

## *Newsletter No. 3*

### **Workshop in July**

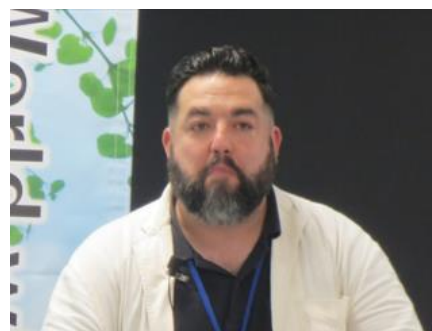
**Date:** July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 10:30-14:30

**Venue:** NUFs Meieki Campus (BIZrium Nagoya)

**Title:** " Teaching with the Brain in Mind: Neuroscience and Positive Psychology in the Classroom "

**Presenter: Jason Walters** (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

**Jason Walters** is a lecturer on the faculty of British and American Studies at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) in Japan, where he has worked for ten years in a number of roles, including that of assistant director of the Core English Program, administrator for the department's innovative Power-Up Tutorial, overseas study tour coordinator, and associate coordinator for the Academic Writing Program. A former entertainment journalist and film critic, Jason has co-authored multiple language learning and conversation strategy textbooks and frequently publishes and presents on topics such as positive psychology in language learning, problems with native-speaker-ism in Asian EFL contexts, and strategies for professional development among busy teaching teams. In addition to his teaching and research roles, he currently chairs the annual NUFs Teacher Development Symposium, fostering collaboration and growth among educators. He also serves as an officer in MindBrainEd, a neuroscience-focused special interest group within the Japan Association for Language Teaching (<https://www.mindbrained.org/>). Jason spends his free time playing with his son, growing chili peppers, and is proud to have enjoyed hot spring baths in 46 of Japan's 47 prefectures (apologies to Aomori). He is currently pursuing his doctorate in Education at the University of Louisiana Monroe.



### **Abstract:**

This 2-part workshop examines how current findings from neuroscience and positive psychology can inform and enrich language education. The first half provides an overview of how the brain processes and retains information, with particular attention to the neural systems involved in motivation and goal-directed learning. Participants will be introduced to the fundamentals of positive psychology- the Science of Happiness- and discuss how these ideas can meaningfully support students with varied motivational profiles and learning objectives. The second half introduces human needs-fulfillment models and engages participants in experiential practice with language learning activities grounded in positive psychology.

These activities align with Nation's "four strands" approach and are adaptable across diverse teaching contexts.

## **The number of participants: 38**

### **1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?**

- Peer-led 'guided journey'. We can relax and do meaning-focused input. Also, we can make good relationship with students. Students make good relationship with friends.
- Using photos stored in your smart-phone to talk about something that made you happy last week was a good ice-breaking activity.
- The guided meditation as a mind break and a way to filter their attention. So they can pay attention to the topic in class after feeling their mind calm.
- Photo-sharing for happiness – I want to use this activity. It can recall their good feeling and let them be positive. Then they must engage to tell their friends how it was great without fear of making mistakes.
- I really liked how Dr. Walters talked about how happy learners are better learners. This really drives me to create more activity centered on positive psychology. I would like to instill happiness in my students while they're learning the language. I also want to teach positive psychology to my older students explicitly and like what Dr. Walters did, look at their textbook topics and ask them which ones reflect what happy people do.



### **2. What you learned from today's workshop**

- Awareness is something I was familiar with in relation to positive emotions prior to this workshop, but I was introduced to it through personal wellness training. It didn't occur to me until now that I can apply it to my teaching practices.
- Being positive helps us in our daily lives. Sharing positivity will help us doing good thing and we can think only good things. Being positive is connected to brain.
- While it is easy to focus on what to teach in the classroom, I was reminded of how important it is to pay attention to how students learn.
- I felt this was a great connection between positive psychology and the ESL classroom. Until today, I had always viewed these two things as entirely separate.
- What people need in order to flourish PERMA: P for positive emotion, E for engagement, R for relationship, M for meaning and A for accomplishment.



### 3. Questions and Answers

#### 1) *I know students always take pictures and they will enjoy showing them and talking about them. Do you think it works well to do every week in university classes?*

I'm glad you enjoyed the photo activity! I find it to be a good ice-breaker for new groups- because of this I had considered using it to begin the workshop but decided to stick closer to the neuroscience piece in the first half. As for using it **every** week in university classes? I don't know that there is any activity I would recommend using **every** week without making changes to the learning target or procedures. Sharing memories taps into a powerful way to foster positive emotions, build relationships, and enhance engagement, which are key elements of the PERMA model, but at the same time, it is worth remembering that our brains are wired to notice novelty. As we discussed in the first half of the workshop, the brain's "*salience network*" decides what gets past the "attention filter" and registers as meaningful. If students encounter the same task every week, particularly if it always targets the same language structure such as answering questions, it can start to feel routine and lose its effectiveness. To keep students engaged, try varying the language focus. For example, you could practice using sensory adjectives one week, storytelling with pantomime in another, and sharing opinions the next. You can also adjust the procedure by using small groups, interviews, or guessing games. Maybe one week use songs instead of pictures! This kind of novelty helps sustain their interest and attention while keeping the activity fresh.



#### 2) *Would you say that 'being intentional' is the same as mindfulness?*

When I talked about these things in the context of Lyubomirsky's "What Happy People Do," I think I probably described them as describing the same thing. But it is useful to note that the two concepts, while related, are not identical. Being intentional refers to choosing actions deliberately and aligning them with goals or values. Mindfulness, in contrast, involves observing and living in the present moment without judgment. It is possible to have one without the other. For example, you can set an intention but lose focus on the present, or you can be mindful of the moment without pursuing a specific goal. When combined, acting purposefully while staying aware of the present can strengthen engagement, meaning, and well-being- not only for the students in our classrooms but for our own sense of fulfillment in the work we do as teachers!



***3) JHS students prefrontal cortex is still developing, so what are some things to keep in mind when teaching/including PERMA in a JHS classroom?***

Before answering this, two caveats: 1) I have never taught junior high school-aged students, and 2) I am not an expert by any means on brain development, only a teacher with an interest in the topic. My answer here should be taken simply as my best guess. I think it makes sense to assume that since, at that age, their prefrontal cortex is still maturing, their ability to regulate emotions, plan ahead, and think abstractly is still developing as well. To support them, it would be useful to keep tasks concrete, connected to familiar topics, and highly social. Activities like sharing things they are grateful for, recognizing kind actions by peers, or identifying personal achievements by way of tracking tools would probably work well at this stage. In my experience, in adolescence, peer relationships and the impressions young people hope to make on one another are central to their lives- so anything that strengthens positive connections, teamwork, and peer support should resonate. Helping them notice their own strengths and progress also supports their growing sense of identity and accomplishment.

***4) What would you say to someone who says there is ‘no time’ to incorporate positive psychology into the classroom?***

Fortunately, well-being practices do not have to take much time or disrupt our course content. Rather, they can (and should!) be woven into what we are already doing. As we talked about in the workshop, the elements of PERMA are already well-aligned with the content topics found in the EFL textbooks most of us are using, and many language routines have positive habits built-in (e.g., giving thanks, noticing, remembering and recalling, agreeing, forgiving)! As examples, you could open class with a brief gratitude reflection, ask students to acknowledge a peer’s strength during group work, or close with a moment of appreciation for something learned. These small moments not only enhance the classroom climate and motivation but also tend to save time over the long run by improving engagement and reducing behavior problems. Rather than something extra, positive psychology can be seen as a way to enrich what you are already teaching. I wrote a short article a few years ago giving a brief explanation of why positive psychology informed activities need not disrupt our existing curriculum- I will share the link here: [https://nufs-nuas.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/1543/files/B-NUFS07\\_16.pdf](https://nufs-nuas.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/1543/files/B-NUFS07_16.pdf)



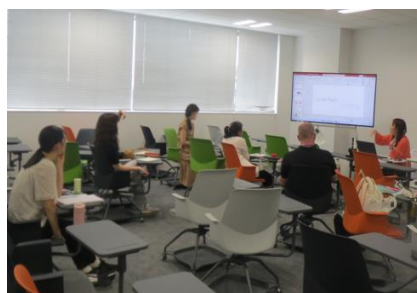
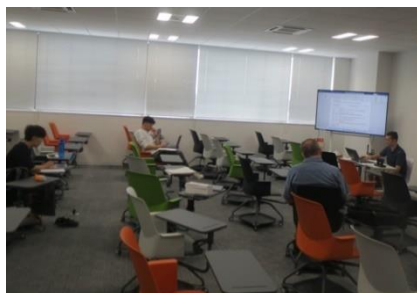
## **AR Discussion**

**Date:** July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025, 14:30-17:00 (Room MW01, 02, 03)

**Title:** Action Research Discussion

**Advisors:** Sato Kazuyoshi, Duane Kindt, Kevin Ottoson (NUFS)

**The number of participants:** 13



*Next AR sessions will be held on August 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> for TESOL course students.*

*Next workshop will be held on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025.*

*Detailed information is here:*

<https://www.nufs.ac.jp/workshop/news/>

### **NUFS Workshop**

Nagoya University of Foreign Studies

57 Takenoyama, Iwasaki-cho, Nisshin-shi

Secretary: Chihaya Sugiura