

Getting Connected: Local Get Together Reports from Kansai, Tokyo and Hiroshima

つながりを求めて：関西・東京・広島

February 18, Tokyo

LD Get-Together Report: *Andy Barfield*

Eighteen people took part in the February 17 get-together held at Otsuma Women's University in Ichigaya (Alan Stoke, Alison Stewart, Andy Barfield, Bill Mboutsiadis, Fumiko Kurosawa, Jackie Suginaga, James Underwood, Joe Falout, Kazuko Unosawa, Ken Ikeda, Lee Arnold, Martin Mullen, Mayumi Abe, Mayumi Takizawa, Mike Nix, Sayuri Hasegawa, Terry Nakajima, Tim Ashwell, Yoko Munezane), with apologies from Aiko Minematsu, Allen Lindskoog, Chris Fitzgerald, Colin Rundle, Debjani Ray, Hiromi Tsuda, Hugh Nicoll, Huw Davies, Masuko Miyahara, Miyuki Sakai, Peter Cassidy, Robert Moreau, Sachiko Maruoka, Stacey Vye and Yasuyo Matsumoto).

A brief report follows, plus more specific reflections from different individuals about particular parts of the get-together. We also decided the dates for the next two get-togethers: Sunday **April 21** and Sunday **May 26**.

As people arrived, they wrote their names and learner development interests on the

blackboard so that everybody could get a sense of possible areas of focus across the group. Andy then started things off by suggesting that, as part of the get-together, we might later talk about how the get-togethers are working and in what ways we might develop them collectively. We would also mix and mingle to get to know individuals that we haven't talked with so much; form similar interest groups for a good hour; and talk about plans for the Tohoku Outreach project – not to mention have updates about the Collaborative Learning book project, Learner Development SIG grants, contributions for the coming issue of *Learning Learning*, and news about the 20th anniversary Learner Development conference in November 2013 .

Through to 14.45 we mixed and mingled to get to know others in the get-together – with some people standing, others sitting, some in pairs, still others talking in threes and fours. All very informal and energizing.

After this, we then formed similar-interest groups, and the discussions here carried us through the next 50 minutes within the blink of an eye. There were three groups:

1. collaborative learning
(Joe, Lee, Martin, Mayumi A., Tim, Yoko)
2. content-based learning
(Fumiko, Jackie, James, Ken, Mayumi, T., Sayuri)
3. critical pedagogies
(Alan, Alison, Andy, Bill, Kazuko, Mike and Terry).

I was in the critical pedagogies group where we talked about our different understandings of what critical pedagogy means and how this differs from the more common notion of 'critical thinking.' We also mentioned briefly key figures in the field, what critical multiculturalism and learning for diversity might entail. Some people talked about how they had got into a critical pedagogy approach, as well as referred to institutional reactions against such pedagogy. We also touched on some of our own practices and the questions/puzzles that we see in trying to develop critical pedagogy practices further. This was a thoroughly engaging discussion: I not only learnt a lot, but also felt that future discussions would help us go into deeper understandings and contradictions in trying to explore critical pedagogies in our work.)

We then had a short break for 10 minutes, stretching into 20 as people talked happily away with each other. In the next part of the get-together, the focus shifted to the Tohoku Retreat March 1-3 and Bill took us through the main parts of the retreat.

Preparation: Andy, Bill and Sayuri reported on a briefing they had last week with a psychologist and social worker who have been doing work in the Tohoku area. Alison and Bill also showed us the bilingual flier that will be used locally in the Sendai area to publicise the event, designed by Rob Moreau and Sayuri, with input from the wider group.

Kesenuma: Mike explained about plans for visiting schools in Oshima/Kesenuma, Sayuri about link-ups with a local businessman, and Andy about connections with a local community leader.

Sendai: Alison and Bill went over the links with a SEELS school in Sendai, "established by marginalized Filipino migrants in the midst of a whirlpool of social issues and natural disasters", following the Montessori method. Mayumi T. showed some of the animal balloons she is going to use, and Fumiko talked us through the animal shapes that can be made from peeling tangerines and cutting the peel into shapes: "My rabbit came to be like a dog!" Fumiko amusingly observed!

As a whole group we shared comments and observations, and also discussed the Tohoku Retreat in pairs.

In the final part of the get-together, Martin reported on the first round of Learner Development grants, and Alison and Tim about the collaborative learning book. Just a few

grant applications have been received so far, so the SIG needs to publicise these more in the next couple of weeks. As for the book, 14 chapter proposals came in, with perhaps a couple more this week, as Alison, Masuko, Steve and Tim set about reviewing the proposals and deciding what the next steps are, keeping everyone on board. James also made an appeal for contribution to *Learning Learning*.

It was gone 17.00, and we still wanted to talk briefly about two other areas of activity – the November conference and ideas for developing the get-togethers themselves. Andy gave out copies of the flyer for the November conference and mentioned some of the main dimensions that we are hoping to achieve – collaborative sessions, discussion and interaction-focused, with the involvement of students, NGOs and other SIGs. Connections were made to the collaborative learning book project, where teachers taking part in that project might also involve their students in the November conference, or in Tim's words "You've heard my side of the story – now here's what my students made of it" – and the very strong sense that we are trying to create a conference with a difference – "a festival of learning", as Andy put it. More details to follow in March and April.

In the very final part of the get-together we shared ideas about how to develop the Tokyo get-togethers further. James suggested trying to link up with the other local LD get-togethers in

Hiroshima and Kansai, to hear from them how they run their sessions, what their activities are, whether they keep a blog and so on. This led to mention of possible Skype link-ups during future get-togethers in Tokyo. Tim then suggested that part of future get-togethers should involve a common focus for an hour or so where one of the interest groups takes the rest of the group through the issues that they have been focusing on. So, for example, the critical pedagogies group might be responsible for organising an hour of the April get-together. The point would be for us to have a common focus as a whole group as part of each get-together, for our collective teacher learning – but also to allow space and time for small – group multiple discussions too, as we have done until now. There was also a sense that in the coming year we would be more focused on going more deeply into learner development issues that we are interested in, through discussion, small-scale explorations and 'research', and through presentations.

Fittingly, Fumiko shared with us how much she had learnt in the last year by taking part in the get-togethers – in her group with Ken, Jackie and Martin, and also across the whole group – and taking part in a group presentation on their research at JALT2012. The question of which languages we might also use in the future was briefly mentioned.

With time racing on, we had to stop and quickly tidy up the room by putting the tables

and chairs back into rows, before meeting outside the entrance to the building - well most of us, that is – some of us forgot that we had come in on the 3F and gone to 5F; going to 1F on the way back led to an unexpected exploration of the building!

Great get-together! Many thanks to everybody who attended – and particular thanks to Ken for arranging the use of Otsuma Women's University and providing signs for us (which we used as we came in).

March 23 Kansai

LD Get-together Report:

The following is a short report by Ellen Head on the latest Kansai Get-together on March 23. Any feedback or suggestions is welcomed especially from those involved in the Tokyo and Hiroshima get-togethers.

Theme: Action Research

Gretchen and Michael introduced a model of the action research cycle drawn from Practical Action Research by Richard Schmuck (IrI/Skylight, 1997), suggesting that we would work through the first two of three steps, 1) identifying a problem, opportunity or ambition, 2) brainstorming ways to address or investigate it, and then 3) talking together to select ways that could be turned into an action plan. Each person would go home with a plan to do and report on at the next meeting. We worked individually for a while, then chatted in pairs/3's about each other's

situations. Next we wrote our problems and solutions/strategies or questions, on A3 paper. After a break, we milled round looking at each other's papers, sometimes writing suggestions on another person's paper, and sometimes grouping to chat in front of a paper which brought up common interests. Questions ranged from "how do I get students to go beyond Katakana pronunciation?" to "how can I increase the support for staff at my school?". My focus was academic writing and how to get my peer editing, marking, re-drafting cycle going more efficiently and encourage students to take more responsibility for their own peer editing and re-drafting. Having the opportunity to brainstorm alone and then talk, helped me to pinpoint small changes I can make. A further stage of the action research project would be to gather data, and in my case students submit portfolios so I have a source of data which is generated by work I would be doing anyway. Other people went away with plans to diversify their range of speaking activities, re-evaluate autonomous homework projects, and vary the ways of doing group work in their classes.

Thanks for writing the report Ellen!

Also please note: On the Kansai FB Get-Together's Facebook page, there is a link to the materials for the March 23 session. Those who weren't able to attend the workshop are welcome to use them as they wish.

We hope to see you soon at the next Get-together planned for July 20th at the Kansai University of International Studies English Education Seminar in Amagasaki. Please visit our Facebook page for more upcoming details.
Michael Wilkins

On behalf of the Kansai GT team:

Gretchen Clark, Ellen Head, Phil Brown, and Greg Rouault

Kansai Get-Together Facebook group

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/126518854184011/>

Hiroshima: LD Get Together report

Coordinator Jim Ronald

In Hiroshima, we are continuing to meet for LD get-togethers just about every month, but are just starting to introduce get-togethers alternating between Friday evenings (end of March, May...) and Saturday afternoons (end of April, June...). The aim is simply to be available to a greater number of people who are interested in joining us. We meet at the Ryugakusei Kaikan, a few minutes' from Hiroshima Station.

Bring your learner development hopes, plans, research projects for the new academic year with you.

And if you have something good to read related to learner development / autonomy,

please bring that along too. Look forward to seeing you!

Calling readers in the Tokyo area!

The Tokyo get-togethers are run in an informal and interactive way, with small-group discussions around learner development issues that participants wish to focus on (such as collaborative learning and autonomy, content-based learning, education for social change and social justice, out-of-class learning, and self- and peer-assessment).

We welcome the participation of teachers from diverse teaching contexts - including elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, university, distance learning & graduate studies, and language school settings - and teachers teaching languages other than English.

私たちは、多様な教育現場(大学以外)でご活躍の皆さんの参加を歓迎しています。小学校、中学校、高校、通信教育、大学院、語学学校での指導や、英語以外の言語を教えている教師の皆様、どうぞ参加ください。

In this coming year, as a whole group, we will be aiming to go more deeply into learner development issues that we are interested in, through discussion, small-scale explorations and 'research', as well as informal presentations.

For more information and get-together reports, please visit the Tokyo get-together blog:

[<tokyogettogethers.blogspot.jp/>](http://tokyogettogethers.blogspot.jp/).

Andy Barfield, Ken Ikeda, & Stacey Vye
LD SIG Greater Tokyo Area Get-together