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From the Editor

To all Younger Learners Teachers,

The first term of the new school year is in session. I hope everyone is well. This issue looks at a variety of issues: from the need for for better assessment methods to critical thinking skills in the the classroom to utilizng Hofstede's cultural methods in the young learner's classroom,

If you are interested in contributing to the next *School House* which should be out before JALT 2018 in Shizouka, please email me at pnanton@gmail.com. Its at this conference where we will be showcasing this years publications as well as the events and accomplishments the TYL SIG has made over the year. We're looking for not only articles but anything you would like to submit such as pics or promoting young learner events in your area.

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*

Assessment in Elementary Schools:

The need for more contributions

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Abstract

Every school teacher is accountable for indicating students' progress first to the students themselves, the parents and the school authorities. While testing remains the most popular assessment method, many authors have argued that alternative assessment methods need to be implemented to create equal opportunities for second language learning. (see Cameron, 2001; Hughes, 2003; Shin & Crandal, 2014; Pinter, 2017). In this article, I discuss how assessments in term two of the academic year 2018-2018 were conducted at a private Japanese elementary school located in a suburb of Yokohama City. With limited resources available at present, I discuss the need for more contribution from elementary school English teachers. Although I agree entirely with how children should be assessed beyond the paper and pencil tests, it is a difficult task for the English teachers to make changes due to factors such as problems in communication and strict working condition for teachers.

How are students taught?

In every year grade, there are three classes of forty students. In year one and year two, students have one English class per week. From year three to six, students received two

English lessons per week. In year three, students are taught by two different teachers. One teacher teaches the project English and the other teacher teaches the phonics. Both of the classes are conducted in the classroom. From year four to year six, the students are divided into two groups of twenty students. One teacher teaches group A (odd number students) and the other teacher teaches group B (even number students). In the first term, group A students are taught in the English room and group B students are taught in the classroom. In the second term, the students switch classrooms but are still taught with the same teacher. The students then return to the first term's setting in the third term. All teachers are responsible to follow the learning objectives from the curriculum and assess students accordingly.

How are students assessed?

Students are assessed through a group presentation, an individual speaking test, a paper and pencil test and an English file check to see students' worksheets completion. The assessment culture of this school is the three grading system: a triangle (△) stands for "not achieved", a circle (○) stands for "achieved", and double-circles stands (◎) for "highly- achieved".

Group presentation

Each term starting from Year 3, students are assigned a topic to present to the class. The topics studied in term two are presented below in Table 1.

Year 3	Winter forest
Year 4	Animal quiz
Year 5	Introducing a country
Year 6	Famous passed-away individual

Table 1. Topics studied in term two

In year three and six, students are presenting in groups of four while in year four and five, students are presenting in pairs. An average of ten forty-minute lessons is given to the students to plan, write up, practice and deliver their presentation. Teachers grade the students on the clarity and content of their speech.

Individual speaking test

There are four assessment criteria in students' report cards in term 2. Table 2. below shows the individual speaking test criteria in term two.

Year 3	Say greetings in different situations and introduce him/herself
Year 4	Understand and use language to describe animals
Year 5	Count and use number to 1000
Year 6	Introduce a family member

Table 2. Individual speaking test criteria in term two

To conduct the individual speaking test, teachers need to assign a task for other students to keep the noise level controlled. Teachers use the recording from the group presentation and create a listening activity. Students are required to listen to specific information to complete the worksheet. The time allocated for the individual speaking test is three minutes. Therefore , each teacher is expected to assess ten students in a forty-minute lesson. Because one teacher is responsible for grading sixty students, it usually requires four forty-minute lessons to finish testing. The teachers assess the students through cards and questions.

'Paper and pencil' test

Table 3. below shows the 'paper and pencil' test criteria from year three to year six in term two.

Year 3	Recognize the phonic sounds
Year 4	Recognize the phonic sounds
Year 5	Recognize the phonics sounds
Year 6	Read and write phonically regular words

Table 3. 'Paper and pencil' test criteria in term two.

The 'paper and pencil' test is usually delivered before the group presentation. The test is a phonics test that test students their listening and reading ability. In the listening section, students are expected to be able to write English letters that correspond to the phonics sounds. For example: the word 'cheese' requires students to be able to recognize the sound /ʧ/ as in 'chair' or 'chips' and the sound /i:/ as in 'bee' or 'tree'. (See table 4.)

1. (cheese)	__ __ __ __ s e

Table 4. 'Paper and pencil' listening test

In the reading section, students are expected to be able to match the English word with the correct picture. The reading section is divided into two parts. In the first part, there are five English words on the left hand side and five pictures on the right hand side. The students are required to draw a line to connect the word with the picture. The second part is a multiple choice. (See table 5.) Students are required to circle the correct answer.

Picture	A	B	C	D
	fish	fich	vish	vich

Table 4. The second part of the ‘Paper and pencil’ reading test

Several problem need to be addressed to conduct a paper and pencil test efficiently. Firstly, English is considered a non-main stream subject, therefore teachers are not encouraged to give homework. Through solely relying on lesson time, students are expected to be able to perform well on the paper test. Secondly, low-level students are struggling to achieve well because the unavailability of the materials unable students to prepare outside classroom time. Thirdly, due to parents’ complained of materials unavailable for students to take home in previous years, teachers have lowered the test standard drastically to avoid further complaints. In the academic year 2018-2019, teachers have created a number of practice tests to increase opportunities for students to prepare for the test.

The English files check

Table 6. below shows the criteria for the English files check.

Year 3	Keep a neat record of the project worksheet
Year 4	Organize and maintain their work neatly
Year 5	Organize and maintain their work neatly
Year 6	Organize and maintain their work neatly

Table 6. English files check criteria

For this assessment criterion, students are usually told to hand-in their English files before the final fun lesson. Teachers check whether students have completed the worksheets.

Further issues

The strict working condition prevents teachers to work efficiently. The three English teachers are dispatched through a company, therefore, in addition to the workload expected by the school, teachers have other teaching and administrative duties assigned by the dispatch company managers. These include compulsory training held twice a year, several teachers' meetings throughout the year and adult classes held in the main office. Time has become a critical issue because the contract agreement between the school and the dispatch company states that the lead teacher is employed full-time, one teacher is on a 30-hour contract can only work at the school from Mondays to Thursdays and one teacher who is also on a full-time contract can only work at the school for two days. Making improvements in standardisation require time but this is difficult to achieve because the only time that the three teachers are working together is only on Thursdays. **(Delete** The 30-hour contract teacher is classified as a part-time teacher which places a heavy burden on the lead teacher because the lead teacher cannot tell their colleagues to stay behind.) Furthermore, homeroom teachers have raised concerns about the quality of the assessment. Due to the fact that English teachers are not hired directly by the school, English teachers are not given feedback directly. For example, according to the homeroom teachers, parents have raised the issue of the wording for the English files check. Parents argue that students should be getting a double-circle regardless of whether they have completed the worksheets providing the worksheets are in the English files. Another issue raised was how students were graded. Parents have raised the issue of 'standardization', "how can my son get a double-circle?" From a biased perspective, the teacher who graded that particular student can only comment on the general factor such as "he needs to speak clearer and louder." This had led to a further issue of each teacher marks differently as homeroom teachers have expressed that there is a great gap between the "nice"

and “strict” examiner. These feedbacks were all received verbally to the lead teacher in Japanese as the other English teachers’ Japanese ability are very limited as well as there was not a formal meeting between the English teachers and the homeroom teachers. When the lead teacher delivers the message, English teachers have raised the issue of classroom management because there are forty students in the class, “I just try to finish everything as soon as possible.” My colleagues have also raised concerns that the older students’ behavior are “atrocious” which makes it difficult to conduct the individual speaking test. This problem is difficult to solve because the lead teacher could not offer his assistance as he has other classes to teach and the homeroom teachers are unavailable due to responsibilities such as meeting with students’ parents or preparing for their next class.

The need for more contributions

As an English teacher in the private sector, I am curious about the assessment culture at other schools. In my current school, the fixation of teachers’ working conditions could be a solution to better assessment experience for the students. However, that factor alone is insufficient. There is a lack of contribution in this field and more contributions are needed to help teachers devise effective assessment methodologies. In April 2017, during an annual presentation of private elementary school teachers of Kanagawa prefecture, the arts, music and P.E. teachers were involved in an individual speaking test to accommodate a large number of students. The English teachers in this school are hired directly and they are invited to meetings. To solve this problem of coverage during individual English speaking tests, the school has decided to include other subject teachers’ assistance to ease the English teachers’ burden. Although the teachers possess varied English abilities, students’ positive attitude, clarity and understanding what’s being asked are more important that students’ grammar accuracy. Pitarch (2014, p.64) on the other hand, has shared his findings that a school in Spain uses five grading systems instead of three. I think this method would help teachers grade students better because my

students would only get a triangle if he has been away from school for an extended period or has mental issues.

Conclusion

Quoting from Pinter (2006, p.41), "for the success of English in primary schools in any one country, the government needs to invest in recruiting and training teachers". Ferrier (2017) shared his findings of the Takasaki city plan for English education in elementary schools. In the public school sectors, the Board of Education has created easy-to-follow instructions for both homeroom teachers and the native assistant of language teachers (ALT) in preparation to welcoming English as the mainstream subject. Although MEXT's (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan) new course of study guidelines is yet too be fully understood, Tahira (2012) predicts that the homeroom teachers will be responsible in students' English assessment in public elementary schools. In a private school, I strongly believe that the school needs to invest in training teachers (Aoki, 2016). In my particular context, it may be worthwhile for the school to consider hiring the native English teachers directly or appoint a Japanese-English teacher. Without the school's support, I believe that the English department cannot operate as effectively due to English teachers' contract conditions.

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"OREO/AREA: An Evidence- and Practice-oriented Approach that Empowers Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to Express Themselves in a Structured and Congruent Manner"

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Abstract
Language learning and pedagogy within EFL has placed significant focus on developing four critical skills; writing, speaking, reading, and listening. Increasingly, the demands for students to function effectively within a globalized context have led to significant attention being placed on the development of critical thinking skills as well. Consequently, various methods of instruction have been developed. Many of the methods have been guided by national language in education policies. This paper will present a discussion on one such method (OREO: Opinion, Example, Reason, Opinion/ AREA: Assertion, Example, Reason, Assertion) that has been tested in EFL classrooms across Japan. The method will be discussed in relation to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology's (MEXT) policy guidelines. Additionally, suggestions will be made about the practical use of the method.

1. Evidence-based Discussion of OREO/AREA

1(a) *Rationale: Practice-oriented outcomes*
For the past two years, the author has travelled to several prefectures across Japan (Toyama, Niigata, Nagano, and Ibaraki) and South Korea (Seoul) to lead professional development workshops. These workshops were aimed at equipping teachers with evidence- and practice-oriented tools to design lessons that may potentially challenge students to think critically and express themselves clearly in English. Feedback and progress reports from practitioners who have used the OREO/AREA method in their classrooms have been positive. As a result of these practice-oriented implications, the author aims to provide transferable content through this documented discussion.

1 (b) *Evidence-based outcomes*
Kaplan (1966) suggested that cultural influences on communication styles are significant and diverse. He further hi-lighted the differences in a range of communicative styles when mapped against the communicative style of a typical native speaker of English from the Western Hemisphere. Kaplan's (1966) discussion suggests that the typical EFL student in the Japanese classroom could be expected to present his idea cyclically. On the other hand, his findings revealed that the typical native speaker could be expected to present his ideas in a linear and direct manner. Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) may be able to identify these differences in their local classrooms.

1 (c) *Ethical Consideration and Limitations*

It must be explicitly stated that neither of the aforementioned communication techniques is better than the other. Instead, both styles are grounded in cultural and historical perspectives. Furthermore, it must be clearly stated that these definitions have been made based on a representation of the typical speaker from the stated backgrounds. Therefore, these definitions should not be viewed as the only true representation of every individual from the said backgrounds. Consequently, this discussion does not intend to address whether or not one communication style is better. Instead, OREO/AREA is simply one method that may be used to teach young EFL students how to express their opinions clearly, confidently, and with congruence in English.

1 (d) *MEXT's Language in Education Policies*

Language in education policies that have been prepared by MEXT for young EFL students suggest that schools should design pedagogy that helps students to function effectively in today's globalized world (Glasgow, 2013; Glasgow & Paller, 2016; Tahira, 2012). Among other things, the guidelines suggest that EFL instruction should help students to develop the skills and the willingness to express their ideas in oral and written forms (Glasgow 2013, Glasgow 2014).

1 (e) *Examinations and MEXT Policy Guidelines*

There have been criticisms about the gap between the guidelines produced by MEXT and the actual requirements of private and national standardized tests. Concerns include time constraints, disparity in content, and lack of appropriate training for Teachers (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2010; Glasgow, 2013; Glasgow & Paller, 2016; Mondejar et al., 2012; Tahira, 2012). As strategies are designed to close the existing gaps, methods such as OREO/AREA have been found to strike some balance in helping students to develop the skills and willingness to express their ideas clearly. In addition to meeting the aforementioned MEXT policy requirement, the method prepares students for a variety of tests. Tests include Global Test for English Communication (GTEC), Eigo Gino Kentei (Eiken), and national entrance examinations, as students are required to clearly express their ideas in written or oral forms (Benesse Corporation, 2018; Eiken Foundation of Japan, 2016).

2. Practical Application of OREO/AREA:

The following sections in this paper will provide a basic understanding of the OREO/AREA method, and make suggestions regarding best practices.

2 (a) *Introducing OREO/AREA in Classrooms*

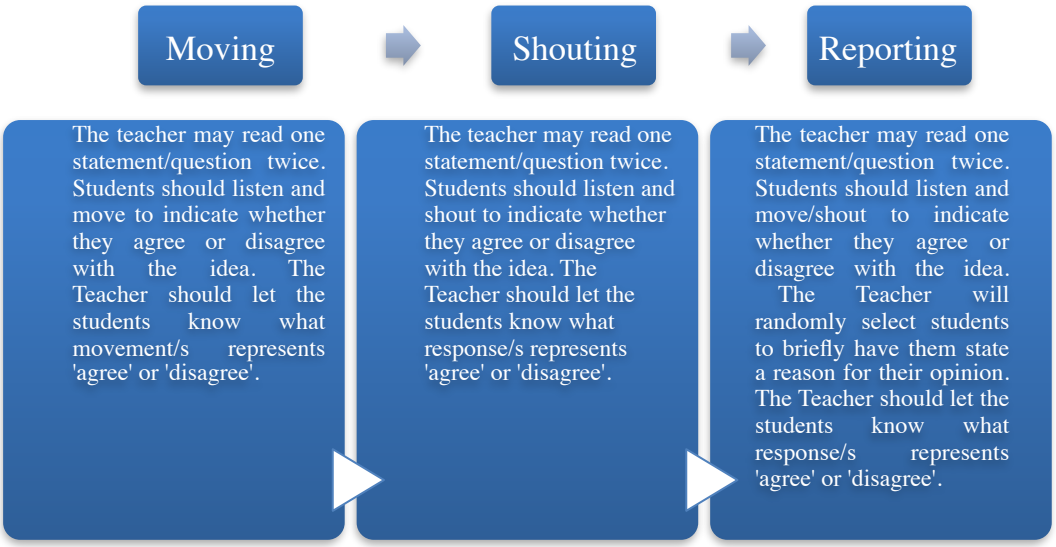
(OREO: Opinion, Example, Reason, Opinion/ AREA: Assertion, Example, Reason, Assertion) is a 'sweet' acronym that students may memorize and use whenever they are required to express their ideas in written or oral forms. The acronym presents four steps that, if memorized, may help students who have the appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas in a congruent manner.

2 (b) *Explaining the Acronym*

It is important to note that some students may not understand the meanings of words such as '*opinion*', '*assertion*', or '*reason*'. In such situations, Teachers should seek to ensure that students understand the definitions and the practical function of each term.

The Basic Function of Each Term in the Acronym

The following question will be used to simply illustrate the function of the acronym: ***'which do you like better, cats or dogs?'***



Steps	Functions	Practical Examples
Step1: **Opinion/ Assertion**	Based on his understanding of the question that has been asked, the student will express his opinion/make an assertion.	I like dogs more than cats.
Step 2: **Reason**	Based on his opinion, the student will provide a reason to support his opinion/assertion.	~ because dogs can do many things.
Step 3: **Example**	Based on his opinion and supporting reason, the student will produce one or more examples to support his idea.	~ for example, dogs can be pets and dogs can help their owners.
Step 4: **O p i n i o n / Assertion**	Based on his opinion, reason, and example, the student will conclude by restating or rephrasing his initial opinion.	~ so, I like dogs more than cats.

Table 1 is a representation of the functions of the OREO/AREA method

2 (c-1) *Practical Suggestions for Introducing the Method (Speaking)*

Figure 1 explains the `moving – shouting – reporting` method

This strategy requires a list of statements/questions. Below is an example of statements/ questions that may be used for different proficiency levels. Teachers may create additional statements/questions. Statements/questions may also be found on past examination test papers.

Sample Statements/Questions
(a) Cats are better than dogs. (b) Which is better, Udon is better than Soba? (c) Pokémon GO is more harmful than useful. (d) High school students should be allowed to do part-time jobs. (e) Is it better to live in a rural town than in a big city?

Table 2 provides an example of statements/questions that may be used while teaching the `moving – shouting – reporting` method

2 (c-2) *Other Practical uses of OREO/AREA include:*

(a) Supplementing textbook lessons (b) Class presentations
(c) Small-group presentations (d) Circle/line debate
(e) HEnDA and PDA debates

3. Assessing OREO/AREA through Speaking and Writing Activities

3 (a) *Writing*

There are as many writing styles as there are instructional methods. Some writing styles that have appeared on private and national standardized tests include narrative, descriptive, comparative, cause and effect, summary, and letter writing. Students have also been asked to express their opinions. As instructional strategies are usually tailored to suit each classroom, this paper will not seek to comment on specific approaches. Instead, a rubric template for assessing OREO/AREA will be provided below. Teachers are encouraged to add the relevant fields as they find them appropriate for their students.

Rubric (template)

	5	4	3	2	1
Content					
Structure					
Grammar					
Word Count					

Table 3 provides a template of a rubric that may be used to assess the OREO/AREA method

3 (b-1) ***Assessing Fluency***

In addition to the rubric, Teachers are encouraged to clearly identify whether they will assess students based on fluency, accuracy, or both. Furthermore, Teachers are encouraged to use both formative and summative assessments. Below are a few simple suggests for the formative assessment of fluency.

3 (b-2) ***Speaking***

Word Counter: This assessment tool may be used in the classroom. The 'listening students' are responsible for listening to their pair or group member/s. As they listen, they are responsible for using their pens/pencils/fingers to count the number of words that are spoken by the 'speaking students'. The 'listening students' will then write the number of words and return the word counter sheet to the 'speaking students'. The 'speaking students' should write the date for each entry. The Teacher may encourage 'speaking students' to periodically compare the 'listening students`' input, and seek to improve over time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
40	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31
30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
70	69	68	67	66	65	64	63	62	61
60	59	58	57	56	55	54	53	52	51
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
110	109	108	107	106	105	104	103	102	101
100	99	98	97	96	95	94	93	92	91

Table 3 provides a template of a word counter that students may use to assess fluency

3 (b-3) ***Writing***

Students may be encouraged to keep a journal. This may be submitted periodically. The teacher may correct the first draft of the journal then return them to students and have them write the second draft. Teachers may encourage students to engage with the assessment process and gain metalinguistic benefits from writing a brief note for each error. The note will be a brief explanation about the root cause of the error.

4. Conclusion

MEXT's Language in Education Policy Guidelines suggests that EFL pedagogy should make an effort to develop human resources, while meeting the cultural and social-political objectives of education (Glasgow, 2013; Glasgow & Paller, 2016; Tahira, 2012). An important aim of the guidelines is to help students to develop the necessary skills and willingness to express their ideas clearly and confidently. The OREO/AREA method meets this guideline and plays a role in filling the gap that exists between the policy guidelines and student readiness for private tests and national standardized exams. Over the past two years, the author has led professional development workshops about this method in several prefectures across Japan, and Seoul in South Korea. Practitioners who have used this method have observed a positive effect on student outcomes. This paper has presented a discussion on the evidence-

based relevance of this method. It has also provided a range of practical and functional information related to the use of the method.

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Factors to Consider in Creating Optimum Learning Environments (OLE) for the Young Learner's EFL Classroom.

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Introduction

Having taught, and trained teachers to teach young learners English as a foreign language, I have found there are some very fundamental principles that underpin teaching methodologies and practices, that can help promote learner outcomes. However, I find these never discussed as critical components that help in the design of the curriculum, lesson plan, or activities in the classroom, and therefore they seem to remain unearthed. This article looks at some of these principles and how they can help the teacher in the classroom.

First discussed is the impact of two aspects of Japanese culture through Hofstede's cultural dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, and the collectivist culture. In the context of those two aspects of the Japanese culture, how they relate to the classroom and learning is it possible to start providing an OLE in the context of the Japanese culture. Next, the use of routines to promote learning the classroom is examined in two areas: the flow of the class, and in the design of the curriculum. Finally, how routines and balancing what we can learn from neuroscience to help create an OLE in the young learner's EFL classroom is examined.

The Japanese culture

Two of Hofstede's cultural dimensions explain some pertinent factors that influence creating an OLE for young learners of EFL— these are uncertainty avoidance and the collectivist culture. Having an awareness of both of these can help teachers apply knowledge about them in the classroom to contribute to create an OLE.

Japan has a high UA (uncertainty avoidance) which means the Japanese like to 'create security and avoid risk' (Hofstede, 1983, 83). The ramifications of this means change comes slowly in the culture as it takes time to work through matters in order to minimize risk. In other words, Japanese prefer to avoid something they are not familiar with, as it might pose a risk. This mentality pervades all walks of Japanese business, education and culture in general, and even explains the use of technology to reduce risk (Hofstede, 1983). Knowing this provides teachers a platform so we can consciously choose activities students may be familiar with, and then set our students up for success so risk of failure is minimized. This is key for teaching young learners EFL: **it helps to use games that are prevalent in the culture as a foundation on which to teach EFL and set the students up for success**.

The second factor Hofstede (2007) describes is the Japanese culture being a collectivist culture. He defines a collectivist society as one, 'in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout their lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty' (p 417). This means that the Japanese have a sense of belonging to a group, or unit, which might be their family unit, or a business, or school — each group provides protection, or security. The application of this in the English

classroom can be interpreted in a number of ways, one of which allows for children to help each other. Another one, however, means that when one student is struggling, the whole class may feel the impact, especially when teaching young children around kindergarten age. **When a teacher nurtures the collectivist mindset in their classroom, the young learners can feel safe, and supported.** This in turn can help reduce stress, and consequently promote EFL learning.

Understanding the paradigms of the culture in which we teach is one tool to success in the young learners' EFL classroom. Understanding the need, and seeking ways to avoid risk, promote collectivism, and create a safe environment can all help young students. Adding to these cultural components is the use of routine to provide a platform through which stability, cooperation, and enjoyment can be increased; all these factors combined may lead to more focused learning. Therefore next, we will look at the use of routines in three different ways: in life and how that applies to the flow of the lesson, to lesson planning of a curriculum, and finally how this impacts our neural pathways and learning from research in neuroscience.

Routines

Having a routine is incredibly powerful and can help reduce problematic behaviours, including those of sleep (Mindall et al., 2009). Routine is in all aspects of our lives. When children start going to kindergarten or elementary school, there is a pattern to their day that provides predictability. Before they arrive at the school or kindergarten, there will be certain activities the child will do, for example: they will get up, get dressed, and at least get to school. Hopefully they will also have breakfast and brush their teeth and do their morning ablutions. Generally, at home mornings are fairly standard in the order of what the child does – we might call this the morning routine. 'Family routines are used to organize activities….and provide stability in everyday life' (Schaaf, et al., 2011). The child gets to school or kindergarten, again there will be another routine the child follows, providing further stability. For example, at school the day may start with a morning meeting. The first period class will start at the same time every morning as will the second class. Lunchtime is always the same time and so the day carries on until the child goes home at which point the evening routine starts.

When life has a routine, there is a rhythm and its predictable. When something is predictable, it provides a feeling of being safe. When something is safe we can relax, and enjoy it. Mindall et al. (2009) found that having a consistent nightly bedtime routine helps improve 'multiple aspects' of a young child's sleep. However, having a routine, can not only help sleep. How routines can also help create OLE for young learners of EFL is illustrated below.

In the classroom

'Given that family routines provide a stabilizing force in the family... and promote health and well-being' (DeGrace, 2004) we can ask ourselves how best we can use routines in order to facilitate learning in our children's EFL classroom.

I founded, ran and taught in my own English school for children aged 0 -12 for fourteen years. In that school, the children used to arrive at our school knowing the class would start on time without exception. From at age 3 they carried their own bags into the classroom, got their books out of their bags, put the books on the table, put their bags in their place, and sat down ready for class. That is the little routine the children completed before starting class. For the children, this series of actions were predictable – they knew what was expected of them, and therefore what they should do. The children also knew how the class would start, and the order and type of activities that would follow. As the children attended class on a weekly basis like this, knowing what to expect, the impact this had on the teacher was they spent very little time trying to get the attention of the children in order to explain what would

be done next. The children waited in anticipation. Concentration was a maximum for the full 50 minutes of class. No time was lost as the children were all focused. No child ever complained that the class was boring, or that they were doing a game they had done in the past. Using routines to keep the children fully focused, resulted in no little time wasters or energy drainers. The children would help one another get ready for activities as there was a good cooperative environment in the classroom. The children had a sense of peace, they were happy, and all the children were engaged.
The routine also meant the both the teacher and student knew the flow of the weekly class, it provided structure, a framework on which to build. It also provided chunks of time for high and low energy activities, and meant lesson planning time was reduced. Such a framework, or routine for our 3 year old class looked like something like this:

Table 1: Routine for the 3-year old class.

Activity	Energy flow
Warm up: Greetings and the 'today chart'	sitting, focused, turn taking
Phonics: sounds of the month & possible review	high/low energy. Sitting, or movement as needed.
Target language: presentation/review, then activity	as above
Song: for the target language	high energy, movement
Worksheet: to consolidate phonics	Sitting, quiet, focused
Homework: check and given out for the week.	sitting, focused
Explanation to parents about the class	sitting, focused
Goodbye	medium energy, movement

A routine similar to the one in the table above flowed across each academic year, gradually changing as the age of the children advanced, all the way up through to 6th grade in elementary school. It provided structure and stability to all the children and teachers, and was easy for parents to understand. The result was time on lesson planning was greatly reduced whilst learning was maximized.
Having applied this principle to lesson planning, it is easily extended to creating a curriculum. So, this is explained next.

In the curriculum
I have seen teachers striving for new activities to implement into the classroom. Alternatively, they are looking for new materials. We need to examine the reason for this. Examining whether implementing new ideas is really to help our students in their learning is good professional practice. New materials and activities can be good, and stimulating, however, as practitioners, we need to evaluate the extent any change is going to improve learning in the classroom. We know that learning a new activity can take time. With limited time in the week there is a constant weighing up as to whether the time it will take to teach a new activity is

going to reap the positive results we desire for the students in their learning. With this constant tension, sometimes it can be just as effective to scaffold an activity, and adjust it to the learners' pace.

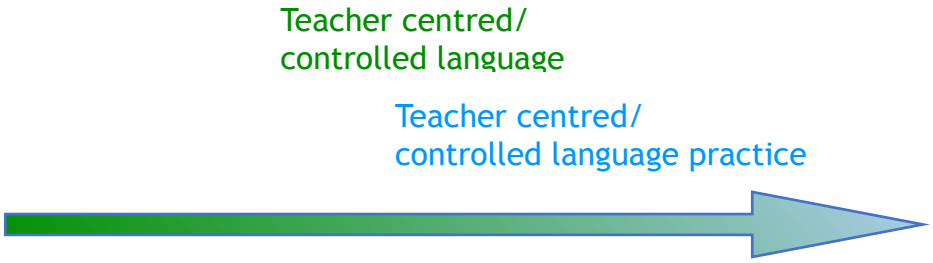
When I was giving teacher training for prospective Elementary school teachers at university, drawing from the experience of how we implemented the curriculum in the classroom, I gave the students a simple guideline they could follow which I explain below. One advantage to following such a guideline means teacher preparation is greatly reduced, without eliminating teacher creativity. Another is, it also provides a way for repetition and review to be woven into the fabric of the curriculum.

Imagine you teach in an elementary school where you have 35 weeks of contact time. In those 35 weeks, you may have to cover 8 topics. In this case, there are approximately 4 weeks per unit, and two extra weeks that might be covered by 'special classes' that could include a week for 'getting to know each other' or a cultural event.

Given that you have 4 weeks per topic then you can create your routine into the curriculum so it may look something like this:

Table 2: Example of Routines and gradation of activities over a four-week period.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Warm-up	Warm-up	Warm-up	Warm-up
Vocabulary Activity 1	Vocabulary Activity 2	Vocabulary Activity 3	Vocabulary Activity 4
Words in practice 1	Words in practice 2	Words in practice 3	Words in practice 4
Check 1	Check 2	Check 3	Final check
Good bye	Good bye	Good bye	Good bye



Over the four weeks, from week 1 to week 4 the teacher may want the activities to go from receptive to productive, from more controlled, or teacher centred to monitored, or more student centred, in order to build communicative fluency. Based on that premise, then the activities could look as follows:

Table 3: Example activities over a four-week period.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Warm-up	Warm-up	Warm-up	Warm-up
Materials: flashcards Slam (karuta). Teachers says the words, children identify it.	Slam (karuta). Teachers starts by saying the words, let children take turns saying the words.	Which one is missing? Students in pairs, challenge each other (students answer orally)	Which one is missing? Students in pairs, challenge each other (students write the answer)
Teacher says: I have a XXXX I have (number) XXXX(s) I don't have any XXXs. (use flashcards in hand, says one sentence, card down, face up on table).	Scaffolding from week 1, adding in: Do you have any XXX? Teacher asks and move to pair asking orally)	Pairs asking: Do you have any XXX? Partner replying. Answer 'yes' partner asking 'wins' the card. Ask once, change partner.	Repeat previous week, but faster paced: timed, and card counting at end. Can be played with class as two as teams, or small groups.
Handout: draw lines to match the picture and the word, trace the word.	Handout: complete the word (letters missing from vocabulary items). Words in sentences practiced last week. Add in the number to make personalised sentences.	Handout: trace the question, and answer the question (can look back at sheet from previous week)	Write a simple dialogue asking and answering questions.
Good bye	Good bye	Good bye	Good bye

A 4-week flow like this can be used for lower elementary school students who can already write the letters of the alphabet. The flow of the vocabulary activities can be the same, using the same activities for any topic. With the example of 35 weeks in a year, and having 8 topics, if slam were played in week one for each topic, the result would mean the students would play slam only 8 times over the course of the year. After the students are familiar with the way in which slam is played with that teacher, the teacher can that add components to the

activity to increase the focus and enjoyment, without having to try and teach a new activity. (An example of adding a component would be to say, 'Put your hands on your head/knees/ etc' before saying the vocabulary item).
When routines are used in the classroom, and in the deployment of the curricula, in ways such as outlined above, this produces a familiarity, and stability in the classroom. In the context of the Japanese culture where uncertainty tends to be avoided, and in the context of introducing new and unfamiliar language, reducing uncertainty where possible can help increase security. Facilitating collective learning for young learners in the EFL classroom can also increase security. Therefore, all of these components can add to creating an OLE.

Routines and Neuroscience

Having looked at how routines play a role in our daily lives, and how these relate to the Japanese culture in which we teach, I have illustrated how these can be combined into classroom management and finally into the curriculum. Lastly, I would like to explain the relationship between routine and neuroscience, to show how routines impact our neural pathways and our learning.
As human beings we learn through interaction with our surrounding environment. We receive *stimuli* through our *sensory receptors* and this is then processed. Neuroscience examines how this takes place, what facilitates it, and what can hinder it. As humans, we interpret the information received, and that is used in *output*. As teachers, the interest in this process lies in how it relates to language learning, and with the linguistic output of our students.
Dunn (1997) explains how as a stimulus becomes familiar, this is recognized and the nerve cells decrease the transmission as there is less of a perceived need to respond to the stimulus - this is called *habituation*. The example given is the feeling of the clothes we are wearing. The first time we wear a nice warm hat, we feel the difference. However, after a while we might even forget we are wearing the hat, until we remove it, when we feel the cold again. From this, we can understand how our young students when they first walk into a print-rich English classroom they may look and investigate their new surroundings, but how after a period of time, they become accustomed to seeing the English around them, they become *habituated*, or used to, their surroundings. When this happens, the focus turns from the environment, and towards the learning. In other words, the more the young learner becomes familiar with the class routine, and other factors indirectly related to the learning, the more they can focus on the learning. Needless to say, if the same lesson were to be repeated consecutively the young learner could become used to the learning, and interest would diminish. Thus, it is obvious a balance is needed in the classroom. The classes need to be stimulating enough to keep the neurons engaged, but with also keeping distractions to a minimum.
Sensitzation is a state in which a heightened response is recognized, and there is an increase of neural connections made available to do a task. Dunn (1997) points out, '[y]oung children use *sensitization* to remain aware of what is going on in their surroundings' (p.25). Something unexpected, new, or harmful can induce *sensitization*. To a certain degree the teacher in the EFL classroom needs to achieve a balance between habitation (so the young learner can focus on the task at hand) and *sensitization (*so new neutron pathways can be created to process the language). Routine can help create habituation, and the actual activities in the classroom can help create moments of *sensitization*. In striking a balance with these two processes we can insert them into the routines in the classroom whilst keeping them in the framework of the culture. The end result is an OLE for our young learners.

Conclusion

Understanding Japanese culture and applying two of Hofstede's cultural dimensions to the young learner's classroom, the need to minimize risk, whilst promoting a collectivist atmosphere is clear. Routine is a useful tool that can help create a safe and stable environment through the flow of the class and the delivery of the curriculum. However, the EFL class needs to be one where the learner is comfortable and distractions are a minimum so the language becomes the focus. Neuroscience shows that embedding engaging interactive activities into routine can create an OLE for the young learner.
Achieving the balance of these factors is rather like getting the ingredients of a dish in the correct proportions. Personal preferences of both the teacher and students will dictate the extent to which each of the factors plays a role. However, hopefully with time, using principles outlined here will help create OLEs for young students.

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