

LOOKING BACK

Language, Literacies, Learners: Development Beyond the Classroom

LD SIG Forum, JALT Pan-SIG 2012, compiled by Jim Ronald

言語、リテラシー、学習者：教室を越えた成長 Jim Ronaldによるまとめ

At the end of June, the JALT Pan-SIG conference was held at Hiroshima University. At the conference, 12 of us presented at the Learner Development SIG Forum. Our overall theme was “Development beyond the Classroom”—with a wide range of topics presented. As it was on the last day, our audience was about the same size—about 12 people! However, since topic groups took turns presenting and being the audience, in three presentation “corners”, we were all guaranteed both an interested audience, and a chance to join other people’s presentations. Here is a brief report from most of the presenters. If you want to know more, please watch out for the conference proceedings—or get in touch with us!

English Camps—Why?

Jim Ronald, Hiroshima Shudo University

A couple of decades ago, sitting in a taxi, on the radio they were reporting a speech contest for high school students, with the prize being a ten-day trip to Hawaii. The taxi driver scoffed at this, saying something like, “What good is ten days? They’ve already been studying English at school for years, for all the good it’s done them!” In fact, if they had won the speech contest, it obviously was doing them good! But it made me think...

Years later, when I had a chance to start running an English camp at my university in Hiroshima, that taxi driver’s question was still challenging me. Obviously, in terms of how much grammar or vocabulary anyone might learn in a 10-day trip or a four-day camp, the taxi driver was right. But what if through the trip or the camp a language learner could change in a positive way that would extend far beyond those few days?

In the first year of the Spring English Camp for university students majoring in English, the aim for change was improved motivation, with the far from modest goal of providing the students’ most enjoyable days of their time at university. From the second year, the focus shifted consciously towards learner autonomy, with the overall camp motto of “It’s up to me!” In the third year, another layer was added to this—“Together we can do it, if we try!” These three goals, combined, have underpinned the running of the camps.

The camp has had no focus on language learning or practice, only on making friends and doing things together, and using English in a wide range of fun, challenging activities: cooking food from various countries including Jamaica, the Philippines and Britain; fun sports and games played inside and outside; writing and singing songs; preparing and performing skits, and mini debates.

English Camp Activities for Business Students

Joy Jarman-Walsh, Yasuda Women’s University

Planning an excursion or doing camp activities can be a great way to connect with students on a deeper and more motivating level outside of class. I’ve been doing summer camps with

my business department students for the past 5 summers and with the English department before that. As each year of students is different and studying business is our focus, I try to base materials on what is available from travel agent brochures, newspaper articles and maps before we head out to the mountains. Then the English camp activities can be based on real materials that are good models as they are successfully and commercially in use. Based on these models, we create maps and travel brochures for the lodge or area we are staying at. I get students to work in groups wandering around our location, mapping out where everything is located, noting the good and useful areas, interviewing staff at the lodge about their recommendations, and drawing sketches about the natural view, lodge landmarks or other charming points of the facility or grounds. Once we regroup, the students have time to work together to put all their information on their maps or brochures and then later in the day we have poster sessions where some group members will stand next to their poster and explain it to listeners. After about 5-10 minutes, we shuffle the speakers and listeners.

In the evening, we have movie time where we all bring pillows and wear pajamas to a main room where we can enjoy an English movie together (students usually choose it) while snacking on popcorn. We also do many active games, campfire, cooking curry or BBQ together and doing an adventure course.

English Camp Nuts and Bolts

Joseph Tomei, Kumamoto Gakuen University

My focus has been to incorporate and integrate these sorts of events within the school and the schedule. While this brings headaches, it does offer opportunities. Organizing a camp within the schedule rather than vacation periods requires *nemawashi* (literally “tending to the roots of a plant”, but means talking to teachers/staff to reach a consensus) and a willingness to adapt the event to fit.

Try and find Japanese antecedents for what you are doing. School clubs and circles, where students often organize *gasshuku* and *kenkyukai* where they stay overnight to practice intensely are one source. Pay particular attention to the types of student committees that these clubs create. The job titles and responsibilities form prefabricated roles and help students understand what they need to do to organize a camp.

Bureaucracy will say no when faced with the “never been done before”. Preface your plans with something that has already occurred at the institution, or argue that what you are doing is “just like” something else to get approval.

Student committees can shoulder a lot of work, so give them a sense of team spirit. Getting t-shirts printed with a camp logo for the committee members or organizing an *uchiage* can be magic.

Food is a remarkable way to have students enjoy and raise their level of participation. A meal of food that people can assemble (we’ve done soft tacos, sui gyoza, and makizushi) can be remarkably inexpensive and make for a memorable experience.

It is important to try and get a budget for these events, a task that is growing more difficult by the day. Still, even if you don’t get a budget, understanding that process can pay dividends in your work and your interactions with colleagues.

Lastly, talk to other folks about what you do, as ideas from other people doing similar things can be pure gold.

Probing the “Intensive” Aspects of an English Camp

Ken Ikeda, Otsuma Women’s University

I identify five intensive aspects of a two-credit language seminar offered by Otsuma Women’s University’s Department of English these past 37 years, concerning its name, principles, duration, the camp itself, and management.

“Intensive” has been retained in the course name since it started as an Intensive Training Course (英語特殊演習) in 1975. The name was revised as ISEC (Intensive Spoken English Camp) in 2004. Another aspect is in ISEC’s two guiding principles upheld throughout its 37 years: keep students focused only on using English, and allow anyone of any language level to attend. Here I associate “intensiveness” with “fervency”. The third intensive aspect is one of instilling students with ongoing awareness of ISEC’s principles and contents. Students must attend three preparatory sessions (事前授業) spaced one month apart prior to the camp, which is held at the end of summer vacation. These sessions orient students to components (lesson topics, presentations, plays) to ensure their readiness from the camp start.

The 4-day camp timetable is intensively packed with lessons and sessions from morning till night. Play-staging is a group activity in which students autonomously develop a skeleton idea into a skit over five sessions. A 3-hour orienteering scavenger hunt has been added this year.

Finally, “intensive” points to the ongoing and engaging correspondence between the ISEC director and instructors to maintain the camp’s inventive yet instructive features. Eliciting instructor ideas for improvement have resulted in renovating camp elements (e.g., the play-staging and this year’s orienteering), reducing the number of lessons, and creating greater rest time for the students.

What keeps ISEC “intensive” is not just the name or tight scheduling, but renewal: carefully preparing students, sustaining their involvement during it, and maintaining intimacy between the ISEC camp director, instructors and students.

Worthy of Consideration? A Critical Look at Media Values

Philip Shigeo Brown, Konan Women’s University

To what extent do we tend to consume the news at face value? Many people pass through the education system with only a limited understanding of how media represents and recreates the news. Yet a clear and critical understanding of the process can help to produce a more aware and informed voting populace, strengthening a cornerstone of society. This short presentation shared a practical three-stage approach for promoting critical media awareness and empowering students with not only a basic understanding of media values, but also opportunities to use them as a tool for improving learner-generated content:

1. Introduce newsworthiness and media values. In addition to Google© Advanced Search's website readability feature, InstaGrok© helped learners to find more accessible material. Further understanding was promoted through an information gap-fill for 12 media values (CyberCollege®, 2012). These values were partially rewritten using a free online vocabulary profiler (Cobb, 27th June 2012) to identify low frequency words and then change them to improve readability.
2. Analyse simple news items using the 12 media values (CyberCollege®, 2012), then share and post comments (in a private Facebook group) to foster peer-to-peer interaction and learning. *The Shukan Times* and other English news media were introduced via ELT News.
3. Finally, students use the 12 media values as a checklist to review their own presentations (or stories) to help generate more newsworthy and appealing content.

For students who may need more support to understand newsworthiness and media values, a background reading assignment might prove helpful. Lastly, Digital Disruption also offers tools for developing students' critical awareness of media and, "building a web-savvy generation" (<http://www.digitaldisruption.co.uk/>).

References and Resources

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CyberCollege®, Twelve Factors in Newsworthiness [accessed 27th June 2012 from <http://www.cybercollege.com/newscrit.htm>]

Digital Disruption: <http://www.digitaldisruption.co.uk/>

ELT News: <http://www.eltnews.com/>

Google© Advanced Search: http://www.google.com/advanced_search

Heatley, A., & Nation, P. (1994). *Range*. Victoria University of Wellington, NZ. [Computer program, available at <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/>]

InstaGrok©: <http://www.instagrok.com/>

Shukan Times: <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/shukan-st/>

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Beyond the Classroom: A Talk in the Park

George Higginbotham, Hiroshima Kokusai Gakuen University

Talk in the Park is a semester-long project that has been running for five years at Hiroshima International Gakuin University. It is the central component of a first-year speaking course. All students are non-English majors studying technical subjects. Despite three years of English at high school they enter with TOEIC scores averaging around 300; typically students are not motivated to study English. As their high school studies have clearly failed them, a project was designed that takes quite a different approach. There are three main parts:

- (1) Students prepare and practice questions in regular classes;
- (2) Students go to Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and interview English speakers;
- (3) Students give a presentation (using presentation software) about their interviews.

In the first half of the semester, the students prepare for their interviews. In groups of three or four, the students choose a topic and are guided through the process of creating questions. Halfway through the semester, having prepared and repeatedly practiced their questions, a day is organized (usually a weekend) to try them out for real. At the Peace Park, each group is given a voice recorder and told to approach English speakers and interview them. In the third stage of the project the students prepare and deliver a short talk about their interviews.

The assessment for this course is threefold:

- The recorded interviews are graded on objective criteria;
- There are regular vocabulary tests throughout;
- The presentation is graded.

The main strengths of this project are: it can be adapted to a variety of ability levels; it encourages student autonomy; it provides an authentic language experience; and there is meaningful use of the language studied. Most importantly, on completing the task students have a real sense of achievement.

Get Inspired, Listen to the Experts: Interviews with People Who Use English at Work in Hiroshima

Midori Kanmei, Hiroshima Shudo University

English textbook creators and classroom teachers make various efforts to make the students' experience of language learning relevant to their lives. This was true of a course I taught using the textbook with DVD, *Global Encounters* (Maeda, 2009), in which students listened to non-Japanese people's interviews about their lives in Japan in English. However, with this course as with many others, there was still a wide gap between what the course materials demonstrated and what the students experienced: listening to people interviewing other people rather than doing it themselves, and doing class-bound language practice rather than preparing to use, and actually using, language for a purpose.

As part of the Pan-SIG LD SIG Forum in Hiroshima, I reported on a project that aimed to create opportunities for students to have real experiences using English. They conducted interviews with people who use English with their jobs in Hiroshima outside class and then gave presentations about this in class. The procedure is described below:

1. Making groups, deciding roles (liaison, interviewing, filming, handout making), and choosing who to interview (from nine people from five countries and various professions)
2. Contacting the interviewee and arranging the interview
3. Preparing interview questions, based on the textbook
4. Meeting the interviewee and recording the interview
5. Editing the video and preparing the class presentation handout
7. Presenting the interviewee in class showing the video of the interview, answering questions, and evaluating each other's groups
8. Preparing and sending thank you letters to the interviewees.

There were some problems with this project: lazy students, technical recording problems, and evaluation issues. However, student responses confirmed many perceived benefits:

A chance to meet professional people, to get a glimpse of possible future career plans, and to hear useful stories and advice. They enjoyed each other's presentations, and speaking in front of people in English was a good experience. The whole project gave students various benefits: opportunities to gain various social skills; communication with unfamiliar classmates and with the interviewee; planning and time management; cooperation through group work; and taking action positively.

Scrabble at Leisure, Scrabble for Pleasure

Monika Szirmai, Hiroshima International University

Scrabble is an excellent language game for people of all ages in any language. As the title suggests, though, you should have enough time—leisure—to play it and you should also have fun—pleasure—while doing it. Although the Scrabble sets available in Japan come with set rules in English and Japanese, they can be easily modified according to one's needs. Depending on the age, or the level of English skills of the players, for example, the use of dictionary can be allowed, or common abbreviations or acronyms can be accepted.

According to a survey carried out before we started organizing Scrabble events on a regular basis, not many students knew what Scrabble was. In order to attract students to an extracurricular activity, it was necessary to show them first what kind of a game Scrabble was. The best way to do this is probably if 5-10 minutes of class time can be used for the introduction of the game and its basic rules with the help of worksheets. About 4-5 sessions should be enough for this purpose.

Scrabble is not only motivating but also serves as a good way to reinforce spelling skills, review vocabulary, learn new words, and in general, it is an excellent mental exercise. When students gave feedback about my courses, a majority put down Scrabble as their favourite activity, in spite of the fact that most of them had never played a full game but only used the worksheets.

The Hiroshima Inter-University Scrabble Project started in April, 2009. One of the main aims was to offer a chance for students to practice English outside classes. The next event will take place on Sunday, January 20th, 2013. It is a friendly contest where everybody is a winner.

Useful web pages:

http://www.hasbro.com/scrabble/en_US/

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/scrabble/id284815117?mt=8>

<http://www.grahams-games.co.uk/dwi.html>

<http://www.facebook.com/Scrabble>

Promoting Independent Pronunciation Improvement

Mathew Porter, Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University

In-class pronunciation activities outside of a pronunciation class may be limited by class size, differences in students' weaknesses and abilities, pedagogy, and the teacher's knowledge

of phonology. Enabling students to study pronunciation on their own can be an appropriate countermeasure to these limitations while also empowering students to take charge of their own learning. The three websites below are especially appropriate for that aim.

First, the University of Iowa phonetics website (<http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/>) can be used as a diagnostic tool by students to discover gaps in their production capabilities. Using multimedia, the site introduces characteristics of American English phonemes and also has discrete examples of sounds occurring in different positions in a word. It can also help develop much needed meta-linguistic knowledge about pronunciation, which can benefit self-monitoring skills (Wrembel, 2005). However, since the site uses some technical terminology, preparing a Japanese handout might be helpful for students.

After students have identified troublesome phonemes, they can register at English Accent Coach (<http://www.englishaccentcoach.com>) and practice recognizing those sounds. This is essential in pronunciation practice because improving sound perception has been shown to have an effect on production (Flege & Eefting, 1987). Using a large variety of voices, EAC begins with phoneme-level minimal pair activities gradually moving to more complicated pairings. Registration is necessary, but free, and the software tracks the student's progress.

Finally, English Central (<http://www.englishcentral.com/>) has both free and for-profit content. It provides a wide range of graded, subtitled videos from YouTube for vocabulary and pronunciation practice. Using voice recognition software, it gives individualized feedback to all users, although only paid subscribers can see their progress on specific sounds. Furthermore, non-subscribers can only practice two videos per month. EC is full of natural, contextualized sounds for pronunciation and can be a "sandbox" to play in and discover along Kolb's learning cycle, which, according to Eckstein (2007), is a suitable model for pronunciation learning with its focus on input/practice, feedback/noticing, hypothesis forming, and hypothesis testing.

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