

The School House

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From the Editor

To all Younger Learners Teachers,

I hope your fall has been a busy and productive one. This will be the last *School House* of the year and I would like to thank all of you for your continued support for this dynamic SIG.

In this issue, we have a couple of interesting articles, Johan Saputra Muljadi talks about cultural exchanges with elementary schools and Adrian Heinel, discusses how to prepare your junior high school students for a speech contest. Finally, the TYL SIG's coordinator has some words of wisdom to convey to our members.

This week, The 2017 JALT International Conference will be held in Tsukuba from November 17 to 20. The Teaching Younger Learner SIG has a wide array of presentations and discussions happening. The JALT conference is the best opportunity of the year for old and new members to meet. Please come by the JALT Junior area to say hello. As a member of this SIG, we hope you can also attend the TYL Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Saturday, November 18 at 3:30 . We're always looking for feedback and support to make our SIG better.

The next *School House* will be out in early 2018. If you have an article, pic or anything you would like to submit, please send it to me, pnanton@gmail.com.

If you want to know more about the SIG or have a question you can get onto our lively Facebook site (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/jshsig/>). We now have more than 160 members and regular posts offering advice, links, information, jobs and a sense of community! See you there!!

(pnanton@gmail.com).

Paul Nanton, Editor, *The School House*

Correction

Please accept my deepest apologies for the unintended typo in the last *School House* in Adrian Heinel's article. He is not working for Chime University but Ehime University.

MY EXPERIENCES IN SETTING-UP CULTURAL EXCHANGES IN PRIVATE JAPANESE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

**By Johan Saputra Muljadi
British Council Tokyo, Japan**

Abstract

This article explores the author's experience in setting-up cultural exchanges in a private Japanese elementary school located in Yokohama city. The author first had the idea of having a cultural exchange in May 2015. As of June 2017, he has experienced in setting up cultural exchanges with schools in New Zealand, South Korea, and the U.K. Exposure to foreign culture, opportunities to communicate with similar age students, further motivates students towards language learning, educators understand that there are many benefits for having a cultural exchange and yet, articles on this subject is still very scarce. In this paper, the author demonstrates the process of setting-up a cultural exchange, highlights students' activities and discusses challenges for teachers who are interested in setting-up cultural exchanges in their schools. This paper shows that the setting-up a cultural is not as difficult as it may seem and the benefits are not only limited to the students; it is an opportunity for teachers to expand their teaching horizons.

The establishment of cultural exchange

The English Club at our elementary school is held every Wednesday for sixty-minutes. My colleague (Tim) from the U.K. is acquaintances with an Elementary School teacher teaching in a public school in the U.K. He was a homeroom teacher teaching a similar age group. Being in similar circumstances and therefore able to help one another, we decided to undertake the challenge.

The first school, Priory Church of England Primary School, U.K.

We were told by our manager to write a proposal including details such as how our students will benefit from this experience, how the lessons will be delivered and what our students will make to send to the partner school and how these would be sent. This needed to be written in English and Japanese. Afterwards, the proposal was sent to the homeroom teacher of Priory Church of England Primary School (Priory). This process of communicating back and forth with our school, the British Council and Priory was not an easy task. Our school for example, is particularly concerned with the use of photographs and recording devices. Our school prohibits the use our students' faces outside the classroom even in school newsletters, social media or websites. Priory on the other hand, is the exact opposite. In addition to their school's website, Priory is also active on Facebook, posting photographs and videos of their school life. Despite the different view point, an agreement was achieved. Our school allowed us to use or take photos as long as they are taken during club activities.

Another factor that needed clear clarification was the due date for sending the letters. For Priory students, these students volunteered which meant that they are writing the letters in their own time; extra homework on top of their regular subjects. Their homeroom teacher

explained that this group of students have a deep interest in Japanese culture and would like to learn more about Japan. The homeroom teacher was confident that his students would send a reply before the due date. This was important because we needed to ensure that every student is included. Fortunately, this was the case. We received the letters on Tuesdays and this allowed us to have enough time to prepare for the next club session which is held on Wednesdays.

The students in the English club had varying levels of English ability. Due to this, it was decided to write English letters while helping members who is not capable of doing so. Prior to the start of cultural exchange, we spent one session introducing our students to Priory. We had agreed on three main topics and these were our school, our culture (Japan) and the Olympics. Two club sessions were spent on each topic. This was because we wanted to make sure that students had enough time to complete their letters. We felt that spending half of the club session on input (presenting the topic, reading letters from Priory students, checking the meaning of vocabulary items) would be needed before asking students to write a reply. The expectation was that our students would be further exposed to authentic English by receiving letters that are written by native speaker children. In the letter below written by Kelsey, “fish fingers” and “else” were vocabulary that our students did not understand. Here is an example of a letter written by a Priory student, and a reply from our student.

Dear Hana,

Thank you for your letter. I run once everyday and I play football once every two days. My favourite football team is Manchester City. What about you?

Also my favourite school lunch is fish fingers with chips and beans. What else do you like? What is your favourite animal? Also, where's your favourite place to go?

Your friend,

Kelsey

PS: please send some more pictures of where you like to go and what's your favourite animal? Also, what is your favourite colour?

Dear Kelsie,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I am good. I think that it is amazing that you run everyday. I play basketball everyday. My favourite school lunch is the herb grilled chicken and corn soup. This is your name is Japanese ケルシー. My favourite place and animal are Tokyo Disney Resort and lesser panda and my favourite colours are green and violet. I will send a photo. Please send some pictures of you.

Your friend

Hana

At the end of the club session, my colleague and I collected the letters to be scanned and sent via e-mail. We thought that this was the simplest method of delivery and the Priory homeroom teacher agreed with our suggestion. The exchanged started in September 2015 but unfortunately, the exchange ended in December 2015 due to the teacher being promoted to a new role as the Dean of the English Department.

The second school, Point View Primary School, New Zealand.

I was introduced to a New Zealand primary school teacher (Jane) through a friend in early 2016. She taught at Point View Primary School (Point View) located in Auckland, and she desired a long commitment. Due to this, a new set of paperwork was needed, again, in English and Japanese. However, this was not much work as before as Tim and I used the same template from our exchange with Priory to inform our manager, our school's principal and Point View's principal. In fact, there were less details. This is because both schools want

flexibility. This means that materials would be sent when they are ready. The reason for this was because an immediate reply was likely to prove difficult due to the constant changes in the Point View school's curriculum. Jane was hoping to be able to use her classroom time dedicated to this cultural exchange instead of assigning students to do it in their own time. For example: when our students sent a presentation introduction of our school in June 2016, Jane used one of her social studies classes to get her students to introduce their school. Furthermore, when our students sent letters about their daily routines, she used a writing class to get her students to write about their daily routines. There was also an occasion where her students sent our students materials outside classroom time. These were PDF files on Christmas. The writing in these files was dense, but my students could understand the content when my colleagues and I read it to them. Below is a table highlighting what we exchanged.

Japanese Elementary School and New Zealand Primary School		
Time	Our School's English Club	Point View Primary School
June 2016	Sent a powerpoint introducing the English Club members	Sent a powerpoint introducing her classroom students
June 2016 (2)	Sent an introduction of our school powerpoint	Sent an introduction of their school powerpoint
July 2016	Sent a powerpoint of our school lunches	
October 2016	Sent a powerpoint of pictures of our halloween events	Sent a powerpoint of pictures our their halloween events
November 2016	Students prepared a mini-poster about themselves in preparation for the two teachers visit day.	Johanna and her colleague visited our school and taught three lessons: introducing New Zealand and a mingle activity where students can talk freely with the teachers.
December 2016	Sent a short powerpoint of our christmas events	Sent five pdf files about Christmas food in New Zealand, Christmas events in New Zealand, History of Christmas, Summer in New Zealand and School lunches in their school.
March 2017	Sent goodbye letters as two of the English Club members will proceed to Junior High School	
April 2017	Requested videos of teachers introducing themselves to be used in 6th grade classes	Sent two videos accordingly
May 2017	Sent five letters of students writing about their daily routine	Sent six letters of students writing about their daily routine (these were also used in 4th grade classes)
June 2017	Sent a powerpoint introducing Japanese supermarket	

Table 1. A summary of exchanges between a Japanese Elementary School and New Zealand Primary School

June 2017 marked our one-year anniversary of collaboratively exchanging e-mails, videos and at one point, Jane and her colleague came to visit our school and taught three lessons in November 2016. This experience was very precious for our students and the feedback from the school and our employer (British Council Tokyo) was very positive. My colleagues and I believe that the benefit of cultural exchange is a fantastic opportunity for students to have an insight of what life is like for others who are at a similar age. Our students are developing their English proficiency skills by reading sentences that are completely new to them such as *I like devices, I don't like germs and I have a step Mum.*

The third school, Hanbat Elementary School, South Korea

On the 13th of August 2016, there was a post on Facebook from a teacher who is helping his friend to find a Japanese school teacher who would be interested in online cultural exchange using English as a Lingua Franca via e-mail, letter or video-recording. The frequency of the exchange was once a month from September to December 2016. After I had expressed my interest, our groups began exchanging. This exchange was the least burdening because some of the materials sent were the same as for Point View Primary School. As it sounded, a fair amount of the “exchanging” was from teachers instead of students. From our views, we feel that our students enjoyed receiving more than they enjoyed making and sending the materials. However, in gratitude to this opportunity, we were able to lessen our workload for two club sessions and students really enjoyed learning about Korean culture, schools and students. The table below details what we had exchanged.

Japanese Elementary School and South Korean Elementary School		
Time	Our School's English Club	Hanbat Elementary School
September 2016	Sent an introduction of our school powerpoint	Sent an introduction of their school powerpoint
	Sent a powerpoint of our school lunches	Sent powerpoints and videos of popular Korean snacks
October 2016	Sent a powerpoint of pictures of our halloween events	
November 2016	Sent a video accordingly	Requested a video of teacher(s) introducing a unique job in Japan
December 2016	Sent a video that was recorded during the 5th grade shopping presentation lessons	Requested a video about shopping

Table 2. A summary of exchanges between Japanese Elementary School and South Korean Elementary School

The exchange ended as planned. Although the teacher (Kim) was keen to continue the exchange, she explained that she would be too busy as she was involved in a big school project in March 2017.

Challenges for teachers

I asked Jane, Kim, and Tim to discuss the challenges for teachers in cultural exchange projects.

I had an interview¹ with Jane in June 2017. Jane said that the main challenge for her is “fitting it into an already overcrowded curriculum and making time for it in jam packed days where the timetable is constantly changing.”

I also had an interview² with Kim, a teacher from Hanbat elementary school in May 2017. She stated that more than one partner school is perhaps necessary to create a successful learning experience for students. This is because Kim believes that “it is hard to get a reply soon from the partner school because each school has different curriculum and academic schedules. Students have very high expectations about foreign friends’ reply so they usually lose their interest if the reply is delayed.” Kim recommended to have two or three partner schools to assure timely replies and recommend that teachers can search for partner schools through the ePals website: (<http://www.epals.com>). Kim also mentioned about students’ English competency. “Cultural exchange project (sic) could be a burden for low level students. You should provide enough time for low level students to practice and let the students collaborate. They can help each other while they’re collaborating.”

Tim identified three challenges for students: culture, language and writing skills while further commenting school rules could be a challenge for teachers. As for culture, Tim explained that the difference between Japan and the U.K. are huge. An example of this was TV shows that Priory students mentioned in their letters. These shows are not broadcasted in Japan, therefore we showed our students clips from the internet. Students’ reaction was very positive as full-episodes are available on Youtube. Furthermore according to Tim, language was possibly the biggest obstacle. Priory students wrote in a style that either mirrored their speech or was quite idiomatic, which is very different to the standard English the pupils from Japan would have learnt. An example of this was ‘What sports are you into?’ This however, didn’t really pose too much trouble as he could explain that this meant ‘What sports do you like?’ Wayne also added that “if there was lots of language to wade through and explain, this could often take up a lot of time.” As for writing skills, Tim explained that for some students, it was the first time they had written a letter to another person. He often found that by using some scrap paper to map out the ideas and the message the pupils wanted to write helped with this. This made Tim wonder because although he felt comfortable reformulating sentences for his students, he wasn’t sure if the pupils appreciated this and would have preferred to write their own sentences.

Over to you

Yanase (2017), wrote that “there is a serious lack of research and publications in the TYL (Teaching Young Learners) field.” I hope that this paper could inspire teachers to conduct cultural exchange with a school abroad or even domestically. I understand that school teachers, and Japanese teachers in particular are very busy due to heavy responsibilities outside the classroom. In our case, our school was very supportive of the cultural exchange

idea and our Japanese teachers' colleagues had shown deep interest in knowing what Wayne and I had planned. I personally believe that one of the biggest advantages of a cultural exchange is being able to use the materials received in my normal lessons. For example: I could use halloween materials as an input session, showing my 5th grader students of how halloween is celebrated in New Zealand.

The challenges for our future exchanges would be the opportunity for our students to have a Skype session. I am working very closely with Jane so that we could achieve this before the end of this year. I am also in close communication with a school in London. Following Kim's advice, Point View is currently the only school we are exchanging with. Therefore, I am always keeping an ear out for another opportunity. I was introduced to this school by my student as he spent three years studying there due to his father's work. This is also one method to approach a school and express interest in having a cultural exchange.

I sometime question whether the hard-work is worth my while. The workload will always be mountainous. However, at the very least, my students appreciate the opportunity to communicate with students' living abroad and the experience would broaden teacher's career. If readers are interested in knowing more details of materials our students sent and materials we had received, please do not hesitate to send me an e-mail. My e-mail address is johan.saputra@britishcouncil.or.jp I hope that my assistance can be of some help to those who have always wanted to start a cultural exchange.

Reference

Yanase, C. (2017). My perfectly Imperfect Academic Journey. *The Language Teacher* 41 (3), p33-34

An interview with Kim, May 23, 2017.

An interview with Jane, June 12, 2017.



Tips and Techniques for Junior High School Speech Contests

by Adrian Heinel, Ehime University

Introduction

Every year junior high schools from across Japan select students to participate in speech contests. Speeches are five minutes long and made in English. Usually students choose their own topics, write their own speeches, and practice for months. Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) often help with the preparation and presentation of these speeches. However, in my experience the most successful speeches are often a result of the students' current English abilities and the amount of self-directed effort they are willing to put in.

The purpose of this paper is to share some specific ways in which students can improve their speeches with only minimal assistance from their teachers. It is my hope that the tips and techniques in this paper can assist with building student confidence and illustrate ways students can facilitate improvement autonomously.

Methods and Techniques for Helping Students

Scheduling

It is important to get the students started early with preparing their speeches. I suggest preparing a timeline (like the example below) for students who are interested in participating in the speech contest during the selection process.

June	Completion of speech in Japanese
July	Translation and correction of speech
August	Memorization presentation practice
September	Speech Contest

The above schedule provides some leeway for students. Flexibility with time is important as students often have tests, events, and other activities that occupy their time. During the initial student selection process, it is important to talk with the students about the extra-curricular activities they are involved in and whether they feel they will be able to devote the time necessary to prepare for their speech. Some years ago, one student that I was assisting was a member of a drama club, and while her English skills and attitude were superior to all the other candidates, in the end, because of the demands of her drama club, she was unable to finish completely memorizing her speech by the date of the competition.

Content

Due to their relative inexperience with life, students often tend to want to talk about their family, school, club activities, their dream for the future, and pets. These topics tend to be redundant and not particularly interesting. However, I believe it is important for students to come up with a unique topic on their own. To facilitate this, teachers can provide some support by giving them examples of poor topics to avoid and by asking students some guiding questions. After that, students should be given some time to submit their own ideas. In this way students become more invested in and compelled to put self-directed effort into their speeches.

The rules state that students can memorize a speech written by someone else. However, I think that students should write the speeches themselves. Due to their limited English ability, at the first stage, students should write their speeches in Japanese. Then some feedback about the form and content can be given to the student by their teacher. This feedback can then be used to revise their work. Once the content has been decided on and written up in Japanese, it generally is up to the English teachers to translate the speech. Time constraints and work schedules may make it difficult, but whenever possible I believe it would be advisable and advantageous to involve the student in the translation process. By doing so, students are able to see their speech both come to life in English, as well as provide feedback on the wording, format and content that needs to be changed during the process.

One point to keep in mind while preparing the speech is that the judges seem to not only put weight on the content of the speech, but also on its structure. I've heard one judge say that 'good' speeches should have an introductory and concluding paragraph, as well as sequence markers throughout the body of the speech (e.g. 'first', 'second', 'then', 'finally', etc.). I don't know how rigidly judges expect speeches to conform to this structure, and I would be surprised if they looked to see if paragraphs had topic sentences, supporting sentences, concluding sentences, and the like. Still, it is important for English teachers to consider the coherence and unity of individual paragraphs and the speech as a whole during the writing process.

Pronunciation

There are several ways students can endeavor to improve their pronunciation. Teachers can record their own voices on a voice recorder or make a video and upload it to the internet for students to watch or listen to and practice along with on their own. They can take videos or voice recordings of themselves as well. Often people don't know how they sound until they've heard their own recorded voices. Students could also use a metronome to raise awareness of their own rhythm and speed.

It is important for students to understand that "good" pronunciation can be interpreted differently depending on who you talk to and what they believe. My own personal opinion is that the intelligibility of what the students say is more important than having "native speaker" like pronunciation. However, if the student already has a fairly good grasp of English pronunciation they may want to learn to mimic the pronunciation features of a native speaker. It may be worth having a conversation with the student to find out what they feel is "desirable" pronunciation and then help them to strive for that.

At the very least it would be appropriate to give some introduction to parts of the English sound system that students can later practice on their own and with the support and advice of a teacher. A few things that I would recommend introducing to students include; rhythm in English, sound reductions, consonant sounds, and intonation patterns. The table below gives examples of each of these.

<p>Rhythm in English</p>	<p>Content words are often stressed (spoken louder and slower). Function words are not stressed. Examples: My father is a teacher. I always walk to school.</p>
<p>Sound reduction</p>	<p>The sounds of words change to keep the natural rhythm of the sentence. Examples: Tell him ‘hello’. =Tellim hello. I like fish and chips. =I like fish-n-chips</p>
<p>Consonant sounds</p>	<p>Consonant sounds change in spoken language. Examples: /t/+’you’=-cha can’t you =cancha /d/+’you’=-ja would you =wouldja /n/+t/=n/ want to =wanna vowel /t/(/t/) vowel=/d/ water =wader</p>
<p>Intonation patterns</p>	<p>Questions with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer use a rising voice pattern. Example: Do you like this shirt <↗>? In lists, each item has a rising intonation, except for the final item. Example: Every day I fight dragons<↗>, trolls<↗>, and orcs<↘>.</p>

Stage Presence

To introduce students to the concept of excellent stage presence you can have them watch other speakers. I have heard a judge say that watching TED Talks is one way to see how good speakers carry themselves on stage. However, personally, I think watching

people in their own peer group is better. An example of someone with outstanding stage presence is Emiko Suzuki. This is her speech from 2013:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IGsyG6woCo>.

In this video she goes right up to but not quite over the top. Her body language and range of emotions are amazing. Note the way she holds her hands. Look at the way she makes eye contact with the whole room. See how she uses gestures to enhance her speech, but doesn't overdo it or use the same gestures overly much. Showing speeches like this one, and having students look up speeches by other finalists and winners at the national level is a good way to raise awareness of stage presence.

At one of my schools we invited a group of the speaker's peers to give their classmate feedback and comments on their performance. We invited three students to watch. All of them were high English achievers and were close enough with the speaker that they could give candid feedback without making them feel uncomfortable. In many cases I have found that feedback from peers about the speeches is taken more to heart than advice the teachers have for them.

Volume and Speed

One way to get students to speak in a louder voice is to use a Volume Unit (VU) meter. Students can use a VU meter on their iPads, but any VU meter will work. They should set it near themselves and aim for a volume range on the meter that is neither too quiet nor too loud. On their own they will clearly be able to see whether or not they need to speak up and adjust their volume appropriately.

Another thing to advise students to work on is that throughout speeches the volume and speed should change depending on the intensity of feeling they are trying to express. When they are talking about something fun and exciting, their speed and volume might increase to match or emphasize this feeling. When they are talking about something sad, for example, they may need to speak at a lower volume. When they are trying to nail something home, they may want to speak more slowly and deliberately emphasizing each word or syllable.

Generally speaking, the students should be talking at a rate of about 150 words per minute. At this rate they are speaking fast enough that everyone can keep up with them, and slowly enough that they can enunciate clearly. They can measure this rate by creating a document that has 200 words. Then have the student read it. If they can only read 100-130 words in a minute, they may be speaking too slowly, and 170-200 is too fast.

Nervousness Training

Many people get nervous speaking in front of a crowd, and more so when they are being judged. Communication, according to some theorists, is a performance act and nervousness plays a huge part in how successful a language learner is at learning and subsequently using the language. With Japanese students, in particular, the fear of making a mistake often prevents them from expressing themselves. While a speech is not exactly two-way communication, the nervousness and fear of mistakes applies. Generally speaking, in terms of learner development, I think that taking measures to reduce the affective filter can go a long way to developing the learners' willingness to communicate

and help dissipate nervousness and fears.

Fortunately, there are a few things students can do to help themselves feel more comfortable. I often tell my students that after they have memorized their speech they should recite it in front of all of the English teachers at their school. Next they should give their speech in front of their family and friends. Finally, they should give their speech in front of several classes at their school. This should help them to gain some confidence and help them feel a little less nervous.

Conclusion

Speech contests are just one hurdle language learners are able to experience on their path to developing English ability. Opinions vary about the “worth” of these kinds of speech contests. In some cases, teachers, and indeed students as well, just go through the motions and see the contests as simply something that the city or school requires them to do. However, I think they may be missing the bigger picture. These speech contests offer a valuable learning opportunity for students. Through them students are able to develop techniques, skills, and confidence that will help them with their English in the future. I believe it is important not to deny the students a serious role in development of their speeches and in their own language development in general. By doing so, we can provide them with tools to lead them towards a path of self-directed autonomous learning.

That all being said, in this paper I have tried to cover some simple, practical ways students can make efforts to improve their speeches autonomously. I hope that it is useful when it comes time to prepare for speeches in the future.



Greetings TYL Sig Members!

I hope this article finds you all well and ready the holiday season fast approaching! I don't know about you, but this is the busiest time of year for my schools. So, I hope you have time to stop and enjoy the season for yourself. I just wanted to reach out to you and express my sincere appreciation for your participation in our special interest group (SIG). Throughout 2017, we here at TYL SIG have tried to put a larger emphasis on the young learners and get more exposure and growth in this awesome and ever so important area of teaching. In the past, a lot of the focus was geared toward the upper levels and university instruction. And while that is important, we feel that our area of teaching should be equally represented. And with the support from you, we have definitely made a larger impact in the organization and are growing! That growth is reflected most importantly at our upcoming 2017 Conference where we have amazing representation of awesome speakers and workshops, probably one of the best ever! Next, our Facebook page and teacher interaction and SIG members have grown dramatically and finally our amount of co-sponsored events in several cities around Japan has grown. Please continue to support us and join our SIG and encourage your colleagues and friends to join also, and in return, please let us know how we can better serve you. Let us know what you would like more of and what tools or resources can JALT TYL SIG provide for our wonderful members.

Thank you and hope to see you at the conference!

Kenn Gale
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