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

The School House:
Teaching Younger Learners Special Interest Group

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Officers and Reviewers include, but are not exclusively:

From the Editors

Dear fellow teachers, researchers and/or parents,

It's already the end of January, and the second week in Hokkaido brings the Sapporo Snow Festival. Remembering those impacted by the terrible earthquake in Ishikawa, to those in conflict zones around the world, I sincerely hope that 2024, a leap year, blossoms into a beautiful year for everyone.

The TYL Sig remains as active as ever, with the officers and members all working hard for students and fellow teachers. In this edition of The School House we have three articles I hope inspire: the articles are about wordless picture books by Suzanne Kamata and Yoko Kita; using tablets in the young language learner classroom by Justin Mercer, and a speaking activity named 'The Sushi Train' by Hugh Dornan.

We are all drawn into stories, and picture books can open a magical world especially for children, but you may wonder about wordless pictures books in teaching language. The authors related this interesting topic to globalisation and cultural awareness. The article by Kamata and Kita introduces three books and suggests different ways in which they can be incorporated into the classroom. No spoilers here!

The use of tablets and young learners can evoke a number of reactions. Mercer summarises four studies with the aim of identifying benefits and drawbacks to their use. He also brings to discussion the six years of experience he has in the field, and I am confident many of you will be able to relate to this article.

Our third article is a practical article which describes an activity aimed to get even the shyest students speaking. Borrowing/Based on the image of sushi that goes around the conveyor belt in the *kaiten* sushi restaurants, this is an adaptable activity many will find a useful addition to their repertoire. Dornan has also included the timings for each section of the activity which will be an aide when lesson planning.

How about you? Do you have a tip or activity to share? Have you come across a useful teaching resource or software/application, or an interesting book, article or presentation that you would like to share with our membership?? Please don't be shy! Why not write up an article and send it in to us and we will help you polish it in preparation for publishing. We accept many different types of articles, so please check out the submission guidelines on our website. We hope to hear from you soon!

Kate & Gaby

From the TYL SIG Coordinator

Dear Teaching Younger Learners SIG Member,

Hello to everyone wherever in the world these words find you. Happy New Year! As I write this it is the middle of January 2024. I have high hopes for this year and wish everyone happy times and new adventures. We have a variety of big face-to-face and online Teaching Younger Learners (TYL) events this year. And of course, there will be a significant TYL presence at the main JALT conferences as well; PanSIG will be at the Fukui University of Technology in May and the International Conference will be in Shizuoka in November. I encourage you to come and connect with all of the other TYL SIG members there and enjoy some excellent TYL presentations, especially at JALT Junior in November!

Why did you join the TYL SIG? I wish I could sit down with all of you and ask that question. I am sure everyone had different ideas and motivations. But, whatever your reason for checking that box on the JALT "Which SIG would you like to join ?" member question, you find yourself here, a member of the TYL family. What do you want to see at a TYL event? What kind of presentation would you like to be a part of? Then, how can I convince you to be a presenter for a TYL event or forum? TYL is for the members, but it is also by the members. Please come and share your energy, your spirit, and your ideas. This year's PanSIG theme is "Back to Basics", and I think everyone has something simple, something foundational that they do in their classes that they could talk about! Did something just come to mind? If so, let us know. I'd love to make your event or presentation idea a reality.

And this goes for our journal, too. The School House is written due to the efforts of fantastic TYL members who have done a presentation, conducted a workshop or have an activity to talk about.

While reading this, have YOU just had the thought, "You know, I do have this one idea…" If so, please tell us about it! Write it up, and send it in to the editors. You'll likely see yourself published in one of the next issues. Wouldn't that be awesome?

I again hope you all have a wonderful 2024. Let this be the year for new inspirations, new ideas… and new voices sharing their thoughts with everyone. See you soon at a TYL event!

Sincerely,

Dr. Erin Noxon

JALT TYL SIG Coordinator

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Promoting Cross-cultural Awareness through Wordless Picture Books

Suzanne Kamata

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Abstract

Guidelines put forth by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), call for "the establishment of an educational environment which corresponds to globalization from the elementary to lower/upper secondary education stage." Avenues for implementing this goal include study abroad experiences and exchanges with foreign peers in the latter grades of this stage. However, learners of all ages, including young children, can benefit from exposure to foreign cultures through picture books. Although it may be difficult to find picture books in English at the appropriate level, numerous recent studies have shown the benefits of using wordless picture books. For example, learners can understand the stories regardless of their literacy levels, which increases satisfaction. Recently published wordless picture books such as *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker (2010), introduce the daily lives of people in different cultures, while *Chalk* by Bill Thompson (2010) features children of different genders and ethnicities playing together in an undisclosed country. *Flotsam* by David Wiesner (1991) might engender in-class discussions about the oceans. In this paper, we would like to recommend several wordless, or nearly wordless, picture books which can be introduced to learners of various levels of language ability, and which can inspire discussions and activities to further promote cross cultural understanding and awareness.

Keywords: Wordless Picture Books, Picture Books, Cross-cultural Awareness, Young Learners, English Language Education

Background

Although MEXT recommends the use of picture books and authentic materials in language teaching, many elementary school teachers who are new to teaching English may simply be reading books aloud and may not know how to incorporate them into lessons effectively (Hasegawa, 2021). Also, teachers need to have access to these books and be aware of suitable books that have been published abroad which may be appropriate for classroom use (Hasegawa et.

al., 2020). In addition, in-service teachers may feel pressure to teach assigned texts, and may lack the time to explore the possibilities of picture books, wordless or otherwise and develop plans to use them in class (Kaneko, 2020).

Nevertheless, the use of picture books in English language teaching in Japan has been widely studied (Burri, et al., 2022; Hatae, 2012; Hasegawa, et al., 2022). Furthermore, there have been numerous studies about the benefits of using wordless picture books in the English language teaching (ELT) classroom (Bland, 2013; Martinez-Alba & Cruzado-Guerrero, 2015; Arizpe & Ryan, 2018). Some of these benefits include increased motivation (Arizpe, 2013) and intercultural awareness (Burri et al., 2022). In addition, students can learn how to make meaning from illustrations (Arizpe, 2013) and use these books to improve their writing (McAdam & Sinkie, 2013). Furthermore, a close reading of illustrations can encourage discussions (Ramos & Ramos, 2011)

This paper introduces the three previously mentioned wordless picture books and illustrates how they could be used to cultivate cross-cultural awareness in students in Japan.

Chalk by Bill Thompson

Chalk by Bill Thompson (2010) is a story told solely in pictures about three children – a girl with Asian features, a Black girl, and a Caucasian boy – who go to a playground together on a rainy day and find a bag of colored magic chalk. Although one might assume that the setting is the United States because the author is from Connecticut, one could imagine the story taking place in Japan. The Black girl draws a picture of the sun on the pavement with the yellow chalk, and the sun magically appears in the sky. Next, the Asian girl draws butterflies with the orange chalk, manifesting actual Monarch butterflies. The boy then draws a picture of a dinosaur with the green chalk and an actual T-Rex appears. The children have to escape from the dinosaur, and ultimately come up with a solution to their problem – drawing a cloud with the white chalk, which brings on rain, which consequently melts the chalk T-Rex.

The story is relatively simple, and can be told in simple language. In preparation for receiving the story, the instructor could review colors and expressions related to weather – "It's rainy." "It's sunny." "It's cloudy." Other words, such as "butterflies" and "dinosaur" can be inferred from the illustrations.

In addition to suggesting language, the illustrations show children of different genders and ethnicities playing together. Although it is not necessary to point out these differences, seeing such relationships in the illustrations would help to normalize cross-cultural and cross-gender friendships in children's minds. The instructor might invite children to guess where the story takes

place, and compare the playground shown to playgrounds in Japan. Also, children could be invited to come up with names for the characters, and even speculate on their ages, families, hobbies, relationship to one another, likes and dislikes. This might engender further discussion. The story is also empowering as it shows children using their creativity, and solving problems on their own without adult intervention.

The instructor might pause at various points to invite children to respond. For example, when the girl chooses the yellow chalk, the teacher might ask, "What is yellow? What will she draw?" And later, after the dinosaur appears, children might be invited to consider their own solutions to the problem.

Some possible extension activities might be drawing with chalk on pavement outdoors, re-enacting the story with appropriate dialogue, or writing text for the story.

Flotsam by David Wiesner

Just because a picture book has no words does not mean that it is simple or uncomplicated (Arizpe & Ryan, 2018). For example, David Wiesner's *Flotsam*, features a boy who finds a camera on the beach. Once he develops the film that was in the camera, he sees an array of intriguing, detailed photos. Some are of fantastical sea creatures and aliens, while the final photos are of children of different ethnicities in different countries and -- judging by their hairstyles, clothing, and the sepia tone -- different times. Each child is holding a photo of another child, suggesting a connection between them.

A discussion of the book could begin with the title. Anyone who has ever visited a beach in the aftermath of a typhoon will have a ready understanding of "flotsam," however, the teacher could prepare photos or a video of actual flotsam beforehand, and show it to students. Later in the book, when the photos of other children appear, the instructor could invite the listeners to guess where the children in the photos are from. It would be useful to have a map or globe on hand to look up countries mentioned. Teachers and students could also go online to look up beaches in different countries.

With younger children, a teacher might construct a simple narrative, i.e., "A boy goes to the beach. He sees a crab. He finds a camera. He develops the film. He sees the photos." While showing the illustrations to children, the teacher could draw their attention to various details, asking for the names of objects they might have learned already in English, such as "bucket," "fish," and "camera." The teacher might invite the children to come up with a name and personality traits for the boy.

As an extension activity, students might participate in a beach clean-up. In addition, they might be encouraged to write a story or draw a picture of something found in the aftermath of a typhoon, or correspond with a child in another country. Perhaps children could even exchange photos with children in different countries of designated things and places.

Mirror by Jeannie Baker

The third book, *Mirror* (Baker, 2010) offers a comparison of a day in the life of a family in Australia, and another in Morocco. The book is designed so that images created by collage from each country can be seen side-by-side. On the first pages, the families are awakening and having breakfast. The Australian family gets out of bed and has cereal, bananas, bread and juice at a table. The Moroccan family begins with morning prayers, then gathers eggs, milks a cow, and eats flat bread and tea at a low table while sitting on the floor. Their days progress until the two families are connected in the end through the Australians' purchase of a rug created and sold at market by the Moroccan family.

Before introducing the story, the teacher might point out the two countries on a map or globe. On each page, the teacher might bring the students' attention to familiar details, by, for example, pointing to the banana and asking "What's this?" Or, when showing the Moroccans riding a donkey, and the Australians riding in their car, asking "Where are they going?"

Although this story does not include a Japanese character, Japanese children can relate to the story through their own experiences. At appropriate points, the teacher can ask "What do you eat for breakfast?" or "Where do you go shopping?"

As extension activities, students might draw and/or dictate a typical day in their lives. Older or more advanced students might be motivated to further study Australia or Morocco, or to consider something in their homes from a foreign country and construct a story, possibly through research, of how it reached them in Japan.

Conclusion

Though we have recommended ways for these books to be used in language teaching, these—and many other wordless picture books – can be enjoyed by children on their own. If they are available in the classroom, children can peruse and pore over them at leisure without adult mediation, absorbing cultural differences and similarities, as well as connections between people of different cultures, ethnicities, and genders. Many wordless picture books originally published in the United States are also published in Japan, and might be found in local libraries or bookstores. As MEXT suggests, picture books should be considered a valuable resource to students in Japan.

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Tablets in the Young Language Learner Classroom: A Help or Hindrance?

Justin Mercer

Toyokawa Board of Education

Introduction

With changing times, recently many language schools are integrating technology into the classroom to prepare students for a rapidly changing world (Ditzler et al., 2016). One example of the changing times is in Japan, where the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) instituted the "GIGA School Program". With the goal of "1 device for 1 student" this program aims to provide every primary school and secondary school student with a tablet and keyboard set ("Japan's Giga School Program equips students for digital society", 2021). The program was instituted in 2018 and accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to MEXT (2020), the goal of the program is to bring optimized and creative learning to all students and develop their technological abilities. These tablets contain several features, such as digital textbooks, games, and apps that could have significant implications on young language learner (YLL) classes.

Due to the increasing relevance of tablets in the classroom, it may be important to consider how they may benefit or hinder the efforts of YLL teachers. In the last decade, a few studies that touch on this topic have been published. This article will summarize the findings of four of these studies to find the potential benefits and drawbacks of tablets in the classroom for teachers and students. The research in this area suggests that ICT use in YLL contexts can be of benefit to both teachers and students. However, using tablets effectively in the classroom requires careful planning and classroom management skills. At the end of the article, I will discuss my experiences using tablets over six years of teaching young learners in Japan.

Research Related to the Use of Tablets in the Classroom

This section will summarize four studies that provide perspectives of teachers and students on tablets. Ditzler, et al. (2016) did a study investigating students' and teachers' views on tablets in the classroom. The study took place in a middle school in the United-States where 6,500 tablets were given to teachers and students. The data was taken from the observations of 8 classes and semi-structured interviews with 23 students. The study provided several key findings. The teachers utilized the tablets for many purposes, including checking assignments, creating projects, and using apps. The observational data suggested that the classroom atmosphere impacted how

efficient the students were with the tablets. For example, the teachers' willingness to interact with students made a significant difference in the students' effectiveness with the tablet. The data also suggested that the teachers sometimes did not utilize the tablets efficiently, and the authors of the study recommended running workshops to mitigate this issue. The students were excited about the possibilities and creative ways the tablets could be applied to classroom work but felt a constant temptation to use them for non-academic diversions.

Another study with mixed views on classroom technology use was conducted by Taghizadeh and Yourdshahi (2019), who surveyed 95 YLL teachers in Iran to find their attitudes on technology in the classroom. The surveys contained 3 questionnaires, followed by 11 open-ended questions. The teachers were positive about technology in the classroom, noting that it helped improve student engagement and communication. However, they were concerned with the students being more focused on the technology than the lesson. They also indicated that teacher training and workshops should be provided before the school year to give instructors the required knowledge, both educationally and technologically, to integrate technology into the lessons. Further, the data suggested that most teacher's and student's competence with the technology increased with time and experience.

Children's and teacher's views on digital games in the EFL classroom were investigated by Waddington and Charikova (2021). The study took place in a primary school class where every student had a tablet with teaching games installed. The data was taken from questionnaires and interviews with 2 students and teachers. The teachers and students felt these games made learning fast, fun, and enjoyable. The teachers noted that the games increased student interest and attention and helped them understand the classroom content. However, matching the games to learning objectives, and gauging the correct difficulty level for students was difficult. These problems sometimes led to troublesome behavior, like the students losing focus on the lesson. The authors concluded that classroom management and carefully planned activities helped minimize this behavior.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have also impacted classroom technology use. Moorhouse (2023) interviewed 16 primary school teachers in Hong Kong to gauge this impact. The teachers reported that they became increasingly comfortable with technology in class because of the pandemic. They were positive about employing ICT in the classroom, but also expressed some concern that there was potential for overuse. One teacher noted that they relied on technology too much during the pandemic. They suggested considering the technologies' importance in the lesson before integrating it. The teachers felt that technology should not replace traditional classroom

interaction, and remarked how technical difficulties, like Wi-Fi connection problems, sometimes caused issues.

In summary, the four studies indicate similar positive and negative points about tablets in the classroom. Tablets are convenient and can be employed for a number of purposes, such as games, textbook work, and presentations. They may also help increase student motivation and engagement. Teacher and student familiarity with the device is important, and training may be needed to mitigate early adoption issues. Furthermore, students may be tempted to use the device for non-class related purposes. Overall, the positive and negative points on tablets indicated in these studies reflect my experience, which I will discuss in the next section.

My Experience Using Tablets in the Classroom

I have used tablets in the classroom many times during my six years of teaching young learners in Japan. In my experience, tablets are highly convenient for classwork. During my first year as an assistant language teacher (ALT), my school's tablet featured programs, textbooks, and games that were advantageous for teaching. The tablet contained digital materials like flashcards that cut down on my preparation time greatly and increased my options for activities. Tablets have also been useful for projects. For example, one project required my students to make a power-point presentation about their summer vacation. In the presentation, the students shared and discussed colorful, vibrant images with their classmates. These images made the topic more interesting and served as a reminder of the target language. Tablet activities may be stimulating for students because they match the fast-paced, visual nature of modern entertainment, in a way that traditional "pen and paper" activities cannot.

While tablets are a helpful teaching tool, an awareness of drawbacks is essential. For instance, tablets can be tempting for students to use at inappropriate times. I have seen many students stealthily use their tablets for unrelated purposes during lessons. A good way to keep this temptation down is through classroom management and communication. The students need to understand that the tablets should only be harnessed for academic purposes during the lesson. When proper boundaries are established, most students operate their tablets appropriately. Additionally, creating fun and engaging activities can help focus the student's energy on the lesson. Although I did not receive training with the device, a workshop would have been helpful at the beginning to learn its capabilities. However, even without training, most teachers and students will likely grow accustomed to it over time. The training could simply point them in the right direction.

Conclusion

Although there are concerns about tablet use in the EFL classroom, the studies presented in this article and my own experience in the classroom indicate that the positives outweigh the negatives. The main factor of success may be how the tablets are used. What activities are they being used for? What boundaries are being established? How active are teachers as participants in these activities? These questions, and many others, are important to consider. Tablets may have a significant impact on the future of YLL education. All things considered, while tablets are an undeniably powerful tool for language teaching, using them may require equally powerful forethought and consideration.

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<h1 style="text-align:center">The Sushi Train: Speaking Activity</h1>

<p style="text-align:center">Kyoto YMCA</p>

<p style="text-align:center">By Hugh Dornan</p>

As most of you know, Japanese students can be shy and lack confidence. Students also find it difficult to find pairs on their own. This activity enables students to come out of their shells and gives them a platform in which they can then use the target language they've learned that day while also assigning a partner they have to speak with.

The activity aims to provide students with an interactive and engaging speaking activity that allows them to practice asking and answering questions using core grammar, vocabulary, and phrases already introduced in the lesson. The students will have the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations while reinforcing language skills. This activity has worked well with young learners and university students that I have taught.

Materials Needed:

- A4 paper with handwritten or printed questions
- A large open space (classroom or designated area)

<p style="text-align:center">Procedure</p>

Introduction (4 minutes):

a. Begin the activity by introducing the concept of a sushi train or conveyor belt sushi to the students. Explain that they will participate in a speaking activity that involves asking and answering questions while simulating a sushi train experience. This involves asking each other questions and answers for a few minutes, before moving to their next partner.

b. Review fundamental grammar structures, vocabulary, and phrases that students should use during the activity. For example, question forms, polite expressions, and standard language related to preferences, opinions, etc.

Set up the Sushi Train (2 minutes):

a. Arrange desks or tables in a long line, forming a "sushi train" or conveyor belt shape, with students on either side of the desks.

b. Place slips of A4 paper with different questions written on them along the length of the train. These questions should cover a range of topics and use the target grammar, vocabulary, and phrases.

Instructions and Practice (14 minutes):

   a. Divide the class into pairs, with each pair standing across from each other.

   b. Explain that one student in each pair will ask the questions (interviewer), while the other answers them (respondent).

   c. The interviewer will start by picking up a question card (A4 paper) from the desk in front of them and ask the question to their allotted respondent in a complete sentence. For example, "What is your favorite movie?"

   d. Their respondent will then answer using a complete sentence, for example, "My favorite movie is Back to the Future."

Corrections and Feedback (4 minutes):

Monitor the students' conversations and provide feedback and assistance as needed. Offer suggestions for improvement and encourage students to use new vocabulary or grammar structures they have recently learned.

Extension (10 minutes):

To mix things up a bit, have the students do rock, paper, scissors. The winner asks the questions, while the loser has to answer and build on their answer. For example, "My favorite movie is Back to the Future because it is a fun movie with good action."

Wrap-up and Feedback (5 minutes):

   a. Have students move the desks back into their original places and return to their seats, then review any grammar, vocabulary, or other language issues. Write sentences with grammar mistakes on the board and have the students try to self-correct the mistakes.

   b. Discuss any challenges students faced while speaking or understanding the questions and responses.

   c. Conclude the activity by summarizing the key concepts and language structures practiced during the activity and chorally repeat the corrections.

Notes:

This activity can be adapted for different language proficiency levels by adjusting the complexity of the questions, focusing on specific vocabulary or grammar points, and providing more or less support as needed.

Submission Guidelines

All submissions are subject to review by the publications team. We currently accept submissions from both JALT members and non-members.

Publication:

The School House is published three times a year (winter, spring, and summer/autumn).

Deadlines:

Submissions for *The School House* are accepted on an ongoing basis.

Types of articles:

- Feature research-based articles (3,000 – 5,000 words)
- Short articles (maximum 1,500 words)
- Interviews (1,000 – 3,000 words)
- Classroom ideas (maximum 1,000 words)
- Book reviews (700–2,000 words) 700 – 2,000 words)
- Conference/ presentation reviews (700 – 2,000 words)
- Text Reviews (700 – 2,000 words and based on a text you actually used in class.
- Language program reviews (600 – 1500 words)

Quick Formatting Guidelines:

Style: The School House basically follows the APA 7 style for English manuscripts, in particular for research-based articles.

Font: Times New Roman size 12 for the entire manuscript

Line spacing: 1.5

New pages for: Appendixes and references/bibliography

Title, author's name(s), and affiliation: Centre

Text: Left aligned. Paragraphs are indented

Headings/subheadings: no numbers.

- Level 1: Centre **bold** font Title Case Heading (text begins with an indent)
- Level 2: Flush left, **Bold**, Title Case Heading
- Level 3: Flush left, **Bold**, *Italic*, Title Case Heading

*Articles other than feature research-based articles may be formatted alternatively.

Submission procedure

1. Submit a cover sheet with the name(s) and institution(s) of the author(s). Biography(-ies) and photographs of the author(s)' are also welcome.

2. Please remove all identifiable references to author(s) and location(s) in the text of the manuscript.

3. We encourage illustrations, photos, and examples of students' work to help readers visualize your content.

4. Please email your (APA formatted) manuscript and cover sheet, in Word (.doc and .docx) format to theschoolhouse.tylsig[@]gmail.com (remember to remove the []).

Please ensure to:

- Indicate the type of article you are submitting in the body of the email.
- Include your name as you want it to appear in the journal.
- Include your affiliation (the name of where you work).
- Three, or four key words for your article (if applicable).

Publication of research articles is subject to a double-blind peer review. The evaluation process for research-based articles typically takes about four weeks, after which time the author will be informed of the peer reviewers' decision.

Non-research articles are proof-read to ensure consistency for publishing.

Thank you very much.

Kate & Gaby