

Exploring personal perspective as a point of departure for learning and understanding: The use of art-based personal visual narratives in the Japanese tertiary classroom

A.R. Woollock

Abstract

This qualitative action research documents the use of arts-based methods to explore Personal Visual Narratives (PVN). These thematic narratives, which the individual educand constructs largely through visual means were utilised in the Content-based Instruction (CBI) in English to first-year undergraduates in the faculty of Social Sciences at a private university in Kyoto, Japan. Using the theory of Applied Visual Enquiry (AVE), the author set out to explore the use of visual methods within a pluralist, postmodern learning context for the purpose of improving both the textural quality of the learning experience, and the modes of expression available to educands. Consciously attempting to disrupt both previously prescriptive learning styles (primary and secondary education), and further attempting to personalise the learning process, the author incorporated various AVE strategies within the teaching of English (i), a twice-weekly CBI class. The study presented herein represents one pedagogical sub-strand used within a content-based class which used AVE methodology to facilitate the study of environmental issues. This PVN activity was repeatedly incorporated into the main structure of the class as a means to engage educands with a more subjective and personalised learning experience. Whilst no quantitative data was gathered in this study, the qualitative data (both hard and soft) in the form of visual and observational data indicate the potentiality of these approaches as legitimate vehicles for not only meeting the aims of the research outlined above, but also for meeting the general outcomes for the course as decided upon by faculty, and established in the course curriculum. As a potential tool for the use and application of visual methods within the wider scope of education through English, the outcomes further indicate that the exploration of PVNs warrants closer and more sustained inspection and demonstrates the applicability of AVE methods in the Japanese tertiary sector.

Keywords:

Applied Visual Enquiry (AVE) ; Narrative enquiry; Second-language Acquisition (SLA) ; Content-based instruction (CBI) ; Postmodernism

“My conception of adult education is this: a cooperative venture in non-authoritarian, informal learning, the chief purpose of which is to discover the meaning of experience; a quest of the mind which digs down to the roots of the preconceptions which formulate our conduct; a technique of learning for adults which makes education coterminous with life and hence elevates living itself to the level of an adventurous experiment.”

(Gessner, 1956, p.160)

Introduction

This qualitative action-research was conducted by the author in the Faculty of Social Sciences at a private university, in Kyoto, Japan (hereafter referred to as *The University*). The participants who explored these approaches to learning were all first-year educands, aged eighteen to nineteen years of age and were all Japanese nationals. The course that this exploration formed part of was English (i), a single semester class which met twice-weekly for a total of three hours per week. In terms of level, most of the educands who attended this class would likely be categorised as ‘false-beginners’ because although prior to attending The University they had all had studied English for approximately six years, they would struggle to reach IELTS 4.0. Whilst having a fundamental grasp of English grammar and a reasonably extensive vocabulary, because of the didactic/rote style of learning prevalent in the Japanese primary and secondary sectors, most were incapable of functional communication in English. In The University’s official curriculum outline, the class was described as a content-based class with a focus on academic speaking; although in actuality it encompassed all of the ‘four skills.’ As a single semester class, educands were re-allocated a new instructor in the second semester where the focus of the class shifted to academic writing. Being mindful of this transition, and in an attempt to bridge the learning gap between the content of both first and second semesters, the author began to develop alternative learning and facilitation paradigms which started the transition away from binary or diametric positions of the four skills as isolated disciplines. This shift to a more pluralist stance allowed for closer integration between the core skills, in this case, speaking and writing; where, for example, some of the written content become the focus for generating educand-centric discourse. This pluralism took as its inspiration Barthes’ (1974, p. 2) postmodern stance pertaining to the death of the author, and the shift from a readerly text (*texte lisible*) to a writerly text (*texte scriptible*), and Lyotard’s (1984) position on the death of the meta-narrative. Furthermore, this research recognises the importance of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) framework (2008) which emphasises critical thinking, creativity, and reflexivity, and the The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) which has called for personalised approaches to learning (2008). At the micro level, this research also draws inspiration from adult-education pioneers, notably Paulo Freire (1921 - 1997), and Malcolm Knowles (1913 - 1997), and aligns itself with Knowles’ taxonomy insofar as the distinction is made between *pedagogy* (the teaching of children) and *andragogy* (the teaching of adults).

“There is a dark spirit plaguing the Japanese university classroom. It is the ghost of opinions suppressed, voices lost, self-expression discouraged, and individuality restrained.”

(McVeigh, 2002, P. 3)

Contextual Underpinnings

As noted above, in the UK, at least, there is currently a turn towards increasing reflexivity in tertiary education (Cunliffe, 2002). This call echoes the advent of postmodern epistemological values and pedagogical practices with a shift from a functional or *homeostatic* position (Edelman, 1992)

to a *sociostatic* position (Schumann, 1997) based more on the act of social interaction and empathic understanding. In postmodern thought, as the modernist's monolithic grand narrative gave way to a pluralist *petit récit*, or micro-narrative, so came a paradigmatic shift in epistemology; a fundamental re-think of the role of the learner in the learning and teaching transaction. Ushered out were Classical Humanist or Behaviorist approaches, what Freire (1996, p. 53) might describe as the "banking model" of education, which 'turn (students) into "receptacles" to be filled by the teacher,' or what Laurillard (2002, p. 20) similarly called the "transmission model," utilising what Knowles (2011, p. 62) refers to as "transmission techniques," where, in such an environment, "the learner's experience is of little worth" (ibid) , and consists of being little more than *tabulae rasae* (Loche, 1693) . In place of the Classical Humanist pedagogical paradigm with its heavily weighted top-down, didactic structure came a belief not in the absolute Truths or binary oppositions, but in a number of relative positions running the gamut of potential truths. Knowledge, information and learning were no longer a ritual of consensus to uphold the status quo (Bourdieu, 1986) , but instead became personalised and in part subjective. This shift offered a potentially massive fracture for the use of education as a means of social control and also a paradigmatic shift in the role of the learner in the learning transaction.

Like Bourdieu, Maton (2005) also argues that it is in the vested interests of agents (often State actors) to control what *is* and what can *be* defined as Truth and knowledge. Postmodernist epistemology, which is based on plurality and heterogeneity disrupts the notion of Truth, because rather than one voice, the postmodern paradigm acknowledges the multitude of voices, each with their own unique timbre and resonance. As Sears and Marshall (2000, p. 210) point out, "this postmodern medley of contemporary curriculum nano-narratives promotes cultural heterogeneity and difference." And it is just such heterogeneity the author wishes to promote through the implementation of this approach detailed in the research. Such heterogeneity sits in stark contrast to how Knowles (2011, p. 60) describes pedagogy as being a "model (which) assigns to the teacher full responsibility for making all decisions about *what* will be learned, *how* it will be learned, *when* it will be learned, and *if* it has been learned. It is teacher-directed education, leaving to the learner only the submissive role of following a teacher's instructions" (emphasis mine) .

Following Schumann's conjecture noted prior, Knowles (2011, p. 45) referencing Carl Jung extends the theory of the sociostatic, and further eludes to its importance within the postmodern/adult learning environment when he states that (Jung) "introduced the notion that (human consciousness) possesses four ways to extract information from experience to achieve internalized understanding; *sensation, thought, emotion, and intuition*" (emphasis mine) . Building upon Jung's conjecture, PVNs attempt to address all of these tenets. Firstly *sensation*. By engaging with the sensory universe, by observing it in order to render it, the educand senses both their metaphysical and built-environment. By adopting a phenomenological stance, the learner is encouraged to not only look with their eyes, but perhaps more importantly to allow what they are presented with to register in the senses. Secondly *thought*. Thought, cognition or the act of cognizance is fundamental to all stages of this process from the initial selecting of visual signifiers, symbols, artefacts, visual metaphors, or tropes, to the actual rendering, processing and visual ordering. In all of these actions, cerebral matter is engaged. Next, *emotion*; emotion is really what undergirds this entire project because it is the individual's emotionality

which should centre their world-view and guide their personal narrative. Lastly *intuition*. Intuition, is a very necessary requirement in this project, because without clearly defined outcomes the process-led learning is guided far more by the educand's intuitive side than their rational side. It seems fair and reasonable to state therefore, that Jung's thesis not only provides a cohesive framework but makes a genuine attempt to bridge the gap between clinical psychology and education. Furthermore, this research is founded upon exploring what Brown (2007, p. 288) calls "affective factors," that is, factors influencing the actual transmission and subsequent archiving of information, rather than the information itself.

Background to the Research

Dewey (1910, p. 155–156) referred to the process or reflexivity of reflection as *experimental thinking*. He, like Bloom (1965) noted that a shift between the concrete (remembering) and the abstract mode of thinking also marks a growth in intellectual or cognitive faculty. Reynolds (1998) also imagined the educand as an individual engaged in reflective conversations with the (leaning) situation, where teaching methods promote dialogue and reflection Vince (1996) . Kolb (1984) like the author, recognises that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, and yet despite this posit, as McVeigh's ominous quote above states, learner's voices are not often heard. Part of this reason is that English classes taught by Japanese nationals tend to focus on line-by-line translations, Japanese; *yaku-doku* (訳読、やくどく) and those run by native speakers of English invariably used prescribed textbooks which are more appropriate for the extrinsic secondary level learner, not the intrinsic tertiary learner. Thus, speaking-focused textbooks used in Japan have subjugated communication to a type of rote and impersonalised interaction, whereby they encompassed a certain degree of staged personal discourse in their dialogue which is often based upon the use of open-ended questions to prompt short responses. It is contentious, however, whether this is an honest and genuine attempt to engage the educands in authentic narrative discourse or whether it is in fact, simply a means-to-an-end; what McVeigh (2000) calls 'fantasy English' whereby a particular grammatical structure or conversation set-piece can be introduced, drilled and practiced with one's interlocutor with whom one performs certain perfunctory or 'performative' routines (Goffman, 1959) .

In respect of the above, the author argues that the vast majority of scripted and drilled dialogues in English textbooks widely used in Japan, appear not to be concerned with hearing the individual's unique voice. Instead, the exchanges they facilitate are largely inauthentic and contrived, something which Baudrillard (1994) might call *simulacral* interaction, or what Eco (1998) might refer to as being an 'original fake.' That is to imply that the dialogue which is generated is often neither genuine nor real; a fiction of form; a notional idea of human interaction. Any actual interest in the learner's voice or personal narrative is invariably surmounted by a different frame, that is, it is arguably preoccupied with the actual act of practice and the attention to form or structure rather than with genuine narrative discourse.

In contrast to this, the use of personal narratives aims to change the structural dynamics of the traditional learning paradigm and move the educands from their current position at the periphery of the learning experience to the centre, to in-effect induce a shift from a *product*-orientated to *process*-orientated paradigm. As Lindeman (1926, pp. 8–9) realised so early on in respect of andragogy, "texts and teachers play a secondary role in this type of education; they must give way to the primary

importance of the learners.” He continues, “the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience. If education is life, then life is also education,” (ibid, pp. 9–19) . This qualitative action research, therefore, with its central focus on the educands’ voices represents a sincere attempt to counter the performative pedagogical trends, and attempts to propagate a paradigmatic shift towards an altogether more *authentic* rendition of the educand’s inner narrative in the English language classroom. This is done, in part, by acknowledging the self as a point of learning. Furthermore, visual mark-making is seen as an innovative and non-prescriptive way to help educands move self-expression beyond the spoken and written language. By rejecting a traditional textbook approach, this methodology presents an opportunity to tailor the learning experience to different learning styles (Honey and Mumford 1986; Barsch 1996) , and this use of non-prescriptive learning materials not only recognises the aforementioned heterogeneity of the learning population, but also provides the opportunity to transpose this acknowledgment into material development (Rovai and Barnum 2003) .

The research: Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this research can be summarised as follows:

- i) To ascertain if a more relevant educational paradigm can be found for the Japanese tertiary educand in the English language classroom
- ii) To explore the inter-space between visual art and other disciplines, in this case the teaching of content through the English language,
- iii) To find ways in which the educand’s authentic voice can be found and utilised in a secondary core, content-based discipline,
- iv) To restore visual creativity to its rightful place as one of a myriad of legitimate tools for teaching in post-elementary education.

Methods

Format

Five project themes were chosen as an initial experiment, these were, The University Campus; My Room; My Life; Japan; My Family and Friends, and finally; My English Class. These were chosen not as a finite or absolute set of topics, rather, because the author anticipated that they were both relatively easy to construct and relatively difficult to contrive. In addition, they are quite clearly things which can easily be represented literally without much consideration for negative factors like style (negative insofar as it would draw the attention away from the central focus which has to be the actual narrative itself) . As a *nota bene*, it is also worth highlighting the fact that in keeping with Bloom’s (1956) Taxonomy and to a lesser degree, Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) later revision, the correlation with learning strata, the topics represent a distinct, yet gradual transition from objective to subjective, from the physical to the temporal. Furthermore because much of the learning took place in non-traditional settings, this research drew heavily on the disciplines of *outdoor education*, (Dewey, 1938; Donaldson and Donaldson, 1958; Hammerman and Hammerman, 1973; Parker and Meldrum, 1973; Priest, 1986; Hunt, 1989; Hopkins and Putnam, 1993; Barnes, 1997) , or *place-based* education (Woodhouse and Knapp, 2000; Smith 2002) .

Project 1: The University Campus

For the first project, educands left the confines of the classroom, and were asked to explore the campus rendering anything they saw and liked. As first-years, this experience helped orientate them with the campus facilities and built environment. Furthermore, by asking them to pay attention to what they saw it was hoped that this might also serve them well in terms of helping establish bearings on campus, as this can usually be quite an intimidating environment for newcomers. In addition, the experience was also designed to help educands develop relationships with their new peers as they negotiated the task. This first project further aimed to demonstrate both a literal and metaphorical shift in their perception of education and demonstrated the potential of learning beyond the confines of the classroom which they were previously used to in their secondary education. To in effect use this as a basis for both a literal and metaphorical shift in their experiences and to incorporate a physical act of adventure (Hopkins and Putnam, 1993) to inspire a cognitive one.

Project 2: My Room

For the second project, the focus was then shifted away from an external physical domain to an internal space and one which represented a shift towards a more personalised subject matter. As many educands had left the family home to attend The University, and were living alone for the first time in their lives, the topic of discussing and sharing their new abodes presented an exciting opportunity for them to share information on their new lives, and to discuss the associated challenges. Through this sharing of their personal information educands were also able to connect with their peers and further develop their fledgling friendships. This exercise also provided a welcome insight for the facilitator as they were privy to the difficulties of university life for first year students, and were presented with an opportunity to re-evaluate their bias about new educands often erratic behaviour. It also provided a good bonding experience with the facilitator as stories were shared and questions received as to what it was like to live overseas.

Project 3: Japan

It is fair to state that for a variety of cultural, political, historical and social reasons, Japanese learners have quite a specific idea about what they perceive to be a relatively homogenised national identity what can be classified as a 'one nation' narrative, Japanese: *tan-itsu min-zoku* (単一民族、たんいつみんぞく) Mouer and Sugimoto (1986, P. 406) , Burgess (2010, p. 1) . That stated however, as the class consisted of those drawn from all over Japan, this exercise provided an interesting opportunity to view Japan as a more heterogeneous and diverse culture (which it clearly is) as those from different regions interpreted Japan in their own way according to localised culture and customs. The variety of 'Japans' was, like task one, also intended to introduce the ideas of heterogeneity and plurality into the postmodern learning process, and guide educands towards realising the multiplicitous nature of tertiary learning.

Project 4: My Life

Beginning to make the transition from the representational to the abstract, a less concrete theme

was chosen for the fourth project. Prior to completion the facilitator introduced the notion of abstract versus representational and educands were asked to consider a more abstract resolution based upon less concrete foundations and more ethereal interpretations of the subject matter. This fourth project was specifically chosen because its outcomes were not so clearly definable and built upon certain themes and ideas which arose during the first three projects. 'My life' drew together many aspects of the previous tasks but also provided a chance for self-reflection and contemplation about the past, the present, and the future.

Project 5: My Family and Friends

Again, the fifth project continued the abstraction of ideas which might usually be rendered in quite literal terms. In this instance, educands were invited not to render their friends or family in a literal or figurative manner, rather, in more abstract terms. Possible resolutions, were discussed which might include a hybrid of both abstract and representational, for example by rendering people's habits, hobbies, character or emotional responses and attachments; something other than the actual person themselves. This provided an opportunity to consider the person/people in question, and to find novel ways to represent them. The abstract mode of representation employed here also provided an excellent platform for questioning, as looking at the PVN, clear answers were not always visible and educands had to really question their interlocutor to gain understanding of the abstract imagery.

Project 6: My English Class

Finally, the last project was to visually capture the English class itself. Once again, prior to completion some initial guidance was offered which included refraining from drawing the facilitator (the facilitator was not the focus of the class) and also refraining from drawing literal depictions of either the physical learning environment or fellow educands. By this point it was anticipated that more abstract, micro-narrative response could be teased out of the participants, and so ideas of a more conceptual nature were discussed. Again this provided an abstract platform which hopefully required more questioning to understand, and also allowed the educands to freely express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions on aspects of the class which helped provide feedback for improvement to the author as facilitator.

The practicalities of navigating the tasks

Phase one, observation and line-work

Taking a three-step phenomenological approach to the projects, the PVNs were completed as follows. Firstly, having previously studied vocabulary pertaining to geometric shapes, educands then made drawings where they firstly concentrated solely on line and shape. This approach was taken so that they would shift their focal point away from the subject as an aesthetic entity with its associated value-judgments, and instead strip it down to its elemental or component parts. As Dewey (1910, p. 141) argues, "the making of pictures should pass to an interest in the techniques of representation and the aesthetics of appreciation." As a result of this disruption, it was hoped that a less considered and more improvised rendering of the subject would occur, one which would be echoed in the discussion which

followed.

Phase two, adding colour

When educands had completed their simple line drawing, a colour photocopy was made (for future reference) to see how it had developed from a piece of visual *art* to a PVN, and once the originals were returned, educands set about adding colour to the line-drawing so as to indicate the component shapes mentioned prior. In this second phase, educands visually coded their imaged and coloured all shapes the same basic colour e.g. triangle in red, square in blue and circle in yellow. It is worth mentioning here that only the actual drawn objects were rendered in colour leaving the white, 'negative' space to perform two functions, as a way to focus the eye on the drawing, and also as a counter-space in which phase three could be performed.



Figure 1: Working on the visual elements of a PVN

Phase three, adding text

Once the visual image portion of the exercise had been 'finished' it was then transformed into a state of becoming a more cohesive visual narrative, by the addition of text. As Polanyi (1956) highlights, this stage where image and text are aligned acknowledges the distinction between collection, digestion, and articulation of ideas through the higher-order skill of synthesis (Holtham et al. 2008) . This synthesis was achieved by using the counter-space (although not exclusively) as a locale in which to place hand-written text which essentially took one of two forms; list form or full sentences. Whilst the content of both of these approaches was not prescribed by the facilitator, the resolutions invariably took on a similarity that could be defined as follows. Firstly, simple nouns - writing out the vocabulary for the physical entities that had been draw. Sometimes these words were repeated over-and-over and were often embellished and/or used in a visual onomatopoeic or alliterative manner. Secondly, simple adjectives – these usually, although not exclusively pertained to shapes or colours, and finally simple verbs and simple prepositions. Educands were also encouraged to play and improvise with modes of presentation, and it was observed that they needed very little persuasion to use text in a typographic or artistic manner. In addition to these listed formats, educands also wrote in full sentences, although these too took on a variety of forms, for example, writing an objective description of some portion of

the PVN, writing an emotional response to some portion of the PVN or writing a more random response to some portion of the PVN. As can be seen in the images below, especially figure 3, by this stage the PVNs became a glorious *mélange* of image and text, where the distinction between image and written language became blurred. This multiplicitous response focusing on bricolage and playfulness echoed the postmodern epistemology undergirding the author's learning theory.



Figure 2: Adding text to colour work

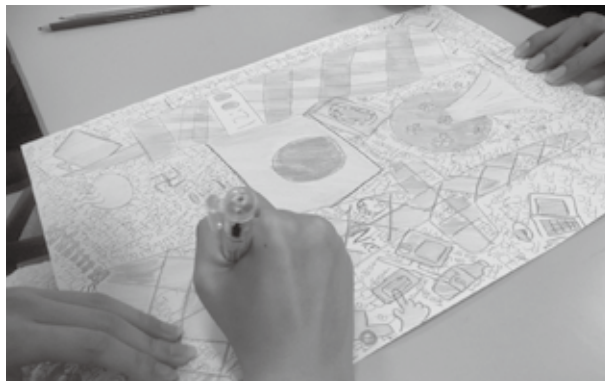


Figure 3: PVN almost complete

Phase four, in-class discussion

Having 'completed' the three stages prior, the PVN was finally used for its intended pedagogical purpose; creating dialogue. In keeping with the idea of both encouraging genuine learner-centric discourse and focusing on the individual educand's micro-narrative, no specific guidelines were issued to educands except that utilising the fullness of the classroom's built-environment they should ask and receive questions about what they had drawn. To aid discussion, however, the 'wh' question words were written on the board as a prompt, and as the educands gained greater confidence throughout the term and began to develop their own questioning and discourse style, these were no longer used. In order to discover new friends and hear an array of different voices, pairs were made of male/female. After monitoring and allowing for an appropriate amount of time, educands then change partners, and this

occurred several times.



Figure 4: In conversation about their PVNs



Figure 5: Educands discussing their PVN



Figure 6: Using PVNs as a starting point for discussion

Final Phase: Group exhibition of work

During the last week of the spring academic term, space was allocated in the entrance hall of

the Faculty Building, and an exhibition was organised by the author and the educands which they also helped curate and assemble. The exhibition comprised examples of PVNs, and photographs of the in-class activities, and not only provided a platform to showcase their work to other educands and members of faculty, but also gave them an opportunity to work collegially in setting the display up.



Figure 7: Preparing the exhibition of class work



Figure 8: PVNs displayed alongside in-class photos

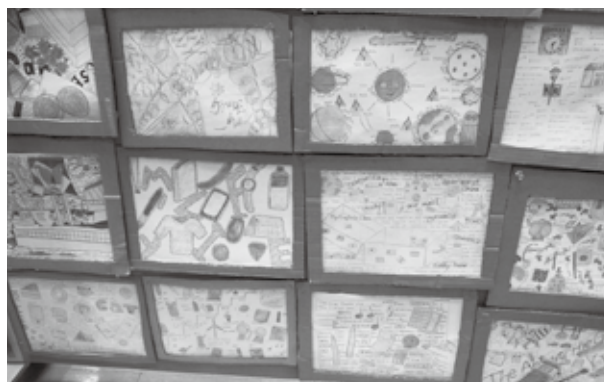


Figure 9: PVNs

Learning outcomes and findings

As a qualitative exploration, no quantitative data was collected from this study. Any qualitative which was gathered, such as artworks, oral and written feedback was secondary to the quality of engagement, the act or participation, and the opportunity for self-expression and dialogue. The pedagogical context or framework in which this research was founded was largely social-constructivism, exploiting what Fleck (2009, p. 71) draws attention to insofar as, “the process of social interaction is the genesis of knowledge [...] knowledge is constructed in processes of social interchange.” Sparrowe (2005, p. 1) offering a similar sentiment further states that, ‘Authenticity is not achieved by self-awareness of one’s inner values or purpose, but instead is emergent from the narrative process in which others play a constitutive role in the self,’ and it is this ethos which was fundamental to this study.

This paradigm therefore focuses not only on the expression of the individual’s PVN, but also on giving educands a collective, or shared learning experience and with it a framework with which to build a social construction of individual reality in the Vygotskian sense. Furthermore, as intimated in the opening paragraph, this is a postmodern pedagogical stance which relies not on the teacher playing the role of guardian to the meta-narrative, or being an oracle - the ‘keeper’ of knowledge, rather, someone assigned the role of facilitator in the proceedings. Furthermore, unlike traditional paradigms, here, it is the act of intrinsic participation (for participation’s sake) that is deemed of primary importance and not an extrinsic obligation nor reward. As Dewey (1910, p. 48) explains in *Experience and Education*, “Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person only learns what he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of forming enduring attributes [...] may be and often is more important.”

Observations

Due to the very nature of individual learning styles, preferences, and neurology, any methods or materials used can never perfectly assimilate to the myriad of learner types we find in our classrooms. Within the learning transaction there will invariably be those with different learning propensities and styles extending beyond the eight basic modalities or types identified by Felder and Silverman (1998)¹. As Barsch (1996) accepts, there will always be a struggle between methods used and learner types, and the approach documented here was no different. After some initial difficulty grasping the concept behind the idea of creating and thus expressing one’s PVN, educands soon became familiar with the process and were both willing and able to use the narrative as a vehicle for communication. One difficulty always lies in over-explaining a task and giving too many examples as illustrations. If that occurs (notably in Japan) then educands are inclined to reproduce the teacher’s examples because by the very act of having been shown, they mistakenly assume this to be what the teacher is looking for. In Japan, there is a certain notion or *form* called *ka-tei kan-nen* (家庭観念、かていかなねん) which exists as a social construct, and if it is the facilitator’s intention that educands aim for originality and individuality, then it is arguably best not to give too much guidance. Excessive guidance also further reinforces the didactic/transferring

¹Sensing or intuitive, visual or verbal, active or reflective, and sequential or global learners

and learning styles encountered in the primary and secondary spheres, something which could dissuade the educands from expressing their own micro-narratives in their authentic voice.

The author observed that the notion of ownership was less clearly defined in this English (i) class; the idea that one educand 'owns' an idea or approach is not something that tended to bother the Japanese learners. The fact that educands shared ideas (either formally or informally) , or arrived at similar resolutions was not something which caused concern amongst the class. That they derived inspiration rather than plagiarised was an important tenet of their co-learning experience. Furthermore, as a postmodern learning paradigm with the focus on constructs such as pastiche, bricolage, and interpretation, exclusive intellectual property ownership was not an issue. Educands worked very cohesively together to the extent that on numerous occasions the author witnessed the idea of contagion, how the same or similar ideas were absorbed and re-processed by other educands, expressed and then re-processed.



Figure 10: Engaging in discourse arising from completed PVNS

This class focused not on traditional modes of communication imbued with a sense of phatic communication, that is, the sharing of more personal and experiential information. The author observed that the educands who undertook these classes, appeared as if genuinely engaged and genuinely interested in discussing not only their resolution to the exercise, but also in learning in what shape the resolution of their peers' had occurred. There was a definite and genuine sense of excitement in the sharing of their PVNs and a sincere pleasure abound in learning about the narratives of others. Educands in English (i) engaged in polite, respectful, good-humoured, and good-natured exchanges. These exchanges made the author feel very proud that the class had made a genuine attempt to try this innovative strategy, that they were indeed mature enough to warrant *andragogy* and not *pedagogy*. In addition to this, although not an accurate indicator, the end of term class questionnaires not only commended the approach but, (and perhaps more importantly for the author) , validated the approaches used in this class. It was noted in end of term feedback, that through this very egalitarian class which focused a great deal of time on peer interaction, and which allowed them to freely express their real intention and ideas, Japanese *hon-ne* (本

音、ほんね) rather than a façade, Japanese *tate-mae* (建前、たてまえ) . As a result of this, educands became to know each other better and made more friends. Something which is especially important for first years starting to live away from home, and yet something which is often overlooked in modes of teaching which do not significantly draw on the individual's narrative.

The Study and its Application to Japanese Tertiary Education

Richardson (1994, p. 321) like Knowles (1973) and Lindeman (1926) , recognises that 'adult learner can themselves become important resources for learning [...] the need to make sense of one's own life experience is often a major incentive for engaging in a particular learning activity. Not only should this generalised approach be acknowledged, but the local cultural and social context of learning must always be acknowledged too. As Japan is largely a group-driven society it is only appropriate that any educator should select their teaching methodologies which acknowledges the prevailing social mores and further exploits the educand's innate learning styles. Although in judicial terms first-years are still minors², in cognitive terms this is clearly not the case, and in light of this, the author posits that despite this disparity, the facilitator should view the Japanese tertiary learner and the undertaking of tertiary CBI through the lens of andragogy - adult-education. By adopting such an approach, it is hoped that the process of finding more appropriate and fitting learning methodologies that assimilates much closer to the young adult learners' skills, desires, and proclivities can be started.

In addition to the above it is also worth noting that whilst not measured in this study nor within the specific scope of the paper, casual observations did allude to the fact that there is an observed correlation between the enjoyment students found through these AVE projects (and the associated arts-based text used for the course) , and their study of English. As Seki and la Greca (2009, p. 28) reported, when polled, only 23% of university students said they liked English, compared to 29% who disliked it and 48% who were neutral. Many of my own students had expressed similar sentiments that, with the addition that despite their previous 7 or 8 years of secondary and primary English education, they felt they were very poor at English, or as King (2013) suggests, they had a 'neurotic dread' of English. Once engagement with English was re-framed, however, and they were introduced to non-traditional, or visual methods and communication, progress was made (or seen to be made) , confidence grew and motivation increased in many notable cases. This can be observed in the class photos at the following weblink:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/artsbasedresearch/albums>

Further research

Clearly this research represents but the first tentative steps in the direction of fully implementing and utilising both the personal-narrative (as an autonomous entity) and PVN within either the context of Japanese English language education, or within the realm of other academic disciplines and pursuits. Clearly there are conceivably numerous areas where the implementation, incorporation and completion of the actual PVN needs both revising and refining. That established, however, having experienced a

²As noted earlier, the age of majority is 20 in Japan

great deal of success with these projects both in terms of work produced and educand satisfaction, and having observed the desire and fervour with which learners engaged in the completion of their PVNs, the author is enthused to extend this process into other classes. The other, more challenging area, however, and the preferred direction for development for the author is located within incorporating AVE into other content-based instruction (CBI) classes. Thus far, however, due perhaps to a number of factors, concerns and preconceptions, it has proven hardest for the use of visual methods to make inroads into 'traditional' education, as many non-arts practitioners are hesitant to use arts-based methods, and those whose research is heavily quantitative perhaps worry about products and measurable outcomes. That stated, however, the author maintains that it is within this under-researched area of exploiting visual methods for secondary purposes – the crux of AVE, where the greatest potential for rewards and for a radical paradigmatic shift lays.

Conclusion

The point of departure for developing this AVE methodology was a hypothesis postulated by the author that the current trend du jour in Japanese tertiary-level English language education (including CBI or EMI) , both in terms of methodology and materials does not encompass the widest possible number of learners into the learning transaction. That furthermore, the dialogues which often take place are indicative of a superficial and simulacral notion of interaction.

Seeing the work that has been produced across academic borders by educands at The University it is clear to the author that the use of PVNs in the teaching of CBI in the Japanese tertiary sector represents both a valid and appropriate pedagogical vehicle and a fitting and suitable andragogical paradigm. Furthermore it seems very clear to the author from this briefest of forays, that the use of both personal narratives and visual narratives represent not only a very powerful epistemological metaphor, but beyond that, represents a sincere and genuine approach to both revive, renew and re-appropriate the ideas encased in Freire's *critical pedagogy* and Knowles' *andragogy* pertaining to nurturing the autonomy of the individual leading towards the development of an intrinsic learner and the subsequent raising of their critical consciousness.

Taking the participating educands in English (i) as being not only indicative of Japanese tertiary learners, but perhaps also other young adults in similar cultural frames, the possibility for extending, developing and utilising this pedagogy for related and entirely different functions is a challenge that cannot and should not be ignored. It is hoped that through dissemination of information, the likes of which is aimed for here, that many different educators across the various disciplines will begin to look at the possibilities and opportunities located within the use of the individual learner's voice and AVE, and that through this appropriation will offer the possibility for not only personalising the learning experience, but also to re-align learning in the current epoch with a more postmodern bias championing heterogeneity and multiplicity in the classroom.

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