

EFL Teacher Journeys Conference

Proceedings

Mike Ellis, Program Chair, TED-SIG

Every spring, recent graduates come back to our high school to say hello during their first few weeks at university. For each student, this visit represents a grand homecoming after a huge step forward in their lives. For us teachers, the visits can be awkward distractions as we try to settle into the hustle of the new school year. Even at the most hectic times though, I try to at least ask these students how they are keeping up with their new university English classes, and which parts of our high school curriculum they have found especially useful (or useless) so far. I always hope that they comment in concrete detail on the aspects we put the most work into, like the extensive reading program, academic writing strand or discussion based speaking tests, but usually we get more general answers, such as “I liked your class”, or “University classes are easy now”, or “Thank you”.

This year though, I was visited by a memorable student who truly thrived in our English program. She took each elective English class offered, and excelled at every assignment thrown at her. I was lucky to teach her three years in a row, and knew that she would give me a more meaningful response to my question. When I asked her what she found most useful from our program, she paused for a few seconds and then answered flatly, You were always so funny.

No, this can't be ! With student-centered the most common buzz word in our profession, and every teacher training program telling its trainees to limit teacher talk time, how could I be the most lasting impression on this student from our entire English curriculum? Upon further reflection, I realized that her answer was also consistent with my own experience as a high school student. I don't remember much beyond the basics of chemistry, but I'll never forget the last day of class when our teacher pulled out his saxophone and played a jazz solo for us. I forget more and more of my once decent French every year, but I'll never forget the color of the red dye my French teacher used on her hair, or how the first day after a dyeing it, the color was closer to purple.

As teachers, we think endlessly about the content of our lessons and how the students respond to it, which is fantastic. Ultimately, our job is to facilitate students' learning, so it is only natural that the lesson becomes our focus, and its success a measure of ours. However, it is important to remember that students aren't always as engaged in our lessons as we are. Sometimes they're more interested in our fashion choice for that particular day than in collocations with the verb take.

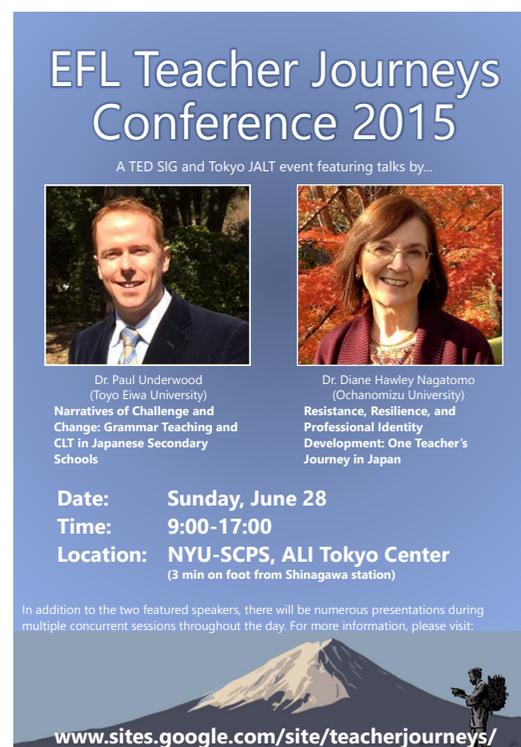
This is why for one day out of the year at the EFL Teacher Journeys Conference, we try to turn the spotlight around, from the students onto the teacher, in order to examine our different backgrounds and personal journeys and to better inform what other teachers do in their classrooms. We at TED SIG hope that this conference will fill a much-needed niche within JALT of reflective, narrative inquiry by giving teachers a platform to share personal stories of professional development.

For this purpose, we feel that the fourth annual conference, a joint venture by TED SIG and Tokyo JALT was a great success. The conference was held at the New York University, School of Professional Studies American Language Institute on June 28, 2015 in Shinagawa. This venue provided a gorgeous view of urban Tokyo and the rainbow bridge as backdrop to a full menu of stimulating presentations. In total, there were 20 presentations in five concurrent sessions throughout the day, in addition to the two plenary talks. The morning plenary, Dr. Paul Underwood of Toyo Eiwa University, spoke about Japanese teachers' English variable use of communicative language teaching in his talk, “Narratives of Challenge and Change: Grammar Teaching and CLT in Japanese Secondary Schools”. He provided videos to better illustrate a full spectrum of implementation. In the afternoon, Dr. Diane Hawley Nagatomo of Ochanomizu University analyzed the journeys that non-Japanese teachers may undergo teaching English in her talk, “Resistance, Resilience, and Professional Identity Development: One Teacher's Journey in Japan”. She focused on a remarkable case study of one teacher who simultaneously teaches English and performs duties as a Buddhist monk. More information on case studies such as this can be found in her forthcoming book, “Identity, Gender, and Teaching English in Japan.”

The general atmosphere among the 55 attendees to the conference was vibrant and exciting. We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback, and are now looking forward to begin organizing the fifth installment of the conference in June 2016. Please look forward to updates on the date and venue. We hope to see you there!

Mike Ellis

TED SIG Program Chair



EFL Teacher Journeys Conference 2015
A TED SIG and Tokyo JALT event featuring talks by...

 Dr. Paul Underwood (Toyo Eiwa University) Narratives of Challenge and Change: Grammar Teaching and CLT in Japanese Secondary Schools	 Dr. Diane Hawley Nagatomo (Ochanomizu University) Resistance, Resilience, and Professional Identity Development: One Teacher's Journey in Japan
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Date: Sunday, June 28
Time: 9:00-17:00
Location: NYU-SCPS, ALI Tokyo Center
(3 min on foot from Shinagawa station)

In addition to the two featured speakers, there will be numerous presentations during multiple concurrent sessions throughout the day. For more information, please visit:

www.sites.google.com/site/teacherjourneys/