# CUE CIRCULAR

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



Rikkyo University, Ikebukuro campus

Photo by Steven Paydon

## As we cross the first finish line of the year…

Welcome to issue 3 of CUE Circular. How was the first semester of 2017?

The CUE Circular is all about providing a space for articles, essays, commentaries, and discussions on exactly that kind of question. What's working for you? What isn't? What have you been trying out, and how has it gone? What got you thinking? Is there anything you want to share? Please take a look at our website, and consider coming up with an article over the summer break.

In this issue, Emiko Hirosawa and Tim Murphey discuss student "miss takes", Mike Guest introduces his approach to developing students' discussion leadership skills, and Anderson Passos discusses one way he overcame some of the challenges of teaching content in English to Japanese students, as opposed to teaching language itself.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the Circular!

*Steve Paton, Editor*

## CUE at PanSIG 2017

The CUE SIG information desk was relatively busy during PanSIG. Teachers who came were interested in general information, and half of them also wanted to know about publishing. It was a good opportunity to continue spreading the word about both publications: *OnCUE Journal* and *CUE Circular*. The highlight was when Paul Wadden stopped by. He is the editor of a 1992 reference book *A Handbook for Teaching English at Japanese Colleges and Universities* (Oxford University Press). Paul said he was in the process of editing a new book along similar lines, but with additional authors including more women. The reason he approached CUE was to ask how we might get involved, so we (Wendy and Glen) started discussions with him, perhaps leading to something at the 2018 JALT national conference.

# Feature articles

# CUE Careers column

*Scenes from the Pan-SIG conference in May. The CUE SIG held a forum entitled "Expanding Students' Interest in English with an Eye on Global Citizenry".*

# Feature articles

## Self regulating beliefs about miss takes: Amygdala whispering to university students

***Emiko Hirosawa, Waseda Jitsugyo Elementary School; Tim Murphey, Kanda University of International Studies***

Emiko Hirosawa got her MA TESOL degree from Kanda University in March, 2017. Her thesis was entitled "Making Mistakes Meaningful: Making Meaningful Mistakes."
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Tim Murphey, PhD, juggles while skiing and makes lots of miss-steaks in order to increase his opera-tunes-it-teas for learning.
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University language teachers who wish to have their students use English and interact with it in their classes want students to speak freely and not be overly stressed. But as we all know, learning a language requires experiencing potentially stressful interactions when we are not sure of what others may be communicating, and not sure that they are understanding what we are trying to say. If students are overly concerned with not making mistakes they often shut down and stop talking. This is where a bit of amygdala whispering might help: "Calm down, everybody makes mistakes, and we learn from them. They are actually treasures. Just talk a lot and you will learn a lot!"

The amygdala is the ancient reptilian part of our brains which tells us to take flight or to fight in dangerous situations. Cozolino (2013, 2016) says that teachers and caretakers must often act as amygdala whisperers to calm people down and assure them that the situation is under control and not dangerous so that they can learn more effectively. When the amygdala is very active, it can actually impede learning.

There are several powerful ways of changing students' harmful beliefs about mistakes and allowing them to self-regulate their amygdalas. One is telling mistake stories. The teacher should be the first to tell one in class to show that everyone does make mistakes (in language or other areas). Secondly,



amygdala
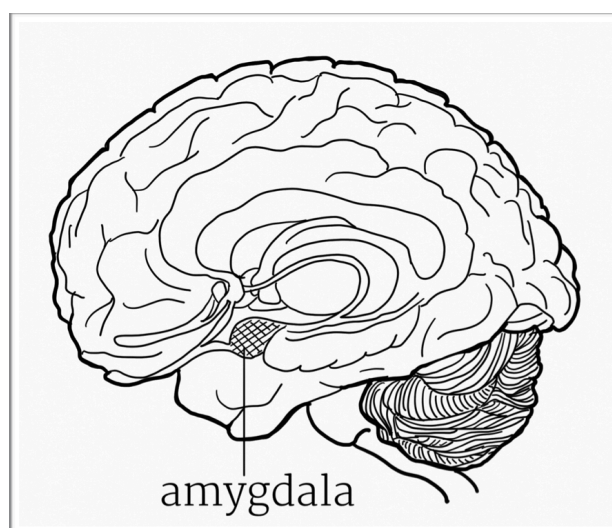
explaining to Japanese students that making mistakes is part of social capital and encoded in Japanese koto waza (proverbs) can also help: Nana korobi ya oki (*Fall seven times, get up eight!*), yareba dekiru (*If you try, you can do it*), naseba naru nasaneba naranu nanigotomo (*If you don't do anything, nothing happens*).

A third way is having "mention conversations" (Murphey, 1994) using just one or two words for each turn. Many native speaker conversations are just a few words each anyway, so these are natural, and they are not mistakes. Teachers can give students topics to practice one- or two-word conversations, such as What foods, sports, movies, or songs do you like? If the teacher demonstrates a conversation at first with one student, other students get it quickly. Here is an example of a mention conversation:

a. Curry?
b. Love it!
a. Salad?
b. My favorite!

A fourth way, adapted from Julian Edge's book (1989, p. 14), is to dictate the three phrases below to students and ask them if they agree: (a) yes, (b) somewhat, (c) no.

1. I make a lot of mistakes.
2. I want my teachers to correct all my mistakes as soon as I make them.
3. I don't like to make mistakes.

The teacher then explains to students that research shows that we can learn a lot from our mistakes and they function as "learning steps." The students are then asked to cross out the word "mistakes" in each phrase and replace each of them with "learning steps" as is written below.

1. I make a lot of ~~mistakes~~ *learning steps*.
2. I want my teachers to correct all my ~~mistakes~~ *learning steps* as soon as I make them.
3. I don't like to make ~~mistakes~~ *learning steps*.

Then ask them to re-read the phrases to each other and see if they agree or disagree with them. There are usually a lot of giggles and laughter and "aha!" moments. It is nice for students to learn to make friends with their mistakes.

**Self-regulation theory**
The above are just four ways among many of gaining some control over our fear of ER ROARS, and of controlling our amygdala's fight or flight response. There is one more self-regulation strategy we would like to share with you that had a long-term effect on Tim's life. When he was on the college tennis team, he noticed that every time he hit a ball into the net, there was a negative voice screaming at him in his head, and afterwards he actually played worse. Deliberately, he practiced changing the screaming voice into a laughing one, actually laughing out loud with a wild guffaw! He did it a lot in practice at first and found that it carried over (generalized) into the games he played. He found that it not only calmed him and made him able to play better, but it made his opponents think he was really strange, which was a good psychological

tactic. Later it generalized to almost any mistake he made, such as dropping a book, or tripping while walking. He would add "Hey great, this shows I'm human! I can make mistakes!" (There is a much longer story about where that phrase came from, but we will leave that for another time.)

After doing these exercises about mistakes, many students experience the thrill of "flow" in a conversation when they can talk for 5 to 15 minutes, enjoy themselves, and feel like they are really communicating. There may be small slips, errors, or funny pronunciations, but students can make their way through them and have an enjoyable conversation. After all, that is what good communication is all about. Helping them cope with their amygdala can relax them so they can learn more and worry less about miss takes.

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Amygdala image drawn by E. Hirosawa

# Teaching discussion skills

## *Mike Guest, University of Miyazaki*

Mike Guest is a 30-year veteran of teaching EFL. He has also published education-related books, academic papers, language-teaching blogs, a newspaper column, and even a novel.
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Imagine a language skill that is widely acknowledged to have immediate practical applicability, a language skill that is understood as enhancing careers and professional standing among academics and specialists. Yet also imagine this skill almost never having a course dedicated to its teaching or learning, never being taught or practiced by teachers or included in their syllabi or curricula. You would naturally think that this scenario exposes a gap in our teaching.

I'm talking about the ability to lead formalized discussions, such as tutorials, seminars, study and working groups, etc. Discussion leadership skills are often simply assumed without being explicitly taught, causing many students who are asked to lead such groups, who do not have training as teachers, to flounder. We might compare this to presentation skills. Most language teachers understand the value of teaching presentations, so those skills can regularly be found in course

curricula, as well as among both popular and academic literature. Why the neglect when it comes to discussion skills?

Over the last several years, I have led an elective class dedicated to developing discussion leadership skills in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Miyazaki, with many skills that need to be taught and practiced emerging. Let me outline a few of those here in the hopes that readers may be inspired to establish such a class or course in their own workplaces.

There are two key external factors to consider initially. The first is that learners must understand that discussions do not equal presentations. The physical setups are distinct. A presentation has an audience, whereas discussions have participants. Participants interact and negotiate — the communicative dynamic is dialogic and inclusive. Secondly, a discussion is not a lecture or a report. While this may seem obvious to readers, it is likely that many Japanese students will instinctively prepare for a lecture and, in doing so, defeat the purpose of having a discussion.

When we turn to internal factors, the immediate concern is topic choice. As I work in a medical school, relevant and meaningful themes are fairly obvious. In fact, I would argue that ESP classes make the most suitable locales for discussion skills to be taught and learned. The foremost feature of topical choice is that it must be of particular interest to the leader. If the leader has little actual interest in the topic they will be unlikely to pique the interest of the participants.

Again, this may seem obvious, but it can be surprising how many learners choose topics out of a sense of obligation or by random selection. Leaders should also do some research. They should be able to convey something that the participants do not already know, and they should be certain of what they say. However, research resources need to be monitored. Young Japanese students may not be aware of the tenor of National Enquirer articles trumpeting the "fact" that 'Mars Bars Cure Breast Cancer.' Conversely, learners may resort to using the most specialized, driest, densest academic journals – which is likely to frustrate both themselves and their participants.

A healthy discussion should also aim to engage participants. This can best be achieved by utilizing the three communicative pillars of PIE: Persuasion, Information, and Entertainment. Young learners will tend to focus inordinately on information, but without applying the other pillars, information being conveyed may lose impact.

Engaging also implies being knowledgeable about exactly who the participants are, being sure to include all members, and discerning their levels of knowledge of the topic early on. This latter point is indispensable to maintaining interest and producing impact since the leader may well have to adjust the level or focus of discussion if participants seem wholly unfamiliar, or conversely, already very knowledgeable about the topic at hand.

The choice of an opening can also affect the mood of the discussion. Students may default to "My topic is…" or "Today, I will introduce…" gambits, but these often have the effect of becoming leader-centered and thereby moving the discussion further into report or presentation mode (not to mention their formulaic kindergarten-like tenor). Rather, openings should seek to personalize the topic, to relate it to participants' lives, and to establish relevance. Indirect openings are particularly effective. For example, a discussion on sleep disorders might begin by asking participants about how long they sleep on average and/or what factors have the greatest effect on the quality of their sleep, before explicitly introducing the topic. Thus, the ability to direct questions to participants becomes paramount. One reason for this is that eliciting is more effective than telling, and immediately involves participants. Questions should be specifically directed; in Japan, non-directed questions will rarely be met with a response. If these lead to mere yes/no responses, expansion and extension should be sought. Teachers should also monitor leaders for obvious or mechanical questions of the 'Do you like sleep?' or 'Do you think sleep is good for your body?' type.

Leaders can also be encouraged to use some type of physical handout, props, or computer/tablet visuals to accompany the discussion. However, paper handouts in particular should not be distributed at the beginning of the discussion unless one wants all participants to keep their heads down and enter passive reading mode. Handouts should also not be too text-heavy and edited in such a way that participants can easily be guided to the key points.

New vocabulary can also be a pertinent issue. However, rather than simply teaching new or "unknown" items in advance, leaders would do well to find out if participants are already familiar with (and to what degree) the items in question. When necessary, ready-made paraphrases and explanations should be offered. The ability to distinguish more intrinsically valuable items (those that have long-term value in a learner's lexicon) from those which have only instrumental value (likely to be used only to participate in the current discussion) is also important. The former should be emphasized and promoted by leaders (or teachers).

Finally, one should aim to have an impactful ending. Students should be encouraged to avoid using the phrases, 'That's all' or 'Finished!' (or, even worse, 'Finish!'). Glib slogans and foregone conclusions ('So, sleep is good for your body and mind!') should be discouraged. Better endings include asking for summaries, questions, feedback, and/or comments, asking participants what they've learned, or even introducing a mini-task comprehension check.

The benefits of introducing such a course are many. A lot of student-generated interactive language emerges. The leaders (who should rotate so that all eventually take on this role) have an opportunity to produce English in a relatively unthreatening language situation, which

tends to produce greater attention to form. Discussion skills classes encourage creativity, autonomy, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and negotiation skills. They help students become more aware of how to educate or be educated (as well as becoming good discussion participants). They foster a sense of self-control and achievement. The teacher's role is mainly to set leader/participant groupings and schedules, keep times, monitor content, and jump-start flagging discussions (as unobtrusively as possible). The teacher should also model a discussion in the first class and, after this, elicit the various skills they employed from the students.

It is recommended that groups be made up of 3-5 participants plus the leader, aiming at a discussion time of 20 minutes per session, with three rotating participant sessions per 90-minute class being ideal. Having three turns allows leaders to refine and consolidate their skills and topic contents/choices to the point where they can feel increased control and competence.

These skills can be applied across various academic and professional disciplines. They also transfer well into the workplace. Furthermore, they are applicable across languages and thus could have a positive washback effect upon the learner's first language. In fact, there are very few reasons not to have a discussion skills class included in the curriculum. Perhaps it is something you should, ahem, discuss, with your colleagues and superiors.

# Classroom journals in content classes

## *Anderson Passos, Miyazaki International College*

Anderson Passos teaches ICT-related courses in English. As a non-native speaker of English himself, he tries his best to make sure students learn content no matter their language abilities. *anderson.passos@ieee.org*

Journal writing is a tool commonly used by language teachers, but it has not been explored as much by content instructors (at least in my institution). After my university was awarded the Acceleration Program for University Reform (AP) grant from the Japanese Ministry of Education (which was rolled out beginning in April 2015), I found that I was one of the key people in charge of promoting the e-Portfolio system inside our institution. As you may have guessed from the title, what started as a means by which to convince my fellow colleagues to use our e-Portfolio system became a wonderful tool for not only students but also myself.

**The system is running… now what?**
The AP grant made it possible for us to distribute tablet computers to all newly enrolled students, which they would use to access our institution's e-Portfolio system inside and outside the classroom. The system uses Moodle (an open-source LMS) and Mahara (an open-source e-

Portfolio system). As the primary Information and Communication Technology (ICT) instructor, I was assigned to a working group in charge of promoting the e-Portfolio system, training students on how to use it, and running faculty development sessions so other instructors would feel comfortable using the tool in class. Everything was well planned, except for the fact that neither my working group colleagues nor I had ever used Mahara before.

We had been using Moodle for some time, but the grant required using Mahara specifically for the task of showcasing students' work and learning achievements. At this point, I had to find a way to convince other instructors to use the system in order to check all the boxes with the grant. This is where classroom journals came to the rescue.

Many language instructors in my institution made use of physical academic journals and forums in Moodle to promote writing fluency, among other objectives. Therefore, writing online did not sound like a great challenge for people who were already doing something similar (although physically), and using Moodle.

Regarding the grant, classroom journals can easily be used to showcase critical thinking and active learning inside and outside the classroom depending on the assigned task. So, when I found out that Mahara had a specific functionality for academic journals, I felt like I had found the perfect reason for using Mahara as part of our system.

## How to write a journal entry?

My institution uses team-teaching for most first- and second-year classes. What that means is that a content instructor is always both sharing the classroom and planning classes together with a language specialist. Different partners have different agreements, but in our case, I set all the ICT-related content and have complete control over the syllabus. Still, I like to give my language partners enough freedom to work on language-related activities the way they see fit.

With two different sections of the Intro to ICT class, I was lucky enough to have different language partners, and it was interesting to see how differently they approached the writing process. One of my partners used a degree of scaffolding, while the other left it to students to decide how and what to write. As a content instructor lacking the knowledge to discuss writing instruction, I still have confidence reporting that both methods were effective for our needs.

Regarding the first journal entries, the class in which we used scaffolding was not very creative at the outset because students simply copied the structure we gave them. Conversely, the class without scaffolding wrote simple sentences with minimal content. To make a long story short, the first journal entries of both classes were not ideal, but within a matter of weeks, my colleagues and I began to see improvements.

## Evaluating journal entries

Again, because I am a content instructor, my primary focus is not correcting

students' language mistakes, but to ensure students learned the content of the lesson. My first shot at evaluating students' writings was to use a rubric for evaluation directly in the e-Portfolio system. Moodle has a built-in rubric module that allows for a point-and-click type of grading as well as the ability to reuse rubrics. Unfortunately, moving between two windows, one for reading the journal entries and one for referring to the rubric to ensure accurate and reliable grading across four categories for 60 students became extremely tiresome. Furthermore, as we are instructing first-year first-semester students in my Intro to ICT class, many of these students arrive with less than desirable language skills. A large majority of students can get the ICT concepts, but it is very common to see their thoughts crossing or going somewhere else when they write. So, for my own sake, rubrics were forgotten, and a simple binary evaluation adopted, meaning that students either received one point or zero.

## And the winner is… me, the instructor.

What was once a quest to get colleagues on board with a new e-learning system had become both an important part of outside the classroom instruction as well as a tool for students to provide critical feedback for myself, the instructor, about my instruction. Having students' journals a click away allowed me to review my class plan because I could identify points that needed further explanation and self-evaluate the effectiveness of materials and activities I had used. Students are very honest when they write things like "I

didn't understand", and if they are saying that, who am I to say otherwise?

Sure enough, writing improvements are the result of English language classes, and many will argue that a binary evaluation system is not ideal. I can say that for now, it fits with my objectives. It is still hard to read and understand all first-year students' entries, but if I look at it as professional development and receive students' comments as criticism, the only possible outcome of it is that the level of instruction in my classes will improve.

Regarding instructors, unfortunately, I have to report that I have gathered fewer people than I expected. Not because the Mahara journals are difficult, but because the system requires a huge amount of manual labor from the instructor. Faculty development sessions are still held and people often praise me for the ideas, but even when I go the extra mile and try teaching someone individually how to do it, I can see they either don't have the time or the patience to learn it. So, until Mahara journals become somehow more integrated with Moodle, I am not expecting many people to join me.

Keeping a class journal helps students not only to improve their writing but also their ability to explain what they experienced in the class. Journaling is, at its essence, promoting self-awareness and reflective learning. Also, in a class setting like ours where language and content instructors collaborate, journals can be used by both, each giving feedback from the perspective of their area of expertise.

# CUE Careers

## Make what you do 'count'

Michael Parrish and Richard Miller are the current co-coordinators 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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"Publish or perish!" That is the first advice given in graduate school for academics just starting out. But what exactly counts as "publishing"? I think most people would agree that a long, statistics-heavy article published in *TESOL Quarterly* or *JALT Journal* would count as a publication, but is that the only metric?

In reference to the value of various types of academic engagement, our colleague Ryan Richardson noted, "It counts until it doesn't." The meaning of this Yogi Berra-esque phrase is that there are various types of publications varying in word length, complexity, or depth of research that job seekers can use to demonstrate (as described in one online job posting) "evidence of continuing professional development." Richardson is trying to say that it is important to try and make as much of what you do in your career 'count' in the satisfaction of minimum hiring requirements, then replacing those lower level publications with those of higher quality as circumstances change. Of course, different levels of publications will be more appropriate for certain jobs, part-time versus contract versus tenured, and according to the level and aims of the employing institution.

The thing that sets applying for an academic (university) EFL teaching position apart from other EFL/ESL positions is the inclusion of a publication requirement (typically 3-5 publications). As a result, after your educational attainments, it is the next most important area of an academic CV, outweighing even relevant teaching experience. Although it remains important to maintain a balance of academic qualifications according to the principles of the "academic balanced scorecard," (consisting of degrees, publications, experience, and service), for most applicants, the weakest area remains the research and publication component (Miller, 2011). Therefore, in reference to the academic CV, always ensure that you are continuously trying to improve the publication side of your professional development.

There are a number of ways to improve your professional development in this area, one of the most accessible is

attending conferences and giving presentations (Parrish, 2014). Conferences provide a venue to network and to get ideas to present on, and making a presentation is a great opportunity that often allows for the option of publishing later in the conference proceedings. One colleague ensures that his paper is written and distributes copies at the end of his presentation with the request that attendees send feedback within a couple of weeks. This ensures that the paper is ready long before the proceedings deadline and that he gets constructive feedback that improves the quality of the paper. This method contrasts sharply with several CVs that we've viewed where there are numerous presentations with no corresponding publications.

If you have created some novel, effective and original materials, there are several ways to convert this type of work into valuable entries on your academic CV. One is to write up a 'My Share' article that explains what you have done and why it can be effective. These appear in many EFL-related magazines and on many websites. As an example, one author took a genre-based exercise that was effectively used to teach students research, writing and presentation skills, wrote up the procedures and rationale, along with a brief literature review, and submitted as a My Share article (Miller, 2017b). The turnaround for this type of publication can be quite fast, so it might be helpful if you are looking for an additional article, just before hiring season. In addition, a collection of good lessons can be combined to create an original textbook, and textbooks (even if self-published) can

be powerful ways to enhance any academic CV (Miller, 2013a, 2013b, 2017a).

Other shorter academic works include scholarly reviews, often included in newsletters and academic publications (e.g., *The Language Teacher*, *JALT Journal*, and *OnCUE Journal* have such columns). Topics include reviews of academic books, textbooks, or recently attended conferences. Other areas could be teacher narratives, writing up summations of what you have done in your teaching practice, taking students overseas, setting up self-access zones, extensive reading programs, oral assessment protocols, or other specialized curricula. Other topics could be more personal: sharing workplace adjustment issues, intercultural issues, or experience with job hunting or employment interviews.

There are also legitimate ways to publish outside academic journals. "Spend a few hours reading news and opinion pieces, surfing interesting blogs, or dipping into conference-based hashtags on Twitter, and you will find academic voices speaking out—everywhere" (Perry, 2014). Perry (2014) discusses how many universities in North America are recognizing the importance of these modes of publication, and using such "public engagement" as a category for the evaluation of faculty. These online media are accessible, widely read, and may provide precursors to longer, more serious works. It also develops your online presence when employers search for you.

Do not sell yourself short. Keep in mind that there are others who would benefit from your experiences and find your insight helpful. Bernie Susser, Professor Emeritus of Doshisha University, always encourages those who are just starting out and applying for work to "get it down on paper; to present on and publish what you are doing." After all, it is through those who contribute that the field improves, and we as peers improve.

As professionals, there are always ways that we can develop our skills and, at the same time, our CVs. We accomplish this through getting involved and then making what we do count. That applies to those who are already well published and those who are lacking in the minimum requirements that are necessary to get the desired job. By making what you do count, you are not only contributing to your own CV, you are broadening academia in general and in your field specifically.

*If you are interested in discussing this issue further, please join the authors at JALT 2017 in Tsukuba where they will be at the Job Information Booth and giving a workshop on publication strategies.*

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