

JALT SPIN Student Research Symposium 2024

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Book of Abstracts

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1

Human-Centered Communicative Approaches to Promoting Democratic Values in EFL Classroom: An Exploratory Review

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The recent advancement of classroom practices after COVID-19 with digital communication, including AI chatbots, has sparked a renewed interest in exploring humanistic elements within classrooms. While the topic of AI generative chat is relatively new (launched in Nov 2022), it needs to establish seminal literature. However, concerns have emerged about these technologies' potential consequences on authentic human communication. This review explores the dimensions of educational practices that can be integrated into classroom practice to promote democratic and human-centered values. Following Creswell's (2014) exploratory literature review guidelines, the review thoroughly examines major themes and their interconnectedness through literature mapping. Informed by John Dewey's philosophy, this article argues for prioritizing human-to-human interaction through democratic values in EFL classrooms. The findings highlight the necessity for an educational approach that harmonizes technological advancements with the foundational principles of democracy and humanistic education, ensuring that EFL classrooms remain vibrant spaces for comprehensive language acquisition and democratic participation.

Keywords: Democratic learning environment, communication, John Dewey

Bio: Ms. Samikshya Bidari is a Ph.D. fellow at Kathmandu University and a recipient of the Young Female Scholar Award from the University Grants Commission, Nepal. Currently, she practices her teaching at several private universities in Japan. Her research focuses on democratic education, learner engagement, and intercultural competence in EFL classrooms.

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How Group and Pair Activities Elevates L2 Learning in the Elementary Classroom

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There have been numerous studies, papers, and books that have stated that pair and group activities can evaluate one's learning of a second language (L2). Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman (2015) have stated that "student-student interaction can constitute a vigorous ZPD". In the field of Sociocultural Theory, there are topics like near-peer role models and Zone of Proximal Adjusting (ZPA; Murphey, 1996) which discuss how students can contribute to their peers' L2 learning, even more than with teacher-centered activities. The presenter will discuss her current research on how group cohesion, either pair or group activities, has worked in her elementary first-grade classroom in Japan. The class of 26 students has an array of English levels and different strengths, which the teacher uses to arrange each pair and group (Porter, 1986). The presentation will take a look at activities that teachers can use in their classrooms, especially for those who teach elementary students, that promote group cohesion in doing and completing activities in the L2, thus letting the students be the main stakeholders of the L2 learning. The presentation will answer the question "Is it possible for young learners to produce their own L2 learning?"

Bio: Amy Braun is currently teaching first grade at Seto Solan Primary School in Seto, Aichi. She is also pursuing a Masters in TESOL at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. Amy has been teaching for 12 years, primarily when young learners.

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Gestures in Second Language Acquisition: Unlocking Potential for Students' Comprehension of English Language Classes in English

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This paper aims to explore the potential advantages of research regarding the use of gestures by English language teachers in Japanese junior high schools (JHS) to facilitate English language teaching through English. In 2017, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) introduced the latest Course of Study, and one of the new initiatives is that “lessons, in principle, should be conducted in English” (MEXT, 2022, p. 9). Leveraging teachers’ multimodality, particularly gestures, is one approach to enhancing students’ comprehension of English instruction through English. In the field of embodiment in the learning sciences, gestures and bodily actions play a crucial role in students’ conceptual development (Abrahamson & Lindgren, 2014). Flood (in press) asserts that some teachers employ strategies to engage with students by integrating gestures with oral explanations and interpreting students’ nonverbal responses, consequently providing personalized and contextualized feedback. In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), furthermore, Gullberg (2006) highlights the significance of gestures for the production of L2 learners, and both teachers’ and learners’ gestures can be significant input for L2 learners’ comprehension. Despite some efforts to examine the role of teachers’ gestures in SLA (e.g., Sime, 2008), there appears to be limited research on the specific types of gestures employed by JHS English teachers to facilitate students’ understanding of English language classes conducted through English. Therefore, this paper proposes the following research questions to guide future studies: (1) What gestures do JHS teachers utilize to enhance students’ comprehension of English language classes in English? (2) What is the interplay between verbal instructions and gestures in effectively implementing English teaching through English? (3) What are the perceptions of JHS teachers regarding the use of gestures to support students’ comprehension of English language classes?

Bio: Yuya Yamamoto is a Ph.D. student in a doctoral program in language education and multilingualism at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He completed his MA in TEFL at the University of Birmingham. His research interests include language teacher education, teaching critical thinking, and language pedagogy.

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When kids refuse to go to school: Three international families in Japan and their experiences with school refusal

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Youth refusing to attend school in Japan is a silenced, confusing, and complex phenomenon reaching back almost a century. Explanatory theories and discourses have shifted through the eras and strategies for resolving school attendance problems have responded in turn. And yet, there are more youth refusing school today than ever before. In hopes of reinvigorating interest in and extending the understanding of the topic, this research uses a hermeneutic approach that asks questions that are vastly different than those informing the body of knowledge to date. In this presentation, three families’ experiences of school refusal and their moments of fear, breakthrough, and discovery are shared. The youth in question are bi-ethnic, (a vastly understudied subset of the population), with one parent identifying as Japanese and the other who does not. How this cultural diversity helps, hinders, or exacerbates the refusal experience is discussed in combination with other key intersections of difference. Medical, sexual, and neurological diversities are prominent features in their stories and demands that a new level of awareness in terms of understanding and practice be considered in the

Japanese education system. Additionally, where the educational, medical, or governmental systems have notably served the families, or appallingly failed, is entwined through the stories. By exploring the experience, exposing the trauma, and extending the understanding through dialogue with parents of school refusers, universal stories of hope, resilience, and belonging have emerged.

Bio: Catherine Takasugi is currently a doctoral candidate at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary in Canada. School refusal in Japan is her area of focus. In addition, she is a part-time instructor at Aoyama Gakuin University, Daito Bunka University, and Waseda University, in Japan. She is most passionate about her seminar course in identity and diversity where she explores knowledge, knowing, refusals, fears, joy, and personal histories.

5

Using Songs to Boost Listening Comprehension of Connected Speech

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This presentation will discuss how to teach connected speech with catchy English songs. Connected speech is a common feature of naturally spoken English, yet it is also one of the most challenging parts of learning for non-native speakers to master. Sounds run together in natural speech, and there is no space between each word, unlike written English. Besides, there are some changes in sounds when they are connected. As a result, even sentences consisting of simple words can be unrecognizable for learners.

Moreover, connected speech is not usually taught in English classrooms in Japan. Therefore, many learners are stuck, not knowing what to do when they cannot understand what people say, and the situation has been the same for many first-year students at Akita International University (AIU). As a teaching assistant for the English for Academic Purposes program at AIU, the presenter made teaching materials for the students to learn connected speech with fun using catchy English songs. The presentation will cover how the presenter made the materials and how the lessons went with them.

Bio: Rintaro Ikegami is a graduate student at Akita International University. He has been helping first-year undergraduate students as a teaching assistant since the spring of 2022. He is working at Nara Kokusai High School as a social studies teacher who teaches in English after graduating in March.

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Play It Again: An Exploration of the Impact of Games on Language Learning and Social-Emotional Learning in a Preschool EFL Classroom

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This presentation will share the planning, process, and final results of an MA dissertation paper that carried out a small-scale research project to explore the impact of non-digital games for both language development and social-emotional learning in a preschool EFL classroom. The ideas and inspiration behind the project will be discussed, along with a short overview of the roles of play and games in language education and young learner contexts, as well as key competencies in childhood development and social-emotional learning. Next, the project methodology will be described,

including data collection and the framework for analysis. Finally, the results will be presented, accompanied by a discussion of the findings, the role of teachers, and limitations of the study. It is hoped that this presentation will be of interest to not only teachers of young learners, but also to current students who are thinking about or about to begin their own dissertation process.

Bio: Martin Sedaghat is a preschool teacher and lecturer at Niigata University of Health and Welfare. He is from San Diego, California, and has been living in Niigata since 2003. His research interests include language game design, picturebooks, and second language acquisition for young learners.

7

Interaction Competence of EFL students with different proficiency

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Communication and interactional competence are crucial to language acquisition. There are many proficiency tests and exams to evaluate language learners' English proficiency by task formats like reading comprehension, listening, writing, and speaking. In terms of speaking assessment, they often use formats like interviews, role-play, or group discussions to assess learners' interactional competence. However, it's argued that these oral assessments cannot display learners' interactional competence in real-life situations. They can only show the learners' performance in a particular genre (i.e. exam environment). In this study, conversation analysis (CA) was employed to examine two groups of higher-intermediate to advanced-level university undergraduate students in Hong Kong. The main aim of this study is to see if the group discussion by the higher-proficiency group resembles a natural conversation more than the lower-proficiency group in the speaking assessment context. It was found that, in terms of speaker selection, turn orders, truthfulness, etc., I noticed that the group discussion was not natural when compared to a natural conversation in the lower-proficiency group. Although the higher-proficiency group performed better, it was still not like a natural conversation. This study gives teachers and test designers insights into how to design an appropriate test and reveals the importance of engaging language learners in authentic conversations in language classrooms.

Bio: Wing Yiu, Ling is currently studying at the English Language Teaching Practices Master of Arts program in Akita International University. She was admitted in AIU since Fall 2023, her main focus of research last year was using Conversation Analysis to examine the authenticity of group discussion speaking assessment of university undergraduate students in Hong Kong.

8

The efficacy of corrective feedback in an EFL classroom

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As English teachers in an EFL environment, corrective feedback is a necessity as well as an inevitability. It's natural for students to make errors when attempting to produce a L2 language that they are still learning. One of the roles of the teacher is to provide corrective feedback to ensure those errors are repaired. However, how corrective feedback is delivered is very dynamic with many variables. The method of delivery and the provider of feedback can significantly impact language acquisition. For example, some teachers may tend to use a select few preferred methods of providing corrective

feedback; Consequently, they may find that those same methods are not as effective in different learning environments, different students, or various situations. Furthermore, teachers may feel they should be the facilitators of corrective feedback, when, in fact, the most effective feedback might come from the students' peers. This presentation focuses on a study analyzing various types of corrective feedback used in a Japanese junior high school English class as well as the results of the study, the effectiveness of the corrective feedback used and the implications thereof.

Bio: June Ha Kim is currently in graduate school at Akita International University, enrolled in the English Learning Teaching Practices program. He was previously an Assistant Learning Teacher in northern Japan for five years and has a Bachelor' of Arts in English from the University of Illinois, Chicago.

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Forming Identity and Leadership Roles in Group Discussions

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This study was conducted at an English-medium university in Japan where students were tasked with having a debate and discussion with other non-native speaking (NNS) peers and one native speaker (NS). Preconceived notions of the expert-novice dyad assume that native speakers should naturally take on the role of the expert due to their linguistic competence. However, recent studies have deconstructed this assumption (Dings, 2012; Reicher & Liebscher, 2012; Vickers, 2010), allowing for a new perspective on how group dynamics can be constructed within discussions. This shift occurs as a result of a co-constructed identity amongst the members. Using conversation analysis as the method of research, this study adds to the current body of research regarding the deconstructing of the expert-novice dyad, by analyzing the conversational turns that students use to determine their expert or novice identity. In addition to the expert/novice identity, two types of roles emerge within group discussions: unofficial leader roles and follower roles. Participants who self-identify as an expert will spontaneously take on unofficial leader roles, while novices stay in a follower role. However, there is no set rule that dictates leadership roles should fall only on the native speaker. By showing that non-native speakers can take on unofficial leadership roles, this can open up opportunities for them to expand their conversational ability.

Bio: Queena Xu is a graduate student of English Language and Teaching at Akita International University. She had worked as an Assistant Language Teacher in rural Hokkaido for 5 years. She is originally from California and graduated with a B.A. in sociology from University of California, Berkeley.

10

Introducing A Role-Play Creative Writing Activity

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Writing in English is a fundamental aspect of learning the language. There are many approaches to learning to write English. However, what to write is sometimes an issue for both learners and instructors. In this presentation, I introduce a role-play creative writing activity. The goal of this activity is to rewrite a fairy tale from the perspective of secondary characters (i.e., not the main character). The students then incorporate original personalities and settings into their chosen characters. The activity allows students to enjoy writing stories with their own semi-original characters. It is

an authentic creative writing activity that can be used from the intermediate level, and it is especially useful for having students practice using the past tense. The framework of this activity can be utilized for many kinds of stories that students read in English. After showing how to conduct this activity, the results from my students will be shared.

Bio: Emi Nagai is a Master's student at Temple University, and an English teacher at a technical college in Osaka, Japan. She is interested in class activity design and learners development.

11

Looking in the Mirror: Fostering Cultural Self-Awareness Through Task-Based Language Teaching

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Developing intercultural competence in monolingual contexts such as Japan, albeit extremely important, can be particularly challenging. This presentation discusses a relatively atypical approach to help EFL students in starting to think critically about culture: developing cultural self-awareness. Cultural self-awareness, which is the ability to understand the intricacies of one's own culture, forms a crucial foundation for fostering intercultural competence, which requires one to navigate their own cultural background when interacting with interlocutors from other cultures. This presentation describes a series of lessons based on the framework of Task-Based Language Teaching methodology that were implemented in an EFL class in a Japanese university to foster the development of cultural self-awareness and knowledge. The tasks that will be outlined in the presentation, such as a YouTube video project and an intercultural exchange activity, may facilitate Japanese EFL students in building deeper knowledge of the complexities of their own culture, understanding how their experiences shape their thinking, and developing the ability to view their cultural practices from different perspectives.

Bio: ARORA Kriti is a graduate student of the Masters in International Language Education: TESOL program at Soka University. She has been engaged with Japanese university students in various capacities as a teaching assistant, discussion moderator, and writing consultant. Her research interests include personal learning environments, global citizenship, and intercultural competence.

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Developing Self-Access Learning Centers Through Book Clubs

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Self-access learning centers (SALCs) are often under-utilized, and enticing students to make use of SALC resources is a perennial challenge for institutions that have such facilities. Previous research on multi-modal book clubs for personal and professional development led to the implementation of a book club held in a SALC writing center to promote the use of the space and other SALC resources as well as to promote advanced engagement with reading in English. This presentation demonstrates the benefit of both SALCs and book clubs, and makes a case for combining these two separate resources to promote student engagement with reading outside of a classroom context. It also details challenges and successes in implementing the book club, in order to encourage educators to start book clubs in their own institutions and contexts.

Bio: Chelanna is an M.Ed TESOL student through the University of British Columbia, and a teacher

at Reitaku University in Chiba. She is the Director of Program for JALT, and a founding SPIN member. She is interested in researching queer identity within TESOL.

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The Effects and Challenges of Establishing a Graded Reader Program in a Japanese Junior High School

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This presentation will review how a graded reader program was established and conducted at a private Japanese junior high school in the Kansai area. It will show the effect extensive reading (ER) had on learner's rate of vocabulary acquisition with regards to the first and second thousand high frequency words as reflected in the New General Service Words list. This study was conducted with first year junior high school students. The students read graded readers from the Oxford Graded Reading Tree. Students took a pre, mid, and post-test using a computer-generated test from the vocabulary levels test website. The results were then analysed by two different raters. Results showed that after eleven weeks of reading, the students' performances reflected findings found at the university level. This study not only suggests beneficial results in the implementation of extensive reading at the junior high school level, it also provides insight for teachers regarding the challenges of establishing and conducting an ER program in a Japanese EFL context.

Bio:

Christopher Mack is a full time junior high school English teacher at a private school in south Kyoto. He is currently finishing his master's degree in TESOL from Temple University. His SLA interests include anxiety, teacher motivation, input enhancement, and research replication.

Aquanna Ishii is a part-time instructor at a university in Kyoto. She is currently completing her M.S.Ed. degree in TESOL at Temple University, Japan. She is interested in the effects of extensive reading in Japanese learning contexts as well as team teaching dynamics in EFL classrooms in Japan.

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Utilizing Genre to Connect Form and Meaning in Reading and Writing

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Abstract: Despite the fact that research indicates that reading and writing are interconnected skills, they are often taught separately. In the Japanese context, students often spend extensive time on intensive reading and grammar instruction without looking at the social and functional properties of texts. Much of the research into the social aspects of writing has been focused on English for academic purposes, which might not be appropriate for low-proficiency students who are not majoring in English. I created a proposal for a class that will address these gaps by teaching genre from a systemic-functional perspective based on Feez's (1998) model. It utilizes the theme of consumerism, which is appropriate for non-academic settings. Students will analyze models such as product-reviews, advertisements, and professional emails to develop analytical reading and writing skills within the genre. I will discuss the methods and effectiveness of this instruction, as well as its use in future research.

Bio: Elizabeth Arikuni has taught in various contexts ranging from kindergarten to adults and is

currently teaching in a bilingual kindergarten. She expects to complete her master's in education from Temple University, Japan in summer 2024. Her research interests include young learners, pragmatics, and genre-instruction and their effects on learner psychology.

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Spice of Life - Language Teaching in Japan

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In the realm of language teaching, there's a complex task at hand: guiding individuals through the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a specific language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Japan, renowned for its rich culture and technological advancements, offers a unique linguistic landscape, especially for third-country nationals living there (Kubota, 2020).

Living in Japan means navigating multiple languages in various contexts. Students study in Japanese at school, converse in their native tongue at home, and often use English or other languages in social or professional settings (Brown & Ogawa, 2017). While this diversity adds depth to Japan's cultural tapestry, it also poses challenges for language learning (Dörnyei, 2005). However, these challenges also present opportunities for personal growth and cultural enrichment as learners adapt to different communication styles (Gardner, 2014).

Through exploring the experiences of language learners in Japan, focusing on their successes, struggles, and strategies for language acquisition, this research project aims to illuminate the complexities of language learning in a multicultural setting (Yashima, 2010). By celebrating the richness of linguistic diversity and encouraging learners to embrace the variety of languages around them, this project aims to inspire a deeper appreciation for different cultures and communication styles (Canagarajah, 2013). In my talk, I want to share how this affects individuals who are termed as third-country nationals in their linguistic accomplishments and also how they can contribute to the fabric of Japanese society by adding diversity. I will also explore the language goals of Japan-based learners, and we can compare their journeys.

Bio: Samia Haseeb Khan was raised in Oman and India. She has been based in Kansai for over 14 years now and has been teaching learners of various ages and levels. Recently, she has been working on translation projects along with personal research. She is a part-time student at Shinshu University working on her research in Cancer therapeutics.