CUE CIRCULAR

News and articles from the JALT College and University Educators Special Interest Group

Hokusei Gakuen University, Sapporo   *Photo by Glen Hill*

Winter greetings

Welcome to the fourteenth issue of the *CUE Circular*. As the CUE SIG publications chair, I am pleased to announce that this issue has four types of articles for your reading pleasure, unlike the one type we started out with in 2016 when CC premiered. In addition to a regular pedagogical article, we have two interviews of veteran teachers, and two new installments. Richard Ingham breaks ground on our first ELT101 section to review the lexical approach. And Erika Tavesa provides us with our first student-written article in From the Student's Seat. Thanks, as well, to Tosh Tachino for recapping the CUE ELT Symposium from September. Dig in!

Glen Hill, Editor

Table of contents

CUE SIG ESP Symposium Report

Summary of the ESP Symposium

Tosh Tachino

This year's CUE ESP Symposium took place on September 21 in Morioka, co-hosted by the Iwate-Aomori chapter and Iwate University.

The two plenary presentations introduced the participants to the field of ESP, and their talks were not only thoughtful and well-grounded but also accessible and practical. Mellisa Ogasawara and Chris Horne's presentation emphasized the importance of a needs analysis. Then, they guided us through the process of conducting a need analysis. Then they provided step-by-step instructions on how to construct an ESP class. Leigh McDowell focused on English for research publication purposes (ERPP), and his presentation covered both research and practice. He walked through the major developments in the field and provided a crash course on how to teach an ERPP course in case anyone is suddenly called upon to teach one.

Some poster presentations were directly linked to the plenary presentations, while others dealt with other aspects of ESP. But what was unique about this symposium was that its size afforded tailored presentations to the audience's interests and extended discussions. Indeed, the morning poster session extended into the lunch hour, and people were still talking an hour later.

The local Iwate-Aomori chapter made a lot of effort to create a "homey" atmosphere, and at one point Chris Horne commented how comfortable it felt to speak to this audience at his plenary speech. Homebaked goods were a fine touch to accentuate this atmosphere, and Kathryin Akasaka should be singled out for her superb cookies, chocolate cakes, banana bread, and biscottis. The feedback from the participants indicates they were happy with this collaborative event, and they want to see more of it in the future.

Feature Article

Reflections on the beginning of the semester

Soren Leaver, Seinan Gakuin University

Soren Leaver has lived in Fukuoka for over 15 years, and enjoys exploring blended learning in language education.
sorenz01@yahoo.com

No matter how well prepared I imagine myself to be, the whirlwind of activity that accompanies the first semester of the year always catches me off guard. The bustle of meeting new students and adjusting to new classrooms underscores the inevitable rust that accumulates over the holiday break.

Amidst the flurry of activity, I aim to lay down a sturdy foundation that will carry my students and me through the inevitable highs and lows ahead. Alongside the logistical tasks that I need to perform, I also prioritize less tangible aspects of the teaching process in the hopes that they will pay dividends over the semester.

The following reflections include three suggestions for teachers in similar circumstances. While navigating the challenges of a new semester can be intimidating, reflecting on our experiences can yield valuable insights that help us grow as educators and better support our students and ourselves.

Building rapport and showing interest

During the opening week of oral communication or four-skill oriented courses, I often use the second half of the class for self-introductions. To accomplish this, I begin by asking students to write answers to two questions in each section of this self-introduction questionnaire:

1.   Basic Information
What is your name?
What city were you born in?
What is your part-time job?

2.   Hobbies and Interests
What do you like to do in your free time?
What are your hobbies/interests?
Do you play any sports or musical instruments?

3.   Family and Friends
Do you have any brothers or sisters?
What jobs do your parents do?
What is your best friend's personality?

4.   Education
What do you like about this university?
What subjects do you like or dislike?
What are your future academic goals?

5.   Travel
Have you traveled to any other countries or cities?
Where would you like to go in the future?
Why do you want to visit those places?

6. Favorite Things
What is your favorite food?
What is your favorite movie or TV show?
What is your favorite type of music?

Next, I pair students randomly and ask them to either deliver their self-introductions or conduct interviews with each other, utilizing the worksheet. This activity is designed to ease students into the class by engaging them with English questions they are likely to have encountered in their previous EFL studies. Additionally, it aims to foster camaraderie between students and reduce the anxiety of being in a new class. Then, I step into the hallway for ten minutes to allow them space to connect with their partners independently. After completing this part of the task, students select four of their original twelve answers and prepare for a second self-introduction. I've noticed that many students who are waiting tend to practice what they plan to say to me. If they're not doing that, they're likely getting to know their partner, which also helps build rapport. When ready, they come into the hallway and using their worksheet as a guide, introduce themselves again—this time to me. By allowing students to approach me at their own pace (that is, with their own choice of introduction statements), I aim to communicate that participation is something they take initiative in. This approach also helps me gauge their independent capabilities and serves as a form of initial assessment. Additionally, this one-on-one interaction is intended to convey my recognition of each student as an individual, rather than just another face in the crowd.

Physical proximity is another element of the first week that I consider when cultivating rapport. Over time, I've noticed that in classrooms when there are more seats than students, there's a common tendency for students to choose seats farthest from the teacher initially, likely as a coping mechanism for anxiety. However, I believe this approach delays the development of rapport and, in larger classrooms, can make it difficult for the teacher to hear students clearly. Consequently, I ask students to choose seats in the half of the classroom nearest to me.

Participation style
Each class consists of individuals with varying levels of language ability and self-confidence. As the semester advances, these differences can either enhance or impede their engagement. The first few weeks seem to be a time when students evaluate the costs and benefits of participating, shaped by their personal identity as learners and their relationships with the teacher and their peers.

I begin semesters by observing the manner in which students answer my questions. During our first textbook exercises, I pose questions to the class and wait to see how they respond. In some classes, students raise their hands to be called on, while in others, they feel more comfortable responding verbally without formal recognition. I recognize the importance of accommodating those who thrive in a more relaxed environment, so I try to infuse humor and levity into our interactions as often as possible.

During the initial weeks of the semester, it's not uncommon to hear whispered responses to my questions in front of the class, perhaps due to self-consciousness or a lack of awareness of voice volume. In such instances, I frequently respond to a whisper with a whisper, or I whisper the question, "Why are we whispering?". This invariably prompts laughter and helps cultivate a more light-hearted atmosphere. While understanding each class's preferred participation style and its impact on group dynamics may take time, I view it as a worthwhile way of encouraging future engagement.

Creating routines

Learning a foreign language is often like learning a new dance; it requires time and the courage to stumble in front of others. Establishing routines may help alleviate some of this anxiety (Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2015).

At the start of each class, I consistently administer a 15-minute quiz. This routine serves three basic purposes. First, it allows students to ease into the class alongside their peers without the pressure of speaking English. Second, it provides an opportunity for them to review the previous week's material. Third, it establishes an immediate sense of structure in the class, which can be reassuring. Carreiro and Townsend (1987) found that "attentional patterns associated with routines are often calming and regulating" (p. 109). Finally, this routine acts as a gatekeeper for chronically tardy students. By integrating a familiar routine into each lesson, students cultivate a sense of security and

structure, gain opportunities to review and contextualize previous classroom studies, and are held accountable for their participation.

As the semester unfolds and my classes develop, I frequently reflect on the effectiveness of the strategies I've employed. While factors like poor course design can hinder progress, I've found that other factors like building rapport, encouraging student engagement, and establishing routines significantly increases one's chances of success. By prioritizing these fundamentals from the start, a strong foundation of trust, collaboration, and study is established, supporting both the teacher and students in overcoming challenges that may arise throughout the semester.

References

Carreiro, P., & Townsend, S. (1987). Better ways to build educational routines. Part 1. Routines: Understanding their power. In D. Baine (Ed.), *Alternative futures for the education of students with severe disabilities. Proceedings of the conference on severe and multiple handicaps: Alternative futures* (pp. 108–110). Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED310559.pdf

Oga-Baldwin, W. L. Q., & Nakata, Y. (2015). Structure also supports autonomy: Measuring and defining autonomy-supportive teaching in Japanese elementary foreign language classes. *Japanese Psychological Research, 57*(3), 167–179. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpr.12077

ELT 101

The impact of the lexical approach

Richard Thomas Ingham, The British Council

Richard Thomas Ingham works for the British Council at a private university in Japan. His research interests include extensive listening, podcasting, and autonomy.
richard.ingham@britishcouncil.or.jp

More than thirty years have passed since the publication of Michael Lewis' seminal work *The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way Forward* in 1993. The book proved to be appealing to classroom teachers of English, in no small part due to Lewis' no-nonsense writing that was far removed from the opaque, inaccessible style of typical academic research. In the book, Lewis sought to influence the English teaching industry, and to alter teachers' perceptions of the way in which language should be taught. He was highly critical of the conventional grammar syllabuses often used in ELT textbooks, and was particularly dismissive of 'Presentation, Practice and Production' (PPP), the prevalent teaching methodology at the time. He believed that since language is not learnt in neat, convenient stages, a PPP approach wasted time on language patterns that took too long to master.

The main thrust of the Lexical Approach is that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar" (Lewis, 1993, p. vi). The Lexical Approach ignores the traditional separation of grammar and lexis, instead stating that real language often consists of multi-word prefabricated "chunks." Lewis distinguished between the following lexical items:

- Words (e.g., cat, pen)
- Polywords (e.g., by the way; bread and butter; the day after tomorrow)
- Collocations, or word partnerships (e.g., banking regulations; fast food; absolutely convinced)
- Fixed expressions (e.g., Good morning! How are you? I'm fine. And you? / Excuse me, could you tell me the way to …?)
- Semi-fixed expressions with slots to fill (e.g., Could you pass …, please? / Have you ever tried…?)

Lewis posited that when combined, these chunks produce continuous coherent language, with only a minority of sentences being completely unique creations. Native speakers were said to have a huge number of these prefabricated lexical chunks at their disposal, which were regarded as vital for fluent language production. Since the book's publication, a significant amount of evidence has emerged to validate Lewis's claims, with research suggesting that language acquisition involves storing

and retrieving prefabricated chunks, not just individual words (Schmitt, 2000). In fact, depending on the genre, it is estimated that up to 80% of native speaker English is based on such prefabricated patterns (Selivan, 2013).

It was Lewis's assertion, therefore, that teachers should guide learners to focus on these prefabricated chunks that make up language. Lewis felt that students would learn best in language rich classrooms and with language-rich materials. Since the Lexical Approach focuses on probable rather than possible language use, teachers were urged to seek out and use authentic materials where possible.

Instead of solely focusing on grammatical accuracy, the Lexical Approach stressed effective communication and the ability to convey meaning in various contexts. As an alternative to PPP, Lewis suggested an 'Observe, Hypothesize and Experiment' (OHE) cycle, believing that learners should be exposed to large quantities of input, in particular listening exercises at lower levels, with more focus on reading at higher levels. The exposure of students to enough natural language examples in the correct contexts would provide a lexical entry point into the grammar of the language. He felt that learners should be encouraged to collect a lot of examples of a particular structure before any kind of analysis was undertaken, and that grammar should be explored rather than explained. Although he was clear about the importance of lexis, stating that words carried more meaning than grammar, Lewis still recognized grammar's importance, remarking that his approach did not completely deny its value.

At the time of publication, the Lexical Approach was the cause of a significant amount of lively debate within the ELT industry, and it was not without its detractors. For example, Swan (2006) was critical, arguing that learners require context and grammatical patterns to help them acquire language. Lewis' ideas were also criticized in some quarters due to a lack of clear activities and examples, whilst failing to clarify exactly how the Observe - Hypothesize - Experiment cycle might work in the classroom.

Perhaps in response to these criticisms, Lewis published *Implementing the Lexical Approach* (1997), wherein he developed the theoretical position of the Lexical Approach. The book highlighted numerous activities that could be designed, or ways in which current textbooks could be adapted, to help learners improve their ability to acquire language chunks. The book focused more on what to do in class on a day-to-day basis, providing teachers with a more practical guide on how to implement the ideas from the Lexical Approach more effectively.

Since I first read *The Lexical Approach* five years ago, Lewis's ideas have impacted on my teaching in several ways. For example, I am less inclined to give complicated metalanguage-based grammar explanations, in favor of getting the learners to focus on meaning, and to actively consider how language is used in context. In addition, I have become much more inclined to help learners to notice common collocations in reading texts. As my current context uses a CLIL syllabus,

learners may be able to use these same collocations at a later stage in, for example, a thematically connected essay or debate. In listening classes I try to highlight language chunks and get students to personalize them by practicing them in a short speaking activity with a partner. Overall, whilst it is not desirable (or even possible) to teach an unlimited number of language chunks, I feel that encouraging learners to notice language patterns can aid fluency and guide learners towards more natural language use.

The Lexical Approach helped contribute towards a paradigm shift in English Language teaching, moving away from strict grammar instruction and rote learning, toward a more communicative and context-based approach. Teaching lexically, as advocated by Lewis, has become widely accepted amongst teachers, with lexical chunks, collocations, and fixed expressions becoming recognized as essential components in language proficiency.

In addition, many textbooks now often include pages with functional language and lists of common collocations and provide more of a focus on natural language, giving an indication of the impact of Lewis' ideas.

In summary, the Lexical Approach was a reaction to the perceived limitations of the in-vogue PPP methodology of the time. With its emphasis on vocabulary, collocations, and authentic language use, the Lexical Approach has had a lasting impact on language teaching

methodologies, helping to contribute to a more balanced and communicative approach in language classrooms. Although published more than twenty-five years ago, both *The Lexical Approach* and its companion piece, *Implementing The Lexical Approach* (1997) are two engaging and highly recommended resource books for all teachers, syllabus designers, and materials writers working within the ELT sphere.

References

Lewis, M. (1993). *The lexical approach.* Heinle ELT.

Lewis M. (1997). *Implementing the lexical approach.* Cengage ELT.

Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching.* Cambridge University Press

Selivan, L. (2013, March 26). Why has the lexical approach been so long in coming? *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/mar/26/leixical-approach-revolution

Swan, M. (2006). Chunks in the classroom: Let's not go overboard. *The Teacher Trainer, 20*(3), 5. https://mikeswan.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Chunks-in-the-classroom.pdf

From the Student's Seat

Practical activities of interaction and form-focused instruction in Japanese elementary students

Erika Tavesa, Temple University

Erika Tavesa attained her MSc in TESOL at Temple University in March 2024. She is academically interested in student engagement, with a focus on creating enjoyable and effective learning experiences.

etavesa@gmail.com

Learning a second language is becoming increasingly important in today's globalized world. In many countries, elementary school students are exposed to a second language in the classroom (Makropoulos, 2010; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). Japan, in keeping with this trend, has made English education mandatory from the fourth grade. However, I advocate for the implementation of English education at an earlier stage in Japan. With the increasing rate of globalization, it has become essential for Japanese to have a good command of English to do business, trade, and politics. Introducing English education at a younger age could better prepare Japanese students to meet these global demands. However, Ariyoshi (2019) found that Japan's current English language education system is considered ineffective due to its excessive emphasis on grammar and reading and the lack of opportunities for students to practice English conversation. To succeed in the international arena, he argued that Japanese students need to be able to communicate effectively in English, and the best way to achieve this may be providing them with more opportunities to practice speaking and listening skills in the classroom. In order to promote effective second language acquisition, I bring up how important it is to understand the role of the Interaction Hypothesis and form-focused instruction (FFI) in this context.

The Interaction Hypothesis (Long & Porter, 1985) suggests that language learners acquire language through interaction with others, and that negotiation of meaning is an important component of this process (Mackey, 1999). Long and Porter (1985) concluded that group work and interlanguage talk can enhance language learning by providing learners with opportunities for meaningful communication and interaction in the target language. Calderón et al (2011) suggested that children have a strong desire to communicate, and they learn language best through meaningful interactions where they can negotiate meaning and receive feedback. Therefore, the Interaction Hypothesis can be applied to elementary school students learning a second language. Because young children primarily acquire their first language through interaction with others, this

approach could also be effective for learning a second language.

In addition to interaction, FFI can also play an important role in promoting second language acquisition. Valeo & Spada (2016) explained that FFI involves teaching students about the grammatical structure of the language they are learning, with the goal of improving their accuracy and fluency. FFI may be effective for elementary students' second language acquisition because it helps them notice and become aware of the structure and rules of the target language, which can facilitate their acquisition of the language. By focusing on specific aspects of the language, such as grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation, students can develop a better understanding of how the language works, which can help them use it more accurately and appropriately (Calderón et al., 2011).

There are several ways to utilize principles from the Interaction Hypothesis and FFI for successful language acquisition. First, group work is a powerful tool to foster FFI and interaction. Group work allows students to practice their language skills and exchange ideas with each other, and it encourages cooperation and teamwork. Sato (2013) investigated the effectiveness of classroom interventions with peer interaction and corrective feedback and concluded that both interaction and feedback can positively impact learners' beliefs and thus enhance language learning outcomes. Examples of group work may include activities such as group discussions, where students can discuss a topic in small groups and share their ideas and perspectives with each other. This can help them practice their speaking and listening skills and also encourage collaboration and critical thinking. Another example is role-playing. Here, students can work in pairs or small groups to act out a scenario or a conversation. This can help them practice their speaking and listening skills and also develop their creativity and empathy. Lastly, activities such as Pictionary or charades are vocabulary games that encourage students to work in teams. This can help them practice their vocabulary and communication skills and also make learning fun and engaging.

Second, within the frameworks of Interaction Hypothesis and FFI, peer evaluation can be a valuable method for students to provide feedback to each other, improving their language proficiency and interaction skills, such as evaluating their peers' performance based on criteria such as pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. Brutus and Donia (2010) have found that the implementation of a centralized peer evaluation system positively impacted the students' motivation, effort, and engagement in group work. This demonstrates the effectiveness of peer learning, highlighting how successful it is in engaging students in group work activities. Examples of peer evaluation activities include comprehension quizzes. In this activity, after a lesson or a reading assignment, students can create quizzes based on the material covered. This method allows students to engage deeply with the course content, encourages them

to think critically about what they have learned, and provides a platform for constructive feedback on their understanding of the subject matter. Another one is group work evaluation. Here, students can evaluate each other's performance in a group work activity by providing feedback on aspects such as participation, contribution, communication, and teamwork.

Another way to enhance language learning is by encouraging students to draw their own flashcards when learning new vocabulary. This technique aids in memorization and bolsters student motivation and autonomy, echoing the findings of Ainsworth & Scheiter (2021). Their research underscores the effectiveness of using drawing across various engagement forms—active, constructive, and interactive. In this context, giving a chance for students to draw their own flashcards allows students to personalize their learning materials, making them more engaging and relevant to their interests and learning style. By creating their own flashcards, students can choose the vocabulary they want to learn and draw pictures that are meaningful to them, thus engaging students in active learning by creating their own learning materials.

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of these approaches may depend on a number of factors, including uneven participation. In group work and FFI activities, there is a risk that some students may dominate the conversation or activity, while others may not participate as much. This can lead to

unequal learning opportunities for students. Furthermore, using FFI and interaction in the classroom requires time, and it may not be possible to devote enough time to these activities in an already full curriculum, leading to some topics or skills being neglected or insufficiently covered. Next, because some students may come to the classroom more prepared than others, there might be unequal preparedness which can create inequality in group work and FFI activities. Students who are less prepared may feel overwhelmed or left behind, while students who are more prepared may feel bored or frustrated. Lastly, as they are elementary students, it would not be a surprise if there are conflicts because of group work due to differences in opinions or personalities. This can create a disruptive classroom environment and may lead to some students feeling alienated or excluded. To address these challenges, it is essential to implement supportive strategies and adaptive teaching methods that foster an inclusive and balanced learning environment. Despite the potential difficulties, the benefits of collaborative learning and FFI, such as enhanced communication skills, deeper understanding, and increased student engagement, make these approaches valuable and worthwhile endeavors in the educational journey.

In conclusion, the Interaction Hypothesis and form-focused instruction can play important roles in promoting second language acquisition in elementary school students. By providing opportunities for interaction and explicit instruction on grammar and structure, teachers can help

students develop their language skills and improve their ability to communicate effectively. However, it is important to be flexible in approach and to consider individual student needs when implementing these strategies. By taking these factors into account, educators can help promote successful language acquisition and prepare Japanese elementary students for success in a globalized world with FFI and interaction.

References

Ainsworth, S. E., & Scheiter, K. (2021). Learning by drawing visual representations: Potential, purposes, and practical implications. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 30*(1), 61–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721420979582

Ariyoshi, K. (2019). *Seeking effective ways of teaching English in Japan* [Master's thesis. Millersville University, Pennsylvania]. https://jstor.org/stable/community.31982650

Brutus, S., & Donia, M. B. L. (2010). Improving the effectiveness of students in groups with a centralized peer evaluation system. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 9*(4), 652–662. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25782052

Calderón, M., Slavin, R., & Sánchez, M. (2011). Effective instruction for English learners. *The Future of Children, 21*(1), 103–127. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41229013

Long, M. H., & Porter, P. A. (1985). Group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*(2), 207–228. https://doi.org/10.2307/3586827

Mackey, A. (1999). Input, interaction, and second language development: An empirical study of question formation in ESL. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 21*(4), 557–587. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44486830

Makropoulos, J. (2010). Student engagement in an Ottawa French immersion high school program. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l'éducation, 33*(3), 515–540. https://www.jstor.org/stable/canajeducrevucan.33.3.515

Sato, M. (2013). Beliefs about peer interaction and peer corrective feedback: Efficacy of classroom intervention. *The Modern Language Journal, 97*(3), 611–633. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43651696

Umansky, I. M., & Reardon, S. F. (2014). Reclassification patterns among Latino English learner students in bilingual, dual immersion, and English immersion classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal, 51*(5), 879–912. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24546729

Valeo, A., & Spada, N. (2016). Is there a better time to focus on form? Teacher and learner views. *TESOL Quarterly, 50*(2), 314–339. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43893822

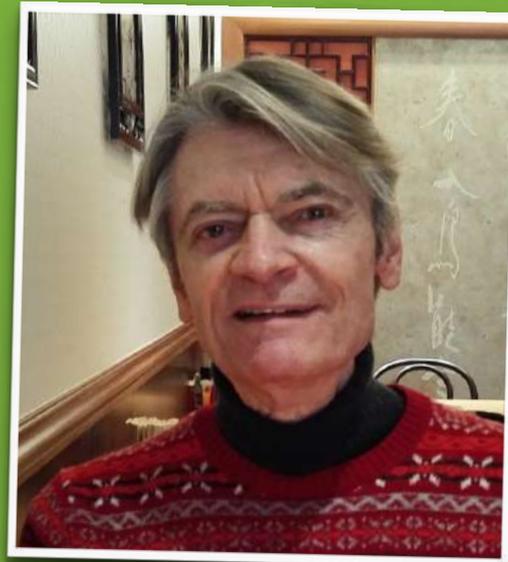# *Veteran Teacher Voices*

Interview with Steve McCarty

Glen Hill, CUE SIG Publications Chair

Glen Hill is retired from his job at Obihiro University and now teaches part-time. Glen also has a scientific English proofreading service (UpHill Proofreading) and a science blog (Engagin' Science). *glenahill@gmail.com*

Steve McCarty

Nationality: *U.S.*
Years of teaching: *40+*
Qualifications: *M.A.*
Highest position attained: *Full Professor*
Professional Fields of Interest: *Online Education, Bilingualism, Japan*

Steve and I met via email when I was searching for materials to update and display at the CUE SIG 25th anniversary conference in 2018. He was also instrumental in helping CUE's founders submit its constitution in 1992-1993. I have seen him very active in various educational milieus through his posts on his Facebook page, so when the *CUE Circular* decided to create this column on Veteran Teacher Voices, it was only natural that I would seek him out for this interview. Let's see what he has to say about himself as well as some JALT history.

Glen: *Hi, Steve. I'm glad to have kept in touch with you since just before the CUE anniversary conference. As I mentioned above, since then, I've been keeping an eye on your contributions to many fields. As a starting point in this interview, please tell the CUE readers what drew you into teaching.*

Steve: My professors encouraged me all along to become a professor, and it is my natural profession, because I love to learn, reflect, and profess. At Northeastern University in Boston at age 20, I was invited to teach an informal Plato seminar. Later, in the University of Hawaii system, I taught non-credit classes such as yoga and co-instructed Introduction to Philosophy. Studying Asian religions in graduate school there, and having met Asianists such as Alan Watts and Edwin O. Reischauer, I specialized in Japan and started learning Japanese in 1979. Eager to try living in Japan, an English conversation school in Hiroshima was the impactful entryway in 1980.

Glen: *What kept you in teaching after all these years?*

Steve: I really liked Japanese people and felt the need for TEFL training. In Takamatsu, I found that there was a JALT Shikoku Chapter. Then, my third sojourn was at an English conversation school of better quality in Matsuyama in 1983. I sought advice from Tom Robb at the national JALT office in Kyoto on how to form a JALT Matsuyama Chapter, and the rest is history. JALT played a key role in my professional development, so I could start giving back to the TEFL field and Japanese society.

Glen: *As someone who has been teaching for over 40 years, you've seen a lot since the JET Program and JALT itself started! What would you say are the biggest changes that you have experienced in your career?*

Steve: About two years after founding the JALT Matsuyama Chapter and summer seminars to provide volunteer in-service training to secondary school English schoolteachers, I was recommended by a journalist for a junior college faculty position in Kagawa. With "no special treatment" for being a foreigner, I worked hard there from 1985, and my second promotion was to full professor in 1993. It was due to many publications on TEFL and Japan, such as articles in *The Language Teacher*, guest editorials in *The Japan Times,* and newspaper articles in Japanese on my in situ research findings on Asian religious syncretism around the Pilgrimage of Shikoku. Meanwhile, Chisato and I got married, and our two sons played around the temples where pilgrims prayed.

From 1985 I collaborated with Japanese and foreign teachers toward starting the Bilingualism National SIG. I was a President or officer in JALT Chapters and SIGs including CUE. I was happy with the leadership of CUE SIG founder Gillian Kay, who did not stay long in Japan, compared to the JALT trajectory that followed (see below). In 1994, I was the sole appointed officer on the national Executive Committee, representing all the SIGs. It was the area of most dynamism in JALT, yet it took years more for the SIGs to be fully recognized.

In the mid-1980s we had changed the name of JALT, ending in *Teachers* or *Kyōshi Kyōkai*, into *Teaching* or *Kyōiku Gakkai*, which convinced many universities to start reimbursing faculty JALT activities. At that stage there were more Japanese than foreign members subsidizing JALT, so there was the potential to grow larger and more beneficial to intercultural relations as well as to language education in Japan.

Without running for national office, I advocated for three things in many JALT publications and meetings: SIG aspirations, the credibility of JALT as an academic society, and—above all—promoting Japanese leaders. My efforts at all three were foiled by foreign JALT leaders, who seemed self-serving from the standpoint of either scholarliness or acculturation.

Thus, when the Internet came along, I branched out internationally, sharing my bilingual publications on the Web from 1996. In 1998, after keynoting one of the first large-scale online academic conferences, I founded the World Association for Online Education (WAOE), registered as an NPO with the State of California, shortly before JALT became an NPO.

In 2004 I took an offer to move to my present university in Osaka, which is strong in content-based EFL pedagogy. I was also invited to start lecturing for the government foreign aid agency JICA on "Japanese People and Society" to visiting government officials from around the world.

When I turned 65, I was demoted to part-time lecturer but taught also at universities and graduate schools from Kobe to Kyoto. One memorable class for several years was Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for mixed international and domestic students at Kansai University. I also held a unique Global Faculty Development position there, helping them start English-Medium Instruction and actively participate in international conferences (McCarty, 2019).

Glen: *That is certainly a lot to have had pass by you over the years! Looking forward, what future trends/changes do you expect or foresee in what you and other teachers touch?*

Steve: I have long hesitated to say that Japanese people need English, respecting their agency. But their level of English keeps the nation at a disadvantage in crucial skills such as ICT and global awareness (McCarty, 2024).

My prediction for several years has been that Japan's economic future will be bolstered by tourism and increasing foreign residents. Especially in regions like here in Kansai, international jobs should soar again after the pandemic and renew the demand for foreign language education.

However, for the future I am concerned that, with automatic translation and AI, foreign languages can easily become like an accessory, similar to relying on information from the internet when needed, rather than internalized learning. In my bilingualism research and experience using Japanese, making a second language a part of oneself fosters personal growth and career success. Enriched with L2 acquisition, one can develop a bilingual identity with the option of becoming bicultural to some extent. Educators will have to draw deeply from human authenticity and creativity to meet this challenge.

Glen: *That is all very insightful. Thanks. Now, it's time to look within yourself and boast a little. What would you consider are your proudest achievements?*

Steve: Most of my accomplishments have come after promotion to full professor: more than 250 publications and 100

unique presentation topics (including nine international conference keynote addresses), and more than 600 citations recognized by Google Scholar. Publications on Bilingualism/Language Teaching, Online Education, Japan/Asia, and the Academic Life/Faculty Development are available from https://japanned.hcommons.org .

As examples of making nearly everything open access, I offer a whole book on mobile language learning (McCarty, Obari, & Sato, 2017), a definitive article on online education (McCarty, 2021), and a biographical book chapter on my Japan research (McCarty, 2022a).

Glen: *That is an incredible publishing record, and I hope our readers will take advantage of the Japanned website and your reference list below. Speaking of readers, who are mostly teachers of tertiary education here in Japan, what advice would you like to offer them?*

Steve: Related to this column, it has been observed that ageism is the only prejudice that is still socially acceptable, and many older people buy into such self-defeating stereotypes. My advice is in an article for the JALT Lifelong Language Learning SIG on what I call "career tapering" (McCarty, 2022b). Essentially, working less allows one to volunteer more, to pursue personal interests, and to continue to grow.

Glen: *Very interesting, succinct, and intriguing. I hope readers will take a look at that article. To conclude this interview, please tell the readers what you are doing now, and what's next?*

Steve: At age 70, I hit the Kansai University age limit and have been teaching Bilingualism and Intercultural Communication classes at Osaka Jogakuin University, until I reach their age limit of 75 in 2025. Public positions generally have an age limit of 65, but my JICA lecturing lasted for nearly 20 years until all lecturers introducing Japan were replaced by videos in 2024.

I continue to select from invitations to write articles or make presentations, free to show my range. This column is one of four recent interview articles. *The Japan Times* quoted my answers extensively in a May 2024 article on bilingual education, and the JALT Bilingualism SIG published the full interview in June (McCarty, 2024). Knowledge Commons, based at Michigan State University, featured my research on a Japanese legend of a woman diver. As a result, a feminist American depth psychology researcher interviewed me for an article in June about the legend's natural healing symbolism.

A most recent surprise is that I have been invited to join the Indo-Pacific European Hub for Digital Partnerships, funded by the EU and partners India, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, as an Expert Member of the Working Group on Digital Education and Skills through June 2027. It is incumbent upon a faculty development veteran to mentor younger generations, most of whom are non-native English users around the world. Being an academic has never been a 9-to-5 job but rather a way of life, and I am happy that new developments keep emerging.

Glen: *In other words, it appears that you are going to continue to give all you can to many types of communities, both locally and abroad. Kudos to you for that, and best of luck! You are an inspiration for teachers of all ages. Thank you for taking part in this interview.*

References

McCarty, S. (2019). Meeting global faculty development needs in Japan. *Child Research Net: Language Development & Education.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330778631

McCarty, S. (2021). Online education as a discipline. *Academia Letters,* 434, 1-6. https://doi.org/10.20935/AL434

McCarty, S. (2022a). Discovering Japanese fusion of religions on the pilgrimage island of Shikoku. In J. Rucynski (Ed.), *A Passion for Japan: A Collection of Personal Narratives* (pp. 286-299). BlueSky Publishing. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361566172

McCarty, S. (2022b). Lifelong learning and retiring retirement stereotypes. *The LLL SIG Newsletter, 18*(1), 10-15. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365838087

McCarty, S. (2024). English education and bilingual education in Japan. *Bilingual Japan, 33*(1), 9-13. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381519445

McCarty, S., Obari, H., & Sato, T. (2017). *Implementing mobile language learning technologies in Japan.* Springer. https://www.academia.edu/37986336

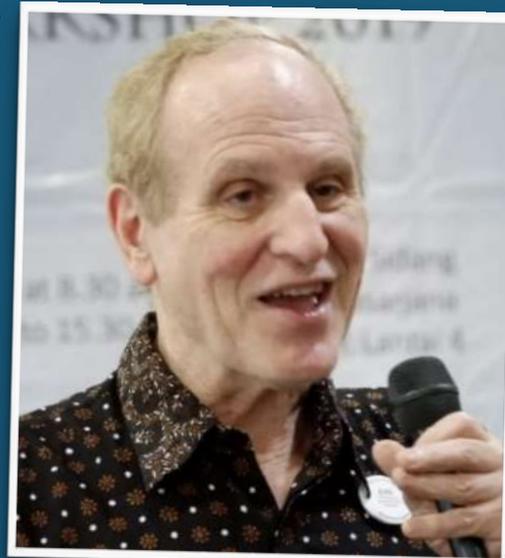# Veteran Teacher Voices

Interview with Thomas Robb

Cory Koby, Tezukayama Gakuin University

Cory Koby is an associate professor at Tezukayama Gakuin University and an Executive Board member of the Extensive Reading Foundation. His research interests focus on extensive reading.
c-koby@tezuka-gu.ac.jp

Thomas Robb

<u>Nationality</u>: *American*
<u>Years of teaching</u>: *45*
<u>Qualifications</u>: *Ph.D in linguistics, University of Hawaii at Manoa*
<u>Highest position attained</u>: *Tenured Professor*
<u>Professional Fields of Interest</u>: *CALL, reading, programming*

Cory: *First off, I would like to thank you, Tom, for taking the time to sit down with me and share a bit of your experience with JALT readers. As you are a founding member of both JALT and the Extensive Reading Foundation, I know you have a lot to share with us. So, my first question is, what drew you into teaching?*

Tom: Since I was an "army brat" living overseas in Japan (elementary school), France (Grade 8), and Germany (Grades 9 & 10), I've always loved to travel. The rest of the time, my family always lived in New Jersey. So, as an undergrad at Brown University, I became a linguistics major because I figured that would give me a leg up on learning languages. I had my eyes on Japan but at that point in time, Brown only offered Chinese, so I figured that was close enough. Even though I went to an international English-medium school for 3 years while in Japan and learned little more than how to count to 100, I wanted to come back. So, after Peace Corps (India), I came back to Japan. I had some training in teaching EFL for my Peace Corps assignment, which was also helpful when searching for work in Japan. However, I was unhappy at my first university which appeared not to be concerned with the quality of instruction. My wife and I then applied to the University of Hawai'i where we both obtained M.A. degrees before returning to Japan.

Cory: *What a great start to teaching here in Japan! And throughout the years, what kept you in it?*

Tom: Marriage and a good job. Initially, I and my future wife taught Panasonic workers in the evenings. The university

work came along, which kept my days busy. Basically, I enjoyed the students, and I enjoyed my work, not to mention it paying quite well compared to similar positions in the U.S. and with longer vacation periods to boot. Another thing that kept me in was my final university, Kyoto Sangyo (KSU), which lasted for 36 years. It helped that the school did not look upon the foreign *sennin* (permanent full-time) teachers as classroom teachers only, but rather assigned me to committee work, as well. I enjoyed working on the entrance exams and, afterward, doing an item analysis to ferret out which questions worked well and which flopped. I managed to do a number of joint research projects and also did two 3-year stints as the *Gakka Shunin* (department head).

Cory: *It sounds like an ideal situation that many of us today strive for. What were the biggest changes you have experienced throughout those years?*

Tom: I think that KSU has evolved like many other universities. At first, there was little discussion or cooperation concerning either class methodology or in research. Thanks to the university pushing *Kakenhi* (government research grants) applications, there is considerably more joint research, and much of it revolving around classroom pedagogy.

Cory: *That sounds like an incredibly positive change. Now, thinking forward, what are some expected future trends/ changes that you imagine?*

Tom: As in other countries, the number of Japanese teachers who are sufficiently fluent in English is constantly growing,

both due to the ease of travel and the availability of online programs for social interaction or amusement. Gone are the days when the English teacher had to stick close to the textbook with no confidence in moving beyond it. And that made a big difference in the methodology that they could use. And, of course we have ALTs in virtually every secondary school in Japan. Non-Japanese students in the schools, as well in the general population, not to mention the huge number of tourists, have surely changed the average citizen's outlook towards foreigners.

Cory: *And how do you think these changes will affect the future of our profession in Japan?*

Tom: I think that there will be less fascination with the Western face in basic English teaching and more expectation that all faculty members will have input into the curriculum as well as have a field of specialization that benefits the university. Also, English is still not regularly taught throughout the primary years, and as more Japanese become proficient in English, I hope that English instruction can be implemented more completely. It would also be good if there were more regular TV programming in English to enjoy and learn from.

Cory: *With almost five decades of experience as a teacher, researcher, and volunteer, what do you consider your proudest achievements?*

Tom: Well, for one, I was one of the founders of JALT and its second president. And then after the presidency, I became the Executive Secretary and

basically managed the whole association including the annual conferences, first from my office, and then we created an office in downtown Kyoto. I resigned in 1990, and the office then moved to Tokyo. Another aspect that I am proud of is my participation in the "pension movement." At that point in time, full-time hires at universities were required to pay into the system, but unless they stayed until they qualified to receive their pension, they lost virtually all the money that they had contributed. I, along with Paul Jaffe, then of Ryukoku University, arranged a series of meetings including a press conference and visits to the *Shigaku Kyosai* (Private School Mutual Aid) offices in Tokyo. We believe our efforts, which included a survey of over 200 teachers, helped them to revise their treatment of non-Japanese. Another area is software development, *MoodleReader* module and its successor *Mreader*, for Extensive Reading has been the most successful. MReader was launched in 2013 so that schools without a Moodle system could also benefit from the quiz program. MReader grew to almost 100,000 users prior to the pandemic, but now there are only about 50,000 active students since there are now more alternatives available on the Internet for language practice.

Cory: *That is quite a list of achievements, and I am sure many of us (including me) owe you a big thank you for at least one of them. Now, thinking about those following in your footsteps, what advice would you offer up-and-coming teachers here in Japan?*

Tom: Even if you are satisfied being a "full-time" part-timer, writing up something that you have done uniquely in your class, a small survey of how your students think about some aspect of your teaching or their learning, could result in a modest publication that will, nevertheless, help you when it comes to finding a future job. For example, 1) Do they wish that you would speak more or less Japanese in the class? 2) Do they wish they could talk in Japanese when doing group work? 3) What aspects would they prefer in which language – homework explanations? 4) Explanations of difficult words or concepts?

Also, I think it's very important for teachers to network. Here, part-timers sometimes have the upper hand. Part-timers are often cloistered in the teachers' room (教員控え室/ *Kyōin hikaeshitsu*) between classes while the *sennin* teachers often hide in their offices when not teaching, which is not conducive to an exchange of ideas or collaboration. Take advantage of the presence of the other teachers to pick their brains.

Cory: *Network, collaborate, and publish... all unbelievably valuable in our profession, indeed. So, my final barrage of questions for you, Tom: What do you do with your time now? What are you working on now? And what's next?*

Tom: Well, I'm retired. No more students. Also, no more income, unfortunately, except for the pension. However, I'm actually as busy now as I was before, although in slightly different contexts. I'm still the Chair of the Extensive Reading Foundation. And I'm also the editor of TESL-EJ, the world's first online journal for English language teaching, which actually was online before we had the internet. Readers had to download

articles by FTP from any one of four servers around the world. And so, those are tasks things that I plan to continue doing until I'm no longer able to or I find a capable person to pass them on to.

Cory: *Well, as one of the many people taking on just a few of those tasks, I would like to express my gratitude for all the work you have done, and continue to do, on behalf of students, teachers, and researchers around the world. I do hope you can manage to take some time to sit back and enjoy the fruits of your amazing efforts. Many, many thanks, Tom!*

Tom: And thank you for providing this opportunity to share my experience with the CUE members!