recorded for the three-way school uniform topic, the teams made successive statements: "I am team A. If they don't have uniforms, it must be tough for them to choose clothes at ceremonies"; a speaker from team B suggested "Their clothes should be their own because young children get their clothes dirty very easily"; a Team C participant added, "They can put on uniforms at ceremonies, but they can put on their own clothes in daily life." Team A uttered 20 words, Team B said 15 words, and Team C reported 18 words in one minute.

Results

The students who participated in the three-way roundtable debates had a word growth rate of 257%, which was higher than the 218% achievement of the two-way debates. Table 1 shows: student No. 8 spoke seven words during one minute in her two-way debate. She said, "I don't want to do Tokyo Olympic" (meaning to say no one wants it

to be held). The highest number of words she was able to speak during one of the five debates was 17 words during one minute. Student No. 2 uttered 18 words in his first two-way debate. He said: "School uniform is expensive, and children become big very fast, the money is *mottainai* (a waste). What do you do?" This debater reached a high of 42 words. Table 1 shows that the students numbered 1 to 16 who participated in a series of five general debates spoke a narrower range of words: between a low of seven and a high of 52 utterances. Students numbered 18 to 31 who participated in three-way roundtable debates uttered from a low of 8 to a high of 91 words.

Table 1

Comparison Between Two-Way and Three-Way Debate Utterances

Debate type	Student No.	Utterances in the first debate	Maximum number of utterances achieved in one of the other debates (second to fifth)	Growth rate (%)	Average increase (%)
Two-team face-to-face debates	1	8	20	250	218
	2	18	42	233	
	3	24	51	213	
	4	19	27	142	
	5	25	35	140	
	6	9	16	178	
	7	17	23	135	
	8	7	17	243	
	9	13	18	138	
	10	11	24	218	
	11	16	25	156	
	12	21	50	238	
	13	13	31	238	
	14	17	43	253	
	15	18	41	228	
	16	19	52	274	
Three-team round-table debates	17	11	35	318	257
	18	8	21	263	
	19	14	30	214	
	20	22	51	232	
	21	21	58	276	
	22	15	42	280	
	23	16	39	244	
	24	22	55	250	
	25	32	68	213	
	26	34	85	250	
	27	28	52	186	
	28	18	56	311	
	29	28	64	229	
	30	30	91	303	
	31	19	53	279	

Conclusion

Even though this was the first experience of debate for 29 of the 31 members, the fact that everyone participated was encouraging for me as a new language teacher. I noticed that every student uttered more words, and some spoke a lot more once they became used to a classroom activity that involves student communication and interaction. An increase in vocabulary suggests that the roundtable discussion encouraged students to speak out. The students said that they enjoyed the flow of the three-team roundtable debates. The number of words spoken within one minute increased. This seemed to demonstrate that three-way roundtable debate is an activity that encourages conversation. In a final survey, 20 students answered that the rules of the less-confrontational three-way roundtable debate seemed more aligned with Japanese culture than the more confrontational two-way debate. I was satisfied with these comments. I would like to continue collecting data during the next academic year to further validate these results and to analyse what other genre of classroom discussion is effective for students.

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Jerry Talandis Jr.

The Writers' Workshop is a collaborative endeavour of the JALT Writers' Peer Support Group (PSG). Articles in the column provide advice and support for novice writers, experienced writers, or nearly anyone who is looking to write for academic purposes. If you would like to submit a paper for consideration, please contact us.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.writers.ws@jalt.org • Web: https://jalt-publications.org/psg

Key Points About Keywords

Jerry Talandis Jr.

Sometimes when submitting a paper for publication, the journal will require you to include a few descriptive keywords in order to facilitate its discovery on web searches. Here is an example of such a request, taken verbatim from the *JALT Journal submission guidelines* (Notes on editing & formatting, n.d.):

> Following the Japanese translation of the abstract, include between two and five keywords, in alphabetical order, separated by a semi-colon. The use of keywords is a new addition to JALT Journal, so articles in past issues may not contain them. Keywords: abstract; American Psychological Association; reference list; style guide

Choosing keywords is no big deal, right? Just pull a few terms off the top of your head and be done with it. Well, even though such a casual approach will technically fulfill a submission requirement, bringing a bit more awareness and attention to optimizing keywords is worth the effort. In short, effective keywords can put your paper on the first or second page of a search result, thus making it more convenient for other researchers to cite. The more citations the better, as this is a measure of your paper's effectiveness and a reflection of your credibility and expertise as an academic (Miranda, 2016). Fortunately, choosing effective keywords does not require in-depth knowledge of sophisticated *SEO* (search engine optimization) techniques. In this column, I will cover a few key points about keywords to help get you started quickly and easily. I will also introduce a few free online tools that automate this task and help you test out and fine-tune your ideas.

The Goldilocks Approach: Not Too Short or Too Long

Ideally, a keyword should actually be a short phrase consisting of two to four words (How to choose the best keywords, n.d.). Single words tend to generate overly broad results, but long sentence-length phrases can lead search engines to filter results to such an extent that your paper is not included (Miranda, 2016). Let's call this the *Goldilocks approach* to choosing keywords, to make it easy to remember. Naturally, on occasion, single words may be unavoidable, but as a general rule of thumb, short phrases highly relevant to your study will lead to the best outcomes.

Avoid Using Words From Your Title

When you begin choosing the keywords, start with your title. Search engines scan article titles first and place great weight on these words (How to find keywords effectively, n.d.). Your title should already contain the most important concepts and ideas, so grab a thesaurus and find a good synonym or two. You want terms that rephrase, complement, and supplement your paper's title.

Highlight the Main Topic and Methodology

For better results, focus on the key concepts in your paper. Usually, you cover these points in the abstract and introduction, so look there for ideal keywords that capture the essence of what you are trying to do. For example, if you wrote up a report on a classroom action research project, mention the main intervention and how you went about collecting data. For example, how can you express the key aims of your study in a single phrase or two? What sort of methodology did you use? Did you analyze recordings? Examine samples of student writing? Evaluate various classroom activities? Tuning in to what you did, how, and why can spur some effective keyword creativity.

Follow Any Journal Guidelines

This point supersedes all others! Even if single word keywords are best avoided, but the journal guidelines call for them, you need to follow the rules. Familiarity with submission guidelines is an essential task in any case, so while you are at it, make note of any guidance on keyword choice. In the example from *JALT Journal* cited above, note how the only stated requirements are total number of items (two to five) and a bit of formatting advice

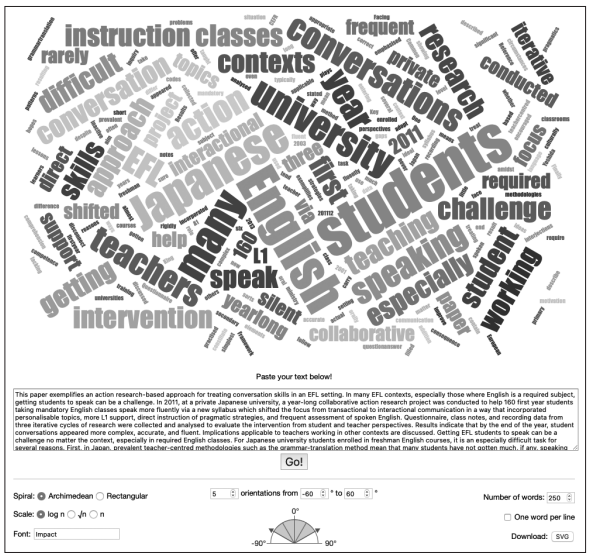
(alphabetical order, separated by semicolon). Otherwise, you have free reign. Note the sentence on the newness of this requirement, which I suppose was included to clear up any confusion on this point. These sample keywords imply what the editors are looking for. However, if the journal you target does not mention keywords, peruse some past issues to see what other authors have done. If you are unclear as to what a journal may want, contact an editor and clarify this point. I would bet that many editors would appreciate your conscientiousness.

Research and Test Out Your Ideas

To make the job of choosing keywords easier, a number of free online tools can automate the process and help you fine-tune possible choices. A quick search of *word cloud generators* will bring up many options. To get you started, I recommend the *Jason Davies Word Cloud Generator*, which can be accessed at https://www.jasondavies.com/wordcloud. Simply paste in a bit of text from your paper, such as the abstract and/or introduction, and see what comes out. This web app is simple to use, and you can configure the resulting graphics to your liking. As a demonstration, I have taken the abstract and introduction from a past paper (Talandis Jr & Stout, 2015) and pasted it into the generator. The resulting word cloud is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Jason Davies Word Cloud Generator sample image



From this image, I can instantly see which words are the most prominent. This information kickstarts me into thinking about which keywords I could use.

Once you have come up with a preliminary list of keyword ideas, the next step is to actually try them out. Miranda (2016) suggests pasting prospective ideas into a search engine of your choice and seeing what comes up. Do you see other papers on topics similar to yours? If so, then you are on the right track. If not, then refine and try again. A few online tools can help with this vetting process. One excellent place to start is *Keyword Tool*, an online service (https://keywordtool.io) with a free option that generates keyword suggestions based on Google search trends (How to find keywords effectively, n.d.). While primarily geared for business, using this service at the free level can provide a variety of useful options for academic research purposes. For example, typing *action research* brings up a list of 321 options (Figure 2).

Another interesting tool is *Google Trends* (https://trends.google.com), which enables comparison of keyword choices to see which are more popular, thus clarifying your decision-making process. For example, say you are wondering which is better, *EFL* or *English as a Foreign Language*. Personally, I would lean towards the latter, as it is more descriptive, but let's compare them in Google Trends and see (Figure 3).

Figure 2

Sample Search Result From Keyword Tool

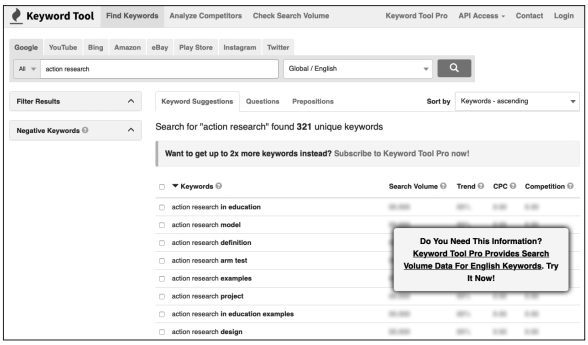
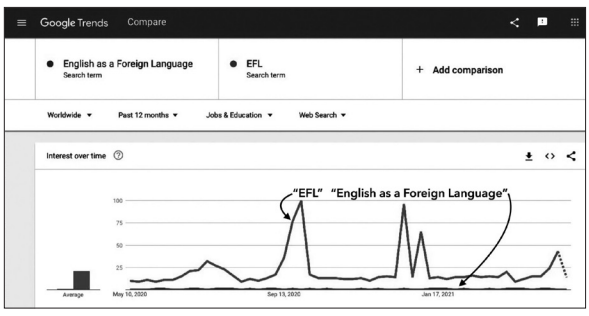


Figure 3

Sample Search Result From Google Trends



"Hm! Interesting," you may think. "According to this data, the term *EFL* seems much more prominent. Okay, let's use that." In this way, Google Trends can help you test out and refine prospective keywords.

Final Thoughts

To recap, the topic of keywords may seem minor, but it is one of those academic writing details which can add a lot of value to your career. After all, it is not just about getting published—it is about doing everything possible to make sure your work gets noticed and cited. You have built your work on the shoulders of others, so it behooves you to do what you can to help others build upon yours. Of course, good research and writing is most important, but wouldn't it be a shame if all your hard work went for naught if your paper was difficult to find? Choosing effective keywords need not be a tiresome chore. In fact, paying some attention to this detail can help you reflect on your work in productive ways. Good keywords, along with your title and abstract, are your manuscript's public face. Taking some time to research the best options is a healthy use of your time and energy and a small but positive step you can take to improve your career.

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[JALT FOCUS] SIG FOCUS


Robert Morel & Satchie Haga

JALT currently has 30 Special Interest Groups (SIGs) available for members to join. This column publishes an in-depth view of one SIG each issue, providing readers with a more complete picture of the different SIGs within JALT. For information about SIG events, publications, and calls for papers, please visit https://jalt.org main/groups.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.sig.focus@jalt.org • Web: https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/sig-news

Collaboration is a cornerstone of JALT activities and the same goes for SIGs. Even though many people often think of collaboration occurring only within a SIG, there is an ever-growing amount of collaboration between SIGs as well as among SIGs, local JALT chapters, or other groups. This year, the SIG Focus column would like to highlight SIG collaboration in all its forms. Please feel free to contribute or suggest ideas by emailing us at jaltsigfocus@gmail.com.

The Performance in Education SIG

Ashley Ford, Nagoya City University, PIE SIG Publicity Chair

David Kluge, Nanzan University, PIE SIG Co-Coordinator

"Collaboration is fundamental to our approach"

The Performance in Education (PIE) SIG (founded in 2011 as the Speech, Drama, & Debate SIG) is involved with a myriad of teaching activities (still including drama and debate but now much more!) that require students to cooperate and collaborate together, so it is natural that our SIG also participates in many collaborative activities with JALT chapters and SIGs. In the beginning, we created events by ourselves, which established our SIG as a vibrant entity. We started collaborative ventures by providing speakers to chapters upon request (Tokyo, Fukui, Fukuoka, Gifu, Nagoya, Okayama, Hiroshima, etc.). These came from SIG members who were also officers of local JALT chapters or local chapter officers we met at conferences who invited us to come and present. Also, we received some cold-call emails from chapters who realized that presentations on roleplay would be interesting and useful to their members.

Many of these collaborations grew into co-sponsoring whole conferences, which we have done several times with Yokohama (since 2015), Okinawa (since 2015), and Hokkaido (since 2019). Ever evolving, these conferences have become annual events. We have also been invited to collaborate by giving presentations at conferences with other special interest groups, such as the Lifelong Language Learning SIG, the Mind, Brain, and Education SIG, and the Critical Thinking SIG (with whom we actively worked together to create a Critical Thinking & Debate conference). We do these projects to tap into the regional bases, which attract many participants, but we also enjoy the synergy that comes from working with new colleagues with different skill sets.

Our most recent and successful collaboration was with Okinawa for the 2nd Performance in Education Research & Practice Conference/Student Showcase/Film Festival held online on February 20, 2021. A large number of professionals joined from Japan and internationally for a day of presentations and workshops. In addition, over 120 students from across Japan and some from Serbia participated in student showcase presentations, performances, a Pechakucha-style night, and an all-day student film festival. Okinawa played a critical role in the success of this conference. With their support, we could have the room hosting and online conference experience we needed for the new format. Also, with participants from different backgrounds performing and showcasing their talents throughout the evening, many said the conference social was one of the most entertaining online parties they have ever attended!

If you missed this wonderful event, don't worry. Join us for the 3rd Performance in Education Research & Practice Conference/Student Showcase/Film Festival to be held September 17–19, 2021 in Nagoya (*face-to-face/hybrid, or online*).

"We are more than just events and conferences. We are a community that supports each other."

In 2020, the pandemic hit us like a hurricane and turned our world upside down almost overnight. The anxiety regarding our health, school/work, and the lack of social interaction quickly took its toll. A few members of our SIG began meeting informally on Friday evenings on Zoom to talk about the problems we were facing, share ideas, get help, and simply decompress. These weekly socials were open to all our SIG members and anyone else in need. They quickly grew in size when Okinawa JALT members joined us, and now members of the Teaching Young Learners SIG have also joined the Friday Social Hour, and the invitation is open to members of all SIGs.

Held every Friday from 7:30–9:30pm, we welcome anyone interested or in need of a place to interact with other teachers to drop in to this social event on Zoom. If you are curious, email us and we will happily send you the info! If you just want to listen, that is fine. Many people drop in for a short time, turn off their cameras while eating dinner, and just enjoy seeing and interacting with people other than students!

"We are always trying to grow and spread our message through collaboration with YOU."

What draws many people to the PIE SIG are the amazing and effective activities described by SIG members, the creative talents of the teachers/performers, and most of all, the warm, friendly atmosphere that we work hard to create. We are useful and FUN. Want to collaborate with us?

Contact us at jaltpiesig@gmail.com if you are in the collaborative mood or come and see for yourself what we are about at the 3rd Performance in Education Research & Practice Conference, September 17-19, 2021 at Nanzan University in Nagoya (face-to-face/hybrid, or online). For more information about the conference, call for papers, registration, and other upcoming events, check the PIE SIG Website (by QR code or address below): https://sites.google.com/view/piesig/home

Malcolm Swanson

This column serves to provide our membership with important information and notices regarding the organisation. It also offers our national directors a means to communicate with all JALT members. Contributors are requested to submit notices and announcements for JALT Notices by the 15th of the month, one and a half months prior to publication.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.focus@jalt.org • Web: https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/jalt-focus

International Affairs Committee July Report

By Andrew D. Tweed and Naoya Shibata, International Affairs Committee

This is the July report of the International Affairs Committee. In each issue, we highlight benefits and professional activities that we have through our partnerships. Below, we detail President Dawn Lucovich's presentations at Korea TESOL (KOTESOL) and Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association (BELTA), the participation of five JALT members at BELTA, and the winners of the seven TESOL complimentary memberships.

Dawn represented JALT at the 2021 KOTESOL International Conference, which was from 19 to 28 February, and at the 9th BELTA International Conference on Saturday 6 March. At KOTESOL, she participated in a roundtable session and talked about collaboration between Japanese and Korean professional organizations and how to maximize benefits. At BELTA, Dawn gave a presentation about post-COVID-19 strategies for education and English language teaching. In both talks, she emphasized the importance of collaborative professional development as leaders, teachers, and researchers, both domestically and internationally.

This year BELTA kindly invited five JALT members to join the 9th BELTA International Conference, 2021. The theme of the online event was Education during the Pandemic: Learning amid Crisis and Emerging Opportunities. There were 12 stand-alone presentations at this year's conference. The five JALT members who attended were Shirley Ando, Anne Howard, Naoya Shibata, Koki Tomita, Chhayankdhar Singh Rathore.

Finally, we are pleased to announce the seven JALT members who have won one-year TESOL International Association complimentary memberships: Kyle Undem, Michael Skelton, Edmund Fec, Joseph Oliver, Bjorn Fuisting, Matthew Douglas French, and Alexandra Jane Burke. We received just over 50 entries into the drawing and the seven winners were drawn via a randomizer application. All winners demonstrated that they are active JALT members. Congratulations to the winners, and thanks to everyone who took the time to apply. The drawing will take place again next year.

JALT Research Grant Proposal Deadline: September 30

Each year, JALT awards up to three grants for a maximum of 100,000 yen each for research on language teaching in Japan. Only JALT members who have no outside funding sources to conduct research are eligible to apply. The goal of the grants is to support language teachers in their professional development and to encourage teachers to engage in classroom-based research. Grant applications are collected each summer and vetted by the JALT Research Grants Committee. Winners of the grants receive funding before the start of the following school year, during which they conduct their studies, provide quarterly reports, and receive guidance from the committee. Following the completion of the research, winners are invited to give presentations on their projects at the JALT international conference and to publish a paper in *The Language Teacher*. The deadline for proposals for projects starting in the 2022 school year is September 30, 2021.

Details and application forms can be found on the JALT Research Grants website.

https://jalt.org/researchgrants

JALT2021 – Reflections and New Perspectives

Granship Shizuoka • Friday, Nov. 12 to Monday, Nov. 15 2021

JALT OLE SIG Multilingual Cafe

Monthly on Wednesdays, 19:30–21:00 (online)

- June 30, 2021—Themed Cafe: *Emotions and Langua*ges
- July 28, 2021—Language Cafe: *Papiamentu* (a Carribean language)
- August—sorry, the Cafe is closed, see you at the September 29th Cafe again!

Each time with breakout rooms to chat in various languages, depending on those attending on the day. JALT OLE SIG (https://sites.google.com/view/jalt-olesig/) wants to provide a space to meet and share using languages beyond the first language, promoting a plurilingual repertoire and creating a community of practice. See the JALT calendar or the QR code for signing up.

Michinoku English Education Summit in Hachinohe (MEES) 2021

"Pandemic Pedagogy コロナ教育"

Hachinohe Gakuin University

Sunday, July 4 2021 - Online Conference

Event Page - https://www.facebook.com/events/523479255286866/

JALT2021 Hybrid
Featured Speakers Workshops

Literature in Language Teaching SIG

Greta Gorsuch, Texas Tech University

Interest Pursuit: Choosing and Using Narrative Texts

Atama-ii Books

Marcos Benevides, J. F. Oberlin University

TBLT Demystified: What it Is, Why it Is, and How it Works

Oxford University Press

Thomas Healy, School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Pratt Institute, Oxford University Press author

Reflections on the Pandemic: Coming Back Stronger

Macquarie University

Phil Chappell, Macquarie University Department of Linguistics

COVID: A Disruption to Reflect on Our Wisdom of Practice in ELT

mangoSTEEMS

Lindy Ledohowski, EssayJack Inc.

Strategies and New Perspectives for Teaching Academic Writing Online

Extensive Reading SIG

Greg Rouault, Hiroshima Shudo University

Diagnosing Reading in a Foreign Language: How Do We Get There?

JALT MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)

- A professional organization formed in 1976
  - 1976年に設立された学術学会
- Working to improve language learning and teaching, particularly in a Japanese context
  -語学の学習と教育の向上を図ることを目的としています
- Almost 3,000 members in Japan and overseas
  - 国内外で約 3,000名の会員がいます

https://jalt.org

Annual International Conference

- 1,500 to 2,000 participants
  - 毎年1,500名から2,000名が参加します
- Hundreds of workshops and presentations
  - 多数のワークショップや発表があります
- Publishers' exhibition - 出版社による教材展があります
- Job Information Centre
  - 就職情報センターが設けられます

https://jalt.org/conference

JALT Publications

- *The Language Teacher*—our bimonthly publication
  - 隔月発行します
- *JALT Journal*—biannual research journal
  - 年2回発行します
- JALT Postconference Publication
  - 年次国際大会の研究発表記録集を発行します
- SIG and chapter newsletters, anthologies, and conference proceedings - 分野別研究部会や支部も会報、アンソロジー、研究会発表記録集を発行します

https://jalt-publications.org

JALT Community

Meetings and conferences sponsored by local chapters and special interest groups (SIGs) are held throughout Japan. Presentation and research areas include:

Bilingualism • CALL • College and university education • Cooperative learning • Gender awareness in language education • Global issues in language education • Japanese as a second language • Learner autonomy • Pragmatics, pronunciation, second language acquisition • Teaching children • Lifelong language learning • Testing and evaluation • Materials development

支部及び分野別研究部会による例会や研究会は日本各地で開催され、以下の分野での発表や研究報告が行われます。バイリンガリズム、CALL、大学外国語教育、共同学習、ジェンダーと語学学習、グローバル問題、日本語教育、自主的学習、語用論・発音・第二言語習得、児童語学教育、生涯語学教育、試験と評価、教材開発 等。

https://jalt.org/main/groups

JALT Partners

JALT cooperates with domestic and international partners, including (JALTは以下の国内外の学会と提携しています):

- AJET—The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching
- IATEFL—International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
- JACET—The Japan Association of College English Teachers
- PAC—Pan-Asian Consortium of Language Teaching Societies
- TESOL—Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Membership Categories

All members receive annual subscriptions to *The Language Teacher* and *JALT Journal*, and member discounts for meetings and conferences. *The Language Teacher*や*JALT Journal* 等の出版物が1年間送付されます。また例会や大会に割引価格で参加できます。

- Regular 一般会員: ¥13,000
- Student rate (FULL-TIME students of undergraduate/graduate universities and colleges in Japan) 学生会員(国内の全日制の大学または大学院の学生): ¥7,000
- Joint—for two persons sharing a mailing address, one set of publications ジョイント会員 (同じ住所で登録する個人2名を対象とし、JALT出版物は2名に1部): ¥21,000
- Senior rate (people aged 65 and over) シニア会員(65歳以上の方): ¥7,000
- Group (5 or more) ¥8,500/person—one set of publications for each five members グループ会員(5名以上を対象とし、JALT出版物は5名ごとに1部): 1名 ¥8,500

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Information

For more information please consult our website <https://jalt.org>, ask an officer at any JALT event, or contact JALT's main office.

JALT Central Office

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Joining JALT

Use the attached *furikae* form at Post Offices ONLY. When payment is made through a bank using the *furikae*, the JALT Central Office receives only a name and the cash amount that was transferred. The lack of information (mailing address, chapter designation, etc.) prevents the JCO from successfully processing your membership application. Members are strongly encouraged to use the secure online signup page located at

https://jalt.org/joining.

Scott Gardner *jaltpubs.tlt.old.gram@jalt.org*

Zen and the Art of Toilet Tissue Branding

Ever since I first encountered the famous painting by René Magritte of a smoker's pipe under which the artist wrote with urgent clarity that "This is not a pipe" (to be honest, what he wrote was not initially clear to me at all since he wrote it in French), I have been interested in the intentional self-subversion of what appear at first to be straightforward messages. Scratch that; I probably got into it as early as junior high school, when my friend loaned me his copy of a book by the British comedy team Monty Python, called *Monty Python's Big Red Book*—a rather thin paperback with an azure blue cover.

There's probably an actual linguistic term for willfully referring to a thing or concept as something it is not. But here, let's call it "cowcrap"—Convoluting Oppositional Words for Commercial, Regulatory, or Aesthetic Purposes. A classic example of an aesthetic purpose would be Shakespeare's "Juliet is the sun," which she's not. Regulatory examples could be government "taxes" on cigarettes that are essentially fines for polluting the air and the streets (as far as I know pipes are exempt); or a naval fleet's "training exercise" that takes place just a few kilometers off the coast of a hostile country.

Commercial applications of cowcrap are abundant in Japan. Perhaps you've seen signs or labels employing English words or phrases and wondered, "Are the people who use English this way really trying to say what the words appear to be saying?" Certainly, translation errors can occur. But often it seems as though there is intention behind commercial misuse of a global language that nowadays, frankly, belongs to everyone. We can all think of examples: "Sweat" that's a soft drink; "Hard Off" that's a secondhand electronics shop; or "Goon" that's a diaper for your cherished toddler. Once, on my way to work, I noticed an artistic wooden sign saying "Cheesecake" outside a tiny, recently opened shop. My natural first guess was that the store was a bakery of sorts specializing in, oh, I don't know, maybe cheesecake. Sadly, though, I had to set that assumption aside because "cowcrap" warned me that the word on the sign did not guarantee what kind of store it actually was. For all I knew, it could have been selling hair products, seedy comic books, or fishing gear.

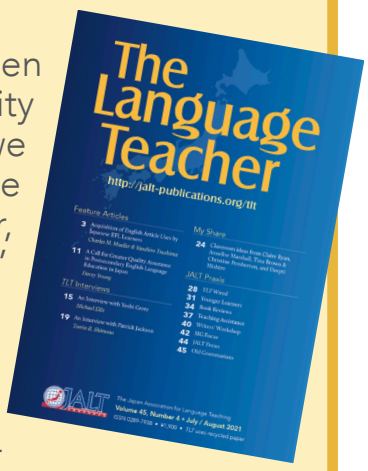
I'll admit that messages can be creatively misused to great effect. The *Love Drug Store* is still one of my favorite shops in Okayama, although cotton swabs are the only things I've had the guts to buy there. Also, a small yakitori (grilled chicken) place downtown used to bill itself as "Japan's Number One WORST Yakitori" (strangely, it went out of business a few years ago).

Misrepresenting meaning for memorable effects, however, cannot be as good as *enhancing* original meaning for the same purpose. If you can pick better words for your message without betraying their semanticity, it's as if you're running on higher octane linguistic fuel. I found a great example of this in, of all places, a public restroom. A brand of toilet paper I often see at my place of work has a name, *Itoman*, which could be the subject of an exegesis all its own, with its two-tone letters intimating the phrase "I to man." The particular variety of Itoman offered that day was called "Core Self." In one sense, this term was as plain as any could be as to what it wanted to describe: a roll of toilet paper with no separate cardboard core that had to be disposed of in a different fashion.

However, thinking more about the phrase "core self"—I had nothing better to do for a few minutes—I began to unravel deeper meanings beneath the outer layers of commercial fluff. How can something's core be itself, I thought. If the thing is its own core, then what necessarily does its exterior "non-coreness" consist of? If I opened a roll and started wrapping it around my head, would I be its core? Would the "self" then be me? Am I indeed my own core? Am "I to man" as man is to me? (In the men's room, at least?)

I had a class to teach, so I flushed and left the rest of my questions there. But I'm still intrigued by the inside-out onion skin philosophies that came to me that day from "Core Self." Better still, they gave me a great idea for a new brand of toilet paper that could be the ultimate in ecological benefit. I'll call it "This Is Not Toilet Paper."

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



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Readers Forum

WANTED: Essays about issues, methodologies, and teaching trends related to second language learners and teachers in Japan. Submissions should be about 2,500 words (excluding appendices)

— *The Language Teacher editors*

For more information:

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