

TEDxKUFS countdown initiative in the classroom

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Abstract

Student, teacher, and institutional identity interweave with the common theme of education, and interpretation of this can often be idiosyncratic. The challenges of collaboration, volunteerism, and expertise are identified and explored to create opportunities for authentic engagement in any future endeavors toward the epistemological goal of education. This community-involved project aimed to encourage students to explore the skills required to complete a task. A five-member teacher team was established to facilitate students from two compulsory English seminar classes plus a few volunteers from senior classes, towards the epistemological goal of organising an online TEDxKUFS countdown event. Community support and acknowledgment from multiple perspectives can impact and inspire participants to allow students, teachers, and institutions to re-evaluate and choose what to identify with. Holistic, whole-school approaches with not only individual class success focus but also keeping in mind the epistemic character cultivation is of central importance when designing pedagogy.

Keywords: KUFS, peagogy, TEDx, TEDxKUFS;

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1. Introduction

Ramifications of COVID-19 are forever prevalent and educators, as well as students, are unable to return to education in the traditional sense of boxing or banking knowledge and information, and this is a positive move towards an intersection of growth mindset ideals and, developing skills, abilities, and potentialities (Christodoulou, 2020; Freire, 2018; Kutaka-Kennedy, 2021; Neisser, 1976). Especially since 2020, a flashlight has been shone on a myriad of classroom disasters and pitfalls that can no longer continue. The paradox is, that with this positive move towards progressive classrooms, there comes more complexity. As the famous adage – with great power comes great responsibility – reminds us, even amongst the multi-intelligence classroom proximities, there must be a willingness to take risks.

There must be a belief in the progression, of student-centered mobility, to prevent the often somewhat well-intentioned teacher-led project-based ideas from becoming a preoccupation of happiness and to instead, continue to flourish well-rounded progressive individuals (Claxton, 2021). This is not the place to review the alternative architectures of cognitive learning but, the major challenges of collaboration, volunteerism, and expertise will be drawn upon to reflect on the journey taken to elaborate on becoming a teacher worthy of the advancing world.

1.1. Conceptual background

During the fall semester of 2021 at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies (KUFS), a movement to get students actively involved with environmentalism was embarked upon. Technology, entertainment, and design (TEDx, independent video presentation) events are independently organised TED-formatted, carefully prepared talks that foster learning, inspiration, and learning (TED.com). The ‘x’ demonstrates independence from the globally targeted TED talks. A TEDxKUFS collaboration meant fitting in with the regulations and restrictions of the organisations, both of which are introduced in more detail in their sections below. To undertake educational action research is courageous at any time, particularly in the current unstable climate of education (Noffke & Somekh, 2013).

1.1.1. TEDx background

TEDx is a voluntary endeavor. According to TechTarget, a TED talk is ‘a video created from a presentation at the main TED (technology, entertainment, design) conference or one of its many satellite events around the world’ (Hanna & Wigmore, 2022). TEDx is an independent branch of this, using the mission statement ‘ideas worth spreading’. TEDx is a global program and therefore has some non-negotiable mandatory rules about content, formatting, media, and distribution to maintain ‘the integrity of the TEDx vision’ (TEDx.com). These regulations became overly robust and limiting when time and expertise were of limited quantity. TEDx generally has much smaller, more localised audiences, but is modeled on the TED format. The countdown initiative which ‘seeks to answer five fundamental, interconnected questions that help inform a blueprint for a cleaner future’. Also had its own ground rules to accelerate the spread of solutions to the climate crisis (Ladias et al., n.d). Again, these restrictions narrowed the creative edge to the classroom and speakers’ agendas. There were five subject areas, energy, transport, materials, food, and nature, of which the student majority voted us to concentrate on food, materials, and nature.

1.1.2. KUFS background

Founded as a language school in 1947 based on the motto ‘PAX MUNDIAI PER LINGUS’ (peace through language), KUFS is made up of 2 faculties with 127 faculty members as of AY2021 and teaches 10 different languages with a passion for education, culture, and customs in the support of ‘shaping global citizens for world peace’ (Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, n.d.). The belief of ‘students spreading their wings and flying out into the world as emissaries of peace’ can be felt

among the faculty as teachers develop global awareness using SDG lesson plans and have held United Nations models with students simulating international conferences to 'deepen their understanding of political systems and global issues'. Students can be witnessed on campus practicing dance routines and creating their study groups in the open-planned study halls and communal gathering spots.

The TEDx countdown event was discovered by researching global events. The 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP 26, held in Glasgow, kickstarted activists to band together globally and Greta Thunberg's unstoppable crusade about climate change made the headlines, even in Japan. KUFs already had TEDx affiliations, so it was deemed fitting to collaborate on a TEDxKUFs event again. The event seemed plausible – support several local speakers to inspire others to join and activate the countdown goal of building a better future by cutting greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050. COVID-19 still imperiling the vicinity, it was quickly agreed this event had to be digital and it seemed appropriate to pre-record the program event to harness the students' availability and produce something with a slightly flexible outcome.

1.2. Purpose of study

This community-involved project aimed to encourage students to explore the skills required to complete a task. The class attempted to level the playing field and abolish traditional ideas of education as opposed to just being yet another classroom that is doing nothing more than depositing students on the grand pyramid of winners and losers (Delpit, 2021). This style of participatory action research has been defined as a process of research, education, and action to which all participants contribute their unique skills and through which all participants learn and are transformed (Broydon-Miller, 2001). The diversity and flexibility of the research enable learning through a meta-cognitive process to work through the permeable boundaries and become more wholly orientated toward learners through a transformational shift in relationships (Broydon-Miller, 2001). The sections of challenges are deliberated upon mobilising the rich collaborative learning experience of British, American, Canadian, Chinese, and Japanese heritage that provided numerous opportunities for cross-examination and surprising insights.

2. Materials and method

A five-member teacher team was established to facilitate students from two compulsory English seminar classes plus a few volunteers from senior classes, towards the epistemological goal of organising an online TEDxKUFs countdown event. A Microsoft Team was set up with nine channels and the students organised themselves into the different categories of event day choreography, fact-checker/greeter, logo/slide design, social media, speech coaching, student voices, subtitles, video choreography, video editing/general manager. The TEDx countdown initiative was set to run events globally from October 2021 and continue to count down until the end of the year. With the second semester starting on 30 September, there were just eight scheduled 100-minute classes before the proposed 5 December 2021, event day. During these classes, the staff and students needed to be introduced to the TED and TEDx concept and ideas by watching TED talks and reviewing the guidelines on the readily accessible website as well as following the carefully constructed TEDx countdown initiative instructions that were sent via email to the TEDx licensee (and in this case a TEDx ambassador). These were distributed during class time, recorded meetings in the Microsoft Team, and frequently in the files section as reported notes or as chat within the specific channels. As face-to-face classrooms were opened, this communication tool was often not utilised as frequently and readily as it potentially could have been as students were excited to see one another and could verbally transmit their messages rather than methodically typing them.

2.1. Procedure

2.1.1. Collaboration

Collaboration can be a sensitive and stretching issue. Prior knowledge and perceptions can divert from the holistic approach required for successful goal-oriented outcomes (Birkhoff, Firehock, & Dukes, 2011). This section will focus on the three key elements of collaboration that brought the most anxiety for students and staff as communicated at the end-of-term survey and verbally throughout the TEDxKUFS countdown initiative.

2.1.1.1. TEDx and KUFS

A strong impetus is necessary for any institution to agree to an outside corporation, company, or philosophy to be implemented at any degree or level. Perhaps the implications of collaboration were not fully considered in the eagerness to hold this event. But it was certainly an invitation to consider a variety of incentives, not just to the panacea of equity but also to the structural and cultural attitude changes that can occur. For KUFS, the benefit of a TEDx collaboration was not immediately apparent. TED and TEDx talks are not often translated into the native KUFS language of Japanese and just as few Japanese speakers in English have been transmitted via TED (less than 10% of total TED talks according to TED.com). What would make this countdown event worthy of being hosted at KUFS rather than elsewhere?

The same question was also posed by the TEDx committee. Why involve KUFS? TEDx is independent, yet it is still attempting to bring together the most remarkable local people across many fields to share their experiences and lives. What could KUFS offer that another facility could not?

2.1.1.2. Faculty of global engagement and the faculty of foreign studies

The two faculties needed to collaborate as the licensee and the compulsory classes involved were cross-departmental. This meant paperwork had to be diligent this entailed certain creativity and flexibility with departmental procedures and paperwork manipulated befitting to the task and demand. This was becoming an institutionally recognised event; however, with professors often giving more value and credit to solo undertakings, any kind of collaboration must have an underlying postmodernism; a paradigm typically of post-1989, betterment of human rationale. The relatively newly established faculty of Global Engagement (2018) is perhaps more able to remain fluid and responsive to suggestions of study direction, than the faculty of Foreign Studies which encompasses the abundance of nine departments, including the department of British and American studies where the compulsory classes were held. The much longer-standing faculty already has processes and systems in place to orientate the maneuvers necessary to accommodate such a large-scale event. One contributing factor to the speed of approval of this event was that the event was to be held online and would therefore not require the presence or contribution of colleagues other than their recognition and approval of the event.

2.1.2. Classes

Without deliberating the theoretical and pedagogical rationale for collaborative learning from psychologists such as Bandura (1977) and Vygotsky (1978), and scholars such as Palincsar, Stevens, and Gavelek (1989), the main challenges the student feedback highlighted will be presented. The main cause of concern was that students couldn't physically see one another face-to-face. Although they had a year of pandemic Microsoft Teams training behind them, they knew their class members and were able to understand their presence and place. With the introduction of another class and volunteers from seniors, the students had difficulty placing themselves. In the Japanese cultural context, Japanese methods of forming relationships often form themselves based upon a

hierarchical nature between age and more experienced persons (Nippoda, 2012). This deserves further comparative research as to whether this is Japan-specific or whether this effect happens in other cultures too.

Most participants involved in the preparation of this TEDxKUFS countdown event had never undertaken the choreography of an event before, let alone a well-known and strictly curated TEDx. Quite often the areas requiring support, such as resistance to being seen as the most engaged and competent student as can often be found in Japanese classrooms, were left unfacilitated (Canagarajah & Dovchin, 2019). Accountability in written form within the Microsoft Team channels and via visible meetings was praised and a student-teacher liaison for each group was established, yet the initial selection of channel selection was met with an unanticipated long blockage as the students tried to firstly, comprehend the roles available, then to figure out their best interest for the term and then distinguish who was already in that channel or willing to be in that channel with them. In individual one-on-one discussions mid-term, it was discovered there was a social pecking order taking place and more focus on how students formed these initial groups could have provided insight into their motivation and behavior. In hindsight, carefully constructing tasks before the initial choice of groups, or removing that choice altogether from the students, could have streamlined and helped to regulate this process. However, as this was an initial inquiry into a TEDxKUFS countdown during class time, figuring out the necessary activities within each channel was deemed an appropriate working method. Once the students had eventually formed these groups, whether they took advantage of the technological tools and peer pecking orders was irrelevant as long as the roles were set, accountability charts, and activities completed, then the class remained on target. The essence of the class was to also embrace the typically collectivist nature of the surrounding Japanese culture (Nippoda, 2012).

2.1.3. Volunteerism

Limitations of volunteering include time and energy of commitment, especially during COVID-19 times, and transferring major elements of life to being online. Due to these limitations, volunteering is often undervalued. Communication with team members you do not often meet, or constantly asking people to do things for a cause can take you out of your comfort zone, and being overly invested in the event can leave you feeling exhausted and overworked. This section, therefore, explores three key limitations of volunteerism during this project.

2.1.3.1. COVID-19 influence

Due to the ramifications of COVID-19, not only students but also faculty members were having more virtual meetings and the conflicts and competition for screen time were real. Working under the knowledge that a whole school had been shut down due to COVID-19, already put the constant possibility of event cancellation as a factor into the mix. Permanently halting progression was something to avoid.

Having little to no face-to-face contact meant that relationships and communities had to adopt a different way of interaction. It was revealed that many of the channel groups were friends and chose the social media application LINE to communicate, having already established relationships before class and event preparation began. The major communication breakdown that was affected by this lack of face-to-face connection was with the recording studio. Fortunately, as the dates drew nearer, face-to-face meetings were held and students could familiarise themselves with the equipment essential for the recording sessions.

2.1.4. Online

Holding meetings online held issues of classroom management; as the classes and additional volunteers collaborated, it was sometimes necessary to hold meetings at other times other than the

specified class times. This held conflicts of schedule but being online could be seen as a benefit to that. One of the issues here is whether students were cheating the system and whether that was worthy of notation. With the development of technological tools, a certain amount of trust must be afforded to participants. Just because a video can be viewed as held, there is no guarantee that students were present and did not just switch their connection on and either walk away or conduct other work while online. On the opposite scale, some students did not know when to switch off and did become overly involved claiming tasks to take an unreasonable amount of time. In other instances, students disrespected, intentionally or not remains unknown. They kept each other waiting and occasionally did not join a meeting without informing other members before the meeting. These encounters typically only the teacher deals with, were now placed between students and there was an instance of one group ostracising another group member for lack of responsibility taken. Time, commitment, and careful collaborative scheduling are necessary for the preparation and lead-up to any event. Having the event as part of a compulsory class meant that there must be a commitment of a specified number of hours, inside and outside the classroom. This requires a self-awareness and self-management system to have already been established to avoid emotional and mental breakdowns. Having an additional classroom or self-management arrangement in place – either within the class or the organisation to refer to, would support these situations in remaining positive.

2.1.5. Preparation

For clear, direct instruction to ensue, a vast quantity of preparatory work is essential. The lack of initial group task design was felt in the first few months as relationships were being established and tensions were fraught as the epistemologically internationally connected environmental awareness growth carrot was constantly dangled and snatched away. Whether the TEDxKUFS countdown event would ever materialise was under constant scrutiny and persistently questioned. This issue has possibly more to do with teacher control than actual preparation. There was a lack of prepared materials readily available which required a constant ability to think creatively and flexibly. The students began to transfer their inquiries which would aid with the acquisition (Perkins, 1993). Another further study area that would be interesting to investigate, would be to discover whether these students are more capable of organising a similar event in the future – if they are asked to organise a differently themed TEDxKUFS event, would they be able to accomplish tasks quicker and more smoothly than this time around? Questions revealing interest and knowledge of the themes of the event can be found in the results and reflections section. Considering the outcome of this event was not a high test score, and quantitative gains were not necessary to demonstrate student achievement, the minimal guided learning approach was perhaps a positive side effect.

2.1.6. Expertise

Increasingly, humans are requiring more and more information to fully understand issues (Bereiter, 2002). Progressive problem-solving constitutes a readiness to tackle problems. Students need to reinvest experience and knowledge gained to be able to advance to better treatment of a problem and ease the mental capacity required, therefore, becoming more able to handle complexities as they arise (Bereiter, 2002). This section is not judging the problem-solving skills in the following areas, but rather highlights the need for formal instruction of equipment and instruments and their uses.

2.1.6.1. Advertising

The key challenges were with media that could and could not be used, firstly; by students alone, and secondly by the corporations involved; namely TEDx and KUFS. Taking the top-down approach here and starting with TEDx as the visiting community to the university, TEDx had suggestive platforms and explicit instructions on design features of all and any form of advertising.

TED has Silicon Valley origins and a concomitant emphasis on technology and design is congruous. A set of quality criteria is set by TED for anyone attempting to join their corporation. Non-adherence to these practices is simply void. This meant students were not granted the inspirational creativity value initially anticipated. Cross-referencing and redirecting and focusing on their every move will hopefully develop their long-standing reinvestment of mental resources, but it did nothing for the ever-present short-term Dec 5th target.

Especially in this progressively tech-savvy appearing world, having someone on board who could consistently manage quality improvement is essential. Someone to reassure all those involved of the beneficial methods applied. There needed to be constant surveillance of media and advertising. Someone to check whether a repost was worthy or cited correctly. Whether a live viewing of students had been regulated and permissions sought sufficiently enough. That there was nothing derogatory or controversial that could bring Orwellian backlash to anyone involved, would have ultimately been a way to work at the edge of TED-level competence rather than KUFs competence.

2.1.6.2. Equipment

There was a lot of detailed equipment usage required to produce the final TEDxKUFs countdown talks. The recording of the videos meant that every angle and minute had to be precisely considered in terms of viewpoint and building genuine expertise is something to strive towards. Experience with something a student is truly interested in can provide energy that formal schooling often lacks in provision (Egan, 2010). Anyone who has ever worked in video editing will know that even a minute is an extremely long time, so these speeches required dutiful attention. The university has a green-screen recording studio, and guest speakers were invited to use it. In theory, the students could record and edit these ready for publishing on the TEDx site. Having restrictions on recording studio time, the students had little time to gain the background knowledge of the inner workings of the studio and the recording studio staff also were on limited teaching availability schedules, which led to some shortcomings in terms of quality. There were also creative editorial discrepancies that led to relationship breakdowns as frustrations with the lack of equipment and software professionalism and knowledge became apparent. These could have been resolved with input from previously experienced persons aiding in the prior planning and understanding of the complexities of putting together an edited video. It would have been ideal if the time pressure were not so unforgiving.

2.1.6.3. Companies

For all of the participants involved who had heard of TED, pre-existing knowledge overcast the reality. There was a TEDx myth floating around of the passionately involved TEDx-ers that would somehow swoop in and help save the day by sharing a wealth of knowledge and experience and help to guide the way. There is an essence of collaboration that once you sign up to be part of the TEDx campaign, it engulfs your life in an almost cult-like fashion. The TED-way, as a video-producing network, has rulings on the manner of things, not just the speaker's topic, but also their style and projection as well as advertising and logo display. KUFs similarly had channels of procedure that were not apparent until the inquiry had been made and the time scale of the practicalities was often conflicting. Collaboration between two strong non-profits often brought compromise that was unappreciated by either side.

3. Results

Change yourself, change the world, change yourself to change the world, change yourself to be worthy of the advancing world (Delpit, 2021, p. 14). For any organisation, event, or performance, even classroom and class, to feel beneficial, requires immense amounts of preparatory setup. The African proverb takes a village and held strength during this mass collaboration of admin, faculty, and

students.

For this semester to be a visible success, the event, as originally planned and suggested, with little adaptation, needed to take place. At several points during the semester, it was questioned as to whether it needed to be a TEDx event and whether it would be better to just switch and make it an in-house event, but it was really about the process and sticking to that goal that made it even more of a success. The fact that now those talks are forever in the world of YouTube and TEDx, and those teachers and students involved will have that memory to build future events and experiences on is a representation of successful collaboration. To be able to view those videos at any time, to reflect upon and do better is a stepping stone towards that epistemological goal of education. To internalise that experience and knowledge gained – not only in using computer software, interviewing techniques, or presentation skills, but also in human relations, in goal setting, in self-improvement, and reflection about selves and others around.

There was authentic engagement – fundamental principles were recognised and pursued with first questions animating teachers and students in their projects and pursuits, and a kind of freedom of education came into view as something attainable and real. That conceptual change and deep understanding and learning had occurred. Most students stated that both their knowledge and interest in environmental issues increased during this setup. They felt confused at the start as they had never had a class like this before, where they had to collaborate and meet deadlines with external forces before. Some of their responses are:

'I'm glad that the event was successful. I participated as a social network service team member, but I was nervous because I saw other groups and teachers working hard. It was a great opportunity to think about the environment and the way of life'.

'This event encouraged me to speak my opinion frequently and learn about eco activities'

'I thought participating in this event and thinking about solutions will help protect the earth on which we live'.

'...the discussion in the second half was about environmental protection from a perspective I had never thought about before, so I learned a lot'.

'At this event, I was able to gain knowledge and stories that I never hear about in my daily life, and I realized that I need to actively try to learn about things that I don't know because I don't know them. For this reason, I am glad that I was able to participate in an event like this one because I was able to learn about things that I didn't even know I wanted to know'.

These students were able to understand the concepts of discussion and move forward with these ideas, saying they could learn about themselves, and the belief that they could change the world also increased.

4. Discussion

From a TEDx perspective, the result is perhaps not as clean-cut as other video productions. The stories are perhaps not quite as ground-breaking. If there had been time to do it over again, perhaps professional guides could be sought. In original naivety, the mythical TED conglomerate would have provided more support and those pre-existing visions should have been addressed before embarking upon any project. Contacts and networks with professionals who would be willing to volunteer and connect with the university to guide skills such as video choreography or set building, logo making, or even to provide an audience among other things need to be established, kept track of, and maintained.

Once students were opened to the creativity of organising an event, it was wonderful to see,

but the restrictions of collaborations, volunteerism, and expertise were too suffocating to allow the necessary creativity to flow and ebb. From the KUFs lens, the event was a success. The students were involved in an international event. The students were able to connect to the community and discover things in the local area and about Japan that they were not previously aware of. It is up to the faculty to continually remind the students of the possibilities, but also for the students to begin the inquiry into their next vision and it will be interesting to see the future actions of all involved.

5. Conclusion

If a TEDxKUFs collaboration were to happen again, it needs to be a whole university operation. Speakers and organisers would need to be KUFs-affiliated. Having speakers in higher positions – possibly having the president speak or having a speaker from every different language taught at the university, in their language speak, would spark the excitement and cooperation needed to fully commit and collaborate to a TEDx, the problem would then become finding a TEDx theme that would be fitting enough to inspire all the teachers to commit the amount of time and effort – freely – to produce an event of that certain caliber.

Is TEDx what KUFs or other institution needs? Personal pursuits connect with collective searches for a better world. Beauty and suffering are all around. We need to be able to act, leap, doubt, and rethink. Collaborate. Strategise and start again (Delpit, 2021). There would have to be a powerful umbrella theme with sufficient, compelling subtopics that would put your institution on the map for it to be an enterprise worthy of serious consideration.

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