

GALE Newsletter Spring 2006

Newsletter of the GALE Special Interest Group (SIG)
of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)



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Spring seems to be the shortest season in Japan, but is possibly the best time of year here. Looking out from my apartment window in Nagoya, I can see the bright green leaves of the thick forests of Higashiyama Park, framed by a translucent blue sky. After this long cold barren winter, the vivacity of colour and clarity of light dazzle me. Being Australian, I am used to the rich hues and hidden textures of landscapes, the bare midday sun, the dappled soft light of late afternoon. But even after sixteen Mays here, I am still astounded at the sheer fecundity of the Japanese spring, its ebullient and sparkling energy.

In this issue, my first as editor, are two articles that reflect this season's vitality and vigour. Jane Nakagawa's thoughtful exploration of the GALE Forum 2005 at the JALT National Conference offers approaches for facilitating student interest in gender issues, structured around a number of pedagogical approaches (multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, learner autonomy), complete with a compact bibliography.

Ayano Fukui's essay is an insightful and perceptive reflection of a young woman growing up in, and growing beyond, the world of *kawaii*. As she writes:

I became a feminist. However, in Japan, people are wary of feminists and it is not easy to call myself one. Some people said to me, "Feminism consists of the voices from the born-ugly girls. Born-beautiful ones do not become

feminists." I nevertheless kept on dreaming of being fearless. In contrast, girls around me dreamed of being cute or beautiful.

I hope that this Spring 2006 newsletter of GALE finds you fearless and feisty! I am looking forward to receiving your ideas and submissions for the next GALE newsletter.

Editor: Robert Croker, Nanzan University <croker@nanzan-u.ac.jp>



Reflections on GALE Forum 2005

Jane Nakagawa (Associate Professor, Aichi University of Education)

The 2005 GALE FORUM at the national JALT conference had the theme of critical thinking about gender issues. Kathy Riley and I were the moderators this time.

Kathy suggested that I moderate the first half and she the second half. Kathy also proposed that she talk about critical thinking for teachers about gender issues in the 2nd half, and me critical thinking for students in the first half. It was great to have a chance to work with Kathy!

When it was time for the forum to begin, we saw many familiar faces of GALE members in the audience. The forum began with me distributing small cards to the audience members and asking them to write their names on the cards. I collected the cards and then asked the participants to form pairs. Pairs were asked to discuss briefly why they had come to the forum; in short, what did they wish to discuss or learn during our time together? I wanted to hear this, before launching in to some kind of "lecture" or presentation that may or may not fit the interests of attendees. Thus, I thought asking why people had come might be a good place to begin.

After several minutes discussion in pairs, I picked people randomly from the name card deck that I made out of their names on the cards, and asked each chosen person to tell roughly one item of interest their partner had expressed during their pair discussion. (I asked people to report what the partner said versus their own idea, to encourage active listening to others and respect for others' points of view, just as I do in classes with students.) Six or seven items were discussed during the first half of the forum as a

result of this procedure, with the items recorded on the white board by me as they came up. Ideas included: Why are gender issues important to teach? Marriage/family issues as far as students including the option of not marrying, gender roles, the image of gender issues as being women's issues versus issues for both women and men, how to get students involved/interested in gender issues in the classroom, and problems created by unsupportive school environments. Participants and the facilitator replied to these and other questions.

It seemed to be easy for participants to answer the question "why are gender issues important for students?" by providing examples of how students themselves perceive gender issues as important to their lives, as well as noting gender-based differences in language use that affect the learning of a foreign language so are thus pertinent for teachers to treat in language courses.

In regard to how to get students interested and involved in gender issues, I said that in my experience, students on their own without my prompting in my courses frequently express a very keen interest in gender issues and very often propose gender issues-related themes themselves for class discussions or projects (without my proposing it). Additionally, I teach an elective content course in gender issues which has proven to be very popular. I also supervise graduation theses where themes are decided entirely by the students versus me and many choose gender issues themes. For example, of 6 students I supervised this year, one chose to research pornography, one gender and English language, one chose to compare parental roles across cultures and another chose to research how to provide social support to working parents.

Some recommendations for making gender issues more appealing to students were given:

- a. Understanding that critical thinking and personal transformation processes can be stressful, so, knowing oneself and then of course implementing techniques for creating supportive classroom environments is important for teachers and their learners. I referred to two books (referenced below) that describe the transformative learning process. Other areas of study I have personally found particularly helpful include the research relative to cooperative learning, since cooperative learning provides techniques for effective peer collaboration and for healthy classroom dynamics (please see references below if interested) to take root.

Cooperative learning research reports benefits such as higher self-esteem, increased liking for classmates and classes, and the same or higher levels of achievements compared with competitive models. Students who share insights and observations with each other in class help the entire class to develop deeper understanding of issues. The transformative learning research describes processes of critical thinking and how to overcome resistance to critical thinking.

b. Taking care to provide or allow for variety in classroom activities, since different kinds of learners prefer different kinds of activities and different ways of executing them. Two models discussed in regard to learner preferences or differences which I find useful include Gardner's multiple intelligences model and Myers-Briggs psychological types based on Carl Jung's theory of psychological types. Some reference materials appear below (my own TESL Reporter article on this topic can be read online on the JASCE website (<http://www.kyoudo-edunet.jp/>)). However, as a word of warning, there are many misunderstandings about the MBTI model as well as Jung's original theory of psychological types, so it was pointed out during the session that one ideally can take the time necessary to learn the model more thoroughly or accurately before trying to utilize it as a tool as a classroom teacher, if interested. As with understanding gender issues, hasty snap judgments may be less valuable than thoughtful reflection. (Incidentally, the same is true of cooperative learning, which involves far more than putting students in physical proximity to each other but requires the teacher to create what is called a "positively interdependent" web of relationships between learners, where the success of one student creates success for others/all in the class.)

c. Allowing for learner autonomy so that students themselves, at least sometimes, can select themes and tasks, or design or manipulate tasks and themes, in order to fit them to their own learning style preferences and interests (otherwise students may not be interested and learn less than they are capable of).

An example of classroom materials that suit the above aims of stimulating critical thinking and accommodating various learning preferences of students is a new (as of September 2005) EFL textbook called Gender Issues Today (an independent review may be found at <http://www.efltu.org/reviews/genderissues.htm>). The activities in this book include ones which "activate" all of the original seven multiple intelligences proposed by

Harvard's Howard Gardner in the early 90s, as well as accommodate learning style preferences related to all of the Myers-Briggs (MBTI) psychological types. The textbook also includes activities which can be done alone as well as in a peer collaborative setting. The readings are geared especially for the Japanese college/adult student who reads English at intermediate level, but our reviewer, an American teacher based in Thailand, and some other educators based in the USA (via personal communication) have expressed the opinion that this textbook, which included the help of GALE and some of its members, is suitable for use outside of Japan as well as within. Interested persons can order the book by contacting Mr. Kawamura of Tokyo Shuppan Service Center at <kawamura@c-enter.co.jp>. GALE members who were active (paid up) as of late October received one free copy of the book, as did the many contributors to the book. The authors and editors worked on a volunteer basis. I have been using this book myself in one of my own university courses. The course is going exceedingly well.

After a short break, Kathy Riley moderated the discussion for the second half of the forum. Kathy opened the discussion by sharing which thinkers and practitioners in gender issues and alternative pedagogy have influenced her. Subsequently, Kathy invited others in the audience to share the same information about themselves. (Please see Kathy's report in this newsletter.)

The national JALT conference theme for 2006 was "sharing stories." Both halves of this guided discussion provided a forum for teachers to share stories: stories about students relative to gender issues in the classroom, and stories about ourselves. One thread common to both halves of the forum was how do students, or teachers, who do not fit the traditional gender molds, thrive in and outside the classroom? Stories shared included teachers who felt threatened with dismissal or faced harassment for bringing up controversial issues in their classrooms, a gay student who felt without marrying his career options in Japan would be limited, a male Japanese student who chose, over the strong objections of his father, to be a home ec teacher in order to promote gender equality, female students who claimed they did not wish to follow custom by quitting jobs upon marrying or childbirth, and others.

I enjoyed participating in this forum. As usual, I wished we had had more than the time (though nearly 2 hours together) that we had. But I feel that is always a great feeling to

end with, as compared to say boredom in a session that seems to drag on too long;-). As far as Kathy's topic, I have often reflected on which persons have served as inspiration and role models for my own teaching practice, and why. For me, the non-traditional teachers were (are) role models for me. I found I preferred art school to traditional school since we learners in art school were given more free rein and autonomy than in traditional university, where I mostly listened to lectures. Today I think my main inspiration is the students themselves, but I feel grateful to those who taught me who have served as a model for my practice, as well as those I meet in groups like GALE who help me by sharing ideas, enthusiasm and encouragement. I also want to thank the many people who helped write the textbook *Gender Issues Today* last year.

In the future, I would like to see a half day or full day workshop on the topic of critical thinking and gender issues in the language classroom, where we have even more time to share with each other and discuss materials, techniques and approaches, so that we can delve more deeply into why we choose what we choose, and what ingredients are important for success.

--Jane Nakagawa, Associate Professor, Aichi University of Education

Selected Bibliography

I. MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator)

The MBTI is a psychological assessment instrument based on C. G. Jung's theory of psychological types. It contains four indices which describe what people notice and how they develop conclusions regarding their perceptions. Some books/articles on this topic:

Fairhurst, A. M. and Fairhurst, L. L. 1995. *Effective teaching, effective learning: making the personality connection in your classroom*. Palo Alto: Davies Black.

Lawrence, G. 1996. *People types and tiger stripes*. Gainesville: Center for Applications of Psychological Type.

Myers, I. B. and McCaulley, M. 1985. *Manual: a guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Nakagawa, J. 2004. Individual differences and teaching style. *TESL Reporter* 37:1.

Pearman, R. R. and Albritton, S. C. 1997. I'm not crazy, I'm just not you. Palo Alto: Davies Black.

II. MI (Multiple intelligences)

The theory of multiple intelligences was developed by Dr. Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University. It suggests that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on I.Q. testing, is too limited. Dr. Gardner proposes eight different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential in children and adults. Some books on this topic:

Gardner, H. 1993. Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice. New York: Basic Books.

Kagan, S. and Kagan, M. 1998. Multiple intelligences: the complete MI book. San Clemente: Resources for Teachers.

III. Transformative Learning

This approach helps to entice and support learners in discovering what they know, how they know it, and whether or not to change their meaning perspectives and why. Some books about transformative learning:

Cranton, P. 1994. Understanding and promoting transformative learning. Hoboken: Jossey Bass.

Mezirow, J. et al. Learning as transformation.

IV. Learner-centered teaching / learner autonomy

Students themselves become the focus of the classroom and are given freedom to (at least sometimes) select, design and tailor activities to themselves. Some books on this topic:

Campbell, C. and Kryszewka, H. 1992. Learner-based teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nakagawa, J. 2004. Language teaching approaches: current practice and future directions. Tokyo: Tokyo Shuppan Service Center. [Written in easier English esp. for Japanese undergrads/teachers in training. Also includes info on learner differences and coop learning. Order by contacting Mr. Kawamura at <kawamura@c-enter.co.jp>]

V. Cooperative learning

This is an approach to organizing the classroom so that equality among and cooperation between students is promoted. Various techniques exist. Some books/book chapters about cooperative learning:

Aronson, E. 1978. *The jigsaw classroom*.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., and Holubec, E. *Circles of learning*. Edina: Interaction Book Company.

Kagan, S. 1994. *Cooperative learning*. San Clemente: Kagan Cooperative Learning.

Nakagawa, J. 2004. *Cooperative learning*. In Makarova, V. and Rodgers, T. (eds.) *English as a foreign language: the case of Japan* (Lincom).

VI. Gender issues

A gender issues EFL textbook (intermediate level English) incorporating multiple intelligences and accommodating various learning style preferences, learner autonomy, critical thinking, and collaboration into its classroom activities:

Nakagawa, J. (ed). 2005. *Gender issues today*. Tokyo: Tokyo Shuppan Service Center. [Order by contacting Mr. Kawamura at <kawamura@c-enter.co.jp>]

Appendix: Some Japanese language resources for cooperative learning

協同学習 WEBSITE: <http://www.kyoudo-edunet.jp/>

塩田芳久・阿部隆 1962. *バズ学習方式：落伍者をつくらぬ教育*. 黎明書房.

杉江修治（編著） 2003 *子どもの学びを育てる少人数授業—犬山市の提案*. 明治図書

Aronson, E. 1978. *The Jigsaw Classroom*. Sage Publication. 松山安雄（訳）

(1986). *ジグソー学級：生徒と教師の心を開く協同学習法の教え方と学び方*. 原書房.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. 1991. *Active learning: Cooperation in the*

college classroom. 関田一彦 (監訳) 2001. 学生参加型の大学授業：協同学習への実践ガイド.
玉川大学出版部.

Johnson et al. Circles of learning. 学習の輪 trans. 杉江修治 et al

Shoes

Grandmother,
at seventeen you gave up your name
for the largest sheep ranch in Edwards
County
and, beside the Nueces River, a home
of flatboard and river stones cut
by his own hands, he promised,
and full of children.

The children came.
Nine poured from your womb
onto a ranch that barely
sustained the scorpions crawling
in and out of your warm shoes
left on the floor.

Winter kept barefoot children
home from school, chickens back
of the stove. Egg money was vital.
Grandmother, you were the only one
who wanted shoes: you bartered
away eggs for hand-me-downs
you could remold to your life.

Grandmother, you gave the first child,
my mother, your shoes
when she married.

Nineteen years ago,
after a hot bath, a bottle of pills,
she came back to you
in a box.
Your shoes did not fit,
Grandmother.

You still wait for a house to be built.
The man who promised
fifty-two years ago no longer
remembers your name;
he waits for death in a hospital bed.

Grandmother,
I'm only twenty now.
I too have had men
promise their name
and a house full of children.
I can't wear your shoes,
Grandmother.

Linda K. Vandermeer-Kadota
(Originally published in *Hard Pressed* #4,
1978)

Undercover Observer: A Personal Essay

Ayano Fukui (Aichi Shukutoku University)

My life started with a cursing spell from my mother in my elementary school days. The spell was strong enough to make me feel that I did not have a place to fit in my life—“You are not *kawaii* [cute].” *Kawaii*. To be *kawaii* is the most important lifelong goal for Japanese girls. In my own childhood, I was forced to have this goal also, but I failed to become *kawaii*.

I recall one particular day in my junior high school days when I think of the spell cast by *kawaii*. My classmates at junior high school called me a freak. I was shy. One day, some girls glanced at me and whispered, “She is gross.” I profoundly wondered, “What makes me ‘gross’ and what is the difference between them and me?” Seconds later, I noticed. They were born *kawaii* or beautiful and I was not, as my mother had indicated before. Since this very moment of realization, my journey started, in search of proof that I would be fearlessly able to lead a life.

The Cursing Spell of Disney Animated Films

In my childhood as I recall, I dreamed of a life with a “happy ending.” This might be based on such animated films as Disney’s *Cinderella* (1950), which my mother had me watch. Parents have their children watch Disney animated films, such as *Snow White* (1937) *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Although it might be said that Disney is popular worldwide, these Disney stories seem to take on special meaning in Japan, the country of *kawaii*, where animated characters become models for real girls. As the everlasting popularity of Disneyland in Tokyo proves, Japan is a country with an obsession for Disney.

If I keep on waiting, my prince will show up in front of me and I will live happily ever after with him. In my delusive dream, I waited for him to show up in front of me. However, he did not. From my junior high school experience, I realized that my prince would not show up because I was not born beautiful, and I guessed, no matter how long I waited for him, the dream would not come true. I began to think that the prince in the story of the cinder-girl in the Disney films showed up only because she was too beautiful to miss, and he found her. Something inside of me insisted on waking up, but I was somehow unable to give up all the delusive dreams of *my* prince. *What is he like if he truly exists? Is he cute?* I fell back deeply into that delusive dream again.

“Princesses” in fictional stories became traumatic for me. No matter how long I waited for my magical moment of transformation into a beautiful princess, it did not happen. I noticed that Disney princess films were unsuitable for me, since the princesses in these films were born beautiful, and their hearts seemed innocent. They patiently believed in the magical moment of their lives, and waited for it without complaining.

Concerning these princesses, feminist art scholar Midori Wakakuwa has observed:

The picture books, fairy tales, animated films, and even the department store and hotels have kept on selling the dream of ‘princesses’ to young girls and they sell ‘princessy clothes’, and hold ‘how to behave like a princess’ seminars at hotels and sell stationery with the illustrated pictures of fairy-tale-princesses. (Wakakuwa 42-43)

Everywhere in the country, the fairy tale princesses that curse and traumatize me are to be found. I have felt wary of this. Standing outside the kawaii culture as someone who has failed to gain entry, I have grown up wondering if there can be a convincing story about a cynical princess, unlike these Disney princesses who innocently believe in the magic moment.

Waking Up from the Spell

Fortunately, I found a convincing film with a cynical princess. The animated film *Anastasia* (1997) was created by two animators who had left Disney Studios, and it truly is a story about a cynical princess. The princess has a quarrel with her prince at the beginning of the film. She is fearlessly willing to go for her dream, which is not meeting a prince, but a journey to her past, where she confronts the question of her identity, who she really is. The cynical and fearless princess in *Anastasia* was impressive since I had been thinking the fictional princess could be innocent only. Watching the film, I had the hunch that “fearlessness,” the keyword of *Anastasia*, would be the key to my life, also. I started to learn about the independence of women and dreamed of being fearless in my campus life.

I became a feminist. However, in Japan, people are wary of feminists and it is not easy to call myself one. Some people said to me, “Feminism consists of the voices from the born-ugly girls. Born-beautiful ones do not become feminists.” I nevertheless kept on dreaming of being fearless. In contrast, girls around me dreamed of being cute or beautiful.

Japan, a Country of *Kawaii* Culture

Growing up cynical, I have secretly observed girls with the dream of becoming *kawaii*, a crucial concept in Japanese culture. Now this word *kawaii* has been exported, extending the cult of cuteness. I have seen Hollywood actresses wearing Hello Kitty T-shirts on television. Hello Kitty, Disney characters (absorbed into indigenous *kawaii* culture), and Japanese cultural production, such as *shojo-manga*, Japanese TV series and some Japanese pop [J-pop] songs represent Japanese *kawaii* culture. Some would find them harmlessly adorable, but I find them “coquettish” and cynically smirk when I see them. One of the reflections of *kawaii* culture, “Hello Kitty,” the character with a red big ribbon in her ear looks funny to me, since the character does not have a mouth and it might metaphorically represent a cursing spell for Japanese girls: girls need to stay silent, they must not be talkative if they want to be cute.

According to the research by psychologist Rika Kayama, *kawaii* culture started in the Meiji Era and is now viewed as “traditional”:

Until Japanese girls married, they had ‘empty’ times, [...] and they were not allowed to have a boyfriend, or become educated while waiting to be married. They were forced to stay ‘pure’ and they had knowledge of daily life only. [...] [T]hey were prohibited from reading anything literal or philosophical. They were only allowed to enjoy color illustrations of young girls, color pictures of them, and make paper dolls of young girls. (Kayama 84)

Coloring pictures and making paper dolls of young girls in the Meiji-Taisho Eras were the beginning of Japanese *shojo* [girl]-culture, and these were also the beginnings of *kawaii* culture.

Kawaii culture has now been set in the genes of Japanese girls. Most Japanese women might have had a childhood surrounded by stuffed animals at home, watching Disney Princess stories on video and holding a big stuffed Hello Kitty doll in their arms. They dream about visiting Disneyland in Tokyo. When they become a mother, they will show Disney animated films about princesses to their daughters and buy them stuffed Hello Kitty dolls and take them to Disneyland in Tokyo. Automatically, the cursing *kawaii* culture will enter Japanese girls’ lives. It is this replication of a destiny script that concerns me most about *kawaii* culture and the widespread expectations that it passes on from one generation to the next, from mother to daughter.

Kawaii e-mail

For several years, the most difficult thing for me to endure in terms of gender awareness is the reflection of *kawaii* culture in e-mail. Most girls I know like to use “emoticons,” called *kao-moji* in Japanese, and “girly” e-mail, in which facial expressions, such as (*_*) [puzzled] or (^o^) [joyful] are used at the end of the sentences, instead of periods. Besides these emoticons, recently colorful icons called *e-moji*, in which the punctuation marks “!” and “?” are colored, and *deco-me-i-ru*, where the entire e-mail is decorative and colored are all functions found on Japanese cellular phones. With these emoticons and colorful icons, young women users are able to show how “pretty” their writings are. To me, this phenomenon in e-mail looks funny, considering there have been women such as Virginia Woolf who insisted on the importance of writing as the key to a woman’s independence. In contrast to Woolf’s association of women’s ambition with writing, Japanese girls use writing to elaborate a virtual *kawaii* self. As I carefully look at both wanna-be-*kawaii* girls and *kawaii* merchandise, I find this “coquettish” cuteness linked with appearing helpless or dependent.

Irish writer Mary Morrissy has called coquettish women “calculatingly female” (*Mother of Pearl* 254). When I apply this term to the Japanese cultural context, I begin to wonder if Japanese girls who are obsessed with *kawaisa* [cuteness] are “calculating” something. I am unsure of what they, their *kawaii* selves long for – aside from a handsome prince.

Kayama’s analysis concludes that Japanese women, who once tried to be independent, will compromise and grow tired of seeking independence since the country does not offer them a comfortable social system to do so. They will negatively feel, as Kayama puts it, “No matter how hard I try, with my black outfits which represents independence, that it will not work out, after all. Therefore, it is better to compromise myself with the *kawaii* stuff (Kayama 91).” The social atmosphere in Japan arguably forces women into *kawaii* culture. Sometimes I feel paralyzed when I reflect on the overwhelming social and economic power that maintains *kawaii* culture. I wonder how I can possibly deal with this cursing issue. No matter how hard I struggle with it, the existence of *kawaii* culture is not movable and I might be pushed into this culture one day.

Kawaii Boys and My Coincidental Walk to Them

I have been presenting *kawaii* culture as constructing girls’ identities, but it also constructs boys’ identities, as well, and is in the popularity of *kawaii* boys in the field of J-pop songs and Japanese TV series.

My young brother is a big fan of these *kawaii* boys, especially the boys from Johnny's Entertainment Inc, the agency of cute-boy singers and actors for Japanese pop culture. The *kawaii* boys from this agency are called "Johnny's boys" and they sing, dance, do back-flips, and perform as actors. Psychologist Chikako Ogura has defined the popularity of boys from Johnny's Entertainment Inc, as "the greatest invention in Japanese television show business since World War II. Boys from Johnny's Entertainment Inc are judged by their look in the same way as Japanese girls are judged by boys" (*The Weekly Asahi* 131). It might be thought that teenager girls only would be obsessed with these *kawaii* boys, but I would like to show how a very predictable story might shift its priorities.

My brother told me to watch a TV series, *Nobuta wo Produce* (2005), starring two *kawaii* boys from Johnny's Entertainment, and I found a show that could be reviewed in terms of gender awareness. In the story, two *kawaii* boys [Kazuya Kamenashi and Tomohisa Yamashita] change a girl [Maki Horikita] who suffers from bullying into the most popular girl at high school—that is, it's a Cinderella story. The two boys as Cinderella's "fairy godmother" try to make the girl Cinderella at the beginning of the story. While I was watching the first few episodes of this TV series, I was not attracted. As I mentioned earlier, Cinderella stories have been traumatic for me. In my obsessive prejudice, Cinderella stories are always gorgeous and have the same plot – magic and destiny lead her to her prince. However, as I kept on watching the TV series with my brother's high recommendation, the plot of the TV series seemed to become different. It started to focus on friendship between the two *kawaii* boys and the cinder-girl. Also, I noticed that the cinder-girl in *Nobuta wo Produce* was neither "calculatingly female" nor coquettish to boys. To me, it was surprising to know a Cinderella story could be translated into a story about friendship and it became the moment that melted my rigid prejudice against Cinderella stories.

This begins my negotiation rather than my utter rejection of *kawaii* culture. Minako Saitou, who writes essays on Japanese literature, culture and feminism explains how a cynical gaze can transform everything you see:

Once you have your 'eyes of doubt,' you will notice that the school, the company, your home, media, the whole world is full of the norms of distinction in terms of gender studies. (*Gender ga Wakaru* 174)

It has been difficult to accept what surrounds me when I view them from the critical perspective of gender studies. I have become stubborn and smirked at Japanese pop culture and it seemed difficult to find something interesting in Japanese pop cultural

productions. However, I have again found my stubborn self nudged, not by a show, but a song.

Beyond Gender Awareness: the New Journey to Myself

My current favorite song is “Seishun Amigo,” the theme song of *Nobuta wo Produce*. The performers of this song are the two *kawaii* boys from the TV series. The song recorded sales of over one million copies and became the best-selling song last year. I wondered if the sale of “Seishun Amigo” was the very proof of the popularity of *kawaii* boys.

In the lyrics of “Seishun Amigo,” [Lyrics by zopp, Music by Shushi, Fredrik Hult, Jonas Engstrand, and Ola Larsson] the two *kawaii* boys sing about friendship, which is a keyword in *Nobuta wo Produce*. The lyrics of the song have caught the attention of not only girls but all generations. According to an article in *The Asahi Shinbun*, “when we have our eyes on the title and the lyrics of this song, [...] it impressively reminds us of the ‘retro’ atmosphere which was seen in our old and golden times of pop-songs in Japan,” and it seems that the very reason why the song is broadly popular must be its “retro” lyrics. However, beyond this, I think the background of the popularity of the *kawaii* boys cannot be ruled out as significant. If they were not performing the song, would it still be popular? The answer to this question seems to be, “No, it would not.”

Chikako Ogura analyzes the reason why this song became popular: “[T]he two Johnny’s boys have the aura of ‘youthfulness’ [...] Youthfulness is what girls are afraid to lose” (*The Weekly Asahi* 131). At the same time, she has written that “Johnny’s boys give ‘transience’ to audience” (*ibid.*). They might be associated with *sakura* [cherry blossom], and the achingly sweet tragedy of the swift passing of beauty. Transience might be seen in Japanese traditional *kawaii* culture, also, particularly in the propensity for the delicate pink of the cherry blossom. As mentioned earlier, girls in the Meiji-Taisho Eras needed to stay pure and they were not allowed to become educated. Now, whether they go to university or take on jobs, they are still ultimately waiting for their prince. Japanese girls might feel something in common with Johnny’s boys, innocent Disney princess stories and Hello Kitty without a mouth, as their chances to find happiness (princes) are so fleeting.

I have cynically observed the popularity of Johnny’s boys, and yet I find myself profoundly addicted to “Seishun Amigo.” My feminist self complains that I must not listen to this song and asks me the question, “Do you long for the ‘youthfulness’ that the song represents or is it the ‘cuteness’ that the performers of this song represents?”

Strictly speaking, feminists would not listen to the songs that are performed by Johnny's boys, and therefore my fondness for this song is contradictory.

Sometimes I feel suspended between my cynical feminist self and another self of mine. I suppose this more complicated awareness is the reason for my search for a new self. I am leading a life, observing my own self.

References:

Film

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Television Programs

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Notes from the GALE Panel at JALT: Inspiration from the Archives

Kathy Riley

(The following essay is an edited version of my presentation at JALT2005.)

The field of gender studies has expanded from a pond to an ocean: papers, workshops, journals—amazing growth in past decade. So, with all of this information, it should be easier to get useful information on how to conduct our classes—right? Well, maybe not. The amount can be overwhelming, and we are still faced with the question of relevance. How does a particular piece of reported research relate to what we actually do in the classroom? Where is the proverbial drop to drink?

Looking for insights, if not answers, I like to go back to old favorites—writers whose work I've thought about more than once and whose writing has informed what I do in the classroom. Here I review some ideas I've learned from writers, such as Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow, bell hooks, Stephanie Vandrick, Jane Sunderland, and Aneta Pavlenko—writers whose work has been disseminated by GALE and other groups over the past 8 years.

For me, before there was “gender studies”, there was feminism. As a social movement, rather than a branch of research, feminism was and is concerned with power. When I came to Japan 15 years ago, fresh from a graduate program and a decade of feminist work in the US, ideas that I later read in Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow's work really resonated with me. In one article, written nearly 10 years ago, she talks about how at the beginning of her one-semester women's studies classes she explains the importance of process. In that article, she notes that “time and time again” she exhorted students to take more power by speaking up and asking questions, but now she's more aware now of “the limitations of exhorting, prodding and even pleading” as a means of getting students to change their behavior. Now she makes student participation and input “an integral and necessary component” of the class. She does so at three points: planning, the actual lesson and assessment.

She speculates that students often seem disinterested because they haven't found personal meaning in the material—even though it seems they should. For example, their

limited experience means that employment discrimination faced by women is not yet a personal issue for them. Also, students have come from a high school experience where the curriculum has been handed down and there is a push to accomplish a lot in shorter and shorter time frames. From the first meeting, students are asked to consider what they want to learn and why. She prepares a tentative syllabus, deciding 9 or 10 of the classes and leaving blanks next to the others. She scatters the remaining 4 or 5 sessions throughout latter two-thirds of the course, reserving them for oral presentations in small groups. The students' work is not just at the end, but rather an integral part of the course. She's gotten much positive feedback that way.

During classes she lectures as little as possible, relying on group work, and trying to guide students through the process of interpreting data or formulating a hypothesis—without imposing her own views. As for assessment: In the first class students get to decide the criteria for grades. Then at the end, they are asked to give themselves a grade (not necessarily the one they actually receive) and comment on why.

Since Fujimura-Fanselow wrote this, I think these ideas have become more widespread, not necessarily because teachers are addressing gender. We see them in the learning autonomy movement, for example. I think we can celebrate that other paths lead to the same point—and that for us, this kind of power sharing is rooted in a movement focused on gender and the empowerment of women.

Fujimura-Fanselow's ideas are connected to the ideas in bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*. In that book, drawing on Paulo Freire's work, hooks encourages us to abandon the "banking system" of education in which authoritarian teachers put information into the heads of passive learners. Although hooks' call to make classrooms places of passion and critical literacy often seems remote from what many of us are actually able to achieve in class, I feel like I come a little closer when power-sharing inspired by feminism is part of the equation. This is not without discomfort sometimes. Two years ago, when I organized my seminar around the theme of gender, students rebelled at focusing entirely on that subject after a semester. We re-negotiated and introduced other topics for the second semester, resulting in better discussions and a more involved class.

In addition to Fujimura-Fanselow and hooks, the writing of Stephanie Vandrick has also informed my own work. In one article (Vandrick, 2000) she reminds us that there is no substitute for being observant. Besides encouraging teachers to become more familiar with research, she urges us to examine our classrooms through lens of gender. Everyday in every classroom there are possibilities for girls and women to have a different experience than boys and men. Examples: Do females feel differently about their own abilities? Do they bring different expectations to class? Are they treated differently by teachers and classmates? Clearly Vandrick's questions can be applied to boys—especially boys who are in the minority in our classrooms. Perhaps this is the most fundamental question for all of us: what are we observing lately in our classrooms?

One of the most observant researchers I've ever read or heard is Jane Sunderland, who GALE sponsored as a JALT featured speaker a few years ago. A researcher from the University of Lancaster in the UK, Sunderland is another writer who has addressed critical or feminist pedagogy extensively. I think her great contribution is to help us look more carefully at the studies we read about—especially the interpretation of results. Maybe you remember a few years ago we heard about some studies showing that boys often got more attention in classrooms than girls—partly because they acted out more or teachers unconsciously favored them. The implication was that “more” meant that girls were being shortchanged. Ever observant, Sunderland participated in a study of classroom discourse in a German secondary school classroom in the UK (Norton and Toohey, 2004). Her results challenge the belief that male dominance happens often in classrooms and that it gives males an advantage. She found that although males dominated the classroom in terms of the amount of attention they got, girls dominated because their questions and comments were more academic.

Another of Sunderland's contributions is her ability to get us to look outside the classroom before we jump to conclusions about the causes of something we observe. It's the social practices outside that may hold the key to answering certain questions like, why is foreign language study pretty much a “girl thing” in many places? To answer that, Sunderland suggests asking how masculinity is perceived. Is it viewed as the opposite of femininity. If so, the mixed-sex language classroom may be a “gendered site” from which boys try to escape as soon as possible to distance themselves from its femininity.

Another possible explanation (which Sunderland credits to one of her students) is that adolescence is a time when boys find it most embarrassing to produce unfamiliar sounds in front of girls, inviting the laughter of other boys. She suggests that boys may actually be disadvantaged--receiving teacher attention in disciplinary form, ending their language study as soon as they can, and generally doing less well. At the same time this situation could be a disadvantage for girls too. Being good at something does not mean it is valued, Sunderland reminds us. Although UK girls might do well in foreign languages, the gap in wages and salaries remains. Perhaps the girls are being channeled into "easier" areas, such as foreign language, rather than tougher technological or scientific areas. Sunderland concludes that investigation and critique needs to go beyond what can be observed and recorded to what is expected and what is not.

Similarly, as teachers in Japan, we need to ask how competence in language is positioned in relation to masculinity and femininity. Personally, I don't watch a lot of TV, but my impression is that competence in English isn't really a "guy thing." (Research on this point would be very welcome.) Maybe we can't do much about changing society—before the end of this semester anyway. But if we think there might be some connection between low proficiency and masculinity, can we bring in other images? One example I've used is *eigo de shaberanai*, an NHK language learning program that shows both men and women using language competently, often in humorous situations. I've started using clips from it in my freshman class this year. But more important, we need to recognize that although we have a lot of choices in the classroom, any solution to the competence problem extends outside of the box.

Another writer on gender issues is Aneta Pavlenko, a teacher and scholar in the U.S. Like Sunderland, she asks us to look outside the classroom, particularly at differences in our students' access to "material and symbolic resources" (Norton and Tooley, 2004). In other words, we ought to think about gender as a system of social relations, along with race, class and age. Our students live in a complex social world that is often largely invisible to us. How do our students see themselves in relation to other students? How do they feel about the worth of their stories—their right to speak? Pavlenko reminds us that development of this sense is really an important part of critical approaches to language learning. She believes this development of a critical voice comes about through the use of personal narratives and credits the excellent work done in Japan, noting Cheiron McMahill's studies of a feminist foreign language class (97, 01). There the links

that students see between feminism and English lead the women in the class to see English as a language of empowerment. This focus on narrative has inspired me to try giving student autobiographies a central place in my seminar this year.

Thanks to all of these writers--Fujimura-Fanselow, hooks, Vandrick, Sunderland, Pavlenko—the sea of gender studies has brought some very relevant currents for me and my students. May they do the same for you.

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