



# TOCHIGI

ISSUE 4, JUNE 2026



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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 fourth issue of the JALT Tochigi Publication!

As the academic year settles into rhythm and summer begins to approach, we're pleased to bring you another issue filled with professional insights, shared experiences, and opportunities to connect with fellow educators across our local teaching community.

We begin this issue with our **Chapter Highlights** section. While we only have two features to share this time, we know many of our members are actively presenting, publishing, researching, and exploring innovative ideas in their classrooms and institutions. One of our goals as a chapter is to celebrate and showcase the fantastic work being done by educators here in Tochigi, so we warmly encourage members to share their activities with us for future issues.

The main feature of this issue is a review of the special event we recently co-hosted with the Pragmatics SIG at Utsunomiya University. We were honoured to welcome **Dr Noriko Ishihara**, whose workshop, *Reflecting on the Sociopragmatics of Micro-aggressions in L2 Teaching and Intercultural Communication*, prompted thoughtful discussion on an important and timely topic. Ahead of the event, Dr Ishihara also kindly took part in a written interview for this magazine, where she shared her perspectives on sociopragmatics, microaggressions, and the challenges and opportunities they present for language teachers today.

This issue also introduces a brand-new feature: **Teaching Tips**. We hope this section will become a space where local educators can share practical classroom ideas, activities, and small teaching successes with one another. The idea doesn't need to be complicated – if it works in your classroom, we'd love to hear about it.

Elsewhere in this issue, Luke Winn sits down with local **ALT Sarah Dunne** to discuss her experiences working in Japanese schools, including the realities of team teaching, cultural differences, and the rewards and challenges of everyday classroom life.

Finally, we're excited to announce our next **free JALT Tochigi event**, which will take place on **September 5th** at **Utsunomiya University**. Dr James York, from Meiji University, Tokyo, will lead a workshop and Q&A titled *Enhancing Speaking Skills Across All Proficiency Levels with 'TBLT Gaming'*. With his extensive experience exploring games and play in language

education, this promises to be an engaging and highly practical session, and we warmly encourage members to attend. You can find the **event poster and details** on **page 7**.

As always, thank you for your continued support of JALT Tochigi and this publication. Whether through attending events, contributing ideas, sharing experiences, or simply reading along, every member plays a part in helping our local community continue to grow. We hope you enjoy this issue and wish you all a productive, enjoyable, and relaxing start to the summer season.

Warm regards,

Chris Smith

Publications Chair, JALT Tochigi

## Previous Issues



### Missed an issue of the JALT Tochigi Publication?

Scan the QR code to access digital versions of our previous issues, featuring interviews, event reviews, teaching ideas, chapter highlights, and insights on language teaching and learning across our local community.





# 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.



# 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.



**Presenter:** Luke Winn (Hakuoh University)

**Location:** Kyoai Gakuen University

**Date:** March 15, 2026

In March, JALT Tochigi member Luke Winn presented to members of the JALT Gunma Chapter on an Action Research (AR) project he began in 2023. Below, we are pleased to share the title and abstract from his presentation. Members interested in Action Research or syllabus development are encouraged to contact Luke for further information and discussion.

### **TITLE:**

Syllabus Development with Action Research in an English Writing Class

### **ABSTRACT:**

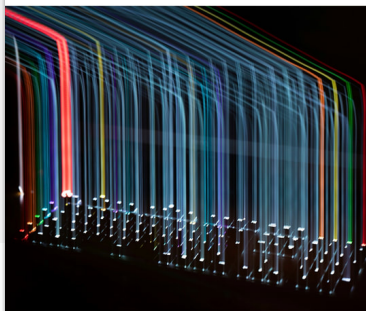
I introduce an Action Research (AR) project which began in April 2023. The purpose of the project was to develop the syllabus and pedagogical practices in an English writing class (Writing 2) at Hakuoh University in Tochigi prefecture. First, I offer a brief primer on AR methodology, before moving on to an outline of the project itself. Next, I describe how an AR process was initiated and how that process produced insights into students' learning needs, which in turn informed the first few stages of an action plan for syllabus development. Finally, I offer a critical reflection of the impact that the AR process has had on the course, and I hope to have a discussion with attendees about further avenues for possible inquiry.

**Connect with Luke:** [lukebwinn@fc.hakuoh.ac.jp](mailto:lukebwinn@fc.hakuoh.ac.jp)



Artificial Intelligence in  
Japan's Language  
Learning Classrooms

Edited by Robert Dykes,  
Oliver Edwards, Dave Bollen,  
and Tina Shu-wen Lin



## Chapter 7. Discussing the Vignette Technique for Assessing Student Perceptions of Ethical AI Use in the L2 Learning Environment

Joel Neff and Kasumi Arciaga



**Title:** Artificial Intelligence in Japan's Language Learning Classroom

**Editors:** Robert Dykes, Oliver Edwards, Dave Bollen, and Tina Shu-wen Lin

**Publication date:** June 8, 2026

We are pleased to highlight a recent publication by JALT Tochigi members Joel Neff and Kasumi Arciaga, whose chapter appears in the newly released edited volume *Artificial Intelligence in Language Education in Japan: Practices, Perspectives and Prospects*, published by Candlin & Mynard.

In Chapter 7, titled *Discussing the Vignette Technique for Assessing Student Perceptions of Ethical AI Use in the L2 Learning Environment*, Neff and Arciaga explore how vignette-based discussions can be used to better understand students' perceptions of ethical AI use within language learning contexts. As AI tools become increasingly present in education, questions surrounding appropriate, ethical, and effective classroom use continue to grow in importance for both teachers and learners.

The chapter examines how carefully designed scenarios and discussion prompts can encourage students to reflect critically on issues such as academic integrity, responsible AI use, and the evolving role of technology in language education. The work contributes to the broader conversation surrounding AI in Japanese educational contexts and offers practical insights for educators interested in classroom discussion, learner perceptions, and emerging pedagogical challenges.

We warmly congratulate Joel and Kasumi on this publication and are proud to highlight the ongoing research and professional contributions being made by members of the JALT Tochigi community.

The book is available in print and online through Candlin & Mynard Publishing. Readers interested in learning more can access additional information via the QR code below.

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# JALT Tochigi

## Free Event

### Proudly hosts Dr James York

**Title** Enhancing Speaking Skills Across All Proficiency Levels with “TBLT Gaming”

Hybrid event

Utsunomiya University

September, 5th,  
3:00 ~ 5:00pm

Workshop +  
Q & A session

**Abstract**



James York

In this workshop, you'll discover how board and card games work as a fantastic tool in a TBLT approach to boost your students' speaking skills. James will walk you through his framework and worksheets, explain the design choices he made, and offer some real-world tips from his experience using this method for over a decade. Attendees will leave with the ability to emulate all of the framework in their own contexts.

James York plays with many things. Games, taiko, music, code, and pedagogy. One of his proudest gaming moments is defeating Towerfall Ascensions on Legendary difficulty. He's designed a few small games including a card game for learning Japanese politeness levels. He works at Meiji University, Tokyo, where he teaches and researches the intersection of games and play in education. He is the founder of [Ludic Language Pedagogy](#), and the [York Game Lab](#).

**Register**



**Contact**

[tochigi@jalt.org](mailto:tochigi@jalt.org)

**Location**







# JALT Tochigi & Pragmatics SIG

## MICROAGGRESSIONS

### Dr Noriko Ishihara

+ Dr Benio Suzuki • Daito Asakura

#### Event Overview

On March 14th, JALT Tochigi, in collaboration with the JALT Pragmatics SIG, hosted a joint hybrid event at Utsunomiya University EPUU Commons. The workshop, titled *"Feeling like a thousand paper cuts: Reflecting on the sociopragmatics of microaggressions in L2 teaching and intercultural communication,"* featured Dr. Noriko Ishihara, Dr. Benio Suzuki, and Daito Asakura.



**Noriko Ishihara** is Professor of Applied Linguistics/TEFL at Hosei University and facilitates professional development courses for language teachers in Japan, the US, and elsewhere with a focus on instructional pragmatics and intercultural awareness. Her research interests include instructional pragmatics, criticality in language education, and teacher development.



**Benio Suzuki** is an Assistant Professor at Utsunomiya University where he teaches English and Intercultural Communication. He mainly researches sociolinguistics and second language pragmatics. He also serves as the President of the JALT Pragmatics Special Interest Group (SIG).



**Daito Asakura** is an undergraduate student studying sociology at Hosei University. He realized he had engaged in microaggressions during his three-month stay in Toronto. His main research interests are barriers to multicultural coexistence caused by microaggressions.

The workshop explored how microaggressions—often subtle and unintentional—can still have a cumulative and deeply felt impact. Drawing on research, real-world examples, and personal experiences, the session encouraged participants to reflect on how language, identity, and power shape communication in both classroom and everyday contexts.

## Inside the Workshop

*"Microaggressions may be small, but their impact can be deeply felt."*

### Noriko Ishihara

Noriko Ishihara opened the workshop by inviting us to reconsider a common assumption—that microaggressions are simply a form of over-sensitivity. Instead, she showed how they are a real and often overlooked part of everyday communication. Drawing on research from psychology and applied linguistics, she described microaggressions as small, often unintentional moments that can still leave people feeling excluded or marginalised.

One of the most thought-provoking ideas was the importance of perception over intention. Even comments meant as compliments—such as praising someone's language ability—can carry unintended messages. As Noriko explained, these moments can build up over time, much like "a thousand paper cuts," gradually affecting a person's sense of belonging.

She also highlighted how difficult it can be to respond in the moment. For those on the receiving end, there is often no easy choice: speak up and risk tension, or stay silent and carry the discomfort. By the end of the session, it was clear that microaggressions are not about assigning blame, but about developing greater awareness—something that is especially important for us as language teachers.

### Benio Suzuki

Benio Suzuki brought a different perspective to the workshop through a fascinating real-world case study. Focusing on an exchange between journalist Magdalena Osumi and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi in September 2020, he explored how language choice itself can become part of a microaggressive interaction.

In the exchange being conducted in Japanese, Motegi's sudden shift to English led Osumi to respond directly, saying that Japanese was fine and that she did not need to be spoken down to. This moment sparked lively discussion among participants, as it raised questions about how language can signal power, authority, and even dismissal.

Benio encouraged us to look beyond what was said and consider how it might have been experienced. Was the language shift helpful, strategic, or something else entirely? The discussion showed just how easily communication can be interpreted in different ways, especially in situations where power and status are involved.

This session offered a valuable reminder that language is never neutral—it carries meaning beyond words, and those meanings can have a real impact on how people feel and how they are perceived.



*“Even well-intentioned language can carry unintended messages.”*

## **Daito Asakura**

Daito Asakura’s talk brought a personal and reflective dimension to the workshop. Sharing his experiences as a study abroad student in Canada, he spoke honestly about moments that left him feeling uncertain, uncomfortable, or quietly excluded.

What made his presentation especially powerful was his willingness to turn the lens inward. Rather than focusing only on what others had done, he reflected on his own assumptions and reactions—recognising that he, too, held unconscious biases. These realisations were not always easy, but they became an important part of his learning experience.

He also described how small, everyday interactions—such as feeling treated differently in public spaces—can gradually build into a sense of not quite belonging. At the same time, he came to understand that microaggressions are not just something we experience, but something we may also unknowingly contribute to.

Daito’s story resonated strongly with attendees, offering a reminder that awareness begins with honest reflection, and that developing this awareness is an ongoing process for all of us.

## **Breakout Discussions and Participant Reflections**

In addition to the presentations, the workshop included small-group breakout discussions, giving attendees the chance to reflect on the ideas and share their own experiences. These conversations quickly became lively and engaging, with many participants finding that once one story was shared, others naturally followed.

A recurring theme was the gap between intention and perception. Many participants reflected on how comments that seem harmless—or even friendly—can be experienced quite differently by the person receiving them. This led to thoughtful discussion about the importance of recognising and validating these reactions, rather than dismissing them.

Participants also shared experiences from both professional and personal contexts, highlighting how microaggressions can appear in classrooms, workplaces, and everyday interactions. For some, the discussion prompted reflection not only on their own experiences but also on how they respond when they witness such moments happening to others.

The role of teachers came up frequently, with many agreeing that educators have an important part to play—not only in recognising microaggressions, but also in helping students develop awareness and sensitivity. At the same time, there was a shared recognition that responding in the moment is not always easy.

Overall, the breakout sessions created a space for open, honest conversation, reinforcing the idea that developing awareness is something we do together, through listening, reflecting, and learning from one another.

*"Microaggressions are not just something we experience—we can also reproduce them without realising it."*

## Key Takeaways for Teachers

- Microaggressions are real, everyday phenomena, not simply overreactions
- Impact matters more than intention in how language is experienced
- Small, repeated incidents can accumulate into a sense of exclusion or marginalisation
- Anyone can be involved—as initiator, observer, or recipient
- Raising sociopragmatic awareness is essential for inclusive teaching
- Reflection on our own assumptions is a key step toward reducing unconscious bias

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Noriko Ishihara, Benio Suzuki, and Daito Asakura for delivering such an engaging and thought-provoking workshop. We are also grateful to everyone who attended and contributed to the open and insightful discussions that made the event both dynamic and memorable.

## For more about pragmatics...

Check out the Pragmatics SIG homepage at **[www.pragsig.org](http://www.pragsig.org)** or by scanning the QR code below.



You'll find many interesting materials and links to newsletters, publications, and even some audio interviews.





# Pre-event INTERVIEW Noriko Ishihara



Before the workshop, Noriko kindly agreed to answer a few questions for the JALT Tochigi magazine. In this short written interview, she shares her thoughts on sociopragmatics, microaggressions, and the challenges and opportunities they present for language teachers today.

First of all, thank you so much for inviting me to this interview as well as to the workshop to be held in March, Microaggressions in L2 Teaching/Intercultural Communication. I'm excited to work with fellow teachers in Tochigi and Pragmatics SIG!

## **1. For readers who may be new to this topic, how would you explain sociopragmatics and why is it important in language teaching?**

Sociopragmatics may sound like a big word, but simply put, it's just the cultural side of pragmatics. When we communicate, it is important to know what language to use in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc., which we call pragmalinguistics, the language side of pragmatics. We also need to know when to speak, to whom, in what context, and why certain forms are more socially preferred and not others. This is what I see as sociopragmatics, namely, social or cultural aspects of our meaning-making.

In my view, pragmatics instruction has focused much on the language side being concerned about how to teach polite forms (e.g., I was wondering if you might ... rather than I'd like you to...), but if our sociopragmatic judgment is off, we could sound too formal or bookish, or in other cases, overly casual or direct even with perfect language form. Then, we could have trouble making friends or offending others. I also feel that politeness and impoliteness are two sides of the same coin. What we say with good intention can be interpreted as an insulting or hurtful microaggression if we are unaware of others' perspectives.

## **2. What first inspired your interest in microaggressions?**

The realization that my global awareness may have been limited. I'm monoracial, having grown up in Japan without much exposure to other cultures until my adolescence. My English classes did not really teach me global sociocultural awareness! Fortunately, my international friends, colleagues, and students have been the source of my global awareness serving as my 'teachers' as I update my sensitivity, but this process is never

complete as things are fast-changing.

When I first read about microaggressions, I recalled several instances in which I may have hurt others due to a lack of racial awareness, sociopolitical knowledge, or simply, empathy and compassion. I was also pleasantly surprised to learn that the もやもや unsettling feelings I had occasionally experienced derived from a phenomenon labeled microaggression and that it had been studied in depth in psychology. I wanted to learn more about this so I can become a better person and a more culturally sensitive intercultural communicator.

### **3. How do microaggressions typically appear in language learning or teaching environments?**

They could appear in countless ways. Just to give a couple of examples, when students study abroad, they may encounter a lack of interest or even elements of exclusion from their peers or people in the host community. They may find it hard to feel integrated into the culture. With an increasingly globalized student populations in Japan, it is likely that an increasing number of students have racially and ethnically complex backgrounds. Some of those students reported feeling exhausted when her professors and peers casually asked where they were from every so often. This question is seemingly simple, but it could be much more complicated for them. Also, international teachers here may face a serious case of linguistic discrimination in hiring. If they come from Outer-circle countries, they may find their language varieties less respected in the workplace. Gregory Glasgow's book, *Black teachers of English(es) in Japan* (2024) reveals a number of stories along these lines, which didn't surprise me but were still very shocking all the same.

### **4. What challenges do teachers commonly face when trying to address issues related to linguistic justice in their teaching?**

Some teachers have reported feeling as if they were imposing their values on students. They sometimes find it difficult to have students express their opinions about sensitive issues and can end up lecturing their own ideas (see Kimura & Psai, 2023). I also have had a similar experience wondering whether I was doing the right thing in the right way in my classroom. Teachers may also encounter disagreements from students, who for example, display xenophobic ideas that unfortunately have become part of the frequent discourse in Japan especially since the House of Councilors election in July 2025. Or other students may argue that linguistic dominance is part of the reality of life that is too difficult to change.

I feel that we, as teachers, may wish to invite students to open up and talk without forcing them to share views or experiences they are not ready to do so in order to respect their agency. Translanguaging, or switching or concurrently mixing and meshing students' L1 and L2 in writing and speech, may be helpful in the process. For me personally, using videos or having guest speakers takes some focus off of my own views while my students and I both can learn from them.

### **5. What directions do you see future research or classroom practice taking in relation to sociopragmatics and inclusive language teaching?**

I hope the issues of sociopragmatics and linguistic justice will be discussed more in professional development to help us create safe environments for students and colleagues.

I have started a collaborative project to investigate students' and language teachers' experiences of microaggressions, as well as their reactions to a type of "training" that allows us to consider how we might intervene when microaggressions occur. Our students and teachers are highly creative, considerate, and compassionate, so much so that I learn a great deal from them. I feel that something like this could lead to promising dialogues, AND ACTIONS that help reduce microaggressions. If you are interested in following up or joining this kind of discussion, feel free to check out our work and consider collaborating!

**Relevant resources:**

Sue, D. W., & Spanierman, L. B. (2020). *Microaggressions in everyday life* (2nd ed.). Wiley.

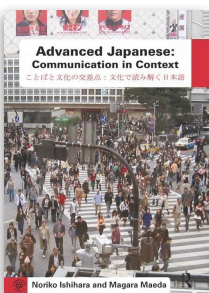
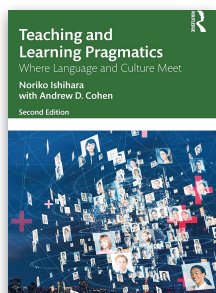
Ishihara, N. (2025). Criticality and creativity in L2 pragmatics: Supporting linguistic justice through pragmatics instruction *JALT Journal*, 47(2), 181–195. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTJJ47.2-3>

Ishihara, N. (under review). The sociopragmatics of microaggressions in global English: Rapport management in the discursive construction of impoliteness in language teacher development.

Glasgow, G. P., & Ishihara, N. (2025, December 6). Microaggressions and their sociopragmatic impact: Implications for second language pragmatics instruction in Japanese higher education. Sociopragmatic Symposium, Kansai University.

Ishihara & Glasgow (under review). Globalization and impoliteness: Countering microaggressions in intercultural communication education. *JALT Pragmatics SIG Book, Pragmatics and Our Changing World: Globalization and Diversity* (tentative title).

Kimura, D., & Tsai, A. (2023). Decolonizing classroom discourse: insights from interactional research. *ELT Journal*, 77(3), 327–337. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccad008>

**Noriko's academic papers****Noriko's research map**

## Teaching Tips



**Got a game, activity, warm-up, worksheet idea, or classroom trick that works well with your students** ?

**Share your classroom ideas with the Tochigi teaching community** !

♥ We'd love to feature practical ideas from local teachers in future issues of the JALT Tochigi magazine. Your idea doesn't need to be complicated – if it works in the classroom, we'd love to hear about it!

**Scan the QR code to submit your idea!** →





# Teaching Tips

## The Gesture Game

**Ideal Learner:** Any age, any level.

**Prep time:** 5 minutes. **Activity time:** 2+ minutes

**Details:** This activity is ideal to get the students up and out of their seats and engaging with vocabulary and key language patterns. It is a great way to change the mood of a class and get the blood flowing. It is incredibly flexible and provides an opportunity to practice the lesson's key vocabulary.



### Preparation:

1. gather pictures relevant to the lesson's topic
2. display these pictures on a screen, blackboard/whiteboard, or piece of paper
3. put the students into groups of two

### Guide:

Step 1: Ask the students to do 'rock, scissors, paper' together.

Step 2: Explain that the loser must pick a picture displayed and do a gesture that best represents it.

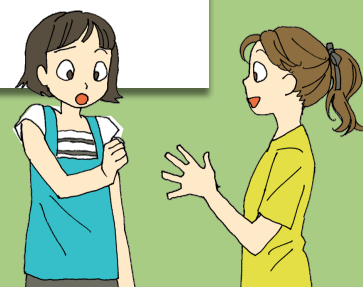
Step 3: The winner must say what the gesture represents in English.

Step 4: The loser says whether the winner's guess is correct or not

Step 5: Repeat step one.

### Rules:

The student who does the gesture must not use English to aid the student who attempts to match the gesture to a picture or vocabulary presented.



### Variations:

The Gesture Game is incredibly adaptable. At the very basic level, the teacher could ask the students to guess the word that the gesture represents, or the teacher could ask the students to use the word to make a question or statement. For example, if the topic of the lesson was 'jobs,' the information displayed in picture form could be a plethora of jobs; the loser of 'rock, scissors, paper' would do a gesture to represent a job displayed, and the winner could ask, 'Would you like to be a [police officer] in the future?' to which the loser could respond with either 'Yes, I would', or 'No, I wouldn't.' Other patterns include 'What's his job?', 'Do you think a [police officer's] job is difficult?', 'What do [police officers] do?' etc.

### Closing remarks:

The Gesture Game is a versatile language game that is ideal for the classroom environment. I often use the Gesture Game to help the students engage with each other more. The use of 'rock scissors, paper' adds a level of excitement and competition to the game which also helps to create a fun learning environment. This game is a great way to introduce new vocabulary or review vocabulary already taught in class; I hope you enjoy using it and can benefit from it.

**Contributor:** Matthew Quinn, Sakushin Gakuin University. Illustrations by Azusa Kato



# JALT Tochigi Special

## INTERVIEW

### Sarah Dunne



We recently had the chance to sit down with Sarah Dunne, an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) based in Tochigi, to talk about her experiences working in Japanese schools. In this interview, she speaks with Luke Winn about her day-to-day teaching life, the challenges and rewards of team teaching, and some of the cultural differences she has noticed along the way.

**Luke:** Can you tell us about your working week? (Number of classes, amount of preparation/marking, extracurricular duties, etc.)

**Sarah:** I have sixteen classes per week. I don't have a lot of preparation or marking; that's mostly during exam periods or in the beginning of teaching a new textbook. I have very occasional extracurricular duties but nothing solid. Nothing by the school.

**Luke:** What specifically do you enjoy and dislike about being an ALT?

**Sarah:** I enjoy helping my students realize learning English is fun and giving them support and encouragement whenever they are motivated despite thinking they are not good with English. But I dislike it when there are times when I am not well utilized in class, during team teaching especially. For example, when they only use me for vocabulary or repeating after me, that kind of thing. But sometimes they don't even use me for that, so I just end up, like, just standing at the back of the classroom. And then, like, only when they ask me, "Oh, can you do this??" And I'll do it for five minutes and then move on. Yeah, so, I really don't like it when I'm not doing anything in class.

**Luke:** How much input/speaking time do you have during classes?

**Sarah:** Not a lot. So, during solo teaching, it is usually a rush to get through the test range. I'm usually given a test range of a certain number of pages, and I have to finish it, so a lot of the time I'm rushing through the textbook. In terms of conversation practice, creative writing, and using grammar that they've learned, that

hardly happens in class, so I think mainly when I'm speaking it's all about grammar. Just teaching the grammar from the textbook. When I'm team teaching, it's even less input.

**Luke:** So when you're solo teaching, do you do speaking activities with them?

**Sarah:** No, not a lot, unless the textbook activities have it because we are given a piece of paper that tells us that we have to do a certain number of pages each month for the test, so I'm constantly trying to rush through whatever's in the textbook.

**Luke:** What's something that surprised you about Japanese schools or students when you first started teaching here?

**Sarah:** I think what really surprised me a lot was how strictly they followed the textbook. Like, it wasn't so bad when I was an ALT teacher in elementary and junior high, but when it gets to high school, they are really strict. The way English is expected to be taught is like teaching chemistry formulas. For me, I think that was very shocking because I personally don't remember learning English like that when I was in school.

**Luke:** How was it different?

**Sarah:** Um, like I learned sentence structure and stuff like that, but we never really concentrated so much on each sentence, like, you know, what the grammar of the sentence is. We learned grammar, we learned how to use the grammar, but we didn't learn it specifically like, "This is S, this is V, this is O, and this is an adverb". We didn't learn every single sentence in that way.

**Luke:** What's one cultural difference you've noticed between your home country's education system and Japan's?

**Sarah:** Okay, one thing I noticed is that, like, (regular) exams in the Japanese education system don't seem to be of much importance; the ones that they mainly concentrate on are entrance exams, like the entrance exam for high school and the entrance exam for university.

So I was really shocked when I started my job in high school and I found that students are not allowed to be failed. We were told that if they fail we have to retest them or give them some extra homework to do and then give them the minimum passing grade, whereas in Singapore exams are taken very, very seriously because it's what streams you into a certain level; so we've got like the express stream for the really smart kids, and then the lower academic students, and then the normal technical students. So any time while you're in high school if you do badly you could drop down to a lower stream, and that could affect you in the long run.

**Luke:** How do you communicate and collaborate with the Japanese English teachers? What works well, and what's challenging?

**Sarah:** Okay, I realize after years working and team-teaching with many different teachers, the challenge is adapting to their individual teaching style. So, some of them you can get along with really well from the get-go, but some of them it takes time to get used to.

And I realized that, like, if you have an opinion and you tell it to them straight, they usually are not very receptive to it, so I realized it's best to do it in a way like asking their opinion. So like, tell them, "I think this way is better. What do you think?" So that in the end they kind of have the final say.

**Luke:** The Japanese way! (Haha)

**Sarah:** Yeah, exactly. And that kind of goes a little bit better with them because they can say their thoughts as

well. If you are able to persuade them at first, and then ask them for their opinion they will feel like what you say makes sense and they are more likely to agree with you.

**Luke:** What advice would you give to someone who's thinking of becoming an ALT in Japan?

**Sarah:** That's a difficult question. (haha) Advice? I think, when you first join, maybe, like, just listen to what they have to say and follow the rules and stuff, and then I think once you've built a good rapport with them, then maybe you can start to, like, give your opinions and ideas. But I think, generally, when you come in as a fresh teacher, don't think that you can straight away make a difference and make changes and stuff, because that doesn't really fly well with Japanese people, generally. So, I think that if you get a job as an ALT teacher, and you want to keep it (haha), then I think it's best to just follow the rules at least for a year, I think.

**Luke:** Can you share one game or classroom activity that you think works well?

**Sarah:** Okay. In terms of remembering vocabulary for junior high and high school students, spelling especially, I like to play hangman.

It kind of gets them more excited, at the same time. You divide the class into two groups and each group will take turns saying the alphabet, but once the group knows the answer they would have to say the word and spell it correctly, without mistakes, not giving random letters, you know. They have to spell the whole word, and every time they make a mistake a part of the hanging man will be drawn, and if the whole drawing is completed ...

**Luke:** Oh, I see! Do they sometimes get ...? (Haha)

**Sarah:** Yes, and they get very excited if the other team gets hanged before them. (Haha)



*Luke Winn is a lecturer in the Department of Business Administration at Hakuoh University.*

## 10 SARAH DUNNE QUICK QUESTIONS

**1. Where is your hometown?**

Singapore

**2. What is your current hometown?**

Utsunomiya, Japan

**3. How long have you lived in Japan?**

11 years

**4. What is your current school?**

UTANF

**5. What are your hobbies?**

Drawing, Chilling with Netflix, Watching Ice Hockey, Playing Video Games

**6. What is your favourite place in Tochigi?**

Cafe Pomme De Pin カフェ ポム ド パン in Kanuma or Yunishigawa/Nikko

**7. What is the best place you've visited in Japan?**

USJ or Lake Kawaguchi in winter

**8. What is your favourite Japanese food?**

Yakiniku (Grilled meat)

**9. What is your least favourite Japanese food?**

Natto

**10. What is your favourite thing about living in Japan?**

How safe and clean it is, the beautiful sceneries/ events of each season and the pop culture like anime, music, etc.

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## Teacher profile

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Introduce your school



## Conference/event review

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## 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.



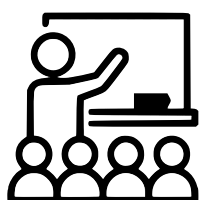
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