Learning Together With an Extraordinary Community of Educators in Non-State Education in Burma/Myanmar[1]

ビルマ・ミャンマーでの非国家教育での特別な教育者
コミュニティーと共に学ぶ

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Abstract
In this article we focus on what we have learnt from doing teacher education workshops in Burma/Myanmar with an inspiring group of trainers of trainers working in non-state education (aka non-formal education). These trainers are active in monastic schools and education and development NGOs. In this article we trace the development of our involvement in these workshops and explore how we have come to understand the "active reflective learning" approach that we take as a process of working towards a creative sense of critical literacy rather than purely skills training. Specifically we consider the complex but minimum scaffolds we used for different workshops and also look at questions of multilingualism in such in-service education.

要旨
本稿では、ビルマ・ミャンマーで非国家教育（別称：ノン・フォーマル教育）に携わる革新的な指導者グループと一緒に行った教員教育のワークショップ実施体験から得られたことを論じる。この指導者グループは、修道院学校、教育、NGO の開発に意欲的に取り組んでいる。本稿では、ワークショップでの私たちの関わり方の変化を追い、単なるスキルトレーニングではなく、批判的リテラシーの創造的な感覚育成を目指し取り組む過程である「アクティブ・リフレクティブ・ラーニング」のアプローチをどのようにして理解するに至ったかを探究する。特に、様々なワークショップで用いた複雑だが最小限に留めた足場かけの在り方を考え、現職教員養成における多言語主義に関する論点についても考察する。

Keywords
non-state education in Burma/Myanmar, teacher education, active reflective learning, critical literacy, creativity　ビルマ/ミャンマーの非国家教育、教師教育、アクティブ・リフレクティブ・ラーニング、批判的リテラシー、創造力

Introduction

Our presentation in the Learner Development forum at JALT2015 focused on what we had learned from running a week of teacher education workshops in Yangon in March 2015 with an inspiring group of trainers working in non-state education (aka non-formal education). They are active in education and development NGOs and monastic schools in Burma/Myanmar, and a large part of their work involves training trainers and teachers, working across the basic education and secondary curriculum[2] (not just in English education), doing vocational training, and running projects with trainers and teachers from local communities, often in rural areas where basic education resources (both human and material) and access to education are limited. The trainers work in Burmese and local languages; they also use English for personal and professional purposes, drafting project proposals in English for donor organisations, writing reports in English too, and meeting

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[1] The name of the country is contested in English. The previous military regime changed the name of the country from "Burma" to "Myanmar" without consulting the people about this change. For this reason many English-speaking Burmese (including Aung San Suu Kyi) prefer to use "Burma" rather than "Myanmar" in English. In the rest of this article we use "Burma" to refer to the country, although we also recognize that ミャンマー is commonly used in Japanese.

[2] As of 2016, basic education means five years in primary school, four years in middle school, and two years in high school.

with international organisations to present and discuss their work.

Non-state education in Burma strives to address the needs of the large numbers of children who do not complete primary or secondary education. UNICEF figures for 2012 suggest that only 75% of children complete primary education in Burma, with around 50% of children enrolling in secondary school (UNICEF, 2013). Children in Burma may take non-state education for different reasons, and these reasons point to wider social conditions that impact directly on the work of trainers and teachers in non-state education. First, children's families may not be able to afford to pay for school uniforms, materials or other costs that participation in state education involves. On the other hand, parents may not believe education is necessary, and/or the children may need to work to help their family survive. In some cases this means that the children cannot attend school regularly, and have time for their education only after completing several hours work in the day. Another reason is that the children in non-state education may have been internally displaced because of conflict, land-grabs[3], or natural disasters. It is possible too that ethnic minority children struggle with Burmese as the medium of instruction and consequently drop out of school. Parents may also send their children away from areas at risk of violence or conflict so that they grow up safely and can complete their basic education. Those children that do not get a regular basic education are often exposed to situations of great vulnerability (e.g., violence, trafficking, poor diet, drugs, HIV/AIDS, child labour, to name but some of the many threats that they may face).

We learnt a tremendous amount from working with these trainers and understanding the work that they do, and the communities that they work with. In this short paper, we trace the development of our involvement in these workshops and explore how we have come to understand "sustainable teacher education" as a process of working towards a creative sense of critical literacy rather than purely skills training.

Learning With Others to Develop the Workshop Approach

Our involvement in these workshops has come from becoming more and more familiar over several years with the work that different civil society organisations do in Burma, particularly those working on grassroots non-state education issues in post-Nargis Burma.[4] In the summer of 2010, Andy had the opportunity to interview Su Su Lwin, the founder of an education NGO working on a Child-Centred Approach (CCA) for non-state education and producing low-cost recyclable learning materials (Barfield, 2012). In August 2012 Bill Mboutsiadis and Andy observed several trainer of trainer (ToT) workshops in Yangon for developing CCA for non-state education. They also learnt about the trainers' local contexts, the work they did, and their interest in developing their English for personal and professional purposes. Further discussions took place with different individuals in Yangon, including Aye Aye Tun, a child rights specialist working on grassroots education development projects in Burma, who was instrumental in making arrangements for Joe Tomei and Andy to conduct two initial weeklong workshop programmes in March 2013 and May 2014 (Barfield & Tomei, 2012, 2013).

Although these first workshop programmes had a strong focus on English skills development, the trainers that Andy and Joe worked with were not simply concerned with English education. We wondered how we might move the focus of the workshops beyond English skills training and connect directly to the wider social issues that the trainers and their local communities

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[3] A 2015 report by Global Witness, Guns, Cronies and Crops, provides details about land confiscation by different powerful groups in Burma. It claims: "By 2013, 5.3 million acres of land - 35 times the size of Myanmar's capital Yangon - had been leased to investors for agriculture. More than a quarter of this total is now covered by rubber plantations." For more details see Global Witness (2015). See also Myanmar Times (22 December 2015) for a more recent mass media update.

[4] Cyclone Nargis struck on May 2 2008 killing more than 140,000 people in the Irrawaddy Delta area. In the absence of a government response (Human Rights Watch, 2010), civil society organisations (CSOs) stepped forward to provide humanitarian assistance. Many CSOs greatly expanded their activities as a result.

Andy and Jenny agreed to team up for the March 2015 Yangon workshop programme.

Active Reflective Learning, Multimodality, and Voice

Our Learner Development forum presentation-display at JALT2015 introduced the trainers and their working contexts, as well as workshop themes and activity sequences, which we worked with in March 2015. We focused on life skills, critical thinking, personal English development, and producing low-cost materials, taking water issues as a main content area. Water issues are central to communities in Burma, and for local people water supply, hygiene, safety, and shortages are fundamental matters of health, survival, and development. We used a number of different activities around water issues, some of which are shown in Figures 1 to 3 below.

Figure 1 shows three trainers sorting around 50 water images into groups and deciding what issue each group of images involves. In Figure 2 a pair of trainers are doing a vocabulary-building activity where they organise water vocabulary into a chain, whereas Figure 3 illustrates how pairs later practised making a proposal for a water) project in stages by placing key point cards on the floor and then walking and talking through their ideas. In these activities the materials are low-cost, featuring locally relevant content, with ideas and vocabulary generated by the participants themselves. The activities are also physically interactive.
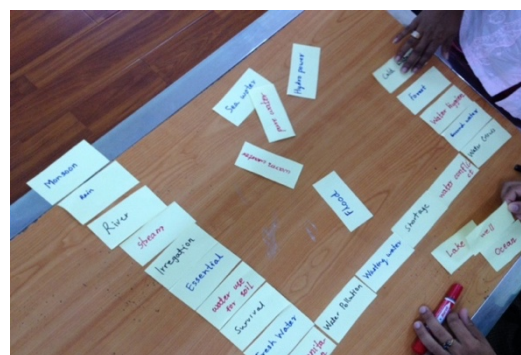
Figure 1.   Water Issue Categorisation and Labelling (March 2015 Workshops).

were dealing with. In 2014 Andy and Joe started to introduce a focus on life skills and experimented with taking pollution and transport issues in Yangon as a theme for some activities. These changes also struck a chord with Jenny who had done several skills-focused teacher training workshops in Vietnam from 2010 to 2013 and who similarly wanted to try to make such teacher education work more developmental, appropriate, and relevant to local participants' experiences and needs. The three of us discussed these questions at the 2014 Pan SIG Conference where Andy and Joe presented on their work in Burma (Barfield & Tomei, 2014). To extend our understanding, we drew further on work done in the UK on critical literacy, citizenship, and teacher education (Andreotti & Warwick, 2007; Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice, undated; Warwick, 2008) and looked at the case made for critical thinking training for "NGO field staff" and "developing country professionals" (e.g., Foley, 2008; Richmond, 2007). With Joe facing many other outreach commitments,

Figure 2.   Water Issue Vocabulary Sorting and Chaining (March 2015 Workshops)

the week (see Figure 4).

Figure 3.   Stepping Through Ideas for) Water Project Proposal (March 2015 Workshops)

Figure 4.   Posters Presenting Participants' Development (March 2015 Workshops).

The trainers we worked with all brought a wealth of knowledge and expertise from their lived experiences. It was important for us to see them as the experts for their contexts, communities, and the society they live and work in. We were there to learn together from them, and with them, and help them develop their English, critical thinking, and life skills by engaging in different whole-person activities during the week. From this the participants created relevant and appropriate materials for their educational/training needs.

The workshops were *active* in that they involved pair, small- and whole-group activities and collaboration, as well as working with pictures, movement, mime and drama, story telling, and discussion. The workshops also had a strong *reflective* dimension in as much as participants were frequently asked to share their experiences and those of the communities they worked with. They regularly reflected on their development, using learner diaries/journal entries, as well as mind-maps and drawings, to document their reflections.

The forum display provided examples of this active reflective learning approach and featured photos of different activities and artefacts, including some highly colourful posters that the trainers had created to show their development and learning over

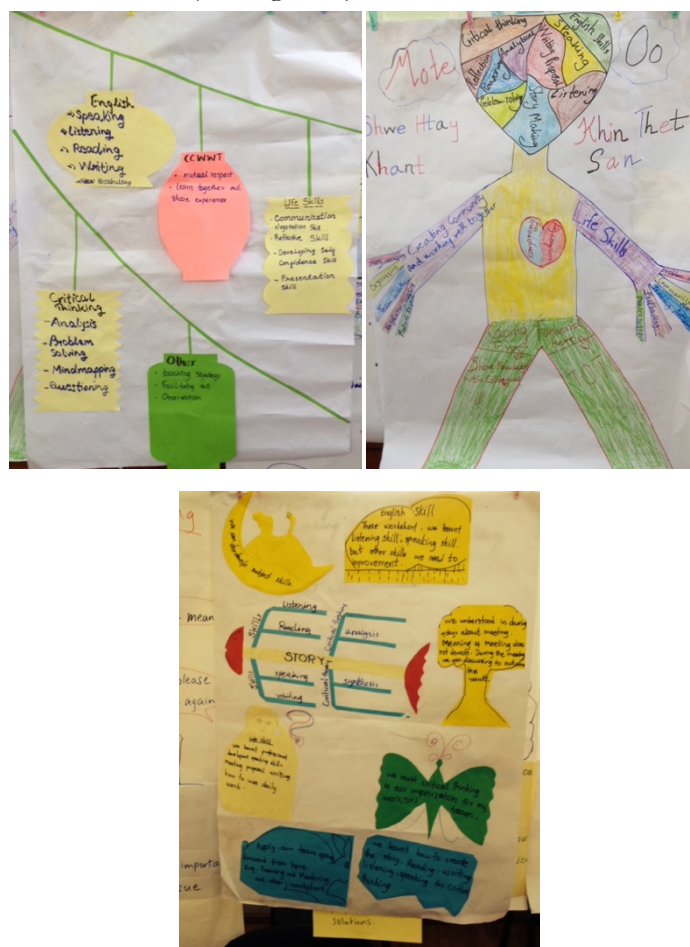What was interesting for LD forum participants at JALT2015 was not only the striking visual metaphors that the trainers used, but also the imaginative and powerful combination of colour in the way they voiced their development.

Puzzles for the March 2016 Programme

Thinking over the discussions that we had during and after the LD forum helped us to crystalize our understanding as we started planning for a new week of workshops for March 2016. We decided to put the primary focus on societal issues (language, environment, sustainable development, democracy) and have a secondary focus on processes and skills (critical thinking, creativity, life skills, and personal English development). This raised new questions about developing our workshop approach.

For reasons of space, we focus here on

the following puzzles. How could we fine-tune the minimum but complex scaffold for the March 2016 workshops? In what ways could we foster critical literacy without becoming lost in written texts? And how might we draw on the work on multilingual histories and practices that the Learner Development SIG's guest at JALT2015, Alice Chik, had presented on and that resonated so strongly for us with a range of social, educational, and political issues in Burma, a richly ethnically and linguistically diverse society where Burmanization[5] has long been a contentious issue? We continue by exploring these puzzles in relation to the workshops that we conducted in March 2016 with a new group of 19 trainers.

Exploring the "minimum but complex scaffold" puzzle

In response to our post-forum summary on the LD website, Alison Stewart asked us about what we meant by a "minimum but complex scaffold" for the workshops. Discussing Alison's question encouraged us to articulate more explicitly the frame that we used for the March 2016 workshops. On one level, we set up activities with minimum explicit teaching and maximum sharing of participants' ideas and experiences in order to engage participants as fully as possible. On another level, "minimum but complex scaffold" includes for us now a more explicit sense of "theorisation from experience." In the workshops in March 2016, with the greater primary focus on content, we attended not only to the "experiential flow" from one activity to the next, but also to the opportunities for participants to theorise from their experiences and develop a critical perspective on the socio-political issues that they were dealing with.

To take an example, when we introduced sustainable development as a theme for the third day, we briefly demonstrated brainstorming ideas, issues and words to do with sustainable development, then asked the participants to do the same in pairs, before they talked about what sustainable development means for them, sharing examples from their own experiences and communities. Later, we asked the participants to discuss what they thought their or their communities' priority needs for sustainable development were, and consider in what ways these ideas might be different from official views of sustainable development (e.g., the government, funding bodies, donors, the UN), and why.

In the next part of the workshop we gave to each pair a set of cards with icons of half of the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) on them (see United Nations Sustainable Development, undated). Pairs then discussed and added in English or Burmese key words and phrases to label each of the eight "official" goals that they had (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.   Labelling Official SDGs and Creating New Ones (March 2016 Workshops).

Next, one member of each pair gathered their pair's cards together and moved to a person who had been working on the other SDGs. Each new pair now pooled their

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[5]   A recent political history of Burma puts Burmanisation in this way: "…the generals ordered that Burmese was to be the sole language used and taught throughout the entire country's school system, effectively denying all the ethnic groups in the union of Burma the right to use, teach or learn their own language. This, more than anything, made language the central battleground of Burmanisation, the insistence that in this country of at least one hundred different languages, including at least three distinct language families (Tibeto-Burman, Mon-Khmer, and Tai), everyone had to use only Burmese." (Cockett, 2015, p. 80)

knowledge together before we guided them towards a critical view by asking them to consider these questions:

* What matches/doesn't match with your own experiences and communities?
* What's missing?
* What voices, issues, goals need to be included and heard?

From these discussions pairs created 2-3 new SDGs based on their experiences, communities, and local needs. These drawings were collected and displayed on a shared "Community Resource Poster" with the title "Making Visible Our Sustainable Development Goals."

Figure 6 further below shows four of the many new SDGs that the group created ("Value religious diversity," "Reducing corruption," "No discrimination against all types of disabilities," and "[Access to proper] toilet[s for everyone]").
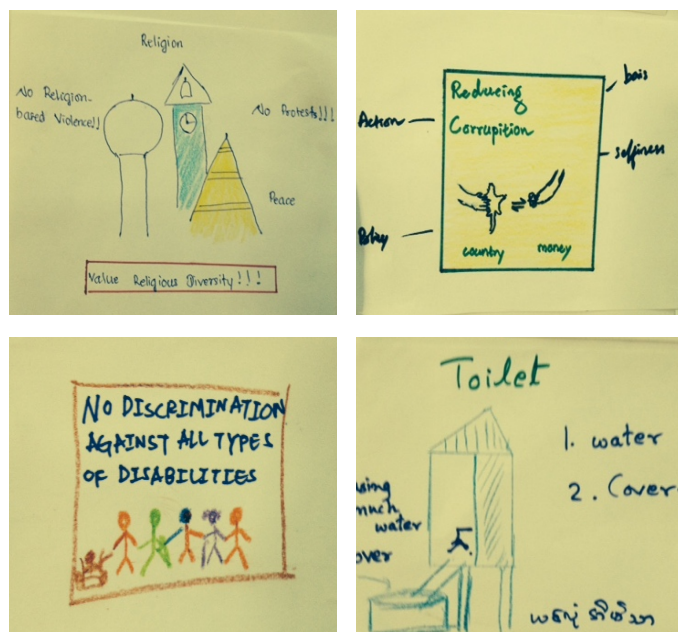

Figure 6. Participants' New Sustainable Development Goals (March 2016 Workshops).

In the two afternoon workshops on the same day the trainers worked in groups of three to create unscripted 3-scene dramas (some in Burmese, others in English, still others mixing Burmese, English and a local language) on a sustainable development issues of their choice, where we asked them

to present a critical view of the issue to raise public awareness. They also put together a poster-pamphlet in English that included three critical questions about that issue for audience discussion, and, later, three tweets of around 40 words or so based on their discussions with the audience. The pamphlets and tweets were also intended to raise public awareness further and were later put up in the room as a "Community Public Awareness Corner" for everyone to view and discuss informally.

Comments such as the following indicate how the participants responded to being asked to draw directly on their own experiences, connect their workshop activities and discussions with their local communities and wider societal issues, and form a critical perspective:

In the past I did not use to think critically though I had attended RWCT training.[6] It was concerned a lot with the text. But here I had to think critically and had to link the environment with my own experiences. This helped us to reflect on ourselves. In our society people dare not think out of the boundaries. They are afraid of the change. We do not link the ideas that we have got from our lessons with our own community. After attending the workshop I learnt more about thinking skills. I come to know how to think and how to make others think. If we don't think critically, what is our brain for?

This trainer's reflection not only foregrounds their personal experience and transformation, but also shows how power constrains individuals' thinking and capacity for social change.

As mentioned earlier, we were deliberately working without written texts as input. Instead, we used images as primary resources, all the while trying to develop critical literacy. Talking with each other, and with the participants too, as we moved to and fro between the experiential and the socio-political, helped us to find our way together towards a critical pedagogy appropriate to

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[6] This refers to Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) training courses run by the Thinking Classroom

Foundation in Burma. For more details see http://www.thinkingclassroom.org/about.html

the community that we were working with.[7]

Exploring multilingual identities and practices

Our second puzzle is connected to our discussions at JALT2015 about Alice Chik's work on visualizing multilingual histories and practices. Both of us were inspired by the drawings that Alice showed in her first workshop, and we thought it would be fundamentally interesting to ask participants in the March 2016 to create portraits of themselves as multilingual language users, particularly on the first day, as they were getting to know each other. We wondered how we might broaden things from the individual to the social, and frame a more critical discussion. We knew that the trainers were coming from Yangon, Mandalay, Shan state, Kachin state, the Ayeyarwady delta area, and Mon state. This was a much greater mix than in previous years. What we were not prepared for, though, was the astounding range of social resources that this group had in the languages that they knew, and which emerged as they talked about and then drew themselves as multilingual language users.

Two examples illustrate this richness. Figure 7 shows the language portrait of a young trainer from Mon state in the south of Burma. Yellow embodies his use of Mon (with family, himself, relatives, work, friends, life, learning). Pink represents his use of Burmese (himself, friends, work, life, learning), while black is connected to his use of English (himself, friends, work, life, learning) and green is for Thai (fun/pleasure with friends, life).

The commentary in his notebook reads:

Language are more than a tool for communication. They help us to connect ourselves with our own selves, with smaller local communities, and larger global community. As a Mon-speaking person, I feel that's Mon language that assists me in relating myself to the Mon community where my families, relatives, friends and colleagues belong. Similarly Burmese enables me to connect with the Burmese-speaking community, where myself, my other friends and fellow citizens are comprised of.
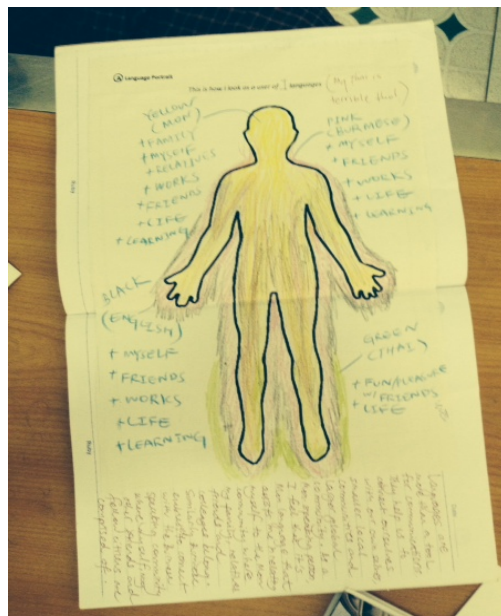

Figure 7.   Mon User Multilingual Language Portrait.

Living multilingually is integral to his connections with different communities in Burma, but Mon, a minority language, appears to embody for him a stronger force in creating identity and social cohesion. This is a very different sense of language as an enabling social resource from the oppressive effects of Burmanisation.

Figure 8 further below shows the language portrait of a trainer from Shan state. The languages that she includes are Burmese, English, Chinese, Shan, Korean, and Indian. Her notebook commentary read:

Burmese is my mother tongue. I feel comfortable whenever I use this language. English is my profession. I have to learn much about that. It can promote my career.

The picture shows that she sees languages as in her head, where different languages take up different spaces. Interestingly, her commentary positions her use of Burmese in relation to English: Whereas Burmese is a "natural" unreflexive part of herself, English has a particular instrumental value for her work.

To move the perspective towards a wider, more critical discussion of language issues in society, we later asked participants to look through pictures of languages in

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[7] This may be close to what Smyth calls "community capacity building" (Smyth, 2011).
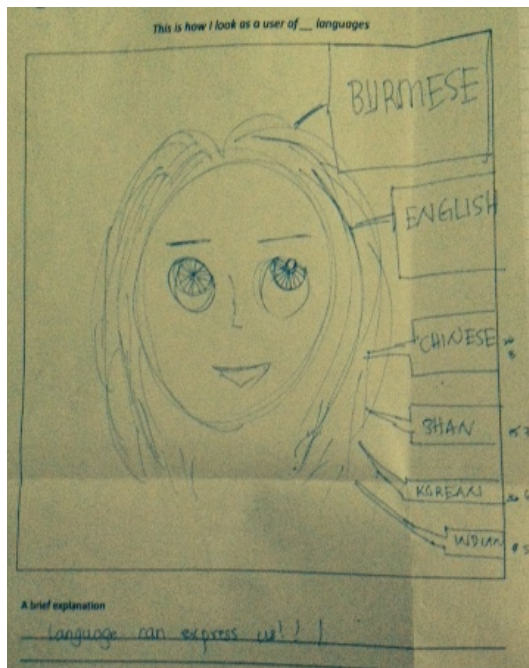
Figure 8.   Burmese User Multilingual Language Portrait.

different contexts of use in Burma and label them with key words and phrases (shops signs, adverts, classrooms, newspapers and magazines, dictionaries on smart phones, street names, language learning resources, internet cafés, and so on) and discuss: What languages people have access to in public spaces; which languages are visible and invisible, and by extension, which users are included or excluded, as well as what languages have official status, and which languages are considered valuable or not, and by whom, and why. These discussions led in the final part of the first day to the participants creating short two-minute "public awareness" role-plays in groups of three in which they presented a critical issue of multilingual language use in society.

The participants also wrote reflections in their notebooks, which led one trainer to comment:

Burmese is my mother tongue, English is my second language, and it makes me active in my work. I also want to study about Japanese and Manipuri, which is a small ethnic group from the border of India. For Japanese I want to study because I have a lot of Japanese friends. If I speak Japanese, I can communicate with them very well. For Manipuri my grandparents come from India. As a family member I should learn about Manipuri language.

What we find interesting about this reflection—apart from the high number of languages in her everyday life—is how the writer's life and family embody many different aspects of the history of modern Burma. Her commentary also underlines the agency that the trainers showed in their multilingual language development and use.

Continuing Puzzles

In tracing our learning about doing in-service teacher education workshops for trainers of trainers in non-state education in Burma, we have explored in this article how the focus of the workshops moved from English skills training in the initial two years to a stronger focus in 2015 and 2016 on societal issues that impinge on the trainers' work with their local communities. We have also become more concerned with exploring how to work multimodally on the development of critical literacy. This shift in focus to development and critical literacy over (English) skills training alone is not total. During other workshops in March 2016 we spent time on skills like "active listening" and "mindmapping," for example. We also included several life skills clinics in the week's programme, which, for reasons of space, we have not dealt with here. In Yangon, we talked with the participants about why we put issues ahead of skills, and why we thought it was important to have focus on critical thinking/critical literacy. We wanted to find out what they made of this change in emphasis. In these discussions we explained that we were interested in nurturing sustainable development for trainers. This, we thought, largely depended on individuals making a "change from within" in relation to their changing critical understanding of themselves, and their position to their work, their communities, and society. In conversation with a couple of the trainers in a small-group discussion in one of the life-skills clinics, one of the trainers observed, "Yes, we are too busy doing skills training to have time for our own development." We cannot say whether we have completely resolved the tension between training and development, but we understand more and more that it is not so useful to think in terms

of a binary between "training" and "development." It is much more a multiplicity that we see ourselves exploring in working creatively towards critical literacy. This is one of the significant puzzles that we are interested in continuing to explore.

We have learnt with, and from, many people in doing these workshops, and we continue to learn a great deal from each other. At the Learner Development Forum in JALT2016 we looked to what we had learned in relation to our own teaching and development in Japan; in this article we have tried to explore more closely our learning with the community of educators in Burma and share more prominently our Burmese colleagues' voices, experiences, and critical views. We hope this exploration has let readers start to get to know this extraordinary group of professionals, as well as leads to widening discussions and collaboration.

Acknowledgments

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