

The Language Teacher

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Welcome to the May/June 2016 issue of *TLT*. During the March graduation season in Japan, we experienced many farewells and changes. However, as the new school year has started, we hope you have valued the combination of new and old as we meet incoming students and colleagues.

It has been five years since the Great Earthquake hit the Tohoku area. JALT expresses sincere wishes for the wellbeing of the people in the devastated areas, and asks JALT members for continued emotional and physical support.

In this month's issue, in our Feature Article, *Writing Instruction: What Is Being Taught in Japanese High Schools, Why, and Why It Matters*, **Bern Mulvey** presents both recent national survey results and observations made during six years of teaching both Japanese and English academic writing. He concludes that in order to improve academic English skills, critical reading, and writing skills, the L1 needs development as well. He suggests collaboration among all teachers providing this instruction.

In Readers' Forum, **Paul Tanner** advocates the use of freewriting (FW) for EFL writing classes in *Freewriting: Don't Think Twice, It's All Write*. In this article, the author defines and outlines one technique for guided FW and explains the procedure for implementing this activity, including possible pitfalls.

Additionally in *Age Effects: An Interview With Robert DeKeyser, University of Maryland*, Robert DeKeyser and **Daniel Dunkley** discuss the effects of age on language learning, and the differences between children and adults in picking up a second language.

Last, but not least, be sure to journey through our JALT Praxis sections for lots of classroom-oriented ideas, tips, and advice! As always, we really appreciate the hard work and dedication of all the volunteers at *TLT*. We hope that you find this issue enjoyable and helpful!

Toshiko Sugino, TLT Japanese Language Editor

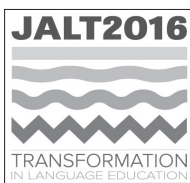
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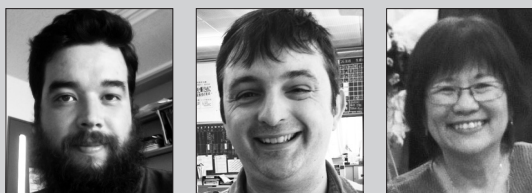
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TLTの2016年5/6月号へようこそ。3月の卒業シーズンにはお別れや環境の変化などがたくさんありますが、新学期が始まり新入生や新しい同僚との出会いに意義を見出されていることでしょう。

2011年3月の東日本大震災からすでに5年が経ちました。JALTは引き続き被災された方々のご健勝を祈りつつ、会員の皆様のご支援をお願いします。

本号のFeature ArticleではBern Mulveyが、What Is Being Taught in Japanese High Schools, Why, and Why It Mattersの中で、6年間の英語・日本語でのアカデミック・ライティング指導の経験をもとに、最近発表された調査結果を検討し、日本におけるアカデミック・ライティング指導の現状を提示し、英語のアカデミック・ライティングの能力向上には、母語でも批判的な読解力やライティング力を磨く必要であり、国語と英語の教員が協力し合って育てる必要性を論じています。

Readers' ForumではPaul Tanner が、Freewriting: Don't Think Twice, It's All Writeで、EFLライティングの授業中のFWの採用を提唱しています。本論では、1つの手法を定義付けその概要を述べ、起こりうる難題など実施の手順を述べています。

Submitting material to *The Language Teacher*

Guidelines

The editors welcome submissions of materials concerned with all aspects of language education, particularly with relevance to Japan.

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さらに、Age Affects: An Interview With Robert DeKeyser, University of Marylandにおいて、Robert DeKeyser はインタビューに答えて、言語学習と学習年齢の影響と、第二言語習得における大人と子どもの相違について論じています。

最後に、JALT Praxisセクションにぜひ目を通してください。授業を中心にしたアイデアや、ヒントや助言が満載です。TLTの発刊に尽力くださったすべてのボランティアの方々に感謝の意を表します。皆様どうぞ本号をお楽しみください。

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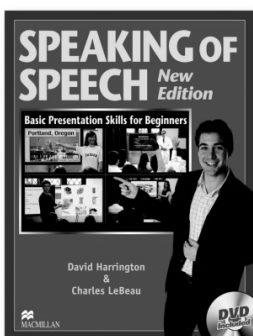
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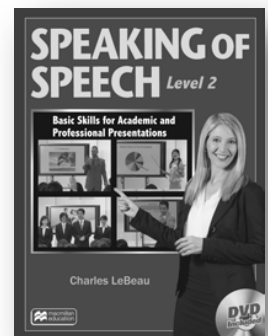
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Writing Instruction: What Is Being Taught in Japanese High Schools, Why, and Why It Matters

Bern Mulvey

Iwate University

Citing continuing poor performance on diagnostic texts, MEXT has recently advocated for an increased emphasis on academic English, particularly writing instruction (to include critical thinking). However, little sustained attention has been given to the specifics of what is being taught now, how, and why. In this paper, I present recent national survey results and observations made during six years of teaching both Japanese and English academic writing to Japanese students at two Japanese universities. The national survey results support my own observations, suggesting that—and in direct contrast to prevailing beliefs about the curriculum—many Japanese students struggle to write logically and persuasively in English for the same reason they struggle in Japanese: because nobody yet has taught them how. Accordingly, in order to improve academic English skills, critical reading and writing skills in the L1 need development also—where possible, in conjunction with similar emphases in the L2 classes, and ideally including collaboration among all the teachers providing this instruction.

近年、文部科学省は診断調査（TOEFL、PISAなど）における継続的な成績不振を受け、国際的に質の高い英語力を目指すためのアカデミック・イングリッシュ、特に批判的思考力を含んだ学術的ライティングの指導の強化を求めている。しかし、日本の大学・高校におけるライティング指導の現状について、何が、どのように、なぜ教えられているのかといったような詳細に対しては、何ら評価・分析が行われていないのが実情である。本論文では、6年間にわたり二つの大学で日本人学生を対象とした英語・日本語でのアカデミック・ライティング指導の経験をもとに、最近発表された調査結果を検討し、日本におけるアカデミック・ライティング指導の現状および今後の課題について研究を行った。「読み・書きの指導が非常に重視されている」とよく言われる日本の国語・英語教育だが、英語に限らず母語においても、その方法を学生に指導してこなかったせいで、作文力が未だに乏しい状態であることが分かった。英語のアカデミック・ライティングの力を向上させるには、母語においても批判的な読解力、ライティング力を磨くことが必要であり、国語と英語の教員が協力し合って、こうした力を育てる必要性を論じる。

In this article, I discuss the systemic weaknesses in the high school writing instruction students receive in Japan which make mastery of this important communicative form even more challenging for students. While hundreds of critical studies of English classroom content and pedagogy in this country exist, the overwhelming focus in the critical literature has been on oral communication skills. In comparison, writing instruction has enjoyed a

privileged existence, at least partly because of the pervasiveness of the *Japanese know grammar, reading, and writing but cannot speak* stereotype (see Mulvey, 1999, 2001; Ueno, 2009). Another contributing factor to the lack of recent critical studies includes a series of influential articles by Kubota (1997, 1998, 1999) and Kubota and Lehner (2004, 2005) discussing Japanese and English academic writing education in high school and college settings in Japan. These articles describe a pattern of study and mastery of L1 rhetorical forms in Japanese high schools, including extensive exposure to writing which incorporates “unity created by a clear theme, logical development of ideas, and placing a topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph” (Kubota, 1998, p. 472)—the so-called academic English format.

The impact of the Kubota and Lehner articles on the field of contrastive rhetoric cannot be overstated. Connor (2002, 2005) has written about this impact extensively. However, as I will discuss, their characterizations of writing education in Japanese and English in academic settings in Japan suggest a high mastery level (including metacognitive awareness) of rhetorical forms in the L1 and extensive exposure to the L2—claims that are contradicted by extensive nationwide surveys and other research. Accordingly, in this article I intend to identify the problem, as well as call for more informed discussion and collaboration on possible solutions.

Literature Review

As alluded to above, the idea persists that Japanese students are mastering English reading and writing skills at the expense of listening and speaking. Mulvey (1999, 2001) lists numerous articles articulating this position, with Yamaoka (2010) one of several more recent examples. Most of these studies assert that this prioritizing of reading and writing skills over listening and speaking is the result of a washback effect from university entrance exams. Still, Kubota and Lehner have argued that another reason is the supposedly powerful Western (spe-

cifically American) influence on writing pedagogy in this country. Their oft-cited claims include the following:

1. There has historically (dating back to the Meiji era) been a strong “Western influence on teaching writing” in Japan (Kubota, 1997, pp. 472, 477).
2. This influence has continued after World War II to the point that “English composition theories constitute the basis of the study of composition and rhetoric” (Kubota, 1997, p. 472).
3. Japanese student writers are taught to model writing structure on English rhetorical patterns (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, pp. 11, 19).
4. The “global homogenization of language and culture” caused by “the spread of English and American culture” has led directly to the othering of Japanese writing (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 20).

Again, it is important to emphasize that their assertions refer to writing in both the L1 and the L2. They contend that due to Western (though again, chiefly American) influence on both pedagogy and written rhetorical forms, even Japanese writing has come to privilege ostensibly English forms and structures. Finally, they feel that the resultant emphasis on mastering academic English organizational strategies has “tended to avert teachers’ and researchers’ attention from second language writers’ writing ability and experience in their native language” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 19), resulting in what they term “assimilationist teaching” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 20).

Both these authors advocate instead a “critical contrastive rhetoric” that “challenges deficit, assimilationist, and essentialist orientations in teaching, responding to, and assessing ESL and EFL writing” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 20). Finally, they argue for “reflexive engagement” in the EFL classroom, where groups of students who share the same language background can “engage in a deeper dialogue in their L1 about their positionings in relation to L1 and L2 writing” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 19). Engagement is seen as crucial to stemming the ostensibly assimilationist trend in Japanese high school writing pedagogy, or as they write, “a significant goal of an English writing course (ESL or EFL) is the addition of new and different ways of writing rather than the subtraction of ways a teacher might find inappropriate or lacking” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 21).

What Is Being Taught

The reality is that little research exists to support the above claims. First, as the Ministry of Education (MEXT, 2005a), Nishijima (1995), and Ueno (2009) demonstrate, there is no evidence that Japanese students are better at reading and writing. On the contrary, PISA and TOEFL test scores typically identify reading and writing as areas of comparative weakness, with Japanese generally faring better in listening (e.g., see MEXT, 2005a; Educational Testing Service, 2010, p. 9). Moreover, MEXT recently published additional statistics documenting the continuing poor performance by Japanese high school students when writing in English, stating that writing, along with speaking, are the major, ongoing areas of concern (2016). Finally, as Guest (2000, 2008) and Mulvey (1999, 2001) discuss in some detail, evidence of a washback effect—positive or negative—from university entrance exams on high school English pedagogy is actually scant. For example, it has been shown exhaustively that for the overwhelming majority of Japanese students, high school English classes do not offer instruction in reading and writing skills sufficient to prepare them for the pertinent sections of these examinations. Indeed, the lack of a washback effect prompted MEXT to release the following statement:

A number of high school educators continue to hold the opinion that, until the entrance examinations change, the curriculum cannot be changed. Well, we would like them to understand that, both with the Center exam and the individual university entrance exams, extensive reforms have been ongoing for some time. (MEXT, 1999)¹

Moreover, MEXT has responded to the ongoing unwillingness of high school teachers to adjust to changing exam contents by mandating English-medium classroom instruction and a greater focus on critical thinking and academic English writing skills (e.g., see MEXT 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2009, 2010, 2012a).

Many of the assertions by Kubota and Lehner are similarly contradicted by research. Interestingly enough, Kubota and Lehner (2004, 2005) repeatedly cite Hirose (2003) in support of their position that “the rhetorical patterns employed by Japanese writers and recommended by writing specialists in Japan increasingly model after English” (e.g., Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p. 19). However, while the Hirose study does suggest that some Japanese student writers may value so-called Western rhetorical strategies, Hirose devotes most of the article to asserting a position identical to my own:

In regard to L1 writing instruction, Japanese students do not generally receive any formal L1 expository or academic writing instruction at any level of Japanese education. They have the most writing experience in expressive writing (writing about their experiences in journals/diaries), summaries and kansoubun (personal impressions) of materials read, and the least in expository and argumentative writing at school. (2003, p. 183)

For example, as a Japanese who was born and received education up to graduate school level in Japan, I have not taken a single L1 writing course, and other Japanese bilingual academics share this background (Hirose, 2003, p. 184).

Regarding L2 English writing, Japanese students' experience is practically non-existent. L2 writing instruction in high school is oriented toward translation from L1 to L2 at the sentence level. (Hirose, 2003, p. 184)

In other words, Hirose's observations actually appear to refute the central premise articulated in the Kubota and Lehner articles which cite it.

The accuracy of the Hirose comments is further supported by Mok (1993), MEXT (2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2010), Mulvey (1999, 2001), and Takagi (2001), all of whom suggest that academic writing—both in the L1 and L2—is not taught in most Japanese high schools. Instead, the traditional focus has been on emotive free writing in Japanese and on teacher-centered classes featuring grammar-translation in English. This latter observation echoes the findings of several recent surveys, including the massive MEXT survey of 2011 that received responses from 218 high schools in 45 prefectures (MEXT, 2012b). In the 2011 survey, Japanese teachers of English were asked to describe in detail their pedagogy choices, including materials and assignment or learning activity types for multiple categories of English classes. The chart below delineates usage rates for the following activities in English writing classes.

Table 1. Usage Rates by Activity Type in High School English Writing Classes (MEXT, 2012b, p. 73)

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Usually	22	9	31	71
Sometimes	30	31	36	17
Rarely	30	28	15	3
Never	20	23	9	1

Given that these are writing classes, low percentages in listening and speaking activities are to be expected. However, it is telling that over 20% of teachers report that their writing classes often include no writing. More significantly, later in the same study, only 20% of writing classes report “essay writing” as a frequent activity; in contrast, over 40% report little to no essay writing over the course of an academic year. Instead, writing class activities overwhelmingly tend to be line-by-line Japanese-English translation exercises, with grammatical explanation of these isolated sentence translations taking up most of the class periods (MEXT 2012b, p. 77; see also MEXT 2010; Yamamoto, 2012). Finally, while there is some evidence (Mulvey & Ogawa, 2015) that writing textbooks include academic English-style models for students, there is little evidence that these textbooks are in wide use—for example, according to MEXT (2006), just 19.2% of all high school students use a writing textbook in their classes.

Here, it is important to reiterate that a similar pattern is found in L1 writing instruction. Essay organizational strategies, recognizing and applying critical analysis, and using factual or scholarly support for opinions are not covered in the typical Japanese high school classroom. Instead, class time is usually devoted to practicing kanji, learning *yoji-jukugo* (four-character idioms), *kojiseigo* (idioms derived from historical events or classical literature), and reading and translating classical literature into contemporary Japanese (Mulvey & Ogawa, 2015; MEXT, 2004b, 2005b). The results, according to MEXT, are multiple areas of L1 weaknesses, particularly an inability to think independently and present logical opinions, the inability to respond articulately and appropriately to differing objectives and situations, and the inability to read and understand texts accurately regardless of task (2004a, 2005a). However, as Hirose notes (2003, p. 184), some university-bound high school students take *shoronbun* (Japanese essay writing) classes as an additional elective which are taught on a rotational basis by that year's *tannin* [head teacher]. However, in these cases, there is often no set curriculum. Significantly, MEXT sees the lack of a set curriculum as a systemic problem with L1 instruction, writing “first we need to reexamine what type of Japanese essay structure and language usage should be used as models” (2005b).² Keep in mind that many Japanese universities have instituted Japanese writing classes for the incoming students in response (Mulvey, Winkowski, & Comer, 2011).

In other words, there seems to be no evidence of systemic, cohesive academic writing instruction at

the high school level, either in the L1 or L2. This finding matches directly with my experiences as a university teacher of both Japanese and English academic writing. In surveys conducted over six years at Iwate National University and Iwate Prefectural University, only 10% of over 300 students who took my classes had received high school instruction in thesis statements, introductory and/or concluding paragraph roles, and other traditional elements of academic English essay writing. None had written formal argumentative papers—in Japanese or English—delineating a unique argument based on their own critical analysis of a text and utilizing quotes or citations to support that argument. Almost half (46%) of the students were initially unfamiliar with citation conventions in Japanese. Finally, over half (51%) had no knowledge of basic paragraphing conventions in English, including students placing line breaks after each sentence and/or indenting randomly—sometimes even within a sentence.

Causes

The idea that many Japanese students receive instruction in English academic writing prior to university is a myth; indeed, few will receive such instruction in their L1. Moreover, MEXT recognizes this and has instituted various policies in response. Since 2008, official government policy has promoted *eigo o tsuujite* (learning through English)—in other words, the usage of English as a tool for academic discovery—with MEXT enacting 18 new initiatives to help ensure this happens (e.g., MEXT 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2010, 2012a, 2012b). In high schools, this means in theory that English is no longer to be taught in isolation, mainly for university entrance and in classes featuring lecture, rote memorization, and line-by-line translation methodologies. Instead, language classes are to become “communicative” and focused on critical thinking and academic English skills.

However, despite its good intentions, MEXT fails to address two important reasons for the continuing usage of ineffective or inappropriate writing pedagogy: class sizes and teacher training.

As can be seen in Table 2, 61% of high school writing classes in Japan have between 31 and 40 students, with another 10% averaging between 26 and 30 students. In contrast, academic writing classes in the United States tend to be below 20 students for “regular” (i.e., instruction by English native speakers) writing classes, and 15 students for ESL classes (Haswell, 2015). In other words, Japanese instructors teaching academic English writing in Japan are doing so with class sizes usually double, and often nearly triple, that of their ESL counterparts in the United States. Indeed, a hypothesis can be made that one reason teachers do not address academic structural conventions in these writing classes is that they lack the time to do so.

Furthermore, as Mulvey (1999) and Takagi (2001) note, there are questions about the preparation teachers receive before being given these classes. For example, academic writing in English is an elective in most university programs. Also, even in these classes, some teachers still use grammar-translation to teach English writing (Takagi, 2001, p. 6). Finally, and perhaps accordingly, when compared to their native English speaker colleagues, there is evidence that Japanese teachers tend to give more comments overall and judge grammatical errors more harshly in their students’ writing (Hijikata-Someya, Ono, & Yamanishi, 2015; Schmitt, 1993). In combination with the large class sizes, the result is that they can generally comment far less on organizational issues. Conversely, any realistic reform proposal must address these issues as well.

Conclusion

What does this mean for our writing classes? First, it means that the “reflexive engagement” advocated by Kubota and Lehner is almost invariably impos-

Table 2. Average Class Size by Type (MEXT 2012b, p. 68)

Class type Class size	Oral I	Oral II	Eigo I	Eigo II	Reading	Writing
31-40	46%	35%	67%	71%	75%	61%
26-30	12%	8%	14%	11%	12%	10%
21-25	7%	6%	7%	8%	5%	10%
16-20	31%	35%	7%	6%	5%	9%
11-15	1%	8%	1%	1%	1%	2%
10	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%

sible, as students lack the L1 and L2 writing background necessary to participate in such discussions. Secondly, there is a demonstrated need to provide basic instruction in how to organize, and to present one's arguments or exposition in ways conducive to achieving persuasion and understanding—including providing typical structures for introductions and conclusions, paragraphing conventions, and training in the use of quotations. Writing classes, as well as pedagogical instruction for teachers, should include discussion of what constitutes persuasive argument in English and in Japanese.

Furthermore, while admirable in their intent, the MEXT proposals for the introduction of TOEFL testing, critical thinking, textual analysis, and academic writing in Japan's high schools and universities can work only with a realistic understanding of how unprepared most Japanese high school students currently are for such testing and instruction. Unfortunately, informed debate addressing this reality is often missing from the general discussion. Worse, the attitudes and efforts of the so-called "underperforming" students are often criticized, as if they are to blame for their evident deficiencies in required skill areas. As should be clear from the above, many students here struggle to read critically and write logically and persuasively in English for the same reason they struggle in Japanese: because nobody has taught them how.

Finally, this is not something solvable merely by adding more "oral communication" classes to the English curriculum. Among other things, critical reading and writing skills in the L1 need development also—where possible, in conjunction with similar emphases in the L2 classes—and ideally should include collaboration among all the teachers providing this instruction.

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Nibutani Ainugo Kyoshitsu, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, and *Asahi Shinbun*.

(Endnotes)

1. 高等学校関係者の中には、「大学入試が変わらなければ高校教育は変わらない」という意見もあるが、大学全体としても、個々の大学においても鋭意改革が進められている状況を十分理解してほしい。
2. どのような文章、表現がモデルとして使われるべきか、望ましい国語力を見直すことが必要”



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Freewriting: Don't Think Twice, It's All Write

Paul Tanner

Shiga University

Freewriting (FW) (also known as timed writing or quick writing) is a 10 or 15-minute writing activity used to originate ideas and eliminate writer's block. It helps students develop and express content by separating idea generation from the editing stage. The activity aids writers in generating content, which can be used for later writings, and also teaches how to write under time pressure. In this paper, I will advocate the use of FW for EFL writing classes. One technique of guided FW will be defined and outlined. Then, the procedure for implementing this activity will be explained, including possible pitfalls. Finally, a list of potential topics will be provided, along with possible applications of how these ideas can be used and developed in writing assignments.

フリーライティング(FW) は、タイムドライティング、あるいはクイックライティングとしても知られ、10分もしくは15分で書き上げる行為である。アイデアの創造とライターズブロック（創作上の行き詰まり）の払拭がその目的であり、構想段階を推敲段階から切り離すことで、学生が自らのアイデアを発展させ表現するのに役立つ。FWは文章の内容を生み出す助けになり、書いた内容は後に別のライティングでも使えるメリットもあり、限られた時間内でどのように書くかを学ぶこともできる。本論文では、EFLライティングの授業においてFWの採用を提唱する。一つの手法を定義付けその概要を述べた後、起こりうる難題も含め、実施の手順を述べる。最後に、使用可能が見込まれるトピックスのリストを掲載し、その応用として、これらのアイデアがライティングの課題でどのように用いられ、発展させられるかも論じる。

Freewriting, also known as timed writing or quick writing, is a type of stream-of-consciousness expressive writing practice. There are many varieties of the activity, with ranges of time, content, and review. Some instructors make the writing content totally free, while others assign a topic or theme. In this paper I describe focused FW, in which one main theme is assigned. The activity emphasizes spontaneous production of language and stimulates invention while deemphasizing attention to grammar and correctness (Jacobs, 1986). Elbow and Belanoff (2000) define FW as writing any ideas or thoughts that come to mind in a given time period without stopping. EFL students often fall into the habit of merely producing what is required with as few mistakes as possible. Students avoid taking chances, resulting in less complex writing of fewer words (Perl, 1979; Bonzo, 2008). By focusing on con-

tent over form, students can write more freely and experiment with language without fear of penalty or correction. FW is a useful activity for L1 writers, but is particularly appropriate for L2 writers in that it allows students to focus on the single task of generating ideas. In this paper, I will explain the benefits of focused FW, describe the procedure and the rules, and provide examples of how FW can be used in later, more formal writing.

Benefits

FW forces students to think in English and provides raw material for formal writing assignments. Students can concentrate on putting ideas on paper without concern about errors (Jacobs, 1986), freeing themselves from the typical overattention on the avoidance of mistakes, and can be, as Ueland (1938) suggests, "free and bold ... careless and reckless. Be a lion, be a pirate. Write any old way" (p. 55).

Because the activity is not corrected or graded, students can ignore the urge to go back and edit or get hung up on grammar. Students no longer feel the need to write to please the teacher and can forget about writing and spontaneously and impulsively tell their ideas (Ueland, 1938, p. 80). Also, FW separates the writing process into recursive steps, allowing students to take the writing process one step at a time and separate writing from editing (Jacobs, 1986; Elbow, 2000).

FW can lead to writing fluency which Casanave (2004) defines as "a writer's ability to produce a lot of language without excessive hesitations, blocks, or interruptions" (p. 67). Hwang (2010) found that EFL students who practiced FW for eight weeks had statistically significant improvements in their writing fluency. A final benefit is preparation for essay writing sections of the TOEFL, IELTS, or the STEP (Eiken) test. All of these tests require students to generate ideas and write quickly with a focus on content over error-free prose.

Meeting Criticisms

Critics of FW consider it a "shallow and permissive activity with no discipline" (Hwang, 2010, p. 99).

FW is not a panacea; it serves as a useful warmup activity and as an idea generator. Still, it is true that grammar mistakes remain uncorrected, and students could possibly choose the easiest vocabulary for expression. Students need to understand that FW is writing practice with the focus on speed and content. Homework will be corrected for grammar mistakes and appropriate vocabulary can be taught. In addition, the instructor can have occasional grammar clinics or spelling quizzes based on FW mistakes. Furthermore, the instructor can make individual comments, such as suggestions to try to write more words and longer or clearer sentences. There is the possibility of repeating the same FW topic in a later class to see what types of improvements have been or could be made.

Once ideas have been generated, students can shift their frame of mind from the inventive to the critical and skeptical mindset necessary for the revision stage. Elbow (2000) notes that, "We can learn to revise, strengthen, and correct our writing more effectively if, after we have freely generated lots of rich material, we take on a critical and skeptical mentality, pondering, thinking about readers, rearranging, and crossing out in a tough-minded, suspicious mood" (p. xiv).

Prewriting Stage

The teacher should select a focused FW (see Appendix, and remember that students can also generate their own theme), allowing a chosen topic to structure students' thoughts for the 10-minute activity. After experimenting with time, I have found 10 minutes to be the ideal length. A shorter time period is not enough time to explore the topic and find a flow, while 15 to 20 minutes can physically and mentally exhaust students. Another suggestion is to be consistent with time. I use a timer set at exactly 10 minutes without variation, no matter what the degree of difficulty of the topics. Students respond positively to this pattern of regularity because they know what to expect.

The teacher then introduces the FW topic and explains it, usually by orally asking a number of questions, without writing on the board. Difficult topics can be discussed in pairs or groups before the writing to review ideas and vocabulary. Students could be told the topic a week in advance, and then research it before coming to class. Dickson (2001) relates a number of prompts he devises from class activities and discussions, including short stories, music, art, video, poetry, or proverbs. The three goals of the focused FW should be impressed upon students: to communicate ideas, to think in English, and to write as many words as possible.

Rules

1. Write continuously and as much as possible, focusing on content and ideas. Do not stop writing. Elbow (2000) explains: "Don't plan, don't stop, trust that something will come in ... and get oneself rolling into a more intense state of preparation and long-range production" (p. 85). Kerouac (1958) suggests writers "write without consciousness in a semi-trance and never after think to improve."
2. Pay no attention to grammar, spelling, neatness, or style. Correctness and quality do not matter; the act of writing does. Concentrate on ideas. Casanave (1994) believes students tend to try out more of their ideas in such a risk free environment.
3. No erasers or dictionaries are allowed. If students don't know a word in English, they can substitute the L1 word and look up the word later. Mistakes should merely be crossed out. It is useful for the teacher to show an example of what a finished FW looks like. The teacher should monitor the class to make sure no one is being distracted by old habits. I physically move erasers out of reach as I walk around the room during the activity.
4. Do not grade or correct FW since the emphasis is on content and ideas. I announce that I only record the word count in my grade book, and that no letter grade will be given. Hyland (1998) notes that pressure from worries about grading or feedback can hinder students' writing output, both in complexity and quantity. FW can alleviate this pressure.
5. When the time is up, students count the number of words and write it on the paper, then write the English for any L1 words they used. Another option is for students to use this time to bracket the best parts of their writing (see Jacobs, 1986).

To be effective and for improvement to take place, FW needs to be done regularly. I use the activity at the beginning of class every week. FW serves as an attendance check, motivates students to arrive on time, and immediately gets the class on task. Some writing teachers also assign a FW for homework every week. Students can easily invest the weekly 10 minutes required for this activity, especially if they can see improvement and believe in the activity. As Elbow (2000) says, "The whole point of FW is to accept anything, to trust it, to trust your mind" (p. 92).

Responding to Freewriting

Students generally expect teachers to correct all their writing and it takes some training for them to accept that instructors are not shirking their duty

by not correcting errors. Elbow notes that learning occurs even if the teacher doesn't write comments: "When we assign a piece of writing and don't comment on it, we are not *not* teaching: we are actively setting up powerful conditions for learning by getting students to do the things they wouldn't do without the force of our teaching" (2000, p. 357).

I assure students that I read all their papers. I use check marks to note key points (usually 2-5 per paper) and underline effective or strong passages by putting a straight line under them. Elbow (2000) also recommends this minimum non-verbal response. Jacobs (1986) suggests that students and the teacher review the FW and place brackets around the *good* parts that could be used in a later draft. I also underline the word count and sometimes compare it with other FW. If given a chance to write often, students will improve word counts significantly, although the numbers will vary depending on the topic and the students' attitudes towards it. Occasionally I write questions or comments, but never a token inauthentic phrase such as "good job," which can potentially inhibit learning opportunities (Wong & Waring, 2009). Checking or reading a FW can be done in one to two minutes. Although FW should not be corrected, the teacher can note frequent errors and provide a grammar clinic or spelling quiz in a later class to review some common errors. This is especially pertinent for those topics which may be written about again in a more formal assignment. There are no hard and fast rules for checking FW other than the teacher's promise to read every paper.

A few students would like error correction. I encourage them to underline passages, or put a question mark where they would like corrections if needed. The instructor can also answer questions as they collect or return papers.

Application for Later Activities

Elbow (2000) believes FW is easy to shape and edit into a more coherent essay. "A free written draft is crude and rough and easy to cut, add to, and rearrange" (p. 87). While revision requires a different mindset, Goldberg (1986) believes revision is "envisioning again" and suggests that writers use the methods and rules of timed writing in the revision stage. To add details and rethink helps the writer become re-engaged (p. 209). Hammond (1991) asserts that focused FW promotes critical thinking. After FW, students were able to have deeper insight on the FW topic because it allowed them think inductively instead of jumping to hasty conclusions.

The FW activity can also be used as a continuation of class activities (see Dickson, 2001), or as

preparation for a later essay. Students can read each other's works and bracket the best points. Even in poor writing, certain parts are always better than others, and students benefit from having this pointed out (Elbow, 2000).

FW topics that could provide substance for more formal essays include an English language learning history, childhood memories, the most important person that ever lived, a famous person I'd like to meet, or my schedule. A self-introduction essay can be given to a partner who must interview their partner and write an essay about him or her. Music as a FW topic can serve as a warm-up for an essay in which students examine two songs in compare-and-contrast format. The instructor could give a spelling quiz (not graded) to review the most common misspellings (bass, acoustic, guitar, chorus, ballad, etc.). Food as a FW theme could also inspire a spelling quiz, and ideas generated could provide the foundation for a process description about how to prepare a type of food.

Caveats

One warning about FW must be made. Some students enjoy the rules and freedoms of FW and may attempt to use the same technique to write their homework. One-take homework assignments without editing or revisions are not acceptable. Receiving such an assignment provides teachers with an opportunity to explain and reinforce the differences between the precision, revision, and organization required of homework and the idea-generation focus of FW.

Conclusion

Japanese English-language students are often apprehensive about writing, and are mistake averse. FW adds a different mindset to the writing process. The benefits of FW are many: it serves as an icebreaker, and gets students on task and thinking in English. It is appealing and challenging to students of all levels. In addition, it provides a new and creative way of thinking about writing, and offers some special freedoms. Students can appreciate the idea of not being checked for errors and focusing on content over form.

Students can write without embarrassment since, as Kerouac says, there is "no fear or shame in the dignity of your experience, language, or life" (cited in Goldberg, 1986, p. xv). When students see other people doing FW in the same place, it produces a positive peer effect as well (Elbow, 2000).

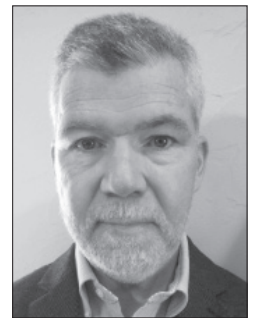
Use of FW by itself in a classroom will not automatically produce better writers. It is one tool to develop writing skills. That being said, I believe FW

should be an integral part of any writing class, and can be used effectively in conversation and reading classes as well. FW can be “an occasion of discovery and of getting to know and appreciate our mind” (Elbow, 2000, p. 88), which is beneficial in any academic or intellectual activity.

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Appendix: Freewriting Topics

- What animal would you like to be?
- Introduction from parents' point of view
- My hometown
- If I could go back in time
- What events changed your life?
- Advice for new students
- Last year's English class
- My dream
- My favorite book
- Entertainment
- Self-introduction
- What's changed since last year?
- My favorite class
- Movies
- My most important possession
- A country I'd like to visit
- Internet
- The nicest thing I've ever done
- First love
- If I could meet a famous person...
- Sports
- Strange fashions
- If I was leader of my country...
- Pets
- My schedule
- The perfect meal
- More people should care about...
- Homework
- Living alone is/would be
- On my next birthday...
- I wish I were better at...
- If I could change one thing...
- World problems
- A happy family memory
- An unusual person I know
- When I am older...
- Teachers should...
- My favorite sport
- Favorite part of the day
- Something I hope never happens
- Dreams
- The top 10 things about me
- In the year 2025...
- When I am bored...
- Nature and the environment
- My best vacation ever
- Television
- I laugh when...
- A person I would like to meet (and why)
- A turning point in my life
- Food
- Bucket list (before I die I want to...)
- I need to learn how to...
- A person I admire and respect
- Friends
- The hardest thing for me is...
- The most useful inventions...
- The best time of day is...
- The best compliment I ever received
- One talent I wish I had
- Music
- Weekends
- An embarrassing moment
- Childhood memories
- My English language learning history
- Crime
- Hobbies
- A place you visited
- Things you would like to try
- Things that make you angry 10 years from now
- Happiness
- A time when you did a favor
- If I had a million dollars
- Earliest memories
- A time when you were frightened
- Friends
- A super power you'd like to have
- A regret
- If I could time travel...
- Superstitions
- My most difficult class
- My family
- Three goals I have

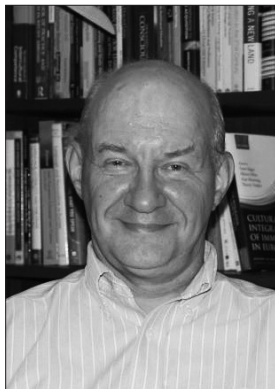
Don't forget to ask students for their suggestions!

Age Effects: An Interview With Robert DeKeyser, University of Maryland

Daniel Dunkley

Aichi Gakuin University, Nagoya

Robert DeKeyser is the author of many articles on age effects and related topics, including, *Age effects in second language learning* (2012).



Daniel Dunkley (DD):

Thank you for this interview, Dr. De Keyser. Allow me to begin by asking you a basic question: What is meant by *the critical period*?

Robert DeKeyser (RDK): The term critical period has existed in biology for a long time. It refers to the fact that various species can only learn certain things within a very small window of time. For instance, goslings will only learn that their parents are these particular geese at a very young age, and follow them around. The first person to transfer this to SLA was Eric Lenneberg in the 1960s. In his book, *Biology of Language* (1967), he expressed in my opinion what the critical period really means in a way that a lot of people have not understood or should go back to reading. He says very clearly that the critical period does not mean that you cannot learn a language anymore past a certain age. When you are 20 or 30 or 40 you can still learn a language, but you cannot learn it effortlessly the way children do, without thinking about it, nor are you going to be indistinguishable from a native speaker. So these are two things that distinguish learning before, let's say 12 or 15—we can argue about the exact boundary—from what happens afterwards. After that, you definitely have to think consciously about the patterns you are learning, and you'll always have a bit of an accent and you're always going to make an odd mistake.

DD: This leads us to the idea of implicit and explicit learning.

RDK: Although Lenneberg doesn't use that terminology, implicit versus explicit is what we now use to distinguish learning without thinking about it, versus learning while thinking about what you are learning. So any young child that is learning his or her native language never thinks about the structure; children don't even know there are verbs and nouns, let alone third persons or the past tense. Children absolutely don't know about this until maybe they learn about it in school, but they can already use the forms much earlier. On the other hand, adults are not very good at this kind of learning. They get exposed to a lot of input if they go to a foreign country to live there by just talking to the natives, but not all that much learning happens. Some people spend a lot of time in the country and really don't learn the language. Others do learn the language, but they reflect on the input and they think about the patterns.

DD: There seem to be two different aspects: the speed of learning, and the ultimate attainment.

RDK: That clearly distinguishes children from adults. You can compare them to the story of the hare and the tortoise in the sense that if you keep going steadily like the tortoise while the hare is sleeping, eventually the tortoise will get ahead of the hare. In this comparison, the child is the tortoise and the adult is the hare. The adult progresses fast at the beginning, because the adult can study patterns of language and then use what he or she knows consciously to try to speak. A child can't do that. At the beginning an adult in a language class can learn a lot more than a child can, but at a certain point in time the adult comes to a halt. For some students this is quite early, for others later when they are relatively close to a native speaker. On the other hand, children keep going until they are speaking like native speakers. So children go slowly but surely, while adults go faster but never reach the final point.

DD: What is this final point? Is there an easy definition of SL proficiency?

RDK: Well, there isn't a simple definition, and that's the reason why proficiency testing is so hard. Of course, roughly speaking, having proficiency means being able to communicate in that language well. But when we say "communicate well," that means many different things: there is speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and there's everyday talk versus more technical vocabulary. If we just think about speaking, there is the pronunciation aspect, versus vocabulary versus grammar. Thinking about pronunciation alone, there is the phonetics, the phonology, and within the phonetics there are the segmentals and the supra-segmentals. You can go on and on. There are so many things you need to know at some level to have communicative proficiency, that it's very hard to know what to emphasize. So that's why it's hard to test proficiency, because you always have to do a trade-off.

DD: You have mainly researched immigrants' competence in grammar. Why do you focus on grammar?

RDK: First of all, because it's well established that pronunciation is clearly a function of age of learning. The correlation between the age at which a person starts learning a second language and the accent the person eventually has is so strong that if you have some experience with this you can talk to a non-native speaker for a little while and guess whether that person was 10 or 14 or 16 when they learned the language. On the other hand, it has always been more controversial to what extent the age someone started learning relates to their grammar. There are many reasons for this. It's mainly because grammar is more difficult to test. If you want to know what accent a person has, you talk to that person for a minute and you have an idea, because even in a short sample of speech, all the sounds and sound combinations will typically occur. But for grammar, you have to look carefully for a set of sentences that have all the grammar structures you want to investigate. So that's why the layman thinks that grammar is less affected by age than pronunciation. But when we test people carefully, even with a paper-and-pencil test, and certainly with more sophisticated tests, then we see that there is also a very strong effect of age on grammar.

DD: Your most famous study was of immigrants to the US*. What did you find?

RDK: In that study of Hungarian immigrants who were living in the US—Pennsylvania and Ohio—

we looked at people who had been in the country for quite a while. I think the minimum was 10 years, and most had been here for much longer; the average is over 30 years. You can imagine the Hungarians often came to this country in the late 1950s after the Soviet invasion. So, there are a lot of people who are native speakers of Hungarian who have been here a very long time. So, we're looking at ultimate attainment; we're not looking at what they can do after a year or two. With these people we tested grammar, nothing very sophisticated. We see that there's a very strong age effect, in this sense: if they learned the language before age six or so they are like native speakers, at least on this relatively easy test. Very importantly, if they do well on this test after age 18, then they must have high aptitude. The reason for this is if you want to learn the language well as an adult, you must learn it explicitly; you must think about the patterns and you need aptitude for that. So there were only a few people out of 50 or so who had indeed learned the language after age 15 to 17 and still scored within the range of native speakers. But this is firstly because of high aptitude and secondly because the test was fairly easy. So if you make the test much harder, using longer sentences, rare structures, collocations and so on, then even for people with high aptitude you will find a clear age effect. Now, this does not mean that these people speak the language very poorly. From a practical point of view, most of them who have lived here for decades use the language for almost every purpose every day. They are highly fluent, but even after all these years you can tell how old they were when they started learning English in this environment. We have done other research with other groups: with Russian learners of English and Russian learners of Hebrew. In a way, Hebrew is a more interesting language than English because it has a lot of morphology and English has very little. The result came out the same way. There was a clear age effect, and only people with high aptitude still did relatively well as adults.

DD: What are your conclusions about learning English, in Japan for example? Would it be more effective to start learning it at age seven or at age 13?

RDK: So far we've only talked about immigrants. They are exposed to the language all the time. That means that if they are still very young and are implicit learners they will learn the language completely like a native speaker through exposure. If they are adults, even though they get as much exposure, they can no longer do it. Now, from the literature on age effects, many people have inferred "All you need to do is start early." Well no, there is

something missing, because in our conversation we've been talking about two things. One is the age at which you start, and the other one is the ability to learn explicitly. That means children learn implicitly and adults learn explicitly. But in the classroom, it's very difficult to learn implicitly. The reason for this is that typically you only have a few hours a week, and in these few hours you cannot possibly get enough input to do what the tortoise does, slowly progressing toward the point of the native speaker. We need far more time for that, and of course, we need exposure to the right kind of language for the child. When it comes to pronunciation, of course, you need a native teacher. So I'm afraid that people will think if you just start early—at age six instead of 12—then all the problems are solved. That's a big mistake.

DD: Have there been studies of classroom learning at different ages?

RDk: The research we have on this point is mainly from Spain. It shows that if you compare a six-year-old and a 10-year-old in terms of how much English they learn after, say, 400 hours, the older they are, the more they have learned. That's not entirely surprising, because if you did the same thing for math you would find the same thing. A 12-year-old can learn a lot more than a six-year-old. So what that tells us, combining the research not only from immigrants, but also from children in the classroom, is that it's not a matter of having to start early, but a matter of providing appropriate instruction for the learners' age.

DD: What are the main differences between teaching methods for six-year-olds and 12-year-olds?

RDk: If people are adults or adolescents the most effective way to teach them is to help them see the patterns in the language. Not just that of course. They also need a lot of practice, but you can really speed the learning up by making people see the patterns. For younger children that doesn't work very well. On the one hand they are at a disadvantage compared to older people because they cannot learn the grammar and understand it perfectly, but on the other hand, if they get an enormous amount of input for years, then they are very much at an advantage. Now the question is, if you only have a few hours a week of instruction, because that is all you can afford (and that's the case for most people worldwide), then for children of course the best thing to do is to adapt to the child, play games with the child, and then engage the child in communication.

DD: You seem to be pessimistic about early foreign language learning! Is there any advantage in teaching young children?

RDk: Nothing magical will happen, the learning will be somewhat limited, but in one area the child will do better than the adult, even with limited exposure. This is the learning of pronunciation, because that is the most age-sensitive part of all. Now, the problem is that it only works if the teacher provides good input. However, that is, in many countries, the irony of the situation. Often people think that in order to teach a language at an advanced level you need to be a native speaker, but to teach it at the basic level you don't have to be a native speaker. Well, if you don't think of age differences that may be true. But if you think that basic teaching often happens for very young children, and advanced teaching is often for adults, then it's almost the opposite. This is because, given that what children have to learn and can learn very well is pronunciation, that's precisely the time you need a native speaker. Then, once people are really advanced and they learn more sophisticated aspects of grammar and pronunciation, you don't need a native speaker; you need somebody who knows the language well and who knows how to teach it.

DD: Thank you, Dr. DeKeyser, for these thought-provoking ideas on age effects and early foreign language learning.

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Philip Head and Gerry McLellan

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

Email: my-share@jalt-publications.org • Web: <http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare>

Hi, and welcome once again to the May/June edition of My Share. The new academic year is now in full swing, and I'm sure that all of you are working hard trying to ensure that your students receive maximum benefit from their studies. Coming from Scotland, I always find June a particularly arduous month in Nagoya. The heat and humidity are stifling, and simply finding the energy to survive the day is about all I can muster. On top of that, we all have to start thinking about preparation for final exams. However, we can always look to My Share for some original ideas to help us, and the articles in this month's edition are no exception to the ones found in previous issues.

First up, Christopher Colpitts shows us how to encourage fluency when preparing short skits without the help of a dictionary. Sylvan Payne then has an idea that not only raises consciousness, but also helps students learn the correct protocol for interrupting during group discussions. Although primarily intended for students planning on studying overseas, the lesson can be tweaked to suit any group of students. Rheanne Anderson shows teachers a way to support and manage student-centered extensive readings, and Ian Wash shows us how to build student confidence in collaborative writing activities and make them more fun.

In the online edition of My Share, Charles McLarty shows us a fun game to help reinforce student vocabulary when asking for directions and map reading, and David Horsley demonstrates a useful and fun way for students to learn and remember new vocabulary.

—Gerry McLellan

Creating Meaningful Dialogue Without Over Reliance on Dictionaries

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Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** Dialogue, translation, dictionaries, teamwork

- » **Learner English level:** All levels
- » **Preparation time:** 5 minutes
- » **Activity time:** 15-60 minutes
- » **Learner maturity level:** Secondary to university
- » **Materials:** Paper, pen, dictionary or smartphone

Preparation

Review the class topic or theme along with the related grammar and vocabulary. Also, draw attention to any potential or common problems such as "What do you like sports?" Prepare a short warm-up activity that relates to the class topic, such as a word association for brainstorming, or showing pictures or a video clip.

Procedure

Step 1: Put students into groups of two or three. Each student needs a piece of paper and a pen. Remind students that all dictionaries and cell phones are off limits until a designated period later. Tell students the topic of the lesson.

Step 2: Tell students that the first stage will be graded mainly on speed and creativity rather than grammar and spelling. They will have 10 minutes to produce a 10-line conversation between two people (see Appendix for an example). For a two-person dialogue of 10 lines, ideally each student would end up with five speaking turns.

Step 3: Check and guide the students as they race to finish 10 lines. Encourage them to write for communication, not perfection. If students can't produce a certain lexical term or phrase they should improvise or make a note in Japanese to check it later. After 10 minutes, make a final check and allocate a quick grade. Because the teacher has been continuously checking the students' progress, the quick grade should not take more than two minutes. While grading, tell students to get their dictionaries and smartphones for Step 4.

Step 4: Allot five minutes for dictionary or translation app usage to edit their dialogue. Tell students that whole sentence translation is prohibited. This stage is to enhance their conversation by expand-

ing on vocabulary or phrases that had previously confused them.

Step 5: Have students memorize and practice presenting their conversations. They can use as much time as required, but usually five minutes is enough. Presentations do not have to be performed in front of the class, but can be done in front of the teacher. Have slower groups wait in line and prepare for their turn. Encourage the use of gestures and discourage the use of Japanese. If partners forget or make errors, the other member must help out in English or another communicative manner.

Step 6: The first students to make a presentation are given bonus marks. This motivates students to finish quickly and also provides more time for less confident or skilled students.

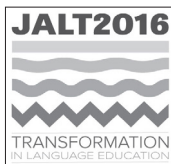
Step 7: Grade students together equally on the speaking part. This encourages them to assist each other when one or both stumbles. Provide feedback on pronunciation, eye contact, speech flow, errors, recovery from errors, and communicative spirit. Also, provide further lexical or syntactic ideas: in the specific case of the kendo conversation (see Appendix), you can teach students further phrases such as 'ancient martial art' or 'promotes discipline', which they can review or build upon for another time or discourse topic.

Conclusion

The activity encourages fluency and speed over perfection, and also gives students a chance to self-correct their compositions. Dialogue creation can be performed on a weekly basis, or more complicated ones can be created for testing. When students are allowed to create their own stories, they invest more into the lesson and completion of the tasks. Weekly presentations also foster more bonding and camaraderie among classmates. Though some students may struggle with the time constraints and weekly burden, most students come out of the class feeling like they accomplished something meaningful and useful.

Appendix

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



42nd Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Exhibition

November 25–28, 2016

WINC Aichi, Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan

It's Not Rude, It's Lively: Learning to Interrupt In Small Group Discussions

Sylvan Payne

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Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Discussion skills, turn taking strategies*
- » **Learner English Level:** *Intermediate and above*
- » **Learner Maturity:** *Senior high school and above*
- » **Preparation Time:** *10-15 minutes*
- » **Activity Time:** *30-40 minutes*
- » **Materials:** *Handout (see Appendix), a smart-phone or similar device to record video or audio, a deck of playing cards.*

Typically, language learners in Japan hesitate to interrupt others during small group topic discussions. Even when familiar with phrases and strategies for actively participating in or leading a discussion, most conversations devolve into a mechanical seesaw rhythm of the leader asking for an opinion and going around the circle getting each student to respond in turn, then repeating the cycle with each discussion question. Sometimes students will agree, politely disagree, or ask for clarification, but even that tends to be politely monotonous (and unnatural). In the real world, lively group discussions are typically messy with members constantly interrupting each other.

This activity was used in a preparation course for scholarship students preparing for a year abroad, but it can be adapted for any class involving small group discussion skills.

Preparation

Step 1: Create a list of useful phrases for interrupting and add the rules of the interruption game (see Appendix 1). Print as a handout for each student.

Step 2: Video or audio-record a few minutes of the students having a small group discussion.

Procedure

Step 1: Play the recording and draw students' attention to the lack of interruption. Point out how each

speaker is politely allowed to finish their thought, no matter how long it takes. Stress that this is unnatural in the real world and that learning to interrupt and dealing with interruptions are important skills they should acquire.

Step 2: Hand out the interruption phrases and go over them briefly with students.

Step 3: Explain the rules of the interruption game: Ten cards are placed in the center of the group at the beginning of a discussion. Each time a member uses one of the interruption phrases they can take a card. Stress that an actual interruption has to occur during cross-talk, when two are people talking at the same time. When all the cards have been taken from the center pile, the students can begin taking cards from each other by interrupting.

Step 4: Divide students into groups of no more than six and have them begin their discussions. In my case, student discussion leaders prepare their topics, and the other students will have read the online texts or handouts on which the discussion is based. Monitor the discussions and arbitrate disputes or misunderstandings.

Step 5: Debrief at the end of the session concerning the use of interruptions. Ask students to compare this discussion with the recorded discussion they considered at the beginning of the lesson. Ask students who “won” the game, and how.

Conclusion

I found that I didn’t need to repeat the game again. However, lower level or less confident students may need a couple of times to get the hang of it. Once students had a frame of reference for what interruptions were, they put it into practice in subsequent discussions. However, the game was necessary to help students break through their natural reticence.

The activity is useful on many levels, but one aspect that surprised me was its consciousness raising. One student remarked that he initially thought interruption was “not good for discussion” because it showed that members were not listening to speakers. However, he realized that “if we want to interrupt, we have to listen *more* carefully.”

Appendix

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

Communicative Extensive Reading

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Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Extensive reading, student-centered*
- » **Learner English level:** *Beginner to advanced*
- » **Learner maturity:** *High school or university*
- » **Preparation time:** *5 minutes*
- » **Activity time:** *5-10 minutes per class, full semester*
- » **Materials:** *Handouts, books*

The benefits of extensive reading are clear, but its use with lower level students can present structural and linguistic load problems for many practitioners. This system is a student-centered, scaffolded, and level-flexible form of extensive reading. Communicative goals are weighed as equal to linguistic and comprehension achievability for the students. What is novel about this system is the way the flexible discussion points allow for a focus on fluency rather than on structure. The focus is on students orally explaining what they understand from their chosen book as they read it, and therefore very little pre-teaching of vocabulary is needed. It also allows students to choose what to report on, and gives them support for broad areas to discuss. It lets students with differing abilities succeed at their level as the activity doesn’t adhere to set grammar points or structures. The activity gives the students the benefits of extensive reading without locking them into a rigid set of patterns which might otherwise increase the lexical load, and therefore, limit motivation. For the teacher, it functions as a continuous assessment tool that can gauge the progress of students through an extensive reading program, but without a cumbersome preparation load.

Preparation

Copy enough handouts (see Appendix) for the whole class and keep a ‘bank’ of extra copies ready in each lesson.

Procedure

Step 1: In the first lesson, instruct students to choose a book from a library or an online source (graded readers are suggested).

Step 2: Assign them a reading load of 20 pages per week as homework.

Step 3: Pre-teach literature-related terms including: *title, author, genre, main/supporting character, plot, and setting.*

Step 4: In the next lesson, have them share their books in small groups or pairs by following the talking points on the handout. The listeners should mark the handout on a continuum from *great* to *good* to *bad*, so as to avoid a number which may be mistaken for a grade. Instruct students to skip to the final “Report” for summary comments if they finish their book in less than six weeks.

Step 5: Repeat Step 4 each week, changing books as needed to keep up with the 20-page a week goal.

Step 6: Collect and distribute new handouts when a student has finished a book. Be careful to collect a handout before you give out another one as this will help keep students on the 20 pages per week schedule, rather than trying to read multiple books at the end of the semester.

Step 7: (Optional) At the end of the semester, after 300 pages have been read, have students do a poster presentation on their favorite book or all of the books they have completed.

Conclusion

This system allows the teacher to support and structurally manage a student-centered extensive reading program. While the system can be used with any level, the simplicity of vocabulary and reporting structures allows it to be used with even very low levels. Another benefit of this system is that the preparation time for the teacher is minimal, yet it still upholds the pedagogical benefits of extensive reading.

Appendix

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Extensive Reading Seminar Nanzan University

Please submit to, and attend, the 9th Annual Extensive Reading Seminar, to be held at Nanzan University, Nagoya, October 1 – 2, 2016

Questions, Questions... Write!

Ian Wash

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Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Collaborative writing*
- » **Learner English level:** *Intermediate*
- » **Learner maturity:** *High school to university*
- » **Preparation time:** *5 minutes*
- » **Activity time:** *30 minutes*
- » **Materials:** *Worksheet, blank paper*

Creative writing can often be a daunting and solitary task for intermediate students who are staring into the abyss of a blank sheet of paper and trying to compose something original. More often than not, starting to write can devour large amounts of class time because learners do not have a clear structure and are bereft of content ideas. On top of that, when students do finally come up with ideas independently, they may have doubts about their suitability, be uncertain of the vocabulary and grammatical structures with which to express them, and subsequently lose confidence in their ability to successfully complete the task. An effective way to overcome these boundaries is to implement a pre-writing task that separates the creative element from the actual writing so students can focus solely on language use and, at the same time, develop their interpersonal and team-working skills. Using this approach, students can collaborate with a partner of a similar level to bounce creative ideas off one another. Once the story is taking shape, pairs can collaborate to share their lexis and grammatical knowledge so that the process of constructing accurate sentences and connecting them cohesively can begin.

Preparation

Create a worksheet with around eight *What/Why* questions that introduce some key information, e.g., character names or places (see Appendix). *What/Why* forms work best to elicit sentences that build up events and background information, although *Who/When/Where* questions could be added to bring out more details. Print out enough for students to share in pairs.

Procedure

Step 1: Assign partners and give each pair a hand-out. Explain that they *were* going to read a text and answer the questions on the handout. However, you have ‘forgotten’ the text so, in pairs, they have to use their imagination to answer the questions.

Step 2: Monitor students as they answer the questions and provide prompts or light assistance where necessary.

Step 3: Once all pairs have answered the questions, tell them that they now have to rewrite the text from their answers. Hand out the blank paper and set a time limit for writing. Remind pairs that it is a team effort and to try to share the workload as evenly as possible.

Step 4: Once pairs have finished writing, have them swap their written work with another pair and check the text for grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes. Tell them they can also write comments about how funny or interesting they found the story.

Step 5: Once the pairs have completed all of their corrections, have them share their stories with the whole class.

Conclusion

This structured collaborative writing activity is a simple and fun way to build student confidence in creative writing. It increases in-class student interaction time as they share their ideas, and it adds to the enjoyment of developing an imaginative plot. Once the storyline is decided on, pairs can then start putting words on paper with more assurance of the content. The activity then allows students to share, review, and consolidate their combined stock of language to construct accurate sentences

that tell a coherent story. The types of questions and key information provided in the pre-writing task questions can be flexibly adapted to control task complexity and to practice other grammatical structures recently covered in class. More or fewer questions could also be used to alter the length of the final piece of writing. The bonus is that the activity develops cooperation and evaluation skills as pairs divide tasks and work together to produce the final text. It also provides an ongoing system of checks on each other’s management of the writing process. For an entertaining finale, which amuses most classes, the teacher can surprise students by revealing that there never actually was a text to start off with!

Appendix

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

Available Online

Street Map Basketball: Help Students Get Into Using Maps in English

Charles McLarty

In this game, students become more comfortable using maps in English while getting practice that could come in handy in future situations where giving or receiving street directions becomes necessary.

Vocabulary Through Pictures Grouped by Themes

David Horsley

This activity is useful (and fun!) when vocabulary is related to everyday objects or activities that can be clearly identified by a picture.



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Adam Lebowitz

"Outside the Box" is a column that not only challenges the community to address a problem, but proposes a creative solution without concerns of being unrealistic. The focus is on originality and creativity, not rigor. More information on submissions can be found online, or contact the editor.

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L2↑ ≠ EF↑ ≠ KY↑

Adam Lebowitz

Recently, an article in the New York Times by psychologist Katherine Kinzler described test results that suggest a multilingual environment enhances developing social skills in toddlers (Kinzler, 2016). This study was premised on the idea of a "bilingual advantage" in cognitive functioning where speakers of more than one language have enhanced Executive Function (EF). This was first introduced about ten years ago (Bialystok, Craik, & Klein, 2004) and has also been discussed in recent domestic L2 research literature (Kutsuki, 2014).

Executive Function is a psychological term defined as "integrative cognitive processes that determine goal-directed and purposeful behavior and are superordinate in the orderly execution of daily life functions" (Cicerone et al., 2000, p. 1605). One key feature is "self-regulation," and associated cognitive actions include planning and organizing behavior in sequence, monitoring and adapting behavior, and deferring gratification (Barkley, 1997). This implies EF plays a role in social functioning; in fact, autism is considered a disorder marked by EF deficits (Jurado & Rosselli, 2007).

It's an appealing proposition: L2 acquisition not only makes you more "with it" cognitively, multilingual exposure will increase your capacity to "sense vibes" in an interpersonal sense. In contemporary Nihongo, this is known as "KY" or *kûki wo yomu* (reading the air). But is it true? Kinzler operationalized social skills as the ability to understand a "speaker's intended meaning." This seems a rather novel concept that would be difficult to validate. In addition, her research group did not find a positive association between EF and KY. More problematic, however, is the initial premise of L2 benefiting EF. Replicating the study designs of Bialystok and others, Paap and Greenberg rigorously controlled for confounding variables such as socio-economic status (Paap & Greenberg, 2013). Furthermore, since current understanding of EF implies an aggregation

of different functions, associations between functions were tested for convergent validity. Through this methodology, the authors found no coherent evidence for bilingual advantage.

The takeaway here is the appeal of L2 as a tool for new employment and social opportunities that in and of itself, however, may not make people socially or cognitively "smarter." This should not only inform student evaluation, but also how native and non-native English speakers evaluate each other.

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42nd Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Exhibition

November 25-28, 2016

WINC Aichi, Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan



Edo Forsythe

In this column, we explore the issue of teachers and technology—not just as it relates to CALL solutions, but also to Internet, software, and hardware concerns that all teachers face. We invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editor before submitting.

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The Google Educator Accreditation Process for Language Teachers

Brett Milliner

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Hubbard (2007) noted that contemporary language teachers not only need to have competent theoretical knowledge and social power, but they must also be responsible for the maintenance and growth of their technological proficiency. In this article, I report on my summer holiday professional development experience becoming a certified Google Educator. Soon after I started this journey, I discovered that a Google Educator's training does not simply amount to a lesson on search strategies or using Gmail; Google offers a range of powerful, free educational tools or apps that teachers can take advantage of in their language classrooms. Google Forms (see Milliner & Flowers, 2015), Google Sheets, Google Docs (see Firth & Mesureur, 2010; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014), Google Sites, Google Maps (see McMillan, 2013), YouTube, Google Draw, and Google Hangouts are all examples of the great tools available (see Figure 1). As I began training on how to effectively use each one of these tools, I

quickly realized that I needed to become more than competent at using each one should I want to pass the Google Educators' test and become an accredited Google Educator.

Online Google Education Training

In early 2015, Google redesigned the teacher training and accreditation process, and it now offers free, online, self-paced, guided courses aimed at growing the practical skills teachers may need in the classroom. After logging into your Google account, a teacher can work through a variety of study units, each bookended with a series of diagnostic multiple choice quizzes. Learning progress is saved by the system, so you can take a break from training and pick up the lesson exactly where you left off. There are currently three free training programs available for educators: Fundamentals Training (12-hours), Advanced Training (10-hours), and Devices Training (for Android Tablets and Chromebooks). Each course is composed of a variety of small units such as *How to analyze student data*, *How to build interactive lessons*, *How to teach students online*, and *How to expand your access to help and learning*. Within these units, training and brainstorming activities are used to illustrate how Google apps can be used to serve specific learning goals. Some examples of the learning tasks included listing how Docs and Slides can be used to promote student collaboration, and creating a playlist of educational videos inside one's English teaching YouTube channel.

Accreditation

After completing the online training, a teacher is eligible to sit a certification exam. For a small fee, a teacher can sit a Certified Educator Level 1 exam (\$10 USD/180 minutes) and Certified Educator Level 2 exam (\$25 USD/180 minutes). These certifications enable a teacher to prove their proficiency using Google Apps in the classroom, and, if successful, that teacher is allowed to add the certification badge (see Figure 2) to their résumé, emails, and other professional correspondence. Teachers can also choose to further their Google Educator accreditations as a Google Certified Trainer or Google Certified Innovator.



Figure 1. The Google Apps for Education Suite (Google for Education, 2015c).



Figure 2. Certified Educator badge (Google for Education, 2015b).

The Level One Test

At the time of writing, I can only report on my experiences taking the Level 1 test. In fact, I failed my first attempt. To describe the testing process, after applicants pay \$10 USD to sit the test, Google contacts you within 24 hours with information concerning the test. From my experience, one should be prepared to dedicate the full 3-hours to sitting this test, as it was very detailed. The test had two sections. The first is a 20-question multiple choice and drag-and-drop section relating to Google Apps and good practices in teaching with technology. The second section asks you to fulfill a variety of teaching tasks using the Google Apps for Education Suite (e.g., building a class website, analyzing a class' grade sheet, or creating a slideshow for an upcoming class).

A test taker needs to achieve more than 80% overall to pass the test. If the test taker fails, they are unable to take the test again for two weeks. Should they fail the test a second time, they must wait a further 60 days before they can take the test for a third time. An examinee is also not allowed to take the test more than three times in a calendar year. With these strict rules and the expenses involved in taking the tests, it is important that the teacher is well prepared prior to attempting the exam. Regarding test support, the exam is an open book test, and the Google Educators Training Center provides a variety of example test questions. Moreover, a test taker can use the unit summary questions found at the end of each Google Educators training module as a way to prepare for the test.

I would also like to stress that for teachers who are already familiar with many of the Google tools and may be tempted to skip units during their study, Google Apps are always developing, and it is valuable to learn the refinements to each Google

App. Moreover, if you skip a unit, you miss out on learning from the practical activities connected to each study unit (see Figure 3). I found that each unit helped me generate new ideas for using Google apps in my language classroom while also developing my technological skills. Particularly engaging are the solutions and ideas put forward by other educators.

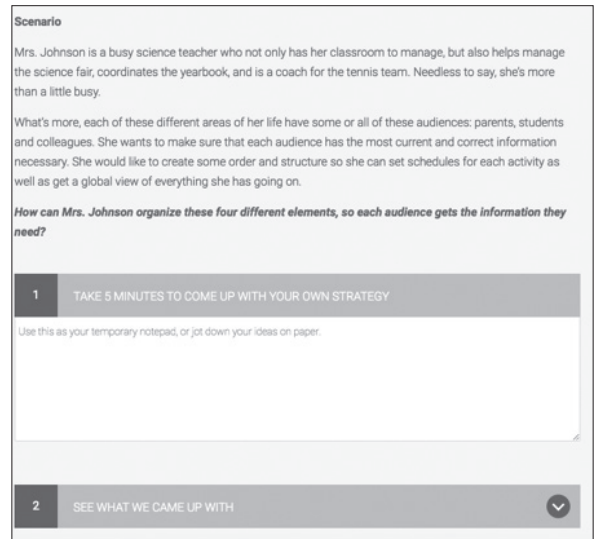


Figure 3. Example of a Google Educators training brainstorming activity (Google for Education, 2015a).

Units of Interest

The YouTube unit was especially helpful for me as a language teacher. It showed me how to create my personal YouTube channel and YouTube playlists of related videos. Fortunately for me, I was able to put these new skills into action when I was asked to create a looping sequence of student videos and an interactive world map for my university's festival. As was noted earlier, the curating of playlists has made searching and filing YouTube teaching content for my classes much more efficient. In addition, the YouTube units introduced me to a wide variety of useful education channels (e.g., Google for Education, The Google Educast, and Google Online Education). I learned how to seamlessly embed YouTube content into my lesson slides and how to create online worksheets with embedded video content (as explained in a previous Wired column by Milliner and Flowers, 2015). I now use this to confirm that students watched the video while also promoting deeper engagement with the video content using the questions in the Google Form. Another useful tip for language teachers was how closed captions

and translations can be employed to support language learners.

As many would argue, the strongest attraction for using Google Drive's apps are their collaborative powers. The unit on promoting student collaboration in the classroom was particularly useful for me. I learned how to plan for using Google Drive tools to support collaborative learning. The practical examples detailing how teachers and students can measure collaborators' contributions to a final product were particularly helpful such as the *revision history* located under the file tab. I also learned how the different tools could be intertwined to ensure more efficient collaborative work. For example, in order to track which part of a project students are working on, or if I want to make a class contact list, I would ask my students to complete a Google Form which then funnels responses into a spreadsheet document (Google Sheet).

Conclusion

Although I struggled with my first test, I wholeheartedly recommend that language teachers consider investing time in developing their technical skills through this program. The Google Educators' program is flexible and cheap, and provides a wide variety of tools that will help all language teachers. The online courses are well designed and structured in a way that is very manageable for busy teachers. Stockwell (2009) advocated that it is best for CALL novices or teachers who want to improve their CALL skills to engage with communities of practice. Google has a variety of vibrant Google Educator groups (GEGs) within Japan (e.g., GEG West Tokyo, GEG Kyoto, and GEG Osaka) which can be a window into how Google apps are being used in the classroom as well as a nurturing support group for your professional journey.

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Editor's Note: As demonstrated by this issue's article, there is a wealth of training available for teachers to become experts in CALL and educational technology. One other amazing opportunity is coming up in early June at JALT-CALL 2016! This article's author, Brett Milliner, has been a strong supporter of the CALL SIG as our treasurer and also as one of the site chairs for the upcoming conference. Be sure to congratulate him on this article and ask him about becoming a Google Educator when you see him at the conference in Tamagawa. There will be plenty of chances to learn new ways to keep your lessons Wired!

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<https://sites.google.com/site/teacherjourneys/>



Mari Nakamura

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

Email: young-learners@jalt-publications.org

Path to Fluent Reading for EFL Children

Hello, colleagues!

I hope you all have had a great start to the 2016 school year. Have you renovated your curriculum this spring to even better serve your students? Perhaps some of you have already seen some positive effects from the changes you have made. If so, let us hear about them in the upcoming issues.

I started this column last summer by sharing the Three-Stage Literacy Program at my school, English Square, with the hope of discussing ways to improve young learners' literacy skills. So far, we have examined the teaching of pre-literacy skills to young children by taking a look at Stage 1 of my literacy program and also by learning from a case study by Cynthia Akazawa.

In this installment, I'd like to shift our focus to the promotion of reading fluency among elementary school age children, which is one of the main goals of Stage 2 of my literacy program.

What Is Reading Fluency?

Do you have any students who read connected text in a laborious manner even though they have a good understanding of oral language, love to be read aloud to, and have basic phonic rules under their belts? It is a sign of a lack of reading fluency, which can be left unnoticed or ignored, especially when we see our students only once a week and feel as if we always have a lot more than we can handle in the limited face time. I have to confess that I had been unaware of the importance of this skill until I set out to make literacy education an integral part of my school's curriculum in 2005.

What exactly is reading fluency? According to McKeena and Stahl (2003, p. 72), "There are three components to fluency: Fluent reading should involve accurate and automatic word recognition, with appropriate prosody or inflection." Fluency in very early grades also refers to the rapid and accu-

rate naming of letters, sounds, words, and sentences (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007).

There is one thing to note. The whole point in reading texts is to understand the message and achieve various and often personal goals, such as expanding knowledge and communicating with the writer of the message. When a student reads a text slowly, "memory is clogged with decoding tasks and is not available to assist with understanding reading." (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007, p. 59) The goal in fluency instruction is to have students improve accuracy and speed so that they read effortlessly, leaving a large enough cognitive space for comprehension. It is "a link between phonics and comprehension" (Rasinski, 2010, p. 31).

What Materials Should We Use?

The best strategy for developing reading fluency is to provide children with many opportunities to read an easy passage orally and repeatedly with explicit guidance (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Texas Education Agency, 2002; Lenters, 2004; Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007).

How easy is easy enough? They need text at their independent reading level which they can read with no more than one error in word recognition for each 100 words. Such text allows children to engage in practice with a high degree of success and construct meaning from the text. This is very important to keep them motivated to read. The content of text plays a major role in the effectiveness of instruction as well. If the content is not interesting to the children, beyond their real world knowledge, or immature for their age, it is likely that students will become less motivated in engaging in repeated reading. We want to be sensitive to individual children's interests, their general knowledge, and their maturity level so that we can make informed decisions in choosing reading materials.

With the generally small vocabulary size of my students, it has been rather challenging to build my library with reading materials that match their needs. In search of tips from experts, I have found the book reviews by Ben Shearon, a lecturer at To-

hoku University, on his blog sendaiben.org <<http://www.sendaiben.org/reviews>> to be interesting and informative. I would like to recommend that you check them out if you have not done so yet.

Let me add that we can use various kinds of text materials besides graded readers for EFL/ESL children, such as authentic picture books, poems, stories from a course book, song lyrics, chant scripts, or student-generated text, to familiarize young learners with different text types.

R.E.A.D.

As mentioned above, research in reading fluency informs us that children need ample opportunities to read a simple text aloud again and again with guidance. This is more challenging than it may sound as children have a short attention span and have not yet fully developed metacognition or the ability to be aware of their own learning. The key to success in our teaching context is to implement a variety of engaging activities with appropriate levels of support.

I have coined the acronym R.E.A.D. to remind myself of the primary features of effective reading fluency instruction.

R – repeated reading

E – easy text

A – assistance

D – developmentally appropriate activity

Here is one of the simplest R.E.A.D. activities that all my students love.

R.E.A.D. Activity: Revisiting a Big Book

If you teach preschoolers and kindergarten children, perhaps you have some big books in your library. “Revisiting” big books that children enjoyed through shared reading in their younger days and letting them read from the text is an effective way to boost their confidence in reading aloud independently. The students’ own auditory memory of the story and illustrations in the book work as support in recognizing the words in print. In a typical “revisiting” activity, the teacher first reads the story aloud, and then, with verbal support, the students engage in choral reading a few times while the teacher gradually reduces her support to zero. In choral reading, some students may not be able to read all the words aloud. However, they can follow along and participate whenever they can by using their auditory memory without feeling left out. These children also benefit from hearing the text being read with good pacing and phrasing by

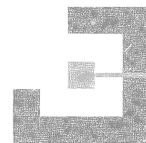
more able peers. As an extension, I have individual students pick their favorite page and read it for the whole class.

What’s your favorite reading fluency activity? What works and why? I am eager to hear what you have to say! Please share them on the JALT Teaching Young Learners SIG Facebook page. <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/jshsig/>>

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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 Lynette Airey's review of *Pathways 1: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking* and Kathryn Mabe's evaluation of *Partners in the Classroom: Team-teaching and Collaborative Learning Projects*.

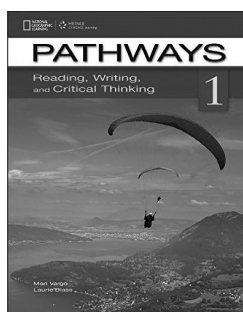
Pathways 1: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking

[Mari Vargo & Laurie Blass. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2013. (Included: Online Workbook, Teachers' Guide, Audio CD, DVD & Assessment CD-ROM with Exam-View) pp. xvi + 224. ¥2,860. ISBN: 978-1-133-94213-9.]

Reviewed by Lynette Airey, Bunkyo University

Pathways 1: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking, a content-based text, is the second of a five-book series aimed at improving students' academic literacy through individual, pair, and group learning exercises using high interest and relevant themes from National Geographic material. The text is very detailed with a well-defined structure, and expresses a definite flow to which my 2nd-year university students were very responsive.

The series allows students the chance to incorporate modern technology into their language learning. The students' Online Workbook provides students with additional exercises to work through on their own, and teachers can monitor students' progress and provide feedback and extra activities online. All video clips and audio material are available in the



online workbook. The students' textbook includes the script of the video clips, grammar and reading skill summaries, and writing and research tips as well as a glossary. The detailed teachers' guide provides a synopsis of the readings and videos plus websites and ideas for extension activities. Teachers can also choose to teach with a Presentation Tool CD-ROM on an interactive whiteboard or computer.

The interconnectivity of the vocabulary and reading exercises along with the writing exercises is paramount in the text. The focus on specific skills devoted to developing academic literacy, combined with the aim of invoking visual literacy, makes it a very engaging text for students. Acquisition of new words and academic material is strengthened by the frequency of speaking activities, which help consolidate new information and ideas and provide balance to a rather demanding pre-intermediate text.

There are 10 units and each unit has 20 pages, lasting about three to four 90-minute lessons. There are four sections in each unit. Two vocabulary-reading lessons (Lessons A and B), a video-listening section in the middle, and finally a writing lesson (Lesson C). The vocabulary-reading lessons provide the language, content, and academic skill, while the video acts as a content bridge, and the writing tasks consolidate the unit.

Each unit starts with discussions of colourful visuals which set the mood for the unit theme, exposing students to the key concepts they will be encountering. Next is the *Preparing to Read* section which is one of the strengths of the text and was well noted in the student survey I conducted. Before each reading, ten high frequency and academic words were identified in context and then reinforced with several writing and speaking activities to consolidate the words. Such work prior to reading certainly satisfies research results conducted by Hulstijn and Laufer (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 64), a study that focuses on the *Involvement Load Hypothesis* in vocabulary acquisition. Further, some target words are highlighted according to their morphological and syntactical structures and collocation groupings, offering chances for extension activities.

The academic reading skill introduced in Lesson A is reinforced in Lesson B. However, the reading passages in Lesson A and B differ in two ways. Firstly, they both offer different perspectives on the unit theme. Secondly, the reading text in Lesson A is a straight reading passage of about 450 words, whereas in Lesson B the content is expressed in a variety of formats, including graphs, diagrams, maps, and photographs, requiring students to interpret numerical or pictorial data.

Woven throughout the text is the emphasis on critical thinking, an essential skill in an academic environment (Gibbons, 2009). Students reflect, analyze, and critically evaluate information and then express opinions and relate information to their personal experience. Several students in my class found this difficult initially but eventually enjoyed the challenge—especially after viewing the video clips, where the content in Lesson A and the video is synthesized, requiring students to think more deeply about the topic.

The writing section, Lesson C, demonstrates that academic writing requires drafting. Students write sentences in controlled situations using a basic grammar structure and a specific function, for example, speculating on a certain topic connected to the unit theme. Students then discuss their sentences between each draft and end with a peer review of their final composition. Whilst the reading section of the book is very detailed and a course within itself, the writing section on its own is insufficient but an excellent summary to each unit.

Instructors wishing to use a solid reading text that teaches a variety of academic reading and writing skills with a balance of speaking and critical thinking activities would no doubt be satisfied with this text.

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Partners in the Classroom: Team-teaching and Collaborative Learning Projects

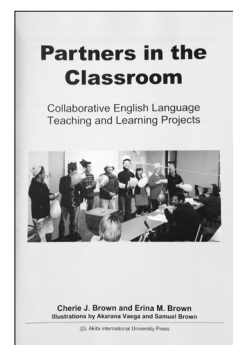
[Cherie J. Brown & Erina M. Brown. Akita: Akita International University Press, 2014. pp. 145. ¥3,500. ISBN: 978-4-9904329-7-3.]

Reviewed by Kathryn Mabe, Asia University

Partners in the Classroom is ideal for instructors who are interested in collaborative learning and want a collection of organized and well-thought-out projects. Made into a volume of two pre-project preparatory lessons and five collaborative projects, this book is intended for pre-intermediate learners upwards in secondary and tertiary teaching contexts. It is based upon principles of collaborative teaching and learning, with the explicit aim of creating “natural opportunities for learners to use and experience English in more authentic ways” (Brown & Brown, 2014, p. 6).

The pre-project lessons are entitled *Learning to Work in a Group* and *Plagiarism*. The former involves some of the students taking part in an EFL-style Survival in the Desert discussion while others (the *Observers*) discretely make notes regarding how their classmates interact. This leads on to discussion of the different roles people play in a group. The second preparatory lesson makes excellent use of online material such as videos made by college students who explain how to avoid plagiarism. As I have found in my experience that students are sometimes unaware of this issue, I was pleased to see it included. Both pre-project lessons largely received very positive feedback from students and I also felt that this was an innovative way to begin a course.

These lessons are followed by five projects based on the topics of news, travel, campaigns, recycling, and global issues. *Partners in the Classroom* includes clear step-by-step lesson plans and suggested time frames for completion of each of the projects, estimated at between 11 to 16 hours of class time.



It is recommended that these lessons be used on a weekly basis and not as a replacement for a more formal curriculum.

The procedure differs slightly for each project. As an example, the *Campaign* lesson begins by leading into the topic through a discussion of students' previous experience of making a speech, showing model examples of the final product expected, and analyzing speeches from famous movies. The instructor has complete flexibility in terms of which aspects of the speeches to focus on as the target language. The next stages involve small groups deciding and creating their own campaign speech and poster. This process of actively using the target language in a personalized way has been shown to be beneficial to L2 development (Ellis, 2003). In the final stages, students present their campaigns whilst being videoed, vote for the best campaign, and complete a self-evaluation sheet while viewing their performance. Throughout the project, learners benefit from features of collaborative learning such as working with peers to successfully complete an academic task with "a sense of 'sinking or swimming together'" (Kohonen, 1992, p. 34). This was reinforced in student feedback, with one learner commenting: "I could learn how important supporting each other is as well as English."

Partners in the Classroom provides photocopyable worksheets such as questionnaires and final product examples which I found to be invaluable in helping weaker learners visualize the project outcome and provide them with a basis to work from. In addition, there are suggested frameworks for teacher and peer-based assessment and feedback. Some excellent authentic online sources of material are also incorporated into lessons. However, as a note of caution, it should be stressed that this is not a textbook with ready-made lessons to be instantly utilized. The aforementioned movie speeches, for

example, were challenging even for students in my advanced-level class as they are an authentic resource and a good deal of supplementary material was required. In addition, material to support the students with the language necessary to be able to collaborate together in English and perform the tasks is not included.

It is also worth noting that these lessons are intended in principle to be team-taught. Certainly at university-level in Japan, this is unlikely to be a realistic option for most teachers. Based upon my own observations, I would wholeheartedly recommend *Partners in the Classroom* for higher-level university classes without a team teacher. Regarding lower level ability classes, I suggest a more hands-on teacher led approach. While I also believe even large classes at secondary-level education could benefit from *Partners in the Classroom*, classroom management issues and potential difficulty for students to understand authentic material could prove challenging without the presence of a team teacher.

In conclusion, I believe *Partners in the Classroom* is an innovative and versatile resource for instructors in a wide range of teaching contexts, providing teachers have sufficient time to create supplementary resources to support it.

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found at <<http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/recently-received>>.

* = new listing; ! = final notice — Final notice items will be removed July 31. Please make queries by email to the appropriate JALT Publications contact.

Books for Students (reviewed in TLT)

Contact: Steve Fukuda – pub-review@jalt-publications.org

Alpha English — Kizuka, H. Tokyo: Macmillan Language House, 2014. [12-unit four skills remedial course for lower level learners incl. online teacher's manual and classroom audio].

* **Arts and Society** — Wakeling, E. Tokyo: Nan'un-do, 2015. [14-unit reading and writing based course with a focus on contemporary society and culture].

Recently Received

Steve Fukuda

pub-review@jalt-publications.org



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 Steve Fukuda 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

! **Business Plus** — Helliwell, M. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014. [3-level integrated skills and business English course w/ TOEIC® style practice sections incl. teacher's manual and downloadable audio and supplementary worksheets].

The Dynamic Interplay between Context and the Language Learner — King, J. (Ed.). London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. [Edited volume of conceptual papers and empirical studies to consider how contextual factors interact with learners influencing L2 learning and usage].

! **Getting Global! Engineer Your Future with English** — Tsujimoto, T., Noguchi, J., Miyama, A., Mukuhira, A., Kirimura, R., & Murao, J. Tokyo: Kinseido, 2015. [24-unit course aimed at developing global language skills incl. teacher's manual w/ class audio].

* **I am Me! Getting to Know Yourself through Language Learning** — Fukuda, S. T., Pope, C. J., Sakata, H., & Fukumori, T. Nagoya, Japan: Perceptia Press, 2014. [15-unit integrated skills course for pre-intermediate students with units centered on self-discovery and personal development].

* **Interactive Writing: Practical Writing Skills for the Digital Age** — LeBeau, C. Tokyo: Macmillan LanguageHouse, 2014. [12-unit a beginner to low-intermediate practical writing course incl. downloadable teacher's manual].

Longman Academic Reading Series — Various authors. White Plains, NY: Pearson, 2014. [5-level academic reading course for college focused on effective reading, vocabulary building, note-taking, and critical thinking incl. online teacher's manual w/ quizzes].

* **On Board for More World Adventures** — Berlin, S., & Kobayashi, M. Tokyo: Kinseido. 2015. [15-unit reading and listening course focused on the topic of world Englishes incl. teacher's manual, classroom DVD, and classroom audio cd].

! **Open Your Eyes through News in English** — Watanabe, A., & Ishii, T. Tokyo: Sanshusha, 2015. [14-unit course reading course incl. teacher's manual w/ class audio and webpage access].

* **Raise Your Score 150 Plus on the TOEIC® Test** — Matsuo, N., & Sobajima, K. Tokyo: Shohakusha. 2016. [20-unit test preparation course with 10 listening, 10 reading, 20 grammar review sections incl. teacher's manual and classroom audio cd].

Reading Explorer (2nd edition) — Various Authors. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2015. [6-level reading course created with National Geographic Learning incl. online workbooks, student and instructor ebooks, and assessment CD-ROM with ExamView].

* **Stretch** — Stempleski, S. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014. [4-level series focused on 4 skills plus viewing and presentation skills w/ videos provided by BBC Worldwide Learning incl. student book w/ online practice, workbook, DVD, classroom audio CDs, teacher's resource pack].

! **Sure** — Hobbs, M., & Keddle, J. S. Crawley, UK: Helbling Languages, 2015. [4-level course of integrated themes within a grammar syllabus aligned with CEFR, Cambridge English, and Trinity exams incl. student workbook, teacher's book w/ class audio, and access to SURE cloud on e-zone].

* **The Thinking Train** — Puchta, H., & Gerngross, G. Crawley, UK: Helbling Languages, 2015. [5 interactive picture books for young learners incl. online teacher's manual w/ resources and worksheets and online mp3 audio].

Books for Teachers (reviewed in JALT Journal)

Contact: Greg Rouault – jj-reviews@jalt-publications.org

* **Language for Specific Purposes** — Gollin-Kies, S., Hall, D. R., & Moore, S. H. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 2015.

* **Academic Writing Step by Step: A Research-based Approach** — Candlin, C. N., Crompton, P., & Hatim, B. (Eds.) Sheffield, UK: Equinox. 2015.

[JALT PRAXIS] TEACHING ASSISTANCE



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: teach-assist@jalt-publications.org

In this issue's Teaching Assistance, educator Junior Koch teams up with Risa Takashima, an OT (occupational therapist), to teach an EFL class to adult students with special needs. Occupational therapists are trained health-care professionals who practice the art and science of harmonizing a client's life and empowering them to achieve an acceptable level of sovereignty over a disability. According to an earlier study by Takashima and Saeki (2013, p. 70), "the occupational therapist can carry the role of coordinator in an interdisciplinary team

for the clients with disabilities by understanding them." In this essay, the authors explain how they formed an interdisciplinary team to observe and assess the teaching and learning that took place in their class. Although there are studies that combine occupational therapy and education, phonological development, and the teaching of languages to special-needs students, according to Koch, "we were unable to find anything involving team-teaching EFL with an OT and an ELT in the literature—this is a new concept."

The Power of an Educator: Occupational Therapist Team

Junior Koch

Sapporo Gakuin University

Risa Takashima

Megumino Care Support Centre

We are like our favourite heroes. Heroes have superpowers or extraordinary skills, which they use to fight evil and help people. However, no matter how powerful our heroes are, they sometimes find themselves overwhelmed—in other words, they become the ones in need of help. This theme carries a simple but important message: No matter how *powerful* we are, we often encounter situations that would be best tackled with a bit of teamwork. Fortunately, most superheroes are not alone. They have a special friend, or a partner, who comes to their aid in the direst situations—and together, they work as a team and try to make the world a better place.

Recently, we became an unlikely team. One of us is an educator, and the other is an occupational therapist. The two of us have known each other for several years and we often talk about our work experiences. We had talked about doing something together, but we were never able to find a practical situation which required a teacher *and* a therapist. Because of this, when an opportunity came to work with a group of guest special-needs students through the barrier-free university programme, we agreed that this was the kind of connection we needed, and we made our choice.

In addition, the students also made a choice—they chose to do this lesson. It was going to be a rare opportunity for them, and the teacher's lack of knowledge about the students' limitations shouldn't get in the way of their experience. This was our suggestion and we were required to obtain approval from the administration as this was the first time this kind of request had been made. Because of this, we hoped our teamwork would be beneficial to the programme. We hoped to address the students' limitations and consider their particular needs. Finally, by doing this together as teacher, therapist, and students, we believed we could all make new discoveries.

The instructions we received from the administrators were straightforward: they wanted a volunteer teacher to deliver one 90-minute English class to a group of six intellectually-challenged adult students. The students had chosen to take the English class from a choice of four disciplines—we expected they were probably going to be motivated and looking forward to it. Still, teaching intellectually-challenged students requires specific knowledge and training, but exposure to this form of teaching (be it through practice or training) by most EFL practitioners is often limited or nonexistent, and this can be especially difficult if the teacher takes a communicative approach in a student-centred lesson.

To address this limitation, an approach that let us think creatively outside of the traditional EFL box was taken. We brought elements from occupational therapy into the planning stage. Traditional ELT is about the development of language skills, while occupational therapy is about promoting health and wellbeing through occupation. Occupations are activities that are meaningful for people, and the goal of occupational therapists is to enable people to participate in meaningful everyday activities.

While there certainly have been attempts to combine education and occupational therapy, we were unable to find a situation with a therapist and a language teacher forming a team to deliver a lesson together. Occupational therapy and ELT have many differences, but they share one main trait: both disciplines are about the art and science of enabling people. In their own ways, both the occupational therapist and ELT focus on improving aspects of people's lives. And one important link between the two disciplines is this: one's language education can be their meaningful occupation.

One Lesson for Them...

Our final plan looked fairly traditional. Its structure followed the three-stage ESA model (Engage, Study, Activate), and our chosen materials and activities aimed to cover both productive and receptive skills. Within our plan, however, there were some elements that are usually not present in more orthodox forms of language teaching. Firstly, we became aware of how foreign language learning can be a negative experience for intellectually challenged students (Schwartz, 2015), and we wanted to avoid this. We considered notions from the Applied Behavioural Approach: i.e., taking short, clear, and isolated steps is crucial when teaching intellectually challenged students (Reynolds, Zupanick, & Dombeck, 2013). In addition, we followed strategies that are suggested by specialists when teaching

special-needs students (Do2Learn, 2016). Finally, we concluded that we could engage students more if we promoted an environment that focused on the learners' primary occupation: i.e., intrinsically motivated activities for pleasure and enjoyment.

We had planned to have the lesson delivered by a teacher, and nine supporters (who were volunteer undergraduate students) would monitor and help students when needed. The OT, in turn, would be present as an observer—only the teacher and supporters would have an active role. Yet, this was not what happened. As the lesson flowed, we encountered situations that made us realise we were a team in the class, too. These moments required more than the presence of a teacher and a supporter. For example, some students were unable to cope with the stimulating environment. The teacher and supporters' instinctive response was to come to their aid—unbeknown to us, we were generating even more stimuli. The OT noticed this and went on to instruct the supporters rather than the students or the teacher. These short interventions were useful to train supporters to help students, and this reduced the amount of stimuli students received (e.g., through tidier desks, and fewer hands and faces around to distract attention). This approach not only allowed the supporters to understand their roles and help students more effectively, but also freed the teacher and OT to focus on their respective roles. Because of our teamwork, we started to transform the class into something less class-like. The language development goals of each activity became secondary and we used our resources to ensure the students were primarily having a positive experience with English.

... and One Lesson for Us

It would have been possible to achieve the lesson aims with a traditional setup—in this case, one teacher and some supporters. However, by working together, we found opportunities for improvement that would have otherwise been missed. Some issues that emerged in class wouldn't have been addressed properly without this collaboration.

This story was told from our perspective as, unfortunately, there was no opportunity to talk with the volunteer undergraduate students who supported the students. We reflected on our experience from our two different perspectives—the teacher's (the teaching and learning that took place) and the therapist's (how these special-needs students engaged and participated in the lesson). We became more aware of some of our strengths and limitations, both as individuals, and as a team. Not only

that, this experience also taught us that it is important to be curious. Without our mutual curiosity for each other's fields, we would not have considered working together.

This was a single lesson in a particular setting with a rather unique team. Although this was a one-off opportunity, we expect to do it again in the future. Certain kinds of collaboration may sound unusual or odd, or even unnecessary, but we discovered synergy from the rare combination of language teaching and occupational therapy. Our experience makes us believe that we should never underestimate what a team can achieve, and no matter how strange an idea sounds, we believe that it should be explored. No matter how successful your exploration is, you will always learn something from it.



The authors conclude their team-teaching class

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Author Note

Risa Takashima is now with Hokkaido University.

Searching for a Research Topic

Charles Moore

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On the path to publishing your work, one of the first steps is choosing a topic to research and write about. In this short article, *The Writers' Workshop* hopes to briefly outline several points of advice writers might want to keep in mind when searching for a research topic.

1. Take Time and Strategize!

This whole process of finding a research idea begins by simply sitting down, setting aside time, and giving some good thought to what you would like to research. A lot of times we as writers can feel rushed to start making real progress on our writing, but the initial thinking stage is the point of our research when our focus can be given to the process of letting creative ideas develop within us.

Many times the best inspiration will come from areas that you are already interested in. If you are a language educator, what are some areas within linguistics that pique your interests? You can even jot down some research questions that have arisen from your own language learning experiences (e.g., vocabulary acquisition through the L1, or the benefits of extensive reading).

Do not feel pressured to sit down and come up with all of your research ideas at one time. You can progressively write down your ideas as they come over a length of time. A good idea would be to keep a "research idea" notebook and gradually write down ideas as they come to mind. Another approach, suggested by the University at Buffalo, is to create an "idea map" and graphically draw a grid of your potential areas of research (University at Buffalo Libraries, n.d.). There are many different methods that will be effective for different people, and the most important thing is to find one that works for you and to intentionally set aside time to strategize about which topics to research.

2. Be Creative!

This point is somewhat contained in the previous one, but it is imperative to remember that, when

the need arises, a researcher can set aside logic for a moment and give free rein to their creativity. At this point your research will still be in its initial stages. Later, there will be plenty of time to rationally plan out the logistics of your research aspirations, but for now you can have the luxury of ignoring these and letting your creativity roam free. O'Leary (2004) states, "I think the best researchers are those who manage to be creative in thinking, yet logical in structure." Just remember that at times being creative, non-linear, spontaneous, and right-brained is very much in line with being an apt researcher.

3. Commit to One Idea

After you have thought through and generated enough potential research topics, you will then need to narrow them down and choose one idea to pursue. Do not worry, the other ideas that you so diligently generated can be saved for the future, with the potential of becoming research papers in their own right. There may be different reasons as to why you choose one topic over another. Rather than endlessly remaining undecided about which idea to research, sometimes it is best to simply choose a topic and leave the other ideas for a later time. They can always be developed into research projects in the future.

4. Read Lots of Review Literature

After you have settled on a single idea, go ahead and read lots of review literature, thoroughly examining the background of the topic you are planning to tackle. Make sure to review not only previous, crucial work related to your topic, but also be sure to cover recent progress made in the area. Thoroughly reviewing literature will also help you understand and define your own research ideas as well. "Initial research problems tend to be general and somewhat tentative . . . By reviewing related studies and discussions of research in that area, the investigator learns how others have defined the general problem in more specific ways." (McMillan, 2008, p. 56). Reading ample amounts of prior work will ensure that your research is built on a theoretically sound foundation from the start, and will ultimately add credibility to your results.

5. Narrow the Scope of Your Research

Without knowing it, a lot of times the scope of what we plan to research can be too broad, even after defining it more after reading through review

literature. If you can narrow your idea down to its clearest form, this will ultimately allow your research question to be very pointed and easy to understand. The MIT Library suggests limiting the parameters of our research by further defining areas such as geographical location, time, or even population group. "Limit by age, sex, race, occupation, species, or ethnic group. For example, on a topic in genetics, examine specific traits as they affect women over 40 years of age." (MIT Libraries, n.d.). You may have a case where the scope of your research is already adequately defined, but it is perfectly normal if you find that your research idea needs further refining and definition along the way.

6. Find Your One Research Question

When you have narrowed your research topic down to one clear, definitive idea, there is still one more thing that needs to be done. Ultimately, all of the work you put into developing your research idea needs to produce one question. "Readers of research reports don't want just information, they want the answer to a question worth asking" (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2003, p. 45). This one question will ultimately represent the problem which your research is all about, and is the definitive idea of your paper. A research question worth asking will leave your reader in anticipation of finding the answers and results as they read through your paper; an ambiguous or uninteresting research question will instead fail to catch your reader's interest.

Conclusion

This short article is by no means an in-depth look into the subject of finding a research topic. Rather, it offers a few guiding tips meant to help the novice writer begin this process. No doubt, one of the best teachers of this will ultimately prove to be experience itself as you search out and generate your own research ideas. Perhaps the most important thing is to simply plunge in, start coming up with ideas for yourself, and ultimately you will find a research topic worthy of your time.

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[JALT PRAXIS] DEAR TLT



Tiernan L. Tensai

Got a teaching problem you can't solve? Need some advice about classroom practice? Stressed out from living in a different country? Then Dear TLT is the column for you. Be it serious or comical, our panel of experts will endeavour to answer all your queries. Send your questions to the email address below.

Email: dear-tlt@jalt-publications.org

Getting Started with Conversation Tests

Dear TLT,

I teach several conversation classes and they are going okay, but I'm at a loss for how to assess my students' speaking skills. I've tried various writing-based formats, but I'm not

satisfied with them. I've heard that it's possible to test speaking skills directly, but I'm not sure how to go about it. Do you have any advice for what I could do?

Curious in Kanazawa

Dear Curious,

Thanks a lot for your letter. This is a topic we're very interested in too, so we'll do our best to help you get started. First of all, how to conduct and

assess speaking skills is a very big subject—one that we can't possibly do justice here in this short column. However, we can share with you some ideas that have worked well for us that will hopefully get you pointed in the right direction. We'll also point out a few of the many very good books written on the subject in case you are interested in acquiring more detailed information. In addition, always remember that Google is your friend—doing a search for *How do I conduct an EFL speaking test?* will bring up a wealth of useful resources.

We notice in your letter that you are unsatisfied with traditional writing-based tests for assessing communication ability. There is a clear reason for this. These sorts of tests do not require students to speak in order to pass! You spend your time encouraging students to talk and express themselves in class, and then for the test, they have to use other skills (such as reading and writing) in order to pass it. In this situation, the test is not supporting the sorts of skills you want your students to improve, such as speaking and listening. In testing parlance, this is called “negative washback.” Washback is the effect a test has on teaching and learning, and it can be either positive or negative (Bailey, 1998). Speaking tests, on the other hand, are more likely to promote positive washback, especially if they are well designed and conducted. However, and here is the rub, while speaking tests may be more beneficial to developing communicative ability, they are also much less practical for the teacher to prepare and carry out. There are a number of logistical matters that need attending to, such as test format, when and where to conduct it, grading procedures, and giving feedback. The number of variables you need to consider may seem overwhelming, but it's not impossible. If you're willing to invest a bit of time and energy, you'll open up a whole new area of learning and growth, both for you and your students.

Okay, enough with the preamble! Let's get to a few test format ideas that have worked well for us.

Interview Tests

A traditional form of speaking test is conducted as an interview between you and a student. Of course, you could also interview a pair, or if you have a large class, small groups of three or four students. One way to conduct these interviews is during class. Just set up a few chairs in a corner of the room, give students a bit of time to warm up, then call up each individual or pair one at a time to talk with you, apart from the rest of the group. Beforehand, students can practice, and afterwards, be sure to have

something for them to do, such as a worksheet or other exercise. On the other hand, if you don't want to use class time for tests, then you could conduct these interviews at another time and place of your choosing.

There are different ways to go about the interview. One idea is to have students perform a memorized conversation. This is especially useful with lower-level learners who have a hard time talking. This is not “real” conversation, but at least they are getting benefit out of the work they put in as they prepare and practice. If you want to add a bit of spontaneity, ask them a question or two after the prepared bit is done. For a bigger challenge, ask them random questions and see how they respond. You could also lay back and let them lead the conversation. Depending on how you conduct your interviews, the difficulty level can be tweaked to meet the needs of your students.

When you mark the tests, you'll need some sort of rubric. Decide ahead of time what criterion are most important, then create a sheet that will help you quickly check off scores and give feedback. For example, you could look at some or all of the following aspects of conversation and give a score of 1 to 5 for each; we don't recommend using too many, as the more you track, the more complicated the marking becomes.

- **Fluency:** How smoothly someone speaks; presence or absence of noticeable pauses is one way to measure it.
- **Accuracy:** How accurately do students speak? Are the mistakes major or minor?
- **Intonation:** What is the quality of the students' voices? Do they sound like flat, droning robots, or do they sound positive and friendly?
- **Content/creativity:** To what degree did students use key words, phrases, or taught grammatical constructions? Did they go beyond the basic requirements, or did they show some creative spark?
- **Body language:** Did the students make eye contact? Were they smiling? How about their posture?
- **Attitude:** This is more of a holistic measurement that can refer to one's overall demeanor.
- **Participation:** If interviewing a small group of students, how well does each person take part?

These are only a few of the many criteria you could grade your students on. Check out the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines website (www.actfl.org) for a thorough list that includes guidelines for assessing all four language skills. Which you choose will

depend on what you think your students need to develop most. Feel free to experiment with different criterion and skill descriptors. Over time you'll find that students will make more effort in a particular area if they know they are being graded on it. So, if you have a really quiet class, you may want to choose intonation as a key criteria. If your students have trouble speaking accurately, make sure that's something they are graded on.

Finally, you may find that engaging in conversation with your students and marking them at the same time is a very tricky thing to do. We therefore highly recommend recording the tests and marking them later on. This will take more time on your part, but it will greatly increase the reliability of the results.

Recording, Transcribing, and Noticing Tests

Speaking of recording... since most students have smartphones these days, that means they have the ability to record their conversations via free built-in recording apps. Instead of interviewing each pair one at a time, have students record a short conversation (3-5 minutes) and then transcribe it for homework. A pedagogically sound task in its own right, this activity will force students to listen to themselves and their partner carefully. Once the transcript is completed, you can follow up with a number of awareness raising activities. For example, students could search for mistakes, look for instances of taught language, reflect on any L1 usage, and imagine how they could improve next time. At the end of the year, students could compare their performances with those earlier in the year and self-evaluate their progress.

If you conduct a test in this way, here are a few tips. First of all, you'll need to spend some time showing students how you want them to transcribe their recordings. In addition, to ensure greater compliance, include transcript completion as part of the grade. If many students are late in completing these transcripts, it would make things more difficult. Alternatively, if your class is not too big, you could consider doing the transcripts yourself. Believe it or not, there are some advantages to this. The transcripts would be more accurate and help you give better grades and feedback. You could also simply avoid the issue of non-compliance altogether. Of course this is a lot of extra work for you! But if you have a small enough group, it may be something to try. Recording and transcribing tests is not for everyone and every situation, but they have the potential to really boost positive washback to very high levels, so they are worth considering.

Project-Based Tests

If you have a large class, you may want to consider a project-based approach. One idea here is to have students create short videos and post them to a private, password-protected YouTube account. There are different ways to go about this, but here is one method that has worked well for us: Create a YouTube channel and show the students a demo video, perhaps one from a previous class that you have gotten permission from former students to share. This lets everyone know what you expect. Give the students a topic to talk about on video and show them how to film and upload the video to the private channel. Students can use their smartphones if you don't have any cameras to spare. Sample topics include self-introductions, talking about your family, hometown, or house—whatever you happen to be learning. The students create one video for each topic throughout the semester. For the final exam, they could do one more video that summarizes three of the topics. Watch and assess the videos on your own time using a rubric you've clearly explained to your students (this is really important, as they should clearly understand how they'll be marked). Having some sort of feedback sheet can expedite the feedback process for you.

Another type of project-based exam is the presentation test. Here, the students, in pairs or small groups, prepare a short skit based on material you have covered in class. You could give them some time to prepare in the prior class, then have them perform their skits in front of everyone in the next class. In this way, students would gain the benefit of building confidence through their public performance, much in the same way that public speeches and presentations do. Students can also learn vicariously through watching their classmates. If public performances are too much, have students perform their skits for you privately at a time and place of your choosing.

Final Thoughts

In this short column, we've covered a few ideas for conducting speaking tests. Compared with written exams, they are less practical and involve more work on your part. However, as you can see, the tradeoff is increased validity—your tests will now positively reinforce the very skills you want your students to build. If you decide to give these ideas a try, we suggest you do more reading on the topic and try them out slowly with a small class that you feel comfortable teaching. Take notes as you go and learn from your efforts, step by step. Over time, your skill in preparing, managing, and marking speaking tests

will increase, and the process will become easier the more you do it. In the end, conducting speaking tests is an excellent way to develop your teaching craft and provide your students with even more learning opportunities. Good luck!

Resources

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[JALT FOCUS] SIG FOCUS



Joël Laurier & Robert Morel

JALT currently has 26 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 <<http://jalt.org/main/groups>>.

Email: sig-focus@jalt-publications.org • Web: <http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/sig-news>

Announcement

It is with great excitement that the JALT Executive Board announces the appointment of Joël Laurier as our Regional Professional Activities Chair (RPAC). This is a presidential appointment with a 2-year mandate. The RPAC is a member of the Program Committee, reports to the Director of Program, and is charged with facilitating the planning, organizing, and funding of JALT events in collaboration with chapters and SIGs.

Under our current operational model, JALT has been able to rely on our yearly international conference and membership dues to finance research and language teaching activities. This includes the issuing of grants and the financial support of national and international events. This model has served the NPO well in the past, but the dependence on these two forms of income exposes the organization to a great deal of risk during economic downturns. At the same time, the increasing number of JALT and non-JALT events throughout Japan have resulted in regional events that are competing with each other. The appointment of the RPAC demonstrates JALT's commitment to address these two issues in order to help the association grow.

By creating the position of Regional Professional Activities Chair, the JALT Executive Board is sending out the message that it wants to support smaller events throughout Japan to better meet the needs of each specific region. It aims to do so with heightened collaboration between chapters and SIGs. This will be the challenge we are giving to Joël.

Joël joins the Program Committee equipped with the experience of working with JALT Special Interest Groups (SIGs), chapters, and publications. He is a member of the Programs team of the Learner Development SIG, co-program chair of the Gunma Chapter, and co-editor of *The Language Teacher's* SIG Focus column. Outside of JALT, he is co-president of the Teachers College Columbia University Japan Alumni Association. We expect this varied experience will benefit him in his new role. Welcome Joël!

Message

It is a great honour to be appointed as the first Regional Professional Activities Chair. I look forward to working closely with the SIG and chapter programming committees to help coordinate their respective needs and help them maintain a healthy level of sustainability. Over the last few years, in my capacity as Programs Committee member with the Learner Development SIG and the Gunma Chapter, I have seen an increase in the number of events that are co-hosted or co-sponsored by SIGs and chapters. My mandate is to further promote these events by aiding in their effective and strategic planning and scheduling in whatever manner the SIGs and chapters deem works best for them. In my role of facilitator and liaison, I hope to help JALT groups form partnerships and assist them in their search for funds if required. If you are a Program Chair for a JALT group or one of our many Associate Members looking for help to promote an event, please contact me at <rpac@jalt.org>, and let's cooperate and make some magic!

Joël Laurier



Malcolm Swanson

This column serves to provide our membership with important information and notices regarding the organization. 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: jalt-focus@jalt-publications.org • Web: <http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/jalt-focus>

2016年第1回総会開催通知 Notice of the First 2016 JALT Ordinary General Meeting (OGM)

日時: 2016年6月26日(日)

Date: June 26, 2016 (Sunday)

時間: 14:30 – 15:30

Time: 2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

場所: 広島市国際青年館、研修室

Location: Seminar Room, Hiroshima International Youth House

議案 / Agenda:

- 第1号議案 議長選出 / Item 1. Determination of chairperson
- 第2号議案 議事録著名人選出 / Item 2. Determination of signatories
- 第3号議案 平成27年度事業報告 / Item 3. Business Report (2015/04/01-2016/03/31)
- 第4号議案 平成27年度決算報告 / Item 4. Financial Report (2015/04/01-2016/03/31)
- 第5号議案 平成27年度監査報告 / Item 5. Audit Report (2015/04/01-2016/03/31)
- 第6号議案 平成28年度事業計画 / Item 6. Business Plan (2016/04/01-2017/03/31)
- 第7号議案 平成28年度予算 / Item 7. Budget (2016/04/01-2017/03/31)
- 第8号議案 その他の重要事項 / Item 8. Other important issues

*6月初旬に、会員の皆様に議案詳細、各報告書のリンク先、及び個別の不在者投票へのリンク先をEメールでご案内いたします。

*An email containing details of the agenda, including links to the various reports that will be presented, and a link to an individualized ballot will be sent to you during the first week of June.

Eメールがお手元に届きましたら、不在投票の方法に従

って投票をしてください。

本総会は、特定非営利活動法人(NPO)としての地位を保つ為に必要なもので、過半数以上の会員の皆様による出席(定足数)をもって、正式に開催することができます。

幸い当学会では、会員の皆様に向けて電子投票システムを提供させていただいており、不在投票をしていただくことで、本総会の出席者としてみなすことができます。

お手数をおかけいたしますが、ご支援とご協力のほどよろしくお願い致します。

When you receive this email, please follow the instructions on how to complete the absentee ballot. It is important for us to have a majority of JALT members present at the OGM for it to be valid, and holding a valid OGM is necessary for us to maintain our status as a nonprofit organization (NPO). Fortunately, you can vote online by absentee ballot and be counted present for the meeting, as per the JALT Constitution.

Thank you very much for being a member of JALT and for your continued support.

Vocab@Tokyo 2016

The Vocabulary Symposium will be held at the Vocab@Tokyo conference this year.

This will be the biggest vocabulary conference to come to Japan. Speakers include Paul Nation, Tess Fitzpatrick, Paul Meara, and Norbert Schmidt.

September 12–14, 2016

Meiji Gakuin University

<https://sites.google.com/site/vocabattokyo/>

JALT Vocabulary SIG

<http://jaltvocab.weebly.com/>



42nd Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Exhibition

November 25–28, 2016

WINC Aichi, Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan



Scott Gardner old-grammarians@jalt-publications.org

"All toasters toast toast." —Mario (or Luigi?)

With fondness, I recollect my youth. I reminisce about those halcyon schooldays, when we would run cackling through the arched hallways of Hogwarts, casting mischievous spells upon each other's shoelaces and lunchboxes. I recall with a tear those summers when we would fight to the death with other teenagers on live TV for the depraved entertainment of dystopian grownups. I remember that at the time I was probably reading too many young adult fantasy books. Mostly, though, I remember making up unique hybrid sports with my friends.

We would take simple playground activities and mix them with larger-world spectacles from the TV. For example, rather than try to organize a full-fledged game of football, my next-door neighbor instead created a simpler game he called "Stinkerball". Inspired by all the crazy feints and running patterns football players on TV carried out as they tried to catch the flying ball, his main rule for Stinkerball was that each offensive player on his way downfield had to perform a series of pointless stunts and silly gestures that were sometimes even . . . well . . . offensive, for the amusement of the quarterback, who would then throw to the receiver who humiliated himself the worst.

The crass but creative energy that went into this sport carried on into our more unruly teen years, when we invented even more sadistic pseudo-sports like "Racquetbutt" and "The Pain-tathlon". Sure, we may have lost a few friendships over games like these. But nobody ever lost any fingers.

This question of playing games by the rules vs. adapting freely has often crossed my mind when I think about Japanese culture. Japan takes justifiable pride in the purity of its cultural institutions, like sumo or tea ceremony. You can tell how seriously they take holding to form by all the certifications offered by the cultural powers-that-be: flower arranging licenses, language learning level tests, and even a government established 3-tiered ranking system for Japanese hospitality (*omotenashi*). And it's exciting when cultural conservation efforts are globally acknowledged, like the selection of Japanese cuisine for UNESCO world heritage status. The only thing Americans can point to in response

would be the McDonald's down the street. (Steak, egg & cheese breakfast biscuit, anyone?)

On the other hand, Japanese also have a great reputation for whimsical and subversive modification of trendy ideas, so it shouldn't surprise us that Japan is the home of soft tennis, which arbitrarily alters a perfectly good, already existing sport; or drifting, which defies all the engineering intent of a racing car by attempting to make it go sideways; or *chindougu* [珍道具], those clever but nearly useless inventions you've seen pictures of, such as toilet tissue dispensing hats or chopsticks with cooling fans for hot noodles.

I was once asked by a local fitness instructor if I'd ever taught yoga. "No, just English." "Can you do yoga, though? I need someone who can give yoga sessions in English." "Why?" "Because it's 'in'!" One could argue that choice of language would hardly disturb the sacred purity of a yoga session. But choosing a flabby, sedentary American who can't even touch his toes to lead it would be a desecration. The instructor's inquiry got me thinking, though: How far could I go, fusing English lessons with other popular culture/health kicks, without profaning either discipline?

One idea was "Hot English". You study in a 40°C room. All your materials are laminated. You do endless substitution drills. You have dialogues with your partner, mostly about the weather. You consider investing in some anti-fog reading glasses. You measure intake in vocab learned, and output in pounds lost. You associate English with chocolate, and vice-versa, and part of you hates them both.

Or there's "English Biker Gang," with nine levels of certification, indicated by leather jackets of various colors. You're confined to a sidecar until level three (3-Kyuu Yellow). Entry-level mastery consists of memorizing the lyrics to "Born To Be Wild" and successfully using the phrase "I'm lookin' for adventure in whatever comes my way" in a conversation. Written tests are administered to the upper arm with tattoo needles. Black Jacket masters have the option of opening their own dojo, but most just ride off into the sunset and never write home again.

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

<<http://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

<http://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

<http://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。バイリンガルイズム、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。

<http://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—the Pan Asian Conference consortium
- 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

<http://jalt.org/main/membership>

Information

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

JALT Central Office

Urban Edge Building, 5th Floor, 1-37-9 Taito, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0016 JAPAN

JALT事務局: 〒110-0016東京都台東区台東1-37-9
アーバンエッジビル5F

t: 03-3837-1630; f: 03-3837-1631; jco@jalt.org

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>.



JALT PanSIG 2016

INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION

教育における革新的な取り組み

Featuring

- » Rod Ellis
- » Joseph Falout
- » John Fanselow
- » Tim Murphey
- » Marcos Benevides
- » Robert Betts
- » Charles Browne
- » Melodie Cook
- » Chris Davis
- » James Dunn
- » James A. Elwood
- » Tony Jenkins
- » Laura Macfarlane
- » Sumiko Ogawa
- » Rab Paterson
- » Robert Rennie
- » Barbara Hoskins Sakamoto
- » Miki Shibata
- » Tomoyoshi Takemura
- » Masanori Tokeshi
- » Rob Waring

May 20–23, 2016

Meio University, Nago, Okinawa

May 20 (Fri)

- » 15:00 Conversation Analysis Forum
- » 15:00 Okinawa Historical & Cultural Tour

May 21 (Sat) – May 22 (Sun)

- » Keynote Speakers
- » Featured Speakers & Workshops
- » Presentations, Forums, & Poster Sessions

May 23 (Mon)

- » 9:00 Language Education Workshops
- » 10:00 Cultural Tour of Shuri Castle

» <http://pansig.org/>

» @JALT_PanSIG #pansig

» pansig2016@gmail.com



Photo courtesy of Shuri Castle Park



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November 25 – 28, 2016

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<http://jalt.org/conference>