

REFLECTIONS

Reflections on Creating Community: Learning Together 3 (CCLT3)

コミュニティの創造：共に学ぶ3（CCLT3）を振り返って

Overview

Creating Community: Learning Together (CCLT) is an informal afternoon Learner Development SIG conference taking place each December in Tokyo. The event acts as the final Tokyo get-together of the year, and both teachers and their students take part. CCLT3 took place in December 2016. Thirty-four students and 30 teachers attended, and by all accounts everybody had a very enjoyable afternoon—inspiring presentations and convivial discussions, with many different LD SIG members leading the reflection circles after each of the three rounds of presentations.

Here Jenny Morgan, Mitsui Hirano, and Debjani Ray share their reflections on what they learned from taking part in CCLT3. Jenny reflects on how presenting at CCLT3 and talking with participants enabled her to develop her understanding of questions to do with creativity and criticality, as well as explore how learners and teachers may engage with important social and global issues in different ways. Jenny's reflections are followed by "Studying Makes Your Prospects Brilliant" by Mitsui Hirano, a student presenter at CCLT3, who reports on her autonomy-nurturing experiences of attending a "free school" in Japan. Debjani Ray closes the set with "Participating in CCLT3: A Sense of Achievement" by looking at the benefits that CCLT3 offers to student and teacher participants who take part together, share, and connect.

CCLT4 will be taking place in December this year, and you are very welcome to take part with your students. More details will follow in the coming months.

「コミュニティの創造：共に学ぶ(CCLT)」は、毎年12月に東京で開かれる学習者ディベロプメント研究部会のインフォーマルな研究会である。

この研究会はTokyo get-togetherの年度末の会合も兼ねており、教師だけではなく学生も参加している。2016年3月に開かれた第3回目の研究会では、34名の学生と30名の教師が参加し有意義な集まりとなった。CCLT3では、プレゼンテーションが3ラウンド行われ、刺激的なプレゼンテーションとともにその後に行われた活発なディスカッションを通して、参加者は様々なメンバーと振り返りの時間を持つことができた。

次に、CCLT3に参加したJenny Morgan、Mitsui Hirano、Debjani Rayの3名によるリフレクションを紹介する。まず、JennyはCCLT3での発表と参加者との対話が、課題についての創造的かつ批判的な理解をいかに構築する。



Reflections about Co-creating Criticality and Creativity in Learning and Teaching

Jenny Morgan

Wayo Women's University, Chiba

At the third annual *Creating Community Learning Together (CCLT3)* mini-conference hosted by the Tokyo LD SIG (December 2016), the number of student participants outnumbered the teachers! This was inspiring to see as it reflects the motivation by learners to take up opportunities to present their research and/or reflections on their learning to a community of peers which includes both students and teachers. I picked up many useful ideas and materials from all the presentations I was able to see, and enjoyed lively conversations with various learners and teachers throughout the afternoon.

Unfortunately, none of my students in my two global issues seminar classes was able to commit time to preparing and giving presentations, but with their permission and collaboration I was able to share their research work, reflections and final reports in my presentation. My presentation focused on issues of criticality and creativity in a

learner-negotiated syllabus for a global issues content based, seminar-style course. Two students worked on creating our poster presentation with me: Using a honeycomb pattern for the poster, we wanted to show the interconnectedness of the learning that happened in our class. In the past, I have tended to view and map syllabus design and learning stages in a *linear* fashion. Of course, some parts of learning are necessarily step-by-step, but I more clearly understand learning-teaching to be interconnected, where deep knowledge building and skills development aren't linear.

In the first class, the students brainstormed various global/social issues they wanted to discuss and learn about in our course, as well as ways (activities, skills, research tasks) they could use to achieve this. Then, we mapped a fifteen-week plan with assessment breakdown. I suggested a certain order of themes to help the learning be interconnected and accumulative, and not merely random. So, in terms of themes, our natural starting point was looking at and sharing about "identities", "communities", "societies." Then, a focus on "gender" aimed to prioritise the realities of these young women students; we felt "diversity" to logically extend the knowledge and

Co-creating learning in a global issues content-based course...



... through learner research, reflections and reports

experiences of (gender) discrimination, empowerment, and the reality and value of diversity in our lives. Research and learning about diverse “social-change makers and heroic individuals” nicely broadened out to “organisations and NGOs working for social-change.” For their final projects students chose their own research topics, which were connected to themes we had already explored together.

While working with content, learners carried out activities which required them to engage more critically and creatively with social/global issues; learners did not just have to research and *describe* a social problem, but also activities/prompts guided them to take an *interpretative* view and a *critical* view when they gathered their information, images, and opinions. Regular reflection writing along-side Internet research, out-of-class interviews, peer-share discussions, creating visual materials for their presentations, and writing their final reports all jigsawed together to help my learners to develop their critical understanding of content, and to understand their research processes better (unpublished data).

One of my goals for CCLT3 was to find out from attendees what critical questions might foster criticality in global issues content-based classes. I invited CCLT3 attendees to write on “post-its” any critical questions they use in their classes to get their learners thinking and exploring issues more deeply. Thank you so much to everyone for sharing and writing their ideas! I gathered many rich questions and prompts for me to take into my classes in 2017.

WHAT QUESTIONS CAN HELP
LEARNERS/YOU WORK TOWARDS
CREATIVITY AND CRITICALITY
WHILE ENGAGING WITH
IMPORTANT GLOBAL/SOCIAL
ISSUES?

- How are you/we connected to this issue?
- Who benefits and who doesn't benefit from this situation?
- EMOTION - how did/do you feel about this (issue)?

- What communities/groups do you belong to now? How do these communities help shape your identity?
- Which groups/communities would you like to join or learn about in the future?
- What slogans, quotations, sayings can you find about this issue? Which are the most interesting for you? Why?
- Find images of different kinds of (diversity) in Japan or other places- write sentences using the prompts for 'three ways of seeing, thinking and questioning' (factual, interpretative and critical views).
- Have students create a survey and find out about attitudes towards their topic on campus. Can their research help understanding/change attitudes?
- What NGOs are doing campaigns on this issue? Why?
- Do you think you could live as ____? Why/why not?
- Environment!!!
- How would you feel if this was you?
- What do other people think? Find out. Do you agree with them?
- Imagine if you were faced with ____, what would you do?
- How would you feel if you had to be ____?
- Imagine/reflect on...you are one of the actors.
- Nicole Gallagher described a roleplay activity where there is a 'lay-judge' and the class engages with agree/disagree stances on an issue. The learners first read some case-studies/stories of different actors.

Re-reading the “post-its” now in January has helped me reconnect with the presentations I enjoyed in December. For example, Dexter Da Silva commented and reminded me about allowing space in the classroom for “EMOTION—how did/do you feel about this (issue)?” Some of the presenters in Round 1 (Dexter Da Silva, Nicole Gallagher, Wakana Sakai, and Yurie Ogura) emphasized the importance of psychological literacy in learning, emotions, and imagination/creativity in communicative competence. I found these presentations particularly refreshing as I am often worrying with my students too much about the academic-intellectual side of language learning and knowledge building. It's good to be reminded how essential the *affective and psychological* aspects of learning-teaching are for sustaining motivation for learning,

developing the whole person, and simply having fun while communicating with other people in the classroom.

The other goal I had for CCLT3 was to talk with many students whose stories I could then share with my own learners. I had interesting conversations with Yusei Ando about learner goal-setting and teachers' roles in supporting learners to set their own goals. He then emphasized the importance for learners to regularly evaluate and adjust these goals throughout a learning cycle. I was very impressed with the quality of research and presentations by three Chuo students, Katsuyuki Tsutumi, Keito Imai, and Kohaku Kawada, who visited Myanmar last summer with Andy Barfield. The students' perspectives as young adults on connecting with local university peers, Burmese teacher trainers, NGO workers, and local business owners offered me a unique insight into important issues facing this emerging nation, issues related to education, gender, ethnic minorities, and micro-finance. This is important background learning for me as I also visit Myanmar in spring to participate in teacher development workshops.

I appreciated talking with Shinobu Nakamura about her extensive reading (ER) project at her university's self-access centre (SAC). Her research showed that by increasing their pleasure reading of graded readers, students developed their vocabulary and confidence communicating in English. All too often, I tend to let ER fall by the wayside due to time constraints when planning my syllabi, but now after hearing the successes of ER at Shinobu's SAC, I'm definitely going to ensure all my communication English freshmen classes get introduced to graded readers early on in their study. At Wayo, I think it'll be enjoyable and motivating for them to aim towards some kind of vocabulary target (with prizes), and to measure their progress at the end of a semester (thanks, Shinobu!).

I was very much inspired by Caroline Kocel's PowerPoint presentation about her research trips to Yap, FSM. Caroline's

journey as a *reflexive* researcher resonated with me as it is largely through asking myself questions and writing reflections in my research journal that I can make sense of my own research processes for writing up data analysis, for understanding the literature, and applying any findings/theories to enrich my teaching-learning approaches; also, in guiding my research students in their own reflection writing and growth as researchers. Caroline's presentation offered a small view into some of the ways that these resilient island communities are facing the challenges of climate-change caused by industrial nations, through environmental education and efforts towards food sovereignty. Caroline shared some photos and thought-provoking visualisations of the "organization and management of learning environments" for environmental education. These powerful visual analyses revealed various elements of learning and pedagogy related to *power* in a classroom, and pose questions about whether the learning-teaching approaches are *participant-driven* (learner-driven) or outsider-driven? Do educational approaches value the participants' lived experiences and existing knowledge about their natural environments and how they sustain local knowledge? Is the learning contextualised, is it co-created, etc? Finally, we discussed the need for *participant-driven* research, meaning that any research projects must have "value-added" benefits to the participants not just the researcher. These were all valuable questions and reminders for me in my EFL teaching in Japan, and also for working effectively alongside teacher trainers in Burma/Myanmar.

Thank you again to the CCLT3 conference team and all the participants. I enjoyed the relaxed, collegial atmosphere, meeting old and new friends, eating the festive treats, and taking away much to reflect on for the coming teaching-learning year.

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Studying Makes Your Prospects Brilliant

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It was a great honor to be a part of the conference and to share my experience and my ideas with everyone. Also, it was a great opportunity for me to think about English education in Japan because I'm taking the educational course at my university. I talked with the participants about why students seldom have the chance to speak English and to state their own thoughts in English class, and also confirmed what teachers can do to give them motivation and confidence through English study. I learned a lot through the discussions. I think this experience will be helpful and useful for my upcoming teacher training and that motivated me to study English more.

“What comes to your mind when you hear the words *free school*?” When I asked this question, most of the Japanese people at the conference didn't know what free school meant. That showed me the current situation of free school in Japan. “Free school” is a unique school based on diversity and flexibility. In my presentation, I talked about how I changed my motivation and attitude to learning through free school. I was so glad to see that the participants showed deep interest in this kind of unique school.

I started to go to free school when I was in my fourth year in elementary school. It was very different from public and private schools. My free school consisted of elementary to high school classes, with the number of the students being nearly 30, all studying the curricula the Government has set in Japanese. Because of the small school, you can have a deep relationship with both students and teachers and learn how to get along with each other in this community. In addition, my school has several great characteristics. For example, you can make

your own class schedule depending on your needs and sometimes you can study on a one-to-one basis. Also, you have lots of chances to meet people from all over the world. You can learn the importance of respecting individual personalities and building relationship with handicapped people and people with different backgrounds.

On the other hand, there are some problems in free school. Currently, it is not recognized as an official educational institution by the government. Because of this, the students who are in elementary and junior high must be enrolled in regular school because of compulsory education. This means that there is not enough cooperation with regular schools and nearby communities. As for my free school, it is mainly funded by school fees and supporting membership donations, so it is hard to manage the school.

However, I think everything I experienced in free school was meaningful and helped to shape my personality. I realized that learning is not for gaining knowledge, but for finding possibilities through your school life. Also, I learned that learning builds your confidence. I believe these things motivate you to continue to push forward even if you face difficulties.

I strongly hope that people in Japan will know more about free schools and the society will be open to accept various ways of education such as free schools.



Participating in CCLT3: A Sense of Achievement

Debjani Ray

Tokyo University of Science

The varied and unique content of CCLT Conferences, where teachers and students present side by side, is very attractive for me. Due to other

commitments, I was there for only the latter part of CCLT3, so I missed much of it, which I regret, but during Round 3, I managed to see two full presentations that I would like to reflect on here.

The first was by a group of students of Political Science and Economics from Meiji University, Tokyo, who presented on a communicative game, called Husky Race, which they described as “brain-friendly.” They also played the game with several participants. In the game, players need to follow some rules: first, players are required to find answers to a list of clues given about some interesting areas of a city or town; the players then go to the places physically and at each place they need to take photos with some landmark as proof that they will later use in a presentation on those places. A few teams are meant to play the game at the same time and to compete with each other. Each team must try to do the race in the shortest possible time.

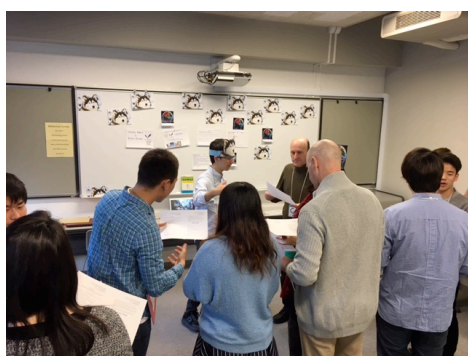


Figure 1. Students playing in “Husky Race”

My impression was that the clues, written in English, were all well thought out and that the game gave ample opportunities of exercise that helped in improving the performance of the brain (Ratey & Manning, 2015). The game combines movement with content and makes students actively and effectively engaged in learning which emphasizes the use of the target language throughout the game. The problem solving involved in this game helps in the essential part of the team-building process through brainstorming and sharing ideas and knowledge. It also enhances co-operation and collaboration within the team and gives

plenty of opportunities for improving comprehension and communication skills, so that motivated students use the target language during the game, which in turn will improve their language skills. This game facilitates learning of a variety of processes, which makes taking part interesting and enjoyable and leads to improved outcomes.

My only concern is that there might be some conflict with the school authorities about using this game at school as the students would have to go to different places without any supervision. Other questions I had are about judging the time used in the game as class time or free time, how much of class time can be spent outside the class and school unsupervised and how much of students’ free time can be directed to be used for an activity for school. This could provide the impetus for a debate about using this particular game in the class. Overall, the game was very interesting, and the students did a wonderful job presenting and playing it with the visitors to their display. Their teacher, Yoko Morimoto, was also present there and helped the students whenever required, but without interfering in any way.

The other presentation that I spent time at was by Jenny Morgan, of Wayo Women’s University, Tokyo. It was on a content-based course dealing with global issues while focusing on encouraging students with limited proficiency of English. The course tried to enhance engagement, understanding, and critical thinking on prominent global issues. The main learning goals for the seminar-style course were developing the skills for critical thinking, opinion making, discussion-developing, researching, and finally, presenting on some chosen global issues. There were some class materials for viewing as well as some learner products, such as journal entries and research reports. The attractive poster used in the presentation provided the major steps of the process, essential information about the project and displayed the outcomes. The nicely organized materials made the logical sequence clear. With its right amount of

font and graphics, restrained use of colours, the self-explanatory poster became a motivational message itself.

Jenny explained how it had been a “challenging puzzle” for her to engage the students with limited English in a meaningful and critical discussion on important social issues. The students worked on a variety of difficult themes such as diversity, social change makers, and gender issues. Jenny also talked about how she guided the students through three levels: seeing, thinking, and questioning, to develop criticality and help them build the necessary vocabulary. She also taught them to research various sources, to choose appropriate topics, to do discussions and peer-share discussions. Finally, the students learned how to write reflections that they shared with each other in class. Then they wrote reports on their research and presented these to their peers, too. As the presenter stated, it was “co-creating” learning.

There were class materials and examples of reflections written by students on display for attendees to look through. One of them was a homework assignment sheet on social change makers. Students needed to go through a series of multiple-choice questions that set them thinking about social change makers and then focusing on one person of their choice. They could choose from a page of pictures of world-famous heroes from different countries from a variety of fields. To help them in doing this, the presenter produced a worksheet using mindmaps to teach them note-taking skills. It was for the students to fill in the blank mindmap after conducting a research on something or someone and in case they did not know or find all the answers, they were allowed to guess or “imagine” them. There were questions to lead the students towards the right direction, for example, why they are a good role model or hero, and how she/he made a difference to people’s lives. There was also a guide for writing reflections. The students needed to write reflections on their partner’s presentations

on global issues. To guide the students through the steps towards writing proper reflections, the sheet contained questions, multiple choice questions, and supportive statements.

As a teacher myself, I know the hardships when dealing with students with limited English, and it takes no imagination to understand how hard it might be to teach and explain difficult topics of global issues to them. I thought that the presentation was very insightful. The presenter led the viewers smoothly through her challenging journey with the students. At the end of the project when the students learned some new social issues and made their presentations successfully, it finally became enjoyable and rewarding for the students and satisfying for the teacher. Specifically, the class materials caught my attention. They were meticulously created with the mission of supporting the students. The example student products indicated that the class materials undoubtedly enhanced the students’ understanding of the complexity of the content and, at the same time, facilitated their language learning.

It was my second time to participate in a CCLT conference: the first time was as a presenter and this time as a viewer. Generally speaking, it is a well-organized conference with a variety of presentations on many different topics and the interactive opening and closing plenary sessions. Its unique quality is having reflection circles after each round of presentations where both the presenters and the viewers can take part together, share, and connect. That is how it creates a sense of achievement for everyone present as people can learn from each other and learn together. And that is also how, in my opinion, this conference stays true to its title.

Reference

Ratey, J. J., & Manning R. (2015). *Go wild: Eat fat, run free, be social, and follow evolution's other rules for total health and well-being*. London: Little, Brown Book Group.

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