

LD SIG 2014 Research Grant Awardees

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Rejuvenating the spirit and challenging the mind at JALT

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When I first heard about the theme for JALT2014, “*Conversations Across Borders*” I was excited. As a theme, I thought that it would be interesting to see the different perspectives people have regarding borders and that the conference would generate many conversations about borders relating to not only myself as an educator but also myself as a learner. I also hoped that I would leave the conference with a sense of renewal and excitement to apply what I had learned at the conference to my various contexts as a learner, researcher and educator.

Back in the winter of 2014 when the deadline for proposals was approaching, I was teaching at a public Japanese junior and senior high school. A co-worker and I decided that we wanted to attend the conference and try to present there as well. We submitted a proposal to present together as well as proposals to present separately. When I received the notification that our short paper presentation and my poster presentation proposal were both accepted I was ecstatic. However, my teaching situation had

drastically changed. Both my co-worker and I had left the high school and were teaching at different universities in Tokyo. I had also left the comfort of a stable position and entered the world of part-time university teaching. As is often the case in today’s society, one of the biggest challenges I faced was money. I really did not have the means to attend JALT and my universities did not provide funds to part-time lecturers.

Going back in time to January 2014, when I renewed my JALT membership, I decided that I would join a SIG to get more involved in JALT. After talking with some friends and remembering from my days in graduate school at TC Tokyo, I decided to join the LD SIG because I heard it was an active and welcoming group. It just always seemed that my schedule and the timing of LD events never matched up.

Fast forwarding to last spring, when I read about the grant for JALT 2014, I really wanted to apply but, because I didn’t have an opportunity to participate in any events, or really know the members, I decided not to. However, when the deadline was extended, I decided that I should give it a shot because I honestly didn’t have the funds to attend the conference and I really wanted to go not only as a presenter but also as a participant. Thankfully I was chosen as one of the recipients for the 2014 award and had a fulfilling experience.

When I arrived at the conference venue, I quickly found where my poster presentation would take place later in the day and proceeded to hear the first plenary speaker explain about why we need borders.

Afterwards, I saw my first PechaKucha presentation sponsored by TED, and then I had to prepare for my poster session. I was very nervous when the poster session began, but I found that the time quickly flew by because I was talking about something I was very passionate about and wanted to share with people. The style of the poster sessions was very relaxed and it gave me an opportunity to interact with a variety of different people from different teaching and learning contexts. It truly provided me with a way to have a conversation that crossed a variety of borders.

While the afternoon seemed to fly by in an adrenaline and coffee induced blur, I was very impressed by Bill Harley's session about music and loved the way he incorporated music in a language that very few people were familiar with. By the end, as the whole audience sang together in a foreign language it really brought home to me the fact that connections between people are the basis of communication.

It made me really want to get my students to understand the idea that we may not be able to understand 100% of what is happening around us, or even 10%, when learning a new language, but that if you have a desire to communicate with someone, you can cross the borders created by language and connect with them. In some of my teaching contexts, this lesson is not a reality for my students and I hope to help them understand that it could be a reality for them if they would just take a risk and try.

However, the session that had the largest impact on me was Leslie Turpin's workshop *Intellectual Love Letters: Responding to Writing*. She had each participant write on an index card and then trade with someone seated nearby. We then responded to their writing by writing them a letter back. It was very powerful to see the written words of advice and feedback that I received and it made me think about the feedback that I provide to my students when they submit writing. She also gave us

examples of the lasting impact that her letters have on her past students. I left feeling that I would really like to make more of an effort to provide my own "intellectual love letters" to my students because, while it is important to help my learners correct their grammar and spelling, it is also important to make them feel like I am taking the time to actually process and connect with them. I also wonder if, with the proper support and guidance, some of my classes would be able to write "intellectual love letters" to their peers when peer editing. It is something I hope to pursue in the coming months.

On Saturday night, I had the opportunity to attend the LD SIG dinner and finally met some of the members while eating a delicious meal. It was a really great experience putting faces and names together and being warmly welcomed into the group. It was also wonderful to get together with people from all across Japan that I would not have had the chance to meet otherwise.

On Sunday I began the day by attending Gerry Yokota's plenary and enjoyed learning about her research relating to gender and anime as I am also interested in Japanese pop culture and try to find ways to incorporate it into not only my research but my classroom as well. It was a struggle to attend everything I wanted to on Sunday, but I really enjoyed the LD SIG's forum in the afternoon. Some of the presentations that still stick with me today were about the student newspaper, the zemi groups that collaborated with different universities and of course the amazing poet who closed the forum with her poignant words.

Finally, Monday arrived and it was easy to see that there were far fewer people attending the conference that day. However, I still found a few presentations that I wanted to attend and also gave my short paper presentation in the early afternoon. When I left the conference, I was exhausted but also exhilarated from all the presentations that I had attended and the people I had met. I felt that I had achieved my original goals of

becoming refreshed and excited about teaching and felt my mind was filled with new ideas and ways I hoped to incorporate them into my context. I am truly grateful to the LD SIG for providing me with this opportunity to take part in the conference and I hope that I can contribute to the SIG in the future.



My Family and Other Conceptions of “Clever”

Caroline Kocel-Ross

The Learner Development SIG awards grants to financially assist people who might otherwise be unable to attend

conferences. Application for these grants includes a written submission detailing why applicants want to attend the conference and why the grant is required. The open nature of the LD SIG and grants committee may lead some potential applicants to hesitate, asking “*What shall I write?*” Each time I confronted this question, my solution was simple: write from the heart. Below is a slightly edited version of the essay I submitted as my Pan-SIG 2014 grant application. By sharing this with readers of *Learning Learning*, I hope to encourage other LD SIG members to be bold, write from the heart, and apply for the diverse grants on offer.

I believe that every person has something positive to contribute to society and that the goal of education should be to provide a positive environment in which each individual can freely explore their talents, weaknesses, and unknown territories, to learn what their contribution might be. However, education today all too frequently leans towards a narrow understanding of what constitutes “clever”. Dictionary.com defines “clever” as follows:

clev·er *adjective*, clev·er·er, clev·er·est.

1. mentally bright; having sharp or quick intelligence; able.
2. superficially skillful, witty, or original in character or construction; facile:
3. showing inventiveness or originality; ingenious
4. adroit with the hands or body; dexterous or nimble.

Current popular perceptions of what *clever* is, are heavily biased towards definition one above, linked to academic ability. This narrow understanding excludes huge portions of society from cleverness. I propose that *clever* is a term that should be applied to include a significantly wider range of skills, including those discussed in definitions two to four above.

Cleverness is not a fixed and stable entity but is a dynamic and developing process. Replacing the wonderfully dull, generic question “*What do you do?*” with the present continuous form “*What are you doing?*” would better reflect this fluidity. The various possible responses to this question are well exemplified by my brother, a man of diverse talents. He studied illustration at university and is a skilled artist and photographer. He has completed a number of picture commissions and held an exhibition of his work in Croatia. He is passionate about inline skating which has led him to compete internationally, but more importantly, to his participation in a worldwide community of skaters. Recently he chose to devote a significant portion of time to helping our aunt complete some long-running DIY projects around her home. She was thrilled with the results of their collaboration. In this busy world of increasingly virtual social networks, I deeply admire my brother’s willingness to create and cultivate shared experiences with a huge variety of people all across the world. I believe that all four definitions of *clever* can be applied to him, perhaps he might even be considered ingenious. However, in our capitalist and consumerist society it seems the only term applicable to describe his

wealth of positive and diverse experiences is...*unemployed*.

Another aspect of cleverness is that of practicality and logical thinking. These are skills I see every day in my husband. I am heavily guilty of taking these attributes for granted. I simply assume that of course he should be able to maintain and successfully complete any and all repairs, including cars, computers, bicycles, our neighbour's hair dryer, the sliding door, the wok handle, my I-pod case, the camera—anything and everything that makes our lives run that much easier. Furthermore, I also fully expect him to have all the skills and know-how required to construct a house, cultivate a farm, and if the world erupts into total catastrophe, survive. My confidence in him stems from his motivation and ability to foresee and avoid potential problems and constantly adapt to evolving situations. We are very aware of the differences in our ways of thinking and skills which is precisely why we complement each other as a team.

Finally, the cleverest person I know is my mum. Why do I feel so embarrassed to state this formally in public, as if this honest view cannot be taken seriously? Is it because APA guidelines don't discuss how to formally accredit all her hard work? My mum completed high school in London with a good number of "O-levels" at a relatively high standard. She never thought she was clever but at a reunion with classmates over twenty years later, she discovered her friends had always thought otherwise. She has a keen understanding and sensitivity of a wide variety of social issues, their interconnectedness, and history. She also has a great capacity to enunciate things clearly and simply, although perhaps not elegantly. As a child I asked her a very simple question "*Why are there wars?*" After a few moments, she replied "*money and power*". To this day I believe her three word explanation. Moreover, she single-handedly raised three children. As I grow older, the more I understand her outstanding strength and

cleverness and the less I can adequately express it in words. She has always prioritised our education, making it clear that my brother, sister and I could be whatever we wanted to be if we put our minds to it. Though she didn't attend university herself, she helped us recognise the value of a university education with simple wisdom; "*a university degree simple widens your options. Whether or not you choose to use it is irrelevant, but at least you'll have it*". Finally, when it came to choosing future studies or career plans, she suggested "*Just do what interests you the most.*" Her sage advice and prioritization of education have led me to the inevitable conclusion that she is indeed the cleverest person I know.

Diversifying our conception of *clever* to encompass the skills and attributes described here could lead to broader talent development both within education and in society as a whole. I believe this will improve society's resilience and is essential for the development of a sustainable society in the 21st century.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Learner Development SIG for awarding me the grant to attend the Pan-SIG conference in May 2014. These grants promote diversity among conference participants, allowing those of us with no access to funding to participate. With my personal interest in sustainability, I was particularly moved by Professor Nakazawa's plenary talk, in which he discussed the wide-ranging issues that communities of the Sanriku coast are facing, such as the seemingly urgent need to construct contentious sea walls and the *Bridge for Hope*—a conveyor belt to transport sand from the mountains to further inland, to elevate the entire land of Takada town higher above sea level. This contrasts starkly with the necessity to provide public housing for refugees still living in "temporary" housing three years after the 3.11 disaster. I was also delighted that he discussed the LD SIG's collaborative translation project—with which I am closely

involved—as one positive example of hope. From a completely different perspective, I was also inspired by Dr. Paul Hullah’s plenary in which he argued for the presence of literature within English curriculums. His presentation led me to pen a rough sketch of a poem which was later performed at the LD SIG’s forum at the JALT International Conference in Tsukuba, November 2014. The financial assistance of the LD Pan-SIG grant provided vital support and nourishment as I continually try to develop my own ideas, knowledge, and cleverness.

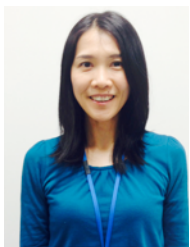
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Conference Report (JALT 2014 Conference)

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Keywords: *conference reflection, teaching ideas, giving feedback, learner autonomy*

I am one of the recipients of the JALT 2014 Conference attendance grants. The conference was truly beneficial for my professional development, and I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the LD SIG members for helping me attend the conference. As a grant awardee, I have been asked to write a report reflecting on the conference experience. I hope that this report would show how much I have learned both at and after the

conference, and how much I appreciate the opportunity given by the LD SIG.

Overview of the Conference:

Attending the JALT Conference was a valuable experience for me in so many different ways. First, I was able to attend interesting presentations and workshops. Some helped me gain a deeper understanding of teaching and learning, some gave me new awareness in serving students’ learning as a facilitator, while others gave me practical activity ideas that could be used the following day. Attending the SIG annual meeting and the Learner Development Across Borders Forum also offered me a wonderful opportunity to be introduced to various LD SIG activities, and get to know many of its members. Located in Mie, I had never had a chance to go to regular get-togethers or conferences, or talk with LD SIG members face to face. I am ashamed to say that all I had done over the past year as a member was be on the mailing list and receive emails. I feel making it to the conference finally has got the ball rolling, and given me the chance to be more involved in the LD SIG. I have agreed to work as a shadow in the Publications team, and have already started reading email correspondence between the committee members, and learning about the publication process. I am excited about reading more articles and essays written by fellow members who have similar interests. I also look forward to attending more LD SIG related events, and exchanging thoughts with other people who are committed to teaching and supporting students’ learning.

New Awareness in Learner Autonomy and a Teacher’s Roles

“Learning happens when a student’s inner teacher learns through experiences, feelings, etc, not when a teacher merely transmits information. Teaching, for me, is creating an environment where a student’s inner teacher can learn on her/his own.” This is a phrase I jotted down when asked to write a short

paragraph about teaching and learning at a workshop by Leslie Turpin, a professor of my graduate program. Though it is a brief description, when I reread the note later on for writing this essay, I felt this embodied what learning is for me. I believe my role as a language teacher is to help the students develop the necessary knowledge, attitude, skills and awareness so that they can become responsible and autonomous learners whose inner teachers enable them to learn on their own.

Leslie's workshop allowed me to develop a deeper insight regarding the way a teacher responds to the students' written work. She explained how she would take different roles based on the KASA framework when she wrote responses to her students' reflective essays. The KASA framework, developed by Donald Freeman, shows four dimensions of language teaching: Knowledge, Attitude, Skills, and Awareness (Freeman 1989). Leslie proposed that a teacher be an informant who gives knowledge, a co-explorer who explores possible attitudes together with the students, a coach/model who shows how to develop skills, or a witness who sees students reaching new awareness. She shifts her roles depending on her teaching objectives as well as on the students' needs.

I became familiar with the KASA framework through studying in my graduate program, and I have always kept it in mind when planning courses and lessons. However, consciously changing my role when writing to the students was something I had never done. At the end of my reading class, I often ask the students to write two to three sentences of personal responses. Reflecting on how I give written feedback to those responses, I have noticed that much of it has been correcting errors and writing simple phrases like "great job!", "thank you", and "interesting points". I often played the role of an informant who only gave the knowledge of correct grammar and English expressions, and sometimes a praiser who merely recognized students' good (or correct) work and their effort. I have done

little to address the other three elements of the framework.

Implementation of the New Awareness in Class

My teaching setting is different from Leslie's. With more than 200 students and 12 courses to teach, it would be difficult to write paragraphs of messages for each student like she does. To explore how the idea can be implemented into my teaching situation, I listed things that I would want the students of my reading classes to improve or develop by the end of the academic year. I randomly chose and read through some of the students' reading responses that were kept in my office, and saw what I would find or feel after gaining this new awareness. Through the process, I have realized by adding a simple sentence or question, I could create a lot more learning opportunities to support the teaching objectives, and help meet students' needs. Besides the knowledge of English grammar and expressions, for example, I could give different types of information as an informant. I could suggest useful websites and magazines for extra reading, and promote the students' understanding of the reading topic. I could share my own insights so that the students could read and examine the text from a different point of view. My students and I could also be co-learners of global issues or different cultures and I could show them what kind of attitude I try to develop towards enriching my understanding of the world through reading English texts, and could ask them to share theirs. By taking the role of a model as an English language learner, I could share my successful experiences of improving reading skills, or show my positive attitude towards being more aware of my own culture as well as learning about different cultures.

New Concept of Writing Comments: Intellectual Love Letters

Leslie's workshop has also positively changed my view of writing feedback to students. She compared a teacher's written responses to

“intellectual love letters”, and asked what it meant to us. After much thought, my current working definition is that a teacher writes letters to invite the students to their life-long voyage of learning. With the teacher’s love and support, the letters challenge the students intellectually so that they can fully enjoy the voyage. The letters also guide the students to develop the necessary knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness to become effective voyagers of life-long learning. Though it is still a work in progress, this newly gained concept will surely make the process of giving feedback more enjoyable and rewarding for me.

The LD SIG Forum: Learner Development Across Borders

Learning about various projects by LD SIG members and their successful experiences at Learner Development Across Borders was truly inspiring. I was greatly impressed with the effort and commitment the presenters made to improve their classes for the benefit of the students. In Japan where many students are not familiar with the concept of learner autonomy, deciding on how much structure and guidance should be given by the teacher and how much autonomy the students are ready for is always a challenge for me. My attempts have not always been successful, and I have to admit that there have been times when I second guess myself and feel I am causing confusion instead of promoting autonomy. The presenters’ successful experiences and positive attitude toward perseverance certainly encouraged me to continue working on what I am doing.

The poster sessions were also full of wonderful activity ideas. One that can be easily adopted in my classes was the idea of quizzing on the textbook and course syllabus by Hana Craig and Jenny Morgan. I am planning to design similar quizzes and use them at the beginning of the coming academic year. Some items on My Learning Record where students keep their goals, attendance, quiz scores, etc. will also be

added to the version I use in my classes. These are both excellent ways to promote the students’ sense of responsibility and involvement in the course.

Students Autonomy in Assessment

Since I teach many reading courses, I went to several presentations on teaching reading, where I gained many useful insights. A presentation by Hongnguyen Nguyen demonstrated how she combined the traditional written and oral book reports with Moodle-based book chats and online recorded book reports. One thing that I would like to take away from her presentation is offering students various modes of assessment, and letting them choose how they want to be evaluated. This not only allows students to take more initiative in their learning, but also to understand their strengths and weaknesses as language learners. Furthermore, assessing with online recorded book reports where students record and submit their book reports on Moodle will be added to my repertoire. I hope to try it in a third-year university reading course as a start and see how it works for my students.

Conclusion

Through writing this report, I further confirmed that the conference was a truly meaningful experience for me. I will definitely make use of what I have learned, and continue working to improve my teaching. I feel that I am now more committed to furthering my studies in learner autonomy, and hopefully to making positive contributions to the field for the improvement of English education in Japan. I am also thrilled to meet more LD SIG members and learn from them.

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