

LD SIG Grant Reports

LD SIG 助成金受賞報告

JALT 2015: A Reflection

JALT 2015 参加助成金



Bjorn Fuisting フースティング・ビョーン、
Sugiyama Jogakuen University 梶山女学園大学

bjornfuisting@gmail.com

First, I'd like to express my gratitude to the Learner Development SIG for awarding me the conference grant and I hope that many more of the SIG members take the opportunity to join this year's JALT conference in Nagoya.

In 2015 JALT's annual international conference was returning to what some people call its "spiritual home" at Granship Arts and Convention Centre in Shizuoka. For me it was also a return to the sight of my first ever JALT conference back in 2009. Since then, the conference complex has gone through a major renovation but it felt like it was still "home".

The JALT International Conference is a great opportunity to catch up with new research and old friends, see the latest

materials that have been published, and get fresh ideas for the classroom. To make the most of the weekend I decided to arrive early and join the Welcoming Party on Friday evening. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, and it was a breeze to get my conference badge and bag. I was set for the weekend.

Two of my main research interests are Peer Review in writing and Extensive Reading. I am also interested in bilingualism, but more on a personal level as I'm keen to know how best to help my own children develop their language skills. So these were areas that I intended to focus on when I was planning which sessions to attend. Here are some of my highlights from the weekend.

Saturday

The first presentation that I had pencilled in was the Bilingual SIG's *A Discussion on Adding Biliteracy to Bilingualism*. It featured three presenters who shared their experiences and results of attempting to bring up their children biliterate followed by a panel Q&A. Although all presenters were quite different in approach, child rearing philosophy, and presentation style, they each gave valued insights and helpful advice. One presenter had been very systematic in the teaching with a structured approach including phonics training, checking reading speeds, and learning targets. Another presenter had instead decided to focus on the children's interest and build the learning around that. All presenters emphasised reading to their children and interaction with family and friends who speak

have a challenge on my hands trying to get my own two children to learn to read and write in more than one language, but I left the meeting encouraged by their examples and guidance.

In the afternoon I went to what turned out to be the most inspiring presentation of the whole weekend. It wasn't a presentation on any research, it wasn't about teaching or by a teacher, but it was a powerful message delivered extremely skilfully. The National Geographic explorer and TED presenter Aziz Abu Sarah shared his story about growing up in the occupied territories of Palestine, losing his brother, escaping from the situation, and eventually returning to start a peace initiative. Mr. Sarah set up an exchange program whereby a Palestinian volunteer visits a school in Israel and an Israeli volunteer goes to a school in Palestine. By talking to the children, they aim to help youngsters understand the other side. Mr. Sarah also shared footage taken by children in the war-torn Syria as part of a National Geographic initiative. It was a truly moving and quite emotional event sponsored by National Geographic Cengage as part of the launch of a new TED Talks textbook. I realised that in Japan we are extremely fortunate living in a peaceful society with almost no violence and, on the whole, sufficient food, shelter and education available. For my own teaching, this presentation made me think about how powerful stories and images can be for provoking thought and igniting action.

I had to follow this excellent presentation by doing my own poster presentation. Poster presentation is my favourite way of presenting educational research since it gives you a chance to interact more with your audience and get immediate feedback on your presentation. Two colleagues, Jeremy White and Brett Morgan, and I have been looking into student and teacher attitudes towards the use of peer review in EFL writing classes for the last three

years and we were presenting our latest data in a poster. We had previously looked into student and teacher attitudes from a mainly quantitative perspective (White, Morgan & Fuisting, 2014; Morgan, Fuisting & White, 2014) but this time we added the qualitative aspect by including teacher interviews. We also included another year's worth of data from the students. Some of our main findings were:

- Most students find value in using peer review
- Students don't feel criticized by peers' comments
- Most students don't worry about hurting classmates' feelings
- Most students believe they need to be trained before undertaking peer review

In the coming year we hope to conclude our study by publishing the findings from this research project.

After having talked to conference goers for 90 minutes about peer review, my two colleagues and I finished the day by attending the *Best of JALT awards* where the top presenters from the past year were recognised. Since JALT is varied in both geographic location and interests, this annual award ceremony gives you a chance to see which presenters have been recognised from all over the country. It was also a splendid and social way to round off the first full day of the conference.

Sunday

Sunday started bright and early as I received the Learner Development SIG's Conference Grant and then attended the Extensive Reading SIG's extremely engaging Colloquium on *Defining Extensive Reading*. Even though I have been using ER in my classes, have read a lot on the topic, and have been involved with the ER SIG, it is always refreshing to come and listen to other people's practice and research. There were eight speakers sharing both

practical advice and research on ER. One of the most engaging of these was the educator and author, Jane Spiro, who showed us the difference in the process of writing graded readers compared to other genres of writing. Her comparison of how the storytelling differed yet was similar in one of her poems and one of her graded readers was delightful. It was clear to the audience that Spiro is an educator, a researcher and a writer, as well as a keen reader, and I felt that most of the audience aspired to become more like her.

- Fluent, sustained comprehension of text as meaning-focused input
- A large volume of material
- Reading over extended periods of time
- Longer texts that require comprehension at the discourse level.
(Waring & McLean, 2015, p. 165)

In addition to these four, however, additional principles listed by Day and Bamford (2002) in their Top Ten Principles of ER may be added depending on the teaching context. Not only did this presentation provide the findings from cutting-edge research, it also confirmed my own belief about what is important in ER. In the past when I have tried to adhere to all top ten principles put forward by Day and Bamford, they have clashed with the institutional requirements and with how my students learn. With just four core principles it makes it much more practical to implement an ER programme in a variety of settings and also adapt it to students' needs. Next year I will ensure that my own ER teaching does follow these core elements but I will not feel forced to comply with the original list of ten if certain principles do not suit the institution, students, or my own teaching preferences. At the end of the colloquium there was the *Great Graded Readers Give Away* when some of the publishers donated graded readers for the

teachers to sample and use with their students. I walked away with advice, information, inspiration, and resources.

Conclusion

Overall, I found that it was the informal things like the international food fair and old friends, the unexpected things, like the TED-style presentation, as well as the stories that stuck with me. Reflecting on the two days, I was pleased that I went, that I learnt a few things, and that I got a couple of leads for improving my teaching. But mostly, I was pleased that I got renewed inspiration and energy to continue to do my best as a teacher, researcher, and parent.

References

- Day, R., & Bamford, J. (2002). Top ten principles for teaching extensive reading. *Reading in a foreign language*, 14(2), 136.
- Morgan, B., Fuisting, B., & White, J. (2014). University student attitudes towards peer review in EFL writing: A quantitative study. *Language Education in Asia*, 5(1), 93-116.
- Waring, R., & McLean, S. (2015). Exploration of the core and variable dimensions of extensive reading research and pedagogy. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 27(1), 160.
- White, J., Morgan, B., & Fuisting, B. (2014). Peer review in EFL writing: Teacher attitudes. *Perspectives* 22(2), 20-27.

Aiming for Autonomy: Reflections on a 36-year career and the 2015 JALT International Conference

学習者の自律性を培うためのアプローチ — 英語教育の現場における36年間と JALT国際会議2015に寄せる考察



Paul Arenson アレンソン・ポール
tokyoprogressive@mailbox.org

In 2012, my wife and I gave up long-term employment and moved to Kyushu. Since the 2011 earthquake and nuclear disaster in Fukushima, we had become fearful for our safety as we were living in a radiation hotspot along the Sumida River. My new job was very different to the previous teaching I had done, where I had been able to pursue learner-centered approaches, and which I had found to be very energizing. In the new job, I was now a “trainer” (in the company’s parlance), drilling my students in exercises designed to help them pass TOEIC and be “successful”. When I tried to do something different and bring the real world into the classroom, my efforts felt clumsy and preachy, and the students did not respond well. I felt alienated in this teaching context and I was unhappy with the teacher that I felt I was becoming.

The grant from the LD SIG was thus a godsend as it helped me to see past the obstacles put in my path by the disaster and our move and refocus my attention on the needs of my learners. In the following report, I trace my journey as a critical pedagogue from my beginnings as a teacher in New York through to the new awareness I have gained about dealing with sensitive issues in my classroom.

The Road to Critical Pedagogy

Thirty-five years ago as a new teacher at LaGuardia Community College in New York, I taught remedial English classes. One day, Sandra, a young single mother, opened up to me about why she thought she couldn’t write “proper” English: she was, in her mind, stupid. In fact, her high school teachers used just those words and she had come to believe it.

At the time, I was using Community Language Learning-Counseling Learning (CLL-CL), a humanistic approach based on the work of Carl Rogers. Part of this involves validating the learner as a person by using “understanding responses” to discover where she is (in all senses, both linguistically and socially) and helping her chart a path that facilitates learning. By the end of the semester, she was writing beautiful essays (even if not 100 percent grammatical!). She had found her voice.

Over time, I broadened my outlook to include an awareness of the essential unfairness that conspires to stop people like Sandra in their tracks and hold them back. Sandra was thus my introduction to critical pedagogy, an approach that looks at the social, cultural and political contexts in which language teaching and learning occurs (e.g., Benson, 1997; Pennycook, 1997; see also Scott Thornbury’s blog, *An A to Z of ELT on Autonomy, Critical Pedagogy, Empowering Education*, Earl Stevick, and Ira Shor)

Teaching in Japan

When I moved to Japan, I was no longer teaching inner-city students, but I found myself most drawn to those students who believed they were stupid and incapable of learning, “poor learners,” as I had once even viewed myself in high school math class. Many of my students with poor self-images were from Japan’s hard-to-see but very real underclass: the working poor, *zai-nichi* and *burakumin*, those with developmental disorders, all but invisible in a society which calls itself homogeneous in order to ignore the issues brought about by inequality. Gradually, it became clear that I needed to bring this world into my classroom if language teaching was to have any meaning to me and for my students. Increasingly, critical pedagogy was added to the mix, particularly critical media literacy, and most of my students responded well to this.

Then 3.11 struck, and our lives were turned upside down. Moving to Kyushu was traumatic, as my wife and I had to settle for low-paid, part-time work, and it became harder and harder to maintain face-to-face contact with friends and former colleagues, let alone pay the bills. Moreover, I felt that my teaching principles were being compromised. I did not become a teacher in the first place just to train students to pass standardized tests. I was sick with anger towards the lives wrecked by Tokyo Electric and I desperately wanted to bring that reality into the classroom. Yet my students resisted my attempts to examine and debate what was going on in Japan (Arenson, 2015). Like a person whose lover has been wrested from him by a giant wave, I felt bereft. This was the situation I was in when I went to the JALT International Conference in Shizuoka.

A Reawakening

At the conference I attended presentations by Hugh Nicoll and Andy Barfield on approaching global issues in the classroom, and I saw how students were allowed to invest time in selecting topics, choosing and analyzing research materials and writing about or discussing what they had learned. In Andy’s case, for example, scaffolding was provided with articles that piqued the students’ interest, and there were links to previous student research and note-taking strategies such as mind maps. This hit a chord because global issues were no longer working for me in my classroom of elite engineers.

As a “radiation refugee” whose own life had been turned upside down by Fukushima, I have rather firm views on the complicity of the government and nuclear power industry in the disaster. I had been choosing materials on controversial issues, including nuclear power, for my students without considering that they might see things differently, especially since among the products their company makes are components for nuclear reactors. Talking to Hugh and Andy, I began to understand why my approach had been backfiring to the extent that a few students were even hostile toward discussing any political issues. It was clear that the students were picking up on my strong anti-nuclear views through the songs and videos that I used in class, and this may have inhibited them from expressing opinions that contradicted mine.

A Reencounter With Carl Rogers

John Spiri’s talk on mindfulness in the classroom was also an unexpected reminder of a philosophy that had inspired me greatly earlier in my career: Carl Rogers and the use of those understanding responses I first encountered 35 years ago with Sandra, where

an empathetic teacher simply tries to reflect back what she thinks the student is feeling. John took a question about “non-compliant” students who refuse to cooperate, just coming to class and sleeping. Rather than get angry at the student, why not, John asked, try to see things from your student’s point of view? In his case, he simply asked the student if he was tired, thus starting a dialogue that helped him feel *understood* and bringing the student back into the classroom emotionally.

It is easy to be lead astray when one’s own life events get in the way of seeing clearly. We must work with the hand we are dealt, and Andy, Hugh and John helped me realign what I was doing in the classroom with the teaching philosophy I did not want to discard. I took away from the conference a plan: from then on I would place emphasis on helping students select a controversial topic, learn how to paraphrase what the author says, how to look for contrasting arguments, and how to develop one’s own point of view. But I would be careful not to impose my own worldview on them. I would guide, I would listen, I would reflect back to them the difficulties they had in confronting the life questions they encountered.

Ta-Dah!

In the semester that had just started at the time of the conference, I provided my students with a list of possible research topics, asked them to add their own, and with them discussed a variety of research sources without steering them toward the conclusion I hoped they would reach. I waited for them to encounter the voices of those who write about the inequalities, the absurdities, the unfairness that is all around them, rather than call attention to them myself. Some took note of these voices and still concluded that all is well. Others said they are not so sure. And a few even ventured to question the status quo.

I began to enjoy teaching again as I saw the students tackle topics that they themselves had chosen such as the death penalty or free trade.

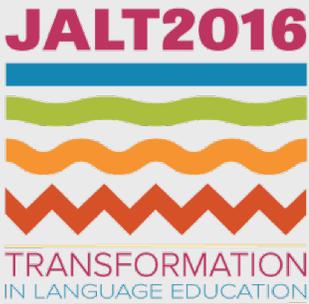
I have begun to see my “trainees” as the people they are and stopped worrying about whether or not they are critically aware of the issues that affect the world they live in. It is probably one of the hardest teaching situations I have ever been in, but, thanks to my conversations with John, Hugh and Andy, something new is being born.

References

- Arenson, P. (2015). What my cousin Joanie taught me about teaching and learning: Developing critical media literacy and autonomy in a guided discussion and debate format. <http://gilesig.org/2015cmlarticle.pdf>
- Benson, P. (1997). The philosophy and politics of learner autonomy. In P. Benson & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 18-34). London: Routledge.
- Pennycook, A. (1997). Cultural alternatives and autonomy. In P. Benson & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 35-53). London: Routledge.

JALT2016: Transformation in Language Education

Friday 25th to
Monday 28th
November, 2016



[Aichi Industry & Labor Center – WINC Aichi](http://www.winc-aichi.com)
Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan

LD SIG Outreach Grant Report: Visiting Tohoku

LD SIG アウトリーチ助成金受賞報告： 東北を訪れて



Alison Stewart, Gakushuin University
スチュアート・アリソン、学習院大学

stewart1411@gmail.com

Natsumi Magatake, Gakushuin University
曲竹 夏実、学習院大学

maggy_jpn@gmail.com

As a grateful recipient of a Learner Development SIG Outreach Grant in 2015, I would like to thank the Grants Team for approving my application and thus helping finance (retrospectively) a trip to Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture in July 2015, the purpose of which was to clear a path to publishing a website and bring the LD's Tohoku translation project to completion. The grant paid for the cost of a Shinkansen return ticket to Ichinoseki for Natsumi Magatake, who was my graduate student at the time, and who agreed to accompany me in the capacity of an interpreter. For this report, I have conducted an email interview with Natsumi to talk about that experience.

Alison: How did you get involved in the essay translation project before the trip?

Natsumi: A number of students from our

seminar translated essays the Kesen Junior High School students wrote into English. I was one of them. After we had finished translating the essays we were assigned, we worked in pairs and checked each other's translations. After that, we worked together in a translation workshop. Here we standardized our word choice, that is, we agreed on ways to express certain words. For example, we agreed to use both *tsunami* and *tidal wave*. We also used a word list sent to us by the project editors to accomplish this task.

A: What do you feel you got out of that experience?

N: I felt that it was difficult to translate the students' experience into appropriate English. We struggled to express certain Japanese phrases like 「これからもよろしくお願いします。」

This sort of means, “Please keep on supporting us”, but not completely. So it was interesting to think deeply about the meanings of everyday expressions and their translation, especially in the context of these students' essays.

A: After that experience, you graduated and rejoined Gakushuin as a graduate student, didn't you? Because we saw a lot of each other over the following two years, I came to rely on you very often for help in corresponding by email with people from Rikuzentakata, especially in the summer of last year.

The translations had all been completed by the end of the previous year, and we were ready to launch a website. But at that point we realised that we didn't have permission from the children, or rather, since they were minors, from their parents or guardians, and so ethically we couldn't proceed with the website. Of course, we should have thought about this much earlier and asked the school to help us get these permissions right at the time when we agreed to do the translations. At this point, three years after the children had written the

essays, it was very much harder. The children had all graduated from the school and moved on, our main point of contact, Kazutoshi Musashi, who had been president of the school Parent-Teacher Association, and who had suggested the project in the first place, was no longer in that role and had no connection with the school, and the school principal had also changed. When we contacted the new principal, he was not interested in helping us contact the students to ask for permission.

So it was then that we thought about traveling up to Rikuzentakata and talking to the principal in person. We weren't sure who should go, but after some discussion and reviewing of schedules, it was decided that I would go with Caroline Kocel-Ross, who would be going on afterward on a fieldtrip with her university, and with you, Natsumi.

N: That's right. I went to Kesen Junior High School with you and Caroline as an interpreter. We met Musashi-san at his new ramen cafe in the town of Rikuzentakata, then drove to the new school building, which is situated a few kilometers away from the coast, and met the school principal, Suzuki-sensei and his deputy, both of whom had been recently appointed to their jobs at the school. We told them about our work and negotiated with Suzuki-sensei for permission to publish the essay. He listened to us kindly and finally agreed to help us.



Kesen Junior High School

A: Before we went to the school for our meeting, Musashi-san took us to see the old school building, which is now unused. What were your impressions of the old and new schools, Natsumi?

N: First of all, I was really surprised at how close the old school was to the sea. So it was hard to believe the fact that all the students had survived on the day of the tsunami. In the area around the old school, there were no houses where people lived. I heard that the people who used to live there have all moved away because the area was so devastated by the tsunami, and probably they will never come back again. I asked Musashi-san a question, "Why don't they come back now?" He answered that it was taking such a long time to repair the area and people could not wait. I was really shocked to hear that...

On the other hand, the students in the new school were very cheerful and polite. They said hello once they saw us entering the new school building. This building was a little bit smaller than the old one, but it had a warm friendly atmosphere.

A: I agree, there was a nice feel to the place. I was very impressed by the new school principal, Suzuki-sensei, and the care he expressed for the children and the people who lost so much in the disaster. Of course, I was also delighted that he agreed to help us track down the families of the students who wrote the essays we translated, and I have to thank you for the very important part you played in helping that discussion go smoothly. As a result, about half of the families sent back permission for us to publish the essays on a new website (<http://lookingback311.wix.com/start>). Given that nearly three years had passed since they had written the essays, I was surprised and relieved that we received so many.

My last question to you is perhaps more personal, Natsumi. You are starting work

as an English teacher at a high school in Saitama this April. Do you think that our trip to Rikuzentakata has affected the way you think about English teaching and your future career as an English teacher?

N: This experience will certainly affect my future as a teacher. I came to think that the reason for learning English is to have more opportunity to get and give information. That is, if you speak English, you can learn more about what you want to know. And you can tell more people about what you have learnt. But this experience also affected me on a personal level. It is very difficult for most high school students to imagine how terrible disasters are because they live in peace. I'd like them to realize the importance of their families and their lives.

A: I think that is one of the main things I too have learned from working on the translation project and traveling to the area that was affected by the tsunami. Even though I experienced the earthquake in Tokyo on 3.11, my life returned to normal quite quickly. For the Kesen Junior High School children, life would never be the same again. Even today, five years later, many families are still suffering from housing, employment, and health issues that are the direct result of the disaster.

It's been important to me as a teacher and as a long-term resident of Japan to gain some awareness of these problems and to share my concerns with students and others. I believe strongly in the value of bringing social issues into the language classroom, but I sometimes feel that this practice can be somewhat sterile or distant from those issues. The Looking Back 3.11 translation project was one of those rare occasions where I could feel practically as well as emotionally connected with the people in the Rikuzentakata area who were affected by 3.11 and its aftermath, as well as with my

students, including Natsumi, who agreed to translate their words and their feelings. For me, this has been a high point in my career as a teacher. To other SIG members who may be considering doing projects with their students that aim to make a difference, I offer my warmest encouragement.



Looking Back: This Past Year After the Earthquake

震災のあったこの1年を振りかえって

<http://lookingback311.wix.com/start>