

**Divergence and Convergence, Educating with Integrity:
Proceedings of the 7th Annual JALT Pan-SIG Conference.**
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Introduction

The 7th Annual JALT Pan-SIG Conference was held at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan. The overall theme of this conference was Divergence and Convergence, Educating with Integrity. This collection of articles offers a small glimpse of some of the ways that the presentations at that conference diverged and converged.

Tim Murphey opens this volume by emphasizing the need to listen more closely to students. Offering students a voice in terms of what and how they study, Murphey maintains, will enhance their engagement and make learners more pro-active. Murphey describes two recent studies of how Japanese university students viewed their high school and junior high school English classes. The results suggest widespread disenchantment with English education received so far among the respondents. To mitigate this, Murphey suggests a list of ways to enhance student voice and foster pro-active learning.

One way to reduce student disenchantment is, in the view of Kazuya Kito and Yo Hamada, to concentrate more on the strengths of each learner. Based on a survey of 57 high school students in northern Japan, Kito and Hamada suggest that writing is the aspect of EFL instruction the majority of students feel most confident about. For this reason, they believe high school EFL classes should emphasize writing more. As students receive more positive feedback about their writing, the authors avow that they will be in a better position to tackle more problematic areas such as speaking.

Wakako Kobayashi investigates the socializing processes in a pre-kindergarten class from various perspectives. After outlining some of the conditions needed for situated qualitative research, she shares some insights about a class for Japanese 4 year-old tots run by Christian church in the Kanto region of Japan. Kobayashi concludes by emphasizing the need for reflectivity in research. She also pointed out the difficulty in maintaining both emic and etic perspectives simultaneously in sociological investigations.

Ever assigned a discussion exercise to a group of students? Who of us hasn't? And there always seems to be a student just sitting there? Christine Wilby investigates "passive participators" and the possible ramifications of such students when it comes to evaluating communication and discussion skills as opposed to only language skills in oral communication classes in Japan.

Two articles by Michihiro Hirai appear in this volume. The first considers how closely two measures of English proficiency correlate. Drawing from a base of 559 Japanese mostly in various business sectors, Hirai compares STEP-Bulats and TOEIC scores. The overall correlation between these two tests was found to be a moderate .69. However, TOEIC scores above 800 (N=349) only had a .46 correlation with STEP-Bulats writing scores. When this was narrowed down to TOEIC 900+ (N=86), the correlation fell to .23. For this reason Hirai questioned whether TOEIC scores alone should be considered a valid measure of writing performance. He also noted how many Japanese workers in positions that demand the use of English were unable to write effectively according to their STEP-Bulats Writing scores.

After this, Edward Schaefer and Takaaki Kumazawa clarified their positions regarding the use of Rasch analysis in language testing in response to a criticism by Gerry Lassche of their 2007 Pan-SIG Proceedings article. Schaefer and Kumazawa emphasize that validity is a foremost concern in Rasch measurement. They stress that precise Rasch measures are not a substitute for traditional attempts to validate tests within Messick's unified framework. What Rasch measurement can do, in Schaefer and Kumazawa's view, is give us some idea of the unidimensionality of a test – information about whether it is measuring one thing or not. This information is certainly important in terms of reaching decisions about a test's validity. The authors note how the term "reliability" has different meanings in the field of language testing. In a Raschian sense, this term refers to separation – the ability of a test to describe the various performance bands of examinees. In classical test theory it generally has a somewhat different meaning, and this is a common cause of confusion.

A second article by Michihiro Hirai then considers the processes involved in writing two ESP textbooks for engineers. Adopting a metaphor from the commercial product development process, Hirai notices how there are distinct phases to the textbook writing process. The first phase typically consists of market analyses. After this, materials developers attempt to identify a viable niche for the future textbook. To facilitate the production phase of textbook development, Hirai recommends using a spreadsheet table. Hirai concludes by emphasizing the importance of textbook quality assurance by getting feedback from diverse persons.

After this, Miori Shimada shares some art exercises that she has found to be helpful in motivating students in her classrooms. She finds that regardless of gender or nationality (she includes a number of non-Japanese in the study), students responded positively to the exercises, improved their English, and (most importantly?) delinquency from class dropped measurably.

Finally, Gerry Lassche summarizes the overall theme of this conference by discussing the planning and implementation of the final roundtable. Diverse perspectives on how to manage mixed

level classes from representatives of each of the special interest groups sponsoring this conference are discussed. After contrasting six perspectives on mixed level classroom management, Lassche concludes by emphasizing three common discussion threads. First, the importance of embracing diversity – and indeed of welcoming it – was noted. Diversity is the reality of most classes and instead of seeing it as a problems, teachers should regard it as an opportunity. Second, the importance of increasing student choice was emphasized. Learners will feel more invested in the learning process if they are offered a voice in it. Third, Lassche stressed that teachers need to be more aware that classroom management is a complex issue and one that requires great focus and skill to make the most of. Teachers should share the sense of responsibility for classroom management more with students and appreciate the diversity of their input.

We'd like to offer special thanks to a number of persons who made the 2008 Pan-SIG Conference possible. Listed alphabetically, a big round of applause is due for these individuals who devoted so much time to making the 6th Annual Pan-SIG Conference a success:

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<http://www.jalt.org/pansig/2008/HTML/Intro.htm> (HTML)

<http://www.jalt.org/pansig/2008/PDF/Intro.pdf> (PDF)