

Report on the LiLT Forum at the JALT 2013 Conference in Kobe: Learning is a lifelong voyage

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The theme of the 2013 JALT National Conference was *Learning is a Lifelong Voyage*. Within the special interest area of Literature in Language Teaching, the idea of the lifelong voyage may suggest the progression of life's stages, or the stories of our lives. In the LiLT SIG Forum, educators from different settings in Japan looked at the following theme: *Literature and the stories of our lives*. Members of the SIG talked about the ways that literature, stories and the lives of characters in creative literary texts have shaped their experiences as teachers. For additional discussion of the Literature in Language Teaching SIG and recent activities by the SIG see Bibby and McIlroy (2013a & 2013b).

Wendy Jones Nakanishi (Shikoku Gakuin), Simon Bibby (Kwansei Gakuin University) and Mari Ota (Kagawa University) talked about *Teaching Literature to Japanese students with lower-intermediate English proficiency*. This presentation addressed the challenge of getting Japanese students possessing only a basic English proficiency interested in literature written in English while also increasing their English vocabulary and grasp of simple English grammar. The three presenters noted what they thought to be a paucity of suitable materials currently on the market, and here described a textbook that they are working on to remedy this, provisionally titled *Real reads: An introduction to literature*. Text choices were discussed, the thematic layout of the proposed text explained, and lesson examples and layout of textbook pages were demonstrated. A key question to the audience was asked and discussed by participants in the forum: To what extent should we use Japanese notes for learners using literature in Japanese settings, if at all? In answering this the notion of scaffolding learning

and making tasks more achievable was raised. For queries or further information, the authors can be contacted at realreadsrocks@gmail.com

Neil Addison (Meiji Gakuin University) presented on the topic of *Finding Shakespeare: The readiness is all*. Beginning with a personal journey towards tentatively engaging with Shakespeare as a teenager, and the legacy of Shakespeare in cultural terms, the presenter mixed modern and classic references to engage his students and the present Literature in Language Teaching SIG audience in his topic: Hamlet. Ranging from discussions on Gil Scott Heron, to Lady Gaga, to Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" speech, the presentation examined how Shakespeare is used, or avoided, in English classrooms in Japan. The talk concluded by proposing several ways in which Shakespeare could be explicated in reading classes.

Tara McIlroy (Kanda University of International Studies) discussed *Creating a content-based literature course for language learners*. Using literature as the beginning point for classroom activities on life events such as childhood, growing up, marriage and divorce the presentation was inspired by the writings of various including Lewis Carroll, Dylan Thomas and Oe Kenzaburo. The theme of literature and stories linked these types of materials together. Next she showed how Paul Nation's suggested four strands are mapped across the design of the materials for this course allowed for scaffolding of resources. Nation's four strands are *meaning-focused input*, *meaning-focused output*, *language focused learning* and *fluency development*. Through this framework a balanced programme using literature can be created which meets the needs and goals of learners. She

talked about the need for material to encourage the interpretation of texts through skills such as discussion and debate. Describing the classroom use of Edmodo, Gogledocs and Youtube, various techniques for scaffolding learning were outlined as part of the discussion.

Suzanne Kamata and Dierk Günther (Tokushima University) introduced their creative writing programme while talking about *Teaching creative writing in extra-curricular english learning programs and regular university classes*. Suzanne Kamata, award winning author of the novels 'Losing Kei', 'Gadget Girl' and the anthology 'The Beautiful One Comes', talked about a variety of workshop-style activities using literature in the 'English Support Room' (ESR) at Tokushima University, in both credit and non-credit classes. Some of the workshops were described in detail, for example those which included describing pictures, using storybooks with learners to develop plot and sequence, and personal writing. Suzanne Kamata's course concept has been adapted for and tried out by Dierk Günther and the presenters described the practical issues surrounding setting up such a course. Finally, the presenters talked about the proceedings, problems, advantages and results of these extra-curricular and university-held classes and answered questions from the attendees.

About Literature in Language Teaching (LiLT)

The Literature in Language Teaching (LiLT) Special Interest Group (SIG) was set up to encourage and promote the use of literature in the language classroom. Our diverse membership includes teachers teaching across the age ranges teaching language through film, creative writing, poetry, the short story, classic literature, literature in translation and world literature. We also welcome interest from educators interested in cultural studies, politics through literature, language learning and applications of literary texts in different contexts. LiLT SIG activities include sponsoring literature/language experts to

spread the good word of literature use across Japan, co-sponsoring conferences, working with other groups to promote effective pedagogical practice, publishing a bi-annual journal. In September 2014 we will have our first full conference.



Notes on the authors

Simon Bibby founded the Literature in Language Teaching SIG in 2011. He was using literature in classes, looked around for a relevant JALT group to discuss with like-minded folk, but couldn't find one. So he decided to start up a new SIG, and here we are! In addition to being a qualified school teacher, he has an MA in Educational Technology and is currently an EdD candidate at the University of Liverpool, UK.



Tara McIlroy is the co-coordinator of the Literature in Language Teaching SIG. She has an MA (Applied Linguistics) from Victoria University of Wellington, NZ and an MA (English) from the University of Aberdeen, UK. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham, UK. Her interests include literary reading, investigating uses of creative texts and uses of world literature in the language classroom.

References

- Bibby, S. & McIlroy, T. (2013a). Creativity and collaboration: introducing the Literature in Language Teaching SIG. *The Language Teacher* (37)1, 43-44.
- Bibby, S. & McIlroy, T. (2013b). Literature in language teaching. *The Language Teacher* (37)5, 19-21.