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Growth Mindset in Education: JALT2023 Conference Report

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The 49th annual JALT Conference was held in Tsukuba, Japan from November 24-27, 2023, providing an opportunity for educators to reflect on their past experiences and gain new information for the future. This year's conference theme, *Growth Mindset in Language Education* took inspiration from Carol Dweck's (e.g. Dweck, 2006) intelligence theory which defines a fixed mindset of belonging to learners that believe their abilities are inherently limited and that educational mediation is futile. Conversely, growth mindsets are characterized by learners who believe in their capacity for development. Though these mindsets are individualistic and learner-centric, presenters at the conference shared classroom observations of diverging mindsets and approaches for educators to encourage confidence in growth. For example, talks on AI and ChatGPT were well-attended by those looking for solutions to restrain use or positively integrate it into the educational process. Its perpetuation of a fixed mindset or potential toward growth is still in debate.

The breadth of presentations connected to literature in language teaching responded to the conference theme in many ways, though the emergent theme of multimodal learning was prevalent. Multimodal literacy encompasses 'multiple modalities' in both learning styles and the resources used to develop them. Multimodal approaches are being integrated into classrooms to "expand students' range of communicative options through existing or new genres and help them to speak to new audiences" (Hyland, 2022, p. 73). These pedagogies were showcased with the LiLT SIG's featured speaker, Shannon Sauro, who detailed the use of digital spaces for language learners to explore their interests and create fanfiction for online communities, and the introduction of picture books into EYL classrooms that encourages young learners to engage in the visual creativity process while developing a range of communicative competencies.

Literature in Language Teaching SIG Forum

The theme of the 2023 LiLT SIG forum, *Collaboration with Literature* drew attention to collaborative and experiential activities in the language classroom. Conducted in-person at the conference site, four presenters summarized their projects in 15-minute talks, which were followed by an interactive question and answer session with the audience. The first two presentations centered on the use of picturebooks, with Martin Sedaghat discussing post-reading projects for young learners and Alison Hasegawa sharing insights from her research on picturebooks. During the second half of the forum, the presenters focused on activities and key takeaways from students' discussions in the university classroom. Mary Hillis explored the use of Instapoetry (Instagram poetry) to engage learners, and Luke Draper's students analyzed a Japanese short story in English translation through the lens of gender. The variety of text types and student populations covered in the forum presentations exemplifies the diverse potential of literature for language learning. The forum was co-chaired by Bethany Lacy and Jennifer Igawa, who both presented as part of the 2022 SIG forum..

Martin Sedaghat: Post-Reading Projects for Picturebooks

The types of activities that educators use in the classroom is a vital deciding factor when creating literature-based classes. These activities must foster engagement in the medium and optimize learning opportunities. Sedaghat spoke from the perspective of a young learner teacher who uses picturebooks as the main text and discussed effective post-reading activities. Sedaghat defines the benefits of post-reading activities as means of checking comprehension, gaining a deeper and personalized understanding of the narrative and developing creativity and social skills. Sedaghat provided examples of post-reading activities that facilitate this development. The first was 'retelling a story,' which Sedaghat illustrated through the picturebook *The Hare and the Tortoise*. His learners deconstruct the story into small scenes, draw the scenes and collaboratively reconstruct the story. This develops logical thinking, recall and synthesizing skills as well as social mediation. Using scenes from *This Is How We Do It: One Day in the Lives of Seven Kids from Around the World* by Matt Lamothe as a model of illustrating the daily routines of children around the world, Sedaghat's learners create their own picturebooks, drawing pictures of their school and home-life as well as their likes and dislikes. *Ketchup on your Cornflakes* by Nick Sharratt also models humorous and imaginative ways of creating food-themed picture books with unusual ingredients. Another activity is 'making predictions', in which Sedaghat stops learners from reading the final page of a story and asks learners to imagine the scene with drawings. Activities that encourage learners to reimagine abstract or decontextualized elements of picture books through their own creations also develop textual understanding and personalization skills while building knowledge of other topics (STEM, social sciences, globalization, etc.). Creating their own texts based on model picture books allows young learners to examine the texts' central themes while exploring their own interpretations and visualizations of them, developing agency and creativity simultaneously.

Alison Hasegawa: The Power of Picturebooks

While there are various definitions of picturebooks, one key feature is the interplay of textual and visual elements. Hasegawa advocated an interactive approach to the utilization of picturebooks, citing Bland who was the LiLT Featured Speaker in 2019: "During booktalk the picturebook reveals its story and the students create

an understanding of its secrets gradually, layer by layer (2023, page 76). Indeed, Hasegawa's recent research project conducted from 2020 to 2023 with students aged 6-11 years old, demonstrated this process of gradually building understanding. The study involved the use of the picture book *The Suitcase* by Chris Naylor-Ballesteros, which focuses on the general theme of diversity and inclusion, particularly in welcoming others. In this book, a stranger arrives with a suitcase and the other characters speculate about what is inside. Critical and creative thinking activities were incorporated throughout pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading activities. One post-reading activity involved students watching a video about a Ukrainian student attending a Japanese elementary school, which prompted students to discuss how they would react if a new student from another country started to attend their school. In another post-reading activity, the children created artwork with new dialogue for the characters. Data collection included audio recordings, student artwork, and questionnaire results. Excerpts from student discussions and examples of their art were shared, highlighting the educational potential of the picturebook to explore concepts such as making friends, learning from mistakes, and embracing diversity. More book recommendations can be found online through the hashtag #weneeddiversebooks.

Mary Hillis: Engaging Language Learners through Instapoetry

Hillis's presentation centered on the use of Instapoetry to engage learners in the language classroom. The word "Instapoetry" is a fusion of Instagram and poetry, and it is characterized by its interactive nature, allowing users to like, comment, share, and remix content. Rupi Kaur, who is one of the most famous Instapoets, not only publishes poems online but also has three published poetry collections. She often writes about the themes of migration, womanhood, and relationships. The presenter shared four poems by Kaur, illustrating how they could be integrated with nonfiction articles covering a range of topics: body image, social media, advertising, beauty canons, and mental health. Students participated in collaborative activities, reading and discussing the poems in small groups before writing comments for selected poems. Their discussions initially revolved around reading comprehension before shifting to an exploration of their emotional reactions. It was observed that the use of Instapoetry can contribute to social-emotional learning (SEL): the emotional learning competency of self-awareness was addressed as students

identified and articulated emotions, while relationship skills were fostered through collaborative group discussions. Instapoetry may appeal to Generation Z learners through the integration of language learning, digital literacy, group work, and emotional exploration.

Luke Draper: The Lonesome Bodybuilder: Exploring Gender through Literature in the EFL Classroom

Draper's talk explored the use of short Japanese prose in translation to prompt ESL learners in a Japanese university to analyze their fiction and thus their culture and society and to articulate their interpretations in English. Draper first justified the use of Japanese literature as a valuable tool for language study by drawing on text-world theory, an area that studies the way meaning is constructed through the mental formation of 'text-worlds' during the reading process (Gavins & Lahey, 2018). These mental images are formed through the relationship of the story's words and the readers' narrative schemata: their stored memories, life experiences and real-world knowledge. When a reader's schema aligns closely to the context of the story, this may engage the reader and expedite the reading process of more challenging texts. Draper's talk focused on the classroom introduction of the short story "The Lonesome Bodybuilder", written by Yukiko Motoya and translated by Asa Yoneda. The narrative is told in the first person by a Japanese housewife who takes up bodybuilding as a hobby. A key objective when designing the course was to ensure that 'authentic' reading experiences are provided over 'manufactured' ones. Giovanelli and Mason (2015) describe authentic readings as borne out of independent response and interpretation, while manufactured reading is created through an imposition of meaning from instructor onto the learner. Thus, the course stimulates the learner to explain their own responses and interpretations in their L2. Draper detailed written and spoken assessment within the course that prompted interpretation and gave examples of verbal responses that corresponded to the overall theme of concepts of femaleness and femininity in Japanese society, yet also demonstrated individual perspectives of the actions and characterizations within the narrative. Draper concluded that allowing learners to draw their own authentic responses to the literature alongside lexicogrammatical instruction facilitates determination to voice their interpretations which leads to authority over their cultural property.

Featured Speaker

The featured speaker was by Shannon Sauro, expert in online fan practices and language learning, and member of the FanTALES project (Fanfiction for the Teaching and Application of Languages through E-Stories). She joined virtually from the United States; at the conference site, attendees gathered in person to watch her presentation, and online, virtual participants joined the session on Zoom via the conference participant portal.

Getting Started with Fanfiction in the Classroom

In her workshop, Sauro introduced the concept of a "fan" by drawing on Duffet's definition: "A fan is a person with a relatively deep positive emotional conviction about someone or something famous ..." (Duffet, 2013, p. 18), and she emphasized that fans exist across various domains such as music, sports, manga, movies, dramas, and books. She highlighted diverse fan practices, which include not only reading and writing fanfiction, but also consuming media, moderating online communities, building websites, and creating fan translations. Some students engage in these activities outside of class in the digital wilds, defined as "digital spaces, communities, and networks [where language learning occurs] that are independent of formal instructional contexts" (Sauro & Zourou, 2019, p. 1). Involvement in these fan communities can contribute to students' language development.

During the interactive portion of the workshop, participants took part in a fanfiction challenge, collaboratively writing a story based on a set of prompts within a 20-minute time period. Prompts were given in four areas: source text, lines of dialogue, settings, and objects, with a minimum of four choices in each category. For example, for the source text, the fairy tales *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, the *Little Mermaid*, and *Frozen* were listed. Choices of an empty library, late at night, Howl's castle, or a mountain village were given for setting; and a purple pen, mobile phone charger, translation software, half-eaten onigiri, a bottle of water, or the Catbus for objects. Sauro encouraged participants to bring in aspects of their own fandoms as well—one group creatively worked in references to JALT and JACET in their story! After completing the Challenge Lit activity, groups shared their stories and debriefed experiences, mentioning that writing together fostered creativity, collaboration, and comradery. Sauro added that another benefit of working in small groups is that

learners can overcome hesitancy they might have toward creative writing.

In addition to Challenge Lit, there are other genres of fanfiction. Two examples are Fix-it Fic (fixing plot holes or changing story events) or Fusion Fic (writing stories which combine two fandoms). Fans also write prequels or sequels, write stories from alternate points of view, or change identity characteristics of the characters (e.g., gender, sexuality). Therefore, fanfiction affords language teachers and students a rich array of options for exploring stories. Sauro's workshop provided practical insights, engaging activities, and valuable resources to introduce teachers to the use of fanfiction in the language classroom.

For more information, the FanTALES website (https://www.fantales.eu/) has additional resources, including lesson plans and a teaching handbook, providing guidance for educators interested in incorporating fanfiction into the curriculum. In addition, Sauro was interviewed in advance of the conference by Robert Taferner for the JALT YouTube channel, and the video "JALT2023 Featured Speaker Interview of Shannon Sauro" can be accessed at https://youtu.be/IHpqZboJwBA?si=sHnzvOW86gLV42CB

Fanfiction from the Digital Wilds to the Language Classroom

After the workshop, Sauro continued the theme of fanfiction by identifying 'the digital wilds' as a space for learners to explore their specific area of fandom. Sauro defines online fandom as "the local and international networks of fans that develop around a particular program, text or other media product" (Sauro, 2014, p. 239) and 'digital wilds' as online communities that are independent of the classroom. By participating in these communities, learners read the fanfiction of other enthusiasts and create their own, thus engaging in the target language in a creative and personally fulfilling way. Sauro draws on case studies from Black (2006) and Lepännen et al (2009) that describes the experiences of ESL learners developing linguistic competence through their participation in online fan spaces, and another study (Korobkova & Black, 2014) that details the growth in language learner's written skills through active engagement in a One Direction fanfiction community. In each of the works drawn upon, it was clear that the learners' language skills developed alongside their sense of identity and belonging to the group. Sauro then discussed the implications of introducing fanfiction to

the language classroom through her own research, in particular a six-year long project that explored in-class collaborative fanfiction writing at a Swedish university and the positive impact the theme had on learner engagement and language proficiency. Findings of interest are reflections from a learner who recognized the expansion of his vocabulary away from common, everyday lexis and another who identified the need to adapt his written language to match the fiction's period, thus demonstrating developed pragmatic ability. Away from a higher education setting, Sauro detailed a project in a Belgian upper secondary school based on the action-adventure video game *Assassins Creed*, in which students demonstrated keen attention to their language use to suit the genre to master the challenge of being creative with a limited vocabulary. The talk concluded with final observations that with the introduction of fanfiction in the classroom, learners gain cultural authority by drawing on their personal fandoms and manipulating their other language to best represent their fictionalizations. These practices shift to online communities, or digital wilds, where language learners continue to socialize and create fanfiction in their L2.

Presentations of Interest

Using Picturebooks in University CLIL Environments by LiLT Forum Chair Bethany Lacy
Bethany Lacy served as the chair of the 2023 LiLT SIG Forum, and her poster presentation showcased practical suggestions for integrating picture books into university content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classes, with examples for units on literature, economics, health, sociology, and zoology. Providing accessible yet authentic materials on commonly studied topics, picture books also develop students' visual literacy, which can be achieved by encouraging them to analyze the pictures before reading the accompanying text. Suggested picture books included *In Search of the Little Prince: The Story of Antoine de Saint Exupery*, written and illustrated by Bimba Ladmann. As part of a literature module, this book could be used to explore factors that influence an author's writing. *Lights On! Glow-in-the-Dark Deep Ocean Creatures*, written by Donna B. McKinney and illustrated by Daniella Ferretti, features bioluminescent creatures and can be used as part of a zoology unit in order to introduce information about animals and give students practice discussing and describing them. For each of the recommended books, vocabulary lists, pre-reading tasks, post-reading research topics, and

connection questions were included to foster further engagement and exploration of the topics. Lacy was recognized as a JALT2023 Conference Poster Presentation Winner, and the poster is currently available at the JALT website (https://jalt.org/system/files/JALT2023_Poster_Lacy.pdf)

Exploring Queer Literacies through an Online Book Club by Chelanna White

White described distinguishing characteristics of the queer book club as "diversifying understanding of classic literature; experiencing perspectives from different, intersecting identities; challenging assumptions about our own and others' experiences; and potentially engendering advocacy and activism". Participant responses to the researcher's questions showed that the book club facilitated their understanding through active discussion, negotiation of meaning, and exploration of the text. Furthermore, all respondents affirmed the book club's contribution to their personal growth. "Educators have the capacity to disorient the social space of their classrooms, making visible queer objects and encouraging students to engage with them in particular ways in order to redress exclusionary and repressive discourses" (Potter 2022, p. 101). Promoted as a social issues English book club, the weekly sessions were held during lunchtime through the university's self-access learning center. One book the group read was *FernGully* by Diana Young. It is about deforestation and was aligned with participants' request for an environmentally themed reading selection; in addition, the story can be enjoyed in both book and animated film formats. The presentation concluded with recommendations for educators interested in starting similar book clubs at their own educational institutions.

Enhancing EFL Learners' Language Proficiency with Literature by Yiu-nam Leung

Yiu-nam Leung's presentation, sponsored by ETA-ROC, showcased the use of the epistolary novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker in an EFL context. The presenter highlighted the short length of letters in the book which make the reading experience manageable for language learners. Various active learning techniques, for instance note taking, group discussions, and presentations related to the novel,

were explored. Students were encouraged to discuss overarching themes related to race, sexuality, and injustice; in addition, students analyzed the significance of the title,

plot development, and the use of colors and other symbols throughout the book. By inviting guest speakers, showing the movie, and conducting internet research, the students' understanding and appreciation of the novel was deepened further. While the presenter acknowledged the difficulties of using literature in the classroom, its effectiveness to cultivate language development and foster an engaging learning environment was emphasized.

Writing a Series of Graded Readers in a University Classroom by Mark Brierly

Mark Brierly discussed the integration of creative writing into a compulsory university English course. He emphasized the benefits of creative writing, pointing out that the fundamental writing process of planning, writing, revising, and proofreading applies to both creative and academic writing. Other advantages of creative writing include stimulating the imagination, increasing student writing output, and producing enjoyable reading materials. The collaborative process for developing the series was discussed. After brainstorming ideas, the list is narrowed down, and then as a class, students vote to decide the overall theme of the series. Then students contribute stories to the series. Brierly shared examples of successful series titles, such as "Japan Travel 2021", "Avocado Man 2022", and "What if there is no … 2023", each providing learners with many choices within a structured framework. The importance of not only including essential story elements (orientation, conflict, resolution), but also crafting effective titles, taglines, characters, and settings were underscored. The presentation offered insight into an innovative approach to teaching writing skills while fostering creativity and learner autonomy in the language classroom.

Teaching EFL Students How to Analyze Short Stories by Camilo Villanueva

Villanueva looks to Foucault's (2015, p.48) conceptualization of literature, "a language, a text made of words, but words that are so appropriately and carefully chosen and arranged that something ineffable passes through them" to illustrate both the challenges and values that literature in the language classroom may offer. His research focuses on the various ways his third and fourth year university students analyze fiction in his elective creative writing class toward a more holistic literary understanding over traditional grammar-translation methods of teaching with literature.

Examples of short fiction Villanueva uses in his classes are "The Egg" by Andy Weir, "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant and "The Chicken" by Clarice Lispector and each story had a specific learning goal in analysing elements of fiction, such as depiction of dialogue, thought and action and characterization. Evaluative feedback of his classes reveal that students mostly feel that positive in regard to the value of literary analysis, that it has helped them develop their literary analysis skills and has helped them in the writing of their own fiction. Villanueva's presenting of both his teaching methods and research findings suggests that literary analysis techniques and their application through creative writing is an underutilized area of study for English learners in Japan which may offer an engaging practice of language production.

Haiku Reading as Meaningful Literacy Practice by Atsushi Iida PhD

The relationship between the stylistic choices of poetry and reader interpretation is an area of research that may inform educators on reading comprehension based on the text's linguistic features. The field advocates for empirical data that analyzes textual form and applies this to a rationale of interpretation. Thus, findings in this area are valuable for all teachers who use literature in considering the impact of style on reader response. Iida's research focuses on haiku, the form of poetry that follows a 5-7-5 syllable line structure and applies imagery in reference to seasons. Iida recognises haiku as a popular style that is taught around the world as a form with strict boundaries that facilitates the development of voice in both its practitioners and readers. His research focuses on the reading process and reader interpretation of English-language haiku by Japanese learners. More information on his research can be found at his website https://atsushi-iida.com/

Reflections on the Conference (Hillis)

During the pandemic period, language teaching associations around the world shifted to online professional development activities, and although there were some drawbacks, benefits of the modality also emerged. Kormpas and Coombe (2023) write that advantages included "… diversity of audiences, inclusion of underrepresented populations of both teachers and students, and the occasion to expand the professional development repertoire of the association" (p. 66). In May 2023, the United Nations declared an end to the COVID-19 global health emergency (UN, 2023)

and Japan's official border restrictions also came to an end ("Japan," 2023). Similar to the JALT 2022 conference, a virtual element remained in the JALT 2023 Conference: presenters and attendees could choose to attend in person or online, which meant that the conference was open to more domestic and international participation. As previously mentioned, this year's LiLT SIG Featured Speaker Shannon Sauro presented live online from the United States, and a selection of concurrent presentations were also available in online or hybrid formats.

Many of the presentations of interest in this conference report dealt with pedagogical interventions conducted within teaching and learning environments during the pandemic period. Moreover, the results of research conducted on emergency remote teaching and subsequent face-to-face classes with measures designed to prevent the spread of infection (e.g., mask wearing, social distancing) were presented. These could further be seen in presentation titles throughout the program, such as "Teacher and Student Perceptions of Online Language Learning" by Ferg Hann and "Navigating Psychological Impacts of Masks in the Classroom" a poster by Lauren Landsberry and Ann Flanagan.

The year of 2023 was also marked by the growth of generative artificial intelligence (AI), with Collins Dictionary choosing "AI" as its word of the year (Guy, 2023). The use of ChatGPT and Midjourney, for example, has become a hot topic in many fields, including education and publishing. In addition to LiLT member Cameron Smith's presentation "Creativity and Artificial Intelligence: Supporting Students", technology was the subject of focus in the CALL SIG Forum "AI and ChatGPT in Education: Prospects and Threats", and in Louise Ohashi and Antonie Alm's presentation "ChatGPT: An Initial Response From Language Teachers in Japan". Language education in Japan continues to change and develop along with societal and technological influences.

Reflections on the Conference (Draper)

For another year, literature as a tool for language education was well-represented at the JALT2023 conference. A range of textual mediums and innovative pedagogies were displayed and an overall sense of positivity and gratefulness to be sharing ideas and experiences together after years of mostly online participation was manifest. The diversity of texts and academic backgrounds was also striking. Featured speaker Shannon Sauro spoke about fan fiction and

digital spaces from the perspective of her Swedish university students, an area of rich opportunity for English learners in Japan who embrace the full reach of global and domestic media cultures. Young learners were widely represented, and it was heartening to watch such diverse talks on the effective use of picture books in EYL that stimulates not only language acquisition but higher-order thinking such as analysis, problem-solving and creativity. Areas of ELT research that may be somewhat neglected in Japan are beginning to emerge, such as creative writing (Mark Brierly; Camilo Villanueva) and stylistic analysis of poetry (Atsushi Iida).

Innovation in the face of adversity seemed an ancillary theme of this year's conference. As Hillis discussed in her reflection, many of the talks arose from experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent prevalence of AI use has posed a challenge to many educators. With constant advances in the technology, there seems to be few solutions for halting student usage. I am reminded of the sci-fi magazine *Clarkesworld* that paused short fiction submissions due to a sudden surge of similarly plotted, AI-generated stories. It may be easy to condemn these authors, though it was revealed that many authors submit from poorer countries where payment for publication may greatly assist in living costs. Similarly, while some learners may abuse ChatGPT due to its existence, others may utilize it for legitimate reasons, such as disengagement with the assignment and overall lack of motivation. Each talk presented innovative approaches to language education through multiple modes of literature that may dissuade learners from seeking shortcuts and engaging with the learning process towards a positive growth mindset.

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