

The **S**aitama  
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*From the Editor*

Welcome to the sixth issue of Saitama Journal of Language Teaching. Three JALT Omiya Chapter members share results of their thinking, their research, or their experiences with you.

**John Finucane** gives practical advice on how to plan educational English events for your students. **Takeshi Ishikawa** investigates how writing out-of-class diary entries influences students' motivation to use English. **Ivan Botev** reviews Diane Hawley Nagatomo's book *Exploring Japanese University English Teachers' Professional Identity*.

I hope that you will find SJLT of practical use in your classroom, or of theoretical interest in your research. However, SJLT has another goal: For all of us involved in this journal, be it as authors, reviewers, or editors, SJLT is an opportunity to develop professional, personal, or social skills. Writing, reviewing, giving feedback to authors, receiving constructive criticism from reviewers and dealing with it, editing, mentoring authors at early stages of their teaching or research career, networking – all these activities give us a chance to learn by doing and to develop ourselves and each other. With SJLT, we hope to create a stronger sense of community at JALT Omiya Chapter and to stimulate good communication and lively interaction between members.

*I would like to remind prospective authors that SJLT editors are not only interested in papers on research or activities, or in book reviews, but in other text types as well. How about submitting an interview, or a summary of your presentation at JALT Omiya Chapter? If you are wondering whether that unusual and creative type of text you are planning would ever be accepted by SJLT, please don't hesitate to talk to us about it!*

**Ruth Kambartel**

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## Planning an Educational Event for Your Students

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Many schools, not just those that specialize in language education, hold educational English events. Frequently these events rely on the participation of ALTs. Often the burden of planning falls on junior Japanese teachers who may lack experience of planning, teaching in general, or knowledge of a particular institution or group of students. Increasingly teachers are passing this burden on to their ALTs. As an ALT at a municipal high school, I was given responsibility for our junior high school English camp with 10 ALTs and 240 students, over 4 days. An event such as this one represents an opportunity for professional development and personal satisfaction for the teachers involved. This article gives some practical advice, based on what I have learned, on how to plan an educational English event for your students.

### Resources

Resources include: teachers; teaching materials, activities; equipment, such as whiteboards, CD-players, projectors and facilities. I was planning an event from scratch, so I began with activities that I had used successfully in the past and was familiar with. I also asked a colleague from outside school to help me with planning. If you are inheriting an event, an honest evaluation of your available time and enthusiasm is required before deciding what to change and what to keep.

### Setting Goals

The second step is to set goals for your students, your colleagues, your event and yourself. It is much easier to plan an event if there is a specific goal to work towards. I wanted first graders to work on fluency, second graders to use English as a problem-solving tool and third graders to practice debate in English. Activities should help students practice the skills and generate the ideas and language needed to achieve the overall goal you have set.

For example, one of my goals was debate. Initial activities helped students practice giving opinions, disagreeing using reasons and summarizing. Subsequent activities were used to introduce the debate proposition in a novel way. Later activities generated ideas

and language that could be recycled in the final debate activity. My intention was for students to suddenly realize that the activities were incremental steps towards a goal they would have believed beyond their ability at the start of the event.

### Planning

The next step is planning. Prefer the familiar to the new, the simple to the complicated and avoid reliance on technology. Producing detailed lesson plans is time-consuming. An honest appraisal of your time and enthusiasm is required before you plan on introducing anything new.

My written plans were very detailed. They contained step-by-step instructions, the rationale behind the activities, anticipated problems and their solutions and described how each element of each activity contributed to my goals. I tested all the activities before the event with members of our English club. I asked for their feedback and ideas for improvement. This can also be done with a group of teachers. Plans should be made available as early as possible.

### Delegation

Delegation is vital in order to efficiently and effectively plan and deliver an event. Planning hours of activities, which often entail creating materials, is a time-consuming business. I allocate blocks of time, particularly at the start of an event, and ask participating teachers to share the planning. The planning of ice-breakers are particularly suitable for delegation.

For my event each teacher planned a 20 minute activity. Groups of students did multiple activities with multiple teachers allowing participating teachers to deliver the same activity several times. Delegation gave me an hour of solid material for my students while allowing me to concentrate on the planning of the most important lesson hours.

An alternative is to involve students in the planning process. Students with a higher, or specialized, ability could be put in charge of planning or leading activities. I asked third grade students who participated in my elective debate class to lead the debate activity. The sempai/kohai relationship was a great motivator for my students. A secondary benefit was the support this provided to those participating teachers with little experience with debate or how to teach it. Delegation also allows participating teachers to personalize their participation, which is a great motivator; a motivated teacher is more likely to build good rapport with her students.

**Meetings**

Formal face-to-face meetings are unnecessary and frequently counterproductive. If there are detailed lesson plans available meetings are unnecessary. The use of collaborative software such as Dropbox or Google Groups is an efficient way of planning. Plans should also be made available well in advance for participants to study them carefully. If participants have a detailed plan to follow they will not require a meeting.

Any meetings that are held should be devoted to practicing not discussing activities. A meeting is a good opportunity to collaborate on composing concise instructions and anticipating problems. Meetings are only an efficient use of time if there is strong, competent leadership and a rigid agenda.

**Recycling**

Most events are annual. In which case once a basic pattern has been established your effort should be spent on refining and improving. New additions should be limited to allow for careful planning and testing. To this end you will need information. Participating teachers and students should be asked to provide detailed feedback on all aspects of the event including activities, goals, facilities etc. Areas for improvement can be identified and prioritized in order of achievability. We recycle things for two reasons: they are valuable and they are finite. So too is your time.

**Conclusion**

Sometimes teachers view educational English events as being important primarily to 'make memories'. Although this is also true, these events are a perfect opportunity to consolidate previously learned material. It also helps to justify to students why material has been taught—that it is useful. Finally, and most importantly, it gives students an opportunity to use English outside the context of assessments and examinations, i.e., the real world. These events should seek to provide students with a forum to use what they have learned to do something new; ideally something slightly beyond their current ability. A sense of achievement is the best outcome.

John Finucane is an EFL Professional. He is the President and co-founder of さいたま市教育家会 (SCE). He edits さいたま市教育家会ジャーナル (JSCE). He has planned and delivered several educational events and participated in several others. His interests are writing, teacher training, event planning, debate and critical thinking. Find out more, or contact John, at: [john-finucane.com](http://john-finucane.com)

## Diary Exchange as a Tool to Facilitate Out-of-class Independent Learning

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to investigate how having an opportunity to write out-of-class diary entries influences students' motivation to use English as a tool. This action research took place in a university writing class in Japan. Every week, the students were required to write a diary entry with questions for and exchange it with their partner, then write another diary entry in their partner's notebook. The activity lasted for a period of three months, during which the teacher stuck to the role of facilitator, and promised not to correct errors. Data was gathered through questionnaires. The results show that the three students with the lowest motivation toward reading and writing in English at first had the biggest jump, and 29 out of 32 students improved in motivation of the same category.*

この論文は学外で行う級友との英語による交換日記が、学生の英語を使いたいという動機づけにどのような影響を及ぼすかについて調べたものである。この行動調査は日本のライティングクラスで行われた。学生達は毎週、級友への質問付きの日記を書き、交換し、それに返事を書くように言われた。この3か月のアクティビティーの間、教師は進行役に徹し、間違いを修正したりはしないと約束した。データはアンケートより収集された。結果によると、当初最も動機づけの低かった3人が結果的にリーディング、ライティングに関する意欲の伸びを最も示した。また、32人中29人のリーディング、ライティングに関する動機づけが増加した。

### Introduction

I have not met many students who say they often use English in their daily life, let alone for fun. Very few students read English books for pleasure, and even fewer write English outside the classroom. Quite a number of students seem to consider English to be a mere school subject in which they decipher a code and translate it into their mother tongue. Acknowledging that language classrooms have occasionally been a place for rote learning, Brown (2001) considers meaningful learning one of the important principles of language learning and teaching, claiming that it is crucial to "capitalize on the power of meaningful learning by appealing to students' interests... (p57)." Brown also stresses the significance of risk-taking, mentioning that, "successful language learners... must be willing to become 'gamblers' in the game of language" (p.63). While good at giving prepared speeches and translating, Japanese students suddenly become helpless when it comes to unrehearsed conversation or free writing. However, by providing a situation that enables students to actually use English in a way that appeals to their interests, it seems possible that they can break out of their perfectionist shells, take the risk of making mistakes, and immerse themselves in meaningful activity. Incorporating learning strategy training such as the diary exchange activity presented here, this paper explores one way to enlighten students about how to learn English in a meaningful way. Learning strategy can be defined as "a range of specific learning techniques that make learning more effective" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 95), and learner training "aims to make everyone more capable of independent learning" (Dickinson, 1992, p. 13). The ability to learn autonomously is a key to success in language acquisition because the amount of time students can spend in the classroom is limited. Noels, Clement and Pelletier (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999) found a close relationship between the amount of teacher support of student autonomy and the increase of student autonomy. On the other hand, some researchers are skeptical about the effectiveness of learner strategy training and say that there is no verifiable evidence that awareness of strategies causes L2 learning success (Rees-Miller, 1993). It is true

that there is no promising that students will continue using a certain learning strategy they learn in class, as in this case of writing a diary, and there is no definitive strategy that fits everyone. However, adding to repertoire of strategies can be students' most trusted weapon later on. As Macaro (2006) suggests, "successful learning is...linked...to his or her orchestration of strategies available to him or her," and that "strategies do not make learning more efficient; they are the raw material without which L2 learning cannot take place (p.332)."

In Ward's (2004) blog project, implemented in a writing/reading class in an American university, the use of blogs contributed to the increased interest of the students in reading as well as writing. The feedback from most students was positive and they said the project assisted their learning. In Pinkman's (2005) qualitative study using blogs in an integrated skills class in a Japanese university, seven out of fifteen learners admitted that the project enhanced their writing skills, and five said the project prompted them to use new vocabulary. Five said that they wanted to continue blogging. Over half of the participants mentioned the importance of commenting from classmates and the teacher and said it was really motivating.

## **Study**

### ***Method***

This study was conducted in a university English writing course in the Metropolitan area in Japan. At the first class meeting, a questionnaire with five Likert scale items on attitudes toward English writing and learning (see Appendix A) was administered to 32 freshmen (17 males and 16 females). The students were asked to get themselves an A4 notebook by the following class, where the teacher gave handouts of sample diary entries as well as a list of complimentary closes used in diaries. The teacher paired students up using playing cards (The Ace of Spades was paired with the Ace of Clubs, for example), and the pairs sat next to each other in the classroom. This pair-making was done once a week. From day one onwards, the students kept a diary with some

questions for their partner, exchanged it with him/her, and wrote another diary entry with reactions. The minimum amount of each diary entry was half a page, and the students were free to write about anything from their favorite pastime, and childhood memories, to their campus life. The minimum number of exchanges was what we called 'one boomerang': Student A writes a diary entry with questions, and then hands it to Student B, and vice versa. When they do it a second time, their own notebooks come back to them like a boomerang.' The teacher said that it was totally okay for the students to decorate each page with photo stickers and drawings, and assured them it was not the content of the diary but the number of diary entries that would affect the final grade. The most important thing was to make sure the students understood they did not have to be afraid of making mistakes. At every class meeting, the teacher had the students put their notebooks on the desk with the newest page open for the teacher to check. The teacher gave some positive comments about their writing (no error correction). At the end of the course, the same questionnaire as was used at the first class meeting was administered. The teacher also handed out a Diary Exchange Check Sheet with which students reported on how many diary entries were written in the notebook (including the entries of their partners as well) and how they felt about this activity.

### ***Data Analysis***

An analysis of internal consistency of the questionnaire items was performed and items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9 were found relatively unreliable. Thus these items were omitted from further statistical analysis (along with Item 11 which was deemed too similar to item 12) with a Cronbach's alpha of .88 for the remaining items. Principal components analysis revealed that these remaining items all loaded on a single factor explaining 67 percent of the total variance in the data. Looking at the items, this factor appears to be the motivation of the students toward reading and writing in English. The means of these items for Surveys 1 and 2 were thus taken as measurements of the students' pre

and post motivation toward reading and writing respectively. Students' motivation toward reading and writing as measured by Survey 2 ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) was significantly higher than as measured by Survey 1 ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = .82$ ),  $t(31) = 5.30$ ,  $p < .0001$ , two-tailed,  $d = .73$ .

By analyzing the questionnaire administered at the first class meeting (See Appendix A), some trends within the class were identified. First of all, when it came to writing, half the class said that they hate the activity, and only 4 out of 32 students showed preference for writing. Second, about 59% of the students feel that reading English is a kind of deciphering a code rather than a way to get information, to a greater or lesser degree. We cannot blame them, though, because, as some students confessed, English tends to be associated with the entrance examination war they have just gone through. To some, reading English is a mere synonym for translation. It is no wonder that they shy away from reading and writing and do not consider English to be a tool for communication.

### **Changes**

Below is the analysis of the students (all pseudonyms) whose mean response difference was worthwhile studying closely.

#### ***The Change in Eriko (pseudonym).***

Eriko's mean response for the first questionnaire was the lowest of all (1.3), but the second questionnaire shows a great improvement (3.0), marking the biggest jump of all the participants. In response to questionnaire item No. 7 ("I feel that reading English is a kind of deciphering a code rather than a way to get information"), for the 1<sup>st</sup> questionnaire, the answer was "Strongly disagree", but "Strongly Agree" for the 2<sup>nd</sup> questionnaire. In response to the questionnaire item No. 7 ("I like writing English"), for the 1<sup>st</sup> questionnaire, the answer was "Strongly disagree", but "Agree" for the 2<sup>nd</sup> questionnaire. The response to the questionnaire item No. 10 ("Receiving feedback on

my writing is a positive experience.") was "Disagree" at the beginning, but it became "Strongly agree" at the end. Eriko's comment: "It is getting more and more fun to write in English. I hated English when studying for the entrance exams, and writing was my pet peeve. So, when the teacher introduced this activity, I thought I would never be able to do it. However, once I started it, I found myself looking forward to my partner's feedback. The amount required for each diary entry was appropriate, so I enjoyed it. There were even times when I had too many things I wanted to write, and because of the limitation of space, I reluctantly reduced the content. As there was no restriction on the topic, it was just like having a chat with my classmates. I was able to enjoy writing with no stress. This activity also helped to enhance our camaraderie."

#### ***The Change in Ren (pseudonym).***

Ren's mean response for the first questionnaire was the second lowest (1.8), but it became 3.7 at the end, marking the second biggest jump. In response to questionnaire item No. 7 ("I like writing English"), for the 1<sup>st</sup> questionnaire, the answer was "Strongly disagree", but "Agree" for the 2<sup>nd</sup> questionnaire. The response to the questionnaire item No. 12 ("Using English is high on my agenda") was "Disagree" at the beginning, but it became "Strongly agree" at the end. In the free writing section in the first questionnaire, Ren wrote, "It is just tiring to write in English probably because I translate Japanese into English every time." In contrast, in the second questionnaire, he says, "It is fun to write in English. However, I also find writing hard to deal with at the same time because it takes time because I have little vocabulary."

#### ***The Change in Yuichi (pseudonym).***

Yuichi's mean response for the first questionnaire was the third lowest (2.2), but it became 3.5 at the end, marking the third biggest jump. In response to questionnaire item No. 4 ("I like reading English"), for the 1<sup>st</sup> questionnaire, the answer was "Disagree, but "Agree" for the 2<sup>nd</sup> questionnaire. The response to the questionnaire item No. 7 ("I like

writing in English.”) was ”Disagree” at the beginning, but it became “Agree” at the end. Yuichi wrote in the first questionnaire, “It is very difficult to write in English,” but later commented, “It takes more time to write in English than in Japanese, of course, but I found it interesting that with English, I can exclude redundancy and write straight to the point.”

#### ***The Change in Akiko (pseudonym).***

Akiko is one of the three participants whose mean response went down, however, the initial mean response was high enough (4.5) and the decrease was small (0.3, and this is the largest decrease of the three participants). Therefore, the result could be interpreted that Akiko was stable at high levels, but also said that the status quo came from her relatively a smaller number of boomerangs (diary exchanges) due to three-time absence. In response to item 10 (“Receiving feedback on my writing is a positive experience.”) and 12 (“Using English is high on my agenda”), the responses went down from “Strongly Agree” to “Agree.” Akiko wrote in the second questionnaire, “I enjoyed keeping a diary,” but the amount of the comment was about one third of what was written in the first questionnaire. This could indicate that contrary to the positive comment, Akiko did not have so much fun writing in English.

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

The present data show a statistically significant increase in learner motivation toward reading and writing in English. However, just because a significant gain in motivation was found does not mean that the diary activity caused the gain. That said, judging from individual answers including free writing in the questionnaire, it seems that quite a few students investigated here found writing exchange diaries interesting (or at least worth trying). They had a chance to go beyond their own restricted linguistic resources, in other words, to become a gambler, which helped them reevaluate what writing in English was like. As for the questionnaire item No. 7 (“I like writing in English”), the

responses of 16 students showed some improvement. There were some who still found writing agonizing, but they too wrote quite constructive comments. Some even seized an opportunity to kick their bad-habit approach to writing as well as reading: heavy reliance on Japanese-English translation while writing, and on Japanese word order while reading. One encouraging result is that the students who were at the lowest in motivation had the biggest jump. However true that may be, as is often the case with any learner strategy training, there is no guarantee that they will keep their motivation after the writing class is over. It would require a more longitudinal research project to check if they will continue writing in their daily lives. However, what is important here is that had it not been for this opportunity, some students would probably have graduated from university without realizing the fun (and the difficulty) of writing about themselves in their own words. It would be terrible if your student, asked about writing in English, said, “I do not know if I like writing in English or not because I have never had such an opportunity except for Japanese-English translation tests.” After personally serving as an exponent of diary writing, I feel that adding this learning strategy to one’s repertoire can only be beneficial. I must also unfortunately add, however, that after the repertoire has been thus expanded, it is totally up to the students as to whether they will continue to use it.

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### Appendix A The Questionnaire (translated from Japanese)

1. Using English for meaningful purposes is a good way to improve my English skills.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

2. Reading and writing are something I should do after building vocabulary and improving grammar skills.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

3. I read English books and/or newspapers to gain information (for pleasure).

Very often    Often    Sometimes    Rarely    Never

4. I like reading English.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

5. I feel that reading English is a kind of deciphering a code rather than a way to get information.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

6. When I read, I move my eyes from left to right, without having my eyes go backward and forward.

Very often    Often    Sometimes    Rarely    Never

7. I like writing in English.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

8. Writing English takes me a lot of time.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

9. When I write in English, I first think of Japanese sentences and then translate them.

Very often    Often    Sometimes    Rarely    Never

10. Receiving feedback on my writing is a positive experience.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

11. I will try to use English as often as possible.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

12. Using English is high on my agenda.

Strongly agree    Agree    Slightly agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

13. Please write how you feel about writing in English.

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**Diane Hawley Nagatomo's *Exploring Japanese University English Teachers' Professional Identity***

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*In Exploring Japanese University English Teachers' Professional Identity* Diane Hawley

Nagatomo talks about English language teaching in Japan in its historical context in general, about the formation of teacher identity, and about how gender and the university profession relate. While the author targets a broader audience of language instructors, the book would be most useful to those teaching in Japanese universities. This review will expose how the book contributes to the field of EFL teacher identity, what is missing in its analysis and finally, why I found this book helpful in a personal transitional period.

The book consists of eight chapters, and Nagatomo starts off by providing historical background of English language education in Japan. She explains the poor English skills in Japanese people and then goes on and profiles "The Japanese Professor", after which she talks about Japanese women and education and female professors in universities. Throughout the book the reader notices that Nagatomo holds a strong opinion about where women in the profession are and where they "should be." This is especially notable in Chapter 5 *Developing Professional Identity* and Chapter 6 *It's a Man's World*.

Nagatomo interviews eight Japanese university professors of English of various ages and at different stages of their careers; seven women and one man. "Narrative research" she says, "is grounded in the tradition of qualitative research. ... it makes extensive use of the actual words that people use to tell their stories in describing their life experiences." The author argues that it is "an ideal tool for analyzing the beliefs, knowledge, practice and identity of teachers in general education as well as teachers in foreign language education." She then continues and observes three lessons taught by one of the female participants and conducts follow-up interviews with that teacher.

In Chapter 4, Nagatomo talks about the participant teachers, data collection methods, and the process of analysis in the book. The following chapters are where the reader gains pace and relates his or her experiences as a language teacher with those of the participants. I personally found those parts of the book the most appealing not only because of the contemporary issues raised by author and participants but also because I could partially see myself in each of the characters. Issues covered include not only what is expected of the university teacher as far as classes are concerned, but also administration responsibilities (open-campus days, proctoring at exams), must-attend official and unofficial faculty gatherings, and how age, gender and educational background are related to career development.

Through this book Nagatomo attempts and contributes to previous research in the field: Clandinin, Clark and Peterson, Elbaz, Shavelson and Stern, Shulman are just a few of the names from a long list of scholars studying the areas of knowledge, beliefs and identity of the teacher that the author mentions. Nagatomo suggests that it is high time for Japanese university English teachers to be recognized as a group that influences "numerous aspects of classroom teaching and of student learning." In the book we read about the Ministry of Education's attempts to

improve Japanese students' English ability through revision of its course of studies from elementary to secondary school level (MEXT 2003) but unfortunately, the author says, "No mention at all was made of improving university teachers' communicative or pedagogical skills or raising the quality of teacher education programs."

In chapter six, *It's A Man's World*, Nagatomo talks extensively about the female university professor. She quickly states that, "Currently less than 14% of tenured faculty in Japanese higher education is female." She talks about the impact of studying abroad and how it helps female teachers to be better recognized within their institutions. Nagatomo states that, "... studying abroad is considered a high-status activity for Japanese women to engage in." In *Exploring Japanese University English Teachers' Professional Identity* readers will be able to familiarize themselves with the place of female tertiary-level teachers in Japan, and with the hardships female teachers experience when they are climbing the stairs towards a high-status career. Readers will see how education abroad helps female teachers gain recognition back in Japan and how they want to behave at the workplace but cannot because of the social norms in the predominantly male world of academia.

The book stops short of where it should ideally begin. It should have included more than one male participant for a better comparison, for example between the career development of male and female university teachers in Japan. Most importantly, Nagatomo should have interviewed not only Japanese teachers but she should have taken into account all the non-Japanese language teachers working in universities in Japan. That would have made her research not only more extensive but also more appealing to the broader audience of English language professionals.

The book would feel more convincing and would help the non-Japanese reader reflect better on

their own experiences as language teachers within the setting of English language education in Japan.

This book grabbed me from the beginning as I was reading it in a personal transitional period. When I picked the book, I was a schoolteacher, employed by a municipal Board of Education. By the time I was finishing the book, I was still teaching at public schools but I was also given the opportunity to work as an adjunct professor at a national university. This experience allowed me to understand the book better, from an elementary and junior high school language teacher's point of view, as well as from a university teacher's point of view. Nagatomo's writing helped me get over obstacles in a life-changing period, such as teaching at a different level and in a new work environment and taking over classes and students in the middle of the semester.

Nagatomo, D. (2012). *Exploring Japanese university English teachers' professional identities*. Bristol, U.K.: Multilingual Matters.

**Ivan Botev** M.Ed. Applied Linguistics, currently works for the Saitama City Board of Education and is involved with developing and teaching English Communication Abilities Development (ECAD) Program classes. He is also an adjunct professor at the Center for English Education and Development in Saitama University. He serves as president for the JALT Omiya Chapter and as social media chair for the Saitama City Educators (SCE). He has been teaching ESL/EFL in Japan for seven years. He is a father of two and his interests outside the education field include exploring the beauty of Japan with his family.