



TOCHIGI

ISSUE 2, JULY 2025



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The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)

JALT is a nonprofit professional organisation dedicated to the improvement of language teaching and learning in Japan. It provides a forum for the exchange of new ideas and techniques and a means of keeping informed about developments in the rapidly changing field of second and foreign language education.

There are currently 31 JALT Chapters, and numerous Special Interest Groups (SIGs) throughout Japan.

SIGs are made of JALT members who share a professional interest. SIGs publish books, journals, newsletters and maintain informative mailing lists. SIGs also hold conferences and seminars, and work with JALT Chapters and other groups to put on events throughout Japan.

For more information about the types of SIGs available and what they are getting up to, please follow the QR code for more information.



Welcome

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the second issue of the JALT Tochigi publication! We're excited to continue building a space that highlights the voices, stories, and expertise of language educators across our community.

In this issue, we're honoured to feature an **interview with Dr. Rob Waring**, a globally respected scholar in extensive reading and vocabulary development. Following his inspiring presentation at our September 2024 event, Rob shared some valuable insights into the role of extensive reading in language programs and offered a personal look into his teaching philosophy. We hope his reflections will resonate with many of you and offer practical ideas for your classrooms.

Also in this issue, our new **Chapter Highlights** section showcases recent presentations and publications from JALT Tochigi members. Whether you're looking for inspiration, collaboration, or simply want to stay informed, this section celebrates the active professional work being done by our local educators.

In **Friends of the Chapter**, we catch up with Diane Hawley Nagatomo, who shared her journey from EFL materials to fiction writing in our first issue. This time, we spotlight her recently published second novel, *Finding Naomi*, as well as her upcoming release, *The Making of Us*.

Looking ahead, we're also pleased to highlight our upcoming **online event on July 5th** with Gretchen Clark titled, *Inclusive Classroom Approaches for ADHD Students*. This promises to be a practical and insightful session, and we encourage all members to join us via Zoom.

As we grow, our goal remains the same: to connect and support educators in Tochigi by sharing ideas, research, and experiences. We're proud of the growing sense of community this publication is helping to foster—and we'd love for you to be part of it. Whether through **a short reflection, an event review, a teaching tip, or a research summary**, your voice matters.

Please see pages 3–4 to learn how you can get involved. Thank you for being part of our journey—we look forward to continuing it with you.

Warm regards,

Chris Smith

Publications Chair, JALT Tochigi

Calling all... TEACHERS

Join our growing community by sharing some information about yourself, your school, your town, or an aspect of teaching. We would love to hear your opinions and invite you to submit something on one of the following topics:



Teacher profile

Introduce yourself!



School profile

Introduce your school



Conference/event review

Have you attended a JALT event? Share your experience!



Book review

Summarize, analyze, and critique an academic text.



Around Tochigi

Tell us about your town, your local festival, your favourite place to visit, etc.



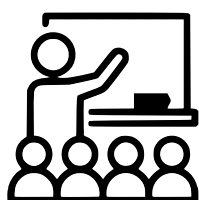
Teaching

Share an idea, a classroom strategy, an approach to a particular topic, a game, an activity, a technology or platform you find helpful, etc.



Free comment

Ask questions and share your opinions!



If you are interested in becoming an active member of the JALT Tochigi community and having your information and opinions featured in future issues, please check out the QR code to submit your ideas.



Calling all... SCHOOLS

We would also really like to feature some of the fantastic schools around Tochigi. Please feel free to showcase your school, share some ideas, or tell us what's going on! We would love to hear from you all.

Why not:

- Introduce your teaching team.
- Share some pictures of your classrooms and your learning environments.
- Tell us about your English programs and the number of students you teach.
- Tell us about any special language projects or activities you are undertaking.



If you are interested in having your school featured in these pages and helping the JALT Tochigi community grow, please follow the QR code below to make your submission.





JALT Tochigi Event

INTERVIEW

Rob Waring



Dr. Rob Waring is an emeritus professor at Notre Dame Seishin University in Okayama, where he taught English for over 35 years. He is a world-renowned expert in extensive reading and vocabulary acquisition. He has published over 80 articles and has given hundreds of lectures, keynotes, plenaries, and featured speaker presentations in 32 countries. He is an executive board member of the Extensive Reading Foundation. He is also the author and series editor of six series of graded readers and has recently published *Teaching Extensive Reading in Another Language* with Paul Nation.

Back in September 2024, Tochigi JALT proudly hosted an FD session with Rob Waring at Utsunomiya University. The topic of the session was:

Why is extensive reading essential in all language programs?

Extensive reading (ER) is often misunderstood as not providing sufficient focus on the language itself and, as such, is undervalued. In fact, ER is the glue that holds language learning together. ER provides the massive, repetitive, and structured systematic practice of language that course books cannot provide, helping students deepen their overall language knowledge into a coherent whole and enabling skill transfer.

After the event, Rob kindly sat down for a short interview with the JALT Tochigi Program Chair, Dr. Josh Kidd. Josh is an associate professor at Utsunomiya University and has a keen interest in extensive reading. He was eager to ask Rob a range of questions about his approach and experiences, particularly how he selects materials, motivates students to read independently, and evaluates extensive reading.

We are extremely grateful for the time Rob spent with us, and we wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

The following is a slightly edited transcription of the interview. In this transcript, fillers, false starts, and minor grammatical errors have been edited for readability, but the content, meaning, and context of the original conversation remain unchanged.

For those interested in viewing the full, unedited interview, please follow the QR code.



Interview

TRANSCRIPT

Josh: Today we have Rob Waring with us. Rob is an expert in extensive reading, so we'd like to thank him for his time. Rob, just a couple of questions—let's get into it. First of all, in your experience, how does extensive reading benefit EFL learners?

Rob: It benefits in numerous ways; primarily, it helps with their development of vocabulary. By meeting words again and again and again, it is going to consolidate the initial meeting they have in their coursework or maybe some intensive reading articles. So, consolidation of language is important, but also being able to see the word in different contexts to build up a mental image of how the word is built and also see it with maybe new collocations or in new idioms. It consolidates the language knowledge that they have, and the more and more knowledge that they have, they can do more with the word. So if you've only met the word, say, 3 or 4 times, you can't really use it either in your writing or your speaking. Maybe you still need a dictionary when you see it in text. So the more and more exposures you have, the more and more you can do with the word and the more and more you understand about the word.

So, I would say that definitely vocabulary is one big thing, but also in terms of reading speed and reading confidence, if you're meeting a lot of language, you can therefore do more, which builds up your confidence in English and has that cyclic effect of enabling you to do more and more and more. But the reading has to be comprehensive and a comprehended text. It's not a matter of just giving students more and more new stuff. That's what study-reading or intensive reading does. Extensive reading is more about deepening and consolidating stuff you already know, building fluency and building confidence in reading.

Josh: Interesting. You've worked extensively in a number of universities, not only in Japan but throughout the world. What challenges have you observed when introducing extensive reading, particularly within Japanese classrooms?

Rob: I found that the preconceived ideas are really, really hard to budge. Many, many teachers here grew up through an intensive reading model—that is short text followed by comprehension questions or vocab[ul]ary exercises]. And let's do another one. Let's do another one. Let's do another one. Let's do another one, either as test preparation or as just getting through the course book. That's their default mode for reading. In fact, for many teachers, they don't know of another way of teaching reading.

So, the concept of extensive reading is sometimes not trusted by these teachers because their model is, "We have to teach new stuff." "The whole reason we teach is to teach stuff," which, of course, is not true. Our job is not to teach; our job is to help students learn. Sometimes, we need to back off from just giving something new. We need to give people practice. Just as with practicing to be a good football player, sometimes you'll do all the drills with your coach, and other times you need to play the game. Unfortunately, many teachers in Japan don't understand the 'play the game' side of the process of reading.

So, I think [it's about] teachers' preconceived ideas. But once they see their students read, and once they see the students understanding, they start to buy into the model. There will always be some people who resist, and I think partly the reason for that is their own identity as a teacher. Many teachers in Japan, because of the concept of sensei—sensei means knowledge haver or knowledge giver—feel that to be a teacher, to be sensei, they have to be teaching something. They need to be with the textbook, with the chalk, at the board, teaching something. That's their role.

Whereas extensive reading, your role changes as a teacher. You're no longer actually teaching anything; you're managing and facilitating the reading. For many teachers, that's uncomfortable because they feel, "What am I doing? If they're just reading, I'm no longer a teacher." So, many teachers feel quite uncomfortable with that. It's important to retrain those teachers and make them understand that sometimes the best thing you can do is shut up and just let them read.

Josh: So, in terms of introducing an effective extensive reading program, the advice is to shut up and let them read?

Rob: Yes.

Josh: What other advice do you have, sort of nuts and bolts, for the teacher to be successful?

Rob: The student, first of all, needs to know what extensive reading is, so we have to train the student to make sure they understand why they are reading. It's supposed to be fast, fluent, high comprehension to enjoy the story, and students need to know that they should be able to read something without a dictionary. If they can read something without a dictionary, that's extensive reading. If they need a dictionary, that's 'intensive' or 'study reading.'

So, it's critically important that we train the students. But also, we need to have a wide variety of materials. Students are going to have different confidence levels, different motivation levels, but also different linguistic levels and interests. Some will like romance, some will like horror, and some will like fairy stories. And we can't predict this; just looking at someone, you can't predict that. So, we need to have a wide variety of materials, lots and lots of different stuff at different levels.

And it's critically important that the teacher themselves knows what books are in your library, so you can advise them. It takes time for students to learn to like reading in this way if they're not already good at it in their first language. So, you knowing your library is going to be critically important so you can guide them and say, "I see you like romances. Why don't you try this one?" or "You're reading all about elephants. This is a really good elephant story." You know, "Do you like other animals in Africa? Why don't you try this one?" Just being able to guide them into other stories, even if the story is a little bit above their level, that's not a problem because it's OK to read something a little bit above your level if you're motivated to read it. Motivation to read trumps everything. If they have the motivation, let them read it, even if it's difficult, because if they're motivated, they don't mind struggling through it. If you give them something they don't want to read and they have to struggle through it, you're going to lose that battle, and they're going to hate extensive reading.

So, being careful about level and student needs is really critical. To be an extensive reading teacher, you need to know your library.

Josh: A common complaint among teachers is that issue of motivation and getting students to actually pick up a book, whether it be a digital book or a hard copy, and sit down and commit to reading. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Rob: Yeah, I think there's a reason they're demotivated, and it's almost certainly something we did as teachers, and that the school has done, and individual teachers have done. Maybe the curriculum they had, maybe the way that they were instructed. I mean, demotivation is an action from teaching practices that were not optimal, so we have to look at ourselves. If we find our students have been demotivated, it's us that's created the environment for that to happen.

Now, they may not be motivated to read—that's fine—but we've demotivated them; that's on us. So we have to look and see what we have done. Do we have the right materials? Do we have something that's boring? Is it too long? Is it, for example, something that they just don't care about? Are we trying to force something on them when we shouldn't?

This is why, again, it's critical to have a good library and a good librarian that will have a wide variety of materials. And I would say that 80% of your motivation problems will disappear if you have the right kinds of materials, because there are so many graded readers out there of so many different types, you will find something. But if you have a skilled teacher who can guide students towards certain texts, it will make a huge difference to that reading program.

Josh: As we go more and more online, and those resources become online platforms, and we've got dwindling paper-based libraries, what are your thoughts on that?

Rob: I think the publishers have a lot to be responsible for in that. Many of the publishers are not really putting out many new series. You don't hear of new series by McMillan or Cambridge or whatever because they've already got several hundred books, and they feel they've done enough. They're not really investing in completely new series, and the money it cost them to make those books has already come back in sales. So, all the sales they're making now is gravy. It's all extra, nice and easy, costing them nothing. The money's trickling in and they're fine, so they don't really have much of an interest to do the niche stuff—materials that would be necessary for extensive reading and consolidation for, say, nurses or engineers or musicians. And there are, I would say, probably 10 or 15 different types of series of graded readers, which could and should be built and should be written. I'm working on a few of them myself, but there are huge gaps in the amounts of stuff that are available to students.

Many students are interested in music. There's almost nothing on music out there, right? There's no history of K-pop, no history of J-pop. There's no history of all kinds of different things. If you're interested in travel, there's not much on travel that's out there. You know, a lot of things that the kids are interested in. Where are the books on food? Where are the books on different cultures? None of that's out there. It's all stories, and it's fine to have narrative, but narrative is limiting. Narrative has a very small range of vocabulary because most narrative is written as dialogue, which is Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. It doesn't have the middle-frequency vocabulary, and so we need lots more texts that have those middle-frequency vocabulary words, which will help them move from intermediate to, say, lower advanced or to advanced level.

So we have a lot of work to do with writing the right kinds of materials.

Josh: When you're in a classroom and you've got a group of students and you see that resistance to reading or extensive reading, how do you generate interest? What's your go-to for explaining it to students?

Rob: Well, there are several strategies. One thing I do is I try and ask, say, the second-year students or third-year students to come and visit [the lower grade students] and talk about the books that they really enjoyed. I tell them to go to the library, find the book that you liked, just tell the other students, and build up that sort of peer support from the senior students about what they've done.

Also, testimonials where you found that the students did really, really well. Students will listen far more closely to another student than they will ever do to a teacher. But the other side to that is to make sure that the students themselves are trained and understand what they're doing and why they're doing it. Why are we doing it extensively? There's a reason for it. Why is the teacher asking you to do so much reading or listening? All the things I've said today about reading apply in the same way to extensive listening. So, training students to just understand what they're doing and why. Very often students are not taught about that. So that's really critical.

But if I have a particular student who's not really engaging with the reading, it may be she has reading difficulties. I might put her to one side and give her some kind of a reading test to see if I can identify some reading problems. She may have mild dyslexia, for example. It may be that she's been bruised by a previous reading experience. Maybe she's had a very bad experience with reading before. Maybe her eyesight is not so good. There may be all kinds of different reasons why she might not read. She might prefer to listen. If she prefers to listen, go and listen to something; I don't care. Maybe she prefers to watch something.

So, one series that I've worked on, which is called the Footprint series—I don't think many people know they have graded readers—also has the audio, but there's a video that comes with every book. There are 100 videos that go with the book, so give her the videos to watch if she chooses to do that. But it's critically important that you learn about your students and what they like and what they don't like. You can't possibly guess what topics they like.

I had one student who came to me about 10 years ago, 17 or 18 years old, very shy, looked like she would not have any confidence at all, but she liked the darkest horror you could possibly get. I had no idea. I also taught at a rival university some years ago, and I had a bunch of boys who were sports students, and their sport was sumo. Their favorite stories were fairy stories. How would I know?

So you can't predict, but having a wide variety of materials will help take that pressure off you a little bit.

Josh: The 'why' of it, do you find that you have to explain that to teachers more and more? Why are we actually doing it? And how do you explain that in a nutshell if someone says, "Why are we doing this?"

Rob: Yes. I think it's to do with consolidation, making sure that teachers understand that if we're only teaching something and we're not recycling it, if it's not coming back again and again and again, then we're not doing our job very well. It's critically important that the language comes back again and again and again, and we don't just have a model which is like something new today, something new the next day, [and something new after that], because students can't consolidate if they're always given something new. They just can't get a handle on it. They haven't met the language enough in Unit 1 to solidly consolidate that and then have it forever before they move on to Unit 2, where they get some more new language.

And typically in course books, new words and new expressions are only met two, possibly three times. That's nowhere near the criteria you need of about 10 or 12 times just to be able to recognize it on the test level. You're going to need to meet the word 20 times to be able to read it without needing a dictionary to look it up, 50 times for you to be able to start using it in your writing, and even more for speaking.

So, if we have teachers who have the teach-and-drop, teach-and-drop, teach-and-drop model, I say we need

to supplement that, and we need to make sure we have additional material to build that consolidation. And every teacher I've ever talked to, they all understand the need for recycling and making sure the language comes back again. But they just don't do it, and that absolutely amazes me. How is it that you can go through knowing you should be doing something, but don't do it? It's like... Huh. How does that work?

Josh: And a final question: What are you working on at the moment? What can we expect from you in the future?

Rob: OK, so a few things. I'm currently doing a lot of work in Southeast Asia—I don't do much work in Japan now—particularly setting up accentuating associations in Thailand and working on ones in Indonesia, the Middle East, and a new one in Italy, so I'll maybe visit later in the year or next year. So that's one thing I'm doing.

I'm collaborating on some research. We just finished a research project exploring attitudes towards extensive reading from 400 extensive reading teachers globally. We had some really surprising information. Japan seems to understand extensive reading, the main principles of reading something fast, reading something that's fluent, [reading] comfortably, reading a lot, and reading something easy. Japan gets that. Other countries like Thailand, Mongolia, and Vietnam don't get that. They're catching up quickly, but there's about 25% of teachers who are actually extensive reading teachers who don't really understand that. So that's an issue for training.

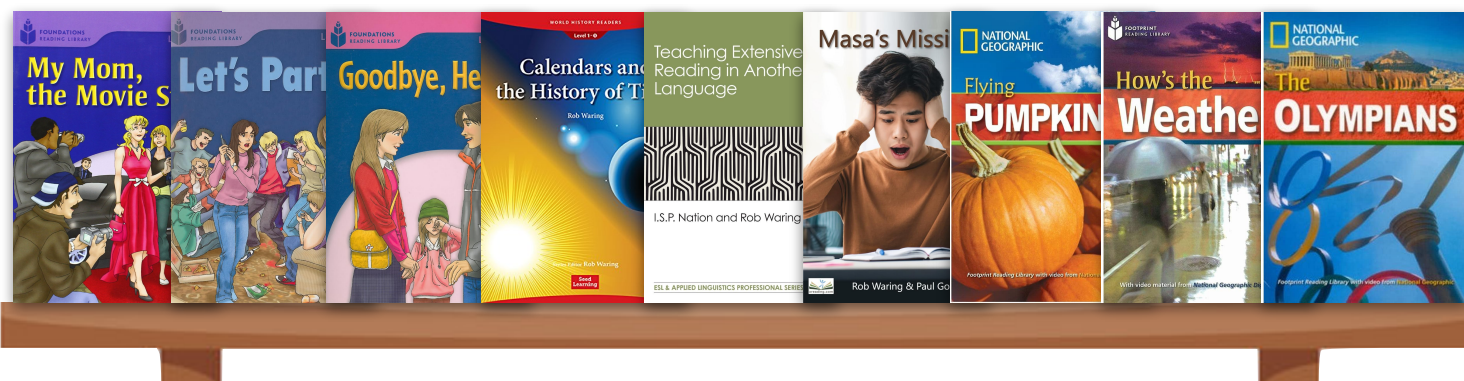
So I'm going to be spending a lot more time down in Southeast Asia in the coming years; I've been to Thailand six times already this year [2024] and Vietnam three times this year [2024]. I'll also be writing more materials, and I'm looking for people to help. So if anybody wants to write some graded reading materials, if you have some ideas, please approach me. I do hold training seminars from time to time. I currently have seminars going in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand, and I'll be doing some more new series coming up soon. So I'm busy!

Josh: Sounds great. You sound busy! Well, thank you so much for your time today.

Rob's academic papers



Connect with Rob on Goodreads



Chapter Highlights

Presentations & Publications by JALT Tochigi Members

In this section, we showcase the recent academic and professional activities of our members—including conference presentations, workshops, and published papers.

Whether you're looking for inspiration, collaboration, or just want to stay informed, we hope these highlights connect and energize our local teaching community.

In May, Dr. Josh Kidd, Associate Professor at Utsunomiya University, presented at PanSIG 2025. Here is his presentation abstract.



TITLE: Transforming a University Commons into a Self-Access Learning Center

RELEVANT SIG: College and University Educators (CUE)

FORMAT: Practice-oriented Oral Face-to-face presentation (25 minutes, including Q&A)

ABSTRACT:

Faced with an underutilized university commons area, teachers within a university English language program examined how it could be transformed into a Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) tailored to meet their students' needs. With minimal financial resources, the teachers collaborated with students and consulted with universities that had established SALCs to create a space that was welcoming, accessible, and responsive to the dynamic needs of the student body. Key initiatives included presentations on social issues, an academic support program, and an English drop-in chat program. This presentation focuses on the drop-in chat, which was managed by a team of trained student staff members. Over the academic year, the program attracted approximately 500 participants and received positive feedback for fostering language development, building community, and promoting cultural understanding. The presentation will explore the transformation of the commons space in terms of design, programs, and student staff training. It will also explore student reflections and discuss challenges and future directions. This presentation offers practical, budget-friendly strategies for educators and administrators looking to develop functional, student-centered spaces while maximizing student engagement and development.

Connect with Josh: j.kidd6776@gmail.com



The JALT 50th Annual International Conference 2024 in Shizuoka was co-chaired by our very own Emily Choong. In addition to her numerous co-chair duties, Emily gave an interesting presentation about Japanese English speaking anxiety. Here is her presentation abstract along with a short summary.



TITLE: Japanese English Speaking Anxiety: In-person vs. Online

RELEVANT SIG: Psychology & Language Learning: College & University Education

FORMAT: Research-Oriented Short Presentation (25 minutes, including Q&A)

ABSTRACT:

Despite decades of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) research, effectively measuring English speaking anxiety in diverse classrooms remains difficult. While some scholars note lower anxiety levels in English learning online, research in the Japanese EFL context is limited. This study aimed to investigate English speaking anxiety levels and sources of anxiety among Japanese EFL undergraduates using a mixed-method approach. An English speaking anxiety questionnaire was adapted from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986) and existing literature. It was piloted by 28 Japanese undergraduates with feedback from two language teaching experts, then administered to 500 Japanese undergraduates. Data analysis, conducted using SPSS, included descriptive statistics and a paired t-test to compare anxiety levels between the two contexts. Additionally, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants to explore anxiety sources. While the mean scores suggested higher anxiety levels in face-to-face contexts, the data analysis revealed that there is little statistical significance to determine a difference between the two environments. Face-to-face English speaking anxiety sources included unpreparedness and speaking in front of large groups, while online anxiety stemmed from timing of speaking and inability to see facial expressions. In both environments, participants expressed the fear of inconveniencing others if not understood and tended to blame themselves. Despite the minimal difference observed between face-to-face and online anxiety levels, the study highlights the importance of educators addressing students' needs in diverse contexts and developing strategies to mitigate anxiety. Creating low-anxiety English language classrooms remains imperative considering ever-changing learning environments.

SUMMARY:

Speaking a foreign language can be intimidating for language learners. Despite extensive research, measuring English speaking anxiety in diverse Japanese classrooms is still challenging. In this presentation, the speaker examines this issue among Japanese undergraduates in both face-to-face and online settings, using a mixed-method approach based on studies in Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). Results of an adapted questionnaire and interviews are discussed. Attendees are invited to join to discover practical ways to create low-anxiety classrooms.



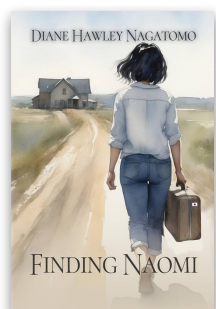
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Friends of the Chapter

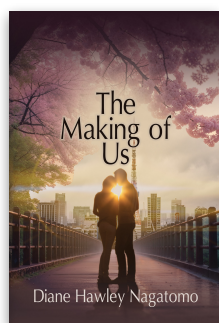


Continuing Diane Hawley Nagatomo's Literary Journey

In our November 2024 issue, we had the delight of featuring retired Ochanomizu University professor and acclaimed EFL author Diane Hawley Nagatomo, exploring her transition from academic writing to fiction and her debut novel, *The Butterfly Café*. Diane released her second novel, *Finding Naomi*, on November 14, 2024, and her third novel, titled *The Making of Us*, is set for publication in September 2025.



Finding Naomi follows protagonist Naomi Kihara, a Tokyo bartender who learns she's inherited property in Nebraska and must spend a year abroad to claim her inheritance. Critics and early readers have praised Diane's heartfelt characterisation and cultural nuance—Goodreads rates it 4.37/5, calling it "a delightful novel by a skilled storyteller."



Looking ahead, *The Making of Us*, due September 4, 2025, returns to Japan-Midwest dynamics, this time set in the 1980s. It centers on Rose Millstone, whose life is upended when her fiancé leaves her, prompting a move to teach English in Japan. There, she forms a bond with a widower and his children, then faces a crisis forcing her to choose between two worlds. Advance praise from peers such as Suzanne Kamata suggests Diane is once again delivering an emotionally rich tale. Kamata described *The Making of Us* as "A warm and tender story that leaps over seemingly insurmountable obstacles and crosses cultures. A+"

We're delighted to see Diane's continued success as a novelist and wish her all the best with *The Making of Us* and her ongoing writing journey. As a friend of the chapter, we look forward to seeing where her stories take her next.

**Free
Event***Proudly hosts Gretchen Clark*

Inclusive Classroom Approaches for ADHD Students



Gretchen Clark
Ritsumeikan University

Online Zoom Presentation

July the 5th, 15:00 ~

ABSTRACT

According to Bergey and Filipe (2018), approximately 5-7.2% of children worldwide have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and it is increasingly acknowledged to be a “lifespan disorder”. This means many ADHD adults (e.g., university students) may be unaware of their condition, choose to conceal it, or have developed coping mechanisms that allow them to navigate neurotypical environments with apparent ease. Given this prevalence, it is likely that several students in any given classroom experience challenges associated with ADHD. How can educators ensure that these students effectively engage with course materials and interact successfully with their peers? This workshop will provide an overview of ADHD and explore strategies for structuring an inclusive learning environment that supports neurodiverse students, particularly those with ADHD. Participants will engage in discussions with colleagues through breakout sessions to share experiences and best practices.

Zoom link



Contact

tochigi@jalt.org

**Start time
15:00**

 **JALT**
TOCHIGI 栃木

Sign up here

If you haven't already joined the JALT Tochigi community, what are you waiting for?

We would love to have you on board!

Please scan the QR code and follow the steps.



Already a JALT member?

If you would like to transfer your JALT membership to the Tochigi Chapter, it's a piece of cake!

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Contact us

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