

Stories of Learning and Teaching Practices | 学習・教育実践の成功談・失敗談

Narratives of Filipino English Teachers in Japan: A Reflective Dialogic Review of Stewart (2020)



Prumel Barbudo
Yokohama City
University
Email:
<pbarbudo@yokohama-cu.ac.jp>



Stephanie Keith Lim
Miyazaki International
College
Email:
<slim@sky.miyazaki-mic.ac.jp>

Stephanie: In her book, *Narratives of Filipino English Teachers in Japan*, Alison Stewart presents the stories of Aurora, Lori, Elma, Sampaguita, Anna Marie, Shin, Katrina, Renata and Carmela as foreign English teachers working at different levels of education in Japan. Through their accounts, Stewart delves into the notion of teacher identity and how it is affected by the community in which they belong.

Prumel: I think that Stewart is bold in adopting an “identity politics perspective” (p. 26) to explain the central theme of the book, language teacher recognition. Stewart suggests that recognition involves a very strong attachment to the background the Filipino teachers were born into, as well as other attributes such as language identity, gender and social class that are both inscribed and ascribed to them. She effectively presents the stories of the interviewees to argue that feelings of prejudice and pride are fundamental to identity. I find her interviews successful in eliciting these emotions from the interviewees. In her analysis, she portrays the organization Filipino English Teachers in Japan (henceforth FETJ) as a driving force for social activism that merits recognition and acceptance. As Filipino teachers with shared cultural identity with the interviewees, Stephanie and I will include our emic view or insider’s interpretation (Creswell, 2014) of the narratives which may be disparate from Stewart’s perspectives.

Stephanie: My name is Stephanie Lim. I have been working as a lecturer in Miyazaki, Japan for three years. I am Filipino-Canadian—born and raised in the Philippines, but my family moved to Vancouver when I was a teen, so I feel like I grew up in the Philippines, and became an adult in Canada. I identify strongly with both national identities. I have firm cultural roots in my birth country, and I have internalized values shaped by my Canadian experience.

Prumel: I am Prumel Barbudo, a lecturer at universities in Yokohama and Tokyo. Just like Stephanie, I was born and raised in the Philippines. I moved to Tokyo several years ago to do some research on teacher development under the Japanese Government Monbukagakusho (MEXT) Scholarship. Working as an English teacher abroad, I have always been proud of my Filipino heritage. I grew up as a “probinsyano” (Filipino slang which loosely translates as “country boy”), so my ex-urban, semi-conservative values are deeply shaped by my Ilokano regional ethnicity, which intersects with my professional and personal identities.

Stephanie: All the teachers interviewed presented diverse and compelling narratives of their respective teaching journeys. Certainly, many of the stories shared and analyzed in the book resonated with us as fellow Filipino language teachers in Japan. In this discussion, however, we would like to focus on three aspects that stood out to us from the stories: teaching path, discrimination, and Native English Speaking Teacher (NEST) and Non-native English Speaking Teacher (NNEST) identities.

Teaching Path

Stephanie: Shin, Katrina and Carmela were clear that teaching in one form or another would be their profession. Shin stated that it was his childhood dream, while Katrina and Carmela expressly pursued a degree in education.

Meanwhile, for Lori, Sampaguita and Anna, it appears that they arrived at teaching rather fortuitously as they studied Medicine, Business and Computer Science at university. However, one point is consistent among everyone, and that is it took a while, having had to overcome significant personal and professional obstacles, before they were able to establish themselves as English educators in Japan. What was your teaching path like as you moved from the Philippines to Japan?

Prumel: My bachelor's degree was in Secondary Education, major in English, and my master's degree was in English Education. In the Philippines, the English department in my university hired me after graduation and while doing this, I passed the licensure exam for professional teachers. I decided to move to the public high school system after a year. I had the privilege to be promoted to a position called "Master Teacher I," which means I had more senior roles such as conducting a mentoring program for other English teachers. When I moved to Japan, I worked at all levels of Japanese education, teaching both adults and children in public and private institutions. It was a struggle for me to start all over again in a foreign land but I worked my way through to become a university lecturer. I love the teaching profession. I have been enjoying this for over 18 years and I could not see myself doing other work. What was yours?

Stephanie: I have been teaching for almost nine years, three of which here in Japan. Like Renata, I never thought I would be in academia. Growing up, I did not like school, but when I was at university, I learned to appreciate it thanks to some of my professors who I felt taught with great passion and kindness. That was when I began imagining myself as a Psychology teacher. For the most part, though, I was unconvinced that it could happen because, at that time, it seemed like getting into graduate school was daunting and arduous. Also, I am quite introverted, and I did not think my personality would be suitable. However, a few months after completing my Bachelor's, I enrolled in the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) program as I was unsure about what to do with my Psychology and International Relations degree. Fortunately, I was hired at a private language school in Vancouver not long after graduating from the program. In my five years there, I realized how singular a profession English teaching is. Among other things, I found it remarkable that people from all over the world, who have highly diverse backgrounds, could converge in our small classroom and connect with each other. I do not think there are many fields which can facilitate this kind of rich cultural exchange. It has allowed me to forge valuable friendships with some of my students, with whom I keep in touch with to this day, and I have really come to appreciate that aspect of this work. In my third year of teaching, I went back to school to get my Master's degree in Teaching English as an Additional Language (TEAL), which then led me to my current position at Miyazaki International College.

Discrimination

Stephanie: In Chapter 4, Sampaguita said she "does not experience or sense any discrimination against her as a Filipino in Japan" (p. 112). She received assistance from Japanese authorities when she needed it, and she stated that her coworkers have been appreciative of her work (p. 112). Similarly, Elma said she is aware that there is discrimination, but believes it can be overcome if you prove yourself to be better at your work than others (p. 93). As Stewart points out, Elma achieved this by garnering distinctions that recognize her as one of the best teachers at her workplace (p. 93). Have you ever experienced discrimination as a foreign English teacher here in Japan?

Prumel: I have not experienced overt discrimination directly from native English speakers or even Japanese teachers and administrators. However, I believe it still exists in the workplace and in our discourses. In the language teaching industry in Japan, we almost always equate the term discrimination to "negative discrimination," which is basically the poor treatment of a teacher because of his background, especially his mother tongue. However, "positive discrimination" is evident in the Japanese workplace too and affects the lives of all English teachers here. It usually favors teachers who come from Inner Circle countries (Kachru, 1992) where English is used as the primary language such as the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. One specific example even until today is that the job advertisements of English schools require candidates to be "native" English speakers from Inner Circle countries.

Upon deeper reflection, based on my recent experiences, discrimination often comes from fellow Filipinos, not from some explicit behavior or discourse from other nationalities. Having said this, I think it is also imperative to address discrimination with this specific Filipino organization in question. Having dealt personally with the interviewees myself, I noticed firsthand that some teachers exhibit a Filipino socio-cultural trait called "*kanya-kanya*" or self-centeredness. Specifically, when job opportunities come, some of them deliberately withhold information so only a few

or only members of the organization know about it, hence, fewer competition. This is primarily a manifestation of “circles within circles” (Martin, 2014) and is a harmful practice in the language teaching community.

Stewart is right to interpret that FETJ primarily caters to the professional, social, and sometimes political concerns of Filipino teachers in Japan. While this maybe so, there needs to be a more truthful representation of who we are as a community. I somehow feel FETJ is a platform where there is a mirage of Filipino values and hard work being projected, but it does not necessarily speak for other modern Filipino English teachers in Japan. Also, it has recently become a business enterprise whose programs are driven more by money-making activities than social activism. Therefore, there is a dire need to represent other Filipino teachers in Japan and not just the already established ones. What about you? What is your experience with discrimination, if any?

Stephanie: Like Sampaguita, I can say that I have not actually felt discriminated against because of my identities. I do not think that it has set me back professionally. I do recognize that it is a reality many minority teachers face, not only here in Japan. I also acknowledge that I inhabit this liminal space; my hyphenated national identity most probably affords me certain privileges. Having said that, I do feel like I have to prove myself as a teacher. Citing Morgan (2004), Stewart points out that, as language teachers, “our identities are ‘on show’ to learners and the people who hire us” (p. 192), so because I look a certain way, I feel there is an initial invisible barrier I need to overcome to get the full confidence of my employers and students. Whenever I enter a classroom for the first time, I feel like I am subjected to this automatic evaluation. I am unsure if this stems from my own insecurities given my age and experience. Nevertheless, that feeling does arise, but the good news is that I think I feel it less as I teach more.

With regards to the “kanya-kanya” mentality within FETJ, as I do not have first-hand experience with the group or other Filipino teachers in Japan in general, I cannot speak much about it specifically. In any case, I do understand this trait you are referring to as I have witnessed some form of it at different points in my life. It truly can be detrimental to everyone involved. As it pertains to us, however, if the larger goal is to elevate the image of the Filipino English teachers in Japan, then this issue within the community needs to be addressed directly and meaningfully. I do recognize that this is definitely easier said than done as everyone would have to acknowledge and accept that it is a legitimate point of contention in the first place.

NEST/NNEST Identity

Stephanie: When asked about her identification as NEST or NNEST, Renata asserted that she “do[es]n’t want labels” (p. 168). I understand where she is coming from as these categorizations are not straightforward. In my case, for speaking, I consider Cebuano as my native tongue. However, I cannot write formally in Cebuano or in Tagalog (Filipino languages), so if I were hard pressed to choose, I would say my first language for writing is English. As for reading and listening, I feel English, Cebuano, and Tagalog are my “first languages.” I think this is true not only for me, but for many people who grew up in the Philippines as the various Filipino languages are more often than not used simultaneously and/or interchangeably with English. Overall, however, I do identify as NNEST, but perhaps part of the hesitation some teachers may have when it comes to these labels arises as a result of this internal/personal, somewhat imprecise linguistic distinctions, even within ourselves. What do you think about the NEST and NNEST distinction?

Prumel: This dichotomy is simplistic but I still believe that these terms should be considered in meaningful discourse. This is not to say that I am complicit to perpetuating stereotypes about native and nonnative English speakers. On the contrary, having a demarcation between the terms “native” and “nonnative” to identify the teachers is the first step in recognizing that these all backgrounds matter. Misrecognition of these subjective terms alone may further marginalize those who identify as such. What should be forsaken is what Stewart mentions in Chapter 1 and the Introduction, which is *native speakerism* (Holliday, 2005, 2018) or the ideology that native speakers are better suited to teach English because they come from the Inner Circle countries. Another ideology that should be condemned is *linguicism*, or the preference for native English speakers (p. 24). There have been many attempts, even at recent international teacher conferences, to use terms such as “multilingual teachers,” “intercultural teachers,” and the like. Using these alternative terms achieves a superficial goal: It simply euphemizes the real problem that conflicts and forms of discrimination usually start in what we know, believe, and think or simply “cognition” (Borg, 2003) as manifested in our discourses and behaviors. Therefore, I do not see a huge problem in using the terms “native” and “nonnative,” however subjective they are, as they can help expose the disbenefits of the ideologies behind them.

Different types of World Englishes have now been intellectualized and as a result, we should have more tolerance to different varieties of the language. As a lingua franca, English is not anymore just owned by speakers from the Inner Circle countries. As Professor Ryuko Kubota (2001) of the University of British Columbia once mentioned, we, as nonnative speakers, also take ownership of the English language. However, in Japan, the misconception that the ideal teacher of a language is a native speaker of that language is still pervasive. This labeling is deeply ingrained in our professional communities, and we can start to change this by asserting ourselves and showing others that regardless of background, first and foremost, we are all English teachers. All experiences are valid, and ethnicity, race, or color should not be a factor in being an effective English teacher. Sure, nonnative speakers may have issues with their linguistic confidence, but if you qualify and can deliver, then nobody should discriminate against you in any form.

Stephanie: Agreed. I would also like to include age, gender and sexuality to those dimensions you mentioned. Indeed, it is wonderful that there are institutions like Renata's workplace that value the various identities of teachers and see them as assets. Arguably, it would be better for students, teachers, and institutions as a whole to recognize that diversity in English language teaching, and in life in general, is an advantage.

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***Dis/Connect* – a virtual art exhibition by students of Miyazaki International College and Kyoto University of the Arts**



Will Hall
Miyazaki
International
College
Email:
<whall@sky.miyazaki-mic.ac.jp>



Eric Luong
Kyoto University
of the Arts
Email:
<eluong@kua.kyoto-art.ac.jp>

Dis/Connect: virtual art exhibition is an online project featuring the artworks of students from Miyazaki International College (MIC) and Kyoto University of the Arts (KUA). The project was organized from August to September 2020, and the works are currently available to view online. Featured artworks span a wide range of media, including photography, illustration, graphic design and video. The theme of the exhibition was distance and isolation, as they relate to the ongoing pandemic.

Motivations and Goals

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, which coincided with the beginning of the university school year in Japan, many universities moved their classes online (MEXT, 2020). Students took classes in the form of live Zoom sessions, Google Meets, or through on demand resources. However, with extra-curricular activities being cancelled, this move to online teaching drastically changed university life and narrowed the breadth of student experience (Cohen, 2020). There were two main reasons for beginning the *Dis/Connect* exhibition project: to provide an opportunity for international exchange (and thereby practice English) and use art to share experiences during the pandemic.

Both MIC and KUA have international exchange programs that were suspended due to the pandemic. All second-year students at MIC have the opportunity to study abroad, while students at KUA can apply to study abroad for one semester. With study abroad no longer possible, the *Dis/Connect* exhibition project aimed to provide exchange between international and Japanese students using capabilities of suddenly very familiar video conferencing software. An open-call to participate was sent via email to students at both schools in August 2020, and finally 21 students of five nationalities in three countries decided to join. The project was run completely in English, and outside of regular class time, giving students the chance to maintain their English skills throughout the summer holiday. Communication was done via email and two Zoom meetings were held before the opening of the exhibition. The opening day also included an online reception on Zoom where students introduced their works.

The *Dis/Connect* exhibition project was partly based on +Project (Plus Project), an international student group at KUA. Every year, international and Japanese students work together to create art exhibitions, artist talks, and other events. This is a student-centered project, also run in English, whereby planning, design, and same day operations are done by students. One result of this project is that students could use English outside of the classroom and make international friends. Many have gone on to study abroad. In the same spirit, the *Dis/Connect* exhibition project aimed to promote interaction between Japanese and international students.

During the first semester of online classes in 2020, there was a concern that the students were feeling isolated (Okutsu, 2020). Many did not have any plans for the summer and some reported that they missed meeting friends and social interaction. Extra-curricular activities at the schools were also cancelled. By giving a chance for students to meet others going through a similar experience, the *Dis/Connect* exhibition project aimed to support students during this time.

Theme and Format

When considering what theme would be appropriate for the exhibition, it became clear that it needed to address the pandemic, something everyone was going through. As the exhibition title suggests, students were invited to make a

work of art on issues of connection, isolation, and distance. It was hoped that by sharing individual experiences, students could help each other during this time of isolation, and perhaps find some positives such as how we can support one another in uncertain times. The *Dis/Connect* exhibition project was a chance for students to reflect and express feelings which are perhaps difficult to share in a classroom.

To encourage a diversity of artworks, students were invited to create a work (or a series of works) in any media. The final result was a collection of photographs, illustrations, graphic design, video, and manga. Another reason for not limiting works to one medium was to keep the project as inclusive as possible and avoid discouraging students who did not come from an art or design background. Along with their work, students were asked to submit a short introduction in English. In this way, they had two tasks: first, to interpret the theme artistically and second, to reflect on and articulate the ideas behind their work in English. This helped viewers to appreciate the art, as both text and image are displayed together online. More importantly, this also encouraged students to further articulate their ideas. First, teachers presented their own images with introduction texts as examples. These were discussed in the first Zoom meeting to provide scaffolding for students to write their own introductions which were edited and checked by the organizers via email and feedback was given.

It was decided that two hosting formats would be used: Tumblr, a free blog website, and Instagram, the social media app. Using two platforms made it more accessible to a wider audience. A benefit to using online platforms was that all media could be shared, not just two-dimensional works. Viewers could click and immediately see videos. Judging by the number of students who already had Instagram accounts at the time of the project, it appeared many students were familiar with the application. This allowed for further visibility as students often shared posts and tagged other users from the official project account.

Meeting and Exchanging Ideas

The exhibition was planned for the summer break. Exhausted from the disruption of the first semester, and following social distancing protocols, most universities had planned to limit summer activities to the bare minimum. It was a concern that students, already suffering from limited social interaction, may feel especially isolated with the ceasing of a regular academic schedule. We wanted to give interested students the opportunity to do something productive and creative, while encouraging as much social interaction as possible, under the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic.

The project consisted of two one-hour meetings and one opening reception, all held on Zoom. The first meeting, at the end of August, was a chance for students to introduce themselves, share their experiences of the pandemic, and listen to those of others. It was especially interesting to hear the voices of students from places we were seeing on the news such as Italy and Sweden, as well as different parts of Japan. The capabilities of the Zoom software, which had become clear during the spring semester, such as the breakout rooms and screen sharing functions, helped make the experience involving and interesting. Several art-related warm-up activities had been planned, but students were more keen to share their experiences with each other, and it seemed a shame to interrupt them. The time went by very quickly. The remainder of the meeting was used to explain the details of the project (such as deadlines and formats for submissions) and to answer any questions students had at this stage. Most participants were not art university students and so had limited experience in creating artworks; especially work to be shown in a public exhibition. For this reason we decided it was important to provide sufficient guidance and support for them to start their creative process with confidence and energy, while at the same time avoiding over-prescriptive instruction which might hamper their individual expression. We ended the meeting encouraged that students understood the requirements and were excited about working on their projects in the coming weeks.

The second meeting was held in mid-September and functioned as an interim discussion in which we could share our ideas and show what we had made so far. By this time, students had begun to formulate some ideas about the direction of their artworks. Some had already started experimenting with test works and were excited to share what they had created. It was crucial at this stage to relieve students of anxieties they had around what makes a good artwork, or how finished their artworks should be at this stage. We stressed the importance of the process over the finished piece and encouraged students to discuss their ideas, however unfinished, as a way of fleshing them out and thinking of possible new directions.

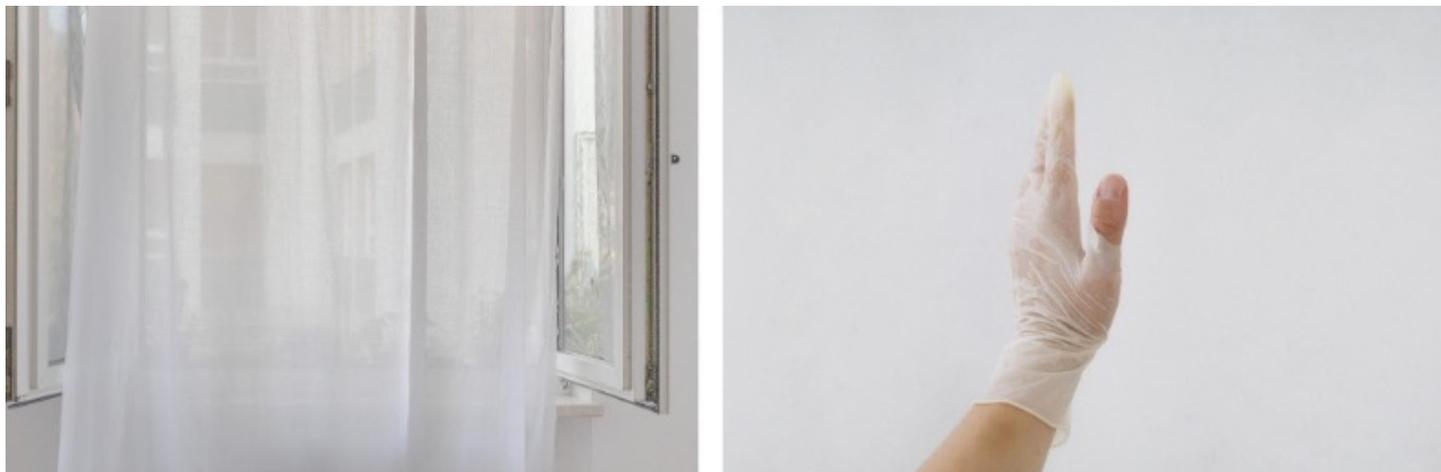
Once finished, the artworks were submitted to the organizers via Email along with the short English captions. They were then uploaded to the Tumblr and Instagram sites and launched before the online opening reception on September 28th. The event was a chance for participants to introduce their finished artworks and to see them hosted in the virtual public galleries. The presentations were followed by lively discussions as we were all excited to see the works on display and learn more about the creative processes of the artists. Translating creative decisions into words is no easy task, let alone in a second language. Yet, while this was a new and challenging experience for many, it helped to add depth to the artworks and a welcome element of closure to the project.

Student Works



Aya Fukunaga Family, 2020

This is my dis/connect image. By using this image, I showed “loneliness” and “connection”. The hand below is mine and the hand above is my grandfather's. He was in a nursing home because of dementia, so I could not meet him often. This image shows the situation when I held his hand and said good-bye after seeing him. Because of coronavirus, the chance of seeing him drastically decreased. This October, his condition suddenly changed and he passed away. So, this image became my treasure and also my family's treasure. At his funeral, I made a photo album by using this image and I displayed it at the back of the ceremony hall. If I did not join the dis/connect project, I don't think I could have had this kind of valuable experience. After joining this project, I thought that taking pictures is important not only in a happy situation but also a difficult situation because we can look back on the memories. So if I feel loneliness and sadness, I look back at this image.

Lucia Rose Buffa, Untitled, 2020

When COVID first hit Italy, there were some initial precautionary measures, but it wasn't long until the strict, stay-home order was issued. Suddenly, all these layers appeared, separating us from the World, as we'd previously known it. They arrived overnight, and now they're integrated into everyday life. There are physical layers—plastic gloves, Plexiglas, facemasks. Layers of distance - 2 meters from other people, a thousand kilometers from my family. Layers of uncertainty and unknown, for all of us. Quarantine in my city lasted 12 weeks. I spent a lot of time in my room (who didn't?). Spring arrived and I opened the windows to let it in; I watched the street through my sheer curtains. One day, in the supermarket, the plastic gloves I had to put on at the entrance caught on the handle of my shopping bag and the thumb snagged open. It felt symbolic.

Outcomes and Reflections

Since the launch, the exhibition has been introduced in two *PechaKucha Night* conferences in Tainan/Kyoto (December 2020) and London (January 2021), helping the artworks reach many more people than would be possible in a physical exhibition. The project was also presented at the CCLT6 conference in which three participating students from MIC were able to reflect on their experiences and show their artworks. The chance for students to talk publicly about their artistic process was very important. Not only did it help them to think deeper about their artworks and process what they had learned, but it also offered educators a direct insight into the outcomes of the project. This was a rare chance to hear directly from the students without teacher mediation.

One interesting take-away from the project that was mentioned by students was the novelty of taking part in a public exhibition. While some participants had prior experience of interpreting guidelines into creative artworks, for most it was their first time. Many commented on the challenge of trying to turn partially formed, perhaps not fully understood, feelings and emotions into something concrete and visual. As a mode of expression, art differs greatly from spoken or written language. One difference being that full explanations are, in fact, often redundant in art. Art welcomes nuance and suggestion, is forgiving of imprecision, and is the perfect vehicle for expressing what you struggle to with more direct forms of communication. Art can help us in the messy task of making sense of our inner world, even when it is not yet fully understood. It is this dialogue with ourselves that can lead to new realisations and discoveries, and help to process emotions in tough times. With all the uncertainties and anxieties of the pandemic, perhaps right now is the perfect time to introduce more creative expression activities into our students' lives.

2020 was a challenging year for students and teachers alike, and new teaching methods were adopted and discarded with rapid pace. On a positive note, being forced to experiment with new educational tools has led to some very creative outcomes, but it will take time for us to reflect upon and realise how successful our response to the crisis actually was. We feel that the virtual exhibition was one step towards helping students process their experience of a very difficult year. By encouraging them to reach-out, make connections, and share what they are going through, we hope that they could realise that they are not alone in these times and that their anxieties and worries are perfectly

normal. We were able to create this project thanks to the hard work and openness of the students and we now have a precedent in place that can be built on. Once we emerge from the pandemic, we hope we can encourage the same sense of creativity and optimism in future collaborative art exhibitions that transcend the physical boundaries of the classroom and create real bonds between students, regardless of how disconnected they may feel.

The Dis/Connect exhibition can currently be found at:

Tumblr: <https://miyazakikyoto.tumblr.com/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/dis.connect2020/>

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Silence, Voice, and Writing



Leena Karlsson,
Helsinki University
Email:
<karlsson.leena.k@gmail.com>



Chika Hayashi,
Seikei University
Email: <[c-hayashi@bus.seikei.ac.jp](mailto:hayashi@bus.seikei.ac.jp)>

The Independent Learning Association (ILA) 2018 was held at Kobe Women's University from the 5th to 8th September in 2018. Due to the heavy typhoon that hit Japan at the beginning of September, a number of conferences were cancelled not only in Japan but other countries. Fortunately ILA 2018 took place although the schedule needed some changes.

On September 7th, we gave our joint plenary titled “A Collaborative Reflection on Our Professional Journeys with Learners' Voices.” When we were invited as plenary speakers, we were informed that it was the first endeavour to have a joint, collaborative plenary at ILA. Wondering how it would work and what we could co-construct, we started to interweave the two threads. We thought of our communication and preparing for the plenary as an engagement in “doing collective biography” via dialogic emails. Our first contact with our potential audience happened, when we were invited to write a “prologue” (which we later called “A meeting of hearts and minds”) mainly to give readers of *Learning Learning* a glimpse into our journey of exploration towards the plenary (Hayashi & Karlsson, 2018). This was our first collaborative writing effort. We had hoped that some readers might have gotten a touch of our complexly interwoven emotions on the journey towards our joint plenary. And so we gave our plenary!

1. Missing a piece: Pursuing the meaning of silence

Chika: Immediately after our joint plenary ended, I realised that the room was full of silence. If my memory serves me correctly, nobody was applauding. I had attended several conferences and listened to various kinds of plenary talk, but this ending full of silence was my first experience. On reflection, I feel a sense of accomplishment every time I give a presentation, as do most people. However, I have to say that I felt awkward about the situation at the front of the room, confused about how to react to the silence (or pretend not to realise it at all) because this was a completely different ending from what I had expected. Actually, it was my first time to leave the room with such awkward feelings. What caused the silence? Was the content overwhelming and uninteresting? Was the audience just tired after listening to our one-hour talk? Had we perhaps disclosed too much in our personal stories? Was our talk too fast to understand? Was the talk successful overall? I was asking myself, but these questions that I came up with indicate that my immediate reaction was not positive.

Leena: I remember the silence. I remember how I was trying to first smile, then not to smile. It was me who had said the very last words. I had spoken about Naoko Aoki, I had finished with the lyrics of a song, I had spoken out her words: *Let's keep autonomy stories alive*. That is, if my memory serves me right. If what I did was taken to be asking for a silence in Naoko's memory and honour, then the silence was good. But at the moment when the talk was finished there was no way of knowing. Because the organizers had asked people to hurry to the next thing, because we had taken too long, because... I was stunned and remember seeing how somebody came to talk to you, Chika, to ask you a question. I hovered there for a while, then sneaked out into the corridor. A colleague who hadn't been listening was sitting and typing in the hall. My answer to a friendly “How did it go?” was a stunned “Nobody applauded.” Would we ever know what the true meaning of that silence was?

Chika: “Silence is golden”—this is a common cultural belief and practice in Japan. As far as I know, this is based on a Buddhist idea that “novice” priests need to maintain silence and devote themselves to special training to be “real” priests until they completely master special skills and manners as a priest. In my everyday life, I admit that I am

accustomed to silence in class and meetings, but the silence both Leena and I had experienced in Kobe was completely different.

On the last day of the ILA conference, Leena and I explored Kobe city (and enjoyed shopping!), chatting about many things such as our families and workplaces. (Do you remember we even dropped in at a cozy coffee shop and our chat continued almost forever over a cup of coffee? I still remember the delightful aroma of coffee we enjoyed together!) Turning this way and that in Kobe city as a stranger, I seemed to be waiting for the right time to talk to Leena about the meaning of silence which I could not get out of my mind at all. I think it was me who broke another “silence” and started to talk about the silence we had experienced. I clearly remember that you told me in a soft but firm voice that we would find out the true meaning of silence after a while. You even said that the audience also would understand the true meaning of silence after several years, which reminded me of the “parallel process” we had discussed in our *Learning Learning* piece just before the ILA conference (see Hayashi & Karlsson, 2018). I was convinced that our meanings of unspoken and nonverbal messages about silence and its various connotations would be transmitted and even shared in due course.

Leena: On our exploration of rainy Kobe we were talking, sharing stories in yet another way from the days before, including our plenary. This was more intimate, not done in front of an audience or through writing stories to be later shared in front of an audience. A Japanese coffee shop was a novel experience for me, and we were, I felt, truly becoming friends.

In the plenary, we had both emphasized the importance of learners’ voices, including their feelings and emotions. We had, at length, talked about how we both aim at truly “hearing” students’ *insider* experiences and their learner *voices*. We had written about this in our prologue as well. But now we had had to listen to the silence of our audience and needed to “hear” their collective inner experience. We both struggled. And yes, Chika, you broke the silence of the last moment of our plenary. It was important that we verbalised our embarrassment and admitted to not “hearing” what the voice of the audience was trying to say. A colleague who had been listening to us immediately said to me that she thought it was meant to be a two-minute silence to remember Naoko. I think that her words gave me comfort and an understanding of sorts was developing in my heart and mind.

When the two of us talked in the coffee shop, we started moving back to what we had come to see as shared understandings and in thinking about educational stories we were looking into the future. At the moment, I feel that there is never one true meaning for a silence. This is true of the Kobe silence as well. And, we have the same saying in Finnish: Silence is golden. In fact, the Finnish silence can be read about in a book (*The Silent Finn*) written by two linguists, Lehtonen and Sajavaara, in 1982. So I know what a silence can feel like in a classroom with Finnish students! By the way, wasn’t it on this walk that meeting each other in Helsinki was mentioned?

Chika: The Kobe silence was always in my mind and even echoed (of course, soundlessly). I guess it was the same as you, Leena. Looking back on our plenary and looking for the meaning of silence like the story of Silverstein’s (2006) “*The Missing Piece*,” I came across some reflective writings on our joint plenary in *Learning Learning*, and *Self-Access Learning Journal*, respectively.

■ Maria Giovanna Tassinari & Christian Ludwig (2018)

“Opening an authentic dialogue with learners and sharing their own personal stories, they encourage learners to find their own (inner) voices [.....] Leena and Chika’s such a reflective journey as the “textual friendship” (ibid.) they developed through their virtual and textual communication illustrates. [.....] Their plenary was much more than passing on knowledge and raising questions as they let the audience participate in their very personal “process of re-storying [their] professional pasts as practitioners, researchers and persons” (ibid.: p. 34).” (p. 72)

■ Elizabeth Schlingman (2018)

“This honest and engaging presentation, made more impressive by the fact that Karlsson and Hayashi live on opposite sides of the globe and ...” (p. 449)

The three participants' reflective writings give a glimpse of their inner voices that Leena and I had been looking for. The importance of transparency and authenticity that both Leena and I emphasised and embodied in our joint plenary were not merely transmitted as Maria and Christian describe, but more importantly, it was mutually shared at least with the three participants. Reading their writings, I came to think that the Kobe silence may have been a sign of our collaborative and reflective moment and endeavour. The audience would have been engaged in the "parallel process," going back and forth between the present and the past in pace with our wandering stories. They may have looked back on their own personal and professional histories related to teaching and learning, and explored critical incidents as they gradually emerged as the "fellow passengers" in our collaborative journey. So, perhaps the silence was one of both individual and collaborative reflection.

As you said Leena, in Kobe I also truly felt that we were bound more tightly with the magic drink (coffee!) and we already started talking about Helsinki as our next destination. To my surprise, I landed in Helsinki airport just one year after our joint plenary. It was September 2nd, 2019—a sunny but a bit chilly afternoon for me.

2. From ILA to Finland: Puzzles, New Encounters and New Challenges

Leena: I, too, read the texts in *Learning Learning* and *Self-Access Learning Journal* with a refreshed understanding about the silence. Our audience had been travelling with us with their own personal memories, histories, experiences, their whole autobiographies. Our individual professional and personal stories and, as Elizabeth Schlingman writes, our virtually and textually shared, and thus entangled, story had resonated with them. Thinking back to our need to look for "the missing piece", Chika, I feel very strongly and palpably how fragile our stories of teaching and learning always are. It is, however, this vulnerability as the tellers that also gives positive hope: there are always listeners with whom the story will resonate.

And a year later you landed in Helsinki and our virtual story continued as a live story. For me it was so enjoyable to introduce my colleagues, the Language Centre and, in particular, ALMS counsellors and students to you. And Hetti, my dog, who loved you from the very first moment.

It was great to have you sit in my ALMS Opening Session with my theology students. I don't always wholeheartedly enjoy having visitors in my classroom because I also tend to feel a bit nervous. Now, it was different. I felt my shy and silent students and I were safe with you. The group you were observing, like any faculty group, is always very diverse in terms of language skills and potential anxieties: not everyone is feeling comfortable in the session when it starts. Some bring a lot of baggage with them. A lot of pedagogical sensitivity is needed and observation can make this a bit problematic. Not with you, Chika!

Your visit to my Opening session was the beginning for a small project which we also planned to write about one day. At the moment, May 2020, I am struggling with an article that is a rewrite of something I had already finished writing when you came to Helsinki. It was the educational story I had referred to in the Kobe plenary:

"My current research work is happening round the ideas of arts-based language, using poetic language, mindful and attentive listening in narrative inquiry, and how an *ethical know-how* can be developed using these as inspirations in *research writing* (Reed & Speedy, 2011). This is work in progress that is at a beginning stage with a text with the working title *Laura*, the girl who wrote the fear. Laura is a diarist, a creative writer, an explorer and experimenter with writing in English, the girl who suffered from language anxiety but found her *voice* and used it as an expression of her *autonomy*."

The text, written along the lines in the above paragraph, was not accepted for publication by a particular journal on the basis of it being too experimental and "not interesting to our readers." I am now trying to rewrite it for another journal. At the moment, I am pondering about (non-native) academic writing, about narrative educational stories, and what kind of qualitative writing is considered "interesting", acceptable, and publishable in academia. Chika, am I making sense when I bring up writing for publication? We wanted to write together about our students' Japanese-Finnish DIY. What are your passions and concerns as an academic writer?

Chika: My first visit to Helsinki was memorable, enjoyable and informative! Prior to my departure, you kindly arranged everything for me, asking what I would like to do in terms of my academic (and personal) interests and needs. You may not have realised this, or this may be your natural manner, but I felt that you were carefully listening to my inner voice. I also thought that this is your way of approaching students ahead of and during your counselling sessions.

Getting a sense of your educational approach, I was welcomed to your first session with your theology students on my second day in Helsinki.

It was the first encounter for all of us, but as you have described, Leena, I was not nervous either and felt safety in the classroom. I think I was an observer, but I felt as if I were auditing your first lesson. Do you remember that one of your students asked about your learning history? I think you didn't expect to be asked such a personal question at the very beginning of the first lesson. But you answered when and how you started to learn English in a friendly but sincere attitude, which I believe sent an implicit and explicit message to your students about you as a practitioner, counsellor, and person. Also, another magic item (not coffee but chocolates this time!) that you prepared for your students helped to establish a trusting relationship between you and your students as well as among students! Again, it reminds me of Silverstein's (2006) *The Missing Piece*. By having one chocolate and sharing parts of it, some of them might have thought that each member is an important part of the team. Smiling at this "sweet" story and taking a note of teaching strategies and critical incidents in the class, I began envisaging a new English course starting from April 2020.

Yes, not only your students, but also your wonderful colleagues kindly welcomed me in a friendly manner! I immediately felt a warm and caring environment that both you and your colleagues co-constructed—Yes, it was a lively community bound together with strong ties. I enjoyed observing some of your colleagues' classes and also talking about their classes over coffee and lunch. I really appreciate that you kindly connected me to your colleagues!

We also talked about our potential Do-it-Yourself project when I visited your home! I was trying to expand our interactive process to a much wider context and wondering if it would be possible to involve our students somehow. Moreover, I had chances to talk with some of your students after the classes I observed. The feeling I had in talking with the students made me realise that there are some commonalities between your Finnish students and my Japanese students. I have no intention to make a sweeping generalisation, but students in both countries are kind of modest but they have their own ideas and opinions which are probably not expressed or shared so often. I immediately thought that these similarities would work effectively because students would be able to naturally establish an equal and healthy relationship for their mutual learning without one student dominating.

With lovely Hetti sitting next to us (probably carefully listening to us and hoping for success), we opened our notebooks and started to make a concrete plan. I soon realised that we were heading in the same direction even if we didn't say anything directly. We were also naturally trying to leave some space for our students to make decisions and also negotiate with each other about how to proceed with the project. Like you, I also invited my students to join the Do-It-Yourself project in exactly the same way as you.

So, our interests in learners' voices including emotions and feelings face challenges. It is often the case that texts related to learners' voices are as a simple record of their learning processes and get judged as "not academic" as you say, Leena. This is a big challenge for us indeed. With a careful choice of appropriate research methods and techniques such as interviews, diaries and drawings, we are able to step into an internal aspect of individual learners' minds. We understand that those are the keys for us to approach and see learners' internal voices and establish a symbiotic relationship, which is an important basis for learner counselling, advising and teaching.

I think this is similar to the reading theory that "reading is an interactive process." As a reader of students' inner voices, we activate our schemata and connect their stories narrated verbally and through drawings to our own learning experiences, several theories, some tips we got in conferences, our former students' failures and successes and other academic papers to find the best practice in a specific context and case. There may be a gap between research and practice. I've just remembered Stevick's (1980) observation that "Success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom." (p. 4)

Leena: The beautiful analysis in your latest entry, Chika, very strongly resonates with what I am struggling to write about, or touch upon, in the article that is on my computer screen right now. We teachers, advisers, counsellors "as readers of our students' inner voices" indeed struggle with how to show, not only tell about, the internal *voices* in our papers. The challenge is how to "convert" into academic text our research done using research tools and methods like diaries, drawings, letters, stories, creative writing, counselling notes and recordings, research discussions, "dream data." When we re-story, we should be brave and stick with evocative storytelling ourselves and this still, amazingly often, seems to be a problem for journals. But we'll keep trying!

I have to confess that all my energy has gone into rewriting the article I keep referring to. In fact, I've been "writing" it for two years now. And I do not think I'm ever going to finish and send it off to be (not) published! In fact, it is turning into a text about "different" academic writing and the voice is now mainly a practitioner-researcher's voice, which she uses as an expression of her own autonomy as a counsellor, as a non-native academic writer. The first version was telling the parallel stories of two writers, myself and Laura, the girl who wrote the fear. I talked about her in Kobe as you might remember. I haven't yet given up on student voices but have to ponder further on how Laura and potentially another student could be written into this "new" story. Writing is a huge struggle and I might be missing a focus and a point but seem to keep going back to the file, like a cat scratching a sore spot.

Chika: It is obvious that we are always with our learners. As you describe, Leena, we need to analyse and interpret the data to share it with readers without distorting the learner voices expressed in their "products." In a sense, we are a mediator between participants (learners) and readers and take responsibility for all the "interactive" processes. However, as you said, we also need to convert the data into academic text. Those who engage with learner voices face the same challenges and dilemmas but both of us dare to choose to devote ourselves to understanding learner voices and move forward together with whatever voices learners have!

Leena, I was thinking about "learner voices in this COVID-19 pandemic." Due to this unprecedented situation, we have been struggling to adjust ourselves not only to the new normal but also to the new teaching/learning environment. Likewise, we also need to change or transform our ways of approaching our learners. In my case, I've been conducting online lessons using Zoom since the middle of April. To be honest Leena, I cannot really feel the presence of my students during the classes although I was aware that our interaction should be clearly different from what we used to have before. I cannot physically feel or touch students or directly interact with students.

Any assignments related to their learning are perfectly typed and sent to a Learning Management System as digital data. Unlike the previous years, I cannot receive their assignments directly from my students, which equally and sadly means to me that I cannot really feel their authentic feelings and emotions. It is my first time in my teaching career that I feel I'm away from my students. All the perfectly typed documents I receive from my students every week are a set of simple, artificial and monotonous documents to me; I cannot feel their particularity even if the assignments are related to their own learning history or their opinions about certain topics. Of course, I know that students put so much effort and time into their assignments and I appreciate their contributions during this difficult time though. I cannot really see how they work on each assignment, but I can imagine that they rewrite their sentences, carefully choosing more appropriate words as they type.

It is a very natural thing, but this means to me that their spontaneous and authentic voices are easily altered to something different or even erased completely. The strength of their hand writings, their use of space, their choice of colour pens and drawings are what I'm missing. I'm missing even dirt like coffee or sweets on some papers I received from my former students, which gave a glimpse of their personality and personal lifestyle. That kind of small but significant "trace" tells me something which is not explicitly expressed but implicitly shared through each student's product. As for my feedback, I myself typed my comments in the same Word file and sent it back to each student, strongly feeling that some important things are really missing ...

Struggling with this challenging situation and pursuing alternative ways, last week I decided to print out all the documents that students had sent to me. I then wrote my comments manually using various color pens. Yes, I decided to be transparent myself in this small way and share my own voice not verbally but visibly. I'm wondering whether and how it will work...

3. What is Writing?

Leena: Chika, I simply love your new angle, the effects of COVID-19 on our students' and our own embodied being in the world and our (written/Inner) voices! It's so very tangible to me, the whole destruction and loss of teaching and counselling as meetings of minds and bodies. I love the way you write about the "perfectly typed" texts with no traces of life in or on them (the dirt, the lovely dirt, the wonderful messes are missing). "Simple, artificial and monotonous," yes, that's what writing can become when we make it possible for writers to use templates, models, when they can just "copy and paste" in their minds, if not in reality, when they never leave an Other's influence, when the whole English-

speaking and English–writing world is writing on their screens, when “help”, when “inspiration” is only a click away. When the product becomes more important than the process, again this happens but for different reasons than before.

In my own work, I got more and more interested in asking the students to freewrite, to write in order to think, to claim their voice, enriched with the native language, but authentic, not copied (Karlsson, 2006; 2017). More and more I was inspiring writing that would be messy and colourful and could be worked with endlessly and “improved” but not immediately, but with time, first reflecting and then “editing”, first generating and then polishing, first making a mess and then cleaning up. This writing approach makes use of pictures and coloured pens and scrap books and glittery pictures.

Do you remember the ALMS Diaries in the session I had with my students when you visited? And you have been getting those kinds of spontaneous texts and drawings back from your students! And we have both enjoyed the reading! We have been reading and thinking with their stories, living their stories in the pictures and colours and handwriting, the scribbles. I think we need to print these pages soon and both take pictures of how we handle them, what visible traces we leave (I can promise footprints of coffee mugs and other dirt!). In fact, could this be the next phase: printing what we have and taking time to READ, UNDERSTAND, BE SURPRISED and DIGEST and do our handwork? Will we see what inner voices are expressed in our entries? Will we be able to spot and mark each other’s *feeling* voices (a lovely term I came across again just now by Elbaz-Luwisch, 2014)? In my email I said this, right? On 24 May I wrote:

We both need to print out this diary, read it with a pen (or many coloured ones) in hand in order to understand and feel what's going on in the text, what (inner) voices are being expressed. When we do it, taking our time, I'm sure we will know what to do with our dialogic diary, themes will emerge...

As I am (almost) retired now and not active in teaching, I can see how these times of upheaval in our lives and in education make me stop and sigh, but not necessarily think of immediate solutions to the problems. I also want to attach a bit of text from my article to this email, the one I’m struggling with, just to hear your immediate reaction. The thing to know is that the article is experimental and I am including my own writing exercises from a course in creative academic writing I took in the research story, using my own writing as data. This bit might be of interest because it is about voice, although a spontaneous writing exercise. I ponder on unique voices in educational stories, how we can keep our own unique, although incomplete, voices as practitioner-researchers and also allow our students to keep theirs. I write how previous student stories always echo in our texts and how it’s always a chorus of voices in narrative inquiry that the readers will hear. You’ll see that I worry about silence, I truly worry about how to write about it in my text and also about not hearing the sound of Laura’s silence, perhaps even silencing her story.

Chika: I was thinking about Freire’s (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He demonstrates the dichotomous relationship between teachers and students and defines it as “the banking model of education.” In that model, the expected roles of students in a traditional classroom are clearly described in contrast to those of teachers. One of them is that students are expected to listen to teachers. This means that the student role is to be silent and their voices are not expected to be heard. Then I came up with an idea of two types of silence: *intentional silence* and *oppressive silence*. In the former case, we are supposed to read between lines and keep quiet so as to maintain harmony. For example, students who believe that “the nail that sticks out gets hammered down” would choose not to express their opinions so as not to stand out or to be isolated from others in a group or class. On the other hand, in the latter case, people are forced to keep quiet to play a role imposed on them like Freire’s example of students described above. Whatever types of silence it is, silence includes (un)intentionally unspoken messages and implicit or explicit meanings, and appear and disappear any decisions a learner makes and a sign of autonomy behind their authenticity.

Leena: *Permission to write*, that’s the name I decided to give to my article! I think that what you and I are talking about now is about the right to write, the right to write academic texts, too, “differently”, in a more human language. I did send my article and will hear in due time if this journal, if these reviewers, might consider that some of their readers might be interested. I’ll keep you posted, Chika! But even to be given a vague permission is not enough; one needs to be able to call oneself a writer by claiming one’s voice and right to write. There are always multiple social and cultural norms that won’t allow a writer writing against them to quite use her voice because there’s always the possibility to be rejected. I guess that somebody from the margins of academia, like myself, a non-native writer, a practitioner-

researcher, not a real researcher, will always hear the nagging internal censor's voice in her head: *"This is not going to be accepted, and for a good reason!"*

So what can we do? Keep writing and sending our papers to different journals. Live with the rejections and suggestions of re-writing and editing. There are also different rejections: rejections for a good reason and for the wrong reasons. The wrong reasons often have to do with strong expectations of conventional and conforming writing only. I believe that the world of education needs experimental writings, texts emerging from experience; it needs narrative and stories, memories and dreams, the use of imagination and creativity. I think it needs *feeling* voices (Elbaz-Luwish, 2014). It needs practitioners who listen to the inner voices of their students and have micro-dialogues with their own inner voices. If we write in our feeling voices arising out of our inner dialogues, perhaps the readers will hear our inner voice, and perhaps they will also hear our students' inner voices in our re-storying. Perhaps it's about a resonance of experiential stories (Conle, 2000) in the world of learning and teaching (advising/counselling for) foreign languages?

Chika, it is a perfect point to bring in Freire! Silence indeed is about power. And here it is learner autonomy that gives me hope! A student who has autonomy, a permission to act autonomously, can choose to be silent and we teachers/counsellors have to have the skill and sensitivity to listen to that silence. Granger (2011) writes about silence as *"a presence rather than a lack, as a methodology rather than a pathology."* Isn't it also a permission to be (autonomously) silent that students need to have in classrooms and counselling offices? We are the ones who can give that permission. But we are also the ones who can reject and refuse silence, force our thinking, our meaning and power on students.

Silence is an ethical question in education, in practice and research. Giving thought to and exploring how we listened to a certain silence might be the starting point to understand it, the slippery and obscure meanings of silences in different contexts, our own prejudices included. Which takes us back to the beginning, to Kobe, and the moment at the end of our plenary.

4. Collaborative Reflection After Writing ...

Leena: I'm looking at a printed version of our dialogue so far. Colours, underlinings, circles and words are trying to tell a story of a collaborative writing project, a project which is experimental in terms of what form the end product, an article will/could/might/should take. Writing has many meanings here, writing is the inquiry in the project. Our writing takes the form of a dialogue, consistently so. And yet, there are fragments, episodes, small stories by Chika and yet others by Leena inside the big story called Silence. Because I am not a particularly visual person, my use of colour is very modest and pragmatic, I go for words, this time I used a red pen to write my words/reactions/ideas/interpretations, which is very interesting as I don't use red as a teacher at all!

We both seem to have an agenda, or an underlying silence/passion/issue wanting to find a form in words; these are not exactly the same but they do emerge from the dialogue for both of us. For me, it's definitely writing, academic and personal, students' and practitioners', writing as written voices, feeling voices. I do not venture to say what's yours, Chika, perhaps you disagree with the whole idea of agendas (a negative word but I mean it as a neutral way of saying we want to focus on certain issues). For me, the other issue, which also gets coloured in yellow (=hope) or orange (=vitality), is minds and bodies, learning as a bodily process, embodied encounters in counselling/teaching, which we might not have in the future. No colours, pens, handwritten texts, breathing the same air, smelling each other. I guess I'm not alone here...

Chika: Our collaborative writing is an explorative process of our own and collaborative voices. We have spent so many years exploring our common interests, students' inner voices, but we may not have been so conscious of the presence of our own voices or we simply didn't have any chances to express or share our own voices at least in a written form and even didn't expect our voices would go across oceans and continents, but we have still continued our dialogue even if we didn't know what our end product would be like.

The dialogue started with my voice and included the emotions I had in Kobe. In response to that, your voice also included your real voice of the negative feeling you had after our plenary session. In this way, our monologue gradually turned into dialogue, expanding it with the others' voices like Elizabeth, Giovanna, and Christian, who had shared the same space and time with us in Kobe. As researchers, we understand the importance of triangulation, so we might have tried to explore the meaning of silence, which is our main concern, from various perspectives. However, it might have

been simply out of our curiosity as human beings that we wished to understand how the audience felt about our plenary.

As the dialogue goes on, not only voices of ourselves as plenary speakers, but also various voices emerge, such as practitioner-researchers, counsellors, writers, teachers, and human beings. It was like a soap opera and each player appeared one after another and expressed their own emotions and feelings from their own perspectives. Their struggles, challenges, passions and hopes are well reflected in our collaborative dialogue. As we responded, repeated, paraphrased and summarised what they expressed, we reflected on our specific teaching/learning environments like a mirror image. In this way, multilevel voices are echoed, mingled and resonated.

Leena: Thank you for the great insights into silence, Chika. I've read your reflections with interest. You don't mention colours at all, this is the only thing I'm surprised about. These months, even years, that we've spent with first the idea of *silence* and now the writing project are indeed a rich story of professional and personal development. I can see and feel a web of experiences forming and resonating and I can hear a chorus of voices joining in, speaking and at other times listening, silently pondering. Voices in us and around us.

The starting point for us was indeed the need for "triangulation" as researchers and plenarists but also human curiosity or perhaps both? For me, this dialogue has given a peace of mind about the original Silence of Kobe. It has provided me a space for reflecting and critically looking back at the silence and its repercussions. During our dialoguing I've written three papers and been engaged in inquiries about themes that are not directly related to silence but also with one that has to do with being "silenced" as a writer. This silencing, or more accurately, the feeling of being silenced has to do both with my inner voice and my written voice as an expression of my autonomy as a practitioner-researcher. Our text as a "soap opera" is a telling metaphor, Chika!

Because we've shared our feelings and opinions and ever-evolving ideas about silence and its meaning, I've started to hear novel echoes of voices having to do with English as an academic lingua franca and writing as a non-native practitioner. During this time, I wrote one text in Finnish about (learning) diaries in ALMS and felt much more expressive and playful in writing it than I do when I use English. Ideas emerging from our "dialogic diary via emails" have written themselves, in deliberately reformed ways, in the other texts and papers I have been writing and vice versa. Two of them have now been published and one is still "becoming" an article. The article I mention struggling with will be published soon and the one in Finnish has just come out. There is a writing story (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) or a story about writing here that I'd be interested to pursue now that as a "third age" teacher, or rather a third-age practitioner- researcher, I have all the time in the world.

5. Closure

Chika: Like our joint plenary at ILA 2018, this piece of writing reflects our authentic voice narrated from the multidimensional aspects of ourselves: teachers, counsellors, researchers and human beings. Whatever aspects it is, we have been constantly pondering, wondering and facing issues, but we are surely moving forward. In my research study (Hayashi, 2010), one of the participants (a 15-year-old junior high school student) drew rock climbing on a sheet of a paper and explained that rock climbing is closely related to English language learning. If we need to climb a rock by ourselves, it would be very challenging and hectic; we might easily give up on the way to the top unless we do not have a strong motivation and can maintain it. However, if we do that with someone with similar interests and goals, the whole process will be more dynamic, motivating and more importantly enjoyable! Likewise, our second piece of writing demonstrates the power of dialogic inquiry between Leena and me, which always empowers me both professionally and personally even under the unprecedented circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic!

Leena: The experience of writing this text with you, Chika, and our whole two-year-process, reminds me of a project we did in ALMS and reported on in Bradley et al. (2015). This was an exploration of our (possible) counsellor selves, of our beliefs and attitudes but also a way of visioning our professional futures. Most importantly, we wanted to explore how a scholarship of language counselling (Vieira, 2010) could be developed via professional discussions and collaborative writing. The way the two of us have worked together since we started preparing the plenary has been a similar effort in developing our scholarships of teaching and pedagogies for autonomy across the oceans and continents. It has been a project of sharing and caring, of peer mentoring, or learning together: learning about ourselves, about teaching, about autonomy, about writing, and about life, both our personal and academic lives.

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