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Reflecting on PanSIG 2025: Reflective Activities—Past Experience, Concepts from the Literature, and New Directions

The Japan Association of Language Teachers' (JALT) PanSIG conference, held annually in May, offers excellent opportunities to reconnect with colleagues from around Japan, and to learn about ongoing research projects that people are involved in. The 2025 conference was no exception. That the conference is held mid-May gives teachers timely inspiration as they enter into the second half of the spring semester. For me personally, the PanSIG presented a chance to revisit ideas associated with student reflection and learner autonomy. Specifically, preparing for the conference provided the impetus to explore concepts more deeply before embarking on writing a practice-based review of Curry, Lyon, and Mynard's (2023) book, *Promoting Reflection on Language Learning*. In this short reflection, I look back on the poster presentation that I did as part of the Learner Development SIG Forum at the conference in order to share some key points about that talk with the reader, and to spark interest in discussion-based reflective activities.

My interest in reflective practices stems from a long-standing focus on learner autonomy, which stretches back to the beginning of my teaching career. Early on, I realized that language learning needs to extend beyond the classroom. Thus setting our students on a path that allows them to continue learning independently became a component of each class that I teach. The importance of reflection in this process is highlighted by Little, Dam, and Legenhausen (2017), who state that, "it is impossible to take charge of one's learning without reflecting on what that entails, and it is impossible to reflect on one's learning without in some sense taking charge" (p. 14).

Therefore, to support students in reflecting on their learning, I have them do short weekly writings at the end of each class period. A goal of doing these kinds of reflections is for students to begin to consider ways that they can develop as language learners. For example, they can acknowledge problem areas and consider strategies for improvement. Beyond this, an additional goal while reflecting is for students to identify moments of enjoyment in their language learning. This point is important as foreign language learning enjoyment (FLLE) has been linked to increased motivation and can lead to both improved resilience against burnout as well as long term gains in language learning (Song, 2024; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

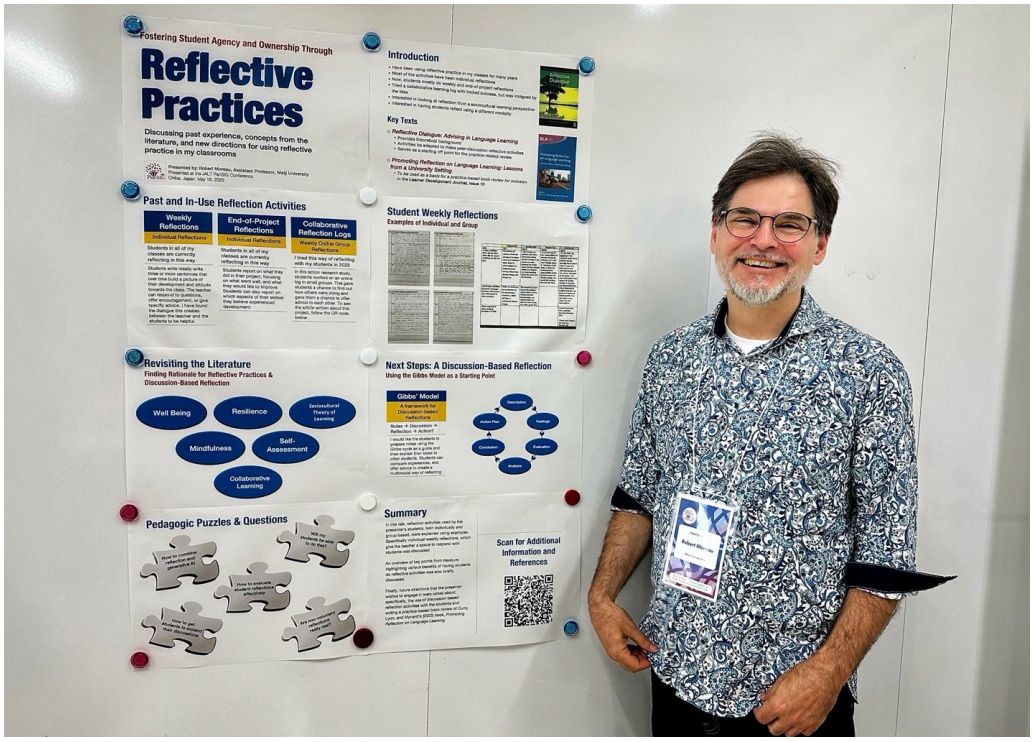
Thus, for my weekly reflection activities, I give guidance, which consists of prompts and questions to guide their responses. However, even with these prompts, I find that the students' writing generally ranges from mainly summarizing what was covered in class, to only occasionally identifying areas of interest regarding what they learned. On rare occasions, students write ideas for facilitating self-improvement. Recognizing the limitations of this system, I began to look for new ways of having the students engage in more effective reflective practices. I also became interested in ways of better evaluating their reflections. This line of research led me towards gathering the information that I presented at the PanSIG 2025 conference.

The start of my preparations came last year, when I was recommended the book *Reflective Dialogue, Advising in Language Learning* by Kato and Mynard (2016). The book has examples of diagnostic activities, which I used to get students talking about their learning. One example of this kind of activity was a simple graphic organizer that students could use to indicate and discuss times when they felt motivated in their language learning. The book also described various frameworks for reflection including the six-stage Gibbs (1988) framework. I thought that this framework was quite logically organized and would give the students a basis for meaningful conversations about their learning. After years of having students do short, written self-reflections, I was intrigued by the idea of having student-to-student discussions around reflection as a tool for development. As stated by Kato and Mynard (2016), "reflection through dialogue can offer more opportunities for transformatory learning, which the process of self-reflection cannot easily reach (p. 6). I realized that students are not trained language advisors, but the opportunity to share learning experiences, and to give advice based on what they learned from those experiences, seemed to have the potential to be a useful activity for the students.

At the time of the PanSIG conference, I had not yet introduced the activity, based on Gibbs (1988) into my classroom. Thus, for my presentation, the activity was merely described. While I cannot explain every detail in this short reflective report, a brief outline can be helpful. Each week an A4 worksheet was handed out for homework. One side of the sheet consists of six boxes in which students could make key-point memo style notes with which they could share their ideas with a partner in the next class. Each box on the worksheet corresponded to each of the six stages of the Gibbs (1988) framework. In brief, the stages are; a description of the activity the students did, their feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and ideas for future actions. The other side of the sheet has a series of questions that correspond to each of the six categories. These can be used by students to help guide them in their note taking for the activity. The questions can also be used in the oral portion of the activity to facilitate discussion. As the reflection activity was introduced in a general study skills class, I allowed the students to choose a learning experience from any class that they were currently taking. Although the above paragraph gives only a brief overview, the activity will be discussed in greater detail in my upcoming practice-based review of *Promoting Reflection on Language Learning*.

A second focus of my PanSIG 2025 presentation explored the relationship between reflection, well-being, and resilience. This was particularly interesting for me as I had not previously considered the connection between these ideas and reflective practices. One particular study that became a main focus of my talk was by Al-Rashidi and Aberash (2024), who reported improved academic resilience and well-being in their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students after they had engaged in self-evaluation and reflective activities. The authors of the study attribute this to learning "how to consider the most effective approaches for accomplishing learning objectives" (p. 18). This study helped to broaden my understanding of reflective practices and also prompted my interest in self-evaluation activities, which I will consider using at a future time.

Overall, PanSIG 2025 provided an excellent opportunity to discuss my explorations into reflective practices, and to learn from the work of others. Also, the chance to explain an activity I was developing at the time was an excellent opportunity to consider ways to both improve and smoothly implement the activity into the classroom. For me, one of the key takeaways from the PanSIG was the reminder that exchanging ideas with colleagues can help to generate new directions for both research and classroom practices. The spirit of camaraderie at PanSIG can also provide some much-needed inspiration for teachers, especially at busy times in the semester, or while undertaking various research projects. Going forward, I plan to build on what I gained from the conference and continue to refine the reflection activities I use to support my students' overall growth as life-long learners.



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From Paperless to Paper-lite: My Move Away From Digital-Only Materials

I was grateful for the opportunity to share my recent teaching puzzle at the LD forum at PanSIG 2025. For some time, I had been debating whether to continue using an exclusively digital format to manage my university courses or, in light of recent technological developments and emerging evidence of the benefits of analog learning tools, to return to making and carrying paper copies of my materials to class. I was encouraged by the insightful comments from other LD SIG members about my poster and the strong sense of connection and community that I experienced.

After years of managing all assignments and feedback digitally, at first on learning management systems and then over the various tools that took off during the pandemic, I have begun to reconsider the wisdom of conducting everything online. Although I'm not particularly tech savvy, I tried to adopt digital tools in my courses for the purpose of organizing student work and streamlining class discussions. Knowing that in many of my classes students would revert to Japanese as soon as I turned away from their group, I gradually added simple summary assignments (written or recorded) collected over digital channels to our classroom routines. Over time, I came to appreciate these tools for reasons such as those shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Benefits to using digital tools in my university English classes

I'm **organized**; giving digital feedback means never forgetting or misplacing student assignments.
Students can access the instructions anywhere to work **flexibly** and easily submit assignments.
I can survey students and show their responses on the classroom screen during **real-time interactions.**
Applications such as Microsoft Teams provide a common space where students can **collaborate asynchronously.**
I can demonstrate my respect for and **compliance with Sustainable Development Goals.**
Digital tools can be used to **scaffold learning of productive skills** (AI voiceover applications for video projects, voice-to-text word processing for pronunciation work and/or grammar and spelling support, editing tools within Microsoft Word, etc.).
Students learn valuable, **transferable skills** (word processing, editing audio and video files, providing feedback via written comments, creating questionnaires, making charts and graphs, formatting citations in APA, etc.).
I can model personal responsibility and healthy skepticism regarding **tech safety.**

In EFL contexts, digital tools can be used to support student learning in creative ways. Poore (2016) suggests ways to incorporate social media into classroom activities, stressing that "[t]he trick is to design teaching and learning tasks that demand deep, considered engagement with a topic, as opposed to surface occupation with a technology or tool" (p. 7). Several studies about using digital tools to promote the production of multimodal texts have been published. For example, Stewart's (2023) project to use social media tools to build digital portfolios allowed young ESL learners to bring their out-of-classroom writing skills to expressive meaning making assignments, allowing

them to focus on the writing process itself and its potential for communicating in a broad, more open-ended manner than typical school assignments. Dahlstrom's (2021) exploration of using computers to scaffold ESL student production of multimodal digital-storytelling texts regarding concepts they were still learning demonstrates the usefulness of such alternate assignments to prepare students for the contemporary context where written text is being overtaken by visual expressions. Thus, when approached with a commitment to reflection, digital tools can and do support the teaching/learning process both practically as a communication/organization tool and pedagogically as tools which support research-backed strategies for scaffolding the language teaching/learning process.

However, there were unanticipated drawbacks to my system. A few years ago, I encountered Paulus and Lester's (2022) work on digital workflows. Their explanation of various theories of technology informed my increasingly critical approach to digital tools in terms of personal agency. Through their work, I learned about Gibson's affordance theory (1979) which deals with how material objects are situated in sociocultural contexts and Fox and Alldred's (2015) idea of how the research process can be framed as an assemblage of the researcher, material things, ideas, and abstractions, thereby decentering human agency. As Paulus and Lester (2022) extended this concept, "Reflexivity as a practice can be framed not only from the perspective of the researcher but also from the perspective of the tools themselves" (p. 11). It took me some time to wrap my head around the idea that in classroom assemblages participants and material tools split agency, a concept I always took for granted as implying conscious aims and, therefore, belonging squarely in the human domain. However, it became obvious that these tools we take for granted as our digital servants are neither neutral nor fully under our control—the affordances of the tools exert control over what we do and change how we do it. With these new ideas, I formed my list of drawbacks (Table 2).

Table 2. Disadvantages ofdigital tools in my teaching/learning context

Students' access to digital tools and digital literacy is mediated by a variety of factors related to their **background and life experiences**.
When students' **computers break**, alternative channels must be set up which can result in embarrassment and additional stress.
Refusing or unable to carry laptops to class, **some students insist on using smart phones** resulting in downward-looking posture/device held close to their faces that interferes with meaningful interaction with their surroundings.
A substantial and growing body of research (a prominent voice being Haidt, 2024) shows that increasing reliance on and addiction to digital devices is producing **dire consequences for youth mental health** (particularly in English-speaking countries).
Emerging research consistently demonstrates the **relative disadvantages of screen-based learning** and e-books and the benefits of taking notes by hand and reading paper books for the retention of learning material.

Since all classroom assemblages will be slightly different, I distilled some basic principles for considering the place of digital tools in my context. I hope that these takeaways will help other instructors in their own reflection.

First, I believe it is vital to center interpersonal communication and build classroom activities around meaningful interaction. The tools should serve the purpose of communication and we should retain as much control as possible over the production and interpretation of messages. To that end, if too much valuable time will be lost to setting up, learning, and troubleshooting digital tools, I choose analog methods. It is also important to ask whether the technology lowers or raises existing barriers to participation. Sometimes simpler is better. Sometimes tactile, embodied learning experiences are preferable.

Next, I recommend considering the scaffolding capabilities for the tools within each task. Would tools that students may use in the future improve the product and/or process for the language learning task? If tools such as AI-produced voiceovers, genAI, and audio/video editing software, among others, will enhance the communicative process in a significant way, it is worth spending time teaching, learning, and using the tools. Negotiating the process of learning the tools can also result in trust-building and language learning.

Finally, monitoring and responding to student engagement is a must throughout. Being prepared to switch to analog methods in a pinch and having contingency plans in mind if the technology proves to be a burden does require extra attention and planning. However, if students start to behave in ways that inhibit communication, such as by retreating into their devices or "finishing" tasks suspiciously early, I can better manage my own frustration levels and simply redirect students to more productive tasks.

I was glad for the opportunity to present in the PanSIG Forum and exchange ideas with other members about the role technology does and should play in our classrooms. It was encouraging to hear how other LD SIG members have approached this puzzle, particularly as technology encroaches more on our workflows. I especially look forward to continuing this discussion about how to help our learners develop in the new digital world presented by the spread of genAI.

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