

Collaborative Teaching and Reflection

By Marnie Mayse & Amanda Yoshida

Toyo Gakuen University

Contact: marnie.mayse@gmail.com
amanda.j.yoshida@gmail.com

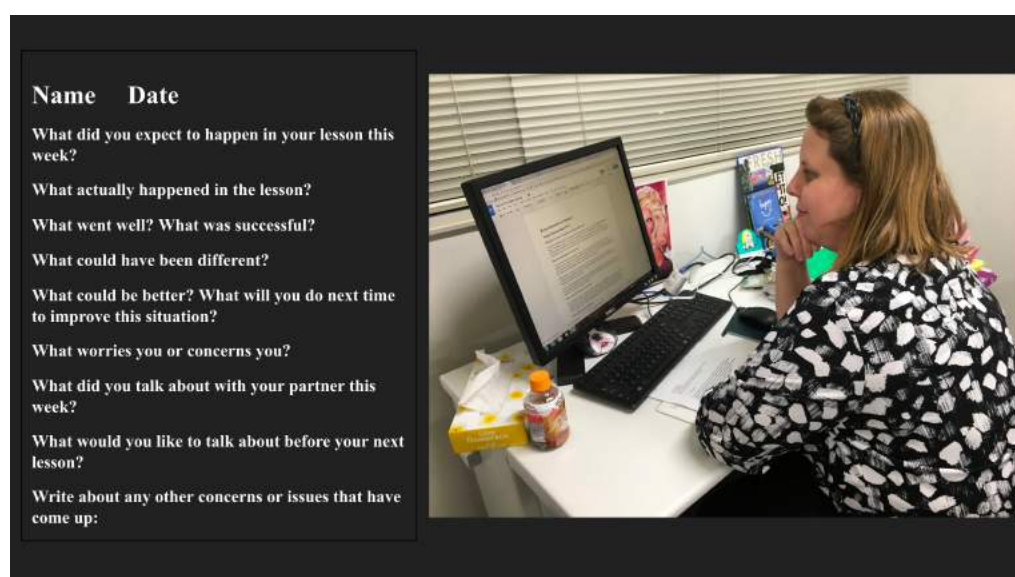
In planning our pechakucha together, we had to look back over the past six months and reflect about what we had gained from our collaborative journal-keeping thus far. Since we were still in the midst of collecting our data, we didn't want to delve too deeply and begin analyzing it right then and there.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

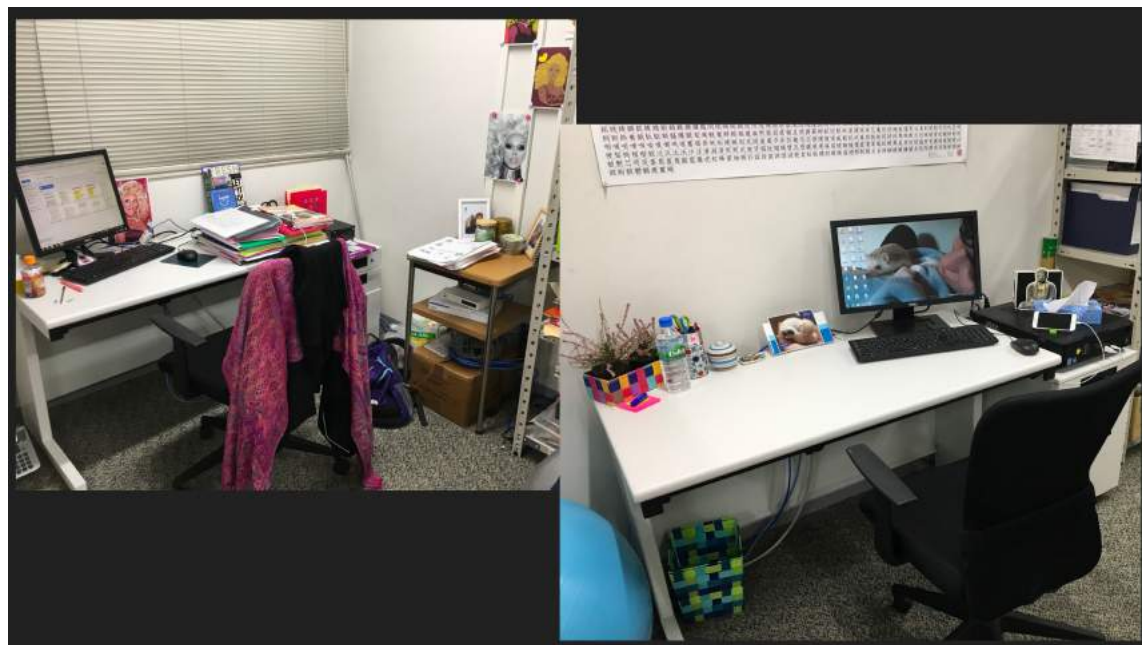
Introduction by Amanda

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

Moral Support by Marnie

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





Constructive Collaboration by Marnie

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

Different Perspectives by Amanda

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

Different Perspectives by Marnie

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

Frustrations by Marnie

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

Teaching Styles by Amanda

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

Self-Reflection by Amanda

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

Peer-Reflection by Amanda

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

Conclusion by Marnie

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

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



Bio: Marnie Mayse has an MA TESOL from Columbia University (Tokyo) and has been teaching in Japan for more than 15 years. Her research interests include action research and media literacy.

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