

Conversations with the Self: Reflective Practice and Teacher Development

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TED Web Site: jalt.org/ted/ CUE Web Site: jaltcue.org

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From the Editor

JALT2015 is almost upon us. Perhaps this special issue brought you by TED and CUE SIGs will get you thinking about your own reflective practices as you prepare for the conference.

At the JALT2014, the two SIGs jointly sponsored a forum called “Conversations with the Self: Reflective Practice and Teacher Development” that was facilitated by plenary speaker, Dr. Thomas S. C. Farrell. I was unable to attend the forum; however, I heard from friends and other SIG members that it was both enlightening and inspiring. Dr. Bill Snyder, who later that day volunteered to become TED’s next SIG Coordinator, suggested that we ask the presenters to submit their presentation content in written form and include the reports in a future issue of our Journal.

If you missed out on this great forum, you are in luck because six of the nine original presenters happily agreed to submit articles based on their presentations they did at JALT2014. I’d like to extend a special thank you to Jennie Roloff Rothman for proofreading this special issue.

Happy Reading,

Amanda Yoshida

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Learning with the learners:

Stories of student input leading to changes in teaching practice

The College and University Educators (CUE) and Teacher Education & Development (TED) SIGs are joining together for our fifth joint forum designed to promote the sharing of professional stories.

The format will be similar to PechaKucha, but presenters from each SIG will share their stories with small groups of listeners using tablets, laptops or paper. Presenters will share 10 slides and talk for about 30 seconds per slide, for five-minute presentations, followed by short Q & A periods; each presentation will be repeated several times for different audience groups so the attendees can hear several short professional stories about reflective practice. A final discussion moderated by **Professor Jean-Marc Dewaele** will focus on his insights into the value of reflective practice for teachers.

Saturday, November 21

from 5:50 to 7:20 in Room 1003

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Forward

I was privileged to be invited as a plenary speaker at the JALT 2014 conference in Tsukuba. I was also honored to be asked to act as a discussant at the TED-CUE Joint SIG Forum at JALT 2014 with the title of “Conversations with the self: Reflective practice and teacher development”. At that time I was especially impressed that every presenter modeled reflection by reflecting on their own practices and how as a result they gained more awareness of their practice both inside and outside the classroom; as one presenter noted: “I taught an academic skills course, which turned out to be as informative for me as it was for the students.” What wonderful insight! After the Forum I wanted to follow-up with each presenter so I asked the coordinator at the time, Peter Hourdequin, to send me all the addresses of the presenters so I could thank them personally for allowing me to listen to their presentations. When I contacted each individual, I also encouraged them to write-up their presentation because I think other teachers would benefit immensely from reading their reflections on their practice.

Now I was just sent the draft of many of these wonderful presentations in writing in this special issue of the TED-CUE SIG Forum. How wonderful is that! The six papers in this special issue all show the power of engaging in reflective practice because it leads to new levels of awareness and insight into what we do and why we do it. As a result of reaching new levels of awareness as many of the papers in this issue show, we develop our individual theories of teaching and thus become generators of our own knowledge based on important issues in our context (Japan in this case), rather than consumers of knowledge produced by so-called experts that have no idea of that context. We engage in reflective practice so that we can provide more opportunities for our students to learn and as a result we can better recognize and discontinue practices not in the best interests of our students’ learning. Engaging in reflective practice also allows teachers to develop resourcefulness and resilience required to face future challenges and changes in profession. I think you will agree that the six papers in this special issue represent such resourcefulness and resilience and they will help other language teachers in Japan with their future teaching challenges. Again I say thank you to all the presenters at the Forum for allowing me to listen to their wonderful talks and now another big thank you to the editors and authors of this special issue for allowing me to read these wonderful papers.

Happy reflecting!

Thomas S.C. Farrell

Promoting Inclusivity among Diverse English Proficiencies in a Content-based Course

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An instructor who merely lectures contributes little to engaging students in meaningful, communicative dialogue. Studies show that classroom interaction is one of the most important aspects of absorbing class content and creating an inclusive environment (e.g., Gay, G., 2002; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Johnson, M.A. & Chang, D., 2012). Moreover, success in culturally diverse classrooms depends on the degree to which there are strategies that encourage all students to speak and work together (DeVillar & Faltis, 1991). Group cooperation and stimulating exercises for dialogue can supplement understanding and inclusivity for a multitude of subjects. Establishing an interactive environment not only involves cognitive aspects of the learner, but also social and emotional aspects as well (Horwitz & Oxford, 1990). Communal activities provide opportunities for students in which they not only build knowledge, but also gain confidence as competent language users (Luk & Lin, 2007). Teachers who then creatively craft such activities into effective tools of communication have the means to switch on the learning lights for students, particularly for those with low motivation or language aptitudes. The following illustrations in this writing depict how two activities created a platform to generate interest and inclusivity among a multinational class of mixed English levels and motivation.

Before initiating the two exercises, an introductory discussion was appropriate to set the tone for a class that was relatively apathetic toward the philosophy of religion. An opening dialogue addressed the rationale that people accept a multitude of truths, facts, and theories based merely on unexamined assumptions, or simply called ‘blind faith’ in class. Comparing blind faith to children accepting almost anything an adult tells them, the class was asked, “How do you know that we breathe H₂O?” The only reason offered was that it is taught as fact. Further solicitations were made on beliefs and presumptions that are normally accepted as truth, although they have never actually been seen or proven through independent perceptions. The contributions the students offered included invisible things such as: time, love, the soul, Santa Claus, gamma rays, black holes, the ozone layer, the universe, and the confidence that the fourth floor of the building in which

they were in would support them without collapsing. It was determined, therefore, that a myriad of things are believed as fact merely because people either trust their natural instincts or, have been taught so by authoritative figures.

Activity One: Balloon Trick

The first activity illustrated blind faith and the use of trust by using a simple trick that contradicts common sense. The students were shown a large balloon, filled with water, and seven sharp pencils. The students were asked what they thought would happen if the balloon was suspended over someone's head and pierced with a pencil. They unanimously agreed that the balloon would burst and drench the person below. Assured by the instructor that the balloon would not break, one reluctant student sat under the balloon while a pencil was pushed through the balloon. The other students shouted in disbelief while the victim tightly shut her eyes and waited to get doused. To her relief and everyone's astonishment, the first pencil passed through the balloon without spilling any water. A number of students were unconvinced that the balloon would remain intact if more pencils were inserted, so six more pencils were passed through the balloon without effect. The balloon, now containing fourteen holes, spilled not a drop of water. This went against the class's collective common sense, but showed how faith in their teacher's word was necessary in order to believe that no water would spill. This demonstration was compared with other beliefs and truths established by faith or tradition, which produced animated dialogue throughout the classroom (Carlson, 2015).

Activity Two: Mine Field

For the second activity, the room was cleared of all desks and chairs and 50 balls were scattered on the floor. The students were divided into two teams, each of which chose several from their team to assemble at the front of the classroom. These later team members were blindfolded and told that the floor was a field and the balls were mines. They were instructed to walk to the other side of the room without stepping on a mine; doing so would metaphorically maim or kill the representative. The other students on their team would guide them through the field by verbally telling them where to step. With blind faith in their teammates, the blindfolded students uneasily moved forward. The guides became spirited as they shouted directions to their disoriented teammates. Despite the confusion, noise, and moving balls, most of the blindfolded students reached the other side of the room unharmed by trusting their guides. Although there were laughter and teasing, those who failed said that they felt disappointment and claimed that their collaborators had betrayed them.

The activity ignited interest and dialogue about the need sometimes to rely blindly on others for information, directions, and perspective. The activity showed both the importance of independently assessing certain beliefs and the feelings of betrayal that can arise when disillusioned by those we trust. Furthermore, the balloon trick in the first activity sparked an extended exchange about the role of science in faith and religion.

The two class activities helped the students to visualize the topic and begin comprehending complex ideas not taught in traditional English language courses. Although Philosophy of Religion was voted the least interesting topic at the start of the course, a post-class survey revealed that, on a scale of one to five, with one being “boring” and five being “interesting,” the class average that day was 4.6. When asked, “Did today’s class prompt you to think that the philosophy of religion/faith is important to your life?” 95.2% of the participants answered “yes,” compared to a previous “show of hands” in which less than half of the class believed religion was pertinent to their lives. To another question, “Did this topic stimulate you to think of things that you had not thought of previously?” 76.2% answered “yes,” while 23.8% answered “no.” Furthermore, when asked if they had developed their own ideas about faith and religion, 71.4% answered “yes” (Carlson, 2015). This survey shows that all students were able to incorporate into an inclusive, communicative class. People of various English aptitudes were grasping new concepts and engaging in rational dialogue with their peers on a level that some claimed they thought impossible beforehand.

Discussion

It was not a small accomplishment for English to be used for philosophical discussion in a multi-cultural setting; predominantly between people who did not share English as their native tongue. Rather than a minority of native speakers among the group idealizing English, the class became less fixed on linguistic accuracy and unconsciously more focused on communicative effectiveness. Furthermore, the less advanced students were able to participate in an all-encompassing class where they normally would have been unable to. Consequently, the overall intercommunication and spirit of inclusiveness reached a new level that was maintained for the remainder of the semester. Most importantly, the entertaining activities and the discussion that followed offered the opportunity for many to actively participate in spite of any language deficiencies.

Another result is that students started to develop a greater consciousness on different sets of issues in a language different from their own. These methods helped arouse the students to establish their own beliefs and values, empowering them to form new, independent conclusions. One of the highest objectives of the overall course was to offer all participants the opportunity to generate a greater awareness of vital life issues, ultimately contributing to their own ideology and abilities to independently draw their own conclusions. When the entire class affirmed that they made new, personal opinions or reaffirmed beliefs on that day, it revealed that this goal was accomplished.

Conclusion

For all levels and types of classes, the learning process should be stimulating, uncomplicated, and gratifying. Imaginative teachers are able to introduce constructive endeavors in any course to introduce complex ideas. Activities and games like the ones portrayed in this paper provide a spirited atmosphere, inclusiveness among members, and higher order thinking. Such enterprises improve participation, self-esteem, and allow

learners to see that there are various ways to approach a problem (Talak-Kiryk, 2010). Stimulating tasks that set examples of intellectual concepts are effective tools for learning as they offer students a hypothetical environment in which new ideas and thoughts are conceived. Such thoughts and actions particularly aid students with English as a foreign language to stretch their comprehension and to think flexibly. The ultimate result is a student-centered, interactive, inclusive, communal process where students realize their own capacities to comprehend, participate, and learn.

Author Note

Disclaimer: Although the core content and message differs, the two activities described and cited in this paper have been illustrated in one previous publication.

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To Thine Own Self Be True: Reflect your Way to a Stronger Sense of Self

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This spring, my teaching load included a course that introduced a variety of academic tools and strategies that would help our freshmen get the most out of their time as university students. I was looking forward to this opportunity because I did not capitalize on all available resources when I was a student and have regretted it on more than one occasion since. Perhaps I could inspire others to succeed where I had not. On the other hand, part of me laughed at the prospect, precisely because I had not utilized what was available to me. Was this not akin to me being the proverbial “pot” teaching a classroom of kettles how to avoid becoming black? What business did I have teaching students about how to talk to professors when I can count the number of conversations I initiated on one hand, let alone teach them about how to manage time effectively? Anyone who knows me understands that I seem to run on a slightly different clock to the rest of the world. In spite of all these thoughts, I welcomed the challenge and dove into creating the best learning environment possible. What I did not expect, however, was that the preparation and teaching of this course would lead me to learn as much about myself (both as a teacher and learner) as the students did about themselves.

I decided that the best place to start in this course was by asking students to evaluate what type of student they were and identify negative habits which may impact their academic lives. Inspiration for this came from *Ten Skills You Really Need to Succeed in College* by John Langan (2003), which contains a variety of activities and student anecdotes that help learners maximize their potential. Since I was asking students to reflect on themselves, I felt it only fair to subject myself to the same task, figuring that if I was going to provide examples anyway, I might as well model it for real and perhaps get something useful out of it. To some, this might come across as melodrama or hyperbole, but admitting to yourself, in front of your students, that you are somewhat disorganized, not a terribly dedicated language student, or that your preferred methods of escape from responsibilities are “I’ll do it later,” and “I’m too busy,” is humbling, to say the least. As I asked my students to self-reflect, I encouraged them to think of ways to overcome their hurdles rather than focus on the existence of them. We are all imperfect in some way, but the key is to become comfortable with your imperfections or make changes that render them moot. As I dismissed them from class, I asked myself, “Am I doing this? Am I comfortable with my own imperfections? Are they really flaws or is

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there something else going on here?” If I had to be honest, I could only answer the second question and it was no. I had no other answers...but I was prepared to start figuring them out.

After these reflective tasks, the syllabus turned to time management skills. I asked my class to bring in every course syllabus for the semester as well as any work schedules they might have. My goal for them was to map out major deadlines and events across the semester so they would know when in the term they would be busiest and when they would have the fewest pressures. Again I used myself as a model, showing them all the due dates for my class assignments that I would have to mark and return, conferences, meetings, Japanese lessons and more. As I filled in my own calendar, I was shocked by how much I was doing. The real eye-opener for me was when I projected it onto the screen in my classroom and one student said, “You’re SO busy.” Internally, I panicked. Had I been too honest? I had just clearly shown my students that I was overcommitted. What did I do that for? Maybe they would draw different conclusions about me than what I intended. “So be it,” I thought, and moved on to time management strategies. While my class practiced prioritizing, goal setting and managing interruptions, I did too. By understanding what I was doing to avoid tasks and when I work best, I could become better. Discomfort was the price I paid for honesty, but I pressed on, determined to improve myself and my teaching from this experience.

One result that has come from this is that I set due dates far more strategically than I previously did. I know when course-wide tests are held and schedule essay drafts to be turned in well ahead or well after so that I am not placing unrealistic expectations on my students. There is no need to stress them out any more than they already might be simply because I can. Also, I talk to my students about the deadlines. I discuss with them what else is going on in other classes and encourage them to come talk to me about extensions. I have always had a policy in which I will grant extensions on assignments to any student who asks before the due date, but now I fully understood why I did it. My primary goal had always been to help students become more comfortable approaching teachers, but this also made them think more responsibly about their time commitments. In order for someone to come ask for more time, they needed to have thought about how they put themselves into a position of needing to ask in the first place. If a student builds up the courage to ask and is met with understanding, I believe they are far less likely to repeat the mistake for the next assignment. For me, coming to terms with my own less than stellar time management skills has led me to be a more compassionate teacher as these young adults learn to develop theirs.

The most informative thing I learned about myself from this reflection is that I am, unabashedly, and now unapologetically, a night owl. I have always preferred to stay up late and sleep in, but I had never thought about how this affected my work. I am fully capable of teaching or lecturing in the morning, but I do not do my best prepping, writing or thinking until mid-afternoon or early evening, often long after my co-workers have left. I used to frequently be filled with anger or frustration that I was wasting time by not

doing work in every free moment; constantly berating myself with questions like, “Why can’t you just do this like any other normal person?” or “You’re an adult, get up and work in the morning!” However, as Tom Farrell said in his plenary at JALT2014, “self-reflection is not self-flagellation,” (plenary speech, November 23, 2014). I reconciled myself to the fact that I really do produce better work in the evenings than early in the day. I stopped fighting who I was and instead chose to capitalize on the moments when I felt creative and productive.

In the months since this realization, I have done, I feel, some of my best work as a teacher, scholar and, frankly, human being. Where before I had felt too exhausted or overwhelmed to read academic articles or think of possible publications, I now find myself brimming with ideas and outlines. Ideas which expand lessons in methodologically sound ways flow easily from brain to lesson plan. Using social media for Q&As or late-night emails responding to questions has deepened connections with my students in ways that I could not achieve before. All because I stopped pretending how I worked best and started actually doing my best instead. More students come talk to me than before about the issues or struggles they are facing as they learn to navigate university life. That is worth a few late night messages to me.

There is no doubt at least one of you out there is questioning whether making yourself vulnerable in front of your students is necessary. It is not for the faint of heart, but I found that it was an exhilarating experience. It has motivated me to do better work while bringing peace of mind about how I work. I strongly encourage you to do the same sometime. It may just change your view of things.

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A Change in Context, a Change in Beliefs

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Changing teaching contexts is common for many teachers and with each new experience they have the opportunity to learn something new. Borg (2003) writes “teacher cognitions and practices are mutually informing, with contextual factors playing an important role in determining the extent to which teachers are able to implement instruction congruent with their cognition” (p. 81). In this reflective paper, I will discuss how a change in teaching context allowed me to see a different aspect of student learning and forced me to reflect on my beliefs regarding struggle, student expectations, and the capabilities of students in the classroom.

Having taught in a number of different contexts (e.g. high school, corporate clients, vocational schools, and universities). I often had a lot of freedom to plan my lessons as I saw fit. However, most recently I taught in a program at a university with a unified curriculum. The course being described here was mandatory for all first year students and aimed to build their communication skills through discussion. While individual instructors could make choices as to how something would be presented, the stages of each lesson were largely set. Furthermore, there were certain constraints that dictated the teacher’s role in the class. One of these constraints was that teachers were not allowed to intervene during discussions. Other than the initial discussion question, the discussions were totally student-led and student-generated.

When I first started in the program, I was surprised to see that this policy of non-intervention was in place from day one. From that very first class, students were expected to do extended speaking activities like presenting for three minutes straight and having a 16-minute group discussion. The TOEIC scores of some of these students were low and were similar to those at my previous university and those students could not do what was required here so I wondered how these students would be able to do that. I was a bit worried that the curriculum was being overly ambitious.

The first several weeks went as you might expect. There would be some discussion but then awkward silence. There would also be communication breakdowns. In many of these cases, the students would turn to me looking for support. In my previous context, I would have intervened and jump-started their discussions by asking a question or would have tried to help clear up any miscommunications they were having. However, because of the policy of non-intervention, I simply waited quietly on the side. I made it clear to them that I would not be intervening and even went so far as to completely ignore any

looks they gave me by focusing on my notes. Some groups would just sit there in silence. Even in those cases I did not intervene but it was painful.

As the weeks went on, an interesting thing happened; the students started managing the discussions themselves. The students soon realized that nobody was going to save them in their discussion and that they would have to sit there uncomfortably unless they did something about it. As a result, they slowly but surely began to exercise their own agency. If it seemed like the discussion was coming to a lull they made their own questions in order to sustain the discussion. Language was still an issue but the students started to manage that better as well. They asked each other for help (e.g. How do I say _____ in English?). They also started to use communication strategies (e.g. circumlocution) in order to negotiate meaning. As a result of this newly found agency their confidence started to grow. Students who seemed so quiet and shy on the first day started to develop a voice. One episode in particular seemed to capture their development. The students were discussing what was important to be happy and one student tried to convey his idea. However, his English was not very clear so his partners did not understand him. One student asked him to repeat which he did. However, the group still could not understand. A different student then asked for an example. He gave an example then another member asked a follow-up question. After hearing his answer one of the students seemed to have caught on and tried to paraphrase by saying “So you mean...?” and he responded with “Yes!” Then the other members exclaimed “I understand!” All in all they had spent about six minutes trying to understand this one student’s idea but in the end, you could see this huge sense of accomplishment on all their faces as they were able to collaborate as a group to understand the idea. These students would never have done this at the start of the semester. Most likely they would have just sat there not understanding and not saying anything. One of my colleagues summed it up nicely when he stated “they went from timid and shy whisperers to confident and opinionated speakers”.

If I had not witnessed this transformation firsthand, I probably would not have believed it was possible. In my previous context I was afraid to do extended speaking activities like a 16-minute discussion. I tried it once or twice. The discussions lasted for several minutes and then an uncomfortable silence ensued. I felt like the activity had failed and it was too difficult for them to do it. I did not want to put the students in that position of sitting in silence since I thought it would demotivate them. I felt like more scaffolding was needed so I tried to structure the discussion. In this case, each student would speak for a minute after which their partners would ask them questions. This was something the students could do but this was not a real discussion. It was more like a presentation. It is funny how being forced into the constraints of not intervening allowed me to see that these types of extended speaking activities could work with lower level students. I better understood the value of struggle. In my previous teaching context I thought I was helping the students by managing and structuring their talk but after

teaching in this context I came to realize that perhaps I was holding them back and not providing the proper space for them to grow. I came to understand that the students were capable of more than I was giving them credit for and I needed to challenge them and allow them to do it on their own.

There seems to be a fine line between having the students struggle and forcing them to do something that is too difficult. As I reflect back, there were some things that I did as an instructor that I believe were key to maintaining the students' motivation and ensure the struggle was not overbearing. The first was maintaining high expectations while remaining positive. You could say I put my faith into the benefits of a non-intervention policy and therefore sought to maintain that as much as possible. I could have easily made it much easier for my students early in the semester but I chose not to. Instead I tried to make it clear to the students that it would be difficult in the beginning but that if they worked at it, it would get easier. After having gone through it once, it was easy for me to say in the following year, "Don't worry, your *senpai* had the same trouble as you last year but they got better. If you work hard, I know you will too." The second, and this goes hand in hand with the first, is that I continuously gave simple but actionable feedback. Some of the feedback came from the curriculum such as elaborating by giving examples or creating their own follow-up questions. Some of the feedback was social: asking for help or even helping another student to explain their idea. Some of the feedback was strategic—for example, doing the related homework readings or previewing the discussion question to gather ideas. The lower level students tended not to do these things but I tried to emphasize how beneficial it would be if they did do them. Many students saw the relevance of the feedback and made an effort to do it and thus were able to reap the benefits.

In conclusion, my change in context enabled me to see a different side of student learning. This was brought about as a result of not being allowed to intervene in extended speaking activities. This particular contextual constraint allowed me to directly experience the struggle that students go through and how through positive and actionable feedback, students can develop their own agency. This experience has given me new insights into my own teaching beliefs and practices and reminds me that through reflection I can further develop my cognition on teaching

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Teacher Auto-Pilot: Becoming Aware of Energy-Draining Habits

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Unlike most of my colleagues, I began my English language teaching career instructing international students in an English-speaking country. For four years before coming to Japan, I taught highly motivated students who had traveled to Australia and committed a good deal of money and effort to improving their English as quickly as possible. At that time, I wouldn't have believed that 'student motivation' was an area of concern in our field - I simply didn't teach any students who weren't hungry for knowledge and for the opportunity to practice. Knowing from experience just how rapidly students can improve their proficiency has no doubt contributed to the stress and frustration I've felt in western-Japanese university classrooms as I've watched low self-efficacy students needlessly squander opportunities to progress towards proficiency. It's really driven me crazy over the years.

However, this is a story of me suddenly discovering that many of the ways in which I'd been trying to help keep classes active, enjoyable, and effective, were perhaps responsible for more of the stress I had been experiencing than any of the student behaviours I was attempting to overcome. I happened across a sudden glimpse into ways of thinking that I'd developed unconsciously and that had turned into a kind of 'auto-pilot', and discovered that they were costing me lots of energy and a fair degree of my sanity. A "conversation with the self" that began taking place in class one Thursday afternoon profoundly changed the way I thought about my own teaching practice.

The opportunity to have this "conversation" came by way of a class of low-proficiency, and stubbornly low-motivation students in a compulsory English Conversation class at a university at which I was teaching part-time. "Stubbornly low-motivation"? Yes. We often hear and read about 'language learning strategies', those practices that effective language learners employ which facilitate learning and improvement. With this particular group of students, I was only ever seeing avoidance strategies. No matter how easy or mundane the task, conscious effort would be applied to finding a way to do less than what was being asked, and to render each activity meaningless. For example, rather than completing a simple dictation speaking/listening exercise with a partner, students would silently copy the passage from their partner's book into their own, and consider the task 'complete'. Rather than forming a group of three, if asked, a contest would seem to begin to see who could remain either alone or in

only a pair for the longest time. Trying to elicit answers voluntarily would result only in deathly silence. Asking students to confirm their understanding, even with only a nod or shake of the head, was completely out of the question; I would get neither. With this group, more than any of the many others I saw each week, the futility of my efforts to make the class worthwhile was driving me up the wall.

So, one Thursday afternoon towards the end of the first semester, in a less-than-optimum mental state after spending a good twenty minutes running around between different groups attempting to get a simple activity underway ('No, you're student "A", so you should be on page 85, and you're student "B" so you should be on page 95.' 'No, you should be on page 85, and you're on page 95.' 'No, you both can't be student "A".' 'No, you can't do this activity on your own, you need a partner.' 'No, it's pages 85 and 95. Everybody?! Pages 85 and 95!'. 'Haven't you bought the textbook yet? It's week 10!' 'No, student "A" is on page 85, not 80. Page 85. Are you listening? Page 85, OK?' 'No, the idea is to speak, not just copy the answers from your partner's book.' 'Who's "A" here and who's "B"?' 'No, see, you're both on page 95. You can't both be student "B".' 'No, the idea is to do it in English, not Japanese.' 'No, don't show him your book, you're supposed to read it to him.' 'No, it's unit 4, on page 85, not unit 1. We've done unit 1 already.' 'No, you can't both be student "A"!'. 'What? Why haven't you started yet? We've been doing this for twenty minutes!'), I waved my arms and called rather loudly for everyone to stop what they were doing, waited as they turned to me, and then began trying to think of something coherent to say. What could I possibly say that would get this activity on track? Twenty minutes in, was there any point trying? What to say, ... Coming up with nothing, I stood there breathing for a while...then a while longer, and eventually announced that I was going to take a break and that I'd be back in five minutes. I turned my back and walked out the door.

During a short miserable stroll around the halls of the university, my head hanging rather low and full of dark existential thoughts about the meaning of my chosen career, I pondered that I simply didn't possess anything in my arsenal of classroom management strategies that could stand up to the apathy and defiance I was contending with. Absolutely sick of constantly stooping so low to try to prop up students who seemed determined to sit in the mud of inactivity and indifference, it occurred to me that I simply didn't want to try any more. I could no longer shoulder responsibility for the success of the class when so much was stacked against me. My efforts were consistently pointless, my role was a farce; I was the only one in the room taking the class even remotely seriously, and I was certainly the only one putting in any effort. I decided that for ten weeks I'd done my share of heavy lifting, with no cooperation, and more or less resolved that I wasn't going to do any more. Yep! No more effort from me for this class. There was simply no point pouring any amount of effort into such a black hole of apathy, so I simply wasn't going to any more. Exactly what that meant, in a practical sense, was anybody's guess, but at some point I decided to go back into the classroom and find out.

I re-entered the room, which was as quiet as I'd left it, and announced to the crowd of blank, confused faces, my resignation. I told them that I'd quit, that after so many weeks I

still couldn't find ways to overcome their indifference and defiance, and that I simply didn't want to try any more. From now on, I wasn't going to try to make the class interesting or enjoyable, and I really didn't care whether or not they participated or got anything out of it. I then suggested that for the remaining twenty-five minutes of the lesson they could get started on the following week's homework if they'd brought their materials (yeah, right), and left it at that. No tomb has ever been as silent as that room was for the remainder of that period.

At this point I should note that I am all too aware that this is not exemplary behaviour from a teacher, and that it raises questions about professional and personal ethics. This story is not a defense of the course of action I found myself unexpectedly taking, it isn't even a story of how the class improved as a result of my shocking meltdown, which it quite predictably did. It's the effect that I didn't see coming that makes confessing it all worthwhile.

In a clearer frame of mind the following week, I started the class by re-confirming that I wouldn't be making any more effort to motivate them or to make the class enjoyable, and that I'd be administering the class from behind the lectern with an absolute disinterest in whether or not they participated. Everything, I said, was up to them. In my mind, my lesson plan was to remain the same as it would have been, and I was resolved to provide just as much opportunity to those who wanted to take it up, albeit without lifting a finger. We opened our textbooks, and when the dreaded speaking activities came along, off they went - with more English than the preceding ten weeks combined, with instant engagement, English almost exclusively, an uncanny ability to be on the correct page in a group of the right number of students, speaking, correcting each others' mistakes, laughing, smiling, enjoying themselves and playing, really playing with the language and the task. It was everything a teacher would want to behold in their classroom.

This could have been the happy ending, but things went in an unexpected direction for me. I had a commitment to uphold and was resolved to not leave the lectern... and thus began the most enlightening class I'd been in for years, as my own habitual teaching behaviours came bubbling to the surface and had to be put aside in favour of not moving. I found it almost impossible to sit still. To not move. To not go and engage with the students. To not stand up and mingle and monitor. To leave them alone, to not involve myself. To sit there, simply leaving them to themselves, and let them get on with the experience on their own, at their own pace, on their own volition, exactly as I'd threatened. Time after time my legs just pushed me off my chair towards the students, and I had to check myself and nail myself back down. I simply had to get amongst them and join them and engage with them and encourage them and relate to them and have fun with them and contribute to them and challenge them and make a joke and ask a question and tell a story and connect with them and my mind was racing, racing, chomping at the bit, demanding that I get out there and DO THINGS! GO AND DO "TEACHER" THINGS! STAND UP, GET OUT THERE, AND DO THINGS!

None of which, I was witnessing with my own eyes, would have contributed anything, because the lesson was already going better than ever, ever before! Everything was on the right track, and nothing needed to be changed. As I repeatedly sat myself back down on my chair after instinctively rising an inch off it, I became aware that not only was my mind demanding that I DO THINGS to help the class along, all of which were evidently unnecessary, but that habitually I'd only ever obeyed those urges more or less instantly, in good classes and bad. These weren't just sudden ideas, these were the routine actions that I habitually carried out almost any time I was teaching a class. A string of "I've got to..." sentences was filling my mind, a stream of helpful reminders of what a 'good teacher' would do. They were coming so thick and fast that I actually began to write them down as I noticed them, because as familiar and apparently 'right' as they instinctively felt, I'd never really reflected on them or questioned them before. Immediately, I could clearly see that in the immediate context they were asking me to fix what was not broken, and I had to confront the fact that things would be fine, and indeed better, if I disobeyed and discarded the wonderful advice I was dishing up to myself.

I've got to get out there and make this more fun. How can I make it more fun? (They were already obviously having fun. I didn't need to contribute anything; doing so would have interrupted it.)

I've got to get out there and make this less boring. How can I change this so it isn't so boring? (They weren't bored. It quite obviously wasn't boring to them. Why do I always feel that I've always got to amend things to make them more interesting?)

I've got to push this along a bit faster, to keep the energy up. How can I get the whole class to go a bit faster with this? (It was going at a perfectly good pace as far as the students were concerned. Indeed, what other pace but their pace would be the appropriate one? Why do I always want to go faster? Is faster really better?)

I've got to highlight that language point more. How can I get them to see that language point better? (They were already practicing with it, and obviously comprehending it.)

I've got to find a way to extend this when they've finished. What useful follow-up activity can I come up with in the next 60 seconds? Quick! (Why? When it's done it's done. I had a textbook full of other things to do.)

I've got to find a way to make this more memorable. What can I do that will help this really stick in their minds? (Really? There had never been a lesson like this. They were not going to forget it! Not every single activity has to be a life-changer, anyway!)

All of this brought to light the fact that I'd habitually been acting on these 'urges' at other times when doing so had been unnecessary and pointless. Having stepped out of my usually busy 'teacher' role, I was seeing the programming of my own 'teacher auto-pilot' setting, the practices and procedures that I'd gradually put in place and which had become unconscious second-nature. They did have their basis in good teacher practice and a concern for good outcomes, but their immediate necessity was questionable, they

were all really, really demanding, and they simply assumed, unquestioningly, that things needed to be enhanced and rectified! Why was my mind so determined to make me work more than was necessary?

Despite the best efforts of my nagging mind, I did manage to get through the lesson without moving from the lectern! And despite being something of a weird exercise, the class went as well as if I'd been administering a model lesson with a keen group. Over the next few days, as I went back to teaching more cooperative classes, in a more sensible style, I kept the paper I'd been scribbling my thoughts onto and found that I was able to add to it often, as I caught my auto-pilot mind compelling me to immediately spend effort doing things to fix imagined problems. Now, I began to ask "Really?" as I spotted each one, and very often, the answer turned out to be "No, actually. Not really at all." They were not arising out of a sensible appraisal of what I was seeing in front of me, but out of some strange kind of fear that things were going to go terribly wrong in the next instant if I didn't DO things:

- This isn't engaging enough. Make it more engaging.
- I need to be out there giving positive feedback so they stay keen.
- Go and monitor the next group, quickly. They need to be monitored. And then the next group.
- Go and encourage them. Point out to them that they can do this.
- Be *genki*. Students like *genki*. A teacher should be *genki*.
- Smile more. I have to look like I'm enjoying this or else they won't.
- I need to show them that this can be fun. Try to make them enjoy this more.

No wonder I was stressed every day and obliterated by the weekend. Many of these auto-pilot ideas didn't stand up to even an elementary inquiry (do students really need their teacher to be *genki* all the time?), and yet I'd been acting on them for a long, long time.

Of course, it's not as if I never again got amongst the students and engaged with them, or hurried them along, or extended and enhanced activities. I began, though, to do so with awareness, and only when I'd given it a moment of thought and determined that such an intervention was truly necessary, and likely to be effective and helpful. If it wasn't, I learned to hang back, let things flow on their own, and conserve my energy.

Thus, taking the terribly unprofessional and borderline-unethical step of "quitting" in the middle of a class in week ten of first semester led to me making a profound discovery that enhanced my teaching practice, made my life a lot easier, and without a doubt improved my classes. Engaging in a "conversation with the self", or rather stepping back and witnessing a very one-sided conversation that had been going on unawares in my own mind, helped me to find sources of stress, frustration, and exhaustion within myself, where, thankfully, I could truly begin to address them.

Reflection through Lesson Planning

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In the TED-CUE presentation it was my intention to bring together two factors that collectively had a great impact on my days as firstly, a trainee teacher, my continuation into a teacher-trainer and the subsequent years until present - where I teach English at a university in the Kansai region of Japan.

The first aspect I touched on was the importance of creating lesson plans, adhering to them and reflecting briefly on them on a daily, rather than weekly, monthly or semester-end basis. Both lesson and lesson-planning reflection were key areas that were strongly encouraged and evaluated in the CELTA course I attended and completed in 2000. The importance of reflection and self-assessment left a lasting impression and this remained with me during my early years in Japan as a trainer and syllabus designer at a major English school franchise in Osaka.

The second aspect I spoke about was a planning methodology known as ARC (Authentic, Restrictive, Clarification). A very simple yet effective method of teaching is achieved by using the ARC approach, as outlined by Jim Scrivener in his book *Learning Teaching* (1990). In my brief lecture in Tsukuba, I had hoped to demonstrate how it was possible to plan a lesson using this approach, regardless of the type of content and, how the ARC approach lent itself to the practice of meaningful reflection.

To further clarify the ARC system, the method advocates using the three ‘stages’ in varying orders to present a successful and engaging English lesson to learners in any class regardless of student proficiency or targeted language. The Authentic exercise stage allows students to do an exercise that involves communication with language fluency practice that relates directly to real-life and is meaningful to them. It allows the students to decide what to do and say for themselves. In a Restrictive stage, students do an exercise as directed by the teacher to practice grammar structure and form, increase their accuracy and demonstrate their ability toward a given language point. The Clarification (and focus) stage involves the teacher demonstrating, explaining, illustrating or pre-teaching the new vocabulary, grammar, etc. in order for the students to complete the first exercise.

A common sequence in a typical lesson may proceed as C, R, C, A, C., although this is certainly interchangeable. Several years ago, when asked to design and implement a “uniform instruction style” for new teachers to Japan, I adopted and promoted the ARC

system because of its simplicity and relatively smooth and sequential integration into lesson planning.

At the TED-CUE forum, I also wished to emphasize that a daily assessment did not need to be complicated, time-consuming or a burden on the already hectic life of an English teacher. Most of us have multiple classes to prepare, teach and grade, often with very limited time. Because of these reasons, I felt it was important to make this daily reflection as unobtrusive as possible whilst trying to effectively gauge the success of a given class. In addition, the results or realizations of this assessment did not necessarily require to be published, shared, documented or form the basis of any rubrics (although they certainly may be). In essence, they are for personal growth and serve to reinforce one's current practices in the classroom, to seek improvement where necessary and to further define our role as an effective and proactive educator.

At the university I teach at, and in many other Japanese universities, students are asked to complete a survey at the end of every semester in which they are given the opportunity to comment on class and textbook content, the syllabus, and most importantly, address numerous questions relating to both the teacher and the teaching. It was from this questionnaire that I formed an idea of the type of questions I wanted to ask myself at the completion of each of my classes. Some of the class survey questions translated from Japanese are as follows:

1. Did you feel the motivation and enthusiasm of the teacher of this class?
2. Did the teacher display effort, such as in preparation and review?
3. Did the teacher follow the contents of the syllabus?
4. Were the textbooks, handouts and presentations appropriate and/or relevant?
5. Did the teacher explain all matters clearly and check your comprehension?
6. Was the teacher's time allocation for tasks and activities appropriate?
7. How do you evaluate this class as a whole?
8. Did you better understand the course content at the completion of the semester?
9. Are you free to question the teacher regarding language points anytime?
10. Did the teacher motivate you to want to study more in the future?

Obviously to try and address all of these factors after every class is neither practical, nor constructive as they cover a comprehensive area of teaching throughout the entire semester. Many, however relate to the importance of effective lesson planning on the teacher's behalf – including opportunities for authentic and restrictive practice, and satisfactory clarification of language points. For this reason I wanted to adopt the overall relevance of this criteria and transfer it onto a daily reflective 'document' that could be completed by simply circling a number as soon as the class finished.

Daily reflective feedback form

	Unsuccessful	Mostly successful	Very successful
Authentic	1	2	3
Restrictive	1	2	3
Clarification	1	2	3
Timing/pace	1	2	3
Materials used in prior classes	1	2	3
New material (untried)	1	2	3
Other teacher or observed	1	2	3
Student feedback	1	2	3

As I believe the students themselves are undoubtedly the most accurate ‘barometer’ of a lesson, successful or otherwise, I value their input and always include this in my daily self-assessment. Prior to the commencement of classes every semester I make a point of conveying to them the importance of their feedback before, during and after every class. I strongly feel this benefits the students in forming a trusting relationship with me, as well as increasing their own confidence as an important and contributing member of the class. I usually allow 10 minutes prior to the end of every lesson for the students to approach me with a number of 1 ~3 relating to how they found the lesson. I immediately add the ranking of individual students to my score sheet but usually work off an average.

As you can see on the form I have included, in addition to the student ‘score’ on the overall success of the class, there are areas for the inclusion of ARC elements, lesson timing and the materials I used. Another important addition to my self-reflective form (if applicable) is the opinion of a peer or other observer. Their ‘ranking’ is based on the

‘general’, overall outcome of the class rather than a comprehensive review. The number they have chosen to give me always stimulates discussion at a later opportunity. I am a firm believer in the importance of observing and being observed by other teachers as often as possible. Not to make judgments or criticisms but rather to learn new approaches which aid in invigorating our lessons. Observations challenge our pre-existing ideas or methodology and help us to continue our reflection on how to become a constantly evolving and improving teacher.

One could certainly argue this system is particularly broad and lacks specifics. I would absolutely agree with you. It was never my intention to place a lot of information on paper. What I wanted to do was to provide “hot” feedback on my class directly after its conclusion. A kick-start. A first impression is often a lasting one. From the information I gather, I reflect upon it in greater detail as the week progresses, often wondering why certain things worked and others failed miserably. Sometimes I’m disappointed or disillusioned, sometimes pleasantly surprised, other times overjoyed. It’s a constant recycling of ideas, methods - and acting upon them to the best of your ability. As I mentioned earlier, this daily reflection is personal. It is there to help us believe in ourselves and to encourage us to keep learning. I honestly believe that if we feel we are doing the absolute best for ourselves and our students, then that is probably the case. Let’s keep striving for that “absolute best”.

Reflective Practice: Stories from the Writing Center

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Reflection is an integral part of developing a culture of learning and growth for all those involved in the writing center. Geller et. al (2007) describe a writing center culture in which “Opportunities for reflection are built in to tutors’ schedules ...” and “Tutor’s reflective writing is encouraged and valued” (p. 52). This presentation will cover three forms of reflective practice used in a university writing center in Japan and share how these inform both the tutoring and training processes.

This writing center was established with the purpose of continuing to improve undergraduate students’ English academic writing skills in a supportive learning environment. The tutors who work in the writing center are undergraduate international students who spend one or two semesters studying Japanese language and Asian studies. Tutors undergo a competitive interview process and are selected from a variety of majors and diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In this way, students can share their particular areas of expertise with each other and can build upon their existing knowledge base.

At the beginning of each semester, an orientation session is held to introduce new tutors to the basics of conducting effective tutoring sessions and working with Japanese students’ writing. Over the course of the semester, reflective practice is used as an ongoing part of the staff’s professional development process because the majority of learning occurs on the job and because tutoring is an educational experience for the tutors. The three forms of reflective practice utilized in the writing center are as follows: discussion, professional development checklist and daily report form.

The layout of the Writing Center is conducive to casual discussion because there is a large table which contains the materials necessary for tutors to do their job, and this is also where the staff members tend to gather in between appointments. As a result, this area serves as a place for the tutors to interact, ask questions, and obtain feedback from each other and the supervisor, thus providing an ideal opportunity for immediate reflection and discussion. One tutor stated that throughout her experience tutoring, she collected information based on the verbal and nonverbal feedback that she received from

the tutees. After reflecting on this information through informal discussion with her peers she said that was able to improve her tutoring, especially managing time more efficiently and prioritizing areas of concern during the tutoring sessions.

Another tool for reflective practice is the Professional Development Checklist; it not only lists recommended readings for tutors, but also includes space for tutors to choose relevant resources on their own. During any free periods or between appointments, tutors have the opportunity to peruse a selection of textbooks and reference books on topics related to writing, tutoring, and grammar. One tutor remarked on the usefulness of this activity by stating, “Reading the tutoring books was helpful in providing me with the vocabulary necessary to explain what I intuitively know within the framework of how a second language learner would understand it.” Some of the more popular books are the *MLA style manual* and *APA publication manual*, *ESL writers: A guide for writing center tutors*, and *An A-Z of common English errors for Japanese learners*.

The daily report form prompts tutors to reflect not only on what they did during their shifts, but also what successes and difficulties they may have had. Specifically, the tutors have two main areas for reflection on their work in the Writing Center. The first area is reflecting on how to make the tutoring session more time-efficient and better organized for the student. The second area is identifying areas in which the tutor wants to improve his or her knowledge. The tutors use the forms for written reflections on their learning in these areas. An experienced tutor pointed out that even though the daily report forms “force you to reflect,” they do provide structure. She recommends making the form more open-ended so that tutors feel less confined and are able to express their thoughts in their own style; the current form requires tutors to report each of their daily activities and the amount of time spent on each one.

The combination of these activities encourages professional development for the Writing Center tutors and more effective tutoring sessions for the students. The tutor’s knowledge and skills grow from the beginning to the end of the semester, and as a result of their increased confidence, tutors are eager to make further contributions to the writing center; tutors have taken the initiative to create training guides for future tutors and tutoring materials for common areas of concern. Reflective practice, specifically discussion, the daily report form, and the professional development checklist, have been invaluable tools for the development of the writing center tutors.

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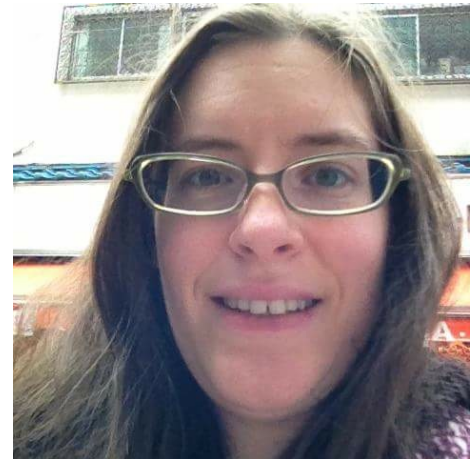
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