

JALT 2017 - Four Corners Tour

Malu Sciamarelli

The C Group

malusciamarelli@gmail.com

I was first invited to attend JALT by Kevin Cleary in 2012 at IATEFL Glasgow, UK. He was then JALT president and convinced me JALT would be an excellent opportunity to meet professionals in the area, share my ideas, and collaborate to the excellence in language teaching. Accepting his invitation, there I was in Hamamatsu as a delegate at that time, and again as a presenter in Kobe and Tsukuba for JALT 2013 and 2014. This year, it was a great honour to be a featured speaker at the main conference and the four corners tour on behalf of the C Group.

After the main conference, my tour began in West Tokyo at the International Christian University High School with the workshop “Reading in a Global Age” organised by the West Tokyo Chapter. In this workshop, we looked at the established reading practices we use in the classroom with our students to help them make sense of what they read. We discussed the difference it makes when we read poems, short stories, or novels in a print book, on a tablet, on an e-book reader, and on a smart phone. As participants engaged in discussions about these reading processes, I pointed out that the physical qualities, internal structures, and technological operations of various medias affect us in different ways. So clearly reading literary texts in different media means reading differently. We could even say we are reading a different text.

As they reflected on these differences, I presented newer, computer driven techniques to get an introduction to what it means to read literature in the digital age and to be a social reader:

- **Hyper Reading:** a non-linear reading strategy that can take us into multiple directions which cannot be foreseen at the beginning of the reading process. Its main techniques are filtering, skimming, pecking, imposing, filming, trespassing, de-authorising, fragmenting, juxtaposing, and scanning; and
- **Social Reading:** a collaborative form of online reading in which several internet users read the same text, comment on it, and respond to others' comments. Social reading promises to

break with the practice of solitary reading and turn reading into a truly interactive, collaborative process, and an exchange among equals.

I believe that the most important part of the workshop was when the participants and I experimented on the activities of hyper-reading and social reading, and discussed whether hyper reading and the collaborative practice of social reading truly enhance our understanding of literary texts and whether they will ever replace solitary reading.

The second part of the tour was at Hirosaki Gakuin University in Hirosaki, organised by Iwate Chapter. There were two workshops: one for students on “How to improve Reading and Writing Skills,” and another one for teachers on “Creative Writing in the English Language Classroom.”

In the workshop with the students, I first listed some reasons why we read and write: to learn something new, to give information, to communicate, and for fun. Then students discussed and presented what their main reading and writing challenges were. After that, I told them the only way to improve their reading and writing skills is to read and write more. Each type of practice supports and strengthens the other, being equally important. Moreover, I dare say that in an age overwhelmed by information, the ability to read, understand, and write, in other words, to organise information into knowledge, must be viewed as equivalent to a survival skill. I went on to present a list of tips to help them focus and start to read and write more frequently. We concluded the workshop by doing some creative writing activities and reading them out loud.

“Writing and reading decrease our sense of isolation.

They deepen and widen and expand our sense of life: they feed the soul.”

(Anne Lamott)

The second workshop for teachers was about creative writing and the role it plays in the English language classroom. My main objectives in this workshop were to help illuminate some of the issues underpinning the use of creative writing in the classroom, share some practical ideas and help encourage teachers who have been working with creative writing to continue with their practices and perhaps reach out to even more teachers. In the first part of the workshop, I explored the essential benefits of using creative writing in the language classroom, its benefits for students and teachers, and what it can teach us about creativity in general. In the second part, the participants were invited to write a series of poems and stories which proved that everyone has creative

capabilities that can be encouraged and developed with constraints and great discipline, as well as creative energy.

The third part of the tour was at Tottori University in Tottori, organised by Tottori Chapter. The workshop “Creativity and Playfulness in the English Language Classroom” was based on my chapter “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation” in the new British Council’s publication Integrating global issues in the creative English language classroom: With reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, edited by Alan Maley and Nik Peachey. In this chapter, I point out that the playfulness approach is based on children’s natural way of interacting with their world and it goes go a long way to creating a more inclusive learning environment and more effective schools in general. This approach contributes mainly to problem solving, creativity, perspective taking, and the development of language. In this workshop, I emphasized that for play to happen, students need time, permission to take risks and make mistakes, and permission to explore new pathways. In addition, as teachers we need to: accept and acknowledge the value of play and creativity; offer activities and role-modeling; encourage creative thinking, active engagement, and critical thinking skills for children to learn a language through play. We concluded the workshop by doing some activities from the book as well as new ones.

*“The creative spark is what ignites the fire of learning.
Without it, we are left dull, demotivating, routine teaching.”*
(Alan Maley)

The last part of the tour was at Fukui University in Fukui, organised by Fukui Chapter. The workshop presented there was “Reading in a Global Age” in which I introduced a new way to approach talking about reading and reading itself.

Although the workshop was the same as West Tokyo Chapter, the discussions and reflections were not. While I was presenting and interacting with other teachers, I remember one of the lessons taught at a tea ceremony in Tottori. Kiyono, my host, told me amongst other things, to treasure that moment for it would never be repeated. That is what was written on the wall:

一期一会

“Ichi-go – Ichi-e” meaning “one opportunity, one encounter”

Each encounter we have with a person or group of people will never be repeated. Even if we meet with those people regularly, that one particular encounter with them is unique. Isn't it exactly what happens in our classrooms?



My special thanks go to the C Group and Pilgrims for facilitating my trip and for the financial support, and for JALT Literature in Language Teaching SIG for also contributing financially to my visit and for inviting me to be their featured speaker. It was an incredible honour. I would also like to thank Mary Burkitt for organizing my tour and for the JALT West Tokyo, Iwate, Tottori (photo below), and Fukui Chapters for inviting me to present and showing me more about the local Japanese culture. My deepest gratitude. I dearly value the friendships and partnerships made and insights gained at JALT and I am sure they will go beyond these workshops and

meetings, leading to better understanding and appreciation of our profession from an international stance.

