

A Year to Remember: Coordinator's Message

Joseph Dias

LLL-SIG Coordinator / Professor at Aoyama Gakuin University

This year (2023) has been one of the most active ones in recent history for the Lifelong Language Learning SIG. We began our activities at the [PanSIG Conference](#) in Kyoto, which took place at Kyoto Sangyo University, May 12-14, where our SIG held a well-attended forum on [Lifelong Playfulness: Creative Uses of Language In and Out of the Classroom](#).

LLL-SIG at PanSIG 2023 in Kyoto

Our forum demonstrated the value of role play and performance for English L2 development inside and outside the classroom from the perspective of both students and teachers. Michiyo Okawa, a professor of performance studies showed how students can perform plays created from their original scripts or adapted from published screenplays to enhance communicative competence as well as creative skills. Joseph Dias explored how teachers in a university intensive English program can prepare their students to get the most out of plays performed by community theater groups either on campus or in local theaters. Gregory Strong demonstrated how teachers can use their experiences as lifelong learners to produce and direct their own creative dramatic work. And, finally, a former student of the other presenters, Miki Tanaka—now a university English instructor herself—discussed the benefits and limitations of role-play and performance, not only for college students but also for adult learners.



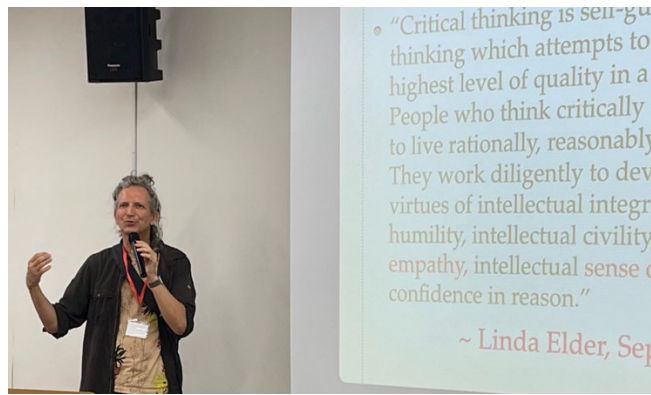
Our Mini Conference in Okinawa

Then, in Naha, Okinawa (August 11-13, 2023), it was my pleasure to present in the Lifelong Language Learning stream at the [OkiJALT Summer Symposium 2023 in Naha, Okinawa](#) along with Kinsella Valies, Mariana Oana Senda, Dom Jones, and Miwako Dias. The conference, which served as our annual “Mini-conference, was co-sponsored by the Okinawa Chapter of JALT (OkiJALT) with JALT’s Materials Writers Special Interest Group (MW SIG) and the LLL-SIG. It took place at the Okinawa Prefecture Gender Equality Center, Tiruru. Before our stream of LLL-SIG talks, on the first day of the conference, Diane Nagatomo gave a rousing plenary talk that covered her storied life as a writer of EFL texts, newspaper columns, and—most recently—a novel.



Diane Nagatomo (far right) along with Julia Kimura (JALT National Membership Chair, far left) and our Co-Membership Chair and conference speaker, Mariana Oana Senda, in the middle.

The first speaker in our stream was Joseph Dias who spoke on the topic “Cultivating empathy through the use of student-created first-person vignettes.” The speaker demonstrated how empathy can be cultivated among university students by having them create vignettes from the perspectives of individuals who are intimately connected to controversial issues they are researching, with the ultimate goal of nurturing critical literacy by having students flesh out an imagined NGO that constructively addresses social or environmental problems arising from their selected issue. A useful activity toward this goal was found to be one in which narratives are created by the students based on perspectives they identified as key to understanding the issue. Through these accounts, students gain a deeper emotional connection to such issues as cyberbullying, the aging population, and rising youth suicide rates. How teachers might adapt this activity for a variety of ages, levels of maturity, and teaching settings was explored.



The second speaker in the LLL-SIG stream was Miwako Dias, representing Dialogue in the Dark Japan (<https://did.dialogue.or.jp/totonou/en/>). She spoke on the topic “Communicating without borders: Communication with the visually and hearing impaired.” The speaker described a program developed by the founder of the social business Dialogue in the Dark, Andreas Heinecke, called Dialogue in Silence, which broadens the communicative repertoire of participants by putting them in situations in which they must communicate with each other, and with deaf facilitators, without words or conventional sign language. Using noise-canceling headphones in an area of complete silence, visitors complete tasks and, along the way, discover how to make better use of facial expressions, body language, and other forms of non-verbal communication. Miwako Dias explored how this might serve as a model for how language teachers can broaden the communicative options and modalities students use to communicate. The history and mission of the Dialogue Social Enterprise were presented, and the speaker shared what she has learned about communicating with blind and deaf colleagues. An interactive activity involving the collaborative representation of song lyrics was used to enjoyably illustrate points made by the speaker.



The third speaker, Dom Jones of Sendai Seiyo Gakuin College, spoke on the fascinating topic “Fostering student well-being, safety, and English skills through martial science games.” In the Ryukyu Islands, the birthplace of a variety of martial arts, the speaker introduced various TPR martial science games and showed how selections from the target language could be incorporated into simple martial art drills. He showed how these fun games can easily be performed by learners of all ages, including those of limited strength and mobility. Session participants were asked to respond to either verbal or visual cues to perform set movements. As well as being a fun way to learn language, other benefits of these exercises include enhanced personal safety, reductions in stress, greater productivity, and an improvement in mental health.



Mariana O. Senda was the energetic and mesmerizing fourth speaker in the stream of talks. Representing Meiji University and Obirin University, she spoke about “The role play revolution: Redefining paths for lifelong language learning.” Her workshop demonstrated how role play can foster meaningful communication, elevate learner motivation, and nurture essential lifelong language learning skills. Initially, the speaker explored the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence supporting role play’s effectiveness in language learning, grounding the discussion in situated learning and communicative language teaching theories. Subsequently, the workshop shifted to illustrating practical role play activities, from basic dialogues to intricate problem-solving scenarios. Attendees were asked to participate in these activities, which enabled them to gain firsthand experience of their value. The final section emphasized the link between role play and lifelong language learning, highlighting role play’s contribution to developing key lifelong learning skills like autonomy, critical thinking, and learner engagement. The speaker also provided strategies to encourage students to pursue language learning beyond the classroom confines.



The fifth and final speaker in the LLL-SIG stream of talks was Kinsella Valies (Jissen Women’s University and Aoyama Gakuin University), whose presentation included a talk on the theoretical

aspects of using role playing games in language learning, which was followed by a workshop that vividly illustrated the concepts.

In her talk “Mission Possible: Leveling up in English at home and beyond,” Kinsella Valies examined how the integration of TTRPGs in informal, adult EFL can lead to significant positive outcomes for learners. The theoretical framework of her research on the topic was phenomenologic, based on dialogues, interviews and, reflections between the researcher and five participants. Participants were lifelong English learners and native speakers from varied backgrounds with the common denominator of having more than 10 years of TTRPG experience. The talk featured on the one hand, personal learning stories of L2 English learners and NNS English educators using TTRPG to improve their speaking and, on the other, the experiences of game leaders guiding L2 players through problem-solving scenarios and making them aware of culturally appropriate knowledge. By exploring the impact of table-top RPGs through phenomenology, the researcher aimed to provide recommendations for learners seeking to enhance their motivation, autonomy, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and fluency. The workshop portion of Kinsella Valies’ presentation was titled “Mission Possible II: Table Try Out.”



That 60-minute workshop, in which the speaker transformed into a game leader “who provide[s] players with situations that must be solved by them (Schneider, 2023)”, allowed the participants to take on the roles of L2 adventurers on a journey that included: speaking up when it was our turn, asking for clarification, using verbs and description creatively, competitive problem solving and critical thinking in English. Sharing peer advice was encouraged. Premade characters were made available for selection and dice were provided. All participants except the game leader controlled a character with different skills to help them figure out how to tackle the problems placed in front of them. After a short introduction to simplified rules of the game, the adventure began. We used teamwork, effective time-keeping and communication to defeat the risen evil in an attempt to bring peace to our local town. There was a debriefing after the adventure during which player-participants were asked to discuss their experiences.

LLL-SIG Forum at JALT National Conference in Tsukuba

Despite the huge role that language schools play in Japan to cultivate a lifelong learning mindset, our forum at the [JALT National Conference in Tsukuba](#) was the first time for our SIG to feature a panel to address this important area. Three present and former language school owners—Amy Cordell Long, Catherine Takasugi, and Lesley Ito—gathered in a presentation room on the morning of November 26, 2023 to speak, from their personal experiences, about the contributions language schools have played in fostering a lifelong learning ethos. Topics that were addressed included considerations that go into planning and establishing a language school, the greatest challenges posed by maintaining them, and good practices in recruiting, training, and retaining teachers. The role of language schools in the whole ecosystem of Japanese language education was also addressed. Fortunately, some members of the audience were contemplating establishing language schools of their own, so they

peppered the speakers with questions that took the session to unexpected areas and led to candid and eye-opening responses.



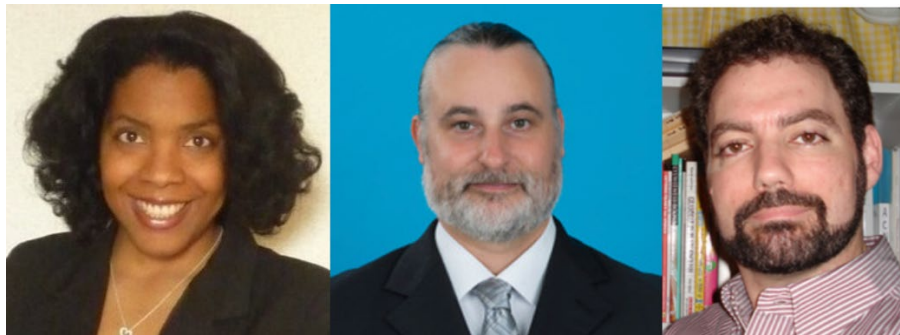
The three distinguished speakers, from left to right, Amy Cordell Long, Catherine Takasugi, and Lesley Ito.

Playful End-of-the-Year Gathering: Panel discussion on possible classroom applications of Tabletop Role-playing Games & a chance to experience them firsthand

At this festive year-end event on December 22, 2023, on the campus of Aoyama Gakuin University in Shibuya, three speakers—Kinsella Valies, Timothy Gutierrez, and Dax Thomas—gave brief talks about the ways they have used role-playing games in personal, professional, and research contexts. They then offered participants the opportunity to experience several game types by leading them as gamemaster (GM). Kinsella Valies gave a reprise of the fascinating talk that she gave in Okinawa at our Mini Conference there, while Timothy Gutierrez spoke on “Lunchtime Adventures for University Students using (Advanced) Fighting Fantasy.”

In his talk, he demonstrated one method for employing tabletop roleplaying games as educational materials to develop foreign language skills with students at the university level, showing how he

has been using such materials during lunchtime language development sessions in the foreign language teaching division of a global research and education center. Firstly, the presenter briefly discussed how the materials were implemented during these sessions, including one idea for linking the activity with extensive reading. Following this explanation, the audience experienced the materials firsthand and discussed effective practices for using tabletop role-playing games.



Dax Thomas, an assistant professor in the Centre for Liberal Arts at Meiji Gakuin University, gave a talk entitled “Me, Myself and Jean-Luc Picard: A Proposed “Play What You Know” Approach to Introducing TRPGs to University EFL Students.” In the first part of his talk he suggested a three-part approach that could be applied when introducing TRPGs to university EFL students to help ease them into the unfamiliar task of role-playing in a second language. The second part of the talk showcased a simple TRPG system and some supporting materials that can be used to accomplish this in the classroom. Participants were given an opportunity to create their own example characters.



Due to how well this program was received, it was decided that there would be regular, biannual sessions sponsored by the LLL-SIG where participants can enjoy tabletop role-playing games while reflecting on their educational applications.



Looking Toward 2024

We already have our 2024 Mini Conference and the PanSIG Forum in Fukui planned and ready to roll. The former will be held in conjunction with the ETJ (English Teachers of Japan) Expo at Otsuma Women's University on February 3rd and 4th 2024. The anchor for the event, conceived by our Program Chair (and Treasurer!) Natsuki Suzuki, will be a panel discussion at which teachers at various levels of education—elementary school, junior high, high school, and university—discuss the unique factors and considerations that go into the choice of effective language learning materials and tasks. Another session will focus on the accommodations that are sometimes

necessary in order to be sure that all students are learning and thriving.

As for the upcoming [PanSIG in Fukui](#), our SIG's in-coming Program Chair, Chiyuki Yanase, assembled what she has rightly dubbed, a dream team of speakers, including Charlie Browne, Louise Ohashi, Eric Kane, and Mary Nobuoka. The title of the forum will be "Fostering a Sustainable Language Teaching and Learning Community." Here is a brief overview of what it will be about:

In the midst of rapidly advancing AI technologies and pressing global challenges, the future appears increasingly uncertain, prompting widespread global discussions. This societal ambiguity can instil anxiety and confusion, particularly among the younger generation. It underscores the vital role of education and educators as guiding lights during such times. Our language-teaching communities find ourselves in a pivotal and transformative era, endeavouring to establish a sustainable and vibrant language-learning community. This vision emphasizes respecting the learner as an agent, fostering curiosity, and promoting well-being. Achieving this objective requires a multidisciplinary approach, urging educators from primary to tertiary levels to adopt cutting-edge approaches across various academic fields in language teaching. The collaborative discourse aims to shape a sustainable language-learning community for the future.

The Forum will be 85 minutes in length, which will include 15-minute presentations followed by a 25-minute Q&A session.

Shout-out to All the Hard-working LLL-SIG Officers

The Lifelong Language Learning SIG could not carry on without the hard work of all its officers. I would like to thank them for making this

SIG the success that it is and wish them godspeed in making our 2024 programs the best ever.

