

## Creating an Excellent English Department in a Japanese Junior College

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### すぐれた短期大学英語科の条件

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#### <要約>

新たに創設された短期大学英語科が、内実ともにすぐれたものだと評価されるには、どうすればよいか。この論文では二つの点に言及した。一つは、諸々の設備の問題。一つは英語学習プログラムの問題。設備に関してはとりわけ、よく吟味された図書を整備が必要なこと。また学習プログラムに関しては、英作文を英語の中核と考えること。つまり、読み、書き、話し、聞くという英語の四技能を、英作文を通して、トータルに身につけさせることを強調し、その工夫を提示した。

#### I The New English Department

The English department is barely a year old. It belongs to a college with a respectable academic reputation. Its faculty is good and comes from diverse specializations particularly suited to teaching English as a Second Language on the elementary and advanced levels. It is however, too young to have established a reputation. What factors will make it not just a good but excellent department ?

A splendid faculty is unquestionably its biggest asset, yet alone is not enough. The department must also attract good students and draw the interest of scholars in other educational institutions. For this it requires outstanding facilities and an outstanding program. If it cannot do better what other colleges and universities do, it can at least offer something that other schools do not. Ideally it should do both. But covering only the freshman and sophomore years puts considerable limitations on the English department's curriculum and what it can realistically hope to achieve.

#### II Facilities

How good a college is can most often be determined by the size of its library. Of course, this is not an absolute rule. A school may have a million books, yet few of these may be up-to-date or even worth reading. Or if the books are excellent, large

collections may be closed to all except favored specialists. Or they may be so deteriorated as to be unusable. A million books for a large university with thousands of faculty members and tens of thousands of students and a large diversity of programs offering degrees up to the Ph.D.'s is not as good as half-a-million books for a small college with only a few specialized programs. The Dropsie University ( Philadelphia, Pennsylvania ), with few faculty members and students and limited specialized studies for example has only around 130,000 volumes in its library, but its accreditation allows it to grant Ph.D.'s in Hebrew and Judaic Studies and in Near Eastern Studies. Similarly, the California Institute of Technology with merely 193,383 volumes is among American technological universities surpassed in prestige only by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which itself has slightly less than a million volumes. All things being equal, however, the more books and other items a school library has the better it is as a center of learning.

Unfortunately a small college, especially a two year one, is forced to limit its collections by its budget and available space. A junior college English department's bibliophilic ambitions are forced to be more moderate than those of English departments in larger (generally four year) institutions. Nevertheless, this does not mean that a Junior College English department cannot compete with better endowed English departments.

When college and university libraries list their holdings they will often refer to not books but "items." "Items" can include works of art, musical scores, unbound periodicals, microfilm collections, etc. Microfilm collections are especially good investments for colleges and departments with limited funds and space. Microfilm is relatively cheap and takes up far less space than books. It also requires less care than books and is less difficult to replace if damaged or stolen. Extra copies of particularly important documents can be made at very little cost.

A good English department will subscribe to one or more of the Japanese English-language daily newspapers to several foreign English language weekly and monthly periodicals (examples: *The Guardian*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*; *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harpers*) and perhaps a number of quarterlies (examples: *The American Scholar*, *Paris Review*). It should also have journals bound after a specified number of issues and newspapers microfilmed before being discarded. (An extensive microfilm file of English-language periodicals published in Japan would be invaluable, being of interest to Japanologists as well as scholars of English.)

English language periodicals generally unavailable in Japan are important assets. *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *In These Times* are three excellent American publications which cannot be found at American Centers or in bookstores.

Video movies, floppy disks and tape recordings are also good investments that are cheap and easily stored. But tapes, unlike the others, do not necessarily require

expensive and space-consuming equipment. Tapes need only pocket-sized recorders or players for use. In the United States, tapes of English and American literature originally made for the blind, have become popular with commuters who listen to them while going to work. *The Japan Times* (June 24, 1982) reported that "the New-track service began in the U.S. two years ago [ 1980 ] by Talking Books Publishing Co. of Denver Colo., claims 11,000 American subscribers." Such tapes would allow blind students to study English with greater ease (as would books and periodicals in brail) and would have general popularity as well.

Collections of first special or autographed editions of British and American literary works add to an English department's prestige, but, in my opinion, are of little scholarly or aesthetic use. (Exceptions would be illuminated manuscripts and books like those published by William Morris's Kelmscott Press; these are works of art.) Even if such volumes are donated to the college, it is questionable whether insuring and maintaining them is worth the expense.

How many items would constitute a respectable quantity for a two-year college library? Here are some figures for several good four-year American liberal arts colleges: Hollins College -- 125,000; Mills College -- 166,000; Reed College -- 260,000; Mount Holyoke College -- 420,000; Smith College -- 853,802. For a two-year college with around 1500 students, 125,000 items would probably be adequate (though not entirely satisfactory for in-dept scholarship) and more than 800,000 items would probably be more than adequate for almost everyone most of the time. The more English-related items, the better it is for the English department of course.

Though a college and departmental libraries are the most important facilities, language laboratories, special reading, listening and viewing rooms should not be neglected. Also, word processors and personal computers made available to faculty and students would enhance an English department's quality. If this is not feasible, the English department's main office should computerize as much as it can afford. It is now possible to send information via word processor over the telephone to another word processor. In the near future colleges and universities will be linked by computers and much information which is now conveyed through the mail and tedious inter-campus loans will be electronically transmitted.

### III The Program

Fine facilities are only *tatema*e if the English program is second rate. This is where many English departments in Japan fail. Whether at famous universities or not, too many produce graduates who, very simply, do not know English above a primitive level. That is, not only are their speaking and hearing abilities mediocre (which can be forgiven if they have had little direct contact with English-speaking cultures) but

they are also poor readers and poorer writers. And after years of "grammar-translation" most cannot translate. They become dreadful scholars and as classroom teachers pass on the bad habits they have learned to the next generation. The real pity is that probably most sincerely believe that they are competent in English. Indeed, the educational system reenforces their illusions.

The "grammar-translation" method, commonly used in secondary education, does not work. One cannot learn a language by only memorizing grammatical rules and disconnected sentences. The damage done to students' minds by Japanese education, however, goes beyond this. Japanese education still uses the out dated "mug" and "jug" method of instruction. The student (the "mug") is an empty vessel into which the teacher (the "jug") pours knowledge. The teacher is presumed to possess absolute truth--whether mathematical, linguistic or moral--which the student cannot dispute. This is the worst environment for creativity or critical thought.

Critical thinking, the basis of modern education, is virtually untaught in Japanese elementary and secondary schools. For this reason, though Japanese students do well on tests requiring memorization and calculation, they tend not to do well on those requiring creativity and deductive reasoning. Minds not subject to dialectic tend to grow numb. Regarding studies linked to English, not only does the "mug and jug" method leave students unprepared to do independant reseach, it does not prepare them to understand the authors they will study. Western literature since the Renaissance has been created in a culture where originality, individualism and the inexorable questioning of established truths and authority has been the rule, often in the face of cruel oppression--a mental atmosphere alien to Japanese education's totalitarian world view.

Our role as college teachers is to undo the damage done to our students by secondary education. When this is admitted by English departments, they frequently assume that the problem is simply that students have difficulty in speaking English because they are too passive or shy, had had little previous practice and do not like English because its instruction in high school was difficult and boring. English departments that follow the latest trends in the teaching of English as a second language may jump to a natural but erroneous conclusion: that "English conversation" filled with lots of easy-going chatter and fun activities is the necessary antidote to "grammar-translation."

There is a kernel of truth in this point of view. Word games, comic books, friendly chit-chat are better than treating language study like an autopsy. But the problem goes deeper than shyness or passivity, lack of practice or aversion to English. Students are passive because they have been taught that being empty vessels is their proper role. They have been conditioned to view knowledge as having little use value beyond achieving high scores on tests. "English conversation" does not really challenge the basis of "grammar-translation" any more than a tasty dessert challenges a badly cooked

main course. In "English conversation" students might indeed play the games the teacher tells them to play and on cue chatter endlessly, regurgitating all the "useful expressions" they know, but has anything radically changed? Students still meekly follow orders and in speaking perhaps do not understand or care about meaning any more than they did when cramming for multiple-choice English tests.

"English conversation" (as in "I want to learn English conversation") is itself a misnomer. In English, as in all other language, conversation only occurs when two or more people have something to say to one another. Conventions aside, conversation does not, as "English conversation" implies, exist in the abstract, like grammar. The Japanese for "English conversation," *eikaiwa*, is indirectly racist or elitist. Generally defined as speaking informally in English (or "practicing" English), "*eikaiwa*" suggests that either English is unsuitable for sophisticated conversation or that sophisticated conversation is the exclusive property of experts. Whatever the case, *eikaiwa* represents false categorization, like calling Japanese *nihongo*, when used by foreigners and *kokugo* when used by Japanese. (Is there "Japanese conversation" or *Nihonkaiwa* or *Kokukaiwa*?) "English conversation," as generally taught in Japan, is small talk and tends to reduce the "native speaker" to a secondrate entertainer, an exotic creature to be gawked at, giggled at and asked impertinent personal questions. Besides being morally disgusting, this has as little to do with serious work in English as "grammar-translation."

I submit that the nucleus of an English program should not be "conversation" or "grammar-translation" but composition--as defined by its original Latin roots: *to put together*. The composition class should, as instruction in the first language, bring together the skills of writing, reading, listening and oral expression.

In American college freshman English courses, students are given reading assignments which they later discuss in class and write about. In the typical composition class the teacher will seldom deliver formal lectures but try to generate discussion among students, using the Socratic Method to bring out students' ideas. Thus, the composition class activates the four skills and critical thought. This is what ought to be done in a first or second year Japanese college composition classes, though the pace would have to be slower. In the first two years the important thing is not so much the pace as the integration of skills.

The foregoing presupposes that work is done primarily in English; that not just words but *concepts* are being taught; and that parallel instruction in critical reading and writing is being done in *Japanese*, as the concepts students are learning in English may be unfamiliar to them in their own language. One way the latter can be accomplished is through team teaching. If, for instance, the English composition class is studying logical fallacies, then logical fallacies could be taught in Japanese, using the same English text and perhaps supplementary Japanese texts. Teaching together,

a "native speaker" and a Japanese, could divide their class into alternating "English" and "Japanese" sections. This would probably be the best compromise between coordinations and autonomy.

All things being equal, a junior college cannot accomplish as much as a four year institution. But if high standards are maintained from the beginning, then a college can accomplish more in two years than a university with a playpen atmosphere can in four years.

High standards should begin with the department's entrance examination, which should incorporate questions challenging the applicants to both comprehend and analyze English texts. (This ought to include one or more essay questions.) In any orientation sessions the emphasis should not be so much on giving students information (which they probably have already received in written form) but on asking questions making them think and respond *in English*.

Besides the usual courses in literature, linguistics and so on, an English program should include courses in translation (not "grammar-translation" but the real thing) preferably taught by people who are either licensed translators or have had extensive translation experience.

#### IV Conclusion

This essay has followed two distinct directions, one dealing with facilities and the other with course work. What is common to both is the dispensation and assimilation of information. In this regard, neither libraries nor excellent courses taught by excellent teachers will be of much use if the learners are without enthusiasm for learning. It is therefore important that an atmosphere of seriousness be established and maintained. It must be understood that simple attendance is insufficient for passing courses. Students entering college have begun their intellectual awakening. They are on the verge of receiving the vote. Above all else, their maturity should be appealed to and developed.

(1986年9月30日受理)

All figures for college and university library holdings are taken from *Guide to American Graduate Schools* (Fourth Edition) by Harold R. Doughty and Herbert B. Livesey, Penguin Books, New York, 1982.