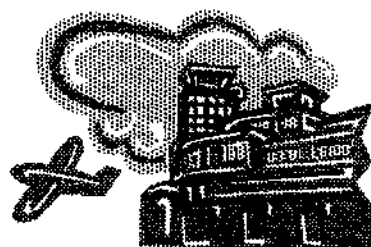


# Explorations in Teacher Education

JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter

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Editor: Robert Croker <croker@nanzan-u.ac.jp>



## Action research in a grassroots EFL teacher development group

Nobuyuki Takaki

Kumamoto University Faculty of Education

### Background

The purpose of this article is to report on an action research project promoted by the PIGATE teacher education group. Japanese junior/senior high school EFL teachers collaborated with pre-service teachers (university students) and university teachers on a variety of projects in 1999 and 2000. Implications of this project for Japanese EFL teacher education will also be explored.

PIGATE is a Japanese grassroots and local college-based EFL teacher education group that, without government funding or support, collaboratively engage in monthly professional development sessions.

PIGATE, directed by Nobuyuki Takaki, is a Japanese grassroots and local college-based EFL teacher education group that, without government funding or support, collaboratively engage in monthly professional development sessions. The group has also published newsletters (101 issues as of February 2002) and journals (8 as of September 2001) since 1993.

### The Action Research Syllabus

PIGATE members have had experience in using reflective teaching techniques through journal writing, taking lesson notes, showing their videotaped classes to each other, and by discussing various matters in a bottom-up and non-threatening way with each other. In 1998, monthly sessions focused on reflective teaching, following Richards and Lockhart's 1994 text, *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. In 1999 and 2000, ten collaborative action research projects were organized and carried out. The development of these projects is explained in this section.

September 1999: The action research syllabus was discussed and approved at PIGATE's annual meeting.

October 1999: Kimiyo Sakamoto, a PIGATE member who had conducted an action research project as part of her Master Degree studies at the School for International Training (SIT), led a preliminary discussion on action research.

November 1999: Terry Laskowski, a university teacher educator and PIGATE advisor, gave a mini-lecture on action research. Each participant verbalized his/her interest area for an upcoming action research project. The participants were then provisionally divided into eight different interest groups, and they discussed among themselves how they would carry out their research.

December 1999: A troubleshooting session was held on action research, and the group members and titles for the first round of projects were finalized as follows:

Group 1: 'A Mini-English Diary Experiment', conducted by three junior high teachers, one graduate student and two undergraduate students

Group 2: 'Increasing Writing Time in the Classroom', conducted by two junior high teachers and three undergraduate students

Group 3: 'Helping Students of Different Levels Enjoy English Classes', conducted by three junior high teachers, one graduate student and two contract junior high teachers

PIGATE members have had experience in using reflective teaching techniques through journal writing, taking lesson notes, showing their videotaped classes to each other ... in a bottom-up and non-threatening way



Group 4: 'Helping Students Learn to Talk in English among Themselves in the Classroom', conducted by three junior high teachers, one graduate student and one conversation school director

Group 5: 'Decreasing Teacher Talking Time to Increase Student Talking Time in the Classroom' by two junior high teachers, one junior college professor, two undergraduate students and one contract senior high teacher

January 2000: In this session, a discussion about action research purposes, procedures, and data collection methods was conducted, and then each group gave an interim report on their progress. This was followed by a whole group discussion.



February 2000: Action research with a focus on hypothesis setting was discussed, and each group gave their progress reports, again followed by a whole group discussion.

March 2000: Groups 2 and 3 orally presented their final reports, and then all eight groups got together and discussed the outcomes and implications of the groups' research on their teaching.

April 2000: Groups 1 and 5 orally presented their final reports, and then all eight groups got together and discussed the outcomes and implications of the groups' research on their teaching. A survey was conducted to find out members' interest areas for the second round of action research projects. These topics were later finalized by the steering committee.

May 2000: Group 4 from the first round of projects orally presented their final report, and then all eight groups got together and discussed the outcomes and implications of that group's research on their teaching. The participants reviewed some basic principles of action research, focusing on preliminary data collection techniques such as surveys and questionnaires. The participants in the second round of action research groups were finalized as follows:

Group 6: 'Making the Most of English Songs in the Classroom', conducted by one junior college professor and one senior high teacher

Group 7: 'Increasing Student English Talking Time through Active Use of Classroom English by both Teachers and Students', conducted by one junior high teacher and a teacher from a school for handicapped children

Group 8: 'Improving the Teaching of Writing by Discovering Where Students Get Stuck in Writing English', conducted by two junior high teachers

Group 9: 'Improving Lesson Plan Execution: Opening, Sequencing, Pacing and Closure', conducted by four junior high teachers, two undergraduate students and one contract junior high teacher

Group 10: 'Helping Students with Different Levels Enjoy English Classes: Part 2', conducted by three junior high teachers, two senior high teachers, one graduate student and one contract junior high teacher

The participants reviewed some basic principles of action research, focusing on preliminary data collection techniques such as surveys and questionnaires



June 2000: In this session, participants discussed in their individual groups and in the large group techniques for analyzing action research questionnaire results.

July 2000: A reflection session was held concerning the first and second rounds of action research projects.

August 2000: There was no official session held since some members were participating in a summer program on language improvement at the University of Montana, USA. The rest of the members got together on their own initiative to further discuss their action research results.

In addition to the presentations given by each group at the FIGATE monthly meetings, all groups published their action research papers in FIGATE Journal 7.

September 2000: Each group orally presented an interim report of their research activities at the FIGATE annual meeting.

In addition to the presentations given by each group at the FIGATE monthly meetings, all groups published their action research papers in FIGATE Journal 7, except for groups 6, 7 and 8. Furthermore, Groups 1 and 5 gave presentations about their action research projects in English at a Kumamoto JALT Chapter meeting in April 2001, and papers based on both these presentations were later published in FIGATE Journal 8 in English.

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## NOTICE

### The Journal of Changing Asian Foreign Language Education (CAFLE)

CAFLE seeks to study and explore the changing landscape of education in Asian countries; promote positive change, create awareness of needed change, suggest alternatives, and report on change efforts both successful and unsuccessful. We wish to give impetus to positive change through highlighting change efforts and innovation in the region and through giving contrast frames of reference. For this to happen, we will need contributions from many foreign language educators throughout Asia, and look forward to your contributions.

At its core, the purpose of CAFLE is to invite more open communication and appropriate risk-taking among the stakeholders who are presently involved in foreign language education in Asia. We hope especially to create a privileged place for the voices of students and teachers through their own narratives and reports about their own experiences.

Editors: Hsin-Hwa Chen, Tim Murphey, Kazuyoshi Sato

Contact Tim Murphey <mits@saturn.yzu.edu.tw> for submission and subscription information



## Action research project: A mini English diary experiment for junior high school first-year students

Nobuyuki Takaki  
Kumamoto University

Kimiyo Sakamoto  
Nanataki Junior High School

Rie Yamashita  
Kogen Junior High School

This paper contains one group's action research report. It was originally written in English, and is shown here as an example of the kind of research the PIGATE teachers have produced.

### Background

This action research project was conducted by the authors in collaboration with four other research partners (two undergraduate students, one graduate student and one junior high teacher), and two university teacher educator-advisors.

### Context

Sakamoto and Yamashita work at public junior high schools in Kumamoto, both teaching first-year students. In their schools there are about 30-39 students in a class and it is the first time for these students to have studied English. Each group has four fifty-minute English classes a week. The main textbook is the Mombusho-authorized *New Horizon English Course Book 1*. The first-year students' classes were chosen as the subject for research mainly because the writers wanted to know how students would express themselves in

### Research Question

We have explored how students develop their creativity and have genuine communication with others for the past six years. The use of student-generated materials appeared to be helpful. It seemed effective for students to use new grammar points that have been introduced in class to write about themselves, as is often done in junior high schools. However, it was also found that such an approach did not necessarily help students to be creative and take the initiative in their own learning, since it regulated their self-expression to a large extent. The researchers hypothesized that the use of 'Daily Notes' might solve this problem; by letting students freely make entries on a regular basis in their English diaries they would initiate their own topics of interest. Moreover, the diary entry approach would also allow teachers to offer students individualized help. Raimes explains the following advantages of Daily Notes:

When people write every day, for their own eyes and not to be judged by another, they often find that they can write more and more each day. Their fluency increases. They labor less over each word. When they write about something that concerns them, they worry less about being 'correct'. All of this is useful in learning to write. (1983, p. 90)

... these teachers decided  
to teach the past tense  
inductively rather than  
deductively, believing  
that student initiative  
should come first in the  
learning process

We decided to explore the use of Daily Notes, defining our research question as "What happens when our students participate in a 'mini English diary experiment'?"

### Rationale

The research question was important because previously these teachers had never required students to keep a diary before they had studied the past tense. This may reflect most Japanese EFL teachers' traditional belief that past tense learning is essential for students to be able to write a diary. However, these teachers decided to teach the past tense inductively rather than deductively, believing that student initiative should come first in the learning process. It was thought that in this way, students could see their own progress, be more aware of their role as a learner, and thereby make their learning more meaningful.





... there is little learning time left for authentic communication in English for two reasons. Firstly, students are excessively controlled by the teacher. Secondly, teachers need to cover the material in the Mombusho-authorized textbooks.

In a diary approach, however, far more attention has to be paid by teachers to students outside of the class, particularly to those who would need individualized help. In spite of the Mombusho's revision of the Course of Study in 1989, which directed a stronger focus on communicative competence, teaching writing for communication does not seem to have been promoted in the past ten years. One of the reasons for this is that Japanese EFL instruction is still heavily controlled by students' need to develop test-taking skills. Thus, there is little learning time left for authentic communication in English for two reasons. Firstly, students are excessively controlled by the teacher. Secondly, teachers need to cover the material in the Mombusho-authorized textbooks. In this context, it was important for the researchers to explore the outcomes and implications of students' use of a 'mini English diary'.

#### Data Collection and Methodology

Four sources were used to collect data for this project: 1) students' 'mini English diaries', 2) a questionnaire on students' learning, 3) interviews with selected students, and 4) meetings with research partners. The next section summarises each source.

##### 1) students' 'mini English diaries'

Each student was given a B6-sized notebook, and advised to keep a diary in English, making entries at least once a week between January and March 2000. They were allowed to write about anything they liked as long as they used English, and to determine the length of each entry; the main purpose was simply to enjoy writing. To further motivate and encourage the students, stamps and stickers were put on the back covers of their notebooks every time they handed in their diaries.

After analyzing the students' writing in their diaries the following five tendencies were observed in their work: 1) students did not seem to be afraid of making grammatical mistakes; 2) students tried to use words which had not been taught in the classroom or could not be found in the textbook; 3) overgeneralization regarding the formation of the past tense showed that students gradually realized that the past tense in English has patterns; 4) students started to write some personal questions to their teachers; and 5) students sometimes quoted example sentences or proverbs from their dictionaries.

##### 2) the questionnaire

Students were asked to fill in the same questionnaire twice during the project, once in December 1999, and again in February 2000. The questionnaires, developed by the teachers and their research partners at their meetings, were collected for analysis. They contained seven items (see Appendix). Students were assured that the questionnaire would not affect their evaluation. The questionnaire was useful as a source of data because it provided the teachers with an overview of how their actions influenced their students, and also because it revealed information from passive students, who were usually not so expressive. The questionnaire indicated that students' motivation for improving their writing ability increased by 10%; students became aware that writing meant not only spelling out words but also writing sentences; and students learned to use dictionaries more than they had previously.

##### 3) interviews with selected students

Four students were interviewed in the first week of April 2000. They were selected according to two criteria: their attitude in class (two active and two passive), and the number of times they had submitted their diaries to be checked. However, all of them wrote and handed in their diaries very often. The interviews were conducted in Japanese on the telephone, and were translated into English. All four students would like to continue keeping a diary and trying to write more about themselves.



The following are excerpts from the four interviews:

Teacher 1: How did you feel when you read my comments or responses on your writing?

Student A: I think I could understand you better than before. It made me feel comfortable so I could be more active in class.

Teacher 1: What interested you most about the mini English diary?

Student B: I enjoyed communicating with you. I did not pay much attention to English grammar.

Teacher 2: How did you feel when you read my comments or responses on your writing?

Student C: Just talking with you made me nervous before. However, I can talk with you frankly now. I always wrote about animals because I love them. If possible I want to write on other topics and have more communication with you.

Teacher 2: How did you feel about the mini English diary?

Student C: I was very happy to write about fishing because I love it. I was glad to know that you also enjoy my drawings in addition to my writing.

#### 4) meetings with research partners

Eight meetings with research partners were held from December 1999 to April 2000. The research partners were all PIGATE members. They helped in planning the research schedule, in making the questionnaire, in discussing progress reports together, by giving concrete comments and ideas, by encouraging the teachers to continue in the research, and in analyzing the data. They also helped the teachers remain objective in conducting the research by, for instance, observing students and their English production in class, and by helping the teachers to focus on the facts. The following are some example comments made by research partners:

Partner 1 (junior high teacher): By reading some diaries and making comments on them I am now able to communicate better with those students who are not my homeroom students.

Partner 2 (graduate student): I thought writing a diary was too much for students before learning the past tense. However, I found that the students tried hard to write about themselves, by using a dictionary.

Partner 3 (undergraduate student): I would like my future students to try to keep a mini-English diary. I think this is very helpful for their English learning.

Partner 4 (undergraduate student): Through this research I felt the difficulties and importance of giving individualized help to students. I would like my future students to try a mini-English diary to give them effective individualized help.

#### Outcomes and Implications

The results of the action research project demonstrated, first of all, that student learning is enhanced if students are encouraged to initiate their own topics for communication. An example of this can be seen in the following chronological entries taken from one student. The items in the parenthesis indicate the teacher's advice. I paint(ed) a postcard.

I goed (went) to 植木市. [Note: The kanji 'ueki-ichi' means a garden plant fair.]

I went (to) ECC. [Note: ECC is an English conversation school.]

Students initiated the writing topics and wrote what they wanted in their own unique method of expression. Then they received some feedback from their teacher. They appeared to be paying attention to the teacher's advice when they wrote about a new topic.

By reading some diaries  
and making comments  
on them I am now able  
to communicate better  
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are not my homeroom  
students.

... student learning is  
enhanced if students are  
encouraged to initiate  
their own topics for  
communication.



Second of all, the teachers found that they really enjoyed reading the student diaries after class. This was probably because the interaction was authentic. Here is another excerpt written by a different student:

I'm very sad. It's Ms. Yamashita と part. I'm a tear がです. I'm very very いやだ. But, it's too late to do anything now. (I will never forget you. I wish your dream come true.)

This entry is an example of genuine communication and demonstrates how this particular student wants her teacher to know that she is so sad about saying good-bye to the teacher. This is communicated clearly even though her writing ability is far from fluent, as indicated by the frequent mix of English and Japanese.

... the teachers learned that having research partners to collaborate with is significant in that they forced the teachers to take an objective view in data analysis.

Lastly, from this study the researchers learned the importance of giving individualized feedback and how it is powerful in helping students to learn. They saw how the strengthened teacher-student relationships helped them to better understand students and students' learning processes as well.

This research project also raised some new questions. We noticed one problem in particular, that some students (although very few) never handed in their diaries, although they were never reprimanded for not doing so. Some of these students told the teachers that they had nothing to write, while others reported that they had no idea how to write.

On a different note, the teachers learned that having research partners to collaborate with is significant in that they forced the teachers to take an objective view in data analysis. Reflecting upon the process and outcome of this action research project, the writers would, in their next project, want to focus on how students' errors should be dealt with, exploring at the same time better ways to teach grammar inductively with the continuous use of the 'mini English diary' approach.

#### Some Implications of the Project for EFL Teacher Education in Japan

This report is only one example of the ten action research projects conducted by the PIGATE group. However, it is clear that action research can be beneficial in the professional development of teachers. This kind of research may also add insight and have broader implications for improving the EFL teacher development situation in Japan.

... the project was made possible because it was planned and implemented by a grassroots group where bottom-up activism has prevailed.

This action research project was conducted in a Japanese context where traditional hierarchical structures have inhibited collaborative teacher learning. Therefore, it should be emphasized that the project was made possible because it was planned and implemented by a grassroots group where bottom-up activism has prevailed. Furthermore, even in such a grassroots organization, it took almost six years of activity before the participants started exploring action research. This seems most probably due to the prevailing traditional teacher thinking that research is only for college professors or graduate students. The teacher-as-researcher approach has taught PIGATE members the following:

- it is essential for their professional development that teachers learn to discuss their worries and problems. Through reflecting about their experiences, teachers can discuss why they do what they do in the classroom.
- teachers should be provided with more opportunities to freely contribute professionally to their own development by giving presentations, writing for journals, discussing various issues and being involved in action research.





- pre-service and in-service teacher education should work hand in hand because there is so much that can be learned from this kind of collaboration. This has proven effective in PIGATE by involving both pre-/in-service teachers and university teacher educators working together.

In conclusion, the authors would like to leave the reader with a comment made by a PIGATE member, a senior high school teacher involved in this collaborative action research project:

I learned that there's no failure in conducting action research. The fact that I'm involved and I'm learning through the process is important. But the best part was that I got to know different teachers with different ideas who were trying to share worries and concerns.



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#### Appendix

##### Student Questionnaire

Your class:      Your name:

1. Which of the following is the most enjoyable in your English classes?

1) listening, 2) speaking, 3) reading, 4) writing

Please rank subjects in terms of 'most enjoyable' and 'least enjoyable'?

most                      least  
(   ) > (   ) > (   ) > (   )

2. Why did you rank 'writing' where you did above?

3. Which of the following do you want to improve the most from now on?

1) listening, 2) speaking, 3) reading, 4) writing

Please rank subjects in terms of 'want to improve most' and 'want to improve least'?

most                      least  
(   ) > (   ) > (   ) > (   )

4. Why did you rank 'writing' where you did above?

5. Which of the following was the most difficult when writing in English, as in writing your self-introduction? Circle the most suitable answer.

1) spelling 2) word order 3) contents 4) sentence order 5) other  
(explain)

6. Do you use a dictionary (Japanese-English, English-Japanese) when you write in English? Circle the most suitable answer.

1) often 2) sometimes 3) seldom 4) not at all

7. Please explain your answer to Question 6?



I learned that there's no failure in conducting action research. The fact that I'm involved and I'm learning through the process is important. But the best part was that I got to know different teachers with different ideas who were trying to share worries and concerns.



## Dialoguing with novice academic writers

Neil Cowie  
Saitama University

### Introduction

I belong to a small group of writing teachers that decided to undertake collaborative action research focusing on novice student writers. I asked for volunteers for a diary study from my writing class in a liberal arts faculty of a national university. Six of the better writers from my class came forward. These students were still novice writers with much to learn, and much to teach me through their own struggles. In this short article I will briefly describe the context in which I teach writing, the stages in the diary study, and the main findings, linking them in with potential teaching implications.

*I made it as clear as I could that I was interested in working with students to find out what difficulties they had with their writing, and that I would try and respond to those difficulties as they arose.*

### Teaching context

This writing class of forty or so mainly second year students meets once a week for ninety minutes. In the thirteen lessons from April to July 2001 most students submitted three reports. These three reports were: a self-introduction, a problem-solution, and a comparison-contrast. The content of the lessons included a focus on the 'process' of writing, such as ways to get ideas and begin writing, redrafting and editing strategies; and, also a focus on the 'product' of 'academic' reports such as clear organisation and logical arguments with sufficient details and examples. After each report was submitted each student received a cassette tape with about five minutes of verbal feedback as well as some written comments.

In the second semester, October-January 2001, the main aim was to introduce writing as part of a research process, using references as a way to provide evidence and support for opinions. The first report required students to focus on a specific topic connected to their own major, and to formulate a research question which they would then try to answer. The diary entries for this study were written about this first report. The lessons for this report included activities to highlight what 'academic' means, to help students focus on one specific issue, to formulate a research question, and to show how references can be included in a report as quotations or through paraphrase. As well as these new activities, lessons were designed to try and reinforce the strategies introduced in the first semester. Students had five weeks in which to complete their reports.

### A diary study of student writers

In the first lesson of the second semester in October 2001, I invited volunteers to work with me on a diary project. I made it as clear as I could that I was interested in working with students to find out what difficulties they had with their writing, and that I would try and respond to those difficulties as they arose. Seven students agreed to take part in the knowledge that I would be talking about the project at the IALT conference at the end of November.

For six weeks I asked the students to write a diary entry, as long or as short as they liked, about their writing for that week. There was a set of standard questions that they could use as a guide: What have you learnt this week? What have you had difficulty with? What are your plans for next week? However, as the weeks went by we moved away from the fixed questions and became involved in a kind of 'dialogue journal' in which the students would ask me questions or pose issues and I would respond with comments and opinions. Five out of seven used e-mail and two wrote by hand. For the latter, I would make comments on the diaries and return them in the box outside my office. It was easier to have a 'dialogue' with those students who sent e-mail messages.



...although most students worried about grammatical accuracy, it was not a dominant concern. Much more interesting was concern about the very nature of writing, in particular voice and genre.

In week five, students handed in their reports (one was late), I marked and returned them, and then recorded an interview in English with each volunteer student. I asked similar questions to the six remaining students, such as whether they had benefited from the diary project, whether they enjoyed writing, and what their image of academic writing was. I also asked them more individual questions based on the comments they had made in their diaries. Each interview lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. After completing the interviews I did a simple content analysis (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000, p.164) of the diaries and tapes in order to highlight the main issues that had arisen.

#### Issues that arose from the diaries and interviews

Diary entries indicated that students face four particular difficulties in their writing. Although there was a lot of overlap between students it is important to remember that every student had very personal concerns and needs. For example, although most students worried about grammatical accuracy, it was not a dominant concern. Much more interesting was concern about the very nature of writing, in particular voice and genre. I will briefly summarise the four main issues, followed by a comment on possible teaching implications. Each issue will be illustrated with an extract from a student diary or interview.

1. Students expressed difficulties in incorporating new knowledge or ways of thinking into their writing. The pace of writing or researching a report was perhaps faster than students' ability to fit new knowledge into their existing knowledge framework.

*"I think if I read something I could get some information in my brain but such a kind of new knowledge will go away in a short time, so I want to use or explain in some words as soon as possible and I wanted to repeat in my brain and interpret...(this is) language knowledge and knowledge itself (about a new topic) and I wanted to think about something but only thinking is not so good study so I wanted to argue with some other people so if my friends could be my partners I will be pleased."* (interview)

This is an example of a student explaining that she needs to co-construct knowledge (Williams and Burden, 1997, p.39) through interacting with partners. She could do this in Japanese so there is no linguistic barrier to her development; however, she went on to explain that in writing in English there is a language barrier which makes it more difficult for her to assimilate new knowledge. I think many students are exploring, perhaps for the first time, what it may mean to go out and research something for themselves. Writing about research is one way to (re)order that mental process but this is something which may take considerable time. In terms of writing theory these students may be describing the difficulties of moving from a 'knowledge-telling' mode of discourse to a 'knowledge-transforming' one (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996, p.117-124, after Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). Students that are only used to giving descriptions or telling stories may find it difficult to move to a more analytical mode of discourse. Teachers need to be aware that this is very challenging for novice writers and may take some time; some may never achieve it. It may also be important to allow students space to express themselves in their own language as they are struggling with new information and tasks.

*I think many students are exploring, perhaps for the first time, what it may mean to go out and research something for themselves. Writing about research is one way to (re)order that mental process...*



2. Students faced problems in knowing how to look for appropriate references and knowing how much of a report should be based on evidence and how much should consist of one's own ideas.

I think students were exploring the issue of what the mechanics of research might entail. They had little or no experience of searching for information or of judging what its worth was. They needed reassurance and suggestions about where to look and what to do with the information they had found. Such an issue is not confined to novice writers - at all levels writers often feel they need to look for the latest and most up-to-date information, not realising that in most situations there are always alternatives and a key part to the academic 'game' is to 'use what you have' and not worry about what you cannot get. I became aware, however, that students were not reading enough to get a deep exposure to different genres of academic writing in their various fields. As a consequence I started to bring in to lessons more texts which they could use as a model for their own work and which they could also use as references to incorporate in their reports. I had been relying on students to find their own information, but for many that is very difficult to do - many of my lesson activities are based on students talking to each other but a better use of time may be to spend more time reading extracts from appropriate academic texts.

All the issues of voice and genre become secondary if a writer is not confident in their ability to correctly encode linguistically what it is they want to say. I have no easy answers for this but the students handed me a useful reminder: it is very important not to forget the primacy of language in the rush to get students to 'do research', or to organise their reports clearly and logically.

3. Students struggled to find a balance between specialist and general lexis and finding an appropriate 'academic' voice.

"Vocabulary is very important...sometimes to distinguish them very clearly which are spoken and which one is academic is a little bit difficult for me." (interview)

"To take reader's attention is very important but if I try to write correctly and academically it's a little boring...so to realise attention I want to include more humour." (interview)

Beneath this seemingly straightforward issue is the huge problem of what academic writing is about and whom it is for. My initial advice was relatively simple: students should imagine their reader is an intelligent, informed non-specialist, in fact, a university language teacher. They should use words and expressions that they anticipate such a person can understand and explain more technical ones if they think s/he cannot. However, beyond this simple advice I have also taken the opportunity through the diaries and interviews to bring up the questions of genre, discourse community, and voice (not in those terms of course), mainly by encouraging students to look for ways in which these features are marked in their own specialities. I have also started to devise more teaching activities that raise awareness of differences between academic and less formal texts, particularly in terms of how 'personal' writing can be, which of course varies enormously from one academic field to another.

4. Students were worried about grammatical accuracy at the sentence level.

"...whenever I start to write my report I worry about the one sentence (whether) the sentence is grammatically correct or not." (diary)

"In Japanese there are no articles so Japanese students may tend to be confused about it." (diary)

Perhaps, as these students were among the better ones in the class, sentence level mechanics and a pre-occupation with accuracy did not figure so often in their comments as might be expected amongst struggling novices. But it is still a major concern and I became aware (again) that I do need to address that in my teaching, both through the feedback I give on reports and through specific lesson activities. My approach has been to encourage students to try and become more aware of their own specific language problems but it is a huge issue for them to face alone. Language choices are probably the main ways in which novice writers are distinguished from more advanced. All the issues of voice and genre become secondary if a writer is not confident in their ability to correctly encode linguistically what it is they want to say. I have no easy answers for this but the students handed me a useful reminder: it is very important not to forget the primacy of language in the rush to get students to 'do research', or to organise their reports clearly and logically.

### Other issues and opinions

I have focused so far on difficulties students were facing but I think it is also important to point out that they also expressed a number of opinions and identified a number of issues about writing which were very insightful. These include comments on the process of writing, the 'rules' of academic writing, and some reflections on the diary project itself.

All the students were able to explain very clearly their approach to writing and what was interesting to me was how variable it was. Initially some spent a lot of time reading, others wrote notes or mind maps, others thought a lot or spoke with their friends. Some started writing with the introduction, others with the conclusion; some wanted to get the organisation clear from the beginning whereas others could tolerate uncertainty and were comfortable making a lot of changes. Some overcame barriers by reading, others by leaving their work alone for a time. The teaching implication for me was that I started to give much more time in lessons for students to go about writing in their own way and if that meant, for example, that they left the classroom to go to the library I was happy to allow them to do so. This gave me more time to talk individually to remaining students about their work-in-progress.

The student volunteers also showed that they were getting a much clearer idea of what academic writing was. Some comments were direct, "a good report is more concise, not repeat many times...not too short...introduction main body conclusion balance...those are connect well." (interview). "academic means not only individual things but also things connected with society and the world." (interview)

Others were more sophisticated, "I'm sure that most of our class have an idea of the common requirements of (academic) writing, like me, but when I begin writing it seriously I found that some problems come out...the most conspicuous ones are: how to show my own ideas, how to use other's ideas and to what degree to state the facts. To overcome these difficulties...I think the most important way is to write and to read, which means I should write as much as I can and at the same time to read the same kind of works to gain a clear idea about this kind of writing." (diary)

All reflected that they had clarified their views of what academic writing was. They were becoming more aware that there were clear 'rules', and although they may not know all of them yet they felt that they were gradually finding them out. For me there came the realisation that each student needs to understand rules slightly differently, and I need to try and help the students discover these for themselves.

All the students were positive about the diary project but for sometimes unexpected reasons. One student explained that the diary was a kind of model of writing, "I can see how native speakers write sentences." (interview). In a similar vein another student saw writing to the teacher as an opportunity to use English outside the lesson, and that gave her more confidence. On the other hand, another student said that writing the diary gave her an opportunity to think about her own difficulties and clarify her thoughts. As if mirroring their multiplicity of writing approaches I was impressed with the variety of ways in which individual students viewed involvement in the diary project.



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What does 'academic' mean and what are ways in which teachers can introduce the concept? What are good models of academic writing? How do writers tread that fine line between copying/incorporating others' work into their own? How can teachers best encourage students to find their own 'voice'?

### Conclusions

As a result of 'dialoguing' with a small number of students I have been made aware of a number of questions that previously I had only superficially thought about. These include: What does 'academic' mean and what are ways in which teachers can introduce the concept? What are good models of academic writing? How do writers tread that fine line between copying/incorporating others' work into their own? How can teachers best encourage students to find their own 'voice'? How can a teacher respond best to students for whom language issues of word/expression selection and grammatical accuracy are very real and pressing problems?

In seeking answers to these questions I have gradually started to change my classroom approach, in particular introducing more models of academic texts, giving students more opportunities to read in the lesson, and by doing less 'teacher-centered' activities, allowing students more time to write in their own way.

I have found that using the diaries as a dialogue journal is an effective and economical way in which to find out what difficulties novice writers face. Moreover, not only can I directly give help to those volunteer students, but I can also use their insights to help the rest of the class. The next stage of this project is to work with the same volunteers but move from dyadic teacher-student dialogues to a whole-group interaction in which I hope students will learn as much from each other, if not more, than from their teacher.

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## Adjustments in teacher language with different level students

Louise Haynes  
Narman University

### Summary

Veterans as well as teachers who are just starting out in the EFL field may not be aware of the different ways they address students of differing levels of proficiency. By making these differences explicit, teacher trainers can guide teachers to communicate more effectively in the classroom. This paper summarises the most important points of teacher talk adjustments, based on the example of a common classroom event, the narration of a personal story.

### Introduction

The term foreigner talk (FT) has been described as "the language that native speakers use when addressing non-native speakers" (Ellis 1997, p. 45). Two main types of modification have been identified: ungrammatical modification, including possible omission of grammatical features, expansion and replacement / rearrangement (Ellis 1994, p. 252); and grammatical modification, including simplification, regularization and elaboration (ibid p. 256).

Ungrammatical FT may include such features as exaggerated intonation, omission of articles and certain auxiliary verb forms, deletion of pronouns or substituting them with names, using foreign or foreign-sounding words. Native speakers may produce ungrammatical FT when speaking with very low-level, rather than higher-level, non-native speakers. Ungrammatical FT has also been used to imply a superior status over the non-native speaker. (ibid p. 252-254).

Grammatical FT tends to be well structured and slower, with more clearly pronounced language, shorter and less complex utterances, and a simpler choice of lexical items (see Long 1996). However, regularization and elaboration can often result in more complexity for the non-native speaker. With elaboration, for example, a speaker may add more detail in an attempt to give clarity to the meaning, but may, at the same time, overload the non-native speaker with too much information.

In this study, the researcher asked an experienced and well-regarded EFL expert-teacher at a language school in Japan to tell the same story to two different groups of learners: a beginning group of six learners just finishing a first year basic-level course (Group B); and an intermediate group of three learners (Group I). The teacher elected to tell the learners the story of her journey across the United States by bicycle. At the beginning of both tellings, the teacher drew a simple map on the board to provide some visual assistance to the learners. The teacher, who was familiar with all but one of the learners, was instructed simply to try to make sure the learners understood the story. No further instructions were given. After the tellings, all the learners indicated that they had clearly understood the story. Both tellings of the story were audio-recorded, then transcribed by the researcher.




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### Analysis

The teacher spoke approximately 720 words with Group B in 00:06:18, compared with 2 995 words in 00:24:40 with Group I, a longer and more elaborate telling. However, importantly the average speed was not dissimilar, approximately 114 wpm in Group B and 121 wpm in Group I, both not much slower than the speed of normal speech. Research indicates that it is better not to significantly slow speech down for beginners; grammatical simplification, vocabulary modification and pausing are more effective, and this is elaborated in the next sections.

### Modification

Simplifying grammatical structures for beginning learners is highly appropriate. In our case study, the majority of sentences in the Group B telling were a series of short fully-formed phrases, combined with conjunctions "and", "because", "or", and "so". With the Group I learners, however, sentences were filled out with more advanced structures such as [so + adj + that] and [thought about + V + ing]. There were also more complex tenses, "he may have thought that we were stupid for riding..."; and more colloquial structures, such as "You could tell it was, like, on purpose...". Most teachers are proficient at modifying their grammatical structures to match their students' levels; reassure teachers that this is appropriate. Obviously, concentrating on the structures that the learners have recently learned would also be

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Ungrammatical modification when speaking with non-native speakers, such as omitting articles, should be avoided. For example, in the case of our expert teacher, no ungrammatical modifications were found in the Group I transcript, and only one for Group B, the omission of the article in "sometimes in hotel".

Vocabulary modification is more common than grammatical simplification. Table 1 gives a comparison of vocabulary/phrase structures used with each group in our study. The vocabulary used with the basic group is much simpler, with general categories used instead of hyponyms.

Table 1 Comparison of language used with Basic and Intermediate groups

BASIC (Group B)	INTERMEDIATE (Group I)
slow pace	gradual pace
you can see all around here	it's very easy to see everything that's around you
blew his horn	beeping the horn
cooking things	cooking utensils
worried	concerned
if someone attacked us	if someone tried to mug us or attack us

Our expert teacher defined or elaborated vocabulary more often for her intermediate learners than her beginning learners. For example, a slug was defined as "a slimy, big, fat, worm-looking thing". This greater elaboration of vocabulary may represent a significant source of lingual input for intermediate learners, and should be encouraged. It helps intermediate learners develop the capacity to define words that they do not know or have forgotten, so they can continue speaking.





*Intermediate learners can learn how to switch time sequences and mark detours, as our expert teacher did, using "In fact..." and "...actually it was kind of interesting..." or to bring the topic back on track with "Ok, so, anyway, ...".*

There is a tendency for teachers to alter intonation patterns or other phonological features, as they believe that these increase learner comprehension. To a certain degree this may be true, but this should not occur to the point of distorting speech. The teacher in this case study did not alter intonation patterns, yet could successfully convey the story to both groups. Teachers should be cautioned against relying on this technique to improve comprehension, and encouraged to use other modifications instead.

#### *Discourse*

Telling a story in chronological order, as our expert teacher did with Group B, aids comprehension for such beginner learners. It is more challenging and therefore appropriate for an intermediate group, however, for the story to jump back and forth in order to elaborate or clarify. Intermediate learners can learn how to switch time sequences and mark detours, as our expert teacher did, using "In fact..." and "...actually it was kind of interesting..." or to bring the topic back on track with "Ok, so, anyway, ...". The teacher also elaborated the story to a greater degree for Group I than Group B.

Comprehension checks have been found to occur frequently in FT (Ellis 1994), perhaps too frequently. Our expert teacher did not use verbal checks such as "ok?" often, as she relied on her learners' body language instead. The teacher using comprehension checks too often can be an annoying distraction from the storytelling. Teachers should encourage their students to indicate their understanding clearly verbally or by using their faces. On the other hand, direct questions such as "Do you know what a slug is?" and "You know a snail?" can be used to focus learners on particular lexical items. Our expert teacher used them more often with intermediate learners than beginning learners, consistent with her focusing more fully on vocabulary elaboration with intermediate learners.

Anaphoric references can be difficult for beginner learners, but are appropriate for intermediate learners. Our expert teacher used them only with Group I, with "those people" referring to "some people in Iowa", and "they" referring to "the people in the restaurant". They can be used with beginner learners if there is adequate redundancy to make the meaning clear, however. Generally, beginner learners are less able to infer meaning, but intermediate learners can. For example, when speaking with Group I, the teacher began one sentence but did not finish it, "...so we had to wait until the doctor...". The speaker assumed that the listeners understood the meaning from the context. Teachers need to be quite explicit with beginner learners, but be increasingly natural and implicit as learners improve.

Learners enjoy simple colloquial expressions such as "like", "you know", "yeah", and "stuff like that", and their use does not seem to impede comprehension even for beginner learners. In the study, there was generally little difference in the amount of colloquial expressions used in the two tellings. However, these phrases occurred with greater frequency toward the end of the story with Group I, with fifteen in the last four minutes. In this part of the telling, the story was quite similar if not identical in places to an exchange between native speakers. As learners become more proficient, more complex colloquial expressions should be used more often.

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The most salient feature found in the transcripts was that the intermediate learners were more active participants than the beginning learners. Group I students responded with frequent back-channel responses, clarification requests, bids for turns, selecting and relinquishing topics; all properties of negotiation by native speakers (McCarthy 1991). There was almost no active participation in establishing meaning by the Group B learners. This is largely due to their inadequate language capacity. Teachers can demonstrate this by, for example, holding a simultaneous dialogue with themselves, persona A being the storyteller, persona B responding, clarifying, and negotiating for meaning. Asking the learners to shadow (repeat) persona B's responses will help them develop a capacity for more active participation.

### Conclusion

Here are fourteen points for making teachers better communicators with their beginner and intermediate level learners:

#### Speed and Pacing

- slow speech only slightly
- pause frequently, to give students time to understand the story
- make shorter phrases with beginner level learners

#### Story-telling

- tell the story in chronological order with beginner learners
- keep the story simple for beginner learners, but elaborate story with intermediate learners

#### Grammatical Structures

- use simple grammatical structures, (e.g. use simple conjunctions for linking)
- be careful of using anaphoric references (e.g. them / their) with beginner learners

#### Vocabulary

- use simpler vocabulary with beginner learners
- BUT define or elaborate more difficult vocabulary with intermediate learners
- regularize your speech with beginner learners, but not with intermediate learners
- use simple colloquial expressions with beginner learners, but progressively increase complexity with intermediate learners

#### Do NOT ...

- make ungrammatical modifications
- alter intonation patterns unnaturally
- use too many comprehension checks

Relating personal stories to students is an activity that students enjoy as it lets them learn more about their teacher. It is also a useful teaching tool that promotes students' active listening and conversation skills. With certain simple adjustments to their speech patterns, teachers can make the process much more effective for learners of different levels.

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## Situated evaluation of communicative language teaching in curriculum innovation

Keiko Sakui

University of Auckland (New Zealand)

### Introduction

Curriculum exists in two forms: the planned curriculum describes and prescribes idealized teaching practices, and the realized curriculum how the planned curriculum is implemented in actual classrooms. 'Situated cognition' (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave, 1997) emphasises the importance of the latter. It views learning as occurring in particular socially- and culturally-situated contexts, rather than in abstract, idealized, and decontextualized learning environments. It centralises the numerous factors that influence realizing the curriculum in the classroom, particularly teacher beliefs. Teachers are viewed not as mere robots who implement curriculum as prescribed, but as individuals who filter, digest, and implement the curriculum depending on their own beliefs and unique understanding of their environmental context (Borg, 1999; Freeman and Richards, 1996; Woods, 1996).

In Japan, a new communicative language teaching (CLT) curriculum (Monbusho, 1998) will be implemented in junior high schools English classrooms from April 2002 and in high schools classrooms from a year later. From a 'situated evaluation' perspective (Bruce and Rubin, 1992; Cervantes, 1993), this paper explores teachers' present understanding and implementation of CLT in their classrooms. The specific research questions are 1) What are teachers' definitions of CLT? 2) How have they actually been implementing CLT in their classrooms? and 3) How do they foresee their teaching situations changing under the new curriculum?

### Background

The new Monbusho curriculum (Monbusho, 1998) prioritises the development of communicative skills, such as understanding interlocutors' simple utterances and expressing opinions, over linguistic structures, such as knowledge of grammatical structures and vocabulary items. These linguistic structures should be incorporated into instruction, but with the goal of helping develop communicative skills. These communicative skills should apply to listening, speaking, writing and reading. The new curriculum gives greater importance to communicative skills for specific situational uses (i.e. shopping, telephone conversation) and some sociolinguistic functions (i.e. requesting, complaining).

### Participants and research procedures

This is a partial report of a two-year longitudinal study (starting March 2000), investigating a group of twelve Japanese junior and high school English teachers, whose teaching experience varies from six to twenty nine years. These teachers belong to a self-initiated teaching pedagogy study group of thirty teachers. They were interviewed in Japanese to elicit their beliefs, knowledge and understanding of CLT. Their classrooms were observed to evaluate how they implemented CLT. Of the twelve, eleven teach in public schools, and the other for a private school; eleven are female and one male. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed following grounded theory procedures to identify recurring and salient themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).



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### Results and discussion

#### Teachers' definitions of CLT

*All teachers supported the importance of CLT and aspired to maximize its incorporation in their instruction. Most teachers defined CLT in broadly similar terms, and these were essentially consistent with the Monbusho curriculum. ... The main difference that emerged between teachers was the place and role of grammar ...*

All teachers supported the importance of CLT and aspired to maximize its incorporation in their instruction. Most teachers defined CLT in broadly similar terms, and these were essentially consistent with the Monbusho curriculum. The teachers suggested that the basic goal of CLT is to be able to exchange messages in English without paying too much attention to details or linguistic forms. Their other comments included many concepts central to CLT, such as recognising the need for communication, self-expression and exchanging opinions in English, understanding English utterances, not worrying excessively about grammar, guessing from the context, and getting the gist. Most teachers agreed that CLT applies to all four skills.

The main difference that emerged between teachers was the place and role of grammar, which Howatt summarises as two versions of CLT. The "strong version" emphasises language learning through communication, "using English to learn it" (1997, p. 279); this minimises the importance of grammar. On the other hand, the "weak version" emphasises understanding linguistic structures, both grammar and vocabulary, and that these should be integrated into communicative activities. This view represents the "learning to use English" approach (p. 279), and is also consistent with the notion of 'form-focused instruction' (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell, 1997; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Pica, 2000). The Monbusho curriculum is essentially consistent with the weak version, which prescribes an integration of communicative activities and structural instruction.

Although a few teachers supported the strong version, most teachers supported the weak version. As one representative teacher noted:

... before they reach a certain point, they need to know the basic sentences and expressions. In order to acquire them... they should be able to read and write. Then they can speak, but before speaking, they should be able to understand [grammar]. (Ms. Hanada<sup>1</sup>)

Therefore, the majority of teachers' understandings were actually consistent with the documented Monbusho curriculum.

#### Classroom implementation

*The actual teaching practices teachers described were also more consistent with the weak than the strong version of CLT.*

The actual teaching practices teachers described were also more consistent with the weak than the strong version of CLT. Teachers' most frequently reported practice was to explain some grammatical features first, followed by some form of manipulative exercise, after which, through a communication task, students produced the grammatical pattern in a contextual situation. Teachers did report using other CLT activities as well. For example, the teacher demonstrates a skit first and then asks students to infer the function of a grammatical structure or greeting.

However, CLT seemed to play a much smaller role in the classroom than the teacher interview excerpts had indicated. Though teachers knew many CLT activities, they did not spend much time actually doing them in class. In the classrooms observed, grammatical instruction was central and far more prominent than CLT. When asked to what extent they implement CLT, several teachers said that they spent 5 minutes out of 50 minutes doing CLT, and this does not even happen in every class.

The tension between grammar and CLT was also evident in interviews of classroom implementation. The importance of grammatical and semantic knowledge was commonly emphasized. This practice is understandable when so much emphasis is still placed on teachers to prepare students for grammar-oriented entrance examinations. Moreover, textbooks are usually written in a way that each chapter focuses on targeted grammatical features.



However, many teachers seemed more likely to do CLT activities when they team-taught with another teacher, either another Japanese teacher or a native speaking teacher. As Ms. Imasaki explained about her team-taught class:

I do a warm-up activity--bingo or that sort of thing. Then we talk about the weather and that kind of topic. Then I cover a little pronunciation, phonics. Then we demonstrate a conversation. For example, we did a telephone conversation the other day. Then we extracted simple phrases like "This is xx". "Can I speak to YY?" Then the students repeat them several times. Then they practice it several times. Then they do a role-play and write the conversation down on a piece of paper. Then they do the role-play in front of the class. This is the pattern I do every time.

This was the class she team-taught once a week and the goal of the class was oral communication. She stated that she could not have done this activity in her other regular classes when she teaches her class alone, because for this particular class, she was a guest teacher who did not have to worry about teaching grammar, and also did not have to worry about continuity from one class to another. She could continue this pattern throughout the year because of the unique teaching situation.

Ms Imasaki's experience is consistent with what I observed in other classrooms; class time with a Japanese teacher teaching alone is usually allocated to teacher-fronted grammar lessons, including explanation of grammatical features, translation, and pencil-paper drills. CLT was mainly implemented through team-teaching, as when two teachers are present the instructional procedures drastically changes from regular English instruction. Instruction is mainly carried out in English, and adopts different communicative activities such as information-gap and game activities, question and answer role-plays and dramas. However, most schools allocated relatively little time for team-teaching, although this varied depending on the school.

#### *Difficulties in Implementation*

The most significant difficulty teachers outlined was classroom management, which is more complex for CLT activities. Teachers needed to ensure that students understood activity procedures, followed instructions, and demonstrated the exercise's outcome explicitly. Teachers were not confident that they could do this effectively. For example, one teacher noted that if she used pair work or group work, students' might chat in Japanese. This teacher did not want to deal with classroom management issues, so she tended to allocate her CLT time to just pencil and paper listening exercises.

Another CLT cost was time. Teachers dealt with many administrative and non-academic responsibilities. One teacher said that before-class preparation for team-teaching with an ALT (assistant language teacher) was time consuming, as it included thinking about different activities, or preparing materials such as large game sheets or cards. Moreover, these teaching materials were not often recycled.

Teachers also noted that CLT activities required considerable class time. Teachers felt that they were expected to progress through the curriculum at a very rigid pace. At one school, I observed a teacher who needed to catch up for mid-term and final term tests. Towards the exam, this teacher used some of the team-teaching class periods for grammar lessons, by asking the ALT not to come to class. This struggle with time will probably continue in the new curriculum, as Ms. Hanada commented:

We will need to teach almost the same amount of materials in 3 hours a week, instead of 4. The core vocabulary items are bold-faced in textbooks and students need to learn them. The number of these core vocabulary items gets smaller [in the new curriculum], but these are inadequate for students to understand or say even something simple. So each textbook includes other vocabulary items, which are not bold-faced. We need to teach them, too. English teachers at our schools are planning to ask our principal for extra class period from "thematic instruction" [sougou gakushuu] so that we can teach what we need to teach.

The main dilemma for teachers was between allocating time for grammar instruction, and CLT. While believing in the importance of CLT and implementing it in team-teaching classes, they needed to prepare their students for entrance examinations. These twin pressures tend to lead to dichotomous English education in classrooms. Mr. Fujimoto reported:



At the moment, I think English teachers in Japan, especially in high schools, are forced to wear two pairs of shoes. One is for the entrance exam... At the same time, we need to teach English for communication. I find it difficult. But for my wish, I think English is a means of communication. I would like to achieve it.

Ms. Omoto expressed a similar concern:

So oral communication is for fun, and the other is for studying for the test. So students wonder why there is a class for communication ...but I hope they think English for entrance exams and for communication are not separate. Ultimately it is the same thing. So I want them to think that if it is not correctly communicated, it won't be understood.

Teachers are clearly struggling to see how best they should integrate the teaching of linguistic structures and communicative activities, but inevitably prioritise teaching linguistic structures.

### General discussion and conclusions

All the teachers in this study claimed they incorporated CLT in their teaching, but to differing degrees, depending on their teaching environment. Situated evaluation theorists recognise that curriculum implementation is not uniformly realized across various teaching situations. A documented curriculum takes a unique shape and color as it is introduced to each school by each classroom teacher. Each teacher holds her or his own beliefs, they work with different students and colleagues in different school climate, needing to satisfy many demands beyond classroom teaching. These situated factors have to be extensively examined in order to gain a good understanding how the curriculum is actually implemented.

Integration of grammar instruction and CLT seems to be the biggest challenge for these teachers. They are concerned that students perceive CLT as being just for fun, with little educational benefits, whereas other English classes are serious ones for test preparation. Although the written curriculum emphasizes the importance of CLT as the major goal, it is marginalised in practice to a "side-show" (Howatt, 1997, p. 279). Teachers in the study hoped to integrate grammar instruction and CLT, but they do not seem to have found satisfactory solutions to integrate and interweave these two aspects as smoothly as the documented curriculum states as a goal. The challenge of smooth integration of grammar instruction and CLT reflects what Richards and Rogers (1986) claim, that often CLT is left for the situated interpretation of teachers, and cannot be prescribed explicitly in literature:

Communicative Language Teaching is best considered an approach rather than a method. Thus although a reasonable degree of theoretical consistency can be discerned at the levels of language and learning theory, at the levels of design and procedure there is much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than most methods permit. (p.83)

Their classroom context tends to force teachers to compromise by adopting the weak version of CLT, the version that Howatt argues has become the most common classroom language practice in ELT classrooms around the world (Howatt, 1987).

The difficulty in implementing CLT has been documented in many studies, such as Li (1999) and Sato and Kleinsasser (1999). Interview and observational data of the current study further revealed that implementing CLT in the Japanese context is also far from a simple task and it brings many difficulties and restrictions such as time, disciplinary issues, relationship with their colleagues and meeting students' needs. One notable finding, however, is that the realization of CLT is considerably altered when two teachers are present. The context of having two teachers present, especially if one is a native speaker, makes CLT more salient for both for teachers and students. It also makes it easier for teachers to create a unique atmosphere, departing from their regular English classrooms.

As Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) claims, teacher research frequently portrays exceptionally good or special teaching environments, which depicts implementation of documented curriculum smoothly and which leads a misrepresented image of what regular teachers do in their classrooms. In order to gain insights from actual classrooms, more research necessary which describes teachers as a "real size" who try to make the best of their teaching contexts.



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Note: All names used are pseudonyms.

## Teacher Support in Vietnam: Patience, patience, and more patience

Nguyen thi Hoai An

Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation- Regional Training Centre, (SEAMEO-RTC)

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



### Summary

As the demand for English instruction in Vietnam has increased, the need to keep up with new methodologies and trends in teaching has also risen. In a country like Vietnam, where resources for language teaching are not always available, it is imperative for teachers to maintain contact with each other, to share materials, information and experience for their own professional development. In Ho Chi Minh City, high schools, state-run as well as private, address professional issues by conducting workshops, but they do not cooperate closely with each other. The British Council program for teacher training and cooperation is also mainly for schoolteachers. Many teachers outside the high schools, especially at language centres, do not receive any such support. There is clearly a need for an organisation that will serve as a professional development forum for these isolated teachers. This article outlines how a TESOL Club is being established in Ho Chi Minh City, whose main objective is to unite and support teachers from different schools and language centres.

*In the Vietnamese teaching context, almost all teachers are extremely busy teaching to earn their basic living, and it is not an easy task to ask them to devote much time and energy to professional development.*

### Introduction

In the Vietnamese teaching context, almost all teachers are extremely busy teaching to earn their basic living, and it is not an easy task to ask them to devote much time and energy to professional development. However, the need for teachers here to act now is clear. Vietnamese learners' needs are rapidly changing, yet teacher training is inadequate due to constraints across the whole educational system. In this situation, teachers must take care of their own professional and career development. Looking at our neighbours, Thai TESOL has been in operation for over 20 years and recently, English teachers in Laos have also set up their own TESOL. We strongly believe that English teachers in Vietnam are competent enough to run a similar organisation.

### Small Beginnings

In February 2001, I invited a small group of friends who were teachers and administrators at several language centres and universities to a meeting in my home to found a TESOL Club. The practical goal was to create a forum for teachers to share their professional experiences by conducting Workshops for each other. The first issue considered was money. Seven of us were willing to contribute some money to create a fund for the Club, but we realised that this would not be a sufficient long-term source. A more fundamental and thorny issue was the legality of the Club. If we legally established a professional organisation, we would be required to ask the local authorities for permission to hold meetings. That meant paperwork and the possibility of not being granted the necessary authorisation. I suggested linking it with the US-based TESOL Association. Another member offered to integrate the TESOL Club's activities into the professional activities of the language centre where he was working. We could use the centre's name as an agent to give us the legality we needed for having meetings. However, this posed another problem: would the centre mind if we asked teachers from other schools, essentially their competitors, to join us for workshops? This issue of the legal basis of the Club was left unresolved.





In March 2001, we had another meeting and agreed we should start by collecting information on teacher development. I adapted a questionnaire created by a trainer in Thailand and sent it to the others so that they could forward it to teachers they knew. I also sent a copy to a teacher trainer working for the Vietnam Australia Training Project (VAT) in Hanoi, and she gave it to the teachers who attended the VAT training courses. All respondents strongly indicated that they were interested in attending workshops. One frequent reply was, "Sometimes I need help but I do not know who to go to." This confirmed our belief that a TESOL club would be beneficial to all teachers.

Other teachers in Ho Chi Minh City also said they were willing to join the club. Things seemed to be progressing well. However, the problem of its legal basis, and participants' lack of free time, were still significant impediments. My concern was that the teachers looked at me as someone who would initiate everything and tell them what to do. I was also a busy person; moreover, I felt I did not have the expertise necessary to do this kind of work. I had never had any experience with organizing this kind of program and did not actually know what direction to take. I also needed help from experienced TESOL organisers.

#### Finding a home for the Club

The issue of finding a sponsor for legal and practical purposes was the next problem that had to be resolved. The member's language centre option considered at the first meeting did not work out, so I concluded that the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education (SEAMEO), where I started teaching in the English Department in 1997, was the best potential sponsor for the Club. In an interview with the Deputy Director there, I explained that the aim of the TESOL Club, helping teachers' professional development, matched SEAMEO's mission, developing education. She agreed to support me, which made the first step towards the Club's creation a bit easier. In October 2001, I applied for the position of SEAMEO corporate training project coordinator, which would allow me to work part-time to promote their training and marketing. This job would help me be more involved in SEAMEO's programs, and also create a firmer foundation for the Club. Then, in early November, I was approached by the Director of SEAMEO and offered the job as Manager of Studies, in charge of their English Department. I accepted.

The SEAMEO management was initially very cautious about hosting the Workshop activity. They wanted me to guarantee that we would not talk about anything other than our professional discussion topics at the workshop. They were also not comfortable knowing there would be some teachers participating from other local schools. I understood why they were cautious; they were making sure that neither they nor the TESOL Club would get into trouble by using SEAMEO as a forum to voice our personal opinions. The Director asked me to submit a report on the participants and content of the workshop. SEAMEO then agreed to host us, and to leave us alone to carry out the workshop. SEAMEO was to be the Club's first home.

*My concern was that the teachers looked at me as someone who would initiate everything and tell them what to do. I was also a busy person; moreover, I felt I did not have the expertise necessary to do this kind of work. I had never had any experience with organizing this kind of program and did not actually know what direction to take. I also needed help from experienced TESOL organisers.*



*the biggest problem was that almost none of them had ever given a presentation, so were quite nervous about doing so. ... It seemed that it would be difficult to find presenters for the first Workshop.*

*The goal is to start a newsletter and possibly even create a web site, so teachers can share their experiences in an immediate, useful and non-threatening forum.*

### The First Workshop

I prepared for the first workshop by asking the teachers at SEAMEO what topics they were interested in. These teachers could be relied on as the central core of the TESOL club, because as a Manager of Studies there, I would be able to ask for their help. Several of them wanted to start with ideas for teaching grammar. However, the biggest problem was that almost none of them had ever given a presentation, so were quite nervous about doing so. I asked one teacher who was fairly successful in teaching grammar in TOEFL preparation classes to present, trying to persuade him that all he had to do was tell participants what he actually did in his classes, but he eventually declined. It seemed that it would be difficult to find presenters for the first Workshop.

Nonetheless, without having any specific presenters in mind, I went ahead and decided on a date for the first meeting of the TESOL Club, and informed all the teachers I knew. It had to be on a Sunday, as many teachers were teaching every other day of the week. The day came and fourteen teachers turned up. I had managed to find two presenters from tertiary institutions. The first trainer was from the Teacher Training College, and gave a presentation entitled 'Teaching and Learning Grammar - Some Ways to Motivate Students'. The second presenter, a teacher at the University of Education who was also teaching at SEAMEO, gave a presentation on 'Teaching Grammar to TOEFL Students'. I also gave a presentation, a demonstration of TOEFL grammar activities. Thanks to the presenters' good sense of humour and interesting sessions, the audience relaxed and a lively discussion ensued. The first Workshop was deemed a success.

### Looking forward

It was encouraging that the participants agreed to meet every 3 months as I had planned. However, when I showed them the EFL journals and newsletters that I brought back from the JALT2001 conference, and told them that they could write about their classroom practices, their reflections on their own teaching and so on, they seemed to withdraw. They thought it would be a time consuming activity, and many taught up to 50 hours a week. Also, most of them had never written an article before and looked at it as an activity reserved for professional writers. To try and overcome this reluctance, I wrote to all the participants, asking them to prepare for the upcoming workshop in February or March by writing a very short article on how they teach their students or problems they have to face in their classrooms. The goal is to start a newsletter and possibly even create a web site, so teachers can share their experiences in an immediate, useful and non-threatening forum.

### Reflections

Everything is still in front of us and the difficulties seem obvious. Where can we get funding for the meetings? How can we ignite and maintain teachers' interest? Can we make them feel that it is worth their time joining us, and contributing for everyone's benefit? Will teachers overcome their reluctance to contribute to a newsletter? Can we get sustained academic help from tertiary institutions like universities? And above all, how can we make both teachers themselves and also the authorities aware that teachers should not be doing their job alone in professional isolation?

It will take an enormous amount of time and energy to bring English teachers in Ho Chi Minh City together for their continued professional development, and we have just begun our journey. However, I believe that the rewards of a TESOL Club will justify the patience required to create and sustain it.



AND NOW A WORD FROM ...

the Editor of *The Teacher Trainer*, Tessa Woodward

Dear Colleague,

I was lucky enough to meet some members of the JALT TE SIG in Kokura at the PAC/JALT conference, but am delighted to have this chance to contact those I didn't get to meet.

In your job as teacher Educator I expect you have to do some of the following tasks: observe teaching, give feedback on teaching, run seminars, courses and workshops for teachers, keep up to date on teaching trends, present at conferences, create resources, interview candidates, write references, assess teachers....? You may also have to do these things on your own or with a very small team of colleagues. Joining the JALT TE SIG is one very good way of getting support from others in similar jobs in Japan.

Did you know that there is also an international practical journal designed especially to help you with teacher training and education tasks and to keep you in touch with fellow professionals all over the world? The journal is called *The Teacher Trainer* and it is based in the UK. It is a practical journal for anyone who supports, trains, guides or helps EFL teachers anywhere in the world. It comes out three times a year. It is published by Pilgrims and edited by me, Tessa Woodward.

If you have bright idea, interesting articles on any aspect of teacher training/education are always welcome. There are regular series on Trainee Voices, Trainer Mistakes, Process Options, Observation and Feedback, Conferences and Books, Meet a Colleague, and so on. But letters, comments and articles on any aspect of our professional world are welcome. Contact me on [editor@ttjournal.co.uk](mailto:editor@ttjournal.co.uk).

Normally the cost of subscribing is £25 p.a. (incl. postage). But I would like to offer colleagues belonging to the JALT TE SIG a lower price. If you would like to subscribe in the spring of 2002, then you need only pay £22 (including postage to Japan) as long as you put JALT TE SIG on the subscription form.

Check out our website at: [www.ttjournal.co.uk](http://www.ttjournal.co.uk), or download our subscription form at [www.ttjournal.co.uk/subscribeform.htm](http://www.ttjournal.co.uk/subscribeform.htm).

I really look forward to hearing from you!

All good wishes  
Tessa Woodward  
The Editor  
The Teacher Trainer  
<[editor@ttjournal.co.uk](mailto:editor@ttjournal.co.uk)>



*Did you know that there is also an international practical journal designed especially to help you with teacher training and education tasks and to keep you in touch with fellow professionals all over the world? The journal is called The Teacher Trainer and it is based in the UK.*



## Upcoming International Conferences

### March

14-17. California TESOL (CATESOL). Conference, "Learning with Purpose," San Francisco, California. <<http://www.catesol.org>>

15-17. TESOL-SPAIN. 25th National Convention, "Access Europe: Language as a Common Currency," Madrid, Spain. <<http://www.eirelink.com/tesol-sp/>>

20-22. TESOL Arabia. 8th Annual International Conference, "Critical Reflection and Practice," Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. <<http://tesolarabia.org>>

24-27. IATEFL. 36th International IATEFL Conference, York, United Kingdom. <<http://www.iatefl.org>>

### April

6-9. American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL). Annual conference, Salt Lake City, Utah. <<http://www.aaal.org>>

9-13. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL). Annual conference Salt Lake City, Utah. <<http://www.tesol.org/conv/index-conv.html>>

22-24. SEAMEO Regional Language Centre. 37th RELC International Seminar, "Methodology & Materials Design in Language Teaching," Republic of Singapore. <<http://www.relc.org.sg>>

### June

25-29. University of Hong Kong. Second International Knowledge and Discourse Conference, "Speculating on Disciplinary Futures," Hong Kong SAR. <<http://ec.hku.hk/kd2>>

### Upcoming Conference Information

Here are three useful URLs that list many EFL-related events:

For most JALT events, including chapter presentations and Four Corners Tours 2001, the <http://jalt.org/calendar/> URL is organised by region and month.

The <http://kyushuelt.com/calendar/index.php> URL lists events that are organised by other groups in Japan, and also covers bookfairs. Groups listed include JALT, JACET, Tokyo IIEEC Study Group, Tokyo British Council Seminars, and Temple University Japan.

The TESOL Worldwide Calendar of Events has an extensive listing of events, at <http://www.tesol.org/isaffil/calendar/calendar-full.html>.

Bookmark these URLs now, and check them regularly!



## Upcoming Japanese Conferences

### IALT Chapter presentation: Statistics for Language Teachers

Speaker: Aaron Sorenson

This presentation will be a short introduction to statistics for language teachers. This presentation/workshop is targeted toward helping teachers understand the statistics that are used in language journals and for teachers who are interested in doing research using statistics. Please bring your calculators since we will be working through some statistical problems.

Saturday, March 16th, 2002, IALT Fukuoka Chapter, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Aso Foreign Language & Travel College, Bldg 5, 1-14-17 Hakataekiminami, Hakata-ku Fukuoka-shi (10 minutes from Hakata Station, map on web site)

### IALT Chapter presentation: The Current State of Teaching English in Japanese Schools

Speaker: Miyaoku Masamichi

Masamichi will introduce the results of his research into high school students' English abilities, and their attitudes toward English education. Also he will talk about how English teachers are working on improving the current state.

Sunday, March 17th, 2002, IALT Hiroshima Chapter, 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

International Conference Center 3F, Seminar Room #2, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park

### Oxford Kid's Club Spring Tour

Speakers: Ritsuko Nakata, Carolyn Graham

Sunday, March 17th, 2002, Okinawa

Thursday, March 21st, 2002, Osaka

Saturday, March 23rd, 2002, Okayama

Sunday, March 24th, 2002, Fukuoka

Tuesday, March 26th, 2002, Sendai

Thursday, March 28th, 2002, Kanazawa

Saturday, March 30th, 2002, Nagoya

Sunday, March 31st, 2002, Tokyo

### ETJ Aichi Group (ETJ is English Teachers in Japan) Teaching English to Children

Speakers: Tania MacDonnell and Joshua Myerson

Sunday, March 17th, 2002, 9:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Place: Ohara Kokusai Travel School (Nagoya), near Kokusai Center Subway exit 10 (map on website)

### David English House Hiroshima Certificates in Teaching English to Children

Introductory Certificate in Teaching English to Children, one day course

Speaker: David Paul, author of *Finding Out*, *Communicate*, and more.

Sunday, March 17th, 2002, 10:15 AM - 5:15 PM (10:15 - 17:15)

Cost: DEH members 8,000 yen for ETJ members; Non-members 10,000 yen.

May 20<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM (10:00 - 17:00)

Cost: DEH members 55,000 yen for ETJ members for the 6-day course; Non-members 65,000 yen for the 6-day course

### IALT Kobe Chapter Miniconference: English Language Teaching in Secondary Education (seven speakers)

Sunday, April 28th, 2002, 1:00 PM - 4:30 PM (13:00 - 16:30)

Place: Kobe YMCA Sannomiya (between JR Sannomiya and JR Shin-Kobe)

### 2nd Conference of the Japan Second Language Association

Speaker: Plenary Speaker: Kazuo Kanno, University of Hawaii

Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Place: Kyoto Sangyo University



## JALT2002: Waves of the Future

at Granship Conference Center, Shizuoka

22-24 November 2002



28<sup>th</sup> Annual JALT International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning  
and JALT Junior, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Teachers of Children Mini-conference

Visit us at JALT 2002, the largest and friendliest professional language  
teacher-oriented academic conference in Japan!

### Plenary Speakers

WILLIAM GRABE is a professor of English at Northern Arizona University,  
author of *The Theory and Practice of Writing* (with R. B. Kaplan, 1996) and the  
soon to be published book in the Longman series of Applied Linguistics in  
Action entitled *Reading* (with Fredricka Stoller). He is a leading researcher of  
L2 reading, writing and literacy.

JANE WILLIS is a Teaching Fellow in the Language Studies Unit in the School  
of Languages and European Studies at Aston University, Birmingham (UK).  
She's researched and published on task based learning and is the co-author of  
the just published Oxford imprint *English for Primary Teachers*, a language  
course for teachers of young learners.

### JALT 2002 Waves of the Future

28<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

#### Place:

Granship Conference Center,  
Shizuoka

#### Dates:

Thursday November 21

Featured Speakers' Workshops

Friday November 22

to Sunday November 24

28<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

### Featured Speakers

- HENRY WIDDOWSON (Creativity and conformity in English teaching)
- KRISTOFER BAYNE (Written instructions in ELT materials)
- CURTIS KELLY (Theories and principles of teaching children)
- LANCE KNOWLES (Combining multimedia and classroom activities)
- MICHAEL ROST (Collaborating: Learning outside the classroom)
- KATHLEEN GRAVES (Developing a reflective practice through discipline collaboration)
- TERRY ROYCE (Developing visual literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century)
- ROBERT WARING (Principles and practice in vocabulary instruction)

Note: Each Featured Speaker Workshop is limited to 30 participants. They are  
popular events; sign up early to ensure that you will have a place. Featured  
Speaker Workshops are held in Afternoon and Evening Sessions.

### Conference Registration Information

Pre-Registration Dates: July 1st through October 22nd, 2002

<http://www.jalt.org/jalt2002>

Please check the JALT Web site for payment information, and for up-to-date  
information about fees, transportation, and accommodation.



Looking forward to seeing you in Shizuoka!!



Come to Hiroshima for ...

## JALTCALL 2002: Local Decisions, Global Effects

The CALL SIG's 7th Annual International Conference,  
JALTCALL 2002: Local Decisions, Global Effects,  
is coming up soon - Hiroshima in May!

As more and more schools have introduced technology into the classroom, this conference will give participants an opportunity to network with individuals who might be farther along in dealing with these issues and provide suggestions and innovative ways to teach and learn. Themes include possible global effects of teacher, student, and administrator decisions in CALL and their influence on intercultural understanding, environmental and social change, and personal transformation and growth.

A lively program of Pre-Conference Workshops will allow participants to learn how to put video lessons on websites (Brian Teaman) and how to use and evaluate the English-learning software available at Hiroshima University's new multimedia facility (Joseph Lauer). The workshops are FREE to registrants of the weekend conference, but please note that a limited number of participants can be accommodated. Apply in advance using the delegate registration form at ...

<http://jaltcall.org/conferences/call2002/reg/delegate-e.html>

An opportunity for casual interaction will be provided by a Pre-Conference Lunch (only 780 yen/vegetarian option available) on May 17 at the Cotton Club Restaurant. The conference fees are 5,500 yen for one day or 9,000 yen for two days, with discounts available to IALT/JACET members and students.

For assistance on any matters related to the conference, please email the conference chair at <confchair@jaltcall.org>. We look forward to welcoming you to Hiroshima at JALTCALL 2002 in May. To find out more about the conference and for information on travelling to Hiroshima and cultural and entertainment events you can enjoy while there, go to ...  
<http://jaltcall.org/conferences/call2002/>

### Call for Papers

The Conference Co-chairs invite submissions for papers. Those relevant to the conference themes will be given highest priority; however, all topics which address the issue of how computer technology is applied in the classroom are acceptable. Educators concerned with all levels of instruction are invited to submit proposals. People whose proposals are submitted on or before Monday, April 1 and are accepted will be eligible to register for the conference at the discount rate. For details on how to submit, please visit our website at ... <<http://jaltcall.org/conferences/call2002/>>. For assistance on any matter, please email us at <confchair@jaltcall.org>. We look forward to receiving your submissions, and seeing you in Hiroshima in May!

## JALTCALL 2002 Local Decisions, Global Effects 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

Place:

Hiroshima Jogakuin Univ.

Dates:

Friday May 17

Pre-conference Workshops

Sat May 18/Sun May 19

7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

Conference Co-Chairs:

Timothy Gutierrez

Naomi Fujishima

Chiaki Iwai





## Explorations in Teacher Education

newsletter of the  
JALT Teacher Education SIG

**Published:**  
Spring, Summer,  
Autumn, Winter

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**Editor:**  
Robert Croker  
Nanzan University

**E-Mail:**  
[croker@nanzan-u.ac.jp](mailto:croker@nanzan-u.ac.jp)

**Submission Guidelines:**  
Contact editor



### AND NOW A WORD FROM ... the TE SIG Coordinator

Dear Teacher Education SIG members

First of all, I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year--for both the calendar and school year. I hope that the coming months will be filled with many rewards as you develop in your teaching and have opportunities to collaborate with others on teacher development activities. Secondly, I would like to say a huge thank you to all who helped out at the TE SIG information table and with other TE SIG-related things at JALT2001 last November. I am pleased to report that all the events went smoothly (including the party!) and were well attended.

This year the discussion was lively at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), and I will give you a brief summary here of the highlights. First of all, to foster better communication, a TE SIG listserve has been set up. The address is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TeacherED/> and all members have been registered. If you do not wish to receive the messages, feel free to delete your name from the list at any time. If you are having trouble posting a message, please contact me at [miriamblacktesig@yahoo.com](mailto:miriamblacktesig@yahoo.com). All messages will come to me first, and I, as moderator will OK them and send them on to the whole group. If you have any messages or announcements that would benefit others, please post them here.

Secondly, the officers have remained basically the same. Please welcome:

Miriam Black, Coordinator  
Tim Ashwell, Membership Chair and Newsletter Printer  
Robert Croker, Newsletter Editor  
Gordon Bateson, Treasurer  
Anthony Robins, Recording Secretary  
Tony Crooks, Webmaster  
Neil Cowie, Member at Large

Regarding JALT2002 TE SIG-sponsored events, Brian Long has worked hard with Thomson Publishing and The School for International Training (SIT) to secure the participation of Kathleen Graves as our Featured Speaker. Since the conference committee this year wished to first fill the Featured Speaker slots with workshop proposals submitted by JALT Associate Members (publishers and so on), we are EXTREMELY grateful to Thomson Publishing and The School for International Training for being willing to sponsor Ms. Graves for us. Look for more details about her presentations in the next issue.

Finally, as we move into a new year, I would appreciate any thoughts you might have as to how we can become more inclusive as a SIG. The officers have done an excellent job in the last year, but in particular, I note a suspicious lack of Japanese voices, female voices, and voices of those in the "trenches" in junior and senior high schools when it comes time to make decisions on policy and programs. As coordinator, I am more than happy to field any requests or listen to the ideas you might have, but if no one speaks up, I cannot do very much. Please feel free to contact me at any time with your questions or comments.

Miriam Black  
TE SIG Coordinator  
[miriamblacktesig@yahoo.com](mailto:miriamblacktesig@yahoo.com)

