

We Are Free at Last, or Are we?

Kyoko Kobayashi
President of Tokushima Prefectural Senior
High School English Teachers' Association
(Principal of Anabuki Senior High School)

We are free at last. This year, it seems we have passed through the tunnel of darkness, the COVID-19 pandemic, through which we could not see the end. Our daily lives seem to have returned to 'normal,' even though we still face many problems which we haven't found a resolution to yet; rising inflation, extreme weather, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the conflict in Palestine. For these three years, we have had a lot of trouble conducting communicative English classes, where talking face-to-face or speaking loudly was prohibited. Moreover, we couldn't have events as they used to be, which has taken away a lot of chances for experiences from both teachers and students. We, however, are getting back to cheerfully laughing within our schools. We are free at last. But are we really? No one has the answer, but we should 'keep calm and carry on!'

When we passed through the tunnel, we found ourselves in a further stage of technology. The Collins Dictionary's word of the year 2023 is 'AI.' During the pandemic, the world was struggling to find an alternative way to move forward, and computer technology and the development of utilizing artificial intelligence were a part of the result. The spread of using AI, especially generative AI, affects many distinct fields, including education. However, it also brings concerns regarding how it is used. In contrast to Collins Dictionary, The Cambridge Dictionary's word of the year is 'hallucinate,' which gained new meaning as it applies to AI. The Dictionary proposes that the word shows how AI is capable of 'hallucinating' and creating false information and narratives. Generative AI is certainly a useful tool but we are still learning more about its accuracy and effectiveness.

Looking back on this year, we held the annual conference in person at Shikoku University, which was done online last year. I was very glad that all the senior high school English teachers in Tokushima could join the conference and share a lot of knowledge through the lectures and workshop. The lectures were very informative and useful for our English classes. The presentation was stimulating and motivated us to reach for higher levels of teaching. Though it was very difficult to change the ways we have been used to for many years, we have to learn new methods and are trying to keep up with the trends of the new education curriculum to better develop students' abilities to thrive in the future. We should not stop making efforts to create better English education which fosters our students' communicative abilities through the English language.

Lastly, I would like to say "thank you" for all the help and cooperation of the Teachers' Association and extend my deepest gratitude to all the teachers who contributed articles to this journal. Thank you again and stay safe.