

Explorations in Teacher Development

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From the Editor

In this issue, we have one feature article by **Richard Sampson** about his experiences in research, something we all struggle with from time to time. Six presenters from the TD-CUE SIG co-sponsored forum at JALT2016 submitted reports of their presentations on the theme, “Transformative Moments in Teaching”.

Please read the Call for Papers below if you are interested in submitting a paper. We can receive submissions at any time, and we are currently looking for submissions for the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 issues of *Explorations in Teacher Development*. If you have any questions about what would be acceptable, please feel free to email me and ask away!

In this issue, I am happy to announce the members of TD SIG who have stepped up to share their editing and reviewing talents for the good our SIG. We now have a publications team! I’d like to acknowledge each member by listing their names here. If anyone is interested in volunteering as a Final Proofreader, please contact me.

Happy Reading and a have a great summer!

Amanda Yoshida, Publications Chair

Reviewers	Copy Editors
Guy Smith Jane Pryce	Daniel Hooper Quenby Hoffman Aoki

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. 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:

jalt.ted.ete.editor@gmail.com

Out of a Rut: Experiencing Authenticity in Presenting Research

Richard J. Sampson

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Introduction

Many non-Japanese English teachers who find themselves working in higher education in Japan arrive at their posts without post-graduate degrees. In such cases, graduate studies can play an important role in obtaining full-time employment and the further development of the teacher's identity as a member of an academic community. Yet, maintaining momentum in such extended studies presents its own challenges. This piece presents a narrative of certain critical events during the latter stages of a research project as part of my own PhD studies. It illustrates at a personal level a coalescence of experiences that moved me out from a rut towards finalising my studies.

Beginnings

It might be useful to firstly provide a little background about my own professional story. Around ten years ago, I obtained a contracted position as a researcher at a small university north of Tokyo. As I settled into my role, I rapidly became aware that the position was less involved with research, and more with teaching English. This suited me fine – I had arrived with no research experience to speak of, and was simply pleased to be able to work with young adults. Teaching the undergraduate students, however, I became curious about the interrelationships between their past and present learning experiences, their evolving identities, and their motivation to mature as English users. I was perhaps predisposed to such an interest through the ongoing development of my own Japanese language identity and coursework Masters studies that had touched upon individual differences. Examining the literature left me dissatisfied with the large body of research into language learning motivation that

utilised surveys. From my perspective, it did little to promote student and teacher voice about perceptions of classroom language learning. I considered that asking for learners' responses to a limited range of set statements could not sufficiently represent the dynamic kaleidoscope of an individual's experiences – certainly not those that I also was experiencing in my own language acquisition. At this time I encountered action research, a process through which practitioners can work together with learners to examine challenges and deepen understandings of their local contexts of learning. I made fledgling attempts at investigating students' experiences in my classroom with qualitative research tools.

Along with becoming progressively more interested in conducting research, my home life had seen the birth of my first child. Suddenly, my employment on yearly contracts seemed overexposed to risk. A turning point in my professional trajectory occurred when I had occasion to talk with a tenured professor at the university. He was aware of my drive to develop myself, and I felt emboldened to inquire as to the possibility of obtaining a non-contract, tenured position. After all, I already had a Masters degree. He bluntly informed me that the university would not even look at an applicant unless they had a doctorate. It was the jolt that I needed to embark on the next stage of graduate studies through an external program with a university in Australia

The professor's comment was also the stimulus that eventually resulted in my leaving the university. I found a post at a Japanese college of technology. Once again, I had to adjust to a new work environment, and I also had the added challenge of the birth of my second child. What fostered pause for thought at this time was that my position at the college was in fact tenured. Despite the

information I had received from the professor at the women's university, I had obtained full-time employment even without a doctorate. Part of me reasoned that I need not impose on myself the added pressure of undertaking doctoral studies. However, I found that the context provided a unique opportunity to work closely with students in exploring the meaning of their English studies. Conducting research and publishing was a further requirement of my role. It made sense, then, to combine these interests and push on with the PhD.

Skip forward a couple of years.

Frustrated authenticity in presenting research

I had finished data-collection, finished analysis. It had all emerged so beautifully. Yet although this study was over but for the write-up, it was the write-up that now made my days truly miserable. I was clearly getting nowhere. While I had written academic articles before, the task of such an extended piece of writing was new to me, as no doubt for many doctoral candidates. After a few initial attempts gone awry, and despite being thousands of kilometres away, my primary supervisor sent me numerous slide-shares and guidelines for thesis-writing, encouraged me to locate other theses online that shared qualities with my ideas, and even offered the first few chapters of her own thesis to act as scaffolding for my endeavours. And to an extent this helped: While there is growing awareness that theses can differ from the traditional structure – introduction, literature review, methodology, results, conclusions – it also appears that in the main theses do not differ much from this pattern (Mullins & Kiley, 2002). Naturally, examiners have expectations of what will arrive on their doorstep, and a thesis must conform to many of the literary beliefs of the academy (Yates, 2004). However, I could not mold my thesis into the traditional structure. What I struggled with the most was representing the temporality of the research process. While I had started with one theoretical focus, I had formed a different way of understanding the data later in the study. Naivety perhaps, but the flood of input regarding what a thesis should look like pushed me to try to incorporate this theoretical stance in the literature review at the start of the thesis. But this just did not ring true. It was insincere. How could I position this particular discussion of theory before the methodology chapter? I certainly had not based the design of my study on these revised understandings. I seemed to

be experiencing something along the lines of frustrated authenticity (Vannini & Burgess, 2009), whereby I felt thwarted in my attempts at acting in congruence with my self-values. I felt uneasy and an impostor in my writing.

This internal battle raging inside my conscience was leading me only to near stagnation in pulling my thesis together. My time to write was most often the early hours of the morning. Armed with coffee, thesis examples, and laptop incapable of Wi-Fi connection – in case the latest Internet gossip might distract me – I was ready. I would click my way to the “thesis” folder with all of its colourfully decorated chapter icons, and my finger would stop as I thought about the next click. Surely there was something else that needed my attention just at this moment? Remarkably, even at three in the morning, there almost always was, or at least I found something. At other times I would actually open a file and churn over the same passages endlessly. As my children awoke ready for the new day, I would realise with despair that I had spent the last couple of hours in complete concentration without having moved forward in the slightest.

Things came to a point. I started to think, whether rightly or wrongly, that in all likelihood my supervisors were becoming tired of seeing draft chapters that just did not work. I know I was. I organised a Skype session with them to attempt to explain my ethical hang-ups about representing the research process “out of order”. They listened, while I worried that their wealth of experience with doctoral candidates might incline them to thinking something along the lines of, “Well, just get over this temporality hiccup, and write the thing as if you had started out with that theoretical position!” To my surprise, they encouraged me to write a draft chapter in the way I wanted. Taking my time, I carefully crafted a text that tried to create a bridge between my initial ideas and analysis and the revised analysis. It placed my decision-making front and centre, expressing how the altered theoretical focus was an emergent result of my interactions with the data. This I could write – this was what I needed to write. Thankfully, when I sent the chapter to my supervisors they appreciated my arguments and agreed to a restructured thesis with a clear narrative voice. While I had lost some time, the experience well and truly reminded me of the importance of following internal convictions to experience authentic action. It moreover emphasised the value of

seeking the advice of those who had already been through the process of doctoral studies.

Socially-mediated confirmation of authenticity

Amidst this period of transition, I had also been accepted to present on part of my doctoral investigation at a three-day research retreat. The retreat itself was in a run-down university hostel in a mountain area north of Tokyo. Most of the presenters were, like me, practitioner-researchers from this particular part of Japan. In addition, what had drawn my interest was that there would be three plenary sessions by one of the most renowned international researchers in my field. I drove through landscapes of urban sprawl giving way to rice-paddies and forests, arriving at the rain-soaked retreat with mixed emotions – eager to engage with new ideas and state my own perspective, but also still lacking confidence in myself due to my inability to make progress on my thesis writing until recently.

My session was not until the third day, so I had plenty of time to feel nervous as I listened to the presentations of other speakers. I was fortunate though to have been roomed with a pair of Masters students and their supervisor from a university in Tokyo. We spent a good deal of free-time discussing our research until late at night, even taking our conversations to a nearby hot-spring bathing area. Throughout the retreat, I found that I was looking forward to these interactions with my roommates for their capacity to assist me in understanding my own point of view more clearly. The plenary sessions were also as thought provoking as I had been hoping, and I came to sense that my perspective shared similarities with that of the plenary speaker.

And so my session came around. Now, I am certainly not a presentation expert. For whatever reason, while I can teach with passion, in most cases I find myself hesitantly standing in front of a conference audience. However, the discussions I had had with other participants and the affinity I felt with the plenary speaker (who was in the audience) renewed my conviction to draw on the story of my own research experiences and the voices of participants in my presentation. This was evidently the right choice for me: In spite of my usual trepidation, on this occasion I experienced something approaching flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). I was so intent on the

development of the research story about these particular findings that I lost track of time, and before I knew it I had arrived at my conclusion. “Any questions?” Silence. Were people trying to take in my perspective? Were they not interested? Maybe they had not understood? But I knew now that I understood. Somehow, putting this story into words and listening to myself made something click on inside me. I knew that I could finish this thesis, that this was the direction I needed to take. This approach was authentic for me.

I had another appointment that meant leaving the retreat straight after my session. I bid goodbye to my roommates, and drove home along empty country backroads on a high, adrenaline still flowing from the presentation. Affirmation of my newfound confidence in the direction of my writing came a couple of days later. Out of the blue, I received an email from the plenary speaker at the research retreat. She had been greatly impressed by the form of my presentation and research, and expressed interest in my future endeavours.

Finally, I was getting somewhere!

Conclusion

It goes without saying that the narrative I have presented here is an extremely subjective reflection on experiences during a critical phase of my own professional development. However, I do still feel that there are certain lessons discernible from the narrative that might be useful for others. In terms of authenticity, Vannini and Burgess (2009) contend that an individual may be motivated to maintain a “degree of congruence between one’s actions and one’s core self-conceptions – consisting of fundamental values, beliefs, and identities to which one is committed and in terms of which one defines oneself” (p. 104). The narrative starkly uncovers the affective and motivational consequences of trying to write in a way that was inauthentic for me. Of course, I am not saying that it is advisable to ignore the wealth of experience of graduate supervisors. However, for my own motivation, it was important to find a way of representing my experience of the research process rather than adhering strictly to formalised patterns of presentation. Furthermore, although I had already made the case (thankfully successfully) to my supervisors for a revised thesis structure, attending the conference allowed me to expose my ideas to feedback from peers through both informal discussions and formal

presentation. The narrative points towards the socially-mediated nature of my self-efficacy beliefs – that confidence in my ability to pursue this particular course of action grew through interactions and discussion with others (see Bandura, 1997). In line with the ideas of Vygotsky (1980), it also demonstrates that the very act of verbalising my ideas gave a form to them and contributed to shaping and reshaping my own cognition. These two processes – affirmation of acting with self-authenticity and verbalisation of ideas in interaction with others – appear to have contributed crucially to the maintenance of my motivation to move on to the end of this phase of my professional development.

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Bio: Richard J. Sampson, PhD, is currently a Lecturer in English communication at Gunma University, Japan. He uses action research approaches to explore experiences of classroom language learning from the perspectives of students and teachers. His PhD study received the Chancellor's Medal from Griffith University, and has since been published as a research monograph with *Multilingual Matters*. Recently he has been founding his work on complexity theory.



The Process of Teacher Development: Transformative Moments

TD CUE SIG Forum at JALT2016

Mike Ellis, Program Chair, TD-SIG

Although teacher development is a lifelong learning process, we can all point to instants of realization in our classrooms which serve as catalysts for the evolution of our teaching practices. In TD SIG's sixth joint forum with CUE SIG at JALT 2016 in Nagoya, we invited presenters to share stories of these transformative moments and to explain how they have grown as educators since then.

As in past forums, the nine presentations were conducted over two sessions, simultaneously to rotating small groups in informal PechaKucha style. A wide range of topics were shared, including parameter setting in student assessment by Darren Van Veelen and the amount of time to wait for a student to answer a question by Soren Leaver. Cameron Romney's presentation about how one poor font choice led to a long series of research projects in materials design particularly resonated with me, as did Tim Knowles' story of repeated transformation through his 42 years of teaching.

A final discussion was moderated by plenary speaker Dorothy Zemach. Dorothy encouraged the participants to share these stories and their lessons with our administrators to effect teacher development more broadly among our colleagues. I believe that the forum left all participants optimistically looking forward to future transformations in their paths as teachers.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy the papers from this forum. The seventh forum's theme will be "Globalizing Education: Reflections on Shaping Broader Perspectives in the Classroom". We hope to see you there in Tsukuba this November.



Understanding Wait-Time from a Learner's Perspective

Soren Leaver

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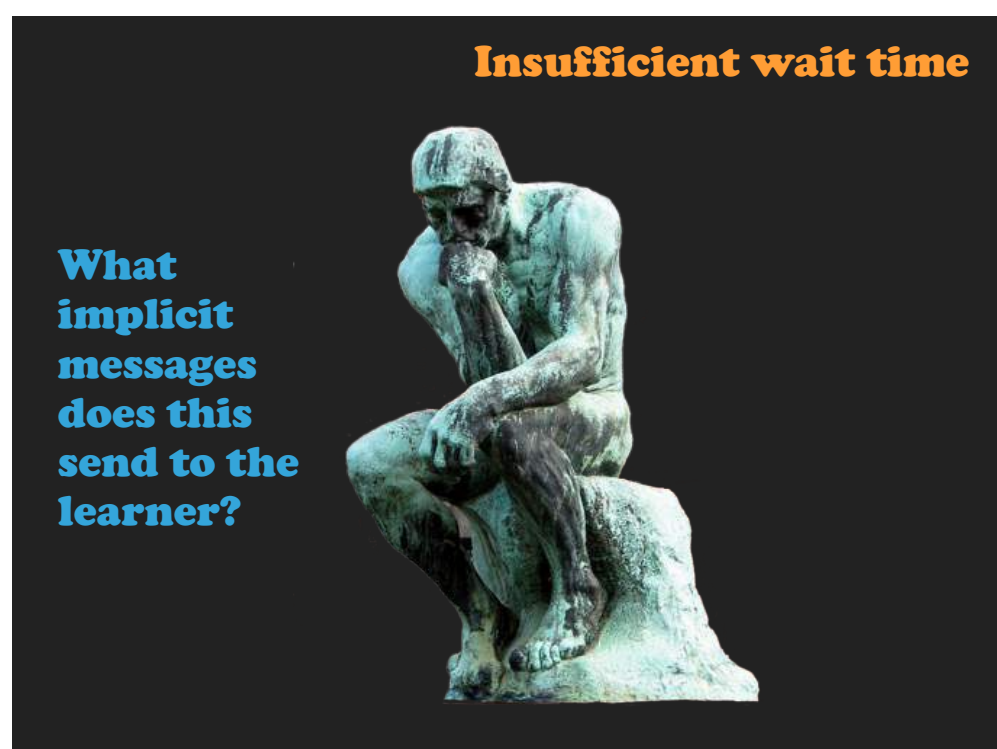
Three years ago, while pursuing my Masters degree in TESOL (Teaching English as a Second/Other Language), I noticed a recurrent theme in one of my professor's lectures. That theme was wait-time, or the period a teacher waits after asking a learner a question. One reason he mentioned wait-time was to highlight a statistic: in EFL classrooms, teachers typically give learners three seconds to respond to questions. In my professor's opinion, three seconds was too short an interval to be using, especially with low to intermediate-level learners.

When I first heard about wait-time, I had only been teaching for a couple of years. During that period, I hadn't considered the amount of wait-time I should be giving learners. In fact, I didn't even know the amount of wait-time I was currently giving them. Due to this hole in my knowledge, I decided to do a thought experiment. This involved visualizing myself as a learner facing an expectant teacher for three seconds. After noticing how the duration felt, I repeated the experiment, this time imagining the teacher asking me a question in Japanese. After a couple more variations on this theme, it dawned on me that regardless of the number of scenarios I played out in my mind, I would never truly be able to understand how learners experience wait-time under classroom conditions.

One year later, in the midst of teaching an EFL class, I realized that I was becoming distracted by one of the learners. Over the course of the semester, he hadn't uttered a single word in response to anything I had said to him. Although I was used to learners occasionally getting flustered, this seemed different. As his silence stretched over the semester, I began to conjecture

on its origins. Did he simply dislike me? Maybe he had a developmental challenge preventing him from speaking English. Perhaps his silence was a protest against compulsory language education.

Noticing the negative arc of my thoughts, I began to worry I would inadvertently treat the learner unfairly. With this in mind, I instituted countermeasures. When asking him questions, I pretended his silence was just as acceptable to me as the other learners' utterances. However, this strategy was only effective up to a point. On one occasion, after asking him a question and receiving silence, I found myself overtaken by irritation. Instead of moving on, I sat rigidly in my seat and stared at him, oozing vitriol. Our standoff lasted an interminable 20 seconds, whereupon he spoke, answering my initial question. His response surprised me, especially because he delivered it calmly and matter-of-factly. As a result of our encounter, my antipathy towards him dissolved. However,



it did little to clear up the question of why he had suddenly decided to speak.

Three months later, my wife persuaded me to start taking Japanese classes. After researching several schools in the area, I found that they were more expensive than I had anticipated. A friend suggested that I take classes taught by retirees at a local community center. The only downside of this was that the retirees had no prior teaching experience.

After surveying classes at the center, I found one that fit my schedule. Furthermore, the teacher was welcoming and enthusiastic. In spite of these positives, I identified a problem with the class on the first day. When the teacher asked me questions, she would interrupt my responses if I paused at anytime. I found this jarring, and asked her in Japanese for more time. She agreed, but started interrupting me again within a week.

After a couple weeks, I began to consider quitting the class. Language learning had become frustrating and anxiety-producing. In the midst of my deliberations, I suddenly had an insight: my negative emotions were a result of insufficient wait-time. Following this I had another, less pleasant insight: maybe my own use of wait-time had discouraged learners in the past. In particular, I thought about the learner who had been silent for most of the semester.

In honor of the learners who I may have discouraged in the past, I resolved to continue the class. Moreover, I realized that now I could study insufficient wait-time from the learner's perspective. Over the course of one month, I wrote my thoughts about wait-time in a journal after each class. The following are a couple selections from that period.

When the teacher doesn't give me enough wait-time, I perceive her as not understanding my educational needs. This lowers my opinion of her teaching abilities.

The more she interrupts, the less I think she cares if I ultimately answer her questions. I am also less motivated to respond.

When she interrupts and supplies me with the correct answer, I perceive her as valuing the correct answer over the quality of our interaction. Due to this, I feel less rapport between us.

When I returned to teaching, I found myself filled with a renewed sense of enthusiasm and direction. Now when I asked learners questions, I waited for verbal responses before continuing. This approach was not without its hitches. Sometimes, extended uncomfortable silences followed my questions. However, these instances exposed one of the reasons I hadn't given learners sufficient wait-time in the first place: my own fear. I suddenly realized that wait-time entails unpredictability. By shortening it, I was protecting against the possibility that I or the learner might do something unexpected. After a couple weeks of giving learners adequate wait-time, I realized that there was nothing that needed protecting.

Bio: Soren Leaver has been teaching in Japan since 2008 and is currently a lecturer at Fukuoka University. He has an MA in TESOL from Anaheim University. His areas of interest include learner autonomy and small-group work.



Transformative Moments: Academic Writing Template

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Academic writing can be a nightmare to teach if essay parameters are not correctly set. I learned the hard way by initially being lax with my essay parameters and assuming my students already knew what was required of them (e.g. writing an introduction with a thesis statement, topic sentences, details supporting the topic sentences, concluding sentences and a conclusion). It soon became very apparent that students, no matter what their ability level or year, needed review and reinforcement of the basic structure of academic essays. Rather than ripping my hair out with each essay for each student, I set up a system that regulated the basic parameters of academic essays consistently for all students. I designed templates that set out the main parts & sub-parts of entire essays. My eureka moment was when I realized how templates could reinforce essay structuring and how much time I could save by using them.

A few years ago, I found myself lost when reading through my students' academic writing. In reflection, I think my biggest fault was assuming my students already knew how to correctly structure a complete essay. I found myself frustrated with the excessive amount of time it took to go through and decipher each essay, so I knew that I had to either find a way or make one to reduce frustration and the amount of time each essay was consuming. I wanted to standardize every essay that I read so there was consistency and so that I could maintain my sanity.

My eureka moment came to me as I was thinking about standardization, forms and templates. I wanted a template that signposted everything that I believed was required in an essay and for the students to fill it out like a form. This way I could clearly see what was going on where, determine whether anything was missing, and avoid getting lost.

The essay template (see Appendix A) presented at the TD-CUE Forum is designed for a persuasive essay assigned in a Writing Skills 4 course consisting of second- year students who meet once a week at Dokkyo University. Most work is done on a personal computer and all materials are downloaded from a class blog. Appendix A shows that the essay's generic structure is divided into three main parts: the introduction, body and conclusion, which almost all students have no problem with. However, difficulty occurs when identifying and writing the sub-parts. For example, in the introduction you can see four sub-parts: Background information, State purpose, State outline

and State thesis. Also, there are prompts in the latter of these three sub-parts to help students start their writing. The essay template assists students by logically laying out the organization of the sub-parts within the introduction, body and conclusion. Students can clearly see holistically what is required where and how the entire essay should fit together. Another advantage of the essay template is that questions, instructions, further information and a word count can easily be inserted into any part to help standardize writing and assist the students.

The essay template is a scaffolding step, a concept adopted from Genre-Based Teaching, between planning and the final draft of an essay. Teacher input is initially high as the class moves through each main part step-by-step with explanations of each sub-part and examples shown. Then, gradually teacher input decreases and student input increases as the students take command of the template and the content. The content is controlled by the students, so there is freedom and creativity to write what they like, especially in the Introduction (background information) and 1st and 2nd Body Paragraphs (details supporting the topic sentence); the only rule is that it must be done within the generic structure.

The essay template frees up time to focus on one-on-one conferencing and I do this with each student for the introduction only. This ensures that: (a) students are following the template, (b) students are off to a good start, (c) I can understand what the rest of the essay should be about and (d) time is saved during final grading.

Once the essay template is complete (approximately 4 lessons), the students copy all their content from the template and paste it into a final draft, which is the final product. Students do many peer-review rounds in class to revise, edit and polish their essays before submission of the final draft.

In my opinion, essay templates standardize writing formats, reinforce the basic generic structure of academic essays and help students by signposting all the main parts and their sub-parts. Most importantly, my eureka moment reduced frustration and gave me more time to focus on conferencing and assisting students. I hope it can also do the same for you.

Appendix

The essay template is also available online at <<http://darrenvanveelenswebsite.yolasite.com/>>

Essay Type	Persuasive (persuade the reader to agree with you)		
Title			
Student Name			
University Name			
Introduction 200 words	Background information (Get reader's interest: 5 techniques)		
	State purpose (Why are you writing?)	The reason I am writing is because...	
	State outline (Map/plan)	First, I will write about... Second, I will write about...	
	State thesis (Your position FOR or AGAINST the issue)	I am for / against... because...	
Body 450-500 words	1st Paragraph Argument FOR and evidence (225-250 words)	Topic sentence (ONE sentence only)	
		Details supporting the topic sentence	
		Concluding sentence (ONE sentence only & link to next paragraph)	
	2nd Paragraph Argument AGAINST and evidence (225-250 words)	Topic sentence (ONE sentence only)	
		Details supporting the topic sentence	
		Concluding sentence (ONE sentence only & link to conclusion)	
Conclusion (no new details) 150 words	Restate your main points		
	Restate your thesis		
	Ask a question, suggest a solution, make a recommendation		
References (alphabetical order)			



Bio: Darren Van Veelen (M.ED TESOL) has been teaching English in Japan for 13 years. His areas of interest are developing speaking strategies, critical thinking skills, motivation, and keeping it real in the classroom.

Learning to be a Language Learner – An 18-Year-Old in Sweden

Dion Clingwall

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This short article will look at a series of “transformative” experiences which inspired me to become a lifelong language learner and profoundly informed my approach to language teaching.

Background

As an eighteen year old, following high school graduation in Canada, I moved to Sweden to participate in a year-long high school exchange program. Why you ask, if I had already graduated would I be going back to high school? Well, the reasons are threefold. First, as I had already completed my studies in Canada, there was no pressure or requirement to achieve academically – a year of adventure or so I assumed. Second, in Sweden they begin elementary school a year older than we do in Canada hence I was the same age as my classmates. Third, and perhaps most importantly, I wanted to live abroad for a year prior to beginning my university studies.

My motivation for choosing Sweden was simple. I am of Swedish heritage and had wanted to travel to Sweden since I was a child. When the opportunity to live in Sweden presented itself, I didn’t hesitate to apply. I was accepted and in August 1988 my life-altering Swedish endeavor began.

Introduction

In this paper I will outline briefly some of the approaches (strategies to succeed) I used to acquire proficiency in Swedish and how I have subsequently applied these same techniques within my role as a language instructor.

Insights, Goals, and Application

While living in Sweden as an 18 year old high school exchange student, there were a number of explicit speaking moments (in Swedish) that profoundly shaped my language learning experience and subsequently my language teaching style. I will draw on these individual experiences to illustrate how real-life interactions can inspire individuals to be motivated and successful language learners.

When I arrived in Sweden I was a monolingual English speaker with little interest in foreign languages. When I left Sweden ten months later I was almost (perhaps 90%) a fluently bilingual speaker with aspirations to learn as many languages as

I could. How did this change occur? Without question, my time in Sweden broadened my worldview and inspired curiosity. However, thanks in large part to a variety of transformative moments, I was also able to discover situations and people that could foster my own language learning. These scenarios acted as powerful motivating engines that drove my learning forward on a daily basis. Within these scenarios, I identified methods of interaction that helped with language acquisition and immediately began refining these strategies.

The most important insight gained was realizing that certain types of individuals were more inclined to talk with someone like myself – a beginner, barely able to make himself understood. The second insight was that by putting myself in situations where people were interested or motivated to communicate with me, I could create massive amounts of linguistic input that would drive my acquisition of new vocabulary and allow for the repetition needed to develop a solid foundation in Swedish grammar. Therefore, putting myself in scenarios and situations that facilitated my language development became the primary goal of my daily routine. My second priority was to use this new linguistic knowledge as quickly as it was acquired. Thirdly, and perhaps my most vital goal was generating ongoing relationships where individuals “voluntarily” acted as my “teachers”. The use of these real life activities became the foundational strategies for both my language acquisition efforts and for what would become my future endeavors as a language teacher.

Approach to Acquisition – “Speaking beyond what you know”

My approach was simple but effective. It involved targeting certain people that were either committed to helping those with whom they were speaking or had a personal interest in chatting with a young stranger from Canada. Once these individuals were engaged in a conversation, however simple, I always attempted to “speak beyond my ability” or “push my vocabulary beyond what I knew”. Regardless of where I was or with whom I was talking, I was determined to use my surroundings to their fullest potential as an active tool for my language learning needs. To the best of my ability, I worked to deepen and broaden my Swedish ability by either placing myself in a never before encountered circumstance or

discussing a topic beyond my ability with an unknown individual that I met at some point during my daily routine.

Transformative Moments – Whom should we speak with?

The key groups I targeted as those with whom I wished to speak, and who appeared positively inclined to speak with me in return, included children and the elderly, people in uniforms, my hockey and baseball teammates, friends and teachers at school, part-time job co-workers, shopkeepers, Swedish lesson classmates, and finally construction site workers.

Initially this list developed naturally as I attempted to speak with different people in different scenarios. However, after having considerable success with my first three groups, children, the elderly, and people in uniforms, I began to be more directed in my choices for interaction. I would try to engage as many different individuals as I could during the typical unfolding of my daily routine.

Transformative Moments – How to prepare?

At the outset of my year in Sweden I would enter possible scenarios spontaneously, without any forethought or specific preparations. However, after a particularly lengthy chat with an elderly woman (for 20 minutes on a bench at a train station outside of Stockholm without understanding almost anything) I realized that before beginning a conversation, if possible, doing some degree of language preparation would be best.

With the idea of preparation in mind, I also realized that I should target specific scenarios in order to ensure useful and effective preparation. For example, when I went to buy something at a shop, I studied the specific language necessary for shopping at that type of store (i.e. buying a badminton racket). I would also bring a vocabulary and grammar list, as well as a sample conversation. This revelation and learning strategy implementation made the experience shopping a free but effective lesson in learning Swedish.

In short, the preparations for creating conversations involved studying the target words and grammatical structures suitable for the intended scenario as well as preparing one or more sample conversations.

Transformative Moments – Interactions in action

Here is a short list of the types of people involved in the most instructive speaking scenarios and why. One important reason that was consistent across all of the people with whom I engaged was that they all tended to generate large amounts of extemporaneous authentic input (extemporaneous, although the topic was predetermined by the question I posed).

1. Children and the Elderly

- They never hesitate to talk about whatever they are asked.

- They speak with brutal honesty.
- They speak a lot.
- They tend to be very patient.

2. People in Uniforms – for example, “Directions please!”

- They are almost always patiently willing to help.
- They are excellent when practicing asking questions.
- They are very helpful with “recasting” practice.
- They almost always take the time to thoughtfully answer your questions.

3. Hockey and Baseball Teams – What are the specifics about a play or a technique?

- You have to prove yourself to be accepted.
- They don’t care about English and thus only want to use the local language.
- They care about communication and understanding because it contributes to the team winning.
- It is in their best interest that you understand clearly their message.

4. Friends, Dating, Parties – What was going on?

- Making friends and finding a girlfriend can act as a powerful incentive.
- Extrinsic motivation comes from the demands of those around you.
- Intrinsic Motivation comes from the pressure we place on ourselves to achieve these relationship goals.
- Friends offer sincere support, patience and a desire to understand.

- Learn about the local culture and language in context.
- Creates the desire to learn the local language.

5. Part-time Job – What was I supposed to do?

- The co-workers had very little sympathy for a lack of language ability.
- You are forced to pay strict attention to what is being said and done.
- One’s power of perception and persistence strengthens.
- Co-workers and supervisors simply wanted you to get the job done properly.
- One devises strategies on how to succeed at one’s task and understand what is being explained.

6. Shopping & Shopkeepers – What was I interested in?

- They want you to buy their “stuff”, therefore they will talk to you.
- One example would be buying shoes: By this I mean, when I went to buy shoes for the first time in Sweden, I studied the language necessary to go to a store, try on various shoes, and possibly buy a pair. I also brought a vocabulary and grammar list, as well as a sample conversation with a

shoe store clerk. This revelation and learning strategy implementation made the experience of buying shoes a free but effective lesson in learning Swedish.

- Shops offered clearly contextualized, targeted learning opportunities.
- Restaurants offered repetition and an apt teacher in role of server or bartender.

7. Swedish Class

- We used a very simple textbook that lacked details and clear explanations. Therefore, I was forced to find other learning materials and sources which were authentic in nature.
- The instructions were only in Swedish which lead to ongoing confusion and frustration.
- This particular classroom experience informed my own teaching style in two important ways. I understood the value of authentic materials and I realized the usefulness of using a learner's L1 in an L2 classroom.

8. Miscellaneous Construction site workers, car repair shop, churches

- These particular locations were concerned with your safety or wellbeing.
- They always seemed more than willing to answer a question about their activities.
- They tended to react either surprised or glad that someone would show interest in them and what they were doing.

9. ESP Everywhere!

- Everything in the local environment was an ESP communicative Language setting.
- Whenever I was communicating I received immediate feedback and knew whether or not I had been successful in conveying my message.
- There was an ongoing reflective analysis in my learning style without realizing it was a reflective analysis.

10. Language learning strategies for success!

- I developed techniques I still use to this day: While learning one must...
 - a) Develop an ongoing and ever-expanding vocabulary Database,
 - b) Develop an ongoing and ever-expanding grammar Database,
 - c) Develop scenario templates with dialogue samples.

Transformative Moments – How to sustain a conversation?

Following language preparation, the other necessary skill for successfully communicating within a scenario was learning how best to sustain a conversation. This turned out to be far simpler than I anticipated. As long as you agree with people, use kind words or expressions, nod your head politely while they speak, use exclamations such as “Oh, really?”, “Interesting!”, “I never knew that!”, and so on, the conversation will continue nicely. It was also vital to look at people, pay attention to them, and use what they were saying to formulate other questions that perpetuated the flow of the discussion.

Transformative Moments – Repetition

The final component of this language learning strategy was repetition. The learner need only find the same scenario in a different location, i.e. move from one grocery store to another, or ask the same question to bystanders over and over and over again. It was always preferable to attempt to repeat the conversation as quickly as possible. Furthermore, this is the part of the approach where learners actively focus on their listening ability.

Practical applications: Vocabulary lists, Databases, and Templates

As the number of scenarios and discussions continued to expand, the question of efficiently cataloguing this new knowledge arose. To that end, what began as mere vocabulary lists evolved into three separate written components. First, I categorized the vocabulary into databases. Second, the commonly used grammatical structures were identified and categorized into dialogue databases. Finally, based on the scenarios and the typical conversations that occurred I designed templates that outlined the structure and content of potential dialogues. These three written aspects of the scenario approach became indispensable as I completed my time in Sweden and moved forward into other languages of study.

This is a very brief explanation of the written components that support and supplement the scenario approach to language acquisition. If you would like more specific details on the structure or layout of these databases and templates, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although this approach works best when one is living abroad where the local population is speaking the target language, these same techniques can be refined and adapted to language study in general. This can be carried out as follows:

1. Target scenarios become classroom topics for which students prepare the required vocabulary and grammar structures.

2. Students produce target scenario dialogues weekly.
3. These target scenarios get revisited throughout the academic semester.
4. Further repetition is fostered through the use of audio and video recordings done out of class as homework.
5. Extra work on “small talk” and “discourse strategies” such as recasting and conversation fillers is done in class.
6. The use of internet resources to find appropriate speech samples furthers the repetition of the language used in the scenarios.
7. Uploading the scenario conversations to video websites such as YouTube allows the students to revisit the conversation as often as the instructor would like for further repetition opportunities.

In conclusion, there are a number of approaches one can use when learning a foreign language. The scenario speaking approach discussed in this short article is one I have used personally to learn not only Swedish, but also, German, French, and Japanese. It is also an approach that I have adapted effectively for use in the L2 classroom.

The skills and character traits one develops by engaging in this approach to language learning are many and varied. A few of the more prominent ones include the following:

1. Tolerance of ambiguity– perpetuating a conversation even though the message isn’t clear.
2. Challenging one’s comfort zone by talking with local people about something for which one does not have adequate vocabulary.
3. Trying to speak beyond one’s ability, attempting to explain things one has never discussed previously.
4. Building patience – learning how to talk to people without really knowing or understanding what is being said.
5. Becoming more confident in one’s ability to interact with people.
6. Building a strong willingness to communicate despite failing regularly.
7. Becoming comfortable with making mistakes while speaking, making your interlocutor feel comfortable discussing topics with you, asking endless questions and many more.

In short, although putting oneself out there and talking as much as possible is absolutely crucial to success, having an effective, implementable language acquisition strategy can mean the difference between communicative competence and communication breakdown.

A Note on English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Reflecting on my language learning experience in Sweden, it is very obvious to now recognize that I was learning in specific, self-generated ESP scenarios. Every day in Sweden played out like an interactive ESP classroom.

Bio: I am a Canadian by birth, who has also lived in Sweden, German, and Korea, I am now into my 11th year in Japan. My current areas of research include the componential nature of fluency and productive vocabulary in oral assessment, ESP within science and medicine, and discourse analysis of ‘small talk’. I am currently completing my PhD in fluency assessment and productive vocabulary at Hiroshima University.



Repositioning Student Responsibility

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“Breakthrough moments” in someone’s career usually happen as a result of being at it for some time. After years of continually working away at challenges, the right circumstance will serendipitously arise in which a light bulb can suddenly flash on, shedding light on new approaches and understandings that lead to better outcomes. In my case, however, a breakthrough moment that showed me a far better way to approach the problems I was having teaching in Japanese universities had actually come way back in 2004, in Sydney, when I was doing my teacher training certificate to actually become an English language teacher in the first place. Remembering it at the right time, around a decade later, really helped me change an approach that was costing a lot of energy and making me a far less effective teacher.

In fact, my first four years of English language teaching took place in Sydney, teaching international students from around the globe who had committed a great deal of time and spent a great deal of money to go down under to immerse themselves in their target language. I didn’t know it at the time, but I was enjoying the privilege of working with some of the most motivated language learners in the world. In those days, I would never have believed that a lack of student motivation was a concern in the ELT field. In spectacular naiveté, I came to Japan expecting to find a whole nation of similarly-inspired students, keen and interested. Within Eikaiwa schools, expecting to meet such students is not entirely misguided, but once I started teaching part-time at a university, I was quickly disabused of the fantasy that my blue eyes and teaching experience would be welcomed by rooms full of keen and curious students.

I needn’t go into the motivation and interest problems that many teachers face in Japanese university English classrooms, especially those populated by students who

are there compulsorily. I also hope it needn’t be said more than once that despite the thrust of this article, I have enjoyed many classes full of interested, motivated, diligent, and hardworking students. The fact is, though, that over the first few years of working in that sector, I did find myself losing both sleep and hair over how to deal with an unexpected lack of student initiative, motivation, and responsibility. I was entirely unprepared and unequipped to deal with students who didn’t take their part in the educational process seriously, and I really suffered as I reacted to their poor ethic by foolishly exerting more and more of my own effort to make up the shortfall.

Without going too far into too many anecdotes, I can identify three broad descriptions of the problems I was facing regularly. I found that I was often dealing with students who

a) did not take instructions seriously, as evidenced by certain “relaxed attitudes” to attendance requirements or homework deadlines, or by an apparent disinclination to listen as explanations or instructions were given in class. “...Okay? Does everyone understand? Good. Let’s start!” “[Blank stares, followed by the realisation that that person at the front of the room had been talking to them.]”

b) were not concerned with meeting even minimal standards of work. Instead, they might print out Wikipedia articles or paragraphs of Google-translated gibberish rather than attempt self-written essays. Others would approach a five-minute presentation assessment by coming up with something that lasted less than a fifth of that and included none of the required components. Others would flounder through entire terms of guessed-at wrong answers on weekly vocabulary tests rather than think to take out the dictionary.

c) displayed no concern with improvement, progress, or achievement. Many students seemed to be in no hurry to extract any greater benefit from their education than a certificate stating that their rear end had been positioned on a chair in a classroom on a requisite number of occasions. I was horrified to discover in those early years that students would write on their feedback surveys that my course had been fun and that I had been easy to understand, when every conceivable indication that I'd seen week after week had suggested that it had been a drudgery to them, and their test scores indicated that they had understood or paid attention to next to nothing I'd said. They truly didn't seem to care that their grasp of English was no firmer after our forty-five hours together than it had been prior; they apparently hadn't come into the classroom with any hope or expectation that it would be.

My instinctual response to these problems, and thus my own special way of mishandling them time and time again, was to do more. When the students didn't shoulder their responsibility, I would find myself doing it instead. When student absences started to edge towards their limit, I would create elaborate slide presentations explaining the attendance and assessment policies and illustrating where the students were headed if they didn't step up and attend an adequate number of classes henceforth. When I received translation-software-produced homework pages of word-salad gobbledygook after stating emphatically that such submissions would be thrown directly into the trash, I would instead scrawl long, detailed replies explaining just how bad the translations were, and why it was really a rather bad idea to approach writing tasks this way. I would stare for hours at my spreadsheets of their (very) slowly accumulating scores, and then produce and present them with graphs, and charts, and trend lines and predictions on what grades they were headed for if they didn't get their act together. And then I'd do it all again on an even grander scale when they didn't get their act together. I'd break down the calculations of what each person needed to do between now and week 15 in order to scrape through to a passing score of 60%. I would work across the weekends trying to find a way to communicate the gravity of their situation and trying to make them understand and change their behaviour. I took their lack of responsibility and effort to be my problem, and mine alone, and it really was, actually- it turned out that most of them were already well

and truly resigned to doing Sairishu (repeaters' class) in their third year, and were just attending, week after week, on the off chance that doing so might get them off that hook.

Ironically, not only was I bending over backwards, but I was also somewhat spineless. When students who had been absent for more than the maximum three classes would turn up suddenly and promise to *ganbaru* (try harder). I would fold, and turn a blind eye to their five absences, and come up with some kind of compromise if they promised to be good. When I would tell the students that sleeping through the class would constitute an absence, then have students sleep through the class giving them their fourth and failing absence, a muttered apology and promise to *ganbaru* would be enough to convince me to retreat from what I'd clearly stated and instead come up with some kind of compromise that they never intended to honour. When the student who had wasted my time by handing in a Wikipedia article asked if they could take even more of my time by attempting a re-submission, putting both me and themselves behind schedule, I would fold and come up with some compromise to make sure that they didn't lose too many points. When I would come across students who hadn't bothered to listen to my explanation of the current activity in a speaking class, I would explain it once again for them, and then the students next to them, and then the other students on the other side of the room, and then run around for twenty minutes explaining the thing again and again. And then I'd do the same the following week. Then I'd spend my evenings coming up with a slide presentation about why I really rather wished they'd listen to me when I'm giving instructions, please (to which they paid no attention).

When work was shoddy, or only Japanese was spoken through communicative activities, I would put on a dramatic display of exasperation and frustration, and try my absolute hardest to communicate to the students how disappointing it was to me, and how pained I was to see them wasting the opportunities that they had to improve their English. And nothing would change, so I'd need to come up with an even more dramatic display of exasperation and frustration next time (next week). Far too often, the only person who would be paying a price for the students' laziness, apathy, and recalcitrance was me. I was not a happy teacher, probably, most of all, because I was obviously not being an effective teacher.

It hurts to fold, and to compromise in the face of laziness and apathy. It hurts to drop your professional standards and accept shoddy work because it's the only way the students are going to be able to pass. It hurts to realise that you're not being taken seriously, and nor is your work, your effort, and your time, especially when you're giving just about as much of it as you have to give. It is liberating, though, to discover that the core of the problem actually lies in the stupid (ineffective?) approach that you yourself are taking, not in the behaviour of the students, over which you obviously have no control. As I was beginning to come to an understanding of how wrongly I was approaching these problems, I remembered that I'd had an experience of someone showing me an admirable, professional, and respectable way of effectively approaching such a situation - and I myself had been the problem student (if only momentarily, and not quite as egregiously)! Without knowing it or intending to, my own teacher had demonstrated and modelled exactly the approach I needed to take that would allow me to ethically reposition responsibility back where it belonged - on the shoulders of the students.

Anyone who's done the Cambridge University CELTA (Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults) knows how arduous and demanding it can be. Doing it full-time gives new meaning to the term "full-time", to the tune of getting to bed at around 2am for four hours of sleep most nights for a month. It's a serious, professional, and thoroughly practical course that sets very high standards for its candidates. To this day, and even having gained a masters degree in Education (TESOL) in the meantime, I've always said that the CELTA is the best program of education I've ever taken part in. From the very first session of my 2004 course, I had an enormous admiration for our three trainers, whom I thought were exemplary models for the sort of teacher I'd like to be. They were truly and literally inspiring.

In the final week of the CELTA, we had two major assessments to undertake. These were teaching-practice sessions, with real students, as always, but of forty minutes duration rather than the shorter lessons we'd been doing up to that point. My first one was on the Tuesday afternoon, and after three days of preparation, in I went with all my self-produced supplementary materials, my almost word-for-word lesson plan printed up on two reams of paper, one for myself and one for my trainer Geoff (not his real name)

who was assessing me, and an awful lot on the line. These lessons would pretty much determine our final grades, and I had every intention of hitting the ball out of the park.

As I recall, the forty-minute lesson went perfectly well, and I sat down afterwards in a glow of relief and satisfaction. The hours and hours of preparation had paid off, my lesson plan had turned out to be coherent and well-timed, all my materials had been up to the task, and now I had only one more assessment to go. When everyone had left, though, my instructor, Geoff, came up to me and delivered a line that can poke a pin into anyone's bubble of self-satisfaction; "Steve, can I talk to you for a minute?"

We sat down, him very calm and me somewhat nervously curious. "So, how do you think it went?" he asked. Again, a curious question, as he'd seen it all, and must have known that it had gone smoothly and successfully. I answered as much. His reply was deadpan, calm, and direct: "Well, actually, it didn't go well at all, Steve. You pretty much blew it, from start to finish." He just calmly looked at me.

Geoff was a particularly good-looking guy, early-forties, in great shape, and had very warm and inviting eyes that seemed to give assurance that he saw the best in each of his trainees and was truly concerned with developing it. I'd quickly come to admire him for his outstanding, very natural teaching ability, his genuine kindness, and his very good-natured professionalism. He knew every trainee's name by heart before the first session of the course, and in fact had addressed me by name before I'd met him, "Ah, so you're Steve, right?", having gone to the trouble of memorising the names and profile photos on our application forms. He'd traveled, taught, and trained all around the world, and his vast experience and exciting anecdotes were inspiring in themselves, but especially in the way that he made it feel like he was inviting us all to step up into a career of meaningful and exciting work in education that could take us around the world. But here he was punching me in the gut? What did he mean I'd blown it? How could I possibly have blown it?

It turned out that I'd failed to grasp the distinction between the two types of lessons we were meant to be giving. One was a "language lesson", and the other was a "skills lesson", the former for teaching grammar forms or vocabulary, the latter for developing listening, reading, or

speaking skills. The two types of lessons were to comprise their own particular formats and components, the details of which elude me now, but I'd built my lesson plan according to the wrong one. I had misused the materials that the lesson was to be based on, effectively squeezing a square peg into a round hole, and produced the wrong sort of follow-up activities for the point of the lesson. When all of that dawned on me, I remember just sinking. Geoff, with his direct, calm, and friendly gaze, and casual, matter-of-fact tone explained that I'd gone the wrong way right off the bat, and for all the good I might have done in the lesson, I'd missed most, if not all, of the criteria he was to be assessing me on, and thus the score for my "skills lesson", or whichever I was meant to have just given, would be seriously low. "So all of the preparation, and the lesson itself, was all for nothing, then?" I asked, in some disbelief. "Yeah, pretty much." With only days left to go there would be no chance to make it up. Again, just a friendly gaze.

I was bowled over. Firstly - how did I screw this fundamental thing up so badly, and why hadn't I realised as I'd mangled the materials into the wrong shape in the hours of preparation I'd done? Secondly, what did this mean for my grade, or ability to even pass? Thirdly; was this some sort of a joke? Ah!, that must be it, I figured, momentarily relieved, as I observed Geoff just sitting with me, calmly watching me react to his news. 'He's pranking me', I thought. 'He's gauging my reaction, checking out how I deal with this sort of set-back, and any minute now he's going to break character and tell me it's all a bit of a joke and of course it was one of the best teaching sessions he's seen in his career as a trainer!' The friendly way he seemed to be observing me was exactly in the manner of someone about to slap me on the shoulder and say "Ha! Your face! You totally fell for it!"

But no such change in demeanour came. He'd delivered his message, made sure that I'd understood, answered my couple of blabbered questions about where to go from here, and ended by offering his hand and asking if we were still cool. We shook hands, I bumbled that of course we were still cool, and that was it, a truly deflating and devastating experience that had my head spinning for a very long time. As it turned out, whatever marks I lost on that Tuesday afternoon I must have made up elsewhere, as I passed the CELTA and the story ended happily, but the kick in the guts was something I wouldn't forget.

As he'd given me the bad news and sat with me watching my reaction, however, amid the rush of thoughts going through my mind there was a small voice at the back telling me to pay attention, because I had a front row seat to something really worth witnessing. The way Geoff handled the situation was, in a way, spectacular, and admirable, and thankfully I had the wherewithal to realise it even as it was happening. His delivery was impeccably professional. He'd had a bad blow to deliver, which can't have been fun, so he'd called me over, sat me down, delivered it, made sure it was understood, and then left having made sure we were on good terms and could move on. He had a job to do in line with the rules and requirements of the course, and he did it. The only outcome he'd needed to achieve was for me to understand the situation so that I could deal with it as I saw fit. He never made a misstep, he was neither timid nor overbearing, and - again, stepping out of my panic and witnessing the situation as an uninvolved observer - it was one of the most impressive teaching moments I'd seen.

Thus, years later, here in Japan, when I'd begun to realise how ridiculous it was to be spending bucketloads of energy on uncooperative, lazy, and disingenuous students who were crashing recklessly through the rules and requirements of the course, I had a true role model whose approach to a difficult situation I could really emulate. Geoff had a professional responsibility to conduct the CELTA course according to its rules and assessment criteria, and when I'd carelessly smashed through them, he needed to explain that that's what I'd done. Not to make up the damage himself on my behalf. It would have been wrong and inappropriate for him to have even suggested that the rules of the CELTA could perhaps be bent in my favour simply because I'd broken them so carelessly. Here was I, though, years later, bending over backwards like a contortionist to try my hardest to stretch or break the rules so as to allow uncooperative students to avoid having their feelings hurt by skirting too near the danger of failing a course they were putting little or no effort into. Geoff had delivered bad news directly, succinctly, and calmly. Here I was, staring at the scores in my spreadsheet tearing my hair out trying to figure out how I could avoid having to watch these apathetic students succumb to the consequences of their consistently unproductive attitudes and actions. Geoff had told me, truthfully and accurately, that there was nothing that could be done about my

mistake, and left me to deal with that. Here I was exhausting myself figuring out what I could do to help these uncooperative students possibly scrape by without a scratch so that they could progress onto their next semester to do the same all over again.

What are we teaching our students about personal and professional responsibility when we take it all upon our shoulders instead of letting them learn about the consequences of flouting it? What are we teaching about initiative and consequences when we accommodate slackness and change the rules of the game if it looks like the rules are going to get in the way of the students being unable to simply progress unhindered along a path of continued slackness? When it comes to rules, assessment, and scoring, as teachers- especially as teachers in a field as practical as English language education- we have a firm responsibility to explain comprehensibly to students what it is that they need to do, or the boundaries that they need to stay within, and to clearly lay out the consequences of their decisions regarding those requirements and rules. Then, when it comes time to assess, we will need to answer one or a number of simple yes or no questions: Were the instructions followed? Were the expectations met? If the answer is ‘no’, then it needs to be an unapologetic ‘no’ if we’re going to call this whole endeavour “education”.

I’m not advocating an unforgiving, dogmatic rigidity that’s impervious to reason. Being reasonable with regard to rules, though, does include knowing when to decline to abandon them. When I started to say “no” to students, when I really couldn’t see that I needed to take any responsibility for the student’s lack of attendance, for example, a weight of responsibility that I had been taking was placed back where it belonged, and where it would do the student the most good: onto their own shoulders.

How has this looked in practical terms? Well, for one thing, preparation of my assessment criteria and my teaching materials has become more sharply focused. Knowing that I will want to consult my own criteria later on and have them be amenable to yes or no answers, I’m getting better each semester at creating rules and rubrics that are crystal clear, and very nearly non-negotiable. When I inform my students in writing (in Japanese) that I will give a score of zero to any writing assignment that is either verifiably plagiarised or obviously produced using translation software, and then they then submit exactly

that, then I respond with a firm and very costly score of zero and enter into no further correspondence. When speaking activities are carried out nearly exclusively in Japanese, then I’ll tell the students very calmly and directly at the end of the lesson that they wasted their time and mine today, that their participation scores for the day will be a zero in accordance with the rubric, and that if they want to avoid failing the course on those grounds that they need to take the initiative and speak English rather than Japanese in future classes, in line with the stated requirements of their, ahem, “English speaking” course. When a student brings the first of her four required writing assignments to my office after the final class of the semester apologising for not having understood that any such homework was required, and I reflect upon how not only are the requirements stated on the syllabus, the week 1 handout, the class website and the student name card, but that I discussed said homework in every single lesson since week 2, effectively enough that the rest of her class and every member of four other similar classes I’m teaching was able to understand, then I can feel comfortable reasoning that she does not deserve the privilege of the same passing grade as her classmates who paid attention, put in the effort, and fulfilled the requirements. I get to sleep soundly, and the student learns something. All the rules, rubrics and requirements in the world mean nothing if they’re not firmly enforced, even in the face of puppy-dog eyes or mumbled apologies.

How fortunate it was for me to have begun my teaching career with the seed of a breakthrough moment already planted! A teacher can never know when some classroom moment is going to be remembered by a student for years to come. Such a memory might even contribute to a breakthrough in someone’s whole approach to their profession.

Bio: Stephen Paton (M.Ed TESOL, Cambridge CELTA, Apple Distinguished Educator) has been teaching English for twelve years; firstly to international students in Sydney, Australia, and since 2009, at universities in western Japan.



Collaborative Teaching and Reflection

By Marnie Mayse & Amanda Yoshida

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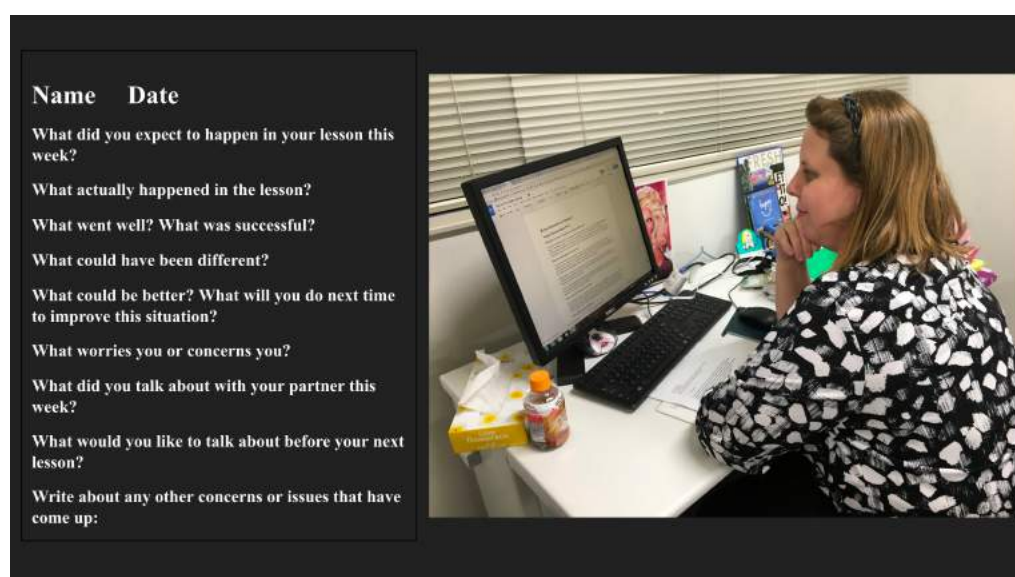
In planning our pechakucha together, we had to look back over the past six months and reflect about what we had gained from our collaborative journal-keeping thus far. Since we were still in the midst of collecting our data, we didn't want to delve too deeply and begin analyzing it right then and there. Rather, we opted to discuss several ways that we had been affected by the mere acts of journal-keeping and actively collaborating on our shared classes. It was a beneficial experience for us at a time when our busy schedules and stress about the upcoming JALT2016 Conference were reaching their peak. Taking the time to verbally reflect on the journal itself and our perspectives was a worthwhile experience, and both of us were happy to take part in the Teacher Development SIG Forum. Following is the script that we planned to use for our presentation.

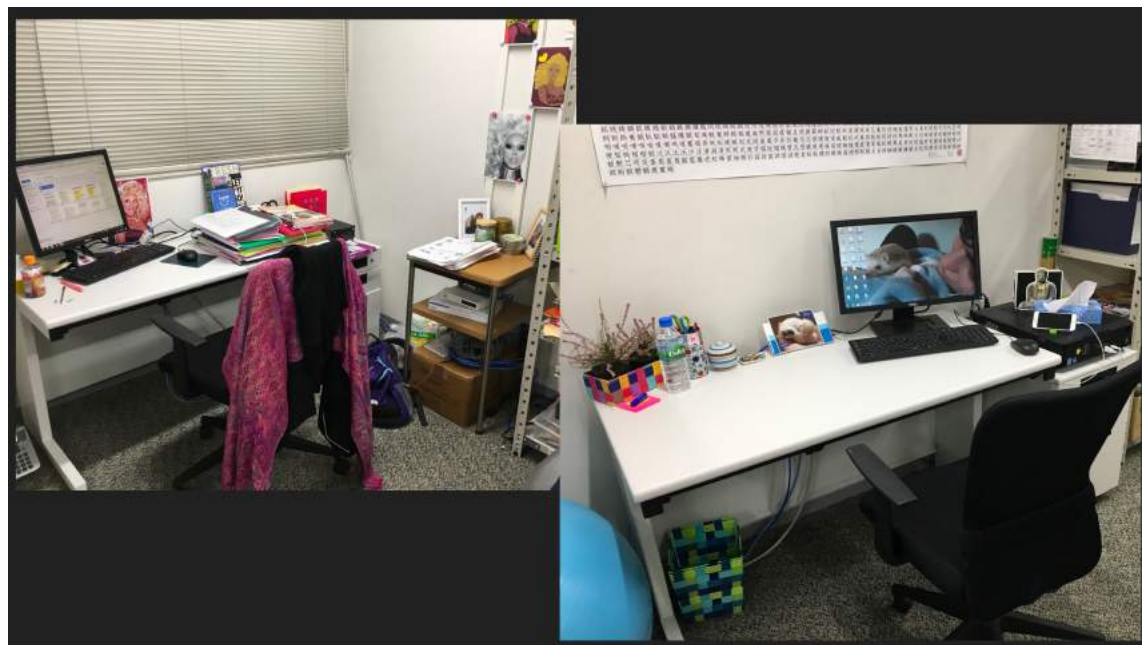
Introduction by Amanda

Marnie and I share two classes. For the past year we have answered ten reflective questions in a collaborative journal after our lessons. One class is a high level academic and professional skills class. The other class is a four-skills English class. Marnie teaches speaking and listening, while I teach the writing component. We wanted to start this collaborative journal to help us see patterns in the nature of teacher collaboration.

Moral Support by Marnie

Writing in a collaborative journal provided many opportunities for support. Not only did Amanda and I share information about students, classes and lessons, but we also shared our missteps, insecurities and our different perspectives. This in turn created many chances for giving and receiving advice. It was beneficial to write about a problem with a student, a lesson plan that went awry, or a tech issue that occurred during class, and then receive support from my partner.





Constructive Collaboration by Marnie

Two heads are better than one. There were many instances when either one of us ran into an issue and then we would both brainstorm solutions. We created several tools, such as rubrics and peer evaluation forms, that we now use in several of our classes. The journal and our active collaboration across all aspects of our two classes actually led us to generate new ideas that were useful in all of our classes.

Different Perspectives by Amanda

The journal allowed us to document a variety of perspectives. Not only were we privy to each other's point of view, we also chatted with students and included their suggestions, issues, and complaints in our journal entries. In addition, when we got feedback from outsiders, such as our interns or colleagues, we included this information too. It was helpful to consider these different perspectives when we had to make decisions about how to proceed.

Different Perspectives by Marnie

We got to know our students better through our collaboration. I got to read about events and personalities that I didn't get to experience in my own class and it helped me to see my students more holistically. I learned more about their skills, interests, and personal lives. For example, I learned who was a strong writer, and who came every Friday even though they often missed my Wednesday class.

Frustrations by Marnie

Probably one of the most frustrating aspects of collaboration, is that your partner may not always provide updates in time, or that life happens and you may not have as many chances to connect as you like. There are times when you've designed a lesson plan but you just didn't have the time to do everything that your partner wanted. Collaboration can be frustrating, but the benefits far outweigh the aggravation.

Teaching Styles by Amanda

One day, I was offering our students some encouragement about collaboration. I told them how Marnie and I are so different, but we keep the lines of communication open, we trust each other to do her part and to assist when necessary, and to rely on each other's strengths. This was the first time I acknowledged how well we complement each other. It's important if the students can see their own teachers as role models of collaboration.

Self-Reflection by Amanda

In terms of self-reflection, the collaborative journal offered a place for me to vent frustrations and confess my missteps. Looking back on my journal entries, I found that I had a lot of both! I realized two things: 1. By bouncing my frustrations and failures off my partner, I could come up with solutions for avoiding problems in the future. 2. Compared to Marnie, I probably worry too much. Not every lesson will be perfectly smooth, but there is always next week!

Peer-Reflection by Amanda

It's rare that a teacher can truly share what goes on in her classroom. The trust that existed between us was a valuable tool for reflection. Knowing that Marnie would read my journal entry sometime soon motivated me to keep going and to keep improving. In addition, I always looked forward to reading her entries in order to gain insights into her teaching style and decision-making.

Conclusion by Marnie

Collaboration is not always easy, but learning about your own teaching styles and more about your students can be invaluable. Additionally, we feel it has been a worthwhile experience both professionally and personally.

In actuality, we went off script a bit here and there, as one does when they present the same things five times in a row. In a presentation of this nature, with a small audience sitting directly in front of you at eye level, it is easy for them to show reactions, ask spontaneous questions, and for the speakers and audience member to play off each other. Both Marnie and Amanda felt energized and happy with each presentation.



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Bio: Amanda Yoshida has an MA TESOL from Anaheim University and has been teaching in Japan for more than 15 years. Her research interests include classroom-based assessment, teacher collaboration, and reflective practice.

Teacher Development

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

Benefits:

Joining TD connects you to a network of teacher colleagues who are interested in growing professionally. Members receive the most current issue of TD's Explorations in Teacher Development (ETD) Journal by email (and in print if requested), and can participate in our mailing list.

TD also sponsors and co-sponsors events throughout the year to help teachers gain experience in mentoring and presenting.

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