

Explorations in Teacher Education

JALT Teacher Education and Development SIG Newsletter

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And Now a Word from...The Editor

Hello and welcome to the Autumn edition of Explorations in Teacher Education (Volume 19, Issue 3), the newsletter of the Teacher Education and Development Special Interest Group (TED SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT).

This issue of the newsletter has five features. We have a report about the recent JALT national conference by the SIG Coordinator, Deryn Verity. We have three articles and another entry in the (infrequent) series of travel features by Michelle Segger. The articles are by regular contributor Hideo Kojima and first-time contributors Tanja McCandie and Jun Suzuki. Suzuki's article is a reflection on a ten-year teaching career written while the author is enjoying a well-earned sabbatical at Aichi University of Education. McCandie's article provides some insight into transferring one's TEFL skills to a different situation, and the difficulties involved in doing so. In her case she worked in London for a year. As I went to University in London and did my CELTA in Highgate in 1993, I have often wondered what it would be like to work in the TEFL field there and McCandie's article has provided some of the answers. Kojima's article is something of a follow on from the article published in Volume 19, Issue 1 on promoting professional development in Japanese secondary school EFL teachers. This time he examines the understanding of plurilingualism and learner autonomy amongst a group of teachers on a Teacher Certification Renewal System (TCRS) program.

Hopefully, the travel feature will encourage you to take advantage of the beautiful countryside readily accessible to us here in Japan, and if you were to relieve some of your stress while you were doing so, I'm sure it would be no bad thing.

The SIG website has been revamped in recent times and if you would like to read some back issues of the newsletter you can access them there also (<http://jalt.org/ted/home.html>).

Hope you enjoy the issue.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Simon Lees

Editor,

Explorations in Teacher Education

TED at JALT 2011: A weekend to remember

reported by Deryn Verity, TED SIG Coordinator

TED made a splash this year at the national conference in Tokyo's National Youth Center near Yoyogi Park; not only did we co-host (with CUE) eminent Featured Speaker Professor Keith Johnson (Professor Emeritus, Lancaster University, UK), but we also designed, organized, and co-sponsored a joint SIG Forum event that had people talking!

Featured Speaker Keith Johnson

We are very happy to report the successful visit of our invited speaker, **Professor Keith Johnson**, who came to JALT as a Featured Speaker co-sponsored by TED and CUE SIGs. In that role, he gave a much-in-demand Featured Speaker Workshop on the question of "What Makes a Good Teacher? Studying Expertise in Teaching Skills." The workshop was fully subscribed well before the conference began, and in the event, the room (for 40) held up to 60 participants, many of them standing for the entire 90 minutes (photo 1). Besides showing some clips of good and not-so-good choices made by teachers in actual classes, Keith encouraged lots of workshop discussion by setting brief but stimulating tasks for his audience.



Photo 1



Photo 2

Continuing the discussions into a later time slot, Keith held an open Q&A session on the topic of teacher expertise later that afternoon; this was attended by approximately 25 interested people and the audience was just as enthusiastic as before. Keith himself was very pleased at the quality of the participation and questions, by the way! Several interesting questions were raised and hashed out, including how we define "good teaching" and what, if anything, cultural traditions (such as

sleeping in class) have to do with our perceptions of successful teaching and lesson planning.

Digital Kamishibai: The First Picture Show

Keith also participated in our successful joint SIG Forum event, nimbly organized by Peter Hourdequin, TED's Program Chair. Based on an idea that grew out of a lunchtime conversation between me, Peter, and Dexter da Silva (from CUE) at the summer EBM, the Forum combined the various strengths of Pecha Kucha (limited time frame, limited number of slides); technology (presenters were encouraged to use their iPads, though paper and laptops were quite welcome); and kamishibai (picture story-based talking; intimate crowds of less than ten viewers; humor and interaction part of the show). Calling it "digital kamishibai," we invited people to share episodes from their teaching lives that somehow touched upon the theme of expertise.

Ten presenters signed up, about half from TED and half from CUE, and they presented their stories to various groupings of the audience (of c. 45 people, some of whom drifted in or out, given the 90-minute time frame). Everybody seemed delighted with the unique format, and Peter had worked out a helpful schedule that allowed the presenters to catch many, if not all, of the other picture shows. Stories ranged from tales of "epic failure" to "going paperless" to "found art in ESL." The post-show discussion periods, while short, were vital to the sense of vibrant interaction that characterized the event. Keith Johnson sat in at all the presenting stations, heard all the stories, and closed the event with a brief commentary that reviewed his impressions (glowing) of the stories and the format. At least two attendees promised to borrow the idea to use at other events, and if digital kamishibai becomes all the rage, TED can take – if not total creative credit – the lion's share.

TED's next conference event will be a joint mini-conference, held in conjunction with Shizuoka's JALT chapter, in late June (in Shizuoka City). Peter Hourdequin will be posting details, including a call for participation, on our newly active website (jalt.org/ted), so anyone who is interested should check there early in 2012. We'll also be participating in PanSIG, as we usually do, and hope that TED membership will join that conference, held this year in Hiroshima in mid-June.

Exploring Understanding of Plurilingualism and Learner Autonomy: A Group of Japanese Secondary School EFL Teachers in a TCRS Program

Hideo Kojima, Hirosaki University, <kojima (at) cc.hirosaki-u.ac.jp>

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is part of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR 2001), which is a recent outcome of a long-term commitment to promote the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe (Kohonen, 2002). In this follow-up study of a group of Japanese secondary school teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) who took part in a Teacher Certification Renewal System (TCRS) program at a Japanese university (Kojima, 2011), the author investigated their perceptions of plurilingualism and learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP. In the program the participants discussed these two concepts and the relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in their communities of learning/practice. This explored their understanding of plurilingualism and autonomy, and the majority of them considered the potential of portfolio-oriented EFL instruction and the reciprocal relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, taking into account various constraints in their teaching settings. Innovation in teacher education needs to be promoted in language education in Japan.

Purpose of the study:

In order to promote plurilingualism and learner autonomy in language education in European countries, the CEFR proposes the ELP as a pedagogical tool for language learners to record their individual learning experiences and to report the language learning outcomes to the relevant stakeholders. "The ELP-oriented pedagogy is a *paradigmatic shift* from the knowledge transmission model of teaching towards a *transactional, negotiated learning model*" (Kohonen, 2004, p. 42). In this educational change one of the goals of the TCRS program is to shed more light on what is meant by plurilingualism/learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP and at the same time to inspire the participants to reconsider their teaching philosophy in EFL instruction. In this follow-up study on professional development of EFL teachers, the author aims to explore their understanding of plurilingualism and learner autonomy in relation to teacher autonomy and collegiality in their institutions.

The research questions are:

- 1) What do the participants think of plurilingualism/learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP?
- 2) What do the participants think of autonomy in their communities of learning/practice?

Method

Participants

The study involved 40 lower/upper secondary school EFL teachers. They took part in the 12-hour (two days) TCRS program in 2011 and learned various key concepts of innovation in ELT, including plurilingualism and learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP. They were advised to promote their professional development more autonomously.

Materials and procedure

In order to get to know each other, the participants introduced themselves and their institutions at the beginning of the program. Then, they learned a variety of new concepts in language education, such as “the paradigm shift from teaching-centeredness to learning-centeredness”, “plurilingualism and learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP”, “communities of learning/practice”, and “learner and teacher autonomy.” They exchanged their beliefs as EFL teachers and discussed various educational issues in EFL learning and teaching, including the potential to promote plurilingualism and autonomy in their teaching contexts. At the end of the program they were asked to write their answers to the following questions: “*What do you think of plurilingualism/learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP?*” and “*What do you think of autonomy in your communities of learning/practice?*” Their answers were analyzed and discussed by the author.

Results and Discussion

In the following sections the participants’ claims in Japanese were translated into English by the author.

Participants’ perceptions of plurilingualism in the CEFR/ELP

It seemed to be rather difficult for the participants to understand the concept of plurilingualism in two days, and a few of their answers were simply parroting what they were told in the program. The majority of them claimed plurilingualism to be essential as an integrated language pedagogy in Europe:

I think of plurilingualism as a language policy which is essential for European nations to live interdependently in the global community. They need to collaborate with one another politically, economically, and educationally in the process of European integration. In particular, in order to integrate education systems among nations and to promote human mobility in Europe, the common basis in language pedagogy would be significant. The educational background of the language policy in Europe seems to be very different from that in Japan.

(Teacher A)

We need to recognize the background to the CEFR/ELP in Europe and then to consider the possibility of contextualizing plurilingualism in Japan. One of the negative claims was as follows:

In Japan we can usually communicate with each other only in Japanese. Thus, it is not necessary for Japanese people to integrate plural languages or to master plural foreign languages. In this circumstance we cannot expect the ample development of the concept of plurilingualism. (Teacher B)

Many Japanese people might agree with Teacher B because they can live using only Japanese language in the society. Plurilingualism needs to be promoted through education from primary through tertiary. This may be possible in Europe, but in Japan there are a variety of constraints, such as exam-oriented language instruction and no systematic language policy.

However, the principles of CEFR/ELP were supported by more participants than I had expected. They seemed to understand the close connection between language and culture. Teacher C answered as follows:

Japanese people should reconsider how to expand Japanese language and cultural competence. In learning English, we usually use linguistic and cultural knowledge, including knowledge of Japanese language and culture. We should not learn languages, each taken in isolation. We interact with someone of different cultural origins on the basis of a conscious awareness of our own language and cultural origins. In this way, we need to develop plurilingual competence in intercultural interaction. (Teacher C)

As Teacher C pointed out, plurilingual competence expands language and cultural competence in a purposeful way in intercultural interaction, producing a more skilled language learner and user (Cândida, 2005).

Teacher D suggests that there are many dialects all over Japan in relation to plurilingualism:

I basically agree with the concepts of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. We can develop them through intercultural communication in dialects in Japan as well as in Europe. It is often the case for me to switch from one dialect to another in communication with others. Plurilingualism contributes to promoting intercultural communicative competence among Japanese people. (Teacher D)

The author's university has many students from all over Japan and from abroad. They enjoy their

campus life using different Japanese dialects and foreign languages. Plurilingual competence involves a complex, multiple language competence.

Japanese people usually use the competence in the mother tongue and knowledge and skills in a foreign language for the learning and use of other languages (Cândida, 2005). They tend to regard native speakers as their ultimate models. From the perspective of plurilingualism, this idea needs to be changed:

I have been learning and teaching English for a long time. I know it is an impossible dream to be a perfect user of English like a native speaker. I appreciate plurilingualism which supports the idea that individual competence is partial. Japanese EFL teachers should not expect students to be perfect in EFL learning. (Teacher E)

The CEFR describes language use and learning as competence-based, but all knowledge of language is partial. "It is always incomplete, never as developed or perfect in an ordinary individual as it would be for the utopian 'ideal native speaker'" (CEFR, 2001, p. 169). With regard to the concept of partial competence, EFL teachers should be aware of the following two notions (Heyworth, 2004, p.15):

- The partial competence including the whole repertoire of languages and competences puts more stress on developing strategies and skills for "learning to learn languages" so that learners can apply these skills to learning or acquiring other languages.
- Learning a language is not an "all or nothing" understanding. The descriptors in the CEFR provide descriptions of partial competence which can be used by teachers as a source for discussion of objectives with learners, including identification both of what they would like to learn and what is not needed.

Participants' perceptions of learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP

As the author suggested in the previous study on secondary school EFL teachers' professional development (Kojima, 2011), in spite of various anti-autonomous forces in the real teaching contexts, almost all the participants in the present program recognized the importance of autonomous learning in EFL education in Japan. One of them claimed as follows:

This time I learned the definition of learner autonomy for the first time. Learner autonomy seems to be a main goal of education as a whole. Thus, teachers need to promote learner autonomy inside and outside the classroom, taking into account various learner factors. As the CEFR/ELP emphasizes learner autonomy in language learning, I believe autonomy is

essential for life-long learning of foreign languages. (Teacher F)

The introduction of learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP helped the participants to enhance their awareness of the importance of learner autonomy in language learning. However, Teacher G, who had paid much attention to exam-oriented EFL instruction at her upper secondary school, had no practical idea about promoting learner autonomy:

In today's Japanese educational contexts, realizing learner autonomy seems to be almost impossible. I do not know how to help learners to be responsible for their own learning, how to implement strategies instruction, and how to evaluate learner autonomy. The ELP may be an effective tool, but portfolio-oriented EFL instruction will not be popular among my school teachers. (Teacher G)

Learner autonomy is a complex concept, deriving from what might be termed a philosophy of education (Newby, 2010). It should be noted that there might be a big gap between language teaching experts who have reviewed literature on learner autonomy and school classroom teachers who have very little understanding of autonomous learning. Thus, teacher educators need to help school teachers to be able to promote autonomous learning in their daily classes.

As for portfolios, some participants had practical ideas, but some had no ideas. Teacher H felt it difficult to implement and evaluate portfolios in the classroom:

I hear that the introduction of portfolios into education has gradually been popular in Japan, in particular in primary and tertiary education. However, secondary school teachers tend to be unfamiliar with portfolios. Exam-oriented EFL instruction may not go well with portfolios. I need to ask myself a variety of questions, such as "What is the purpose of portfolio-oriented instruction?" and "How can the individual pieces of work or the portfolio as a whole be graded?" (Teacher H)

Discussing the ELP as a tool to promote self-directed language learning, about 30 participants agreed with portfolio-oriented EFL instruction, although they were conscious of various constraints:

We need a new approach to promoting learner autonomy in Japan. In this program I could recognize the three main components of the ELP and a variety of properties as a tool to promote learner autonomy, plurilingualism, and pluriculturalism. The ELP might be very useful for us secondary school teachers to see what students have done before. In order to promote positive thinking behind "I can" descriptors and reflective, autonomous language

learning, many Japanese learners and teachers have to change their learning and teaching styles. (Teacher I)

Teacher J, who had been implementing a reflective approach in his class, expected the government to develop a national project:

I have encouraged my students to write journals in English or to work on learning portfolios. Thus, I am interested in the components of the ELP: language passport, language biography, and dossier. However, I need to understand the pedagogic/reporting function of the ELP. The ELP proposes a reflective approach to promoting learner autonomy and a tool for documenting communicative proficiency related to the criterion-referenced level descriptors. The Japanese ELP project should be conducted as a national project. (Teacher J)

As the government emphasizes the implementation of portfolios in education, the full potential of portfolios is now being explored in Japan. However, portfolios present particular challenges to teachers: clarity of purpose, logistical matters, time for portfolios, authenticity or authorship, assessor training, and grading and evaluation. As Newby (2010) points out, the ELP requires a substantial change in existing teaching practice, and teachers must accept a shift to more learner-orientation. In addition, the ELP might be considered as an “overload”, logistical, and financial problem of ensuring access to the ELP.

Teaching portfolios as well as learning portfolios should be developed and utilized interdependently in each educational context. Both will be useful for developing autonomy in language learning and teaching in Japan. In the TCRS program the participants were encouraged to improve their professional competence and autonomy, and to collaborate with their colleagues and develop effective communities of learning/practice.

Participants' perceptions of autonomy in communities of learning/practice

Almost all the participants claimed that both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy should be promoted interdependently in communities of learning/practice. As the author found in the previous study (Kojima, 2011), the participants understood the importance of promoting learner and teacher autonomy through positive interdependence:

If teachers would like to develop learner autonomy in the classroom, it is essential for them to be responsible for their own teaching and to have positive attitudes towards practice and research as professional teachers. Most of my students would like to express themselves in English and enjoy communication with foreigners. In order to develop learner and teacher

autonomy, I am sure that collaboration among teachers is essential. (Teacher K)

The participants were likely to value highly, good relationships with their students and colleagues. Some of them were promoting positive interdependence in their communities of learning/practice, but some worried about the way to foster cooperation/collaboration among students and teachers:

I am usually teaching English with native/non-native teachers at my lower-secondary school. This sort of team-teaching is very effective in advising individual students in the classroom. The door of the classroom is always open and anybody can observe the class. Once a week the English department has a meeting and discusses effective approaches to ELT. In order to promote learner and teacher autonomy, I would like to improve my EFL instruction through collaboration with other teachers. (Teacher L)

Teacher L had positive attitudes towards collaboration among EFL teachers. In addition, a lower-secondary school teacher was building a community of practice among teachers:

In order to promote professional growth among teachers, my school principal encourages us to foster the mutual exchange of classroom observations every week. I observe the students' attitudes towards learning in the classroom. I have had many findings, observing students' positive interdependence in communities of learning. I would like to contribute to the promotion of collegiality, feeling a greater sense of belonging to my school. (Teacher M)

In contrast, an upper-secondary school teacher referred to the difficulty of building a good community, where learner and teacher autonomy could be developed:

Exam-oriented EFL instruction is popular at my school and some reading/writing strategies are taught in the EFL classroom. However, students tend to lack self-regulated learning skills. Individual teachers teach in their own way and would not like to share their educational goals, technical knowledge, and pedagogical skills with one another. In order to promote students' critical thinking and self-expression in the social context, I am implementing cooperative learning in my own classes. I would like to promote learner and teacher autonomy through cooperation/collaboration at my school. (Teacher N)

The majority of the participants acknowledged EFL teaching to be a very worthwhile and rewarding endeavor in today's global society. However, they also claimed that there were various difficult problems in their teaching contexts. An upper-secondary school teacher, who majored in literature, told me after the program:

I should have learned more technical knowledge and pedagogical skills at my university. From now on, I would like to develop my professional competence and autonomy to enable me to collaborate with other teachers for innovation in ELT. (Teacher O)

Teacher O was able to understand that the explicit descriptors in the CEFR would provide a means of assessing language competence in a systematic way, but it was very difficult for her to help students participate actively in the reflective and autonomous learning process. She was advised to reflect on her EFL instruction in the daily classroom and to share and discuss her new approaches with her colleagues. A variety of in-service teacher education programs need to be developed for professional growth.

Conclusion

In Japan, CEFR is likely understood in terms of the Can-do list, but plurilingualism, pluriculturalism, and the other components such as learner autonomy and the ELP are not well understood (Sakai & Jimbo, 2011). Thus, in this paper the author has analyzed the participants' perceptions of plurilingualism/learner autonomy in the CEFR/ELP, and their perceptions of learner and teacher autonomy in their communities of learning/practice. In the TCRS program for secondary school EFL teachers, the author introduced the CEFR and the ELP as a tool to promote plurilingualism, pluriculturalism, and learner autonomy. The participants discussed these concepts and the relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, taking into consideration their own teaching contexts. The majority of them understood the significance of learning a foreign language and the close connection between language and culture.

Regarding learner autonomy in the ELP, about 30 participants expected that portfolio-oriented language instruction would promote Japanese students' autonomy, even if it might be very difficult to implement portfolios like the ELP. Moreover, they claimed that learner autonomy and teacher autonomy should be developed interdependently as the previous research (Kojima, 2011) also indicated. As for the significance of learner/teacher autonomy, the participants' teacher cognition seemed to be enhanced in the program. The next issue is how they can realize autonomy in their communities of learning/practice.

The author helped the participants to consider the principles of the CEFR/ELP as critically as possible. They needed new information about innovation in ELT. In order to promote their professional competence and autonomy, their continuing professional development should be enhanced through a variety of teacher education programs. This on-going support would help them to explore their leadership, including teamwork and collegiality in their institutions.

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Thinking of Heading Home? A Personal Anecdote of Looking for ELT Work in London, England

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Abstract

After years of working in Japan, the downturn of the Japanese economy, the population decline and the cutting of classes at the high school and university level, some English teachers are thinking that perhaps now is the “make or break” time and are considering heading home. We all know that times are tough back home, and we all know finding a job back home could be difficult. However, are people really aware of just how competitive the ESL/EFL world is back home? Do people know what their qualifications, or lack thereof, really mean when it comes to pursuing a teaching career in native English speaking countries? This paper will look at the experience I had when looking for employment in London, England, the qualifications you realistically should have if thinking of going home, the practical training options one has while living in Japan and the reality of working in ESL in England.

Introduction

I walked into the teacher agency head office a little apprehensive as to what I was getting myself into. Having heard all the horror stories about working in the school system in England, I was having second thoughts about my decision to become a substitute teacher for the year I was going to be in London. Qualified to work as an Overseas Trained Teacher (OTT) at the secondary level by the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE), I figured it was just a matter of signing a few papers, getting a few criminal background checks done (one for each country you’ve lived in for the past ten years and mandatory for anyone planning to work with children or youths) and I would be ready to go. “London is desperate for teachers as no one wants to teach there” was what everyone told me. “There are plenty of jobs. You’ll find one with no problems at all!” What I didn’t realise was that getting background checks could take months. After realising it could take three months before I could start teaching at the secondary level, I thought I’d try my luck at one of the language schools as there seemed to be thousands of them in London. I figured it would tide me over while waiting for my background checks to be done and it should be pretty easy to find work with over ten years teaching experience at various types of schools, student levels and ages. Though would it be?

What experience and qualifications do you have?

As I spoke to the agency worker about the possibility of English Language Teaching (ELT) due to the long wait to get the background checks done, it became apparent that it was not going to be as

easy, nor as prosperous, as I had thought.

“What qualifications do you have to teach ESL?”

“I have an MA in Applied Linguistics.”

“Right, so what qualifications do you have to teach ESL? An MA is pretty useless here.”

Gobsmacked to have my MA dismissed so quickly, I asked why MAs are “pretty useless”. They are the starting block for employment at universities in Japan, give one a pretty thorough background in ELT theories and methodology and well, are pretty costly and time consuming. None of that seemed to impress this man. Basically, it came down to practical teacher training, teacher assessment and course standardization. He commented that pretty much anyone could read articles and papers, do a little research, write a thesis or a few reports and be rewarded with an MA. However, not everyone would be able to stand in front of a class and have their teaching assessed on various things like classroom management, time management, addressing student needs...and pass. With no global standardization for MAs, the quality will vary and language schools in London don't want to take the chance of hiring someone that might not be able to teach well, let alone, meet their students' needs.

On top of all of this, the agency worker had himself worked in Japan; as a JET teacher (The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme). He made it pretty clear that he thought most foreigners in Japan had very little real teaching experience and pointed out a few concerns he had with hiring anyone who had just come from Japan.

1. Native English teachers in Japan are very rarely in the position to teach large classes alone.
2. Native English teachers in Japan very rarely teach things like grammar, pronunciation and test-taking skills.
3. Native English teachers in Japan are often unqualified or lacking in practical training.
4. Most students in Japan study English because they are forced to and are not highly motivated so teachers are often not motivated. How would a teacher who has taught in this environment handle the demands of highly motivated students with regards to their large knowledge of how the English language works and is used?
5. Teaching in Japan means homogenous classrooms where students often have the same language needs and errors. How would one handle the London language classroom where students from all over the world have varying needs and problems?

I did my best to address his concerns but to be honest, I had to agree with some of his concerns

and comments. When I worked at an English language school (eikaiwa), I very rarely had classes larger than six students. When I worked in the public school system, I was an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) and had very little control over the classes. I pretty much did what I was told to do and very rarely was I given the opportunity to lead classes and take part in department meetings. Although I did help plan lessons, because I pretty much insisted I take part, I certainly wasn't in charge of the class. I did teach a bit of grammar and pronunciation but that, for the most part, was the job of the Japanese teachers. I have never been asked to teach a test taking class such as TOEIC, TOFEL or IELTS. My university classes were full of unmotivated Japanese students who didn't seem to care much about English as long as they passed the course. For the most part, my students were all Japanese with the exception of a few Koreans and Chinese, who had similar issues with spelling, pronunciation, grammar...

What I did disagree with though, was the notion that all native language teachers in Japan have no experience teaching large classes alone and have no practical teaching qualifications. When I pointed out that private junior high and high schools, and all universities hire native English teachers who are allowed to teach alone, I was asked the type of classes we taught. My reply of "oral communication and writing" didn't impress him; nor did my comments about teaching at a motivated university that focused on language learning and British and American studies. Regardless of my experience, it seemed the agency worker wasn't going to change his mind. That was until we started talking about practical teacher training and qualifications.

What qualifications are they looking for?

In short, they wanted someone with "hands on" practical qualifications like CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults), DELTA (Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults), Trinity CertTESOL (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or Trinity DipTESOL (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). CELTA and CertTESOL, seen as starting qualifications for many in the ELT world, would get my foot in the door, a few cover classes at some schools and perhaps, if a job opened up, a full time language school teaching position. DELTA and Trinity DipTESOL, on the other hand, would get me full time work, subject to availability, and could put me on the path to becoming a school director, head teacher, and/or class and syllabus coordinator. These courses are taught and respected worldwide and programs and schools like the British Council insist that their teachers have a minimum of a CELTA or Trinity CertTESOL, and that all their head teachers have DELTA or Trinity DipTESOL (British Council).

Why are these courses what the schools and agencies are looking for? In short, because they are standardized worldwide, include a teaching practicum with classroom observation and students

aren't automatically given a diploma or certificate once they complete all the work. While the failure rates are low, due to their screening processes of interviews and application tasks, not everyone will be given a pass (Cambridge ESOL). These courses look at not only methodology and language analysis, but practical "in-class" skills such as teacher/student interaction, material usage, target language introduction, error correction... In short, it looks at many things that an MA, with little or no teacher observation, does not offer.

When asked about teachers who have other certificates and teaching diplomas such as university ESL teacher training or TEFL certificates, the agency worker said that a lot would depend on where the teacher received their training. Due to the numerous sub-par teacher training courses out there, he didn't expect that many schools would want to hire someone with a certificate from a program/school they didn't recognize. Courses offered by International House London offers numerous teacher training courses besides CELTA and DELTA (IHL Teacher Training), and would usually be recognized within London. The same could not be said for university certification programs because they are of questionable quality. When I mentioned my B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) and how it was a PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate of Education) equivalent (England's elementary and secondary teacher qualifications), I was told that because the methodology and student needs are different, it wouldn't normally be accepted at a language school. What does a trained high school history teacher know about teaching ESL/EFL? Fair point and one reason why qualifications like PGCEs and B.Eds don't really matter when it comes to English language teaching.

Where can I get the training they want?

For whatever reason, Japan is one of a handful of countries that doesn't really offer courses like CELTA, DELTA, CertTESOL, or DipTESOL, nor really pay much attention to them. Some schools, such as the British Council, and dispatch companies, like Phoenix Associates, do ask that their teachers hold these qualifications. However, for the most part, they are largely unknown and ignored in Japan. Most Japanese teachers of English I have spoken to about them, have never heard of them. This pretty much means that taking these courses won't really open any doors or get you a pay raise like it would elsewhere. Therefore, the demand for such teacher training is pretty non-existent in Japan. So much so that, as it stands now, there is only one CELTA training centre in Japan (Language Resources in Kobe) and while a handful of DELTA training centres supposedly offer module one, of three, I have yet to find a centre that runs the course. At the time of writing, none of the centres listed on the Cambridge ESOL Exam Centre page actually offered the courses. The British Council in Tokyo used to run courses but gave up it seems because there was no demand. The Trinity qualifications have fared even worse and the last reported CertTESOL was offered by the "Shane English School Japan" group in 2008 ([tefljobsinjapan](http://tefljobsinjapan.com)). No further

information could be found on any Trinity courses in Japan even though the Trinity College webpage states Japan offers courses.

So how do you prepare yourself if you are thinking of teaching back home? The best option would be to head to an exam centre that offers the courses in intensive blocks or do the course via distance learning. For CELTA, Thailand tends to be popular with teachers in Japan as they offer competitive prices, are close by and offer a little R&R once the course is done. For information on courses and locations, please check the Cambridge ESOL Exam Centre webpage and Trinity College of London webpage that are listed in the references. For anyone wanting a firsthand account of taking the one month CELTA course, Robert Croker's "Continuing Professional Development: Seven Reasons to do a CELTA course" (2008) is well worth the read and closely resembles my experience with my one month intensive CELTA course.

DELTA, as a more in-depth course, runs minimum eight weeks intensive and can be done via distance, though with two weeks needed at the training centre for module two (Cambridge ESOL). With the summer and winter holidays in Japan often not being a full eight weeks, it can be difficult to find a program schedule that works. Unfortunately, the way DELTA distance courses are done, it can be rather difficult to find a centre to allow you to sit the exam for module one and find a tutor for module two (I personally have not been able to find someone and have concerns about the DELTA method of teaching clashing with the classroom culture of Japan).

With regards to Trinity, it would be best to contact them directly and see what kind of options they could offer you based on your holiday schedule and availability.

Is going back worth it?

Curious about the working situation for ELT teachers in the London, I inquired about pay, jobs, and chances of full time employment. It seems that getting your CELTA and working in a language school is becoming a popular choice for many university graduates who can't find a job and dream of moving abroad. This means there are a lot of CELTA holders floating around London and England looking for work. The pay? Certainly, it depends on the school but I was quoted about 15.00 pounds per hour if done through an agency, and you only get paid per class that you teach, with zero pay for prep time. Getting hired directly for part-time positions pays more, ranging anywhere from 18.00 – 25.00 pounds and certainly, full-time positions pay more but no one was actually willing to share just how much a full-time teacher makes on average.

In the end, I was offered a few substitution classes at various language schools with the option of taking semi-full time work while I waited for my criminal background checks to come through.

However, with the cost of transportation, the lack of payment for preparation time and the fact that I was studying for my DELTA module one exam, I decided to wait it out. This isn't to say that some people won't return home and walk into a great teaching position. However, based on a few formal and informal interviews and discussions with teacher agencies, teachers at International House London and a few fellow DELTA examinees, teaching ESL in London didn't seem anywhere near as nice and as rewarding as teaching in Japan. As for teaching in the secondary system in London, I survived to tell my war stories and have to say, rather enjoyed my tour of duty.

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Reflections on My Teaching Career

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Introduction

After having worked as a high school teacher in Shizuoka Prefecture for ten years, I am on sabbatical at Aichi University of Education to study language education. This opportunity has made me reflect on what I have done as a teacher and has given me time to think of issues about education objectively while I am away from my normal busy daily routine.

Besides, I joined a group for interchanging opinions on education in Facebook, called 'TP (Teaching Practice) Interchange'. My professor has set up and run this project, and will describe it in the next issue of 'Explorations'. The members are in a range of positions such as teachers, undergraduates, graduates, and so forth, and are from various countries. All of them are involved in education. Through the project, I could debate several issues in education and I could exchange views with members, who are in completely different positions and cultures from me. This activity has had a great impact on my fixed view of education and given me a chance to reflect on my achievements over ten years, although I had never reviewed them while I was working as a teacher.

This time, I will introduce some of my reflections from this sabbatical. Particularly, I would like to concern myself with some of the topics discussed in TP Interchange.

Teaching English All in English

Following the adoption of MEXT's official guidelines for school teaching, English classes for high school are expected to be basically taught all in English to students who start high school in 2013. Regarding this implementation, a lot of English teachers feel some misgivings. I also happened upon several doubtful opinions, about English classes completely performed in English, from students in the TP Interchange group who had just finished their teaching practice, although they all agreed that teachers should use English as much as possible.

The main reasons they think so are as follows; one, for a teacher, fluency and accurate pronunciation of English like a native speaker are required. Those skills would highly motivate students because many of them would respect the teacher and think they want to be able to speak English like him/ her. Two, when they teach English grammar, explanations in English get their students more confused as to acquiring the correct usage of the language than those in Japanese do. Three, disparity in various students' comprehension would widen even more.

In addition to those factors, I have often heard incumbent English teachers say, "It is impossible to have English classes all in English because of the low English level of our students" or "I wish our students could have better ability to understand English."

However, I believe that it is quite possible to carry out our English classes all in English to any levels or grades of students and it is more effective for them. In the first place, having English classes all in English allows students to increase the time they are in contact with English. Furthermore, we can create the atmosphere where students are more comfortable speaking when we teachers do not speak Japanese at all in classes.

I think the most important thing for Japanese students is using English as much as possible in a practical way as a means of communication. Few Japanese students actually use the language to speak and listen outside of their classes. Where are the places that the students use English? They are our classes.

I do not actually attach great importance to total fluency and accurate pronunciation from Japanese English teachers in their English classes. Of course, it would be best if that were really possible. However, accompanied with more demand for global English, it seems that students should acquire English as a means of international communication rather than of learning authentic English. Rightfully, it should be important for them to learn accurate pronunciation and usage of English but what they learn can at least be a minimal standard to communicate. I think the priority for teachers is to encourage a positive attitude to communicate with others in English.

As for the anxiety, indicated above, that students get confused about explanations in English, it is solvable by making use of visual assistance such as pictures, movies, our facial and physical expressions, or the choice of words we use. It seems that there definitely is a way if we carefully devise our teaching methods.

My own strategies

As for me, initially, I used to teach English grammar all in Japanese and to make my students read texts through by translating sentence by sentence into Japanese when I first became a teacher.

So, what changed for me? Active use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and ALTs in my classes dramatically altered my ability to carry out my English classes mostly in English and I could make my students understand well enough although the level of English among students at my high school was quite low overall.

Fortunately, technical equipment, such as computers, a projector, monitors on each student's desk, sound devices, Internet access, and so forth, is always available in a specific classroom at my school. Also I could regularly have team-teaching classes with a ALT for about half of all my classes because my high school is very small, partly due to demographic changes.

For example, when students read a text, I explain the outline of the text in English, using a slide show on the screen that shows the images and key phrases related to the content of the text. This greatly helps the students grasp the content, through considering the English they listen to in connection with the images and the phrases they see. Even for teaching English grammar, I try to make my students gradually become aware of certain rules of English grammar by repeatedly showing various expressions, which contain the target grammar, through role plays with the ALT or visual assistance, which represents the situations where the expressions are used, rather than to make them figure out English grammar by explaining it in Japanese. After that, the students create their own sentences, following the form of the model expressions but substituting vocabulary items. And then, they have conversations with their classmates by using the expressions in a practical way.

My current problems are whether I can adopt these methods to teach more difficult and complicated things in teaching grammar and reading, and whether I can link the methods I use to university entrance exams, which only a percentage of my students take. It seems that the present state of entrance exams needs to, and is changing towards, assessing students' English ability, not purely literally and theoretically, but as a means of communication.

However, I cannot accomplish such successful classes all in English unless I plan elaborately and prepare materials for the classes adequately. If I didn't spend much time to plan and prepare, the classes would not be successful. Hence, what teachers need to carry out their classes all in English successfully is adequate time to plan and prepare for their classes, to improve their own ability to use English, and improvement of the equipment at their schools.

However, in actual circumstances, many teachers are pressurised with other school duties and it is difficult to have enough time to prepare for their classes and study English for themselves, as referred to by Robins (2010) in a previous issue of 'Explorations'. Next, I will look at these issues in more detail.

School Facilities

As mentioned before, improvement of equipment brings a positive educational effect to our classes. But the fact of the matter is that it is difficult for every teacher to use such equipment every

time in a class at public schools in Japan due to insufficient facilities. This is an issue about public funds. In this connection, I found an interesting article, posted on TP Interchange, 'Education Spending Lowest in OECD' from 'The Japan Times', which described that the ratio of educational expenditure of Japan to GDP in 2008 stood at 3.3 percent, the lowest among 31 of the OECD's 34 members with comparable data, whose average ratio of educational expenditure by central and local governments to GDP was 5.0 percent ("Education...", 2011). Now Japan is in financial difficulties, but I personally favor the government investing more in education for young people who are the support and driving force for the future.

Aside from the topic of insufficient equipment, there is another matter of making use of the technology, where many teachers, elderly teachers in particular, struggle over the drastic transition to practical use of the technology in classes even if equipment is provided. In connection with this issue, 'Investing in E-Learning, Future' in a newspaper from The Philippines illustrates an attempt, which is called 'ICT4E (Information and Communication Technology for Education)', by the Department of Education in the Philippines, to introduce ICT to schools nationwide. In this article, it is said that the most serious hurdle for e-learning, even in a developing country with fewer resources than Japan, is to change the mindset of teachers.

Many teachers are likely to hesitate to free themselves from their conventional teaching norms. For this reason, all teachers should have chances to receive training for using new technology or making the maximum use of the equipment which each school already has.

Teachers' Working Environment

One of the university teachers participating in the TP Interchange group posted an article 'Give Teachers Time, Not a Fine' (2011) and it said, "To perform well, teachers need downtime to reduce stress, develop new techniques and read and think about education. Good teaching requires mental readiness...." Yes, but teachers have a lot of other things to do in addition to giving lessons. In addition, many of us hold down too much work, which cannot be completely finished while on duty.

Speaking of myself, my routine at my high school involves coaching a soccer club for about three hours a day; after that, I do administrative duties, prepare for my homeroom management, and deal with my students' problems such as bullying, truancy, and building a good relationship with their parents; and then, and only then, can I finally work on preparing for my English classes. Consequently, I get home late, typically at around ten o'clock in most cases. Moreover, I usually have soccer club activities even on weekends. I sometimes find my work tough but I personally enjoy it, with a sense of fulfillment and mission, countered by not having sufficient time to spend

with my family.

The work of teachers is difficult to measure by numerical outcomes and it is hard for people in administrative posts to grasp how much and how long each teacher actually works because of 'grey areas' between work and private duties. Work knows no bounds in education, so we have to find a good point to stop working. However, many young teachers are bad at doing that. In fact many teachers crack up through being busy, an increasing issue in the educational world.

Another article from 'The Japan Times', 'Teachers Bolt Jobs over Mental Angst' (2011), posted on TP Interchange, describes how the number of teachers who quit their jobs and take a leave of absence for psychological problems has increased in recent years. As a matter of fact, I have seen several teachers who had to take leaves of absence from their work because of mental illness, and who 'went mad' because of taking all the work upon themselves without discussing it with others, or because of hostile criticism from their students or parents.

How then should we cope? Lately, it has often been emphasized in teachers' seminars that teachers need to share information about problems their schools are facing and deal with the problems in groups. That seems to go without saying but teachers are often likely to remain their 'own bosses'. Therefore it is very important for us to share ideas and opinions, as in this SIG, and, as I hope I have done, and to see issues that are considered problematical, such as 'teaching English only in English' as a stimulating and surmountable challenge.

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Gotta Get Outa the City 2

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So, I promised to write one of these stress relievers regularly but the editor informs me it has been a year since the last one, and I'd better get my act together if I want to live up to my promise to make it a regular feature. Sorry. I've been out and about recharging and refreshing myself every weekend, so that my kids get the best teaching I can give them, so I've struggled to find the time. No more stalling. Here is hill number two.

This time we'll head north-east out of Nagoya to Fujimidai Kougen 富士見台高原 and Mt. Misaka (神坂山) near Ena in Gifu prefecture. This was another scouting expedition for hikes that will be good in the winter with the snowshoes. We tried the previous hike (see Autumn 2010 for details) when there was snow down, and the rolling hills on the top were great with snow shoes.

For this hike you have to head out of Nagoya on the Chuo Expressway and exit at Nakatsugawa. It should take between 90 minutes and 2 hours to get there. When you exit the expressway you'll drop onto route 19. Turn right and head for central Nakatsugawa. There is a Valor supermarket just off the road on the left here if you need supplies. Follow route 19 past Nakatsugawa and turn right onto route 7 at the Okita (沖田) junction. The footbridge just past the junction is a good landmark. Route 7 snakes under the expressway and you will see signs for Kua Resort (クアリゾート湯舟沢). Drive past this and continue up the hill. Look out for the sign for Fujimidai Kougen (富士見台高原), (it is a little difficult to spot) and turn right onto a smaller road. If you miss the sign (we did) the turn is at the fourth bus stop after the resort. You will immediately cross a small stream. This road is narrow. Keep going up it for 5 or 6 kms. This is hard to judge because it is so winding. Drive past the old people's home and you will soon come to a deserted campground. We slept here in our camper van the night before the walk. There is parking off the road and there are basic toilets. It was very quiet and very, very dark. No lights up here! I was a little worried when I headed off to the toilet on my own with just a flash-light for a weapon. After a most excellent breakfast we drove on up the road to 強清水 (this may be called kyo shimizu. I am not sure on the reading for this combination of kanji!). There is parking for about three cars, a shelter and the mountain entrance (登山口).

This is the link for the map from the turn off route 19

<http://yahoo.jp/XyIT01>

The trail is well signposted and starts out pretty easy through the trees. It's lovely. You stay with the

road and cross it many times, but rarely stay on it. It is always well signed. You will pop out on Misaka Pass (神坂峠). If you leave the path you will see there is also parking here. You can climb Mt. Ena (恵那山) from this parking area. To Mt. Ena is a long walk so be sure to set off early.

If you continue up the path here it will bring you out into an open area above the parking. Strangely there are no signs here! Head to the highest point of this open area, climb over the fence onto a path that goes right. This will take you around the hill. It is a little narrow in places. It will pop you out on a stony flat area. Down to the right is a villa (萬岳荘, the reading is probably Mantakesou). Head straight on for Fujimidai. The signs are good again here. You will pass two very nice looking mountain huts. We didn't see much here as it was cloudy the day we went. The peak is just a few minutes beyond the huts. Then follow the signs going east for Misaka. It is an easy incline with lots of signs about staying on the path so you don't trample the alpine plants. From Misaka peak you can head straight back to the stony area. The hiking up on the top of the hills here is lovely, easy stuff. We also saw a guy with a big remot-controlled plane waiting for the clouds to lift so he could play. We followed the same route home and had a picnic lunch in the shelter next to the car.

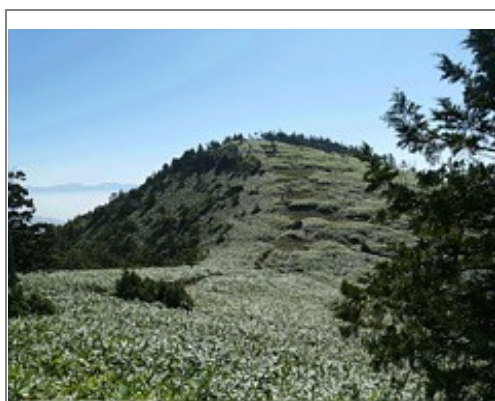
Took us about three hours. A nice half day hike.



The start point



Mountain hut



Easy incline to the peak

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Font: Arial 11 point, single spaced, one line between paragraphs, SINGLE space between sentences.

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