

Considerations When Creating a Coordinated English Program

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I . Introduction

What are the benefits and challenges when creating an English program in Japan? What are the reasons behind the inaction and the rationale in moving forward? These are the broad questions addressed in this paper. I want to be clear that all of the ideas here are open for debate and that there are numerous effective ways to learn a language. The purpose here is to spur discussion on the topic so that, at the very least, universities know what the questions should be and how they might be implemented when answered.

II . Point of Argument

Not all language programs are created equally but even those that are found to be lacking have advantages over those with no program at all. The intent here is to show what is necessary to create a coordinated system of learning so that teachers and students can reach their full potential. Language programs should always be evolving based on the needs of the students and the discoveries of those who facilitate learning. The process will be long and challenging but the aim is to demonstrate how and why it is essential for all universities to undertake a systematic approach. This paper is absolutely not meant to criticize any existing or nonexistent program.

1. Background

One of the single greatest advantages to coordinate and integrate an English program is for continuity and the potential ways that teachers, and quite possibly students, will be able to collaborate on basic assignments as well as more involved projects. Nevin (2009: 572) stated a number of reasons for collaborative teaching of which I will mention three:

- **More learning from and with colleagues about students and about teaching and learning;**
- **Increased collective expertise resulting in greater effectiveness with a variety of students;**
- **Decreased teacher isolation, increased support and feeling valued by colleagues;**

Few teachers currently have any idea what or how students are being taught once the door to the classroom closes. There are informal chat sessions occasionally set aside during meeting to discuss classroom concerns but these are rare and no substitute for true collaboration. This would begin with implementing a system that we can agree upon and only then could we reap the benefits Nevin stated above. The concerns are most pronounced by teachers of other disciplines who are now teaching language and the isolation comes through in the questions asked. Since there are a seemingly infinite number of

ways to teach and learn, teachers must constantly be evolving and one of the simplest ways to do this is to collaborate with other teachers. Before this can happen, however, there must be a search for common ground.

2. Sampled Universities

I am not nearly as concerned with theory as I am with implementing concrete ideas that are tailor made for particular universities. Thus it is important to note that examples that used are from seven real universities where I have taught over the past 20 years. Universities chosen are those I have worked for two years or more. Parallels can be drawn from these seven institutions. Often there are no English majors but English classes have been required in some form or another since the start. Although classes have been required, no coordinated program has ever been established. Classes are simply named English for first or second-year students and requirements vary between departments but generally students must take one year of English and another language option for a second year. The syllabus for the classes were usually created in a top-down manner and are viewed as vague due to the fact that no materials are provided and only sparse professional development exists. Granted there are advantages to this kind of decentralized system as creative teachers are unencumbered by any real requirements that may take away from a dynamic class but I am going to make the case for some structure within the freedom to create. But where do we start?

3. Methodology

It is difficult enough to decide where to draw the line when deciding on content and even more so when deciding how students should be taught. Teachers should absolutely be free to create and teach in ways that best suit their unique abilities. There are, however, certain fundamental truths that should be agreed upon in a coordinated program.

The Oxford living Dictionary defines coordinate as to: Negotiate with others in order to work together effectively.

The key part of this definition to recognize is that the creation of any program should be a negotiation. Every teacher brings a different skill set and breadth of experience. The ideas that I suggest should be open to debate and criticism based on the needs of students and what they will require as members of society. In each of the recommendations, some theory will be discussed but, perhaps more importantly, the goal is to realize how each can be implemented at any university.

III. Current Problems and Their Solutions

1. Student-centered

In language teaching and learning, the term "student-centered" is seen as a learner-centered or part of the "humanistic" approaches. (see Cook, 1996: 198f.) In the last 20 years, it is also seen as promoting the concept of autonomy (Benson and Voller, 1997:7). The goal of this paper is to provide a fundamental shift away from the methods that students were taught English in junior high school and high school. The vast majority of students enter university with the idea that they have been a failure at

English language study. In many cases, it is the system that failed them. The biggest mistake then, would be to carry on teaching in the same way -indeed teaching the same material in the hope that this time they might get it, lacks sense. Virtually all of students were taught in a teacher-centered classroom with an emphasis on testing. The emphasis was on reading and writing but in fact it was on testing. Reading and writing should be communicative but it was probably not. In a language class, I know that I fail when I talk more than 20% of the time. For every minute that I lecture about language or even provide the directions for a project, I take away valuable time that students can use to communicate.

In a student-centered class, it is the learner that takes responsibility for learning. As much as possible, goals and methods are negotiated and autonomy can be seen in the activities. Learner autonomy requires that learners take responsibility for deciding the purpose, content, rhythm, and method of their learning, monitoring its progress and evaluating its outcomes (Little, 2000:69).

When students negotiate their goals and ways of reaching those goals then they are engaged. When they are engaged, they will have the motivation to learn more.

A common complaint of teachers is that students tend to sleep in class. Although there are times when there is nothing that can stop certain students from sleeping, these times are extremely rare if the classroom is truly interactive. If agreement can be made that the class model should be student-centered, then many of the behavioral problems will decrease. How can a student sleep if he is meant to be working on a project or in a group or talking with another person? In classes observed with language teachers at the helm, I have yet to see this as a problem because students are not only engaged with the content but have also had a hand in creating it. This is the main concept of student-centered classes. Learners are invested and so they are engaged in the content.

I was able to observe a very simple example of this when I arrived unannounced in a medium-level class taught by a part-time language teacher. The exercise was simple and everything was taught in English; in fact it had to be as the teacher does not speak Japanese. It was called "A University Story." On the board the rules of the task were written. Pairs were given 10 minutes to go anywhere on campus and take six photographs that will later served to illustrate a story that they will tell two other storytellers. The grammar help on the board was basic. It included verb forms and examples but little else. The teacher explained the task in less than five minutes and the students were off. They came back 10 to 15 minutes later and we're excited to find a way to express the illustrated story they had created. Of course the stories were simple and the grammar mistakes were rampant but the atmosphere was nothing short of exciting. After 20 to 30 minutes to work out the vocabulary, students then began to share their creations with other classmates. Teams rotated until every group had heard all the stories. There are a couple of strategic factors at work here. The first is that of repetition. The more students told their stories, the less reading was taking place and the more authentic communication occurred. Another noticeable effect was the lack of teacher talk. The more teachers talk in a language class, the less students are able to speak. The teacher was in his proper place as facilitator and the students were only interrupted with minor error corrections. Compare this atmosphere with one in which the teacher is complaining that students are texting or more with their phones or even sleeping. In this case students were using their phones to enhance the lesson and because they were busy preparing for their performances, there is little or no time

to use the phone for other reasons.

I realize that all not all lessons can be this active but most can. Once students are accustomed to taking responsibility for their own learning – once they know they will be required to truly produce language, things should become much easier for the language teacher. I cannot emphasize enough that it is the responsibility of the teacher to set up this atmosphere from the very first day of class.

The opposing view to learner-centered classrooms usually involves a few things. Teachers say, "my students must study grammar and vocabulary and I need them to learn this for a test." Grammar study does not have to exclude fun. Some of the most interesting presentations I have seen at conferences were on the studying vocabulary and grammar in active ways. I'll get to what students need to learn later when we get to goals. In the Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners by Dornyei and Eotvos (1998), the second deals with climate in the classroom. Two findings in that section are to compete in class with language games, and to have fun! Some universities have a large population of students involved in sports. They may not understand grammar but they do understand competition. They are also the first to put their heads on the desk when a class bores them. They are tired.

Number 5 of the Ten Commandments is "make sure students experience success." I'll get back to this in the goals section but I would like to add my own experience that I'm sure Dornyei did not intend. When sports classes start to fade, I have taken them outside for 10 minutes to play Frisbee or dodge ball. Of course energy levels increase outside but this continues when we return. There is also a difference in attitude. Outside, I was able to see students excel at something when previously I had only seen them struggle. Once the student knows that you care about more than English, the difference in attitude can be astounding.

2. Projects and Presentations

The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experiences which is had. Even when a person constructs castles in the air, he is interacting with the objects which he constructs in fancy. – John Dewey Experience and Education, (1938:44).

As John Dewey points out, experiencing in order to learn is not a new concept and yet nearly 80 years later it is underutilized. Listening to a lecture about language is the experience of listening to a lecture. Repeating what is in a textbook is the experience of repetition. Project work is one way in which we can be sure that students experience what it is like to use the language. The ways in which the four skills are studied are often determined by the individual students depending on the need for each skill. This can be much more chaotic but also more authentic. Let me give some examples. The student-centered classroom tends to be more interactive. In project work or presentations involving groups or pairs, there is an inter-dependence not usually found in the teacher-centered classroom. When a student has a clear role and needs to prepare, not for the teacher or a test but for other students, then the student understands responsibility. Imagine if the teacher only stands at the front of the class and "covers the material" in the textbook. What motivation does the student have to attend class if she can simply study the material on her own? If she is absent, will she be noticed by other students? Since the internet was introduced, teachers, indeed schools, have had a relevance problem. Good libraries have always had

more information than teachers but now students have more information in their phones than teachers could ever provide. It would seem then, that the real reason for school is to learn how to get along in social situations. This is where the interdependent student-centered classroom is superior. In project work, every student has a role and a responsibility to fulfill that role for the greater good. This is not the case in a teacher-centered model. If we agree that, like Vygotsky, and view learning as a social process which occurs in interaction with others and with oneself, Vygotsky, L.S. (1978), then teachers must create social activities and the student-centered model enjoys a clear advantage.

3. Behavior and Rules

Years ago while working at a university in Tokyo, they conducted a survey asking students what they thought were the problems associated with the breakdown of certain classes. The somewhat surprising results showed that the students said the teachers were not doing enough to stop students from improperly use their phones or enforcing rules they created about not sleeping in class. The findings went against what the administration had predicted. The students did in fact want rules and wanted them enforced.

Language teachers at most universities are fortunate to always have first year students. What is normal classroom behavior at a university has not yet been established. Teachers and students can negotiate everything from what is prohibited to what the appropriate penalty for such actions should be. I recommend including the students in the process so that if they break the rules then they are breaking their own rules.

4. Use of L1 in L2 Classrooms

There are benefits to using the L1 in the TESOL classroom. Native Japanese speakers and non-Japanese fluent in Japanese can absolutely enhance their classrooms using L1 in instances when lower level students are unsure of an activity or when significant time can be saved by using L1.

Van Lier stated:

"Learning is a process of relating the new to the known, and language learning is no exception...Our strategies and conscious learning actions are greatly assisted if we can connect the known (L1) to the new (L2) in a principled, realistic manner" (1995:39).

Very few professionals advocate hiding L1 completely. The key is in finding what the "principled, realistic manner" actually is. It has been my experience that teachers of English who are teaching outside their field and others who simply find it convenient to use L1 use it entirely more than they should in class. Recent observations have shown that some English classes are being taught entirely in Japanese. Although I am not sure what is meant to be taught, I am confident that very little communicative English is being learned. There is the argument that L1 is necessary for advanced concepts or specialized discussions but the question then arises, "Why is this being taught in a beginning level English class for low-level learners?" Surely the class has been misnamed. It is not an English class at all and should be put in a different category.

Students of English need to be using English. This fundamental concept should be agreed

upon. Basic concepts such as greetings and classroom English should never be communicated in L1. I understand that this may become frustrating when the teacher asks a class to turn to page 51 and it takes 3-5 minutes for some classes to all get there. Still, humans get better and with time, students of any level will understand these basic concepts. To not give directions in English is depriving students of any opportunity to learn English and there may be a carryover into other classes. If most of the teachers of English give directions in Japanese then the outliers become the few teachers that are actually teaching English. Students wonder why and may even consider it inconsiderate that a teacher uses mostly English in class.

For support on this topic, I went to a teacher of Japanese and asked how much English, German, or Thai was used when teaching Japanese. The answer given was, unsurprisingly, none. There we have a progressive language teacher using the direct method out of common sense when teaching Japanese but more than half of the teachers of English use a majority of L1 when teaching English. The disconnect is astounding until you look at the fact that very few teachers of English are teaching within their chosen field.

While it is risky to mandate things that occur in the classroom, in the name of cohesion, the program should layout a framework or at the very least have an opinion on these matters. False beginners will benefit little if at all from the teacher using all English in the classroom. On the far other side of the coin is that it would be hard to find a rationale for using Japanese regularly in a higher level class. A key question then is where to set policy when levels vary and teachers also have varied levels of English and Japanese.

At the very least, regardless of level, teachers need to use classroom English. Specifically, taking attendance, classroom instruction and greetings should be in English. Although speakers of Japanese may say it is easier to get past these basics if using Japanese. While this is most likely true, it is important to not lose sight of the goal of each class which is to learn something about English and to be able to use it as a tool.

5. Tools and Texts

5.1. Technology

Teachers who opt out of using technology in the language classroom are effectively cutting themselves off from a large part of how their students experience communication and life. There is a Wi-Fi connection in all our classrooms and with that we can access free language tools that are more in line with how students learn. There is also a great deal of research to back up the use of technology in the classroom. Al-Jarf (2004) found that using Web-based lessons as a supplement to in-class writing instruction was significantly more effective than using only the traditional textbook with lower-level EFL students. Notice that simply supplementing the textbook showed significant improvement. The changes do not have to be life-altering for the teacher. The instructor can start with small changes each year.

There are storyboard creators and ways to practice and remember vocabulary. A constant favorite in my class is making the students aware of pronunciation using their iPhones or my phone. These phones have a powerful and accurate voice recognition system. It may not be perfect but it is close

and students can be made aware of certain patterns of pronunciation that they need to improve. They can also be made aware that they can be understood. I encourage my students to use the "computer in their pocket" to check pronunciation, spelling, or to quickly look up information. Better to have the phone part of a useful task than a distraction. A couple more of my free and favorite resources are below.

PIXTON:

Pixton is a comic and storyboard creator with grading and assessment tools.

<http://www.pixton.com>

QUIZLET:

This tool can be used to teach and review vocabulary. <https://quizlet.com>

5.2. Textbooks

Textbooks, it seems to me, are enemies of education, instruments for promoting dogmatism and trivial learning. They may save the teacher some trouble but the trouble they inflict on the minds of students is a blight and a curse. —Neil Postman, *The End of Education*, (1995:116)

These words from my old professor ring as true today as when I first heard them in class. So why did I ever make it my business to have a hand in the making of more than 20 books in the last decade? The simple answer is that I wanted to make them better. I wanted to make them more relevant to students and as authentic as possible. I am still in the process of doing so and it is a quest in that I am sure that I will never completely succeed. What I have learned about the process is something that can and should be shared. I have come to believe that textbooks have a place but their relevance needs to be kept in perspective. One of the most common mistakes I have seen is that of requiring a common text and holding it up as the cornerstone of a unified course. A common text for a course is an insufficient fix that only gives the appearance of uniformity. Although it may seem that teachers using the same text are teaching the same material, this is not necessarily the case. Textbooks around the world can be broken down into 2 categories: There is the “kitchen sink” variety of book that contains everything and all of the material in each chapter cannot possibly be covered and there is the more specific and specialized text that limits itself by only being good at one or two skills. It is supplemental. Both can be criticized for their short comings or praised for what they do well but in either case, a textbook should only account for 30-40% of each course. In the all encompassing first example, teachers must get together and choose what material is relevant. There will be listening, speaking, reading and writing and teachers must negotiate what is worth trying in the classroom.

I would lobby on the side of having only a couple of different options of books for each course and that those options are reviewed every 2 years. The rationale behind this is that teachers can have a base text and agree on the kind of content that can be taught. After that decision is made then each teacher can find ways to teach the material and share their methods at professional development sessions. Some methods may be based on the book but improved and others may be superior to anything in the book. In either case, the winners are the teachers and students because of the diversity of ideas that can be utilized to teach certain concepts.

Ideally, in a program with enough full-time language teachers, original content can be created

in the form of a custom text. The reality though is that most universities lack the expertise to undertake such a project. The publishing industry is also fairly good at keeping up with technology so that most progressive books allow students to access videos and other learning materials via their phones.

5.3 Homework

Most students attending school are not used to doing homework. Instead of seeing this as something that we cannot change, we must see it as an opportunity to help students understand the difference between high school and university. Since they are not satisfied with six years of mandatory English classes, what should our goal be? To teach them the same way and give the same type of assignments or to use this opportunity to change the way they think about language study?

I'll admit the task can be daunting. The example I will use is a listening passage that is on a CD included in each textbook I require. The passage is short and requires between 5 and 20 minutes to answer the 4-5 questions associated with the 20 second passage. The first time I gave the assignment, less than 20% of the students did the work. A common excuse was that they did not have a CD player. I apologized and pointed them in the direction of the media center that had all the players they might need. The next week a little over 50% completed the task. It took more time than I would have liked to check each student but once they know they are being held accountable the attitude changes. By the third week 90% had done the task but it was, however, obvious to me that many had copied. They next week I presented them with a pop quiz that was exactly the same as the homework. Now the students realize that they need to try the work themselves if they want to succeed. The result was that the completed homework rate settled in at about 80% for that particular task. More importantly, those students developed a study habit due to what the teacher was requiring and carefully checking. Teachers often complain that students do not do homework or even know how to study but it is our responsibility to give the proper tasks that students can accomplish and we must not give up before students have had time to develop good study habits. The key is to be consistent and not give too much. Students can increase their exposure to the target language by 15 - 25 hours a year if we give them just a little to do. It must also be something that is not too difficult so they can get in the habit of succeeding.

6. Tests and Grading

6.1. Testing

Interest - build on the learners' interests rather than tests or grades, as the main energizer for learning. This is number six on Dornyei's Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners (1998)

Tests and grades should not be the main reason for learning but practical experience has led me to include them. There are challenges when testing any of the four skills; I would like to focus on what I believe to be the most difficult, namely speaking. Once the goals of the class are established to be communication in communicative classes the question of whether to test or not will inevitable arrive. The problem that lies within is that we want our students to communicate in a natural way and yet the constructs that we build are artificial. An example of this would be that we want our students to be able to have a basic conversation about what they did last weekend. So we use a chapter in a textbook and

create pairs on what could be a Wednesday morning (when no one would ask about the weekend) with two students that may or may not care about the weekend plans about the other and tell them to practice while repeating certain key words and phrases. Conceding the artificiality of the exercise, it is all we have at our disposal at first. The goal then is to move past this towards something more natural at a later date so that students can produce the target language in the proper context. But how do we do this? Remember that the textbook should only be used as a jumping off point and it is up to the program and teachers to write expansion lessons so that students can get used to the target language. Repetition is the key. If students are asked every other class through expansion lessons then they will surely remember the language. The real test is whether someone other than the teacher can ask a student a question and receive an appropriate response. Logistically speaking this situation is usually not feasible so we are left with creating some kind of exit test.

Various types of exit tests have been used over the years at different universities. Some insisted on groups of four students discussing their summers while others required pair work and employed detailed rubrics breaking down ten levels of pronunciation, intonation, and even forms of discourse analysis. While it is good to dream big, most of these programs made these complex forms of grading for the purpose of making their departments look better on paper. While there is inherently nothing wrong with looking good, there is little or no educational basis for testing things such as intonation at the beginning or end of a semester. This is similar to testing the height of each student at the start and finish of each month.

So should we throw away tests altogether? I don't believe we should. What convinced me was when I was on the committee to choose scholarship students who would study abroad for a year. These students were some of the more motivated at the university. They were in the top classes and had received the highest grades yet when it came time to voice their most basic opinions or information, most could not. No doubt nerves played a part but they often do in life but students were failing at being able to say what their interests were. If the most motivated students cannot do this, then system could very well be failing them and we, as teachers, need to take a hard look at what can be done to improve using English as a tool for communication.

Enter the exit test. Students must be able to use classroom English, explain interests, talk about their weekend, daily routines, give directions and survive in a few more basic situations before graduating the program. The process is fairly simple as long as it is understood that it is a process. Start with the textbook to introduce the material. Give homework so that students think about the language outside the class. Give expansion exercises every few weeks to reinforce the target language. Move on to project work such as poster presentations that have similar themes. Finally, we can move on to the test. Ideally students will be tested by another teacher to remove bias and show that communication in English can take place with someone other than their primary instructor. Perhaps the first rule of teaching is that a teacher should never test on what has not been taught. If this process is followed with the emphasis placed on communication, the test, although somewhat artificial by design, should easily serve the purpose of showing whether or not students can communicate the most basic English. As I hinted at before though, if the students do not succeed, it is the teacher who is failing.

6.2. Grading

Universities have vastly different grading policies. Some are fair and others less so. Some want to maintain the integrity of the university and others will go to great lengths to inflate grades or pass students who barely attend class. The underlying difference in Japan as compared to universities in the West is that students who are accepted into their institutions should absolutely graduate in 4 years. This should happen regardless of whether or not each student puts forth quality work.

Although it necessary to distinguish between students who put forth a great deal of effort and those who do not, I am certainly aware of the underlying cultural reality that there is pressure to move students along. Without instituting a completely uniform system of grading, some minimum requirements should be discussed and common tests or at least tasks should be administered. Attendance minimums should be set required to be at least 67% and a dynamic grading system that takes into account the varied personalities of students should be implemented. One important factor here is that students who are not as outgoing should have an opportunity to do as well as those who are. Textbook homework that can be done alone at home should be as valuable as some classroom discussions. Most students are better at one or the other. Project work is another way to divide the responsibilities in a task and allow each student to play to their own strengths.

If a classroom is truly student-centered then grading should absolutely be transparent. Ideally, the criteria should be negotiated and then the student knows exactly what is expected for each grade. While this is not always possible, the student should still never be confused as to why they received their final grade. What I have done for years is have exit meetings with every student at which they bring a paper where they have predicted their final grade according to the previously agreed upon criteria. If I have done my job properly then the score in my iPad is not more than a few points different than the prediction of each student. Often times, this ideal will be the case 95% of the time.

So what about students who refuse to work with others? The reality is we need to find a way to help them. My first question though about behavioral problems is, are we asking for students to do something that is not natural or something that may not help them in the future. Teachers often throw students together and say repeat what is in the book when the content and the book is not realistic. Every time a student is put in pairs, it must be it must have something to do with the goals of the course and the goals of the course must match the overall production goals. If it is fake, the students will smell it. We have to avoid English learning theater and we have to put forth actual learning. The same is true for the teacher who lectures on grammar for long periods of time in Japanese. None of these things motivate students to produce language; to use language as a tool.

7. Courses

7.1.Required Courses

In many universities grammar based courses are taught by Japanese teachers of English. The more communicative courses are taught by native English speakers. One year of each class is often all that is required. It would be beneficial to make all required courses based on production and output. The

idea, also that only Japanese should teach one course and non-Japanese teach other courses is extremely outdated as nationality does not always correspond with experience, or language ability, in this global world.

A lot goes into what a course should contain but the main focus must absolutely be on what will inspire and benefit our students. The first concern, that of naming, is what some may see as simply aesthetic but I believe is a telling sign of deeper problems. By not making a commitment in the name, the curriculum is left intentionally vague for both teachers and students. The title of a course should reflect content to be learned. Names of books, movies, and yes, courses are a constant reminder of what the product should represent. Who would go to a movie titled *Movie 1*? Titles of courses should be related to the content of the course. And what should that content be? All progressive courses should contain all four skills but it is common among first-year, required courses to focus on two skills per course.

7.2. Reading and Writing

There are minor, relatively painless, changes that universities could be take to make programs look better. The first is to remove vague course titles and rename them as something more concrete, such as Reading and Writing. A somewhat more inspired name would be welcomed but at least with this reflects what is being taught. Now we must consider what students will need. The majority of students in Japanese universities range from false beginner to lower level so trying to train them to take advanced placement English tests would only be setting them up for further failure. It is important to ask what they might encounter outside the classroom? Surely how to read and write emails would be beneficial. Generally speaking, if they could conquer paragraph reading and writing then that would be some progress. Including the reading and writing of emails and how to recognize fake news on the internet, since that is where 95% of their reading takes place. The focus should be on fluency over grammar at this point. Journal writing should be employed to emphasize this. These students need to be reminded about what they do know instead of told again what they do not. After that, they should be shown how to use technology (phones) to help them communicate and understand English. Spelling is the first but not only thing that comes to mind. Finally, it is necessary to have a project where their writing can be shared. This can be done by making a class magazine or taking a day for poster presentations.

7.3. Speaking and Listening

Another basic course common at universities could be called Conversational Fluency or simply Listening and Speaking. Again, it is essential to think of what students might need in the future. What kinds of situations are they apt to encounter after they graduate? Perhaps there should be a core set of 20 questions that all students should be able to understand and respond to. Pronunciation is absolutely a worthy area of study as it has been shown to improve listening skills. There are the fundamental situations such as introducing oneself, giving and taking directions and being able to talk about interests, but the key here is for all of the teachers to get together and come to some consensus. Once the content is decided then method can be discussed. Again, if content is agreed upon and all teachers contribute to the methodology, unique and interesting ways can be found to approach the teaching of these skills.

7.4. Custom content

Ideally, the content and the method should be tailored to each department. If Law majors study English that has something to do with law then they may come to see the relevance much faster than they normally would. Those in Economics could participate in English projects that deal with stock trading. This would take a great deal of coordination but the result would be to make English classes relevant to many students who would currently see English as something to get past so that they can study their major.

The most important idea to take away here is that there should be conformity on what students should be able to do when they leave each course. The goals should be realistic and attainable. All the teachers should agree, for example that students who get credit for Freshman English will be able to read and write paragraphs and that those passing Sophomore English should be able to listen to and participate in certain basic situations. The goals should be negotiated and agreed upon based on the future needs of the students. The manner at which the teachers reach these goals is not nearly as important as whether their students can perform these tasks.

7.5. Electives

English electives either take the form of specialized areas of English or of content courses. It is important here to work to the strength of the teacher. Often times the Japanese teacher of English will be much better suited to teach a specialized TOEIC class because they have had much more experience with the test than that of a native speaker of English. Teachers should be surveyed and asked to propose courses that suit their interest and hopefully, those of a class full of students. Content courses provide a unique opportunity for both student and teacher. Usually it is a disadvantage for a non-language teacher to teach English but content courses can be a bridge that allows the teacher from another discipline to teach in their area of specialization. Still, it is essential to remember that teaching an English content course is still an English course first and content is the vehicle. Even if I have a PhD in film and I teach a course titled English through Film, my first job is to teach English. It is not to provide the basics of film studies in the native language of my students.

7.6. Departments, A Language Center and Content

Individual departments should absolutely set or help to set the language content that they hope their students will learn. They should not however, have much of anything to say with how students learn the language. Methodology should be left in the hands of the language teachers. It is common sense that language teachers should have nothing to do with department curriculum. So why is the converse not true? The reality is that non-language teachers must teach English at times but those teachers should be part of the methodology debate and take part in peer observation so that we can raise the level of instruction and learn from one another.

8. Teachers

8.1. Professional Development

Remember: in order for a perception to change one must be frustrated in one' s actions or change one' s purpose. Remember, too, that no one can force anyone else to change his perception. It might take a lifetime for anyone to create the conditions that would permit these teachers to modify their perceptions. – Neil Postman, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, 1969, p.115

The frustration is real. We hear it in the meetings and it manifests itself in the blaming of students or outside forces. Is it more difficult to teach students who are at a lower-level? Is it more difficult to teach students who are not interested in the topic? Surely it is in both cases but the responsibility lies with the teacher to create an environment where any kind of student can learn. When I hear teachers saying that I have “bad students” I know we have a teacher that has given up and needs something new. The teacher needs to rediscover why she became a teacher and often times that entails seeking out new ideas. Fortunately, the answers are not far away as Japan has a robust conference schedule. Professional development is essential at any institution of learning. While this may seem like common sense to most universities, it is far from universal in Japan. At the very least, it shows that teachers still have some stake in the game and that they are trying to continually learn and improve. It would be ideal for all teachers to attend and present at conferences so that new ideas could be shared within the program. Technology is just one example where it is easy to fall behind the times if you have not attended conferences for a couple of years. At some universities, however, it may take on an even more fundamental role. If the majority of teachers teaching English are not language teachers, professional development may take the form of retraining. This is a serious issue if language policy is being set by teachers who are not language teachers. It would be odd for language teachers to set a curriculum for other esteemed fields of study so it make sense for professors specializing in other departments to set language policy.

In many universities the hierarchy is set and is not about to change, the least that should be done is implement bi-annual professional development days for all teachers of English. The goal would be to share ideas and give presentations about what works in class. Forums to debate topics such as use of L1 in the classroom can be set up. The result should be an increase in teamwork and eventually, in trust, between all the teachers. After this is established, the road will be paved for peer classroom visits.

8.2. Class Visits

A large number of universities employ classroom observations to some degree. The places where it has worked have a robust professional development system and are used to discussing methodology without fear of reprisal. This makes sense because imagine you are not a language teacher or even if you are, and you are using ancient techniques with no long range goals then it may be very uncomfortable to open up your classroom to another teacher. Language teachers should always be open to observation in the right setting. They should have weekly visits and participate in projects and activities. The result will be that teachers motivate each other to be better and the students get used to sharing their learning with someone other than their main teacher. By asking questions to students in other classes, those students become used to using English as a tool rather than something to fulfill an

assignment. Ideally, regularly scheduled professional development conferences will lead to open classrooms and better policy making.

8.3. Evaluations

With a coordinated program based on production and progressive methodology, students and teachers will both have a better understanding as to what is expected and this will be reflected in teacher evaluations. No matter how flawed teacher evaluation systems may be, programs must take a look at each one and have conferences with each teacher to see what can be learned from one another to make our classes more stimulating. If there is no improvement in evaluations over a number of years then a reduction in classes taught should be considered. This is particularly true for the teacher who resists all change or lacks the desire to learn. It is common to get a few students in each class who are not suited to the style of certain teachers but if disapproval ratings are consistently below 50% then surely we have a problem. Many teachers are able to adapt, change methods and their numbers improve. In this case, it is the effort that matters most. To be clear, there does not have to be a correlation between the age of the teacher an ability to look at progressive teaching methods. Some of the most highly evaluated teachers are often those near retirement age. The difference between highly evaluated teachers and those ranked low usually seems to be connected to the teachers ability to try new methods and relate to the students interests. All universities should remember that good teaching is good business. Highly evaluated teachers that contribute to the program should be rewarded. Those that stonewall any attempt to change and contribute to students being unsatisfied should absolutely be noticed and interviewed with a goal toward making positive changes.

8.4. Protocol

This may seem very basic but a standard protocol for delivering teacher evaluations needs to be set. Evaluation protocol should be taken seriously as it is not out of the realm of possibilities that I teacher could alter evaluations. If evaluations are not done online, then teachers need to allow at least 20 minutes of class time to complete the form. During this time, the teacher must appoint one student to collect and deliver the completed forms to the administration. Once the forms are handed out to the students, the teacher should not be in the room. The students should be left to complete the evaluations without the teacher present, as the mere presence of the teacher may influence the scores. The teacher should leave the room and never touch the completed forms.

9. Administration

9.1. Repeaters

Inevitably, some students will get lost. For a number of reasons, some students will not meet the required number of classes and will fail to get credit. Some students fall behind because of part-time jobs or club activities other students may not get along with teachers and some have more serious problems such as health issues. There are various ways of dealing with this situation at Japanese universities. Some integrate the students with the younger students coming in. I have not seen this work well, as often the first year students lose motivation when paired with an older, less motivated, student. I

am not saying that it cannot work; I am just saying that it is the exception. Other schools have had students take a 2 to 3 hour test the next year that gives them credit for the entire course. This seems inherently unfair but I have seen it done by some of the more elite schools. Another policy is for only full-time teachers to be responsible for the repeater classes. The rationale is that these classes are difficult and it is important that the students pass and so full-time teachers are uniquely qualified to guide them. In universities where I have seen this implemented, usually less than 25% of the students registered actually show up. This becomes a productivity concern that could never be tolerated in any profitable company.

So what should be done with repeaters? One thing that is certain is that they cannot be taught in the same way that they have already failed. Surely, schools need to maximize the number of students per class so the teachers do not end up with four or five students. Would it not make more sense to move to something that is task-based and online. There are a number of companies such as English Central and Really English that provide online courses where the students can get practical skills. The students would be responsible for finishing these online tasks and the teacher would be present for any questions that students might have. They would not be expected to make a unique syllabus. The teacher could keep track of each student's progress online and meet students each week to encourage and facilitate the completion of the tasks. Since this is online and nearly self-sufficient, classes could be much larger. Instead of registering 25 for each repeater class and having 25% show up each class should register upwards of 100 students. This would fulfill the responsibility of the university to have students learn the target subject while at the same time freeing up a large number of hours for teachers to teach other classes and make class sizes smaller for the required English classes.

9.2. Class Sizes

One of the main excuses of using Japanese in the classroom even for classroom communication is classroom management. Teachers often say that in a large class, students will never quite tune in if English is spoken at first. If there are 30-35 students in a class, using Japanese is particularly tempting. In a communicative language class, 15 to 20 students are ideal. The reason for this is that it is meant to be communicative and teacher feedback is necessary in real time. Administrators often question why language classes cannot handle as many students as other classes. The answer is relatively simple. Language classes are not lectures. The more the language teacher lectures, the less language is being learned, the less language is being used as a tool for communication. Language classes are not about information. If they were then the internet surely has more information about languages than any one teacher. Language classes are about using the target language and in order for language to be used, there needs to be other humans for interaction.

9.3. Double Major

One progressive move that universities have taken is to offer special English minor programs or even an English double major. Currently, it is very difficult for employers to truly discern which students are skilled in English. Most simply go by test scores but tests are only one skill and universities have a responsibility to promote students who have extraordinary ability in a language even if they do not

have a corresponding department. One way to do this would be to set a number of courses and an advisor in the language center for students who wish to have an English major or minor listed on their diploma. Criteria would, of course, consist of a minimum number of English classes but also may mandate studying abroad for a period of time as well as taking part in clubs such as ESS and participating in English speech contests each year.

9.4. Keeping Qualified Teachers

At most universities in Japan, the majority of English classes are taught by part-time teachers so it follows that many of the valuable teachers go on to get full-time jobs. Those who are not sought after or even qualified tend to remain part-timers. So what is to be done so that this transient group can be kept consistent? The most important first step is that qualified language teachers are hired. There are times when less than ideal candidates are hired under emergency situations. The key is to implement a system where emergency situations are to be expected. So how can we set up a system where this kind of emergency never happens? In the current climate, it is not the exception but the rule that good part-time teachers will move on to better positions. Universities cannot and should not be surprised when changes occur at the last minute. To counter this fact, interviews should be held yearly whether new teachers are needed or not. Each year one or two new teachers should be accepted and approved to teach by the appropriate committees so that in the inevitable event that a valued teacher leaves at the last minute, programs are not put in a position to hire someone less qualified.

IV. Conclusion

This paper is meant to serve only as a jumping off point for debate. It is in no way comprehensive and it admittedly tries to cover too much territory. There is, however, one question that any university must have answer before taking steps to implement a coordinated English language program. Is English considered important enough to devote the time and resources to make such a program? If the answer is yes, then there are small changes that universities could make fairly quickly that would lead to big results. The first would be to have professional development sessions twice a year with all the teachers of English so the goals could be decided for each course. The step after that would be to agree on fundamental methodology. This should be a complete team effort undertaken only by those with a passion for teaching English and a desire for lifelong learning. If these are the teachers involved then there is only an upside, not only for the teachers and students, but also for the university.

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