Explorations in Teacher Development

JALT Teacher Development SIG

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From the Editor

Welcome to the Spring 2016 issue of Explorations in Teacher Development. At this busy time of year for teachers, we hope to provide you with reading material that will inspire you in some way.

This issue includes four research articles and four reports based on presentations at the joint forum held at JALT in 2015. I was really happy to begin working with a peer reviewer, who kindly read and reviewed the papers and then provided extensive feedback to all the authors. All of the authors seemed to be grateful for the feedback and revised their papers accordingly. Going through the entire process of writing from first draft to submission, to revision process to final lay out, is a growing process for all involved, and I am happy to help authors, both new and experienced, as we navigate this process together.

The first paper, by **Liz Shek-Noble**, informs us about the delicate balance between teacher- and student-centered teaching styles.

Next, **Stewart M. Dorward**, shares his on-going process of observing Japanese teachers of English in a secondary school setting.

Marc Jones provides us with some insights on teaching phonology and pronunciation in his qualitative study that focuses on teachers' beliefs and practices.

Finally, **Daniel Hooper**, currently an MA Student in TESOL, describes his experiences within the *eikaiwa* system and his journey of obtaining his degree.

In the Forum section, four of nine presenters contributed their reports for our Journal. All four presenters have provided insights about a time when student feedback has helped them to change their practices. **Darren Van Veelen** tells us how he uses the students' brains in place of textbooks for classroom input. **Alexander McAulay** explains about his past resistance to using social media networks with students. **Ken Ikeda** reports about his struggles with using an online instructional learning system combined with a content course. Finally, **Lorna Asami** shares her practice of project-based learning with her students who are studying to be teachers of young children.

Happy Reading!

Amanda J. Yoshida

Call for Papers

Explorations in Teacher Development is a journal for teachers, by teachers, where we encourage people to share their experiences and reflections.

Papers for the *Explorations in Teacher Development* (ETD) Journal are accepted on an on-going basis. **Papers submitted by October 15, 2016 will be considered for the Spring 2017 issue of ETD. Papers submitted by April 15, 2017 will be considered for the Fall 2017 issue of ETD.** We encourage both members and non-members of our SIG to submit papers, so please share this information with your colleagues and friends to ensure a rich and diverse publication.

Following is a list of the categories and types of articles we are interested in publishing:

Research Articles (2000-3000 words)

•Narrative Inquiry

•Reflective Inquiry

•Action Research

Explorations (1000-3000 words)

•Reflections on beliefs/practices

•Learning / Teaching Journeys

•Other (1000 words or less)

•Book Reviews

•Creative/Humorous Observations

In addition, interviews of relevant educators/researchers may be accepted at the discretion of the editors. Please contact us if interested in writing an interview piece.

TD SIG also publishes the proceedings of our Teacher Journeys conference held in June as well as occasional special issues in collaboration with other JALT SIGs.

If you wish to submit a research paper or explorative piece to the ETD, please pay attention to the following requirements:

All submissions should use APA style and a maximum of 12 references. Submissions that are not in APA style will be sent back to the authors for reformatting.

Research articles should include an abstract of 100-150 words.

Explorative pieces do not require references but connections to the literature are encouraged.

All authors should provide their current affiliation and a contact email. A short bio is optional.

When sending in a submission, please indicate which category of the ETD Journal your article will fit under.

Please note that all submissions for the research and explorations sections of the ETD will undergo a peer-review process and that, if accepted, we will provide feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Authors are encouraged to include charts, images, graphs, etc. with their articles, which will provide a visual representation to our readers.

Questions and contributions may be sent to the following email address:

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"Teacher-Centered" and "Student-Centered" Learning in the EFL Classroom

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What does it mean to be a teacher with an explicit teaching philosophy? What role(s) do teachers encourage students to assume within the practical and ideological frameworks of learning? How do variables including educational background and work experience shape a teacher's self-perception and the interpersonal dynamics of his/her classroom?

These are some questions that have occupied my thinking as a result of changing academic and teaching disciplines within the last year. This explorative paper will function as the complement to an earlier project I completed as part of in-house training for my current position as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructor at Rikkyo University. Whereas the former paper provided an overview of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles and their application within function-based, oral discussion classes, the current study focuses more on insights of a professional and personal nature. My aim is to outline how my recent appointment as an EFL instructor precipitated challenges to my teaching ideals. In so doing, I will explain how I have reimagined my role, responsibilities, and obligations within the EFL classroom. Indeed, my willingness to reconceptualize existing teaching beliefs has worked to alleviate and in some cases, eliminate these challenges.

Same Language, Different Disciplines

University English Literature classes and EFL classes: although both are usually conducted in English, these disciplines diverge significantly in their ideological, practical, and epistemological goals. I quickly came to this realization upon commencing work as an EFL instructor at my present workplace. Prior to this, I was employed as a seminar leader and tutor in an Australian university. The classes that I oversaw were on contemporary American literature and British literature between the Early Modern and early twentieth-century periods.

These seminars and tutorials had a consistent format. Often, I summarized the main tenets of a literary genre or text for the first 5-10 minutes of the class. I then transitioned into a close analysis of the chosen text and requested students to provide their interpretation of such matters. At such times, students discoursed amongst themselves, seeking clarification on their peers' ideas or supplementing existing responses from others within the class. Nonetheless, I ensured that discussions remained on track through direct and indirect means; I directed students to return to the main seminar topics or confirmed their opinions by drawing an explicit connection to the course outcomes. I also found myself acting in the role of an arbiter, settling disputes amongst students if certain comments proved erroneous, anomalous, or unclear. Consequently, my understanding of the teacher's role in the classroom was highly circumscribed. I saw myself as disproportionately responsible for my students' learning, in large part due to my understanding of the teacher as having an authoritative presence within the classroom.

Retrospectively, the methods I employed and the roles I delegated to my students and myself approximate King's (1993) model of the teacher as a "Sage on the Stage". I was unaware of the considerable body of research about the potential shortcomings of this style of pedagogical instruction until I moved to Japan and changed teaching disciplines. As a "Sage on the Stage", the teacher in the traditionally hierarchical classroom often applies a rigid "lecture and test" mode that can negatively impact the development of students' autonomy. Students become passive receivers rather than active co-constructers of knowledge. This formulation assumes that a "student's brain is like an empty container into which the professor pours knowledge" (King, 1993, p. 30). Although this model may at times be necessary and beneficial in the context of literary courses, where textual analysis often requires the teacher to coordinate and/or negotiate a wide range of variables (context, genre, themes, secondary criticism) of which students may be unaware, the "Sage on the Stage" can be an impediment to learning within foreign language classrooms. From my recent experience teaching oral discussion classes, the context for which new expressions are learnt are social interactions that permit to some degree syntactic and/or grammatical errors in favor of communicative competence. Communicative competence, defined by fluency gains and increased speech rate, is often facilitated by activities where content of a familiar nature is repeated under increasing time pressure (Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 9). Furthermore, frequent use of group and pair work, where students discuss topics without the active participation of the teacher, means that the "Sage on the Stage" must accept a supporting role away from the spotlight. Put another way, the teacher

is no longer the gravitational center around which her students orbit: the center and periphery are reoriented within the communicative, EFL classroom.

The Curious Dichotomy of "Teacher-Centered" and "Student-Centered" Instruction

A major factor contributing to a revision of my existing teaching beliefs was becoming part of a department with a unified curriculum and teaching philosophy. Professional development sessions provided the theoretical basis for the implementation of CLT methods within my oral discussion classes. The design of the course reflects the general paradigmatic shift away from traditional approaches to second language acquisition (SLA) such as the audiolingual and cognitive code methods within the last thirty years. From a theoretical valence, the course advocates the importance of "student-centered" activities in the development of communicative competence. Unlike "teacher-centered" instruction, "student-centered" instruction shifts the focus away from learning as an evaluative and a results-driven mode of testing into a process that accounts for individual needs and variances in the definition of achievement (Richards, 2006, pp. 24-25). Consequently, within the oral discussion course, collaborative activities and ongoing assessment are utilized to lessen the power differential between the teacher and students. Cliffton (2006) comments that students "have a larger say in who says what to whom and when" (p. 143) in situations where the teacher assumes the role of a "facilitator". Within my department, this methodology is realized through the implementation of uninterrupted student-student discussions as well as peer-directed feedback in the form of checklists and gap-fills.

Personally, the notion of "student-centered" instruction was jarring for theoretical and practical reasons. I initially found the dichotomy of "student-centered" and "teacher-centered" to be unnecessarily antagonistic. Within this paper, my hesitation to accept such a totalizing and discrete boundary separating these categories of instruction is reflected in their typographical enclosure. With respect to the first term, I asked myself, what is teaching if it does not have as its raison d'être the learning needs of students? As for the second term, it struck me as having limited currency apart from elevating its opposing term, since it "somehow implie[d] that the teacher is ignoring the needs of the students" (O'Neill, 1991, p. 301). I found that "teacher-centered" was used as a derogatory term for teachers whose practices reflected a greater interest in their own professional gratification rather than the advancement of their students' learning. Ultimately, I leapt to a defensive position in observing how my former teaching practices were seen as antiquated within the literature of SLA.

Despite my reluctance to accept unquestioningly a methodology of which I had little experience, I soon found that many aspects of "student-centered" instruction are practicable within the EFL classroom. Specifically, gaining teaching experience in my department using "student-centered" techniques helped to erode my initial scepticism. The course integrates a function-based syllabus in order to improve students' communicative competence. Students acquire an inventory of functions that assist them in performing specific tasks common in everyday social exchanges. Examples of these functions include asking for reasons ("How come?"/"Why do you think so?"), and giving opinions ("Personally speaking..."/ "In my opinion..."). The topics around which these functions are organized are commonly found in everyday conversation, including social etiquette and crime. Discussion of these topics does not require expert knowledge or the demanding recall of esoteric or context-specific vocabulary. Given these parameters, the role of the teacher as an "expert authority" on topic-based or linguistic matters becomes untenable. Teachers must limit their intervention in discussions to allow their students to engage freely on topics using anecdotal and experiential knowledge. In moving away from a dominant position within the classroom, teachers within the course can encourage positive attitudinal factors such as active learning, peer collaboration, and autonomy within their students.

Resistance towards CLT: A Sentiment Shared by Teachers and Students?

In principle, the design and implementation of activities in the course made sense to me in their relevance to the goals of CLT. However, breaking away from the model of the teacher as an authoritative voice was a vexing process. I was accustomed to this model on an ideological level; having spent years at university studying literature and teaching at secondary and tertiary levels, I felt that it was my responsibility to impart expert knowledge and skills to my students. Although the oral discussion course differs markedly in structure and aim to my former classes, it was nonetheless difficult for me to step away from such a prominent role, allowing students the time and trust to coordinate activities amongst themselves. I was also uncomfortable with the drastic reduction of teacher-fronted activities to a maximum of 10 minutes per class. Questions circulated in my mind: Is a teacher still a "teacher" if he/she takes a "back seat" and allows students to assume the "driver's position"? Do students want their teacher to display explicitly their knowledge in a given field, or do they feel more comfortable in seeing him/her as a co-learner?

Although I and other teachers in the course organize the number of questions and duration of group discussions, once under way students are encouraged to utilize strategies to maintain discussion fluidity and resolve communication breakdowns independently. During the discussion, I record examples where my students negotiate meaning using clarification requests ("Can you explain?"), explicit correction, and/or elicitation ("How do you say ~ in English?"). Following the discussion, I enlist students to work together or by themselves to identify positive and negative feedback about the discussion. Feedback can relate not only to the (in)correct usage of particular functions but also the quality of the discussion in terms of its content and distribution of speaker and listener roles. Once I have elicited information from students, I supplement their comments by providing concrete examples of function use on the whiteboard and suggest goals to improve subsequent discussions.

The above explanation shows how the teacher within "student-centered" and communicative oral discussion classes plays a different role to what Dupin-Bryant (2004) calls the "formal, controlled, and autocratic" figure (p. 42) that dominates in traditional pedagogic settings. I accepted that the objectives and outcomes of language courses differ dramatically from content courses, and thus that there is a complementary reduction in the amount of teacher talk per lesson. However, in being directed to limit my intervention in discussions to when grammatical errors, questions concerning vocabulary, and dysfluencies surfaced, I began to question the extent of my contribution to my students' learning. Although Grasha (1994) has said that the teacher within CLT classrooms acts as a "resource person" (p. 142) when students have exhausted their ability to solve a problem amongst themselves, I felt that I was more of a prop being used to direct classroom traffic. Like a timed road signal that indicates when vehicles must start and stop, I would inform my students of the beginning and end points of a discussion. The instructions I gave to signal these points were scripted to maximize comprehensibility through carefully chosen vocabulary and grammar. I found that in order to achieve the goal of communicative efficiency, I needed to eliminate certain rhetorical and syntactic aspects of my speech reflective of my personality. Consequently, I experienced many of the concerns that Felder and Brent (1996) see as common amongst faculty members making the transition to more "student-centered" methods in their teaching. In addition to experiencing frustration towards my truncated role in the classroom, I was not convinced that group activities were the optimal way to maximize productive and relevant uses of the L2 with respect to the lesson topic, given the tendency for students to become side-tracked, engage in small talk, or lapse into L1 usage. Equally, I had concerns regarding classroom management (Felder & Brent, 1996, p. 44) and my ability to prevent the fossilization of grammatical errors when needing to observe more than one group at a time.

I also experienced difficulty changing my teaching style and methods because of (imaginary) prejudices my students held towards CLT. Sakui (2004) has observed how certain secondary teachers in Japan resist integrating CLT into their classrooms for fear that such classes will be perceived as a sideshow to "real" learning. According to her, "some teachers are concerned that students only perceive CLT as fun, with few educational benefits, whereas grammar-focused English instruction is serious test-taking preparation" (Sakui, 2004, p. 161). Although Sakui is referring to the pressure for high school English teachers to prepare their students for the university entrance exams using grammar-translation and memorization exercises, this sentiment often lingers when these same students enter tertiary education. Such students may be at best, puzzled by, or at worst, resentful towards, the adoption of CLT. In much the same way as I have needed to accept the upheaval of my existing teaching methods by CLT, students who take part in the oral discussion course must quickly adapt themselves to an environment antithetical to passive learning and monologic instruction. Indeed, in the transition from teacher-fronted to CLT activities, there is a shift in different role expectations, which in turn place "demands on both students and teachers to establish a new set of classroom norms" (Sakui, 2007, p. 49). In the final section of this piece, I will outline how my adjustment to these new classroom norms has had a positive impact on my ability to change my teaching ideals and ultimately, re-envision my role and responsibilities within the EFL classroom.

A Shared Center in the Classroom

Acceptance of changes in classroom dynamics, curricula, and pedagogical instruction all take time. Upon completion of my first semester as an instructor of function-based, oral discussion classes at Rikkyo University, I have observed certain alterations to my perception of "student-centered" instruction and its relation to my existing beliefs about the role and responsibilities of the teacher. Norms of "student-centered" instruction, such as reducing the presence and participation of the teacher within classroom activities, no longer cause me to question my relevance. Partly, I have come to this acceptance based on concrete observation of the variety of socio- and meta- linguistic strategies that my students use to resolve communication breakdowns in class. Often, I scaffold these strategies during post-discussion feedback sessions, thereby retaining some explicit influence over my students' learning. Mainly, however, I have learnt to appreciate how a less hierarchical classroom structure is advantageous in establishing a positive atmosphere, where students achieve the necessary learning outcomes of the course without such a high-handed style of pedagogic instruction.

The last teaching semester also triggered for me a reappraisal of the modes and contexts in which learning takes place. Certainly, the classroom is the traditional setting in which such learning occurs. However, given the prominence of group discussions in my classes, quotidian and ordinary social interactions can also provide sustained opportunities wherein my students can use the L2 in "real-life" contexts. I have come to see learning as a participative process involving equal parts of action and reaction from the teacher and students. Thus, a co-constructive model of learning has supplanted the transmittal model of the "Sage on the Stage".

According to King (1993), the opposing conception to the "Sage on the Stage" is the facilitative and reactive model of the "Guide on the Side". However, I would like to suggest Weston's (2015) notion of the "Impresario with a Scenario" as a model that better reflects my revised understanding of the teacher as both the orchestrator of, and audience to, action amongst students. As an "Impresario", I set the scene, parameters, and roles of my students within group-based activities. In organizing the scene this could mean asking students to change the set-up of the classroom by forming different table arrangements or having them stand face-to-face during fluency activities. Consequently, a degree of control is required in the organization of such elements within a given "scenario". Yet the "Impresario with a Scenario" calls upon students to engage actively in developing different problem-solving methods while taking on the role of a leader or team player. Thus, this model displaces the notion of a stable ideological "center" to classroom instruction: "The 'center' is neither primarily in the teacher nor primarily in the students, but is shared by all, albeit in different ways" (Weston, 2015, p. 100).

Conclusion

The aim of this piece has been twofold: to share my pedagogical experiences with the EFL community, as well as to construct a coherent narrative of my teaching career as a way to reflect on the importance of continued reassessment of one's beliefs and practices. As the fall semester of the new university year approaches, I find such reflection crucial to the ongoing process of creating classroom environments that promote the goals of communicative competence, active learning, and collaboration between the teacher and students. Equally so, such reflection gives me the necessary theoretical space to reimagine what good teachers do and how they do it within an EFL setting.

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Teaching English Through English: First Steps

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This article describes the approach adopted by a group of Kanto-based private secondary schools to implement the MEXT directive that English teaching should be principally conducted in English "transforming classes into real communication scenes" (MEXT, 2009, p. 7). The writer was appointed to a post that allows him to observe and advise the Japanese English teachers throughout this group. Some suggestions for improving their teaching, that had proved to be practical in a small number of cases, are highlighted and discussed.

Introduction

From April 2015, I was appointed as the "English Development Coordinator" for a group of five private junior and senior high schools in the Kanto area. Since 1998, I had worked in both teaching and managerial roles in this group. The goal I was given was to help to improve the English teaching. I was expected to observe all lessons taught by both full and part-time English teachers for the first year. The observations had the twin goals of providing some initial feedback to the teachers and to help me gain an overview of the current situation. Following my assessment of the latter, I was to make suggestions for the general improvement of the English program with an emphasis on teaching English in English.

The group consists of three senior high schools and two junior high schools. Although belonging to the same group, they are very different. Two schools have a good academic reputation with an emphasis on science, hereafter referred to as the "academic" schools. A further two schools, have a broad range of student ability, hereafter referred to as the "standard" schools. The last school has a reputation for sport, hereafter referred to as the sports orientated school. Statistics for the five schools can be seen in Table A below.

Table A: School Profile for 2015/16

	No. of Students	No. of FT Japanese English Teachers	No. of PT Japanese English Teachers	No. of Native English Speaker Teachers
1. Academic SHS	300	5	0	3
2. Academic JHS	300	4	0	4
3. Standard SHS	1100	6	14	4
4. Standard JHS	80	2	4	4
5. Sports-orientated SHS	1500	9	19	8

Despite their diversity, the schools have a common English program. First, STEP Eiken examinations are compulsory for all students up to and including Level Two. Second, all students have at least weekly communicative English lessons from native English speakers. Third, all students can study abroad for two weeks in junior high and a month in senior high. Furthermore, the academic school is the head of the group supervising some of the work of the other schools, for example checking and editing internal tests and entrance examinations and selecting textbooks. Within each subject in each school the teaching follows a strict pacing schedule and standard pattern. Lastly, all schools use the same textbooks. Overall, there is strong central control and weak autonomy for individual teachers.

Overview of Previous Research

In 1994, the Japanese Ministry of Education published guidelines emphasizing the importance of developing students' communicative ability in English. This was followed by studies that looked at its application (Browne and Wada 1998) and in

particular the continued use of the "Grammar Translation" method that seemed to go against these guidelines (Gorsuch 1998). The "Grammar Translation" method is referred to as *yakudoku*, for those readers outside Japan.

Gorsuch (1998) mentions eight practices associated with *yakudoku*. First, teaching focusses on the translation of English texts into Japanese. Second, the text books used are difficult for the students to use without support with the lessons resembling intensive reading classes. Japanese is the language of classroom instruction. In addition, students are not asked to produce English and teachers demand conformity in the students' work with the classes being teacher centered. Finally, there is frequent student assessment, (p23-26).

Impediments to changing the above eight practices include an emphasis on examination orientated English (Sato and Kleinsasser 2004, p.808) in general and university entrance examinations in particular (Gorsuch 2001, p.3). Also, inadequate preservice teacher training (Browne and Wada 1998, p.100) and in-service teacher training (Gorsuch 2001, p.5). In addition, there is a need to keep pace with colleagues, manage large numbers of students and other school tasks which leads teachers to adopt the least risky and the most time efficient teaching method they are familiar with, namely *yakudoku* (Sato and Kleinsasser 2004, p.808).

However, some teachers, who are teaching in English, have moved towards the communicative practices that promote the communication of content by students. In other words, using English and not just studying it (Yamaoka 2010, p.65). Saito (2015) explores some reasons teachers make this transition (p.10-11). However, Tsukamoto and Tsujioka, in their 2013 survey of the use of English by public senior high school teachers in Osaka and Fukuoka, show how little English is still used in the classroom. They found no teacher that used English for most of their class in contrast to 90% who said they used English for less than half the class or seldom (p.314). Furthermore, once the use of English is looked at in detail it is clear most is only used for greetings, warm up activities and classroom instructions (p.315).

Method

"Yes, English in English is important but, since I retire in five years, I can escape doing anything about it." I heard many variations on this theme during my initial school visits. It was a brush off from overworked teachers juggling the demands of school life. However, after confirming that my observations were "compulsory", they complied with my request to observe them.

Many teachers were apprehensive at being observed, so I attempted to reassure them. First, I showed them the assessment criteria along with the report form and a small number asked for some clarification. Second, after the teachers were familiar with their students, I asked them to nominate a class for observation. Third, on the observation day, I usually remained at back of the room, seated and out of view of the students. After the class, I produced a report within a few days and gave it to the teacher, clarifying any points I thought might need it. The teacher read it and then we arranged to discuss it later. I attempted to make the process stress-free and efficient. In the report, I tried to include practical ways that the particular lesson could be improved. Between May 2015 and February 2016, I did a total of sixty-three such observations.

Summary of Observations

Overwhelmingly the teachers used *yakudoku*. A small number apologized for this in advance, but most stated it was the only realistic way to teach the expected material at the pace required. Only six out of sixty-three lessons could be said to contain real communication in English. These are summarized in the table below.

Table B: An Overview of the Six Teachers who used English and their Lessons

	Gender of Teacher	Employment Status	Age of Teacher	HR Teacher is English Teacher	School Type	Class Level	Communicative Content	*Yakudoku* Method Used
L. 1	Male	FT	50s	Yes (Head of English Dept.)	Standard SHS	High	Yes - theme 'International Space Station'	Yes
L. 2	Female	PT	60s	Yes	Standard SHS	High	Yes - theme 'Nuclear Energy'	Yes
L. 3	Female	PT	50s	No - Head of Year	Standard SHS	High	Yes - theme 'Direction Giving'	No
L. 4	Female	PT	60s	No - Social Studies	Sports Orientated SHS	Middle	Yes - theme 'Cleopatra'	Yes
L. 5	Female	FT	30s	No - Head of Year	Sports Orientated SHS	High	No	Partially
L. 6	Female	FT	30s	Yes	Sports Orientated SHS	Middle	Yes - theme 'The World Cup'	Partially

Comparing my observations with Gorsuch's eight instructional practices of *yakudoku* (1998, p.23-16), most of the lessons I observed focused on Japanese to English translation. The senior high students used the Crown "English Communication" textbook series, but this was supplemented with worksheets which turned their use into intensive reading. This is because the students could only understand the textbook with support from the teacher. At the end of one lesson at the "standard" school, I was asked to come to the front of the room and comment on the text. I stated that I believed many native English speakers could not easily read it. After the lesson, I asked about the choice of textbook and was told that it was too difficult but impressed the parents. Most of the teachers started the lesson with an English greeting and many went on from that to ask about the date, the weather or the day's schedule in English. However, English was rarely used after that point. Apart from the six classes summarized in Table B, students rarely produced any English, whether spoken or written. Teachers were controlling about what was acceptable as a correct answer and the testing regime was rigorous with daily, weekly and monthly tests. The tests and lessons were in the same style, with gap fills, word order exercises and similar closed activities. This style of instruction closely follows Gorsuch's outline for a school reliant on the *yakudoku* system.

Overall, 90% of lessons were *yakudoku*, which seems a higher rate than found in the 1980s. Gorsuch (1998) mentions 70% to 80% of university and high school teachers using *yakudoku* (p7). However, this survey includes university and high school teachers. It would be interesting to know the percentage for those working in private high schools since Gorsuch (2001) states that such teachers were more approving of the *yakudoku* method than any others (p.13).

So what made the six lessons that made greater use of English different? The teachers seem to have nothing in common as they were of all ages, employment status and levels of experience. (See Table B.) The classes were equally mixed. There were four "Reader" classes, in which the students studied themed texts and answered comprehension questions. One "Grammar" lesson, in which the teacher was only explaining the grammar points required for that week. Lastly, one "English Communication" lesson, in which the teacher had students doing communicative task-based activities. "Reader" classes might lend themselves to greater use of English. As Yamaoka (2010) found, students are more likely to use English communicatively when they have something beyond English grammar or vocabulary to discuss. The overwhelming view was that it was not possible to teach grammar in English as it was difficult enough in Japanese. The "English Conversation" class was communicative but this class was the only one of its type at any of the five schools. Its existence caused some surprise when I mentioned it at the academic school as it was an unapproved innovation due to the initiative of the head of the English department at the standard school. Interestingly, he was also the teacher of Lesson One in the Table B above. It seems he was sufficiently motivated and able to use more English in his classroom and in a position to enable others to do so.

Of the six lessons, only two were entirely in English. Lesson One was a reader class by the head of the English department for that school. He stated that he often conducted lessons this way. However, he apologized for the false image I was getting, as in the previous lesson the vocabulary needed had been covered in Japanese. On the other hand, it was obvious that what I saw was not rare from the ease with which the students used English.

Lesson Two was another "Reader" class that was about 70% in English, with the first ten minutes being a quick review of the vocabulary needed. In other words, the same process as described above but within one teaching period. It is worth noting that the homeroom teacher for this class is also an English teacher. However, both of these classes were not communicative but *yakudoku* in nature. The innovation was that grammar translation was being done in English.

Lesson Three was an "English Conversation" lesson with the highest level class in the school. This teacher later stated that she never used Japanese to teach. The whole lesson included a fast and fluent use of English with many and varied forms of interaction. The teacher was formally trained in 2011 to teach younger pre-literate children. This resonates with Saito's (2015) discovery that further training voluntarily undertaken by the teacher helps to facilitate more communicative use of English in the classroom.

All teachers thought that teaching in English was not possible with lower level students. However, in Lesson Four, one teacher did the best she could with a mid-level "Reader" class by making exclusive use of English for classroom instructions. Again this use of English had been established as the usual pattern.

Lessons Five and Six were mostly conducted in Japanese but the teachers set up communicative activities in order for the students to more freely practice English. Again, one of these classes was a "Reader" class, one class had an English teacher for their homeroom teacher and the other was the highest level class in the school.

Conclusions from Initial General Observations

A tentative conclusion from these six lessons is that greater use of English is most likely in the following cases:

1. The homeroom teacher for a class is convinced of the importance of English, as shown by three of the six classes having English teachers as their homeroom teacher.

2. The class teacher is consistent in using English in the classroom so that it becomes expected by the students.

3. It is a more academically-able class. Four out of six classes were either highest level in the school or close to it.

4. There must be something to communicate, as in the three "Reader" classes, which contained texts about space exploration, nuclear energy or a new park in Tokyo Bay. The students were asked their opinions about the topics and real communication took could take place.

In January 2016, the heads of the English departments at the schools were asked to prepare action plans to develop and encourage the teaching of English in English. As a move towards this I suggested guidelines based on my observations above, namely that:

1. Classroom management and instructions to be done in English for all groups at all levels.

2. All grammar teaching to be done in Japanese for all groups at all levels.

3. Reader classes to make as much use of English as possible.

4. The above does not imply that all lessons should be or aim to be communicative – if needed, using the *yakudoku* method in English is a viable method to achieve certain goals.

The above suggestions do not meet the MEXT goal. In fact, most teachers are not even attempting this minimal standard. However, these suggestions are viable, as six teachers have shown. In addition, my suggestions mirror earlier research which found teachers were using English for classroom instruction and warm up exercises about 70% of the time, for vocabulary teaching about 30%, and though for grammar teaching, hardly ever (Tsukamoto & Tsujioka 2013, p.315). My suggestions are realistic first steps.

Future Developments

Certain of the impediments to the greater use of English in the classroom are unlikely to disappear soon. The need to keep classes moving through course material at the same pace and the need of teachers to manage large classes is not going to change. Neither is the nature and quality of teachers' preservice training. However, my role is an attempt by the schools to meet the needs of teachers for in-service training and support.

There are reasons to be optimistic about the future due to external pressure on the schools. The greatest external pressure would appear to be a change in the external exams that the students take. As mentioned above, STEP Eiken examinations are compulsory for all students. Until recently, Levels 4 and 5 had no speaking test and Level 2 had no free writing section. This will change in 2016 (STEP Eiken 2015). As a result, the Japanese teaching staff will be under pressure to devise ways to prepare all students for these new more communicative tests and not just the more able students taking the higher level tests. This will become more important if lower level universities meet their need to ensure their entrance requirements by asking students to have passed Level 4 or 5 Eiken. A similar pressure may work for higher level students sitting the revised Level 2 writing paper. This external pressure could benefit all the students at all the schools regardless of age or academic ability and help weaken the dependence on *yakudoku* that I observed.

In relation to the sports-orientated school only there is another external pressure. From April 1st 2016, a nearby city will start a revised English curriculum called "Global Studies". This runs from the first year of elementary school to the third year of junior high school. It is a communicative English course making heavy use of ALTs and only contains skills-based assessment. For example, assessment of the students' ability to use the past simple is to be done by the teacher observing the students discussing which of them had just had the best winter vacation (Semens 2015). These schools feed a lot of students into the sports-orientated school. Their previous experience might influence the nature of English teaching over the coming years because they will have had more exposure to a variety of teaching styles beyond *yakudoku*.

My instructions for the 2016/17 academic year include more intensive mentoring of selected individual teachers with me observing every class they teach on their schedule. This will involve some follow up on the earlier observations done in 2015/16. However, one observation of one lesson is only a snapshot of that teacher's work. It does not facilitate understanding of a teacher's overall work. By observing all their classes, I hope to understand these teachers in depth and to be able to agree a more comprehensive set of improvement targets with them. For those teachers observed there will be a follow up observation in the next term, to see what progress has been made. In my next paper, I plan to describe how effective my role has been over the academic year 2016/17.

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Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Regarding Listening and Pronunciation

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Although listening is an important form of language input for English language learners, it may not always be a skill that is taught but merely one that is practised or assessed (Field, 2008). In this paper, the author investigates stated practices and beliefs regarding listening and phonology of EFL teachers in Japan. The majority of teachers surveyed stated a desire for more training in listening and phonology.

Rationale

Listening to English or any other language that is not one's first language is difficult. As Rost (2016) paraphrases Gafos (2013):

The listener's knowledge of and experience with these three systems, articulatory causes of sounds, the psychoacoustic effect of sounds and the likely linguistic intentions of a speaker – all maximize the efficiency of speech perception. At the same time, if the listener's knowledge or experience is incomplete or flawed, use of these systems will limit or distort perception. (Rost, 2016: ch. 2, 3/51)

This project set out to gather data regarding beliefs and stated practices regarding the teaching of listening and phonology among EFL teachers in Japan. The reasons for this are personal yet also have wider importance for the EFL community in Japan and even worldwide. I found that despite teaching for over twelve years, I had never questioned many of my practices and the area of practice that had the most unreflective ritual rather than rationalised, reflective practices was the teaching of listening. This is a worldwide issue due to the widespread use of similar listening practices suggested in supplementary teacher's books that accompany most internationally sold language textbooks by the major ELT publishers. I know I am not alone in this; a teacher based in Europe states, "I certainly know that I never really taught listening myself, pre-delta (sic). And I'm not sure how good I was post-delta (sic)." (Harrison, M. in Jones, M. [2015]).

This project was undertaken as part of the London Trinity LCTC Diploma in TESOL (DipTESOL) and was intended to investigate whether my own beliefs were shared, that is listening is rarely taught through bottom-up approaches or methods but largely top-down ones. The implications of this for learners may be that they spend time with the intention of learning the language but end courses of study still unequipped with the skills required for simple decoding of interlocutors' utterances, thus leading to communication breakdown. Part of the reason for this failure, I assumed, was the predominance of top-down processing being promoted - such as listening for key details – when bottom-up decoding of the speech signal from its constituent parts is entirely neglected. If phonemic decoding is never taught nor even acknowledged, learners are expected to develop skills without instruction but may be expected to just understand any listening texts that the teacher plays. While utterances may be subject to top-down processing, with known words and cognates being understood and used as a foundation for understanding, this may be unreliable and overreliance upon this strategy may lead to misunderstanding in all but the most basic contexts.

While such cases of communication breakdown may be a site for learning opportunities/affordances (Ellis, 1990) they may also be factors in learner demotivation. This is due to the affective factors involved; if learners are assumed to be able to just understand known words in L2, then little teaching is going on. Learners will therefore see the teacher as providing little assistance other than access to listening texts which cannot be understood and with little improvement in sight. Therefore, if teachers are to be seen as facilitators as well as instructors in an Instructed Second Language Acquisition environment, then the instruction of strategies and techniques to both decode and comprehend language ought not to be neglected.

In order to access the views of the Japan ELT community, I posted a link to a Google Form questionnaire on JALT forums on Facebook and LinkedIn. This gave me a significant sample size (n=51).

Hypotheses

The hypotheses I wished to gather evidence for are the following:

Bottom-up listening skills are focused upon less than top-down skills.

Teachers are already highly proficient users of English and their bottom-up processing in English is largely automatic as a learned process or a process in development. It is is necessary to bear in mind because as Field (2008) states "the heavy emphasis placed by current methodology upon "comprehension" as the target of listening practice seems being a largely unconscious process, whereas learners' bottom-up processing is not automating have contributed to a perception that using contextual information is more central to successful L2 listening than recognising words and phrases accurately. The impression had perhaps been bolstered by experience of listening in a first language, and where our recognition of words is apparently effortless, as compared with the attention we need to devote to working out the speaker's intended åmeaning." (Field, 2008: ch.8 p.6/37) Thus, I hypothesise that teachers often focus upon top-down skills because they can more consciously follow their own listening strategies and teach such skills to students. In turn, as these teachers remain as senior members of educational institutions and gain responsibility for providing continuing professional development (CPD) to other teachers, they then transmit this prioritisation of top-down skills.

Teachers want more training in listening.

Due to the factors mentioned in the previous hypothesis, teachers do not feel knowledgeable about how to teach bottom-up listening skills, only about practising listening as a whole. The ramifications for this, if found to be true, are that learners' acquisition of L2 listening skills may be delayed, thus leading to a lack of effectiveness in teacher-provided input, and therefore inability to decode authentic listening texts unassisted either inside or outside the classroom.

Phonology is taught mainly at word level.

Citation forms of words are available to be checked in pronunciation dictionaries and most learners' dictionaries. However, multi-word units, while present in many learners' dictionaries, are not always given with pronunciation transcription showing that how the words that make up the unit may change slightly from their citation form in ways such as weak forms, elision, assimilation, linking and stress changes. Intonation may also be dismissed because it is often seen as fuzzy, with McCarthy (1991) stating "it would seem open to question whether any direct intonational and grammatical correlates exist" (p.106) and that "we cannot reliably label a tone contour as displaying a particular attitude or emotion" (ibid. p.107). However, there are some standard functions of intonation in English that can aid learners in ensuring speakers' intentions are understood inasmuch as intonational units tend to correspond to grammatical units such as sentences and clauses (Field, 2008: ch. 11, p.3/41), for example, rising intonation on all list items except the final one which has falling intonation.

Method

Sample

The research was carried out by creating a questionnaire in Google Forms and posting the link in the Tokyo Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) Facebook group, the JALT group on LinkedIn, English Teachers in Japan (ETJ) group on LinkedIn and emailing acquaintances. The questionnaire was anonymous in order to gain participation from the teaching community without privacy concerns.

The limitations of the sample are that it comes from groups involved in teacher development (TD) and therefore their members are motivated to continue their professional development. Due the interest in TD these teachers are likely to be pro-active in acquiring skills that they realise they lack by reading methodology books, journals and other teaching periodicals. Conversely, if teachers do not realise that they are lacking skills they will not seek out development opportunities or literature. Furthermore, this sample does not contain a large number of practitioners without ELT credentials.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was organised in two sections: teachers' stated classroom practices regarding listening and phonology; this was followed by stated beliefs and level of qualification. The stated classroom practices were assigned a scale of frequency. This scale of frequency is related only to the answers at the individual level. One respondent's "always" may not be equivalent to the frequency of classroom practice as the same answer for a different respondent. It is merely the teacher's perception of their own classroom practice. For example, Teacher A may state that they always teach intonation in sentences. Teacher B may state the same thing. However, Teacher B may teach the intonation patterns used in listening tasks as well as elsewhere in the lesson, whereas Teacher A may only teach it in listening tasks. The reason for not choosing a numerical frequency is that it was considered easier for teachers to assign a fuzzy value to a belief regarding general practice than a numerical frequency over a given period (e.g. "once per lesson" or "three

times a week"). Were a numerical value chosen by respondents and provided inaccurately, comparing subsequent answers to those of preceding questions may also compound inaccuracy.

Data Analysis

Teachers' Stated Practices

Pre-tasks and pre-teaching

The vast majority of teachers pre-teach new vocabulary in order to prepare their learners for listening, with 49 teachers who pre-teach vocabulary "sometimes" and more frequently. This roughly correlates with the number of teachers who do topic-based elicitation pre-tasks "sometimes" and more frequently, which is 46.

Of those teachers that never or rarely do topic-based elicitation pre-tasks, vocabulary tends to be pre-taught, with only one teacher stating that they never do topic based elicitation pre-tasks and rarely pre-teach vocabulary.

Prediction is frequently taught as a strategy in the EFL classroom because it can activate schema, such as known vocabulary on a given topic or likely grammar structures to be used. However, it should be considered that one would rarely be given access to gapped utterances of an interlocutor or parties one is listening to in situations outside the classroom.

Phonology

Phonology is one of the areas with which teachers stated that they struggle (see section 4.2.2) yet in teachers' stated practices it appears that pronunciation teaching does occur. This means that one of the following is true: a) teachers rarely teach pronunciation and gave answers that reflect this; b) teachers teach pronunciation through unsophisticated and overly simple means only and do not understand how to teach pronunciation effectively but to rely on providing negative feedback when errors occur and positive feedback when correct pronunciation is realised; or c) teachers teach pronunciation but gave unreliable information about their theoretical and/ or practical knowledge and confidence in applying it in the classroom.

As can be observed in the table in appendix 1, as the length of linguistic item gets longer, the more likely it is for teachers to state that they neglect the teaching of its phonology, the evidence being the increase in "rarely" or "never" answers with the increase in length of linguistic item. One clear reason for this appears to be complexity but it may be the case that teachers consider longer utterances (at the phrase or sentence level) to be merely made up of words in the citation form or that they neglect consideration of aspects of connected speech at the lesson-planning stage. It may also be the case that those teachers who rarely teaching pronunciation lack subject knowledge in this area, and therefore lack confidence in teaching it effectively. This may be reflected in the results for teachers expressing a desire for more training in phonology (see section 4.2.2)

Teaching stress is important because, at the utterance level, stress on the wrong word and/or syllable can alter the message and at the word level it can impair intelligibility. In addition, strong syllables facilitate connection to utterances and aid comprehensibility (Field, 2008).

At the word level, the majority (78%) of respondents stated that they teach stress in words sometimes or more frequently. This is markedly different to sentence stress, which 58% of respondents stated they teach sometimes or more frequently.

Intonation is stated by the teachers to be taught more often than pronunciation of sentences and stress in sentences. More than 33 teachers provided an answer of sometimes or more frequently regarding their teaching of intonation, as opposed to the 24 who stated that they teach pronunciation of sentences sometimes or more frequently and the 29 who stated that they teach stress in sentences sometimes or more frequently. The number of teachers who stated that they teach these aspects of phonology is roughly the same, at between 14-18 respondents.

Teacher Beliefs

Teacher Beliefs About Teaching Listening and Pronunciation

There appeared to be a small majority, just one teacher over half of the sample, who believed that they assess listening more often than they teach listening. This was less than I expected due to the number of coursebooks on the market with listening exercises designed only to practise or test comprehension skills. The responses to the questionnaire could be taken to mean that just under half the teachers perceive practice to be the same as teaching, that they are actively involved in providing strategies to their learners more often than they assess listening skills or that they know that teaching listening is important yet lack the knowledge or skills necessary and thus state that they teach more often than they assess and refused to answer honestly.

There can be a tendency among teachers to assume that they are teaching a listening lesson when they are merely using the audio texts as a method to present language rather than practice skills. However, as Field (2008) states, "The prevailing tendency in the

teaching of listening is to provide practice and more practice without clearly defined goals. How comfortable would we feel about and approach to speaking which told learners to simply 'get on with the task' and provided no pronunciation teaching, no modelling, no controlled practice, no pragmatic input and little feedback?"(Field, 2008: Introduction, 4-5/14).

Just over half the teachers use listening tasks to present language to students (27/55 respondents). This means that listening may not be a means unto itself, but that listening tasks are vehicles for the transmission of linguistic artefacts, perhaps through an input flood (Loewen & Reinders, 2008 p.92). With this approach, it is unlikely that authentic (regarding English used outside the classroom) texts are used, but pedagogical texts. Pedagogical texts tend to be slower and scripted (to include instances of grammatical usage or lexical chunks). Furthermore, if used to the exception of all else, they lead to learners being underexposed to authentic language, with its false starts, mumblings and mutilation from background noise.

Just over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they mainly use listening tasks to present language intended to be produced at a later stage of the lesson. This reinforces the view that listening is mainly practised rather than taught by approximately half of the sample. If listening skills are rarely taught, then most learners cannot develop the skill because we rely upon learners to trial strategies that they have not been informed about, finding greater or lesser success in listening in relation to these strategies.

Almost all respondents expressed the belief that teaching pronunciation aids listening development, with only two expressing disagreement and none expressing strong disagreement. However, as mentioned above, over half of the sample (thirty or more) who do teach pronunciation teach it "sometimes" or "rarely". From this it may be inferred that teachers know pronunciation aids listening yet do not prioritise the explicit teaching of pronunciation in the classroom.

Two thirds of the respondents stated agreement or strong agreement with the statement, "Students need listening activities in the classroom just for exposure." If this were the case, the role of explicit teaching of listening in the language classroom would be severely diminished; if exposure were the primary purpose then listening activities are essentially whole-group extensive listening exercises. Such exercises are aimed at providing comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982). However, where Krashen's i+1 construct (where input should be pitched just above the learner's current level of comprehension [Krashen, 1982]) may be argued to be ineffective in whole-group situations due to i+1 being dependent upon the individual. If one could pitch input as i+1, in any class it would be likely that the median level of learner would receive correctly pitched comprehensible input whereas the higher level would likely receive i<=1 (i.e. known, thus inefficient for learning) and the lower level would be likely to receive i>1, (i.e. containing a significant proportion of incomprehensible input, thus also inefficient for learning).

Respondents do, however, have their learners listening for sounds. Approximately 63% of respondents stated that they agreed with the statement in Fig. 16. This indicates that bottom-up listening skills are being taught at least implicitly and at least occasionally.

Teacher Beliefs About Training

Most of the respondents did not agree that their in-house training involved a phonology/phonetics element. This is unsurprising and may be seen as one of the causal factors in respondents not teaching pronunciation beyond word level, with a general trend toward sticking to word-level pronunciation and intonation, and a tendency toward student exposure to the target language.

However, a majority of respondents stated that they have received training to teach effective listening activities. It may be inferred either that most teachers see phonology as unimportant to listening activities, or else that they have received phonology/ phonetic training as part of their personal professional development outside of work (for example, through teachers' organizations). However, a majority of teachers expressed a desire for more training in the teaching of listening and in phonology. Whether this is due to perceived lack in classroom skill or merely a desire for CPD would benefit from further research.

Despite the trend toward agreeing their in-house training has equipped them to teach effective listening activities, approximately 75% respondents stated that they would like more training in teaching listening, although only approximately 21% expressed this strongly. Furthermore, approximately 70% of respondents agreed that they would like more training in phonology, again with only approximately 21% having expressed this strongly. Most respondents gave roughly similar answers regarding the desire for further training in teaching listening and in phonology, with only one respondent's answer moving by a value of two on this scale.

If teachers have received training to teach effective listening activities, what is the stimulus for the desire for further training in listening? It may lie beyond activities, such as listening for details or examples of connected speech, and be connected to the interest in further training in phonology. Again, this warrants additional research.

Discussion

As can be seen above, the answers to the questionnaire are not always straightforward, with some questions regarding classroom practices and teacher beliefs more divisive than others, particularly the teaching of pronunciation beyond the word level and whether listening is tested more often than taught and whether it is used to present language to be used in later output. The stated classroom practices may not be wholly accurate reflections of what the respondents actually do in their classrooms but only their stated practices; that is, the respondents may have stated practices that they do not undertake or practices that they believe themselves to undertake yet do not actually do so.

Teachers' stated beliefs about their developmental needs and their judgements thereof are more reliable than the statements of practices The degree to which their practices are reflected in their statements cannot be ascertained by means of a questionnaire: that would require observation on a scale that is beyond the scope of this project; however, beliefs underpinning practices themselves are more easily captured.

Conclusion

Bottom-up listening skills are focused upon less than top-down skills.

My hypothesis regarding the focus upon top-down listening skills being greater than that of bottom-up skills may neither be confirmed nor unconfirmed. While it is clear, according to respondents' answers, that teachers are teaching gist and listening skills a great deal of the time, they are also teaching word-level phonology (pronunciation and stress) which would aid decoding, though as the length of linguistic item increases (i.e. from word to phrase to utterance) the likelihood of the phonological aspects being taught decreases. To extrapolate this further with an example, the likelihood of teaching of consonant clusters and their differences is more likely to be taught than aspects of connected speech, which in turn would be more likely to be taught than the intonation pattern for lists. Certainly, with prediction activities being frequently taught, and with vocabulary being more often pre-taught than not, it is clear that top-down processes are used widely in the teaching of listening.

Teachers want more training in the teaching of listening.

It is clear that the respondents favour more training in listening and phonology, despite the majority having stated that they have been trained to teach effective listening activities. Therefore if organisations provided more training on listening and phonology to their teachers, including sharing effective practices of those who are highly skilled and/or experienced in using a wide repertoire of techniques to teach listening, it would be seen as useful by a majority of teachers.

Phonology is taught mainly at word level.

In this study it is clear that more teachers teach pronunciation at word level than at either the phrasal or sentence level. However, it is not possible to make a definite assertion that phonology is taught mainly at word level. A significant number of teachers teach pronunciation at the word level but also teach it at the phrasal level regularly. In addition, although the majority of teachers surveyed teach stress at the word level, intonation is regularly taught, generally at sentence level. Whether this is due to intonation and stress being relatively easy to teach compared to other aspects of phonology requires more research.

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Appendix 1

Question: "How often do you:"	Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Pre-teach vocabulary?	14	17	18	2	0
Do topic-based elicitation pre-tasks?	14	24	8	2	3
Complete gap-fill activities before listening?	3	8	20	13	7
Teach pronunciation of words?	11	11	19	10	0
Teach pronunciation of phrases?	7	11	16	14	3
Teach pronunciation of sentences?	4	9	11	19	8
Teach stress in words?	10	13	16	8	4
Teach stress in sentences?	5	13	13	14	6
Teach intonation?	7	12	14	13	5

Appendix 2

Question: Indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.	Level of Agreement			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I assess listening more than I teach listening.	6	20	18	7
I mainly use listening tasks to present language I want students to use at a later stage of the lesson.	5	22	19	5
Teaching pronunciation aids listening development.	18	31	2	0
Students need listening activities in the classroom just for exposure.	9	25	12	5
Students do not hear enough native speech outside the classroom so they need to practise gist and detail exercises.	21	22	8	0
Listening tasks develop better student pronunciation.	8	31	12	0
I have learners listen only for sounds sometimes.	4	27	13	7
My in-house training has involved a phonology/phonetics element.	7	11	16	17
I have received training to teach effective listening activities.	7	24	14	6
I would like more training in teaching listening.	11	28	11	1

Academia, Angst, and Identity: Reflections on *Eikaiwa* and Teacher Training

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The role of formal training and academic research in the professional development of teachers and the extent to which it guides their classroom practice is an ongoing source of debate within the field of language education. Freeman and Johnson (1998) identified a significant gap existing between what researchers or teacher training programs deem to be effective for language learning and the realities of a highly contextualised classroom setting shaped by local and institutional tensions. Conversely, a number of research studies (Borg, 1998b; Rankin & Becker, 2006) have demonstrated ways, such as raising awareness of correction techniques or exposing teachers to inductive teaching methods, that formal teacher training and knowledge of relevant research can indeed shape the approach teachers adopt in addressing ground level classroom issues.

An area of Japanese English language teaching that arguably lies in almost complete isolation from research findings and professional training programs is the English conversation school (called *Eikaiwa* in Japanese) industry. *Eikaiwa* schools sprawl the entirety of Japan and despite being a three billion dollar a year industry (U.S. Commercial service, 2015), often lack sound hiring policies or basic training for teaching staff (Bossaer, 2003). *Eikaiwa* schools offer one of the few opportunities for Japanese English language learners to maintain contact with English post-university and, despite this, schools are often more interested in hiring what they deem to be physically (or racially) appealing foreign staff rather than being concerned with the pedagogical value of classes (Bailey, 2007; Kubota, 2011). There is a marked lack of research available on the private English school sector (Lowe, 2014), suggesting the need for an increased focus on what is actually happening in *eikaiwa* schools.

This narrative article follows my journey through my MA TESOL program and looks at how the formal training I received influenced my practice and led to a sense of belonging within a community of teachers. What I experienced during this time reshaped my self-conceptualization as a teacher and led me to define my role within *eikaiwa* as a catalyst for change rather than simply a commodified entity within an institution not much concerned with pedagogical value.

The Role of Formal Training and Research

The debate over the value of formal training and research in informing classroom level pedagogical practice remains, to date, unresolved. Addressing the effectiveness of formal teacher training, Freeman and Johnson (1998) claim that much of what goes on in standard teacher preparation fails to utilize the inherent value of real teacher perspectives, experiences, and the sociocultural settings in which they are formed. Furthermore, they postulate that, as Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research is often not easily applied to language classrooms, the value of such theoretical knowledge may be of limited value in both teacher development and practice.

Several other studies in teacher development have, however, suggested teacher training and an awareness of SLA theory can have a beneficial effect on both teachers' beliefs and how they translate into practice. In a study conducted in a German as a foreign language classroom, Rankin and Becker (2006) reported that the participant teacher, following exposure to research articles on corrective feedback in tandem with reflective practice, was found to adapt and utilize ideas from formal studies in his own teaching. Borg (1998b) also found, in a study of a native speaker teacher's approach to grammar teaching in an English as a Foreign Language context, that formal training played a significant role in constructing and solidifying his beliefs on student-centered inductive teaching.

In her article on the role of TESOL academic research, Ur (2012) has offered a compromise between the two positions. While conceding that many researchers have extremely limited experience in pedagogy, thus calling for caution when applying findings to the classroom, she also supports the notion of research exposing teachers to new ideas. The article concludes that if research is evaluated through the lens of practical experience and contextual awareness, it can indeed be of value to the classroom. This perspective highlights the notion that although we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater and totally disregard the pedagogical value of research, teachers need to carefully evaluate, based on their experience and professional skills, the degree to which an academic study has practical merit.

Eikaiwa Schools

Far from being primarily an educational institution, in a study on the ideology and motivations lying behind the *eikaiwa* school model, Kubota (2011) presents the business as being based on "leisure and consumption". Rather than for the purposes of language acquisition, many students regarded *eikaiwa* classes purely as a hobby or a form of escapism through the act of spending time in close proximity to foreign instructors. Kubota also found that the type of foreigner that was promoted by the company and preferred by customers was based on a narrow, clearly defined image – Caucasian and generally male. This deeply engrained image, still prevalent in modern *eikaiwa* schools, was highlighted in detail by Bailey (2007). Through a qualitative investigation of English conversation school students, Bailey investigated how desire, gender, and race shape the expectations and everyday realities within this setting. Bailey found that eroticism between Caucasian men and Japanese women, the interaction of gender and power, and the promotion of Occidentalism including the "ideal" foreign man were key components of the *eikaiwa* experience. As was found in Kubota's research, concerns related to pedagogical standards or SLA did not strongly feature.

Born, in part, from the markedly non-academic nature of many conversation schools, an often controversial and low grade image surrounds the *eikaiwa* industry in Japan. In an article for the Japan Times, McNeill (2004) draws parallels between modern *eikaiwa* and the fast food industry, in that both industries currently feature high turnover rates, low salaries, demanding schedules, and a lack of social security benefits. Mirroring Kubota's findings, this article also defines the conversation lessons as "a cheap and trendy pastime". In a study investigating varying perspectives on professionalism in *eikaiwa*, Bossaer (2003) conducted interviews with both Japanese managers and foreign teachers from five different conversation schools in Hokkaido, Japan. The study found that poor hiring policies, a lack of support for professional development, and a reluctance to involve teachers in decision making were major concerns for foreign staff whereas the Japanese managers stated that they wanted the foreign teachers to give more consideration to business concerns rather than pedagogical issues.

The research currently available centered on the world of *eikaiwa* suggests fractured and tempestuous relationships, both between foreign and Japanese standpoints as well as between overlapping spheres of education and entertainment.

Starting Out

Having just been released from the unrelenting production line format of a major chain *eikaiwa* company, my new local *eikaiwa* position seemed like heaven. I had a relaxed dress code, a leisurely schedule and the ability to once again flex my creative muscles in lesson planning. Add to this a new apartment, time for long-neglected hobbies and new co-workers, it felt like a new start. Having been marked as a popular instructor in my previous school and a reliable Assistant Language Teacher in public school before that, I was full of confidence in that I knew what I was doing in the ESL (or whatever acronym I thought I knew the meaning of) game and that I could float along on autopilot whilst enjoying the good life. And I was right. Every week, I would turn on my best "kind foreigner" routine and attempt to engage students in broken English conversation in any way I could. All of this whilst making sure that I didn't push them too hard because, in the world of *eikaiwa*, the customer is always right. This was cemented by frequent reassurances from the Japanese staff that I was indeed "*ninki*" (popular) and my lessons were "*tanoshii*" (fun). That sounded great. I was an exemplary employee.

But was I a good teacher? If I really looked at myself, my lessons, and, most importantly, my students, I could not shake an awkward feeling that had been festering under the surface since my earliest experiences in Japan as a fresh-faced ALT; the students aren't really improving. Of course, the easy schedule and marked lack of concern from the company about this issue helped to temporarily distract me from this sense of unease but I could never shake it completely, especially as I saw students continuing to hand over envelopes full of cash for tuition fees every month.

After about a year of floating along in the school, two new workers were thrust upon us that together dragged these uncomfortable feelings to the surface and forced me to address what lay behind them. They were M, a young woman who though, only still in her early 20s, had already received her MA TESOL from a prestigious school and J, a young man, a few years younger than me, who had also graduated from a leading MA TESOL program in the U.S. These two teachers emanated ambition, drive and passion, and I immediately felt dethroned and threatened. They did not belong in our school. Their ambition and qualifications seemed alien and ill-fitting in the world of English teaching I had experienced in the years up to that point. I had never met anyone like them before and as I listened to their conversations, full of alien-sounding acronyms and terms, I felt as if I was getting a glimpse into a world that had previously been hidden from me.

As the weeks and months went on, my fear and dented pride morphed into a fascination that both M and J fostered by offering me books and articles to check out that I hoped would allow me more access to their conversations and ideas. Although the material was initially often impenetrable and exhausting, I kept going and, together with discussions in the teachers' office, I was able to flesh out some basic principles that repeatedly popped up. What I also came to realize was that some of these principles were deeply at odds with what I and the school in general were doing for our students. The festering feeling that had remained beneath the surface for years had developed into something that I could no longer ignore.

Lashing Out

Through a desire to develop both my teaching ability and theoretical knowledge, I started to work on gaining a variety of different qualifications through teaching groups based in Tokyo and through online resources. These experiences had a profound effect on how I was able to utilize my class time

effectively and increased the degree to which I was able to interact with M and J, my two adopted *senpai* (a Japanese word for an upperclassman or upperclasswoman). However, exposure to SLA theory and methodological discussion also opened a Pandora's box for me in terms of the way I viewed the *eikaiwa* and my role within it. I began to be confronted with points of view that implied that a lot of the policies within the school were actually detrimental to learning and that the lack of assessment or any formal curriculum highlighted a lack of concern for linguistic development. Furthermore, the realization that the school had minimal interest in either the qualifications that I was attempting to get or the achievements that my *senpai* had already struggled to make slowly but surely edged me towards a mindset where I grew to resent almost everything that *eikaiwa* stood for. I saw my school's administration as con artists, duping students out of money, luring them into class with white faces and descriptions of teachers that resembled dating website profiles whilst lying to them about how they would become fluent speakers by sitting in class for an hour a week.

Following a chat with one of the presenters of a TESOL course in Tokyo, I applied to enter the MA TESOL program at Kanda University of International Studies. This was to be a decision that was to have a far reaching effect on how I looked at my own position as a teacher and as a member of the English language teaching community in Japan. The modules that I took in this course were very practical in focus and exposed me to an even wider and richer range of perspectives on what we should be focusing on in language teaching. An important point that was introduced to us early in the program was how, in the post method era, we should be able to choose what elements of instruction work for us and combine them as we see fit as teachers with our own "sense of plausibility"(Prabhu, 1990). Plausibility refers to a true belief in that what we are doing in class is causing learning to happen. The freedom and flexibility that the notion of plausibility gives teachers, in spite of whatever methodology is fashionable at any one time, appealed to me a great deal and remained in my mind throughout my MA classes.

Despite the enormous amount of positive experiences I was having in my MA program, I was still, however, unable to shake off the contempt I began to feel towards *eikaiwa*. This was eventually heightened even further as, through my background reading, I became more and more engrossed in critical pedagogy literature and started searching out as much information as I could on analysis of the *eikaiwa* industry, native-speakerism, and racism in Japan. This literature served to confirm everything I was feeling and with every article I read, I felt a kind of puerile cathartic satisfaction, like I was getting back at, in some small way, what I viewed to be an immoral enterprise.

Leveling Out

My trips down from Tochigi to the graduate school in Tokyo became a kind of sanctuary for me, a place where I could step out of the edutainment production line and catch my breath for long enough to reinvigorate my passion for teaching and gain some perspective on what I was doing week in, week out. As my courses progressed, it seemed as if the volume of my own angsty anti-*eikaiwa* one-man band was being softened and was giving way to something more productive and deeper than self-obsessed teenage snarling.

Through conversations with both my classmates and professors, my eyes were slowly opened to the plethora of struggles faced daily by teachers in junior high, high school, and university and the way that their creativity and passion often allowed them to overcome even the most rigid obstacles standing before them. On the other hand, I also heard stories of seemingly impossible institutional barriers suffocating both teachers and students. This sharing of teacher stories and the efforts by our professors to adapt the concepts we were studying to each of our individual contexts allowed me to understand that my frustrations and complaints were by no means only existent in *eikaiwa*. This fostered a real sense of camaraderie with people I saw as "real teachers", something that, in my self-assigned outsider status, I had never really felt beforehand. This feeling of belonging to a community of teachers spurred me to move past the problems of *eikaiwa* and seek to bring about positive change to both my classroom and the wider sphere of the conversation school industry.

One idea that stuck with me during my time in graduate school originated from the highly respected scholar and educator, Leo Van Lier, who said: "Reform thus occurs from the bottom up, one pedagogical action at a time"(Van Lier, 1996, p158). When I first heard these words, I thought it was a nice idea but did not really consider it deeply. It was not until I started putting the pieces together in terms of developing my own teacher beliefs, working together with my peers, and working towards positivity that I was able to truly appreciate and feel empowered by what Van Lier was saying. In this sense, my formal training, the community I have adopted and the wealth of perspectives I have been exposed to has flipped my conception of what it means to be a teacher on its head. Had I not made that step and committed myself to the MA, I believe that the energy and drive that had existed within me as I nervously sat in my application interview in Kanda almost two years ago would now have been replaced with tired acceptance of the seemingly unalterable. Furthermore, the knowledge and ideas that I have developed through my training and my interest in formal research have led to a great many developments in my everyday teaching. These include the introduction of an extensive reading program, the construction of a monthly newsletter where students share written work, an increased focus on transcribing my lessons and teaching reflectively, attempts to foster student autonomy through the use of mobile assisted language learning, and the use of awareness raising activities designed to encourage students to view non-native speakers of English as role models. Without exposure to new ideas through research and training, none of this would have existed.

Do I still believe *eikaiwa* to be a racist, deeply exploitative and educationally ineffective institution? Unfortunately, yes. But I no longer think that it has to be. As I move from being a devalued "foreign worker" to becoming a member within a community of "real

teachers", I feel a responsibility to raise awareness of the issues existing in the sphere within which I work. I would like to see all teachers interested in transforming *eikaiwa* basing their suggestions for change on research as well as what we can feasibly enact within our own particular contexts. Through an informed and measured approach, I hope that we can go some way to challenge the status quo and make the transformation of *eikaiwa* a work in progress.

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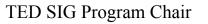Van Lier, L. (1996). Interaction in the language classroom: Awareness, autonomy, and authenticity. New York: Longman.

TED CUE SIG Joint Forum at JALT2015

Mike Ellis, Program Chair, TD-SIG

For the past three years, I have had the pleasure and privilege of co-coordinating the annual TD-CUE Forum at JALT National Conference with Wendy Gough of CUE SIG. The fifth installation of this forum at JALT2015 in Shizuoka was possibly our most stimulating yet, with a packed room of engaged attendees and presenters armed with exciting stories to share. This year's theme was "Learning with the learners: Stories of student input leading to changes in teaching practice." We asked presenters to reflect on their experiences and describe one episode when student feedback led to some kind of transformation in their teaching. The presentations were conducted over two sessions, simultaneously to rotating small groups in informal PechaKucha style. Specific topics ranged from healthy regulation of teacher-student interaction on social media to expansion of the use of peer feedback on speaking tasks. The forum maintained a focused coherence throughout these various topics thanks to the unifying theme of teacher's professional development through narrative inquiry. Professor Jean-Marc Dewaele, visiting from Birckbeck University of London, moderated a final discussion which further connected the important lessons of the stories, and encouraged attendees to continue learning from and with their students.

Please enjoy the papers from this forum, and consider joining us again in Nagoya this November. The sixth forum's theme will be "The process of teacher development: Transformative moments", and promises to offer more insight on our journeys to improve ourselves as educators.

Mike Ellis

TED SIG Program Chair

Brainstorm Input You Need

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Focus: brainstorming can give you access to things you don't know that your students are thinking

Dokkyo University runs a course named Comprehensive English 1 for first-year students. I do not use a textbook but instead have students provide all the input for all lessons (e.g., they show the class and myself what they are thinking for a topic and task during a brainstorming session on the board); they are the textbook! My teaching adjusts to what they tell me whether it be advice on what is acceptable in a conversation or mistake/error correction. It is a very dynamic and unpredictable technique that involves students socially co-constructing their own English conversations with other students and the teacher.

In the beginning

When I first started teaching English in Japan, I was very comfortable with textbooks because they save on preparation time and have ready-to-go materials with exercises. However, I started to realize that I was subscribing to someone else's educational beliefs and sacrificing my input on what was being taught. I also noticed negative student reactions when I mentioned the word "textbook", which made me think…what would it be like ditching textbooks?

But why ditch textbooks?

I had to justify my reasoning. In my experience, textbooks are limited in tapping into human thoughts and feed the mind rather than open a window to it. Therefore, I wanted to change my teaching and focus on student input in my lessons. Essentially, I wanted my students to replace textbooks.

But how could I ditch textbooks?

I started my journey into a world without textbooks by experimenting with the brainstorm concept, which is often used for new and creative ideas. However, I started experimenting with it from a different angle; as a window to see what my students were thinking in preparation for conversations and using their brainstorming input to inspire and drive practice conversations.

Thinking about thinking

This got me thinking about thinking and the philosophical proposition, "I think, therefore I am." Rene Decartes, a French philosopher, proposed doubting one's own existence serves as proof of the reality of one's own mind (Cogito ergo sum, n.d.) but I used a simpler interpretation for brainstorming:

• I think therefore I am engaged.

• I think therefore I am sharing my thoughts and beliefs with others.

• I think therefore I am being valued.

So what did all this mean?

It meant that I had to convince my students that thinking for themselves was allowed, expected and valued. Fortunately, by this stage, I was teaching conversational courses that met twice a week and I was able to establish a brainstorming routine made up of homework preparation, which was to write three facts, opinions and questions about a topic (e.g., Love & Money) and three language ideas to achieve a task (e.g., Giving opinions); a total of 12 ideas. At the beginning of the first lesson of each week, students shared their homework with a partner and then each student wrote ONE fact or opinion or question or language idea to achieve the task on the blackboard; about 23 in total. This brainstorming session opened a window to what the class was generally thinking. My job was then to be a linguistic filter that checked content and grammar and gave advice on how realistic the student ideas were for an effective conversation at their level. This student input helped direct practice conversations before assessment, which was demonstrating task-competence in front of the class.

In addition

I have also used brainstorming in public speaking courses to find out what my students already knew about speeches and presentations. For example:

- Who gives a speech/presentation?

- What is a speech/presentation?

- When do we see or give a speech/presentation?

- Where can we see or give a speech/presentation?

- Why see or give a speech/presentation?

- How can we give a speech/presentation?

This kind of brainstorming probed for a connection with real world applications and I found it to be quite successful too.

Finally

In conclusion, I believe that through brainstorming my students took a degree of ownership and control of their own learning by thinking for themselves and by using their OWN input in preparation for conversations and public speaking rather than being overly dependent on me and overly dependent on textbooks. And this is as far as my story goes, so far.

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Bio: Darren Van Veelen (M.ED TESOL) has been teaching English in Japan for 12 years. His areas of interest are developing speaking strategies, critical thinking skills, motivation, and keeping it real in the classroom.

Social Media Utilization: A Critical Journey

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The potential to utilize social media to enhance and enrich students' language learning experience beyond the confines of the classroom has been noted by various commentators (e.g Dabbagh and Kitsantas 2012; Wodzicki 2012). Surveying the literature, Thorne (2010) notes "the mercurial rise in the use of communication technologies that enable language learners direct interaction with speakers of the language they wish to learn, independent of spatial location" (p. 139). Despite these opportunities, many university teachers remain reluctant to engage with students across social media. Sometimes there may be institutional restrictions in place preventing such interaction, but often, according to Cox (2013), the cause is "a lack of understanding of its educational value" (p. 22).

At JALT2015, the TED CUE SIG Joint Forum on "Learning with the Learners: Stories of Student Input Leading to Changes in Teaching Practice," afforded me the opportunity to critically reflect on my own social media use, and the journey that led me, prompted by students, to connect classroom practice with social media in order to benefit the language learning experiences of my students. Drawing on Moon's (2004) maxim that "experience must be processed in order that knowledge can result from it" (p. 113), I outline the implicit negotiation that allowed me to learn from learners and change my practice as a result.

I am a teacher, writer and filmmaker. As well as standard EFL classes, I teach screenwriting in content-based courses, including my Seminar for junior and senior students at Yokohama National University. I also run various Study Abroad programs in my role as Director of Study Abroad in the Department of Economics.

Rouse (2012) defines social media as a "collective of online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration". The key word here is interaction. I often focus on social issues in my teaching. In the past, I have used textbooks such as *Impact Issues* or Kinseido's *Understanding BBC News*. In the classroom, I am comfortable with a fairly high level of self-disclosure. In social identity terms (Tajifel 1979), I talk with students as a teacher, but also as an expat, a Scot, a European, a foreign-language learner, a parent, a football supporter and a filmmaker. Outside of the classroom, all of these social identities and more are represented on social media. However, until recently, the only online presence I brought into the classroom was an email address: one address, for students to submit their work to. Basically, I tried to maintain strict boundaries between the self in the classroom, and my online self.

However, as websites and apps became more multi-functional and interactive, maintaining those boundaries became more and more difficult. If you have any kind of online presence, especially one where you use your own name and include image content, then one thing is certain - your students will find you. Despite occasionally using pseudonyms and making no mention of my online presence in class, students would pop up to comment on my Flickr photos or, more problematically, send me Facebook friend requests.

Reflecting on this, I realized there was a contradiction here. I had nurtured a classroom culture of sharing ideas, opinions, and experiences, but was attempting to block that sharing when it led to a natural curiosity about me. I was encouraging interpersonal communication, but not taking full advantage of the opportunities our digitized, globalized times offer to expand this beyond the classroom. Of course, in any age, maintaining public/private boundaries are important, but I was missing a trick here. Instead of shunning interaction with students on social media, I should be exploiting it as a learning opportunity, all the while managing it, and controlling it. The solution was not to shut students out of my online world, but to invite them in to designated spaces where we could foster learning opportunities together beyond the classroom confines.

The result is that these days, come the beginning of term in April and October, I begin every new course by giving out a handout that tells students all about me, and where we can and cannot interact on social media. That handout still includes an email address for students to submit work to. However, they can also interact with me on selected social media, and in some cases are even required to. For example, on my screenwriting course, you have to follow my Twitter feed, which allows us to discuss the film-related articles that I re-tweet. EFL Writing students are required to post film reviews on IMDb.com, where they can also read and respond to my film reviews. Students interested in the various Study Abroad programs I run can follow my Instagram account. In 2015, I took 30 students to University of Edinburgh for a one month summer intensive, and then in autumn took 10 students to Rome and Venice on our Euro-Japan Dialogue program, where students present and debate on economic topics with their European peers. Prospective participants get real-time updates from these overseas locations and through word and image can anticipate the experience that awaits them should they apply for the following year's program. To access these social media resources, all the information you need is on the handout.

Significantly, the handout also clearly states that we cannot be Facebook friends until after graduation. Various studies have investigated the utility of Facebook in tertiary education (e.g. Selwyn 2009). However, in the context of university teaching in Japan, my personal opinion is that you can't be friends with someone you may have to give a grade to.

More problematic is LINE. LINE is an application often used on smartphones to exchange text messages and images, amongst other things. In Japan, applications such as LINE are strongly associated with the negative aspects of the digital age such as cyber-bullying (Shariff 2010, p. 111). On Study Abroad programs, I would insist that students use their university email for all contact, but I was aware that students formed their own groups for information sharing using LINE. In fact, Wi-Fi access problems when overseas would compromise the effectiveness of my email-only policy, and students preferred LINE groups to communicate with each other, especially while abroad. In 2014 the student cohort visiting universities in France and England on Euro-Japan Dialogue asked that we, the accompanying teachers, join those groups. We did so - a little hesitantly, to be honest.

However, the decision to engage with students over LINE was justified by events on the Euro-Japan Dialogue program in November 2015. My colleague and I took ten YNU students to two European universities, one in Rome and one in Venice, for presentations and discussion. This was the 10th year of the program, and the second year that we had a dedicated LINE group. On Euro-Japan Dialogue we meet our students in Europe, and say goodbye to them there. This allows them to travel for a week or two before and/or after the program. This is an aspect of the program that is particularly popular with both students and teachers, as it allows flexibility for each to prioritize their respective concerns.

On November 13, 2015, I had been back from Europe less than a week when I woke on that Saturday morning to the news of coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris, and immediately thought of my students still in Europe. At 9:18 AM I posted a message on our Euro-Japan Dialogue LINE group, and 20 minutes later knew that we had one student in Paris, who was safe, but based somewhere close enough that she could hear the gunfire, and she was scared. I was able to offer reassurances on LINE, and minutes later my Japanese colleague was responding on the feed, giving the student updates and advice in Japanese. Our university has crisis management policies and practices in place to deal with such situations, but on reflection I wonder if we could have dealt with the situation as swiftly and effectively as we did had LINE not been part of our process.

As the above shows, not only does social media interaction with students offer up opportunities for language input and authentic communication, it also aids the logistics of running programs in terms of effective information sharing and crisis management.

In summary, my own personal journey has been one of shunning social media interaction with students, being met with pushback from them, which led me to critically reflect on how to make judicious use of social media to enhance my own professional teacher-student relationships. Moon (2004) discusses the "emotional insight" that can come from critical reflection, noting "[t]here can be learning that results in a behavior change that seems to be more profound than simply knowing something" (p. 51). Looking back on my own personal journey towards the judicious use of social media with students has afforded such emotional insight. It will undoubtedly continue to do so, as the digital era continues to evolve and challenge the ways we teach and learn.

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Revising Teaching Components of an American Literature Course with Students

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This presentation will show how a literature course which I taught to 3rd and 4th year English majors evolved over four years' time, from being a small discussion-based class taught the first two years, to a medium-sized computer-based class using the manaba online instructional system being implemented in universities in Japan. I also show how the course moved from being teacher-fronted to one more attuned to students, who helped me revise my teaching format, assessment and lesson dynamics.

The graphic novel "American Born Chinese" by Gene Luen Yang (2006) consists of three tales of identity and prejudice interlinked with an American-born Chinese boy's childhood years, first in San Francisco's Chinatown and later in a mostly white school setting. This novel mirrored my own experience as a second generation Japanese in California. I regarded the book to be taught as intensive reading, which "involves learners reading in detail with specific learning aims and tasks" (British Council, 2008), as I wanted students to understand deeply the present lives of American-born Asians in the United States and grasp more fully the differences between comics and *manga*.

The first two years I taught this course to very small classes of less than ten students. Students read each chapter, asked questions, and discussed themes. I did not engage in much self-reflection other than to gauge the novel's language level difficulty, which is the equivalent of early American high school level. Two years later, when my department decided more students should be enrolled, I proposed to teach it as a web-based course, which required the use of computers and limited the number of students in such rooms.

In the first year of web-based instruction, I taught the course mainly in lecture style because I was convinced that students needed a great amount of cultural input. I put lots of material online, with links to YouTube videos and websites. Students completed chapter comprehension exercises and took quizzes online during lessons. In time I became aware of a growing disconnect between my efforts and students' satisfaction.

Brookfield (1995) encourages teachers to engage in critical reflection through four lenses: self, colleagues, research literature, and students (Miller, 2010). As for myself, I saw my situation as a puzzle rather than as a problem, along the lines of exploratory practice (Allwright and Hanks, 2009). Regarding collegial experiences, I could count on my departmental peers for advice. I have offered every year my course as an open class for faculty development. I am also a member of the Learner Development (LD) SIG which researches practices that support autonomous learning and teaching. I read works (Barkley et. al 2005; Ashwell et. al 2014) that promote collaborative learning between students. What remained was how to elicit student opinions.

I elicited these opinions through the course questionnaire endemically used in universities in Japan. Teachers regard it as an unnecessary evil obstacle to teaching, and dread reading haphazard and insensitive student comments. Nevertheless, I saw the questionnaire as the best instrument to elicit such views. I asked students to write honest and explicit comments about the class dynamics and use of the manaba learning system. I received a detailed list of responses full of constructive criticisms. I felt confounded to fully understand them due to my primitive Japanese language skills and sensitive ego, but I was determined to use the questionnaire as a catalyst for change.

I asked several students who took this class to go through the list of student responses in order to identify problems and solutions. The students identified two major problems: the lack of organized class discussions, and my inefficient use of the manaba system, particularly in regards to administering quizzes. The solutions they proposed were 1) a small-group discussion activity with assigned roles, and 2) judicious use of the manaba system with tests and content pages. The students presented these problems and solutions at the initial Creating Community: Learning Together LD-SIG conference held in Tokyo in December 2014.

I adopted these two student-developed solutions into my 2nd year teaching this course using manaba. Approximately the same number of students enrolled. In every lesson, I implemented the role-based discussion activity based on themes of the novel and in which partners were changed every several weeks. I also reduced the number of online homework assignments and had students take quizzes on their own time outside of the lessons. I still had students read every chapter of the novel by themselves.

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Again, I asked students to write detailed answers on the course questionnaires, and enlisted students who took this year's course to read the responses and discern solutions. To my surprise, the discussion activity was negatively viewed, because of students who came without reading the chapters and were unable to play their role in the discussion. Also, the discussion time allocated was too long. As for the manaba system, there were still complaints with test administration problems and heavy workload. The students presented their solutions at the 2nd Creating Community: Learning Together LD-SIG conference held in December 2015.

Through the lens of critical self-reflection, my teaching has improved by proactively using the university course questionnaire learner comments to engage learners to read these comments, identify problems, construct solutions, and present these in a public forum. By becoming more sensitive to the needs and preferences of students, and empower them, I have developed new ways of seeing and taking action. This is the kind of learning that brings faculty development into active interplay with students to view their learning with the same lens as teachers, and vice versa.

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Bio: Ken Ikeda belongs to the Department of English at Otsuma Women's University in Tokyo. His current research interests are on second language identities of Japanese learners and undergraduate thesis supervision in Japan. He would like to have more time writing stories, playing the piano, and enjoying his wife's company.

Listen to the Learners

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For me, learning with the learners happens when I am quiet and the learners are contributing to class. Over the years, my students' input has led me to change all parts of my teaching from planning to final evaluation. I used to think it was me and all about me – my ideas, my lesson plan, my personality, - that made a class sparkle. Giving a student more freedom opens up the classroom to a profusion of experiences, ideas, and impressions. The classroom becomes an immensely enjoyable and interesting place where we can share our individual personalities. I need to trust my students and give up trying to be completely in control of everything. My learners have shown me that when I speak as little as possible, and they speak as much as they can, the final results are much more satisfying and lasting.

One day I ran out of time to prepare my lesson. I gave up trying to generate ideas by myself, went to class, and asked the students for help. I felt like I had failed because I couldn't come up with more ideas, but it turned out the ideas they wrote on the board were so interesting I was stunned. This was my epiphany. I needed to find ways of including more of their ideas in my lessons.

Conducting a needs analysis allows students to have input into what will happen in class. My Early Childhood English course was not a popular course at first and few signed up. I asked the students what they wanted to be able to do in English and found they wanted to be able to tell a story. We came up with different ideas for individual storytelling projects and I ended up discontinuing the final exam in favor of a final presentation. I completely overhauled the syllabus and evaluation method and students now fill my class.

One of the first times that I hesitatingly allowed high school students to take control of a topic of study was for our Oregon-Oxford type of class debate. The first of two debates that the class does is a silly or fun topic to get the hang of debating and the second debate is on a serious topic. The students decided they first wanted to debate whether digging the meat out of a tiny *shijimi* clam during mealtime was an etiquette faux pas or not. However, the "silly" debate turned out to be a weighty debate on tradition, social progress, respecting your elders, and food waste. Many members of the student audience were chanting "*shijimi, shijimi*" by the end of the debate they were so fired up by the debaters. Allowing students to select a topic of their own choosing turned out to significantly increase their interest, participation, and recall of what they had learned through the debate experience. Autonomy has reaped these types of rewards time and again and I learn so much along the way from my students.

No matter how young or old the learner, one thing everyone seems to enjoy is a fun game or activity. My younger students especially have begged me for games so I finally made an original board game using the class material. It was so well received that every once in a while, I will invent a new one. It helps the students to stay focused on the subject, improves the class dynamics, participation goes up to 100%, and motivation not only for the game but for my class goes up as well.

Trying to keep bored or discouraged beginner students interested in English is a challenge. When I have let them try to write their own dialogues with the little vocabulary and grammar that they know, they have shown me amazing creativity in their writing. I ask them to dramatize their dialogues and the entire class focuses on their production. Their personalities emerge and class becomes a fun and accepting place.

Students tell me over and over that presentations are stressful! In order to cut down on the stress, I sometimes have three or four students presenting simultaneously around the classroom with a few students in front of each presenter acting as their audience. After the speaker is finished, the listeners move to a different speaker and the speaker repeats their presentation to a new audience. Students have told me that their stress level is reduced as they do not have to present to the entire class at once, with all eyes looking up and the attention on them. Through repeated performance of the same presentation, the quality of the presentation goes up and there is more participation from the smaller audience.

For me, learning with the learners happens when I am quiet and the learners are talking, or writing, and creating. Giving learners more say about what happens in the classroom has helped me to develop classes where students make English their own tool for communication. I owe so much to my students who have taught me to be a better listener, to be more accepting of all kinds of people (and learners), and not to be afraid to let people be who they are.

Suggested Resources:

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Bio: Lorna Asami was at Rikkyo Junior College and High School for many years. She recently accepted a full-time position at Kanda Jogakuen, another private girls' high school in Tokyo. Her research interests are in the areas of learner autonomy, motivation, and task-based learning.

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JALT TD SIG

The JALT Teacher Development SIG is a network of foreign language instructors dedicated to becoming better teachers and helping others teach more effectively. Active since 1993, our members teach at primary and secondary schools, universities, language schools, and in various other contexts. New members are always welcome to join our conversation and share their experiences with other teachers. (Please note that the name was officially changed from Teacher Education & Development SIG in early 2016.)

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