

Explorations in Teacher Education

JALT Teacher Education and Development SIG

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<http://jalt.org/ted/ted/Home/Home.html>

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From the Editor

Welcome to the July 2013 issue of *Explorations in Teacher Education*, the publication of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) Teacher Education and Development (TED) SIG.

Two articles are included in this issue of *Explorations in Teacher Education*. The first is a timely reminder of living history research and a report on its successful application with Japanese university learners of English. In this article, *Lisa Theisen* shares her personal experiences with a living history project before she became a teacher and how she has used this experience to connect her students to their past and create an active classroom for language learning. She reminds us that history is best shared, particularly our personal histories and those of our family.

The second article, by *Peter Hourdequin*, explores the application of Vygotsky's dialogic principles with internet technologies and the benefits of these for teacher development by first reviewing the underlying principles of the dialogic interactions then reviewing how several internet sites and Twitter feeds can support teacher development and give even the busiest teachers a place to share their stories and gain insights into our field.

Finally, this issue of *Explorations in Teacher Education* provides a report on the second annual TED conference, EFL Teacher Journeys from TED Program Chair *Mike Ellis*.

Tamara Swenson, Editor,
Explorations in Teacher Education

Keep Your Calendar Open!

Teacher Journeys Conference 2014

Watch for it in June, 2014!

Check the JALT TED SIG website for details!

jalt.org/ted

Living History: Researching and Sharing Personal Stories

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History does not have to be a boring subject, and can, with a little preparation, be an engaging activity for language learners in Japan. This article outlines the experience of one teacher with a living history project with her Japanese university students that provides insights into how living histories can, as one movie suggests, make history “come alive.”

A Class Project . . .

Until my 3rd year of high school, the only history I studied was the kind you find in textbooks. There were names, there were places, and there were numbers, but there were never really any stories. However, my 3rd year high school history teacher was really into the value of stories, and he wanted his students to know stories from history. Thus, when we started the unit on World War Two, instead of relying solely on what the textbook said, he gave us the assignment to find someone who had actually lived through that war and interview that person to find out things we couldn't find in history books. As a busy high school student (that is, as a teenager not having much time for school work), I remember being very resistant to this task. After all, what teenage kid thinks it's cool to talk to an old person?

. . . that led to a connection with my father

But it didn't really happen that way. My dad, who had been a young teen when the United States entered into World War Two, was a good storyteller, but up until that point in my life, all his stories had been made-up stories. I had never really asked him about his life, nor had he offered much in the way of his childhood stories. But once I started asking about his life during World War Two he seemed happy to open up and tell me. Also, maybe more importantly pedagogically, it became a meaningful learning experience because the information I was able to gather (my research) was so very personal.

He was 13 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. On that day, he and his younger brother and his father were sitting around a radio in Wisconsin, listening to their home team, the Green Bay

Packers, play football. He recalls that, just at a moment when the game was getting exciting, it was interrupted by the announcement that Pearl Harbor had come under attack. His reaction, he said, was extreme disappointment. But he added that his disappointment wasn't related at all to the attack; he was disappointed that the football game had been interrupted, never to be broadcast again on that day or on any other day. I know of no history book that has a story about the start of the war that matches my dad's.

He also told me about something called War Stamps, which kids were encouraged to buy to support the war effort. He said it was really exciting to save his pocket change to buy these stamps, and he recited (as he can to this day) the jingle he and his classmates learned in their junior high school that was used to encourage them to put their spare change toward supporting the war. I can still hear him singing it (to the tune of "Scotland's Burning," which was a round I had learned in my Girl Scout days):

*"Save your nickels, dimes and quarters,
Pennies, too, old and new.
Buy more war stamps,
Monday morning here at school."*

These are just a few examples of the many personal stories from history that I learned that day and for many days after. Later in my life, after I became a teacher, I realized that what made the assignment memorable and meaningful – what made a difference – is that what I learned when I made an effort to ask was much more valuable and memorable than what I learned from any textbook chapter that covered the "facts" of World War Two.

Becoming Researchers of Living History

Fast forward to today. In the first month of the school year my university freshman speaking and listening courses, I teach students how to make basic presentations, and while my goal is actually to teach the format of a simple presentation without worrying too much about academic content, I try as much as possible to give them topics that they might find meaningful to research and that others in the class will, hopefully, find interesting to listen to.

One of the first presentations the students do is called Living History Presentation. For this presentation, borrowing from the idea my history teacher had, students are required to interview their grandparents or someone who is their grandparents' age and to give a presentation about what they learned. While many students, much like I did, initially assume that the interviewing process will be tedious and are thus resistant at first, most tell me after the presentation (and, for some, even years after) that what they learned from the interview was not only interesting and new, but, in some cases, it's the most meaningful research they have ever done as a university student.

For example, one student interviewed her grandmother who had lived in Okinawa during World War Two. She said that her grandmother had been so excited to be asked about her life that her interview had lasted days. One of the most memorable facts she learned about her grandmother was that a bomb had been dropped very near to her while she was out working in the garden as a small child. The bomb, however, failed to detonate. Hitomi, my student, told the class with tears in her eyes that when her grandmother told her this story, she realized that

if that bomb had exploded, she wouldn't be here today. She said that even her own mother had never heard that story. Maybe she had simply never asked, just like I'd never asked my dad about his life as a teenager until I was "made" to do so.

Another student told of her great-grandfather being separated from his family during the bombing of Hiroshima, and of how he spent days searching for his family and finally was able to locate them. Others told lighter stories of how their grandparents met or what kinds of punishments they got when they were in school back in the "old days". All of the stories were real, all were interesting, and all had much more meaning than any history textbook could ever have.

Learning from our Histories and Stories

When I did my interview with my dad and when my students did their interviews with their elderly relatives, we learned not only about our own histories and stories, but we also learned something else. We learned that people want to share these stories; they are just waiting for us to ask. And when we do ask, that can make all the difference.

Submissions Welcome!

The Teacher Education & Development SIG welcomes submissions for its publication, *Explorations in Teacher Education* that address aspects related to the SIG's core mission of expanding and exploring issues in teacher education.

Submissions must conform to the Guidelines of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition (APA, 6). Manuscripts should be prepared using either MS-Word or as a text document. Graphs and figures should be sent

as PDFs in separate files. Author names should NOT be included on the manuscript. The Author Names and contact information should appear in the body of the e-mail.

Manuscripts must be submitted by email to:

jalt.ted.ete.editor@gmail.com

The Subject box should read:

TED ETE submission: Author Name

Dialogic Teacher Development in the Internet Age: Tools and Opportunities

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This article makes the case for the centrality of dialogue in EFL teacher development, and then introduces three digitally dialogic platforms that allow teachers to continue their professional development without requiring large blocks of time, as is necessary for traditional coursework. Finally, the opportunities that current technologies provide for empowering teacher development that is tailored to local needs in specific contexts are discussed.

Foundations of Dialogic Interactions in Education

After cave-painting, there may be no older pedagogical device for teaching than dialogue. Plato believed that truth itself was only to be found in dialogic interactions (rather than untrustworthy things like books). Plato's dialogues form a foundation of Western thought, and though today we see truth as emerging by way of various forms of inquiry, something like the so-called Socratic method remains a popular tool in both formal and informal forms of teacher education. As teachers, who among us has not felt invigorated by a good conversation with a colleague about theory, pedagogy, or classroom practice? The perspective offered by the voice of another—perhaps more experienced teacher—dealing with issues similar to our own can

outweigh anything we read in academic articles and books.

The Dialogic in Teacher Education

Lev Vygotsky—forefather of sociocultural theory—praised the power of dialogic verbal interaction this way:

In conversation, every sentence is prompted by a motive. Desire or need lead to request, question to answer, bewilderment to explanation. The changing motives of the interlocutors determine at every moment the turn oral speech will take. It does not have to be consciously directed—dynamic situation takes care of that (Vygotsky, 1962, p.99).

As teachers in conversation with other teachers, we discuss individual students, we explore what works and what doesn't work in the classroom, we describe the specifics of our teaching contexts, and we try to connect theory to practice or vice versa. We have these conversations, that is, when we can find opportunities for them. In the meantime, we continue with the everyday grind of lesson planning, materials development, teaching, and whatever administrative duties are demanded of us by our institutions.

But to keep the conversation going, we also read and write. These two activities represent more reflective types of dialogue than the back and forth of verbal communication. In reading, we engage in an intimate conversation with a chosen author. Writing, on the other hand, involves a dialogue between ourselves and a more vaguely imagined other. The writing of reflective practice may be addressed to our future selves, whereas in academic writing it is the imagined readership (you!) and/or editor of a given publication that shapes our voice.

The primary differences between textual dialogues and face-to-face verbal interaction relate to time and space. Traditionally, verbal conversations have always been both local and ephemeral. They involve negotiations of meaning with a particular interlocutor in a particular place at a particular point in time. Text, however, is more permanent, allowing asynchronous interaction on more expansive time scales. You can revisit a great book or article over time, and as you change and grow, so can the conversation you have with the work's author (though her words remain the same).

Digital Tools for Teacher Development

It is only relatively recently that we are starting to see, online, new avenues for dialogic teacher development that mix the conversational nature of face-to-face interaction with the reflective potential of textual interaction. As Gee and Hayes (2011) point out "When digital media carry language, language can be interactive, . . . but also permanent" (p.1). Examples abound: there are online forums and bulletin boards, blogs, podcasts, Facebook groups, and hashtag conversations on Twitter. And though the internet and its myriad digital conversations have been around for more than two decades, it is only recently that educators have started to take full advantage of the medium's great potential for dialogic teacher development that combines the interactive nature of conversational interactions with the permanence of digital storage.

There are a very wide variety of digital tools available for online teacher development, but here I would like to highlight just three platforms that seem rich in potential for ongoing teacher development by offering affordances for dialogic learning.

Joining a Digital Conversation

The first digital conversation I would like to look at is #eltchat on twitter. Twitter, as most readers probably know, is a microblogging and social networking platform that limits text posts (tweets) to 140 characters. That is about the length of a sentence like this one: similar to the length of a typical "conversational turn unit" in normal spoken discourse. So even though twitter is a text-based medium, its design characteristics create affordances that encourage conversational interaction. #Eltchat is a live and archived hashtag conversation about various

issues relevant to EFL and ESL teachers around the world. It takes place every Wednesday at 12pm and 9pm, British Standard Time (BST). Teachers from around the world participate in the discussion by noting the topic that is posted on the eltchat.org website beforehand, and then commenting and/or responding to each other with relevant tweets. For the chat to be visible anyone, participants include the #eltchat within their message. This allows for others to follow the conversation on twitter in real-time, and it also allows the [eltchat](http://eltchat.org) administrators to consolidate a written transcript for publication afterwards at eltchat.org. Topics vary by week, and run the gamut of issues relevant to teachers in a variety of teaching contexts. This week, for example, the topic is lesson planning. The eltchat.org website provided a prompt that asked participants to read a short blog post about lesson planning, and to respond with comments and reactions. Shortly after the twitter conversations are complete volunteers post summaries and transcripts (in easy-to-follow graphic formats). Here are some examples from the website of recent chat transcripts and summaries:

1st May, first chat, Coursebook Authors Fight Back

1st May, second chat, Criteria for evaluating web based tools

15th May, first chat, Motivation á la Hadfield and Mackay

15th May, second chat, The Power of Questions

17th April, first chat, Six Abilities to be a Competent Teacher Part One

17th April, second chat, Six Abilities to be a Competent Teacher Part Two

24th April, first chat, The Flipped Classroom

24th April, second chat, Oral Correction –

Reflections from a Recovering Recaster

These chats, and others, are available at

<http://eltchat.org/wordpress/eltchat-summaries-index/>

Even if you cannot (or would rather not) participate in the live #eltchat on twitter, scrolling through the transcripts and summaries is a nice way to tune into current conversations in our field.

The second digitally dialogic forum for teacher development I'll introduce is Scott Thornbury's long-running blog (now back from hiatus), *An A-Z of ELT*. This Wordpress blog is located at

scottthornbury.wordpress.com

and features occasional posts on a variety of topics related to English language teaching. Scott is a leading voice in our field, and he is involved in teacher training through the New School's MA-TESOL program. As the blog's title suggests, Scott writes about an incredibly broad range of topics related to ELT, both theoretical and practical. His writing is eloquent, pithy, and at times contrarian, but it is always informed by a broadly-informed perspective on old and new issues in our field. But *An A-Z of ELT* offers much more than Scott's edifying essays. Every post triggers a rich international conversation in the blog's open comments section. Thornbury frequently chimes in himself to respond to criticisms and insights offered by the community, and commenters also dialogue with each other about issues in the original post and others that emerge in the ensuing discussion. All blog posts (essays, really) and discussions are archived and available on the site. I very frequently return to

these posts and discussions because they are so rich and engaging.

Podcasts are another digital medium well-suited to dialogic teacher development. Podcasts, as most readers also know, are essentially pre-recorded radio programs that are placed on the internet for download instead of, or in addition to being broadcast terrestrially. Using the internet for distribution allows listeners to listen on their own schedules, rather than at a pre-determined time of broadcast (as with traditional radio). Podcasts are available as streaming audio on the internet as well, but most users “subscribe” to shows they like through itunes or other platforms, then listen to them on their smartphones, mp3 players, or other digital devices. Though monologic podcasts exist on a variety of topics, shows that feature interviews or other forms of dialogue between multiple voices are more common.

Several podcasts exist that focus on conversations relevant to EFL teachers development. In addition to its twitter conversations, #ELTchat also hosts a podcast that can be found on itunes. The ELTchat podcast features conversations with prominent teachers and educators, usually in extended interview formats. Topics vary in accordance with the specialty of those being interviewed. Occasionally, presentations or panel discussions from recent professional conferences such as IATEFL are posted as well. Another, more practically focused podcast is ESL Teacher Talk. This podcast features conversations with teachers around the world about lesson ideas, teaching techniques, and classroom activities. The show’s regular host is a teacher residing in Japan, but co-hosts, guest-hosts, and interviewees from throughout the world provide the show with a

truly international perspective. Finally, one of my favorite podcasts is the occasional audio and video interview series entitled The Lives of Teachers, run by Darren Elliot. This series features intelligently informed interviews with some of the most prominent voices in TESOL. Darren is also based in Japan, and he frequently interviews featured and plenary speakers while they are present at conferences here. Some recent interviews available as audio podcasts and also as videos at <http://www.livesofteachers.com/> include conversations with Diane Hawley Nagatomo, Alan Firth, Junko Yamanaka, Stephen Krashen, and Jeannette Littlemore.

New Technology to Continue the Conversation

Here I have presented several online platforms for teacher development that are dialogic or conversational in nature. They present rich conversations between educators in our field that are informed by a common desire to solve problems and improve teaching practice. Because EFL teachers teach in a very wide variety of contexts throughout the world, these platforms do not offer something for everyone, but many of them are small enough in scale that the administrators would likely respond to the interests of users. Platforms such as Scott Thornbury’s blog, and #ELTchat are relatively open in nature, encouraging participation rather than just consumption. When EFL teachers are able to use web technology to engage conversations they would otherwise never have, digital technology shows its true potential for teacher development that is truly dialogic in nature.

One final consideration about localization and customization: in researching teacher development podcasts, I came across one focused specifically on Japan's university teaching context, and immediately subscribed. This was ELT Podcast: The Teacher's Lounge, authored by Bill Pellowe, Robert Chartrand, and Kevin Ryan. I was struck by how refreshing it was to hear colleagues in similar teaching contexts speaking candidly about their classroom practices. I listened to a few episodes with interest before I realized that they were recorded in 2007 and 2008! When I contacted Bill Pellowe to ask him about why the podcast is no longer active, he told me that the process of recording and editing was simply too time-consuming to sustain long-term. This is unfortunate, but its understandable of course.

Things went the other way though when I was researching #ELTchat on twitter. There, I was pleasantly surprised to come across another version of the same kind of discussion, but one localized for teachers working in Korea. This discussion is marked #KELTchat on twitter and takes up similar issues, but with reference to teaching conditions in Korea. In this

case, achieving localization of a professional development discussion was as simple as finding some teachers interested in having a conversation and agreeing on a hashtag (#KELTchat) to mark their conversation with. This showed me that though digital technologies are certainly not a cure-all for EFL teacher development, they can in fact offer unique affordances for conversational exchanges between teachers who might not otherwise meet.

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TED SIG Information

The Teacher Education and 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. For further information, contact

ted@jalt.org

EFL Teacher Journeys Conference Report

TED Program Chair

Mike Ellis

TED SIG is proud to report the success of the 2013 EFL Teacher Journeys Conference. This year's conference was the second annual, and the first for me as TED's new program chair. The full day conference was held on June 16 at the Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages in Kanda, Tokyo as a collaborative event with the Teachers College Columbia University Japan Alumni Association.

This year's conference theme was "Transformation". 52 presenters and attendees came to Kanda from places spanning all over Japan, from Kyushu to Kanazawa to Iwate. 16 presentations were held across five sessions throughout the day, plus two plenary sessions. In the morning plenary session, Andy Boon from Toyo Gakuen University spoke on "Journeys of Transformation", sharing his own journey as a professional teacher from its beginnings, and encouraging the audience to engage in transformative reflective practice. Dr. Deryn Verity traveled far from Pennsylvania State University to deliver the afternoon plenary, "Secret Agents of Change, or Life is a Cabaret", in which she discussed the importance of mentors in teacher education and development.

We'd like to thank Alastair from JALT's associate partner englishbooks.jp for setting up a display with a wide selection of professional development books, along with everyone else who contributed to the conference's success. Please look forward to more information about the 2014 EFL Teacher Journeys Conference!

JALT Teacher Education & Development SIG

The JALT Teacher Education and 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 help educate other teachers.

Become a TED Teacher!

Joining:

TED is a special interest group (SIG) of the Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT). To join TED, you must be a JALT member. Information on joining JALT is available on the JALT web site (www.jalt.org).

If you are already a JALT member, you can also add a TED SIG membership to your existing JALT membership. Please see the JALT membership page for information on joining JALT joining in the TED conversation.

Benefits:

Joining TED connects you to a network of teacher colleagues who are interested in growing professionally. Members receive the most current issue of the TED's newsletter by email (and in print if requested), and can participate in our Yahoo group / mailing list. TED also sponsors and co-sponsors events throughout the year, to which members are welcome.

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