

# Explorations in Teacher Education

## JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter

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## And Now a Word from...The Editor

Hello and welcome to the Summer edition of *Explorations in Teacher Education* (Volume 18, Issue 1), the newsletter of the Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG) of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT).

There has been quite an interval between this issue and the previous one. Sorry about that. Unfortunately, there has been a reduction in the number of submissions I have been receiving which has meant that I have had no choice but to delay publication of the next (this) issue. Why not consider writing a piece for submission this summer?

This issue of the newsletter has four articles. The first is, "Considerations of Classroom Management in the Age of "Free-Pass" Universities," by James W. Porcaro. It's a thought-provoking and informative article which I found relevant to my teaching situation. The second is, "Coordinating Curriculum and Teachers: Standardizing or Community Building?" by James Venema, in his first contribution to *Explorations in Teacher Education* since the summer 2006 edition. The third is, "A Really Charming Job – An Interview with Junior High School Teacher Takeshi Yamamoto," by Anthony Robins. Though I have been teaching in Japan for seventeen years this article contained many pieces of information about Japanese teachers that I didn't know and so was interesting. The last one is, "Seven Ways to Keep your Non-English Majors in English" by Simon Lees.

In SIG news there have again been ruminations about changing the name of the SIG. There has been some mention of calling it the "Teacher Education and Development" SIG. This would allow us to continue to be referred to as the TED SIG. If you would like to have your say on this matter, why not come to the SIG AGM at the annual JALT conference in Nagoya?

Hope you enjoy the issue,

Simon Lees,

Editor,

*Explorations in Teacher Education*

## **Considerations of Classroom Management in the Age of “Free-Pass” Universities**

**James W. Porcaro, Toyama University of International Studies <porcaro(at)tuins.ac.jp>**

### **1. Introduction**

Demography is destiny, it is said. Perhaps nowhere is this adage more applicable than in Japan. The social, cultural and economic fabric of the nation is being transformed by unrelenting change of its population structure. The effects apply as well to university education. The 18-year-old population in Japan peaked at 2.05 million in 1992 and has fallen steadily to 1.21 million at present as a result of one of the lowest fertility rates in the world. This accounts for a 41 percent drop in the pool of high school graduates from which all incoming university students are drawn. As a consequence, the phenomenon of “free-pass” universities was defined more than a decade ago as those that accept virtually all students who apply, regardless of whether a formal test and/or interview must be taken for admission, in order to sustain enrollment for survival (Shuukan Asahi, 2000). By 2009, nearly half of all the private universities in Japan failed to meet their enrollment quotas for that academic year.

As a result, most universities, particularly those that do not enjoy a high level of prominence, are increasingly filling places with students that are found lacking in fundamental academic skills and orientation for university level studies. Many of the students entering universities on a “free pass” bring to campus the baggage of poor and inappropriate academic and personal behavior that includes: coming to classes late or not at all; not bringing required books and papers or even notebooks, pens and pencils; not doing homework; lazing about and having private conversations in class, usually in the rearmost of the room; exiting the classroom to use their mobile phones; and exhibiting manners that are less than those expected of mature and courteous young adults (Porcaro, 2002). Ironically, the much maligned university entrance examination system seems to have served in the past at least to impart to students a respect for effort, self-discipline, and individual responsibility. Now, as more and more students do not have to go through this rigorous system to enter a university, there seems to be a widespread breakdown of this ethic.

Thus, in many university instructional circumstances, classroom management has taken on a much more important role as teachers must address the particular needs of these students in order to make it possible for them to attain a worthy level of academic performance along with personal growth and development in their university life.

### **2. Learner needs and teacher needs**

Teaching English to low-proficiency learners with a low academic orientation at university involves

some singular considerations. In many instances these students take only one general English course to fulfill curriculum credit requirements. It has no specific purpose for them and almost none of them will take any further English courses ever. Thus, the English course stands by itself. Moreover, many students simply are not comfortable in an academic environment and lack certain basic expected behaviors, attitudes, and discipline for university studies. Their sense of the expectations of their teachers is often inappropriate or confused. Furthermore, they surely have had quite unsuccessful experiences in the previous six years of middle school and high school and have come to fear and feel hostile toward any English language instruction. These factors, however, should not be seen as impossible impediments to a successful and satisfying course of instruction. Indeed, they provide a challenging opportunity for teachers to apply their craft and achieve meaningful and productive outcomes. Classroom management is an essential element of this undertaking.

Teaching English in these circumstances is a very personal endeavor in many respects. Teachers need to establish their own mission for the course of instruction based on their personal educational philosophy and practical instructional experience and expertise. The instructional materials and methodologies employed will be devised by each teacher to fit the defined goals and objectives of the mission which suit the limited English language proficiency and academic preparedness of the students. Likewise, the manner of classroom management that is essential to an effective course of instruction will be implemented according to the teacher's own sensibilities and personal skills.

Finally, for teachers to sustain their efforts in this setting, their motivation must be firmly rooted and well-founded. It must go beyond simply a strong desire to advance students' learning and their personal development. Often that is not enough to sustain teachers for long when they encounter mounting frustrations and disappointments in their attempts to fulfill those ends. They may become disillusioned and demoralized all too soon. At the same time, it is no more than a pretext to claim, after all, that learning is the responsibility of each student, as a means to relieve these feelings of deficiency. I may say, personally, in every lesson I expect from students what I know they are capable of doing and I use all of my skills and force of personality to have them approach that end and to do so willingly and with satisfaction. I am exacting and demanding in my classes, and I am rewarded for that. However much learner autonomy is a goal, my students' learning is always my responsibility and I am always accountable for it. Yet, I believe there must be something more to it. Teachers must have "fire in the belly" and simply love to be in a classroom, love the process of teaching itself, for all its complexities, and be in it for themselves as much as for their students. Indeed, meaning for me as a teacher is drawn from and defined by the daily classroom experience itself, and each teacher must construct that meaning for themselves. The process might be said to

be existential in nature as we make choices freely based on our experiences, beliefs, and outlook, and take full responsibility for the teacher we are.

### **3. Implementing classroom management**

In my view, classroom management refers to instructional planning and the entire instructional process. It takes in not only matters of discipline that may need to be addressed with students but also, much more essentially, the relationship between teacher and students and, indeed, everything that happens in the classroom.

Teachers must establish an appropriate academic atmosphere in the classroom. They must have clear, precise rules and procedures for the courses they teach which are communicated to students in a simple, easily understood way. These will refer to attendance and absences, class supplies and lesson materials, behavior and manners in the classroom, performance of class work, completion of homework assignments, and the criteria for evaluation and giving a grade for the course. It is imperative that students understand that the rules are real and the sanctions will be enacted as defined. At the same time, they must recognize the fairness of the rules and accept them for the good of order. Students with low language proficiency and academic preparedness need a well-structured learning environment which they perceive to be humane, fair, safe, and within their capabilities to survive in. It is absolutely necessary in teaching such classes that the students trust the teacher. The teacher's moral authority is based on students' perception of their honesty, fairness, genuine caring, and professionalism.

Students must know that when they attempt to act as directed by the teacher they will be capable of performing the task to at least an acceptable level and that they will not be frustrated, embarrassed, or demoralized in the English classroom. Students must be enabled to feel confidence in themselves and show respect for one another in the classroom.

Lemov (2010, p. 213) makes distinctly clear that it is utterly false to think that warmth and strictness in the classroom are opposites. The teacher must be both; indeed, often at exactly the same time. "When you are clear, consistent, firm, and unrelenting and at the same time positive, enthusiastic, caring, and thoughtful, you start to send the message to students that having high expectations is part of caring for and respecting someone. This is a very powerful message."

Sulich (2004, p. 33) states convincingly that, "expectations and perceptions influence classroom interaction from the beginning." She notes that research among younger students shows that they see the teacher in six dimensions. These views have direct relevance as well for the university students who are the subject of this paper and teachers would do well to keep them in mind. The

dimensions are: keeps order vs. cannot keep order; teaches vs. does not teach; explains difficult concepts vs. does not explain well; interesting lessons vs. boring lessons; fair vs. unfair; friendly vs. unfriendly.

Issa (2009) points out the importance of incorporating organizational skills development into instructional routines, as students lacking such basic skills have significant difficulty learning. Establishing appropriate rules and procedures for classroom instruction teaches students to follow a basic organizational system that provides the scaffolding to support their learning. It also allows them to maintain such a system on their own and helps prepare them to cope with other university courses and the realities they will face when they enter the workforce. In task-based language teaching (TBLT), in particular, there are organizational requirements implicit in the assigned tasks themselves for students to proceed with their successful completion. Thus, the nature of this instructional approach, for one, provides the kind of training in independent skills that many low proficiency students need. Classroom management, then, is seamlessly interwoven into the organization and actualization of the assigned tasks for students.

One often neglected aspect of good classroom management is the physical classroom environment itself. Teachers might learn something on this point from the application of criminology to pedagogy. The “broken windows theory” is based on the idea “that observing disorder can have a psychological effect on people” (Criminology, 2008). The name is taken from the observation that a few broken windows in an abandoned building usually leads to more shattered windows in that building and others, along with other petty and serious crimes in the neighborhood. The theory has been tested experimentally by researchers who conclude that one example of disorder can encourage another. “The tendency for people to behave in a particular way can be strengthened or weakened depending on what they observe others to be doing.” The message for teachers is that when they do not seem to care that students enter the classroom late or chat while the teacher is speaking, or that the front board is not clean or that students’ seats are not ordered or leftover papers and canned drinks remain on desks, students then assume the teacher does not care either about the lesson he presents or whatever students do or do not do. Conversely, when the classroom itself is well-ordered and stated rules and procedures are implemented, students assume that the lesson is important for the teacher and they more likely will assume the importance of the lesson for themselves as well and respond accordingly.

TBLT is one mode of instruction that promotes responsible and autonomous practice on the part of students through its indispensable element of pair or group work. In its operation, even classes of low proficiency university students who lack a fundamental academic orientation can approach achievement of some of the principal aspects of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Students can readily perceive that they are positively interdependent with their partner(s) for the accomplishment of the assigned tasks. At the same time, they recognize that the teacher holds each one individually accountable for the performance of the tasks. The face-to-face interaction among students in their cooperative effort addresses the development of personal relationships and social skills essential for their mutual success in the completion of the tasks. For many Japanese university students, after six years of rigid teacher-centered instruction through middle school and high school, these skills have atrophied since their active use during elementary school years (see Porcaro, 2001). Teachers can maximize the opportunity for students to act in these ways and achieve these ends by effectively facilitating, managing, and monitoring their work.

Classroom management is well served when grade assessment for each student is compiled on the basis of their participation and effort in course tasks, and consideration of performance outcomes is leveraged on the linguistic capabilities of each individual student, rather than from the results of formal examinations whose nature is inherently detrimental for students at low levels of language proficiency and academic preparedness. In fact, they recognize and respond positively to the justice of such a system. No student who enters a language class in the circumstances addressed in this paper should be, in effect, condemned from the start of the course to a poor or failing grade merely because they have low proficiency in the foreign language due to whatever reasons from prior experience. At the same time, students understand well their personal accountability for their course grade with such a system and they act accordingly in the classroom.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In his essay “Language and The Human Spirit”, Jim Cummins (2003) observes that, “there is an inseparable linkage between the conceptions of language and human identity that we infuse in our classroom instruction.” In the context of the instructional choices we make, he notes that we must examine, “the extent to which the classroom interactions we orchestrate build on and affirm the cultural, linguistic, intellectual and personal identities that students bring to our classrooms.” In the setting of university classes with students having weak academic preparedness and orientation, along with low levels of English language proficiency, not only the mode of instruction, but also more fundamentally the foundation set by good classroom management enables this humanistic educational endeavor to be achieved. Teachers, in fact, make all the difference in the quality of education for our students. Our exercise of good classroom management along with effective instruction will serve both our students and us well.

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The content of this article is drawn from a longer paper titled "Task-Based Language Teaching for Low-Proficiency Students at University" which will appear in the *Journal of the Faculty of Contemporary Society, Toyama University of International Studies*, Volume 3, in March 2011.

## Coordinating Curriculum and Teachers: Standardizing or Community Building?

James Venema, Nagoya Women's University, <[dfhj\(at\)hhh.com](mailto:dfhj@hhh.com)>

“You can’t tell me what to do. I’m a university teacher!” Despite my best efforts I was running into precisely the confrontation I had tried to avoid. The trigger in this case was a final oral test for 1st year students in a conversation class where teachers swapped classes to administer and evaluate the oral test. As a teacher coordinating part-timers in a university language program moving from a situation where teachers had been operating with complete autonomy for years to a fully coordinated program, I was right in the line of fire when the perhaps inevitable confrontation occurred. The idea of curriculum coordination, particularly at the tertiary level, remains a controversial one. My own experience, including painful mistakes and miscommunications, has taught me that part of the problem lies in a lack of consensus on what coordination, or even curriculum, actually means. This can lead to the situation where teachers and program developers believe they are talking about the same thing where the underlying conceptions may be radically different. In this article I would like to outline two contrasting extremes, ‘standardization’ and ‘professional community building’.

### ***Curriculum Coordination as Standardization***

When working towards curriculum standardization the goal is clear – ensuring that teachers in the same course are teaching the mandated syllabus. A number of steps are required.

1. Write detailed syllabi for individual courses. The detail of the written curriculum will vary widely, but the starting point for many programs is the selection of a textbook. Some programs will move one step further, particularly where different teachers might be sharing the same textbook, and include class-by-class descriptions of what needs to be covered. Most syllabi will also include descriptions of how students will be evaluated, perhaps with a common test, written or otherwise. A few might even go so far as to include descriptions of classroom activities. What they all tend to share in this approach is a conception of a curriculum as apart from any individual teacher – something to be followed. I would also suggest that one other characteristic is an inherent tendency towards stasis. After all, the curriculum writers would likely have put a lot of time and thought into writing the curriculum and would typically be reluctant to make major changes.
2. Ensure that teachers follow the curriculum. A curriculum isn’t worth the paper it is written on if individual teachers are still doing exactly as they please. Teachers can be monitored in a variety of ways, classroom observations, coordinating meetings, common tests, and even (in one situation I encountered) by curriculum coordinators interrogating students on what

they were doing in their classes. No matter how the monitoring is done 'good' teachers are the ones who follow the curriculum whereas those teachers who deviate too far can be seen as problems. The goal here is conformity.

3. The relative success of the program tends to be defined within certain parameters. "How successfully was the curriculum carried out?" is a much more likely question than "Are the goals as laid out appropriate and meaningful?" Similarly, "How have the textbook activities been successfully incorporated in classes?" is more likely than "Are there other materials that would better meet the needs of students?" And finally "How closely have teachers been following the curriculum?" is far more likely than "Have any teachers been able to innovate successfully?"

### ***Curriculum coordination as professional community building***

The emphasis in this approach is the teachers themselves. The teachers, and their interactions with students in the classroom, are integral and dynamic components of the curriculum. The process would involve a number of cyclical steps.

Establish common objectives for teachers. Coordination here still assumes teachers need to work towards converging objectives. This is the essential starting point which makes further dialogue meaningful. These objectives would need to be defined in terms of student learning. In this case "the 3 conditionals" would not serve as an objective unless it was defined how students use them and/or demonstrate comprehension. Similarly, the objectives would need to be measurable. There needs to be some way in which the success, or the lack of it, can be measured at the end of a course. Working backwards from goals, there would need to be some ideas regarding classroom materials and practices. Converging objectives would obviously put parameters on what teachers would be free to do in classes, but they would have leeway in responding to student needs, using their own creativity to help students meet, and perhaps even exceed, common objectives.

Provide the opportunity for teachers to meet and share information on what they are doing in classes and success, or lack of it, in getting students to meet learning objectives. The open and frank exchange of ideas regarding classroom practices and student learning is a key point. In conversations directed by converging goals, all aspects of classroom practice including activities, homework, assessment, and individual student needs are open to discussion. Even the goals themselves can be brought into the discussion where they appear inappropriate or could simply be clarified and improved. The dialogue itself would be guided not just by individual opinion or personal preference but by the results, student learning. These results would necessarily be measured in a variety of ongoing ways, including student engagement in classes, written

homework and essays, final and mid-term tests; in fact they would be measured in all the ways that teachers typically reflect on their teaching. The only difference is the reflections would be carried out in teacher teams, with the goal of arriving at some reasonable consensus on success or the lack of it.

Innovations resulting from teacher dialogues are incorporated in the future curriculum. Rather than being static, the evolving curriculum would continuously reflect the insights and innovations of contributing teachers, including classroom practices, materials, and assessment. These innovations could be recorded in a constantly evolving written curriculum, as well as materials including student handbooks, classroom handouts, tests, and the like. Still, the most critical source of information would remain ongoing teacher dialogues.

### **Choosing between alternatives**

Despite the rather controlling description of a standardized curriculum described here, the choice between the approaches described might not be as straightforward as one may assume. A standardized curriculum offers the security of stability, and typically demands less time from participating teachers. Teachers, particularly where they might feel under-qualified or underpaid, might prefer standardization as the less threatening, or time-consuming, alternative. In addition, the mere selection of a textbook, and even common tests, can leave some leeway for teachers, provided they are seen to be 'following the curriculum'. However, for teachers approaching their job as a vocation, who engage in a continual process of reflection regarding classroom practices and learning, standardization could be a stifling imposition. In my experience it is precisely this approach to teacher coordination that has generated the most controversy, particularly where teachers resent a lack of opportunity for input and innovation. Provided the relative demands on their time remain realistic (perhaps a dangerously vague term), I would suggest most teachers would prefer the professional community approach. In any case, it seems clear to me that it is the approach that is more likely to result in better teachers, and greater learning gains, over time.

The reality is that teacher and/or curriculum coordination will appear in many guises between, and even outside, the two relative extremes described here. There is also no doubt that the immediate educational context is the ultimate determiner of what is, and is not possible. Still, the next time you hear curriculum coordination being simply equated with exerting administrative control over reluctant teachers, you might ask yourself whether the problem lies not in the idea of coordinating teachers but in the way in which the coordination is being carried out.

**A Really Charming Job –  
An Interview with Junior High School English Teacher Takeshi Yamamoto**

**Anthony Robins, Aichi University of Education, <anthonycrobins(at)yahoo.com>**

Previous issues of 'Explorations in Teacher Education' have featured interviews with JETs (Japanese Exchange Teachers), also known as ALTs. In this issue we turn to a mainstay of Japanese English education, the local junior high English teacher.

AR: Takeshi. You've now been a teacher for how long?

TY: This is my sixth year.

AR: The first question I would like to ask you is, 'How does the reality of teaching compare with what you expected before?'

TY: Before I became a teacher, I heard this job needs much amount of work and paperwork. Of course, I heard that it would be very hard to keep being a good teacher. But the reality is that the amount of work is over what I expected. I had expected that it would be hard to prepare each English lesson, but the reality is that I'm really really busy for other things. For example, last school year, I was in charge of the student council and for this school year, I'm in charge of the school trip. From the first year I have been coaching the boys' basketball club.

AR: How about your working hours? On a typical day, when do you start and when do you finish?

TY: Usually on weekdays, I have a morning practice for club activity, so I come to school at about 7.30 and morning practice starts at 7.35. Classes finish at around 4 in the afternoon, but I have to coach basketball again until about 6 pm. After that, I can do my paperwork. It's not only paperwork, but also preparation for the English lessons. I'm in charge of one homeroom class (3.6) this year, so I have lots to do for the homeroom class.

AR: So, what time do you usually leave school?

TY: Yesterday, I left school at 10.30pm, but sometimes 11 or 12. The earliest I leave is 9.

AR: This year are you teaching all the grades?

TY: No, only 3rd grade.

AR: What is your average class size?

TY: 35 to 40, maximum 40. This year it's 35.

AR: Do you think it's good to have 35 or 40 students? Wouldn't you prefer smaller classes?

TY: I do prefer smaller classes. 35 is too much for me, too many for me.

AR: How do you think it affects the teaching and learning, having 35 or 40 students?

TY: It's really hard. I want to teach each student in each way, so in that case I should have 35 different ways for each student, so it's really difficult.

AR: So you would like to do individualised teaching really. How do you feel about the amount of English and the amount of Japanese which is used in classes? The government is encouraging English, especially in senior high schools and also in elementary schools. Not using Japanese, only English. How do you feel?

T: I think it's a good thing. It's good, but in fact it is really, really difficult. The level of English for each student varies very widely, so it's really hard. In my school we have three regular classes and one oral class each week. In the oral class I try to use English as much as possible, so when giving instructions I try to use English. In the regular classes, I think I put much more importance on comprehension, so I don't use English so much.

A: In the 3rd year classes of junior high you are teaching now, can you tell us which coursebook you are using?

T: 'New Horizon'.

A: Did you use a similar book when you were a student?

T: Yes, almost the same.

A: Can I ask you, did you have any choice in choosing 'New Horizon'?

T: No, I didn't have any choice.

A: So that was decided by the city?

T: I think so.

A: 'New Horizon' is quite a typical coursebook. How do you feel about it? Do you feel positive?

T: I think positive, because the balance is really good. Reading, conversation section, and some songs in English. It's a really good balance, well-balanced. That's why I like it.

A: Mentioning songs. When I came here recently, you started off the lesson with a song. Why do you do that?

T: I just want to make an atmosphere for studying English. I think it's good.

A: Connected with using English is the system of ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers). This year, I've heard that you don't have any. Why's that?

T: I heard it's the city's decision. Money! A financial issue.

A: But anyway, you have had experience before this year of working with ALTs. Which countries did they usually come from?

T: Two from England, two from New Zealand, and one from America.

A: Having had the experience with ALTs, was it positive for you? If so, in what ways?

T: I think for students, it is really good to have chances to hear actually how native speakers really speak and how native speakers really are acting, with every movement. It's sometimes really new for the students, so sometimes it can be good to motivate students for English learning.

A: So, that was interesting. It's not just the way they speak, but even the way they move! So, this year, do you miss not having ALTs?

T: Yes, I wish we could have ALTs, but we're managing!

A: You talked about ALTs' influence on children, through motivation and body language. How about for you?

T: For me? It's really good, of course. For example, like this year we don't have any ALTs, so the chances to speak English for me are really reduced to almost nothing, but when we have those ALTs we have no choice but to speak English. Sometimes that made me think I need to brush up my English.

A: Coming back to club activities, club activities are very important in Japanese schools, especially at junior high level. How do you feel? They are very time-consuming, aren't they? Do you feel positive or negative?

T: It's really hard. I think it should be more balanced. It's really time-consuming, but I'm a coach of basketball, so I feel very close to the students who belong to it, closer than the other students. Yes, that's a positive thing, but the negative thing - it takes time, too much time.

A: You once told me that the way you deal with club activities, is that you think of it as a hobby. Before you started coaching basketball, were you experienced at basketball?

T: No, not at all! My main sport was baseball.

A: By the way, how many members are in the basketball club?

T: Right now, 30. Around 30.

A: Do you have many chances to develop your English and your English teaching?

T: Almost no chances. I don't think it's good. I wish I could have more time.

A: Do you belong to any kind of teaching groups like JALT?

T: No, but I'd like to.

A: How about your own future? As you said, you have been teaching for five and a half years. At the end of this academic year, next March, you actually have to move. How do you feel about moving?

T: I feel it's positive. We should move because when a school is different, the atmosphere is different. Students are also different, teachers are different, so it's O.K.. It could be my motivation. I think we teachers have various ways to approach each student, so that will be good for me.

A: What will you miss when you leave this school?

T: I'll not try to think that way. Around that time maybe I'll miss something, of course, for the third-year students, I've been with them for three years, so I feel a special emotion for them.

A: During these six years, how many years have you been a homeroom teacher?

T: Five years.

A: And, as you said, the last three years, you've been with the same students as they get older.

T: Yes.

A: You came from a university of education and students now, of course, are thinking about becoming teachers. What advice would you give to students who are still studying now?

T: If they think about the salary, I don't recommend to be a teacher. But this job is really charming, because we can dive in to their education. ... How can I say? As they grow, we can grow up. We have many chances to sympathise with them. Like I said, many chances to grow up together. In our workplaces there are many emotions and we can share them. That's very charming and there's no other job like that. It's really special.

A: Of course, you also have to deal with parents. Sometimes in the media there are reports about 'monster parents'? How do you find dealing with parents?

T: I try to adjust to each parent. I try to have much communication with parents also, not only with the students. Communication is important. When sometimes students do bad things, I never miss the chance to keep in touch.

A: Finally, I'll ask you to tell me three things which you'd really like to change about his job? What are they?

T: First, I wish I could have much smaller classes. I wish I could have a 15 to 20 class size. That would be easier to teach each student in each way. Secondly, I wish I could have much more chance to brush up my English skills, and if I had much more time I would maybe go to an English conversation school or, if I had much, much more time, I would go abroad to study English.

A: And your third wish?

T: I wish I could have my own English classroom. I could organize the whole classroom!

A: Thank you very much.

T: Thank you (it was around 7.30 pm, so Takeshi then returned to paperwork!).

Anthony Robins works in the International Cultural Studies course at Aichi University of Education and enjoys keeping in contact with past students.

Takeshi Yamamoto teaches in a junior high school about 30 minutes from Aichi University of Education, his former university. It has a school roll of around 700 and he works with five other English teachers.

## Seven Ways to Keep your Non-English Majors in English

Simon Lees, Kinjo Gakuin University, <simich(at)gol.com>

Are you teaching non-English major classes? Or are your English majors not very keen to stay in English because they are in a monolingual classroom? Anyway, here are seven ways to keep them in English!

1. Put a tape recorder in front of them.

Yes, it's that simple! I've found that it usually works best if there is a tape in it and the record button has been pressed but tests have demonstrated that the mere presence of a tape recorder on the table causes the students to stay in the target language for longer!

On a slightly more serious note I have found that if I have my students do free conversation at the beginning of class while I am checking their homework and they record their conversations, that they do indeed stay in English for most of the time. Have them organised into small groups, three or four works best. Then they don't feel under pressure to perform as individuals and their friends can help them with vocabulary lookup and turn-taking.

2. Have them do an information exchange crossword where they are explaining something that is Japanese.

A good example of this is in the 'Talk A Lot' textbook. Because all of the items they have to explain are familiar to them they can free up more of their cognitive processing power to concentrate on their English. Other examples of this phenomenon are activities where the students have to describe or answer questions about pictures of very Japanese scenes. Good examples are contained in "Explain Yourself! An English Conversation Book For Japan" by Nicholson and Sakuno.

3. Make them do presentations.

This can result in a monotonous memorization so you will have to demonstrate how to give a proper presentation and encourage them to use keywords and cue cards and so on. Providing a broad theme is good, such as, sports or hobbies or "how-to" presentations. Within the theme though, the fact that the students get to choose and prepare what they are interested in, seems to provide a large dose of motivation to stay in the target language. Obviously if they stay completely in the target language they run the risk of having their audience not understand what they are talking about. This problem can be solved by encouraging them to use simple sentences and easy vocabulary and to use mime and gesture as much as possible. It is also a chance to get them to

pre-teach any difficult vocabulary by, for example, preparing a gloss. Obviously, other strategies are possible too. If you have access to computer resources then you can take the opportunity to teach them some real-world skills such as using Powerpoint. However, beware the “death-by-Powerpoint” syndrome!

#### 4. Play games in English.

Many simple games can be played in the classroom but for low-level students it can be quite a challenge to stay in English. It is best if the staying in English becomes part of the game. For example if they are playing a game like Uno you can impose a new rule where anyone who uses their L1 has to draw two cards (a standard penalty in the game). You may well have to have a “game-playing” English class to prepare for this, but that is no bad thing. I have found that having some game-playing English cheat-sheets in with the game is helpful as well.

#### 5. Fine them!

At the beginning of the year you can agree with the students to have something akin to a swear box which they have to pay into every time they stray from the target language. This one tends to work better if the proceeds are going to fund a prize or better yet, a class party, rather than being perceived as an alternate revenue-stream for the teacher!

#### 6. Choose an appropriate textbook.

It may be that you have no input on the textbook selection but if you do, then try to match your students with the textbook, in terms of content and context as much as possible. As most of the English classes taught at university level are for non-English majors, many of the textbooks on the market are inappropriate choices. For example, many four-skills textbooks tend to be focused on business English aimed at adults who are working and the context is usually outside Japan. In my experience textbooks published in Japan aimed specifically at university students, such as the EFL Press publications fit the bill in terms of appropriateness to the students' context. Because the activities and situations presented are familiar to the students they are less likely to be intimidated or alienated and they are far more likely to stay in English as they interact with the book with genuine interest. I believe it is a similar effect to that found in extensive reading where learners gain a lot from reading books where there is not too much unfamiliar vocabulary and where the interest level is high because they have chosen the reading material for themselves.

#### 7. If all else fails, get good, motivated students.

If you have good, well-motivated students to start with, you have much less trouble keeping them in the target language. This could be the necessary impetus to drive you to get a better job, perhaps at a more prestigious institution where the calibre of the students is higher. Go for it!







## **Be published In *Explorations In Teacher Education!***

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**Font:** Arial 11 point, single spaced, one line between paragraphs, SINGLE space between sentences.

**Notes:** Please include a catchy title, your name and professional affiliation, an e-mail address to go at the top of the article, and a 75-100 word bio-data for the end.

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## **What is the Teacher Education SIG?**

A network of foreign language instructors dedicated to becoming better teachers and helping each other teach more effectively, the TE SIG has been active since 1993. Our members teach at universities, high schools, and language centres both in Japan and other countries. The TE SIG focuses on five areas: action research, teacher reflection, peer-based development, teacher motivation, and teacher training and supervision.

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