

# The School House

The Publication of the JALT Teaching Younger Learners SIG  
全国語学教育学会若い人たちに教える研究部会研究部会定款



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ISSN: 1881-0713

**The Schoolhouse**  
**Volume 25, Issue 2**

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# Summer /Fall 2017 – Volume 25, Issue 2

Hi Everyone!

I hope your summer holidays were filled with rest and relaxation wherever you went. With the new term upon us comes a time to reflect, refresh and revitalize as to how we can better reach our students. This issue tries to give you different approaches to teaching both in and outside of the classroom. The first article by Marian Hara, introduces a new opportunity for teachers of young learners to share what they do in their classes. Followed by Adrian Heinel's article on challenging other methods of teaching grammar. Finally, Chris Cooper, outlines how he uses the joint storytelling method to make English more enjoyable for elementary school kids.

If that is not enough for you, 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!!

Just a quick reminder, this year JALT is going to be held at Tsukuba, Ibaraki from November 17 -20. I plan to put out one more School House before JALT. **If you would like to contribute an article, an event your promoting or anything you would like to be announced to TYL members, you can send it to me ([pnanton@gmail.com](mailto: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 Armando Duarte's Ethnographic Case Study article. His heading read "Ethnographic Cast Study" while it should have been "Ethnographic Case Study".

## **Younger Learner SIG Joint events with Local Chapters**

### **By Marian Hara**

In Tokyo JALT we started an exciting new project in cooperation with the TYL SIG last year, bringing together teachers and presenters working at various levels in the range covered by the term "Younger Learners". We have now held three events. There is growing interest in this idea as a way of providing more for SIG members, so here is a run-through of some points to cover. We hope this will help teachers thinking of holding similar events elsewhere.

**Venue:** We were lucky as the school where I teach was willing to let JALT use two class-rooms free of charge on days when they would not otherwise be used. Teachers at the school can attend free of charge. Two of the teachers have presented once and others have attended so there is a payback for the school. The management are very helpful and have also helped to get the word out to other schools and teachers. One benefit of using the school is that it's reasonably well equipped with large screens, projectors and an interactive whiteboard. But the sessions don't have to be high tech. If you register as a local group, community centres are usually inexpensive. Some mansions have meeting rooms for rent and using a coffee shop can work too, bringing in new customers for the business.

**Timing:** We settled on Sunday afternoon as Tokyo JALT already holds many events on Friday evenings. We started small with two 2-hour gatherings which were basically teacher shares. The first turned out to be mainly for the younger levels, pre-school and elementary and the second for junior & senior high - as decided by the proposals that came in. For the 3rd event we got ambitious and extended to four hours, offering a choice of timings to those wanting to present (45 or 75 min) or to do a shorter share (15 or 30 min). As for frequency, we hope to run three events a year. The last one coincided with the Nakasendo Conference which wasn't ideal. Best to check ahead with neighbouring chapters, and maybe join together with two or more chapters, to get the best bang for your buck. One choice is shorter and more frequent events or longer and less frequent - whatever works for you!

**Organization:** When I suggested this idea to Tokyo JALT they promptly created a new job, and that's one way to go. Tokyo's Program Chair is very busy with other events and, while very involved and helpful, doesn't need yet more work! Having a Young Learners Coordinator works for us in Tokyo but it could be more ad hoc depending on the make-up & organization of the local chapter. It helps to have someone with experience and connections in the YL field to take the lead in developing plans and spreading the word. I was already a member of both so it was relatively easy, and the other office-bearers have been great at turning up, finding speakers and sharing the work. Volunteer to help - your chapter needs you!!

With the further spread of English lessons in public elementary schools there must be many people out there who could benefit from getting together with other teachers to share ideas. Running YL events could help bring new people into JALT, especially JTEs and students.

**Publicity:** This is crucial! Just putting out flyers through the chapter and the SIG is not enough if you want to reach more new people. Word of mouth is helpful, so badger all your acquaintances to share on-line and tell their contacts. It's a slow process. I asked people in school to dig through those books of meishi to find other schools, university teachers who train student teachers, juku teachers and other private & public schools. Other important targets are kiddy English schools, both chains and private, and associations of JTEs. I have mailed ex-students who I know are now teaching and walked into a nearby public JH with flyers, causing some surprise. People are often not free, but don't give up. I've had a few people say, "This date doesn't work but I'd love to go". They all go on the list. It helps to make sure previous participants get the information by e-mail as we found people don't always catch FB posts or scroll through longer chapter mailings to reach the details.

**Program:** Catering for such a wide range of levels is a challenge. Someone who wants ideas for developing debate at high school level is not necessarily interested in sitting through a session on Mother Goose rhythms and vice versa! After the first two events we wanted to cater for both groups at the same time, so planned the third with one joint session, a great presentation by Sean Reid (who came all the way from Gifu) on communicative strategies that was relevant for everyone. After that we spilt into 2 rooms for short teacher shares and finished with a longer presentation for each level. It worked well, though we worried about getting enough people for 2 rooms. JALT members often turn up without booking. Luckily that happened this time and we had 15 people altogether and some great discussions.

Our third event had a longer format and more "headline" speakers, but the teacher-share sessions are the lifeblood. We like the combination so we can have both longer and "bigger" topics, while new presenters have a space to try out their skills as well. We aim for the more hands-on, "take home" kind of sessions over lecture-style and theory, but it's best to gauge the interests of your audience by asking for feedback. It may be easier to run separate events in turn for the different levels, depending on your location, venue and participants. We also plan to experiment with setting a basic theme and see how that goes.

**Socializing:** The noise level at these events has to be heard. Teachers LOVE to talk and share ideas, so leaving time between the sessions for hanging out and refuelling is very important. If they have fun they'll want to come back! We finish at 5pm so those who want to chat more can head off to the pizza place near the station - a nice end to the weekend.

**Financing:** In Tokyo we charge 1,000 for non-JALT members, in line with most Tokyo JALT events. You may want to make it less. Members come free and we have a new 3,000 yen annual Tokyo JALT membership which pretty quickly pays for itself (half price for JETS). The YL SIG and the chapter share the cost of snacks, drinks, supplies and printing. The SIG has been very cooperative and keen to expand these events - so don't hold back!! You paid your dues to chapter and SIG so you can expect something back. We hope there may be funds in future to bring in big headline speakers from time to time, and perhaps involve booksellers.

The SIG is happy to list up and share information about good speakers and programs, and is hoping that people will be willing to share materials on-line. We looked at recording the sessions, but honestly that's such a lot of work and many speakers would rather not anyway.

Our Tokyo project has been a lot of fun so far, so if the idea appeals to you, please go for it. Enjoy the warm glow of serving your local teaching community and meeting great people in the process! We're interested in knowing what other areas are doing, or planning to do, for the YL community - and happy to answer any questions at: [tokyojaltyl@gmail.com](mailto:tokyojaltyl@gmail.com)

Photos from Young Learner events in Tokyo



Basic

# Notions of Alternative Ways to Teach Grammar

By Adrian Heinel Chime University

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## 1. Introduction

In 2015 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) revealed their latest plan to improve the English skills of junior high school students in Japan. The MEXT wants more than “70 percent of junior high school graduates achieving at least A1 level in the Common European Framework Reference for Languages index by 2024” (Murai, 2015). The plan also states that a nationwide four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) examination for all third year junior high students will start to be administered from 2019.

In the midst of these changes, local Boards of Education (BOE) are looking for ways to improve their teachers’ teaching abilities and their students’ language learning abilities. In my working context the BOE and teachers have inquired about alternative ways to introduce English grammar to students. This paper covers some basic ways teachers can present and practice grammar in Japanese junior high school English classes

## 2. Explicit Teaching of Grammar

**Explicit** teaching of grammar involves the teacher straightforwardly explaining rules and patterns, and students consciously learning them. An example of this is when a teacher writes a sentence in English on the blackboard, translates it, and then explains the grammar point while students listen quietly and take notes.

On the other hand **implicit** teaching involves *the students* picking up or learning grammatical rules by guessing how they work from context that the teacher provides. At Japanese junior high schools, for various cultural and contextual reasons I won't go into here, grammar tends to be taught explicitly. Rooted in the traditional 'grammar translation method', explicit teaching of grammar is often thought of as 'rote learning' and the students sometimes may appear bored or uninvolved. However, explicit teaching of grammar has its place and can be useful. According to Brown (2001) explicit teaching will be most effective if grammatical items presented:

- are embedded in meaningful, communicative contexts,
- contribute positively to communicative goals,
- promote accuracy within fluent, communicative language,
- do not overwhelm students with linguistic terminology,
- are as lively and intrinsically motivating as possible (p. 361)

In addition to the above, Brown (2001, p. 361) gives some general rules of thumb when explicitly explaining grammatical points to learners:

- a. Keep your explanations brief and simple. Use the mother tongue if students cannot follow an explanation in English.
- b. Use charts and other visuals whenever possible to graphically depict grammatical relationships.
- c. Illustrate with clear, unambiguous examples.
- d. Try to account for varying cognitive styles among your students.
- e. Do not get yourself (and students!) tied up in knots over so-called 'exceptions' to rules.
- f. If you don't know how to explain something (for instance, if a student asks you about a point of grammar and you are not sure of the rule), do not risk



giving false information (that you may have to retract later, which will cause even more embarrassment). Rather, tell students you will research that point and bring an answer back the next day.

**3. A deductive** approach is when a grammatical point is explained explicitly to the learners before practicing the language. In this kind of approach grammatical rules are taught to the students, examples are given, and these are followed by practice and production activities where the learners apply the new rule. In an **inductive** approach students are presented with contextual information and examples often linked with what they already know. Then, teachers help to guide learners to a discovery or an understanding of a grammatical rule which they essentially work out for themselves (Nunan, 1995).

### **Inductive and Deductive Approaches to Teaching Grammar**

The procedure for an inductive approach, according to Cross (2001), is first for the teacher to demonstrate the meaning of something and give several examples. Then the students produce or figure out the correct forms. Finally, the grammar is shown on the board or may be elicited from the students and explained in the mother language. An example of teaching using this approach at a Japanese junior high school can be seen at the following URL: <http://tinyurl.com/h9qovhp>

The main argument for using an inductive approach is to support real English for communication. Brown (2001), gives some reasons for this:

- a. it is more in keeping with natural language acquisition (where rules are absorbed subconsciously with little or no conscious focus).
- b. it conforms more easily to the concept of interlanguage development in which learners progress, on variable timetables, through stages of rule acquisition.
- c. it allows students to get a communicative 'feel' for some aspect of language before possibly being overwhelmed by grammatical explanations.

- d. it builds more intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover rules rather than being told them. (Brown, 2001, p. 365)

In my opinion a mix of a deductive and an inductive approach is the most appropriate for Japanese junior high school students. Cross (2001) explains that both have their advantages; a deductive approach is simple, short, and easy for introducing simple grammar points while an inductive approach is more student centered and better for getting the students to figure out the language for themselves. Whichever approach you use it is worth remembering two things: 1) whatever approach you take, overly focusing on grammar can be “boring and counterproductive to fluency and communication” (Cross, 2001, p. 38). 2) You “should not expect miracles to result from grammar teaching of any kind” (Cross, 2001, p. 29). In fact I believe that, in some cases, grammar does not need to be taught at all in order to be learned. Which leads us to our final section.

#### **4. Consciousness Raising Activities**

**Consciousness raising** (CR) is a kind of middle way which diverges from the idea that grammar should be taught either implicitly or explicitly. CR rejects the traditional view that language learning is successive and that once something is taught the learner has ‘acquired’ it. CR activities encourage learners to actively look at regularities in language and draw conclusions about them. Below are three characteristics of CR based on Willis & Willis (1996, p. 64):

The ‘attempt to *isolate* a specific linguistic feature for focused attention’.

The provision of ‘*data* which illustrate the targeted feature’.

The requirement that the learners ‘utilize *intellectual effort*’ to understand the targeted feature.

According to Willis & Willis (1996), CR activities have the specific goal of creating increased awareness and sensitivity to language through performing certain operations. The following table, based on Willis and Willis (1996, p. 69), illustrates the kinds of operations that promote CR:

### *Identify/consolidate*

Students are asked to search a set of data to identify a particular pattern or usage and the language forms associated with it.

### *Classify*

Students are required to work with a set of data and sort it according to similarities and differences.

### *Hypothesis building/checking*

Students are given (or asked to make) a generalization about language and asked to check this against more language data.

### *Cross-language exploration*

Students are encouraged to find similarities and differences between patternings in their own language and patternings in English.

### *Reconstruction/deconstruction*

Students are required to manipulate language in ways which reveal underlying patterns.

### *Recall*

Students are required to recall and reconstruct elements of a text. The purpose of the recall is to highlight significant features of the text.

### *Reference training*

*Students need to learn to use reference works – dictionaries, grammars and study guides.*

In their book Willis and Willis (1996) give some examples of CR in action. It seems to me that some of the operations are doable, while others require more of a base of English and would be too difficult at the junior high school level in Japan. Nevertheless using CR activities will provide learners with opportunities to draw their own conclusions about how English works. It will also serve them in the long run, giving them the skills to be more autonomous, life-long, active English learners and less passive and reliant on teachers to explain everything.

## 5. Final Thoughts

If you are interested in changing the way you teach grammar I suggest a few things. First of all, if your class is team taught, try swapping roles with the JTE or Assistant Language Teacher (ALT). Many times the JTE is in charge of explaining the grammar while the ALT is in charge of preparing and leading activities. Have the ALT introduce grammar from time to time and watch how they do it differently.

Finally, not all JTE's take a traditional approach to explaining grammar. If you know a teacher that does something that you find particularly effective, talk to them about it. Take notes on what you find particularly useful. Take pictures of how they use the blackboard. Make videos of their grammar explanations. And above all, share what you learned with your peers.

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# Joint Storytelling in a Japanese Elementary School

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'**J**oint Storytelling' (Allen-Tamai 2011, 2013, 2014) is an approach to teaching English stories rhythmically with gestures and some songs. The nine stories in the three books available in the series are all fairy tales from Japan and around the world, the idea being that learners are already familiar with the content and can concentrate on the language.



## How we do it

Teaching methods can be implemented in a number of ways, but this is how we do Joint Storytelling at the public elementary school I work at.

1. The teacher reads the 'original' story to the whole class
  - All of the Joint Storytelling books include a longer version of the story, like a picture book, which should be read first.
2. Tell the simplified, dialogue based story with the students following these steps, using illustrations, gestures and explanations where necessary:
  - a. The children repeat the story line by line, copying the teacher's gestures.
  - b. The teacher only does the gestures and the students say the lines and do the gestures.
  - c. The children tell the story with each other in small groups.
    - ◇ These three steps can be varied as deemed appropriate by the teacher.



### 3. Follow-up activities

- Quizzes or worksheets about the animals or themes from the stories.
- Games or communication based activities using the language learned during storytelling.
- A final performance of the story to parents or other learners.
- Reading the story (for 5th and 6th grade): as the story is already known orally by heart, the learners can pay attention to the words on the page, reading along with their finger, rather like an early L1 reader might read along with a well-known nursery rhyme.

### **What is so good about Joint Storytelling?**

When I was first introduced to and asked to teach using this approach, I was unsure about it. It seemed like mechanical drilling, with a lack of creativity. However, the more I do it, the more I like it, the main reason being that learners can use English learned during storytelling outside the classroom. To give an example, we taught a modified version of *Momotaro* (Allen-Tamai 2013) to our 1st grade class including the line '*Let's cut the peach*'. When I was eating lunch with the same class, one of the children looked at me and said (in Japanese), '*Chris, Chris, how do you say Wiener in English?*', when I replied '*sausage*', he said confidently, '*Let's cut the sausage!*' and proceeded to cut the sausage on his plate in two with his spoon.

I have seen many more examples like this, as well as instances of children singing the songs and performing parts of the stories in their classrooms, corridors and in the playground without any prompting from teachers. This is something I have rarely seen while following more standard question and answer based curricula that follow set target language such as:

*What color do you like? / I like blue.  
Do you like dogs? / Yes I do.*

The stories and follow up activities provide students with plenty of comprehensible input and the reason they can use phrases learned in stories outside the classroom may be because they have encountered them in context. Joint Storytelling also seems to be a leveler of different abilities. Lesser able students can start with gestures and join in with speaking when they feel comfortable in the safety of the group.

## Potential weaknesses of Joint Storytelling

As the lines learners speak are set by the text there is not much room for creative speaking, but learners can add their own spin on stories by coming up with voices for the characters, changing the gestures, or even ad-libbing if they present adaptations of scenes from the story as a follow-up activity. It could also be said that there is a lack of communication in Joint Storytelling, as students do not interact with each other with a communicative purpose. For me, communication comes later when the language is used outside the classroom.

One slight criticism I might make of Joint Storytelling is the rhythm of the stories does not always feel like a natural English rhythm, but maybe more of a Japanese rhythm. This can be remedied by the teacher by altering the rhythm, or even the lines of the stories where necessary.

## Conclusion

Joint Storytelling seems to work well with Japanese public elementary school students. It has proven so popular in the school I work at that we are planning to teach two stories per year group per school year, taking up a substantial part of the school curriculum. I should mention our school already meets the proposed increase in elementary school English lessons from 2020 (The Japan News by The Yomiuri Shimbun 2017). Other schools may benefit from exploring this approach to plug the gaps in their own curricula following the changes.

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