

2012 LD SIG Grant Awardees: Essays on Research Interests

LD SIG研究助成金受賞者：研究課題についてのエッセイ

A snowboarder's insights: Teaching for the digital age



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'You know it's funny what's happening to us. Our lives have become digital, our friends virtual, everything you could ever want to know is just a click away. Experiencing the world through endless second hand information isn't enough. If we want authenticity, we have to initiate it'. (Rice, T. in Morgan, 2011)

This powerful statement from snowboarder, Travis Rice reveals several issues affecting today's society, which in my opinion should ultimately affect how we educate and prepare our learners for life after school. First, the Internet has changed our relationship with information by making it more accessible and easily disseminated. Second, collaboration with others using virtual platforms has also become more frequent both socially and in the workplace. In turn, effectively utilizing the

influx of available information in collaborative situations calls for heightened critical thinking skill. Finally, all three of these issues may complicate the road to authenticity of experience and require a more proactive approach. In the first part of this article, I will discuss the connections between these issues and describe how they might inform educational innovation. Then, I will discuss how these ideas have surfaced in EFL classrooms in Japan and finally outline the changes I plan to make in my classroom for the 2013-2014 school year.



Figure 1: Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revised version of Bloom's taxonomy of thinking (adapted from Forehand, 2005).

Information at our fingertips

In the mid-1950's, Benjamin Bloom proposed a taxonomy of thinking skills that provides a framework for organizing and assessing learning activities in classrooms across the globe. Anderson and Krathwohl's revised

version in **Figure 1** illustrates the six levels of thinking (Forehand, 2005).

As indicated by **Figure 1**, Bloom and his colleagues surmised that thinking could be characterized by its level of complexity. These range from lower order skills such as ‘remembering’ and ‘understanding’ to the higher levels, ‘evaluating’ and ‘creating’. A common thread that links all levels of thinking is a mastery of declarative knowledge. We exercise different levels of thinking from simply ‘remembering’ this information to ‘evaluating’ or ‘analyzing’ it, to finally using the new information to ‘create’ a personalized rendering of it.

Traditional approaches to teaching operate most often in the bottom tiers of the taxonomy. Characterized by transmission modes of teaching, these classrooms emphasize the memorization of information imparted from ‘expert’ teachers to ‘novice’ students. These lessons are supported by examination systems that reward students for memorization of facts. In this digital age however, computers and smartphones with Internet access make it easy to get information whenever and wherever we choose, making the distinction between ‘expert’ and ‘novice’ less clear cut.

Furthermore, Sparrow, Liu and Wegner (2011) argue that search engines like Google, in addition to collaborative wikis or blogs make information so easy to find that people are

more adept at knowing where to find information on the Internet rather than to actually be able to remember and produce the information on their own. These realities call for a change in how we educate, a move from the transmission of information to the teaching of skills concerning how to use it. This may involve more concentration on higher order thinking skills, such as applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating and most definitely requires skill in critical thinking.

Fruitful collaboration requires skill in critical thinking

More than a storehouse for information, the Internet also acts as a mechanism for connecting people all over the world. Not only for contacting family and friends, social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook also provide platforms for businesses to network and advertise. Web applications like Skype, Dropbox, and Google Drive make doing business with people off-site quick, easy and convenient. Online collaboration has become an important part of the modern way of communicating in general and also doing business.

When interacting with others, individuals contribute their own previous knowledge to the creation of group-authored new knowledge. This requires the manipulation of declarative knowledge in a variety of ways and may include the execution of higher order thinking skills such as the analysis and

evaluation of one's own against others' opinions. Critical thinking is becoming more important as a skill needed to be web-savvy and teachers are taking notice. For example, the 21st Century Fluency Project is a Canadian online initiative that recognizes the importance of teaching critical thinking skills and offers support for teachers interested in preparing students for life in the 21st century (21st Century Fluency Project Homepage, 2012). It promotes critical thinking as it relates to five different fluencies: solution, creativity, collaboration, media and information. Young people who are proficient in all five of these fluencies operate as productive 'digital citizens'.

The necessity of the development of critical thinking skills for use in and outside the classroom, both online and in daily life is also promoted in critical thinking literature. Marin and Halpern assert, 'The proliferation of information via the Internet will only be managed effectively by individuals with well-developed thinking skills' (p. 3). Rudd (2007) comments that critical thinkers are 'invaluable' as participants in the workforce, future leaders and as simply members of society (p. 49). Students of the modern digital age must have expertise in the higher tiers of Bloom's taxonomy of thinking skills and have an ability to use this expertise in collaborative settings. It is our job as teachers to help students develop these skills.

Scriven and Paul (2008) offer a comprehensive definition of what it means to be a 'well cultivated critical thinker'. Critical thinkers:

- [Raise] vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
 - [Gather and assess] relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
 - [Come] to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
 - [Think] open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences
 - [Communicate] effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.
- (Scriven and Paul, 2008)

Mulnix (2012) concurs and emphasizes that good critical thinkers '[grasp] evidential relationships that hold between statements' (p. 464). Therefore, critical thinking involves an ability to sift through information, create sound arguments for one's opinions while allowing for flexibility in a collaborative situation.

Because the ability to think critically is not an easy endeavor and perhaps not learned implicitly from regular classroom interaction, several researchers advocate for the explicit instruction of metacognitive aspects of the critical thinking process (Rudd, 2007; Marin & Halpern, 2011; Mulnix, 2012). Mulnix (2012) provides several ideas for how to design a course in developing skill in critical thinking. In summary, good courses:

- use models and have a strong metacognitive component.
- possibly use argument mapping, a visual way to organize sound arguments (author note: See Austhink website for examples).
- provide several opportunities for practice.
- generate immediate feedback to learners.
- include some instruction on terminology to use when arguing a point. (Mulnix, 2012, pp. 474-475)

The changing view of the road to authentic experience

As previously discussed, the influence of the Internet on classrooms and daily life is far reaching but this also may contribute to an increasingly blasé view of the human experience, as affirmed by Rice: 'Experiencing the world through second-hand information just isn't enough' (Morgan, 2011). Splitter (2009) also laments, '...more and more of what we experience in the ordinary course of our lives strikes many people as inauthentic, second-hand, phony and, to that extent, deeply unsatisfying' (p. 136). Information overload may be sabotaging a once clear cut route to attainment of authentic experience which was seemingly characterized by the simple attainment of new knowledge. Rice's reflection, 'If we want authenticity, we have to initiate it' captures a sense of urgency and a need for a more proactive approach (Morgan, 2011).

A mindset such as this may also be an asset when searching for authenticity while studying and working within a digital

community. In the classroom, authenticity has surfaced as a goal of the autonomous learner, someone who takes control of his/her learning and acts independently of a teacher's guidance. Little (2007) describes the notion of autonomy as being related to learners doing things by themselves as well as for themselves. In addition, Littlewood (1999) suggested: '... the concept of autonomy has associations with independence, self-fulfillment, freedom from external constraints and 'authoring one's own world without being subject to the will of others' (p. 72; Young 1986, cited by Pennycook, 1997, p.35). Both Little and Littlewood seem to pit the individual against the group in a dialectic war in the pursuit of authenticity. However, with the development of collaborative capabilities fostered by online platforms, a slightly more appropriate take may be: autonomy and authenticity are two constructions that develop not only in spite of a group's influence but also because of it.

Splitter (2009) offers a more positive, inclusive rendition of what is at the core of authentic learning that seems relevant in this digital age:

'...what lie at the heart of education are not learning, truth and knowledge, but thinking, meaning and understanding and, moreover, that this heart is not to be found buried inside each one of us, nor locked up within those bodies of knowledge that pass for school disciplines and subjects, but rather within the richness of the relationships that we enter into when we are, or become, students' (p. 136)

Nurturing positive relationships with others is an important asset to the way we communicate as students and/or do business in the modern digital age. The 'richness' we encounter through collaboration enables us to stretch and create powerful authentic new meanings, both alone and in conjunction with others. Teachers are instrumental in preparing our learners to successfully navigate the digital arena to ensure authentic learning is accessible to all learners.

Implications for EFL in Japan

In the late 1990's, there was some disagreement among leading scholars about whether topics such as autonomy and critical thinking have a place in the Japanese EFL classroom. Some called critical thinking 'culturally imperialistic' or a distinctly 'Western' thought process and claimed the Japanese culture constrained students from challenging others' opinions, be it a fellow classmate or teacher (Atkinson, 1997).

However, Davidson (1998) found that Japanese learners are especially adept at the skills of listening to others views, endeavoring to make sense of differing perspectives while at the same time avoid making rash assessments (cited in Long, 2004). Long (2004) boldly asserted that '...if students are not exposed to these skills, they will be denied the opportunity to complete (*sic.*) in the global community' (p. 230). Without instruction and chances to develop this skill, Japanese learners may be at a disadvantage. This especially

becomes relevant in today's digital age, where life unfolds online very often in English (Internet world stats homepage, 2012).

Evidence for this move toward the inclusion of critical thinking in curriculums is manifested at the national level by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). In the second of five proposals for a 2011 curriculum renewal plan, MEXT (2011) included a focus on critical thinking through the utilization of debates and discussion. MEXT also suggested these to be instituted via collaborative measures using available technology and online forums. These pedagogical practices are intended to help Japanese learners be competitive on an international level and encourage a 'global perspective' (MEXT, 2011).

In Japan, one vehicle for the instruction of critical thinking is through content-based subjects. These may be conducted strictly via English under the guise of academic writing or discussion-based seminar courses. According to a 2006 survey, 227 universities (approximately 1/3 of the total) have introduced English-medium Instruction (EMI) courses (MEXT, 2006). LD SIG members Pemberton and Nix (2012) describe two student-centered programs at the undergraduate and graduate level, both of which are conducted in English and encourage students to interact critically with a subject of interest. Ritsumeikan University's

International Relations Department offers a Global Studies major within which students can select one of three programs: Governance and Peace, Development and Sustainability, or Culture and Society and take discussion-based courses delivered solely in English. A more flexible rendition of these English-only content-based courses is to also include some sort of language support. This type of course has come to be called content and language integrated learning (CLIL). CLIL-type courses are also surfacing at the secondary level. My home economics CLIL program is one example (Clark, 2013, forthcoming).

The aforementioned courses appear to be mostly conducted within single classrooms with no online component. One online program that has interested me recently is Apple's Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) program in which students collaborate in groups to provide solutions for real-world issues. These are then published online for other students around the world to view and comment on. Themes include: Making Your School a Place of Peace, How to Reverse Student Apathy, and How to Improve Your Wellness (Challenge Based Learning home page). If needed, a project like this could be engineered to include a language component and could serve to be an interesting way for EFL teachers in Japan to make classroom learning more relevant to real-world situations and therefore authentic via use of the Internet, collaboration, and real-world problem solving.

My aspirations for the 2013-2014 school year
A CBL-type course that provides ample opportunities for students to grow intellectually via a strong critical thinking component, is an exciting idea for Japanese EFL classrooms and could easily be instituted at the tertiary level. However, programs like this could be difficult to introduce at the secondary level because of stringent curriculum guidelines for content and assessment. In lieu of this, for example, in my academic writing classes, I plan to include more collaborative work featuring student-to-student idea exchange. This year's 'Influential Scientist' research project might evolve from simply an exercise in reporting information ethically to asking students to use facts from primary sources to back up their arguments in essays. Instead of asking students to write about their daily life in their journals, I'd like to pose more probing themes such as 'Your friend found 10,000 yen on the school steps and decided to keep it, do you tell the teacher or not? Why?' I might use the journal as a tool for reflection on learning and pose these following questions: 'What did you learn in today's class? What questions do you still have?' In addition, I hope to use a class blog or Edmodo page to provide information about the class such as syllabi and homework assignments and also have students respond to each other's posts in a forum setting. I'd also like to use Dropbox or Google Docs for digital submission and feedback for essays. While not a large departure from what some teachers

already do, I think these are important changes for my classroom that will first, better prepare my students for life in the digital age both inside and outside the classroom and second, through collaborative tasks that require critical thinking, help them in their quest for more meaningful, authentic learning.

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Web links

- 21st Century Fluency Project:
<http://fluency21.com/>
- Challenge Based Learning*
<http://www.challengebasedlearning.org/pages/welcome>
- Dropbox:
<https://www.dropbox.com>
- Edmodo: www.edmodo.com
- Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com>
- Google:<http://www.google.com>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/>
- Skype: <http://www.skype.com/en/>

From Motivation and Anxiety to Autonomy: Reflections of Learner Development in Japanese High School Students



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Worlds Apart

When I first came to Japan four years ago I found that teaching Japanese students at a public prefectural high school was a whole different world from teaching high school English in the United States (stop me if you've heard this before). In America I was trained extensively in classroom management skills. However, what I had learned proved to be of little use when I came to Japan in 2009 as part of a sister cities teach abroad program. When I began teaching at Himeji High School I thought I was fully-prepared to dazzle the

students with my immense teaching skills and indomitable passion for English education. Instead, like many foreign language teachers, I found myself in a state of mild shock at the blank stares and drifting eyes I received in response to my well-formulated and meticulously planned lessons. My schedule, which included seven first grade oral communication classes and two third grade English expression elective classes per week, was not daunting in size, but was disturbing none the less in the outcomes I was getting from my students. At first I wasn't sure exactly what to expect in the classroom, but what I found was far worse than anything I had imagined. Through classroom observations I noticed reluctance and what appeared to be general apathy in a large number of my students. These observations lead me to my first foray into learner development research. The first component of learner development that I focused on was motivation in foreign language learners. Teaching American high school students requires many types of classroom management skills, but motivating students to learn English is not one of them for obvious reasons. In an EFL context, however, motivating students can be one of the most difficult, and necessary, tasks that teachers deal with on a daily basis. In my personal experience I have found that motivating Japanese high school students to invest time and energy into their English language studies, when many students find no practical use for the language besides passing the college

entrance exams, is one of the most difficult aspects of my daily teaching.

The Motivation Factor

Through my research I was able to learn that this test-centered type of motivation is called instrumental (Hudson, 2000; Norris-Holt, 2012), and, as suggested by Berwick and Ross (1989), is a main source of Japanese English language learners' motivation. In contrast to instrumental motivation, integrative motivation focuses on bilingualism and biculturalism as the ultimate goal (Falk, 1978; Norris-Holt, 2012). Additionally, I have found research that indicates there is a new way of viewing motivation. Wadell and Shandor (2012) suggest that teachers should employ practices that move away from instrumental and integrative motivation, and instead allow students to develop a bicultural identity. In other words students are motivated by having a sense of their place in the global community while continuing to maintain their own cultural identity.

Once I gained some understanding of the different types of motivation I started to understand the seemingly apathetic attitude or lack of genuine motivation in many of my students. Recently I have taken steps to create lessons with a cultural aspect to them in the hopes of increasing motivation for my students. One very successful lesson I have created is a presentation lesson on major American cities (see Appendix 1). Many

students have shown increased motivation and enjoyment in completing this project, and yet I still observed some difficulties related to the oral presentation section of the activity. Some students created wonderful visual displays, study guides, and even short quizzes to supplement their presentations, and yet when it came time to do the presentations I noticed nervousness, tension, apprehension, and fear in about half of the students. A few students would even tremble when they went to the front of the class to begin their presentations.

The Anxiety Factor

In addition to the behaviors I observed during the American cities project, I noted, through daily classroom observations, that many students showed a distinct reluctance or apprehensiveness towards oral communication of any kind. Furthermore, I noticed that this reluctance and apprehensiveness was not necessarily correlated with the students' overall English language ability. I was perplexed by this seemingly inexplicable divide between student ability and student output, so I began to investigate the possible reasons for the inconsistencies. When I investigated the possible causes for the lack of oral communication proficiency I was seeing in my classroom, I discovered the concept of anxiety as it relates to foreign language learning. Soon I began to understand what foreign language practitioners have been finding for decades; a large percentage of foreign language learners

suffer from anxiety, which leads to other problems such as lack of motivation and even low self-esteem (Aida, 1994; Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Horowitz, Horowitz, & Cope, 1986; Horowitz & Young, 1991; Krashen, 1987; von Wörde, 2003). Ultimately anxiety can significantly hinder language learning. Personally I observed what appeared to be a double-headed monster - lack of motivation and speaking anxiety - dominating my classes. It was frustrating at times, but I took it as a challenge to develop a teaching style that would combat the obstacles I was encountering in my classroom. The first step was to learn more about the dynamics of foreign language teaching, specifically as it relates to Japanese students, in order to be successful in my own teaching practices. There were many helpful articles that I came across in my research, but one in particular stood out as being particularly useful to my situation. I strongly believe in the idea, set forth by Peter Burden (2004), that the teacher should act as a facilitator of language learning. He suggests that communicative strategies in which the teacher encourages positive self-assessment among all students will help to raise learners' motivation and overall effort.

I decided that in order to give myself and my students the best chances for success I needed to play to my strengths as an educator. My personal teaching style has always been to try and employ a high level of awareness in the hopes of creating a safe and comfortable

learning environment, a place where students are encouraged to think critically and to express their ideas openly and without reservations. Through careful planning, observation and self-reflection of all aspects of my classroom experience I have been more successful in accomplishing these classroom goals.

Towards Autonomy

My continuing research has led me to the topic of autonomy in foreign language learning. According to Benson (2011) autonomy is the "capacity to take control of one's own learning" (p.58). He is careful to point out that autonomy is not something done to the students by the teacher; it is not simply another teaching method (p.59). I am just beginning my focus on autonomy, but I hope to conduct action research in the future which will shed some light on the best ways to develop learner autonomy in the EFL classroom. Combating lack of motivation and anxiety are necessary components of any EFL classroom, but I believe the ultimate goal should be autonomy for foreign language teachers and students.

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Calling all readers!!!

The SIG is pleased to announce that we are continuing to offer grants for the JALT National Conference, and the LD-SIG conference in November 2013 celebrating the 20th anniversary of the LD-SIG.

2013年度、今までと同様に言語教育の現場で自律学習を研究しているLD SIG会員の支援と、LD-SIG創設20周年記念大会への参加助成金を設けました。

In particular we welcome applications from the following groups of teachers:

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- Elementary school teachers / teachers of children ~子供の言語教育 (小学校、幼稚園、保育園／塾等)
- Junior high school teachers ~中学校教員
- Senior high school teachers ~高等学校教員
- Language school teachers ~ ランゲージ・スクール
- Teachers currently doing graduate studies ~大学院 (在学中の教員)

You are still welcome to apply even if you're not in one of these groups.

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We also welcome applications in either Japanese or English.

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