
The School House

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From the Editors

Dear SIG members,

Summer is pretty much over, and what a hot one it has been! I hope you all managed to keep cool and hydrated. I've just come off a 4-day camp with university students in Niseko, Hokkaido where EdVenture hosts and runs kids camps for children and families from all around Japan: their clearly labelled 'hydration stations' help remind us to keep drinking throughout the days' activities.

In this edition of The School House, we have two activities outlined, and a write-up from the PAN SIG. **Martin Sedaghat** shares a lesson plan for '**Country Tic-Tac-Toe**'. He clearly describes how to play it and the photos illustrate the cards and markers used in the activity.

Jim Porcaro's article reminds us of a tried and tested activity for teaching which is useful: **dictation**. He outlines the benefits, talks about the texts he uses and how to use them.

I use both of these activities in teaching phonics to elementary school - they are both very adaptable; versatile tools are great to keep in our teaching activity bank! It reminds me of Occam's razor – sometimes the simple solutions really *are* the best.

The Niseko camp was over before it had begun and this year seems to have been the same. Since the last journal we have had a number of events. From the PAN SIG back in May (doesn't that seem so long ago!), **Martin Sedaghat** has written an excellent summary of '**Which Approach to Phonics is the Best for L1 Japanese Learners**'. I hope each of these articles helps you in your teaching, and in supporting your students in getting to their next level.

Whatever you are doing, and wherever you are when you are reading this, I wish you the very best in these latter months of 2023, and hope to see you at OkiJalt in October, and/or JALT Junior in November.

Best wishes,

Kate & Gaby

From the SIG Coordinator

Dear SIG Membership,

Hello to everyone wherever in the world these words find you. I hope everyone had an excellent summer and had a little time to reflect on work and life. I always feel like I have extra time to reflect in the summer, if only because I am usually just parked in front of the nearest air conditioner at work and it is too hot to go anywhere else!

During my reflection this summer, I thought a lot about the interactions I'd had in TYL SIG over the past year. After talking and working with everyone, at events, at the JALT and PanSIG conferences, and during online programs, I really think that we have the busiest members of any SIG. The 0-18 educational system means we don't really get summers off, and many of us (myself included) work many days well into the evening. Even so, we have a super active SIG, with so many great events and presentations, and have so many members. What's the expression... "If you want something done, ask a busy person!"

So, I would like to appeal to you, fellow busy people. We need you! We need you to let us know what events you want to have. We want to get you involved at those events, too. We have so many different people in this SIG, from so many different educational institutions, so many levels and backgrounds... I'd really love to see new and different events that feature your ideas and skills.

Oh, and if you feel like you aren't involved, send me an email, let me know, I'll get you involved! I know sometimes when you are part of a big group it can seem pretty mysterious about how things happen, but let me assure you, we are all just super busy volunteers, trying to do our best to put things together. Many events are planned in bursts. Someone has a great idea and sends an email, then we network them together as best we can with someone who can help, and then great ideas and content tumble out of their effort and suddenly we have this great event! It's really a dynamic process. Some events are year long efforts, like the JALT Junior conference in November and the joint 21st Century Language Teaching Conference in Okinawa in October (join us in Okinawa!). But if you would like to get involved, in any way, please send an email to tyl@jalt.org and just let me know, I'll get back to you. We really do need you!

I'd also like to encourage members to join the Open LINE group. Check your latest or the next email newsletter you get for the QR code to join. So many people share ideas, ask questions, share job postings and more on there; it's a great resource.

Again, I hope the school year so far has been treating you well. We look forward to hosting everyone in Okinawa in October, and please come say 'Hi' to me and the other officers, and introduce yourself in Tsukuba in November if you are there at the JALT conference. I'd love to meet you and find out what you are looking for as a member of TYL SIG.

Talk to you soon!

Dr. Erin Noxon
SIG Coordinator

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The Importance of Knowing the Needs of the Students Working with an Old Acquaintance: Dictation

James W. Porcaro

Toyama Kokusai Gakuen

Introduction

I met up with an old academic acquaintance during the ten-week lockdown that my high school imposed at the start of the school year in April 2020 because of the initial spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The connection was not only restored but much strengthened from the renewed association. The name of my old academic acquaintance is dictation.

At that time, as I and other teachers at the school brainstormed and devised the most effective ways to utilize the online lessons we had to deliver to students at home, I decided to work again with this instructional activity which I had used in the past.

One might be quick to dismiss dictation as an old-fashioned technique from bygone days of language instruction that has little value and no place in the present day with so many other devices available with new technologies, but that would be wrong. Dictation worked very well with the online lessons; so much so that I included it in my syllabus when regular classroom lessons commenced in June of that year. Even though we were back to face-to-face classes, limitations on doing pair and group work remained for some time, and dictation activities worked well in this somewhat restricted teaching environment too.

As I came to recognize and appreciate again the effectiveness of dictation for English language learning, along with the positive response from students, it became an established element of my instructional repertoire. On average for the year I teach about 52 fifty-minute classes, and I include a dictation activity in about 8 to 10 of my first-year classes and in 5 or 6 periods of my second-year classes.

Benefits of dictation

I always explain to my classes, in simple terms they can understand, the reasons for my presenting certain kinds of lessons. For example, I will explain the rationale for doing pair work, the reasons for story reading aloud, and the nature of critical thinking. Following are the ten benefits of dictation listed in the handout that I give to students.

1. Dictation raises your level of listening comprehension, that is, your ability to understand what you hear in English.
 2. Dictation is a good English spelling exercise.
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3. Dictation raises your awareness of English grammar.
4. Dictation raises your English vocabulary knowledge.
5. Dictation improves your auditory memory, that is, your ability to remember what you hear in English.
6. Dictation is a good exercise for thinking in English because you have no time to think in Japanese and then translate words in your head to English.
7. Dictation helps your pronunciation as you hear the words from the teacher and repeat them in your head as you write them.
8. Dictation improves your use of correct English punctuation.
9. Dictation raises your power of concentration in English.
10. Dictation is a good reading exercise because you must read the text very carefully to self-check your work when the dictation is finished.

Classroom benefits

An important benefit of dictation for all teachers is that it is a precisely focused activity in which they can concentrate on their pronunciation as well as the pace and rhythm of their speaking in English in measured phrases. This enables students, particularly those with lower levels of L2 proficiency, to easily understand the dictation content. The amount of English used by the teacher in class is also increased. At the same time, dictations presented by JTEs give students an important L2 role model which dispels the persistent though utterly false native-speaker fallacy that the ideal models of spoken English can come only from native-speakers of the language. Thus dictation activities have myriad benefits in the English language classroom.

Dictation texts and procedures

I write the text of all the dictations myself. The word count is usually from around 180 to 250. I do not have to use a textbook for any of my courses and so I make all of my own lessons and instruction materials. Topics for the dictations include at first, for example, information about seasonal events such as Golden Week, which is the first dictation I present early in the year for first-year classes. Just before summer break, around July 7 (Tanabata), I present for dictation the traditional story of *Orihime* and *Hikoboshi*.

My lessons throughout the year include those for critical thinking in which students working in pairs discuss and list at sentence level pro and con points for the issues that I introduce. Later in the year, after students have become proficient enough at this task, my lessons for some of these issues include argumentative essay writing, focusing on the body paragraphs that explain

either pro or con points for the issue at hand. It is very important, then, that students receive a basic introduction to academic writing. So, before starting the writing task, they receive a model for the short body paragraphs they will write for the essay. I present a model for this in the form of a three-paragraph dictation for three points on one side of the issue, for example, explaining and giving examples of the advantages for Japanese high school students to go abroad to study for one year, as many of the students at my high school do in the second year. Students can then refer to the model to write their own body paragraphs for the opposite side of the issue, the disadvantages of study abroad.

I present the dictations at a pace suitable for the overall English proficiency level of the class, speaking in clearly measured phrases with appropriate time for students to write, and repeating each sentence. I used to read all of the text for a third and final listening after completing the dictation but stopped doing this as it did not seem especially worthwhile. I then give students the text of the dictation in a handout, and ask them to self-check their writing very carefully. I circulate around the room during the dictation and while students do the self-check. In this way, I get a good sense of how each student is handling the dictation. I do not collect students' papers to grade their performance.

Conclusion

I would urge teachers to consider dictation activities in class. Of course, this kind of activity needs to be modified to suit each individual teaching and learning environment. Teachers will also likely develop their own style and procedures for presenting dictations to their classes. I think dictation has the potential to be a very valuable part of lessons, and become a much-appreciated acquaintance both for them and their students.

Lesson Plan for Country Tic-Tac-Toe

By Martin Sedaghat

Niigata University of Health and Welfare International Preschool

Introduction

English lessons can be a great opportunity for teachers to share information about other countries and cultures with their students, even at the preschool level. I would like to share a simple lesson plan for an activity that my students have enjoyed, learning about and using their knowledge about different countries to play tic-tac-toe. This game also incorporates teamwork and thinking ahead, as students must strategically place their markers to win.

Materials

For this lesson, only three types of materials are needed to prepare and play the game. Country cards are first used to introduce the countries along with a few pieces of information about each one. As long as there are at least nine of these cards, the game can be played. For the game itself, flashcards showing each country's flag are needed, and a set of small cards or markers to indicate the two teams (O and X, 1 and 2, etc.)

Goal

There are two main goals for this lesson. Firstly, students can use what they have learned about each country, such as common greetings, famous landmarks, and the design of the flags, to choose the space for their team's marker. Secondly, students can work together with their teammates to think about strategy, consider the other team's choices, and make a decision on where to put their marker.

Pre-activity

Before being able to play the game, students must have time to become familiar with each country and learn the various facts. In my classes, I introduce one new country per week. Showing the country card, I read the country's name and give students time to look at the pictures, make comments, and ask questions. We spend some time talking about the colors, shapes, and design of the flag, and also practice saying the greeting. After talking about the food and landmark of that country, I often use an iPad to show the country's location on a world map, focusing on the path

one might travel to go there from Japan. I also try to show a short YouTube video that introduces the country.

During the rest of the week's lessons, I spend a short time every morning reviewing each country card with a variety of quizzes designed to engage different types of learning. For example, sometimes I will hide each card and describe the flag for students to guess, or show the card for only a moment. One of my students' favorite quizzes has me showing a card that I can't see to them, and the children must use only gestures (no speaking allowed) to help me to guess the country. Some students mimic eating the type of food, some try to make the shape of the landmark with their bodies, and others use their hands to make the first letter of the country name.



Country cards

Activity

To play the game itself, nine flag cards are chosen and placed on the table or floor in a three by three grid pattern. I usually model the rules of the game for students by putting marker cards on the flags in several variations and asking them if they can see a winning line of three Os or Xs. I explain that this game is like bingo, but they can choose where to put their cards, and they should work together with their teammates to think of the best choice. For very young children, competitive games can often be stressful so I usually play this game with the children as one team

and myself as the other team. This way, I can more easily control the flow of play based on the atmosphere of the class.

To begin, I play rock scissors paper with one student to determine which team goes first and chooses their marker (O or X). The first player gives a hint about which country they would like to play their marker on, such as the greeting, landmark, food, etc., and places it on top of the flag. Play continues with the other team, back and forth until a line of three Os or Xs is made, ending the game. I usually play a few rounds of the game, shuffling the flag cards and changing their position between each game.



Flag cards with team markers

Which Approach to Phonics is the Best for L1 Japanese Young Learners?

PanSIG 2023 presentation by Kate Sato

Event report by Martin Sedaghat

In this presentation by Kate Sato at the JALT PanSIG 2023 conference held in Kyoto, various approaches to teaching phonics were explored, with several shown to be particularly applicable to the context of young learners in Japan. Phonics instruction is a major part of ESL and EFL curriculums around the world, but for the purpose of teachers who work with children whose first language is Japanese, there are important considerations to make regarding how these learners acquire literacy in their L1.

Firstly, four different approaches to phonics were introduced and defined. These included 1) the embedded approach, in which phonics is not taught systematically, and where learners are exposed to phonics in the context of literature, relying on recognition and the ways in which words and sounds are embedded in sentences, 2) analogy, in which patterns and rhymes are used to help learners look for similarities between words, 3) analytic, in which learners analyze and discuss common phonemes in a set of words, and 4) the synthetic approach, in which letters and their sounds are pronounced in isolation, and then blended to create words. The embedded, analogy, and analytic approaches all function to break down words, whereas the synthetic approach builds up.

This was followed by an examination of Katsuo Tamaoka's work on how the Japanese written systems of hiragana, katakana, and kanji are constructed. Tamaoka described two functions, sense-discriminative and sense-determinative, which are used to decode scripts and access meaning for readers. Katakana was shown to be sense-discriminative, in that character shape was a very important element, whereas hiragana was sense-determinative, focusing on word context and function within the script as a whole. Similarly, some words in English are read by decoding and breaking down into individual sounds, and others depend upon their context for the correct pronunciation and meaning to become clear.

In the final part of the presentation, this knowledge of Japanese scripts and how they are commonly decoded was applied to teaching phonics for young children in Japan. Just as hiragana is usually taught first to Japanese children, synthetic phonics can work well as an initial approach as they share the sense-determinative function. Furthermore, katakana and kanji activate the sense-discriminative function, mirrored in analytic, analogy, and embedded approaches to phonics, so these can be added in later in the process. Font selection was also touched upon, with examples of how some font types are better for either determinative or discriminative functions.

Overall, the presentation was very informative and structured well. As a teacher of very young learners who involves phonics instruction as a major part of my curriculum, Kate's talk gave me a lot to think about, particularly in how my approach and choice of activities can be tailored to work hand-in-hand with how the children are already learning to read in their L1.

Announcements

The LINE Open Chat (LINE OC) group for SIG members has been gently active with brief texts by members in the SIG! It's great to see people chatting when they want to discuss anything younger learner related, or JALT related (e.g., how to get to a conference, a URL for the website, etc). Jobs have also been posted so you want to make sure you are on the Open Chat. You don't share any private information, and all you need is the LINE app and the OC chat QR code to join. If you don't have that code, please contact our membership secretary (Amy) at aisasami@gmail.com. Thank you for remembering it is only for TYL SIG current members.

Submission Guidelines

Detailed submission guidelines can be found at:

<https://jalt-tyl.net/submission-guidelines/>

Please make sure to follow APA 7 guidelines for referencing if you are submitting an academic article. If you are unsure of those guidelines, please look at Kensaku Yoshida's article in *The School House* Volume 30 Issue 3, published in 2022.

Thank you very much!

Kate & Gaby
