The School House

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A Word from the Editors

Hello SIG members,

This year is flying by. In July we had the PanSIG, and we have three exciting events coming up in succession: at the start of October there is the TYL SIG & JALT Okinawa annual conference with Penny Ur as plenary speaker. Please note this event is FREE to you as a SIG member!! Penny is a much-published author, and you may know, or recognize her from her YouTube 'tips' videos. Then, next is Tokyo TYL with presentations by Yoichi Kiyota and Ruth Iida, and to finish off this triple bonanza is JALT Junior (JJ) which runs concurrently with the JALT International Conference in Fukuoka over the 2nd weekend in November. For our JJ plenary speaker, we are excited to inform you that Kensaku Yoshida is going to talk to use about the new Courses of Study. We anticipate this will influence many realms of English teaching in Japan, as the current changes are influencing many aspects of language teaching here in Japan.

Our feature article is appropriately on the topic of factors that have influenced and continue to influence trends in English language learning: Exploring Young Learner Education Trends in Japan to Find Future Directions for Young Learner Research. Before you reach the feature article, both Martin and Gaby have written reports on the PanSIG (on a collaborative writing workshop and the forum and respectively). Finally, Grant starts this issue with a word to you as his term as SIG leader comes to an end.

Through Grant's patient and encouraging leadership, the TYLSIG core officers have become a stable, well-coordinated and focused group. Although he promises to support us from the wings, we will miss his leadership. If you can come to Fukuoka this November, please join us in raising a glass in thanks to Grant for all he has done.

You may be wondering how to find us at JALT. Please come up to the JALT Junior table and introduce yourself. We would love to meet you in person. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask any one of us – we are here to help.

We, Kate & Gaby, hope to see you at one of the upcoming events, and wish you all the best as Christmas (yes, I did dare write that word) is now only 16 weeks away!

The next issue is due out in early 2023. We hope to hear from you as even a short article is welcome in *The School House*.

Best wishes,

Kate & Gaby

Message from the SIG Coordinator

Dear SIG Membership,

As I write to you, I am reminded of the commitment we all make teaching younger learners. This was especially evident at the PanSIG hybrid conference in early July. The conference was in beautiful Nagano prefecture at the University of Nagano. Many volunteers came together and put on a model hybrid conference. It was a great success, and we learned many things about the possibilities for this type of conference. Allow me to share a few with you in this message.

First, many people shared their stories and offered solutions to issues they have faced. We had over 400 people over the weekend coming to learn and share online, we had over 600 people coming and going on site. There were over 200 sessions of which 10 were specifically for TYL teachers. Of course, other sessions also were beneficial for TYL teachers as they talked about issues related to brain research, extensive reading, and teacher development just to name a few. Furthermore, as you know we held a joint forum in collaboration with the Intercultural Communication in Language Education Special Interest Group. It was wonderful to be a part of that session and learn with fellow teachers.

Secondly, this conference allowed us to finally meet people face to face that we have only known virtually over the past two years. Over the weekend there were many handshakes, hugs, and tears of joy as we celebrated our passion for teaching. It was refreshing to see so many people reaching out to one another and embracing our plight together. The PanSIG, as you might know, is all about us coming together in small groups sharing our experiences and learning from each other.

Finally, I want to take a moment and encourage our readers to share their knowledge and unique circumstances with us. We all have things to share and things to learn. At the PanSIG conference, we saw many novice teachers sharing their experiences with audiences, excited by the perspectives they once knew. If you participated in the PanSIG conference, I hope you were enriched by it. If you were not able to attend, please consider becoming involved and learn why I am so enthused by it. Also, don't hold back, please contact the TYL editors with your stories and share your unique viewpoints with our readers. Thank you as always, and we hope to see you in Fukuoka for JALT International and our flagship conference JALT Junior!

Sincerely,

Dr. Grant Osterman

SIG Coordinator

PanSIG 2022 Presentation Report

Martin Sedaghat

Student-Centred Collaborative Writing:

Ran Niboshi & Dr. Frances Shiobara

At the PanSIG 2022 conference in Nagano, on July 9th, Ran Niboshi and Dr. Frances Shiobara gave a wonderful presentation on how to inspire elementary school students with creative writing activities. They spoke about their experiences with a Saturday school program and the challenges of teaching writing for young learners, such as lack of motivation and approaches to feedback.

Two activities for creative writing were shared, following the principles of "creative, motivational, authentic, and meaningful". The first was a story retell project, in which learners watched a short wordless animated movie. By pausing the movie at specific intervals and eliciting story points from learners, which were then written by the teachers on a board, the class could create their own storyline together.

The second activity was writing individual fairy tales, building stories gradually scene by scene. The teachers shared an assortment of classic stories through videos and pictures as meaningful input, and learners could choose the vocabulary, settings, and events that appealed to them as they wrote their stories in their notebooks. Finally, the students could read their original fairy tales for the younger children at their school, with a feeling pride and satisfaction in their work.

During their talk, Frances and Ran displayed many pictures of their students working on their projects and passed around copies of the original fairy tales for attendees to enjoy. Through this excellent presentation, we attendees could learn about several useful approaches for helping young learners to build up their creative writing skills.

PanSIG 2022 Forum Report

Gaby Benthien

Shumei University/ Chuo University

Language and culture are closely intertwined. When we learn a language, we are also learning to interact within the norms and mores of a different culture, and deal with all the challenges that this entails. With this in mind, a collaborative forum between the Teacher Younger Learner SIG and Intercultural Communication in Language Education SIG was decided upon for the 2022 PanSIG.

I began with a brief overview of the culture component within the new Courses of Study, and how culture is approached in teacher training. Next, two presenters shared their experiences and views from the mainstream classrooms. Satomi Miura's presentation reminded us that some expressions like "*I can do XYZ well*" may pose a challenge for our students, as their usage may not be the norm in the socio-cultural environment of the L1. Maria Theresa Niibori pointed out that using photos or artifacts alone when introducing a culture may be insufficient, and gave us some interesting ideas on how we can create engaging activities to supplement visual aids.

The presentations that followed were both linked to the *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (FREPA). Daniel Pearce introduced us to an inspiring project which combined foreign language activities, nutrition studies, and cultural awareness. Activities related to 10 cultures (representing the countries of non-Japanese children in the city) were integrated into classes and school life for a month each at an elementary school in Osaka. Fumiko Kurihara, Natsue Nakayama and Yoichi Kiyota shared their research into culture components in the new Year 5 and Year 6 Elementary school English textbooks. They found that the current textbooks can help learners gain competences with regard to 24 FREPA descriptors (13 descriptors for knowledge, 9 descriptors for attitude, and 2 descriptors for skills). Yoichi Kiyota also introduced us to the "Min-pack" service from the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, which sends out themed artifacts in a suitcase, and thus can help to bring cultures to life. See https://carap.ecml.at/ for FREPA details and https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/en/teacher/school/minpack) for Min-pack information.

Finally, a big "Thank You" to both coordinators and presenters for an informative and inspiring forum!

Exploring Young Learner Education Trends in Japan to Find Future Directions for Young Learner Research

Andrew A. Kirkpatrick

Keywords: Learner Trends, EFL.

The study of English language is a major and progressively expanding facet of modern education in Japan. In 1992, two elementary schools and one junior high school in Osaka City played host to "experimental English activities" which grew to include over 100 schools by 1998 (Kasuya & Kuno, 2010). Following reform that allowed schools to select foreign language as part of a new field of "Integrated Studies" for elementary Grades 3-6, by 2006, 97% of Japanese elementary schools elected to implement some manner of English activities (Kasuya & Kuno, 2010). After yet further reform, which came into effect from 2011, Grades 5 and 6 then took part in compulsory "Foreign Language Activities" offered once a week (Kasuya & Kuno, 2010). Finally, following a transitional period from 2018-2020, the most recent educational reform dictates that Grades 5 and 6 now receive 70 hours of Foreign Language instruction each year, while Grades 3 and 4 receive 35 hours of Foreign Language Activities, which in total amounts to 210 classroom hours before entering junior high school. A 2013 figure reports 15,432 assistant language teachers (ALTs) employed across Japanese public schools, increasing to 19,234 in 2018 – a 24.6% increase over five years (Kano et al., 2016; MEXT, 2018). Concurrent to this expansion in mainstream educational institutions (defined here as Japanese elementary, junior, and senior high schools), English language businesses, including English conversation schools (*eikaiwa*) and cram schools (*juku*), have been a

consistently ubiquitous feature of Japanese extracurricular education. Collectively, such businesses represent a multibillion-yen industry, employing approximately 30,000 teachers, 15,000 of which are foreign nationals (Hooper, 2018; Nagatomo, 2013, p. 3; Taylor, 2017). Several of these businesses, including English conversation schools for children (*kodomo no eikaiwa*) including Aeon and Seiha (see Aeon Corporation, n.d.; Seiha Network Co.,Ltd., n.d. for details), provide programs that directly target younger learners (YLs) aged 0-16. Altogether, this demonstrates the exponential rise of English language education across both mainstream and extracurricular Japanese young learner (YL) contexts. This trend might be better understood with the aid of three distinct discourses:

- First, is a discourse involving the historical development of post-feudal Japanese educational policies in response to increasing internationalism and globalisation.
- Second, is a discourse on linguistic instrumentalism and the role English language plays as a skill in the modern domestic/global economy.
- Third, is a discourse that involves the persuasive linguistic intuition that YLs generally experience better, even comparatively effortless, language acquisition outcomes when compared with older learners.

What follows is a brief outline on how each discourse interacts specifically within the context of Japan. Although outwardly useful in explaining general YL education trends, the final section indicates that these discourses are not without room for critique. Therefore, while far from exhaustive, this basic outline provides a point of reference for researchers interested in exploring and critiquing in greater detail the forces at play across modern Japanese YL English language educational contexts.

Globalisation

During the Edo Period (1603-1867), Japan experienced a period of national isolation (*sakoku*) where international trade was predominately restricted to China and the Netherlands (Sasaki, 2008, p. 64). Foreign language skills facilitated trade; however, a series of events towards the latter end of this period ultimately precipitated a paradigm shift in how Japan would approach foreign language education from a geopolitical perspective. In 1808, a British naval vessel violated Japanese international policy by forcing its way into the bay of Nagasaki under the threat of setting the city ablaze (Sasaki, 2008, p. 64). In response, the Shogunate commanded their Dutch speaking officials "to prepare for further threats" which included learning English (Sasaki, 2008, p. 64). In 1853, a fleet of U.S. warships sailed into Tokyo Bay with the express intention of forcing Japan to end its isolationist policies and commence trade with the United States (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022b, 2022a). The recent defeat of China in the Opium War (1839-1842) provided Japan with a cautionary tale, and the threat posed by Western technological supremacy was made clear in these unequal exchanges (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022a; Perez, 2013, p. 382). The existential threat of Western imperial forces meant that the fate of Japanese sovereignty would now be determined by its relationship to Western powers (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022b; Perez, 2013, p. 382). In the years to come, foreign language education would become one of the key factors in negotiating this relationship.

The early years of the Meiji Period (1871-1886) marks the beginning of a formalised modern education system that was, from its inception, inextricably and explicitly linked with concepts of nation building and the need to respond to the then emergent reality of globalisation (Fujita-Round & Maher, 2017; Koike & Tanaka, 1995).

The Meiji government considered English and other European languages a means of accessing the advanced cultural and technological knowledge of Western nations necessary for achieving their ambitious modernisation goals (Koike & Tanaka, 1995, pp. 15–16; Sasaki, 2008, p. 65). Such developments might not have been possible without the pre-existing infrastructure of temple schools (*terakoya*) responsible for the high levels of literacy observed in Japan at that time (Koike & Tanaka, 1995, p. 15). Mainstream second language education (predominately English) began in earnest as early as 1872, and from its inception "the main purpose of teaching English was to catch up with the advanced civilization of the Western world and to modernise the nation" (Koike & Tanaka, 1995, p. 16). Despite considerable efforts to promote language education, gradually a reverse trend emerged from 1882 onwards (Sasaki, 2008, p. 66). Public sentiment turned against English language as a medium of instruction as it was identified with the "humiliation of a 'colonized state'" (Sasaki, 2008, p. 66). This trend continued in 1889 during a surge of nationalistic sentiment that promoted "the teaching of Japanese culture and language … and undermined the policy of encouraging foreign language teaching" (Koike & Tanaka, 1995, p. 17). This trend would reach its lowest point during World War II where English language education was reduced to the point of being "almost dead" while its study was considered anti-Japanese (Koike & Tanaka, 1995, p. 17). English language education was however reinstated after the war during the American occupation (Koike & Tanaka, 1995, p. 17; Sasaki, 2008, p. 67).

Later in the 1970s, predicated on post-war education trends, a wider share of economic capital, combined with the perceived need to bolster the growing potential of the Japanese economy, saw families investing more into education (Fujita-Round & Maher, 2017, p. 4; Koike & Tanaka, 1995, p. 14). For example, in 1948, only

approximately 40% of junior high school graduates matriculated into senior high school, however in 1974, that figure exceeded 90% (Sasaki, 2008, pp. 69–70). Sasaki (2008, p. 69) states that the English educational zeitgeist post 1970 tended towards global communication as opposed to the previous eras' focus on English "as a unilateral means of importing foreign culture and knowledge." Indeed, in the aptly named "English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization", by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2014), states that one aim of the 2020 reform was for "[the enrichening of] educational content in relation to nurturing individual's sense of Japanese identity" (MEXT, 2014). Perhaps the international exchange dynamic presented here has, in recent years, flipped – rather than Japan using foreign language as a means of importing foreign culture and technology, recent Japanese governments hope to instead reinforce Japanese culture and identity via foreign language, perhaps even with the expectation that a population armed with foreign language skills might export Japanese culture and identity during instances of international exchange.

It is interesting note how global events at different points in time throughout history impact Japan's stance on foreign language education. Over time, despite any particular direction, the promotion of foreign language education remains a key component in Japan's response to the opportunities as well as threats posed by increasing globalisation.

Economy

The consequence of the globalisation discourse is an increasing emphasis on the role of English language as a critical skill in an increasingly globalised economy; this partially explains the consistent expansion of English education in Japan (Butler, 2015;

Copland et al., 2014, p. 738; Fujita-Round & Maher, 2017, p. 6; Garton et al., 2011, p. 4; Kubota, 2011a, 2011b). For their part, businesses and universities adopting standardised proficiency scores as means of gatekeeping applicants, further reinforces English as a form of embodied cultural capital – something that is akin to potential economic capital. This is achieved by making English language skills a requirement for access to higher learning and earning potential (Bourdieu, 2011; Kubota, 2011b). Caregivers who express an interest in fortifying their children's future economic prospects react to this implicit connection between embodied and economic capital by pursuing additional opportunities for their children to learn English (Cameron, 2003; Copland et al., 2014, pp. 738–739; Garton et al., 2011, p. 4; Nunan, 2016, p. 68). Incentivised by the increased demand for higher levels of English language competency, the number of private institutions has increased exponentially over the past decades (Butler, 2015, p. 320; Cameron, 2003, p. 105; Copland et al., 2014, p. 738; Kubota, 2011a, 2011b). The increased connection between language learning and higher earning potential gives rise to the notion of *linguistic instrumentalism*; the utility of language skills as a means to "economic development and social mobility" (Kubota, 2011b, p. 248). In summary, businesses, and educational institutions, as well as parents and care givers, recognise and promote linguistic instrumentalism, which contributes to an increased supply and demand for extracurricular English education.

This trend also appears to correlate with the increasingly younger/earlier starting age of English education in mainstream and extracurricular contexts. As stated in the introduction, English language activities were officially introduced starting in Grade 3 (ages 8-9) of elementary school as of 2020 (MEXT, 2014, 2020, p. 10) and some extracurricular institutions have, and continue to cater to, students as young as 0 years old.

It is possible that the perceived benefit of an English education is so great that various stakeholders desire that the learning process begin as soon as possible. However, there may be another discourse that better explains this age-related trend.

"Younger is Better"

One other contributing factor to the gradual decrease over time in starting age for English language education might be the commonly held folk-linguistic intuition that "younger is better" for learning additional languages (Butler, 2015, p. 320; Copland et al., 2014, p. 738; Garton et al., 2011, p. 4; Muñoz & Singleton, 2011; Rao & Yu, 2019). Explanations for this supposed inverse correlation between age and language learning outcomes may refer to a 'critical period' for language acquisition in "which a child can acquire language easily, rapidly, perfectly, and without instruction" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 146). In its strongest form, a critical period hypothesis implies a specific cut-off point, typically somewhere "during or at the end of childhood" (Muñoz & Singleton, 2011, p. 1), at which point language acquisition becomes qualitatively different, characterised as more difficult and/or less successful (Ioup et al., 1994, p. 74; Nunan, 2016, pp. 70–71; Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 146). If true, then it appears that earlier language education is not only beneficial in terms of future economic prospects as per linguistic instrumentalism, but also an expedient means to this end. Consequently, this might inspire a sense of urgency on the part of concerned parents, thereby exacerbating the demand for earlier English language education. This might also explain the very early starting age at some extracurricular institutions. As for mainstream contexts, such a hypothesis could have been a driving force behind the gradual decrease in starting age noted previously.

The younger is better hypothesis promises to expedite the language acquisition process and this appeals to stakeholders and other interested parties who see an advantage to English language ability.

A Brief Summary of the Three Discourses

Each of the discourses discussed attempt to explain the forces behind the expansion of YL English language education in Japan. First, English education is promoted as an important tool for businesses and the government in response to globalisation. Second, the promotion of English education in government and business contexts, combined with the influence of gatekeeping standardised testing, reinforces English as a viable means to increased economic capital. In response, parents and caregivers who, in general, are concerned with their progenies' long term economic viability, seek out learning opportunities for their children. This translates into an increased demand for and subsequent supply of educational opportunities. Third, further influencing this increased supply and demand is a sense of urgency derived from the belief that there is a negative correlation between age and successful language learning outcomes favouring younger learners, here summarised as the younger is better hypothesis.

Critiquing the Three Discourses

The three discourses presented in this article may serve as a convenient explanation for the apparent expansion of YL English language education in Japan. Yet, despite their appeal as a means of explaining YL education trends, there is room for critique. Globalisation is certainly an inevitable factor for modern governments and

business to confront, especially for an island nation like Japan, which has become increasingly reliant on an international network of trade imports since the Meiji period (Koike & Tanaka, 1995, p. 14). However, one might question the singular importance of English language in a context where citizens of some of the most prominent, and geographically closest trading nations, such as China, Taiwan, and the Republic of Korea, do not feature English as a first language (JETRO n.d.). One might further object upon consideration that "more than three quarters of the world population are non-English-speaking" (Kubota, 2011a, p. 474). However, considering the sheer variety of languages each potential trading partner offers, the question arises, if English is not to serve as a lingua franca, then what language would? Kubota (2011b, p. 256) provides an example of a Japanese workplace that had some need for both English and local language skills, in this case Chinese, suggesting that other regional languages ought to, in theory, play into linguistic instrumentalism. Thus, rather than objecting to the seemingly disproportionate importance placed on English education, one might instead wish to explore a principled plurality between English as a lingua franca and one or two other neighbouring languages – something akin to the continental European education system. The English language may however simply be overrepresented in key areas such as academic journals and scientific studies (Nunan, 2003, p. 590), as well as being the choice of many people using online spaces. Furthermore, Japan has significant English-speaking trade/Pacific-defence partners such as Australia and America to consider (JETRO n.d.). Altogether, this might reasonably provide a strong source of motivation to learn English.

Also, the degree to which English language as a skill translates into tangible economic gains needs to be seriously assessed. Kubota (2011b) addresses this matter and

found mixed results and further suggests that large-scale standardised testing organisations are in some sense responsible for partially artificially inflating the perceived need to learn English. In some instances, businesses might weigh the potential benefits of hiring full-time English-speaking staff versus comparatively cheaper dispatch workers for essential, yet niche, jobs that require English language skills (Kubota, 2011b).

Finally, despite the persuasive strength of its folk-linguistic wisdom (Nikolov, 2000, p. 24), the literature has been more than critical of the younger is better hypothesis (Muñoz & Singleton, 2011). One significant controversy is that there appears to be a lack of evidence for determining a clear offset point for language acquisition (Bialystok & Miller, 1999, p. 144; Ioup et al., 1994, p. 75; Muñoz & Singleton, 2011, p. 8; Singleton, 2005, p. 271). Furthermore, the introduction of English in Japanese elementary schools was met with criticism, including claims of unremarkable learning outcomes and negative impact on motivation to study English upon entering junior high school (Kasuya & Kuno, 2010). Perhaps age is an important factor in language acquisition. However, this example suggests that other factors need to be considered, such as the quality and duration of programs which also impact acquisition to a certain degree. In particular, researching YL motivation might be key in this regard. For example, it is reasonable to suspect that the concept of linguistic instrumentalism is lost on many YLs as it may yet lay beyond the peripheral of their individual experience. Furthermore, despite the heighten importance surrounding English education, English in Japan might be accurately described as a “foreign language” which implies a lack of opportunities to meaningfully engage with English outside of classroom contexts (Butler, 2015; Richards & Schmidt, 2010, pp. 224-225). Ostensibly, this suggests a lack of immediate incentives

to study English at this age level and therefore might explain evidence of unremarkable learning outcomes as well as reports of low student motivation.

Conclusion

The discourses discussed here indicate several potential topics for those interested in conducting applied linguistics research within the context of Japan, including language for specific purposes, language assessment, language acquisition, and learner motivation. Regarding specific directions for future YL research, gaining qualitative insights on consumer preferences for YL English education might indicate the extent to which the economic and childhood language acquisition discourses influence preferences. Such research has the potential to reveal unique and possibly contradictory insights. On the other hand, it might simply reinforce what has been discussed here. Similarly, qualitative data on YLs motivations to study English might possibly confirm a disconnect between macro level rhetoric regarding the value of English education for international trade and diplomacy, and micro level realities such as a lack of meaningful opportunities to engage with English language on a regular basis.

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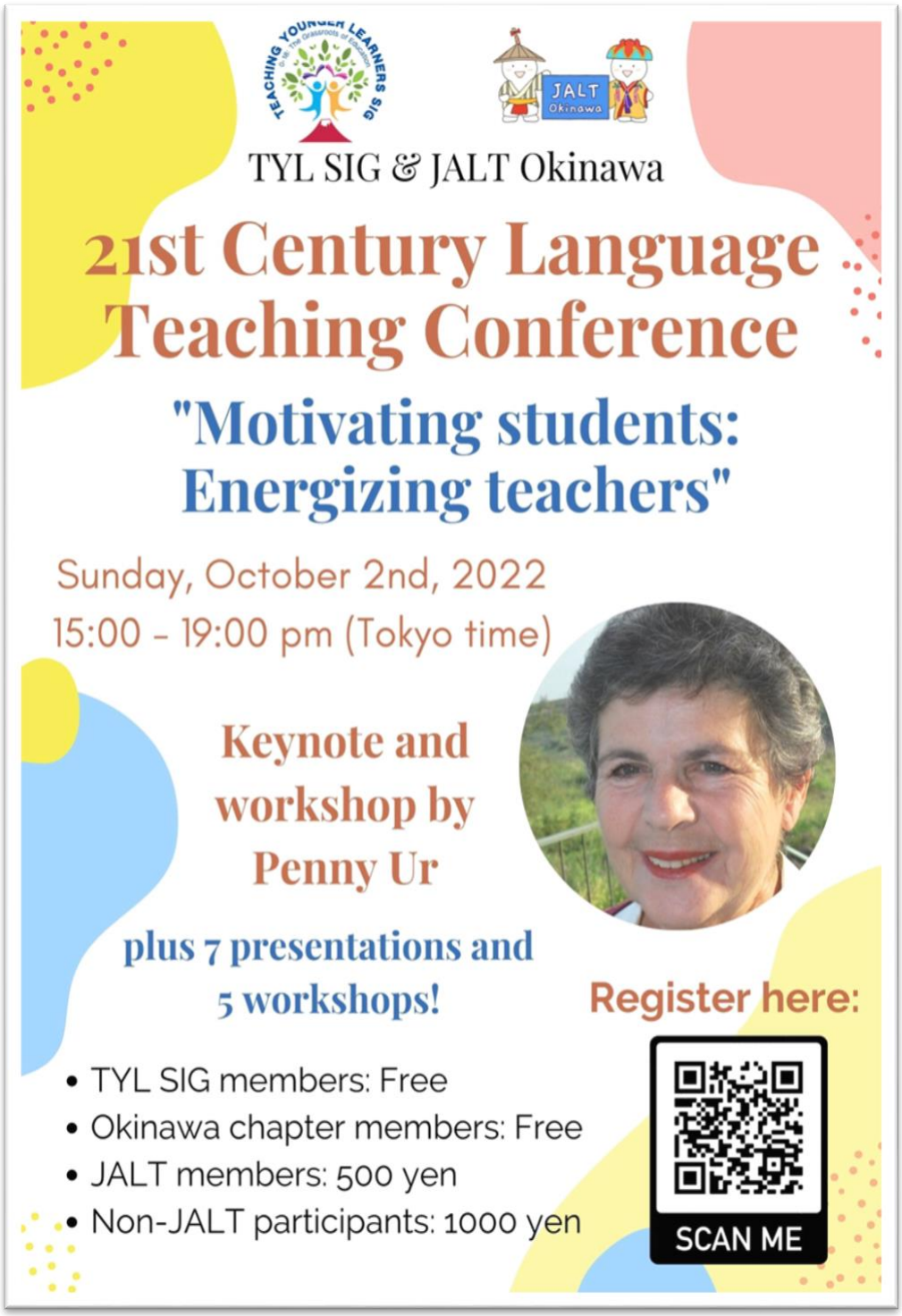
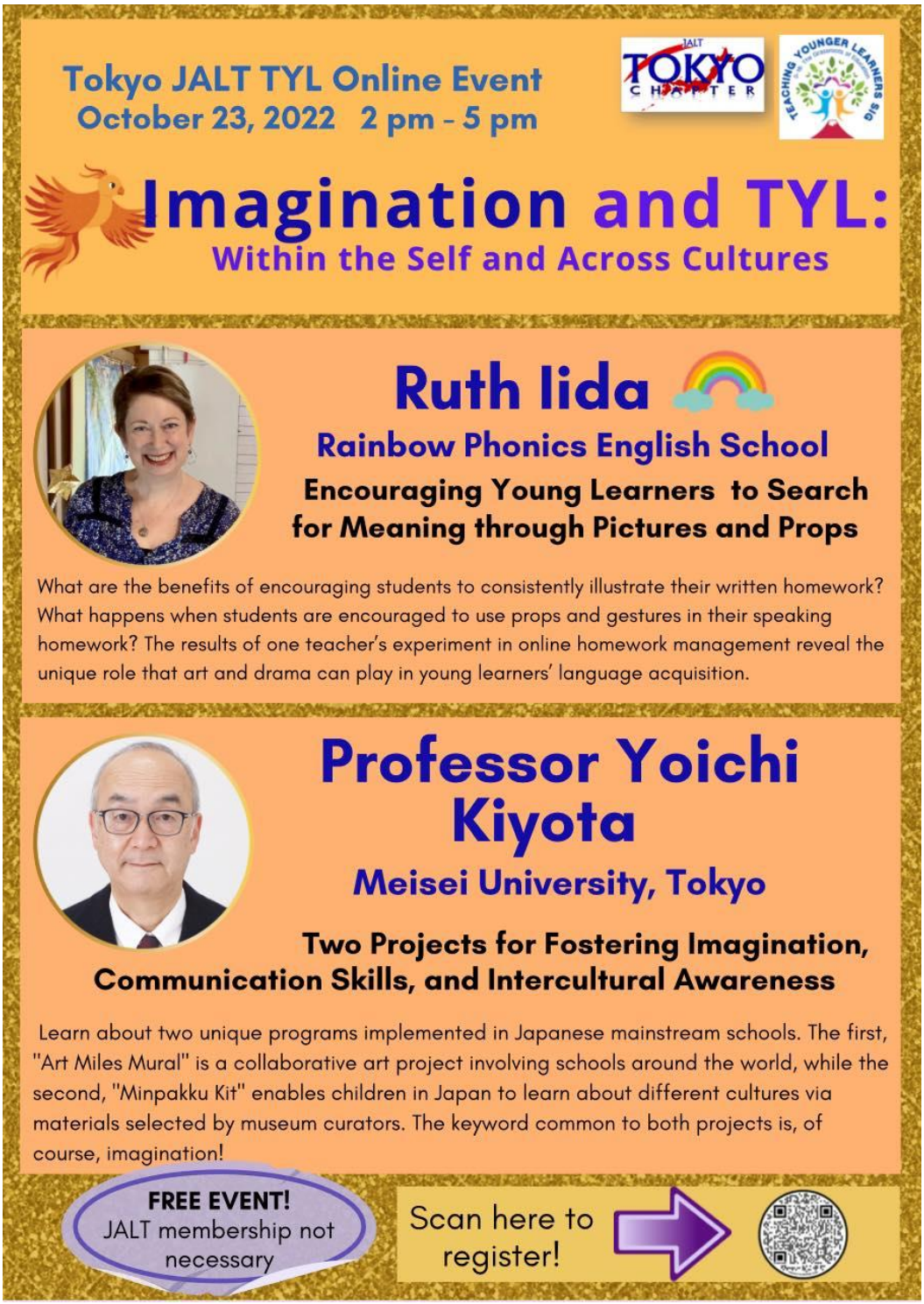
Upcoming Events

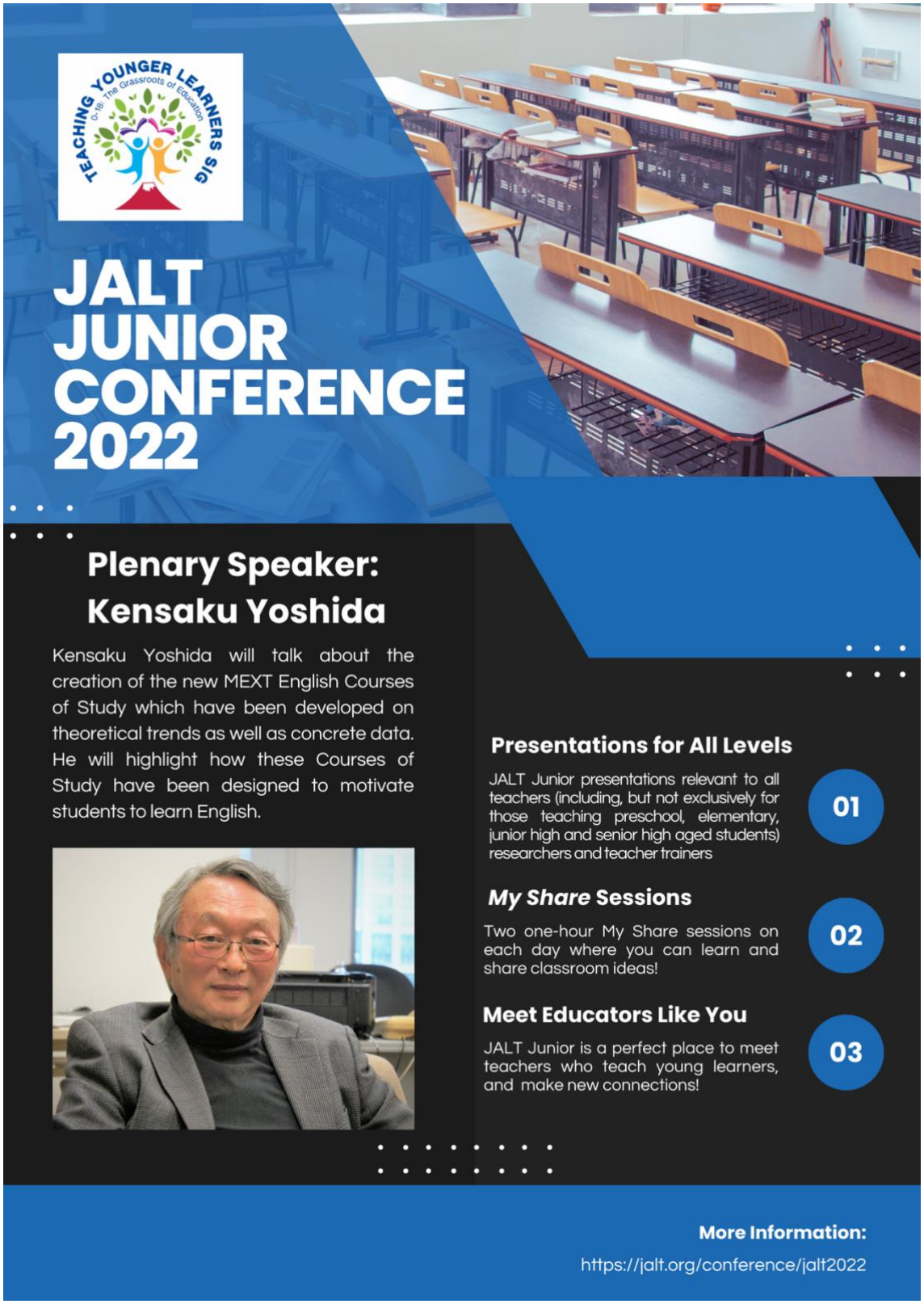
October 2nd



October 23


Tokyo JALT TYL Online Event
October 23, 2022 2 pm - 5 pm
JALT TOKYO CHAPTER
TEACHING YOUNGER LEARNERS SIG
Imagination and TYL:
Within the Self and Across Cultures
Ruth Iida
Rainbow Phonics English School
Encouraging Young Learners to Search for Meaning through Pictures and Props
What are the benefits of encouraging students to consistently illustrate their written homework? What happens when students are encouraged to use props and gestures in their speaking homework? The results of one teacher's experiment in online homework management reveal the unique role that art and drama can play in young learners' language acquisition.
Professor Yoichi Kiyota
Meisei University, Tokyo
Two Projects for Fostering Imagination, Communication Skills, and Intercultural Awareness
Learn about two unique programs implemented in Japanese mainstream schools. The first, "Art Miles Mural" is a collaborative art project involving schools around the world, while the second, "Minpakku Kit" enables children in Japan to learn about different cultures via materials selected by museum curators. The keyword common to both projects is, of course, imagination!
FREE EVENT!
JALT membership not necessary
Scan here to register!

November 12-13


TEACHING YOUNGER LEARNERS SIG
The Grassroots of Education
JALT JUNIOR CONFERENCE 2022
Plenary Speaker: Kensaku Yoshida
Kensaku Yoshida will talk about the creation of the new MEXT English Courses of Study which have been developed on theoretical trends as well as concrete data. He will highlight how these Courses of Study have been designed to motivate students to learn English.
Presentations for All Levels
JALT Junior presentations relevant to all teachers (including, but not exclusively for those teaching preschool, elementary, junior high and senior high aged students) researchers and teacher trainers
01
My Share Sessions
Two one-hour My Share sessions on each day where you can learn and share classroom ideas!
02
Meet Educators Like You
JALT Junior is a perfect place to meet teachers who teach young learners, and make new connections!
03
More Information:
https://jalt.org/conference/jalt2022

Submission Guidelines

Detailed submission guidelines can be found here:

https://jalt-tyl.net/submission-guidelines/

Please make sure to follow APA 7 guidelines for referencing.

Thank you very much!

Kate & Gaby

Photo credits:

SIG Officers

The Teaching Younger Learners SIG Officers

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Programs Chair
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Publications Co-Chair
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….and you?

Please feel free to join us!!