In this issue:

UPCOMING PANSIG CONFERENCE

THREE FEATURE ARTICLES

**CUE CAREERS** 





News and articles from the JALT College and University Educators Special Interest Group



## It's getting near time to thaw!

Welcome to issue 2 of CUE Circular. Thanks for your support of, and interest in, our first issue last year. We were pleased by the feedback we received and are proud to continue here with a selection of enjoyable and practical articles that might provide food for thought as we head into preparations for the coming academic year.

Rebecca Arthur shares how she talks herself through difficult classes, Jonathan Isaacson introduces a smartphone app that he integrated into classes, and Mathew Porter discusses ways in which he's helped students adopt autonomous and self-directed learning habits. Those are followed by our regular CUE Careers column.

The Circular is all about providing a space for articles, essays, commentaries, and discussions like these, on topics that are of interest to teachers in our field. There is a lot to

discuss, reflect on, and write about. We all have experiences worth sharing, we all have interesting teaching ideas, we all work towards similar goals and to solve similar problems, and we've all developed points of view on a wide range of topics within teaching at the university level. Let us hear about yours! Readers will be glad you did, and you'll be adding to your resume.

What worked for you last year? What didn't? What got you thinking? How are you going to approach things differently this year, and why? Please do take a look at our website for a fuller explanation of what we're looking for, and consider contributing an article.

I hope you enjoy the second issue of CUE Circular.

Steve Paton, Editor

#### Coming up - PanSIG 2017

This spring, CUE is getting ready for the JALT PanSIG 2017 Conference. This year's conference will be held May 19-21 at Akita International University, and the theme is "Expand Your Interests." The call for proposals has already closed, but pre-registration for attendees is open through May 8. A more intimate conference than JALT national, PanSIG is a great opportunity to make connections with other CUE SIG members.

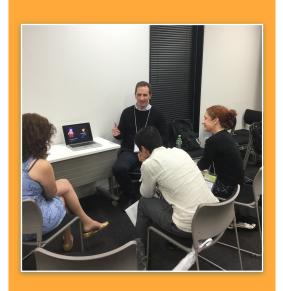
SIG members attending PanSIG will take interest in a variety of CUE-related presentations as well as the CUE SIG Forum. This year's forum is titled "Expanding Students' Interest in English with an Eye on Global Citizenry." Forum presenters will discuss creative pedagogical methods that promote sustained interest inside the classroom and provide practical applications in the real world.







Scenes from the joint TD-CUE forum at JALT 2016. Presenters gave small-group presentations on transformative moments of professional development.







#### Are you hearing from CUE?

Have you been getting CUE's monthly SIG News emails? If not, check your spam folder or contact Publicity Chair Jamie Taylor. Calls for papers, conference announcements, and other important CUE communications are being sent in these messages.

You can also keep up with CUE on our website, the JALT CUE SIG Members Yahoo group, our public Facebook page, and our CUE members-only Facebook group. We're also happy to announce that our Twitter account (@jaltcue) is up and running again.

Jamie Taylor, SIG publicity chair

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### **CUE Careers column**

Reflective practices and planning for professional development *Michael Parrish and Richard Miller* 

# Feature articles

# Things I need to remind myself on a daily basis

Rebecca Arthur offers some helpful reminders for dealing with challenging classes.

# Rebecca Arthur, Poole Gakuin University & College



Rebecca Arthur received her Master's Degree in TESOL from the School for International Training (SMAT 7) and has been teaching English in Japan for many, many years. arthur@poole.ac.jp

I teach required introductory English conversation classes to first-year non-English majors at a two-year women's college and have done so for many, many years. As can be expected, the students vary greatly in English ability and motivation levels. Regardless, I have always enjoyed teaching these classes and watching students gain confidence and increase their ability as the term progresses. It is true, though, that while many of these classes have been a joy to teach, some have been very challenging. No two classes are the same, of course, and the reasons can range from classroom dynamics and personality conflicts to the growing number of students who arrive illprepared for English classes or college life in general (or both). As I teach these classes, here are some of the things I need to remind myself on a regular basis.

#### It's not personal.

Students' lives are complicated. Don't take the fact that a student is doing poorly in your class as a personal affront. It's not about you. (Or, at least, it's rarely about you.)

#### You know nothing!

Although it's easy to make assumptions about why students are behaving the way they do, don't! If there's a problem, talk to the student outside of class and express concern. Ask if they have suggestions about how you can help them with this problem. Don't just assume you know what's going on. You usually don't.

#### We're all God's creatures.

Yes, and that includes the student draped over her desk who only uses a baby voice, as well as the one in the corner with a youcan't-make-me look on her face. Regardless of their behavior or how cross you are, treat all students with compassion and common courtesy.

#### Everyone is a work in progress.

Remember the student with the I'm-too-cool-for-school attitude who used English swear words in her homework assignments? And how, over the term, she slowly shed her tough-girl persona and transformed into a motivated student? The potential for change is always there. Know that it is possible, and trust that it can happen again.

#### And what did you know at 18?

Exactly! So, be generous and kind when you discover your students have no idea

about things you think they should know. Help them remember what they have forgotten, and if they didn't learn it in the first place – hello, learning opportunity!

#### You're not the mom!

Some students would be quite happy if you micromanaged every aspect of their English learning experience. Don't do it! Of course, providing support is necessary and helpful at first, but at some point, students have to learn to make decisions on their own. Give them choices instead of always prescribing how things should be done, and no hounding them to turn in late homework. Make sure they understand what is expected and are clear about the consequences of their choices, and then let them at it.

#### Count to 10...and then some.

Don't be so impatient! There are a multitude of reasons why students don't respond as quickly as you think they should. Always give more time than you think is necessary or give them time to think and come back later. Don't be in such a rush!

#### Who is the adult here?

You! You're the adult here so if there's a problem in your classroom, deal with it! Trust me, the problem isn't going to go away on its own. Sure, it takes time, something you are always short of, but taking the time to deal with it properly will pay off. And remember, how you choose to deal with the problem affects every student in your classroom. So, in the heat of the moment, instead of saying or doing something you might regret, take a deep breath, calm down and be the adult. If that means walking out of the room and

spending time in the corridor calming your anger and trembling hands so you can return and have a civil talk about appropriate classroom behavior instead of throwing a hissy fit – do it. (Last week. True story.)

#### Let it go! Let it go!

Of course, if a student's behavior is disruptive, don't ignore it! However, choose your battles wisely. If it doesn't affect your ability to do your job and it's not affecting other students' ability to learn, sometimes it's best to let it go. They are 18-year-olds, not children. (Of course, if a student sleeps through class, there will be consequences. However, after one or two reminders, don't nag her about it. The student has the right to make this choice – even if you don't think it's a good one.)

#### Don't stubborn on through...

Sometimes it can be lonely in the classroom – especially if you are having difficulties – but don't be afraid to ask for help. Does a student need extra support? That's what advisors, support centers, and counselors are for. Are you out of your depth with this particular student, group of students, or class? Ask for help, or at least talk to someone about it. (Thank you, Support Center!) Don't just grit your teeth and stubborn on through. Believe me, that's not going to solve the problem.

#### Focus on the positive!

No matter how challenging it gets, remember there are students in your class who are motivated and want to learn. Don't spend so much time on disruptive students that you forget about the rest!

#### This, too, shall pass!

So you've just had one of the worst classes in the history of the world and you are questioning your career choice – if not your sanity. It's okay! Welcome to the world of teaching! Learn what you can from the experience, think about ways to improve, and get ready to start all over again.

#### Submit an article!

We're looking to publish short, accessible, interesting articles concerned with the day-to-day realities and practicalities of teaching and learning in our sector.

What's happening in your teaching? What's influencing your decisions? What obstacles have you overcome, and how?

What ideas or opinions do you have that others might be interested to read?

What have you read, heard, or seen recently that's changed your approach to teaching, either in or out of the classroom?

www.jaltcue.org/cuecircular

# Duolingo in the university classroom

Jonathan Isaacson introduces a language-learning smartphone app that students can learn from and enjoy.

#### Jonathan Isaacson, Tokyo International University



Jonathan Isaacson has taught a wide variety of levels in a wide variety of places in Japan since 2004. His research interests include world Englishes and mobile assisted language learning (MALL). jisaac@tiu.ac.jp

Last school year, while searching for ideas to motivate our lower level students, my teaching partner and I came across Duolingo for Schools. Duolingo is a free language learning app that was released in 2012. It is largely based on translating back and forth between the learner's first language and the target language. To make the learning more interesting, it is set up to look and feel more like a smartphone game. The app groups language learning into "skills." The "skills" would more aptly be described as grammar points, such as prepositions and vocabulary sets, or words grouped around concepts such as education or family. It also incorporates many game features, such as gaining experience points and unlocking levels. In early 2015, the developers released Duolingo for Schools, a way for teachers to utilize the app in the classroom. Duolingo for Schools allows instructors to monitor students' progress from a computer as well

as set assignments based on either experience points or skills.

#### Reasoning

We decided to try Duolingo with our students for several reasons. One of the chief reasons is that it offers language learning in a mobile phone gaming setting. As most of our students use their phones nearly constantly, this app would offer them language learning on a familiar and comfortable platform. Another key factor in our decision to implement a trial of Duolingo is that the method employed to learn within the app is close to the current English learning experience of our students. Having worked in Japanese junior high schools, I have seen firsthand how many translation-based activities are present in English classes and textbooks. Duolingo is also based mostly on back and forth translation between the learner's L1 and English. We believe that this connection could possibly offer an aid in helping students make a transition to a more communicative language learning style that many native English speaking teachers employ. In many cases, the teacher does not speak the students' L1, and so translation-based activities are impossible, regardless of their efficacy. These two factors were the two major reasons we decided to test Duolingo in the classroom.

#### **How Duolingo for Schools works**

The way the app is set up for school use is quite simple. Teachers create virtual classrooms for students to join, similar to many LMSs such as Schoology. Once students are in a classroom, teachers can then create assignments. The assignments are either to achieve a set number of

experience points or a skill within the app. With experience points, students are only required to use the app, the lessons are entirely the choice of the students. With skill assignments, the teacher chooses one skill that is predefined within the app. As noted above, these skills can be either grammar points, such as prepositions or past tense verbs, or vocabulary sets, such as words related to family or education. If the teacher assigns a skill, students must complete all the lessons within a skill, anywhere between 3 and 10 short lessons. Each lesson takes approximately five minutes. Students must complete the entire sequence of skills in the app before they can "unlock" the assigned skill, much like a video game. For example, before they can begin the "occupations" skill, they must complete both the "time" and "family" skills. The examples in the "occupations" skill require the words and grammar learned in the "time" and "family" skills, as well as all the skills prior. With either type of assignment, the teacher sets a due date, and the teacher's control panel will let them know which students have completed the assignment and which students have not.

#### **Mixed results**

As this is our first time using the app in class, we have seen both positive signs and areas we need to change. One of the positives of using the app is that students always have access to English study. This is very useful during in-class activities when some students work at a much faster pace than others. Rather than having the faster students sit with nothing to do, we ask them to do a Duolingo lesson using their smartphones. As our students always have their phones with them, there is always

something for them to do. Another positive we have seen is that due to it being on their phone and having game-like elements, students seem to enjoy using the app, especially during the initial period of use. In the first few weeks using the app, several students raced through the initial skills at a very high pace, helped in large part by the ability to test out of skills. Since then, the pace slowed, though it is not clear if that is due to Duolingo fatigue, second semester fatigue, other factors, or some combination of the three.

On the other hand, there are some drawbacks to the app, especially with mixed ability and mixed motivation levels. Ideally, we would like to utilize certain topics from Duolingo in class. To best do this, we would like to assign certain skills, either grammar skills such as present tense verbs, or specific vocabulary topics such as family. Ideally, we would assign the skill as homework and then use the structures and vocabulary in the next day's class. However, because students have worked at such radically different paces, it has been very difficult to do this. Students who have already completed the skill are automatically counted as finished, and students who have not yet unlocked the skill struggle to catch up. There are certainly ways to work around this problem, such as asking the faster students to go back and review the assigned skill; however, it is not ideal. On the developer side, Duolingo has a reason for not allowing students to unlock skills without going through the complete progression. The course is designed to be cumulative, with each skill building upon the knowledge gained from the prior completed skills.

Overall, I have been encouraged by this attempt to incorporate Duolingo into the classroom, though if I use it again, I think I will start by assigning skills from the very start, rather than assigning experience points. I think incorporating quizzes based on the grammar and vocabulary in the app would also improve the overall experience, as the students would see more of a connection between the app and their classroom activities. It would be important to make the quizzes not too imposing, though, as that would take away from some of the fun that I feel is inherent in this type of learning.

While Duolingo for Schools is not without its problems, I think it could be a very useful tool for educators, especially in a university setting when teaching lower level or mixed level classes. Setting up a virtual classroom in Duolingo for Schools merely requires a free Duolingo account and a computer. Once an account is set up in the regular Duolingo, the schools.duolingo.com website will guide teachers through the steps for making a virtual classroom. The first step is creating a classroom. Teachers can then choose a course of study such as English for Japanese speakers, after which it is just a matter of adding students to the course and giving them an assignment. While it can seem difficult for teachers who aren't as technologically savvy as their students, Duolingo makes it very easy to set up a fun supplement to regular classes.

# Self-directed learner training

Mathew Porter helps his students develop autonomy.

#### Mathew Porter, Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University



Mathew Porter has taught at the post-secondary level in Japan for 10 years. He is currently Cocoordinator of JALT's Learner Development SIG.

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Most language teachers have encountered the definition of learner autonomy in their teaching training or through their professional development. As originally proposed by Holec (1981), learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning. However, learner autonomy goes much deeper than this (see, Benson, 2006, for a summary). Talking about learner autonomy has been likened to opening a can of worms, and as a result, some teachers might not know where to begin.

In 2013, I left traditional foreign language teaching and began working as a language learning advisor in a self-access center. My main role was to help learners develop autonomy. One approach to learner autonomy that was influential to our methodology was self-directed learning (SDL). Knowles (1975) described SDL as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for

learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes." Self-reflection and critical thinking skills are essential for effectively moving through the process, and an understanding of the process and development of self-reflection and critical thinking skills requires practice.

This process can be introduced to learners in stages, helping them to prepare for a final self-directed learning project. The process can also be iterative, leading to refined learning plans and further action as with the Deming Cycle or Kolb's experiential learning cycle. If an entire course can't be devoted to self-directed learning, classroom activities that call on learners to use the metacognitive skills addressed in the process can be added to other classroom activities. I will introduce some activities here that can be used with learners to diagnose needs, set goals, and introduce an approach I found successful with first-year, mixed ability university students.

#### Wants, Interests, Needs.

The first stage in the process focuses on learners' needs, but limiting the diagnosis to "needs" might be demotivating. Instead, having students examine their wants, interests, and needs (WIN) can help learners identify potentially exciting or personally worthwhile learning objectives, strategies, and resources (see Morrison, 2011 for more information). For example, as a user of Japanese, I want to be able to speak appropriately for my gender (male), age (41), and status (assistant professor). I'm interested in classic cars and wild birds and would like to talk to people with the

same interests. Since I participate on many committees at school, I need to write emails, take handwritten notes, present proposals, and give suggestions and opinions. This simple exercise revealed a wide range of objectives I could focus on to improve my current Japanese level.

#### The Strategy Tree

Another activity that can be done with students at any level to help them assess the state of their current language development is The Strategy Tree, designed by Abe, Yoshimuta, and Davies (2014). The tree is a visual representation of a learner's language skills based on a self-evaluation survey. Learners can draw their trees in about 30 minutes and share them with each other, giving each student an opportunity to see their strengths and weaknesses. This activity can also be used to help learners (and the teacher) recognize trends within their group of learners and how each learner is unique.

#### Goal-setting with ABCD and SMART

Based on a better understanding of their wants, interests, needs, and their current state of language development, learners can identify a learning goal to pursue. In my experience, when students are asked to create a goal, students formulate something unrealistic, such as "mastering English". Here, students can be introduced to two helpful acronyms, ABCD and SMART, which can be used to evaluate and refine goals to make them more realistic. First, the ABCDs of goal setting (see Sullivan & Collett for an example) means creating goals that are achievable, believable, conceivable, and desirable. An appropriate goal should take into consideration the learner's strengths as well as environmental constraints such as time limitations. In addition, the goal should be clearly stated and measurable. The learner should feel the goal is realistic and something they want to achieve. SMART goals result in a similar checklist: goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. Using one of these acronyms, students can check and discuss their goals and make improvements before creating a learning plan. Based on my WIN analysis, one realistic SMART goal would be becoming able to write a business email requesting action from committee members within two weeks.

#### **Identifying Resources**

For two years, my colleagues and I followed the self-directed learning process as is with mixed results. We explicitly introduced the stages of the learning cycle and developed activities and tasks for students to complete which would give them practice in analyzing their needs, formulating goals, choosing materials, and implementing their learning plans. At the resource stage, the learners I worked with often did not choose materials suitable for the goals they had set; for example, choosing a book with practice questions for the TOEIC reading and speaking test to be used to develop conversation strategies for small talk with a host family. As available resources don't always match perfectly with students' goals, students need to be selective and innovative, but in our case they struggled to be either.

In my third and final year, we designed a variety of questions, problems, and activities for the four skills (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling)

that could be solved or completed by using resources in the self-access center and had students complete this stage before the others. This discovery approach to identifying resources seemed to help students become familiar with possible resources and how to use them, making it easier to introduce the earlier stages of the process.

Having a self-access center full of learning resources might seem necessary for this approach, but it could be implemented by any teacher willing to investigate and catalog materials available in the library and online. The teacher could then present learners with a limited list of potential resources along with a list of challenging questions to initiate discovery. Throughout the exercise, learners could be asked to share in groups the resources they found to address the challenges. However, according to Grow (1991) one potential problem when introducing self-directed learning to learners arises from mismatches in the teacher's orientation and learners' level of self-directedness. In other words, a teacher who acts as a facilitator may not match well with students who are more dependent on the teacher. Grow's article provides insights to dealing with such mismatches.

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CUE Circular www.jaltcue.org/cuecircular

# CUE Careers

# Reflective practices and planning for professional development

January 28th marks the start of the Chinese New Year, sometimes called the greatest migration on Earth. In Japanese academia, it is also often a time of change and migration as many people change positions. Although New Year's Day is in reality just another day, nevertheless, the months of January and February can be perfect times to set aside time for professional development due to the fact that most university educators do not have classes and have a lighter workload at this time of year. The break between academic years is a great opportunity to schedule regular professional reflection and to reflect on what has occurred over the past year that helped to improve your Academic Curriculum Vitae (ACV), and how you intend to improve it over the next year (Parrish, 2015). If you do not currently have one, you should take the time to properly develop an ACV (Miller, 2011a, 2011b). This is also a good time to consider your professional image: how you are perceived by colleagues as a person, an educator, and a scholar. In our Internetconnected world, our public image is available to all who do a simple Google (or Bing) search. Be aware that it is increasingly common for hiring committees to carry out such searches of social media and online resources when

In this regular column, Michael Parrish and Richard Miller offer insights on the employment market for college and university language teachers in Japan, as well as general career guidance, advice, and strategies.

Contributions from readers with specific areas of expertise, or regarding specific issues or changes in the job market, are encouraged.



Michael Parrish and Richard Miller are the current cocoordinators of the Job Information Center at the JALT National Conference, and are former editors of the Career Development column in *The Language Teacher*.



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vetting applicants. This article will offer some tips on how to optimize your online presence and organize your activities to maximize the benefits to your academic career.

The first step is taking the time to update your ACV. This is something that should be done on a regular basis both as an employment tool and as a tool for personal and professional reflection. While updating your ACV, be sure to type everything out on a separate page so that you can clearly see exactly what had taken place over the year. At the same time, ensure that there are no errors on your ACV. Make your published papers (or even presentation slides) accessible in at least a couple of different places; one could be your profile page on your university website or a personal website. If you do not have access to those, some other options include the following: Google Scholar, Academia.edu, Research Gate, LinkedIn,

or even Scribd. Having your information easily accessible makes you appear more legitimate and scholarly. It also allows access to hard-to-find publications such as in-house university journals (kiyos) or older publications. Although we encourage making your professional achievements more visible online, be careful what you post on your personal social media pages, either through blocking who can view your pictures or by not posting potentially embarrassing photos or overly contentious comments.

If you are full time at a university, you will no doubt be required to fill out your research and academic activities that are listed under various headings. While different universities have submission times, it is typically towards the end of the fall semester (when hiring decisions begin). I recommend doing this in December for the previous calendar year. This is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the year in terms of the various activities that helped to enhance your ACV. Those activities can be categorized into presentations and publications (be sure to distinguish the two), service (e.g., committees, volunteer activities), education and training, and teaching. When you look at the year that just passed, see how much better your ACV is than at this time a year ago. Reflect on how you feel, and why you feel that way. If you were particularly satisfied, what activities made you feel that way? You can resolve to continue to do more of the same or to delve deeper next year. If, on the other hand, you were dissatisfied with the lack of improvement to your ACV, then you must consider what you want your ACV to look like a year from now. How are you going to change? What activities will you pursue?

There is a direct correlation between reflection, planning and actual production. Therefore, to get more production, planning is necessary. And, the best type of planning takes place after reflection and professional self-awareness.

Utilizing the SMART goals approach (Miller, 2012), plan your year in advance. This describes the characteristics of wellarticulated goals. There are several popular versions of this acronym, but a common one is that your goals should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-limited (Haughey, 2016). In addition, try setting benchmarks using the Minimum, Target, Outrageous (MTO) approach, with the most important goals listed. Ask yourself, "How will I improve my ACV to look like I want it a year from now?" As there are always opportunities to improve, you need to discover ways to fulfill those goals. If you search for conferences and calls for papers, other publishing and professional development opportunities will arise, sometimes in unexpected areas.

Although the new year is a good time for intensive reflection, it is important to also schedule time in your monthly agenda for reflection and goal setting. So, be sure to spend a short amount of time regularly, at least 30 minutes, going over how things are shaping up with regard to your SMART goals.

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