

appropriate for Storytime? How much of an accent is acceptable? What level of intonation?

On the one hand, Storytime is a free offering to the public; on the other hand, the presentation quality in Storytime is important to me. Storytime is not primarily meant to be a forum for students practicing English; rather, as expressed earlier, it is an opportunity for children to hear English books and songs spoken by native and expert English speakers. With the three students who participated in November, I definitely feel that goal was met. However, with lower-level students, I think the quality of the Storytime experience could be compromised.

A final issue on my mind is the actual value of the Storytime Project for the children and parents who attend. One of the students who participated in November mentioned that "It is a little strange to read English books, because the children do not speak English." I understood the comment. Though Storytime is not completely monolingual (i.e., using Japanese sometimes is encouraged), it is true that some of the children who come to Storytime do not speak much English, and they probably do not completely understand the stories that are read. Some of the children do not (or perhaps cannot) sing along with the songs. What value are they gaining from Storytime? Are their parents forcing them to attend for the wrong reasons? Obviously, I cannot definitively answer these questions. However, I continue thinking about how I can make Storytime as accessible and interesting as possible to the children attending, while also generally maintaining the use of English and the goal of exposing children to the sounds of English through children's books and songs.

Conclusion

I am looking forward to another year of English Storytime events. My thanks again to the Learner Development SIG for seeing value in the project and for supporting it. If

anyone lives in the Nishinomiya area and would be interested in being involved with the Storytime project, please contact me.

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Reflections on and Takeaways from JALT 2016

JALT2016 の振り返りと学び

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The theme of this year's JALT conference was transformation in language education, with the goal being to explore the transformative power of education from many vantage points. Looking through the conference handbook, I was thrilled to see some of the biggest names in the field of language teaching and research as well as many presentations related to how computer technology can transform the way language is taught and learnt. The use of technology in language learning and teaching is of special interest to me, so I felt like a kid about to enter a huge candy store. What a golden feeling!

I am delighted to report on how the conference has affected my development as a language learner and teacher-researcher. For me, the main takeaways from the conference were collaborative action research, digital teaching/learning tools, and secrets of transformation in language education in Japan.

Collaborative Action Research

I began the weekend with Professor Anne Burns' plenary titled *Transforming the Shape of the Way We Work*. Burns, of the University of New South Wales (Australia), is most well known for her work introducing teachers to the excitement and usefulness of

doing collaborative action research (AR) in their particular teaching contexts. Her reader-friendly book, *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching* (2010), has been used by language teacher-researchers worldwide, and helped guide my own master's dissertation project which, incidentally, I presented at the University of Birmingham's Graduate Student Showcase at JALT2016. In her plenary, Burns discussed different shades of the meaning of transformation and how we can change the shape of what we do in several different ways. For example, by introducing changes to our practices of language learning and teaching, and improving the way we interact with our colleagues and learners through doing collaborative AR. She talked about the basic steps in AR: Plan, Action, Observe and Reflect (see Figure 1).

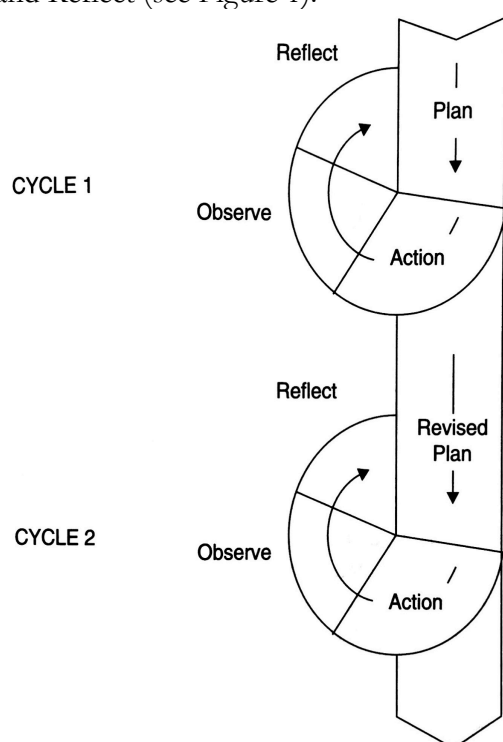


Figure 1. Cyclical AR model based on Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).

For me, the takeaway message from her talk was an encouraging reminder that carrying out AR is a practical and methodical way for teachers to continually and collaboratively strive to deal with common issues and improve teaching practices. Her talk refreshed my fond memories of carrying out the AR cycle, and it made me feel empowered to continue with my efforts to

improve interactions and learning outcomes through doing collaborative AR in my current university teaching contexts. It also encouraged me to seek out further opportunities to share with others with a view to recognizing and crystallizing the most important aspects of the AR I have already completed and the AR I am currently working on.

One such opportunity presented itself while participating in Burns' practice-oriented workshop called *Transformation in your Classroom: What Works?* on Sunday. In this workshop, Burns guided participants in sharing how we are transforming or intending to transform our classrooms, teaching, and how we work with learners. One of the very "hot" issues discussed in my group was the transformative power of educational technology and how it can indeed help to engage students, promote learner development, and facilitate the creation of effective and efficient opportunities for learning. I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to share with my group members about my successful experiences using online learning/teaching tools to engage students and train them in language learning strategies which help them develop their English vocabulary efficiently and effectively.

Digital Learning/Teaching Tools

One of the Saturday afternoon poster presentations that immediately attracted my attention was *Websites & Apps that will Change your Classroom* by Erin Morris

and Herman Bartelan of Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages. Their poster presented a wide-ranging list of websites and apps in categories of all skills, speaking & listening, reading & writing, vocabulary, and miscellaneous. For me, one of the key points to be remembered came from a conversation with Morris in which I asked



her which one of the foremost online vocabulary learning tools listed on her poster she thought is more useful, Quizlet or Memrise. Her response was that she finds Memrise, which I had not used much before the conference, particularly useful. Shortly after the conference, I had another go at using Memrise to study Japanese vocabulary and I am pleased to say that I have since become captivated by Memrise's user-friendliness and usefulness. I am now steadily and efficiently learning new Japanese vocabulary at a remarkably high rate of retention and progress toward my goal of acing the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (N2: upper-intermediate level) this coming July. I find Memrise's mobile app for iPhone especially brilliantly designed and easy-to-use. What I have learned firsthand is that Memrise's recipe for effortless learning comprises several simple ingredients, one of which is science which involves giving our brains just the right workout by continuous choreographed testing and adaptive "spaced repetition" of what we've learned at scientifically optimized times so our memories of new words are always growing stronger, and never forgotten. Another ingredient is fun, which involves turning learning language into a compelling, competitive game where we grow a colorful garden of memory; planting the seeds of new words and nurturing them through reviews and tests until they grow strong, take root and blossom into flowers in our long-term memory. I now plan to create my own multimedia flashcard courses and introduce Memrise to my students as supplementary material to be used alongside textbook materials, and as a very useful tool to help them achieve their language learning goals such as getting a high score on the TOEIC test. To learn more about Memrise (and sign up—it's totally free), go to www.memrise.com and enjoy learning more!

Another one of the poster presentations that particularly appealed to me was *Transforming Vocabulary Learning with Quizlet* by Brent Wright of Kanazawa Institute of

Technology. Wright presented his research project in which he aimed to enable his students to experience how easy it is to make digital flashcards and thus motivate them to use Quizlet to study vocabulary autonomously and effectively. In his project, he attempted to measure not only the amount of time it took his university students to make 20 English-Japanese flashcards using Quizlet with smartphones, but also the accuracy of the flashcards they created. His findings were that the average completion time of 7 minutes 50 seconds was a reasonably low burden to students, and that accuracy may be an issue that can be addressed by, for example, having students check each other's work using Quizlet's built-in audio to check how words on their word cards sound. The key idea for me was that it is certainly worth training students to make their own word card sets with Quizlet in class, especially as they can check each other's work using Quizlet's excellent audio feature.



Quizlet is undoubtedly a very popular tool among language teachers. This was shown by the large number of other JALT2016 presentations showing how it can transform the way vocabulary is studied. Among these presentations was a workshop called *Quizlet: The Optimum Digital Flashcard Tool* by Bruce Lander of Matsuyama University. Lander introduced some of Quizlet's newest features, such as the collaborative team-based classroom game "Quizlet Live," which requires participants to work together to correctly match the target words and definitions of a Quizlet set. Quizlet Live is, by all accounts, now taking the world by storm (Wolff, 2016). I have also experienced great and rapid success in introducing Quizlet Live in my own classrooms, having received overwhelmingly positive feedback on it from my students over the past several months. The most memorable experience for me from Lander's workshop was playing a very enjoyable game of Quizlet Live for

the first time from a student's perspective using our smartphones. This experience strengthened my resolve to continue using Quizlet Live and other Quizlet activities to make lessons more enjoyable for students.

Lander also encouraged us to attend the JALTCALL 2017 conference that will be held in Matsuyama in June, inspiring me to not only attend the conference but also give presentations to share my successful experiences promoting active learning and learner development through computer-assisted language learning, especially using Quizlet.



Among other key digital takeaways, of particular note is how Google Docs can transform student writing. In his poster session titled *Transform*

Student Writing with Google Docs, Nick Boyes of Nagoya University of Foreign Studies explained that Google Docs, which is a free web-based word processing software, can be used to foster collaboration and autonomy among students. With proper support from a teacher, Google Docs allows students to quickly and easily share their written work with their peers and give each other immediate, personalized error-correction feedback, working together on the same document at the same time. As an added anxiety-reducing bonus, we never have to hit "save" again, as all of our changes are automatically saved as we type.

Secrets of Transformation in Language Education in Japan

In their presentation called *Transforming Teacher Development*, Chuck Sandy, Barbara Sakamoto, and John Fanselow of International Teacher Development Institute (iTDi) led a thought-provoking discussion about our beliefs about language teaching and learning. Fanselow reminded us of Socrates' wise words on ignorance: "True knowledge exists in knowing that you know nothing." Indeed, these wise words

prompted me to reflect on my ignorance and seek out other nuggets of Socrates' wisdom, one of which I found is especially relevant here: "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new." For me, then, an additional and crucial takeaway from JALT2016 was a renewed focus of all of my energy on "building the new," with a view to furthering collaborative action research and making further use of innovative digital teaching/learning tools, especially Memrise, Quizlet, and Google's suite of productivity apps.

One other secret of transformation is of special importance and relevance here. In his presentation titled *The Power of the Senpai*, David Barker of BTB Press explained from past experience that there is no use trying to fight against Japanese university students' tendency to observe hierarchies, as Japanese society places strong emphasis on hierarchy, and the senpai/kohai relationship is a powerful example of this: the senpai (senior or older student) may even have more influence on the kohai (junior or younger student) than the sensei (teacher). It is therefore advisable for us teachers to try and harness the power of senpai/kohai relationships in order to transform our classes into more cohesive and supportive learner groups. To harness the "power of the senpai," I plan on trying to get to know my university students more deeply by participating in more of their extracurricular activities, creating more opportunities for them to learn about each other in class, and structuring in-class activities in culturally sensitive ways that make use of the natural dynamics of the Japanese classroom. For example, it has been suggested that certain group members can be assigned specific roles such as "leader" to coordinate a discussion, "secretary" to record group decisions, and "spokesperson" to report back to the class (Anderson, 1993, p. 108).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I received a great deal of takeaways, handouts, inspiration, and

encouragement at JALT2016. As a result, I am encouraged to keep striving to transform myself into a better learner, a better teacher-researcher, a more supportive colleague, a more successful materials creator, and a more productive citizen of Japan and the world.

I encourage everyone to participate in the JALT International Conference in the future. The conference allows participants a venue for meeting experts in the field, learning about new research, ideas, and materials, networking, learning about graduate study at many top graduate level TESOL programs, transforming yourself, and building your career. There was such a wide range of excellent workshops and presentations, the hard part was deciding which to attend because there were often several interesting events being held concurrently. Overall, most of the presentations I attended were very practical.

As the grateful recipient of the JALT2016 International Conference Grant, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Learner Development Special Interest Group (LD SIG) for awarding me the grant and making my journey to attend and present at the conference in Nagoya possible. It is thanks to the LD SIG grant that I had such a valuable experience at the conference, so I am deeply grateful to all LD SIG team members, especially Jim Ronald who posted information about the grant and tagged me through Facebook, thus encouraging me to join the SIG and apply for the grant in the first place. I am incredibly thankful to be a member of such a supportive, well-developed group, and I strongly recommend that other eligible LD SIG members (or soon-to-be members) can and should apply for LD SIG grants of interest to them. Finally, I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Arnold Arao and Yoko Sakurai for their valuable advice and comments on this report. I am also particularly grateful to Aaron Sponseller, Philip Head and Jim Ronald for their great help with proofreading / copyediting.

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