

The LLL-SIG's Mini Conference: Drama, Story-telling, and So Much More

Joseph Dias
Program Chair

We were pleased to hold our LLL-SIG Mini Conference on February 10th and 11th under the auspices of English Teachers of Japan (ETJ), which concurrently held their Tokyo Expo in the same facilities at the Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages. This collaboration with ETJ has continued for seven years and we hope for future productive joint endeavors with David Paul and ETJ.



Joseph Dias (Program Chair) and Tadashi Ishida (LLL-SIG Coordinator)

This year's LLL-SIG Mini Conference saw the largest number of presentations ever and record-breaking attendance numbers. As the Program Chair on the LLL-SIG side, it was my pleasure to work with Terence Yearley and the vetting team he assembled to put together the conference program of distinguished and talented speakers. Although the LLL-SIG stream of the conference had no particular theme, the bulk of the presentations concerned the use of drama and

story in the EFL classroom. Other presenters discussed activities to promote student interest in current events, service learning in Japanese academic contexts, and the challenges and joys of teaching students in difficult situations—such as those in poverty or in orphanages.

Here is summary of the presentations, categorized by theme, and profiles of the presenters:

***** Story-telling and Drama-related Presentations *****

Nena Nikolic-Hosonaka [Title: English Through a Child's Eyes (Early childhood English education)] discussed the concept of learning English through the eyes of children and involved the audience in activities compatible with the ways children experience the world, using science experiments (learning through direct experiences), playacting activities (getting into somebody else's shoes), and familiar games from another angle.



Nena Nikolic-Hosonaka (KUIS, Aoyama Gakuin University)

Profile: Nena Nikolic-Hosonaka created the Teacher Training Department (for young learners) at Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages 22 years ago, and presently teaches undergraduate and

graduate courses at Kanda University of International Studies, and runs "Nena's English School" for students from ages 1-71! Formerly, on the subject of young learners, she had a radio program, a column in the Yomiuri Newspaper, and was once even a TV personality. Nena speaks Japanese and Serbian, has two MAs (teaching English and Japanese), and a PhD (on teaching culture to young learners).

In Paul Howl's presentation [Title: Drama Language Games in the EFL Classroom] participants learned how to utilize drama-related language games to enhance listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in high school and university classrooms. These challenging games were explained and teachers were able to experience them and learn how they could be adapted for different teaching contexts.



Paul Howl (Aoyama Gakuin University)

Profile: Paul Howl has been teaching at Aoyama Gakuin University for eight years. He has his Masters degree in dramatic literature and enjoys acting and directing for several Tokyo theater companies. Last year he directed the award-winning play "Blackbird."

Chris Parham, Justin Davis, and Walter Roberts teamed up in their workshop [Title: Bringing Drama into the Classroom in Japan] which focused on the need to bring more drama to English classrooms in Japan. Twenty drama-related games were presented under these categories: warm-up, focus, teamwork, storytelling, imagination, improvisation and cool-down. By the end of the session, teachers had a wide repertoire of drama activities to draw from. The speakers also spoke briefly about the work of the Black Stripe Theater Company and their recent performances and workshops.



Chris Parham (Aoyama Gakuin University / Black Stripe Theater Company)

Profile: The principal speaker, Chris Parham, teaches public speaking as well as drama courses at Temple and Aoyama Gakuin Universities. An actor and director, with an MA in theatre and performance art from Rose Bruford College, London, he is a co-founding member of Tokyo's Black Stripe Theatre and was most recently seen in the role of Charles Dickens in “A Christmas Carol” at a performance at Aoyama Gakuin University. Black Stripe Theater was established in 2007 and the group have staged over twenty full-scale productions. They have also performed, directed and led drama workshops in several schools and universities in the Kanto area.

Yumi Matsunaga [Title: Joint Storytelling at public elementary schools] briefly introduced the theory behind Joint Storytelling--a technique pioneered by the Aoyama Gakuin University professor Mitsue Allen-Tamai—before demonstrating how it is being integrated into the curriculum at Shinagawa Ward elementary schools. Participants were given the chance to see for themselves how this method could be used to foster spoken language skills by trying it out themselves.



Yumi Matsunaga (Shinagawa Ward Public School Teacher)

Profile: Having done her MA at Aoyama Gakuin University, Yumi Matsunaga has been teaching English to 5th and 6th graders at public elementary schools for four years.

***** Presentations on Service Learning,
Teaching in Difficult Contexts, and Making the Most of
Current Events *****

Miwako Dias [Title: Teaching English to Students in Difficult Situations] described her experiences teaching English as a volunteer at orphanages and the ways she has tried to improve self-esteem and motivation. Putting her work in context, she noted that at present about 30,000 children live in orphanages throughout Japan. However, fewer than 20% can enter higher education due to financial constraints or impoverished educational opportunities. The speaker encouraged participants to volunteer and explore what role they might play at an orphanage in their area. The need is great but the number of staff (and volunteers) at orphanages hardly scratches the surface of that need.



Miwako Dias (Tokyo University of Social Welfare)

Profile: Miwako Dias has worked for the non-profit sector in public relations at the NPO Kids' Door and has volunteered as an English teacher and interpreter for an orphanage in Tokyo. She is currently studying toward getting her credentials as a high school English teacher and counselor.

Joseph Dias [Title: Service Learning in Japanese Academic Contexts] began by explaining the concept and practice of service-learning, telling the audience that it combines learning objectives with community service. He then demonstrated how students can activate their language skills while supporting the activities of NPOs, incorporating their experiences into assignments and presentations. Case studies were presented of university students who have volunteered for Second Harvest Japan, Doctors of the World, TELL, and other non-profits.



Joseph Dias (Aoyama Gakuin University Professor and Program Chair of the LLL-SIG)

Profile: Currently serving as the coordinator of the Integrated English Program at Aoyama Gakuin University, Joseph Dias teaches courses on intercultural communication and food culture as well as a professional development course for graduate students. His is also a reviewer for the JALTCALL Journal and program chair of the Lifelong Language Learning SIG of JALT.

Kathleen Yamane [Title: Activities for Fostering Student Interest in Current Events] introduced several in-class tasks and homework assignments that aim of encourage students to regularly access a variety of news sources, both written and audio. These tasks are designed to help learners develop inferencing skills, enhance the decoding process, as well as improve their self-expression in English.



Kathleen Yamane of Nara University [Membership Chair of LLL-SIG]

Profile: Kathleen Yamane teaches in the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Nara University. Her research interests include semantics and sociolinguistics, with a focus on language varieties.