

Looking back 報告

My Reflections of the January 29th
Get-Together Teachers College
Columbia University Tokyo
Campus, January 29th, 2012

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Andy Barfield and Stacey Vye started off the Tokyo LD-SIG get-together with an introduction of the SIG and what goals they envision for the get-togethers. The goal of the get-togethers is for participants to discuss our teaching contexts and research interests related to learner development issues – how our students learn and understand language and how we as teachers learn too. By getting together, we can better collaborate, develop ideas for research or classroom practice and support each other.



Reflection: For me this is really important. In my Teacher's College Columbia University days I had my classmates to bounce ideas off of and I found that discussing different concepts with others helped me a lot to clarify not only my understanding but also focus in on what was really important and how I wanted to approach my own classroom. I did a lot of presentations and research projects with my classmates in the final year of my master's

degree and I found working in a group to be not only extremely helpful for confidence building but also fun. The LD SIG get-togethers are providing me with the same kind of learning and researching atmosphere that I enjoyed at Columbia.

Since there were a lot of new members joining the get-together, Andy and Stacey had the new participants make a group with a person who had attended the December meeting to bring them up to speed. My group was Mike Nix, Masuko Miyahara, Fumiko Kurosawa and me. Fumiko had attended the December meeting so she told us what they did and then proceeded to tell us about what she was interested in researching. She is interested in "tandem learning." It was very interesting to hear that there is an international association of tandem learning that pairs language learners up with native speakers over the Internet. Masuko also had a chance to tell us her research interest, which was "Autonomy and Identity." It was very inspiring to hear that her university wants to implement autonomous learning underlying the whole curriculum at her university. Unfortunately, Mike and I didn't have a chance to talk about our research interests.

Reflection: I felt this activity really helped make the new members feel welcomed into the fold. Even though we had missed the December meeting, we could still catch up and participate in the get-togethers to follow. Fumiko and Masuko's stories were really inspiring!

In the next part of the get-together, we were asked to write a few of our research interests



on a A3 paper and walk around the room with the paper facing outwards so that others could see if they had similar research interests. My A3 paper had two areas of interest. The first was helping my students establish more effective vocabulary learning practices outside the classroom and how does encouraging feelings of happiness, excitement and energized focus affect memory. My second research interest was helping my students become better critical thinkers and agents of change. I ended up talking to Andy and Lee

Arnold a lot as they were both interested in vocabulary too. But I talked to a lot of other people as well.

Reflection: I thought this was an efficient and creative way of getting a large group of people to quickly find others with similar interests. I also enjoyed the fact that I met a lot of different people though briefly. As the contact person for the get-together, it was great to meet people and start connecting the names of people I had contacted by email with their faces. I wanted to have more time to talk with people but we had to keep things focused.

After the A3 paper activity, we sat down in groups of people with similar research interests. My group was Andy Barfield, James Underwood, Lee Arnold and me. I hadn't talked to James at all before so I wasn't sure exactly what specifically he was interested in. Lee and I had talked a lot. We are both teaching content classes in which the students were having difficulty discussing topics due to lack of vocabulary. We wondered how we could better help our students. I could be mistaken but I think James was interested in vocabulary acquisition strategies. Andy had been doing research related to vocabulary for one year already. His students had written reflections about the way that they learn vocabulary. He is teaching a content class in which students have to do a research project on some social, political or global issue and though vocabulary is not explicitly taught, students have to be able to explain their research to their classmates in presentation format. In preparation for this activity, students initially felt that they needed to study "new and difficult" words but when they went through the process of explaining their research to others, they realized that their vocabulary focus shifted to "important and useful for explaining my research."

Reflection: My initial feeling in this meeting was that I needed to start doing a lot of reading on my own so that I could get a feel for what kind of research is being done in this area and what I would like to do with my own classes. Andy had mentioned reading Paul Nation's *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* as a good base for the field. Later on he recommended another source, Folse's *Vocabulary Myths*. I plan to get a hold of these resources and others and start familiarizing myself with the field.

In the later part of the get-together, John Fanselow, in his usual unique and creative way, asked us to watch a video clip of an "ideal

class." He had us transcribe what the teacher and students were saying. Although the class seemed very positive, we learned that by transcribing it, there were "issues." The teacher was not really listening to her students' responses but instead focused on the answer to the question she had asked. His point is that when we audio or video tape our classes and do a bit of transcribing, we can realize a wealth of information that is not readily available to us compared to if we just reflect about our class afterwards. He encouraged us to ask the question, "What do students learn from this kind of teaching? Is the instruction useful and helpful or is it stupid and useless?"

Reflection: This exercise reminded me of when I took the Observation course at TC. I had some basic questions about my movements in the classroom and how I interacted with students. I video taped my class and was quite surprised by what I learned. I think that when we are teaching, we often are in our own "zone" thinking about what we have to accomplish in that time period allotted. We do things that we don't realize and I was reminded that either video or audio taping my classes is an excellent way of collecting data for research!

Final reflection: I thoroughly enjoyed the January 29th Tokyo get-together! It was inspiring on many levels. My current work situation is so busy and sometimes I feel that it is all I can do just to keep up with my responsibilities. But this gathering helped me get back my motivation to start exploring my students' learning and researching again. I teach a class about social and cultural issues in which students read a lot of articles and then discuss and debate them. The students find it difficult to discuss and debate various topics due to a lack of vocabulary. I want to help them with their productive vocabulary and vocabulary coping strategies. I still have a lot of reading to do but I look forward to future gatherings for more support and inspiration! ☺

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References

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